“This is the place for toil”
Neighbourhoods at work in the later Victorian Black Country

Submitted by
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to
UNIVERSITY COLLEGE LONDON

for the degree of
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY
IN GEOGRAPHY

2001
Abstract

Work and the places where work was performed were fundamental components of the cultural and morphological traditions of nineteenth century English towns and cities. However, while considerable attention has been directed to work as a significant occupier of time, the role of the workplace as an occupier of physical and social space is less well known. This thesis seeks to explain how differing urban geographies of work placed distinctive demands on both space and time in local neighbourhoods. The focus is the industrial workplace itself: as an enduring and recognisable feature of the local landscape; as a place where livings were made within a complex social and market context; and as a neighbour to labour and part of a negotiated industrial culture. Industrialisation is shown to be at once an agent of geographical change and a beneficiary of customary, home grown forms of work and workplace.

This study looks specifically at two Black Country towns – Walsall and West Bromwich – to illustrate how the mantle of industrialisation was shouldered largely through a process of adapting to prevailing customs of work. Through a focused examination of a single neighbourhood in each town, using institutional, business, newspaper, photographic and physical evidence, it is demonstrated that local manifestations of industrial capitalism were indeed quite diverse, even in a region commonly interpreted by contemporaries as exhibiting an encompassing level of blackness. Sometimes striking levels of differentiation between the two neighbourhoods are examined in successive chapters on the form and design of workplaces, the organisation and experience of labour, the perception of working spaces held by neighbours and the extent to which work cultures extended beyond the factory. In the end, the conclusions of the thesis challenge several accepted notions of modernity within nineteenth century regional centres, arguing that the role of capital in rationalising an industrial landscape was neither universally applied nor universally destructive.
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For my parents,
Norman and Dorothy Cort.
Acknowledgements

It is a given that completing a major research project such as this thesis, especially in a foreign country, would not be possible without the very generous support and contributions from a great number of individuals and groups. In both England and America, family, friends, colleagues and library professionals stepped forward willingly with gracious and sometimes gallant efforts to help bring this work to a conclusion. To one and all, I owe an extraordinary debt of gratitude.

A number of people must be necessarily be credited for knowing far more than I ever will about the historic resources under their care, and for the enthusiasm they often showed in hunting them down and opening them up for view. Librarians at the British Library, British Newspaper Library, Public Record Office (Kew and Chancery Lane), Senate House Library, UCL Library and the Institute for Historical Research provided a supportive hand in my London-based work. In the West Midlands, I am grateful to the underfunded but hardworking folks at the Staffordshire Record Office, Black Country Museum, Walsall Local History Centre, Sandwell Local Studies Centre, Dudley Archives and Local History Service, Wolverhampton Library and Information Services Division and Birmingham Public Library. Special thanks are owed to the staffs in Sandwell (for West Bromwich) and Walsall for helpful suggestions about the potential applicability of sources I had not considered.

A large portion of this work has been accomplished during visits away from my Washington State home (4,662 miles according to British Airways) and has meant that several good people have offered and sacrificed their spare beds. In particular, Anne Scully-Hill and Lee Hill welcomed me into their Tottenham home for brief and extended stays while in London. For my many visits to the West Midlands, Ray and Jean Strong were kind enough to provide both room and board and a thorough introduction to the cultural geography of the Birmingham public house. Their consistently generous hospitality transformed the fieldwork part of this study into an absolute pleasure.

Related to these Black Country visits, I am very grateful to the University of London Central Research Fund Committee for providing financial support for this part of the research. I must also give thanks to staff and postgraduate colleagues at UCL who read
early versions of several chapters and made important suggestions. David Green and John Benson were kind enough to attend my upgrade workshop and provide instructive comments.

Three individuals must be singled out and thanked separately for their distinct roles in helping to bring this thesis to completion. At the beginning, Jan Jolley was an integral part of the decision to move to London in order that I could return to postgraduate study. Hatched and developed over many joyful dinner discussions, the plan moved with her help from idea to action and her continuing support throughout the life of this thesis is gratefully acknowledged. Toward the end, when it came down to simply finding the time to complete, it was Nancy Conard, Mayor of Coupeville, who stepped forward to approve an extended leave so that I could return to London for writing-up. This was no small sacrifice on her part, given my role as the sole planning officer for a small, historic town, and I am indebted to her willingness to understand how important it was for me to complete this work. Finally, my supervisor Richard Dennis showed both persistence and patience in effectively keeping a pilot light burning on this thesis when there were signs that it was all but extinguished. His enthusiasm and knowledge about the nineteenth century city, and his support and critique of my work in this arena, were crucial in my being able to translate pages of primary and secondary sources into what follows.

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A fundamental expectation of people in capitalist societies is that they must work (or be associated with someone who does) to live. Certainly for a vast proportion of individuals in these societies, it is waged work which provides money to make a living, but there are any number of personal economic strategies. For example, someone enjoying the fruits of a large inheritance relies on work performed by sometimes distant ancestors to provide currency in the present. In another example, for those unable or unwilling to do paid labour, livelihood is dependent in many nations on the willingness of those doing paid work to part with a proportion of their earnings. Whatever combination of working options becomes available to ensure personal survival, work is arguably one of life’s most important influences and pre-occupations.

Complicating the arrangement between people and work is that work is social, not simply an individual economic activity. People work for, with or via others in a complex network of social and economic relationships. Grint calls the cultures created through these connections “a world of symbolic representations, meanings and interpretations rather than a world of self-evident objective facts.”¹ Work itself and places where work is performed are at once reflections of past and present societies which created them, and generators of cultures which overlap and change that society. Norms can be defined within work environments, but these are necessarily negotiable and prone to adjustment in a constant search for “equilibrium of social relations.”² Changes in work custom and workplaces can therefore be important bellwethers for how workers and communities adjust to larger societal shifts.

Recognition of work’s vitality as an occupier of time and a shaper of lives has, over the past 20 years, been a major pre-occupation within the historiography of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Social historians such as Joyce, Benson and Whipp, along with Berg’s bridging efforts in economic history have, since the early 1980s, argued convincingly that the experience of work offers important evidence to support or rebut larger assumptions.

about the industrial revolution. In his introduction to The Historical Meanings of Work, Joyce welcomed the move towards an explicative parity between a "calculating economic 'rationality' operating in a perfect market of standard products" and the more subjective rationalities exposed by examining the agency of specific groups of individuals. It is this downscaling of focus to the human side of work culture which informs much of this thesis.

While historians have taken strides toward viewing work as an important occupier of time, geographers have been far less attentive to work as a major occupier of space in the nineteenth century city. In what should be a natural domain for geographical enquiry, most studies limit their perspective on the workplace to an endpoint on a connecting line to home, or simply as a static locale for employment. The factory, workshop or back garden shed have not so much been opaque to geographers, but transparent. If Berg is correct in saying that "the most striking change in the industrial structure of the country between the end of the seventeenth and the middle of the nineteenth centuries was its geography," then to date this change has been understood only at a national or perhaps regional level. Glimpses into and beyond the workplace in a town or neighbourhood context have been rare indeed.

This thesis seeks to explain how differing work geographies place distinctive demands on space and time in local neighbourhoods. The spotlight is directly on the workplace: as a locale where work is performed and livings are made; as a social unit where work cultures develop and change; and as a neighbour to labour and a feature of the local landscape. Specifically, neighbourhoods in two Black Country towns, West Bromwich and Walsall, are used to illustrate how a region painted by contemporaries with a damning brush of industrial degradation, did in fact exhibit a variety of work cultures and workplaces. By scraping this consensual canvas of darkness, it is proposed that the local experience of work

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in the late nineteenth century was instrumental in shaping quite unique neighbourhood geographies.

THE INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION'S MULTIPLE HISTORICAL GEOGRAPHIES

That the coming of industrial capitalism effectively reconstituted the relationship between labour and capital seems fundamental, although the interpreted pace of this transformation ranges from the catastrophic to the congenial.6 While several researchers have rightly noted seventeenth (and even sixteenth) century portents, there does appear to have been a locus of change beginning in the late eighteenth and continuing to the middle of the nineteenth century. Even beyond the obvious example of the cotton textile industry, workforces and workplaces underwent comparatively rapid transformation in sectors such as shipbuilding, engineering and woollens.

In attempting to explain the revolution, historians from every discipline have, especially prior to 1975, concentrated on the growth of large-scale enterprises. As the most apparent manifestation of industrial capitalism, they were a logical choice and necessarily put cotton textile manufacturing in the limelight. Impressive in scale, inventive in the application of technology to work and influential in shaping social relations across entire cities, the Lancashire mills were and remain seductive arenas of enquiry. Engels referred to the textile district as “that classic soil on which English manufacture has achieved its masterwork.”7 As a consequence of this prominence, the region for many years provided almost a pro forma for eighteenth and nineteenth century industrialisation in England. In relying on this model, the distinctions between pre-industrial and industrialised societies could be explained in evolutionary terms, a transformation from small- to large-scale production units, with the latter exhibiting higher degrees of mechanisation and divisions of labour.8

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6 The sudden and all-transforming interpretation of the industrial revolution is epitomised by Landes's 1969 *The Unbound Prometheus*, a publication with clear linkages to Engels' first-hand description of early nineteenth century Lancashire. Works by E. P. Thompson and David Harvey provide some continuity to this more unforgiving explanation of industrialisation. In contrast, Berg’s gradual and contextualised approach in *The Age of Manufactures* (1985) could be considered a landmark in the more recent historiography of this period. Eric Hobsbawm and Patrick Joyce have also argued convincingly in support of the resiliency of local conditions and traditional cultures of work.


8 This definition still in 2000 leads the discussion on 'Industrialization' in *The Dictionary of Human Geography* (4th edition, p 388-9), whereby "small-scale production for either personal use or a limited local market" is replaced or augmented with "a type of activity characterised by a much larger scale of productive unit and by
In fact, the methods of production adopted in the cotton textile industry were anachronistic to the ways that most early Victorian businesses operated. Employment opportunities for women to earn factory wages were unusual, as were the strong distinctions between craft and skill levels. Similarly, the paternalism practised by the Lancashire mill owners, while in evidence elsewhere, extended far more pervasively into worker and community social patterns. In terms of mass, the mills dwarfed factories in other sectors of the economy. Industrial workplaces have traditionally been segmented roughly by size and geography into home, workshop and factory. All may be considered workplaces, or sites at which labour and the means of production are brought together. The once popular and highly exaggerated linear model of industrialisation described above assumed a sequence of workplace development which, if anything, was more the exception than the rule. Small workplaces did not necessarily agglomerate into factories, just as large factory masters did not all start as small shop operators. Joyce points to the misleading assumption that "large-scale factory production has been the goal and defining characteristic" of industrialisation.9

The realities of the revolution were far more splintered. For example, Hobsbawm, writing on the eighteenth century, maintains that "the obvious way of industrial expansion . . . was not to construct factories but to expand the so-called domestic system."10 Similarly, this emphasis on the "winner" in the industrial revolution prompts Berg to plead that "industry . . . needs its sympathetic historian, one who would rescue all those forms of enterprise other than the factory from the dustbin of history."11 Benson makes a complementary point, cautioning that primitive, small-scale and non-mechanised employment continued into the twentieth century to provide more people with livelihoods than large-scale enterprises.12 Empirical studies by Whipp (Potteries) and Behagg (Birmingham) confirm the persistence of non-factory employment for the majority of workers.13 Certainly for the Black Country, and arguably in most regions of the country, the workshop and small factory played a

stronger formative role (and employed more people) than those large enterprises upon which many theories advocating early nineteenth century agglomeration are based. Joyce’s use of less than 300 employees as the ‘small firm’ threshold in 1883 Preston, would have encompassed nearly every work site in a similar time frame Black Country.  

Benson argues that “the owners of workshops, sweatshops and small factories proved remarkably resilient in the face of large-scale industrial development.” Further, even within the organisation of cotton textile production, Gatrell notes with “certainty that small and single process firms retained their numerical predominance into the 1840s (and beyond), and had high chances of survival even in a strongly competitive climate.” Samuel’s landmark analysis of nineteenth century labour processes reveals that “mechanisation in one department of production was often complemented by an increase in sweating in others; the growth of large firms by a proliferation of small producing units.”

In addition to steady waged work, the domestic trades persisted as contingency occupations for factory workers in times of seasonal or recessional unemployment. Female and young male labour could utilise extensive outworking networks in many industrial sectors to find paid work, especially when opportunities in factories became increasingly marginalized through local custom or national legislation. Large enterprises patronised local workshops as a way of lowering wage costs for non-mechanised tasks in their production process. Thus, the industrial revolution in no way eroded the small unit of production either as a place of employment, as an economic entity or as a feature on the landscape. As a place for work, it proved to be extremely adaptable to local forms of capitalism.

While acknowledging the resilience and inertia of the small production unit, it would be unwise to dismiss the very real search for economies of scale, advancing divisions of

14 As an example, G. C. Allen’s important 1929 study of the West Midlands, The Industrial Development of Birmingham and the Black Country, forwarded a workplace classification scheme that set 150 employees as the threshold for a ‘large factory’ (p 114-15). Within the cotton mill work culture, this number of workers under one roof would have hardly registered on the landscape radar.
18 Blackburn contends that this option was available to either gender and under a variety of circumstances, including “age, lack of skill, a temporary personal misfortune (such as ill-health or alcoholism).” S. C. Blackburn (1997) “No necessary connection with homework”: gender and sweated labour, 1840-1909,” Social History, vol. 22, no. 3, p 275.
labour (and consequent de-skilling) or the prominent position of sprawling factories on the Victorian landscape. These were all well-documented facets of the industrial revolution. In fact, there is overwhelming evidence that large-scale factories became common sights in many Victorian cities and neighbourhoods. Factory masters used the structures themselves to advertise, artists used visual mass and obvious effluent to conjure a distinction between the countryside and city, the working class saw in them opportunities for employment and municipal authorities welcomed them for their rateable values while grappling with the less desirable side effects of industrialisation. In addition, pre-Fordist discipline introduced techniques to maximise economies of scale in many industrial sectors, in the process creating (or extending) worker consciousness of solidarity in the workplace. Revill asserts that nineteenth century railway workers "were tied to particular companies as dependants by exclusive systems of examination and promotion." These arguments resonate most strongly for those developing a thesis of working-class solidarity created within a factory environment. Certainly, nineteenth and twentieth century popular culture expressed freely the disassociation that many workers felt concerning their workplaces.

Actual workplace organisation across space in the nineteenth century city depended on a number of factors, including size of the work unit, type of product, skill level of employees and power requirements. For the factory operative, many of the points raised by Thompson concerning the onset of heightened work discipline and worker conformity held true. In contrast, family work units toiling in small workshops perpetuated many traditional approaches to work, in addition to reproducing at work the patriarchy of the home. Mumford provides some perspective on the continuum, saying that many of the factory system's ills had actually been "established under the decentralised eotechnic organisation of production. Exploitation began at home." Hopkins would seem to concur, calling the

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Black Country family work unit in the mid nineteenth century “a mode of work organisation which was associated with the worst living and working conditions in the district.”24 A House of Lords enquiry in 1889 into the sweated trades revealed widespread abuse of work hours and child labour within family units.25 From networks of clothing cutters and assemblers in London to chainmakers in the Black Country, the standards of living made possible from these trades lagged considerably behind those of factory workers.

Except on a very small scale, probably no neighbourhood was uniformly represented by only one type of workplace, and the contexts of time and space must be confronted when gauging localised effects of industrialisation. However, within the size and organisational ranges at work in the industrial revolution were abundant opportunities for the development of distinctive workplace cultures. It is important to acknowledge that different internal control structures influenced the extent to which that culture affected the neighbouring community, or conversely, simply confirmed pre-industrial patterns. Understanding how different forms of production were manifested on the physical and cultural landscape is a primary goal of this thesis. With the concurrency of large and small, mechanised and non-mechanised, specialised and non-specialised workplaces, it is apparent that there were regional and chronological variations in the industrial model.

With reference to the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Gregory has called these distinctions the multiple historical geographies of the Industrial Revolution.26 The well-researched and considered analyses of the Lancashire mill towns thus represent only one manifestation of rapid industrial growth, and should not be regarded as representative of other manufacturing districts. Other English regions offer sharp contrasts, and intra-regional differences emphasise the importance of local custom in shaping and responding to industrial capitalism. Anderson argued as early as 1971 that approaching industrialisation as an “irresistible force . . . has failed to do justice to the empirical

diversity and complexity of reaction to similar pressures for social change."\footnote{27} In recognising the variety of ways in which local cultures adapted to the demands of industrial capitalism, this chapter examines how the constructions of nineteenth century work and working spaces were linked with place-bound customs and traditions.

**INDUSTRIAL SPACES AND WORKING COMMUNITIES**

Burns calls industry “the characteristic institution of modern advanced societies.”\footnote{28} Indeed, it would be difficult to argue against the pre- eminent role of industrialisation in shaping the form and function of economic and social life - the “embodiment of the central capitalist social relation.”\footnote{29} From this centrality of importance, however, rises a complex level of differentiation by place. Industry does not simply appear exogenously on the landscape, leaving a pre-existing culture to grapple with its aftershocks. Rather, the increasing speed of capital movement in local economies - what Storper and Walker have called geographical industrialisation - is interwoven with what came before and what a local population expects to come after.\footnote{30} “People handled change and created new identities, but they did so with a cultural legacy which was still living.”\footnote{31} The economic characteristics of place through time thus provide a starting point for understanding how capitalism’s many forms of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries “structured the physical and social communities in which [they were] lodged.”\footnote{32}

**Regional Economic Landscapes of Industry**

There is a long tradition within economic history and economic geography of viewing England’s industrial revolution from a national perspective. From Engels to Landes, these broad views are ambitious but ignore the nuance in favour of the vivid. Their vantage points are from the outside, looking in on an industrial powerhouse which was nothing if not exceptional. More recently, geographers and historians have looked beyond the facade to the structural underpinnings of industrialisation. One obvious beneficiary of this altered

perspective has been the surfeit of studies which emphasise regional differences instead of a national model. A fundamental outgrowth of this interest has been the realisation that industrial capital is selective, and that regions and industrial sectors develop differently because of this selectivity.

Storper and Walker maintain that “the central motor of regional development is not industry location as a response to prior resource endowments but geographical industrialisation as a process of growth and resource generation.” This view is supported by Dodgshon’s analysis of capital movement and regional development in a trans-European context, although a fundamental tension is isolated between capital’s antithetical needs of circulation and fixation. ‘Growth and resource generation’ are enhanced regionally through the investment of fixed capital, but are subject to “abandonment as the community of money [profitability] dictates.” Harvey’s later work applies a human face to his case for volatility when he states that “the struggle to maintain profitability sends capitalists racing off to explore all kinds of other possibilities.”

It can be argued, however, that industrialisation, while economically tenuous, is socially fixed. Capital tends to become tethered spatially to a region by generating built environment, a trained work force, community ties, firm and workplace linkages and technological localisation. This relationship with place, and those connections forged between firms and industries, becomes more complex as capital expands intra-regionally. Despite capital’s inherent volatility, this ‘grounding’ puts some limitations on rapid abandonment, although Harvey asserts that there are always “abundant opportunities for different structures of distribution to assert themselves.” Certainly, movement by industry within or away from these socially-driven complexes is likely to cause turmoil within a community reliant on local manifestations of fixed capital.

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Collectively, these characteristics of 'territorial production complexes' serve to facilitate maximum capital accumulation. Regional capitalisation for industry succeeds along lines that encourage the continuation of the regional complex. Massey has said, however, that "the world is not simply the product of capital’s requirements." Uneven patterns of regional development may occur as a result of the changing movement of capital, but the specific imprint is equally a function of the characteristic regional social relations. To a region's people, "such places form an absolute space of particular qualities that can be the focus of particular place-bound loyalties." Social divisions of labour, size and type of production units, skill requirements, sectoral specialisations and community morphology all evolve within the context of localised conditions.

This thesis argues that the development of the Black Country was in fact spurred by the intersection of a receptive cultural history, of technological advances which sought the region's raw materials, of proximity to Birmingham and London capital and of a readymade labour force primed with adaptable skills. The emergence of a Black Country territorial production complex was a social, as well as an economic, enterprise. While the focus is on the Walsall and West Bromwich neighbourhoods, the particular qualities and loyalties of the Black Country confirm the importance of cultural markers in shaping industrial capitalism. However, for the average worker, the gross movement of capital was as distant from their daily lives as events in America. Closer to home were their individual strategies to translate a changing local work environment into basic human needs. Livelihoods were realised within the production spaces arranged, organised and constructed within the context of local neighbourhood capitalism.

Simonsen's observation that "rules presuppose a social context" is an apt starting point for linking the economic colonisation of space with the highly disparate social venues in which work was performed. While we will turn later to the resiliency of family and

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39 Such a complex is defined by Storper and Walker as "an extensive work site that brings disparate production activities into advantageous relation with each other, at a larger scale and scope than the individual workplace, firm or even, in many cases, the industry." Storper and Walker, op. cit., p 138.
community relations and the relatively new spectre of state intervention in crafting the
nineteenth century character of work and employment across Great Britain, the rules of
place governing this character were far from universally formulated or applied. “Conduct
an ascending analysis of power” is the task set by Foucault as a foundation for
understanding of how localities with “their own history, their own trajectory, their own
techniques and tactics” adapted to the more global demands of industrial capitalism. In
other words, working lives in a particular nineteenth century space and time should be
considered at once to be reflective of “the micro-politics of power relations in different
localities” and reactive to “the qualities of modernism” at work in that century. The
following two subsections attempt to knit together the regional and extra-regional
economic and social arguments with recent observations within cultural geography about
the theoretical production and representation of spaces within the nineteenth century city.

The Production of Localised Industrial Spaces

It was shown above how territorial production complexes colonise regions based on a
combination of social and economic criteria friendly to the needs of industrial capitalism.
Tightening the gaze to a scale closer to the individual lives of workers, however, it was the
community that often contributed both playground and rules for emerging industrial forms.
Joyce’s argument that “acceptance and accommodation within the new social order of
factory industry were enacted in community terms” is used to support his thesis that
distinct factory cultures were promoted from within but coalesced beyond the mill walls.
Employers recognised the importance of local custom and could, through a process of
appropriating that custom, influence worker behaviour in the workplace. It was not enough
to insist rigidly, for example, that Monday was a workday, when the community agreed
that it was not. Real influence on worker lives to maximise profit was best achieved by
adapting work custom to the contexts of working communities and industrial
neighbourhoods. This argument prevails particularly in research which links work,
community and home as virtually coincident spheres of social space.

43 M. Foucault (1972) Power/Knowledge, p 159.
44 D. Harvey (1990) The Condition of Postmodernity, pp 26, 45.
45 P. Joyce (1980) Work, Society and Politics, p 93. Joyce goes on to say that “the end result was
compounded by the employer’s permeation of the locale and so of this very sense of place and belonging.”
Central to supporting or rebutting this claim within historical geography should be a series of small area studies that test the strength of traditional cultures of work in moulding local forms of capital, a body of work yet to be accomplished. Intuitively, however, patterns in place should be very instructive in informing labour and landscape about what comes next. Drawing on Harvey’s “more humanistic conceptualisation of modernity,” Dennis reminds us that a person’s ability to adapt to change over time was in part dependent on the pace of that change.\textsuperscript{46} “The persistence of the character of places is apparently related to a continuity both in our experience of change and in the very nature of change that serves to reinforce a sense of association and attachment to those places.”\textsuperscript{47} Dodgshon offers a similar observation about change, asserting that “we can expect core areas [of society] to have both less diversity and a greater interest in maintaining the \textit{status quo}.”\textsuperscript{48} Challenges to individual ‘identities’ can lead to resistance, a concept that can appropriately be extrapolated to encompass neighbourhoods and communities. Further, Harvey’s contention that modernism was more reactive than proactive in its early stages “to new conditions of production, circulation and consumption”\textsuperscript{49} would seem to imply that tensions over capital (in the nineteenth century at least) were negotiated locally instead of globally. It might be expected even that growth and change in urban form during this period owed more to the constructive landscape models of the past than the relatively more destructive paths blazed by twentieth century capitalism.

Over the past ten years, historical geographers have picked up on Lefebvre’s ‘production of space’ ideas,\textsuperscript{50} or the “social production of the spaces within which social life takes place.”\textsuperscript{51} Of particular salience to the arguments presented in this thesis is his theory that urban spaces became more ‘logical’ in their representation in industrial cities. On the ground, this logic might take the form of state-sponsored infrastructure improvements, increasing levels of segregation between different categories of land use or the organisation of community rituals and public spectacle. According to Lefebvre, the physical manifestation of these spaces would be informed by ‘representations of space,’ or the large

\textsuperscript{47} E. Relph (1976) \textit{Place and Placelessness}, p 31.
\textsuperscript{49} D. Harvey (1990) \textit{The Condition of Postmodernity}, p 23.
\textsuperscript{50} See especially H. Lefebvre (1991) \textit{The Production of Space}.
body of abstract concepts which collectively shape urban growth and change (a twentieth century example might be the assignment of industrial zoning). In turn, these spaces become ones of 'representation' within the organic character of the community, complete with emotional values and power relationships ascribed by the citizenry. This circular (and circulating) argument helps to explain the dynamic nature of the social production of urban spaces, industrial spaces among them.

It seems clear at least that during the nineteenth century the forms of spaces of production were rooted in community-based practices and expectations. Unfortunately, one problem with contextualising work within different communities lies in the word itself. Raymond Williams contends that the word ‘community’ is almost universally interpreted as having positive connotations.52 ‘A sense of community’ is judged as a desired attribute in the minds of most people when describing their ideal social environment, one that implies reciprocity and neighbourliness. Viewed from this perspective, industrialisation’s negative effects are immediately placed at odds with community visions.53 In his discussion of community, Harvey fires a similar warning shot, arguing that “we appropriate ancient spaces in very modern ways, treat time and history as something to create rather than something to accept.” The word itself can “disguise radical differences in meaning” because the social processes at work vary remarkably from place to place and from year to year.54 Benson also questions an assumed good will, arguing that positive community social relations have to be demonstrated.55 Communities encompass the gamut of human behaviour, from positive job finding support in Anderson’s Preston to cut-throat competition between nailmakers in Lye or Rowley Regis. This thesis acknowledges a dynamic relationship between community and work. While notions of reciprocity were incontestably present in working-class communities, they were also symbolic spaces “in which the tensions between work and leisure are played out.”56

Confirming the presence of communities is difficult, but possible if defined socially and

52 R. Williams (1988) Keywords, p 76.
53 Gilbert has noted that both sides in his study of miners’ strikes employed the potential threat to community to bolster their bargaining positions. D. Gilbert (1992) Class Community and Collective Action: Social Change in Two British Coalfields, 1850-1926, p 224.
54 D. Harvey (1990) The Condition of Postmodernity, p 204.
spatially through the identification of social spheres. These spheres, or relationships, can be measured by ‘density’ (how closely the spheres connect) and ‘plexity’ (the number of different spheres). The drawback to this approach from a research perspective is that it can create as many ‘communities’ as there are people. Also, as Dennis observes, our limited ability to gather information on past societies renders both measurements beyond our grasp.57 When Hopkins pleads that “only a succession of studies of industrial development on the local level will provide the evidence” for understanding how communities differed in their response to industrialisation,58 he may be asking the impossible. Further, while McFarlane’s assertion that “the geographical demarcation of an area of interest . . . is artificial”59 provides sufficient caution against drawing boundaries too quickly, it may be enough to accept that communities are constructed through social interaction, and that different spheres of sociability can each be bounded spatially.

It may only be possible therefore to study communities or neighbourhoods from the researcher’s vantage point.60 Certainly, there is no shortage of efforts to reconstruct components of community life. Residential mobility, patterns of marriage, occupational geography, ethnic diversity, voting records and church membership are examples of approaches taken to understand community sociability.61 Taken as a whole, they provide a graphic description of nineteenth century urban existence, but lack explanations of the learning processes that led people to act one way as opposed to another, a course of instruction that was often tied closely to the experience of work. For example, we would expect that the strategies employed by communities to grapple with changing industrial forms and work opportunities would have been a major preoccupation of nineteenth century urban dwellers. Sources obviously limit a modern reading of these adaptations, but smaller area studies offer the best opportunities.

60 For some approaches to understanding community and place, see D. Massey and P. Jess (eds.) A Place in the World? Places, Cultures and Globalization, OU Reader.
Despite the difficulty in defining and researching communities, and fairly representing their occupants, the small geographical unit remains a vital setting for understanding social change brought by industrialisation. It was within this setting that people experienced change. Two modern scholars, Roberts and Seabrook, commenting on their own childhood experiences, would agree that “most of the couples in the street had met either in the neighbourhood or at their place of work.”62 Anderson found in Preston that this social closeness “was probably reinforced by the fact that neighbours, workmates, co-villagers, friends and even fellow church members would usually have been the same people.”63 Mutuality to this extent can act as reinforcement for change brought by new forms of workplace, new connections between small production units, new frontiers of technology and new forms of industrial management. That there was a changing geography associated with these new forms seems self-evident.

In writing on the architecture of modernism, Harvey uses the phrase “the spatialisation of time” to describe the tendency of the built environment to reflect the age of its construction.64 Construed more broadly, the recognition that time and space meet thousands of times daily to make the individual and collective decisions that shape communities provides a handy tool for understanding changes wrought by industrialisation. As one of the primary goals of this thesis, the production of industrial spaces within two defined neighbourhoods will be examined in detail. Each of these neighbourhoods, or ‘communities,’ as “a social entity created in space through time,” is considered in the context of late Victorian capitalism. However, the differences between their comparative industrial geographies far outweigh the similarities that might be expected to emanate from their coincidental spatialisations of time. In fact, “the processes of community production themselves diverge remarkably according to group capacities and interests.”65 Representations of space and the concomitant spaces of representation offer many distinct contrasts. Before introducing the organisation of these arguments in this thesis, however, it seems useful to review the comparative natures of communities at work in the nineteenth century. The section following highlights several aspects of working cultures that can be

65 D. Harvey, op. cit., p 204.
quarried for clues about how neighbourhoods addressed the tension between capital and tradition.

Communities at Work in the Industrial Revolution

At its foundation, industrialisation created new community-based venues for socialisation, and probably eroded others, not in a day but over time. Behagg characterises the transformation as “justification through ‘custom’ being replaced by justification through the market,”66 although it can be argued that this substitution was far from encompassing. Certainly, as many have pointed out, this was not a process without conflict, but one that was almost by necessity accepted. Deals were struck between an emerging capitalism and a ritualised social tradition. For instance, to outside observers of industrialised Black Country communities, like Elihu Burritt or Charles Dickens, capital had drawn the long straw, seemingly obliterating pre-industrial culture without mercy. Could one form of industrial organisation more rapidly subsume community-based social relations than another? The pace at which different areas assimilated change is an important but often overlooked angle on the industrial revolution. Hanson and Pratt point out that neighbourhood socialisation, far from being pressed upon the passive individual, “is an active process whereby individuals absorb and react to aspects of their neighbourhood context.”67 Family and community relations were no doubt altered by an increasing externalisation of work routines, but it cannot be assumed that this was a consistent change. Further, Pleck argues that focusing on the evolution of institutional functions tends to ignore variations within the institution.68

These types of changes were felt most readily at the neighbourhood level - such as hiring operatives for a new factory whose rules challenged the status quo - but it would be expected that traditional patterns endured until the new working environment engendered a modification of the operative’s social network. Even during times of high residential mobility, a neighbourhood provided the interactive setting for a large proportion of people’s daily lives. Collective individual contributions in churches, schools, work, the

street, the public house, the home and other places served either to perpetuate traditional patterns or to encourage change. “When a good deal of people’s social contacts and experiences come from within their own local community then it is clear they have considerable importance.” 69 It is within this space of social and geographical intimacy that workers were socialised to the prevailing conditions of capitalist production. 70

However strong were the tradition-bound, routinised social relations in the neighbourhood, the role of workplaces as social spaces cannot be ignored. In Patrick Joyce’s Lancashire landscape, the centre of the community may have been the neighbourhood, but “very near the heart of neighbourhood feeling” was the factory. The degree of assimilation of a work-centred culture (specifically factory work) depends, according to Joyce, on the extent to which pre-existing activities of daily life were relocated to the newly structured work environment. 71 For instance, a person shifting employment from a family production unit to a large factory may discover a tendency to begin developing primary social relations with co-workers, rather than family or immediate neighbours. From the viewpoint of those in control of production, this closeness had potentially unfavourable consequences. In her work on nineteenth century British railway workshops, Drummond asserts that “the rules which most aided management were those which attempted to undermine craft pride and solidarity, replacing it with pride and identification with the railway company.” 72 These rules were often obscure. Further, these arenas of work socialisation were often tight-knit and exclusive. “The worker who was inclined to accept the subordinate role of labour within the [factory] workplace had also to reject certain aspects of the wider culture of his own community.” 73 A different public house might be frequented, an outcome reflecting both the new social relationships and the fact that factory pay packets may have been distributed there.

On the other hand, as Hopkins argues, “the organisation of industry on a domestic basis must have contributed powerfully to the maintenance of traditional attitudes and practices

70 Harvey takes up this notion in The Condition of Postmodernity (1990) pp 123-4.
which were already breaking down in the adjacent communities."  

While regions such as the west Midlands were arguably highly industrialised, the old neighbourhood cultural linkages probably lingered due to the strong geographical propinquity and mutuality between work and home. In places dominated by a workshop level of organisation, the unwritten rules of many, disparate workplaces were more than likely closely akin to the unwritten social rules of the neighbourhood itself. It is also important to note that small workplace geographies and advanced capitalism were not necessarily exclusive. Berg is quick to point out that new technologies and labour practices could have created "new departures in the workshop economy deploying extensive divisions of labour and multi-plant production processes." From a community and neighbourhood perspective, the social distinctions between working in a large factory as against a small workshop extended beyond the workplace walls. As spaces of production, places of work were colonised within local neighbourhoods with social consequences which can be best tested at that level of analysis.

It seems clear that no uniform model of the production of industrial space can serve for the nineteenth century. It is equally true that the differences in size, management, construction techniques, mechanisation, labour organisation, power requirements, waste streams, product lines and plant location all had a hand in contributing to a local industrial landscape. More than just exogenous physical presences, workplaces were part of the neighbourhood and community in which they were located. People worked inside these spaces, then brought that experience of work into their domestic lives and leisure time. Drawing on the theoretical framework presented in this section, we turn now to consider that experience as a social constructed need and locally constructed opportunity.

THE CENTRALITY OF WORK IN EVERYDAY LIVES

When E. P. Thompson stated graphically that "the family was roughly torn apart each morning by the factory bell," he was, among other things, acknowledging the central

position held by neighbourhood work custom in moulding even the most intimate of social relations. At the same time, his notion that regimented work schedules effectively dominated the relationship between worker and employer tends to diminish the vast number of ways in which industrial capitalism adapted to local conditions. Extending Thompson’s culturally-driven yet functionalist approach, a number of social historians have directed their attention toward work itself as a foundation for studying associated work cultures. By concentrating on the experience of work, a picture emerges which promotes a more balanced view of industrialisation’s broad role in shaping these cultures. Both employer and employed import values and motivations from home into the work environment which, in turn, produce a work culture influencing neighbourhood social relations. Joyce, in arguing for this reflexive approach, maintains that “to be a worker was to be a member of a community, of a family, of a nation, as well as of a trade.”77 The sections following, drawing primarily from the work of post-1980 social historians, examine work as a primary social and economic activity. As a starting point, an attempt is made to define work within a nineteenth century context. The relative inclusiveness or exclusiveness of this definition has a bearing on later chapters which propose geographies of employment within the two Black Country neighbourhoods. Following this, family and opportunity are considered for their primary roles in shaping individual and cultural adaptations to work.

**Defining Nineteenth Century Work**

Work can be defined along a continuum ranging from the narrowness of waged labour to any activity not clearly play or leisure.78 Certainly, Grint’s contention that the term ‘work’ is both ambiguous and transient provides little guidance for where to begin looking at local geographies of work and workplace.79 What is it that distinguishes work from the rest of life? Commonly, work is seen as any action taken to earn money, thus furthering the daily existence of individuals or families. Joyce argues that this is a dangerously limited perspective, pointing out that a distinctly economic attachment to work dates only from the

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78 The most likely type of ‘work’ to be ignored is unpaid labour, perhaps best typified by women’s work within the home. Counting this as work is consistent with the arguments made later in the chapter that domestic spaces and work spaces are simply parts of a whole, with the family wage economy dependent on contributions from both spaces, whether paid or not.
late eighteenth century.80 Even today, when paid labour dominates in industrialised nations, a number of options persist outside the pay packet world.

That people obviously managed to survive in the nineteenth century through an array of personal strategies signifies that some broader definition is needed. Several have distinguished between the formal economy of paid work, and the informal sectors, a distinction which blurs the division between work and non-work. For instance, Benson enumerates a number of techniques which facilitated individual or family survival, but which most would not consider as work. From petty theft to prostitution or from casual trading to begging, work encompassed both legal and illegal activities used either as family wage supplements or as primary income generators.81 People adapted to available opportunities, choosing that combination of working strategies which could be accommodated locally. If an individual desired a waged position, there may or may not have been employment available which matched their skills. Lacking this formal option, the individual could enter the informal work sectors or migrate toward the prospect of paid employment elsewhere.

While the need to work (using the broader definition) is recognised by most researchers, many sociologists would contend that the need for employment is merely a social construction, though highly desirable in many cultures. “Employment has shifted from being a burden to be resisted to a necessity that cannot be foregone.”82 Pahl traces this change to the nineteenth century, linking it with a burgeoning tendency for people to work for money as a means to consume. Prior to this large-scale shift toward waged labour, with no pressing need for money, work provided a direct means by which subsistence was achieved. For the working class, “work appeared more akin to a material necessity than a duty,” an inextricable part of life rather than a distinct portion of one’s day allocated for employment. As Kumar states, and Benson would probably agree, being unemployed was not the same as being out of work.83 Where formal employment opportunities were

limited, work could be found to support basic human needs.

In order to address the language of work, it seems necessary to use two terms which recognise both the wide ranging options available for individual and family survival and the increasing dominance of waged labour in the nineteenth century. In this thesis, work refers to a broad spectrum of social and economic strategies, while employment refers specifically to a subset of work resulting in waged or pieced compensation. Employment is treated solely as an economic arrangement between worker and employer, an arrangement which may be restricted by characteristics of class, gender or skill. Work options are limited only by personal choices exercised within a local context of social customs.

There can be no doubt that work, as opposed to employment, is crucial in reproducing labour. In Benson’s words, it “helped to determine most other aspects of working peoples’ lives: the standards of health they enjoyed; the type of accommodation in which they lived; the nature of their family and neighbourhood.”84 However, just as localised capitalisation is transformed within patterns of living tradition, so must work culture be seen as part generative, part created by its relation to the surrounding community. Whipp also recognises this reflexivity, noting that work experience results from individual worker contribution “of their own, independent orientations to work with the technological and organisational features of the industry.”85

**Industrialisation, Work and Family**

The extent to which rapid industrialisation on a national scale affected family social relations at a local level has been a contentious issue amongst social historians. In many interpretations, seen especially in early works by scholars such as Smelser and Thompson, the rise of industrial capitalism effectively substituted the workplace for the family as the primary agent of change in worker lives.86 Domestic circumstances stood little chance of competing in either a social or economic arena with the new style work arrangements. Industrialisation brought a relatively swift conclusion to centuries of coincident home and

85 R. Whipp (1990) *Patterns of Labour*, p 82
work spheres. This point of view is echoed by Harvey from the geographical side of the fence, painting a picture of external forces separating workplace from home.87 At the heart of this perspective, the surrender of individual and family control to the workplace is seen as an inevitable consequence of shifting control over the means of production to outside the home.

In contrast to these interpretations, researchers such as Whipp, Pleck and Hareven maintain that the vitality of family and home as behavioural contexts and influence persisted with industrialisation.88 The new forms of capitalism did not separate work from home, nor did they prompt wholesale abandonment of domicile for external workplace. Clearly, the particularly local characteristics of production organisation precipitated an adaptive response by the family, but this response was rooted more in local culture than in the irresistible demands of new work forms. Even large factories saw in the family a means by which labour could be reproduced or work patterns reinforced. As Whipp and Grieco argue, \textquoteleft family labour is homogeneous labour,\textquoteright a statement which recognises that new labour practices were an outgrowth of family, \textquoteleft expanding domestic space beyond the home.\textquoteright 89 Pleck takes this notion even further, theorising that within the context of the stricter workplace rules inherent to the textile industry, the prevalence of family work units may have actually served to enhance family unity.90

One consequence of this debate has been an increase in the study of work as an element of a larger social landscape. Whether the nineteenth century worker laboured in a factory with 3,000 colleagues or in a home alone or alongside family members, the act of work was fundamentally a social experience whose norms were rooted in family and community. This approach is consistent with the discussion above which distinguished work and employment. Instead of viewing the unprecedentedly large displacement of employment from home-based work to extra-familial work sites as a separation of work from home, it

87 D. Harvey (1985) 	extit{Consciousness and the Urban Experience}, p 37. See also 	extit{Social Justice and the City} (1973).
may be more useful to re-associate them. In fact, Berg maintains that the notion of two spheres, "one of moral imperatives and collaboration and another of commodity relations and economic individualism," is artificial. Social exchange at the family level was necessary to ensure economic survival.

The search for the roots of this academic division begins and ends almost inevitably with sources - their geography, gender, scale and newsworthiness. If the experience of work is interpreted through the eyes of male factory labour in Lancashire, the comparative richness of institutional and anecdotal sources support a socio-industrial order dominated by the factory. Anderson's exhaustive study examining family life in the cotton textile district reveals strong connections between family and working options. However, his reliance on census records to generate his findings leads him to link family survival with a collective wage economy. This emphasis necessarily prompts conclusions such as the tendency for wives of artisans to work only if they had no children. While this may be correct with respect to paid employment, it serves to marginalise women's work alternatives outside the formal sector. The perhaps unintended conclusion is that families became less important during industrialisation because many means of subsistence were externalised.

It is the "very elusiveness" of source material on any subject except "the male institutional solidarities" of the large workplace, which accounts for the family's seemingly reduced role in the nineteenth century. Most researchers, when tackling subjects such as outwork, women's and children's employment, seasonal work practices or penny capitalism, alert their readers at the outset to the paucity of evidence. These were working strategies undervalued or invisible to contemporaries and thus underrepresented in the historical record. Commentary which survives is dominated by denunciations of the lack of work ethic or other moral discourses, clearly evident in many parliamentary enquiries on working conditions. Thus, the importance and persistence of family social custom in shaping local patterns of industrial capitalism are difficult to assess.

94 Penny capitalism is a term used by Benson to describe working strategies for compensation that were entrepreneurial in nature and outside the more widespread application of waged or pieced compensation. Casual trading is perhaps the best example.
Several studies have managed to demonstrate the resilience of family relations in industrialised local economies. Accampo (Saint Chamond, France) and Hareven (Amoskeag, United States) explicate complex levels of mutuality between the family and work custom which go well beyond waged labour. Both argue that families were instrumental in supplying and socialising labour in both formal and informal work environments. And, although their study periods are separated by fifty plus years, Whipp’s Potteries and Joyce’s Lancashire were also characterised by a barely discernible separation of work and home spheres. Joyce looks at and beyond the domineering mill-town landscapes to the family’s role in perpetuating and adapting to factory culture. In dealing almost exclusively with formal waged employment, working is interpreted as “the social relationship that converts power relationships into moral ones.” Family and kin were pre-eminent in reinforcing and perpetuating these moral values. As Whipp explains, potters’ families were “a means of developing work group control of production and [were] responsible for transmitting control mechanisms and customary practice.”

That Whipp, Joyce, Hareven and others reached similar conclusions about family in vastly different work contexts is illuminating. Apparently, differences in levels of mechanisation, employment opportunities for women, size of workplace, control over the production process or work discipline had little effect in diminishing the centrality of family custom in shaping work patterns. Indeed, the nineteenth century English worker made many concessions to industrialisation, but the family proved remarkably creative in exerting traditional controls over worker behaviour and custom. At the same time, however, there does appear to be strong evidence that industrialisation’s many forms caused labour to adapt to changing work customs. Practically speaking, the local rules of employment were often the most powerful force in crafting individual work histories.

98 Joyce calls this deference, which he defines as “the social relationship that converts power relationships into moral ones, and ensures the stability of hierarchy threatened by the less efficient, potentially unstable, coercive relationships.” P. Joyce (1980) *Work, Society and Politics*, p 92.
Internal and External Rules of Employment

In the case of waged labour, the ebb and flow of employment possibilities implied adaptive economic strategies. Likewise, the variable market worth assigned to a particular skill, or the limitations placed customarily on employment for women, drew socially constructed boundaries around waged workplace environments. If Hobsbawm is correct in stating that a “worker’s wage calculation [was] largely a customary and not a market calculation,” then community customs were instrumental in shaping local standards of living. It would also be true to state that trends associated with modernisation were also important in determining who could work where and for how much. Nineteenth century movements such as increased government regulation over the workplace, the reduced need for skilled labour, the assertion of worker solidarity and their own selectivity in employment and other new forms of capital movement were instrumental in rationalising the employment landscape. This section examines the changing rules of employment, and how opportunities were enhanced or diminished as result of these changes. Individual free will and physiological ability are not considered in this thesis, but certainly these personal traits could often override family or community influence.

Robert Knight, of the Boilermaker’s Society, intoned in 1881 that his brethren had to

“make the best of the sunshine we now enjoy, for as certain as night will return, so surely will the clouds of depression surround us with gloom, loss of work, and consequent suffering to ourselves and families.”

Knight’s statement is at once recognition that market swings were an unavoidable by-product of industrialisation, and moral encouragement to his fellow operatives to adopt a rainy day philosophy. Similarly, the Birmingham Chamber of Commerce in 1868, also concerned about trade depressions, saw a remedy in preventing “the previous expansion which caused them.” Certainly, sudden or gradual change in product demand was recognised by business and government as a fundamental barrier to reliable regional and

100 Quoted in McClelland (1987) “Time to work, time to live: some aspects of work and the re-formation of class in Britain, 1850-1880”, in P. Joyce (ed.) The Historical Meanings of Work, p 186.
local prosperity. While very little could be done to prevent economic downturns, business owners and operatives alike were encouraged to view prosperous times as transitory. In fact, as Southall and Gilbert have observed, working communities displayed a range of survival strategies, such as “spreading risk by having many family members working; developing relationships with local shop keepers to ensure credit; maintaining a ‘Sunday suit’ so as to have something to pawn; and of course a willingness to delay marriage until better times.”

Finding work however, regardless of local economic fortunes, was more than a simple arrangement of matching labour to vacancies. Family and community provided at least a portion of the cultural infrastructure which organised work units, filled apprenticeships, perpetuated skills and reinforced work customs. From large, highly mechanised factories to labour-intensive domestic workshops, customary social patterns permitted both intergenerational continuity of working opportunities and intragenerational flexibility in adapting to cyclical work. For instance, of employed children under 18 in the southern cotton textile district, 12-15% in 1833 were employed with the nuclear family as part of a work unit. While significant, this number may have been even higher if not for an overall shortage of age-appropriate child labour. Beyond the immediate family, recruitment spread first to larger circles of kin, to lodgers or neighbours, or to kin of co-workers. Joyce interprets this tendency as a reproduction of community-based family structures inside the workplace. Social patterns were reinforced “in terms of either direct patrimonial employment or of supervision.”

Similar patterns were detectable in the early twentieth century Potteries, a context far removed from the large Lancashire mills. In a 1920 survey of 76 working families, an average of three family members worked together on the same potbank. Generations would succeed generations using learned and adapted family skills. While using extended

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105 R. Whipp (1990) Patterns of Labour, p 73.
family and social ties to secure employment was a common strategy, employers encouraged good workers to recruit other family members. The expectation by management was that desirable skills and a positive work ethic were family traits. This technique for filling job vacancies was particularly important for small masters, controlling discrete workplaces hidden behind largely residential streets or down back alleys. Without prior knowledge of their existence, prospective workers were unlikely to find their way to these locations, gravitating instead toward large, prominent factories where employment prospects might be perceived to be more plentiful.

While community and family ties cannot be debated as a crucial influence in creating work opportunities, it is important to remember that nineteenth century urban dwellers were highly mobile, moving often within neighbourhoods, across regions and around the country. The further that people removed themselves from their social networks, the less likely it was these reliable sources could be tapped. In recognising this characteristic of the work force, it follows that the mobile worker devised adaptive strategies which had little to do with either family or community. This aspect of work, local strategies used to match need with opportunity, forms a discussion point in Chapter 6 of this thesis. Two possibilities in particular are examined - the ability of nineteenth century workers to read industrial landscapes for clues about finding work and the importance of the local press to recruit workers to small workplaces.

Despite the strong focus on waged or pieced employment in much discussion of nineteenth century work, it must be recognised that England of that century was a nation of workers unaccustomed generally to the idea of year-round employment with one employer. Would the prospect of being put out of a job inspire a change in day to day behaviour? In the Lancashire described by Joyce, or the Tyneside of McClelland, waged factory employment was viewed by operatives as an "irreversible development" associated with

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security, job permanence and community well-being.\textsuperscript{109} Worker dependence on their places of employment, and their faith that jobs today meant jobs tomorrow led to strong ties of loyalty between the community and workplace. However, shifting international demand for cotton textiles or engineering products regularly tested this bond. Anderson estimates that fewer than 15\% of Lancashire operatives escaped poverty in their lifetimes.\textsuperscript{110} Change could come rapidly, as Foster notes in Oldham, finding 50\% struggling to make ends meet in 1847, only to drop to 20\% two years later.\textsuperscript{111}

In cities dominated by several large workplaces, market collapses, such as that which occurred at the end of the American Civil War, challenged the community to adapt. As work units were often formed around kin, entire families could forfeit pay packets if the group was disbanded. Trained in the regimen of factory labour, with clear divisions in skill and labour, operatives in large workplaces were faced with unfamiliar work options in times of slack employment. Fewer opportunities meant greater competition, and greater likelihood that neighbourhood loyalties could be tested in times of short employment. As evidenced by the testimony provided in parliamentary enquiries, neighbourhood rivalries for economic favour were much in evidence during tight economic times. Tactics such as cut-throat pricing, manipulation of raw material supply or delivery of finished products and rare instances of sabotage all indicate how changes in global demand could be felt at the neighbourhood or even individual level.\textsuperscript{112}

From the other side of the production fence, Samuel argues that mid-Victorian Britain’s “superabundance of labour” actually encouraged capitalists to keep one foot in the labour-intensive, machine-poor production world that dominated pre-industrial workplaces.\textsuperscript{113} Further, Bythell, Behagg and others argue that, in the broader definition of work defined

\textsuperscript{111} J. Foster (1974) \textit{Class Struggle and the Industrial Revolution}, p 96.
\textsuperscript{112} These tactics are given a human voice in the Minutes of Evidence before the Select Committee of the House of Lords on the Sweating System (PP 1889 [1889] xiii). “When his next door neighbour is at work while he is out of work of course he is tempted to accept the reduction in order to get work.” [response no. 17946 by Richard Juggins, Secretary of the Midland Counties Trades Federation].
earlier, plentiful opportunities existed to return to pre-industrial work forms. As a consequence, local labour markets were primed to adapt to the changing fortunes of waged employment and whether or not employers could maintain jobs locally. This flexibility, no doubt rooted in traditional cultural patterns of work, was a critical safety valve throughout the nineteenth century.

On another level, however, the reactive nature of early modernism meant that new external controls over the workplace began to be felt at the level of people’s individual lives, although it could certainly be argued that these controls were applied with some obeisance to customary patterns. From the earliest days of factory legislation in 1834, it was clear that conflict was bound to arise over who exactly had control over the workplace. The Factory Acts gave rise to appointing regional sub-Inspectors, placing conditions on employment of women and children, and linking childrens’ health and education with their work. Initially, these Acts encompassed employment in cotton, woollens, worsted, flax, hemp, jute and other textile manufacture, indicating a strong bias toward the earliest manufacturing sectors to undergo large-scale agglomeration. Extensions in 1865, to include bleaching and dyeing works, and 1867, adding all power-driven industry (steam or water), brought thousands of new workplaces under the Factory Inspectorate umbrella. In particular, the 1867 Factory and Workshops Extension Acts extended coverage to small employers (less than 50 employees), although with less stringent regulation and usually less oversight from local sub-Inspectors.

Throughout the nineteenth century history of factory and workshop legislation, the intent appears to have been to apply external rules governing the relationship between employer and employee behaviour in three main areas: conditions of employment (particularly women and children), education and health of children and working safety. Within these broad categories however were exemptions which indicate the more specific aims of the legislation. Places granted total exemptions were as follows:

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1. Workplaces with men only and no machinery moved by mechanical power.
2. Industrial schools where the purpose is instruction.
3. Houses where straw plait, pillow lace or glovemaking is carried on by members of a family residing in a home.
4. Houses in which any handicraft is performed by members of a family residing in the house, as an occasional occupation and not as the principal means of living.

Places granted partial exemptions included:

1. Houses where the members of a family residing therein work, the labour of adult females is unrestricted; that of young persons may be taken between 6.00 a.m. and 9.00 p.m., and until 4.00 p.m. Saturdays.
2. In workshops where notice has been given that neither children nor young persons are employed, the labour of female adults may be taken between 6.00 a.m. and 9.00 p.m. 116

For the latter partially exempted workplaces, no abstract of the Acts needed displaying, no compulsory holidays needed specifying and no legislation pertaining to ventilation or limewashing was applied.

Restrictions placed upon employment applied to all work by children and young persons (younger than 16),117 to a large proportion of work by women (outside small domestic workshops or ‘female appropriate’ labour) and to some work by men (mainly power-driven sites or in places with women or children also working). Limiting the hours and days of female employment was couched generally by the Factory Inspectorate as instituting moral authority over a perceived imbalance of paid over domestic labour. Basically, it was felt that women were working too much in work environments too degrading. With regard to this employment, Robert Baker, Chief Inspector of Factories, stated that

“against the general employment of females in industrial pursuits there is nothing to be said; on the contrary, there is a good deal to be said for it, where any care at all is exercised in the shape of moral supervision over them.”118

116 PP 1884 [C.39451 xviii.181, Report of the Factory Inspectors, this review was published in conjunction with the ‘jubilee’ of factory legislation.
117 For enforcement purposes, child labour was split into two categories - children (less than 13 years of age) and young persons (ages 13 to 15) - for which different regulations applied.
Paid employment by women inside or outside the home was inevitably translated to neglect of household duties. According to the Inspectorate, if women were earning a wage to supplement their family income, then children and husbands were not being cared for. Again according to Baker, “long-continued employment from home, i.e. from childhood to womanhood, prevents any adequate opportunity for domestic training . . . and hence we trace the absenteeism from home of husbands, and the increase and success of houses and places of entertainment.” Some employers devised schemes to encourage a balance between working women and domestic maintenance. For instance, in 1868, a local sub-Inspector reported a Redditch manufacturer offering an abbreviated workday for his female employees to ensure that neither children nor husband would return to an empty home.

Children’s employment opportunities were also curtailed by the Acts. The main restriction for children (under 13) was the provision for half-time employment in conjunction with ten hours formal education per week. No child could work more than a half day on Saturday, and not both before noon and after 2.00 p.m. on any weekday. In addition, no allowance was made for night work, a common practice in ironworks where smelters were fired 24 hours per day. Enforcement problems were legion, encompassing uncooperative employers, recalcitrant parents, generally hostile communities and ineffective or non-existent school boards. Once children reached their thirteenth birthday, they graduated to the status of ‘young person’ which permitted them to work full-time so long as they achieved a certain standard of education.

From this overview, it is clear that the primary motives behind factory legislation were to regulate employment opportunities for wage earning women and children. How these regulations were implemented at a local level were once again subject to the influence of established, routinised social relations. In one sense, the Factory Acts helped to institutionalise restrictions on female employment which were already at work within many neighbourhoods and communities, sets of rules based on changing local customs that went well beyond those placed on men. The means by which women were systematically

120 Women would begin work at 8.30 a.m., leaving for the midday meal at 12.30 p.m. (early enough to meet children returning from school and prepare her husband’s meal). Paid work would restart at 2.00 p.m., continuing to 4.30 p.m. when she would leave for the day to have the home in order by the husband’s arrival time.
excluded from many employment sectors have been well documented, and are traceable to the increasingly externalised and mechanised workplaces of the eighteenth century, combined with the masculinisation of these spaces through social custom. According to Berg, men regarded their artisanal workshops as ‘moral communities.’ \(^{121}\) Expectations of a decent wage, some control over production and free association in new community rituals created through the workplace could be fulfilled only through excluding women.

When women were able to find work outside the home, it was generally remunerated at about one-third to one-half the rate for men. Even professions where female labour was considered crucial, such as in the Birmingham pen and jewellery industries, offered much lower pay rates than male-dominated industries. In the Black Country though, the largest percentage of women’s work was in small workshops or family units. A husband and wife working side by side, doing the same work, would be compensated at different rates, all the while insuring that there was no “neglect of home duties.” \(^{122}\) This work was often performed under brutal conditions. It is small wonder that “for such women [nailmakers] in Lye and Wollescote, the eventual extinction of the trade and alternative employment in the local hollow-ware factories, where restrictions on hours were enforced, must have come as something of a liberation.” \(^{123}\) Legislation against excessive hours for female workers did not apply to family work units because the women were technically their own mistresses and therefore able to set their own work schedule. In fact, even if the legislative intent had been there, the sheer number and geographic elusiveness of these shops would have precluded regular inspections.

This and the previous sections have attempted to provide a basis for the decision to seek employment, to understand the process by which this decision could be put into action, and to realise the restraints on where the decision could lead. If we accept the centrality of work in peoples’ lives, then it is important to acknowledge that the decision was not made in a vacuum. Family expectations, community customs and external influences all played a role in constructing local opportunity to meet individual or family need. Collectively, these

\(^{121}\) M. Berg (1985) *The Age of Manufactures*, pp 159-60.
were the ‘rules’ through which employment choices were enacted. These arguments are taken up again in Chapter 6 within the geographical context of the selected Walsall and West Bromwich neighbourhoods.

TWO GEOGRAPHIES OF WORKPLACE AND COMMUNITY

Massey alludes to an academic division of labour which "assigns the job of trying to explain the spatial organisation of production within particular countries largely to the discipline of ‘geography.’"124 Given this assignment, it might be expected that geographers would ensure that only the methodologies developed for studying Lancashire industry would translate to other areas, not the regionally-based conclusions. In fact, one of the great problems and ironies of research fashion in the study of nineteenth century industry (both as a social and economic construct) is the lack of widespread interest within geography. Urban geographers have dissected many facets of the industrial city and social geographers have traced the effects of industrialisation, but industry as an occupier of space in the nineteenth century city and industrialisation as an agent of change at the local level scarcely rate centre stage.

Sources, or the lack of them, could help explain the barge pole distance. As far back as 1979, Dennis speculated that the neglect of nineteenth century industrial geography could be attributed to "an abundance of information on the residential areas of cities."125 Workplaces "of the mushroom breed"126 offer little in the way of meaningful documentation, and directories provide lists but no information on the hundreds of working environments in the Victorian city. Still, Carter and Lewis argue that "if the epithet ‘industrial city’ means anything, it is surely that the driving force which made it different from other cities was, quite obviously, industry."127 It is perhaps this ‘obviousness’ which is partly responsible for the neglect of industry by historical geographers. Judging from the literature, one could argue that the industrial revolution appears to have occurred without modification to the industrial landscape.

126 J. Alfrey and C. Clark (1993) The Landscape of Industry: Patterns of Change in the Ironbridge Gorge, p 70. In this study, the authors describe the difficulties in using landscape evidence as a source.
There is certainly no consensus on how the factory system, or the new capitalist cities, altered the 'urban experience.' Corrigan and Sayer speak of new districts being colonised with new social forms "that lacked the old forms of moral or natural policing and the new civic institutions." Harvey's evolutionary approach, from 'places of encounters' (social integration) to 'places of separation' (social segregation) implies that "the habituation of the worker to the new mode of production . . . was and is still no easy matter." Massey's brief statement that "industry is society-forming" provides an appropriate starting point, but for that realisation to assume a dynamic dimension, it should be followed with 'and changes in industry are society-altering.' This thesis places workplace form and geography in the forefront in an attempt to understand how neighbourhoods 'were colonised,' 'evolved' or 'formed' in an era of rapid industrialisation.

Putting Industrial Geography into the Revolution

How did neighbourhoods learn from industry and how did industry learn from neighbourhoods? This thesis argues that a good approach for understanding the mutuality between industrial form and neighbourhood social relations is one which is not sector-specific or site-specific, but place-specific. Joyce has said that "no matter how useful more manageable concepts and methodologies may be, they will almost certainly lead us back to the centrality of neighbourhood and community feeling." People understood change, and either accepted or rejected their understanding, primarily because of what was happening in their immediate surroundings amongst their neighbours, friends and family. Pooley states that "from the perspective of those who organised and worked in the industry, small-scale variations from place to place and firm to firm were far more significant than national distributions." Despite inherent difficulties in defining a neighbourhood, demarcating its physical boundaries and identifying internal and external links, it nevertheless provides a critical local filter through which regional and even global industrialisation must pass.

To bridge the regional and the local, thereby recognising the Black Country as a collection of spatially distinct places, one neighbourhood each within Walsall and West Bromwich is examined. It is recognised that the term ‘neighbourhood’ as employed in this thesis has little meaning beyond a conveniently sized tool for geographical analysis. The criteria used to select their boundaries offer only a nominal social or economic basis for calling the two areas neighbourhoods. However, the relatively integrated nature and the range of land uses within each suggests that the bulk of many people’s lives and daily interactions could easily have been contained within their geographical bounds. Work and home, especially if they were one and the same, seem to be represented fairly despite the comparatively arbitrary border delineation. It should be stressed that the constructed neighbourhoods, while undeniably resembling Black Country test tubes, are viewed in this thesis as parts of the larger regional landscape.

Four primary criteria were considered when selecting and delineating neighbourhoods for study as follows:

1. **Size.** - Since the scale of the study extends to mapping individual properties and land uses, approximately one-third mile square is as about as large as could effectively be considered.

2. **Transport.** Each neighbourhood includes one major thoroughfare, connecting the neighbourhood to the rest of the community and providing the retail destination for the predominantly working-class housing in the area.

3. **Vacant Land.** At the beginning of the study period, approximately 60 percent of effective building space was occupied, compared with about 90 percent by 1890. It was felt that looking at newly constructed space would provide some indication of industrialisation’s role in shaping developing parts of the neighbourhood.

4. **Archetypal.** While realising that no neighbourhood can effectively represent an entire town, every effort was made to select areas that were not exceptional in their distribution of land uses or contained a particular workplace which was one of a kind.
From High Street to High Street, West Bromwich and Walsall are separated spatially by only four miles, but as nineteenth century Black Country towns, it is possible they represented respectively the rule and exception of urban growth in south Staffordshire. That they had almost identical populations in their respective boroughs by 1865, the nominal starting point of this study, is misleading considering their sharply contrasting antecedents.

In general, the evolution of the Black Country during the industrial revolution is distinguished more by localised growth of rural villages than by accretion around older city centres.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, Walsall was arguably the second most important urban area in a hierarchy of west Midlands towns. With Birmingham already established as the region’s primate city, and with Wolverhampton still twenty years away from claiming second city status, the Walsall Corporation began to flex its municipal muscles as early as the late eighteenth-century. Pearce’s 1813 history of Walsall hints of the morphological stirrings of a modern city, citing the presence of a race course, assembly rooms, a theatre, three bowling greens and a cock-pit. In addition, industry was already prominent on the Walsall townscape. By mid-century and beyond, growth tended to occur in fairly close proximity to this clearly recognisable city centre.

In contrast, West Bromwich at the turn of the eighteenth-century was a thinly populated series of small villages, with the future town centre still an area of unenclosed heath. William Kenrick, writing in 1865, related a story long established in the area concerning the decision by Izon & Company to move their cast iron holloware plant in 1780 from Birmingham to West Bromwich.

“He brought only seven or eight workmen with him, and that even this small band was looked upon with such distrust by the inhabitants of that then rural district as to be refused lodging, so that Mr. Izon had to buy or build cottages for his workmen.”

Nineteenth century growth in West Bromwich tended to confirm traditional village

132 As noted in E. L. Glew (1856) History of the Borough and Foreign of Walsall, p 5.
133 W. Kenrick (1866) “Cast iron hollow-ware, tinned and enamelled, and cast ironmongery,” in S. Timmins (ed.) The Resources, Products and Industrial History of Birmingham and the Midland Hardware District, p 104.
patterns, with satellite centres such as Hill Top, Greet and Great Bridge as active as town centre construction sites. Novelist D. C. Murray, born on the High Street in the 1850s, recalled that as a young child, he “could pass in an hour from the clink, clink, clink of the anvils . . . to a rural retirement.” Indeed, it was not until the 1870s that West Bromwich began to build some of the trappings of a municipality.

With this level of divergence in their respective municipal histories, it suggested that the two towns could very well exhibit different patterns of industrial geography. In fact, research on the two towns tended to bear this out. On the whole, West Bromwich appeared to have supported larger scale production units than Walsall, leading to a comparatively more segregated industrial landscape. Walsall’s dense network of workshops and family production units were acknowledged features of the leather industry and small metals production for which the town was recognised. The two towns offered the potential to identify two neighbourhoods within the Black Country regional industrial complex which met the established criteria, but still exhibited enough contrasts to fulfil the goals of the study.

Selecting and drawing a boundary around one neighbourhood within each town that met all the qualifying criteria proved relatively easy for West Bromwich, but more difficult for Walsall. For the latter, an area extending east from Ablewell Street to the Chuckeries was not unlike many other areas in Walsall, with dense concentrations of workshops and some smaller factories (see Figure 4.2). In fact, so similar were the development patterns in the town that almost any developed area of the correct size could have served as the study area, although any sense of identity associated with place remains largely elusive. Ablewell Street served as the one major thoroughfare, a main street connecting the Birmingham Road to the centre of Walsall. About 40% of the land area, located primarily in the southeastern portion of the neighbourhood, was undeveloped in 1860 but would almost completely built by 1890. This neighbourhood is referred to as Ablewell East in this study.

As noted above, West Bromwich was in 1860 a poorly connected landscape of villages which bore little relation to one another apart from their growth as industrial work

locations. Again, because of the consistency in their development histories, almost any one of these municipal satellites could have served as the selected neighbourhood. Spon Lane, on the southern flank of the District, seemed to fit the criteria most closely (see Figure 3.2). It was closer to what would become the centre of West Bromwich and it was located adjacent to a number of transport links (canal and railway) which were able to augment the carrying capacity and capability of Spon Lane itself. Several medium- to large-sized factories hugged the canal, which was typical of other growing villages in greater West Bromwich. In common with Ablewell East, about 40% of the neighbourhood remained available for development, although much of this growth would be achieved through infill rather than the laying out of new streets and building lots.

The Ablewell East and Spon Lane neighbourhoods are the focus of this thesis. Industrial geography has been mapped at a building lot scale, location and occupation have been confirmed through rate books, census enumerator’s books and directories, business and government records have been used to better understand the use through time of public and private space, and local newspapers have been read to capture what the locals considered to be newsworthy during the study period. Despite the amount of information contained in these documents, there remain large gaps in understanding key aspects of the two neighbourhoods. Central to this source void is documentation on those disposable acts performed every day - the act of going to work, the act of being sociable with co-workers, the act of making income last another week, or the act of pleasing your gaffer. While these aspects of daily life remain opaque, the scale of this study does allow for a number of individual and collective work strategies to be examined.

This thesis is organised to conclude in Chapter 8 with several observations on the cultural geography of working spaces, working lives and working neighbourhoods in two defined locations. The mid-Victorian Black Country provides a regional setting while, as noted above, specific neighbourhoods within the towns of Walsall and West Bromwich are examined in detail between the mid-1860s and the early-1890s. Chapter 2 provides an overview of the Black Country during this period, focusing particularly on regional development and identity and the character of work and workplace.
Chapters 3 and 4 are devoted to providing individual historical, industrial and geographical contexts for the two neighbourhoods, from both a townwide and local perspective. Brief overviews of pre-1860 development are provided for both towns, followed by breakdowns of industrial form, product specialisations, and working cultures. Finally, the historical geographies of each neighbourhood are examined and reconstructed, with emphasis on the industrial geography of newly developing streets and the reproduction of large and small workplaces. Development is tracked from a land use perspective, noting where possible the mechanisms of capital spurring the growth. Building industry scale, factory construction and the number of family production units in newer developments give some indication of changes in industrial form. These two chapters are intended to explicate differences and similarities between the two towns and neighbourhoods and provide a backdrop to the more comparative analyses considered in Chapters 5 to 7.

The last three chapters before the conclusion form the heart of the thesis and attempt to answer the question posed at the beginning of this subsection. Their intent is to compare the experiences of work and aspects of working cultures within the two neighbourhoods – Ablewell East, characterised by a largely integrated workplace geography, and Spon Lane, a much more segregated industrial landscape. The comparison begins by looking at the Walsall and West Bromwich spaces of production and their micro-geography within the neighbourhood. Where possible, modernisation is examined as an initiator of neighbourhood change and as a reflection of capital processes at work.

Chapter 6 makes an effort to go inside the opportunities and need for work (particularly waged and pieced employment). How was each neighbourhood able to adapt and reproduce sufficient labour to ensure that its workplaces were operating at capacity, and how did family and the neighbourhood help to define the need to work? Where need and opportunity met was that part of life spent working, and each neighbourhood was characterised by working lives which were respectful, if not always slavish, to a prevailing culture of work. Behagg hints at the inherent difficulties of this type of research, claiming that “the actual rules of behaviour by which the workforce governed their own activities and attitudes at the place of work were largely unwritten.” Certainly, a sliding scale of

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135 C. Behagg (1982) "Secrecy, ritual and folk violence: the opacity of the workplace in the first half of the
data exists from the comparatively well-documented factory cultures to the anonymous workshop and family production unit cultures.

Looking outward from the workplace, Chapter 7 considers the physical and social manifestations of living and working with and around industry. Joyce has said that "the culture of the factory reached down further still than the organised event, embracing the fundamental activities of human sociability."\(^{36}\) The word culture is used in this thesis to encompass not only workplace relationships and work-related social activities, but also the residential spaces that housed the workers. This evidence provides some fundamental determinations for how workers interacted with the neighbourhood once leaving work. As a final comment, this chapter seeks to contribute to some understanding about what it was like to live next door to industry. Besides the outwardly obvious noise, smoke and blackness, there were less apparent ramifications of industrial capitalism, manifested in geographical, social and economic change. By collecting information at a neighbourhood scale, a bridge may be constructed to link the broader Black Country industrial visage with more spatially discrete distinctions.

Tracking attitudes to change is not easy. Cultural markers can often be discerned but at a time scale that bears little relation to people’s daily experience. Historians and historical geographers can be guilty from time to time of compressing years into days, regions into neighbourhoods and experience into anecdotes. Often, there seems little choice if any sort of understanding is to be achieved. The challenge in this thesis is to at least be “more sensitive towards and more reflective of the role of human agency in the skilled accomplishment of historical change.”\(^{37}\) Consideration of over thirty years of Black Country impressions provides flavour but is painfully short of real sustenance in some areas. However, as far as the sources permit, this thesis seeks to approach the region’s spaces of production from a necessarily distant perspective but with an intimate gaze.

Chapter 2

THE BLACK COUNTRY
"The Worst Country God Ever Made"?1

Metaphors appear to be irresistible when discussing the Black Country of the nineteenth century. Certainly other regions may have been as degraded, other local populations as derided or other English dialects as distinctive, but the combination existing at one place and time in a country called 'Black' tempted to hyperbole even the most democratic of commentators. Collectively, using colourful prose, these writers constructed a horrifying image. Vulcan was called to testify as a symbol of Black Country labour, neighbourhoods were reduced to the oppressive sounds and odours of industry and the sky burned by night and darkened by day. In some sense, the region became a yardstick against which the worst aspects of industrial capitalism were measured. Stories such as Queen Victoria's request that her carriage's curtains be drawn between Birmingham and Wolverhampton, whether apocryphal or not, ostracised the Black Country to a level of industrial hell which had few other occupants.

If contemporaries thought the region represented the nadir of industrialisation's broadly perceived effects, were the social and geographical aspects of Black Country working lives simply extensions of this ravaging? George Blenkinsopp, for many years the district's factory inspector, referred to local labour as "wanting intelligence" and "not a promising subject."2 The elderly woman, whose comment about the Black Country working environment to the local Factory Inspector provides a title for this chapter, would seem to concur. Certainly there were many whose descriptions seemed to link Black Country workers with their industrial landscape in a synchronous whirlpool of personal and environmental neglect.

While these observations provide a distinctive (and remarkably consistent) flavour to the Victorian view of the Black Country, they reveal next to nothing about the experience of working under such conditions. This chapter argues that the Black Country was far from being a homogeneous wasteland. In common with other English regions of the nineteenth

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century, it was characterised by discernible communities - communities of people brought together by prospects of employment, communities of workers connected in a complex network of personal and market linkages and communities of overlapping social spaces which formed patterns within neighbourhoods. The selection of the Black Country as the locale for studying workplace geographies attempts to reconcile the distinctively unflattering views of the region given to us by nineteenth century observers with the daily, intimate lives of its workers.

BLACK COUNTRY RESEARCH THEMES

Researching late nineteenth century Black Country industrial and cultural geography is at once enticing and problematical. While the paucity of available literature is appealing from the ‘filling a niche’ standpoint, the research vacuum is so deep as to be daunting. In addition, what is available often perpetuates several generally acknowledged conclusions. For instance, Benson argues that much of the historiography of labour in the district is rooted in two assumptions. First, conclusions are drawn primarily from anecdotal or institutional sources, perhaps epitomised by the work of George Barnsbury. In a series of articles and books investigating the interplay between labour and capital in the nineteenth century Black Country, archival fence posts are linked into a seamless narrative which serves to support each source. Since these posts are inevitably defined by the survival rate of primarily institutional records, the results lean heavily to a masculine work experience and leap chronological and geographical fences at a breathtaking rate.

The second assumption is the common argument by Black Country historians that the region (often conjoined with Birmingham) was somehow unique and eccentric in comparison to other industrialised areas. This uniqueness has taken many forms, and is traceable to two seminal works, Samuel Timmins’ *Birmingham and the Midland Hardware Trade* (1866) and G. C. Allen’s *The Industrial Development of Birmingham and the Black Country* (1929). Both interpreted the west Midlands as the ‘workshop of the world,’ stressing occupational diversity and small master management. Further, both stated

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3 Benson’s overview of Black Country labour historiography is contained in “Black Country history and labour history” (1990) *Midland History* 15, pp 100-110.
5 Allen himself used Timmins’ findings to support many of his conclusions about the second half of the nineteenth century, even to the point of using the 1866 publication date as a watershed year for the Black Country industrial revolution.
strongly that the segregation of industrial sectors into individual towns and neighbourhoods provided a distinctive regional geography. Black Country labour was described as proffering less skill, having less education and being less likely to organise, than its counterparts in Birmingham and other locations. At least economically, their conclusions support a thesis of Black Country difference, in effect giving academic credence to the more subjective Victorian views discussed above.

For about forty years following the publication of Allen's book, the Black Country remained much the exclusive domain of economic historians. The enticements of rapid nineteenth century industrialisation inspired studies on the iron, glass, coal and leather industries, along with more general works on economic emergence and growth. By building on the foundations laid by Timmins and Allen, the result by 1970 was a region which was understood to be a former industrial powerhouse which had lost its raison d'etre in the twentieth century. Certainly, there was little social or labour history, let alone historical geography, to illuminate the human consequences of either the build-up or breakdown of a major player in the industrial revolution.

Although still few and far between, there have since 1970 been fledgling efforts to bridge Black Country social and economic histories. Barnsby, Hopkins and Taylor have contributed several publications relating to working-class lives and Phillips and Woods cover a number of consequences concerning Black Country criminality. More recently, Trainor has added a political component by comparing social structures in Bilston, Dudley and West Bromwich and Liddle made an effort to provide a comprehensive study of

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Victorian Walsall.10 In addition, since the late 1980s, an M.A. in West Midlands Historical Studies offered through the University of Wolverhampton has generated a steady flow of place-, issue- or time-specific analyses.

Despite these recent efforts, very little has been done to rebut or support the original conclusions forwarded by Timmins and Allen, or to bring the Black Country into a contextual stream with other English regions. Too few historians, and almost none from related disciplines, have elected to address what Benson has called the "paradox at the centre of Black Country labour historiography."11 He seems prepared to acknowledge that perhaps an economic argument does serve best to explain working-class behaviour. However, the emphasis on uniqueness does little except to perpetuate an understanding that the Black Country was somehow distanced socially and economically from other industrialising areas.

BUILDING A BLACK COUNTRY REGIONAL IDENTITY

Both the origins of the name and the geographical extent of the Black Country lack a clear consensus. Most people seem to agree that the proper name came into recognisable use in the 1840s,12 and by the 1850s was used commonly in literary, journalistic and business circles.13 Putting a name to the region did help to draw a boundary around it, and modern research properly hedges against a strong delineation. Studies focusing on the iron and coal industries tend to treat the underlying geology as the basic delimiter, while others find it difficult to exclude the western districts of Birmingham (such as Handsworth) which seemed more characteristic of Tipton or Dudley, than of Birmingham. Even the more arbitrary boundaries suggested by political divisions are of little assistance. In the nineteenth century, the bulk of what people today refer to as the Black Country was situated in south Staffordshire, but with its southern flank split between Worcestershire and Warwickshire. Since 1974, the region has been integrated politically, along with Birmingham, under the banner of the West Midlands.

11 Benson, op. cit., p 100.
12 The precise date and meaning behind the origin of the name 'Black Country' is open to question. Lay's description in Notes and Queries is the most comprehensive analysis.
13 A volume of the Juvenile Englishman's Library published in 1846 (Colton Green: A Tale of the Black Country) is the earliest occurrence found during the course of this research.
Figure 2.1
The Black Country
This thesis adopts as a working definition a boundary which encompasses those towns which by the middle of the nineteenth century were recognised by outside observers as having some regional identity (see Figure 2.1). For the most part, their grouping under a Black Country label was rooted in proximity, rapid nineteenth century growth from villages to cities, and the bulk of labour employed in non-agricultural pursuits (specifically metals). Moving clockwise from West Bromwich, the area is ringed by Smethwick, Halesowen, Stourbridge, Dudley, Wolverhampton, Wednesfield and Walsall. The following two subsections examine two aspects of regional geography – the economic development of the Black Country and its landscape transformation during the nineteenth century.

Regional Economic Development

As a region, the Black Country, with or without Birmingham, developed as a substantial industrial power in nineteenth century England. Capital poured in to fund the fixed infrastructure of extractive and manufacturing industries. In common with other areas, migration and natural increase supplied sufficient labour to work the mines, toil in factories, and produce an array of items in courtyard workshops. Transport, first by canal and road, later by railway, criss-crossed the former heathland in a bewildering footprint of ingenuity. Technological innovation, beginning with Boulton and Watt’s Soho Foundry in the eighteenth century, ensured at least initial localisation for products like tubes and guns. Nineteenth century markets for Black Country goods, both as finished products and as upstream subcontracts, seemed sufficient to have attracted an accelerated pace of regional investment. If, as Storper and Walker argue, “territories develop through sequences of successful industrializations,”14 then the Black Country could correctly be termed industrialised territory by the mid-nineteenth century.

Lee’s study of regions (counties) and structural change confirms Staffordshire’s growth well above the national norm between 1841 and 1861.15 More specific details on the west Midlands are provided in Lawton’s study of population movements during this same period. Intensive in-migration accounted for a greater than 30% increase in population for each decade in several Black Country boroughs, including West Bromwich. The sources

for these economic migrants were primarily rural areas and surrounding counties (the so-called "short-range drift"), although the Black Country and Birmingham also acted as magnets for people from other urban or industrialising centres, such as London, Lancashire and Yorkshire.\(^\text{16}\) It was noted above how the name Black Country came into general use during this period, perhaps an indication of growing economic cohesion and stature. This could also explain the region's ability to attract potential workers from other urban areas.

The development of regions within capitalist economies has been a significant pre-occupation of geographers over the past twenty years. Within most of these studies, industry (or aspects of industrialisation) has been isolated as the primary determinant in the uneven nature of this transformation. Marxist explanation prevails, whereby uneven distribution of regional wealth globally mirrors uneven distribution of individual wealth locally. In other words, class divisions exist not only within a regional labour force, but also inter-regionally as capital redistributes economic favour over time and across space.

Explaining the whys behind the formation of regional industrial centres like the Black Country depends on how capital movement is interpreted. If capital is seen to follow a neoclassical model, spontaneously leading to re-establishment of a macro-economic equilibrium, then the region could be seen simply as a recipient of just enough investment to maximise profit. In a more hierarchical interpretation, the Black Country could be seen as the locale to which capital migrated from Birmingham in search of cheaper labour. Allen may have been a proponent of this theory, noting the shift to Black Country towns of trades with lower skill requirements (nailers to Dudley and Stourbridge, saddlers ironmongers to Walsall). Employing a historical materialist perspective would reveal that capital's need to appropriate space acted to encourage a steadily increasing pace of industrialisation so long as profit expectations were met.

In her exploration of uneven spatial development, Massey argues against the existence or even need for a single model of locational behaviour, stressing the "apparently endless adaptability and flexibility of capital."\(^\text{17}\) This perspective liberates explanations of regional development to permit lateral consideration of the different forces in geographical

industrialisation. For its theoretical framework of Black Country growth, this thesis adopts predominantly Marxist views of localised economic expansion, while recognising an influential pre-industrial social structure. Borrowing from Lefebvre’s work, new spaces of representation had necessarily to negotiate with existing representations of space.\textsuperscript{18} Thus, while “capitalism is capable of escaping from the past to create new localisations of industry,”\textsuperscript{19} it must be recognised that capital’s new face in its new place was likely to display features which were decidedly home-grown.

By mid-century, the Black Country was gaining a regional identity based on common development trends and expanding capitalisation. As might be expected, this did not imply that the region presented a homogeneous economic landscape. However, commentators considered local sectoral specialisations enough alike in industrial character (namely the metal trades) to refer to the rectangle cornered by Wolverhampton, Stourbridge, Halesowen and Walsall\textsuperscript{20} as a region. Certainly, there were enough similarities to confirm Storper and Walker’s assertion that “regions tend to be highly specialised in terms of their economic bases, and as a corollary, most industries show a marked skew of their activities towards relatively few places.”\textsuperscript{21}

Allen appears to have been the first to isolate technology and fixed capital as the seeds for localisation in the region. While stressing that a complete explanation must remain tentative, he nevertheless states that “localisation was confirmed by the existence within the town of labour, plant and subsidiary industries appropriate to the new trades.”\textsuperscript{22} Storper and Walker would seem to concur, arguing that “technological localisation is thus a process of learning by problem-solving as an industry or closely-linked group of industries grow and change.” White’s comment from 1860, “different towns, different work,”\textsuperscript{23} is indicative of both the degree of local specialisation and how early it was recognised.

Associations between Black Country towns and certain products were legion: Willenhall and locks, Wednesbury and tubes, Walsall and saddles, West Bromwich and holloware and Cradley Heath and chains were several examples. However, could the epidemic of sectoral

\textsuperscript{18} H. Lefebvre (1991) \textit{The Production of Space.} See especially Chapter 2 (Social Space), pp 68-168.
\textsuperscript{19} Storper and Walker, \textit{op. cit.}, p 71.
\textsuperscript{20} With respect to Walsall, some boosters used the town’s prominent leather industry as an argument that they were ‘just outside’ the Black Country (see Chapter 4).
\textsuperscript{21} Storper and Walker, \textit{op. cit.}, p 20.
\textsuperscript{22} G. C. Allen (1929) \textit{The Industrial Development of Birmingham and the Black Country}, p 45.
\textsuperscript{23} W. White (1860) \textit{All Round the Wrekin}, p 264.
localisation qualify as one of those attributed Black Country ‘eccentricities’ referred to by Benson? It must be remembered that while the region boasted of considerable industrial development and linkage, it was still a complex of relatively small towns, “retaining rather more of the village than [they] acquired of the city.”24 Chapters 3 and 4 reveal the extent to which individual neighbourhoods could support the production of a wide range of goods and services.

Storper and Walker credit in part the differential development of industry to the socially-produced dimensions of labour, “residuals of local and regional histories that predate industrialisation . . .”25 It might be expected that Black Country industry, in 1860, with village craft-based antecedents still strongly ingrained, would retain many of these characteristics. Moreover, the region probably had much in common with other specialised centres which were industrialising elsewhere. The Northampton leather trades, Nottingham’s lace industry26 or the Staffordshire pottery banks were also highly localised economies with obvious ties to pre-industrial specialisations and work patterns. Capital growth in the territorial production complex that included the Black Country and Birmingham thus inherited a broad spatial pattern of local specialisation. It has been argued that geographical industrialisation promotes flexibility and integration within these complexes. “Industrial systems seek more fluid divisions of labour in which linkages, contracts and production commitments can be continually made and unmade as industry evolves.”27 The extent to which the march of industrialisation transformed the Black Country landscape is examined in the following section.

Regional Transformation of the Industrial Landscape

As viewed by contemporaries, all Black Country towns contributed to a singular regional identity, partly of awe for its raw industrial power, and partly of horror for its obvious wasteland-like appearance. For Elihu Burritt, the American consul in Birmingham during the 1860s, the region’s industrial vigour and work-inured labour force were characteristics for which admiration should be afforded. His time-honoured sound bite for the Black

26 For a recent approach to “mapping of the world of work” in the lace industry, see Gray and Loftus (1999), “industrial regulation, urban space . . .” Urban History, pp 211-229.
27 Storper and Walker, op. cit., p 144.
Country, "black by day and red by night,"\textsuperscript{28} appears in context to be high praise for the very apparatus and detritus of industrialisation, a tolerable by-product of economic prosperity. Certainly, people were getting rich there. The fortunes amassed by aristocratic landholders such as the Earls of Dudley, Bradford and Dartmouth, among many others, were in large part derived from exploitation of landholdings enriched with mineral wealth or building space.\textsuperscript{29}

Most writers and travellers, however, were content to comment on the obvious features before them. Charles Dickens' visit to the Black Country in the 1830s merited in \textit{The Old Curiosity Shop} what would become typical of regional descriptions. "This mournful land," wrote Dickens,

\begin{quote}
"filled them with a dismal gloom. On every side, and as far as the eye could see into the heavy distance, tall chimneys, crowding on each other, and presenting that endless repetition of the same dull, ugly form . . . poured out their plague of smoke, obscured the light, and made foul the melancholy air."\textsuperscript{30}
\end{quote}

This sentiment was reiterated from many sources, and seemed to gather consensus from the 1840s as railways opened the heart of the Black Country to an array of travelling observers. A tour of the Black County apparently provided inspiration for John Martin's illustrations of Pandemonium in Milton's \textit{Paradise Lost}. "With its burning fires and colony of supernatural blacksmiths," these images spurred Martin to produce his vast biblical canvases which, as mezzotints, proved to be popular images.\textsuperscript{31} Considering that the entire nation was supposedly in the throes of an industrial revolution, it is extraordinary that so much attention, mostly disparaging, was focused on one region.

The prevailing theme was blackness. Smith, from 1838, supposed that "black and blackening must the occupations of the mine, the furnace, the forge and the nail-shop ever be . . ."\textsuperscript{32} Twenty-two years hence, White regarded that "blackness everywhere prevails; the ground is black, the atmosphere is black, and the underground is honey-combed by

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\textsuperscript{28} E. Burritt (1868) \textit{Walks in the Black Country and Its Green Borderland}, p 1.
\textsuperscript{29} Even Lord Henry's uncle in Oscar Wilde's \textit{The Picture of Dorian Gray} had holdings in the Black Country.
\textsuperscript{30} C. Dickens (1985) \textit{The Old Curiosity Shop}, p 422.
\textsuperscript{31} For a discussion of these paintings, see M. Freeman (1999) \textit{Railways and the Victorian Imagination}, pp 43-4, 226.
\end{flushleft}
mining galleries stretching in utter blackness for many a league." 33 Advancing another twelve years to 1872, a *Leisure Hour* reporter described leaving Birmingham by train and encountering "clouds of thick smoke pouring from tall chimneys, a general appearance of dinginess and dirt . . ." 34 For a final example, from a 1902 book on the Black Country by Frederick Hackwood, prolific chronicler of local history, the landscape is portrayed as "no longer green, but of a dirty, grimy hue . . . so sooty that one may not venture to pluck so much as a struggling dog daisy without the absolute certainty of soiling the hands." 35

While these nineteenth century observations paint a consistent portrait, they offer no comment about the uniqueness of the Black Country scene or, more importantly, whether the residents themselves viewed the area as extraordinary. To what extent did the descriptions provided from without accurately reflect the view from within? What may have seemed a degraded and unhealthy environment to Dickens or White was also home to several hundred thousand people. It would be tempting to speculate, given the similarities in the verbal pictures presented above, that successive generations of Black Country families accepted the effects of industrialisation without question. While hands may have turned sooty when fingering a dog daisy, would this experience have been any different from that of the previous generation?

Full comprehension of the visual transformation of the Black Country in the second half of the nineteenth century presents some problems. First, there was comparatively little interest shown by artists in setting their subjects amidst a Black Country landscape. 36 This was consistent with the recognised Victorian aesthetic preference for the great cities or the countryside. With some exceptions, factory towns in particular, and regional industrial complexes in general, seem to have been ignored generally for widespread artistic expression. There is no recognised group of ‘industrial paintings’ to mirror the industrial novels discussed by Williams and subsequently adopted by others. 37 Some photography

33 W. White (1860) *All Round the Wrekin*, p 6.
34 A series of sketches called "A Midland Tour" appeared in *The Leisure Hour* throughout 1872. Quote is from the 16 March edition, p 170.
36 Turner’s *Dudley* and Martin’s apocalyptic images were notable exceptions.
37 Raymond Williams’ discussion of the ‘industrial novels’ appears in *Culture and Society 1780-1950* (1961) pp 99-119. The Black Country as a setting for novels was used by Black Country-born authors D. C. Murray and Francis Brett Young, in addition to the accepted conclusion that Disraeli’s Wodgate in *Sybil* was based on Willenhall.
and woodcuts survive focusing on the Black Country’s darker industrial scenes. Also, in common with the northern mills, the larger manufacturing establishments used their buildings as advertisements in product directories and annual reports, trying to convey a sense of industriousness and stability.

What people saw, or the public face of industrial capital, was undoubtedly a component of nineteenth century regional identities. It has already been shown that written descriptions assigned to the Black Country an inclusive blackness that showed no respect for intra-regional shades of grey. Other English regions likewise gathered bodies of evidence, both anecdotal and observational, that evoked images that have often survived to the present day. London’s ‘rookeries’ south of the Thames and in the City and Lancashire’s mill towns can still conjure vivid pictures, many rooted more than a century earlier in words created by Dickens and Engels respectively. Similarly, Turner’s views of Leeds and Dudley or Loutherbourg’s *Coalbrookdale by Night* survive as testaments to a violent industrial vision. On the latter, Daniels’ comment that the artist portrayed “the industrial process at Bedlam with precision tourists had come to expect,” is fair warning that these depictions were often fanciful or exaggerated. Despite this caveat, geographical industrialisation did change places outwardly, often in very powerful ways which invite comment. Understanding the extent of landscape transformation seems crucial to discern spatial variation in capital’s fixed physical manifestation.

For the Black Country, regional transformation due to industrialisation was obvious. But was the brand of industry that was there for all to see from a regional perspective, also responsible for transforming local working landscapes? Carter and Lewis are correct in noting that “it is one of the axioms of geographical interpretation that explanation changes with scale changes.” For instance, one obvious characteristic of nineteenth century Black Country industry lies in the region’s urban ecology. Workplace and residence often evolved as neighbours or even as joint use structures, mutuality that continued even as the pace of industrialisation quickened. The spatially independent industrial precinct or workshop district was exceptional, usually involving place-bound extractive sites and associated manufacturing. Only transport infrastructure appears to have encouraged any degree of

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warehouse or factory concentration, initially along the maze of canals and later adjacent to railway lines and stations (the Spon Lane neighbourhood in West Bromwich exemplified this tendency).

The experience of the Factory Inspectorate in the late nineteenth century is instructive in picturing many Black Country thoroughfares. Workshop activities were often hidden behind the front door or tunnel gates of terraced residences, making their discovery dependent on a combination of chance and reliance on listings in local trade directories. The inspector working the chainmaking districts of Dudley and Cradley Heath reported that many workshops were so difficult to find “that the same place may be passed many times, and only be discovered at last by the merest accident.”40 Added to the relative opacity of workshops on the neighbourhood landscape, the inspectors could enter workshop premises only if there was evidence of work being conducted. To determine this, in many cases, it meant first gaining access to the house, admittance to which could legally be denied by the occupier. This loophole in the national law was meant to be closed by the locally-appointed Board who could have made it possible to enter any workplace at any time. Creation of these Boards was essentially a dead letter in the Black Country.

Black Country towns and villages were thus decidedly integrated in a pattern which confirmed pre-industrial precedents. Even late in the century, the two oldest urban areas, Wolverhampton and Walsall, displayed a high level of land use integration.41 Eighteenth century morphology was being reproduced in new developments, with residential terraces interspersed with courtyard or back garden workshops and adjacent to larger-scale, purpose-built factories. With this type of neighbourhood geography, it is not hard to believe that a great deal of mutuality existed. Lines between work and home, if they existed at all, were blurred, and people may have had a clearer sense of landscape transformation than in regions characterised by higher levels of land use segregation. The Walsall and West Bromwich neighbourhoods discussed in this thesis offer forms of industrial landscape on both sides of the spectrum. How they were transformed as a result of growth and increased

capital movement is discussed in later chapters.

That the volatility, availability, movement and physical presence of capital reached into the rituals of daily life of Black Country residents cannot be contested. From geographical clustering on a global, national or regional scale to a dense network of Walsall workshops, change fuelled by industrial capitalism was encountered, absorbed and accepted normally in very personal ways. For the Black Country in the second half of the nineteenth century, in common with other industrialising regions, the places called work and neighbourhood were transformed by capital. However, because each day had to be lived by Black Country residents, it should be kept firmly in mind that change, and even revolution, had to be dealt with in a local context where people may have been too busy scraping together an existence to notice the revolution.

THE SHAPE OF BLACK COUNTRY WORKPLACES

Understanding the geography of industry in the Black Country, or any region, seems an obvious first step in understanding how neighbourhoods adapted to different forms of industrial workplaces, and how capital movement was facilitated. Pooley promotes the significance of industrial development in space (the mechanisms of change) as an underexplored but important area of geographical analysis. "Although unfashionable, the only way in which [this topic] can be tackled is through careful analysis of the development, location and organisation of specific industries."42 In general, though, research by historical geographers on Black Country topics is industry's enigmatic equal. Apart from the hit-and-miss geography which finds its way into historical studies, the spatial underpinnings of nineteenth century industrialisation have been largely ignored. This vacuum is especially noticeable at the local level, which, except for Wolverhampton,43 has been neglected entirely.

Despite this lack of evidence, we have seen that the Black Country has been persistently characterised as exhibiting strongly localised industrial geography. However, while it may appear regionally that a town is dominated by one or several industries, it may be that local geography shows much wider variation at the neighbourhood level. In other words, it does

43 Shaw's work on Wolverhampton relies on extensive analysis of census enumerators' books.
not necessarily follow that Walsall’s regional hegemony in saddlers ironmongery meant spatial concentrations of these types of workshops. In fact, West Bromwich and Walsall presented a differentiated industrial landscape at any scale less than town-wide, while simultaneously confirming several widely accepted regional notions of localisation in both communities.

For a large part of the nineteenth century, the Black Country relied on an industrial base which was at once focused yet diverse. While most employment in the region was associated with the iron trade (from extraction to manufacture to distribution), the variety of products was nothing short of mind-boggling. The Factory Inspectors’ Reports described industrial employment by county in 1868 (to coincide with the Factory Acts Extension Act) and again five years later. Of the 53 listed Staffordshire trades with more than 100 workers covered by the new legislation, 44 were ferrous manufacturing concerns. With the exception of glass works, the largest trades were associated with metal, including bolts and rivets, metal engineers, ironfounders, iron manufacturers and japanners. Collectively, these six trades accounted for 44,109 of the 63,810 Staffordshire workers (69%) affected by the 1867 Factory Acts.

The extent to which the metal trades dominated ‘factory’ occupation, as defined by the Factory Act legislation (more than 50 employees), is apparent in looking at an 1870 breakdown of factories in the Walsall district. Despite the strong leather trades presence in Walsall itself, only 11 out of 91 factories were non-ferrous (of these, 6 were printing shops, 3 were currying works, with one each of glass and fancy leather goods). This gives strong indication that the metal trades were more likely to employ larger numbers of workers per site than other industrial sectors. Adding some support for this conclusion is George Blenkinsopp’s 1873 accounting by town of factories and workshops within Wolverhampton District A. Of the seven largest towns, six (Bilston, Darlaston, Smethwick, Tipton, Wednesbury and West Bromwich) showed a workshop to factory ratio of about 2:1 or lower. All these towns were heavily dependent on metals-based manufacturing. In contrast, Walsall displayed a nearly 4:1 numerical dominance of

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workshops over factories, perhaps an indication of its more diverse industrial base and historical bias toward small works production (see Chapter 4).

While this thesis does not attempt to reconstruct the entire industrial geography of the nineteenth century Black Country, it is important to recognise that certain characteristics of local industry were driven by the regional character described in the previous sections. Closer to home, however, both literally and figuratively, were the spaces of production constituted locally. It was within these spaces that the working lives of individuals were spent, and from which the surrounding neighbourhood was able to draw its unique connection to industrial capitalism. The following sections flesh out a Black Country context for those aspects of work and workplace discussed in later chapters. Specifically, the topics of firm size, the organisation of capital movement, conditions of work, workplace management and effect of state control over employment are considered.

**Size of Workplace**

Allen relates that “if the small concern was widely prevalent in the Birmingham staples, it was even more characteristic of the chief finished manufactures of the Black Country.”

Behagg provides some perspective on this character in noting that in the 12 years from 1803 to 1815, “military gun production in Birmingham increased fivefold without witnessing a development of larger units of production.”

Even the work forces at blast furnaces and pit heads were relatively small, averaging in 1866 40 and 80 employees respectively. Whether or not the Black Country witnessed a gradual escalation in numbers of larger production units was not clear until later in the nineteenth century. Hopkins’ study of the Stourbridge glass and iron industries is inconclusive. In selecting these two sectors, he focused attention on industries that were already close to fully capitalised early on in the century. It might be expected therefore that fluctuations in production or employee numbers would be most accountable to macro-economic influences, not increased local investment to capture further economies of scale. In an industry important to Walsall, Church uncovered a modest rise in the number of curriers between 1871 and 1911, but a marked fall in the number of firms. The obvious implication

is a larger employee count at individual work sites. Still, tanning and currying tended to
possess the largest production units throughout the entire leather trades, with less than 20
being the average size unit in 1871.51

As noted earlier, a threshold of fifty employees was established to distinguish factories
from workshops. This distinction appears to have generated a fair amount of controversy
because of the more restrictive measures placed on workplaces designated as factories. In a
letter from the Birmingham and District Trades Council to Robert Baker, Chief Inspector
of Factories, it was argued that

"there will be created two classes of factories, the one large, the other small and
leaving the smaller ones free from restriction of which they stand in greater need,
seeing that as a rule, the sanitary arrangement, the system of management, and the
moral supervision are of a much lower order than those generally adopted at large
manufactories, and the children in the smaller factories would lose the benefit of the
education that might be conferred upon them."52

It is interesting to note the term ‘smaller factories’ used in lieu of workshops. Baker himself
proposed that seven employees should be considered as the breakpoint, calling this
arbitrary delineation “the evil of the dividing line.”53 Certainly for the Black Country, the
predominance of smaller scale enterprises meant that comparatively few work sites
qualified as factories, although the difference in work environment between workplaces
with forty versus sixty employees was probably minimal. As the first sub-Inspector for the
region, George Blenkinsopp noted the animosity felt by factory owners towards slightly
smaller workshops able to operate more freely (and presumably more economically),
feeling “it hard that their next-door neighbours may work women and children as long as
and whenever they please.”54

However, the importance to workplace operators of being designated a workshop instead of
a factory went beyond the more liberal rules of employment. In contrast to the more federal
oversight of factories, enforcement of regulations relating to workshops was intended to be
a joint effort between the local sub-Inspector and town councils. The latter were

empowered to appoint a Local Board to ensure compliance by workshops within their jurisdiction. In fact, the willingness of Black Country councils to involve themselves in fulfilling this obligation seems to have been minimal. According to Blenkinsopp, it did not help when Birmingham rejected this part of the Act. In combination with the sheer number of workshop sites, the reluctance of local authorities to assist in administering the Acts suggests that the chances of avoiding inspection altogether were much better than with factories. Clearly, there would seem to be some motivation for employers to keep their ‘official’ workforce under fifty, thus ensuring less frequent inspections and fewer restrictions on employment.

The geography that seemed to emerge from the Reports of the Factory Inspectors suggested a spatially dense small workshop network of manufacturing sites, with perhaps a discernible increase in the number of larger production units. With such a locally complex pattern of production, the question that must be answered is why, with all these discrete economic units, did large scale production units not become common more quickly in the Black Country? Several reasons could account for this. First, to have shifted production into larger, centralised factories would have been contrary to the village-oriented social divisions of labour. Industrial capital was on the move, but it was adapting to traditional Black Country practices and values. Joyce has noted that “rural and industrial England shared more in common after mid-century” than might be expected. One of these common threads may have been the persistence of small urban workshops as the ‘natural’ successor to cottage industries.

A second debilitating factor against widespread agglomeration in the Black Country could be traced to the lack of money to fund expansion or improvements. In the cotton textile industry, Gatrell has noted that “advantages accrued to established reputation and size in the competition for capital need not be doubted,” often to the point of receiving preferential interest rates. Priming a pump already in operation would have proven more difficult in the Black Country, where large, established firms were very rare. It may have been that local banks were unwilling to accept the risks involved in large-scale capitalisation, particularly in an area with a poor track record for large-scale industry and

55 PP 1870 [C.77] xv.75, Reports of the Factory Inspectors, p 208.
a reputedly suspect work force. Further, Chapman makes the point that financiers away from London often lacked the experience to meet the market demands of budding entrepreneurs.\textsuperscript{58} This view may help to support Raybould's findings on the seminal role of the aristocracy in developing Black Country industry.\textsuperscript{59} Using not only their own resources, but drawing also on London banking contacts, they were in a better position to find money (and arguably a better risk) for investment than a small master seeking to expand a business. Yet another angle on the availability of money is suggested by Payne. A major source of nineteenth century investment capital "was the steady increase in the number of persons [eager] to invest their savings," reflecting the growing wealth of the middle classes.\textsuperscript{60} Trainor notes that the region's middle-class residents "were relatively few and of modest means, and in the early nineteenth century they seemed rather isolated and clearly subordinate members of the British propertied classes."\textsuperscript{61} If there was a money shortage in the Black Country, this may have indicated a monied class unwilling to invest locally.

Thirdly, it can certainly be argued that the unique characteristics of the Black Country metal trades meant that significant increases in profits from larger production units were not possible due to the lack of opportunities for economies of scale. In common with Waller's explanation for small company persistence in the building trade, if no advantages accrued from agglomeration, then it was logical for small masters to remain small, thus insuring flexibility during economic downturns.\textsuperscript{62} While this line of thinking may conflict with a modernist perspective that there is economic strength in size, a small master just two generations removed from a village workshop may have continued to feel more control in a smaller unit.

A final potential deterrent to the growth of larger scale units was tied to power. Industries or products requiring a large power source were more likely to centralise in a common location where the power could be shared. For the most part, Black Country industries were

conducive to low-technology, low-power work sites, but exceptions did exist. For example, chainmaking was performed largely in small workshops adjoining or inside the home, except for the largest chains (requiring a steam-driven hammer to bend and seal each link) which were produced in factories. The question of whether an externalised industrial framework carried on in small production units differed significantly from a centralised factory operation is best posed from a geographical perspective. Developing an effective network of linkages to maintain remote operatives was at the heart of Black Country industrialisation. Large manufacturing premises may have been at a premium, but the organisational response to regional industrial growth highlights the adaptable nature of capital.

**Organising Black Country Capital and Workplaces**

One well-recognised by-product of the industrial revolution for factory production units, and to a lesser extent in the workshops, was that workplace organisation had necessarily to be more tightly controlled by masters and employers. The conventional wisdom concerning this development has been that increased levels of discipline slowly eroded some of the more subjective qualities of working lives: the ability to work without direct supervision, to have control over hours and days of work or to maintain the last vestiges of home-based economies. This ‘inevitability’ has been used extensively to explain the development of a working-class consciousness. However, while pictorial descriptions of nineteenth century factory life portray vividly the large-scale surrender of individual control to industrial discipline, they can be matched sight for sight by the continuation of small-scale hardship in workshops everywhere. As Pleck notes, “pessimism, insecurity and physical fatigue were often the consequences of menial work,” an outcome which surely pre-dated the industrial revolution and large-scale industrialisation.

The movement and organisation of capital within the Black Country was a complementary feature to the region’s industrial geography. If Allen is correct in stating that by 1860, “there had been no ‘industrial revolution’ in Birmingham and District,” then it must be

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assumed that he was comparing the region to the classic cotton model and finding the organisation of production reshaping itself locally to accommodate industrial growth. Without a doubt, there were more workplaces on the landscape and more people earning a living from manufacturing employment. By almost any standard, the Black Country was a rapidly industrialising region, although it certainly bore little outward resemblance to the cotton mill towns to the north. In Birmingham of 1871, Bramwell found in mapping industrial locations along individual streets a highly integrated mix of workplaces and homes. Geography such as this would seem to be more prevalent in towns with an industrial structure that allowed small-scale production units to be perpetuated on the capital landscape. This advanced level of land use integration, especially in working-class neighbourhoods, could be seen as industrialisation which simply extended forward in time the village smithy, saddler and ironmonger into an urban environment. It was only the sheer quantity of work units which necessarily brought new capital mechanisms into play.

From a purely production standpoint, the most basic linkages were the provision of raw materials to a manufacturer, connections within the production process itself, followed some time later by the movement of finished products to market. Within the Black Country economy dominated by small factories and workshops, a ‘factor’ role developed to facilitate these transactions. In a simple model, Bythell has called the relationship between merchant, worker and factor a partnership. The merchant (or manufacturer in the case when parts were collected for final assembly before reaching the market) provided materials and adjusted production quotas to meet market demand. Workers were responsible for providing, usually on a contract basis, the part or finished product.

Linking merchant and worker, the factor’s duties could range from a de facto manufacturer to simple transport of raw material and finished product. Historically, Bythell calls the factor “ubiquitous but elusive. He can merge imperceptibly at the one extreme into the ranks of the genuine entrepreneurs and, at the other, become almost indistinguishable from the real wage earners.” It was a complex chain of linkages that required a great deal of coordination. In retrospect, the appearance of factors on the Black Country economic scene

68 Bythell, op. cit., p 19.
seemed to represent a localised and necessary response to the shape taken by industrialisation. If there were local or regional inhibitions to a more rapid expansion in the average size of production units, then compensation in the form of additional linkages was critical to facilitate more rapid capital movement. It would seem however that some level of critical mass for local linkages could be reached that would eventually encourage a movement toward agglomeration. Storper and Walker develop a causal scenario which claims that if linkages become more complex and dense over time, thus raising the transactional costs, then the factor’s duties would begin to be internalised under a single, larger production unit. Therefore, the explanation for the Black Country’s slow but steady increase in the number of factory workplaces may be attributable to a gradual phasing in of control by manufacturers over rising transactional costs.

On the other hand, there is evidence to support an explanation that factors, in order to maintain their own profit levels, attempted to force a lower standard of living on small workshop masters and employees. Instances of economic coercion between factor and outworker to accept lower piece rates, to sign off on short deliveries of raw material or to delay payment for completed work, were all reported in government enquiries on the sweated trades. By lowering the transactional costs, the factor was thus able to continue as before despite increasing competition and lower per unit prices. Barnsbys disclosure that average wage levels for Black Country workers actually fell between 1870 and 1890 would indicate some local mechanism contributing to consistently short measures in weekly pay packets. Certainly for the family production units, and to a large degree for the workshops, the factor exercised a significant amount of control in work unit operations. For the small work units, the flexible range of factor responsibilities ensured their economic survival, but also put them at risk for exploitation. Before the Factory and Workshop Acts (and these were less than adequate), no safety net existed to ensure fair play between factor and outworker. Allen mentions the presence of ‘slaughtermen’ who took advantage of oversupply or low demand by reducing unit costs.

71 G. J. Barnsbys (1980) Social Conditions in the Black Country 1800 - 1900, pp 222-6. This finding is a little misleading owing to the lack of consideration for how often people worked and the significance of local working customs. For instance, a rise in piece rates would allow a worker to make the same money by working less hours in the week.
Allen’s interpretation of a workplace hierarchy based on dense, small unit production carried with it a loosely defined level of management between employer and worker. Even in a Lancashire context, Joyce too has argued that “it is not always easy to tell who was regarded as the ‘boss’ in nineteenth century industry.” In the Black Country, direct supervisors of work were referred to alternately as subcontractors, overhands, fitters, charter-masters, butties or piece-masters depending on the industry. They were hired generally by the employer to engage a staff to perform some work function, thus divorcing the owner from day-to-day operations. While this type of arrangement was quite common, the Black Country work culture also included a worker/overseer class, a type of management that seemed to typify many Walsall trades and workplaces. A number of paternalistic, large factory masters also emerged along the lines of those management archetypes in the cotton textile industries. Provisions for educating employees, allowing annual paid holidays, participating in community politics and charities and establishing employee benefit programmes characterised some large Black Country masters (see Chapter 7).

These examples of paternalism were obviously most prevalent in factory settings, and not in workshops where the master would normally work alongside the employees. Briggs saw this close working relationship as that characteristic of Birmingham industrialisation which was most at odds with the likes of Manchester and Leeds. “Relations between ‘masters’ and ‘men’ . . . if not always good . . . laid emphasis on ‘mutual interests,’ ‘interdependence’ and ‘common action.’” The dominance of this style of work unit varied between industrial sectors, with the small metals trades very likely the most representative. Tildesley, writing about the Willenhall lock trade, found “its distribution among so many masters, the majority of whom employ only six or eight men and boys.”

At the bottom of the size hierarchy, but arguably at the apex in the familiarity of working relationships, was the family work unit. These small operations could be managed by a

73 Allen, op. cit., p 160.
75 A. Briggs (1968) Victorian Cities, p 186.
married couple with their children, a married woman with children or a single man or woman operating independently. Of the four scenarios, the two with women supervising production appear to have been the most common. Here again, a concentration of this type of unit was often tied to individual industries. Franklin noted in 1865 that 60% of harness stitchers were female, and "many are allowed to work at their own homes." Nailmaking and chainmaking were also bastions of women-led work units, apparently into the twentieth century. If the husband did work alongside his wife, workplace organisation tended to mirror the patriarchal family relationships, with the male commanding hours and days of work. Since payment more than likely took the form of piece rates, the husband in essence controlled the amount of income per household. The possible extent of control in the family nailmaking unit is described by Hopkins:

"If he wished, he could idle his time away and get drunk, knowing that his wife and children would finish the work if they wanted to eat at the end of the week when the nails were taken to the warehouse." Toward the end of the century, when all the sweating trades were in a process of decline, it appears that nearly all were operated by women.

Returning to Allen's contention that the industrial revolution did not take root in the Black Country until after 1860, it is clear that the densification of smaller workshops and pre-existing local linkages were key to industrial growth. As the century wore on, however, and new methods of organisation were necessary to keep pace with competing regions, including more demanding timetables and a greater reliance on machine power, the Black Country had to adapt. As a result, workplaces grew in size (requiring more capital investment), labour organised more along craft lines, the factor role ebbed in favour of specialist suppliers and wholesalers, and product lines expanded. By the end of the century, the traditional trades of the region continued, but had necessarily adopted a new rule book that was being authored through time by industrial capital, by local cultures of work, and by the state (primarily through the Factory and Workshop Acts and other legislation).

Social Relations at the Black Country Workplace

We have seen that the industrialising Black Country took the form of a growing number of scattered large factories sharing streets and neighbourhoods with a network of small urban workshops and family production units, in essence, a denser re-generation of pre-industrial geography. At this level of highly integrated urban function, it would be expected that work and non-work patterns found many ways to overlap within the neighbourhood spaces of production. Given this arrangement, how quickly did the changing character of work in the Black Country, either in the form of factory discipline or as heightened accountability to new market linkages, change the social character of the workplace? Answering this question on a neighbourhood scale is the focus of later chapters, but it may be useful to introduce several topics here within a wider Black Country context.

From the evidence available about Black Country working conditions, it may be generalised that the larger the work unit, the more tolerable the indoor work environment. However, from back wall workshops looking as if “they had been built for no other reason than to tumble,”79 to factories described as “neat and well-built,”80 the environment was rife with the sights and sounds of industry at work. White provides a description of a Birmingham back street, “where in a low range of workshops, you may hear the ring and thump of hammers, the gnawing of files, the rumbling of lathes . . .”81 Bramwell noted an over-representation of less skilled manual workers clustered in neighbourhoods suffering “the negative externalities of numerous large and polluting industrial premises.”82 Descriptions of oppressive heat from forges were also noted. An 1864 Report of the Factory Inspectors related that in Walsall harness and saddle factories, “it is too much the practice in these shops to keep the shop very hot and exclude all fresh air as much as possible.”83

While the main provisions of the Factory Acts until the 1880s lay in regulating the activities of employees within the workplace, work environment and safety took a more prominent role following passage in 1882 of the Employers Liability Act. Before this date

79 W. White (1860) All Round the Wrekin, p 185.
81 W. White (1860) All Round the Wrekin, p 205.
however, local inspectors were at least cognizant of the range of conditions present in
Black Country workplaces. Encompassing noise, poor ventilation, long hours and danger,
the working environment was seen by the Inspectorate as lacking basic structural and social
amenities. This appeared especially to be true in the smaller domestic factories where
access and regulation were bound to present problems.

Among the most prominent, and certainly headline-gathering, of workplace dangers were
boiler explosions. In a county which in 1867 generated over one-quarter of all steam power
in England and Wales, Staffordshire was never far from the centre of calls for boiler
regulation. Regular inspection was not required, but many companies had their premises
insured by the Midland Steam Boiler and Assurance Company which conducted periodic
safety checks.84 Three Black Country explosions in 1877 on uninsured sites (two in iron
mills, one in a file grinding factory) give some indication that works continued to operate
without any oversight. Danger in general continued to be a concern to local inspectors, both
from structural inadequacies in the workplace fabric and from fallout from hazardous work
practices. Bevan commented on the ruinous state of Walsall workshops, noting that “I
occasionally find men working in places it is almost a risk to get up to, the stairs being in
such a bad state and the flooring so rickety that it is a marvel the workers consent to work
there.”85 Japanning and holloware factories were described as dirty and ill-ventilated. In
general, it appears that factories were more structurally sound than workshops, but the
presence of moving machinery and blast furnaces in larger work sites clearly added to on-
the-job danger. Burns from flashes, falling on hot iron or losing a limb to unfenced
machinery were addressed by the Inspectorate in an ad hoc way until the liability laws
began to change.

These conditions appear in retrospect to be even more acute when considering the long
working day. In Black Country coal and iron works, the work day averaged about 12 hours
(six days per week), not including up to one and a half hours for meals. Factory and
workshop employees normally took their midday meal at home. As work teams were paid
as a unit in many industries, it became important for all members of that team to maintain
regular working hours. In contrast, the smaller workshops and family work units carried on

85 PP 1890 [C.6060] xx.579, Report of the Factory Inspectors, p 30. Bevan went on to state that he
believed the Corporation of Walsall was “dealing with the matter.”
more traditional weekly work patterns. Sunday and Monday were not working days and Hopkins reports that many workers worked only half the day on Tuesday. However, Wednesday through Friday would often be long, arduous days up to 14 hours in order to complete the week’s work. Saturday mornings were often dedicated to work with the afternoon allocated to delivering the product and collecting payment.

Much has been written on the burgeoning mechanisms of control over labour brought by large-scale industrialisation, especially the efforts to impose a more rigorous regulation over time and conduct. McClelland found a timeboard in use at Stephenson’s locomotive factory in Newcastle which regulated time by type of part and the part’s destination. Likewise, in some of the larger Black Country iron works, Hopkins has noted the printing and posting of rules of conduct for employees. Given the immediate advantages of higher wages and higher job stability relative to small work units, would this new accountability have caused turmoil in a worker’s life? Joyce and McClelland have ventured that most people were willing to work hard, and as such, the factory work force may have been amenable to specified codes of workplace behaviour. The factory system was not questioned, nor was the market seen as a ruler over peoples’ lives.

Beyond the physical condition of the workplace, the Factory Acts also addressed this most fundamental aspect of the experience of work – the working day. The combination of the shorter workday mandated by the Acts and the overwhelming use of piece work for worker remuneration in the west Midlands (estimated at 40:1 in Birmingham) would seem to be a recipe for reduced wage packets. Baker argued against this inevitability, basing his conclusion on the “constant employment of every minute under the new regime. There is no dawdling on Monday, nor time wasted in needless conversation.” Conceding that those workers on a daily/hourly rate might have seen an initial wage drop, this shortfall would have been corrected in short order by market forces as a greater demand for labour was created by shorter hours. This would seem to have been wishful thinking for the Black Country which, as noted above, suffered depressed wages until the late 1880s.

Overall, the degree to which the region’s workplaces were able or willing to comply internally with rationalisation of the work day to meet national standards was linked to prevailing work practices and mechanisation. In addition, differences were detected according to the number of employees engaged as a work unit. For example, chainmakers normally worked alone at their hearth, while nailmakers could cluster four or five to a fire. Those working with chains would thus have had the freedom to set hours and days of operation, while conversely, nailers needed to work a schedule that coincided with others sharing the hearth. Similarly, the managing partner of J. Whitley & Co, locksmith and hingemaker, reported divergent approaches to work under a single factory roof. Hingemakers kept regular hours due to their need for power but the non-mechanised locksmiths “are not quite so punctual in their hours, simply because their labour is not stopped by the cessation of machinery.”

Judging from comments by the local inspectors, physical working conditions varied widely and until the 1890s were probably only marginally affected by the Factory Acts. Work routine and environment within workshops appears to have been largely unchanged from beginning to end of the study period. The arena where change occurred most significantly was in altering the daily work patterns of large factories. Inspection was certainly easier and larger employers were more accepting in principle of the aims of factory legislation. Local Inspector Bevan could report in 1892 that hours of work were fairly well observed, expressing local compliance with the Saturday half-day.

Though factory legislation was intended to regulate workplace activity, the repercussions extended well into the community. Existing local customs often conflicted with the regimentation expected by the Acts. For the most part, inspection staff were fairly lenient when it came to pardoning precise points of law in favour of longstanding employer/employee relations. For example, the legislating of a half-day holiday for Saturdays after 2.00 p.m. could be exchanged for Monday or Wednesday half-days if this was the custom. Blenkinsopp reported “in all such cases I believe relaxations have been conceded.”

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One of the most enduring work-related rituals was Saint Monday, a tradition which the Factory Inspectorate invariably associated with any number of socially dubious consequences.93 In a comment which seems to express the official position, the Monday holiday persisted “notwithstanding that engines are often standing for assistant workers, and wives and mothers are seen hunting for their should-be breadwinners among the various public houses and beerhouses of the neighbourhoods.”94 The use of such family-oriented moral arguments to encourage community acceptance of the Factory Acts was not rare in the Reports. When one firm objected to the Saturday half-holiday on the grounds that the extra time off only meant more drinking, Blenkinsopp countered with “the majority would be ashamed to go to the public house at one or two o’clock and that there would be more chance of the wives getting hold of the money, if the men were paid at one o’clock than if they were paid at five or six.”95

By 1850, Lancashire labour is seen as having “a clear recognition that factory industry is an irreversible development, also an association of this development with the well-being and future of towns and communities.”96 Could a similar statement be made about working conditions and worker attitudes in the Black Country? The year 1850 can almost certainly be questioned, but differences grounded in the Black Country’s regional identity stand out: a higher ratio of workshop/family work units to factories; lower and more exclusive investment capital options, potentially damaging entrepreneurial spirit; and highly integrated neighbourhoods, perhaps a corollary of the prevalence of smaller scale work units. People went to work, either in the home or in a workplace. But what they brought into the work environment, their attitudes toward change and how change at work restyled home and family, seems rooted at a sub-regional level, in particular the neighbourhood. Evidence of neighbours joining forces to deal with localised repercussions of the Factory Acts were commonly reported by the inspectors. Blenkinsopp related from 1876 the story of a young mother who was fined for permitting her son to work and not attend school. When asked how she could afford to pay her fine, she replied “O, the neighbours

subscribe.” Actions of neighbourhood solidarity were also confronted as evidenced by the inspector’s frustration with local people denying any familiarity with names or families of truant children. Taken as a whole, these were clear signals that the conditions of work remained highly subjective by place in the Black Country, even in the face of a rationalising modern landscape of work.

The Power of the State in Black Country Employment

Workplace legislation was arguably the most pervasive of the state’s efforts to exert control over spaces of production, and there was not another district under the Factory Inspectorate gaze which elicited more derogatory comments than the Black Country. Blenkinsopp and Baker in particular stepped outside the prime directive of enforcing the Acts to offer judgements on the region’s ethical and moral constitution. Working men were singled out as exhibiting notable ambivalence toward pursuing gainful employment, and thus providing for their families. As early as 1870, Baker set a tone of regional aspersion which extended beyond the working classes, offering a contrast with his observances of the textile districts.

“Both the [Black Country] employers and the employed . . . have long accepted fewer hours of work per week as a day’s work and are content with it, both as to produce and wages. The difference extends even further than this. The manufacturers of the textile districts begin life with fortunes which those of the hardware districts are content to retire with. The same idea of ‘enough’ therefore, seems to pervade both labour and capital.”

Blenkinsopp reiterated this argument a year later, although reserving his remarks for the working man. “Many workmen could they make £1 a day, would work that one day in the week and no more. . . . I regret to say it that after 3½ years experience I have not found the ‘workingman’ of South Staffordshire a promising subject.” The Factory Inspectorate placed a great emphasis on parental responsibility for maintaining hearth and home and for encouraging the education of children. Black Country families were observed to be indifferent to these obligations, a failure, according to Blenkinsopp, rooted generally in low levels of education. “They do not seem intelligent enough to look beyond the immediate present. In fact, this want of intelligence is one of the melancholy features of the

Clearly, the Inspectorate’s opinions about the working class within the Victorian Black Country bordered on the blasphemous, although other moral comments went beyond the Midlands district. On a national level, Baker and his sub-Inspectors tended to view the strong presence of women in the workforce as motivated by their social preference for paid labour over unpaid domestic labour. Brewer, writing of his own experiences with female workers in the western Black Country, stated that “they not only have no time, but in many cases have no taste or tact for housework.” A Birmingham factory manager observed in 1865 that women with up to three children were “willing to give all their wages for the payment of them [to a child minder] so that they might return to work after their confinement, which they preferred to nursing and domestic duties.” Similarly, in a report to the Medical Officer of the Privy Council, one local medical officer noted from his experience that women returned to work as quickly as possible after childbirth, “the average period of their absence being about five or six weeks.”

Significantly, there was very little mention of the possibility that women’s wages were a necessary part of household income. Blenkinsopp reported in 1870 that some women factory workers earned as much as 16s. or 17s. per week (about 6-7s. more than their workshop-based counterparts). These high waged women “were often married for their earnings,” at least suggesting that men equated economic betterment and security with a working spouse. This economic argument is perhaps inadvertently given credence by the local inspectors’ less than complimentary view of men as wage earners, especially outside the more regimented factory work environment. Both Brewer and Blenkinsopp in the western and eastern Black Country respectively commented on the role women played in providing financial dependability for their household. Brewer reported an old woman

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103 Dr. Greenhow, the regional medical officer, reported this to the Privy Council. This report was referred to in the 1872 Report of the Factory Inspectors, p 93.
describing the Black Country as "the worst country God ever made. The women do all the work and the men do nothing."\(^{106}\)

Also absent from the Inspectorate’s conclusion that women opted for paid labour to escape from domestic duties was any recognition of the social benefits of the workplace.\(^{107}\) While no direct reference is made in the Reports to camaraderie amidst female-dominated work sites, there were glimpses of solidarity. This was especially prevalent in the lengths taken by women brickyard workers to conceal underage workers from the Inspector. Blenkinsopp reported being attacked by a group of brickworking mothers to enable their children to run away and hide themselves.\(^{108}\) In another incident, a group of women chainmakers was reported by Brewer to have set upon an idle male living off his wife’s labour, chasing him to an open square and stripping him naked in front of a gathering crowd.\(^{109}\) Occurrences such as these could be said to contribute to close social ties amongst groups of working women, thus providing another possible reason to seek paid work.

The demography of female labour in the Black Country during the last half of the nineteenth century highlights the continuing employment of females predominantly outside factory work sites. Birmingham had its pin, button and jewellery manufactures, trades which the nineteenth century Factory Inspectorate considered appropriate to female employment. Baker himself, expressing concern over ‘inappropriate’ work for women, devised in 1872 the following three categories of labour (percentages represent totals from across the nation):

1. Trades in which the sewing machine has been such an efficient helper (encompassing 61% of female paid labour);
2. Trades in which the work is not out of place for women, but is usefully assistant in a pecuniary point of view (encompassing 31%);
3. Trades in which the work is unsexing and degrading - blast furnaces, iron mills, foundries, nails, rivets, bolts, chemicals, lucifer matches, percussion caps, gunpowder (encompassing 6%).

With the exception of the Walsall leather trades, the bulk of Black Country women worked within the third category, mostly in workshops or domestic factories. Brickmaking appears


\(^{107}\) For an interesting perspective on this topic in the cotton and chain industries, see C. Morgan (1997) "Gender construction and gender relations in cotton and chain-making in England: a contested and varied terrain," *Women’s History*, vol. 6, pp 367-389.


to have been the sole trade which supported large work sites populated predominantly by
women. In fact, Blenkinsopp noted that these ‘brick kiln wenches’ were women “eager to
obtain employment in an area with few opportunities for women.” He went on to offer
an explanation for this anomaly.

“Probably brickmaking fell into the hands of women partly because the masters at
one time got wages down very low, and then as collieries were opened the men
obtained better work. But when once women got established it became more
difficult to find men moulders.”

There are several conclusions which may be drawn from the Factory Inspectors Reports
concerning the employment of Black Country women. First, they were seen as a group to
be more reliable and sober workers than their male counterparts, and were consistently
portrayed as economic saviours to families where husbands failed to provide adequately.
As a second comment, Black Country women were seen to be performing work that was
considered either inappropriate to their gender or a deterrent to maintaining domestic order.
It was not so much work in general by women that concerned the Factory Inspectorate, but
what kind and for how long. Thirdly, inspectors equated the preference by women to work
for wages with a concomitant dislike of domestic labour, not with any economic or social
benefits that could be gained. Finally, the nature of Black Country industry left many
women workers beyond the legislative reach of the Factory Acts. The persistence of female
labour in small domestic factories made this group not only hard to find but outside a large
proportion of the law.

Although the Factory and Workshop Acts applied regulations governing female
employment, at least for the Black Country, the overwhelming proportion of prosecutions
were for illegal employment of children. The intent was not to disallow such employment
but to limit hours and days of work and, importantly, to link education with employment.
For the purpose of enforcement, child labour was split into two categories - children (less
than 13 years of age) and young persons (ages 13-15) - for which different regulations
applied. Once again, Blenkinsopp found the Black Country somewhat unreceptive to the
new laws, citing as summation the local expression, “It's a pity as them as makes these laws

aren’t got to keep the c h il d r e n .” '' 12 There can be little doubt that children were found
employment from the earliest possible age.

Part could be said to be economic and part social. In a district that laboured for
comparatively low wages until the late 1880s, even a small contribution to household
income by children could have had a significant impact. In addition, paid work was seen to
fulfil a domestic function in providing occupation for what would otherwise be idle time,
and in ensuring an environment often more conducive to child welfare than staying in the
home. Blenkinsopp conceded that “the iron mill is often warmer and more comfortable
than the home, and a boy has more chance o f getting food if he is at w o rk ... In many
cases, it is food against sleep, and I prefer the former.”l 13 For a district which, according to
Blenkinsopp, had been “too long accustomed to regard their children as mere money­
making machines,”i 14 this reaction could not have been too surprising.

While the allocation of blame for the imperfect administration o f the half-time programme
extended to many sectors of the community, local inspectors singled out Black Country
parents as the most culpable. One manager reported that even under the most favourable
conditions of relatively high household income, parents resisted sending their children to
s c h o o l.i

15 In the 1874 Report, Blenkinsopp listed techniques parents used to circumvent

the age regulation: making false entries in family bibles; using birth certificates of older
siblings; or inducing surgeons to certify them for full-time work. More often, parents would
simply shift young children from factory to workshop work, taking advantage o f the more
lenient and opaque smaller workplace. For many apparently, it was “wrong to prevent
children working.”l 16

In addition to the active role taken by parents in skirting prosecution, some employers,
workers and neighbours helped to make enforcement difficult. Blenkinsopp’s descriptions
of his problems in overseeing the Acts provides a clear indication o f the ‘outsider’ role
given to the local inspector by the community-at-large. On a day out in Oldbury to inspect
brickyards, “the moment I get out of the train news is sent to every brickyard, a watch kept.

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P P 1876 [0.1572] xvi.237, Report o f the Factory Inspectors, p 76.
pp 1870 [0.77] xv.75, Report o f the Factory Inspectors, p 210.
pp 1870, op. c/f., p211.
pp 1876 [0.1572] xvi.237. Report o f the Factory Inspectors, p 84.

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and the [underage] girls concealed on my approach."117 Neighbours tended to look out for other neighbours’ children. Those that were apprehended often had all or part of their parents’ fines paid by the employer. Similar problems were experienced in ironworks, with Blenkinsopp arriving “in time to see boys drop the tongs and bolt like rabbits.”118 Here again, apprehending a violator did not guarantee a successful prosecution. “When I have caught a boy, the noise in the mills is so great, and so many children are illegitimate, or go by nicknames, that there is the greatest possible difficulty in obtaining the proper name and address.”119

Because of the provision for formal schooling of half-timers, the Factory Inspectorate expected that local school boards would assist in documenting truancy. In fact, only the West Bromwich School Board appeared to have initiated any programme which dovetailed effectively with the local inspector’s work. Attendance officers in the town conducted more than 16,000 parental visits in the three years ending 31 January 1877. Of that total, the officers issued 7,758 notices (many were to repeat offenders - one parent was summoned 30 times) for which 1,229 were eventually brought up and charged. Blenkinsopp called the West Bromwich Board the most effective in his district, citing their use of pre-printed forms for schoolmasters to complete in cases of absence. It is fairly easy to speculate how this approach could have assisted the factory inspector in checking compliance with the 450 or so registered half-timers in West Bromwich. In comparison, other Boards were considered ineffective and by 1877, the towns of Handsworth, Oldbury, Bilston and Darlaston had not yet formed School Boards.

Legislative authority to penalise employers and parents of children not in school came from two sources, the Education Act and the Factory and Workshop Acts. The latter dealt specifically with cases when a child was found working instead of going to school. In these instances, both parent and employer were fined and local school boards preferred because of steeper penalties that, where applicable, prosecution would occur under the Factory Acts instead of the Education Act. The fine for simple truancy under the Education Act ranged to a maximum of 5s., whereas the Reports of the Factory Inspectors record assessments up
to five pounds against employers and one pound against parents. For the most part however, the amount of money payable on a minor offence such as employing an underage child or not producing a school certificate was a small percentage of the earning potential of that child. As Blenkinsopp rather pragmatically pointed out, a boy of eleven earning six or seven shillings per week, even if caught three times in a year, was still an asset to household finances.

Once children reached their thirteenth birthday, they graduated to the status of ‘young person’ which permitted them to work full-time so long as they achieved a certain standard of education. In the opinion of both Hudson (inspector for Walsall 1868 - 1872) and Blenkinsopp, boys between the age of 13 to 15 led transient work lives before “they gradually became more staid” at about age 16. Hudson linked turnover rates in jobs and locales to education and skill, finding young persons moving rapidly between low skill employment in the iron, brass, bolt and nut industries, to the relative stability of trades like printing, glass cutting and japanning. Wherever employment was found, young persons needed to obtain a certificate of medical fitness from the local certifying surgeon. If a young person was ‘refused’ in one district by failing to pass the required medical, then apparently it was a simple matter to “cross from one side of the parish to another” to either work illegally or find a more sympathetic surgeon. Other reasons for moving swiftly from works to works might have included the temptation of higher wages, quarrels with managers or “love of change and variety.”

Of the several conclusions that may be drawn from the Factory Inspectors Reports concerning the employment of children, the most apparent is that Black Country working parents expected their boys and girls to go to work as young as possible, preferably without hindrance from the state. It was a culture that placed work and earnings before education, although this was probably not significantly different from other industrialising English regions. Certainly a large proportion of Black Country employment was in trades which

123 For instance, Anderson’s analysis of the textile industry in Lancashire found that children entered into work at a young age, with many of the same social consequences seen in the Black Country. He cites clear evidence of neglect, although, like the west Midlands, employment itself was not viewed as exploitation. See M. Anderson (1971) *Family Structure in Nineteenth Century Lancashire*, pp 26-29, 69-71 and 74-75. Galbi also found a strong tendency by parents to send children to work. Citing the case of Mary and Ellen Hootton, mother and daughter were both employed and on days when Ellen would run away
required either unskilled or semi-skilled workers. For the latter, it could be argued that formal education was less important to employers than early on-the-job training.

A second point that emerges is that providing for schools and schooling was a gradual process of acceptance rooted within individual communities. Blenkinsopp reported in 1870 that children seemed more receptive to education than their parents, yet apart from several paternalistic employers and the West Bromwich School Board, support from parental, employer and municipal sources grew only marginally throughout the period. Bevan provided some support for this conclusion in 1888 when he noticed that young migrants from rural areas were consistently better educated than those born and bred in the Black Country. Finally, the Factory Inspectorate saw education of children to be a partnership between workplace, municipality and home. The greatest praise was reserved for educationally-minded employers, and the most serious rebukes went to parents who "laugh at the Board."124 On a national level, Baker expressed admiration for factory schools, recommending that "where there is no night school in the neighbourhood of small manufactories . . . the employers unite in applying for one to be opened in some neighbourhood schoolroom."125 In a national survey conducted in 1868, he praised Black Country factory schools.

From a national platform, Baker argued that the Factory Acts offered the average worker more flexibility in life outside the job. In fact, achieving social reform through consistent and effective implementation of factory legislation was never far from the Chief Inspector's mind. In a rather poetic summation to the first report following the 1867 Extension Acts, Baker observed that

"the working classes are beginning to reside one, two or three miles from their place of work . . . it shows that the present tendencies of both workers and masters, wearied with the din and reek of close alleys, the turmoil and excitement of towns, the noise of hammers and the whirl of straps and wheels, is to seek repose in the quiet of more distant residences."126


124 PP 1876 [C.1572] xvi.237, Report of the Factory Inspectors, p 82. Repeat offenders were common, and the West Bromwich School Board prosecuted 1,200 parents in the three years prior to 1876.


From this statement, it is apparent that the moral authority being exercised through the Factory and Workshop Acts and other Victorian legislation was in large part inconsistent with the integrated, small production unit landscape that characterised the Black Country (among other regions). Baker’s assumptions about spaces of production pre-supposed a segregated social landscape with clearly demarcated arenas of industrial activity under the benevolent scrutiny of the Inspectorate. In many ways, this approach was consistent with the Victorian approach to dealing with the poor and mentally disabled. Just as there was no panacea for dealing with these segments of society, so there was no pan-industrial formula for regulating who worked where and when.

CONCLUSION

Drawing a connection between how Black Country industrial production was managed and the corresponding form of workplace relations would seem to be at the heart of how neighbourhoods changed. Joyce’s statement that many large cotton masters “lived a life larger than the purely local” could also be said for large employers in the Black Country. From another angle, factory wages tended to be higher and more reliable than those in workshops or family production units. Benson argues that “it was prosperity rather than poverty that posed the most serious challenge to the survival of working class neighbourliness.” Conversely, and in support of this position, those “same families that gained least from improvements in material conditions” were more likely to be dependent on neighbourly help in ameliorating the effects of low pay. The result of this situation was that those employed in higher waged factory employment not only developed social relations closely aligned with emerging divisions of labour, but also interacted less with neighbours in the mutually beneficial world of community help.

Despite the aura of difference and degradation that dogged the Victorian Black Country, and continues to influence the historiography of the district, the region arguably had more similarities than dissimilarities with other English industrial complexes. Industrialisation was occurring at a rapid rate, transforming a formerly agrarian-dominant heath into a complex landscape of pitheads, ironworks, transportation infrastructure and row after row

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of hastily constructed residences, many with back garden workshops. On a gross level, this
same metamorphosis was occurring in many other locations, but it would be naive to think
that local variation was not paramount in shaping the experience of work in these places.
Trainor said as much when he observed that many aspects of the Black Country’s Victorian
social relations “can best be observed at the level of the individual town.”130 The next two
chapters consider the towns of West Bromwich and Walsall in an effort to link their late
nineteenth century characters with their place-bound industrial cultures.

Chapter 3

WEST BROMWICH
“Plantagenet’s meek token now blooming golden”¹

Of the two towns given primary consideration in this thesis, it is West Bromwich which resembles more closely a Black Country developmental blueprint. Although its thick coal seam lay several hundred feet below the ground, the town sustained rapid nineteenth-century growth on the strength of metals-based industrialisation. In particular, localised manufacturing of holloware, spring balances, nuts and bolts and railway hardware, in addition to many smaller, specialised products, attracted to the town by 1900 a population second only to Wolverhampton in the Black Country. Also in common with many neighbouring towns, West Bromwich grew from a number of spatially distinct villages which had encroached steadily on land unenclosed until 1804. “Imagine a district four or five miles wide, the centre of which is a bleak heath, and in the outskirts of which a forge or colliery of small dimensions is occasionally met with among cultivated land.”²

This pattern of growth had a significant effect on industrial organisation and workplace geographies, as well as influencing transportation, municipal politics and local social customs. While Chapters 5, 6 and 7 focus primarily on one neighbourhood within the town, this chapter attempts to capture a broader perspective on West Bromwich, highlighting those pre-1860 changes which laid the groundwork for subsequent growth and development. Following this historical overview, the industrial geography and structure of nineteenth century West Bromwich are considered, putting into a municipal context those descriptions of working spaces, working lives and working neighbourhoods discussed. At the conclusion of the chapter, the Spon Lane neighbourhood is introduced and described, with an emphasis on the production of industrial spaces through time and the evolving character of an area with a strong manufacturing heritage and presence of larger factories.

WEST BROMWICH IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

¹ The title is taken from a poem written by West Bromwich-born James Silvester on the occasion of the 1882 borough incorporation. The full stanza reads as follows:

“Ahl ‘verdant broom’ – plant of renown –
Plantagenet’s meek token
Now blooming golden in our crown,
Let praise of thee be spoken.”

² Quoted from an 1872 Leisure Hour article on West Bromwich 70 years before that, or about 1800.
When novelist D. C. Murray recalled his West Bromwich youth of the 1850s, he described his birthplace as "a rather doleful hybrid of a place - neither town nor country." This remark is particularly revealing given that Murray was born and raised above the High Street printing and stationery shop operated by his father. In an 1818 Staffordshire County Directory, there was not even an address called 'High Street' along any portion of the old turnpike road. Even by mid-century, despite some growth in the city centre, people and buildings continued to concentrate around pre-nineteenth century villages or near the many collieries, blast furnaces and ironworks which had taken root throughout the Black Country. This irregular distribution of population, combined with weak central municipal authority, appears to have encouraged social cohesion within individual neighbourhoods.

How important were the numerous large factories, which prospered in West Bromwich from the late eighteenth century, in shaping local customs of work and contributing to a nexus between workplace and neighbourhood? As a foundation for answering this question, this section discusses two aspects of pre-1860 development: an economic and municipal overview of West Bromwich growth, and ways in which the town adapted to this growth and increased capital movement through communities separated spatially and socially from the High Street.

Emergence, Growth and Authority

In common with many other English towns which were sufficiently well-placed and well-endowed to capture the attention of capital investment during the industrial revolution, West Bromwich exhibited strong and steady population growth throughout the nineteenth century. According to census counts, the town doubled in population every ten to fifteen years between 1801 (5,687) and 1841 (26,121). This rapid increase in the number of working people and families was spurred by an expanding local, national and global demand for iron-related products. While the actual rate of growth slowed somewhat in the second half of the century, a steady population gain of 6,000 to 8,000 per decade was indicative of the town's growing stature in the Black Country municipal hierarchy. By 1901, the borough was home to 65,175 residents, representing an increase of 60,000 people.

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4 The heath that contained what became central West Bromwich was not enclosed until 1804, and the High Street, a stretch of the Birmingham to Wolverhampton Road, did not begin to attract building activity until the 1820s.
in the nineteenth century.

West Bromwich capital and labour had a solid range of assets by the end of the eighteenth century to exploit the international demand for metal products. First, metalworking had been a mainstay occupation in the parish since the sixteenth century, concentrated in small workshops adjoining worker cottages. Production of buckles, nails and bridle bits, among other ironmongery, helped to localise metalworking skills in the village centres. A second factor was the precedent set by wrought iron nailing firms for production organised on a large-scale. For example, enormous quantities of nails were manufactured for a thirsty American market, with some employers claiming to offer subcontracting to more than a thousand contract labourers. Travelling through West Bromwich in 1776, Arthur Young noted “one continued village of nailers” for five or six miles. Finally, a network of canals and roads connected the dispersed villages to national transport corridors and hence to wider markets. Most were concentrated in the western part of the parish where collieries and ironworks developed rapidly from the late eighteenth century.

This combination of locational attributes appears to have attracted an emerging entrepreneurial manufacturing class to complement the dominant subcontracting system. Izon and Company left Aston in Birmingham for West Bromwich in 1782 to establish a tinned holloware foundry at Greet along the Birmingham Canal. Water power was the primary lure, although the transport potential offered by the canal was also an attraction. Bringing only seven or eight workers with him, Izon perhaps intended to rely on the local availability of skilled local labour. Similarly, another Birmingham ironfounder, Archibald Kenrick, moved his foundry operations to Spon Lane in 1791, also along the canal. Kenrick explicitly named labour as his reason for moving to the Black Country, stating that “some plan must be laid down and strictly adhered to prevent the inconvenience of loss of time in the workmen.” From this comment, it would suggest that Kenrick was keen on developing a culture of work that would extend outside the factory walls. Certainly, the wide availability of land in West Bromwich made it possible to house his workers within close physical distance to their workplace. Apparently, Izon, Kenrick and the other pioneering

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7 W. E. Jephcott (1948) House of Isons, pp 13-14. With steam power introduced by Boulton and Watt in the late 1770s, the need for water power became superfluous to the early West Bromwich factories.
ironmasters found what they were looking for in terms of land, labour and transport in West Bromwich.

Allen’s contention, noted earlier, maintains that up to 1860, Black Country economic development “was marked by a vast increase in the number of producing units rather than by a growth in the size of the existing few, and the factory still remained unrepresentative of the majority of the concerns producing finished goods.” While he is no doubt correct in arguing the continuing dominance of small unit production, at least in West Bromwich there were growing numbers of factories being built in village centres, taking advantage of these favourable skill, transport and cultural conditions. This was especially true in the manufacture of finished goods. White’s 1834 Directory lists 14 ironfounders employing a total of over 1,500 workers. At more that 100 employees per site on average, all fall snugly into Allen’s criteria for small factory and several probably employed more than 150, the threshold for large factory. When the first factories were built in the 1780s and 1790s, they were certainly large by West Bromwich standards but still relatively small in comparison to large firms in Birmingham, let alone those in the north.

Beyond mere numbers however, early nineteenth century growth patterns in West Bromwich bear some correlation to the presence of these larger employers. In addition to Izon (Greet) and Kenrick (Spon Lane), John Bagnall & Sons (Golds Green), the Birmingham and Staffordshire Gas Light Co. (Swan Village) and Siddons (Hateley Heath) contributed to the continuing development of these villages as centres of authority removed from the High Street. Figure 3.1 shows the geographical distribution of these village centres. Trainor comments that these satellites gathered a great deal of attention, with newspapers using local names when reporting news. Thus, while large enterprises may have been relatively small in number, their influence in attracting workers, complementary firms and growth was probably disproportionately high. An equally significant consideration was the relative importance of these industrial sites. Proportionally, a large West Bromwich workplace could potentially have dominated these former villages with a few thousand people in much the same manner as a huge mill in a much larger town.

10 W. White (1834) *Directory and Gazetteer of Staffordshire.*
Figure 3.1
West Bromwich Village Centres
Toward the mid-century point in West Bromwich development, several factors were in place or at work to bring these workplace-dominated villages into a municipal orbit. First and foremost, with an 1851 census count of 34,591, West Bromwich was no longer a small town. Sheer population growth was necessarily adding large numbers of houses and shops, bringing formerly distinct villages into closer contact with neighbours. On the heels of this increase came the stirrings of municipal level decision-making. Hackwood cites the formation of the West Bromwich Poor Law Union in 1834 (a union encompassing the parishes of Wednesbury, Handsworth, Oldbury, Warley Salop and Warley Wigorn) as a critical decision which “forced its name and existence into prominence.”\(^{12}\) Unable to continue to provide adequate governmental service, the local parish vestry took the initiative in 1853 to appoint a large committee to investigate and promote passage of an improvement act. The Act for West Bromwich passed in 1854, and the first orders of business were to appoint a borough surveyor and health officer to support the Improvement Commission. In its first complete year of deliberation, 1855, the Commission considered 91 building proposals for projects ranging from sheds to rows of six houses.\(^{13}\)

Power within the nascent municipality followed along traditional lines. Hardly a surprise, Trainor found local captains of industry occupying 39% of the new elite town positions (the next highest function group was professionals at 28%).\(^{14}\) In essence, while overall municipal gravities may have been experiencing a shift from mid-century to the High Street, local decisions were still being managed by factory owners whose large enterprises dominated the historic communities. This particular feature of West Bromwich politics persisted into the next century and would play a strong part in enhancing the prestige of local industrialists within their neighbourhoods. However, this growing sense of place for the town as a whole apparently did little to detract from local allegiances forged within workplaces and among work communities tied culturally and economically to factories. These points are examined further in Chapters 6 and 7.

**Adapting to Industrial Capitalism**

It was shown above how West Bromwich as a town negotiated the mantle of

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\(^{12}\) F. W. Hackwood (1895) *A History of West Bromwich*, p 1.
\(^{13}\) Sandwell Local Studies Centre, Acc. 9105.
\(^{14}\) R. J. Trainor, *op. cit.*, p 81A. Trainor develops several categories of what he calls ‘function groups’ to determine who were the power elite in the three cities under review.
industrialisation, shifting from relatively autonomous historical villages (often with one or two major employers) to an urbanising parish with leanings toward municipalism. Perhaps more germane to the arguments presented later in the thesis were the adjustments made prior to 1860 to accommodate the local manifestation of industrial capitalism. Increasing numbers of both small and large workplaces became part of the landscape, railroads were built to serve more markets faster, skill requirements changed with new products and technologies and the nature of work itself was undergoing a transformation. For West Bromwich, as elsewhere, the demands of capital movement reached into individual lives and workplaces in ways that were as much shaped by the past as moulded by the present. Several aspects of industrial change are discussed in this subsection.

The reception given locally to Izon and Co. in 1780 provides an example of the potential for friction and negotiation when new types of workplaces failed to meet established social norms. According to Izon’s biographical details, the eight or nine workers he brought were “looked upon with such distrust by the inhabitants of that then rural district as to be refused lodging.” In the end, the firm was forced to supply housing for a new breed of employee, one who would leave their domestic space at the beginning of each work day, proceed to a day of employment in a purpose-built factory, then return to their home at the end of the shift. As dense as the cottage industrial landscape became, it remained a historical geography which was highly integrated in terms of residential and work spaces. From a cultural perspective, these new workplaces, which effectively drew a line in space between where people lived and where they worked, offered a challenge to an entrenched set of working customs.

Chapter Two highlighted the commonly held notion that product specialisation by town or parish was a key feature of Black Country geography. While these were by no means exclusive, West Bromwich did appear to exhibit its share of flagship industries. From a nineteenth century perspective, these fell generally into four categories:

1. Products which were mainstays of local cottage industries, but which were outmoded before 1850. Examples included wrought iron nails and buckles.

2. Products as above but which continued to be important to the local economy

15W. Kenrick (1866) "Cast iron holloware, tinned and enamelled, and cast ironmongery," in S. Timmins (ed.) The Resources, Products and Industrial History of Birmingham and the Midland Hardware District, p 104.
throughout the century. The best example of this category was brickmaking.

3. Products that were not manufactured until around the beginning of the nineteenth century. Holloware was the classic West Bromwich industry.

4. Products newly introduced at various times throughout the century. Among many, several examples included springs, safes, balances, railway fastenings, nuts and bolts, axles, coaches.

If any industry could be singled out for putting West Bromwich on England’s industrial map, it would be holloware. Four manufacturing names whose fortunes would mesh closely with town growth had their start as small- to medium-sized firms late in the eighteenth century. Izon’s and Kenrick’s were mentioned earlier, but Bullock’s (Spon Lane) and Elwell’s (Hill Top) also contributed to an apparent clustering of holloware manufacturing. Both Timmins and Allen cite this example to support their strong localisation argument. However, this propinquity was deceptive. While they all carried West Bromwich postmarks, Izon’s was in fact situated nearer to Oldbury and Elwell’s a short distance from Wednesbury town centres. Kenrick’s and Bullock’s, located along the southern parish boundary, looked out across the canal to Smethwick. While caution must be used in leaning too heavily on the appearance of geographical specialisation, it is logical to assume that local factors such as skill and established markets helped to spur holloware localisation. That all of these firms were still in operation in 1850 was indicative of their ability to draw labour from local spheres of skill, which would not necessarily have overlapped those of the other firms.

After 1800, the largest emerging sector of the borough’s economic and business base was in cast parts for engineering and construction, particularly for railways. Spring, coach, fastening, nut, bolt and axle production flourished in small and large workplaces from the late 1830s. For instance, White’s 1851 Directory lists eighteen coach-building firms, five offering specialisation in railways. Nut and bolt manufacturing to supply a burgeoning international engineering demand started primarily in small firms, only to begin offering wider product ranges from larger factories later in the century. Allen comments correctly that almost all precision engineering in the west Midlands occurred in Birmingham, but the exception was Salter’s in West Bromwich. The Salter family had produced steel bayonets.

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on the High Street from the 1770s, but during the first half of the nineteenth century expanded into a profitable line of light springs. A large firm by 1860, the company later fostered a strong reputation for precision casting of safes and scales.\textsuperscript{18}

Taken as a whole, the product diversity offered by West Bromwich manufacturers showed a substantial increase during the first half of the century, especially in consumer products. Demand was generated within railway and steamboat manufacture, gaslighting and sanitary science, furniture and domestic ornaments, and industrialists were able to adapt with capital and enterprise to produce a range of highly finished goods.\textsuperscript{19} In addition to the newer industries noted above, established sectors such as brickmaking and holloware expanded product lines. Writing in 1866, William Kenrick noted that for the latter, “the number of branches of manufacture has usually gone on increasing with the age and standing of the firm.”\textsuperscript{20} With four plants approaching their 75th year of operation, and others nearing fifty, this mature sector was capable of producing a staggering array of metal products.

Type of product, machinery and power requirements and the degree to which economies of scale could increase profits were probably the strongest catalysts for determining firm size in West Bromwich and elsewhere. Judging by the number of medium to large concerns (by Black Country standards) which were scattered about the town by 1860, these three criteria were strongly in evidence. The agglomerating tendencies of industries discussed above contrasted sharply with the small-producer dominated sectors of metals-based production, such as cut-nails in Dudley, locks in Willenhall or saddlers ironmongery in Walsall. It has been suggested that black and whitesmiths were specialising in certain types of forging, but the 1861 census counted only 848 males in the profession, a small total in comparison to the 4,484 in iron manufacturing.\textsuperscript{21} According to statistics compiled later by the Factory Inspectorate, small production units did persist in West Bromwich, but they offered considerably less gross employment than the mines, ironworks and foundries.

Inside these factories, production needs and processes provided the best evidence for why

\textsuperscript{17} W. White (1851) History, Gazetteer and Directory of Staffordshire.
\textsuperscript{18} For a business history of the Salter firm, see M. Bache (1960) Salter, The Story of a Family Firm. There is a copy in the Sandwell Local Studies Centre.
\textsuperscript{20} W. Kenrick (1866) “Cast iron holloware, tinned and enamelled, and cast ironmongery,” in S. Timmins (ed.) The Resources, Products and Industrial History of Birmingham and the Midland Hardware District, p 107.
some industries developed larger plants while others continued to operate from small workshops. At least part of the motivation to agglomerate related to the power required to keep forges fired or machinery in operation. Most Black Country metals-based work required fire to melt, shape or cast pig and wrought iron. While a lone smithy might get by with one coal-fired forge (employing an apprentice to work the bellows), casting holloware or shaping coach hardware necessitated a larger and hotter hearth. Capital was needed to construct the oven and stack and to purchase a steam engine to blow the fire. Once this initial level of investment fixed the production process to the site, further augmentation of capacity or diversification tended to be \textit{in situ}. In fact, this scenario was reminiscent of many West Bromwich factories. Salter's, at the corner of High Street and Spon Lane, underwent a number of expansions prior to and after 1860 as it added a wider range of springs and precision casting to its product list.

The second potential stimulus to workplace expansion or construction of purpose-built factories was the potential profit offered by economies of scale. To manufacture more units faster and cheaper was in many ways the classic economic \textit{raison d'être} behind industrialisation. Many West Bromwich industries, including holloware, nuts and bolts, coach iron, springs and wrought iron, grew simply because it was profitable to grow. In fact, for many of the iron trades, it was possible to break down the labour process into smaller divisions, allowing economies to be realised in both efficiency and reliance on more specialised and possibly less skilled operatives. In a trade like holloware, even a simple division into the major manufacturing steps of turning (the process of shaping the pots), tinning (adding a surface to the pots) and japanning (finishing or lacquering) could represent huge costs savings in the production process. This option was especially important in those consumer-oriented sectors such as holloware, where competition was keen and product diversity meant wider appeal to more customers.

On the other hand, while nut and bolt making could be and was performed in factories (see Patent Nut and Bolt below), outworkers could also serve as a cheaper and more flexible alternative to in-house production, especially for small articles. Even toward the end of the century, these parallel production paths continued to frustrate Richard Juggins, founder of the Nut and Bolt Society of the Midland Counties Trade Federation.\footnote{Richard Juggins was the founder of the Midland Counties Trades Federation which represented several crafts, including nut and bolt workers. The Federation formed in 1870 in response to a disagreement over...} In pleas before...
various Select Committees, he argued for dismantling the workshop system by prohibiting employers from purchasing the finished products of workshops and for not permitting the construction of attached shops to houses.\textsuperscript{23} There is no doubt that this putting out system had strong roots, reaching down into eighteenth century bedrock, and it was unlikely that the dual workshop/factory arrangement could be abolished even if it was regulated. It offered flexibility to both employer and employed.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>1861</th>
<th>1881</th>
<th>1891</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japanner</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Glass Manufacture</td>
<td>370</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>417</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iron Manufacture</td>
<td>4,484</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>4,742</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nail Manufacture</td>
<td>205</td>
<td>301</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bolt, Nut, Rivet, Screw</td>
<td>134</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>165</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Labourer</td>
<td>2,039</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>1,622</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Census of England and Wales, 1861, 1881 and 1891

The range of industrial sectors and firm sizes which developed in West Bromwich had further influence in how labour opportunities and working customs developed in the town. Options for employment were in large part determined by the characteristics of the workers themselves. Table 3.1 looks at totals by gender for six occupations in West Bromwich from the census years 1861, 1881 and 1891.\textsuperscript{24} At least for those workers enumerated within the borough, there were some telling trends that developed over the second half of the nineteenth century with respect to the construction of working opportunities. For instance, while the overall numbers were small for an occupation such as japanning, there was a tendency for this skill to shift from marginally more males to predominantly females. In occupations such as glass or non-specific iron manufacture, steady growth of opportunities within the trades effectively reproduced the 1861 gender percentages in larger numbers of workers. No such trend is discernible from nuts, bolts, screws and other small metal working trades. Female labour was in the forefront in the 1881 census, but by 1891, had fallen back to an 1861 ratio. As noted above, this was one of the most organised of the early labour groups in the Midlands, particularly in West Bromwich, and the falloff in

\textsuperscript{23} PP 1892 [C-6795] xxxvi.1, Response 17,830 and others.

\textsuperscript{24} The occupational statistics for 1871 are not included in the table because the occupational categories do not correlate well with the other three years.
female labour might be explained by the Trade Federation’s oft-expressed distaste for the use of women to cut production costs. Juggins reported that one employer said that “when the time comes that I have to pay females the same price as males I shall have no females.”25

The erosion in the number of nailers and general labourers points to some adjustments being made in the industrial structure of employment in West Bromwich. Nail production, the first commodity to really put the town on England’s industrial map, was a contracting trade by mid-century that became even more mechanised with the passage of time. Despite the well-known persistence of sweated nailing workshops in several Black Country villages to the west of West Bromwich, there were less than a hundred nailers counted town-wide in 1891. As one of their many products, even a portion of this small number could have been Kenrick’s operatives. The dense network of capital movement and connections which once made small back garden forges a viable economic alternative in the production of nails, chains or other small metal products, was no longer a significant part of the West Bromwich industrial landscape. The trend toward employment in large and growing factories, several with origins in the nineteenth century, helped to define the town’s late-Victorian character.

An accompanying structural change in the nature of employment helps to explain the smaller numbers recorded for non-specific labourers. As the workplaces grew larger to gain economies of scale, divisions within the labour at these sites became more precise. In effect, this trend gave greater definition to the different trades practised in West Bromwich, most likely resulting in a greater tendency to class someone in the ‘iron manufacture’ category if that person performed a variety of jobbing work at somewhere like Patent Nut and Bolt. Thus, in terms of the official returns, labourers dropped off and iron manufactures increased. This degree of job specialisation would have been especially reflected in the 1891 census because the entire metals-based industrial sector was emerging from its longest sustained period of growth.

It may bear emphasising at this stage that the prominence of heavy industrial enterprises on the Black Country landscape was disproportionate to its actual land occupation. In addition

to row after row of working-class terrace housing, a large amount of open space (which included agricultural, waste industrial and undeveloped land) characterised even the most intensively exploited areas. In 1872, an observer noted of West Bromwich that “amid the smoke of the collieries, good crops of wheat may be seen growing on the unbroken lands, and also on those that have been broken up, worked out and reclaimed.”\(^{26}\) The 1882 *Report* of the West Bromwich incorporation enquiry noted that fully 50% of the parish remained in agricultural use, although two-thirds of this total could be found in the Sandwell estate (north and east of Spon Lane).\(^{27}\) Employment from agriculture peaked with the 1871 census, when 828 males listed their primary occupation as farm processing or working on the land. By 1891, the figure had fallen to 101.

As different as 1860 was from 1800 in terms of production processes and the structure of employment in West Bromwich, the customs of capital continued to evolve throughout the Victorian era and beyond. Some already large factories, such as Salter’s and Kenrick’s, continued to expand to capture economies of scale while simultaneously offering a wider range of products. In contrast, occupational statistics suggest that a large proportion of the small workshop economy faded into memory, the victim of competition from heavily capitalised sites which brought together the means to produce goods quickly and cheaply. The 1889 enquiry on the sweated trades contained no evidence from West Bromwich, a sharp contrast to the outpouring of testimony from neighbouring Black Country communities. In terms of the percentage of people in factory employment, the town was arguably the region’s closest relation to the northern mill towns.

**THE WEST BROMWICH NEIGHBOURHOOD – SPON LANE**

To this point in the chapter, West Bromwich has been depicted as an amalgamation of villages which grew rather fitfully from peripheral to central municipal authority. Almost any one of these areas in its late nineteenth century incarnation could have served as the focus area. The following sections introduce the neighbourhood commonly referred to as Spon Lane (see Figure 3.2) or, more accurately, the southernmost portion of Spon Lane and environs from Parliament Street south to the Birmingham Canal (Wolverhampton Level).\(^{28}\)

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26 *The Leisure Hour* (1872) p 172.
27 Sandwell Local Studies Centre, West Bromwich Incorporation Analysis (1882).
28 The Wolverhampton Level rose dramatically out of the topographic valley separating West Bromwich from Smethwick, and levelled out just to the west of Spon Lane. The Birmingham Level continued west at a lower elevation on its route to Dudley.
While the canal served to legally separate West Bromwich from Smethwick (and to demarcate the geographical limits of this study), this area was one of those extraordinary confluences of transportation-related ingenuity. A tram moving south on Spon Lane and crossing the borough boundary would, in the next 1500 feet, intersect the Birmingham Canal (at the Birmingham Level), the London and Northwestern Railway (Stour Valley Line), the Oldbury Road (a major thoroughfare between Birmingham and Dudley) and the Great Western Railway (Stourbridge Extension – the main line crossed Spon Lane to the north just south of the High Street). Without a doubt, lower Spon Lane was intimately connected with the industrial revolution and its burgeoning world markets.

Spon Lane’s place in the global economy was a relatively recent phenomenon. In a series of articles entitled “Old West Bromwich” appearing in 1943-44, it was noted that “it is not such a very far cry back to the time when Spon Lane as a district was of a distinctly rural character.” Remembrances of unenclosed heath, isolated farmhouses and small clusters of worker housing (for operatives at Kenrick’s and Bullock’s) were part of family lore. In the final article dealing with Spon Lane, author William Jephcott quotes a letter he received from a former resident who recalled “in my boyhood, Spon Lane District was like a small self-contained town.” Authority and working cultures were established locally, and stories were not so much West Bromwich stories as they were Spon Lane stories. As a foundation for the comparisons in Chapters 5 to 7 between this neighbourhood and Ablewell East in Walsall, the following sections examine the mid- to late-Victorian geography of Spon Lane.

**Early Industrial Profile**

Occupying the southwestern corner of the parish, Spon Lane owed its early growth to the Birmingham Canal and the Lane’s own importance as a major north-south roadway. General histories of the region date the origin of ‘Spon Lane’ as a place-name to the late seventeenth century, although the actual road probably pre-dated this period. Brindley’s Birmingham Canal, constructed between 1768-72, brought additional market connections, and most likely enhanced the desirability of the neighbourhood as a manufacturing

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31 Descriptions of the origin of the name ‘Spon Lane’ appear in the *Victoria History of the County of Stafford*, (1976), F. W. Hackwood’s *A History of West Bromwich* (1895) and J. E. Jephcott’s series of articles entitled “Old West Bromwich” (1943-4).
location. Between 1791, when Archibald Kenrick arrived on the canal bank, and the mid-1850s, the Spon Lane district grew steadily as one of the borough’s characteristic local centres outside the proximal orbit of West Bromwich High Street. Until 1849, when the Spon Lane Railway was completed, surface transport of raw materials and finished products were at the speed of a horse or horses, pulling a wagon along a roadway or a barge from the canal path. Both methods continued to be used to aid the flow of capital, although the speed offered by the railway became increasingly critical to delivering finished goods to a global marketplace.

The early works that relied on canal transport were likely very primitive but appear to have been purpose-built, and their appearances were probably not so dissimilar from the product catalogue line drawings reproduced in Figures 3.3 and 3.4.32 Coming from the east, “we pass a little foundry at the side of the road, owned by a Mr Bullock. Directly, we are at the corner of Spon Lane looking down the canal, houses on the left side and nearer the canal is Kenrick’s and some workshops of Mr Hadley.”33 Plentiful open land around the works and easy access to the canal allowed these enterprises to develop in the first half of the nineteenth century and expand their range of manufactures. By the 1850s, both firms were advertising themselves as “Manufacturers of Improved Cast Kitchen Furniture” with wide-ranging catalogues. Both offered coffee mills, humane man traps, pulleys, castors, latches, andirons and an impressive array of cast iron cooking vessels. Thus, the mid-century profiles of Bullock’s and Kenrick’s would have been remarkably similar in size and output. Thirty-five years hence it was a different story. Kenrick’s would be the dominant Spon Lane workplace and span two boroughs, and Salter’s would have purchased Bullock’s to supplement their High Street works.

32 These catalogues are located in the archives of the Black Country Museum in Dudley.
33 From an article entitled “West Bromwich Seventy Years Ago,” published in the South Staffordshire Advertiser, 30 November 1872.
In fact, any discussion of the historical profile of work and workplace around Spon Lane must give considerable attention to the firm of Archibald Kenrick and Sons. Although the founder’s arrival canalside in 1791 was some ten years after George Salter had established his works on the upper end of Spon Lane, Kenrick’s was the firm and name which people associated with the neighbourhood. In fact, it is likely that this area was known as Kenrick’s Village at one time, and certainly the names Kenrick Street, Kenrick Park and Kenrick’s Schools were testament to the close connections between the firm and the surrounding neighbourhood. Chapter 7 looks more closely at other ways in which Kenrick’s participated in the day to day life of the Spon Lane neighbourhood. As the prominence of the firm grew in the later nineteenth century, the company was often represented at national debates and enquiries on the state of trade or working conditions.

In the decades following the early industrial colonisation of Spon Lane by Kenrick’s and others, additional firms moved into the neighbourhood (see Figure 3.5). Just across the canal in Smethwick, Chance Brothers and Company started glass production under Thomas Shutt in 1814 only to be purchased ten years later by company scion Robert Lucas Chance. As an industry without significant cultural precedents in West Bromwich, the firm struggled to find skilled labour, especially for making the sheet glass that was added to the product list in 1832. Chance solved this problem by importing continental workers, primarily from France and Belgium, who were skilled in blowing the huge hollow cylinders which were then flattened to produce sheet glass. The company offered accommodation and high wages to entice these workers to leave their native countries, an arrangement secured by a contract guaranteeing payment even during slack trade. Housing for these workers was owned by and supplied by Chance’s, primarily adjacent to the Smethwick works. However, the firm did purchase sixteen houses in 1846 at the northeastern corner of Union Street and Spon Lane. This example of company housing is discussed further in Chapter 7. Chance’s continued to grow in size and stature and was, by 1865, the largest workplace in the vicinity of Spon Lane, eclipsing even Kenrick’s.

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34 In his 15 October 1943 article on “Old West Bromwich,” Jephcott refers to the omnipresent Kenrick name as “an indication of the character of the locality.” The firm’s and family’s significant presence in the neighbourhood is explored further in the 14 January 1944 article by Jephcott, and in Church’s company history, Kenricks in Hardware: A Family Business 1791-1966 (1969).

Figure 3.5
Major Factories in the Spon Lane Neighbourhood

500 feet
Neal Street
Wolverhampton, Houghton
Like Kenrick's and Bullock's, the Summit Foundry on the east end of the Spon Lane neighbourhood also specialised in holloware production, along with manufactured nails. It was opened in 1830 by Samuel Kenrick, a cousin to the sons of Archibald Kenrick who were then managing the larger firm. After twenty years of manufacture, the works were sold in 1853, and for a short period in the 1850s continued to produce nails and stove grates under a new proprietor. George Taylor and Reuben Farley purchased the foundry in 1861 and it was this partnership that built the company into one of the largest iron rolling firms in Staffordshire. By 1860, three additional large ironworks had been built in the gaps along the canal between the Summit Foundry and Bullock's. In the space between Summit and Kenrick's, the Providence Ironworks of Thomas Silvester and Son yielded in 1866 to Bridge, Gill and Bridge. Further west, Peter Duckworth Bennett's ironfounders, millwrights and engineers occupied the location across Hall Street South from Kenrick's, behind the residential/retail frontage to Spon Lane. Finally, Weston and Grice, specialists in railway and engineering bolts, nuts, rivets, screws, spikes and fastenings, operated the Stour Valley Works on the west side of Spon Lane next to Bullock's. This firm became known in 1864 as Patent Nut and Bolt.

Thus, by the start of the study period, the Spon Lane neighbourhood was characterised by a concentration of major industrial works along the canal, along with a growing residential area just to the north. Large gaps still existed within this part of town, both within the industrial spaces themselves and within the community that surrounded them (see Figure 3.6). Both land uses had room to grow. For instance, in 1855, the West Bromwich Improvement Commission approved for construction 31 new houses in the neighbourhood, including two blocks of eight houses each on Neal and Glover Streets. Seventeen new houses were reviewed the following year, ten of which were part of one application to infill a large back lot off Union Street. These actions point to the existence of large, undeveloped sections of the residential part of the neighbourhood. Likewise, a drainage map fragment from the 1870s appears to show open land within the Kenrick's site and next to Bennett's. How these open areas were filled over the succeeding thirty years has much to

36 Reputedly, Grice Street, which housed Weston and Grice (Patent Nut and Bolt), was the inspiration for 'Rusty Lane' in J. B. Priestley's 1934 English Journeys. "I have never seen such a picture of grimy desolation as that street offered me." Apparently, the Black Country's ability to awe travellers continued well into the twentieth century. This is quoted in J. E. Jephcott (1944) "Old West Bromwich," 31 December 1943. Much of the Victorian chronology of firm ownership noted here has been derived from Jephcott's articles in the Midland Chronicle, supplemented with Directory evidence.

37 Sandwell Local History Centre, Acc. 9105, Series A.
say about the local effect of industrial capital on neighbourhood space.

**Neighbourhood Change from 1865 to 1895**

Growth within the thirty year period being primarily considered in this thesis can be summarised in two outcomes – it completed that process begun early in the century to connect the urban landscape between Spon Lane and the High Street, and it filled in the open spaces within the neighbourhood itself. Apart from a short open vista to the west halfway between the canal and the High Street, Spon Lane at the turn of the century presented an unbroken built environment to travellers. These same travellers could travel on foot as they had for centuries, or elect to ride on the public tramway that opened in 1883. Two pennies would buy a fare from Spon Lane to Hill Top, site of another former village now part of the West Bromwich municipal orbit. Spaces within the neighbourhood were being filled not only with new homes and larger workplaces, but also with new public buildings such as schools and churches. However, despite this growing sense of connection to Greater West Bromwich, the incorporation of the borough in 1882, and the subsequent designation of the Spon Lane Ward, confirmed the resilience of the area as an enduring and recognisable geographical entity.38

Jephcott refers to a document from 1836 from which he was able to count six houses in Neal Street and thirteen along Glover Street.39 By the end of the nineteenth century, these streets and every other thoroughfare in the vicinity were essentially fully occupied. Using directories and surviving rate books, Figures 3.6 and 3.7 describe neighbourhood land use for the years 1872 and 1899. Five types of land use have been mapped: housing, retail/public houses (including beerhouses), institutional (government, religious), factories and workshops (non-domestic workplaces with an associated residence). Whereas the earlier map indicates well-established patterns of land use, the mature neighbourhood of 1899, suggested by the unavailability of buildable land, confirmed and extended several aspects of the built environment. A more pronounced segregation of industrial and residential spaces, a greater provision for the educational and governmental needs of the residents and a marked densification of factory uses along the canal all signify a

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38 The first nominees for Borough Councillors were Joseph Cooksey, mining engineer, Rueben Farley, ironmaster and Henry Sutcliffe, surgeon. Once again confirming the local managerial elite in local (Spon Lane) affairs, this slate was nominated by G. H. Kenrick and T. B. Salter.
39 J. E. Jephcott (1943) "Old West Bromwich" 15 October 1943.
Figure 3.6
Spon Lane Generalised Land Use, 1872

- Workshops
- Retail/Public Houses
- Factories
- Institutional
- Housing
Figure 3.7
Spon Lane Generalised Land Use, 1899

0 500 feet

- Workshops
- Retail/Public Houses
- Factories
- Institutional
- Housing
neighbourhood that was changing.

Residential growth between 1855 and 1900 can be tracked in gross numbers by the reports of the West Bromwich Improvement Commission. Table 3.2 charts the combined number of new residences approved for construction on Parliament, Lower Trinity, Neal, Glover, Maria, Kenrick, Green, Union, Houghton and Hall Streets, in addition to the lower portion of Spon Lane. Trends in residential construction activity paralleled the trade fortunes of the Spon Lane factories. Peaks in the mid-1850s and around 1880 corresponded to strong demand in the iron trades, with new home construction topping thirty in the years 1855 and 1880. Similarly, the generally depressed economy of the 1870s was characterised by small numbers of new units, with an occasional spike attributable to the erection of blocks of four or five houses by one developer. The number of new housing starts dropped low and stayed low from 1892 until the end of the century, a factor of the increasing scarcity of building land within Spon Lane. All but one of these applications during this period were for one or two houses.

Table 3.2
Residential Construction in Spon Lane, 1855 to 1900

![Graph showing residential construction in Spon Lane, 1855 to 1900]

Indeed, the changing geography of housing in Spon Lane provides a good illustration of the neighbourhood in transition. Several factories, most notably Taylor and Farley (Summit Foundry), Kenrick’s and Patent Nut and Bolt, experienced rapid growth during the second half of the nineteenth century. Obviously, it would be expected that this expansion in

40 Sandwell Local Studies Centre, Index of Building Plans.
employment opportunities would have engendered a greater need for local workers, and the residential construction statistics provided above seem to confirm that the market responded by increasing the number of housing units. In fact, this housebuilding occurred predominantly along those streets not adjacent to the major canalside works. The gross number of census households living on Hall, Houghton, Union, Maria, Kenrick, Green and Glover streets actually dropped from 369 in 1871 to 351 in 1881 and further to 337 in 1891. This reduction could be attributed to the demolition of residential terraces along Hall Street South and Houghton Street to accommodate factory expansion (see Figures 3.6 and 3.7), thus converting residential into industrial space.

The relationship between industrial and residential space is an important measuring stick for modernity. In the Spon Lane of 1872, there were still vestiges of a more integrated workplace geography. For instance, the Vulcan Tube Works at 10 Neal Street hints of an industrial presence adjacent to predominantly residential uses. Likewise, the rows of homes on Hall Street South and south of Grice Street next to Patent Nut and Bolt were constructed when the nearby factories were still relatively small and space would have been available to house workers adjacent to the works. By 1899, even these few examples of a less exclusive delineation between home and workplace had been consumed by capital forces within the neighbourhood that effectively demanded a segregated landscape. The Vulcan Tube Works management sought agglomeration with another firm and moved to a new location in West Bromwich, making way for the new Board school. Growth of Kenrick's, P. D. Bennett's and Patent Nut and Bolt obliterated the remaining residential uses along streets closest to the canal that would in the future be devoted exclusively to spaces of production.

Several neighbourhood workplaces did manage to weather the trend toward segregation. Across Union Street from Kenrick's at the intersection of Hall Street South, a blacking and grinding mill operated to produce the charcoal and coal dust used in the inside of casting moulds to give holloware and other cast iron products a smooth surface. This location had been used for this purpose since at least the 1810s, and was a complementary business to the neighbouring foundries. Three other manufacturing locations persisted in the neighbourhood, a ginger beer works at 18 Neal Street (the former wheelwright shop), a heel and shoe tip workshop at 72 Glover Street (see Chapter 7) and a zinc and tinsmith at 348 Spon Lane. By the end of the nineteenth century, the
presence of these establishments in the residential sections of Spon Lane could be considered anomalies.

While there seemed to be an increasing tendency for residential and industrial spaces to retreat to their respective corners of Spon Lane, the new uses in the neighbourhood were the scattered presence of public buildings. The Summit School, built about 1840 by the Kenrick’s firm in a green field site north of Kenrick Street, was still in 1872 the extent of accommodation for neighbourhood educational pursuits. Started with a nonconformist mission to educate his workers, William Kenrick lamented in 1862 that “none who are in the works attend it,”41 and it was never the success that the Kenrick family had envisaged. The West Bromwich School Board took over operation in 1873 until the new Spon Lane Board Schools were opened in 1889 between Parliament and Neal Streets. Also moving over to the new Board Schools were those pupils receiving weekday education at the Spon Lane Wesleyan Methodist Sunday School on the west side of Spon Lane near the intersection of Union Street.42

Beyond provision for education, Spon Lane also attracted a number of establishments consistent with national trends. Letters of support for a Spon Lane Post Office began to appear in the local press by early 1881, and a branch was opened on 15 August of the same year. In the first eight months of operation, there were reports of 450 money orders and 180 new deposit accounts (not including transfers). The following year, the Free Library Committee moved forward with a plan to provide branch reading rooms in Spon Lane, Hill Top and Great Bridge. In its first two months of operation, the Spon Lane branch proved to be so popular that the local press described it as “over-accommodated.”43 These improvements were in part reflective of a new spirit of municipalism brought by the 1882 borough incorporation, but equally of the sense of place which had moved forward with Spon Lane from its village origins. A more extensive discussion on the role of the municipality in supporting or ignoring neighbourhood improvements is considered in Chapter 5.

42 The associated chapel was established in 1841, but Reeves notes that there had been outdoor sermons preached “at the wharf bottom of Spon Lane” by the 1830s.
43 The Free Press, 6 January 1883.
CONCLUSION

In many ways, what happened in the second half of the nineteenth century in West Bromwich in general and Spon Lane in particular could be viewed as a town and neighbourhood coming of age from roots of modernity planted in the late eighteenth century. The first wave of small factories along the canal fixed, to a relatively untrodden economic landscape, places of production which were at once exploitative of local skills, resources and labour customs, but in a form which diverged from traditional small workshops. In a development pattern that confirmed the historical villages of West Bromwich, the neighbourhoods that grew up around these workplaces undoubtedly had close connections to their local factories. However, in terms of geography, increases in the size and number of these works in the nineteenth century etched a line between domestic and employment spaces, at least for those drawing a pay packet from the factory. That this groove seemed to deepen by the end of the century, such as along Union Street, points to strong forces of capital at play throughout the study period.
Chapter 4

WALSALL
"Beyond Walsall, it grows darker"¹

Most people drawing a boundary around the Black Country include Walsall. However, for those who prefer to chip away at the region's fringes based on specialised criteria, the town is amongst the first to be excluded. Certainly, when municipal history or industrial base are considered, Walsall stands apart from the late eighteenth century roots and iron-dominant economies typified by most Black Country communities. Even contemporary observers and residents went to varying lengths to distance the town from the likes of West Bromwich, Dudley or Wolverhampton. "As a modern town, it is not so dirty as most of its Black Country neighbours."² Blackness as a municipal trait was seen by Walsallonians as descriptive of other places. At worst, it was viewed as a community shaded by gray and at best, an enterprising oasis bordering on the "dusky denizens" of its neighbours to the south and west.

This chapter considers Walsall’s somewhat uncharacteristic Black Country antecedents and their influence in shaping the Victorian characteristics of the city. Among the Town’s often touted distinctions were its early nineteenth century prominence, its palpable sense of pride as a municipal entity, its reputation for balancing the omnipresent Black Country metalworking trades with an equally strong leatherworking labour force and its location on the verdant fringes of industrial degradation.³ E. L. Glew, one of Walsall’s biographers, stated in 1856 that the town’s past was viewed jealously with “a sort of contempt” even by Birmingham, the latter once described as “a hamlet near Walsall.”⁴ The extent to which these differences helped to shape workplace geography and neighbourhood development provides the main focus for this chapter.

WALSALL IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

In a letter from 1845, Lord Bradford’s agent reported that all the wealthier inhabitants of

¹ W. White (1860) All Round the Wrekin, p 263.
³ G. C. Allen provides inadvertent credence to this argument, stating that "iron and coal were practically the only raw materials which counted," and that "all the staple manufactures of the Black Country were directly dependent on the local extractive industries." G. C. Allen (1929) The Industrial Development of Birmingham and the Black Country, p 65.
⁴ E. L. Glew (1856) History of the Borough and Foreign of Walsall, p 2.
Walsall lived near the town centre, while the working classes, “being for the most part miners and mechanics,” occupied areas somewhat removed from the commercial heart. While this interpretation of the town’s early-Victorian residential geography is no doubt simplistic in its characterisation, it is noteworthy in the sense that this depiction contrasts so sharply with West Bromwich of the same time period. While Walsall was ringed by a number of historic, smaller villages that could boast of thriving local ironworks or pitheads, such as Pleck, Bloxwich and Rushall (see Figure 4.1), these places were arguably mere satellites subject to the strong cultural and financial gravities which connected them to the larger town’s sphere of influence. Was it inevitable that this centralisation of economic power and municipal authority would have had an effect on workplace and neighbourhood sociability? Or, were these social relations influenced on a smaller scale by the particular working cultures of individual neighbourhoods? The following sections take a broad look at the early historical geography of Walsall, with a focus on patterns of capital and spatial accommodation that helped build the Victorian countenance of the town.

Emergence, Growth and Authority

Despite the rather well-accepted notion by contemporaries that Walsall’s eighteenth and early nineteenth century regional importance far outstripped its Black Country neighbours, the 1801 census counted only 10,399 inhabitants. Even by 1851, enumerators tallied only 26,822 residents. Given these numbers, it would be a stretch to rank Walsall as the “second manufacturing town in the county, as regards its population,” an argument put forward by White in his 1834 Directory. However, even 34 years later, Elihu Burritt would still describe the town as “one of the most important and populous towns in Staffordshire.” A possible explanation for the common perception that Walsall was larger than other Black Country communities, such as Wolverhampton or Dudley, may have rested with its largely centralised population. By 1800, with a population similar to West Bromwich, Walsall’s built environment exhibited a more recognisable

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5 Staffordshire Record Office, D. 1287/12/3, Peter Potter to Lord Bradford, 1 Dec 1845.
6 5,222 of this total were in the “foreign,” with the remainder in the “borough.” The latter consisted of about 100 acres in the centremost part of Walsall which, according to the Victoria County History of Staffordshire, split from the original Walsall manor in the 13th century. A formal boundary was not established until 1814. Most population counts of Walsall provide both the borough and foreign totals.
7 W. White (1834) Gazetteer and Directory of Staffordshire.
Figure 4.1
Walsall and Vicinity
urban mien that contributed to a strong sense of municipal place, one that dwarfed the outlying villages and industrial enclaves.

The bulk of the citizenry huddled together in a relatively small area surrounding the High Street, falling off on all sides of the prominent limestone hill upon which stood St. Matthew's parish church. The church "sits upon the head of the town like a crown, and from a certain distance the houses seem to pave the steep slope down from its base." That this concentrated morphology offered such a sharp contrast to other towns in the early nineteenth century Black Country almost certainly contributed to the Walsall's regional prominence. Further, late eighteenth and early nineteenth century political initiatives and responses indicated a strong municipal presence with more than a small focus on civic construction. The town's first post office and public library date to 1793 and 1800 respectively, followed by a theatre in the central square and a grandstand at the race course in the new century's first decade. Savings banks, a mechanic's institute and a horticultural society came later and, considered collectively, can easily be interpreted as signs of a conscious effort to provide a veneer of middle-class respectability to what was predominantly a working-class manufacturing town. In 1832, Walsall became the first Black Country town to return a Member for Parliament.

Obviously, Walsall's regional and national profiles as a nineteenth century manufacturing centre were not solely the result of the increased capital movement and urban population growth which help define the industrial revolution. In common with its regional neighbours, the town carried from previous centuries a legacy of manufacturing skill and production, certainly with local specialisations, but still close enough to the iron-dominant regional mainstream to be classed as a Black Country community.

William Franklin's review of "The Walsall Trades" for Timmins' study of the Midlands hardware district singled out iron products as the "staples of the town." In particular, lighter metal working in the form of nails and buckles could be traced back to the fourteenth century, but it was ironwork and brasswork "chiefly related to somewhat of

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9 Burritt, op. cit., p 356.
horsemanship, such as spurs, bridles and stirrups," which became the town’s primary market niche. Willmore quotes a 1540 historian as recording “there be many smiths and bit makers” in and around Walsall. The so-called ‘horse furniture’ trade had reached a wide market by the mid-sixteenth century and, except for a fashion-driven demand for buckles in the mid- to late-eighteenth century, continued to employ more Walsall labour into the late nineteenth century than any other industrial sector. Complementing the trade were many allied metal products, such as chains, bits, cart gears, hames and saddle buckles.

The pre-nineteenth century traditions of work, inured through centuries of producing small, specialised items by outworkers or in modest-sized workshops, continued to inform the Walsall workplace and marketplace, even during later periods of rapid industrialisation when agglomeration and vertical integration under one roof were becoming more common. In fact, during the relatively rapid growth of the town in the nineteenth century, there were remarkably few examples of the large power- and labour-intensive metal works that typified the village centres of West Bromwich. The most noteworthy, in another example of product localisation cited by Allen, were three large metal tube firms located in Walsall, which, in 1866, employed about 1,500 operatives in total. One of these companies, the Alpha Tube Works, began operation in 1829 and moved from Birmingham Street to Ablewell Street in 1834. Between this date and the end of the nineteenth century, it is likely that this was the largest private employer at a single plant within the built-up area of central Walsall.

Beyond the metals-based sectors, leather production and manufacturing were also solidly established in Walsall well before the town gained a global reputation for delivering all types of saddles, harnesses, bridles, reins, horse collars, whips and other leather articles. Leather manufacture can be divided broadly into three steps: beamhouse work, or sorting, washing, soaking, depilating and fleshing the hide; tanning, or treating the hide to become imputescible and water-resistant; and currying, or dressing to impart character and appearance to the leather. The latter stage was considered the most artisan-like of the

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11 From Plot’s Staffordshire, quoted in F. W. Hackwood (1902) The Story of the Black Country, p 60.
12 F. W. Willmore (1887) History of Walsall and Neighbourhood, p 64.
13 G. C. Allen (1929) Industrial Development of Birmingham and the Black Country, p 92. Wednesbury and Wolverhampton were also recognised for the manufacture of tubes.
three stages. Once curried, leather could then be cut, sewn or worked to produce a wide range of products. Walsall's associations with leather production went back several centuries. The *Victoria County History of Staffordshire* traces a fledgling tanning industry back to the mid-fifteenth century, and Homeshaw makes note that a tanner served as mayor three times between 1584 and 1607.14 The industry developed slowly but steadily until the mid-nineteenth century, when global demand from South Africa, India, South America and the United States spurred sector-wide growth in leather production.

Consolidation of Walsall's status as leather centre progressed throughout the remainder of the nineteenth century, no doubt helped along by the comparatively low cost of by far the largest value-added component in the sector. Local labour costs in the leather trade ran about 75-80% of those in London, which may help to explain why two Bermondsey manufacturers decided in the 1860s to open plants in Walsall. In fact, it was this characteristic of the labour market that fuelled fierce competition between the two leathemaking centres, reaching a zenith during the Parliamentary sweating enquiries of the late 1880s. In effect, Walsall was singled out for scrutiny and criticism over substandard and exploitative working conditions. London leather makers were only cursorily investigated. The Walsall Chamber of Commerce went to great lengths to combat the sweating stigma, and went so far as to accuse the London Saddler's Society of fomenting the enquiry.15

Like the light metal trades, industrial structure in leather consisted "for the most part of many small and almost ubiquitous units, owned or rented by family firms or partnerships and worked by a handful of people."16 Tonkinson's study of the leather trades confirms the anecdotal evidence provided by the nineteenth century trade directories. Prior to 1800, craft organisation in leather products was such that the "saddler's shop was

15 P. Liddle (1988) "Victorian Walsall: An Economic and Social Study," unpublished Ph.D. thesis, p 216, "the main resort of country saddlery had a reputation . . . where little girls learned to stitch harness at a very early age and where women worked in their homes six days a week, sixteen hours a day."
intimately connected with village life” and served the local population. As Walsall outgrew its village status, it might be expected that a town with a burgeoning manufacturing base and reputation would be amongst the first to exploit all available economies of scale in leathemaking. In fact, while Bolton charts some growth in the size of currying works in the nineteenth century, and several large saddleries did emerge after 1860, the industry as a whole continued to operate predominantly within a small workshop and outworker environment. This trend is confirmed in Church’s study of the Leeds leather trades.

This hegemony of small unit production in the two largest manufacturing sectors in Walsall was enormously influential in how the town would grow in response to the capital investment and population boom of the nineteenth century. In one of the most important conclusions of his study, Tonkinson argues that the industrial revolution in Walsall meant “the multiplication of the number of small manufacturers and their concentration.” While the town centre edged gradually toward a locus of municipal and retail uses, the streets leading outward from the High Street were reproducing a traditional village pattern of coincident home and workplace, only in a much more dense form. On the ground, builders extended the familiar village intimacy by constructing long terraces and dense courtyards (often to accommodate workshops) on all available space leading from St. Matthew’s Church. Historic transportation corridors were preserved, such as Ablewell Street, and these served to link the city centre with outlying mining communities, agricultural lands and markets outside the Black Country. Liddle consults the 1801 census for one of these routes, Rushall Street (which connects to Ablewell Street’s northern terminus), to highlight the highly integrated occupancy of these thoroughfares. In adjacent buildings, a shopkeeper, currier, town clerk, jobbing smith, baker and labourer plied trades and maintained residences. This tight-knit geography of work, featured in a Black Country town which could reputedly be traversed in little more than a quarter of an hour, made all jobs accessible to all people and workplaces were liable to emerge on every street.

19 Tonkinson, op. cit., no page number.
20 P. Liddle, op. cit., p 145.
This expanding village pattern of closely connected domestic and work space, which may have worked very well when there were only 10,000 people in the entire borough, had social and economic consequences for a rapidly growing town home to over 40,000 by the beginning of the study period. Housing and sanitary conditions suffered, and a large proportion of the small workshops, hidden as they were behind a domestic front, appear to have escaped the scrutiny intended by reforming legislation such as the Factory and Workshop Acts and the Education Act. On the other hand, Walsall was the only Black Country town to take advantage of the 1875 Artisans’ and Labourers’ Dwellings Improvement Act, demolishing “slums” at Townend Bank northwest of the town centre. As noted above, Walsall in 1888 became embroiled in the sweating enquiry being conducted at the Parliamentary level, and was singled out as a locale where employers were notoriously exploitative of their workers.

Throughout this period, the local press editorialised about what they saw as the erosion of municipal respectability. As an example, in 1868, the Walsall Advertiser, in its advocacy for a new Agricultural Hall, pointed to a lack of ‘public spirit’ in the town council. “We have no public room worthy of the name; our post office is a disgrace to use; and as an ancient borough of quite ordinary wealth and importance, we are certainly behind other towns in our march of improvement.”

Glew, as one of Walsall’s earliest biographers, attributed in 1856 the lack of worthwhile improvement facilities for the working population “to prejudice and a ruinous division of class.” This statement seems to imply an unsympathetic manufacturing class, but it may also be symptomatic of the lack of the type of municipal patronage practised by the factory owners in West Bromwich. Walsall’s small master economy was simply not able to engender an influential and patrimonial class typified by men like George Salter and William Kenrick (see Chapter 7).

Whatever flaws attached to Victorian Walsall that could be attributed to its localised pattern of growth, it was clear that by 1865, the changing demands of industrial capitalism were being accommodated within the linear expansion of a culturally familiar

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21 Walsall Advertiser, 25 January 1868.
22 E. L. Glew (1856) History of the Borough and Foreign of Walsall, p 39. Glew went on to state that the favoured few “might bestow a small portion of their wealth, their time, and their patronage, on that class to whom, after all, they are so much indebted for their respective positions.”
model. This argument will be re-introduced later in the chapter within the local context of the Ablewell East neighbourhood. However, before turning to this smaller area analysis, it seems useful to look closer at the evolving industrial character of the town as it grappled with wider product lines, increased competition and market fluctuations, government regulation and national trends toward larger workplaces in many industries. Understanding how the town adapted to these extra-local demands and movements seems fundamental to arguments later on working spaces, lives and neighbourhoods in Victorian Walsall.

Adapting to Industrial Capitalism

We saw through the examination of West Bromwich in the previous chapter that medium- to large-sized factories gained footholds in the outlying parish villages, and even on the High Street in the case of Salter's. Over time, these villages grew together but still retained much of their identity from when they were distinct places. In contrast, it could be argued that Walsall's established dense centre, where land values were higher than in outlying areas, where vacant land itself was scarce, where municipal decision makers passed bye-laws to regulate industrial smoke and waste removal and where transport links were weak at best, was simply a poor location in which to locate such a factory. Bolton provides the example of the Butler Brothers, a saddle firm that moved west of the town centre in 1870 due to the demolition of its central workshops to make way for town improvements.23 Certainly, these potential geographical and political hurdles had at least some influence in keeping Walsall on a small production unit trajectory, but it would be unwise to conclude that capital's expansionist tendencies would not have dismantled this industrial heritage over time had the need arisen. This section delves further into the town’s industrial sectors, and in particular the labour, power and production characteristics inherent to the town’s two primary industries, the small metal and leather trades.

In terms of metals-based manufacturing, a significant event for Walsall occurred around 1810 in the development of a reliable method for casting malleable iron. The ability to cast small metal articles, and then finish them by filing, turning and polishing or plating,

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23 Bolton, op. cit., p 96.
offered significant advantages over the comparatively crude forge techniques in which smiths heated metal bars and then shaped them on an anvil. The town’s skill base, honed through the centuries by workers who “exercised deftness on the anvil by producing an infinite variety of small articles in iron and other metals,”24 made it a receptive area for application of this new technology. To illustrate this historical diversity, a 1770 trade directory included in Walsall 10 saddler’s ironmongers, 10 spur makers, 5 bit makers, 18 snaffle makers and 11 stirrup makers.25 With this type of localised expertise, it is small wonder that these product lines continued to prosper with the introduction of the malleable casting process. The Children’s Employment Commission enquiries of the 1860s revealed that as many as 25 to 30 firms were using this specific process in Walsall, although the Commission’s interest was more narrowly focused on the potential for exploitation of young children to file the cast articles.26

Almost exclusively, these firms remained small throughout the nineteenth century, with the largest of them having only about 20 workers. Liddle detected no change in the average number of employees per firm (8) in saddlers ironmongery between 1861 and 1881.27 The need for agglomeration remained marginal at best because few economies of scale could be realised in the small metal trades. Casting occurred in small, sand-filled tubs, overseen by one or two workers, sometimes with a young assistant. The production process included firing the tubs in hearths small enough to be powered by hand-pumped bellows to keep the fire hot, thus keeping mechanical (and almost by definition capital) requirements to a minimum. Compensation was generally by the piece, exploiting the factor/manufacturer arrangement described in Chapter 2. All of these features, the low power needs, the small space requirements, the efficient small work unit, the small capital investment, the size and character of the finished product, and the ability to pay by the unit, contributed to the continuing vitality of the small workshop in the small metal trades. Moreover, the fact that these workshops could be constructed and maintained in back gardens or down narrow alleys meant that abundant spatial options were available to further their existence in established and newer Walsall

25 Sketchley’s and Adams’s (1770) Directory of Staffordshire.
neighbourhoods, even within a decidedly dense town centre

Of course, casting represented only a portion of the process by which finished products were readied for market. Once removed from the casting mould and cooled, each article had to be filed to remove the rough edges and then plated or polished to finish off its appearance. These tasks could be and often were performed under largely domestic circumstances, in many cases in a location removed from the casting workshop. For the most part, as competition and product demand increased the need to produce a wider array of products more inexpensively, the Walsall small metals work culture adapted by adopting “a division of labour carried to an extreme limit.”28 This ‘extreme limit’ was the multiplication of work sites of “domestic character,” although definitively entwined with an expanding and increasingly complex grid of capital relations. Obviously, there were exceptions in Walsall to this landscape of non- or tentative agglomeration, especially in the manufacture of tubes as noted in the previous section. However, with the largest industrial sector evolving as it did, the potential for influencing the town’s industrial geography was enormous, and likely to offer sharp contrasts with West Bromwich.

The other major industrial sector for which Walsall had a global reputation was in the production of leather and leather products. Leather’s prominence on the town’s economic landscape, while replete with pre-nineteenth century antecedents, matured in the age of Victoria, after emerging from a “chrysalis stage”29 earlier in the century. William Franklin’s contribution to Timmins’ 1866 study noted that the number of operatives in leatherworking had doubled in the seventeen years since 1849.30 A large portion of this growth during this period and beyond could be attributed to robust global demand, often precipitated by international or internecine conflict. Bolton cites high demand in the 1860s brought about largely by the American Civil War to account for a growth in the size of currier firms.31 Similarly, the Franco-Prussian War of 1870-71 precipitated another bump in production levels from which Walsall was able to weather a region-wide

29 Tonkinson, op. cit., no page number.
31 Bolton, op. cit., p 96.
trade depression better than its metals-dependent neighbours.

The success that Walsall firms had in gaining government contracts for outfitting both foreign and domestic ventures was widely acknowledged. Another important influence on leather fortunes evolved when the trade began to respond to a growing domestic demand for fancy or speciality leathers for the consumer market, for instance the manufacture of carriage interiors, bicycle seats, hand bags, cigar boxes and suitcases. Thus, as one of the chief centres for leather manufacture in Great Britain (along with London and Leeds), this sector of the town's economic base was able to exploit a combination of foreign wars, Victorian imperialism, shopping preferences and traditional home markets to maintain production and thereby employment. In fact, perhaps the most significant downturn in leather demand during the study period, occurring in 1879-80, was linked to a national agricultural depression.32

Walsall's attractiveness to capital had a number of components. First, and probably foremost, was the inertia provided by a skilled workforce operating within a production environment of inter-related industrial sectors. The strong traditions of saddlers ironmongery and saddle production in Walsall were well-established locally by the time heightened global demand in the nineteenth century pushed manufacturers to produce a wider range of products in higher quantities. Within this receptive local culture of work and work organisation, the town was able to respond by implementing economies of scale where practical and by achieving vertical integration through the familiar workshop or outworker arrangements already in place. This was particularly true in the use of female labour for tasks such as stitching or buckle covering, normally undertaken outside the primary workplace. It was noted in 1866 that 60% of the workforce in bridles, saddles and harnesses was composed of women, of whom "many are allowed to work at their homes, as harness stitchers, thus preventing the usual ill results of female employment in factories."33 Girls too were an integral part of the outworking network, and it was not unusual for male factory employees to take work home to female household members.34

33 Franklin, op.cit., p 130.
Measurements on comparative firm size over time are difficult to assess, and it is useful here to separate leather making (tanning and currying) from leather products (saddle, harness, bridle, whip, etc.). As noted earlier, Church's study of the Leeds leather industry found that curriers were the most apt to organise as larger workplaces, although the average size in 1871 was still less than 20 workers. Mechanisation within leather making establishments remained problematic at best. Uneven and irregular hides required versatile and complex machinery, which, for most small masters, would have been prohibitively expensive. Likewise, leather making was time consuming (although tanning time was reduced from 12 to 4 months between 1800 and 1870) and embodied a complex cost structure. Less the need to consolidate manufacturing under one roof to localise power sources or to maintain strict scheduling regimens, larger leather works appear to have had specific site-based requirements for acquisition of raw materials (hides, bark), access to a plentiful water supply, room to store tanned hides and a method to dispose of waste materials. For production levels to increase, these needs were perhaps best met within a larger factory. Liddle in fact did detect some growth in firm size in Walsall, with leather works averaging 34 employees in 1881, up about 100% from 1861.

Within the leather products industries (especially saddle and harness), small factories with up to 50 to 60 employees (and several even larger) did begin to gain a toehold in Walsall, especially during the late nineteenth century. However, the reasons for this development contrast with the pre-Fordist organisational motives seen in places like Kenrick's. For instance, power requirements to produce leather products tended to be minimal, although mechanisation of the cutting and stitching processes did gain momentum in the later nineteenth century. Hand crafted work endured, and many aspects of leather product manufacture could accurately be classed as artisanal occupations. Given these characteristics, it was small wonder that much of Walsall's leather industry remained tied to a denser form of pre-industrial organisation. On the other hand, there

were motivations within the sector to bring together under one roof the component parts of leather product manufacture. Government contracts, which could involve orders up to "25,000 sets of artillery and cavalry harness" to be delivered in 20 months, were available only to bidders able to fulfil such large contracts. However, piece work was still the custom, and Leckie's successful bid in 1882 for a War Department requisition necessitated an advertisement in the local press for 50 brown saddlers, harnessmakers, bridle cutters and stitchers. With 250 workers (counting inside and outside), the firm was certainly large enough to manage contracts of such magnitude.

The resiliency of the leather trade to resist great fluctuations in demand was noted above, and helped to buoy Walsall's economic prospects. According to Liddle's analysis, the percentage of the town's 1881 working population engaged in this sector was roughly equivalent to employment in metals-based trades. By 1891, there was no contest, with about 21% (as against 12% in metalworking) of working men, women and children listing their occupation as leather-based. Part of this shift could arguably be attributed to the gradual erosion of the Black Country's ability to compete economically with other emerging territorial complexes. Undeniably, though, the trend signified a change in the fundamental character of Walsall employment. Table 4.1 examines occupational patterns in an array of seven categories of production.

Two leather trades have been selected for comparison, one associated with the manufacture of leather itself (currier) and the other more product specific (saddler, harnessmaker). In addition, the brush and broom occupation is considered due to its raw material linkages to the leather industry (bone and hair). What is probably most striking about these three occupations when considered over a thirty year span is the extent to which their growth in numbers exceeded the overall population growth rate in Walsall. During a period in which the town grew from 39,692 to 71,789, or 1.8 times, brush and broom employment expanded by a factor of 2.6, curriers by 4.5 and saddlers and harnessmakers by a significant 7.5 times. This finding confirms the increasing importance of the leather trades as the dominant Walsall industry in the late nineteenth century. While metals-based manufacturing persisted, it became relatively less important.

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37 The Walsall Observer and South Staffordshire Chronicle, 19 August 1882.
38 Liddle, op. cit., p 165.
in terms of employment.

Table 4.1
Walsall Occupational Trends by Gender, 1861 to 1891

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>1861</th>
<th>1881</th>
<th>1891</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saddler, harnessmaker</td>
<td>523</td>
<td>244</td>
<td>2,490</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Currier</td>
<td>143</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>360</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brush, broom</td>
<td>137</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>208</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iron manufacture</td>
<td>1,102</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>1,528</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nail manufacture</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clasp, buckle, hinge</td>
<td>not recorded</td>
<td>148</td>
<td>253</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brass and bronze</td>
<td>218</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>422</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Census of England and Wales, population abstracts

Almost as remarkable as the sheer growth in numbers, the gender ratio remained consistent throughout the period, with males outnumbering females by 2.14 to 1 in both 1861 and 1891. This continuity is indicative of two enduring characteristics of the Walsall leather trades – one cultural and the other technological. In the first case, the way in which the local working traditions assigned tasks in the production process by gender was well-established by the beginning of the study period. Women’s and girls’ roles were fairly strictly limited to stitching, covering and warehouse packing. That the number of females employed in these jobs rose along a linear trajectory in relation to total employment can be attributed to the lack of significant technological changes in the leather production process. There was no spinning jenny or equivalent introduced in leather manufacture which might have altered the culturally familiar gender relationships in the work force. An 1896 comment on saddlemaking in Walsall referred to it as “a genuine trade of the old sort.” As confirmed by the 1891 census, women and girls were still able to work at home by the piece, just as the previous generation had done. There were simply more of them.

In analysing trends in the four metals-based occupations considered in Table 4.1, it is clear that movement within each employment sector has something to say about the changing structure of Walsall employment during this period. For instance, in common with West Bromwich, nail production by individuals was a dying occupation by the mid-nineteenth century, having been subsumed within iron works where nails were one of many products offered. By 1891, only 16 people submitted this occupation to the

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39 Mechanical systems to cut leather were introduced in the early 20th century.
40 W. J. Gordon (1896) Midland Sketches, p 120.
enumerator. On the other hand, brass and bronze employment was growing a full percentage point higher than the overall town growth rate. Much of this growth could be attributed to the consumer-driven demand for fancy leather products, often containing brass ornament. Like most of the metal trades, employment in brass and bronze was overwhelmingly male in character.

Steady growth occurred over the thirty-year period in iron manufacturing employment, although at a rate slightly less than the town growth rate. With the historical importance of saddlers ironmongery, it is somewhat surprising that this sector did not continue to expand with the boom in leather employment. Again, this may be the result of the diversification of the leather industry itself. Many of the new products being introduced for the consumer market had few metal components, unlike saddles, harnesses and other horse furniture. Thus, while these latter product lines continued to need an allied and complementary metals manufacturing sector, the raw employment numbers failed to keep pace with those in leather. This interpretation is given some credence by the numbers of males and female employed in 1881 in the production of clasps, buckles and hinges. These small, delicate items would have been instrumental in finishing off new consumer articles such as dog collars, suitcases and handbags.

By the Victorian age, the cultural traditions influencing the organisation and use of space in Walsall were in many ways more entrenched than those in West Bromwich. Earlier development of a town centre, and thus the fixing to the landscape of institutional, residential, commercial and industrial forms, meant that any industrial revolution in Walsall had to be accommodated within the morphological constraints of an established market town. More importantly, though, the ability of capital to transform the economic and spatial landscape had to be accommodated within a work culture alive with the social customs of small craft traditions. The Walsall model of work and workplace, characterised by diverse product lines, devolved yet connected work sites, small master management, comparatively skilled labour force and production processes unlikely to benefit greatly from agglomeration, was a powerful deterrent to attracting the type of capital investment seen in West Bromwich. The extent to which a specific neighbourhood did adapt is taken up in the next section.
THE WALSALL NEIGHBOURHOOD – ABLEWELL EAST

The sections above described Walsall as a town that grew outward from a strongly centralised centre. This pattern provides an appropriate starting point for considering neighbourhood change in Ablewell East during the middle- to late-Victorian period. Unlike the infill trend which characterised Spon Lane between 1865 and 1895, neighbourhood growth in Ablewell East can best be described as the annexation of additional town spaces. In essence, the neighbourhood in 1895 represented two distinct eras of development – the north and west portions (with antecedents to the fifteenth century and fully occupied by 1865) and the south and east sections (which transformed from agricultural lands to built environment between the temporal endpoints of this study). Acknowledging that these growth and occupancy patterns contrasted sharply with Spon Lane is less important than trying to understand how change occurred in the newer parts of the neighbourhood in comparison to the older. In many ways, the land use patterns that emerged from the ‘blank slate’ of the former encapsulated the local adaptation of industrial capitalism during the late nineteenth century.

Much as Spon Lane itself linked that neighbourhood to the wider community, Ablewell Street served as a primary thoroughfare for destinations southeast of Walsall, Birmingham and London in particular. Its southern end connected with the Birmingham Road and northern end to The Bridge, the latter serving to link Ablewell with Walsall’s High Street. The *Victoria County History of Staffordshire* traces the street’s origins to very early in the fifteenth century and, by 1856, Glew described Ablewell as of “good length and proportionate width; many of the buildings are commodious, and bear the stamp of ancient respectability.” Topographically, the street was relatively flat, but rose dramatically off its western flank up the side of the hill housing St. Matthew’s Church and more gradually to the east. Ablewell Street demarcates the western boundary of the study neighbourhood. As shown in Figure 4.2, the remainder of the Ablewell East neighbourhood extends to Paddock Lane in the north, to the east as far as The Chuckeries and southeast to Walsingham Street. The latter two streets represented, in 1895, the central eastern limits of the built-up part of town.

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41 E. L. Glew (1856) *History of the Borough and Foreign of Walsall*, p 34. Additional information on the origins of the Ablewell name can be found in the *Victoria County History of Staffordshire*, p 147.
Figure 4.2
The Ablewell East Neighbourhood
The former village centres in West Bromwich made neighbourhood selection in that town a more straight-forward task, because each had demonstrable local identities that often transcended municipal allegiances. People and businesses were from Spon Lane, and the place-name persisted throughout the nineteenth century and beyond. No such obvious neighbourhood identity existed for Ablewell East, although topography and the physical limits of Victorian Walsall did lend a sense of cohesiveness to this part of town. Earlier, however, in the eighteenth century, the area immediately east of Ablewell Street was known as Lime Pit Bank due to the presence of a limestone quarry. This extractive heritage survives not only in the names Lime Street and Bank Street, but also in Pool Street. The latter was so named because of the presence of a pond fed by springs into old limeworkings near the intersection with Ablewell Street. Lime Pit Bank as a place-name survived as far forward as an 1828-29 commercial directory listing as the location for William Franklin's tannery.42

Beyond the early mining interests, there is much to suggest that the northwestern streets of Ablewell East, encompassing Ablewell itself, including western Paddock Lane (in place by 1782), western Tantarra Street (circa 1830s), Bott Lane (in existence by 1501), Bank Street and Pool Street, developed slowly throughout the first half of the nineteenth century. This “extending part of town” was being marketed by the Lords Bradford and Hatherton for residential and industrial uses. In 1856, Glew noted that “in the neighbourhood of Paddock Lane, many buildings are now in the course of erection.”43 It is clear that part of this building activity included the area’s earliest workshops and factories. The 1828-29 commercial directory listed four manufacturing establishments in the neighbourhood, a currier and bit maker on Ablewell Street, William Franklin’s tanners and curriers on Bank Street and a saddlers tool maker on Pool Street. Of these three firms, only Franklin’s building appears to have been built without an adjoining residence.

Ten years later, in 1839, the compilers located seven firms, including three on Pool Street alone (Catherine Cresswell’s malleable ironfoundry, Josiah Wedge’s bridle cutting firm

42 Pigot and Co's National Commercial Directory (1828-9).
43 Glew, op. cit., p 34.
and Thomas Adam's saddlers tool works), with a note that other small manufacturers were also located on the street. This was the earliest indication that the physical manifestation of industry in Ablewell East was largely modest in profile, although there was an exception. The largest firm to locate in the neighbourhood, the Alpha Tube Works, moved to its western Ablewell Street location in 1834. Between 1840 and 1860, the directory compilers were not particularly vigilant in adding new businesses to their lists, probably due to the difficulty in locating workshops behind rows of new terrace housing. Except for Ablewell Street, Pool and Bank Streets were the only thoroughfares to be named as supporting small industrial works in 1860, with nine tallied on the former and six on the latter. To illustrate the diversity of manufacturing being carried on in Ablewell East, Table 4.2 lists these locations, operators and products. Certainly within the neighbourhood, there was no evidence of craft localisation, and the list was as diverse as Rushall Street of 1801. And, except for Franklin's currier works, all of these workshops were located behind the residential facades of these two streets.

Table 4.2
Manufacturing Enterprises on Pool and Bank Streets in 1860

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pool Street</th>
<th>Bank Street</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Address</td>
<td>Master</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-</td>
<td>Simeon Burns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Catherine Cresswell</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Josiah Wedge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-</td>
<td>William Dutton</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-</td>
<td>Thomas Spink</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41</td>
<td>Joseph Williams</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>46</td>
<td>George Reay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>47</td>
<td>Charles Edwards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>64</td>
<td>Thomas Emery</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Post Office Directory for Staffordshire, 1860

While Bank and Pool Streets were developing industrial spaces of their own, although relatively opaque, Ablewell Street could by 1860 boast of nearly full occupation as the mercantile, commercial and small manufacturing centre of southeastern Walsall. A large number of these establishments catered to supplying provisions and discretionary services to nearby residents. Clothing, coal, food products, drink and furniture could be purchased, along with services such as tailoring, dressmaking and personal grooming. For the most part, these enterprises presented a single front to the street, although many had yards and outbuildings which dwarfed their streetside countenance. Even the Alpha Tube Works, whose frontage on Ablewell Street was equivalent to about five shops,
opened up into an even larger interconnected network of yards and warehouses. Listed as iron and brass founders and manufacturers of iron tubes for gas or steam, the firm also supplied gas fittings, chandeliers, pendants and brackets and "newly invented" tubular metallic bedsteads. Taken as a whole, Ablewell Street was clearly the commercial epicentre of this part of Walsall.

By the beginning of the primary study period, the developing portion of Ablewell East was moving toward a mix of land uses that would not have looked out of place in the more ancient neighbourhoods of Walsall. Long, congested rows of residential terraces faced the street, fronting a smattering of industrial workplaces tucked into back courts or gardens. As the neighbourhood (and town) grew, would the newer spaces take their cue from this long tradition, or would the changes in industrial employment and character discussed in the previous section mandate complementary change in the built environment? Ward expected older cities to persist in reproducing a small master economy, "but not the emergence of similar districts in cities whose main growth occurred during the course of industrialisation." As a town that grew into a city over the span of the nineteenth century, Walsall may be a good barometer for testing the importance of an entrenched work and workplace culture in shaping urban form.

Neighbourhood Change from 1865 to 1895

Tracking the ebb and flow of Ablewell East's many industrial enterprises in the late nineteenth century proved difficult even for contemporaries. Once off Ablewell Street, where almost every address housed a commercial or manufacturing establishment, the undifferentiated facades along other streets in the study area presented an effective residential disguise. Directory compilers, the Factory Inspectorate and even the local constabulary depended primarily on neighbourhood contacts to find small workplaces. However, despite their relative anonymity in the built environment, many, if not most, side street firms were resilient in the face of the cyclical demand, technological innovation and structural change which characterised nineteenth century industry. This section looks broadly at development within the Ablewell East neighbourhood, and specifically at trends in the geography of industrial enterprise.

Figure 4.3
Ablewell East Generalised Land Use, 1876

250 feet

Workshops
Retail/Public Houses
Factories
Institutional
Housing
Figure 4.4
Ablewell East Generalised Land Use, 1893

- Workshop
- Retail/Public House
- Factory
- Institutional
- Housing
In the thirty years under consideration in this thesis, the development of the southeastern portion of Ablewell East represented one of the most extensive additions to the town's urban boundary during this period. In addition to constructing the eastern extensions of Tantarra Street and Paddock Lane in the late 1850s, and the addition of Box Street in the early 1860s, the Improvement Commissioners approved in 1872 the layout of streets as far as Walsingham Street. This master plan was initiated by a local solicitor, John Farrington Crump, on land he had purchased from Lord Hatherton. Over the next 25 years, construction activity marked this area, and most available building lots between Walsingham and Ablewell streets were occupied by 1896. Eldon, Walsingham, Burleigh and Richmond Streets were dedicated in 1882 as highways (thus shifting maintenance responsibility from adjacent property owners to the borough council), followed by Lime and Selborne Streets in 1887. Street level improvements in the form of pavements, guttering, street lamps, fire hydrants and paving continued in the area throughout the late 1880s and early 1890s, and are discussed further in Chapter 5.

Certainly, we would expect that the newer portions of Ablewell East would have a predominance of residential land uses over any other, but the extent to which concurrent development occurred of non-residential spaces provides the most insightful evidence for how industrial capital was adapting as Walsall grew. Figures 4.3 and 4.4 depict land use in the neighbourhood for two slices of time - 1876 and 1893. As with Spon Lane, these years were selected because of the availability of both rate books and trade directories, using the rate books to complement directory lists which may have overlooked or omitted sites not currently operating but still assessed as industrial premises. Addresses were matched to properties shown on the Ordnance Survey town plans (first series), although differences in individual street numbers between the two survey dates were considerable. To solve this problem, every effort was made to match building footprints shown on the map with land use descriptions and values as indicated by the rate books.

Interpreting the precise relationship between industrial structure and landscape occupation over time obviously has its limitations when the comparison includes only two moments in time. More so than in West Bromwich, the potential for mobility and change in Walsall’s small enterprise culture renders any reading of these maps as tentative at best. Even at this large scale, there were undoubtedly legions of micro-scale changes that occurred and
remain opaque. Given these drawbacks, however, several broad conclusions can be drawn from a direct analysis of the two years. First, the use of land behind residential terraces for industrial purposes persisted in established areas and appeared to be reproduced in growth areas. With the exception of Franklin’s currier works on Bank Street and the Alpha Tube Works on Ablewell, the neighbourhood in 1876 would have shown only minor visual presence of industry when viewed from the street, effectively disguising the relatively concentrated levels of industrial activity. According to the trade directories and rate books, as many as seventeen manufacturing premises operated along the loop connected by Ablewell, Bank and Pool Streets. A similar number were still present in 1893.

This was not, however, a situation limited to the older portions of the neighbourhood. Of the 90 addresses on Walsingham Street in 1893, as many as 14 appear to have supported some level of domestic manufacturing. Saddle trees at 14, spring bars at 58, brown saddles at 24 and stirrups at 16 were examples of the kinds of workshops in operation. This sectoral diversity is highly reminiscent of the listing in Table 4.2 of Pool and Bank Street enterprises in 1860. Almost certainly, these types of activities would not have been visible from the street, and it would be fair to speculate that for Walsingham (in common with most parts of the neighbourhood), the industrial spaces were largely hidden. Similar cases could be argued for the presence of workshops behind domiciles in Burleigh, Richmond, Eldon and Selborne Streets. Clearly, these new streets proved to be fertile ground for extending the prevailing small unit production character of Walsall manufacturing discussed earlier in the chapter.

A comparison of the two maps also gives compelling evidence that there was growth during the period in the number of purpose-built small factories constructed along the newer streets in the neighbourhood. Using 1876 as a baseline, and dismissing several residence/workshop properties along Ablewell Street (where rateable values tended to be higher), only three premises were valued greater than the average public house (about £30-35). These are shown on the left side of Table 4.3. Of these three enterprises, the firms managed by Franklin and Cresswell had been started by their respective fathers and had persisted at their original locations for about 40 years. By 1893, as shown on the right side of Table 4.3, nine industrial sites exceeded the average public house rateable value measuring stick (rateable values did not appear to rise during this period).
Table 4.3
Firm Size in Ablewell East by Rateable Value, 1876 and 1893

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Address</th>
<th>Firm</th>
<th>Value £</th>
<th>Address</th>
<th>Firm</th>
<th>Value £</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Eldon/Burleigh</td>
<td>Rowley &amp; Lynex, builders</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>11 Eldon</td>
<td>Fairbanks, Lavender curriers</td>
<td>190</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22 Bank</td>
<td>John Franklin, curriers</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>22 Bank</td>
<td>John Franklin, curriers</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 Pool</td>
<td>Thomas Cresswell, ironfounder</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>8 Selborne</td>
<td>Alfred Bullows, ironfounder</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>21 Bott</td>
<td>Henry Bayley, fancy glass</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Eldon/Burleigh</td>
<td>A T Stanley, harness furniture</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>45 Selborne</td>
<td>Albert Venables, curriers</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>19 Selborne</td>
<td>George Bates, ironfounder</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>12 Pool</td>
<td>Thomas Cresswell, ironfounder</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Rope Walk</td>
<td>Ann Hawley, rope</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Walsall Rate Books, 1876 and 1893, Walsall Local History Centre

All seven of the sites developed between 1876 and 1893 (Rowley & Lynex did not survive but its location was subdivided in the 1880s, and partly occupied in 1893 by Stanley’s harness furniture works) were in a line starting from Rope Walk, down Selborne Street to Eldon Street. They were purpose-built manufacturing premises, and their occupants represented a cross section of the most prominent industrial sectors in Walsall. Map evidence suggests that the building footprint for each enterprise varied widely, but there can be no doubt that each was constructed to bring together the people, machinery and resources of production under one roof. It is impossible without good sources to gauge if size of plant had any relation to the number of employees. For instance, an 1890 wages book for Bullow’s Beacon Works (third largest by rateable value in 1893) indicates a total work force of about 130. How this total might relate to Franklin’s larger leather works, where large rooms were needed to flesh, scour, dress and dry skins is difficult to assess.

On the other hand, there is little evidence to suggest that growth occurred in individual firms, as measured by enlargement building footprint. Both cartographic and rateable value sources point to little change in the structural capacity of individual manufacturing sites. For instance, of those factories listed above which operated inclusively of 1876 and 1893, John Franklin’s currier works showed no change in rateable value, and Thomas Cresswell’s ironfoundry gained only £4 over the seventeen year span. Certainly, the Ordnance Survey maps confirm the difficulties confronting any expansion plans, although both Franklin and Cresswell owned property across the street from their respective locations (Cresswell owned and rented three residential properties at 50-52 Pool, Franklin owned the gardens on Pool which by 1893 were 75% occupied with a mixture of residential and industrial land.
uses). Likewise, James Sly's buckle factory at 15 Burleigh edged only slightly higher in rateable value from £22 to £24 between the two years.

One exception to the apparent structural stability of industrial premises was the *in situ* growth of Bayley's Selborne Works (fancy glass) at 21 Bott Lane. In 1893, the residential terrace next door, incorporating numbers 14-20 Bott, were being assessed as houses. Three years later, when the property came up for auction, these same seven houses were listed as Lot 2 of an enlarged industrial site, "comprising what were formerly seven dwelling-houses . . . but now converted into a factory." The auction description hints at some conversion problems in gaining access behind the terrace. "It is suggested that a good entrance could easily be made through the lower part of the former dwelling-house No. 17." Chapter 5 takes a closer look at the specific design and occupation of the Selborne Works.

As a final comment on the culture of work and workplace in Ablewell East, it appears that only the largest firms had no adjoining residence occupied by the proprietors of local firms. Of those large firms listed in Table 4.3, only the Cresswells maintained their dwelling on the same lot of record as the industrial works. The larger manufacturers tended to occupy domestic addresses in higher rent neighbourhoods (Bullows owned 'The Limes' just south of Richmond Street, Franklin likewise owned 'The Lindens' on Lichfield Street, one of Walsall's prestige residential neighbourhoods). Below this exceptional level however, nearly all of the neighbourhood's small manufacturers lived adjacent to their workshops. In fact, of all the non-residential uses mapped for 1893, only those eight of the nine largest employers had no adjoining residence, and there were only three instances of workshops existing independently of homes. For example, Simeon Heath occupied a saddler's tool workshop behind 16 Tantarra Street, but lived over on Eldon Street. His ability to afford an Eldon Street address from the earnings of a smallish workshop may be explained by Heath's second income as a landlord of low-rent properties throughout the neighbourhood. For the most part however, back street and garden shopping was built on lots no larger than those occupied by neighbours for houses only.

If anything, that portion of Ablewell East that developed between 1865 and 1895 was more

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45 Walsall Local History Centre, Acc. A61.
highly integrated in terms of land use than the older parts of the neighbourhood. Residential terraces shared walls with small factories, and even smaller workshops were secreted in open spaces on residential lots, to say nothing of the extensive outworking that persisted inside the home itself. To be sure, modern forms of industrial capitalism were taking shape within the workshops, small factories and streets of Ablewell East, but it could be argued that the physical forms of local industry were undergoing a very deliberate metamorphosis. Moves toward agglomeration were tentative and selective, with capital’s needs satisfied by expanding the home-grown domestic system in sectors like saddlers ironmongery and leather. Those firms following capital’s siren call to larger, purpose-built small factories did so within a neighbourhood context, sharing space with residential and institutional uses instead of creating a veritable industrial precinct as seen in Spon Lane.

CONCLUSION

Chapters 3 and 4 have addressed the historical foundations of work, the nineteenth century characters of industrial capitalism and the landscape adaptations at a neighbourhood scale using a unilateral approach. West Bromwich (and Spon Lane) and Walsall (and Ablewell East) were contextualised within the broader framework of the industrial revolution. Obviously, the sectoral, spatial and morphological contrasts between the two neighbouring communities have much to say about how the present must respect the past, and how capital’s needs were buffeted by locally rooted cultures going back centuries. However, the conclusions drawn to this point are merely starting points. Harvey’s observation that “how a city looks and how its spaces are organised form a material base upon which a range of possible sensations and social practices can be thought about, evaluated and achieved”\textsuperscript{46} provides an appropriate signpost for the transition to the remainder of this thesis. The myriad ways in which working spaces, working lives and working neighbourhoods were constituted within Ablewell East and Spon Lane offer two examples of the industrial revolution’s multiple historical geographies cited at the start of this study.

\textsuperscript{46} D. Harvey (1990) \textit{The Condition of Postmodernity}, p 66.
Chapter 5

WORKING SPACES
Local Forms of Industrial Capital

The previous two chapters put into context the broad roles of capital movement and cultural inertia in modifying and creating nineteenth century spaces of production in West Bromwich and Walsall. For both the Spon Lane and Ablewell East neighbourhoods, new construction confirmed a densification and extension of patterns established in the eighteenth century. Their respective workplace and residential geographies were distinguished by continuing trends of segregation in Spon Lane and integration in Ablewell East. For example, it is apparent that a street like Walsingham in Walsall, not even envisaged in 1860 but fully occupied by 1890, bore stronger material and cultural resemblance to Pool Street a half century earlier than to any contemporary street in Spon Lane which developed during the same period.

This tendency for each neighbourhood to reproduce a complex morphology and workplace geography by adapting its past, as opposed to reinventing itself to accommodate new demands of industrial capital, provides a foundation for the final three chapters of this thesis. Ablewell East and Spon Lane offered opportunities and dynamic locales for participating in the wage economy or in less formal arenas of work. As noted in Chapter 2, population growth in the Black Country was fuelled largely through migration from rural areas, contiguous counties or major urban centres. Certainly, by the last half of the nineteenth century, the district was on the industrial map and its extra-regional reputation attracted thousands for perceived or real work opportunities. In fact, according to Longe, “no one, unless compelled by duty or necessity, resides in a district from which nature has been so roughly excluded.”1 Broadly interpreted, people came for the work.

This chapter looks more closely at the neighbourhood spaces in which work was performed. By examining the organisation and use of industrial workplaces in Ablewell East and Spon Lane, it becomes clear that even within two nearby Black Country towns, the role of capital in shaping urban form was far from consistently applied. Traditional

measuring sticks for industrialisation, such as levels of segregation, agglomeration and divisions of labour displayed significant variation between neighbourhoods, and suggest that a broader definition of what constitutes modernity in the nineteenth century needs to be considered. Through an examination of several characteristics of the neighbourhoods themselves, the workplaces within them and the spaces inside factories and workshops, it is concluded that the spatialised manifestations of geographical change within the Black Country territorial production complex were highly differentiated by place.

**ORGANISING AND OCCUPYING NEIGHBOURHOOD SPACE**

In terms of spatial organisation, it was obviously Spon Lane which was more typical of the level of land use segregation widely interpreted as modern in nineteenth century towns and cities. Even as additional open spaces within the neighbourhood began to infill in the 1870s through the 1890s, the tendency was to further refine the separation of industrial workplaces from residential terraces. John Spencer’s iron tube works and Thomas Smith’s wheelwright shop on the north side of Neal Street were conspicuous by their presence in the 1860s and 1870s, being two of only a half dozen small works in this dominantly residential section of West Bromwich. In 1883, William Gadd moved into the former wheelwright shop to manufacture ginger beer, a consumer product far removed from the prevailing metals-based economy. Spencer’s works were gone completely by 1889 to provide access and play areas for the new Spon Lane School, opened as a Board school to bring together pupils from temporary locations at Kenrick’s Summit School and the Spon Lane Wesleyan School.²

By 1899, the trade directories indicate that only John Hall’s zinc works at 348 Spon Lane and the blacking and grinding mill on Union Street persisted as heavy manufacturing uses east of Spon Lane under a small master.³ However, even these locations, Hall’s fronting on lower Spon Lane and backing up to the site of P. D. Bennett’s former iron works and the Union Street mill across the street from Kenrick’s, could be said to be enclosed within the phalanx of manufacturing concerns south of Union Street. In essence, the powerful

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² To provide additional play area, two houses fronting on Spon Lane were demolished by the School Board in 1892.
³ Hall, listed as a zinc and galvanised iron worker, ran an advertisement in 1882 as a manufacturer and fitter of zinc and iron eave gutters, piping and heads, window and garden lights, casements, weathervanes, chimney pipes, plain and ornamental verandahs, and roofs.
presence of the canalside factories as industrial employment centres effectively taught the neighbourhood that there were places for employment and places for home, a process of instruction that continued to the end of the century and beyond. Apart from Jewell’s shoe tip works on Glover Street, two shoe manufacturing establishments, a blacksmithy on Ault Street and an occasional shop, public house or beerhouse, Parliament, Neal, Lower Trinity, Glover, Green, Maria, Kenrick and the north side of Union were exclusively the domains of home and predominantly married women’s work, certainly non-industrial in character.

Table 5.1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Street Address</th>
<th>Occupier</th>
<th>Land Use</th>
<th>Frontage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Thomas Horton</td>
<td>Harness Workshop</td>
<td>64 feet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 to 9</td>
<td>Humphries, Short, Davis, McFredrics</td>
<td>Residential (owned by Lavender)</td>
<td>58 feet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Fairbanks, Lavender</td>
<td>Saddlery</td>
<td>71 feet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13 to 21</td>
<td>Horton, Reading, Sanders, Wise and Fox</td>
<td>Residential (part owned by Lavender)</td>
<td>81 feet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Back Lot</td>
<td>Alfred Mills</td>
<td>Workshop (trade unknown)</td>
<td>door width only – 5 feet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23, 25</td>
<td>Ingram, vacant</td>
<td>Residential</td>
<td>29 feet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to corner</td>
<td>A. T. Stanley</td>
<td>Saddlery</td>
<td>135 feet</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: *Post Office Directory for Staffordshire* (1896); Walsall Local History Centre, Acc. 113/2; OS Town Series (1884)

Decidedly less ‘modern’ in the traditional industrialised language of segregated land use were both the older and newer areas of Ablewell East. In contrast to Spon Lane, the learning processes that took place in the neighbourhood East were those which accepted that the manifestations of fixed capital belonged in the neighbourhood. There was no industrial ‘precinct,’ or any movement throughout the later Victorian period to separate the town’s industrial spaces from its residential spaces, especially in working-class neighbourhoods. Even the increasing number of medium-sized works on Selborne and Eldon Streets, while having a street façade, occupied spaces side by side with rows of houses and shops. To illustrate this integration, Table 5.1 shows the occupier, land use and frontage length for the east side of Eldon Street in 1896 between Burleigh and Bott Streets. Of the total length of the street frontage of 443 feet, approximately 62% represented workplaces, with the remainder in residential use. That none of these uses (and only two of the structures) existed twenty years prior confirms the resiliency of strong neighbourhood integration between places of employment and residential uses (including home work).

The historical geographies of industry described above were highly influential. Newer and larger workplaces were being adapted or built in both areas, but within a
neighbourhood context that favoured a customary historical form. Clearly, though, these communities were much more than their industrial spaces. Both Spon Lane and Ablewell East contained substantially identical types of land uses typical of mid-Victorian towns—residences, shops, public houses, public gathering places (churches, schools, parks) and workplaces—along with the infrastructure necessary to at least minimally support these uses. As each neighbourhood and town grew in size, population and complexity, the local authorities made choices and assigned priorities in one direction as opposed to another. Facilities such as roads and streets, sanitary sewer lines, water and gas mains and storm water conveyance systems were crucial to facilitate not only the flow of capital and reproduction of labour, but also to provide a public overlay to the private relationship between labour and capital.

We have seen that localised forms of industrial capitalism were clearly in charge of landscape reproduction on private property, but the following two subsections consider other aspects of the modernisation of space within each neighbourhood. Particular emphasis is placed on the extent to which the state, especially the respective borough authorities, participated in rationalising the public landscape. More specifically, to what extent did local industrial spaces, characterised by divergent levels of land use integration and segregation, influence the organisation and occupation of space? The pace and level of ‘modern’ improvements, such as a street numbering system, street improvements and lighting and security, offer clues as to how each neighbourhood made necessary adjustments to capital’s varying demand for change.

**Municipal contributions toward a rational landscape**

Walsall’s longer municipal heritage translated to a six year head start in the appointment of an Improvement Commission (1848 as against 1854 in West Bromwich) to oversee matters of building and infrastructure. Among the most important decisions the Commissioners took in Ablewell East was to approve Crump’s proposed layout for the new streets west of Bott Lane.4 From that date in 1872, fifteen years elapsed before Lime and Selborne Streets became the last to be dedicated as public highways, and thus repairable by the Council. In the intervening years, houses, shops and workshops began

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4 Most of the information regarding the progress of public improvements has been taken from the Reports of the Borough Surveyor to the Town Council, copies of which are in the Walsall Local History Centre.
to be built along the newly surveyed streets, at the same time the Improvement Commission was systematically arranging for sewer installation, street levelling and paving, kerb and gutter improvements and street lighting. Eldon, Burleigh, Walsingham and Richmond Streets were declared in 1882, with new street lamps and fire hydrants added in subsequent years. The identical level of improvements were common to all the new streets, which in turn were consistent with standards used for older streets in Ablewell East that were reconstructed during this period. Only Ablewell Street varied from the standard by having different coloured pavers used to distinguish pedestrian crossings.

The expansion of Ablewell East in 1872 essentially opened up a large amount of land to be developed in such manner as the market and custom would bear. Large factories may have moved in to occupy or, conversely, uninterrupted residential terraces may have been constructed to house Walsall’s labouring classes. Likewise, the size of existing and new lots in Spon Lane could easily have accommodated a back garden or attached workshop. However, it is clear that by second half of the nineteenth century, the characteristic neighbourhood geographies for both Spon Lane and Ablewell East were so well ingrained that even the marketplace geared its advertising appeals to suit the local conditions. Auctioneers exploited the presence of the concentration of large employers in Spon Lane to entice potential buyers to residential and commercial opportunities. Houses “eligibly situated in a very populous neighbourhood and in the vicinity of extensive iron and other works” or shops “capitally situated for business, surrounded by glass and iron works” indicate an awareness that a strong industrial presence translated to full occupancy and steady custom. Few lettings in West Bromwich boasted of associated “shopping”, which were so prevalent in Walsall that fewer words were afforded to the house description than the workshop (“to let, house with extensive two-storey shopping and gateway entrance”). Even if no workshop facilities were available, they could be added in less than two months. Clara Hawley, a stirrup maker at 22 Walsingham Street, received planning permission for workshops on 20 April 1887 and completed them on 2 June 1887. With so many small workplaces built and being built, finding applicable skills within the Walsall building trade

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5 The Free Press, 1 January 1881 and 10 February 1883.
6 The Walsall Observer and South Staffordshire Chronicle, 4 October 1890.
7 Register of Planning Decisions, 28 December 1886 to 2 March 1889, Walsall Local History Centre, Acc. 14772.
would probably have not been difficult.

The primary charge of the respective municipalities, in their roles as overseers of community improvements, was to connect these geographies of homes, workplaces, shops and institutions of Spon Lane and Ablewell East into a semblance of urban logic. They were, in essence, expected to do their part to aid the flow of capital. As the Victorian age grew into maturity, the number and scope of tools at the municipal workbench grew exponentially. Working primarily through appointed committees, both towns acted to attach a veneer of municipalism to growing populations, including provisions for streets, sanitation and nuisances, building standards, lighting, public health and policing. Asserting control over public spaces and regulating behaviour for the public good attempted to bring order to spaces and places developed in a more laissez faire era. Taken as a whole, these efforts to improve were key components of modernisation, and their pace of implementation within each neighbourhood offers important clues about how the geographies of work described in previous chapters influenced municipal decision making.

The depth and rationality of municipal public works seen in Walsall were not so evident in West Bromwich. Granted, there was the nearly fifty year gap between their respective incorporations as parliamentary boroughs, but this can hardly be the sole reason for the latter’s selective approach taken toward public improvements. Certainly, the West Bromwich Improvement Commissioners were busy from their inception approving new structures, but the town’s efforts to modernise the public infrastructure were slow off the mark. As an example, the order to pave Spon Lane from Neal Street to the Smethwick boundary was not issued until August 1877, and only then upon the requests of local residents. Later that same year, orders came to make and sewer Green, Maria and Kenrick Streets, and to complete Union Street to the parish boundary. These were streets which, according to rate book evidence, were about half occupied with houses as early as 1872. Apparently, the motivation was to remove the causes of disease and fever that

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8 See Trainer’s discussion of the growth of elite groups and the people who filled their ranks in *Black Country Elites* (1993), pp 93-137.
9 The Sandwell Local Studies Centre has a number of building plans for the years 1855 to 1900. The Index of Building Plans is located on Shelf 19(11).
10 Sandwell Local Studies Centre, West Bromwich Poor Rate Book (1872)
existed in the area, with the Sanitation Committee encouraging special emphasis for the
Green Street sewer line for public health reasons. In the 1882 West Bromwich
incorporation enquiry, it was noted that as late as 1874, the town had “no proper public
buildings, ill-lighted, totally unpaved, atrocious roads, undrained and with a high death
rate.”

When considering the ‘need’ for improvement against the characteristic workplace
geographies of the two neighbourhoods, it becomes clear that need was at least partially
defined by what the streets would be used for. For Walsall, the ‘one size fits all’
approach to public highways was perhaps recognition that there were few streets in the
town which were used strictly by one type of use or another. Because of the integrated
neighbourhood workplaces, all streets were in effect commercial streets, subject to the
associated wear and tear and, importantly, the desire to keep them in good repair as
corridors of commerce. On the other hand, while it was obvious that the streets and sewer
system in the residential part of Spon Lane were inadequate and unhealthy, they were
exclusively working-class residential streets. Deliveries of beer and food to public
houses, provisions to neighbourhood shops and residences or traffic from the building
trade were likely the only non-pedestrian or animal uses these streets saw on a daily
basis. Even five years after incorporation, a letter to the paper commented on the muddy
state of the streets around Summit School (Green, Kenrick and Glover Streets). Not
being vital to facilitate capital movement, improvement of those streets serving strictly
residential uses was low on the list of municipal priorities.

Thus, while modernisation, and even respectability, may have been on the minds of the
Walsall municipal authorities as they specified street standards, built sewers, piped in
water, laid gas lines and lit public places, it was the prevailing workplace geography within
the established and new urban spaces which helped to prioritise their actions. Alternatively,
while the municipal learning curve in Spon Lane followed a similar trajectory, it had fewer
intersections with capital movement, translating to neglect within parts of its more

11 The Free Press, 8 September 1877
12 Incorporation of West Bromwich (1882), p 6.
13 The Free Press, 22 January 1877. The letter went on to suggest that the local works could provide the
ashes for free, and that “there are plenty of willing men unemployed in Glover Street who would be glad of
a day’s work to level them.”
segregated landscape. With the 'state of the trade' at the forefront of public discussions, it was perhaps inevitable that decision making at the borough level would have been responsive to initiatives to improve that state, and thereby the profits of the workplaces and the condition of the workers. By 1890, therefore, the public landscapes within Ablewell East and Spon Lane were being transformed and improved, but by two distinct approaches to modernisation. The next section delves further into another potential measurement for modernity – the need to further organise the industrial landscape to ensure efficient capital movement.

Addressing Capitalism

Perhaps the most fundamental technique for organising neighbourhood space, whether residential, industrial or retail, is to assign and display a street number for each beneficial use. As cities grew larger and more complex, as architecture moved toward an encompassing, mass-produced rationality of design, as populations and commerce became more mobile, and as government regulators reached more deeply into the private lives of individuals and workplaces, it became more important to organise people and places so they could be found. One writer to a Walsall newspaper in 1878 supported affixing street names to junctions because he found the lack of any system inadequate for strangers.14 This subsection looks at the use of addressing in both neighbourhoods, both as a means of organising space and, more importantly, as an adaptive response to their unique brands of capitalism and modernisation.

It is one of the most striking contrasts in the respective municipal histories of Walsall and West Bromwich that their initial efforts to assign addresses were separated by about 50 years. A numbering scheme for the majority of streets in Walsall dates from the 1824 Walsall Improvement Act, while West Bromwich did not even put the task out for tender in populous areas until 1877 (the addressing system was in common use a year later). When Spon Lane was finally addressed, the system was a classic of rational organisation, made possible by the grid-like network of streets. Addresses were even on the north and east sides of the street, and odd on the south and west, moving from lowest to highest from north to south, and westerly west of Spon Lane and easterly east of the main street.

14 The Walsall Free Press, 20 July 1878.
Ablewell East, on the other hand, used two different systems with a clear divide between older and newer streets. Ablewell, Paddock, Tantarra, Bott, Bank, Pool and Box Streets all employed sequential numbering, starting on the northern end, east side for north/south streets or starting with number one at Ablewell, along the north side, for east/west streets. At the end of the street, the numbers continued in sequence back the opposite way, so that number one was opposite the highest numbered address. The newer streets in the neighbourhood, Lime, Selborne, Walsingham, Burleigh and Richmond displayed a pattern similar to that seen in Spon Lane, with the only difference being that there was no consistency on which side the odds and evens occurred. Eldon Street, definitively the transition street between the older and newer portions of the neighbourhood, was changed about 1884 to make it consistent with the newer streets being built to the southeast.

For two towns with similar populations during this period, and consequently similar challenges in precisely locating buildings, what might have caused the West Bromwich Highway Committee to delay acting on such a scheme until the town’s population was nearing 50,000? If an addressing system can be seen as a capital need, it could certainly be argued that Walsall simply had more use for street numbers than West Bromwich. As noted earlier, Walsall was generally a town of small workshops, highly specialised, with complex divisions of labour at distributed sites. These locations were both complementary and supplementary to the larger workplaces that were gaining footholds in most neighbourhoods. In order to facilitate the flow of capital between these shops in the form of raw materials, parts and finished products, given their general opacity on the landscape, exact addresses would have almost been a necessity. It would not have been sufficient, for instance, to arrange for deliveries to Cresswell’s works in Pool Street, given the hidden workplace character discussed earlier. To have had available a 12 before the Pool would have assisted immensely in wayfinding, an act which could be viewed as a municipal response to a demand by capital to aid the movement of commerce. Trade directories published after 1850 confirm the widespread use of numbered addresses along Walsall streets.

In contrast, West Bromwich, largely a town of prominent, locally and even regionally known factories, could probably have managed without addresses and not have lost too much in the imprecision. Taylor and Farley, for instance, used a commercial address of

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Union Street, Spon Lane, even after the advent of a numbered addressing system. Others, including Kenrick’s and Patent Nut and Bolt, used Spon Lane (Kenrick’s also used Houghton Street on occasion) as their sole addresses for customers. Giving credence to this argument was Alpha Tube Works, the largest employer and factory by far in Ablewell East of the 1860s and 70s, using ‘Ablewell Street, Walsall’ as their business address. Similarly, larger factories in the newly developing portions of Ablewell East, such as Fairbanks, Lavender, the Beacon Works, and Carver’s Whip Works, did not employ their street number when advertising for additional workers.

By not using number addresses, these firms were in essence saying that their site prominence and business reputation were so evident as to obviate any need to provide further assistance in finding them. Although we have no direct evidence, it is also very likely that individuals on the street or in shops would also have been able to readily give directions to these major workplaces. In other words, their size and reputation alone were sufficient to ensure that all the necessary links between capital, labour and market could be negotiated outside of a formal addressing system. It follows therefore that the need to organise and rationalise space was more pronounced within Ablewell East than Spon Lane. In terms of comparative levels of modernisation, this would seem to contradict one aspect of conventional interpretations of nineteenth century urban spaces, namely that modern forms of production helped to constitute modern spaces. At least in the use of addressing to organise space, it was the persistence and densification of smaller workplaces within an expanding framework of capital movement which seemed to generate a greater need for commercially-oriented wayfinding.

THE WORKPLACE ON THE LANDSCAPE

We now know something of the comparative neighbourhood geographies of Spon Lane and Ablewell East, from the perspective of how public and private spaces were organised throughout the study period. The following two subsections narrow the focus to the workplaces themselves as elements of the neighbourhood landscape. In their study of the industrial landscapes of the seventeenth and eighteenth century Ironbridge Gorge, Alfrey and Clark speak of an “industrial vernacular” style of building which emphasised “the
tenacity of tradition, and the importance of adaption rather than innovation.” In other words, industrial workplaces were spaces created for profit, but clearly within place-bound constraints and exploiting the opportunities available within a local culture of work. Considered below are the respective landscapes of industry, from the perspective of their construction and change in adapting to local forms of capital, and their persistence as landscape features and employment centres.

**Building Landscapes of Industry**

In just about all English manufacturing districts during the industrial revolution, large places of employment were the most prominent features of the neighbourhood landscape, towering over residential terraces, exhibiting a mass larger than other buildings and usually active with the sounds, smells and motions of the manufacturing process. Large workplaces served as community symbols. Carter and Lewis equate the ability of the nineteenth century mill, factory, mine and warehouse to dominate the townscape, with a similar prominence exhibited by medieval castles and churches. Girouard cites the work of Edward Walters in Manchester, designing and creating purpose-built warehouses in palazzo-style homages to those built by Renaissance merchants. As noted in Chapter 3, a string of medium- to large-sized workplaces were built in Spon Lane on the banks of the Birmingham Canal, starting in 1791 and continuing to the middle of the nineteenth century. This segregated cluster of large, prominent industrial works helped to define the neighbourhood geography of Spon Lane, and would have dominated the skyline for residents and visitors alike.

While perhaps not on the scale of the Lancashire cotton mills and warehouses, the Spon Lane works were not subtle landscape features. The depiction of Kenricks shown in Figure 5.1 appeared in every catalogue between the early 1880s (the completion date of an ambitious expansion programme) and 1895 (when a photograph, reproduced as Figure 5.2, taken from across the canal, replaced it). The new part of the works at the corner of Hall Street South and Houghton Street represented the factory’s public face, and was intended to

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18 The largest public collection of Kenrick’s product catalogues and business records is contained in the Black Country Museum in Dudley.
inspire confidence, prominence and awe. Rising to three storeys, the ground floor gothic revival arches were reminiscent of medieval chapels, as were the soaring two-story windows which took the eye upward to smallish rose windows in the gable ends of each roof division. The distinctive clock tower at the corner gives a clue as to where the Kenrick family saw the cornerstone of their operation. The main gate to the works was the extension of Houghton Street onto Kenrick's property, tying them closely to Spon Lane and the canal.

Figure 5.1
Archibald Kenrick and Sons, South View, early 1880s

Figure 5.2
Archibald Kenrick and Sons, South View, circa 1895
So extensive was Kenrick’s by the 1890s that a large portion of the factory was located south of the borough boundary between the Wolverhampton and Birmingham Levels of the canal. A bridge crossed the canal with a hydraulic lift to unload and load raw materials and finished products. Chance’s glass works across the canal in Smethwick was an even more massive operation, extending in 1883 across more than 28 acres and providing work for over 1,500 employees. Even the relatively small factories presented a respectable face to adjoining public spaces. Figure 5.3 shows the Union Street entrance to Taylor and Farley, the smallest in area of the works on the east side of Spon Lane. The italianate entrance, frieze and ornamental windows present a dignified welcome to the world. Taken as a whole, the industrial landscape along the canal in Spon Lane could hardly fail to catch the attention of newcomers to southern West Bromwich, whether they came by train to Spon Lane Station, by road from Birmingham or Dudley or on the canal.

![Figure 5.3](image)

**Summit Foundry (Taylor and Farley)**

**Union Street Facade**

In contrast, we have seen that the Ablewell East neighbourhood workplaces were often hidden behind residences, in courtyards or at the end of tunnels leading from the street. Granted, there were large employers in the area in 1860, notably Alpha Tube Works on Ablewell Street, but the vast majority of workplaces employed less than 20 persons, usually in premises which did not have a frontage to the street and normally hidden from street view by the occupier’s residence. For instance, as late as 1893, not counting Ablewell Street, only 6 out of over 50 manufacturing workshops and small factories in the neighbourhood faced the street. These streets in a sense belied their residential facades, offering only glimpses of the production carried on in or behind them. The 1900 appearance of Pool Street as seen from Ablewell Street can be seen on the right of Figure 5.4, and the location of Cresswell’s moderately-sized iron works at 12 Pool Street in Figure 5.5 shows clearly the tunnel leading into the back garden where the works were located.
Judging from these perspectives, the residential countenance from Ablewell Street to Box Street along Pool Street was remarkably consistent, although the tunnel to the works was larger than similar tunnels between 14 and 15, 16 and 17 and 18 and 19, only one of which housed a manufacturing concern. Further, photographs of Walsall streets from the late nineteenth century show no evidence of street signage for industrial premises.

In essence, there was little to distinguish the Cresswell’s factory entrance from neighbouring uses. Walsall’s industrial culture, even though highly integrated, appears to have demanded that workplaces be separated from public space. The still relatively intact Ablewell East neighbourhood confirms that it was virtually impossible to determine from the street which houses in a terrace once housed a stirrup maker, a brown saddler or a tool shop and which houses functioned solely as residences. Perhaps the only tell-tale sign of the presence of an industrial workshop would have been the chimney stacks. George Pedley’s application in 1887 to build a new 50-foot stack for his currycomb works at 69 Ablewell Street gives a dimension to one of these features. In 1888, James Carver also constructed a stack associated with his new whip works.\textsuperscript{19} Even these would probably have been hidden for most people because they would have been impossible to see through the two- or three-storey residential street frontage.

\textsuperscript{19} Both of these applications appear in Acc. 147/2, Register of Planning Decisions, in the Walsall Local History Centre.
While there were obvious differences in the visual industrial landscapes of Ablewell East and Spon Lane, both experienced significant change in the period between 1865 and 1895. Tracking the construction of new work spaces is possible partially through the records of the Improvement Commissioners (and borough surveyors) for both Towns. These bodies were responsible for reviewing applications for new construction or additions to existing structures, and for inspecting the finished product. Permission was required, but despite numerous handwritten violations noted on West Bromwich building plans, there does not appear to have been widespread enforcement through the courts. Staffs were small, duties were plentiful (new garden wall, roofs, and shop windows were all subject to review) and both towns were experiencing rapid growth.

Since a large percentage of Walsall industrial enterprises were relatively small, required less power than their agglomerated cousins and often squeezed into narrow back gardens, they were relatively inexpensive and quick to construct. Even James Carver’s 1888 whip works on Eldon Street, a purpose-built, two storey shop with a larger than average building footprint, went up in rapid fashion as indicated by the following report of inspections:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7 March 1888</td>
<td>Presented to Improvement Commission</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 April</td>
<td>Walls up to eaves, floor joists laid</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24 April</td>
<td>Roofing in</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 May</td>
<td>Laying floors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24 May</td>
<td>Ready for slates, fitting up, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 June</td>
<td>Drains laid to stack, stack 20 feet high</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 June</td>
<td>Stack complete</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 July</td>
<td>Fitting up water closets, etc</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21 July</td>
<td>Complete</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In just over four months, Carver had gone from approved plans to occupant-ready. Carver appeared to have moved in directly after completion of this new works. Certainly, his leased space on Ablewell was listed for let in the 17 March 1888 Walsall Observer and South Staffordshire Chronicle, which was probably the first edition following approval of his plans by the Improvement Commission. The advertisement for his former location stated that it could accommodate ‘shopping’ for 50 hands. In terms of the surveyed

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20 A complete index of building plans exists for the Borough of West Bromwich for the years 1855 to 1900. Building plans exist for some of these applications. Only one Register of Planning Decisions has survived for Walsall, for the years 1886 to 1889.
building outline on the Ordnance Survey map, the new Eldon Street works was almost exactly the same size as Carver’s prior location, so it would not appear that overcrowding forced the move (although the survey did not reveal whether the Ablewell location was one storey or two). More likely, his economic success in leased space on Ablewell probably prompted him to take advantage of the availability of cheaper land away from the main street to purchase the amount necessary to move his business. These types of lateral movements in capital were only economical because of the loosely fixed nature of Walsall industries, and were never a feature of the Spon Lane neighbourhood.

Later in 1888, a leather factory in Park Street was constructed in a remarkably similar timeframe to Carver’s, although it was three storeys and had more machinery, hot water and pipes. These short construction periods for small, purpose-built factories were indicative of a fairly simple approach to design, certainly more massive than residential structures but retaining many of their architectural elements. Cut off from the need to build to impress or to accommodate huge reverberating power requirements, the newer Ablewell East works were not that far removed from their residential counterparts next door.

The photograph in Figure 5.6 shows the modern appearance of a portion of the Selborne Works, another of the new breed of small factories built in the newer portion of Ablewell East (see Figure 4.4 for location on Bott Lane between Lime and Selborne Streets). When it opened in 1878, the fancy glass and fittings manufacturers were heralded as “a new Walsall industry.” The works were described as first-rate, “not the least interesting feature in connection with the establishment is the care that has been shown for securing the comfort and convenience of the workpeople.” Perhaps the most outstanding feature of the building, and the feature that most distinguished it from Franklin’s earlier works on Bank Street, was the number and ornamentation on windows and the amount of light they let into the interior work spaces.

In many ways, the newer industrial architecture in Ablewell East was mirroring similar trends in local house construction. Note how similar the wider entry door was to the Cresswell’s entry shown Figure 5.5. The residential overtones of these new working

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21 The Walsall Free Press, 2 February 1878.
environments were carried to the point of adding flower boxes to the many windows, which could then be tended by operatives. In terms of constructing late nineteenth century industrial spaces, a built capital hybrid developed which perpetuated the residential, back garden workshop, while at the same time borrowing elements of home and reproducing them at the workplace. Thus, the physical closeness that could be interpreted from neighbourhood geography contributed to a cross-pollinating industrial vernacular in Walsall. Not surprisingly, this development served to emphasise further the traditionally strong connections between workplace and home.

Was the tendency in West Bromwich to build more ostentatious expressions of industrial power, especially during the last decades of the nineteenth century, also indicative of an entrenchment of prevailing attitudes toward industrial space? We know that most of the factories in Spon Lane were active in augmenting their works throughout the study period, ranging from new stabling to major expansions of capacity. Table 5.2 highlights the planning actions encompassing the years 1863 to 1900, in particular those proposed and implemented on the row of enterprises from Patent Nut and Bolt to Taylor and Farley. It is interesting to note that after 1876 only two firms, Kenrick’s and Taylor and Farley, had any activity related to new construction. Bennett closed his Spon Lane firm in 1879, but the other two major works along the canal, Patent Nut and Bolt and Bridge, Gill and Bridge,

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22 This was noted in 1878 as a feature of the Selborne Works.
either never submitted any sort of application or stopped submitting after 1874, during years when both enterprises were actively manufacturing. In comparing the first and second editions of the Ordnance Survey 1:2500 series, it is clear that both works had made many changes between the mid-1880s and early-1900s. Failure to appear on the index of building plans probably indicates that modifications and additions were either insignificant or, more likely, performed without Commission approval.23

Table 5.2
Planning Actions at Spon Lane Industrial Establishments
1863 - 1900

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Firm</th>
<th>Action</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1863 July</td>
<td>Bennett &amp; Co</td>
<td>Offices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1865 March</td>
<td>Bennett &amp; Co</td>
<td>Stabling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1865 March</td>
<td>Patent Nut &amp; Bolt</td>
<td>Fence wall</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1866 December</td>
<td>A Kenrick &amp; Sons</td>
<td>Lodge and gates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1867 September</td>
<td>A Kenrick &amp; Sons</td>
<td>New stack</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1868 February</td>
<td>A Kenrick &amp; Sons</td>
<td>Foundry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1870 July</td>
<td>Bennett &amp; Co</td>
<td>Fence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1873 February</td>
<td>Bennett &amp; Co</td>
<td>Additions to works</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1873 August</td>
<td>Taylor &amp; Farley</td>
<td>Works</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1874 May</td>
<td>Patent Nut &amp; Bolt</td>
<td>One house and stables</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1874 October</td>
<td>Bennett &amp; Co</td>
<td>Stabling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1874 December</td>
<td>Patent Nut &amp; Bolt</td>
<td>Stabling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1875 February</td>
<td>A Kenrick &amp; Sons</td>
<td>Workshops</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1876 May</td>
<td>Bennett &amp; Co</td>
<td>Chimney and flue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1879 July</td>
<td>A Kenrick &amp; Sons</td>
<td>Cart shed and store room</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1881 November</td>
<td>Taylor &amp; Farley</td>
<td>Three privies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1882 August</td>
<td>Taylor &amp; Farley</td>
<td>Offices and boundary wall</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1883 March</td>
<td>A Kenrick &amp; Sons</td>
<td>Workshop</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1884 January</td>
<td>A Kenrick &amp; Sons</td>
<td>Works addition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1887 May</td>
<td>A Kenrick &amp; Sons</td>
<td>Workshop</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1889 November</td>
<td>Taylor &amp; Farley</td>
<td>Lavatory and book room</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1893 May</td>
<td>A Kenrick &amp; Sons</td>
<td>Stores</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1893 October</td>
<td>A Kenrick &amp; Sons</td>
<td>Additions to works</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1894 January</td>
<td>Taylor &amp; Farley</td>
<td>Stabling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1894 April</td>
<td>A Kenrick &amp; Sons</td>
<td>Boundary wall</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1894 July</td>
<td>A Kenrick &amp; Sons</td>
<td>Four water closets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1894 July</td>
<td>Taylor &amp; Farley</td>
<td>Machine shop</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1894 August</td>
<td>Taylor &amp; Farley</td>
<td>Alterations to house</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1897 May</td>
<td>Taylor &amp; Farley</td>
<td>New lathe shop</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1897 August</td>
<td>Taylor &amp; Farley</td>
<td>New time lobby</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1900 May</td>
<td>A Kenrick &amp; Sons</td>
<td>16 water closets</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Borough of West Bromwich, Index of Building Plans (1855-1900)

Both Kenrick's and Taylor and Farley experienced rapid growth in their industrial capacity in the last quarter of the century. In addition to gains in sheer size, there also seemed to be an evolution in what they built and how they built it. Kenrick's 1875 application to expand the works brought the clock tower, along with the italianate and gothic revival elements to Hall Street South. Brisk growth into the 1890s brought project after project to the drawing board, to the point where Kenrick's entire site north of the canal was fully occupied, and the annex across the water in Smethwick was being swiftly consumed. While the firm of

23 As a result, we know very little about either establishment in terms of how they grew and changed during this period.
Taylor and Farley was smaller and had less room to grow, its expansion in the 1890s was particularly pronounced, with new capacity and machinery being added every few years. Certainly, new technologies in the metals industry were pushing the two firms to make frequent and often substantial modifications to their plants.

The exact forms these improvements took were, like those in Walsall, subject to choices based on the local context of industry. For instance, the physical changes to Kenrick's had, by 1894, completely enclosed the works around a formidable and formal exterior. There was no longer any doubt that Kenrick's space was industrial space, with little to suggest that the physical fabric of the neighbourhood consisted of one cloth draping both work and home. While less foreboding than Kenrick's, even the new offices at Taylor and Farley implied a sense of separation. In essence, the larger Spon Lane workplaces had already colonised these spaces prior to 1860, and the remainder of the century was spent in consolidating these gains by better defining spaces of industrial production within the neighbourhood. Soft edges became harder, boundary walls became taller and the public face of industry became more formidable. On the other hand, changes that were occurring in the interior, such as increased accommodation for creature comforts and worker well-being, suggest that capital was adapting, only in ways that were enclosed within a production environment.

Workplace Persistence

For a worker to continue his or her employment at the same workplace over a period of time was partly a function of worker competence and desire, but also subject to the ability of an employer to sustain economic success through the inevitable swings in the trade cycle. For a Walsall worker, many of whom were small masters or were associated with small workplaces, the immediacy of solvency was probably much more pronounced than for an operative at one of the Spon Lane factories. How workers dealt with the sometimes tenuous nature of employment will be addressed in Chapter 6, but this section provides a foundation for that discussion through an analysis of workplace persistence in both neighbourhoods. Persistence hinged on many factors, from the global marketplace to the continuing health of a key manager, but this section does not attempt an exhaustive study of the reasons behind business success or failure. Rather, it attempts to understand the shifting nature of fixed capital in Ablewell East and Spon Lane. As might be
expected, there were significant differences between firms in the two neighbourhoods, both in the extent to which they were bound to a specific location and in their longevity on the landscape.

It was reported in 1879 that Kenrick’s had a large representation at International Exhibitions in Sydney and Melbourne, a long way from home for the West Bromwich firm. Of all the dynamics involved that affected the ability of a firm or person to earn in the nineteenth century, it was probably the global economic swings in fortunes which were least understood. During a period when the British Empire stretched across the globe, how could black saddleries or outworkers in Walsall be expected to understand that one of the reasons they and all their neighbours had jobs in 1890 was because of enormous demand from southern Africa. “All experienced hands are at present fully employed and no more best workmen in any of the leather trades are to be found.” Similarly, it was speculated in the local press that downturns in orders for railway nuts and bolts might have resulted from political turmoil within the Indian subcontinent that brought construction and further speculation to a halt. Black Country products were not simply for the English market, but instead were part of supplying a global marketplace made especially volatile by British imperialism.

The impact of changing demand tested the resilience of both the Ablewell East and Spon Lane neighbourhoods and the families within them, although often at different times. Certainly, the ‘state of the trade’ was a keen talking point in journalistic, municipal, labour and management circles. Some offered creative solutions, such as when the Walsall Observer editor related a story from Waukegan, Illinois whereby the town recruited a tannery with a bonus of $7,000. “Is the Walsall Town Council enterprising enough to follow suit?” During times of hardship, much of this discussion revolved around coming up with ideas to alleviate suffering amongst the working classes and small masters. In February 1886, the Walsall paper encouraged those “young and blessed” to emigrate to Australia, and the Mayor called a special meeting to investigate

24 The Free Press, 10 May 1879.
25 The Walsall Observer and South Staffordshire Chronicle, 9 August 1890.
26 The Free Press, 21 May 1887.
27 The Walsall Observer and South Staffordshire Chronicle, 17 March 1888.
ways to relieve stress in town.28 People working six months prior were now begging in
the street, relying on a non-employment form of work for survival. Five hundred were
thrown out of work in 1887 when poor trade temporarily shut the Bromford Ironworks
just west of Spon Lane. Closure in 1892 of the Crookhay Ironworks in Hill Top, West
Bromwich, prompted local commentator Jacob Faithful to declare this to cause “a large
amount of keen distress and hardship.”29

All of the Spon Lane factories, except the Providence Iron Works of Bridge, Gill and
Bridge which formed in 1866, existed in physical form from before the beginning to well
beyond the end of the study period. Therefore, as features of the West Bromwich
industrial landscape, it could be said that they persisted throughout the study period. In
fact, twenty-five years after Bennett’s works were closed, the Ordnance Survey was still
mapping the site as “Spon Lane Works – disused,” a good indication of its endurance as
a built feature of the local landscape. However, this approach would place too great an
emphasis on the primacy of fixed capital as a measurement for persistence, rather than
the more meaningful standard of being open consistently for business. In the context of
the nineteenth century, consistent operations often included changing firm ownership,
transforming the product line, and mandating short hours or enforced holidays as a
response to slow trade. Change and adaptation were as much features of persistence as
the ability to keep the production process ticking along.

Apart from Bridge, Gill and Bridge and Kenrick’s, the latter which remained a family
enterprise from its origins until the late twentieth century, the larger firms in Spon Lane
experienced changes in ownership during the study period. The only closure during this
time frame was at Bennett’s works, which shut for good during Wake Week in 1879.
Reuben Farley and his brother in law George Taylor acquired in 1861 the former Summit
Foundry site started in 1830 by one of Archibald Kenrick’s nephews. Taylor passed away
in 1881 at which time Farley became the sole proprietor. Patent Nut and Bolt began the
study period as Weston and Grice, manufacturers of railway accessories. In the late
1860s, the company amalgamated with Watkins and Keen, a Smethwick nut and bolt
making firm, at which time the name changed to Patent Nut and Bolt (Stour Valley

28 The Walsall Observer and South Staffordshire Chronicle, 13 February 1886.
29 The Free Press, 26 February 1892.
William Bullock and Company, on the west end of the canal side string of factories, continued to operate as the Spon Lane Iron Foundry until it was acquired by Salter’s in 1892. Of the few smaller firms in Spon Lane, it was noted above that John Hall’s metal works persisted throughout the study period, but that the Vulcan Tube Works on Neal Street picked up stakes in 1887 and moved to Hill Top, reopening as part of the Globe Tube Works.30

When William Kenrick responded to the Schedule of Questions issued by the 1892 Royal Commission on Labour, he noted that their trade was “exceptionally steady,” and attributable to their large number of products and markets.31 Similarly, one of the reasons stated for the amalgamation which produced Patent Nut and Bolt was to combine railway hardware with more generic small metals work to create a more versatile company. Presumably, these firms believed that a wider product range would have helped to immunise them from the inevitable market swings which hounded every business sector. However, from a landscape perspective, fulfilling this desire meant greater and greater investment in the fixed facilities of production, an outcome especially predictable for Kenrick’s who operated without outworkers. Thus, as the nineteenth century progressed, it became less and less likely these large Spon Lane work sites would be abandoned. Locational persistence for them became a fact of business. In effect, while the workplaces may have undergone managerial or structural changes during the later Victorian era, their in situ investment in fixed capital improvements precluded rapid mobility for the entire firm.

In contrast, the landscape efficacy of the small master firm was much in evidence in Ablewell East, particularly for those businesses without great power requirements. One good example of the potential for mobility was revealed at the bankruptcy hearing in July 1891 of John Green Oakley, a horse collar manufacturer in Walsall.32 Oakley worked for others as a journeyman until opening his own business in 1884 at 101 Paddock Lane. Start-up costs were minute, consisting of £5 from his brother Arthur followed by an

30 The former owner of Vulcan Tube Works, Thomas Bridge, became one of the partners in Bridge, Gill and Bridge on Union Street.
32 A lengthy description of this hearing is printed in the 4 July 1891 edition of the Walsall Observer and South Staffordshire Chronicle.
additional £25 two months later. Four years later he moved his entire business to Holtshill Lane (just north of Ablewell East) and in August 1890 picked up stakes again and moved to Eldon Street where his brother was the landlord. By May 1891, Oakley owed his brother over £20 in back rent, and, after liquidating some assets and paying expenses, was left with only £7 which went toward family maintenance. At the time of his hearing, he was back at work but had no assets and liabilities of £388.

Several points can be made about Oakley’s experience as a small manufacturer within Ablewell East. First, the level of capitalisation needed to open the doors, at least for a horse collar manufacturer, was extraordinarily small. Investment needs were probably limited to the initial purchase of raw materials to manufacture the collars, which would have been primarily straw and leather. Costs associated with capital improvements were probably minimal or non-existent, which leads to the second point. Without a huge investment in fixed expenditures, Oakley was free to move around within an industrial culture which supported small enterprise at nearly any location, and within a real estate market where the best possible value could be sought. From a production standpoint, he was relatively untethered and could move his operation seemingly at will, although almost certainly this movement would have had an effect on other aspects of doing business. Strained relationships with raw material suppliers, outworkers, factors and customers may have contributed to his bankruptcy. Finally, it is important to note that a family member was instrumental in financing the venture, and in offering a helping hand when ends could not be met. In the end, it was his brother who offered to settle his debt.

In this decidedly freer-wheeling capital environment, was it inevitable that levels of workplace persistence were much reduced from those in West Bromwich? Without a doubt, there were larger numbers of workplaces that came and went within Ablewell East, a not altogether surprising finding considering the sheer number of industrial enterprises. However, what did characterise the neighbourhood was the large percentage of workplaces whose longevity spanned more than twenty years, a record that rose even higher if family successions were counted.33 Tables 5.3 and 5.4 look at industrial workplace persistence along Ablewell and Pool Streets, two of the oldest and best

established of the neighbourhood thoroughfares. Using directory and rate book evidence, occupants are noted for time slices taken at 1860, 1868, 1878, 1888 and 1896, at addresses which consistently supported product manufacturing, as opposed to retail goods and services or professional services. These locations are mapped on Figure 5.7.

Table 5.3
Ablewell Street Manufacturers, 1860 - 1896

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Address</th>
<th>1860</th>
<th>1868</th>
<th>1878</th>
<th>1888</th>
<th>1896</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4 Ablewell</td>
<td>James Malpas</td>
<td>Mary Malpas</td>
<td>Henry Malpas</td>
<td>Isaiah Parrott</td>
<td>Mary Ann Deeley</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bellow Maker</td>
<td>Bellow Maker</td>
<td>Bellow Maker</td>
<td>Saddler</td>
<td>Shopkeeper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 Ablewell</td>
<td>Samuel Butler</td>
<td>Joseph Brittain</td>
<td>Joseph Brittain</td>
<td>Joseph Brittain</td>
<td>Arthur Bates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cart Gear Maker</td>
<td>Brass Founder</td>
<td>Brass Founder</td>
<td>Brass Founder</td>
<td>Cabinet Maker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13 Ablewell</td>
<td>Phillip Holloway</td>
<td>Phillip Holloway</td>
<td>Phillip Holloway</td>
<td>Phillip Holloway</td>
<td>Phillip Holloway</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14 Ablewell</td>
<td>John Walker</td>
<td>John Walker</td>
<td>John Walker</td>
<td>John Walker</td>
<td>Harry Haywood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Wood Turner</td>
<td>Wood Turner</td>
<td>Wood Turner</td>
<td>Wood Turner</td>
<td>Wood Turner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 Ablewell</td>
<td>Joseph Brittain</td>
<td>George Duke</td>
<td>unknown</td>
<td>Denison DuFoyle</td>
<td>John Breeze</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Brass Founder</td>
<td>Collar Maker</td>
<td></td>
<td>Collar Maker</td>
<td>Blacksmith</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16 Ablewell</td>
<td>S &amp; M Frankham</td>
<td>Edward Price</td>
<td>Edward Price</td>
<td>Alfred Blake</td>
<td>Richard Shanel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bistrip Maker</td>
<td>Brass Caster</td>
<td>Brass Caster</td>
<td>Gas Fitter</td>
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<td>unknown</td>
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<td>Abel Beech</td>
<td>Henry Beech</td>
<td>Abel Beech</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Hame Furniture</td>
<td>Hame Furniture</td>
<td>Hame Furniture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34 Ablewell</td>
<td>Abel Beech</td>
<td>Abel Beech</td>
<td>Richard Price</td>
<td>Louisa Price</td>
<td>George Bird</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hame Furniture</td>
<td>Hame Furniture</td>
<td>Greengrocer</td>
<td>Greengrocer</td>
<td>Saddler</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50 Ablewell</td>
<td>John Bagnall</td>
<td>John Bagnall</td>
<td>Joseph Bagnall</td>
<td>unknown</td>
<td>Charles A Lane</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Spur Maker</td>
<td>Gigg Saddle Maker</td>
<td>Gigg Saddle Maker</td>
<td>unknown</td>
<td>Gigg Saddle Maker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>69 Ablewell</td>
<td>Thomas Holman</td>
<td>Thomas Holman</td>
<td>William Peledy</td>
<td>Joseph Tuckley</td>
<td>William Deasman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Saddle Tree Maker</td>
<td>Saddle Tree Maker</td>
<td>Currycomb Maker</td>
<td>unknown</td>
<td>Iron Founder</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>73 to 77 Ablewell</td>
<td>Lambert Brothers</td>
<td>Lambert Brothers</td>
<td>Lambert Brothers</td>
<td>Lambert Brothers</td>
<td>Lambert Brothers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Alpha Tube Works</td>
<td>Alpha Tube Works</td>
<td>Alpha Tube Works</td>
<td>Alpha Tube Works</td>
<td>Alpha Tube Works</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>82 Ablewell</td>
<td>John Owen</td>
<td>John Owen</td>
<td>John Owen</td>
<td>Owen Brothers</td>
<td>Maria Young</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Saddler</td>
<td>Saddler</td>
<td>Saddler</td>
<td>Saddlers</td>
<td>Draper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Silver Plater</td>
<td>Silver Plater</td>
<td>Whip Maker</td>
<td>Whip Maker</td>
<td>Saddler's Tools</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.4
Pool Street Manufacturers, 1860 - 1896

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Address</th>
<th>1860</th>
<th>1868</th>
<th>1878</th>
<th>1888</th>
<th>1896</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>12 Pool</td>
<td>George Cresswell</td>
<td>Catherine Cresswell</td>
<td>Thomas Cresswell</td>
<td>Thomas Cresswell</td>
<td>Thomas Cresswell</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Malleable Iron</td>
<td>Malleable Iron</td>
<td>Malleable Iron</td>
<td>Malleable Iron</td>
<td>Malleable Iron</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41 Pool</td>
<td>Joseph Williams</td>
<td>William Liggins</td>
<td>Henry Roberts</td>
<td>John Aulton</td>
<td>John Aulton</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Plater</td>
<td>Hame/Hameess</td>
<td>Bit Maker</td>
<td>Harness Furniture</td>
<td>Harness Furniture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Roller Buckles</td>
<td>Spring Roller Maker</td>
<td>Spring Roller Maker</td>
<td>Spring Roller Maker</td>
<td>Spring Roller Maker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51 Pool</td>
<td>George Bird</td>
<td>S &amp; M Frankham</td>
<td>Thomas Frankham</td>
<td>George Jones</td>
<td>George Jones</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hame Maker</td>
<td>Bit and Spur Maker</td>
<td>Bit and Spur Maker</td>
<td>Silver Plater</td>
<td>Silver Plater</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is clear from the information in Table 5.3 that Ablewell East’s main street was relatively stable in terms of the persistence of industrial spaces. Of the three middle years selected (1868, 1878 and 1888), there were only five instances out of 39 possibilities when a manufacturer had no connection to the enterprise that came eight or ten years before and after occupation. Three manufacturers, Phillip Holloway, Abel Beech and the Lambert Brothers (Alpha Tube Works) persisted for the entire 36 year period, while three more, John Walker, Joseph Brittain and the Owen family saddlers, worked on Ablewell.
Figure 5.7
Ablewell and Pool Street
Industrial Locations
for at least 28 years. Walker was actually listed as an Ablewell Street turner in the 1839 Robson's Directory, and died around 1890, giving him at a minimum 51 years in the same location. His grandson, Harry Haywood, took over the family business at about age 28.

Generational continuity within the family seems to have been particularly important in lengthening trends of persistence. When James Malpas died at some point between 1861 and 1868, his widow Mary Malpas, who was 65 years old at the latter date, assumed responsibility for the business. Their son Henry appeared as a member of the household at the 1871 census and was soon listed as manager of the family bellows making firm. Likewise, John Owen relinquished control of the family saddlery business at 82 Ablewell Street to his two sons, George and William, who carried on the family name. Perhaps the most outstanding example of persistence based on the family was the Cresswell malleable iron works at 12 Pool Street. George Cresswell started the firm in the 1830s, managing it without a break until his death in the mid-1860s. For the next few years, trade directories listed his widow, Catherine, as the head of the firm, which gave way in 1878 to son Thomas who carried the firm into the next century. In total, the Cresswell family owned and operated their business, and maintained their residence, at 12 Pool Street for nearly eighty years, a record of longevity and managerial continuity that rivalled or exceeded several of the large Spon Lane firms.

Beyond persistence at a single location, there were several known examples in Ablewell East of persistence within the neighbourhood. While it is impossible to know for certain the reasons behind these intra-neighbourhood moves, map evidence suggests that most were made to acquire more space. The Frankhams’ move from 16 Ablewell to 51 Pool brought them substantially more square footage, along with a yard that they did not have to share with other businesses. The same motivation was apparently behind the decision by Joseph Brittain to move three numbers to the north from 15 to 12 Ablewell. A corner location, wide entry passage and room to expand would have been valuable assets to a local businessman with aspirations to middle class respectability.34 Beech’s harness furniture works moved a similar short distance, from 34 to 31 Ablewell, bringing with it a larger house and more commodious workshops. A large owner of property within the

34 The Brittain’s son, Arthur, passed his examinations in 1882 to become a physician/surgeon.
neighbourhood, Beech was no doubt on the lookout for favourable real estate possibilities. Finally, the examples set by Joseph Carver and William Pedley, both of whom moved from Ablewell Street leased properties to purpose-built small factories, provide further indications of strong levels of workplace persistence within the neighbourhood. Oakley’s experience of movement and eventual bankruptcy may have said more about his skills as a businessman than any inherent weaknesses in the ability of small businesses to weather difficult times. “Being a poor scholar,” he admitted that he kept no books,35 probably an unwise practice in a neighbourhood where his competition seemed to be thriving.

Perhaps the clearest message, and the sharpest distinction, that can be derived from comparing patterns of persistence between the two neighbourhoods was that there were plenty of opportunities to move within Ablewell East, and the small masters took advantage of those opportunities. Whether it was Brittain’s move to gain more space, or Carver’s shift from leased space on Ablewell to his new purpose-built works on Eldon Street, movement was part of the industrial culture of Walsall. The needs of capital were certainly responsible for reconstructing space within both neighbourhoods, but that transformation occurred within primary industrial spaces, or those places where labour and the means of production came together. In Spon Lane, these spaces were very clearly defined, and rarely extended beyond the property limits of the factory. Conversely, the whole of Ablewell East could arguably be designated as industrial space, giving capital a broader canvas on which to create.

INSIDE THE WORKPLACE WALLS

To this point in this study, workplaces have been examined as physical constructions within late nineteenth century regional and local contexts. In comparing their spatial relationship to other land uses, their dynamic presence as features of the neighbourhood landscape and their persistence within evolving geographies of work, a number of distinctions have been drawn between Ablewell East and Spon Lane. As a prelude to the discussion in Chapter 6 about whether the experience of working lives within each neighbourhood was equally distinct, it is useful at this stage to consider the micro-

35 The Walsall Observer and South Staffordshire Chronicle, 4 July 1891.
geographies of the workplaces themselves. In a combination of enclosed rooms, machinery, hearths, open yard areas and connections to public thoroughfares, these spaces were the venues of work-related social relations. How these spaces were organised physically has much to say about opportunities to develop intimacy within working groups, and the degree to which space and power needs by industrial sector influenced the ability for occupational closeness to develop.

Unfortunately, the paucity of records giving details on individual workplaces presents challenges in attempting a careful reading of these spaces. Building records from West Bromwich, auction notices, the Ordnance Survey 1:500 town plan series and first-hand observation of extant Walsall workplaces constitute the most reliable entrée into the nineteenth century workshops and factories. In addition, Kenrick's was particularly diligent about documenting their works through line drawings and occasional photographs, although these are necessarily distant perspectives which show site development very well, but obscure the organisation of space inside the walls. From a reading of these sources, the sections that follow attempt to reconstruct three different types of workplace – the back garden workshop, the small factory typical to the newer streets of Ablewell East and the Kenrick's site. Consideration is also given to the relationship between internal geography and the growth of the firm.

The Back Garden Workshop

Very common in Ablewell East and almost non-existent in Spon Lane, this type of workplace represents one step removed from outworkers who might have used a portion of their residence to perform piece-work tasks such as harness or saddle stitching, assembling small leather goods or filing. A Walsall back garden workshop was arranged around one or more rooms whereby every stage of the production process could be accomplished in close proximity. The master, who was a worker as well as a manager, would have exercised tremendous control over the workplace environment. More than likely, only one type of product would have been produced, such as horse collars or stirrups, and the small size of the workshop would have meant that each skilled worker (not including

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36 Drummond (1995) demonstrates how the internal labour process can be reconstructed for certain industries in Crewe: Railway Town, Company and People 1840-1914, pp 91-132.
37 In 1882, Bullow's advertised for young women for filing, "in shop or in home."
apprentices or assistants) would have shared the same craft.

Back gardens behind a typical late nineteenth century residence in both neighbourhoods would have contained the privy and often a brewhouse, but about one in twenty on average in Ablewell East had a detached workshop which ran along the side or across the back of the property. One of the most striking characteristics of the back garden workshops was their similarity in width, all scaling to approximately 13 to 15 feet along their narrow dimension. This uniformity suggests what might have been an unwritten tenet of the building trade, but also provides some evidence of the space requirements for the type of work being performed in Ablewell East. When 116 Tantarra came up for let in 1882, it was advertised as “light and dry shopping, suitable for platers, harness makers, saddlers or any light trade, fitted with workbenches and gas fittings.” This one-size-fits-all approach to small workshops is confirmed by the range of sectors represented at the same address in the persistence analysis in the previous section.

Clearly, these spaces were intended to be used for manufacturing, both in their construction and in their marketing to prospective tenants. The Ordnance Survey town plan shows a relatively small, attached workshop behind 83 Tantarra, but the 1888 auction of these premises indicates that this was in fact two-storey shopping, recently vacated by J. H. Siddons, a harness furniture maker. An auction three years later of the properties at 16 and 17 Pool boasted of two houses “with two ranges of shopping in rear.” To gain some understanding of the internal geography of these workshops, it is necessary to turn to the West Bromwich building records. While the Spon Lane neighbourhood was essentially bereft of back garden workshops, other parts of town did contain these types of industrial spaces. A 13 June 1871 application for a house, outbuildings and workshop on Walsall Street, reproduced in Figure 5.8, highlights the simple functionality of both the site design and building layout. On a lot 28 feet in width, accommodation was made for a house fronting the street with a six-foot passage on one side leading to the back garden. The one-storey workshop measured 13’6” x 28’, with a smith’s hearth on one end of the structure. Skylights were constructed on the roof to capture sufficient light to make the room

38 The Walsall Observer and South Staffordshire Chronicle, 24 March 1882.
39 The Walsall Observer and South Staffordshire Chronicle, 13 June 1891.
40 Borough of West Bromwich Building Plans, Shelf 19 (11), Acc. 1284, Sandwell Local Studies Centre.
Figure 5.8
Walsall Street Workshop Floor Plan (West Bromwich)

Figure 5.9
Selborne Works - 1902
functional as a workplace. From these plans, there did not appear to be any other windows nor interior walls to further divide working spaces, and it was likely that the single door shown provided the only access point.

A second application submitted later that year for a new filing shop in Watton Lane, off the northern end of Spon Lane, illustrates the similar approach to designing these small workplaces. This workshop was identical in width but only half the length, with the smith’s hearth in a corner rather than centred along a wall. This application disclosed the chimney height at 25 feet and probably would have had skylights as well. Constructed using brick secured by simple balloon framing, the interior spaces where most likely dark and ill-ventilated, and certainly would have been very warm when the hearth was in stoke. This type of workplace would have typified the small metals industries in Ablewell East, such as spur or buckle making or brass saddle ornamentation. Back garden workshops specialising in leather goods, spring bars or other trades that had no need for the hearth, may have had a greater need for light for close stitching work or leather tooling. However, beyond some interior remodelling to accommodate a new use, there did not appear to be instances when a small workshop was expanded to the proportions of a small factory. More likely, a small master wishing to expand operations would have moved to an established location (like Brittain) or built a larger works (like Carver).

Small Factories – the Selborne Works

One step larger than the back garden workshops were the small factories in Ablewell East. These enterprises offered a wide range of products, although clearly focused within a specific market sector. For instance, the types of situations vacant at Fairbanks and Lavender included horse collar makers, horse clothiers, brown and black saddlers, gig collar makers, bridle stitchers, bit makers and filers and harness furniture makers, among others. It was noted in Chapter 4 that at the beginning of the study period, there were only two of these purpose-built factories in Ablewell East – the Alpha Tube Works on Ablewell Street and the Franklins’ currier factory on Bank Street. Noteworthy both for their size and their lack of associated residences, these works were joined by the increasing numbers of small factories built within the newly developing section of the neighbourhood. Day-to-day

41 Borough of West Bromwich Building Plans, Shelf 19 (11), Acc. 1294, Sandwell Local Studies Centre.
management of these firms would have been necessarily more in the hands of shop-floor foremen who had responsibility for meeting production quotas within their particular area. However, since many of these firms, especially in leather making or fancy glass, operated outside of the classic industrial model where each step was interwoven with others, the smaller work unit remained paramount in the organisation of production in the small Walsall factory.

In common with the many neighbouring back garden workshops, these workplaces displayed some significant similarities in size and building and site design. Looking at the five largest in particular, which represented four different industrial sectors (saddles, harness furniture, fancy glass and two ironfoundries), the space needs ranged from between 800 to 1,000 square yards. Certainly, the saddlery of Fairbanks, Lavender and the Selborne Street glass works of the Bayley Brothers were the most densely occupied sites. This would be indicative of their need for less yard space than the other works, and their concentrated need for interior work spaces. The vast majority of the firms occupying this form of industrial space had these buildings constructed to house their specific enterprise. Only Stanley’s harness furniture works, which adapted the former Lynex and Rowley building firm site, and Bayleys’ Selborne Works, which was a hybrid of purpose-built space and former residential properties, did not fit this development trend.

To better understand the interior geography of these spaces, a good description of the Selborne Works survives from an auction sheet printed in 1902 which helps to explain each of the building sections shown in Figure 5.9.42 As noted on the plan (based on the Ordnance Survey 1:500 town plan), the small factory was broken into two lots, Lot 1 the original fancy glass works and Lot 2 the adapted houses and back gardens. As shown in the photograph reproduced in Figure 5.10, the two-storey, 54-foot wide, 18-foot deep frontage on Bott Lane had an arched one-storey access way in the northwest corner which provided the only access to the street. Behind this main building, which would have housed the main workshops and warehouse space, were five single-storey and two double-storey buildings together with a brick stack and boiler shed. This rear portion of the site would have been given over to the machinery, power and storage necessary to produce the basic materials for

42 Walsall Local History Centre, 1902 Auction Sheet for the Selborne Works, Acc. A61.
assembly into the Bayley’s range of products. Gas was available throughout the premises.

Figure 5.10

Selborne Works Façade Detail

Sometime between the date of an 1896 rate book and the 1902 auction, the firm acquired the adjoining site which was slightly larger than their original space (see Figure 5.9). In addition to constituting the residential terrace addressed as numbers 14 to 20 Bott Lane, an 88-foot by 22-foot conversion into factory space, Bayley constructed a 41-foot by 17-foot, three-storey extension on the Lime Street frontage. In total, this added 5,900 square feet of manufacturing space, which combined with their existing amount of 5,034 square feet, meant that the factory then had nearly 11,000 square feet of floor space. It was noted in the auction sheet that the enlarged factory still relied on the one Bott Lane entrance, but “it is suggested that a good entrance could easily be made through the lower part of the former dwelling-house at No. 17.” Interestingly, there is no evidence to suggest that the works expansion included the addition of any new or expanded machinery or power sources. This would seem to indicate that the additional square footage was used for creating, assembling and storing final products, an appropriate use for the small rooms in the former residences. Expanded product lines were part of a general trend within manufacturing nation-wide in an attempt to gain the upper hand against downturns in demand for certain products.

Large Factories – Archibald Kenrick & Sons

The internal geography of the West Bromwich workplaces, especially larger firms such as Kenrick’s, Chance’s and Salter’s, bore a strong resemblance to the neighbourhoods that surrounded them. Where residences, shops, streets, open spaces and public gathering places constituted the surrounding landscape, the large factories were organised around production areas, warehouses, movement of raw materials and finished products and an administrative component. The 1,270 people who worked for Kenrick’s in 1894, none of whom were
outworkers, were spread throughout the complex of buildings seen in Figures 5.1 and 5.2. The vast majority of these people were associated with a work unit which, like the organisation of a family residence in the neighbourhood, revolved around a central figure with nominal authority over how the others behaved. This aspect of work will be explored more fully in Chapter 6, but it is important to keep in mind that the interior spaces of large factories were structured to exploit the full production value of these units. As noted above, these workplaces consumed many acres of land and the production flow would have most likely been organised to facilitate movement to ensure sufficient profits and therefore longevity.

Of all the workplaces flanking the canal, it is Kenrick’s which was the best documented during the late nineteenth century. Not only did the family use the site itself as an advertisement for its formidable product line and flexibility, but successive members of the Kenrick family were tapped often for expert testimony before various government enquiries. In addition, the firm was diligent in presenting their applications for additions to the Improvement Commission. From the latter records, we know that the major increases in square footage along Hall Street South were built in two stages, the 1875 application to add administrative offices and showrooms in the clock tower section (Section A on Figure 5.11) and an 1880 request to construct new warehouses (Section B north of the clock tower). From this figure, it is also fairly simple to discern the locations of the many hearths from the stack locations. These would have been the areas where the wide range of products offered by Kenrick’s were fired and where power was generated to run the equipment needed to mould the holloware.

Given the density of buildings and the complexity of the divisions of labour, organisation inside the workplace walls of Kenrick’s was critically important. From Figures 5.1 and 5.2, it was apparent that as the firm was moving through its rapid expansion phase from the late 1870s to the early 1890s, a works master plan of some sort must have been conceived. An outer ring of buildings adjacent to Hall Street South, Union Street and the Providence Iron Works (Bridge, Gill and Bridge) encircled an inner throughway, which provided uninterrupted access around a dense concentration of buildings in the centre of the works. Buildings were at least two-storey with many climbing to three. Closer to the canal, and across the canal to the plant annex, the site design seemed less ordered, but with ample
open space along the canal itself. By the time the photograph in Figure 5.2 was taken, the site was almost fully occupied.

![Section B Section A](image)

Figure 5.11
Archibald Kenrick and Sons, West View, circa early 1880s

Obviously, one of the biggest challenges for a workplace of this size was in moving material from one location to another. Transport between different parts of the plant was in large part accomplished using a combination of horse-drawn wagons and rail cars and wheelbarrows, connecting from these conveyances to the canal and rail transport which came right to the factory’s doorstep. The 1:500 Ordnance Survey Town Plan (surveyed in 1886) mapped an extensive internal tramway system that reached every corner of the works except the northeast, and a similar network was in place at Patent Nut and Bolt on the other side of Spon Lane. In Figure 5.2, the 1890s photograph indicates bulk storage of coal in the lower right, with rails leading directly from the large pile. Most likely, the large barrels seen under cover were used to pack finished products for shipment around the globe. These would have been taken to the packing rooms for order fulfilment, and then loaded on rail cars or canal boats (as depicted in lower left of the more idealised drawing of the works shown in Figure 5.1).

CONCLUSION

In terms of the organisation and occupation of space, Ablewell East and Spon Lane continued in the late Victorian age to track along a morphological trajectory established prior to 1860, but with some significant concessions to changing economic times. Geographies of place, both inside and outside the workplace, were subject to strong capital-
induced currents. A mosaic of smaller factories grew up amidst the new residential terraces of Ablewell East, while Spon Lane appeared to evolve into a neighbourhood whose land uses were increasingly segregated from one another along a finer and finer line. Concurrent with this crafting of private space, municipal muscles were being flexed, which in many ways were responsive to the shifting forms of local capitalism, although not always in ways that have traditionally been interpreted as representing aspects of modernisation. Micro­geographies of the workplace persisted in the back garden, but elsewhere became more exclusively associated with the spatial contexts of local production as the nineteenth century closed.

Clearly though, the geographies of modernisation and workplace location within each neighbourhood told only a small portion of the experience of working in Ablewell East and Spon Lane. The new spaces being created for capital and labour to come together said very little about how people adapted to change in this most fundamental human activity. The connection between the arrangement of worker and workplace on the industrial landscape came down to a very personal attachment between their lives as individuals and their lives as workers. Chapter 6 looks more directly at working lives in both neighbourhoods, and attempts to link the working spaces described in this chapter to “the overlying pattern of human agency.”

Chapter 6

WORKING LIVES
The Experience of Labour in Two Industrial Neighbourhoods

For the average worker, the essential formula which motivated his or her presence at the workplaces described in the previous chapter was how much compensation could be earned in exchange for their labour. However, the connection between worker and pay packet was and remains a complex social process encompassing need, opportunity and the experience of work itself. Need was a two-way street. Employers needed labour to perform an assigned component of a production process, and individuals needed work to ensure individual and family survival. Within this acknowledged mutual need, however, working opportunities were socially constructed and meted out in accordance with local customs of capital. Not everybody was right for every job. With so many variables, there was obviously no *pro forma* for the experience of labour in the late nineteenth century.

The previous chapter focused on the occupation and organisation of space within Ablewell East and Spon Lane, both inside and outside the workplace. However, the industrial workplaces of both neighbourhoods were much more than simply locations on a burgeoning global economic grid organised for profit. They offered working opportunities for people living in and around them, and a means by which the need to work could be fulfilled within the context of local working cultures. Along with the economic nexus between worker and workplace, they were also interior spaces where aspects of culture were exercised and hybrid varieties developed. Certainly, as we saw in Chapter 1, the workplace was a fertile ground for bringing together both the economic and cultural forces of production, with as many local variations as could be imagined. The exact form of production within a workshop or factory was certainly influenced by the local geographies discussed in Chapter 5, but they were by no means the only determinant of workplace social relations.

This chapter looks at working lives in Ablewell East and Spon Lane in the late nineteenth century, and the experience of labour as a significant occupier of time. Starting with an analysis of why people felt the need to work, succeeding sections look at how the search for employment (from the worker’s side) and labour (from the employer’s perspective)
was a locally constructed process, before delving into a discussion of social relations within the workplaces themselves. Based on the geographies presented in the last chapter, these sections seek an understanding of internal working conditions, work customs and social connections with particular emphasis on the experience of work itself within each neighbourhood. Work was and is arguably a lifelong preoccupation, so it follows that the ways in which people trained for, sought, found and actually performed work had much to say about the industrial culture in which they were living.

CONSTRUCTING THE NEED TO WORK

Remembering Joyce’s statement that “to be a worker was to be a member of a community, of a family, of a nation, as well as of a trade,” it might be expected that the motivation to work was a cultural and social decision, as well as an individual one. “The work decision . . . is a social process [and] must encompass relationships in the community and home.” What pressures, subtle or pronounced, brought someone to the point of seeking work, and further, what happened when these desires were fulfilled or went unfulfilled? This section considers the reasons behind the need to work, particularly those motivations generated from within the individual, family and community.

Although it was clear that the most fundamental motivation for employment was to bring home a pay packet, this discussion is not intended as an analysis of standards of living, wage and piece rates or the cost of basic goods and services. Instead, it begins with an examination of expectations within a family wage economy, and proceeds to a wider discussion of how peoples’ lives could be shaped by the experience of work within their neighbourhood.

In common with other industrialising communities, family and social connections afforded the most reliable entrée into paid employment. In both Spon Lane and Ablewell East, small workshops to large factories relied on family and neighbourhood connections

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to replenish local supplies of labour. Expectations were certainly high. In an 1874 vagrancy hearing in Walsall, the magistrate chastised the mother of one boy for throwing her son out on the street with an ultimatum to get a job or not bother returning home. He went on further to suggest that, as a parent, she should have accompanied her son to find a job, instead of turning him out in inclement weather.4 This example of magisterial instruction is a reminder that the family unit had both a moral duty to direct children to gainful employment, and a practical duty to help them find work. Arguably, all family members experienced some level of expectation that they would participate in a labour process which assured that the family remained solvent.

Without a doubt, the clearest cultural mandate of the Victorian working classes was that men should be gainfully employed. Within an urban context, this employment normally took the form of waged or pieced compensation, in other words, the exchange of their labour for an agreed upon price. The expectations of married men were likely even more pronounced because of their role in contributing what was normally the largest share of the family wage economy. When a Walsall woman asked her husband for a new pair of boots, he told her to go to work for them, to which she replied “not while I have a husband to work.”5 In fact, the census records for 1871 through 1891 indicated that nearly all men of working age in Ablewell East and Spon Lane, married or unmarried, boarders or those listed as heads of households, reported an occupation. At least on paper, this group understood the expectations placed on them, although there were certainly no guarantees that sufficient opportunities would exist to maintain employment for all. John Hands, a Neal Street resident in Spon Lane, found this out in 1883 when, after two years of sporadic employment, his wife and six children moved into the workhouse.6 After finally gaining steady employment at a local forge, he was given the opportunity to meet expectations through support of his family.

Beyond the universal expectation that working age men should be at work and be the primary breadwinner, further refinements of need were usually enacted in family and community terms, often after consideration of the ‘family wage.’ This term implied that

4 The Walsall Free Press and General Advertiser, 28 November 1874.
5 The Walsall Observer and General District Advertiser, 31 October 1869.
6 The Free Press, 22 September 1883.
more than one member of the family would be expected to earn money for the household, including children, wives, husbands and the rent from lodgers. As the shadow of the nineteenth century grew longer, the family wage approach to economic survival became more complicated, and arguably more tenuous in meeting expectations. For Spon Lane and Ablewell East workplaces of the 1860s, the range of opportunities for women were wider and more locally managed and the potential for outworking may have been more widespread. However, with some working paths being gated by the state, at least on paper, family members who were once active contributors to the collective income had necessarily to either scale back their expectations or redirect them to other forms of work. In reality, expectations appeared to remain high despite the state intervention.

By far the most nebulous in terms of consensus was whether married women needed to contribute to the family wage economy. Robert Burnett (the labour correspondent to the Board of Trade) summed up the dilemma for many working-class families in 1892 in the following comment on the sweated trades:

"On the one hand, they [men] seem to feel that the cheaper labour of their wives and daughters is forcing them to lower and lower wages, while on the other hand, their earnings are so miserably low, and their state so bad, that they fear to give up the few shillings which the female workers add to the family income. They are between the devil of cheap labour competition, and the deep sea of family poverty."^7

In other words, there were conflicts between need as constructed socially and need as interpreted economically when it came to employment by married women. Obviously, even with wage rates that were often less than half those of male workers, an extra 12 or 14 shillings per week could make a substantial difference in the family standard of living, especially for those couples with younger children. For instance, Thomas and Mary Ann Staples, residing at 93 Tantarra Street in 1881, had children aged 11, 6 and 2 and two boarders. Income from these boarders, combined with their occupations of bit forger and bridle stitcher respectively (Mary Ann Staples most likely worked as an outworker), could have returned a family wage of nearly two pounds per week. On the other hand, it was clear from the census findings that the need for this level of compensation was not

^7 Quoted in the 25 March 1892 edition of *The Free Press.*
so great as to spur large numbers of married women to participate in formal waged employment. Only 8.2 percent of married Ablewell East women and 4.9 percent of those living in Spon Lane had a listed occupation in the 1871 enumerators' books. These percentages did not vary more than one percent in the subsequent census years of 1881 and 1891. This consistency points to a durable respect for local customs of opportunities for women, a topic discussed in the next section.8

On the scale of expectations between adult males and married women, the next highest group was probably single young men and women who had completed their schooling. This group had the highest potential for contributing to the family wage, with few of the charged moral arguments associated with employment by married women. For young men, of course, it was the time of life when it was expected that a trade would be learned, either through a formal apprenticeship or by the side of an experienced relative or other adult. Young women also had opportunities available to their gender, including domestic service. According to census records, it is apparent that many young males and females remained at home until they were married, thus adding to the collective wage of the household. Pressure, sometimes overt, from within the family helped to define need for this group. In 1872, after two youths were apprehended in a boat near Patent Nut and Bolt, they told the magistrate that they dared not go home because they feared the consequences from their parents of not going to work.9

Younger children too were expected to add their modest earning power to the family wage, although this ability was curtailed sharply with implementation of the Factory and Workshop Acts and the Education Acts. Although, as we saw in Chapter 2, compliance with these regulations was hit and miss at best. Only two years after passage of the 1867 Extension Acts, the Walsall paper was saying that education must be supported, but "we are quite aware that some persons are zealous overmuch on the subject of education – such persons would think nothing of destroying the national manufactures in order that the operatives might be instructed."10 Resistance was certainly an enduring symbol of

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8 It is widely acknowledged that the census enumerators' books were often deficient in recording women's work, even when that work was paid. For a discussion of this issue, see E. Higgs (1987) "Women, occupations and work in the nineteenth century," History Workshop, 23, pp 59-88.
9 Wednesbury and West Bromwich Advertiser, 14 December 1872.
10 The Walsall Observer and General District Advertiser, 7 August 1869. This comment came from the
local labour. In 1882, Union Street box maker Henry Foakes was charged with employing his nine and eleven year old sons during school hours. Caught with his sons lashed to the front of a cartload of boxes, Foakes claimed poverty and said that he would continue to employ them and not send them to school.\textsuperscript{11} Since young children were often critical in assisting experienced workers in their craft, family expectations were correspondingly high.

Ironically, it may have been that the most influential member of the family in constructing the need to work was the one person whose culturally-defined opportunity to be part of the household wage economy was the most restricted, the female head of the household. Women were generally in control of the family finances, and were thus in a position to apply pressure on family members to bring home a wage packet. In the words of the Reverend P. Mackenzie in West Bromwich, “while it was quite true that the husband is the head of the house, it is also true that the wife is the neck, and whenever the neck desires to turn the head, turn it must.”\textsuperscript{12} This statement was made to explain why the wives of employees of Wednesbury’s Patent Shaft and Axletree Co. were actively contesting the demand by the men to be paid weekly instead of fortnightly. In the wives’ view, this change would only lead to one additional “drinking bout” which would no doubt cut into the family wage. In fact, part of the interest by wives in ensuring the steadiness of household income could have been due to their own reduced ability to earn at their husband’s rate. On their own admission, two incidents of domestic violence against women, one in Bank Street in 1891 and another in Union Street in 1892, were not prosecuted simply because the victims had children and were fearful of being without support.\textsuperscript{13}

One measure of the importance of the social and economic need to work was how people reacted when they were not able to continue working. There was some shame in going to the workhouse, some reticence in relying too heavily on neighbourhood support and

\textsuperscript{11} The Free Press, 4 March 1882.
\textsuperscript{12} The Free Press, 28 February 1890. The male response to this charge was that they were unaware that women’s rights had progressed to the point where they could override the wishes of their husbands.
\textsuperscript{13} The Walsall Observer and South Staffordshire Chronicle, 28 November 1891, and The Free Press, 18 March 1892.
many moral arguments at the time that encouraged people to associate their work strategies with family and individual survival. As a result, the consequences of not meeting personal or family expectations could be high. Sometimes, this failure was enacted with plenty of neighbourhood company such as when a trade-wide downturn or factory layoff precipitated widespread redundancies. Other times, the reasons may have been more related to personal behaviour, such as neglect of work or workplace agitation. To be certain, nineteenth century work opportunities were subject to rapid change in accordance with the sometimes fickle flow of capital. As a consequence, the working lives that needed those opportunities were often caught in that crevasse that forms when one opportunity ends before another one presents itself.

Some were unable to cope. In December of 1877, the national and global iron trade had taken a turn for the worse, with very local consequences. John Betts, 37, was one of 30 who were discharged from P. D. Bennett’s Ironworks over a fortnight. Sacked on a Monday, Betts took out his frustration on Isaac Turner, a foreman moulder, by attacking him with a stick. In testimony before the magistrate, Betts regretted the attack, “but hated seeing his wife and children in want.”14 Two weeks later, John Williams, 36, a shingler at Bridge, Gill and Bridge committed suicide. At the inquest, his wife said that she had been concerned about her husband’s despondency since he had lately been short of work due to continuing bad trade.15 Other suicides that appeared to have had a link to poor trade and lack of work continued to plague the Spon Lane neighbourhood. An 1887 inquest found that Alfred Slaney, 38, an ironworker who lived at 18 Maria Street, had hanged himself. According to his widow, Mary Jane Slaney, her husband had very little work recently and this weighed heavily on his mind.16 One final example was another Maria Street resident, John Swann, a glassmaker at Chance’s. He had not worked for 19 weeks in early 1892, and his sister, Louisa Skidmore, thought again that lack of work “preyed upon his mind” because he appeared depressed.17 It was noted in Chapter 1 that the need to work is socially constructed. For these individuals, there was clearly a very powerful nexus between the need to work and their own mental well-being. Denied the

14 The Free Press, 1 December 1877.
15 The Free Press, 15 December 1877.
16 The Free Press, 12 March 1887.
17 The Free Press, 8 April 1892.
opportunity, for reasons that perhaps had more to say about global economics than about them as individual workers, they were unable to make quick adjustments or to deal any longer with being out of work.

The fear of poverty brought on by lack of work was a great motivation. Church’s study of Kenrick’s cites this fear, along with loyalty, as the “two principal factors explaining the number of workmen who spent more than 40 - and several more than 50 - years with their employers at Spon Lane.”\(^\text{18}\) Of course, only a small percentage of those thrown out of employment would have chosen suicide as an option to unemployment and failure to meet one’s family obligations. Significantly larger numbers would have fallen back on a family wage or relied on neighbourhood support to see them through. Others would have sought less skilled work as a stopgap measure to stem the shortfall. Jacob Oakes, a skilled tanner in Walsall, found himself in 1880 unloading wood as a day labourer during a trade depression in the leather industry.\(^\text{19}\) However, it is interesting to note that all of the suicide decisions occurred in Spon Lane, with no parallel events reported from Ablewell East. This fact begs several questions about whether Spon Lane would have been emotionally a harder place to lose your job. We will return to this question later in the chapter.

This thesis began with an assumption that the need to work is a basic expectation of people living in capitalist societies. While this study explicates many contrasting morphologies, working environments, social relations and other aspects of community culture between Ablewell East and Spon Lane, the need to work provided their most fundamental similarity. For most residents of the two neighbourhoods, the pursuit of day or pieced wages was the foundation to individual and family survival. This interpreted need started early in life, with children responding and contributing to their parents’ expectations to be part of the family wage, and continued throughout their working lives. The following sections look at how the process of fulfilling the sense of need discussed in this section led to patterns of working strategies and behaviours that helped to define the work experience in both neighbourhoods. While degrees of need may have been felt

\(^{19}\) *The Walsall Free Press*, 1 May 1880.
individually, fulfilling that need was enacted within local cultures of working opportunities and workplace custom.

IN SEARCH OF LABOUR

At a very basic level, the relationship between labour and production is initiated by a connection made through a search for work. Spurred on by the need discussed in the previous section, and perhaps fearful of the potential consequences of not being employed, people sought opportunities within the different spheres of their lives – how far they could travel to work, where their skill and trade were practised, how knowledgeable they were of the job market and what controls local custom placed on the market for employment. Both Ablewell East and Spon Lane offered a range of industrial workplaces for prospective workers - from setting up as an outworker to a Walsall black saddler to an operative at any of the factories flanking the Birmingham Canal. This section seeks to understand how the search for work was influenced by the respective neighbourhood geographies, and how those strategies may have developed as a consequence of the industrial landscape.

Given the sharply distinct geographies discussed in Chapter 5, is it possible that the dynamics of matching employer with employable were equally diverse? At least on the surface, the relatively opaque workplace environment in Ablewell East would suggest that opportunities could not be discerned so readily by those seeking work, especially for those unfamiliar with the neighbourhood. Although a significant proportion of the back alley and garden workshops were exclusively family enterprises, an even larger number appear to have had an ongoing, trade-driven need to hire employees on short notice.20 These recruitment efforts seemed particularly acute during above average economic times when labour was in short supply, and in recruiting youth labour to perform routine tasks such as rough filing or to assist experienced workers in saddleries or ironmongeries. Conversely, larger establishments such as Alpha Tube Works on Ablewell Street or any of the large Spon Lane works apparently had no trouble in attracting skilled and unskilled hands to their doors. What techniques did industrial

20 This conclusion is reached through an accounting of the situations vacant section of the Walsall newspapers. During times of active trade townwide, such as in 1889, it was not unusual for two columns of job openings to be advertised.
workplaces employ to attract workers and conversely, how would a job seeker go about the process of finding work with no connections within the community? It is clear that the process differed between the two neighbourhoods, with each adapting to their unique industrial blueprint and the ability of that blueprint to reproduce labour in the most effective manner.

When London glass merchant Robert Chance purchased in 1821 Shutt's glass works south of the canal, he noted that localities such as this, "begirt on every side . . . by the evidences of gigantic industrial undertakings and echoing with ceaseless throb of everyday working life," served to perpetuate the material greatness of England. Logically, that throb and enormity of factory development along the canal and railway would probably have served as an employment beacon to those searching for situations. From the employer's standpoint, this prominence on the landscape translated into a regular flow of people seeking work. Thus, while family and neighbourhood connections were no doubt the primary sources for recruiting labour, the 'landscape of industry' in Spon Lane could be equated with industriousness, work activity and at least the prospect of gainful employment. In testimony before the Children's Employment Commission, the timekeeper for the Patent Screw Works in Smethwick stated that "there has been no difficulty whatever in getting more hands. Not only women and girls, but men, fitters and labourers, crowd the gates."22

It was clear that there were not queues of people waiting outside most Walsall workplaces. Given the relative workplace opacity on the landscape, how would the jobseeker find, not only who was hiring, but even where shops of a given trade were located? Or, turned around, how did these small employers find additional help when the most obvious recruitment channels, such as friends, family and neighbours, were depleted? It would be unlikely that many potential job hunters with no prior knowledge of the neighbourhood, would venture through front doors or tunnels with hopes of matching their own skills to those of the business. From an analysis of weekly papers in Walsall, it appears that the situations vacant column provided the most reliable means of getting new employees. All

21 Quoted in the 7 Dec 1872 edition of the Wednesbury and West Bromwich Advertiser.
levels of skill and experience were represented, from apprentices to supervisors, from saddle to domestic work and from temporary or piece to waged compensation. It appears that just about every employer in the Walsall neighbourhood advertised at one point or another for additional help between 1865 and 1895. The nature of their work being primarily contract, it was very important to be able to quickly locate and hire one or two additional workers to meet current work orders.

As an example of the challenges experienced in attracting appropriate labour to a medium-sized Ablewell East workplace, consider the malleable ironfoundry owned by the Cresswell family at 12 Pool Street. Throughout the 1870s and beyond, this firm was advertising consistently for new workers. The best estimate for how many workers were employed there would have been 20 to 23, as indicated by an 1880 ‘to let’ notice and the auction sheet prepared for the premises in 1886. In terms of 1876 rateable value for those establishments not located on Ablewell Street, this was the fourth largest works in the neighbourhood. As an example of their seemingly never-ending hunt for employees, the following listings were placed in 1874 alone:

- Feb 7 one malleable iron caster used to terrets, buckles, etc.
- two common iron casters
- Apr 18 one common iron buckle caster
- May 9 three young women for roller buckle work
- June 20 one common iron buckle caster
- July 4 one steady man for pot tinning, and to make himself useful in buckle manufactory
- Sept 26 one common iron buckle caster
- two young women for filing

By 1874, the Cresswell family had been in continuous operation at 12 Pool for nearly 40 years and the firm was no doubt well-known by locals. However, from this rather non-exceptional list for one year, it would appear that the firm could not attract enough labour from family or neighbourhood connections to keep staffing levels at the production capacity of the works. In terms of potential lost income, locating a ‘common iron buckle caster’ was probably their greatest ongoing need, as this person would most likely be put in

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23 The Walsall Free Press, 13 March 1880.
24 The Walsall Observer and South Staffordshire Chronicle, 30 January 1886.
charge of two (or more) tubs for casting, be paid by the piece for completed work, with the Cresswells selling finished products to local factors or wholesalers. Lack of sufficient labour translated to fewer units to sell and, as result, reduced profits.

Along with the Cresswells, small workshops throughout the neighbourhood compensated for their lack of social and industrial prominence by using the local press to advertise for new workers. Certainly it would have been an imperfect system, if for no other reason than a prospective employee would have had to have seen the newspaper advertisement. Larger factories did not seem to have this problem, at least on a large scale. While there is some evidence that big firms, such as Leckie’s in Walsall, had to advertise after receiving large War Department contracts (in one case for 50 new hands), these listings were exceptional. Except for clerking jobs, factory row in Spon Lane did not use the local press to attract workers until 1890 when Kenrick’s ran several requests for moulders with specific experience (“used to sanitary work”) in a tight labour market.25 This pattern was identical to Ablewell East’s largest employer, Alpha Tube Works, who never placed an ad for new workers until 1890, when the Walsall industries were also booming and labour in general was very scarce. During the years 1889-91, several employers ran ads every week, an indication of either little success or constant need.26 A town newspaper commented in 1890 that “all workmen and women” were occupied.27

Interestingly, as the larger, two- and three-storey factories became established in the 1880s throughout Ablewell East (away from Ablewell Street), the owners still advertised quite extensively to attract new workers. For instance, the leather firm of Fairbanks and Lavender on Eldon Street ran in 1882 13 different advertisements to fill vacancies.28 Certainly, by this date, the practice of using the papers to recruit labour was well-established as part of the workplace culture in Walsall, but there may have been another reason why even these large premises continued to fill labour needs through the local press. It will be remembered from Chapter 4 that Walsall grew primarily around an established city centre, and not as the

26 The use of classified ads in Walsall extended even to efforts by manufacturers in other parts of Great Britain and abroad to ‘poach’ skilled labour in the leather trade. Entries were extended from Glasgow, Bermondsey and New York during the study period.
27 The Walsall Advertiser and South Staffordshire Chronicle, 6 December 1890.
28 As counted in The Walsall Observer and South Staffordshire Chronicle.
growing together of formerly distinct villages. Therefore, in one sense, the newly created urban spaces in the southeast of Ablewell East were located on Walsall’s fringe. Writing on the Ablewell East area,

“That locality, comprising such large manufactories as Messrs. Fairbanks and Lavender, Messrs. Bayley’s glass works, Mr. Carver’s whip factory and others, is becoming an important centre of commercial activity. Strangers to Walsall can form no idea from the centre of town of the immense strides which have been made of late years in its local manufactures, for most of the large factories are now situated in the outskirts.”29

As a comparison, Ablewell East was closer to Walsall High Street than Spon Lane was to West Bromwich’s High Street, yet larger workplaces in the former were seen as away from a townwide centre, as opposed to being a key location within a historical centre. As a result, even though some Walsall employers were growing in landscape stature, their size and prominence were not so large as to allow them to compete for labour on a townwide or regional level like Kenrick’s or Patent Nut and Bolt were able to do.

It can be fairly safely concluded that the predominant industrial landscapes within each neighbourhood, forms clearly shaped by the unique historical geographies in each town, prompted differential strategies to attract labour. In Spon Lane, the visual prominence of factories on a sub-town level, combined with the broader regional profile, meant that these workplaces drew labour like sirens drawing ships to rocks. On the other hand, the more hidden workplaces, as epitomised by most sites in the Walsall neighbourhood, forced them to adopt the local newspapers as a means for increasing staffing when traditional avenues dried up. Within Spon Lane and Ablewell East, there does appear to have been a strong nexus between industrial form and landscape prominence, and the way in which job vacancies were filled.

FILLING THE NEED: CRAFTING OPPORTUNITIES TO WORK

From a culturally-defined need to work and from within local contexts of opportunity, individuals and families coped with learning trades, showing up for work, spending their day in gainful employment, maintaining that employment and earning enough to make

29 *The Walsall Observer and South Staffordshire Chronicle*, 16 Aug 1890
ends meet. It was argued in Chapter 1 that work was central to peoples' lives, and those that worked in Spon Lane and Ablewell East between 1865 and 1895 all made choices at one point or another that connected their need to work with available opportunities. This section examines the experience of work from two perspectives. First, for adult workers, local customs are examined which provided opportunities for some workers, but closed the door on others. In particular, formal employment possibilities for women (especially married women) were few and far between in Ablewell East and Spon Lane, mirroring similar marginalisation elsewhere in England. The second half addresses the working lives of young people and children, with some consideration of how these opportunities changed with the coming of the Factory and Workshop Acts.

There is no shortage of evidence to suggest that people generally appreciated the ability to stay employed throughout their working lives, even in one location. In the last chapter, the persistence of the small Ablewell East workshops points not only to endurance, but also to a desire to meet personal and family expectations over long periods. These small workshop owners were not only workers themselves, but also employers of small numbers of people and fixtures of the local neighbourhood. When Charles Bamford, a corn dealer, coach proprietor, dairyman, baker and riding master, died after nearly sixty years of service at 71 Ablewell Street, it was said that “on the road he will be a man much missed.”30 Similar examples of longevity were seen in the Spon Lane works, with many examples of workers with long records with the company.31 A fragmentary Kenrick’s Hiring Book with notations of signed multi-year contracts showed a strong tendency for employees to sign many contracts in succession. George Beech’s name first appeared as an enameller in 1845, with successive notations in 1851, 1856 and 1860. With each new contract, his day wage was either increased or stayed level, starting at 5s. per day, and progressing to 6s.8d., 6s.8d. and finally 7s.6d.32 Steady work and pay rises meant that expectations were being met, and staved off any fears of not being employed.

The experience of work for some was not nearly so predictable as the old-timers at

30 The Walsall Observer and South Staffordshire Chronicle, 31 October 1891.
31 R. A. Church (1969) Kenricks in Hardware, p 281. Seller’s also had employees with long track records with the company, as indicated by several personal histories archived at the Staffordshire Record Office.
32 Archives of the Black Country Museum, Kenricks acquisition.
Kenrick’s. And, while high levels of persistence for the owners of small workshops have been demonstrated, the periodic advertisements for new labour by many of these businesses indicated higher levels of mobility for many Walsall workers. At his bankruptcy hearing in June of 1869, John Reay, a Walsall buckle tongue maker, provided testimony that indicated just how mobile his occupation could be. Between December of 1864 and June of 1869, Reay changed jobs six times as he tramped around and inside Ablewell East.33 The following describes his movements:

- Dec 1864 to Dec 1865: Worked in Green Street (lived in Union Street)
- Dec 1865 to May 1866: Worked at 44 Union Street
- May 1866 to July 1866: Worked in Croft Street
- July 1866 to Jan 1867: Worked in Paddock Lane
- Jan 1867 to Sept 1867: Worked at 45 Union Street
- Sept 1867 to Apr 1868: Worked at 47 Pool Street
- Apr 1868 to June 1869: Worked at 44 Union Street

This pattern of short bursts of work with different employers,34 but also a tendency to return to Union Street, was enacted during a difficult time for the Walsall leather industry. When the American Civil War came to a close in 1865, trade ramifications were felt as far away as Ablewell East and many manufacturers were dealing with a severely curtailed global market for leather. Reay’s ability to work enough to get by during this five-year stretch prior to declaring himself bankrupt may be a good lesson in how the labour market worked in this area. Without recourse to steady waged or pieced employment, opportunities existed in Ablewell East for a skilled person to ply a trade under reduced and less predictable circumstances. While Reay eventually did go bankrupt, there were probably significant numbers working in similar straits who were able to piece together a living as a casual employee or outworker for the large numbers of small producers with temporary needs to fill.

This ability to survive trade depressions by finding short-term alternatives to steady, waged or pieced employment may also help explain the lack of suicide incidents in Ablewell East or, more accurately, the number of them in Spon Lane. A person turned

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33 The Walsall Observer and General District Advertiser, 28 September 1870.
away from work at Patent Nut and Bolt had fewer options for re-employment, not only in the number of workplaces in the immediate neighbourhood, but exacerbated by the degree of skill specialisation and social relations that likely centred on people in like circumstances. There was less of a support network to fall back on and a less developed neighbourhood culture of economic adaptation brought on by the fear of not meeting expectations. The only circumstance that might have ameliorated this difficult situation would have been if the former employer stepped forward to soften the hardship. In fact, this was exactly what happened when Kenrick’s issued redundancy notices to 68 turners in 1891. The company offered 20 shillings per week until alternative employment was found, up to a total of 40 pounds, for those dismissed “owing to the introduction of holloware turning machinery.”

There were no rival instances uncovered of this type of severance package offered by other manufacturers.

More endemic even than trade fluctuations in affecting working lives were the culturally-defined barriers that existed in both neighbourhoods. Perhaps no one barrier to employment was more entrenched than the construction of opportunities based on gender. The ‘appropriateness’ of prospects for men’s and women’s employment in both factories and workshops was, as noted in Chapter 2, of supreme interest to the expanding rota of sometimes self-proclaimed workplace specialists (government inspectors, trade union organisers, politicians, factory masters, and moralists from all persuasions). In some cases, however, it was women themselves within local contexts of work who did the most to determine where and when they could work. This point of view had its advocates. In the words of one woman giving evidence in 1876 before the Commissioners looking into the Factory Acts, children should be protected “because they do not belong to themselves, they are not their own masters, but I think women are.” Although clearly speaking with the healthy self-interest as a major employer of female operatives, John Arthur Kenrick, then Chair of the Holloware Association, was

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35 The complete agreement contained five provisions. "1) Any Journeyman Turner who being so dismissed by the employers owing to the introduction of holloware turning machinery shall be entitled so long as he is out of employment to the sum of twenty shillings per week until he shall have so received the sum of forty pounds upon the following conditions: 2) Payments cease with employment, but received bonus of 20 pounds minus whatever he was paid to date; 3) Employee making a written statement abandoning trade to receive 40 pounds minus payments to that date; 4) Must return to work if called and if refuse, no more payments will be made; and 5) Apprentices to receive 20 pounds." All 68 people affected by the termination signed the agreement.

36 PP 1876 [C.1443] xxix.1, p 337.
keen to agree with this assessment for women over 18.

"I should put them on a perfect equality as regards making arrangements for the sale of their labour, whether married or single, and it appears to me that the more opportunities you give a woman of choosing her labour the better she is off." 37

That one of the most influential industrialists in Spon Lane urged a laissez-faire approach to women and paid employment is significant, but also highlights the nature of work performed at Archibald Kenrick and Sons. Of course, putting this philosophy into practice had to be negotiated between the workplace and the community-at-large.

Both neighbourhoods appear to have reached tacit agreement on the extent to which women could participate in the local employment market. Perhaps because of the nature of work in Walsall, and the predominance of smaller workplaces, gender-specific references occurred quite frequently in the long list of situations vacant between 1871 and 1891. For instance, buckle rollering and filing were two of the most common prospects specifically gendered to women. David Archer, a bucklemaker at 85 Paddock, Cresswell’s shop at 12 Pool and C. Hastings at 41 Tantarra sought girls used to buckle filing and women for buckle rollering. Saddle stitching, japanning, hame plating and sorting and wrapping were also job titles tied exclusively to female workers. 38 In 20 years of ads for situations vacant, only one specifically asked for a “man or woman for harness furniture trade, to look out orders and assist foreman.” 39 [italics added] This request came from Fairbanks Lavender, the neighbourhood’s largest employer after the Alpha Tube Works, and almost certainly the largest employer of women in the vicinity.

Beyond those advertisements which specifically asked for female workers, it was very likely that at least a portion of other situations, where no gender was specified, could have been filled by either men or women. However, by far the largest proportion of waged positions appear to have been held by men. This was especially true in any job involving the use of heat and machinery, such as casting, plating and machine cutting in

37 PP 1876 [C.1443] xxix.1, p 331.
38 Of the occupations listed for women in the census enumerators’ books for 1871, 1881 and 1891, stitcher was by a large margin the most common.
the leather trades. In addition, employers sought males to oversee production in saddle making, where some of the stitching may have been farmed out to female outworkers or assistants (who could also have been wives or daughters), but assembly and finishing work was performed by men inside the workshop. In rare instances, the census enumerators listed a woman’s occupation as ‘machinist,’ which may have referred to mechanised stitching in many cases. Nancy Cleghorn, at 17 Pool in 1871, was one married woman who had her occupation listed as machinist, with three daughters (ages 17, 13 and 10) and one female visitor (age 24) living in the same house. All the females were listed as saddle stitchers. In this case, opportunities for women and girls appeared to have been created by the introduction of machinery by the matriarch of the household.

Further limiting women’s employment opportunities was an apparent bias by employers against hiring married women, especially in the larger works of Spon Lane. This custom came out loud and clear in 1876 testimony by two of the largest manufacturers, Kenrick’s and Chance’s, before the Commissioners appointed to inquire into the Factory Acts. John Chance related that his firm employed 70 women, none of them married, while 87 women were at work inside Kenrick’s, very few of them married. For both of these employers, this decision was likely a combination of the popular moral arguments against factory work by married women, and the perception that a married woman’s home responsibilities could interfere with job performance more often than for single women. Factory Act limitations on hours were also problematic. In 1876, John Kenrick testified that making his female japanners go home at 6.00 p.m. “deprived the men of something like 2 and a half hours work, or a quarter day’s work every week.” Certainly, the opportunities were there at places like Kenrick’s, who hired women for tying up paper parcels, japanning the outsides of saucepans and kettles, doing light work with the hammer, working light machines and cutting out covers from sheet iron. By a large margin, these jobs went to single women. From this evidence, it would appear that employment opportunities for married women were fewer in Spon Lane than Ablewell East, but possibly equal or greater for unmarried women.

40 Husband William Cleghorn was a brush manufacturer, and would probably not have worked regularly in his wife’s occupation.
42 PP 1876 [C.1443] xxix.1, p 331.
This breakdown could be symptomatic of how larger employers, with ample labour at their disposal, imposed their own sense of moral authority over their spheres of influence. Kenrick felt that "it is better for unmarried women to go home as soon as possible in the daylight,"\(^{43}\) a stance echoed by Chance in their policy to dismiss women a quarter hour before the men "so as to avoid going out at the same time."\(^{44}\) This makes the hiring stance voiced by John Kenrick all the more interesting because he seemed to be saying that, regardless of marital status, women should be able to seek out their best (read, most remunerative) opportunities for work. This inconsistency points to a concession to local cultures of work which put married women largely off-limits for waged employment and built in workplace concessions to morality for unattached women. The response by the employer to this custom was to continue to hire women for 'gender-appropriate' work, but to restrict this employment to unmarried women.

Beyond gender, age had an important influence in determining who was the right person for the job. In hundreds of instances, large and small workplaces in both Spon Lane and Ablewell East sought to bring in young persons to perform rudimentary tasks, assistant duties or to sign on as an apprentice. In fact, as the nation learned during the Children’s Employment Commission enquiry, and in later enquiries dealing with the Factory Acts and sweating, child labour was critically important to workplaces regardless of size, sector or location. However, while we saw that it was evolving workplace cultures and moral arguments which limited opportunities for women (with some help from the Factory Acts), the Factory and Workshop Acts attempted to almost single-handedly tighten the clamp on unrestricted child labour practices.

For children under the age of 13, the Factory Extension Acts of 1867 effectively squeezed working opportunities down to a point where many workplaces had to make major adjustments. Small children had regularly been called upon to assist relatives and other workers in such places as ironfoundries, brass foundries, holloware works and leather factories, types of firms well represented in Ablewell East and Spon Lane. In

\(^{43}\) Ibid, p 331.  
\(^{44}\) Ibid, p 343.
evidence before the Children’s Employment Commission, eleven year old Job Carter, a
caster’s assistant to his brother at the Hill Top Foundry in West Bromwich, related that
he came in between 5.30 and 6.30 a.m. to prepare sand for castings. “I get my breakfast
in the casting shop. My brother does not come till 9.”45 A similar story was told by
Charles Curley, a 10-year old at Kenrick’s, whose duties ran to putting parts of hinges
together, picking up scrap, riddling sand, skimming metal off the top of a pot before
pouring and general cleaning. He started work at 6.00 a.m. and went until 6.30 p.m.,
taking two meals at the factory. Working with one man and one older boy, Curley took
home 3s. 4d. per week, paid by the man in charge of his work unit.46

Kenrick argued during the same enquiry that he did not see a need for additional
legislation because the hours were closely regulated already owing to the dependence on
fire. “If a man begins work as soon as he has finished eating, which perhaps he may do as
it is piece work, the boys who help him must begin too.”47 The owner of James and Co.
Ironfoundry in Walsall employed many boys who worked directly for the casters, mainly
for their fathers. “They are a shifting class. Their work does not require any skill.”

Apparently, very little skill was necessary for these assistant positions in casting work,
which would have been the primary need at Kenrick’s. On the other hand, a Walsall bit
maker stated during the investigation that boys were no use until they were 12 to 14,
“when they learn smoothing with files.”48 In these trades, the boys worked mainly for
factors and occasionally the manufacturers.

Because of the shortage of boy labour after implementation of the Factory Acts, the use
of apprenticeship agreements as a means of securing labour grew increasingly important,
although some trades were reporting drops in the number of new apprentices. These
agreements were usually signed and sealed when the boys were about 13 years of age,
and often ran for eight years to age 21. Certainly, any boy with a choice about whether or
not to be indentured would probably have thought it over very carefully. In 1889, when
John Callingswood of Walsall apprenticed his son Ernest to a local saddlers ironmonger

46 PP 1864 [3414.I] xxi, p 34.
47 PP 1864 [3414.I] xxi, p 33. This relationship between time and work-discipline in factory employment
was at the root of Thompson’s arguments in “Time, work discipline and industrial capitalism.”
to learn the trade of bridle cutting, the compensation started at 3s.6d., rose to four shillings at age 14, then climbed one shilling per year to age 21 (the agreement included board, lodging, apparel). By this age, most young men could have been earning up to a pound a week outside an indenture agreement.

This system continued to be an active part of the training program for firms like Kenrick's well into the 1890s, for instance reporting 35 apprentices under contract at the time of the 1892 Royal Commission on Labour. This trend persisted, despite the phasing out of certain job titles, such as turners, due to the introduction of machinery. The agreements set out terms and compensation, and included provision for a 60 pound payout at the end of the term and a number of performance conditions as follows:

"Do no damage to company;
Shall not waste goods;
Shall not buy or sell without licence of company;
Shall not play cards, dice, tables or other unlawful;
Shall not haunt taverns, alehouses during working hours."

In common with some of John Kenrick's comments about female labour, there was also a layer of moral authority being exercised over child labour. Many employers seemed to believe that an early working life was the best outcome for many of the children of the industrial revolution.

The youngest child encountered in this study who had a record of steady employment was George Jones, who started working at Kenrick's at age seven, or six years prior to his age-thirteen testimony before the Children's Employment Commission. As a filer and lathe turner, young George earned seven shillings per week in 1864, plus another three pennies sweeping for a woman. In his way, he was fulfilling fairly typical expectations for that time period – learning a trade which would lead to steady employment as an adult, while supplementing the family wage economy until he moved away from home. Once away from home, all the family and community expectations

49 Walsall Local History Centre, Indenture Agreement, Acc. 432.
51 Appendix 3 of footnote 47. There did not appear to be any restriction on social activities outside working hours.
52 PP 1862 [3414.l] xxii, p 34.
described above would be borne throughout his working lifetime, with success more or less dependent on a combination of hard work and luck. All told, by the year 1900, it would be expected that George Jones would have worked for 44 of his 51 years, but he would have seen workplace regulations in place for many years that would have prohibited other boys from having the same start to their working lives.

This section has examined those cultural forces at work inside and outside Ablewell East and Spon Lane that shaped the way people conducted their working lives within each neighbourhood. From national influences, like the Factory and Workshop Acts, to neighbourhood controls, such as which jobs were appropriate for women, the availability of opportunities to meet individual and family needs were ever shifting. Factor in the inevitability of trade-induced booms and busts and it is clear that a person’s working lifetime would be subject to many changes through the years. From the perspective of a lifetime at work, the next section narrows in on the experience of work inside the workplace. It is assumed at this stage that the need for work has been recognised, the job opportunities have been available and the right people found to fill the vacancies. The needs of industrial capital have marshalled together the cultural, structural, managerial and labour ingredients necessary to the production of goods.

INSIDE THE WORKPLACE: ENVIRONMENT, LABOUR AND POWER

Workers and management seemed willing to assert their authority over both space and time, often within the framework of traditional customs and rituals that pre-dated the modern industrial landscapes that were taking root in Walsall and West Bromwich. In pressing their positions on issues such as work hours, wages, working conditions, apprentices and even what to do with scrap iron, conflicts between labour and management were inevitable. On the other hand, there were many aspects of the working experience which were negotiated and settled as a matter of course, part of an ongoing dialogue of work. This section begins by looking at the physical and social conditions of different types of neighbourhood workplaces as a way of understanding what people might have seen and experienced as they walked through the workplace door. Following this, negotiation and power relationships within the Spon Lane and Ablewell East neighbourhoods are considered, attempting to explain how the organisation of production
and workplace labour relations were part and parcel of a prevailing industrial culture.

**Working Conditions - Physical and Social Cultures of Capital**

In Chapter 5, the site geographies for three different types of workplaces were discussed from the standpoint of how they occupied space within the industrial landscape of each neighbourhood. Each manifestation of industrial space was organised to facilitate the production process and thereby the flow of capital. Beyond this economic purpose, workplaces were also physical environments where people went to work, not to mention social arenas where others were also working. Nineteenth century workplaces were where people spent about half of their waking lives. What was behind the factory or workshop door when people turned up for work? From the somewhat limited evidence that survives from Spon Lane and Ablewell East, it is apparent that these were spaces of work and sociability, but also of differing levels of comfort and social closeness, sometimes subject to dangerous events. This subsection looks more closely at the conditions inside the workplace, and their effect on opportunities for on-the-job socialising and the potential for workplace accidents.

Working conditions varied by type and size of workplace. Chance’s glass works, the largest workplace around Spon Lane, was considered by contemporaries to be “very hot, and the workers wear as little as possible.”\(^{53}\) The amount of heat needed to keep glass in a molten state, the close proximity between worker and the heat source and the need to work quickly before it started to cool contributed to a stifling environment. Showing strong divisions of labour, the glass making room was a beehive of activity. Using a rake, skimmers would skim floating impurities from the vat of molten glass. Gatherers would be at work collecting lumps of molten glass on an iron pipe and conveying them to a blowing furnace using holds. At the hotter furnace, blowers would heat the glass even more, turning each lump constantly and then blowing it to specifications. This latter process was repeated until the desired shape was achieved. Specialists in cutting, flattening or shaping would take the product to its final form. The production process was constantly in motion, and even meals were taken inside the shops at the midway point of a turn. “As they stand about, it is not a very comfortable arrangement, but that is

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\(^{53}\) *Wednesbury and West Bromwich Advertiser*, 14 December 1872.
the only way we can manage it. We do not allow them to go outside the works during that time."\textsuperscript{54}

Inside the Spon Lane metals-based industries, it is likely that there would have been a similar dependence on a very regimented production process, involving strong divisions of labour and intra-group reliance on the use of heat and power. From many small, focused work groups involving a turner, an assistant and an apprentice (or other youth), holloware would be fired in successive ‘heats’ of the furnace, and then turned in preparation to hand over to the tinning shops. Under the supervision of a foreman and having as many as four assistants (younger men primarily), these shops would heat and apply the tinned metal coating to the cast products. From this shop, the items would proceed to the female-dominated japanning rooms where the final surface coat was added to complete the finished product. Packing and shipping completed the process. Each of these stages was dependent on the successful application of the others, although there likely would have been greater flexibility from hour to hour than would have been seen in the glass works.

These levels of time-dependent work tasks, which would have been typical of working conditions inside factories with great heat and power requirements, can be contrasted with an 1882 description of the largest of the Walsall leather works, John Leckie and Company. In a much more segregated working environment involving about 250 employees, separate shops existed for each stage of the production process. Curriers passed along dressed leather to the bridle and harness cutters, who were equipped with cutting machines making it possible for an attendant to cut nine or ten bridles per day. From the cutting shop, the pieces would go to an assembly room where “clean, well-dressed men prepare the cut leather for the female stitchers” on light work or for male stitchers on heavier saddle work. Completed items would be sorted and packed by female workers in the warehouse.\textsuperscript{55} Thus, while the mutuality of interdependent tasks was likewise a defining characteristic of the leather industry, fewer variables would have led to comparably greater margins for flexibility within the time frames of production.

\textsuperscript{54} PP 1876 [C.1443] xxix.1, p 343, testimony of John H. Chance. 
\textsuperscript{55} The Walsall Observer and South Staffordshire Chronicle, 20 May 1882.
Potentially, this type of working environment would have led to enhanced opportunities for on the job social relations to develop. Figure 6.1 reproduces an early photograph of the interior of a horse collar workshop. Eleven male workers, along with the tools of their trade, were arranged comfortably within this small workshop. Finished products hang on the walls of the room, most likely awaiting collection by a factor or manufacturer for payment by the unit. We saw in the last chapter that interiors such as these were usually about 13 to 15 feet in width, and of a variable length. Windows have been added to provide natural light. With workers seated close together in a smallish room, performing identical work within a relatively quiet and clean environment, it would not be difficult to imagine that group sociability existed at a very high level. It was exactly this type of working environment which led many to distance Walsall from the likes of West Bromwich and other Black Country towns. In 1862, a local surgeon noted that the town’s manufactures make it “as healthy as any town in England.”

Looking at some of the workplace accidents that occurred in both neighbourhoods, it becomes clear that the experience of work in the larger Spon Lane works demanded greater on the job awareness. Larger and faster machines, bigger and hotter furnaces and

56 pp 1864 [3414.1] xxii, p 31.
greater dependence on colleagues with variable skills translated to a heightened level of work-related accidents. Due diligence was expected of all workers. In the most catastrophic industrial calamity of the thirty years considered in this thesis, a tinning shop explosion at Kenrick’s in 1890 killed two workers and injured five more. The foreman, George Sweeney, and one of his tinners, Samuel Allen, both succumbed to massive burns caused by molten metal. At the inquest, it was learned that Sweeney had filled a water gauge on his own initiative, when he should have gone to the office between 9.00 and 9.30 a.m. or 2.00 and 2.30 p.m. to get specific orders to perform this task. William Ryland, the plant manager, testified that he had never known as capable a mechanic as Sweeney in that he was always trying some new scheme or experiment. Ryland surmised that the “deceased might have been overzealous to get the shop at work,” and concluded that he was an extraordinary man but very impulsive. In other words, Sweeney had overstepped his responsibility in his desire to not lose production time within his shop, time that accrued to money for his work group in the piece work system.

The undisguised message from the firm was that while creativity was a fine attribute, adherence to the letter of plant policies and regulations was critically important. Three years prior, a 15-year old was killed at Kenrick’s after falling down a shaft from an overhead tramway. Ryland’s arguments focused on the safety precautions taken by the firm, e.g., a notice was posted citing those people designated to work the lifts. Further, it was felt that the foreman should not have allowed any others to operate the machinery, and it had been confirmed by the local Factory Inspector that the lift could not be made any safer. What is clear from both incidents was that shop management was in the hands of those who occupied it, subject to adjustments from the established procedures when needed to expedite production. While this was probably common to all workplaces, the motivation to move forward came with higher potential consequences. The need for heightened attention to safety in these modern workplaces may have affected the ability to socialise at the works.

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57 Three separate inquest hearings were described in detail in The Free Press, 14 November 1890, 28 November 1890 and 12 December 1890.
58 This accident occurred two years after adoption of the Employer’s Liability Act. Kenrick’s was cleared of any blame or financial responsibility as a result of this event.
59 The Free Press, 19 November 1887.
Working conditions, and the environment of work itself, apparently had some influence on patterns of socialisation within the workplace. The degree to which workers were accountable for the minutes of their working days, the extent to which co-workers were dependent on them successfully carrying out their duties and the level of work-related vigilance were all factors in determining how much social communication was possible. However, it needs to be stressed that even at those workplaces least conducive to sociability, friendly connections would have been forged. From these spaces, there was a tendency to explore social activities outside the workplace, including some that would be brought before the magistrates for some minor offence. In 1877, for instance, eight Patent Nut and Bolt workers between the ages of 16 and 19 were charged with neglect of work for taking an unauthorised holiday, an activity which was most likely planned outside working hours.\footnote{The Free Press, 1 December 1877.}

**Working Days and Working Weeks**

When the Walsall Harness Manufacture Employers Association met and implemented a code of conduct in 1872, it included a regular work week. This was intended to prevent “the present system of men idling their time away at the beginning of each week, and working day and night at the end of the week.”\footnote{The Walsall Free Press and General District Advertiser, 18 May 1872.} The question of who controlled the time and week clocks was amongst the most contentious of issues between workers and management in industrialising Britain. Manifestations and consequences of negotiating seemingly contradictory cultural needs, such as Saint Monday and the factory bell, have been well documented from many parts of the country. In many cases, both persisted and thrived simply because there was not one encompassing (or destructive) model of industrialisation. “People no doubt like the rules under which they have worked for years.”\footnote{PP 1876 [C.1443] xxix.1, line 5402.} This subsection examines the traditional daily and weekly rhythms of production within both neighbourhoods, including efforts to manage change without foregoing jobs, profits or too much of prevailing community custom.

In common with many parts of the nation, the tenacity of Saint Monday continued to
frustrate those who preferred a more regimented work week. As late as 1890, the *Saddlers and Harness Makers Gazette* was reporting that more men were idling on Monday than in recent memory. The publication went on to note that it was not due to lack of work, but instead because recent rises meant that workers could now earn in five working days what it used to take six.\textsuperscript{63} Even greater concern was expressed about the time lost to the Walsall Wakes. In October of 1882, it was reported that there was unusually high pressure within the town’s workshops that week as there was much to be accomplished before the Wakes started. The fact that “no one can induce men to work Wake week until Thursday or Friday,” was accommodated by the small masters by ensuring that orders were filled prior to this community ritual.\textsuperscript{64} Six years later, the *Gazette* was still complaining about the loss of three to four days of work, “but we suppose they are quite accustomed to it, and therefore prepared to endure what they cannot cure.”\textsuperscript{65} Attempting to disturb the traditional rite would have likely cost more in the long term.

Of the two neighbourhoods being examined, it was Ablewell East which clung most securely to customary workplace practices. At least part of this reticence to change had to be rooted in the relative insecurity experienced by small workplaces of knowing from where the next lot of work was coming. When Joseph Kent, a Walsall spring bar maker, gave testimony at the 1862 Children’s Employment Commission, one of his primary points was that full employment tended to last about three months, followed by a slack time. Hours of work during the flush times were from 6.00 a.m. to 9.00 p.m., except Saturdays when they quit at 5.00 p.m. Not counting Sundays or Mondays but not discounting for meals, this schedule translated to a 71-hour week, at a time when factories were working 60- to 64-hour weeks.\textsuperscript{66} For instance, Henry Brace’s saddle factory in Walsall had a reported 62-hour week that same year. The tendency for small workshops, and especially leather outworkers, to set their own hours continued into the 1890s. Unfortunately, surviving records do not permit a comparison of these hours to the gradual scaling back of the work week for factory employment.

\textsuperscript{63} Reported in the 10 May 1890 edition of *The Walsall Observer and South Staffordshire Chronicle*.  
\textsuperscript{64} *The Walsall Observer and South Staffordshire Chronicle*, 7 October 1882.  
\textsuperscript{65} Reported in *The Walsall Observer and South Staffordshire Chronicle*, 6 October 1888.  
\textsuperscript{66} PP 1864 [3414.I] xxii, p 30.
Due primarily to the production-based interdependence of many jobs in the Spon Lane workplaces, and the greater likelihood of being able to supply steady employment, factory owners had less respect for local traditions of work and play time. Timekeeping systems and set hours for starting and ending work, taking meals and even closing the plant became commonplace by the 1880s. Part of the reason was attributed to numbers of employees at some workplaces. Early in 1880, a Salter’s manager sat down with older employees to explain a new system for keeping track of hours. In the manager’s handwritten notes for this meeting, he cites the large increase in the number of employees as making it impossible to keep correct time under the old system. The other reason given to the workers was that greater competition and reduced orders in some areas had made it “absolutely necessary to be stricter as to time and working expenses.” No overtime would be paid except with a note which would be surrendered to the watchman as they left the plant. Further, all workers would now have an employee number and time card, whether they were piece or day workers. The management must have been aware how radical this scheme would appear to the veteran employees. In closing, the unnamed manager told them that “the new system may seem difficult and unnecessary to some but with patience believe they will be for our mutual benefit. Of course exceptions will be made for a few of old workmen and invalids to whom tickets will be given.”

Also announced at that date was a revised work schedule which placed tight controls over time at Salter’s workplace. The doors to the plant would open at 5.50 a.m. and close at 7.05 p.m., with meal times to ring at 9.30 a.m. and 2.00 p.m. (with doors closing five minutes past each bell). Kenrick’s employee Arthur Wharton remembered that firm’s tower bell sounding each morning at 5.55 a.m., with the gates closing at 6.03. Breakfast went from 8.30 to 9.00 a.m. and lunch from 1.00 to 2.00 p.m. About half the workers ate in the plant and the other half went home. Those that ate in sometimes had their

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68 R. A. Church (1969) *Kenricks in Hardware*, p 279. This recollection from 1899 matches the hours provided by John A. Kenrick in his 1876 testimony before the Commission charged with investigating the working of the Factory Acts. That these hours had not changed during this period is indicative of an ingrained work day.
69 In her study of the London and North-Western Railway Company works in Crewe, Drummond found that workers preferred to eat in their workshops with their immediate work unit, rather than go to the company
meals delivered by younger children in the family. These narrow parameters of industrial time as measured within the larger Spon Lane workplaces were consistent with factory floor cultures described in the previous section. Actual time to perform individual tasks, such as the length of time it might take to perform one heat, was no doubt a factor of the skill and character of individual work groups, but it was enough for the management to ensure that people were at their stations. At Kenrick’s, each foreman kept a ‘Lost Time Account’ to account for days or parts of days lost by individual employees. When it came time to pay a work group leader for the production of that unit, this account would be used to calculate deductions in pay based on attendance.70 Salter’s had a similar system that recorded time in fifteen minute increments, as measured within five minutes of each increment.71

Given this emerging degree of control of time spent during the working day, it follows that authority over the working week was also contested during this period. In fact, one of the significant changes that occurred across England during the late nineteenth century was the steady reduction in the number of working hours in the week, especially for factory workers.72 From peaks of 60 or more hours per week in the 1860s, to a 53-hour week granted in 1892 at Patent Nut and Bolt, the larger workplaces within Spon Lane and Ablewell East kept pace with national trends, usually without threatened repercussions. Occasionally, these concessions were accompanied by a comment that indicate some misgivings, such as Chance’s hope that “men would do as much work in 54 hours as they do currently.”73 The only evidence of a dispute was in 1872 when an amalgamation of Walsall bridle cutters, black saddlers and harness makers requested a drop from 62 to 56 hours per week. Amazingly, at least to the trade members, the employers countered with 57 hours, and “it was scarcely to be believed that for the sake of one hour per week, the employers would risk a rupture with their men.”74 After a joint conference, the 56-hour week was granted the following week. This was broken down into 10 hours on Monday to Friday and 6 hours on Saturday, at least on paper a
concession to the employers to create a more predictable work week.

In making concessions to price or hours, some workers even went out of their way to advertise the largesse of their firm. In 1872, the employees of the Summit Buckle Works in Walsall published a testimonial to the firm's owner thanking him "for the kindness in conceding 3.5 hours per week, thereby making an average of 9.5 hours per day; this we take as an especial liberality, considering the number of day workers employed."75 The same money for less work, at least for day workers, was no doubt considered a plum concession. Similarly, during a price dispute by Walsall saddlers in the early 1890s, a time of intense competition for skilled labour, "The Brown Saddlers at Messrs. Fairbanks, Lavender and Sons" wrote to the Observer that the firm had "voluntarily made an advance to their employees in the brown saddle department of 10 percent on the book prices and 10 percent of day workers wages."76 More often, however, it was the works managers themselves who went out of their way to advertise their labour-friendly acts.

This section has made it clear that in exercising control over working days and weeks, it was not surprisingly the larger workplaces that were most able to institute tight controls over work time and hours worked. For them, at least a portion of their negotiating authority was being handled on a nationwide level, involving all levels of trade organisations and workplaces from a wide range of industrial sectors. Regional variations in work day and work week were being eroded as the century drew to a close, and it was certainly just as important to these factories to develop specific local rules to ensure predictable performance and attendance. Certainly some exceptions did persist. In granting holidays, for instance, Kenrick's granted workers 18½ days of play in late June and early July to allow time for stocktaking, repairs and whitewashing. On the whole, however, both management and labour in smaller workplaces continued to have more flexibility in setting work schedules, although general trends seemed to follow what the large works were doing.

75 The Walsall Free Press and General District Advertiser, 23 March 1872.
76 The Walsall Observer and South Staffordshire Chronicle, 11 January 1890.
Workplace Behaviour and Labour Relations

In Chapter 2, it was noted that one of the themes that dominates the historiography of Black Country labour was a region-wide failure to organise around work-related issues, leading to an interpretation of acceptance and complacency. Certainly, if the number of strike actions was used as a barometer of worker solidarity, then the Ablewell East and Spon Lane workplaces could be viewed as spaces of acquiescence. What formal labour actions existed tended to be brief and generally revolved around a dispute over the price list, an endemic problem in a region dominated by piece rather than day wage rates. However, focusing on these major events of unrest obscures an ongoing effort by workers and management to negotiate the terms and conditions of labour as they occurred. Perhaps acknowledging the link between continuing employment and economic comfort, errant behaviour was largely controlled through a prevailing workplace culture and collection actions were few and far between. Periods of labour peace over prices and hours far outweighed incidents of labour action, but a workforce largely content was not considered newsworthy.

Anecdotal information from the local newspapers and court reporting showed a strong inclination to identify and discourage the activities of known workplace troublemakers. Both organised labour and working colleagues were quick to support the ‘respectable’ element and just as quickly to chastise the ‘roughs.’ As an example, the Hame Makers Employee Association in Walsall concurred actively with the prosecution of Solomon Lowbridge, one of their own who had allegedly corrupted a young man by taking him on a “spree” lasting for one week in 1872. Lowbridge was dubbed the “corrupter general” of the workmen.77 That same year in Spon Lane, two Patent Nut and Bolt apprentices were singled out as the “pests of the works” for their role in an assault and plant vandalism.78 The following year, in an incident at the Alpha Tube Works, John Stubbs was charged with assaulting Lawrence Melville, when Stubbs retaliated against Melville’s perceived aggression by punching him in the mouth. At his hearing, Stubbs was represented as one of the quietest workmen at the works, maintained an aged mother and did not associate with the rougher workers. According to testimony, this behaviour was so unusual that he

77 The Walsall Free Press and General District Advertiser, 24 August 1872.
78 Wednesbury and West Bromwich Advertiser, 9 November 1872.
was singled out for harassment and three co-workers were called in to confirm the bullying. Stubbs’s defence was paid for out of a subscription initiated by his colleagues and the magistrate was convinced that he was not the aggressor. These isolated incidents provide some support for the idea that workers were expected to conform to workplace norms, or risk being ostracised as troublemakers.

Individual workers may have come in all shapes and sizes, but it was within the production unit where the rules of acceptable behaviour were set down. This was especially true when the amount in one person’s pay packet was dependent on how others in the work unit performed. An 1871 incident at the Alpha Tube Works illustrates the interdependence of workers within a work unit, and the potential effect of protest by a recalcitrant individual. A gas tube welder was charged with neglecting work. As a consequence, “a number of the other workmen had been compelled to leave off and had been put into considerable expense and inconvenience.” The works management paid the 20 shilling fine, deducting the amount from the welder’s wages. In another example eight years later at Chance’s, seven pipe warmers, all aged 20 to 24, claimed that they were not being paid enough after an adjustment in the piece work compensation schedule. The group refused to work one day, “putting others out of work,” and the company lost between 25 and 30 tonnes of coal. Every member of this impromptu action was sacked which no doubt was a relief to their fellow operatives who were most affected by the action.

Similarly, in the small Walsall workshops, the reliability of all workers was an assumed trait, although there were many instances when operatives were brought up for ‘neglect of work.’ The specifics of some of these cases provide some insights into how power was managed inside these small workplaces, and the different strategies used by employers to ensure steady performance. Some small workshops seemed to have written terms and conditions of employment, along with contracts which guaranteed performance over a certain period at a given rate. Joseph Proffitt, a small Union Street saddle tree maker, appeared several times before the local magistrates on matters relating to neglect of work

79 The Walsall Observer and South Staffordshire Chronicle, 3 May 1873.
80 The Walsall Observer and General District Advertiser, 25 March 1871.
81 The Free Press, 1 February 1879.
by his employees. His enfant terrible was Webster Wright, who began work at Proffitt’s in 1870. The first charge of neglect of work occurred in November of 1871, when Wright led a group of eight fellow employees out on strike following an unsuccessful petition for higher wages. Proffitt argued that the defendants had all willingly signed a 12-month contract, a counterpoint viewed favourably by the local magistrate as he fined the group of eight. Just over two years later, in February of 1874, Wright and another saddle tree maker were charged with leaving work before their terms of engagement were completed. Apparently, a second contract between Proffitt and Wright, this time for two years, was signed on May 31, 1872, tying the latter to the firm until that date in 1874. In late April, Wright was again charged with neglect, this time following an attempt to stretch Saint Monday all the way to Wednesday. After another fine, Wright seems to have left Proffitt’s employ at the end of May and no more was heard of the situation.

Controlling workplace attendance and behaviour was much more difficult when it involved workers who were essentially free to shop themselves around the labour marketplace. For instance, Ann Oakley’s neglect of work charge in 1872 stemmed from not showing up for her bridle cutter job on Easter Tuesday because, as she testified, she had been dismissed by the foreman. The owner, who was making the charge, responded that he was the only one who had that authority. In the end, Oakley had already found work at another establishment for higher pay and did not object to paying the one shilling fine. This lack of workplace loyalty seemed to have some connection to the popularity of paying by the piece. In an 1873 neglect of work case in Walsall, a brass dresser claimed that he was a piece worker and therefore not bound to give notice. The exact same argument was attempted in 1890 by Samuel Bluitt, a springhook maker working for piece wages at Venables’ shop at 45 Selborne Street. Bluitt claimed the 14-day notice requirement did not apply to pieceworkers. Interestingly, Venables asked Charles Sleigh, another of his pieceworkers, to step in and finish Bluitt’s work but that “he refused to finish another man’s work.” While neither magistrate accepted the pieceworker argument, the perception within the workplace that workers who were paid by the unit

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82 The Walsall Observer and General District Advertiser, 11 November 1871.
83 The Walsall Observer and South Staffordshire Chronicle, 7 February 1874.
84 The Walsall Observer and South Staffordshire Chronicle, 2 May 1874.
85 The Walsall Free Press and General District Advertiser, 2 April 1872.
86 The Walsall Observer and South Staffordshire Chronicle, 5 April 1873.
were freer to set their own terms of work persisted throughout the study period. Sleigh’s reaction to being asked to finish Bluitt’s work was consistent with someone who had greater loyalty to his own efforts as a free agent springhook maker, rather than to identify with Venables and the larger workplace.87

On the whole, labour and employers tended to organise around their trade, even in the large Spon Lane workplaces. For instance, it was more likely that Kenrick’s management would associate with other holloware manufacturers and not with Patent Nut and Bolt down the street, as it would have been for the turners within Kenrick’s to join with other turners rather than other trades in the same plant. Concerns about work and actions to force change were thus enacted in craft terms, which recognised the highly specific divisions of labour in both communities. For instance, when the harness manufacturers decided to adopt the code of conduct for dealing with operatives, it was critical for them that certain agreements be taken within the trade so one employer could not grab an unfair advantage. In this way, every harness maker would theoretically be subject to the following guarantees: fourteen days notice for quitting or termination; one month notice for reduction or advance in wages; and implementation of a regular work week. For similar reasons, workers found it beneficial to establish trade-specific standards to avoid the cut-throat labour practices seen in sweated trades such as chain and nail production. This type of organisation was encouraged by the Midland Counties Trades Federation, and was epitomised in Spon Lane by the Nut and Bolt Makers arm led regionally by Richard Juggins.88 There were limits, however, to organisation along craft lines. When the Walsall chasers met in 1874 to form a local society, the council advised them to join an existing group simply because there were so few of them.

As noted above, collective actions affecting workers and workplaces in Spon Lane or Ablewell East were not common. The first event of consequence involved the nut and bolt workers at Patent Nut and Bolt (Stour Valley Works) on Grice Street. At an early joint meeting held on 15 January 1872 in Smethwick, but including members from West

87 The Walsall Observer and South Staffordshire Chronicle, 6 September 1890.
88 This group was formed in 1870 when fees were charged for a new Young Person’s Certificate of Employment whenever a new job was acquired. It was a five month action which resulted in a drop in the certificate fee from 3s to 1s.
Bromwich and Darlaston, Juggins read out the following statement reputedly to be signed by prospective new employees of Patent Nut and Bolt:

"In consideration of your employing me at your works, I hereby agree to work for you at the prices, and to observe the rules of ‘Bolt, Nut, Rivet and Railway Fastening Manufactories Association’ which prices and rules are set forth in the prices list which is now posted in your works. And I declare I am not a member of the ‘Nut and Bolt Makers Protection and Death Society of Darlaston, Smethwick and District’; and that I am not a member of any other society or union of bolt and nut makers, and that I will not become a member of or join any such society or union as along as I remain in your employ." 89

Not surprisingly, this type of contract, obviously meant to prevent collective action, was poorly received by the workers. Over the next two months, several attempts were made to reconcile the price lists proposed by the Society and the Manufactories Association, with very little movement by either side. By the end of March, a Smethwick firm had agreed unilaterally to open on the workers’ terms, and a week later the Society countered with reduced prices for certain small bolts. By May, there were widespread desertions reported from the labour ranks and more factories were working out modified agreements with their own workers. 90 The strike was called off finally on 11 May 1872.

As the first major strike during the period of study, the 1872 action concluded in a way which would be characteristic of labour unrest during the late Victorian era. 91 While solidarities were evident along trade and craft lines, for both masters and workers, it was apparent that loyalties to family, neighbourhood and workplace began to undermine a geography of protest which extended beyond the local. Workers drifted back to work and individual deals were cut between manufacturers and their work forces, both strong indicators that cultural pressures were at work from within the neighbourhood. A similar trend was seen in the 1883 ironworkers’ strike which included workers from Bridge, Gill and Bridge and Patent Nut and Bolt. At the beginning of the action in July, operatives from the former voted 50 to 5 in favour of adopting a new price list, far in excess of the

89 Reported in detail in the *Wednesbury and West Bromwich Advertiser*, 20 January 1872. Juggins referred to this statement as a “shame and disgrace.”
90 *Wednesbury and West Bromwich Advertiser*, 4 May 1872.
91 For a geographical perspective on industrial action since 1750, see A. Charlesworth, et al. (1996) *An Atlas of Industrial Protest in Britain, 1750 to 1990*. 213
nearly 50-50 split when considering the entire membership. Despite this overwhelming show of initial support from within one workplace, widespread drift back to work was reported by early August at both locations, with the strike officially called off in the middle of the month.

The importance of neighbourhood and industrial culture in shaping labour relations was perhaps best seen in the 1890 holloware turners strike. In the more than thirty years of Kenrick’s history considered in this thesis, this was the one and only incident of collective action against the firm. Church’s business history of the firm places the blame for this unprecedented labour disquiet on the rapid growth in numbers of employees. His contention that the vast numbers of new workers strained the company’s ability to instill loyalty in the work force may have some merit, although the decision to strike also seems bound up with the introduction in 1889 of new moulding machinery which led to selective redundancies. The job titles most affected by this change were the turners and tinniers, who had manually fired and shaped holloware prior to that date. On 30 January 1890, 63 Kenrick’s turners went out on strike over issues of apprenticeship, distribution of swarf and prices.

The action of this relatively small number of employees threw 200 men, 250 boys and 100 girls out of work, and seemed to hit the heart of the community, and particularly Spon Lane. Only two weeks after the start of the strike, the Liberal newspaper, the West Bromwich Free Press, complained of the “war between capital and labour,” on the same day that 250 Kenrick’s workers gathered at the plant to consider proposals to get turners and masters together. The tinniers and casters offered to mediate a solution to the impasse. However, “play on” was the quick summary from late February and early March, with the strike eventually coming to a close on 19 March 1890. The editor of The Free Press called it “one of the most stupid strikes” he had ever witnessed, and Kenrick’s

92 The Free Press, 21 July 1883.
94 This was out of a regional total of 360 striking workers.
95 Swarf were the end pieces of metal not used during the manufacturing process. The workers wanted credit for the amount of swarf they saved during the production process.
97 The Free Press, 14 February 1890. The newspaper noted that the longer the strike went on, the more it would “engender bad feelings between masters and men.”
almost apologetically perfunctory comment, “the men were beaten, and returned to work on the employer’s terms,” was perhaps acknowledgement that a long era of labour peace had ended.98 Less than two years later, these same turners were issued the notices of termination with the benefits package described above.

Do the aspects of workplace behaviour and labour relations discussed in this section lead to a conclusion that workplace solidarity was more pronounced in the large Spon Lane workplaces than the small Ablewell East workshops? Certainly, the decision to pursue collective action was by itself a signal that some level of solidarity had been achieved. Further, the tendency for craft allegiances to be eroded over time by pressures from within local cultures of work would also suggest it was possible. It may have been that the differences in workplace size and duration of employment simply provided more opportunities for labour closeness to develop, not only inside the workplace but also in the neighbourhood surrounding it. Neighbours, especially families not striking but affected by the action, could have been very persuasive in coaxing workers back into the plant. In the predominantly small master economy of Ablewell East, family and neighbourhood expectations may have been just as high, but workplace expectations may have been limited to being a steady hand.

CONCLUSION

This chapter began with the assumption that there was not just one labour experience that defined industrialisation in the Black Country. While it could be argued that capitalism had been very effective in helping individuals and families associate survival with the need to work for a living, every other aspect of a working life had a local flavour. From the way that people found jobs to what opportunities were available to them, from what went on inside the workplaces to how a work week was organised, these decisions were in essence choices negotiated inside and outside the work environment. Inevitably, labour and management did not see eye to eye on every issue, just as surely as some people worked with and others resisted the opportunities presented within each neighbourhood. An 1872 Walsall Free Press editorial about local labour concluded, “all are going in for more money at less work,” perhaps an appropriate reminder that conflict

98 The Free Press, 21 March 1890.
and negotiation were at the heart of the work experience.
Chapter 7

WORKING NEIGHBOURHOODS
Industrial Culture and Local Social Relations

The neighbourhood view of the workplace could take many forms. Several perspectives on the role of the workplaces in nineteenth century towns have been examined in previous chapters, as occupiers of space in nineteenth century towns, as places that matched employment opportunities with labour's need and as centres of production and power, both large and small. In particular, Chapters 5 and 6 attempted to answer the first part of the question posed in Chapter 1, how did industry learn from the community, more specifically the neighbourhoods of Spon Lane and Ablewell East? We have seen that customs and tradition within each neighbourhood had a significant voice in shaping industrialisation, one that spoke quite loudly and insistently. From adding on workshops behind new residential terraces in Ablewell East to sustaining the inertia of female employment practices in Spon Lane, the characteristics and form of industry were in part constructed from the raw cultural material supplied by the community.

Chapter 7 turns the gaze around from the workplace into the surrounding neighbourhood, and attempts to answer part two of the question: how did the community learn from industry? Just as it is erroneous to view industrial capital as effectively erasing or dominating local workplace cultures, so it would be incorrect to say that the community did not have to do its share of adapting to new ways of doing business. In their 1981 investigation of Victorian 'communities,' Dennis and Daniels cite the latter's finding in literature that "the role of workplaces in fostering community consciousness depended less on whether the workers lived nearby than on the state of industrial relations."¹ This seems an appropriate springboard for considering several aspects of the relationship between the working spaces of Ablewell East and Spon Lane and the late Victorian neighbourhoods in which many working lives were played out. Starting with an analysis of how workplace cultures shaped residential spaces in each neighbourhood, the chapter examines several questions of neighbourhood space, both public and private. Is it

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possible, for instance, to suggest how neighbourhood residents viewed industrial space as measured through events of accommodation and/or resistance? Further, to what extent did the characteristic industrial social relations within each neighbourhood influence people’s lives away from the workplaces?

**LIVING NEXT DOOR TO INDUSTRY**

Capturing the experience of living in close proximity to nineteenth century industrial workplaces presents an elusive target. While it is certainly not difficult to use literary and artistic depictions of smoking chimneys, dirty streets or clanging production processes to conjure the direst of conclusions, it is again the extraordinary occurrences which figure most prominently in contemporary records. West Bromwich-born novelist David Christie Murray described a series of pit bank chimneys as “a cluster of giants lying in a rough semi-circle, smoking enormously long and thin cigars.”

Likewise, Francis Brett Young wrote that “the human fauna of Mawne Heath resembles its vegetation, being wiry and black and writhe.” However, granting that individual tolerance for environmental degradation caused by the by-products of industry was a personal reaction, it is probably safe to say that local viewpoints would have run the gamut from horrified to accepting. Most residents of the Spon Lane and Ablewell East neighbourhoods were probably content to accept industry as part of their everyday landscape, although it would be difficult to argue a convincing case using contemporary source materials. This section considers three aspects of how each neighbourhood adapted to the presence of industry as a neighbour to labour, and the degree to which neighbourhood residents perceived residential spaces as somehow different from industrial spaces. Specifically, by looking at the construction of residential space within each neighbourhood, the interpenetration of public and private spaces, and how people viewed the environmental consequences of industry, it may be possible to suggest something of the experience of living next door.

**Neighbourhood Residential Spaces**

A key source missing from both the Walsall and West Bromwich neighbourhoods is a
clear picture of who worked where. If it was possible to refer to lists of people employed
at Kenrick's, Patent Nut and Bolt, the Alpha Tube Works or any of the smaller Walsall
firms, these names could be cross-referenced at least every ten years through census
information, or even more often in cases of the surviving rate book evidence. This
analysis could reveal such conclusions as residential persistence by type of workplace,
distance to work\(^4\) or spatial concentrations of workers exhibiting a particular skill or
workplace. Without this information, arguments that link residential spaces with
industrial spaces become much more speculative, especially in the case of Spon Lane.
While it may be possible to confirm through the census or rate books that many of
Walsall's back garden workshops were operated by the occupier of the associated
residence, no such clear connection can be made from the listed occupations of Spon
Lane residents. For example, while Patent Nut and Bolt was the only factory of its kind
in the neighbourhood, another large such works was just over a mile away in Smethwick,
and certainly within walking distance for local residents. Only Chance's glass factory
was one of a kind, making anyone listed as a glass worker a fairly certain employee of
that firm. This section looks at residential spaces within Ablewell East and Spon Lane
with an eye toward understanding their relationship to industrial spaces and, where
possible, toward linking their occupants with each neighbourhood's industrial culture.

Chapter 5 highlighted patterns of consumption of space through time in both
neighbourhoods that in many ways confirmed and consolidated trends already at work by
1800. The canalside industrial precinct so clearly delineated in Spon Lane of the 1890s
still showed evidence of residential spaces as late as the 1870s. On the north side of
Union Street, however, residential uses were gaining, with several industrial and
retail/service exceptions, nearly exclusive rights along and behind Parliament, Neal,
Lower Trinity, Glover, Kenrick, Maria and Green Streets. Conversely, residential
development within Ablewell East was very clearly a reproduction of the integrated
industrial landscape that had characterised the town for decades. Brand new streets, such
as Lime, Selborne, Richmond, Burleigh and Walsingham were being fronted with terrace

\(^4\) Green has shown the interpretive possibilities that result from good employment information in his
"Distance to work in Victorian London: a case study of Henry Poole, Bespoke Tailors" (1988) *Business
History*, vol. 30, no. 2, pp 179-194.
housing interrupted occasionally by one of the new smaller factories. Back garden workshops remained common features of the neighbourhood. From a wider neighbourhood perspective, both locations were clearly under the influence of a locally-driven industrial culture.

Moving from the neighbourhood level to individual streets and houses, was there a more direct link between workplaces and residences? Probably the most clearly drawn of connections between a Spon Lane area factory and worker housing were the 19 houses owned by Chance Brothers at the northeast corner of Spon Lane and Union Street. As noted in Chapter 3, these dwellings were purchased by the firm in 1846 specifically to house skilled workers from mainly Belgium and France, and the area became known locally as 'French Row.' The company sold this block of homes in 1877, but the 1871 census provides strong evidence that these residential spaces were for the exclusive use of glass works employees and their families. All of the heads of household for the eight properties fronting on Union Street, which included three women (one glass gatherer’s widow, one glass sorter and one glass picker), had glass-related occupations. Further, of the 13 working age children listed for these addresses, 12 were working for or apprenticed to Chance’s. However, only the Herbert household had family members born abroad (in Paris), so it can be assumed that Chance’s plan had succeeded in using foreign labour to colonise glassmaking skills in an English neighbourhood with no cultural antecedents for such skill.

By the 1881 census, or four years after the date when French Row ceased to be owned by the Chance firm, only two of the eight Union Street properties housed glass workers. Obviously, having no direct link to the workplace placed these dwellings into the broader housing market available to all potential occupiers. But this focused conclusion discloses only a portion of the residential geography of Chance’s workers. The firm had over 1,800 employees in 1871, and the Spon Lane neighbourhood as a whole was a popular

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5 Additional background on these workers and their relationship with the firm can be found in J. F. Chance (1919) A History of the Firm of Chance Brothers and Co., Glass and Alkali Manufacturer, p 118 and J. E. Jephcott (1944) "Old West Bromwich," 4 February 1944, Article 47.
6 J. F. Chance (1919) reported the results of an August 1871 company census that counted 1,309 men over the age of 18, 99 women and girls and 392 boys under 18.
residential choice for many of this number. Of the 666 individuals living on Houghton, Hall South, Union, Glover, Kenrick, Maria and Green Streets listing occupations in the 1871 census, nearly 1 in 4 (23%), or 151 men, women and children, had a glass-related job title. This represented nearly 10% of the entire Chance Brothers payroll. In many instances, entire families (or at least those members reporting an occupation) were employed at Chance's. For instance, the male head of the Pendrons family on Glover Street was a glass crate maker, and his working offspring (ages 20, 19 and 17, all males) showed two glassmakers and one glass crate maker. In a female headed household on Union Street, Ellen Lunn (48) listed herself as a glass sorter and her three sons (ages 21, 20 and 17) were labourers in the glass works. Clearly, the neighbourhood residential space in 1871 Spon Lane was a favourite locale for Chance Brothers employees to find housing, with the short distance to work a primary attraction.

Ten years later in 1881, only 59 out of 635 of those listing occupations on these streets, or slightly less than 10%, could be connected with employment at the glass works. By 1891, the numbers had dropped even further, to 51 out of 655 of those listing occupations (7.7%). Certainly a significant percentage of the apparent shift in residential choice by Chance's workers away from the neighbourhood could be attributed to the selling off of the Spon Lane and Union Street houses. For instance, Union Street was home to 76 glass workers in 1871, dropping to 18 and 21 respectively in the next two census years. Within the cultural life of the factory, the existence of the Chance's enclave in Spon Lane may have acted as its own social magnet, drawing co-workers with housing needs to known streets. This argument is given some credence by the presence of nine additional glass workers living within the first eight residential addresses west of the Union Street factory-owned housing. The legal disintegration of this residential space in 1877, which had represented a uniform connection to the workplace, would have gradually loosened intimate knowledge of this area within work units at Chance's, resulting in fewer new employees moving to Spon Lane.

However, the selling off of factory-owned housing does not explain the less dramatic though significant drop in glass workers on Glover (42 to 28 to 17) or Green (14 to 6 to
3) Streets. To understand why this might have occurred, it is useful to look at the commensurate growth in holloware workers within the Spon Lane neighbourhood as a whole and individual streets in particular. It will be recalled from Chapter 6 that Kenrick's experienced tremendous growth in plant size and employee numbers from the late 1870s through the 1890s. With an increase of about 500 operatives during this period to a total of 1,217 employees in 1892, the firm was certainly smaller than Chance's, but clearly the largest of the factories north of the canal. This influx of new workers had to find housing, and the census enumerators' books from 1881 and 1891 would suggest that many lived in the streets directly north of the factory. Of those residents on the streets cited above, the number specifically listing the word 'holloware' in their census response grew from 36 in 1871, to 59 in 1881 and to 65 in 1891. As a growth factor, the number of holloware workers living in Spon Lane housing grew at a nearly identical rate as the number of new employees hired at Kenrick's during the same period (1.7 and 1.8 times respectively). Most likely, many other workers from the firm also lived in the neighbourhood, but their presence is impossible to track from their listed occupations.

Returning to Glover Street, the comparison in numbers between glass and holloware workers shifted from a 4 to 1 superiority of the former over the latter in 1871, to a 2 to 1 predominance of holloware operatives in 1891. Again, this tendency for streets to develop workplace-based (as opposed to occupationally-based) concentrations in the local geography of housing, even without a direct connection to the factory through ownership, suggests that residential choices may have been stimulated within the social context of the working day. Occasionally, the local newspapers did print classified advertisements for housing availability, but the ability to secure this type of information from co-workers is recognition again that the workplace was social as well as economic space.

Connecting other households within Spon Lane to individual workplaces is more problematic than with Chance's or Kenrick's where the product lines for each company

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7 As reported in the 1892 Royal Commission on Labour [C.6795.vii] xxxvi.533, p 202.
8 This included moulders, turners, tinners, casters, japanners, polishers, cover makers and warehouse workers.
could be linked with a stated occupation. There is some evidence to suggest that Patent Nut and Bolt workers were also scattered throughout the local housing market. In 1871, 45 neighbourhood residents used either the word ‘bolt’ or ‘screw’ in their occupational title, of which 29 were female.9 This number had dropped to 13 by 1891, with only five females in that total. Given the proximity to the canalside factory and the fact that no other neighbourhood firms specialised in these products, it would be expected that the vast majority of these individuals worked at local Patent Nut and Bolt works.

In one of only two examples in Spon Lane of a small industrial works operated by a small master with an associated residence (John Hall’s zinc works on Spon Lane was the other), George and Sarah Jewell’s shoe tip factory at 74 Glover Street persisted throughout the study period. The couple were 27 and 25 respectively in 1871, with two sons, William, 5, and George, 1. Ten years later, the enumerator noted that the small firm was employing one man and eleven women at the Glover Street location, and William, then 15, was also listed as a shoe tip manufacturer. Just west of the workshop, at 60 Glover Street, Hannah Fletcher, a 60-year old widow, listed her skill as making tips for bootmakers. By 1891, middle son George Jewell had married and moved next door to 72 Glover Street where he, and his two brothers still at home, William (by then 25 years of age) and Arthur (13), continued to work for their father. Fletcher (who had moved to 94 Glover just east of the shoe tip works) no longer listed an occupation, but her daughter Elizabeth, 21, named her occupation as a shoe tip polisher and a 50-year old sister living with the family was described as a shoe tip presser. As we have seen, this example of an industrial land use integrated into predominantly residential space was anachronistic within Spon Lane, but it is important to recognise that capital remained adaptable in even the most segregated of landscapes.

The residential connections seen in Jewell’s small shoe tip workshop provide an appropriate segue into an examination of Ablewell East’s residential spaces. In a neighbourhood replete with workshops and domestic outworkers, it would be expected that the local geography of housing would be reflective of the industrial character

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9 According to the 1876 Report into the Working of the Factory and Workshop Acts, Patent Nut and Bolt had about 800 employees in its West Bromwich works as of that date.
described in Chapter 5. Two major distinctions stand out between the two
neighbourhoods. First, Ablewell East grew as a result of the annexation of additional
land and the construction of new streets, as opposed to the infilling trend seen in Spon
Lane. The second difference, which is related to the first, can be detected in examining
the surviving rate books from this period. Development patterns influenced the
construction of residential space in each neighbourhood and, as a result, shaped the
ability of workers to afford housing along certain streets.

In terms of valuation for dwellings, each street within Spon Lane was represented by a
wide range of rateable values. For instance, 1872 values on the north side of Union Street
between Spon Lane and Lower Trinity ranged from £4 to nearly £8, broken up into
blocks of three to ten houses, usually under separate ownership. This pattern is best
explained by the residential growth pattern described in Table 3.2, with construction
occurring in spurts over an extended period of time, normally by different builders. No
street in Spon Lane was significantly different from any other in terms of rateable values,
and the census occupational information confirms that higher income Kenrick’s or
Chance’s workers shared residential streets with lower paid general labourers or nut and
bolt workers. In contrast, the poor rate geography of Ablewell East, where there was a
relatively clear line between the older and newer parts of the neighbourhood, exhibited
rateable values on average about £2 to £3 lower along streets such as Pool, Bank and
Bott. For example, the 1893 residential values for Lime Street were, with several
exceptions, all rated at £7 or £8. Pool Street dwellings, on the other hand, were rated as
low as £2 and with most in the £4 to £5 range.

The extent to which the cultural geography of housing in Ablewell East was influenced
by this pattern can be measured by comparing occupational statistics in the older and
newer portions of the neighbourhood. Table 7.1 examines seven separate categories of
employment along eight streets, four (Box, Pool, Bank and Bott) that were substantially
occupied by 1865 and four (Eldon, Burleigh, Selborne and Lime) that developed
primarily between 1872 and 1895. The first column provides an occupational breakdown
for 220 of the 393 individuals in the older part of the neighbourhood who stated a job
title in the 1871 census.\textsuperscript{10} As noted in Chapter 4, the predominant Walsall trade up until 1881 was in the traditional small metals manufacturing sector. As might be expected during this decade, employment numbers in these trades outnumbered the leather-related occupations by 127 to 93, a significant number but not so large as to ignore the coming shift toward dominance by leather manufacturing. What is worth noting was that the proportions and numbers of people living in the older portion of Ablewell East, and employed in small metals and leather manufacture, were almost identical in the two census years. Apart from a drop in small metals employment, and a rise in the number of filers and polishers (almost exclusively women and children), there was remarkable consistency at these 20-year fence posts. Thus, even though the leather trades overtook the small metal trades in sheer numbers by 1881, it is clear that the ability of an established neighbourhood to maintain its own cultural trajectory was certainly possible.

Table 7.1
Occupational Distribution by Trade within Ablewell East 1871 and 1891\textsuperscript{11}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category of Occupation</th>
<th>1871 Older Portion of Neighbourhood</th>
<th>1891 Older Portion of Neighbourhood</th>
<th>Newer Portion of Neighbourhood</th>
<th>Totals for 1891</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Metal  Leather</td>
<td>Metal  Leather</td>
<td>Metal  Leather</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small Metal Trades</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Filers/Polishers</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brassworkers</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Leather</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saddlers</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stitchers</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curriers/Tanners</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Totals</strong></td>
<td><strong>127</strong></td>
<td><strong>93</strong></td>
<td><strong>68</strong></td>
<td><strong>406</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: 1871, 1891, Census Enumerators' Books

Within the newer portion of Ablewell East, we see the residential structuring that came with the burgeoning economies of leather manufacture and the geographical ordering of different occupations by the cost of housing. Saddlers were considered the aristocracy of the Walsall working classes, and the number of saddlers who found housing in the new

\textsuperscript{10} The remaining occupations included a wide range of employments, including domestic servants, dressmakers, merchants, miners, publicans, heavy metal trades, etc.

\textsuperscript{11} The 1881 census information is not used in this analysis owing to some gross inconsistencies in the number of addresses recorded and the number of residents listing occupations. For example, Bank Street of 1871 had 68 addresses with 136 individuals naming their trade. These numbers compared well with 1891, which had 153 people listed with occupations in 70 dwellings. In contrast, the 1881 returns showed only 57 addresses enumerated and only 74 with job titles. Similar discrepancies can be found for Bott Lane and Pool Street.
streets of the neighbourhood was a testament to their earning power. Other leather trades and practitioners also prospered during this period, and the relatively small number of residents with metals-based occupations along the new streets of the neighbourhood could be attributed to both smaller family wages and the slower growth in this sector of the economy.

Beyond the broad trends in residential geography brought about by the growth and development of Ablewell East, and some structural changes in Walsall’s industrial base, it must be remembered that this was still in 1895 a neighbourhood characterised by a persistent pattern of integrated land use. Almost by definition in terms of the small workshop locations, workplace and residence were intimately connected. This relationship was as true in 1895 as it was in 1865, and provides the strongest argument possible for recognising the importance of customary social and capital relations. Thus, while changes were afoot to reconstruct the cultural geography of Ablewell East housing along the new streets, the morphology of this transformation had barely nudged from early in the nineteenth century. Like George Jewell in Spon Lane, the Ablewell East workshop owners and managers continued to ply their trade on the same lot as their residence. In comparing the 1871 census with a trade directory of the same year, there were at least six workshop/residence combinations in existence along Pool Street, all small metals manufacturing (bit and spur, hames, spring bars, malleable iron, harness furniture and chains). Twenty years hence, in making a similar analysis of the 1891 census, there were seven such establishments. Again, they were all metal concerns but several different products (malleable iron, brass casting, silver plating, two hame forgers, brass plating and spring roller making). Each enterprise was operated by the family living in the residence adjoining or in front of the workshop.

This arrangement was repeated along and behind the newer Ablewell East streets. Thomas Horton’s harness workshop at 13 Eldon, Joseph Grew’s brass casting workshop at 11 Burleigh, James and William Sheldon’s bridle cutting workshop at 25/27 Selborne and Augustus Stubbs’s horse collar workshop at 13 Lime were all in existence in 1891, serving to extend and perpetuate this aspect of the neighbourhood’s residential
geography. Like their counterparts in the older streets, these small masters often owned adjacent housing. Stubbs owned five houses on Lime Street, including the adjacent three to the southwest of his own home and works. Similarly, Grew was listed as owner of three houses on Lime Street, in addition to his own and two more dwellings on Burleigh Street. Between them, the Sheldon Brothers owned five houses on Selborne Street. This common property connection to the streets where these small workshop owners lived and worked was certainly a social link to the neighbourhood, but the lack of sources prohibit any further understanding about whether there were any work-related links between these properties and their owners.

This section has attempted to analyse the local geographies of worker housing from the perspective of how each neighbourhood was shaped by the characteristics of work and workplace present in Spon Lane and Ablewell East. It has been shown how the residential spaces offered domiciles to many who worked in the local factories and small workshops, but there were obviously many living in them who worked elsewhere. For instance, several Spon Lane residents listed their occupations in the manufacture of spring balances, surely an indication that these people worked at the northern end of Spon Lane at Salter's works. Despite the drawbacks inherent in not being able to connect individual workers with their workplaces, the housing patterns that emerge from census records, rate books and directories are instructive in understanding at least a little about the representation of residential space in different types of industrial neighbourhoods. Whether there was an obvious link between workplace and residential choice, such as in Chance’s factory housing on Union Street, or the less apparent construction of options based on custom, as seen in the metals-dominant occupation that persisted on Pool and Bank Streets, domestic and industrial spaces were clearly intertwined.

**Interpretations of Public and Private Space**

In September of 1874, the Walsall paper ran a story about a cow that, while being driven along Paddock Lane, turned into a greengrocer’s yard, entered the house by the rear door and did considerable damage to the interior before exiting via the front window.\(^{12}\) Some 13

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\(^{12}\) *The Walsall Free Press and General Advertiser*, 26 September 1874.
years later, four boys from the Spon Lane neighbourhood were charged with playing football on Green Street. In their defence, they argued that they had been playing on nearby waste ground but the ball got away from them. These two relatively minor incidents point to differing notions of which spaces were public and which private inside the two neighbourhoods. We saw earlier how the characteristic workplace geographies for Spon Lane and Ablewell East elicited different responses from the local municipal authorities in their efforts to rationalise and organise space. Within these neighbourhood contexts, this subsection analyses how non-domestic spaces were used to facilitate capital movement, and considers how the locally structured flow of capital might have taught residents about public and private space.

It was noted in Chapter 5 that the presence of workplaces on every street in Ablewell East meant that every street was in effect a commercial thoroughfare. The combination of small workshops, extensive outworking and smaller, consumer-oriented products required that a complex network of connections be established and maintained. These connections would have been particularly active on those days, normally Saturday and Mondays, when finished products were collected and raw materials distributed. Access to the back garden workshops was through tunnels or open paths leading from the street. These connections were usually about four to five feet in width, and could only have been negotiated by the smallest of barrows or carts. Larger wagons and carts remained on the street, which accounts for the relatively large number of citations in Ablewell East for obstructing the street. However, actual prosecution tended to focus on isolated cases, such as leaving a box in Ablewell Street for four hours, parking a cart overnight in Bank Street or obstructions associated with arguments between the involved parties. Accommodations for minor transgressions were being negotiated in neighbourhood terms, and, despite the volume of commercial traffic on the narrow streets, actual conflict seemed to be quite low.

13 The Free Press, 19 November 1887.
16 The Walsall Free Press and General District Advertiser, 9 March 1873; The Walsall Observer and South Staffordshire Chronicle, 9 August 1884 and 4 September 1886.
Given the commercial expectations that the streets of Ablewell East were expected to shoulder, it would be expected that the neighbourhood would learn to view these spaces as purely public space. In fact, apart from the occasional obstruction offence, there were no instances of any person being cited for unlawfully using the streets for work or leisure activities. Even the cow incident cited above rated little interest beyond a commitment by the owner to make good on the interior damage caused by the rampaging animal. However, despite their critical role in connecting the street to places of production, it is unlikely that the private tunnels and corridors leading to back garden workshops were viewed as anything other than private spaces. Contract workers and factors would have been welcome, but only to the extent that their business was connected with the activities of the workshop. As we have seen, most of these workplaces were associated with street front residences and were managed by the occupants. In this sense, the vast majority of Ablewell East workplaces were partly extensions of domestic space, and would likely have been subject to similar customs of privacy as their home.

Of all the larger enterprises in Ablewell East, it was the Alpha Tube Works which stood out as the exception to the prevailing industrial culture. Set on a large plot of land on Ablewell Street, with a long frontage opening up to a wider part of the works behind, it dwarfed other good-sized factories in the neighbourhood (see Figure 4.3). Alpha Tube Works also lacked that sense of landscape ‘compatibility’ seen in places like Fairbanks, Lavender on Eldon Street, the second largest employer in the neighbourhood. As noted earlier, the new larger, purpose-built works in the new portion of Ablewell East were often flanked by rows of terrace housing, with Fairbanks, Lavender’s frontage equivalent to the width of four of these adjacent homes. Therefore, interpreting the two works strictly as landscape features, Alpha Tube Works stood out as somehow larger than the surrounding neighbourhood, out of scale with the prevailing character, even though it was an older factory than those on Eldon Street. In the minds of the neighbourhood, it is conceivable that this difference may have engendered feelings that the works were somehow set apart from neighbourhood social relations, and therefore not protected by notions that a privately-held business was private space and therefore off-limits.
What may have been true about Alpha Tube Works could certainly be applied to the row of factories in southern Spon Lane. Bullock’s, Patent Nut and Bolt, Kenrick’s and Bridge, Gill and Bridge were all as large or larger than their Walsall counterpart, and were part of a substantial cluster of large workplaces. In addition, these enterprises bordered on the Birmingham Canal, a waterway which was privately owned and operated, but which was clearly viewed by the neighbourhood as public space. Middle Lock evangelism and local prize fighting were regular rituals practised along the canal, strong indicators that the locals considered this vital transport link as part of their territory. Since the canal provided ready access to the row of adjoining factories, and considering their segregation from the domestic spaces of the neighbourhood, it is not illogical to think that factory space was viewed at least as quasi-public. For instance, local children used to play ‘Follow the Leader’ through the 20-foot sections of structural columns made at Bennett’s works on Union Street.17

In looking at the exclusionary domestic spaces within the Spon Lane neighbourhood, it can be argued that the use and interpretation of the streets contrasted with those in Ablewell East. While Union Street and Spon Lane may have been alive with the coming and going of commerce, other streets within the neighbourhood, such as Parliament, Lower Trinity, Glover, Kenrick and Green, were probably relatively subdued. While by definition public streets, there is evidence to suggest that the level of neighbourhood segregation seen in Spon Lane might have spurred an enlargement of ordered domestic space out into the street. The incident of the boys being fined for playing football in Green Street, and efforts to control gambling in the streets,18 were signs that private, domestic moralities were being extended into the public sphere.19 Without capital’s need to exert control over these residential streets, the way was clear for these new forms of power to emerge.

17 Jephcott provides a number of examples of social customs occurring along the canal and within the neighbouring works. See especially his articles on 12 November 1943, 7 January 1944 and 11 February 1944.
18 The Free Press, 16 May 1890.
19 Croll found in Merthyr Tydfil that “throughout the late nineteenth century town-dwellers themselves displayed a willingness to watch over the various public spaces that went to make up the built form.” A. Croll (1999) “Street disorder, surveillance and shame: regulating behavior in the public spaces of the late Victorian town,” Social History, vol. 24, no. 3, p 259.
From a landscape point of view, large workplaces that operated exclusively as production centres often appeared as tempestuous islands surrounded by quiescent seas of residences, shops, public houses, churches, parks and other uses making up a community. Looking at the graphic renderings and photographs used by Kenrick’s (see Figures 5.1 and 5.2) to inspire confidence and progress, the firm appeared in context to be extra-neighbourly, part of the physical space of the neighbourhood but not really of it. Looking east down Union Street from Hall Street South, it would have been fairly simple to visually segregate the line of factories on the south from the residential terraces across the street. One way to test whether locals assumed and accepted this segregation is to examine neighbourhood criminality. Crimes, both petty and serious, were the bread and butter of local newspapers in Walsall and West Bromwich. Previous sections in this thesis have looked at prosecutions for work-related criminality (especially neglect of work and apprenticeship violations) and Factory Act/School Board transgressions. By analysing incidents of crime committed against the workplace, it can be conjectured whether people were more likely to view workplaces as part of their neighbourhood, and therefore subject to local strictures on morality, or whether they were instead seen as fair game because people were able to segregate them from the intimacy of their daily lives.

The sheer size, concentration and location of the Spon Lane workplaces were key to how they were perceived by the surrounding community. Except for those shops and residences fronting on Spon Lane, works running the length of the canal from Bullock’s in the west to Taylor and Farley in the east were physical and visual barriers to water- and rail-borne commerce. Their mass, complexity and geography combined to isolate ‘hidden spaces’ in many parts of the complex. Out of sight from neighbouring residential and retail uses, these spaces were vulnerable to petty theft and malicious mischief, and seemed to be specifically targeted by pilferers of small amounts of iron and coal. The perpetrators who were caught and prosecuted ran the demographic gamut. In 1872, William Sanders and John Turton, 10 and 13 respectively, were charged with stealing iron from Patent Nut and Bolt.20 Four years later, David White, an adult labourer, was convicted of taking raw iron from a canal dock belonging to Bridge, Gill and Bridge (he

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20 Wednesbury and West Bromwich Advertiser, 14 December 1872. Sanders gave a Spon Lane home address.
had tried selling it to an Oldbury ironfounder who turned him in). Women too were found guilty. In 1882, Mary Ann Blakemore, 45, and Maria Smith, 36, both of Union Street, stole some pig iron from the Birmingham Canal Company, and were arrested at 5.00 a.m. by a local police constable on Spon Lane coming from the canal.

To combat this petty criminal intrusion onto private property, several of the Spon Lane factories took measures to secure their premises. In 1866, Kenrick’s received planning permission to construct a lodge and gates at their Houghton Street entrance, while Patent Nut and Bolt used nightwatchmen to keep an eye on the works. John Jenning was on duty at 8.30 p.m., inside the gateway leading to the canal, when he noticed two juveniles pilfering about 26 pounds of coal from two moored canal boats. Similarly, two apprentices at the same factory were caught before work at 5.00 a.m. running across the roof breaking glass and slate shingles. That it was felt that these premises had to be monitored outside of normal working hours, along with the nature of the crimes themselves, leads to a conclusion that factories were viewed as less private than homes or shops. Certainly, the crimes were not serious. Instead, they were indicative of an attitude that considered raw materials, left largely unsupervised in the hidden spaces away from the moralising eyes of the neighbourhood, available for the taking. Coal and iron could be used or sold to supplement family wages with little likelihood of detection.

The largest factory in Ablewell East, Alpha Tube Works, experienced a similar pattern of criminality. Thefts of coal and mischief in the form of window breaking by young boys were the extent of reported crimes. Here again, the number of hidden spaces and the ability to operate criminally away from direct view were due in large part to the size of the workplace. More so than direct actions against larger Walsall employers, however, there were far more instances of criminal behaviour committed inside smaller

21 *The Midland Advertiser*, 5 February 1876.
22 *The Free Press*, 24 June 1882. The stolen metal was secreted in Blakemore’s apron and in a bucket carried by Smith. According to the census records, Blakemore lived at 102 Union and Smith at 69 Union with no listed occupations. However, both women were married to men who gave their occupations as boatmen.
23 Sandwell Local Studies Centre, Borough of West Bromwich, Index of Building Plans, Shelf 19(11).
24 *The Free Press*, 25 April 1890.
25 *Wednesbury and West Bromwich Advertiser*, 9 November 1872.
26 *The Walsall Free Press and General Advertiser*, 2 May 1874 and 20 June 1874.
workplaces. Theft of six hogskins from W. and J. Franklin (Bank Street)\textsuperscript{27}, snaffle bits, burnishers and tools from Charles White (Pool Street)\textsuperscript{28}, 60 yards of cordage from Hawley and Son (Tantarra Street)\textsuperscript{29}, and 26 pounds of coal from Alfred Roberts (Paddock Lane)\textsuperscript{30} give some idea of the variety of criminal acts. All of these locations were well integrated into the residential/industrial patterns so much in evidence in Ablewell East. In 1873, Charles Boot, a tool fitter, was charged with breaking into a workshop “within the curtilage of a dwelling house occupied by Mr. Hadley of South Street.”\textsuperscript{31} To commit a crime against the workplace in such integrated neighbourhoods, it was often necessary to trespass into domestic space.

Both in the type of crime and in the targets, the nature of criminality against neighbourhood workplaces was shaped by industrial form and perceptions of public and private space. When a thief entered a small workshop in Walsall, it is likely that there were people nearby or in the building, with few hidden spaces. It may have even been known from whom he or she was stealing. When Ablewell Street resident George Henry Cook was charged with stealing iron from coach builder Charles Hawley, it was revealed that Cook had worked there the past four years and Hawley went so far as to recommend mercy for his wayward employee.\textsuperscript{32} Clearly, workshops and small factories were seen as private spaces in terms of criminality, part of the neighbourhood and therefore beholden to accepted customs of appropriate behaviour.

Could the same be said about crime in the more modern, segregated spaces created along the canal in Spon Lane? It was argued earlier that the neighbourhood most likely viewed the canal itself and the adjacent uplands as at least quasi-public space. If this is an accurate representation of space, then this customary notion would have engendered a concomitant perception that stealing what was there, such as loose coal, iron or other materials, was somehow less of a crime because these items were being taken from what could be considered as community assets. Obviously, the local magistrates did not

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{27} Walsall Advertiser, 15 February 1868.
\textsuperscript{28} The Walsall Observer and General District Advertiser, 20 March 1869.
\textsuperscript{29} The Walsall Observer and South Staffordshire Chronicle, 30 September 1882.
\textsuperscript{30} The Walsall Observer and South Staffordshire Chronicle, 28 February 1891.
\textsuperscript{31} The Walsall Observer and South Staffordshire Chronicle, 1 March 1873.
\textsuperscript{32} The Walsall Observer and South Staffordshire Chronicle, 11 March 1882.
\end{flushleft}
believe this to be true, handing down equal sentences regardless of the crime location. However, it is interesting to note that on two occasions at Patent Nut and Bolt, the nightwatchmen were actually assaulted during attempted thefts of coal, further evidence that the modern industrial precinct that developed in this area was adjacent to but not really part of the intimate social relations practised in the Spon Lane neighbourhood.

The process by which neighbourhoods learned to interpret space as either largely public or largely private seems to bear some relationship to the accommodations made to capital movement and fixation. The concentration of industrial space onto clustered factory sites, as opposed to a distribution of that space in scattered small workshops, led to different local perceptions of space in Spon Lane and Ablewell East. The common denominator seemed to be that spaces characterised by the presence of industrial capital, either in built form or in terms of movement, were interpreted by each neighbourhood as being more public. In Walsall, capital needed every street because every street had workplaces, and were consequently viewed as purely public. In contrast, neighbourhoods extraneous to capital’s needs (except in their role as domestic space for labour), like those in Spon Lane, saw the extension of private spaces into traditionally public arenas. The factories brought a concentration and segregation of industrial space to discrete areas, in essence removing that space from the more residential/retail streets nearby.

Representations of Environmental Space

In an 1890 letter to the *Free Press*, a writer stated with barely concealed pride, “it may be that the inhabitants of West Bromwich are not aware that they reside in the neatest, cleanest and best little town in the Black Country.” Similarly, in defence of someone placing Walsall in the “undesirable” part of the region, an *Observer* writer resented the “casting abuse upon it because of its contiguity to what is known as the Black Country.” These external views were discussed at length in Chapter 2, and the question was posed about whether the outsiders’ interpretation of the region prevailed within the

33 *Wednesbury and West Bromwich Advertiser*, 9 November 1872 and *The Free Press*, 11 July 1890.
34 *The Free Press*, 21 February 1890.
35 *The Walsall Observer*, September 1862.
neighbourhoods that constituted the Black Country. Based on these comments, it is obvious that both communities had their supporters and this section looks at the environmental experience of having the workplace as a neighbour, with particular attention to differences between the two neighbourhoods.

There were two main forms of effluvia which could potentially make nineteenth century industry an undesirable neighbour – disposal of sewage through a conveyance system or directly into a water body and the distribution of air-borne particulates through a smokestack. Due to a combination of topography and geography, Spon Lane appears to have been spared the worst effects of environmental degradation within its residential streets. First, the neighbourhood’s history, as a distinct village that grew into an urban village, meant that there was still plentiful open space between it and the town centre and along the western and eastern flanks. This relative isolation tended to lessen the cumulative impacts that might have accrued if it was bordered closely by other industrial or built-up areas. A second consideration was that the low point in elevation for the neighbourhood was along the canal, especially the area near the eastern end of Union Street. Factories along the canal could jettison waste directly to the water or at least downstream of the residential areas of Spon Lane. This topography also explains the presence of the sewage collection point at Green Street. As the lowest point in a growing residential area, this was the likely endpoint for the polluted runoff caused by failure to empty ash-pits in a timely manner or by the large numbers of small farm animals kept in the neighbourhood. Jacob Faithful traced reports of bad smells from Spon Lane, “that salubrious thoroughfare,” to too many pigs being kept at houses.

With sewerage problems limited to domestic sources, and only one incident of prosecution for non-consumption of smoke (Patent Nut and Bolt in 1877), could Spon Lane’s characteristic segregation of land uses have contributed to a reduced impact to residential areas? Certainly, homes in Parliament or Neal Streets were a long way from

36 In an American context, Joel Tarr has published an extensive number of analyses on the environmental history of North American cities. A selection of these works appears in J. A. Tarr (1996) The Search for the Ultimate Sink: Urban Pollution in Historical Perspective.
37 The Free Press, 9 July 1881.
38 They were acquitted, along with 12 other defendants.
any sort of industrial enterprise, and may have felt little or no ill effects from living in an industrialised area. On the other hand, there is evidence from both towns that local Sanitation Committees were reluctant to penalise manufacturers for failing to abate their smoke nuisances. However, in 1865, while reviewing new rolling mills for a metal works in Great Bridge, the Improvement Commissioners were willing to bend over backward to permit a 70-foot stack “to consume the smoke as much as possible.” After some initial efforts at enforcement in the 1860s and 70s, it fell to the manufacturers at a regional meeting in 1890 at Birmingham to suggest that smoke abatement was “of importance to all Black Country Districts.”

Jacob Faithful, again, later that same year found it unfair that homeowners are fined for chimney fires, while “owners of large factories are allowed to poison the air by the belching forth from their stacks of large volumes of black smoke.”

The 1895 photograph of Kenrick’s indicates the presence of at least nine high stacks and numerous smaller chimneys (see Figure 5.2). Operating at full capacity, this plant, in combination with adjacent works, would certainly have been capable of epitomising Burritt’s “black by day, red by night” description.

In 1871, Walsall Mayor Duignan took the lead to rid that town of smoke because he feared the problems would cause monied interests to leave, referring to Wednesbury’s problems in this respect. When he asked his police superintendent (who was also inspector of nuisances) about prosecution, Superintendent Cater replied that there was no need, to which the Mayor rejoined, “there are none so blind as those who would not see.”

The Mayor had a point. Efforts to contain the smoke nuisance in Walsall dated to the 1824 Improvement Act, and passed a bye-law on 6 December 1860 mandating a 40s. fine for failure to “use or manage any such Steam Engine or Furnace, so that the smoke arising therefrom shall not be effectually consumed or burnt.” Observing violations was apparently quite easy. On 31 August 1870 between 10.45 a.m. and 12 noon, Sergeants Drury and Ogden of the Walsall Police observed 12 separate works emitting

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39 Sandwell Local Studies Centre, Acc. 9105, Series A, No. 756.
40 The Free Press, 18 July 1890.
41 The Free Press, 21 November 1890. This commentator went on to say that he did not wish to hinder operations, but thought that firms should avail themselves of whatever new technologies were at their disposal.
42 The Walsall Observer and General District Advertiser, 5 August 1871.
43 This bye-law was based on one passed by the city of Leicester. Walsall Local History Centre, Acc. 1/107.
smoke that had not been consumed or burnt. There is no record of any of these occurrences resulting in a fine or sentence, although several firms were asked to abate the nuisance within a certain period of time. The attitude of the residents to smoking chimneys was perhaps best summed up by Samuel Russell, neighbour to Anselm Parker’s saddlery on Bridge Street. Russell related that the stack did occasionally emit black smoke but, “being in a manufacturing town, he did not care to complain.”

Due to the nature of the waste products, Walsall’s leather industry presented different challenges for neighbours than metals-based production. Refuse from tanneries and skin-dressing establishments were hardly appropriate as surface-borne sewage, prompting the Improvement Commissioners to create a collection system in 1848. Even after the sewers were constructed, however, these works continued to discharge directly into Walsall Brook, causing this surface drainage to be horribly polluted by 1860. Even worse for many residents were the smells which emanated from factories and workshops working with skin and fats. Right after Mayor Duignan began his crusade against smoke, a letter appeared which noted that “there are still greater and far more dangerous nuisances than mere smoke. I refer to the smells which abound in certain parts of town.” The writer referred specifically to Stokes and Company (owned by Hyla Holden) and the smells that came from the tan pits through open windows which opened onto the footpath. To avoid the nuisance, many people “cross over to the other side of the street.”

Holden, a currier, and Beaumont Cottam, a chandler, were both prosecuted in 1871 for creating a public nuisance by polluting the air. Once again, there appeared to have been reluctance on the part of the magistrate to pursue this type of violation, but “there have been too many complaints to overlook.” Ten people signed a complaint against Holden and nine against Cottam. In Holden’s case, the Sanitary Committee offered two choices: shift the offending operation out of town “at a place where there are no inhabitants” or erect a stack to carry the fumes away. The defendant offered to boil the skins at night, and if that did not work, he would cease that part of his business. One month later,

44 Walsall Local History Centre, Acc. 1/107.
45 The Walsall Free Press, 23 February 1878.
46 The Walsall Observer and General District Advertiser, 13 May 1871.
47 The Walsall Observer and General District Advertiser, 17 June 1871.
Holden returned to the bench and reported that he had moved his nuisance operation to Dark Lane, a newer street that extended east of Ablewell East at the end of Paddock Lane.48

The complaint against Cottam was signed on 7 August 1871, and claimed that his candle house “is a nuisance and injurious to the health of the inhabitants of the neighbourhood.”49 In the Petty Session one week later, several neighbours gave testimony about the offensive nature of the smell. “It came by Mr Cottam’s manufacturing. Many persons complained to me . . . and I bet many customers who went away from my shop thinking it was my meat which smelt.” 50 Cottam was actually convicted and fined for the offence, but wrote a letter to the Sanitary Committee stating that he had spent three or four hundred pounds to install the latest improvements. He had contacted “all the first chandlers in Birmingham and [is] quite ready to adopt any new idea that may be found beneficial.”51 No further complaints or prosecutions were recorded against Cottam.

Though neither Walsall nor West Bromwich was particularly enthusiastic about enforcing nuisance bye-laws, what regulatory activity did occur was in Walsall, although few prosecutions resulted from these activities.52 Once again, it must be noted that it was within the more highly integrated industrial landscape, where peoples’ experience of living next door to industry would have been more immediate, that groups of neighbours pursued legal remedies. Despite a tendency to think that large factories would somehow intrude more belligerently into people’s daily lives, and thereby triggering more complaints, allegiances formed at the neighbourhood level may have worked against this outcome. The sheer numbers of people employed by each Spon Lane factory probably meant that just about everyone had at least one neighbour, family member or other social

48 The Walsall Observer and General District Advertiser, 12 August 1871.
49 Walsall Local History Centre, Acc. 107/5.
50 Walsall Local History Centre, Acc. 107/5(B).
51 Cottam was convicted on 12 September 1871. Walsall Local History Centre, Acc. 107/5.
52 Interestingly, Stradling and Tarr found a similar municipal response in Chicago following adoption of that city’s first anti-smoke ordinance in 1881. The Department of Health levied small fines, but “shied away from strong enforcement, emphasizing education and cooperation, a strategy that had only limited results.” See D. Stradling and J. Tarr (1999) “Environmental activism, locomotive smoke and the corporate response: the case of the Pennsylvania Railroad and Chicago smoke control,” Business History Review, vol. 73, no. 4, p 680.
contact who worked for every workplace. From this perspective, it would be more difficult to imagine someone swearing out a complaint or getting support for a petition against one of the factories. Loyalty and closeness amongst those who lived in the neighbourhood were probably extended to their places of work as well.

The failure of either town to vigorously support and enforce their own bye-laws dealing with smoke abatement could have been indicative of regional acceptance. While there was obviously interest by some in regulating smoke emissions, it does not appear to have gained popularity. Certainly, the most obvious by-products of the majority of iron-related works were smoke emissions. Further, if there was one environmental feature which was the Black Country's calling card, it was that black smoke emitted from every corner of the region and many points in-between. This seems to have been a consistent observation whether you were a traveller on your first sojourn through the area, or you were a long-time resident. In this sense, the local experience of living next door to industry in the Black Country was one which included the omnipresent greyness of smoke. Solving the problem would have taken a regional approach, as suggested by the Ironmasters Association, but for the average resident of Spon Lane or Ablewell East, smoking stacks and chimneys were part of their daily lives and would have been so routine as to be ignored.

SOCIAL SPACE AND COMMUNITY RITUALS

The first half of this chapter attempted to bring some understanding to the constructions of space through time that people would have experienced as part of their daily, weekly and annual routines in Spon Lane and Ablewell East. The dwellings in which they lived, the streets and alleys through which they travelled and the environments within which they breathed and smelled were all part of that experience. These individual choices were made within differential contexts of place negotiated over time by the sometimes complementary, sometimes antithetical needs of industrial capital and local custom. For essentially the same reason that a Walsall merchant had to make a choice about whether or not to complain about a polluting workplace where some of his customers may have worked, so had the management of Patent Nut and Bolt to choose to install gates and hire
security to guard against criminal intrusion by people from the neighbourhood that supplied much of its work force. In both cases, decisions were made to rationalise capital movement and the neighbourhoods learned to adapt.

This thesis has argued against the proposal that peoples' days and working lives move through distinctly different spheres (e.g., home to work, work to leisure, street to home), but rather through neighbourhood spaces created from a unique, place-specific marriage between capital fixation and local custom. Each space exhibited aspects of public contact and private repose in varying degrees. How individual choices and neighbourhood customs were shaped within these spaces by the respective workplace cultures in Ablewell East and Spon Lane forms the final major section of this study. In many ways, it is the most difficult angle to grasp without first-hand accounts. No records exist, for example, to explain who frequented which public houses and whether these choices were made as a result of social connections forged at the workplace or along the street. Patterns only emerge when collective individual wills combined to create sufficient cultural mass to be recorded by the press or the institution itself. Two perspectives on the social space of the neighbourhoods are considered, the role of workplace form and management in supporting and augmenting community rituals, and their specific influence on the early years of football organisation.

**Working Spaces and the Organisation of Football**

One of the best known stories of Black Country football is how West Bromwich Albion began as a side dominated by operatives and invitees sponsored by George Salter's spring balance and precision engineering works at the corner of Spon Lane and High Street. For many years, a member of the Salter family managed or served as president of the club. Their English Cup matches (with victories in 1887, 1891 and 1892) were bastions of civic pride, prompting many to gather around the telegraph office on the High Street to hear reports every 15 minutes. In the 1892 semi-final against Nottingham Forest, the half-time score report of 4-0 in Albion's favour prompted "people to enquire whether there was not something wrong with the telegraph instrument." Arriving at

53 *The Free Press*, 11 March 1892. The half-time score was confirmed by both telegraph and telephone.

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Spon Lane Station after such important victories, team members and management would be feted in a procession along Spon Lane to the town centre. Pride was everywhere and seemed to extend beyond the borough boundaries. The *Walsall Observer* of 27 September 1890 reported that “on Monday, the famed West Bromwich Albion paid us a visit.” The Free Press concluded after the 1892 Cup triumph that “our lads have once more demonstrated what Black Country pluck and determination can do.”

That Albion’s nascent years were associated with a fairly large and successful factory enterprise was not surprising. As football gathered momentum as the spectator sport of choice for England’s working class, factory operatives (or often, those hired by the factory to concentrate mostly on football) took a leading role in many of the top clubs. While Salter’s were by far the most successful in the Black Country, other large firms in West Bromwich sponsored local teams, usually made up of operatives who might mould kettles 5½ days per week, then square off against another local factory side on Saturday afternoon. Both Kenrick’s (who also fielded a cricket team) and Chance’s had at least one side, as did Patent Nut and Bolt’s Smethwick plant. In essence, early football clubs in Spon Lane tended to organise around social connections made in the factory, without regard to residential geography. Only the Victoria Football Club (Spon Lane) appears to have had its name associated with a street, although not in the name of the Club itself.

In sharp contrast, Walsall’s more integrated, smaller workplace geography encouraged sports organisation along streets within the Ablewell East neighbourhood. Almost every street of any length seems to have given its name to a local side – Bott Lane Association, Paddock Unity, Walsingham Rovers, Ablewell Street Wanderers, Tantarra Rangers, Chuckery Star, Paddock Crown, Selborne Villa and the Union Strollers. These clubs were well enough organised that they were covered regularly in the local press. The first local newspaper reference in Walsall to a side organised around a workplace was in 1886 at Leckie’s, the large leather works. However, by 1888, the older clubs with street-based names were facing off against a growing number of factory sides organised from workplaces townwide. Within Ablewell East, James Carver’s whip works and Bayley’s

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54 *The Free Press*, 25 March 1892. For the second year in succession, Albion got the better of arch-rival Aston Villa, 3-0, in front of 32,000 at the Oval.
fancy glass factory were both large enough to support a club, but other smaller works, such as William Beebee’s harness furniture works, combined with players from other smallish factories. Both types of clubs persisted to the end of the study period in the mid-1890s.

For a team sport such as football, it was a given that social contacts were critical to gathering the necessary number of individuals together to form a side. However, it is clear that the recruiting grounds differed substantially between Ablewell East and Spon Lane, a difference attributable in large part to workplace size and organisation. In the Spon Lane factories, comparatively large numbers of operatives worked together in a single location, and apparently socialised together in wider community-based sporting activities. While no lists of players have survived, it is quite likely that a Kenrick’s or Chance’s side would be composed entirely of workers at their respective works. These types of activities appear to have had the blessing of factory masters, reminiscent of the level of paternalism seen in the Lancashire mill towns. “There are few towns in the Midlands where healthy and manly sports get more encouragement from some of the principal manufacturers than is the case in West Bromwich.”

With smaller workplaces, Ablewell East adapted to the growing popularity of football by organising around streets. One such side, the Ablewell Street Wanderers, faced St. Judes Rover in 1886 with 10 individuals named in the local paper. Although five years removed from the 1881 census, the surnames and first initials of five out of 10 (including two sets of brothers) still appeared at numbers 15, 17 and 78 Ablewell. The Coach and Horses Public House was located at 78 Ablewell, directly across the street from the other two addresses, thus offering obvious opportunities for association. Adding five years to their 1881 ages, the youngest in this group was 16 and the oldest 18, with occupations still listed as ‘scholar’ in the census enumeration book. That this group organised from social relations occurring in the street rather than along craft or workplace lines (their fathers’ occupations were publican, chainmaker and tailor), indicates enduring neighbourhood connections at the street and family level.

55 The Free Press, 21 Feb 1890.
In March of 1892, *The Free Press* reported that five boys from the Spon Lane neighbourhood (three from Union, one each from Glover and Lower Trinity) were summoned for disturbing the Sunday sermon at the Primitive Methodist Chapel by playing football on Hall Street South. On the surface, this report would suggest that some level of the organisation of sport in Spon Lane occurred at the street level. However, two of the three with Union Street addresses were actually 19- and 15-year old brothers, both listed as 'forge labourers' in the 1891 census. The other three are not traceable through the enumerators' books, but this occurrence would suggest that the street remained a vital venue for socialisation even though the initial connection might have been made in the workplace. Unique workplace cultures and geographies did much to prescribe how a recreational pursuit would be ordered in both neighbourhoods. With the introduction and early years of football's growth taking place within the time period of this thesis, it provides a good example for how each neighbourhood accepted the organisation of football on its own local terms.

**Paternalism - Helping Workers Help Themselves**

By the mid- to late-1890s, Ablewell East and Spon Lane were nearly fully occupied, streets were constructed, sewers were laid and other modern amenities were gradually being added. The lines between residential, public, institutional and working spaces, while sometimes a bit fuzzy, were more clearly discernible simply because most of the area was built and occupied. However, while the neighbourhood workplace geographies may have diverged sharply in accordance with their cultural precedents, the provision of many public improvements followed along a roughly parallel course that owed its map to larger movements afoot in later Victorian England. What was different was not so much in what was built and when, but in the respective roles of local manufacturers in providing or supporting these improvements. In Spon Lane to a large degree, and to a lesser extent in Ablewell East, factory masters used their influence and money as a rationalising, and sometimes moralising, force within their neighbourhoods. Not to discount purely altruistic objectives, their vested interests were obviously in the well-being of the people who provided labour to keep the mills and workshops turning profits.
Citizens from both West Bromwich and Walsall, as Black Country towns, participated actively in a number of traditional regional rituals, as well as a range of home-grown events. The West Bromwich Wakes and the Walsall Races, for instance, were annual events which seemed to attract wide attendance from within both communities. As a measure of their popularity, an 1873 log book from the Tantarra Street Infants School records average attendance of only 28.3 pupils for each day of the Races, compared with around 50 to 55 for most days. When the West Bromwich Improvement Commissioners attempted to suppress their community’s wake by banning stalls in the High Street (borrowing the idea from neighbouring Wednesbury), activities were simply moved to other locations. Without a doubt, community rituals were among the most persistent and predictable of citizen behaviours, and often incited the most passionate of reactions against efforts to change or ban them. This subsection looks at how traditional representation of space within each neighbourhood was tested and accommodated during the study period, and how manufacturers sought to participate in the creation of new events and activities consistent with their own goals.

As might be expected, it was the manufacturers in Spon Lane who exhibited more of the type of paternalistic behaviour that Joyce has identified from Lancashire mill towns. In particular, successive generations of the Kenrick family, Reuben Farley of Taylor and Farley and the management of Chance’s Glass Works across the canal seemed to recognise both responsibility and benefit from taking an active role in the community. Further up Spon Lane, George Salter and Co. had a local reputation as a kind and generous employer, and offered a range of social opportunities for his employees. Through such organised activities as sports, holiday excursions, special dinners, community privileges, social clubs and on-site recreation, workers were able to join with

56 Only 12 pupils attended on Monday afternoon, perhaps an indication of the enduring popularity of St. Monday. Walsall Local History Centre, Acc. 116/103.
57 An editorial comment on the well-known Tipton Wakes in the 21 February 1890 Free Press stated that “anyone acquainted with the Black Country wakes and their attendant evils will admit the best interests of the community would be served by the total abolition of the old fashioned institutions.”
colleagues in factory-sponsored socialising. This largesse did not stop with the operatives. Most masters could be counted upon to support local philanthropic efforts, sometimes with the direct support of their workers. Workers at Kenrick’s contributed £56 10s. to a distress relief fund in 1879, an amount matched by their employer. Except for the Earl of Dartmouth, the biggest contributors in 1882 to the West Bromwich Institute read like a who’s who of Spon Lane – A. Kenrick and Sons, G. Salter and Co., Reuben Farley and Chance Bros.

At the heart of this behaviour was an understanding by some masters that their responsibilities and the influences of the workplace were not truncated at the factory gate as workers left at the end of the shift. From the simple neighbourhood benefits to annual excursions, workers were encouraged to spend their leisure time in pursuits which steered them clear of less salubrious activities. In January of 1879, Chance Bros. gave five-penny cheques to each workman to spend at the Spon Lane Coffee House where they were “regaled with substantial tea, cocoa, ham sandwiches or other equally substantial refreshments.” It was noted that the workers were usually given money, but that it would be spent on beer. According to the report, the operatives praised the new approach which, in effect, was an attempt to control their behaviour outside the workplace so they would perform better at their jobs. The Coffee House was a popular location to treat employees and for local workers to gather, including meetings of the Spon Lane Money Club. In 1879, Samuel Withers, a Kenrick’s foreman, treated 40 of his employees, plus their wives and children, to tea, coffee, cakes, fruit and entertainment.

The annual excursion was another popular feature of larger workplaces in West Bromwich, but less so in Walsall. In the latter, only Leckie’s Leather Works and Job Wheway’s iron works were regularly reported as having an excursion. Samuel Price’s...
brass and german silver caster shop at 3 Tantarra was the sole firm reported from within Ablewell East as having an annual picnic, although it is likely that others did as well. Price’s excursion to Milford included sightseeing, dinner, sport, stroll and tea, and the entire group travelled in brakes. In terms of size, this paled in comparison to some of the Spon Lane excursions. In 1872, Chance employees’ Wednesday journey to Alton Towers left Spon Lane Station at 7.15 on two trains, each with 27 carriages. Chance’s started their annual excursions in 1854, and by the mid-1880s was taking 600 or more workers to a variety of destinations. Taylor and Farley also reported annual days away from the works, but there is no evidence that Kenrick’s or Patent Nut and Bolt had such a programme. One explanation, at least for Kenrick’s, was that their annual holiday for stocktaking, repairs and whitewashing, as described in Chapter 6, would have been considered sufficient as a sponsored break from the works.

Beyond the excursions, which came but once a year, other social opportunities were created to attract worker attention throughout the year. Kenrick’s, Salter’s and Chance’s all sponsored prizes for floral displays at the 1885 West Bromwich Flower Show, with Kenrick’s offering 63 cash prizes ranging from 1s. to 10s. and Chance’s 82 prizes up to 6s. One year later, it was reported that 212 Chance employees and 174 Kenrick people participated in the show. When Kenrick’s pulled their cash prize sponsorship in 1887, no employees took part, a clear indication that some employee programmes suffered without the direct participation of their employer. Special dinners were held for retirements, significant events within the master’s family, Queen Victoria’s Jubilee and to celebrate significant expansions of the works. When Salter’s completed in 1890 the provision of new worker dining rooms, reading room, library and billiard room, the management organised three consecutive nights of dinner and entertainment (with invitations each night based on age of employee).

Collectively, these efforts to engage the working class in social activities associated with the workplace appear to have been successful. They were well-attended and often resulted in displays of reciprocity. When Rueben Farley married in 1879, the employees of his Summit Foundry presented him with a silver epergne with the engraving “In

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64 The Walsall Observer and South Staffordshire Chronicle, 18 July 1891.
recognition of his high personal character and public contacts.” Farley seems to have generated tremendously high levels of loyalty in his dealings with workers. After his selection as Mayor in 1883, his employees presented him with watercolours of town buildings accompanied by the following testimonial:

“As an employee of labour, your upright and honourable dealing, combined with the kindly consideration you have ever shown with our material interests and welfare, have created an abiding sense of gratitude and esteem which the lapse of time will not efface.”

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In perhaps the most telling comment of the celebration, it was duly noted that at the Summit Foundry they did not know about strikes. From the perspective of a factory master, this probably represented the most highly desired outcome of his relationship with the people operating his works, a result fuelled in part by the levels of paternalism demonstrated by the likes of Farley.66

This subsection has necessarily focused most of its attention on Spon Lane. Examples of paternalism did exist within Ablewell East but the size of the works and number of operatives limited their sway beyond the factory walls. Frederick Lavender was active in the local Temperance Society which met at the Bott Lane Mission and F. W. Lambert of Alpha Tube Works spearheaded an appeal to fund furnishings for a Science and Art Institute, but these were exceptional acts in Walsall, and were oriented less to their individual workplaces and more to broader town interests. Perhaps more important than the size of Walsall firms, however, was the town government’s traditionally strong advocacy of providing social outlets for its workers. Those institutions and rituals described in Chapter 4 effectively grabbed the mantle of paternalism for the municipality, leaving little for the manufacturers to do except provide financial support or names on lists of supporters. There simply was no vacuum to fill as there was in West Bromwich.

Much of what the Spon Lane factory elite, to use Trainor’s term, accomplished within the social spaces of the neighbourhood was tied to their desire to exert influence over working

65 The Free Press, 14 July 1883.
66 Trainor offers a perspective on Farley’s life as one of the West Bromwich elite in Black Country Elites (1993) pp 354-55.
lives outside of working hours. This effort could take many forms. Earlier, we learned that Chance Brothers used the promise of housing to attract foreign workers with desirable skills to come to the west Midlands and teach English operatives how to make glass. Likewise, the sponsoring of excursions, public displays, neighbourhood social gatherings or public improvements were part and parcel of an effort to instill a sense of responsibility and loyalty in the workforce. At its heart, this paternalistic overlay on traditional social spaces acted as a welcome mat between the neighbourhood residential spaces described earlier in this chapter and those segregated industrial spaces that characterised Spon Lane. Clearly, the management at places such as Kenrick’s and the Summit Works were successful in making the mat readable from both directions. A factory worker was not completely away from the neighbourhood if a portion of his or her social life revolved around the workplace and, further, that same worker was not entirely removed from factory life if some of his or her leisure pursuits were organised around work. The notion of separate spheres thus loses some of its credibility.

CONCLUSION

In terms of space within the Ablewell East and Spon Lane neighbourhoods, the knitting together of the component parts of peoples’ working lives brought them into contact with a terrain of dynamic complexity. Ongoing negotiation over pride of place between capital and custom, traditional and new or rational and laissez faire appear in retrospect to have adopted a Solomonesque set of rules. Neighbourhood decisions to defer or to take a stand were more often than not facilitated in community terms, where it was agreed that the future would not be so different from the recent past so as to be unrecognisable to the future. Hiring a night watchman to protect ‘private’ space interpreted as quasi-public by the neighbourhood was a negotiated and necessary balance between conflicting viewpoints. Likewise, having ‘public’ improvements provided by private enterprise elevated factory masters into a quasi-municipal role, enhancing capital’s prestige while returning favour to the neighbourhood which supplied their labour.

While the examples of negotiated terms presented in this chapter are discernible from a distant perspective, it is extremely doubtful that individuals within each neighbourhood
were aware that they were adapting. This was true despite the fact that their social experiences were "formed at the level of the concrete, the familiar and the immediate."67 As a result, neighbourhoods learned and reacted collectively to represent a group of individuals about new demands or opportunities. Thus, while an individual saddler in the newer portion of Ablewell East may have noticed that his nearest neighbours included a proportionately high number people with the same profession, he would probably not have questioned why this was happening or, more obliquely, wondered who was moving into other Walsall neighbourhoods. In many senses, the working neighbourhoods of Ablewell East and Spon Lane were nothing more than a collection of individuals focused on fulfilling the primary capitalist need that opened this thesis – accumulation for survival. However, while each person's choices may have grown from self-realised needs, the menu of available opportunities could be written as far away as a war in America or as near as the factory next door.

Chapter 8

Intimacy, Distance and the Experience of Work

From a distant and macro-economic perspective, all of the later Victorian workplaces in Ablewell East and Spon Lane were production centres on an extraordinarily complex and ever-changing map of industrial England. Even from this detached vantage point, however, it can be argued that the variable shapes, sizes and locations of these workplaces solicited different responses from those forces that sought to consume the neighbourhood spaces of Walsall and West Bromwich. For instance, it could be proposed that the workplaces in the segregated industrial precinct south of Union Street and north of the canal came closest to epitomising the Victorian popular view of industrial England, an image that endures even today. In his study of Turner’s *Dudley* painting, Rodner confirms that that town “and the Black Country became essential destinations for Turner and those of his contemporaries interested in experiencing for themselves the full power of England’s raw manufacturing culture.” The travelling consumer of aesthetics, eager for a glimpse of the energy and mass of a large factory glowing red with coal fire and punctuated by stacks spewing smoke into the surrounding air, would undoubtedly have been disappointed had he or she been escorted to Pool Street in Walsall to witness the revolution. Even more fancifully, it no doubt would have been impossible to convince the observer that the power of capital to shape neighbourhood landscapes was just as vested in Ablewell East as it was in Spon Lane or even the Lancashire mill towns.

Visual representations of the nineteenth century city apparently told only a portion of the work experience story. A modern reading of these depictions of industrial capitalism “has to be broached in terms of its multiple social relations, processes and class formations.” To be working in one of these later Victorian neighbourhoods meant that people, as individuals, had an intimate connection to the place-bound, capitalist social relations of the neighbourhood in which they lived, no matter how long that presence lasted. As we have learned, this relationship was often very personal in nature and also

1 W. S. Rodner (1988) "Turner’s *Dudley*: continuity, change and adaptability in the industrial Black Country," *Turner Studies*, vol. 8, no. 1, p 34. The watercolour was painted in 1832, or five years before Victoria's coronation.
incontestably dynamic. “Attitudes to work are not stable, they change as individuals change their status, their family situation, their age and their interpretation of the discourses imbricated around such categories.” Those Spon Lane workers who translated lack of work into despondency, and ultimately suicide in several instances, offer powerful evidence that an individual’s connection with work was sometimes unremittingly personal. However, it would be inaccurate to assign the source of these attitudes simply to expressions of free will released over time. These choices, exercised as they were in the context of an industrialising England, were made in “a system of production in which some people had significantly more power, authority and control than others.” Further, it should be recognised that those with that power extended well beyond the traditional hierarchy of factory master or workshop foreman. Global markets, factory inspectors, municipal decision-makers, customary social relations, trade organisations, the family and even the physical landscape itself all had a voice which the individual worker may not have heard, or even thought about, but which helped to construct his or her localised experience of work.

This final chapter attempts to knit together the sometimes intimate, sometimes distant conclusions made in this study about working spaces, working lives and working neighbourhoods in Walsall and West Bromwich. Approaches to the localised geography of nineteenth century work should be at once respectful of the intimate connections between people and work and cognizant of the often distant (in both space and time) influences on these connections. The arguments presented in this thesis are neither those that can justifiably be separated from the later Victorian Black Country nor, for that matter, from the specific neighbourhoods of Spon Lane and Ablewell East. In fact, the lessons of postmodernity that have informed the study of historical geography from the late-1980s to the present, including “the inherent instability of meaning,” seem almost to mandate that the conclusions from this study not stray too far from the particular contexts from which they were drawn. Dodgshon’s recent conclusion that “it is the differences between particular times, or particular spaces, not their equivalences, that now matter,” provides a concise description of current research themes in historical

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geography. However, while the unique spaces of production in two Black Country towns may have little bearing on such spaces in other neighbourhoods and communities, the forces that constructed them were undoubtedly at work across Victorian England.

In his consideration of spaces of work and their relationship to ‘living space,’ Markus has said that “production brings together the worker, the machine, any power source, the raw materials and built space. Culture shapes this workspace, as indeed the space for reformation, recreation and the production of knowledge.” This observation in effect summarises the three workplace considerations expressed as goals at the start of this thesis, i.e., as a locale where work was performed and livings were made; as a social unit where work cultures developed and changed; and as a neighbour to labour and a feature of the local landscape. Within these three approaches, it has been shown that a myriad of economic, social, cultural and governmental influences were constantly at work shaping and reshaping industrial spaces and workplaces, and by association people’s lives. By looking at the assignment and acquisition of control over social space within each neighbourhood, “social relations stretched over time,” local custom has been examined as a “field of change and of contest, an arena in which opposing interests made conflicting claims.” Certainly, if anything obvious emerges from the detailed focus on Ablewell East and Spon Lane in the nineteenth century, it would be that even these small geographic units offered highly complex landscapes of negotiation and consent.

In the context of the current historiography of the urban, “the city is no longer the site of abrupt structural transformation; rather it harbours discursive movements of a more serpentine nature, in which ideological and cultural tropes - often of preindustrial vintage - are reworked and recycled.” If we accept this conclusion, and the previous chapters would seem to offer some confirmation, then the layers of contest over social space in Ablewell East and Spon Lane were logically enacted within the characteristic customs of each neighbourhood. For instance, an abrupt interpretation of the passage and

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9 E. P. Thompson (1991) “Introduction: custom and culture,” in E. P. Thompson, *Customs in Common: Studies in Traditional Popular Culture*, p 6. This statement, as used in this context, is muted somewhat from Thompson’s own arguments. In a later comment in the same article, he avers that the industrial revolution “destroyed the authority of customary expectations,” a conclusion not reached in this thesis.
implementation of the Factory and Workshop Acts would lead to a conclusion that the letter of the law became an immediate responsibility of workplace managers. In fact, the pace of assimilation tended to be governed locally. For the Factory Inspector in Walsall seeking to exercise control over who worked where and for how long, the small production unit proved to be a hindrance for carrying out these duties. When there was “no access to the workshops and factories, other than through the houses,” then these spaces remained largely opaque to the moral authority of factory legislation. While this opacity may have frustrated the local sub-Inspector, it could be argued that the workshop operators and those who worked in them could have equated this landscape invisibility with good fortune, especially if they were employing women or children illegally. In the 30 years of this study, there were no prosecutions from within the small workshops of Ablewell East. On the other hand, the larger neighbourhood works were occasionally investigated and fined. For instance, Catherine Cresswell was detected in 1871 employing three unregistered young persons at her Pool Street foundry. Arguably, the true test of controlling industrial space within the Walsall neighbourhood was in recognising that potentially all spaces were industrial. On any given date, who could or would have known about all the workplaces in Ablewell East?

At a municipal level, the efforts to rationalise this integrated landscape included a standardised approach to street and utility improvements and the early assignment of addresses to individual properties. In effect, this response facilitated the continuation of historical land use and production patterns for many of Walsall’s major industries. The associations between modernity and capital movement in the neighbourhood were thus enacted in partnership with the state. Perhaps this was the inevitable consequence for an industrial regime dominated by smaller workplaces moving forward in time with the established municipal presence described in Chapter 4. Capital shaped and local cultures of work responded, and the intersection served to secure and perpetuate the needs of both.

The allocation of power was clearly different within the neighbourhood spaces of Spon Lane. A weaker borough authority, combined with the early colonisation and nineteenth century growth of larger enterprises within the former village centres of West Bromwich,

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translated to a comparatively more destructive model of industrialisation. Although, in many ways, hegemony of place for industry was earned in Spon Lane and other neighbourhoods much earlier by virtue of the ability of a factory culture to establish itself in the eighteenth century. Viewed from these earlier roots, the nineteenth century can be interpreted as the consolidation of industrial space into an increasing segregated arrangement of neighbourhood space. For instance, the expansion of Kenrick’s and P. D. Bennett’s in the Victorian era was accomplished by consuming residential spaces established when both factories were smaller and land was available to construct housing in close proximity to the workplace. As late as 1871, Hall Street South (with 35 residences) and Houghton Street (with 17 residences) were home to 52 residential properties. Twenty years later, the only remaining housing along these two streets were 8 addresses toward the western end of Houghton Street. That there was no equivalent to this transformation in Ablewell East provides an argument that the built industrial environment in Spon Lane was arguably more fixed and therefore more likely to expand outward at the expense of other established land uses.

Do these ‘differences’ in the respective spatialisations of time in Ablewell East and Spon Lane challenge our understandings of modernity in the later Victorian city? In the broader context of human geography, the answer is probably no. For instance, the 2000 edition of the Dictionary of Human Geography, referencing Ogborn’s recent work, acknowledges that a “differentiated and plural understanding of modernity distributes transformations ‘across a range of connected sites, scenes and networks’ and, equally important, that these ‘geographies of connection are moments in the making of modernities rather than being matters of their transfer or imposition.’” In other words, it should not be surprising that two neighbourhoods within the same territorial industrial complex would exhibit such strikingly different forms of industrialisation and modernity. Rather than an encompassing surrender to modernisation, temporal ‘moments’ contributed to gradual spatial change, each with a brand established within a prevailing culture of work. Within the two neighbourhoods, an enduring sense of tradition appears to have been able to assert itself over even the most coercive influences inspired by industrial capitalism. At its foundation, “social space can in no way be compared to a

THE PRODUCTION OF INDUSTRIAL SPACE

In his brief but important gauntlet thrown before historical geographers of Canadian urban history, Lewis recites the familiar refrain of the lack of attention given to the production of industrial space in nineteenth century cities. "In particular, the interaction between economic imperatives and the social construction of the built environment are missing." To explore this relatively untrodden territory, Lewis forwards three challenges. First, it is important to consider that geographical change is spurred by the uneven application of new technology, labour processes and production organisation. A second challenge should be to "interpret the formation of urban industrial spaces within the context of the cyclical growth of capital investment." Finally, these spaces need to be linked with the wider social processes at work within the neighbourhood or community. This study has addressed at least a portion of these three challenges, using those sources available that offered some insights into geographical change within the industrial spaces of Ablewell East and Spon Lane. Taking an example from the two neighbourhoods for each of Lewis' points, this section suggests how additional avenues for research might be possible given different or more complete sources that may be available elsewhere.

At a neighbourhood level, it is difficult to gauge the degree of geographical change wrought by the onset of new machinery or production processes. However, there were several examples whereby the local population of workers had to adapt to workplace-based modifications in the fundamentals of daily work practices. In Spon Lane, the 1890 strike by 63 holloware turners at Kenrick's struck at the heart of a factory that had until then been unaffected by organised labour stoppage. It was shown in Chapter 6 that the walkout had a widespread effect on the ability of other trades to accomplish their work, and spurred these co-workers into making gestures to facilitate an end to the strike. The action lasted less than two months with the workers returning on management's terms.

16 Lewis, *op. cit.*, p 72.
Less than a year later, the job of holloware turner at Kenrick's was eliminated in response to the introduction of machinery to do the same work. Although a generous severance package was included with the notice of termination, the loss of employment for 68 workers with relatively high wages could be expected to have had an impact on the geography of the neighbourhood. That the turner's skill, the ability to manually shape holloware, was for a century one of the bread and butter occupations at Kenrick's must have further challenged the community to adapt.

We are able to learn something about how the neighbourhood might have reacted and learned from this technological change by looking at the census enumerators' books for 1891. Before this date, however, it is interesting to note that during a span of time when Kenrick's was expanding and the total number of individuals listing 'holloware' occupations grew from 36 to 65 (1871 to 1891), the number of turners rose from nine to eleven between 1871 and 1881, then dropped back to nine in 1891. Part of this drop could certainly be attributed to the worker's specific response to the enumerator, perhaps using the more broadly-defined occupation of holloware moulder (which did rise between 1881 and 1891). It seems fairly certain, however, that the axe had already fallen on the turners by the date of the 1891 census, since two of these nine individuals were noted as being "out of employ." In other words, their occupational responses may simply have been recognition that the turner trade had been eliminated at Kenrick's.

Beyond mere numbers of workers in the surrounding neighbourhood, the act of eliminating these positions could be examined for its effect on social change within the household. Of the nine men listing holloware turner as their occupation in 1891, four lived on Glover Street, two on Green Street and three on Union Street. According to the census, four of the nine had no other members of the household listing an occupation, three were sons sharing a residence with either a widowed mother (1) or working father (2), and two were heads of household with employed members of the family. None of these households had more than one turner listed, although it is likely that at least two of the homes had more than one person working at Kenrick's. At both 96 and 110 Glover Street, girls and young women of employment age (ages 14, 14, 16 and 19) were listed as warehouse girls, a department of the neighbourhood factory that was almost exclusively female.
The post-termination household income at 96 Glover Street would have been particularly dire. John Warden, the 23-year old unmarried son of Eliza Warden (50 and a widow), was probably the primary income support for the family, even though his sister Sarah Warden, 19, worked as a warehouse girl. In a case like this, and probably many others, the severance package offered by the firm would have bought the family time to adapt to sudden unemployment from a company that had no history of layoffs, technological or otherwise. Unfortunately, lack of sources limit a modern reading of the experience of these machine-related redundancies. However, in terms of measuring geographical change, additional sources such as employee records could link individuals to their company longevity and address, consistent rate book survival might reveal how long and if these redundant workers stayed in the neighbourhood, and business records could illuminate the use and effectiveness of the severance provisions. Even from what little is known about the aftermath of the Kenrick’s layoff, the Spon Lane neighbourhood and workplace would almost certainly have felt the repercussions of having these people thrown out of work.

The second proposed research challenge in understanding urban industrial spaces is the concern over how trade cycles affect the amount and form of capital investment within a given area. Clearly, the ‘state of the trade’ was a fertile ground for discussion in the local press, management and worker cooperatives, the Factory Inspector reports and in local Chambers of Commerce and municipal circles. Liddle, in his 1988 study of Walsall, draws a link between an ebb in overall trade fortunes and the completion of workplace construction projects. In fact, he ascribes the pattern of factory building in the 1880s as the manufacturing class “consciously picking their moment” when the economy was slackest. Given the number of economic sectors at work in Walsall, and the existence of other factors that could have helped ignite a factory building boom, Liddle’s conclusion must remain tentative. However, the study of growth within the Ablewell East neighbourhood between 1865 and 1895 did disclose a combination of traditional spaces being reproduced and innovative spaces being introduced.

Perhaps the most significant change between the older and newer portions of the neighbourhood was the presence of a significant number of small factories along the new streets. Firms such as the Bayley’s fancy glass works, Alfred Bullow’s metal works, James Carver’s whip factory and the leather works of Fairbanks, Lavender all chose to occupy this emerging urban space. We have seen how these structures were interspersed amongst residential terraces, much like workplaces along Pool or Bank Street, but their larger masses and streetside countenances distinguished them from the back garden workshops. To what extent did trade cycles and market characteristics cause this adjustment in the industrial landscape of Walsall? These new working spaces would have demanded higher levels of capitalisation than the many small workplaces in the neighbourhood, but the source and motivation for this investment remains hidden. Banking records and a more complete set of planning decisions could be instructive in connecting dates and financing with such wider issues as global demand, a growing Walsall entrepreneurial class or shifts in consumer tastes. Similarly, family histories could reveal personal motivations for seeking new and larger industrial spaces.

Despite these shortcomings, there were several aspects of this small factory building initiative that offer some clues to explain this development. The 1880s were generally prosperous for many of the Walsall trades, leather and leather products in particular. With demand being generated from the British Empire, domestic and European sources, and large War Department contracts, firms such as Fairbanks, Lavender on Eldon Street and Franklin’s currying works on Bank Street enjoyed steady custom. Further, with the interconnectedness of the town’s small metal trades with the leather trades, the success of the latter often meant that the former were able to ride these coattails. Larger firms were able to respond to greater demand, not only for one product, but for the ever-expanding consumer market as well. Carver’s move from Ablewell Street to his new factory, while not gaining much in space, was most likely organised to manufacture whips on a larger scale using the same floor area. Demand may have been important, but the changes in workplace organisation were equally important in fuelling the change in industrial space in Ablewell East. Owners’ decisions to either build or purchase adjoining residences in many cases is also difficult to explain, although we do know that most chose to live along more salubrious streets elsewhere in town. Here again, better
building records in another locale might help to link these small factory owners with the larger neighbourhood picture.

Using the available sources, this study has sought to examine the industrial spaces within Ablewell East and Spon Lane and associate them with the wider social processes at work within the neighbourhood and the community. In his final challenge, Lewis refers to the “active creation” of these spaces, linking this process to recent Canadian studies that “demonstrate the importance of land developers in the building of certain socially segregated neighbourhoods and suburbs.” While this is without question an important angle to consider in associating residential and industrial space, especially in the context of capital investment, it is in some ways a detour away from a clear focus on the latter. As evidenced by some of the findings presented in this study, there are conclusions to be drawn in pointing the research spotlight directly on the reflexivity between where people worked and where people lived. Not only does this approach encompass the widest possible range of working options, including those whose work was performed largely in the home, it opens up to view the vast number of ways in which constructions of social space emerged from the merged experiences of both spheres.

The attempts by several large factories within Spon Lane to appropriate leisure time pursuits, such as scheduled social events at the Spon Lane Coffee House, sponsorship of prizes for the local flower show or excursions to holiday destinations, were indicative of a growing sense that industrial space extended beyond the workplace walls. In turn, the fact that these events were reportedly well-attended and popular with the workers points to the willingness of the rank and file to welcome aspects of their working environment into personal time. In some ways, this desire to socialise with co-workers during non-work hours contrasted with how these same workers, of both neighbourhoods, organised in terms of workplace-specific issues such as hours of work, piece work rates or even what to do with scrap iron. When issues arose that had something to do with compensation or working conditions, then loyalty from within the shared experience of the trade seemed to reign supreme. From nut and bolt workers representing several area factories, to awl blade or harness makers spread across a large number of Walsall workshops, industrial actions were undertaken across whatever lines were drawn around

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spaces of work. Clearly, people relied in some cases on traditional patterns of social relations and in other instances upon what they learned within new and changing spaces being created by industrial capital.

Perhaps it is too obvious to state that there was not one uniform experience of work in later Victorian neighbourhoods of Walsall and West Bromwich, nor would there have been elsewhere. The individual people and events referenced throughout this study are able to generate only a partial picture of the complex links between workplaces and the larger communities. In addition, it is one of the ironies of scale that what made it possible in this study to explore a number of connections between individual people and addresses and the larger patterns of social and industrial space within Spon Lane and Ablewell East, is the same reason why there are large gaps in understanding these relationships. A study of this nature has raised far more questions than there is evidence to provide answers. However, there are lessons to be learned by simply recognising why certain aspects of neighbourhood working lives cannot be analysed or examined. In the absence of source material relating to small workshop management, to the extent of leisure time pursuits shared with co-workers, to the amount and topics of discussion at the workplace or to the organisation of space inside factories and workshops, there is the tacit lesson that these aspects of people’s lives and of industry’s needs were not exceptional. The experience of work, whether distantly viewed or intimately lived, remains mostly opaque to all but those present at the time. In his Black Country novel The Far Forest, Francis Brett Young wrote that “all the serious side of the street’s life was conducted at the back,”\(^2\) certainly ample notice that our abilities to participate in or comprehend this experience are very limited indeed.

\(^2\) F. B. Young (1936) The Far Forest, p 5.
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