FATHERHOOD AND THE
EXPERIENCE OF WORKING-CLASS
FATHERS IN BRITAIN, 1900-1939.

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Thesis Submitted for Ph.D. Examination.
Edinburgh University.
2004.
I hereby declare that this thesis, entitled:
Fatherhood and the experience of working class fathers in Britain 1900-1939

(a) has been composed by me and is all my own work.
(b) has not been submitted for any other degree of professional qualification.

Signed: .................................................................
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ABSTRACT

In the last ten years or so, largely as a consequence of serious study into manliness and masculinity, the place of the father in family life has begun to gain some critical attention in an historical context. The focus to date has been primarily on the Victorian middle-class father, and this thesis seeks to continue the story into the Edwardian and inter-war years and to broaden the focus of enquiry onto the less well explored experience of the working-class father.

The first portion of the thesis examines fatherhood as a set of perceived and prescribed ideas by examining some prominent ‘discourses’ from the period. During the passing of the 1925 Guardianship of Infants Act, lawmakers and judges scrutinised the father’s importance to family life. While emphasis was placed on the importance of the mother - in itself often exposing a limited perception of the father’s functions - the father was still seen as an important figure in his children’s lives. Continuing these themes, a ‘progressive’ and cohesive understanding of fatherhood emerged from within the infant welfare movement that stressed the importance of a close father-child relationship for ‘healthy’ child development and also argued that fathers could not fulfil their functions as parent from the margins of family life. Mirroring the attempts to ‘educate’ working-class mothers in welfare clinics, it was the working-class father who became the target of this didactic ‘fathercraft’ movement, and it was the fathercraft movement that provided a legitimate and pioneering version of male parenting in the inter-war years.

The second portion of the thesis moves the focus onto the conduct of fathers and the day-to-day experiences of fatherhood among the working-class. It uses oral history and autobiography to illuminate some of the ways that the father-child relationship was shaped. It suggests that middle-class perceptions of fatherhood were often at odds with the realities of working-class life, but that there was probably a greater ‘overlap’ between the conduct of fathers and the ‘culture’ of fatherhood than the current literature suggests. It is shown that fathers were often loving and certainly often ‘involved’ as parents and that this involvement is only fully understood by viewing the father in a different way from the mother. This portion of the thesis also examines some experiences of fatherhood during the First World War by an analysis of letters written during that conflict. The strains on family life created by the enforced absence of the father serves to highlight some of the assumptions and expectations surrounding his functions. Similarly, an exploration of the experiences of the unemployed father highlights that joblessness sometimes affected his functions as a parent and that being less able to ‘provide’ often caused as least short-term shifts in the expectations surrounding a father’s behaviour.

The thesis shows that there was much continuity in the experiences and the understanding of fatherhood in the period but also that inter-war period is most accurately viewed as a unique period in the history of fatherhood. As contemporaries believed, and as this study suggests, the expectations surrounding inter-war fatherhood were shifting. This did not simply create a forerunner to the ideas of ‘New Fatherhood’ that emerged after the Second World War as has sometimes been suggested. Rather, this thesis concludes, the period between 1900 and 1939 witnessed – not a dramatic change – but a subtle refocusing when it came to the experience of fathers and the perceptions surrounding fatherhood.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Deep and warm gratitude is extended to my Ph.D. supervisors, Michael Anderson and Trevor Griffiths, both of whom gave up much of their valuable time and both of whom offered friendly and valuable comments and suggestions on numerous drafts of the thesis. The moulding and development of this project would have been impossible without their knowledge, guidance, and encouragement.

Insightful comments on early drafts of key chapters were provided by my brother, Andrew, who also helped me deal with the practicalities and concerns of being a Ph.D. student. The friendship and humour of Laura Henson was a tonic in the early stages of this project, and towards the end of the process the kindness and friendship of Chris Edwards kept me rooted in the realities of a world outside the thesis.

Throughout the four years of this project, the advice, support, encouragement and love of my dad has been, as it always has, boundless and beyond measure. He has helped me gain a Ph.D. in more ways than he knows, and more ways than can be measured.

Without the limitless love, affection and patience of Witney this thesis would have fallen by the wayside a long time ago. She has supported my work, even when it has been painfully for us both for it to continue, and she has kept me focused on a life beyond this work. Even from 3000 miles away she has shown me tenderness and support, even when I have been too self-absorbed to do the same, and I cannot thank her enough.

My biggest debt and deepest thanks go to my mum. Her efforts in reading the numerous drafts of this thesis have been stupendous. Her keen eye, love, and cheery support made me smile, gave me confidence and dragged me through the times when this project stopped being fun.

Researching and writing this thesis has been a personal achievement of which I am proud, but the process would have been far longer, far more difficult and probably impossible without the advice, support and patience of these people. To each I offer my sincere thanks.
Chapter One

INTRODUCTION: CONTEXTS AND CONCEPTUALISATIONS

The human community needs fathers, but not just their sperm; all societies expect more of “father” than the biological *sine qua non* of impregnation.¹

As this quotation indicates, fatherhood, unlike biological paternity, is socially constructed. It encompasses (in different societies) a variety of social ‘functions’, such as ‘breadwinner’ and ‘disciplinarian’, or ‘head of household’ and ‘playmate’, each of which can be given varying emphasis in different places and times and within different groups of the population. Fatherhood can be defined by private and intimate acts such as reproduction and childcare but it is also, in almost all societies, a public position, containing rights and responsibilities prescribed and policed by society as a whole.

This thesis is a study of fatherhood within one specific group during one specific period in British history, the working class between 1900 and 1939. This opening chapter provides the context for the study and indicates the importance of, and reasons for, selecting this group and period. The first section reviews the current literature and focuses on some of the shortfalls of the approaches adopted by other historians who have made a real or conceptual contribution to our understanding. The second section examines the specific social and economic setting and outlines developments between 1900 and 1939 that provide the backdrop to the study. The third section of the chapter tries to ‘unpack’ fatherhood and its meanings in order to provide at least a minimal conceptual framework upon which the study can draw.
Literature Review.

It is no longer true that, as the American historian John Demos wrote in 1986, ‘Fatherhood has a very long history, but virtually no historians’. Over the last ten years or so, mainly as a result of studies into manliness and masculinity, but also reflecting modern contemporary concerns about fathers, men’s domestic lives have gained some critical attention in an historical context. ‘Gender history’ insists that femininity has always been defined relative to masculinity (and vice versa) and indicates that the study of one sex in any arena where both are present is inadequate. In the domestic setting it is often the man who remains shadowy because the space was defined as the ‘woman’s’. Yet historians of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries have shown that the ‘separate spheres’ model of gender roles has often been applied too rigidly and that, as a result, movement by men and women between and within these ‘separate’ spheres has often been hidden.

Fatherhood has not gained significant attention in the current literature; there is only one monograph devoted entirely to fathers and fatherhood in Britain and this focuses on the image of the middle-class father in Victorian periodicals. There have however been important essays or sections in monographs or contributions to edited collections that have focused specifically on fatherhood. Most notable among these are the work of John Tosh and Megan Doolittle for the Victorian period and the work of Lynn Abrams and Trevor Lummis for the period after 1900. But such focused studies are still rare. More commonly (and this is true even for the aforementioned authors) scholars have given attention to the historical presence of fathers as part of their wider concerns for themes such as the family, masculinity, childhood, or
motherhood. Within these works the most developed understanding we have remains that of fatherhood among the Victorian middle class. Therefore, as Martin Francis concludes, 'it will be necessary to supplement the work ... on the middle classes with studies of ... working-class genres of manly behaviour'. This seems nowhere more pressing than for fatherhood.

This section will not attempt to examine every mention of fatherhood in every discipline or in every chronological and geographical period covered by the literature reviewed in writing this thesis. The aim is to highlight how this study will add to, build on and re-interpret our current understanding. Just as importantly, the 'by-product' image of working-class fatherhood we currently have will be critically examined in order to show that there is a pressing need for a deliberate and specific study on fathers and fatherhood.

The first serious modern attempts at studying masculinity and 'manliness' in an historical context focused on 'manliness' in the nineteenth century, notably the idea of 'muscular Christianity' and what we can term the 'ethos of the public school'. However, as John Tosh has pointed out, 'manliness' is different to 'masculinity' because the former is largely about the 'inner character of men' and is constructed and demonstrated within all-male groups. The key point therefore is that these early studies on manliness were often 'quite innocent of gender' and often 'only secondarily about men's relationship with women'. The possibility that domesticity or a man's family relationships could be a component of manliness and masculinity was only first seriously explored in 1991, with the publication of Manful Assertions, edited by Michael Roper and John Tosh. Building on his contribution to this, Tosh produced a number of articles on Victorian middle-class masculinity as
it related to domesticity, research that culminated in his 1999 monograph *A Man's Place*. This uses etiquette manuals, private letters and diaries to map the domestic lives and responsibilities of a number of middle-class Victorian men and shows how masculinity was often tightly bound to the home and that fatherhood was a central component of masculinity; at least until c.1870 when Tosh argues there was a 'flight from domesticity'. Contrasting to the work of David Roberts, who focused on authority, distance and patriarchy in paterfamilias of the Victorian governing classes, Tosh shows that there was a variety of fatherly behaviours. He identifies four main 'types' located between the extremes of 'absent' father and 'tyrannical' father, and he hints that the often-stereotyped view of the 'tyrannical' father was in fact perhaps the experience of a minority. What is highlighted is that fatherhood among the Victorian middle class was principally about being the breadwinner, 'protector' and representative of the family, but also that the more intimate aspects of the father-child relationship could sometimes be important - men in Tosh's evidence are described as having 'delighted in their children and put their love to many practical tests'.

The Victorian middle class and the twentieth-century working-class fathers occupied very different worlds and applying Tosh's work directly to the working class in the first half of the twentieth century is not overly useful. However, some of his conceptual underpinnings do have importance.

Tosh argues that the father became secondary to the mother in many aspects of parenting because of the moral weight attached to her in this period. Where fathers had once led the family prayer time, the mother began to lead in bedtime prayers for example. (Claudia Nelson has similarly suggested this in the context of sex education
in this period). This emphasis, on how fatherhood was altered by changes to the perception of the mother and the enlargement of ‘her’ functions, is vital. Indeed, this ‘relationship’ approach finds convergence with work of the American sociologist Ralph LaRossa who argues that changes in twentieth-century American fatherhood had as much to do with the conduct of the mother as that of the father. Although not explicit on this point, Tosh also hints that the waxing and waning of a father’s interaction with his children could be tied to the age of the children. This tentative step away from seeing children as one amorphous whole is a point expanded on in this study. Tosh notes that the cosy domesticity of the home was always at odds with what many fathers saw as their most pressing duty, to provide sons with the ability to function in the harsh realities outside the home. This contradiction sometimes created the ‘distant’ father who, though physically present and devoted to children, was resistant to expressing emotion or indulging in play and intimacy. The notion that different ‘players’ in a man’s life (wife, children and peers) could exert different expectations is a theme given prominence in this study, certainly in the later chapters that explore fathers’ conduct.

Middle class ideas of masculinity were often at odds with working-class culture. John Springhall’s examination of the Boys’ Brigade between 1884 and 1914 and Pamela Walker’s study of working-class recruits to the Salvation Army between 1865 and 1880 both highlight that middle-class conceptions of masculinity were often rejected. Studies into working-class masculinity have primarily focused on all-male associations at work and leisure or on the transition from boyhood to manhood. Work-related virtues, such as strength and skill are seen as having been central to masculine identity but so too are ideas of self-restraint, self-improvement
and the duty to support dependants. The expansion of the franchise in 1918 and the growth of the Labour party in inter war Britain meant that working-class issues took on greater political significance. Certainly the male breadwinner norm and ‘family wage’ ideal became persistent underpinnings of Labour and Trade Union policy throughout this period. Studies conducted on unemployment during the 1930s similarly highlight the importance of work, suggesting that a lack of employment cut to the heart of masculine self-respect.

However, a clear gap in our understanding is the relationship between working-class masculinity and domesticity. Some broad studies occasionally illuminate some pertinent issues in this regard, but the only explicit attempt to address this emerges from Humphries and Gordon who conducted an oral history project on manliness between 1900-1960, and whose original interviews are heavily drawn upon in the latter part of this thesis. Without repeating what will be dealt with in detail later, they suggest that public ‘nurture’ was often shied away from because it was deemed ‘effeminate’ in many working-class groups and also that the function of masculine role model sometimes resulted in the emotional relationship between fathers and sons becoming ‘blunted’. However, Humphries and Gordon’s study on fathers is brief, with little discussion, lengthy interview extracts and gaps in the analysis. For example, while emphasising the father-son relationship, they neglect the importance of age and, moreover, their conclusions sometimes contradict one another. Therefore, as the later chapters of the thesis will show, their interviews can usefully and legitimately be ‘revisited’.

Within the body of literature concerned with the move to ‘protect’ children since the early nineteenth century - such as research on the development of the
NSPCC and child welfare legislation for example - we are given insight into some contemporary perceptions of fatherhood and, indeed, the conduct of some working-class fathers. For example, even in the first decades of the twentieth century, it was still often believed that fathers had the sacramental 'right' to deal with and treat their children as they saw fit. In the nineteenth century this was related to their God-given 'right' to control their children, but even as this religious underpinning waned, the fear that curtailing paternal rights might erode paternal responsibility sometimes meant that law makers and welfare workers were wary of challenging the way fathers acted. This in part explains why the first 'protective' legislation focused on children in 'public' arenas such as work, school and the street.

However, at some point during the late nineteenth century, concern over the harsh treatment of children began to take precedent over the rights of parents. The 1889 Prevention of Cruelty to Children Act was a landmark piece of legislation in that it challenged parental rights by allowing irresponsible and cruel parents to be deprived of their children, who could be placed in institutions for their own safety. The principles enshrined in the Act set the tone for the next seventy years which, as Hewitt and Pinchbeck argue, steadily expanded towards the protection of children in all areas of life. While this is perhaps an exaggeratedly 'Whiggish' interpretation, it is nonetheless generally accurate to view the period as a time when the primacy of parental rights was displaced by a growing concern for the rights of children.

An outcome of the greater 'policing' of working-class parents was that certain 'negative' images of fathers emerged and, by often focusing on these images, the current literature has perhaps produced a 'skewed' portrayal of unloving, unscrupulous, exploitative and cruel parents. This is not to argue that this image did
not reflect what was sometimes the reality. George Behlmer has shown that the working-class father was the prime (although not the only) target for the NSPCC and in Salford between 1900 and 1925 Robert Roberts observed that, ‘the regular and often brutal assaults on some children [were] perpetuated [by parents] in the name of discipline’. However, it is this ‘cruel’ or abusive father that is perhaps the most readily identifiable image for historians and his presence has therefore often been over-emphasised in studies of working-class autobiographies and oral histories, such as those conducted by John Burnett and Jeremy Seabrook. Furthermore, while the negative parental image has perhaps been qualified for mothers in community studies on motherhood, the image of the brutish father has probably gained unwarranted primacy and endured so long because we have so little to compare it to, and qualify it with. As Trevor Lummis suggests, research on fathers in the early twentieth century is required ‘in order to question the common stereotype of the drunken, brutal, working-class father’. This study, while acknowledging throughout that some fathers were at times violent and abusive, will try and move the focus on to the more common cordial relationships in order to question the representativeness of this ‘stereotyped’ image.

The development of family law has been studied by a number of historians. The focus has invariably been either the improvements of children’s rights vis-à-vis parents or improvement for wives’ rights vis-à-vis husbands. In both cases the conclusion reached is an unproblematic ‘Whiggish’ development in which, over the last century, fathers’ rights over their legitimate children have been substantially curtailed. However, the wider connotation for changes with regard to fathers and fatherhood are rarely addressed. For example, the history of divorce, which contains
important studies by James Hammerton and Lawrence Stone, has notably little
discussion of fatherhood and motherhood within disputes about child support and
custody.\textsuperscript{33}

More recently however, Megan Doolittle has conducted research on
nineteenth-century fatherhood through an examination of family law. Explored in
detail in her Ph.D. thesis and condensed in \textit{Family Story}, she argues that there were
significant legal challenges to paternal rights from c.1830 as a result of growing
concern for a woman’s legal position but notes that the idea of a father’s ‘natural’
rights proved ‘highly resistant to change’.\textsuperscript{34} The law could only have limited
practical effect because it only dealt with the rare cases of divorce and because the
husband continued to control the economic resources. The focus of judges’ decisions
more often revolved around the comparative ‘guilt’ of each spouse rather than
detailed discussions of the functions of each parent. It was only where ‘a man had
clearly and conclusively failed to fulfil his marital duty’ that he ‘might lose control
over his children’.\textsuperscript{35}

Mid-nineteenth century feminists attacked the subservient and unequal
position of wives and it was largely this pressure which spurred on legislation which
sought to equalise custody and property rights between the sexes.\textsuperscript{36} Ann Sumner
Holmes shows that by the 1920s there was a ‘dramatic reversal of a nineteenth-
century view that judges should not grant adulteresses custody of their children’; a
bar that had never existed for adulterous men.\textsuperscript{37} Interestingly, Holmes tentatively
links this shift to changing ideas about parental influence:

[The mother] was to serve as moral guide and exemplar, while the
father’s role was more passive. Thus her misconduct necessarily
“contaminated” the children, while his did not.\textsuperscript{38}
Holmes’ evidence does not allow her to expand on these perceptions of parenting; certainly nothing more is said for the implications for fathers. But her conclusion that ‘the seeds of judicial preference for mothers are evident in the decision to grant custody to adulteresses’, is a trend much highlighted in the current literature.\textsuperscript{39} The sub-text of her argument is that there was a growth in the importance attached to mothers that allowed the mother-child bond to be privileged over all else in the name of child welfare.

Outlining the limits of paternal authority during times of family ‘crisis’ tells us little about working-class fatherhood on a day-to-day basis. For example, what Doolittle maps is the decline in paternal rights as enshrined and encoded in the law, rather than changes to expectations surrounding fatherly behaviour. As she argues, the father’s functions were not ‘unpacked’ or scrutinised by judges or lawmakers in her period and it was the very fact that his position rested on long-standing assumptions about paternal authority that caused his ‘rights’ to be often beyond question. This study argues that, as we move into the twentieth century, a number of discourses increasingly began to scrutinise the assumptions surrounding paternal rights and also began to ask exactly what a father’s parental functions were. It will be argued that, in a period when motherhood was transformed and elevated, fatherhood did not remain ‘static’ as is suggested in the current literature. Rather, it adapted to lay focus on areas that were more compatible with the new ideas on mothers’ rights and child welfare.

Moving away from family law, the relationship between children and parents in our period has gained some attention but the general picture is often general and vague, and almost always focuses on the mother. The trend, as outlined in the current
literature, can be summed up in the statement: throughout our period there was an alteration, and almost certainly an ‘improvement’ in the way both working-class and middle-class children were regarded and treated by their parents. Exactly what authors mean by ‘improvement’ is often unclear. The consensus seems to emphasise the growth of affection and increased parent-child interaction as well as a shift among parents towards viewing children as valuable in themselves, rather than viewing their value in terms of their for their future (economic) potential.

Historians have emphasised the decline in corporal punishment between c.1850 and c.1950 in explaining this shift.40 No doubt, in general terms and with important exceptions and qualifications, the period from c.1850-1939 saw a dramatic decline in the use, and acceptability of, corporal punishment. However, its use was by no means eradicated by 1939 and studies such as that conducted by Young and Willmott in East London have shown that it was still common in some working-class areas as late as the 1950s.41 For our concern, as Humphries and Gordon have suggested, it has commonly been the father who has been seen as having handed out the sternest physical punishments.42

Paul Thompson offers a ‘demographic’ explanation for this trend towards more ‘cordial’ parent-child relationships in his study of Edwardian society. He argues that fewer children allowed for the rise of ‘progressive’ childrearing, first among the middle-class, but later among the workers, because fewer children meant less crowded homes and less effort for parents and this meant that more time and affection could be given to each child.43 Such a view is linked to broader changes in the way children were viewed by society. Continuing developments from the mid-nineteenth century, legislation increasingly kept children from work and in school,
children survived longer, and childhood became extended, identifiable and valued in itself. Indeed, from a national perspective the value of children was seen in terms of imperial, military and industrial progress. It certainly seems to make sense to suggest that, as the economic reciprocal relationships between working-class children and their parents became less significant, it perhaps allowed emphasis in their relationship to be placed on different areas. However, as Ellen Ross exemplifies for London before the First World War, it was often the very ‘work’ mothers did for their children, and children did for their mothers, that underpinned the affection of that relationship.

Burnett also highlights the importance of economic resources in parent-child relationships, but he is less quick to see them as always being the predominant factor. While he does argue that limited resources might curtail affection, he observes that in autobiographies it was often the poorer working-class households that were remembered as the happiest. As this study will argue, parent-child affection cannot be explained only by increased contact or opportunity for interaction.

How these general trends in parent-child relationships affected father-child relationships specifically is of course one of the concerns of this study. Much of the dynamics of parent-child relations have been studied through studies on motherhood and in these studies the father is portrayed as the less affectionate and more brutal parent. Ellen Ross, who is not shy of portraying the working-class mother in a harsh way, concludes that fathers gave out the worst punishments, for example. Burnett and Thompson both provide many good examples of caring and affectionate fathers, yet they conclude that fathers were less affectionate, and in turn less loved, than
mothers. In his 1997 review of the literature concerning childhood, Hendrick sums up the view of the current literature: ‘Affection between fathers and their children seems to have been far rarer in comparison with that between mother and children’. Questioning this view, or at least presenting a more detailed picture, is a major concern of this study. For example, it will be suggested that the age of the child was a vital component in the affection shown to and by a father and the thesis questions the day-to-day impact of the disciplinarian function on a father’s relationship with his children. More broadly, it focuses on exactly how the father-child relationship was experienced by examining the nature of their interaction. In comparison to mothers, it will be shown that fathers were often seen as distinct from the mother precisely because they had more time to be affectionate and accessible when in the home.

This thesis is not only concerned with the conduct of fathers but also with ‘discourses’ focused on fatherhood. Didactic ‘advice’ literature addressed to parents has existed throughout the modern period (and indeed before). However, the only study of parenting advice to focus on fatherhood is a short 1980 essay by Barbara Fass Leavy who examined fathering as it appeared in the British Mother’s Magazine between 1845 and 1864. While outside our period of interest and based on a magazine for educated middle-class women, the study raises some interesting issues. Leavy’s basic conclusion is that the scant attention given to the father in the magazine was an indication of ‘a growing conviction of his passivity and relative ineffectualness’. Any hint at ‘advice’ to a father in the magazine was typically in the form of what Leavy calls ‘negative parenting’ - fathers were told not to get in their wives’ way, as an article titled ‘Non-Interference: a hint to Fathers’
underlines. Leavy’s attempt to interpret the absence of advice given to the father is conceptually useful. As we shall see, the notion that the father could be more of a hindrance than a help when trying to assist with the care of children became an often powerful motif in advice given to working-class fathers during the inter-war period.

Studies of didactic and theoretical approaches to childrearing conclude that, between the period 1900 and 1939, there was a steady expansion of often widely read (certainly among the middle-classes) advice on childrearing but that this literature gave virtually no attention to the father. As Christina Hardyment outlines in her comprehensive study, ‘from the evidence of the manuals, the role of fathers seems to have remained disappointingly distant’. Such a statement does perhaps show confusion in interpretation between ‘prescribed’ behaviour and the conduct of fathers, a fact of which we need to be wary. Yet Hardyment herself gives a glimpse that the evidence might reveal more about how fathers were at least interested in their children. She notes, for example, that in the 1880s, ‘Ada Ballin [an ‘expert’ who dispensed childrearing advice in the magazine] decided to rename her “Mothers’ Parliament” in Baby magazine “Parents’ Parliament” because of the increasing number of letters written to her by fathers’. What, we are immediately led to ask, were these fathers concerned with? (As it happens these letters fall outside the scope of this thesis, but could provide a fruitful avenue for a broader class or chronological study on fatherhood). Interest from fathers is very different from advice being issued to them, with which the Hardyment study is primarily concerned, but the complete dominance of the mother in childrearing theory and advice up to 1940 should not automatically be seen as evidence that the father was viewed as unimportant.
This study certainly suggests that the conclusion offered by the current studies of childrearing advice is not the whole story. Published advice manuals for parents were not the only source of childrearing advice in this period. By the turn of the twentieth century, and certainly after 1918, didactic advice on child rearing was being expounded through the increasing number of Infant and Maternal Welfare Clinics (and, after 1920, Child Guidance Clinics) and even taken into homes by health visitors. Moreover, and a point vital for the focus of this study, within these arenas the advice was specifically tailored for the working classes who, as Hardymont, Beckman, and indeed Fass Leavy all acknowledge, were rarely reading the advice they critique in their studies. The inter-war years also witnessed the emergence of psychoanalysis and psychology that perhaps increased the attention given to the male parent. Studies by Urwin and Sharland on the incorporation of psychology into childcare literature and by Deborah Thom on the Child Guidance movement in inter-war Britain (while neither explicitly mention the father) suggest that the scope for the father’s involvement expanded in the inter war years because the attention moved away from mere physical survival.\(^{56}\) Indeed, a recent study by Julia Grant for the inter-war USA shows that the belief that gender identity was formed in a child’s early years and not, as had been believed in the nineteenth century, during adolescence, also at least implicitly demanded that fathers were involved more.\(^{57}\) Useful too in the broader picture is Martha Wolfenstein’s study of the emergence of what she terms ‘fun morality’ in the immediate post Second World War era in the United States.\(^{58}\) This was far more accommodating for fathers because it suggested that play and affection and a parent’s ‘instincts’ were important.
The nature of chronological 'changes' to fatherhood and a father's conduct is another theme given discussion in this study. The emphasis given to the post Second World War era within the current literature will be qualified by the argument that the inter-war years were an important period of change too. John and Elizabeth Newson argue that the increased involvement of the father in the family has been the result of 'socio-economic' factors, including rising standards of living, improvements in housing and the increased amount of leisure available to men.59 However, they suggest that it was only after the Second World War, and indeed it seems from their slightly vague chronology only in the 1960s, that these changes became significant enough to locate the father in the home.

Placing the start of significant change to fatherhood in the immediate post Second World War era is also often emphasised by social scientists within studies on contemporary, or almost always what is termed 'new', fatherhood.60 Those working on 'new' fatherhood have had a strong thirst for an historical context to their studies but it seems that historians have failed to satisfy this demand; as Thomas Laqueur wrote in 1990, 'I am annoyed that we lack a history of fatherhood'.61 As such a brief 'historical' analyses often appear within these contemporary studies. These seem always to suggest that the inter-war years were of no particular significance in the development of fatherhood and that in the inter-war period fatherhood was more similar to the Edwardian, and even perhaps late Victorian, eras than it was to the 'new' fatherhood emerging in the 1950s. For example, the sociologist Julie Smith sees an unquestioned linear increase in paternal involvement beginning in the 1940s, but concludes that before this time fathers did little or nothing.62 Lynn Segal, while highlighting the short-fallings of the impression, notes that, 'both the popular and the
academic writing of the fifties celebrate a new “togetherness”, domestic harmony and equality between the sexes’. In their study of 1950s Nottingham, John and Elizabeth Newson conclude that, by that time, a father more than ever before, ‘chooses to sit as his own fireside, a baby on his knee and a feeding-bottle in his hand’. Young and Willmott’s study of late 1950s Bethnal Green led them to conclude that:

Nowadays a father as well as the mother takes a hand in the care of children. ‘It used to be thought very undignified for men to have anything to do with children. You’d never see a man wheeling a pram or holding a baby. Of course all that’s changing now’.65

Historians have also suggested that the 1950s was the period when identifiably ‘modern’ fatherhood first emerged in Britain because, as Martin Francis notes, ‘the late 1940s and 1950s [are] a period regularly presented as the apex of domesticity in modern Britain’.66 However, historians emphasise that this was the culmination of developments and trends starting in the inter-war years. To this end, those years are often portrayed as little more than a ‘stepping-stone’ or a period of transition towards this ‘modern’ fatherhood. Joanna Bourke’s review of working-class culture between 1890 and 1960 sees an increase in men’s ‘involvement’ in the home throughout the inter-war years as part of the gradual, linear and rather ‘Whiggish’ change to family life, for example.67 This study offers a different interpretation. Although it does agree that some of the patterns of behaviour associated with ‘modern’ fatherhood are identifiable in the inter-war years, it also seeks to stress that fatherhood in the inter-war years must be seen as distinctive and as having contained a number of unique elements and therefore should not merely be seen as an early form of ‘modern’ fatherhood.
This point leads us nicely to some work on fatherhood in the USA by Ralph LaRossa who argues that the inter-war period witnessed the "modernization" of fatherhood.68 His basic thesis is that, "it was during the Machine Age [inter-war years] that the current image of the father as economic provider, pal, and male role model all rolled into one became institutionalized."69 He thus places the roots of the "new" fatherhood in contemporary America in the years between the wars, but does note that the move towards it was not entirely linear but "fluctuated" according to socio-economic and cultural changes. He argues that, by the early 1940s, there was a convergence between the way mothers and fathers were portrayed in relation to childcare, which was the essence of the "new" fatherhood of the 1970s.

LaRossa's studies will often be referred to in this thesis because his analysis of "fathercraft" and patterns of "modern" fatherly behaviours have strong convergence with the picture for Britain in the same period. However, this study suggests that, while many of the fatherly behaviours we seen in inter-war Britain remind us of "new" fatherhood, it would be a mistake to see this simply in those terms and to do so would be to fall into the trap of "present minded" history. There was not a convergence between fathers and mothers in Britain in the inter-war years, certainly not to the degree that caused parenting functions or responsibilities to be "inter-changeable". If a father did become more "involved" as a parent it was largely the result of expansions of, or re-emphases within, "his" areas of influence, importance and conduct, rather than a "mothers" functions becoming expected functions for a father.

Within broad reviews of working-class culture and family life in Britain between c.1870 and 1950 the father is typically portrayed (where given attention at
all) as marginal to family life but as moving towards more ‘involvement’ towards the end of the period. Characterising the period as a whole however, the father is portrayed as distant to the children and as being rarely involved in tending to their needs. His interests are portrayed as being outside the home or, when in the home, rarely associated with his children directly.

Standish Meacham concludes in his study of the working class between 1890 and 1914 that the gender divide in the home prevented father-child interaction and argues that this was perpetuated because it was convenient for both men and women. Apart from the few who cleaned dishes or repaired shoes, men, it is argued, were passive in the home. Father-child relationships are characterised as ‘distant’, the natural result of a father’s absence from home and of his ‘traditional’ position as head of household - a situation not helped by the fact that ‘what few weekday leisure hours they [men] could afford [were spent] in the company of other men’. Ross McKibbin’s more recent study paints a similar picture of a father’s marginal importance. He again stresses the rigid role segregation in the working-class home and the centrality of the mother and her female-kin networks for the smooth running of family life, what he terms ‘matrilocality’. The outcome of this, McKibbin hints, was the exclusion of the father from the currents of family life: ‘If anyone suffered in this arrangement it was the father’.

Diana Gittins offers a more qualified understanding of the segregation of roles in the working-class home. She concludes that the segregation of roles in the home (and therefore the involvement of the man in domestic life) was related to the access of the wife to paid work. The high levels of female employment in some textile areas meant that husbands and wives shared domestic chores while the lack of
employment for miners’ wives meant that they controlled the domestic space and husbands did not participate in ‘their’ sphere. However, Gittins is not specifically interested in parent-child interaction and her thesis has only limited value for a study of fatherhood. As will be shown for example, characterising father-child interaction as a domestic ‘chore’ is manifestly wrong for much of what they did together. Gittins herself, to be fair, partly qualifies her thesis in this regard by noting that some of the men who helped least in the home still played with their children.74

Joanna Bourke’s 1994 study of working-class culture between 1870 and 1960 has a useful chapter on domestic life. Although her exact chronology is not clear her general thesis is that men became more ‘involved’ in, and were increasingly located in, the home during the inter-war years. At any given time Bourke shows that some men performed some aspects of childcare some of the time, but her thesis is not centred on fatherly behaviour and does not give any notion of whether this changed in the period. She does not suggest that fathers began to perform the ‘female’ tasks (such as babycare) in the home. Indeed, she suggests that wives were often protective of their domestic duties, as it was from control of the domestic space that women could gain power and respect. Therefore, as she writes, ‘the real change was in the expansion of other forms of domestic labour for men … changes [that] required alterations in housing and the provision of allotments and gardens’.75 We must remember that being present in the home is not in itself an indication of father-child interaction. After all, fathers could have been in the home more without having greater involvement with their children, what LaRossa terms the ‘technically present but functionally absent’ father.76
Perhaps the most dominant image we have of the working-class father in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries has emerged as a 'by-product' from community studies focused on mothers and motherhood. Work by Ellen Ross and Anna Davin on London, Carl Chinn on Birmingham and Elizabeth Roberts on northwest England have all detailed the multiple functions working-class women played as household managers, nurturers, carers and workers. The point is that these studies do not completely ignore the father, but rather discuss him from a particular and, for our purpose, a very limited perspective. Such studies have thus had a massive impact on our image of the working-class father. Far from being portrayed as an integral part of family life, he is shown often to be an 'external' problem or inconvenience to the wife's day-to-day struggle to make ends meet and maintain respectability. He is portrayed as rarely having a part to play in childcare, detached from the emotional life of the family, taking leisure outside the home perhaps, and is seen as marginal to its needs once 'his' wage has been handed over. Where he does appear it is often to make the children's lives, and that of his wife, worse, demanding the best food and commodities, snapping at the wife and children as he demands peace and quiet. Valuable studies of domestic violence in working-class homes have, moreover, accentuated this image of the working-class fathers as an often dangerous and troublesome member of family life.

The mothers' relationship to their children has dominated not just histories of conduct and experience in working-class families but has also been the focus of the studies on the political and cultural discourses on parenting in the period. Work by Jane Lewis, Deborah Dwork, Carol Dyhouse and Anna Davin have outlined the growing emphasis placed on the mother in inter-war infant welfare programmes.
The relationship between parent and state has been seen as exclusively the relationship between state and mother, amidst concerns for infant mortality, national efficiency and population levels. This has been studied without any concern for the possibility that the working-class father might have been targeted in such discourses. Yet, as later chapters will show, a significant interest in male parenting developed around the idea of fathercraft.

Finally in this section we turn to literature that has specifically and deliberately examined the working-class father. For the mid to late nineteenth century Doolittle has analysed working-class autobiographies to 'assemble' a history of fatherhood. Her conclusion is that the father's primary concern and worry was the constant need to sustain family life in the face of shifting economic conditions. This, in itself, underlined his function as provider. The fundamental duty of fathers is labelled as 'protection of children and other dependants from the vicissitudes of life'. The working-class fathers Doolittle examines held and demanded authority as heads of household. However, many could also be affectionate and caring, keen to share enjoyable time with their children. While men perhaps did perform some domestic chores, these rarely directly involved the children, and instead focused on 'masculine' housework like setting fires and shoe-repair. As Doolittle concludes from the incidence of family break-up, the father was never as important to internal family cohesion as the mother.

Trevor Lummis has studied fatherhood among East Anglian fishing communities between 1890 and 1914. His picture of fatherhood and fatherly conduct is at odds with what he outlines as the 'stereotypical' view of a distant, brutish and uninvolved father commonly held for the working class in the period. He shows that
fathers were often responsible and aware of their 'duty'. handing over their wage without question, and often helped with housework and were very much home-centred. Lummis' evidence suggests that fathers were rarely stern disciplinarians and that they spent time in easy association with their children. The study is clearly important, not least because it represents the first attempt to study fatherhood among workers in this period. However, caution is required because the fishermen studied have to be seen as a very specific case. Their long absences from home, and then their continual presence when ashore, were no doubt a major factor in the domestic arrangements which Lummis outlines. For example, the fact that wives rarely used their husbands as a disciplinary threat probably owed more to the fact that children knew their father was not coming home anytime soon (so that wives had to discipline them themselves) rather than any definitive ideology of fatherhood.

The most considered attempt to construct a history of fatherhood in this period is the work on Scotland by Lynn Abrams, who links the conduct of fathers with broader discourses on fatherhood. Her conclusion is that Scottish working-class fathers in the period between c.1900 and c.1940 were, to use her term, 'marginalised' by official and popular discourses 'as incapable, feckless and frequently absent individuals'. Her examination of Children's Homes and Orphanages indicates that lone fathers were far more likely than lone mothers to place children into care. Importantly however, she argues that this tendency was neither a reflection of male attitudes to their children, nor a reflection of how 'involved' many fathers were in the home. Rather, it was the result of moral pressure and deep-rooted assumptions about men's ability to offer certain types of care.
Annie Croall, director of the Whinwell Children’s Home in Stirling remarked in 1907:

Motherless bairns have a special claim upon us. While the widow can, by various means, work and keep her little ones around her, a widower is perfectly helpless with children. He cannot mother the bairns and be the breadwinner too.  

Abrams goes on to show that many of the fathers who handed over their children maintained contact with and often had strong emotional bonds to them. They also sought to ‘improve’ their situation (most often by finding a ‘mother substitute’) as quickly as possible in order to have children released back into their care. The existence of father-child ‘bonds’, combined with some oral accounts of affectionate, caring and ‘playful’ fathers, leads Abrams to conclude that there was a dichotomy between ‘official’ discourses and men’s conduct. In ‘popular and official’ discourses men were always seen as secondary to mothers and incapable of being lone parents, whereas their conduct as fathers suggests they were often caring and involved.

There are a number of issues with Abrams’ study however. The evidence taken from orphanages and Children’s Homes is not from ‘normal’ families, but rather from families in which one parent was dead. Comparing this to evidence of ‘normal’ intact and continuing family life is therefore perhaps misleading. This also ties in with the fact that the apparent ‘marginalisation’ of fathers in popular and official discourses was in fact, as closer inspection of her evidence suggests, the marginalisation of men from ‘mothering’. Consider again Annie Croall’s comments in the quotation above, in which she explicitly refers to a father’s inability to ‘mother the bairns’. The point, it seems, is that the Children’s Homes and Orphanages were not providing a substitute for male parenting, but for mothering. Just because fathers
were not seen as particularly capable ‘carers’ it should not cloud the historian to the fact that he was perhaps seen as important in other ways.

This thesis offers a different interpretation from that of Abrams because it argues that the discourses on fatherhood in this period did not serve to marginalise the father but rather continued to stress his importance. Although commentators were not always entirely clear what the importance or function of the father was, it will be argued that the period witnessed a ‘refocusing’ of fatherhood which shifted emphasis to fit better with the extensive discourses on the mother.

To conclude, the current literature provides an inadequate interpretation of working-class fatherhood in the period between 1900 and 1939 for a number of reasons. The inter war years have been too simplistically portrayed by social scientists and historians alike as merely a ‘stepping stone’ of greater or lesser importance in the transition from ‘distant’ to ‘involved’ fatherhood. The current literature usually generalises inter-generation relationships as ‘parent-child’ and this has hidden the particular and different importance and experiences of the father. Equally unsatisfactorily, ‘mother-child’ relationships have been broadened out to include the father. This is erroneously to ‘judge’ or ‘view’ the father only through the same conceptual lens as the mother - it limits the arena of parenting to the domestic space and places emphasis on maternity and baby care for example. The same can be said for the lack of consideration for the gender of the children. Father-child interaction has often been lumped together in discussions of other male domestic activity and this has led to often vague and confused generalisations about men’s ‘involvement’ ‘in the home’. Differentiating between domestic chores and interaction with children is clearly important, as is distinguishing between what a
father did in the home as a ‘husband’ and what he did with his children ‘as a father’. Finally, it has been rare that both the conduct and the ‘culture’ of fathers have been given consideration. This is in sharp contrast to the large amount of literature on the ideological and political contexts of motherhood. The current literature’s neglect of such discourses suggest that fatherhood remained static in this period and that the only fluctuations were in the way motherhood was perceived and prescribed. This thesis argues that this was not true, and that discourses on fatherhood show a ‘refocusing’ in emphasis, partly in response to these well-documented and more effectively understood changes to motherhood.

**Social and Economic Contexts**

The social and economic context is important in understanding the experiences of working-class fathers in this period. However, the importance of changes to these social and economic factors should perhaps not be exaggerated. For many of the people in whom this study is interested there was as much continuity as there was change between 1900 and 1939. It can therefore be misleading to place too much emphasis on social or economic factors when examining shifts and developments in family life, something of which other prominent studies of the period are perhaps guilty.  

That said, there were some significant social and economic developments in the period that this study will suggest affected the way fatherhood was perceived and experienced. It is these that will be the focus of this section.

The period between 1900 and 1939 witnessed significant demographic shifts. Although the population of Britain increased from 32.5 million to 41.5 million
between 1901 and 1939, the rate of population growth within the period slackened. Between 1901 and 1905 there were 28.5 births per thousand members of the population in England and Wales, and 29.2 for Scotland. By 1931-35 however, the number of births per thousand members of the population had decreased to 15.0 and 18.2 respectively. By 1933 the birth rate had reached its historical low before the 1990s.

More relevant for any discussion of family relationships is the fact that completed family size fell during this period. For marriages of the 1870s approximately 57 per cent of families had six or more children but by 1925 the number of families with six or more children had fallen to approximately 7 per cent of families. In that time completed mean family size declined from 5.8 to 2.2 persons.

Among the working class this fertility decline and reduction in family occurred less rapidly than for the middle class and disparity between the fertility rates of the classes caused some concern, especially at the turn of the century when class differences were probably at their widest. Within the general decline in fertility rates among the workers there also remained significant intra-class differences throughout the period. Simon Szreter explores these differences and, based on the 1911 Census, indicates that, for example, textile workers had a much lower fertility rate than miners (who, on average, continued to have the largest completed family size).

Glass’s inter-war data is probably the best indication of inter- and intra-class variation. Table ONE shows fertility rates the number of legitimate live births per 1,000 married men under 55 years of age in each social class in 1911 and 1921.
The class numbers refer to: I, upper and middle class (including the professional class); II, intermediate (including farmers); III to V, skilled, semi-skilled, and unskilled workers respectively; VI, VII and VIII, textile workers, miners and agricultural labourers respectively.\textsuperscript{92}

As Szreter comments therefore, we should view Britain not as having a single fertility regime but ‘many distinct fertility regimes changing alongside each other’.\textsuperscript{93} The fact that these were converging towards a national ‘norm’, ‘under the double influence of birth control and the spread of a common cultural pattern’\textsuperscript{94} should not mask continuing inter and intra class differences in the period.

\begin{table}[h]
\centering
\begin{tabular}{|l|c|c|}
\hline
Social Class & 1911 legitimate births per 1,000 & 1921 legitimate births per 1,000 \\
\hline
Social Class I & 119 & 98 \\
Social Class II & 132 & 105 \\
Social Class III & 153 & 134 \\
Social Class IV & 158 & 153 \\
Social Class V & 213 & 178 \\
Social Class VI & 125 & 110 \\
Social Class VII & 230 & 202 \\
Social Class VIII & 161 & 155 \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
\caption{Fertility rates by social class in 1911 and 1921.}
\end{table}


The counting of the population remains inextricably linked to women and their reproductive capacities. Discussing fertility and family size in terms of fathers specifically is hard and it is easier to ascertain the number children born to a mother than it is the number of children fathered. Moreover it is probably an entirely unnecessary complication to try and do so. The completed family size statistic, for
example, implies the presence of a father. Until the 1950s, illegitimacy accounted for less than 5 per cent of births and, wartime-related 'blips' aside, illegitimacy rates generally declined during our period.95 The likelihood of spousal death also declined in this period and remarriage remained common when death did occur. Therefore a high and an increasing percentage of children were born into a stable two-parent family.96 As we saw, Lynn Abrams has suggested that such remarrying was particularly pressing for fathers, and it is also evident that contemporaries believed that children needed two parents, for practical as well as moral reasons.

However, a quick 'snap-shot' of fathers and their children in the middle of our period can be given. As Table TWO indicates, about 40 per cent of all men in England and Wales over 20 years old had dependent children. It also indicates that the number of dependent children a majority of fathers had at any given time was small.

The implications of decreased family sizes must be seen as significant. As John Benson writes, 'Whatever its roots, the decline in fertility had... the most profound consequences for working-class family life... small families tended to raise expectations, to foster fresh attitudes, and to facilitate the development of new and more satisfying personal relationships'.97

Small family sizes were a factor in a general increase in living standards for the period; less money being spent on necessities fuelled consumer spending on 'luxury' items - many of which could directly shape the nature of family life and indeed father-child interaction. Joanna Bourke suggests for example that 'the overall improvement in working-class living standards was crucial for the evolution of particular forms of masculine housework'.98
Table TWO: Family Background of Men over 20 Years in England and Wales, 1921.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>%</th>
<th>Category</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>26.6</td>
<td>Bachelors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34.0</td>
<td>Married men with no children under 16 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16.0</td>
<td>Men with one dependent child</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.5</td>
<td>Men with two dependent children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>Men with three dependent children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>Men with four dependent children</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


More subtly, regimes of fertility control meant that there was the possibility of ‘de-coupling’ marriage and sex from parenthood and conception. This increasingly meant that parenthood could be a choice. If men had the ability not to father children, then we are forced to ask what value (if any) they placed on them and what place being a father occupied in adult male identity.

A decline in mortality rates and an increase in life expectancy matched rapid decreases in fertility and the shrinking of average family sizes. Life expectancy increased from about 49 years for males and 52 years for females at birth in 1901-1910, to 59 and 61 years from birth by 1930-32. 100 This was not primarily the result of a lengthier ‘natural’ life span but largely due to reductions in ‘premature’ deaths from disease and, to a lesser extent, accident, both of which were most prevalent among the working class. Differences in the mortality rates of occupational groups and between places highlighted that environmental factors were often significant in premature deaths. There was, for example, a higher rate of deaths among urban dwellers. The improvement to mortality rates was not simply the result of those with the highest rates of mortality ‘catching-up’ with those with the better rates, but rather
a process in which all classes benefiting roughly equally. It was this that led to the continuing, and in some cases widening, class bias in health and welfare indicators.\textsuperscript{101} The poor state of health among the workers was also highlighted during recruitment (and some argued performances) during the Boer and First World Wars, and the health of the nation rapidly became a military, industrial and imperialist concern. It was this that underpinned the move towards legislation for healthy environments and improved health services for families and children in this period.

The general increase in life expectancy meant that fathers could expect to see their children grow to adulthood and, arguably more importantly, could reasonably anticipate that babies and young children would not die. The impact of an increased ‘permanence’ in the father-child relationship is almost impossible to judge. However, we are for example reminded of the early sentiment school in family history, authors such as Shorter and Stone, and indeed comments by Elizabeth Roberts, all of whom suggest that high levels of infant death perhaps meant that some parents (always mothers) may have refrained from growing too attached to children.\textsuperscript{102}

Indeed, of particular interest for this study is the pattern of infant (under 1 year old) mortality rates. These remained high (along with maternal mortality) in the first decades of the twentieth century (although they were decreasing after c.1900) and high infant death rates remained a feature of poor urban areas right up to the First World War, after which welfare provision began to have a notable impact.\textsuperscript{103} This finding was the underpinning for the intense focus on working class motherhood in the first half of the twentieth century when infant mortality became defined by contemporaries as one of the pressing social problems of the time.\textsuperscript{104}
addition, the discovery of the link between bacteria and human disease by Koch and Pasteur in the late 1880s spawned a new wave of medical and welfare thought that highlighted the health risks of dirt and poor sanitation. The pressure on women to be ‘good’ mothers thus became intense. Middle-class welfare workers emphasised the ‘social and moral duty that mothers had to fulfil’ and focused much of their effort on the ‘necessity of training and educating them’.\textsuperscript{105} The extent to which the working-class mother ever acted on advice and education is questionable but it was the middle-class domestic ideal that framed government policy and charitable action.\textsuperscript{106}

As we have seen, infant mortality rates were greatly reduced by the inter-war years. While there had been 110 deaths per 1000 live births in England and Wales in 1911-15, by 1916-20 the figure was 90 and by 1936-40 it had decreased to 55.\textsuperscript{107} These figures were still high however, and regional and occupational variations made infant mortality a persistent problem for many local authorities.\textsuperscript{108} This was enough to perpetuate schemes to educate mothers and increase the provision of welfare clinics under the provisions of the 1918 Maternity and Child Welfare Act. Indeed, the rapid decline in infant mortality rates, many believed, had in no small measure been a direct result of mother-education schemes.\textsuperscript{109}

The fact that (certainly by the 1920s) more children than ever before could expect to survive past their first birthday had an important impact on the development of childrearing theory that, in part, can explain why fathers were incorporated into some discourses on parenting. As the Newsons have argued, before the twentieth century ‘simple physical survival has been the dominant issue in child upbringing’\textsuperscript{110} and it was only after the chances of survival increased that the ‘massive change of emphasis’ on to the child’s mental, social and emotional...
adjustment became possible. Urwin and Sharland note that in the late 1920s and 1930s 'the infant emerged as having particular psychological as well as physical needs'.\textsuperscript{111} It is the inter-war years that witnessed the first inroads of child psychology and Freudian psychoanalysis that focused on the emotional and personal adjustment of children.\textsuperscript{112} Such developments were 'prompting parents to think from the child's point of view [which also] brought to the forefront what was later known as the parent-child relationship'.\textsuperscript{113} In basic terms, the shift in the period was on child quality and not quantity.

In any discussion of the period between 1900 to 1939 the First World War must be given attention. There were significant immediate, short-term disruptions to family life when millions of fathers volunteered or were recruited for military service. In Britain the number of war-dead in 1918 was approximately 750,000 and within this figure were hundreds of thousands of fathers.\textsuperscript{114} In the longer term therefore, many of the 'absent' father families became 'fatherless' families. Moreover, at least another 750,000 men were crippled by injuries inflicted during the war, making the 'return home' to adult masculine life often deeply problematic.\textsuperscript{115}

Within a broader context, the war brought about, or accelerated, changes that are of some pertinence to this study. For example, Kingsley Kent suggests, 'Something like the blurring of gender lines that took place during the war continued into the 1920s'.\textsuperscript{116} Roberts argues that 'Whatever the war did to women in home, field, service or factory, it undoubtedly snapped strings that had bound them in so many ways to the Victorian age'.\textsuperscript{117} Tensions emerged when the expectation that there would be a swift return to pre-war standards jarred with the new views and understandings that the war had brought. How far wartime changes continued, were
halted, or were reversed in the inter-war years has been debated and such questions will be pertinent for studying the way fathers reacted to war. For example, can permanent change in a father’s conduct be traced to the war or were the years of conflict an unrepresentative ‘blip’ within broader trends? Within all the scholarship on the First World War such areas have yet to gain attention. Certainly, the impact of the war on family life as experienced from a man’s (or his children’s) perspective is a much-neglected theme. This thesis is primarily interested in ‘normal’ family life and cannot hope to answer all the issues resulting from the exceptional and extreme circumstances of war. However, Chapter Five does offer a tentative first investigation into the impact of the First World War on fatherhood.

The legacy of the War can be seen in many socio-economic developments during the inter-war years and one of these was housing. The home environment has been seen as a central factor in dictating the comfort, health and status of families, and has even been seen as having had an impact on the efficiency with which family members performed work.\textsuperscript{118} Working-class housing affected the nature of the ‘home’, which remained the principal (although not only) arena in which father-child relationships were experienced.

In the initial aftermath of the First World War much improvement to working-class housing was promised. However, ‘homes fit for heroes’ under the Addison Housing Act (1919) was a short lived scheme, all but abandoned by 1922 when a policy of economic retrenchment (the Geddes Axe) was adopted. There were however a number of important developments in housing, particularly the emergence of local authority housing. Although rarely cheaper than private rented accommodation, ‘council’ houses offered ‘a vastly improved physical standard of
accommodation': houses had gardens, inside bathrooms, hot water and were wired for electricity and piped for gas. Moreover, suburbanisation expanded with the development of the petrol bus and electric tram, many local authority tenants were housed on large, suburban estates, such as Kirkby (Liverpool), Wythenshawe (Manchester), Longbridge (Birmingham), Becontree (East London) and this had an important impact on the nature of working-class neighbourhood relations. Families lived in greater isolation from long-established friends and family networks and traditional amenities such as the local shops (and importantly 'tick' facilities) and pubs were restricted. Reciprocal relationships and support networks outside the immediate family frequently became much weaker than in the past. resulting in what Tebbutt describes as the 'receding of matriarchal power'. Authors such as Andrzej Olechnowicz have concluded that the new estates encouraged home-based activity and that council housing 'offered many opportunities for a privatised home life impossible in overcrowded conditions'. Certainly, studies focused on working-class family life have often laid great emphasis on these 'new' houses for this reason.

However, focusing on changes to housing hides the fact that, for the period, the most accurate interpretation is one of continuity. The real phase of council estate building was after the Second World War World War. As Table THREE indicates, although there was almost a doubling of working-class home ownership between 1918 and 1939 and, although there was a twenty-fold increase in housing provided by local authorities, the change to the form of tenure in working-class housing was in fact only slight given that by 1939 over 70 per cent of all housing was still provided by private landlords. The increase in separate family units between the wars meant
that, between 1921 and 1931 there was still a housing shortage. Moreover, within this general pattern we must again be aware of regional variations. For example, owner-occupation was more common in ‘the Lancashire cotton towns, the mining regions of South Wales, shipbuilding towns such as Jarrow, and to a lesser extent the Yorkshire wool districts and some isolated working-class suburbs of south-east London’. Also, although the early building societies were working-class institutions designed specifically to facilitate house purchase, the need for a deposit largely confined the practice to the most affluent workers and even for them the repayment of loans could cause constant anxiety.

It would be rash to exaggerate any changes to the condition of working-class homes between the wars. For many workers housing conditions remained overcrowded, technologically ‘backward’ and insanitary, as studies conducted in the period, such as those by Margery Spring-Rice and George Orwell, indicated. Yet, even if it was for a minority, new housing was perhaps an important ‘arena’ that perhaps facilitated changes in home-life.

Table THREE: *Working-class Accommodation, 1850-1939.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Owner-Occupier</th>
<th>Local Authority Owned</th>
<th>Privately Rented</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1850</td>
<td>c. 5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>c. 95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1918</td>
<td>c. 10</td>
<td>c. 0.5</td>
<td>c. 90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1939</td>
<td>c. 19</td>
<td>c. 10</td>
<td>c. 71</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Another important context for this study is developments in leisure in the period, particularly the shift (for some) towards home-based leisure activity and, to a lesser degree, the increased leisure time for some married working women.

There were reductions in standard working-hours from 52 to 48 a week in 1919 - although as later chapters explore, this does not allow for the impact of overtime - and as we saw, for a minority there were improvements to the home environments and, for all, a decline in family size. Such factors have led Hugh Cunningham to argue that ‘one of the chief characteristics of twentieth-century leisure was the extent to which it became organised around the home and family’.\(^{127}\) Although the real move towards this home-based leisure came after the Second World War, there were developments within the inter-war years that indicate that leisure was already shifting in this direction. For example, ‘broadcasting’ emerged in the 1920s with the formation of the BBC and radio sets became a staple in virtually all homes by 1939.\(^ {128}\) Universal literacy bolstered the expansion of the printed media, which often underpinned home-based leisure. For children the choice of magazines/comics increased but perhaps the biggest consumers of reading materials were women, who enjoyed a surge in ‘Women’s Magazines’. As Chapter Six explores, for many fathers at the end of the period unemployment meant that the ‘usual’ forms of male leisure were restricted and men were thus perhaps inclined to spend more time at home.

Other family leisure pursuits also developed. Holidays at the seaside expanded in the inter-war years, although the impact of holidays-with-pay was only really felt after 1939 because the inter-war legislation never compelled employers to provide them.\(^ {129}\) Work by Andrew Davies has indicated that large section of the working class in the inter-war years could not afford holidays.\(^ {130}\) It was also most difficult for
parents of young children to afford such trips. Yet, even if the majority were perhaps left behind, as Mass-Observation indicated in a study of Blackpool in the 1930s, an annual trip to the seaside was rapidly growing in popularity in this period.\textsuperscript{131} It was also possible for families who could not afford a week at the seaside to enjoy day-trips to the surrounding countryside.

Married women’s access to leisure continued to be subject to financial, moral and domestic constraints - because the onus of household management and childcare fell on to their shoulders – but they did enjoy certain outlets such as the cinema. Although a debated issue among feminists, and although contemporary studies such as that of Margery Spring Rice point to the continuing burdensome work of many working-class wives in the 1930s,\textsuperscript{132} improvements to the home, decreased family size and improvements in technology probably meant that many wives/mothers had an easier job than their parents and to that extent enjoyed more free time.\textsuperscript{133}

Of course, for the inter-war years, as Davies argues, it would be wrong to exaggerate changes to leisure. As he comments ‘a detailed study of leisure in Salford and Manchester reveals that many of the most important working-class leisure activities during the 1930s were well established by the mid-nineteenth century’.\textsuperscript{134} Mass-Observation found for the 1930s that ‘more people spend more time in public houses than they do in any other building except private houses and work-places’.\textsuperscript{135} Many male leisure activities, such as the pub, excluded children and it is also apparent that other leisure activities, such as the cinema, were unlikely to encourage father and children to spend time together. Yet, even if it would be misleading to suggest that there were ‘changes’ to leisure in the period, there were developments that perhaps meant that children featured in men’s leisure activities. Informal play,
relaxation and (for the older child) even sport, could mean that a father’s leisure time and interaction with his children were by no means mutually exclusive. There was also a rise of commercialised toy manufacture with cut-price department stores, such as Woolworths, which allowed the working-class access to a growing number of child-focused leisure activities which, as Hendrick suggests, ‘furthered the long-term trend among the working class towards indoor play’.  

Shifting our focus, the inter-war years are peculiarly contradictory when viewed from an economic standpoint. Staple industries declined, yet the period saw the rise of ‘new’ industries, including the National Grid, EMI, Unilever, ICI and Shell, each of which grew and employed more people. As Tables FIVE and SIX indicate, unemployment varied according to occupation and region. New industries were centred around the Southeast, which fuelled a swing in population distribution towards this area and away from old heartlands.

Table FIVE: Unemployed as a percentage of insured workers in regions of Great Britain.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1929</th>
<th>1932</th>
<th>1937</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>London and S.- E. England</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>13.7</td>
<td>6.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S. W. England</td>
<td>8.1</td>
<td>17.1</td>
<td>7.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Midlands</td>
<td>9.3</td>
<td>20.1</td>
<td>7.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northern England</td>
<td>13.5</td>
<td>27.1</td>
<td>13.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wales</td>
<td>19.3</td>
<td>36.5</td>
<td>22.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scotland</td>
<td>12.1</td>
<td>27.7</td>
<td>15.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1929</th>
<th>1932</th>
<th>1936</th>
<th>1938</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Coal</td>
<td>18.2</td>
<td>41.2</td>
<td>25.0</td>
<td>22.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cotton</td>
<td>14.5</td>
<td>31.1</td>
<td>15.1</td>
<td>27.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shipbuilding</td>
<td>23.2</td>
<td>59.5</td>
<td>30.6</td>
<td>21.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iron and Steel</td>
<td>19.9</td>
<td>48.5</td>
<td>29.5</td>
<td>24.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average for all Industries</td>
<td>9.9</td>
<td>22.9</td>
<td>12.5</td>
<td>13.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Stevenson, *British Society*. p.270

From 1921, when the post-war boom collapsed, until the first months of 1940, Great Britain suffered mass unemployment on an unprecedented scale, with never less than a million (one tenth of the insured population) out of work. While the period before 1929 was characterised by short-term unemployment, at its peak (after the collapse of the US economy in 1929) the number of insured unemployed reached nearly three million. Of course, unemployment (and the risk of unemployment) did not affect all sections of the population equally; men were more likely to be unemployed than women were, and older men were more likely to be unemployed than younger men.

The impact of unemployment was most significant in communities dependent on one industry, such as textiles, mining and shipbuilding. The mining villages of Durham were badly hit and the widespread nature of unemployment there had a more devastating impact because such a high percentage of the labour force relied on the industries affected.

Unemployment pay was kept deliberately low so as not to encourage 'loafers' and the most obvious consequences loss of income - cannot fully encapsulate the
impact on familial relationships. Life on the dole affected individuals and families in many ways. Studies conducted during the 1930s and collected memoirs of the unemployed indicate that unemployment could undermine masculine status and that family life could alter as the needs of the family meant ‘traditional’ gender roles had to be flexible.\textsuperscript{140} Unemployment has been viewed primarily in terms of the impact on the health of children and wives, or from the point of view of an adult male’s public life.\textsuperscript{141} This study offers an investigation of how unemployment affected the conduct of fathers, their relationship with their children and their functions as parents. It seems that, not only did unemployment have an impact on male work and peer relations, and relationships between husband and wife, but also on the relationship between fathers and their children.

Trends in standards of living between 1900 and 1939 were not simply linear but for our purposes the important trend is a gradual rise. The interaction between wages, incomes and the cost of living determined working-class purchasing power and it was this which influenced the activities individuals and families could participate in and even the people with whom they spent their time. Overall, the cost of living index fell by more than a third between 1920 and 1938 and by the early 1930s, prices were falling faster than wages, with the result that real earnings rose. This allowed more money to be spent on commodities above those necessary for life. The growth in the home market created an increase in advertising and the family unit became an ideological peg on which many products were hung. Women in particular were championed as homemakers and in many ways the importance of the family as a unit of economic consumption meant that women were more important as consumers than workers. A general rise in the standard of living created inflated
expectations about ‘desirable’ or ‘acceptable’ standards of consumerism. A surplus income rarely eased anxieties and rarely allowed a relaxation of the daily efforts of wage earners.

While the majority began to enjoy a small margin of income above the necessities, social surveys conducted in areas such as Liverpool and London highlighted the continuation of significant numbers of people living in poverty. Up to, and even into, the twentieth century, the laissez-faire policy of the state was intended to promote circumstances which would allow individual effort to flourish. The notion of ‘self help’ and the stigmatising of poverty meant that the state was reluctant to provide any significant universal relief for fear of undermining such individual effort. The direct relief of poverty was not seen as a realistic goal and instead help was especially focused on those seen as ‘needy’ groups, such as widows and orphans - distinguished by their lack of protection and provisions from a husband or father.

More broadly, the relationship between the ‘state’ and the family altered significantly in the years under review here. The shift away from a laissez-faire attitude towards what we can term ‘state paternalism’ (by which the state increasingly provided support for its citizens) meant an ever broader range of legislation and a more regulated welfare apparatus aimed at aiding the family unit in times of crisis. The start of this shift is usually traced to the Edwardian Liberal administration which introduced old age pensions, labour exchanges and health and unemployment insurance. During the First World War, as we saw, centralised government grew rapidly and infant death and civilian health became an area of concern. The political landscape was altered in 1918 when the franchise was
extended to every working man and women over thirty. The rise of the Labour Party and the power of Trade Unions thus contributed to the demand that more was done for the workers. There was a five-fold increase in central expenditure on the social services between 1918 and 1938. The state spent on education, on welfare clinics for mothers and babies and on health insurance and pensions. Most pressing however was the problem of unemployment and in the inter-war years there were various schemes which, for millions of families, meant that the husband/father was replaced by the state as the main ‘provider’ for the family’s income. As we shall see, this pattern of undermining what was seen as the father’s principal responsibility generated some concern and criticism.

Measures to help the needy were of course not just the result of philanthropic tendencies among policy makers. Improving the living standards and health of the poor was believed to be vital if Britain was to compete on the world stage and if she was to be militarily secure and be able to police her Empire. In such an atmosphere matters once left to the individual or community became the concern of the state and its institutions and this often meant that the state enforced middle-class ideas of life styles and family set-up. The state began to control what the family and its members ought to do. For example, the new council houses had a certain number of rooms, which restricted certain activities, the ‘means-test’ dictated ‘legitimate’ areas for financial outlay and throughout the inter-war years the state bolstered the mother carer / father earner ideal. Certainly, the emphasis on the woman as mother was matched by the emphasis on the father’s duty to provide and much legislation underlined his obligation.
Between 1900 and 1939, many working-class families became smaller, healthier and more affluent. The family became more ‘permanent’ in membership and more resilient to some of the fluctuations that had been so often disruptive in the nineteenth century. The forces that had pulled family groups apart, or indeed brought in ‘outsiders’ (such as lodgers), were waning. The family was shifting away from being an economic unit for group survival and towards a unit devoted to child rearing, affection and group leisure. For working-men the identification of the married male as ‘earner’ was sharpened because married women’s work decreased and the idea of a ‘family wage’ and the male headed bread-winner model continued. But this was perhaps diluted by state safety nets and, for millions, restricted by long periods of unemployment. During the war years hundreds of thousands (if not millions) of fathers were forcefully removed from the family unit, demanding discussion of what their presence in the family really meant. Trends in leisure and housing were starting to favour the domestic. Middle-class ideologies about separate spheres and domesticity became the blueprint for welfare and philanthropic intervention, and in many ways some polarisation of expected gender roles followed. Childrearing became a national interest and educating the ‘feckless’ mother became seen as the single biggest challenge.

**Meanings and Conceptualising**

Fatherhood should be conceptualised as a social role and socio-historical institution, and should be said to consist of the norms that men are expected to follow when they become fathers ... and the routine activities of men who are trying to act ‘fatherly’.
As this quotation suggests, we must draw a distinction between two linked but conceptually distinct components of 'fatherhood'. On the one hand are the shared norms, values and beliefs surrounding a man's parenting emerging from various 'discourses' on fatherhood. On the other hand is his conduct, parenting behaviour and interaction with his children. This distinction is fundamental when we begin to conceptualise fatherhood and this study is focused on both.

A point to make immediately is that these two ideas – what LaRossa usefully terms the 'culture' and the 'conduct' of fatherhood – will not necessarily be 'in-sync'. A broad concern is therefore the relationship between conduct and culture: did changes to men's conduct affect the 'culture' of fatherhood? If behaviour became prescribed in discourses on fatherhood, did men quickly adopt it in their conduct? Such questions are difficult to answer in an historical context and we can only advance tentative suggestions given the nature of the evidence. But what is important to understand is that, as Leonard Benson comments, 'what some fathers do and what all fathers do, or what fathers can do and what they ordinarily do, are quite different things'.

This notion highlights that there was/is no monolithic 'culture' of fatherhood. At any given time, different groups, communities and individuals can identify their 'own' versions of fatherhood. Community values and experiences are important in their particular 'cultures' of fatherhood – a point emphasised by Lummis and which can be inferred from Diana Gittins' study of mining and textile communities in this period. In addition, Tosh makes the seemingly obvious but often forgotten point that, 'In face-to-face relationships too private to be policed, much obviously depends on the particularity of the individuals concerned'.
While it is tempting to see the different 'cultures' of fatherhood merely as interpretations of an 'official' fatherhood which emanated from the national discourses such as law and welfare, this is to suggest that the process is 'one-way', i.e. a diffusion of ideas from 'top to bottom'. What this study suggests is that men's conduct had an impact on broader 'cultures' of fatherhood and that behaviours often created expectations within certain groups that could have nothing to do with the wider ideas of fatherhood.

Variations in the 'culture' and 'conduct' of fathers make it hard to generalise. Consider, for example, the issue of labelling a father's actions as 'good' or 'bad'. Stuart Wilson defines 'bad' motherhood as 'behaviour that is regarded as more or less reprehensible by those living in that society'. Yet 'society' is never a homogeneous whole but is made-up of many separate groups. What might perhaps be labelled as 'bad' in one area may not be labelled as such in another.

The comments so far have indicated that it is difficult (and it requires caution) to talk about fatherhood or 'fatherly conduct' in general terms. This is exactly what this study attempts to do. It considers a large geographical area (Britain) and a diverse group of people, the 'working class'. Caution will be taken throughout not to suggest that what certain fathers did, or certain communities considered 'normal', was applicable to all. Yet there are perhaps a number of 'core' or 'normal' fatherhood functions, notably the responsibility to provide for their children. As Benson notes, 'certain paternal roles are given special emphasis in all societies'. While it is probably an exaggeration to suggest, as Megan Doolittle believes, that fatherhood 'has universal qualities which cross across class...
boundaries’ we can suggest that what a majority of fathers did was the ‘norm’ within any given community or sub-group of the population at any given period.\textsuperscript{150}

Parenting functions associated with fatherhood can often be fulfilled in a number of ways. Useful in aiding a conceptualisation of this point is Benson’s 1968 sociological study in which he attempted to ‘unpack’ fatherhood.\textsuperscript{151} In this he suggests that we can usefully view fatherhood as comprising a number of ‘dimensions’, for example ‘survival’ and ‘expressive’ dimensions. Benson suggests that each of these ‘dimensions’ is in turn composed of a number of ‘paternal roles’ so that for the ‘survival dimension’ the ‘paternal roles’ include ‘material support’, ‘handling crisis’, ‘reproduction’ and the like. It must be emphasised that Benson’s study runs the risk of being labelled sexist and is clearly rooted in its functionalist and ‘role theory’ sociological paradigm which is today largely seen as outdated. His study also lacks a clear idea of gender and can be criticised because the ‘dimensions’ are too rigid, and because he fails to include some important aspects of parenting that he \textit{assumes} to be applicable only to the mother – such as routine childcare. However, such a conceptualisation can be usefully modified for our study; usefully portrayed in a simple pictorial form (see Figure ONE).

The conceptualisation in Figure ONE adds a third element, that of ‘tasks’. These ‘tasks’ are what make the functions and dimensions visible to an observer; they are ‘indicators’ that a father is performing the function. (It is however not only possible to ‘measure’ a function by tasks. Evidence surrounding the \textit{expectation}, or concern voiced when a father fails to perform certain functions, is equally valuable, and perhaps more so for the study of ‘discourses’ on fatherhood). Figure ONE also indicates that a ‘dimension’ of fatherhood is a broad and often general aspect of
parenting which is unlikely to be exclusive to fatherhood. The way a father can conceivably fulfil the functions making up this dimension are varied. This suggests that different fathers can perform different tasks while at the same time fulfilling the same function.

**Figure ONE: Dimension, Functions and Tasks of Fatherhood: the example of 'Education'.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimension</th>
<th>Function</th>
<th>Task</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>Academic Training</td>
<td>Help with homework, Visit school/teacher, Resources for learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>Moral Training</td>
<td>Set code of conduct, Administer Punishment, Law-abiding role model.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

An historical example from the current literature might be the different ways a working-class father and a middle-class father performed the 'education' dimension of fatherhood. While a middle-class father may provide academic instruction and provide for schooling, a working-class father may provide instruction on manual skills and aid in finding an apprenticeship and job. These are varying and class specific conducts, but, seen broadly, both indicate that the father was trying to fulfil the same paternal function. Indeed, it should also quickly be noted that the way a father performs his parenting tasks can vary greatly. As Benson notes, 'Each man brings his own individuality to the complex set of roles and hence develops his own fathering style'.

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Fatherhood, and indeed a father’s conduct, must not be viewed in a vacuum or simply ‘conceptualised’ as an abstract idea. Fatherhood is meaningless unless the fact that it refers to a set of social relationships is given prominence in our discussion. A child is exposed to the total ‘parenting team’ and in this sense the ‘father’ is only understood by comparison with and in contrast to the mother. LaRossa suggests that ‘to know what fatherhood is… to be able to “see” it – we must be clear what it is not’; by viewing the ‘gaps’ in mothering we can ‘see’ fatherhood.\textsuperscript{154} It is useful to see that ‘mother’ and ‘father’ are partly defined by their position relative to each other, but in many ways this is an unsatisfactory conceptualisation because the focus is on the mother and because it is simplistically ‘oppositional’. More importantly there are a number of functions that have a greater or lesser ‘overlap’ between the parents. Indeed, it is this shifting ‘overlap’ between the functions of the mother and the father that often underpins change. After all, it is rare that a completely ‘new’ aspect of parenting will emerge and therefore change to fatherhood is primarily about its changing position relative to motherhood. Again, this can most simply be illustrated pictorially (see Figure TWO).

Figure TWO demonstrates that certain aspects of fatherhood and motherhood perhaps remain exclusive - or at least exclusive enough to remain perceived as being part of one or the other parent’s functions. A good example would perhaps be principal material support for the father, and care of babies for the mother. These two functions would be towards the extremes of their respective circles while functions that both parents might both make important contributions towards, such as education, might be more towards the centre of the circle.
Figure TWO: *Fatherhood and Motherhood 'Overlap' and changes to parenting function.*

Although the assertion in figure TWO is that change to fatherhood has been the result of convergence between father and mother functions – an argument we have seen almost universally endorsed in the current literature – this is by no means the only way in which change can occur. Just as influential would be a *divergence* in function, or, just as importantly, a shifting emphasis on function *within* those already associated with the father. Important too is the fact that ‘change’ to the functions associated with the father is unlikely to be simply linear: a point emphasised by LaRossa for the image of fatherhood in the first half of the twentieth century in the USA.155
Even this conceptualisation is insufficient in one regard, because it largely fails to acknowledge the often hidden power relationships between parents. As John Lukes’ study of power has shown, the question is often not who performs certain tasks but who decides who should perform them and, further, who decides who decides. For example, although a mother may take responsibility for performing certain tasks, it does not necessarily follow that the father had no interest or involvement. We cannot conceptualise fatherhood just by a man’s actions. Many commentators have suggested that the power relationship between a husband and wife has meant that a husband is able to have his wife act for him. This was certainly the conclusion of one commentator, writing in an 1849 edition of Mother’s Magazine: ‘Fathers delegate their duties to others without strengthening their authority’, and of Helen Bosanquet, the middle-class philanthropist leader of the Charity Organisation Society, who in 1906 suggested that the father’s importance was often in his ‘influencing’ his wife in parenting.

Clearly, the negotiations within the parenting team are vitally important, although they are hard to identify.

Asserting that aspects of parenting or certain child-parent interactions were exclusive to the father is an easy conceptual mistake, especially in an historical context. However, viewed on a broad base, there is virtually no parental function that was one hundred per cent ‘exclusive’ to either parent. For all the periods and subsections of the population discussed above we can find evidence of some mothers going out to earn a wage or we can find some fathers performing ‘motherly’ care. Moreover, things a father did could perhaps also be done by an uncle or older brother. However, this study suggests that this is not the point of importance. What
matters is how far, at any given time, or within any particular sub-section of the population, certain functions were *expected* of the father. This is particularly pertinent for father-child interaction, as we shall see. The point is often not that a mother did not perform certain activities (such as play), but that as a *proportion* of their total parenting function they were more *significant* for the father. This has been a point made by contemporary sociological studies of fatherhood.159 We can thus perhaps condense this conceptualisation to a simple notion; fatherhood is the set of functions expected of a father, but not necessarily exclusive to him, and change to the idea of fatherhood is the change to these expectations. That different groups, periods and discourses can produce varying, and indeed competing, expectations is what informs this thesis.

It is not just the relationship with the mother that we need to consider. Prominence also needs to be given to the fact that fatherhood is only one of a number of social ‘roles’ or ‘positions’ a man can hold. Men might not just be fathers, but also workers, husbands and friends. The fact that these different male roles can be held concurrently with that of father is often problematic because fatherhood is an identity that both conflicts with and complements other male roles, and indeed broader notions of ‘manliness’ and masculinity. This does not mean that the functions of a husband and the functions of a father are always mutually exclusive, indeed, they often overlap. Being the breadwinner, for example, must be seen as being a husband’s as much as a father’s function. Where the distinction between a father’s and a husband’s activity was the weakest, certain actions could easily be seen as important for the father and husband (for example, if a father takes his child and entertains him/her then his wife is able to have a rest).
However, there can be a degree of incompatibility between fatherhood and other expectations surrounding ‘manly’ behaviour. The point is exemplified in an historical context by Robert Roberts in his observations of Salford at the turn of the century when he notes that there was a fine line between helping in the home and being labelled with ‘derisive names like “mop rag” and “diddy man”’. Moreover, and even more pertinent for this study, the different expectations surrounding fatherhood itself could often be incompatible. Fathers were often confronted with ‘catch-22’ situations and decisions – Do I work overtime to earn more money or do I go home and spend more time with the children? The outcome of such decisions often offer the most illuminating insight into what was seen as the most significant and important functions of a father. Such conflict can be seen as particularly troublesome for fathers during the times when the ‘culture’ of fatherhood was changing because during these times there were notable social forces dragging them in different directions.

At the centre of fatherhood is of course the father-child relationship but this has often been sidelined in historical analysis (no doubt because it is hard to investigate). Yet modern studies of fatherhood have been primarily concerned with this father-child interaction and numerous studies have been conducted. Drawing on these is useful, but we must be careful not to fall into the trap of ‘present minded’ history for which some of the current literature can be criticised.

An issue that contemporary social scientists have highlighted but which is nonetheless relevant to the study of fatherhood in an historical context is that we need to be clear on how we conceptualise, and measure, parental interaction. Michael Lamb (focusing on contemporary America) sees this interaction as being one of
three types. First, ‘engagement’, which is one-on-one interaction with the child and which covers activities such as feeding, dressing, or playing football in the garden. Second is ‘accessibility’, that is a less intense form of interaction in which the parent is focused elsewhere, reading the newspaper or cooking for example, but is available and willing to respond to the child. The third element is what Lamb calls ‘responsibility’, which refers to which parent is accountable for the child’s welfare: when it needs a nappy change or a new pair of shoes for example.\textsuperscript{161} The point Lamb makes from this distinction is that fathers and mothers spend their time with children \textit{in different ways}, with father-child interaction in his study comprising thirty three per cent more ‘engagement’, and sixty five per cent more ‘accessibility’ than mothers. Of course, this is the proportion of the total time each parent spends with the child. Therefore, ‘Mothers actually play with their children more than fathers do but, as a proportion of the total amount of child-parent interaction, play is a much more prominent component of father-child interaction, whereas care taking is more salient with mothers.’\textsuperscript{162} The point is that fathers thereby become associated with play much more than mothers even though they perhaps spend less time playing.

Finally, it is important to understand that mothers and fathers can experience parent-child activity in different ways. The line between a domestic chore of care and ‘play’ is often fluid for example. What mothers may see as a necessary but perhaps not pleasurable part of their care for a child, a father (and indeed child) may view as a form of leisurely interaction. A good example may be bathing a baby. The greater restraints on a mother’s time in the domestic setting might mean she is less able to experience the bathing of her child as a pleasurable or ‘fun’ activity. By
comparison, the father may categorise bathing his child as part of his leisure time and, as a result, might be more inclined to 'play' rather than just 'wash'.

**Synopsis**

Ideally, we want to know what norms prevailed in any social group at any given time, and how such norms have varied according to the "class", wealth, size, structure, activities and ethos of the families concerned... We then need to inquire into actual behaviour and to see how far it departed from established norms, and we need to discover what sanctions were applied against deviant behaviour and by whom.  

So, this thesis examines working-class fatherhood in Britain in the period between 1900 and 1939. The intention is not to provide a detailed study of one community, but rather a study of the perceived and practical parameters within which fatherhood operated in Britain during these years. It adopts a broad definition of the 'working-class', and indeed a fluid one, but will acknowledge the variety of experiences within such an amorphous categorisation. The interest is chiefly on the more affluent skilled worker, but the unskilled and 'border-line' upper working-class / lower middle-class are sometimes discussed. The very poor are not focused on, although the experiences of the unemployed father of the 1930s are given significant attention. The focus is almost entirely the urban working class, yet relevant examples and discussions from rural areas are sometimes used.

The first portion of the thesis views fatherhood as a set of constructed, perceived, and prescribed ideas, 'discourses'. Chapter Two in effect starts at the 'top' with an examination of family law, specifically the passing of the 1925 Guardianship of Infants Act. It identifies some of the prominent assumptions that lawmakers and judges held about what fathers 'ought' to be doing as parents, but also what they (the
lawmakers) believed they (the father) already were doing. It suggests that, despite the fact that legislation limited fathers’ rights, men were still viewed as being important in their children’s lives. Chapter Three examines a ‘discourse’ that was specifically focused on the working-class father. It explores the place fathers occupied in the inter-war Infant Welfare Movement by examining the birth and expansion of the British Fathercraft Movement. It suggests that fathers were believed to have complementary but nonetheless important functions as parents and that fathercraft offered a notably ‘progressive’ version of fatherhood.

The second portion of the thesis moves the focus on to the conduct and experiences of working-class fathers. Chapter Four examines letters written during the First World War to offer some tentative answers to the question of how the circumstance of war effected fathers and their relationships with their children. The letters also indicate attitudes of the pre-war generation. Chapter Five uses oral history and autobiographies to explore some experiences of working class fathers in the period and highlights that there were many factors which have been neglected in the current literature but which seem to have had an impact on the expectations surrounding a father’s conduct. Chapter Six explores some personal experiences of unemployment to suggest that joblessness often altered the expectations surrounding male parenting and that, viewed more broadly, times of unemployment can be seen as an important ‘arena’ in which fatherhood was, at least temporarily, ‘refocused’.

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3. A good review of the literature on manliness, masculinity and domesticity is provided by M. Francis, ‘The Domestication of the Male’ in Recent Research on Nineteenth-and Twentieth-Century


8 For example, fatherhood and fathers in literature are not given attention and the work on contemporary psychoanalysis is given only brief discussion.


11 ibid. Cft.


16 J. Tosh, *A Man’s Place*, p. 86.


18 R. LaRossa, 'Fatherhood and Social Change', *Family Relations*, 37 (October 1988).

19 ibid.; J. Tosh, 'Domesticity and Manliness in the Victorian Middle Class'.


33 J. Hammerton, Cruelty and Companionhip; L. Stone, The Road to Divorce.

34 L. Davidoff et al., Family Story, p.136.


37 A. Sumner Holmes, ‘“Fallen Mothers”’, p.37.

38 Ibid., p.41.


43 P. Thompson, The Edwardians, p.290-290; See also D. Vincent, Bread, Knowledge and Freedom, p.60.

44 See, for example, A. Davin, ‘Imperialism and Motherhood’, History Workshop Journal, 5 (1978); D. Davin, “War is good for babies and Other Young Children”: A History of the Infant and Child...
46 J. Burnett, Destiny Obscure, p.16.
47 E. Ross, Love and Toil, p.150.
51 Ibid., p.11.
54 Hardyment, Dream Babies, p.122.
55 Ibid.
65 M. Young and P. Willmott, Family and Kinship in East London, p.28 [emphasis added].
67 J. Bourke, Working Class Cultures, Chapter Three.
68 R. LaRossa, The Modernization of Fatherhood.
69 Ibid., p.1.
71 Ibid., pp.117, 121.
73 Ibid., p.164.
74 D. Gittins, Fair Sex, Chapter Five.
75 J. Bourke, Working Class Cultures, p.84.
76 R. LaRossa, ‘Fatherhood and Social Change’.

80 L. Davidoff *et al., Family Story,* p.149.

81 L. Abrams, *Orphan Country: Children of Scotland’s Broken Homes from 1875 to the Present.* (Edinburgh: 1998); id., “‘There Was Nobody like My Daddy’”.

82 L. Abrams, “There Was Nobody like My Daddy”, p.228.


84 Quoted in, L. Abrams, “‘There Was Nobody like My Daddy’”, p.234.

85 For example, see the discussion of the period by D. Gittins in *Fair Sex,* Chapter Two and also the emphasis given to socio-economic changes by J. Bourke in *Working Class Cultures,* Chapter Three.


89 R. Woods argues that the ‘class diffusion’ theory of fertility decline hides the fact that substantial proportions of couples in all occupation groups were behaving in a similar fashion at roughly the same time, *Demography of Victorian England and Wales,* (Cambridge: 2000). p.120. See also, for example, D. Levine, *Reproducing Families: The Political Economy of English Population History,* (Cambridge: 1987), p.162.


91 S. Szreter, *Fertility, Class and Gender in Britain, 1860-1940,* (Cambridge: 1996), Chapter Seven. see especially Figure 7.1, p.312.

92 D. V. Glass, *Population: Policies and Movements in Europe,* p.69. Other evidence for these occupational differences within the ‘working class’ can also be cited. In his social survey of Merseyside, D. C. Jones indicates ‘a steady rise in the average total number of children born per family as the occupational grade of the family falls’, *Ibid.,* p.71.

93 S. Szreter, *Fertility, Class and Gender,* p.548.


98 J. Bourke, *Working Class Cultures in Britain,* p.82.


102 ‘Most women accepted the loss of their babies as a sad, but inevitable fact of life … there were quite possibly a few women who welcomed the loss of a baby’ as it was one less mouth to feed, E. Roberts, *A Woman’s Place,* p.165.


104 J. Lewis, *Politics of Motherhood.*


108 For instance, in 1913 the infant mortality rate in Oxford was 32, while in St. Helen’s it was 116. D Gittins, *Fair Sex,* p.50.
D. Dwork, *War is Good for Babies.*

J. and E. Newton, 'Cultural Aspects of Childrearing'. p.54.

C. Irwin and E. Sharland, 'From Bodies to Minds in Childcare Literature'. p.175.

J. and E. Newsom, 'Cultural Aspects of Childrearing'. See also, for example, C. Hardymen, *Dream Babies.*

C. Irwin and E. Sharland, 'From Bodies to Minds in Childcare Literature'. p.186.


See, for example, J. Bourke, *Working-Class Cultures*, Chapter Three. It should be said that her study extends to 1960 which would incorporate the post Second World War council house building period. However, her discussion in Chapter Three is vague on the chronology and the emphasis appears to be on inter-war England.


H. Cunningham, 'Leisure and Culture'.

Exemplifying the growth, in 1922 there were 35,744 wireless licences issued, by 1926 the figure had grown to 2,178,259 and by by 1939 there were 9,082,666 radio licences, J. Walvin, *Leisure and Society*, 1830-1950, (London: 1978), pp.137-38.


135 The risk of unemployment rose sharply between the ages of eighteen and twenty-four and was greater among men over the age of fifty-five’, B. Harris, ‘Unemployment and the Dole’, pp.203-206.

139 J. Hopkins, Rise and Decline of English Working Class, p.35.


143 At the beginning of the inter-war period £2.4 was spent per head of the population, whilst the figure rose to £12.5 by 1938. In 1918 2.4 per cent of the GNP was devoted to social services, compared to 11.3 per cent of a higher GNP in 1938, D. Vincent, Poor Citizens: The State and the Poor in Twentieth Century Britain, (London: 1991), p.71.

144 R. LaRossa, Modernization of Fatherhood, pp.10-11.

145 R. LaRossa, ‘Fatherhood and Social Change’.


147 J. Tosh, A Man’s World, p.93.


149 L. Benson, Fatherhood, p.37. Benson suggests that all fathers are expected to work and ‘provide’ but this seems a rather inflated assertion. Certainly being the provider has been the most prominent function of the male parent for over two centuries, but it probably only gained the universal association with fatherhood (as opposed to parenthood) as a result of the separation of home and work following the emergence of industrialised capitalist society.


151 L. Benson, Fatherhood.

152 M. Doolittle, ‘Missing Fathers’.


154 R. LaRossa, Modernization of Fatherhood, p.14. It should be noted that LaRossa himself outlines the shortcomings to this approach.


162 Ibid., p.10.

Chapter Two

FATHERS, PARENTAL PREFERENCE AND THE 1925 GUARDIANSHIP OF INFANTS ACT

There was notable family-centred legislation in the 1920's. This, as Pinchbeck and Hewitt have argued, was important in the long-term development of family law (and the father's/husband's place within that law) because Acts altered long-standing legal frameworks. For example, the 1925 Guardianship of Infants Act replaced the 1886 Guardianship of Infants Act and the 1925 Summary Jurisdiction (Separation and Maintenance) Act built on the 1895 Summary Jurisdiction (Married Women) Act.¹ As we have seen, the development of family law since the mid-nineteenth century has been discussed in some detail within the current literature. The argument put forward in this literature is typically 'Whiggish', the argument being that women's 'rights' and a growing concern for child welfare began to take precedent over the father's right to control the way his child was raised and his right to custody after a family breakdown.

This chapter uses developments to the law in a different way and adopts a different approach. The interest here is not in the place of the 1925 Guardianship Act within a longer process of legal development or the Act's place in the long-term developments in the rights of the father. Such analysis can be found elsewhere.² Rather, this chapter examines the debates preceding the passing of the 1925 Guardianship Act, and judge's rulings after the passing of the Act, because they offer a convenient and rare glimpse of what the lawmakers perceived the father's functions to be. The chapter is therefore not another examination of the father's rights and
responsibilities under law but an examination of one ‘discourse’ on fatherhood which offers a particular perception of the father’s place in family life, his importance to child development and the importance of the child-father relationship. The interest is in the perception of fatherhood at one specific time, the inter-war years, rather than the way the 1925 legislation related to previous, or indeed later, Acts.

The 1925 Guardianship Act allows such an analysis because it removed (or at least was passed in order to remove) any legal preference for the father remaining from nineteenth-century law. This forced lawmakers and later judges to outline a more specific understanding of a father’s importance as a parent beyond the ‘traditional’ understanding that, merely as the economic head of household (merely by being the father) he was ‘entitled’ to custody and the final say in parenting issues. Simply put, the 1925 Guardianship Act was one of the first occasions when lawmakers were forced to think about a father’s ‘sphere of influence’ as a parent.

It emerges from this examination that, while the mother’s responsibilities and importance for the children were often easily identifiable, almost ‘obvious’ in some ‘maternalistic’ rhetoric, the father’s functions were often far less well understood and often remained elusive. Beyond his function as the provider for his children, there was little clear-cut understanding among lawmakers as to which areas of a child’s life a father ‘ought’ to be involved in. The outcome was thus an often confused understanding of fatherhood which underlined vague attachments to material provision, the importance of paternal authority and which placed emphasis on children’s age and gender when weighing the father’s importance.
Sources and Method.

To gain a better insight into this 'discourse' debates surrounding the passing of the 1925 Guardianship Act in the House of Commons and Lords (as reported in Hansard) are examined. Of course, the MP and Peers debating the Act do not reflect a homogeneous view about the responsibilities and importance of the father, but rather a multiplicity of views. What an MP or a peer articulated could be dramatically influenced by his/her personal situation, be it age, class or, indeed, the idiosyncrasies of his/her own family experience. A number of the themes surrounding the Guardianship Act had possible political implications. While our interest is not in the policy of individual parties, there is therefore the issue of whether party ideology created a skewed view of these issues. Such a concern is not massively problematic however because the issues surrounding the passing of the 1925 Guardianship created notable cross-party support. Changes to the laws relating to guardianship, custody and maintenance had been part of the election pledges of the Liberal and Labour Parties and were also supported by the Conservative Party. Indeed, the very fact that Guardianship Bills came before the Houses on so many occasions during the 1920s meant that the issues were of concern to governments from different political persuasions.

More pressing (and of course related to party politics) is the issue of social class. The question we have to ask is whose opinion does the perception of fatherhood we find articulated by lawmakers reflect? Certainly, with regard to peers and judges, we are forced to argue that this perception was a middle - or even upper - class view. However, it is important to highlight that, by the 1920s, the composition of the House of Commons increasingly reflected working class interests and
perspectives. From January to October 1924, for example, the first Labour Government held power, and throughout the 1920s the Labour Party held a significant number of seats. By examining debates within the House of Commons we are therefore not just examining a middle-class perception of family. Of course, much of what we will analyses is the middle-class opinion (even a number of the Labour MPs were from middle-class backgrounds), but it would be wrong to argue that, by the 1920s, working-class opinions were not present in the Commons. The Labour MPs were typically from skilled and trade unionist backgrounds.

This is not however the same as arguing that the working class at this time enjoyed equal access to the law. The high cost of having an application for divorce or a case of disputed custody heard meant that access to the law relating to custody, maintenance and guardianship was unquestionably limited for the working classes, even after 1925. Similarly, as contemporaries observed and as historians have confirmed, there was significant class (and indeed intra-class) variations in the meaning of marriage. As such, the working classes were often far less likely even to consider having marital disputes settled by the court.

However, this is not directly relevant to our focus because we are interested in the way fatherhood was perceived and not in the way the law had an impact in practice. The perception we will explore is one discourse on fatherhood, whether the working class were significantly targeted by the passing of the legislation or not. Furthermore, the Act was not class-specific legislation, as much legislation tended to be in the nineteenth century. The grounds on which custody was granted under the 1925 Guardianship Act were also the grounds on which magistrates decided whether to issue separation and custody orders in magistrate’s courts under the 1925
Summary Jurisdiction (Separation and Maintenance) Act. As Iris Minor has suggested, 'the most notable feature of separation orders was the fact that the moral strictures of the Central Divorce Court were applied'. Therefore, the perception examined in this chapter, whether emerging from working, middle or even upper class, is a convenient point to start our examination of fatherhood.

A small number of reported court cases are also used. As Hammerton notes in his study of marriage law in the nineteenth century, 'an examination of marriage through its "hard cases", especially at a time when litigation involved such a tiny proportion of all marriages, runs obvious risks of judging the mainstream from the experience of the exceptional'. How far an historian can argue that changes to the law had any relevance for the father within an intact, continuing marriage is a key methodological concern. However, we are not interested here in how far the behaviour of fathers was affected by changes to the law. We are instead interested in how agents of the state perceived the functions of fatherhood and what might happen when changes to the law occurred. Moreover, as will be discussed, one of the more radical elements of the 1925 Guardianship Act was a clause that did seek to challenge the father's position in continuing marriages.

The Passing of the 1925 Guardianship of Infants Act.

Colonel James Greig, the Liberal MP who introduced a Guardianship Bill in 1921, argued in the Commons that 'the scales of justice are weighted in favour of the father'. Pinchbeck’s and Hewitt’s historical analysis confirms this contemporary perception. They argue that, despite significant reductions in the 'sacrosanct' rights of the father, the law prior to the passing of the 1925 Guardianship Act 'fell short of
recognising the legal equality of parents as regards their rights of guardianship over their children.\textsuperscript{13} The 1886 Guardianship of Infants Act (which set the law until the 1925 Act changed it) had instructed judges to give 'regard to the welfare of the infant, and to the conduct of the parents, and to the wishes as well of the mother as of the father'.\textsuperscript{14} However, this did not mean that the principle of a father's prior claim to custody had been completely dismantled because, as the Lord Chancellor commented in 1924, it 'left to the Court a very vaguely worded discretion in dealing with these things'.\textsuperscript{15}

This 'vagueness' in the law meant that, as James Greig further commented, as long as 'there are no serious charges of misconduct against the father...[his] wishes must prevail'.\textsuperscript{16} This typically meant that it was necessary for wives to prove that their husbands had been abusive in order for them to be granted both a separation and custody order in the magistrates' court. Margaret Wintringham (Liberal) – who introduced a Guardianship Bill in 1924 – commented that it was only women who 'obtained separation orders from their husbands because of habitual drunkenness, aggravated assault, persistent cruelty, desertion or failure to maintain' who were automatically granted custody of their children.\textsuperscript{17} A father's superior legal rights meant that, in continuing marriages where the husband was not overtly abusive, children could be used by him as 'a tool' in forcing his wife to stay with him:

There are fathers who strike at the very dearest thing the mother has, namely, the desire to be with her children, and there are many cases this is one of the real troubles which this Bill is designed to meet where the father uses or threatens to use his power to take the children away from the mother to the intense misery and unhappiness of that mother.\textsuperscript{18}

Such 'imbalance' in the law and the potential consequences led to increased pressure for new legislation during the early 1920s. Dorothy Jewson, an
outspoken advocate of women’s rights and Labour MP for Norwich who had knowledge of working-class family life through her work as a social investigator.\textsuperscript{19} argued that the law needed to be redressed as a matter of equalling women’s rights. Although women over 30 had won the vote in 1918, she argued that their inferior position under law and the fact that wives were typically dependent on their husbands’ wages meant that true equality had not been reached. For Jewson the aim of the proposed Bills was to ‘protect a mother and the child against the bad, or tyrannical, or inconsiderate husband or father’ by granting equality in matters of guardianship and custody.\textsuperscript{20} Other prominent feminists and Labour women also argued in favour of the Bill using the rhetoric of sexual equality. Some, like Jewson, saw the Act explicitly in such terms and suggested that it was ‘another phase of the application of the principle that a woman is an equal citizen with a man’.\textsuperscript{21}

However, arguments that pressured for change within the context of the rights of women faced opposition. R. Murray (Labour), a magistrate in his constituency of Renfrewshire in Scotland, supported the 1924 Guardianship Bill but was aware that surrounding the legislation in the rhetoric of women’s rights made it less palatable for some. He suggested that there was a ‘general tendency on the part of those who oppose[d] this alteration in the law, to regard it primarily as one more of the steps which are being taken for the purpose of extending the position, the power and the rights of women’.\textsuperscript{22}

Certainly critics of the Bills were often deeply hostile to what some regarded as a sinister ‘feminist agitation’\textsuperscript{23} perpetuated, as they saw it, by the ‘women’s societies’ in order to redress the balance of sexual power within the home.\textsuperscript{24} Even lawmakers who were fully in favour of the measure were clear to place emphasis on
the benefits the measure would have on child welfare rather than arguing that it was a component of women's rights. R. Murray was explicit in outlining such a distinction, noting that it was 'a Bill for the protection of the child, and only incidentally, is it a Bill for dealing with certain legal anomalies in the position of fathers and mothers'. Similarly, Lieut-Colonel Fremantle (Conservative), who supported the Bill in principle but was wary of its possible implications, told the Commons during the second reading of the 1921 Bill that law makers must not confuse the two issues. He stated that the 'whole problem of the guardianship of infants must not be in any way damaged by any suggestion that ... we are deciding for women's rights as apart from the rights of the infant'. It seemed, according to Fremantle at least, that supporters of the Bill could easily be discouraged from giving their support if the Bill were seen as part of the women's rights movement, rather than part of a campaign to aid the children of the Empire.

To this end the rhetoric surrounding the Bills focused on child welfare. The emphasis was placed on granting equality between male and female parenting, rather than between the sexes per se. The preamble of the 1925 Guardianship Act emphasised these principles.

[The Court] shall regard the welfare of the infant as the first and paramount consideration, and shall not take into consideration whether from any other point of view the claim of the father, or any right at common law possessed by the father, in respect of such custody, upbringing, administration or application is superior to that of the mother, or the claim of the mother is superior to that of the father.

Of course, equalising the rights of the parents meant, as the current literature has emphasised, limiting the rights of the father, and it is accurate to see the Act as primarily passed in order to limit a father's long-standing claim to preference. As
one Judge explained in the case of *Hume v. Hume* (1926) which was heard shortly after the 1925 Guardianship Act passed into law, ‘the Court ... is forbidden from taking into consideration whether the claim or common law right of the father is preferable to that of the mother.’

In giving the father and mother equality under the law the Act was not seen as radical but was seen as necessary in order to bring the law into line with current legal, moral and public opinion. As Jewson argued, ‘modern opinion recognises husband and wife to be equal partners, and I think it is high time that the law should be brought into accord with public opinion on this subject’. Most of those in favour of new legislation believed that it lagged behind what was the ‘normal’ experience of (working-and middle-class) family life. Sir P. Richardson (Conservative) believed that ‘the question of equal guardianship between fathers and mothers appeals to the ordinary population as a matter of commonsense and not as a question of policy’.

However, one aspect of the 1925 Guardianship Act did cause controversy. As the full title indicated, the Act dealt with issues relating to the ‘custody or upbringing of an infant’. It was therefore not just concerned with the rights of each parent in circumstances when a marriage broke down. For the first time legislation was put in place that could be used by a mother to challenge the parenting decisions of the father within continuing marriages. As clause six of the act stated:

> Where two or more persons act as joint guardians of an infant and they are unable to agree on any question affecting the welfare of the infant, any of them may apply to the court for its direction, and the court may make such order regarding the matters in difference as it may think proper.

The current literature fails to emphasise the possible radical implications of this clause in its potential to weaken fundamentally the position of the father within
the family. Contemporaries, however, were aware that such a ruling was a significant departure from previous trends in custody and guardianship legislation. As the Lord Chancellor stated in the debate following the second reading of the 1923 Guardianship Bill in the Lords:

This Bill proposes that even when the two parents are living together in the same household, the father and mother shall be joint guardians with equal powers, and if they disagree they can call in the assistance of the Court... That, of course, is a tremendous change.\textsuperscript{33}

The problem for critics of this measure was that such interference in child management in 'normal' family life went beyond what was acceptable for the state. The law was not just providing equality between parents in obtaining custody after a marriage had broken down, but was prescribing what each parent 'ought' to be responsible or best suited for. Lieut-Colonel Fremantle, the Conservative MP who, as we have seen, was broadly in favour of a Guardianship Act, argued that lawmakers should not confuse the two 'entirely different subjects ... of the distinction of duties between father and mother ... [and] the promotion of the welfare and the custody of the child'.\textsuperscript{34}

As we shall see, the perceived greater ability of each parent to perform certain aspects of parenting was the way cases of disputed custody were often settled but, in continuing marriages, the court's interference was believed by some to do more harm than good. Some critics believed that to undermine a father's authority in the home was to disrupt the status quo of family life. Although, as we shall see, most lawmakers believed that a father probably left day-to-day management of the children to the mother, being able to decide on issues such as religious upbringing or education was traditionally seen as (at least among the middle classes) the right and
responsibility of the father. Allowing the mother to challenge the father's decisions in such matters could, some argued, have serious negative implications for parental unity, the division of responsibility in the home, child welfare and even the very foundation of family life. Sir Charles Wilson (Conservative) thus lampooned the proposed Guardianship Bill during its Second Reading in 1924.

I find myself in opposition to this Bill. I think it ought to be called The Promotion of Domestic Strife Bill. Look at clause 3 - equal guardianship of father and mother [sic.] - which I believe is the corner-stone of the whole Measure. The question is one of equal authority... I foresee endless domestic strife if this Bill becomes law.\textsuperscript{35}

Mr. Greaves-Lord (Conservative), who became a High Court judge, warned that legislating for equality in 'child' 'management' issues was 'likely to create a very unhealthy atmosphere for the children.'\textsuperscript{36} Under the 1925 Act, according to Major Sir B. Falle, a judge and Conservative MP, a child 'would become the shuttlecock of its father's and mother's idiosyncrasies.'\textsuperscript{37} He even suggested that being stripped of legally sanctioned rights to decide what happened to his children might mean that men could be put off the idea of marriage altogether.\textsuperscript{38}

Turning to what the passing of the 1925 Guardianship Act tell us about perceptions of parenting functions particularly, in important ways the Act was recognition of the perception held by lawmakers that the mother was more involved and more important to children than the father. Such a view was often aired when the measure was debated in the Commons and Lords and those arguing for the new legislation reasoned that the father had rights under law which were disproportionate to both his effort and importance as a parent. George Roberts (National Democratic Party, although once Labour) commented during the second reading of the 1921 Bill for example, that:
When we consider the tremendous anxiety, the danger and the tremendous amount of suffering which the mother has to experience in her capacity of motherhood, we must admit that not only has she a right to equality, but if there is to be any preference at all the mother really has the right to have it, because after all the father has not so very much trouble in the upbringing of the children.\textsuperscript{39}

The sentiment being expressed here is clearly that the mother deserved equality with the father under law because she had the greater involvement, worry and toil as a parent. Conversely, and what is significant for our interest, is that a father's efforts were (comparatively) dismissed because he had little direct involvement in the child's upbringing. Furthermore, equalising parental rights under the law was not only about rewarding a mother's greater efforts, it was also a reflection of the perception held by most lawmakers that she had greater importance for children's day-to-day needs. There was a strong assumption among lawmakers that the mother knew more about issues relating to children's care, and was thus better able to make decisions on such matters. Mr. Storry-Deans (Conservative), a barrister, told the House in 1924 that "no man who is wise in his own house will say to his wife, "I have equal rights with you in the house and in the children." He says to her, in endearing terms, "Of course you know more about the children than I do; I leave it to you."\textsuperscript{40} It was she, and not the father, who made the majority of parenting decisions and therefore it made perfect sense to allow her to challenge her husband's parenting decisions in the courts.

So, we can summarise, the intention of the 1925 Guardianship of Infants Act was to make male and female parenting equal under the law. In practice this was achieved by limiting the rights of the father because it was he who had been favoured in the law since at least the mid-nineteenth century. The Act outlined that it was no
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The sentiment being expressed here is clearly that the mother deserved equality with the father under law because she had the greater involvement, worry and toil as a parent. Conversely, and what is significant for our interest, is that a father’s efforts were (comparatively) dismissed because he had little direct involvement in the child’s upbringing. Furthermore, equalising parental rights under the law was not only about rewarding a mother’s greater efforts, it was also a reflection of the perception held by most lawmakers that she had greater importance for children’s day-to-day needs. There was a strong assumption among lawmakers that the mother knew more about issues relating to children’s care, and was thus better able to make decisions on such matters. Mr. Storry-Deans (Conservative), a barrister, told the House in 1924 that ‘no man who is wise in his own house will say to his wife, “I have equal rights with you in the house and in the children.” He says to her, in endearing terms, “Of course you know more about the children than I do; I leave it to you.”’ It was she, and not the father, who made the majority of parenting decisions and therefore it made perfect sense to allow her to challenge her husband’s parenting decisions in the courts.

So, we can summarise, the intention of the 1925 Guardianship of Infants Act was to make male and female parenting equal under the law. In practice this was achieved by limiting the rights of the father because it was he who had been favoured in the law since at least the mid-nineteenth century. The Act outlined that it was no
longer sufficient for judges to give custody to the father merely because of lingering assumptions about his ‘right’ to a prior claim. More broadly, the Act was also a recognition of the perception of lawmakers that the mother was probably generally more important for a child’s welfare than the father. (Such a perception, as the next chapter will explore, permeated other discourses on parenting within this period.)

With this new evidence we have confirmed the argument prevalent in the current literature. However, this does not fully recognise the fact that, among this ‘discourse’ on fatherhood, lawmakers and judges were forced to outline a more detailed understanding of (what they believed) the father’s importance to be. While it is correct to point out the shifting emphasis toward the mother and child welfare that changes to the law indicate, as we shall now see, it would be wrong to argue that the father was not still seen as having important and specific functions as a parent. The current literature has perhaps mistakenly interpreted a move towards equality as an ‘attack’ on fathers.

Settling Disputed Custody: Defining the Father’s Responsibility and Influence.

One of the biggest contemporary criticisms to be levelled at the 1925 Guardianship Act was that it would be impossible to implement in practice. Because there was no distinction in priority between the mother and father, it was argued that a judge would be unable to decide which parent was to have custody, let alone which parent was to decide on a particular parenting issue. As Major Sir B. Falle commented during the second reading of the 1921 Guardianship Bill, ‘If two people ride on a horse, one of them has to sit in front and hold the reins? … We are talking
of ordinary family life, in which one must be the master. I am quite prepared to say it should be the woman, but I prefer it should be the man. It must be one or the other, it cannot be both. Major Moulton (Liberal) similarly stressed what he saw as the practical impossibility of implementing a law that viewed both parents as completely equal:

It seems very simple to say that two people have equal rights, but there seems no machinery for providing for that and discovering exactly what it means. Take an example. Say the child wants to marry. At present you have the consent of one parent [the father]. But in this case, suppose one parent gives its consent and the other refuses? What is the situation in this matter of equal guardianship? Can the child get married or not?

In defending the proposed Bill against such criticism, lawmakers outlined the way judges could/would draw on prevailing normative assumptions about the division of parenting responsibility and importance within the home as a guide in difficult decisions. As Lieut-Colonel Hurst noted, although the Act ‘provided that the rights of husband and wife shall be exactly equal, the Courts in practice will be bound to adopt some doctrine of convenience’ in settling parenting and custody disputes. It is this ‘doctrine of convenience’ that allows us an insight into the assumptions surrounding the responsibilities and importance of the father. The rights a father once enjoyed simply by being the head of the household were no longer enough to justify giving him preference, more detailed scrutiny was required from judges when balancing the importance of each parent.

For some proposing the Guardianship Bills the ‘doctrine of convenience’ would be unproblematic. Fremantle argued, for example that:

Nature take the thoroughly straightforward and natural line that marriage is a partnership. The father has his definite duties and the mother has her definite duties, and the mother has the more intimate domestic duties.
But so long as she requires protection and provision of food from outside, it is the duty of the father to provide it.44

As this quotation suggests, lawmakers struggled to outline the father’s function beyond these tasks of material provision and protection. For example, a clause (which was dropped from the final legislation) was suggested during the second reading of the 1924 Bill in which the mother’s ‘work for the infant in the home [was to be recognised] as a contribution to maintenance.’45 Rhys Davies (the Under Secretary of State for the Home Department, Labour) argued that it would be impossible to calculate ‘the value of the affection and love of a mother for her children’.46 He further argued that ‘it may be possible to value the work of the father for his child, but what the mother does is very difficult for anyone to measure in terms of money’.47 This is significant because it underlines how it was assumed that the father’s value was easily calculated precisely because he had such little involvement and responsibility beyond provision. The mother’s, by comparison, was less easily calculated because it was seen as the amorphous responsibilities attached to day-to-day care. Indeed, as Lady Terrington suggested, it was because of this that men were so fully dependent on their wives for the care of children.

From the moment when a child enters into the world, the mother has the care of it, and everything is left to her. A husband, if he be a working man, has to go out to earn a living, and even when he has not to earn a living, he does not see to the upbringing of the children. He does not buy their shoes and clothes; he simply pays for them.48

The belief that a father’s functions did not expand further than provision is also reflected in other discourses on fatherhood in the period. For example, during the debates surrounding the possible adoption of a family allowance scheme as official policy of the Women’s Labour League, Dr. Marrion Phillips outlined her
belief that a father might drift away from the family if his provider function was even partially diluted:

She believed the idea of childhood pensions, taking from the father all need to provide for his children, tended to increase the irresponsibility of fatherhood and to further the growing idea so common now amongst middle-class women, that the father had practically no concern in parentage and that the mother was the only one that mattered. 49

This reflected the common assumption (whether accurate or not) held by lawmakers that in the home it was ‘normal’ that the mother had sole responsibility for day-to-day childcare. For many debating the Bills therefore, the division of parental functions which judges should adopt was to be self-evidently based on the ‘provider’ / ‘carer’ division. Such an assumption reflected many MPs’ personal experiences of marriage and parenting. As R. Richardson (Labour) commented, ‘I look upon it as my bounden [sic.] to provide for my wife and family, it is my wife’s duty to feed and clothe children after I have provided for them’. 50 It seemed natural therefore that, in cases of disputed custody:

Where the question at issue involves expenditure, it seems to me that the father should have a dominant voice in deciding what should be done with the child...It may not be necessary, perhaps, to indicate this in the Bill, no doubt, these facts will weigh with the judges who have to administer the bill. 51

However, a particular ‘child management’ issues which might demand financial outlay was one thing but for a child’s overall welfare the ability to provide was not always seen as sufficient reason to give the father custody. As was outlined in the case of M v. M (1926), in which a father was awarded the custody of ‘a boy aged less than three years’ after his wife had left him and made false allegations about his behaviour: ‘The welfare of the child was the main consideration, and that
included moral welfare as well as material welfare. Therefore, while it would be wrong to suggest that material factors were not significant in a judge’s deliberation, it appears that concern for the parents’ moral character and ability to meet the needs of their child was perhaps even more significant. As Lord Merrivale noted in the case of *W v. W* (1926) – in which a father was granted custody of a 5-year-old child - for example:

> Sometimes great importance is attached to the present and future material interests of the child. No doubt they are important matters, but I do not think the view of the Court has ever been that they are by any means the most important matters. The matters of immediate consideration are the comfort, the health, and the moral, intellectual and spiritual welfare of the child.

Although an unofficial ‘doctrine of convenience’ was seen as a sensible way to settle dispute cases, in the debates surrounding the passing of the 1925 Guardianship Act a small number of significant issues (religion, education and marriage) relating to the child’s upbringing were identified as perhaps requiring special legislative attention. What is interesting is that these issues were ones that were perhaps once assumed to be the father’s responsibility; at least historians of the middle class have seen them as his. Even though no clause which dealt with a specific parenting issue made it into the final act, the very fact that the issues were debated points to the fact that the father’s ‘traditional’ responsibility and importance in some areas was perhaps being questioned. As Sir Henry Craik. (Conservative) rhetorically asked during the Second Reading of the 1925 Bill for example, ‘do Hon. Members really think that the mother is generally left aside if there is a question of a choice of school, even religion?’
Of course, we have to be cautious in assuming that the working-class father had ever been the parent to control religious upbringing and education to the same degree as the current literature suggests was the case in the middle-class home. For example, Ross McKibbin has suggested that it was the mother in working-class homes who had the most interest in education and, as Chapter Five explores, fathers could be hostile to schooling. However, for the generalised image of fatherhood the lawmakers adopted, issues such as religion, education and schooling and granting a child permission to marry were not perceived to be solely the father’s concern by the 1920s. Whether stemming from the perception of middle-class lawmakers or a mixture of working-class and middle-class ideas, the point is that the ‘traditional’ areas of influence were no longer regarded as being obviously ‘his’ concern for them to gain protection under law. As Mr. Storry-Deans (Conservative), suggested for the middle-class context at least, it was the wife who ‘in 999 cases out of 1,000 decides about the education of the children … the only time when the husband is disposed to object is when he says “I am not able to afford it”’.  

For lawmakers the most obvious ‘doctrine of convenience’ that a judge could call upon when deciding disputed custody was assessing a child’s needs with regard to its age and, to a lesser extent, its gender. As Mr. Birkett (Liberal), himself a judge, commented during the second reading of the 1921 Bill ‘the father should have the deciding voice with regard to the sons and the mother should have the deciding voice with regard to the girls’. And, when it came to the child’s age, MPs were just as quick to emphasise that parents had varying responsibilities. Sir P. Richardson (Conservative) commented that ‘in the early part of the life of a child the mother is more responsible, and later on the father becomes more responsible’. Similarly, Mr.
There are some considerations which warrant us in giving the custody to the mother rather than to the father. There is the tender age of the child and its sex. It is a little girl, who is yet under three years of age, and I think a child of that age and of that sex ought, if possible, to be with the mother rather than with the father or any relative.\footnote{64}

The ‘age and gender’ doctrine was not a new principle in deciding which parent should have custody, but by the 1920s it was entrenched in the minds of both lawmakers and judges. Indeed, it was such an ‘obvious’ way to decide custody disputes that a father was perhaps the parent who was at a disadvantage in this unwritten ‘law’. As Mr. Storry-Deans commented during the Second Reading of the 1924 Bill, ‘the only time when the father stands any sort of chance of having custody of his children is in the case of boys growing up and of school age’.\footnote{65} Such preconceived limits on the scope of fatherly care were, for some, not always to be reason for a father to be deprived custody. In the case of *Hume v. Hume* (1926), for example, Lord Sands outlined in no uncertain terms that it was wrong to discriminate against a father merely because his responsibility as provider typically necessitated him being absent from the home and marginal to the day-to-day care of his child:

> Nor ... is an innocent husband to be deprived of the custody of his children because, being at work all day, he must leave them to the care of his sister, whilst his wife can offer a home with her father who is able to maintain her so that she is free to attend to the children all day.\footnote{66}

It can be suggested that, during the inter-war years, the perceived importance of a mother’s care became regarded as even more paramount given the context of infant welfare combating illness and death particularly during the vulnerable years of early childhood (as the next chapter explores in greater detail). MPs not only believed that judges were already adopting the principle, but fully endorsed the idea. This is well illustrated during the debates over the 1924 Bill when the Lords rejected
the need for a clause in the legislation which specifically recognised the varying importance of the parents according to the child's age and gender.67

Judges also tended to favour mothers because it was so often assumed that the mother-child relationship was a greater source of happiness for a child than the relationship it had with his/her father. How accurate such an assumption was for the working-class father and child will be explored in subsequent chapters, but it is important to highlight that it was assumed that there was greater affection between a mother and her child than there was normally between a father and his child.

However, while MPs perhaps perceived a young child's need for care to be reason to give the mother custody of him/her and, while judges did often use the age and gender of a child as the deciding factor in determining which parent would be best suited to take care of him/her, a glance at even a few court cases indicates that fathers were sometimes given custody of children of 'tender years'. In another Scottish case of M v. M (1926), in which a mother and father disputed custody of their 3 year old son, the father was awarded custody. The judges were keen to explain that, in this case, there was no evidence that the father had done anything wrong despite the petition of his wife that argued he was abusive. It was therefore seen as wrong to strip him of custody merely because of assumptions about the 'better' ability of a mother to care for a young child.68 Lord Ormindoale commented that: 'there is no indication at all, as we have said, that the child would suffer if he were to recover his custody'.69

A father was sometimes favoured because it was understood that a child's 'happiness' did not necessarily match with its best interests. In the case of In re. Thain (1926) for example, a 7 year old girl had, since the death of her mother, been
living with a maternal aunt but the girl’s father was awarded custody. As Lord Hanworth noted, in judging what was to serve the best interest of the child, ‘it is not merely a question whether the child would be happier in one place than another, but of her general well-being’. The wider view of what would benefit a child outside his/her ‘happiness’ was of significance to the father given the assumption that there was greater intimacy in the maternal (or in this case, the substitute maternal) bond. In summing up Lord Hanworth noted that, while both sides were ‘of the highest moral character’, he nonetheless believed that ‘the true interests of the child are that she should be guided to feelings of love and affection towards her father’.

There is further evidence to suggest that judges did not necessarily believe that a young child’s best interests would always be best served by being placed with his/her mother. In assessing what would best serve the welfare of the child, judges sometimes showed a more subtle understanding of a child’s ‘needs’ than merely deciding custody based on its immediate physical demands. A ‘longer-view’ meant that a judge had to weigh up the immediate ‘care’ demands of ‘tender years’ with the long-term benefits a father was perceived to offer. The tension between this short-term and long-term welfare was often at the heart of a judge’s deliberation. Lord Anderson encapsulates the dilemma facing a judge in his comments during the case of M v. M (1926) in which, it must be remembered, the father won custody of his 3 year old son:

It may be that the physical welfare of this child, looking to its tender age, would be best promoted by leaving it for a year or two with his mother. But there are other considerations, which must be kept in view. The education of a child, for example, ought in general terms to be the care of the father.

Again, we must acknowledge that the emphasis on education perhaps reflects middle-class concerns, which were perhaps of less relevance to the working classes.
at this time. However, the point of importance was that, despite what the current literature often suggests, we must not see the developments in settling custody disputes as simply linear. Anne Sumner Holmes, and Fenster and Goldstein, both suggest in their analysis that children were increasingly given to mothers since family law began to be changed in the mid-nineteenth century. While this is a generally accurate shift, the evidence suggests that there was, in the 1920s, still enough importance attached to the father in certain areas that in certain cases he was awarded custody. This, for our interest, indicates that the father as a parent was regarded to have some importance.

We must however be cautious in the way we interpret cases in which a child was given into his/her father’s custody. It must be recognised that it was rarely, if ever, an acknowledgement of his equal ‘ability’ to care for young children. That is, when judges awarded custody of young children to a father this was done despite the belief that he was unlikely to be able to provide the intimate care for the child. A closer look at the cases in which a father won custody reveals that, in every one of those cases, there was a very prominent ‘mother-substitute’ who was important to a Judge’s decision.

In the case of *Hume v. Hume* (1926) the fact that the father lived with his parents was a significant reason for his winning custody. Lord Moncrieff explained:

> In the case of children of such tender years I would in ordinary circumstances have thought it proper to give the custody to the mother. I think, however, that in this case these children have already had a second home, and that even during the years of nurture they are assured of maternal care at the hands of their grandmother.73

Similarly, in the case of *M v. M* (1926) the father won custody with the understanding that he too would stay in his parents home and, in the case of *In re.*
Thain. a father won custody because, since the time he left the child with his dead wife’s sister, he had remarried. It was noted that, in the case of In re. Thain, the father ‘had no female relative of whose services he could avail himself … [and he was] brought face to face with the problem of providing for the care of his little girl’.74 When the father applied for custody of his daughter to be returned to him, however, Judge Eve J. commented on the father’s changed circumstances, which included the fact that ‘his [new] wife [was] willing to take to his daughter as her own’.75 In this case the father was seen as having served his daughter’s best interests by placing her with a ‘mother-substitute’. The father still had a right to the custody of his child because he had ‘visited the child as often as he could get away from work, and contributed to her expense in every way’.76 The act of placing his child with strangers was not equated with the surrendering of his paternal rights but rather as the act of a caring father who understood that he alone was unable to tend to the day-to-day needs of a young child. In this the evidence examined here leads us to the same conclusion as Lynn Abrams in her study of Scottish lone fathers. As we saw in Chapter One, she found that lone fathers were strongly ‘encouraged’ to give young children into care until they could ‘improve’ their circumstances.77

Conclusion.

Custody law – specifically the passing of the 1925 Guardianship Act - was an important inter-war ‘discourse’ in which fatherhood was scrutinised. By removing the assumption that the father had a right to custody, the 1925 Guardianship Act necessarily demanded that judges and lawmakers gave voice to what they believed was the father’s importance. Although many of the perceptions we have seen
articulated reflected more closely middle-class perspectives on family life than working-class, the chapter has shown an ‘official’ state-sanctioned perception of fathers’ functions and limits as a parent. How far this ‘official’ or general image was an accurate reflection of working-class life is a theme addressed in later chapters.

This chapter has used fresh evidence to add to the general argument put forward by the current literature that, during this period, the father’s superior position under the law was to a significant extent eroded. This was the continuation, or as Pinchbeck and Hewitt and Doolittle see it, the completion, of a process begun in the mid-nineteenth century.\(^7\) Indeed, a father’s legal rights were so fully limited within the inter-war period that it was he, and not the mother, who required legislative assistance by 1928 in order to equalise the legal standing of the parents.\(^7\)

However, despite affirming this general conclusion, this chapter has differed from the current literature in some important ways (or at least places emphasis elsewhere). It suggests that, although the father’s superior legal rights were to some extent curbed by the 1925 legislation, he was still regarded by lawmakers and judges as important for many aspects of a child’s welfare. The chapter has highlighted that it is important to see changes to family law as an outcome of a drive for equality between the sexes rather than a direct attack on the father as a parent.

Abrams concludes in her Scottish study that fathers were seen as unimportant and ‘secondary’ to the mother as a parent in ‘official’ discourses but makes this conclusion from examining the way small and young children were treated. Evidence in this chapter has suggested that we need to qualify this view, moving away from a focus on the youngest children for example, because in certain areas the ‘official’ view was that the father was an important part of a child’s life. Judges’ decisions in
cases of disputed custody and debates during the passing of the 1925 Guardianship Act indicate that the father was still viewed as necessary for the healthy development of the child. Despite the growth in ‘maternalist’ rhetoric, the evidence leads us to conclude that it was still believed that there was part of the father’s importance and responsibilities that could not be replaced by the state or by expanding the mother’s ‘sphere of influence’.

Within the context of the thesis, this chapter has, as suggested, offered a first ‘official’ perception of fatherhood in the period. This was probably built on a largely middle-class ideology, but in implementation (that is through the law) it was never class specific. We have seen that, within this discourse, a father’s importance was seen in terms of his ‘traditional’ functions - his importance to boys and older children, his ability to help with public integration and, of course, his ability to provide materially for a child. Indeed, we have also seen that judges tended to acknowledge a mother’s greater ‘ability’ or ‘importance’ in caring for younger children even when children of that age were given to fathers because of the presence of a ‘mother substitute’. This is important because it underlines that, within the discourse examined in this chapter at least, a father was still not seen as the ‘appropriate’ parent to administer day-to-day care.

The next chapter examines a perception of fatherhood which emerged within the infant welfare movement which was both specific to the working-class father and which came to offer a more cohesive and detailed understanding of a father’s functions as a parent.

1 M. Pinchbeck and L. Hewitt, *Children in English Society: Vol. II*, Chapter XIII.

3 'In their election manifestos [sic.] the Labour Party and the Liberal Party agreed to the principle of equal rights for the father and mother in relation to the child', Miss Jewson, *171 H.C. Deb.* 5s. p.2668.

4 'Although those words may not appear in the Conservative programme, it may be assumed that Hon. Members on this side of the House are equally interested, and I hope no attempt will be made to make party capital out of it', Sir P. Richardson, *171 H.C. Deb.*, 5s. p. 2678.

5 There were Bills on these issues in the years, 1919 (referred to in, *H.C. Deb.*, 5s. p. 2672); 1920 (e.g. 129 *H.C. Deb.*, 5s.); 1921 (e.g. 141 *H.C. Deb.*, 5s.); 1923 (e.g. 53 *H.L. Deb.*, 5s.); 1924 (e.g. 57 *H.L. Deb.*, 5s.); and in 1925, when both the Guardianship of Infants Act and Summary Jurisdiction (Separation and Maintenance) Act passed into law (e.g. 61 *H.L. Deb.*, 5s. When the Act was passed in 1925 Stanley Baldwin’s Tory Government held power. When the issue first came before the Commons in 1919 the Government was a Lloyd George-led coalition, which represented a cross-section of political persuasion (although it was dominated by Conservatives). Even the first Labour Government in 1924 sponsored a Bill during its short-lived time in office.


7 The 1857 Matrimonial Causes Act (a result of the 1850 Royal Commission on Divorce) established civil divorce proceedings for the first time. The problem for the poorer classes was that the new jurisdiction was wholly centralised in London and, as M. Finer and O. R. McGregor note, the costs were still very considerable and beyond the reach of people of ordinary means', *The History of the Obligation to Maintain*, Parl. Papers, 1974, 18., paragraph 30.


9 M. Doolittle, 'Missing Fathers'.


11 J. Hammerton, *Cruelty and Compassion*, p.3. Similarly, Megan Doolittle notes that most custody cases were 'only taken in extremis, and cannot be a reflection of any sort of normal family life, but rather show the splits and strains, where the accepted relationships of power and authority were no longer functioning’, M. Doolittle, 'Missing Fathers'. p. 108.

12 141 *H.C. Deb.*, 5s. p. 1393.


14 Guardianship of Infants Act, *LL/Par. 49 7 50 Vict.*, 1886, p.2.

15 57 *H.L. Deb.*, 5s. p. 793.

16 141 *H.C. Deb.*, 5s. p. 1393.

17 171 *H.C. Deb.*, 5s. p.2660. Wintringham further commented that 'the only way to obtain the natural possession of a child is to belong to one of these unfortunate classes of women [i.e. an abused wife or mother of an illegitimate child] ... if a 'women is legally married and behaves in a conventionally normal way she has no right to the guardianship of her children', Mrs. Wintringham, *171 H.C. Deb.* 5s. p. 2660.

18 *Ibid.* , p. 2682. See also for example, Mr. R. Murray, *171 H.C. Deb. 5s.*, p. 2665.

19 She and her brother conducted a large-scale investigation into poverty in Norwich, *The Destine of Norwich and how they live: A report into the administration of Outrelief*, (London: 1912).

20 171 *H.C. Deb.*, 5s. p.2667.

21 Miss Jewson, *171 H.C. Deb.*, 5s. p.2668. Indeed, it must be highlighted that the preamble in the 1925 Act itself made reference to the wider connection with women’s rights, Guardianship of Infants Act, 1925, *LL/Par. 15 & 16 Geo. V. Ch. 45.*

22 171 *H.C. Deb.*, 5s. p.2664.


24 For example, Lord Banbury scathingly described how he believed the Bill originated: ‘A lot of women, having formed themselves into a society, must have something to do to justify the existence of the society, and the payment of a secretary. Therefore they say: ‘‘We must have equality of the..."
sexes, and they bring forward ideas which probably some female friend of theirs has put into their heads ... Having formed the society and having come to the conclusion that something must be done, they bring forward a Bill in Parliament’, 58 H.L. Deb., 5s. pp.360-361. See also, Arnold Herbert, Letter to The Times, 17th January 1925, p.6. Herbert opened his letter ‘Sir – The title of the Guardianship of Infants Bill is rather a misnomer: its ostensible object is care of children, but its real effect is rather to enable a wife, as against her husband, to settle the style of living of the family’. 25 171 H.C. Deb., 5s. p.2664.

26 141 H.C. Deb., 5s. p.1420. (emphasis added).

27 Guardianship of Infants Act, LL/Par. 15 & 16 Geo. V, 1925, Ch. 45.


29 171 H.C. Deb., 5s. p.2668.

30 171 H.C. Deb., 5s. p.2678. See also for example, ‘Here is a branch of British domestic law where Parliament has lagged far behind what is known to all of us who lived a happy childhood to be the ordinary practice of the British home; let us by Act of Parliament bring the law into consonance with what is the ordinary practice of the decent and happy British home’, Sir J. Simon (Liberal), 171 H.C. Deb., 5s. p.2700.

31 Guardianship of Infants Act, LL/Par. 15 & 16 Geo. V, 1925, Ch. 45. (emphasis added). The Act dealt specifically with the issue of consent for a child’s marriage outlining, for the first time that, if all circumstances were normal, both parents were required to agree.

32 Guardianship of Infants Act, LL/Par. 15 & 16 Geo. V, 1925, Ch. 45. ‘Joint guardians’ would, in the majority of cases, of course be the mother and father.

33 53 H.L. Deb., 5s. p.632.

34 141 H.C. Deb., 5s., pp.1420-21.

35 Ibid., pp.2674-75. See also, for example, ‘the only result will be an enormous increase in applications to Courts of Law for when two people have equal authority there must be a referee’, Claudi Mullins, letter to The Times, 9th January 1925, p.8. The suggestion that many more couples would suddenly turn to the court to settle disputes was however dismissed by others. Colonel Greig, commenting during the second reading of the 1921 bill, suggested: ‘equality of bargaining is created ... and it will assist parents in reaching a decision without resorting to the Court’. 141 H.C. Deb., 5s. pp.1398-1399.

36 171 H.C. Deb., 5s. p.2708.

37 141 H.C. Deb., 5s. p.1407.

38 ‘It seems to me that the tendency of this Bill will be to prevent men marrying and to prevent women marrying, but especially the man, if he is not able to bring up his children as he likes’, 141 H.C. Deb., 5s. p.1409.

39 141 H.C. Deb., 5s. pp.1424. The mother’s natural duties as caregiver were also stressed, for example: ‘After all, in the world of nature it is the female, the mother, who is charged by the great mother nature with superintendence and the guidance of the young’, Mr. Jameson, 141 H.C. Deb., 5s. p.1411.

40 Ibid., pp.2711-12. See also for example, Ibid., p.2690.

41 141 H.C. Deb., 5s. p.1407. See also, for example, Mr. Storry-Deans who commented during the Second Reading of the 1924 Bill, that ‘You cannot have divided authority. I personally, do not care whether you declare that the wife has the whole authority, or that the father has whole authority, but you cannot have both’, in, 171 H.C. Deb., 5s. p.2710.

42 171 H.C. Deb., 5s. p.2705. Many other critics raised the point that granting complete equality would make the Act unworkable. Mr. Greaves-Lord summed up the general feeling when he declared during the Second Reading of the 1924 Bill that, ‘Under these circumstances [of equality between the spouses] it is almost unnecessary to go any further to show that the Bill contradicts itself’, 171 H.C. Ded., 5s. p.2707.

43 141 H.C. Deb., 5s. p.1413.

44 141 H.C. Deb., 5s., p.1419.

45 171 H.C. Deb., 5s., p.2690.

46 Ibid.

47 Ibid.

48 171 H.C. Deb., 5s. p.2673.
Marion Phillips, ‘How Shall Women Live? Three Debates on the Economic Position of Women held by the Central London Branch of the Women’s Labour League’, Labour Review, December 1913. Dr. Phillips was a member of the Women’s Labour League from 1908 and by 1912 she was Secretary. She also edited the League’s leaflet, which by 1913 became Woman Labour. Between 1929 and 1931 she was MP for Sunderland and was Chief Woman Officer of the Labour Party.

50 Mr. R. Richardson, 171 H.C. Deb., 5s. p. 2678.
51 Hansard Commons Debate, Volume 181, 4th March 1925, p. 537.
53 In the Reported Court Cases examined, the judges were always careful to outline that the material welfare of a child (relative to the standard of living it had enjoyed before the marriage broke down) would be well met by both parents before outlining other factors in making their decision.
54 Lord Merrivale in the case of W v. W, 1926 Probate Division, p. 115. See also, for example, Lord Moncrieff’s comments in the case of Hume v. Hume (1926): ‘I think that their [the children’s] welfare may be assumed to depend in part upon the general conditions of the home as regards its prosperity and comfort, but in greater part upon the character and disposition of the persons in whose charge the children are to be placed’, in, Hume v. Hume. 1926 S.L.T. p. 706. (emphasis added).
55 J. Tosh, A Man’s Place.
56 For example, it was eventually concluded that judges would use their common-sense and that to legislate so explicitly on one issue would negate the ‘whole object of the legislation’, Sir Henry Slesser, 182 H.C. Deb., 5s. p. 2330. See also, for example, ‘If you are going to specify, you must specify a great deal more than that’, The Lord Chancellor 58 H.L. Deb., 5s. p. 353.
57 181 H.C. Deb., 5s. p. 543. Under the 1886 Guardianship of Infants Act the right of the father still extended to control over the religious upbringing of his children. He could change his faith at any time after marriage and expect his wife and children to do the same. As Gerald Hurst (Conservative), a Manchester barrister, commented in the Commons in 1925, ‘The father’s view at this present time is absolutely paramount. Even if the spouses have entered into a contract before marriage that the children should be brought up in one particular faith, that contract is not a contract enforceable in the court of law, for the father’s wishes are paramount and the contract can be broken’. 181 H.C. Deb., 5s. p. 537.
58 R. McKibbin, Classes and Cultures, p. 167.
59 171 H.C. Deb., 5s. p. 2712.
60 Mr. Birkett, 171 H.C. Deb., 5s. p. 2683. See also, e.g., Lieut-Colonel Hurst, ‘... in the cases of boys one line of ruling is followed and in the cases of girls another line of ruling’, in, 141 H.C. Deb., 5s, p. 1413.
61 Sir P. Richardson, 171 H.C. Deb., 5s. p. 2678.
62 Mr. Jameson, 141 H.C. Deb., 5s. p. 1411. This reasoning was not a new belief in the 1920s, as Megan Doolittle has highlighted its existence in the Victorian era, M. Doolittle, Missing Fathers, p. 118.
63 Sir P. Richardson, 171 H.L. Deb., 5s. p. 2679.
65 Mr. Storry-Deans, 171 H.C. Deb., 5s. p. 2711. (emphasis added).
66 Lord Sands, Hume v. Hume, in, 1926 S.L.T. p. 709. Another example can be found in the case of In re Thain / In re M. M. Thain / Thain v. Taylor. In this case the lawyer advocating that the child should be given to the foster parents argued that, ‘if the child is delivered to the father, he, being a professional man, would probably see little of the child ... and consequently the care of the child will devolve on upon his wife [who was not the child’s mother]’. As we have seen above, however, this argument was insufficient to deprive the father of custody.
67 ‘When the Court is in doubt to the direction in which the welfare of the infant lies it shall in the case of a boy incline to the opinion of the father and in that of a girl to the opinion of the mother’. Lord Raglan, 58 H.L. Deb., 5s. p. 353.
68 ‘Why should the husband, in these circumstances, be deprived of the custody of his child? Why should the status quo not be restored, seeing that it was destroyed merely because of what I may describe as the whim of the respondent (i.e. mother)’. Lord Justice-Clerk. 1926 S.C. p. 783.
69 Lord Ormisdale, in, M.v. M. 1926 S.C. p. 784. Interestingly, the judges in this case interpreted the 1925 Guardianship of Infants Act in a way which allowed for the consideration of marital behaviour, despite the fact that the Act itself had stated that the only consideration should be the child’s welfare.

Chapter Two: Parental Preference and the 1925 Guardianship Act.


Lord Anderson, *M v. M.* in, 1926 S.C. p.786. The lawyer arguing for the father in this case also drew attention to his greater ability with regard to education provision: ‘Further, the father is better able to supervise the child’s education and give it a start in life’. p.782.


*In re. Thain / In re. M. M. Thain / In re. Thain v. Taylor*, 1926 Ch., p. 679 (emphasis added). Important to note is that the problem was not financial or material provision, but rather the provision of care.


L. Abrams, ‘‘There Was Nobody Like My Daddy’.


The 1928 Administration of Justice Act included a clause which allowed fathers to apply to a court of summary jurisdiction under the same terms as a mother for guardianship of his children: ‘The powers of a court under section five of the Guardianship of Infants Act, 1886, as amended by the Guardianship of Infants Act, 1925, to make orders regarding the custody of an infant and the right to access thereto of either parent, may be exercised upon the application of the father of an infant in the like manner as those powers may be exercised upon the application of the mother of the infant’, *Administration of Justice Act, LL/Par. 18 & 19 Geo. V.*, 1928, Ch. 26.
Chapter Three

‘GOOD FATHERS WERE NOT BORN, BUT MADE’: FATHERS, FATHERS’ COUNCILS AND THE BRITISH FATHERCRAFT MOVEMENT, 1919-1939.

The words ‘Mothercraft’, ‘Maternity and Child Welfare’, ‘School for Mothers’ and so forth, have come to be associated so closely with the child welfare movement that they seem to have shut out the father from the duties and privileges of his position and ... have placed the onus of child care wholly on the mother.

As Chapter One outlined, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries there was significant concern for Britain’s military, imperial, eugenic and industrial capabilities. Amidst such concerns an increasing volume of social ‘investigations’ focused on working-class life and middle-class philanthropic and government medical ‘experts’ were often led to conclude that it was the way working-class parents raised their children which was the primary welfare concern of the day. As Chapter One also outlined, the current literature has argued that the resulting welfare measures were focused exclusively on the working-class mother. For example, Jane Lewis concludes that, although welfare workers ‘acknowledged many possible causes of infant death, for the purpose of active study and intervention they managed to reduce them all to one “fundamental” cause: maternal ignorance. This had but one solution: maternal education’.² ‘Mothercraft’ became the chief vehicle for the dissemination of a middle-class domestic ideology about the ‘proper’ way to care for babies and raise children: the working mother was reached through the rapid
expansion of welfare clinics, health visitors and, to a much lesser extent, popular childrearing literature.³

According to such historical analysis, the working-class father was completely excluded from such discourse. Studies of childrearing advice and theories have concluded that ‘it was assumed that the father should be a reliable breadwinner and he was given no other role in the new literature’.⁴ Studies of the infant and maternal welfare movement give no discussion of the place the working-class father was seen to occupy in the inter-war welfare initiatives, and we have been led to believe that he was of no interest to those trying to ‘improve’ working-class parenting practices. The literature not only implies that working-class fathers were uninterested in the way their children were raised, but also that this was something the infant welfare movement was not interested in altering. Therefore, as Pat Ayres and Jan Lambertz suggest from their study of infant welfare provision in Liverpool, by focusing entirely on the mother when it came to issues of parenting, ‘welfare agencies did not invent the gender-specific division of responsibility in families … but they strengthened the division in fundamental ways’.⁵

However, as this chapter explores, the working-class father was not completely omitted from the growing interest in ‘educating’ working-class parents in the inter-war years. To suggest that he was is to miss an important arena in which the perception of working-class fatherhood was ‘refocused’ between 1919 and 1939. The period witnessed the birth of British fathercraft, a development with parallels in many other western European countries in this period.⁶ Fathercraft - best described as the science of male parenting, the skills and knowledge prescribed by the Infant Welfare Movement as required to be a ‘good’ father - was a deliberate attempt to
ensure that childrearing in inter war Britain was not simply seen as 'women's business'. Fathers' Councils became common male adjuncts to welfare clinics in many districts and offered a progressive view of the father's functions that challenged the notion that he could fulfil his duties from the margins of the family. Male and female parenting remained distinct and complementary but fathers were encouraged to guard against emotional and physical distance from their children and were told that their functions as a parent were often just as important as those of the mother.

**Sources and Method.**

There seem to be very few surviving documents produced by Fathers' Councils themselves but documents relating to two prominent Councils have been found. These relate to the Lancaster Road Fathers' Council in Kensington and the Croydon Fathers' Council. In both cases the material examined consists of notes, comments and minutes from meetings from the Fathers' Council contained within the annual reports of the Welfare Clinic to which the Fathers' Council was attached. The Lancaster Road material covers the years 1927 to 1939 and the Croydon material covers the period 1932 to 1939.

The bulk of the remaining evidence comes from an analysis of over 100 articles appearing in the journals *National Health* and *Mother and Child* from 1908 to 1939. *National Health* – which was 'a monthly magazine appealing to health visitors, school nurses, district visitors, district nurses, and all health workers' – was discontinued and replaced with the journal *Mother and Child* – 'the official organ of

Of course, we have to be cautious as to how we interpret such articles. Ralph LaRossa notes in his examination of articles appearing in USA parenting magazines that 'every magazine, like every book, bears the imprint of its producers' and as such 'they most certainly reflect the agenda of their publishers, editors and authors'. The fact that these journals were explicitly championing the cause of the maternity and infant welfare movement meant that they were primarily concerned with the health of children, with hygiene and 'survival', and were not necessarily interested in wider notions of 'good' parenting practice. It also means that they were perhaps overly positive about the success of and reaction to Fathers’ Councils, playing down failures for example.

Articles within the journals were written by middle-class welfare workers and doctors and therefore reflect one perception of working-class fatherhood which, as this and subsequent chapters suggest, did not always allow for the restraints and 'norms' of working-class life. The journals in which the bulk of the evidence appears would not have been read by workers themselves and, while there is much reported reaction and participation of the working class, the journals typically hold debates and discussions of interest to a small specialised group of welfare workers and doctors. Harry Hendrick has commented that 'child care literature is always a significant indicator of certain societal attitudes towards children, irrespective of the degree to which parents follow the guidance', but it can be dangerous to correlate advice to parents with parents' action. The extent to which any historian can argue that trends in childcare advice had any real impact on conduct has been questioned.
Certainly, how far the message of fathercraft had any impact on the conduct of working-class fathers, or even how far working-class fathers were exposed to it, is an important theme of this chapter.

*The Formation of Fathers' Councils.*

Before the First World War, advocates of infant welfare provision rarely concerned themselves with fathers. As I. G. Gibbons recorded in his 1913 review of welfare provision, 'only one Centre which now has regular meetings for the father seems to have had them continuously for a long time'.¹¹ Even though the first School for Mothers (formed in St. Pancras in 1907) provided 'fathers' evening conferences',¹² such interest in the working-class father was only peripheral before the inter-war period and does not appear to have reflected a coherent focus on the male parent. An examination of the articles appearing in *National Health* from the first issue in December 1908 also indicates that fathercraft and Fathers' Councils only became a topic of interest after 1920. Previous to this date there is just one reference to Fathers' Councils in the monthly publication, in January 1911, and this is a tiny reference within a larger article.¹³

Within the fathercraft movement itself the 'birth' of the interest in fathers was understood to be in the inter-war years. It was generally accepted (and actively publicised) that the Lancaster Road Infant Welfare Clinic in Kensington was the first to have what could properly be recognised as a Fathers' Council, being formed in 1920.¹⁴ This was co-founded by Dr. James Fenton and W. H. Wheeler, both of whom became leading proponents of the movement. Dr. Fenton, the district's Medical Officer for Health, published and lectured on fathercraft throughout the period and
W. H. Wheeler, who was acknowledged as the ‘Father of Fathers’ Councils’, became instrumental in the administrative side of the movement, lecturing nationally and abroad on the movement.¹⁵

The Lancaster Road Fathers’ Council became the blueprint for other Fathers’ Councils in the inter-war years.¹⁶ All the Councils, for which details can be found, were established and run at the district level by the local Medical Officers for Health and prominent doctors, an important reflection of the fact that their initial concern was for children’s health rather than parenting behaviour per se. Councils were directly linked to the welfare clinics to which they were attached, the idea being that husbands would be more interested in helping the clinic if it was the place their own wife attended. Meetings were held on a weekly basis, and were always in the late evening so that working men could attend.¹⁷ Meetings seem to have primarily consisted of lectures and discussions on various aspects of childcare. There was some practical instruction on child and babyscare given to fathers, but, in contrast to the Schools for Mothers and Welfare Clinics, Fathers’ Council meetings encouraged men to ponder fatherhood in more theoretical terms compared to the instruction on practical day-to-day care that mothers received.¹⁸ [See Appendix ONE, a ‘flyer’ for the first meeting of the Croydon Fathers’ Council, as an example of how meetings worked].

Councils were certainly middle-class at their core. They had tightly organised committees at their centre, with the positions of President, Secretary, Treasurer and Chairman all apparently being filled by professional and middle-class men. Significant to note therefore is that fathercraft was not born of grass-root pressure or concern from among workers. Rather, like welfare clinics and most philanthropic
activity since the middle of the nineteenth century, fathercraft needs to be seen as part of the wider attempts to disseminate a particular middle-class version of domestic ideology to the workers. Indeed, the divide between ‘teacher’ and ‘student’ within Fathers’ Councils was so strongly drawn along class lines that the Medical Officer for Health for Sunderland wrote to *Mother and Child* in 1933 to highlight that ‘no mention was made that the fathers of the middle classes take any part ... clinics should include the fathers of well-to-do babies’.

The extent to which the working-class father adopted these patterns of conduct is therefore questionable, particularly, as Pauline King and Rosalind O’Brien have shown in a study of welfare clinics in Hertfordshire for this period, the impact of parenting advice on the behaviour of mothers was often limited.

Although the paucity of surviving sources make it largely impossible to calculate the exact number of Fathers’ Councils established in Britain between the wars, or indeed to calculate the number of men attending meetings, some points can be made when evaluating the significance of fathercraft. On the one hand the evidence within the journals indicates that the geographical spread of Fathers’ Councils was impressive. They were not just confined to London, although the capital did remain the epicentre of fathercraft and was home to the densest number of Fathers’ Councils. There are references to Fathers’ Councils being formed in Oxford, Birmingham, Rugby, Shropshire, Durham, Liverpool, Bristol and Glasgow for example. Moreover, these geographically diverse Councils were not isolated and independent entities but rather part of the cohesive ideology. One of the characteristics of the movement from its inception in 1920 was that it was not just locally focused.
Perhaps the best indication of this was the formation in 1932 of the Central Union of Fathers’ Councils (CUFC), which was heralded as ‘a red letter day’ and was seen as a sign that fathercraft had become ‘firmly rooted’ as a significant part of the Infant Welfare Movement.\(^1\) As Dr. Oscar Holden, Medical Officer of Health to the Borough of Croydon wrote:

A number of independent councils, acting on their own initiative, although each and all may be doing excellent work, lose much of their driving force by reason of their individuality. A Central Union can speak for all and, being a representative of a large number of fathers, its decisions will carry weight.\(^2\)

The CUFC met quarterly after 1932, with local Fathers’ Councils sending two delegates to the conference and with invitations also being issued to local borough councillors, health workers and doctors. The CUFC’s membership expanded quickly to provide, as Dr. Holden further commented, ‘not only a bond of fellowship between the individual Fathers’ Councils, but also a clearinghouse of information’.\(^3\)

It was instrumental in gaining recognition for fathercraft both within, and outside, the Infant Welfare Movement. Indeed, fathercraft had gained enough recognition by 1939 for the father to be adopted as the main theme of the annual National Baby Week and for fathercraft to be specifically commended by H. M. Queen Mary. In that same year, a National Fathercraft Advisory Council was formed showing, in the words of one author, ‘conclusively that public interest is appreciating this new phase of the maternity and child welfare movement’.\(^4\)

The CUFC collaborated with other welfare groups, such as the National Baby Week Council, the Association of Maternity and Child Welfare Centres and local hospitals in order to devise various propaganda schemes. A resolution requesting recognition by the Ministry of Health was passed at the Fourth Annual Conference of
Fathers’ Councils in 1935. It urged the Minister of Health to ‘bring to the notice of local health authorities the … necessity for the formation of fathers’ councils.’ The CUFC resolution also asked that ‘the Ministry of Health be urged to sanction the reasonable expenditure incurred’ in establishing and running Fathers’ Councils. The CUFC sent a delegation to the Ministry of Health in the same year and at the Sixth Annual Conference of Fathers’ Councils in 1937 a letter from the then Minister of Health, Sir Kingsley Wood, expressed the government’s ‘appreciation of the value of the movement’. From such collaborations, various pamphlets were published and a ‘talkie film’ showing ‘fathercraft fathers doing their jobs’ was produced. This period also saw the start of a special ‘Father’s Day’ parade in an attempt to bring public attention to the movement.

The spread of fathercraft as a legitimate ideology within the committees and organisational heart of the Infant Welfare Movement was one thing, but reaching the working-class father was something very different. On the other hand therefore, the evidence suggests fathercraft perhaps struggled to reach the fathers it sought to ‘educate’. If we note, for example, that there were over three thousand maternal and infant welfare clinics in Britain by the 1930s but that only fifty three Fathers’ Councils are mentioned by name in the evidence, it is clear that the overall number of districts to have regular meetings was relatively small. Although, in the pages of *Mother and Child* and *National Health*, advocates of fathercraft enthused about their success in attracting working men to meetings, it would be an exaggeration to suggest that they attracted a significant number of working-class men in the inter-war years. For example, by 1934, North Bristol Fathers’ Council had a weekly meeting at which ‘out of a total membership of 60 fathers, an average attendance of
40 men is recorded’. Lancaster Road seems to have had a membership of over forty, Battersea of over thirty, and Croydon, by 1933, was reported to ‘have grown to a membership of eighty four fathers in less than a year’. Attendees of meetings were of course also limited to the districts in which they were based.

Initially, fathers were considered an important target for infant welfare initiatives because they were perceived to be hampering attempts to improve child health via the mother, not because there was a particular interest in him as a parent in his own right. As the advertisement for the first meeting of the Croydon Fathers’ Council in 1932 outlined, ‘the main object of Fathers’ Councils is to ensure the best possible health for children’. From the outset Fathers’ Councils were primarily concerned with educating men about infant welfare in order to foster a positive attitude among male heads of household towards welfare centres and health visitors. This was believed to be central to the success in reaching the mother because, whether an accurate reflection of what was common in working-class households or not, welfare workers readily believed that ‘in most working-class homes [the man] was still head of the house’. As such, as one author wrote, ‘unless he was fully in sympathy with the aims and objects of the child welfare services there was a risk that his prejudices might stand in the way of the mother accepting and acting upon the advice she received’.

For the middle-class welfare observers the ‘uneducated’ fathers could be a ‘positive danger’ – especially in the antenatal and babyhood years – because ‘he may well discourage his wife from seeking the supervision she, in the interests of herself and her child, should have; indeed, if he is autocratic he may forbid her to do so’. Moreover, unlike in middle-class households where fathers could more easily find
space away from their children, it was believed that the imperative for educating working-class fathers was great given that their typically smaller and more cramped housing placed them in greater proximity to their children. Unless a father understood the importance of certain childrearing methods, it was believed, he may discourage them because they were disruptive to the peace and quiet of the home.

Overcoming this ‘obstructionist’ father was therefore the initial justification behind the formation of Fathers’ Councils. As Dr. John Scott, Medical Officer of Health for Fulham, commented, ‘surely we are justified in bringing the fathers into the maternity and child welfare movement, if only as a means of countering that sort of negativism’.36 Pioneers of fathercraft were quick to emphasise that instructing fathers reversed any hostility they might show to welfare workers. Dr. D. Regan (Medical Officer of Health for Edmonton), who commented that he and his colleagues were often hampered in their duties by fathers, outlined how ‘on an explanation being given by me to any particular father, his opposition usually ceases and he often becomes a valuable co-operator’.37 Indeed, Dr. Fenton found that in his borough of Kensington, the attendance of mothers in the poorer districts to ante-natal clinics rose from 25 per cent to 75 per cent; ‘a result which he very largely attributed to the realisation of working-class fathers of the importance of ante-natal care’.38

Clearly then, Fathers’ Councils were not initially formed in order to instruct fathers on their own parental activity but were rather seen as a way to gain a husband’s collaborative support when pressuring his wife to follow ‘expert’ advice and attend welfare clinics. Indeed, the Lancaster Road Fathers’ Council outlined that only fathers of the wives attending the welfare clinic could attend meetings, further
suggesting that the aim was to maximise the chances that the advice being given to
the mother would be taken onboard. 39

Although the desirability of instructing working-class fathers was quickly
understood in this regard there was concern as to how and where such instruction
should or could take place. Even within the pages of their own journals it was
occasionally admitted that ‘the formation of fathers’ councils in some districts may
be very difficult, and even impossible’. 40 It was believed that many men were
‘inclined to regard the health visitor as a busy body and the infant welfare centre as a
club to which his wife was liable to resort when she ought to be at home’. 41 Men’s
long working hours often meant, according to the experiences of Dr. Holden in
Croydon, that ‘the ministrations of health visitors [did] not reach the father, who
[was] mostly out when the visitor calls’. 42 The focus on the mother meant that
parenting and child welfare were closely associated with the ‘female sphere’ and,
combined with a rigid gender division of labour in many working-class communities,
this could mean any attempt to involve men in childcare was undermined by
‘feminine’ associations. Attending a welfare centre was clearly unthinkable for men
in many areas. Dr Jane Hawthorne (President of Queens Crescent Fathers’ Council,
St. Pancras) reported observing ‘several men standing in a group outside of an infant
welfare centre, and no one [sic.] of them seemed to have sufficient courage to go
in’. 43

There was also deep scepticism that wives would pass on information to their
husbands. 44 As historical studies have shown, help from family members could be
interpreted as a sign that she was an ‘incompetent’ mother or that she was
‘henpecking’ her husband. 45 Some contemporaries critically observed that wives
might jealously protect their monopoly over domestic management from ‘outside intrusions’ because it was from these activities that they might gain power in the marital relationship. Anna Martin, commenting on the reaction of some women to the implementation of free school meals in 1906, noted how they often believed ‘the strength of [their] position in the home [rested] on the physical dependence of husband and children’. Mary Read, a prominent ‘expert’ on childrearing, criticised women for excluding their husbands from parenting. In her popular book *Mothercraft Manual* she wrote that ‘the father who would voluntarily forgo his share in the care and companionship of the child, or the mother who would demand this are equally lacking in parental instinct’. More sinisterly, as advocates of fathercraft sometimes found, the apparent hostility of fathers towards the work of welfare institutions could be invented as a convenient excuse by wives not wanting to follow welfare advice. As Dr H. Cross found, ‘in 90 per cent of cases the father as an obstructionist was a myth, a creature evolved of the mother’s imagination as a barrier behind which she and her child could hide’.

Pat Ayres and Jan Lambertz suggest that the working class wife discouraged ‘social workers from making contact with their husbands’, but from their evidence are only able to say this is ‘speculation’. The new evidence here seems to suggest that it is correct to argue that some wives did try to prevent their husbands from interacting with welfare workers and this was plainly one of the important reasons why Fathers’ Councils were believed to be necessary.

Fathers’ Councils were also believed to be necessary if men were to be educated in their parenting functions, because welfare workers often understood that trying to educate men in their own homes could be problematic. Ayres and Lambertz
suggest that health visitors were often intimidated by the prospect of going into a home in an attempt to 'influence' him.\textsuperscript{50} A direct challenge to a father's domestic authority was perceived as a dangerous tactic, liable to breed resentment and resistance rather than winning co-operation. Previous attempts to help children had sometimes struggled because of the belief those parents alone, and specifically fathers, had the right to decide what happened to their offspring. Advocates of fathercraft recalled how paternal opposition 'was once a feature of refusals to allow children to be examined at routine medical school inspections'.\textsuperscript{51} By the inter-war years children in 'public' arenas, such as schools and factories, had long been the subject of welfare provisions but the home was still uncertain ground, perceived by many to be 'out-of-bounds'.

The early pioneers of fathercraft therefore understood that what was needed (what was essential) was a specifically and distinctly 'manly' arena for educating fathers. As I. G. Gibbons wrote even before the first 'proper' Fathers' Council was formed:

\textit{Meetings for fathers held expressly in connection with Infant Welfare Centres are not likely to prove successful... Addresses by competent and attractive speakers should be arranged in connection with organisations expressly for men – such as gatherings for men in connection with churches, trade unions, friendly and co-operative societies and the like.}\textsuperscript{52}

Clearly, there had to be no hint that men were either usurping the mother's importance or involved fathers were becoming emasculated as a result of training in 'female' tasks. Dr James Fenton thus underlined that 'it was essential in the inauguration of a Fathers' Council that the masculine atmosphere should be preserved – the health visitor must realise that this was outside her scope'.\textsuperscript{53} Simply having female nurses or health visitors instructing men was dismissed from the
outset. The ‘manly’ atmosphere of meetings was further achieved by allowing smoking, encouraging audience participation and offering tea and biscuits, thus making the meetings more like a male ‘club’ than a didactic welfare initiative. Similarly, Fathers’ Councils also appealed directly to the working-class male by offering a host of adjunct social activities (many of which often acted as fundraisers for the clinics). For example, within the annual reports of the Lancaster Road Fathers’ Council there are references to a cricket club, male voice choir, annual dinners at ‘Ladbrooke Tavern’ and trips to the Kensington Music Festival.  

Organisers of Fathers’ Councils were keen to make them as little a threat to the man’s position in the home as possible. The meetings were never compulsory, nor did they intrude into the home or necessarily bring about changes to the domestic set-up. Perhaps most significantly, we can suggest from an historical perspective, the underlying rhetoric of the fathercraft message was distinct from other welfare measures addressing the family in the period because it explicitly stressed that a father was important in his children’s lives. He was not merely seen as a drunk, violent or exploitative figure to be monitored, curbed or mocked. This general conclusion, in itself, can be viewed as evidence that fatherhood was perhaps undergoing a ‘refocusing’ in the period. It also highlights that, as was argued in Chapter One, the working-class father was perhaps perceived in ways other than the negative image we have been offered by the current literature.

How men themselves felt about Fathers’ Councils meetings is harder to gauge. We have already seen that attendance to meetings should probably be viewed as limited. However, we can suggest that Fathers’ Councils offered an important outlet for men interested in their parenting. Unlike working-class women who
enjoyed access to comprehensive support and advice networks among kin, friends and the community, fathers did not seem to have had such peer support when it involved their own domestic matters. Within work-related and male leisure associations there was often an expectation of 'manly' behaviour and it has been shown that it was unlikely that they would have openly discussed domestic matters such as fatherhood. Fathercraft helped a man to gain recognition for his actions in the private sphere and public (specifically peer) identification of 'good' fatherly behaviour was an essential component of making parenting attractive to men.

Fathercraft was also conscientiously portrayed as a serious intellectual discipline; men could sit exams and gain certificates to prove their worth in the 'science' of childcare. In 1935 the Association of Maternity and Child Welfare Centres 'set a special examination paper for fathers ... which had hitherto been confined to mothers'. According to the report 'centres find fathers are eager students' and the examiners noted that 'The papers showed intelligent interest in the subject to no mean degree, and we are sure that such interest will be of great possible benefit to the work of the centres'.

There is also other anecdotal evidence that suggests that some fathers were keenly interested in fathercraft. 'Sixty fathers' for example, who attended a lecture at a Putney Fathers' Council stayed on after it was finished, discussing and asking questions 'until the caretaker of the building arrived to turn out the lights'. And, on another occasion 'in spite of the fact that the evening on which the meeting was held was foggy' more than sixty fathers attended a meeting at Southgate Welfare Clinic, and showed 'a keen interest in their responsibility'.

Chapter Three: Fathers, Fathers' Councils and British Fathercraft
Towards Education in Fathercraft? The Role of Fathers' Councils.

It is useful to view Fathers' Councils as having two distinct functions. First, they were used as a forum in which the message of fathercraft could be disseminated to the working-class father - a place where they could be 'educated' and 'instructed' on their responsibilities and functions as parents. Second, however, Fathers' Councils could be utilised as a kind of 'club' that encouraged men to offer practical support to the Welfare Clinics. Bringing fathers into the infant welfare movement was initially promoted with the second of these functions in mind. This we can view as a conservative framework. That is, while involving fathers in discussions about childrearing and child welfare was perhaps in itself perceived as 'progressive', this did not necessarily mean that the message - what fathers were being told their function as parents were - moved away from 'traditional' perceptions of parenting functions.

Consider the stated aims of the Lancaster Road Fathers' Council when it was first formed in 1921:

(1) To bring home to fathers the responsibility which rests upon them in giving the child a proper start in life.
(2) To advance the interests of the Centres.
(3) To raise funds for the Centre by means of entertainment and other functions. 63

As was the case at Lancaster Road, Fathers' Councils placed emphasis on fundraising for welfare clinics, mirroring quite sharply the importance all discourses on fatherhood within the period placed on the father as the breadwinner within the family. There are repeated references to the fact that 'some fathers' councils work very hard to assist the infant welfare centres financially'. 64 Indeed, before the Lancaster Road Fathers' Councils existed there had been another fathers'
organisation, 'The Fathers' Concert Committee', attached to the welfare clinic that had existed for the explicit reason of raising funds.\(^{65}\) Even when founded as a Fathers' Council, Lancaster Road continued to hold numerous fundraising schemes\(^{66}\) and by 1932, had 'made contribution of £618 towards the voluntary funds of the Centre'.\(^{67}\)

Fathers' Councils also took it upon themselves to 'protect' and 'provide' for Welfare Centres by actively involving fathers in upkeep and maintenance, again reflecting the 'traditional' tasks it was perceived a working-class father might perform in the home.\(^{68}\) Within an article entitled 'Modern Aspects of Fathercraft', for example, Dr. Geffen and Dr. Hyde championed the fact that fathers in their districts had 'decorated a maternity and child welfare centre, and [had] helped to equip it'.\(^{69}\)

Fathers were also encouraged to utilise their 'influence' and public positions to act as 'missionaries and propagandists'.\(^{70}\)

There is a lot of permissive legislation which has not taken effect.... Fathers should find out from a prospective candidate for borough elections what view he [sic.] holds on infant welfare work, and to what extent he would recommend the borough to proceed with the work which the borough may do, but is not compelled to do. In that way fathers' committees can be a tremendous asset in keeping local authorities up to scratch.\(^{71}\)

Indeed, for some observers within the Infant Welfare Movement, a working man's practical involvement in family life was far less important to improvements in maternal and child health than the 'many ways the father can assist as householders and citizens in furthering the broader aims of public health work'.\(^{72}\)

Such 'aims' make it clear that there remained a strong belief among welfare workers that there was an important public / private divide between the functions of the parents. Fathers' Councils viewed the father as a 'social label' or 'position', in

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his public capacity, rather than viewing him as a person, who might have functions and relationships in the private sphere. Fundraising, protection and being a ‘propagandist’ reflected the view held by many welfare workers that the father had little part to play in day-to-day childrearing activities. Fathers had long been providers and protectors, and Fathers’ Councils were merely reflecting and reinforcing this long-standing perception of a father’s functions within the new context of child welfare:

From time immemorial the father has been the protector of the family. No mastodons, dragons or mammoths now threaten the tribe, but they are still menaced by ignorance, ill-health and disease, and we fathers still claim our ancient privilege to take our place in the forefront of the battle against these enemies.73

However, increasingly as the inter-war period progressed, the evidence indicates that there was often unease among many advocates of fathercraft with this limited prescribed view of working-class fatherhood. As they argued, the functions a father was often encouraged to perform as members of Fathers’ Councils often reinforced the ‘traditional’ belief that fathers could fulfil ‘their’ functions from the margins of the family. Placing too much emphasis on his public functions ‘marginalised’ the father from a more active involvement with his children and this, some argued, was a limited view of fatherhood and was exactly what fathercraft was trying to counteract. Fathercraft ‘warned against allowing the father to slide into the position of a passive parent – a mere wage earner’ and was keen to stress that a father was not just to be viewed as important for material support.74 As the period progressed the relationship between Fathers’ Councils and the message of fathercraft became a far from simple one and became a contentious issue within the movement. It is, for our purposes, therefore vital to be mindful of the difference between the
Fathers’ Council as an organisation and the message of the fathercraft movement because Fathers’ Councils were necessary, but often insufficient, conveyors of that message:

In the formation of these councils, and in their federation, we think much has been lost of the original desire to educate fathers throughout the country in their duties towards their children. The formation of fathers’ councils must not be considered the be-all and end-all of fathercraft.75

Although not rigid or linear, there does appear to have been a chronological development in which the emphasis within Fathers’ Councils shifted away from mere fundraising and aid and towards educating fathers on their own parenting functions. After all, as one author wrote, ‘the spirit and gospel of fathercraft … [was] more important than the organisation of formal committees’.76 Committee members at Lancaster Road noted in 1934 that it was ‘gratifying to know how members now attach special importance to educational lectures’ and that educational lectures became the ‘first object’ of the Council.77 Of course, not all lectures were concerned with the father in the private sphere, many were explicitly about the ‘public’ father, but lectures were typically focused on the functions of individual fathers, rather than what the Fathers’ Council as an organisation could do for welfare clinics.78

However, once it was recognised that Fathers’ Councils could have a positive function in ‘educating’ fathers (rather than merely preventing their ‘obstructionist tendencies’) the central issue of concern within the infant welfare movement relating to fathercraft became how far, and in what direction, such ‘father education’ should go.

Some, like J. A. Scott (Medical Officer of Health for Fulham), believed that educating fathers was probably a waste of limited resources. In a letter to Mother and
Child in February 1938 he argued that other aspects of infant welfare (such as nutrition and the reduction of maternal morbidity) were all "of more importance to the public health services than fathercraft." Dr. W. G. Booth (Medical Officer of Health for Finsbury) suggested in 1932 that Fathers' Councils were nothing more than a novelty and that they needed to 'face facts' and see that educating fathers was an 'experiment that has had its day'. Clearly, among many middle-class observers, focusing on the working-class father was deemed far from sensible. As others suggested, it was nothing more than a joke, that it was 'considered comic, and rather low comedy at that' and that fathers involved in fathercraft were being scornfully viewed as 'dilettante males' and were, 'on the whole, not officially encouraged'.

Such critical attacks on fathercraft fully reflected many middle-class welfare workers' own perception of the importance of the father to childrearing and the 'proper' functions of men and women. A father, it was believed, did not need instruction in parenting in the same way as mothers because he was not (and should not) be responsible for the practical caring tasks that were the concern of 'scientific babycare'. J. A. Scott suggested that 'the ordinary father has been equipt [sic.] by nature to play his part in the care and upbringing of the child and any teaching that they [Fathers' Councils] could give him was a work of supererogation'.

Other criticism stemmed from perceptions of working-class family life and their domestic arrangements. Some critics believed (whether accurately or not) that working-class fathers were simply not interested in being instructed about parenting and that the fathercraft movement was being naive if it believed men had a genuine interest in learning about child welfare issues. The long-standing division of responsibility between working-class parents was so deeply entrenched, it was
argued, that fathers would never take parental instruction seriously. Critics highlighted the practical problems that impinged on the working-class father’s ability to become any more involved in childcare. After all, there was no point in instructing fathers when they were so rarely in contact with their children. Dr. Booth rhetorically asked, for example, ‘can we reasonably expect the working man to take an active interest in babies and children, when he only sees them about one day a week?’ Fathers attending Fathers’ Councils meetings were thus viewed as curious exceptions, untypical men, who were merely attracted to Fathers’ Councils because of the array of social activities on offer:

My own experience of a working-class district is that the mother generally manages the home and the family exchequer entirely, whilst the father provides the money, does the odd jobs of the household in his spare time and interests himself in sport, politics or the garden. There are, of course, exceptions, and it is from these exceptions that you will get your classes if you provide enough free coffee, cigarettes and interesting speakers.

The suggestion was clearly that fathers were not interested in childrearing or even their children and, as such, there seemed to be little merit in trying to educate them to ‘do better’ something they had no interest in the first place. How far such a view accurately reflects what working class fathers felt and did is a theme taken up in the second half of this thesis.

Given such criticism and levels of cynicism it became increasingly important for advocates of fathercraft to portray their movement as integral to the infant welfare movement rather than merely a fringe element. It was stressed in 1935 that the Annual Conference of Fathers’ Councils had ‘enjoyed the hospitality of one of the most important public health institutions in London’ (School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine) and also that ‘highly distinguished’ doctors and obstetricians had
lectured. Fathercraft, it was inferred, could not be viewed as an amusing notion if so many prominent welfare workers and doctors took it seriously.\(^{85}\)

The idea that father education was an act of ‘supererogation’ was attacked by fathercraft advocates who argued that such a view was the very cause of a spectrum of child welfare problems. The ‘father must not rely entirely on instinct, which may prompt him to do the wrong things’, it was argued because ‘he requires guidance in the bringing up of his children and in the proper development of their character’.\(^{86}\)

Advocates argued that working-class fathers were genuinely interested in being more involved parents and that Fathers’ Councils were facilitating this interest. Dr. MacDonald, member of the Battersea Fathers’ Council, noted that the Council had been formed because it had been observed that ‘men will occasionally come to the centre to consult health visitors over matters relating to their wives and children’.\(^{87}\) Having a father-specific meeting was believed to encourage this existing interest as much as to create a new interest among other fathers.

It was fiercely argued that any social elements of Fathers’ Council meetings were not an indication that fathers did not have a genuine interest in the educational aims of the fathercraft message. Charles Slade (Secretary of the South West Ham Fathers’ Committee) adamantly stated that ‘it has never been necessary to offer refreshments and cigarettes as an inducement to fathers to attend talks’.\(^{88}\) Advocates of fathercraft were explicit in underlining the fact that, in their view, ‘men do not attend these meetings for charity…their service is a real service of love – not only to the welfare centre, but a real love for their wives, homes and children’.\(^{89}\) The father who attended Fathers’ Council meetings and devoted himself to the study of fathercraft was, moreover, seen to be more representative of the attitude among
working-class fathers than critics believed.\textsuperscript{90} One author, for example, commented of a prize-winning father: ‘let us not dismiss him as “exceptional”. He is perhaps more articulate than many fathers, but he is not untypical’.\textsuperscript{91} Of course, the claim that such a father was not ‘untypical’ did not mean he was, but it was important for those promoting fathercraft to maintain the idea that men who attended were not unusual.

Finally, those defending fathercraft argued that, far from bringing a man’s masculinity into question, ‘fathercraft made men more manly, stronger, firmer, and better husbands… in no sense did it make them effeminate’.\textsuperscript{92} It was argued that it was a father’s duty to involve himself as much as he could in the detail of his child’s life and that, in doing so, he was serving a greater purpose than merely being a good father:

These, then, are not men to be held up to ridicule, but are well worthy to be put in the foremost rank of great pioneers of this great Empire. They are doing what God admires; they are proving how much they value His most precious gift to them – their children – and they are proving themselves valuable stewards to be entrusted with these gifts, and are helping to bring up citizens of the future which any nation will have a right to be proud.\textsuperscript{93}

\textbf{A ‘Fathercraft Father’ and Childcare.}

Finding a place for fathers that directly involved them with their children’s upbringing but which was also acceptable to contemporary ideas about ‘appropriate’ gender roles proved to be a persistent concern. Critical observers came easily to the unsavoury conclusion that ‘fathercraft meant teaching fathers to do mothers’ work’ and that educating men in parenting could only result in turning them into ‘babies nurses, mother’s [sic.] aids or charwomen’s substitutes’.\textsuperscript{94} Others believed that \textit{to
teach fathercraft was to make men effeminate, weak and uninteresting sort of fellows' and declared that fathercraft made men 'peculiar and namby-pamby'. How could Britain govern her Empire, meet the challenges of industrial decline or combat another European aggressor if her men were bathing and feeding babies?

In response to these fears, advocates of fathercraft endlessly stressed that male and female parenting were distinct and that a father's 'involvement' in childrearing was not simply as a 'substitute' mother. They were not, they emphasised, suggesting that men should have the same level of active participation in the care of children as the mother but rather that they were trying to identify the different and complementary activities unique to him. As one author wrote, 'the mother was the natural nurse, and must supply the child's everyday need in the early days of life. The father's responsibility lay in quite another direction.'

Where a father was to have an involvement in childcare it was ideally confined to a form of 'overseeing'. As Dr. Geffen commented, 'although it is not his duty to bathe the baby or wash his [sic.] clothes, it is his duty to see that all things are done efficiently.' This was of course very different from being practically involved in such care and this, fathercraft advocates emphasised, was evidence that they were not trying to 'blur' the parenting functions.

A distinction between a parent knowing why something should be done for the benefit of the child and a parent knowing how that activity was to be done (with regard to childrearing) was heavily gendered in this period. To take a simple example, a father could gain an intimate knowledge of why it was important to bathe his baby regularly but at the same time he may have no knowledge of how to go about the act of bathing him/her. By adopting this distinction advocates of fathercraft
could encourage a father’s interest in his children while, at the same time, maintaining the idea that day-to-day care was the work of the mother. Fathers’ Council meetings therefore used lectures and discussions primarily to emphasise a more ‘intellectual’ and ‘detached’ interest in issues relating to childcare. A keen, knowledgeable father, who attended lectures at Fathers’ Council meetings, must therefore not necessarily be seen as having been instructed to take a more practical interest in childcare.

Indeed, we must be careful in how we interpret a ‘fathercraft father’s’ involvement in childcare within the broader context of this study because involvement in childcare was often framed as the action of a ‘good’ husband. A flexible understanding of what constituted the father’s or husband’s functions was a feature of how fathercraft advocates attempted to involve men in the broader aims of child welfare and, via the mother, encourage a father to maintain links to his children. For example, when his wife was pregnant or when there was a new baby it was believed that a husband might ‘drift into his old bachelor ways’. Locating the husband’s duty in the rhetoric of responsible fatherhood was therefore seen as a powerful way of countering this and encouraging men to be involved with their wives even when they might be unable to offer any direct benefit to the child:

There are many things a prospective father can do before the birth of his child. Many of these things may be considered the duties of a husband to a prospective mother, and therefore not fathercraft, but surely what a father does for his wife during pregnancy is not only for her own sake, but for the sake of the unborn child, and therefore ought to be considered fathercraft.
Yet, one of the key aspects of the fathercraft message for this period was that a responsible father did require ‘hands-on’ training in order that he might ‘take the blame, share the praise’ in childrearing:

Lectures and discussions ... are by no means the only interest of the fathers’ councils. The practical side of the father’s function – helping in the home as occasion needs – is encouraged wherever possible, and some men attend demonstrations on washing and feeding and otherwise administering to the needs of the infant.101

Fathercraft advocates even suggested the rather radical notion that some fathers could be ‘quite as capable in the home and management of the children as their wives’102 and that any father could be schooled by fathercraft to be proficient in practical childcare.103 Of course, promoting the ability of an (educated) father to be an effective caregiver helped raise the profile of fathercraft and ‘newsworthy’ cases of fathers succeeding as carers were often publicised, and none was more dramatic than a father who succeed in raising a ‘prize winning’ baby:

The success of the baby girl whose mother died in child-birth, in winning first prize in a baby competition, is very significant of what intelligent fathercraft can secure, for this infant’s father, who had entered his baby daughter for the show, had devoted himself intensely to the bringing up of this motherless baby.104

Of course, the very ‘news-worthiness’ of the story might suggest the best interpretation of it for our purposes was that it was still rare and ‘unusual’ for a lone father to care for his children in this way. We certainly cannot argue that this evidence indicates that fathers were better able to cope with the needs of small children than they were before fathercraft. However we can view this as evidence that there was a shift in the perception that the father as carer was possible and ‘acceptable’, even if this was still not desirable.
Evidence from the start of the twentieth century points to a belief held within official discourses that a lone father was incapable of childcare tasks. It was noted in St. Pancras in 1914 that, after the death or desertion of his wife ‘the widower too frequently finds his children become unruly and dirty, in disgrace at school, unhealthy and a source of endless worry to him at home’. The solution to this problem was to provide for the practical care of the children, either on a permanent basis inside a volunteer’s home, or (as a notable forerunner to the health visitors introduced after the 1918 Maternity and Child Welfare Act) by having a ‘Visiting Mother’. Lynn Abrams concludes that for the whole of this period the discourses on Scottish fatherhood were exclusively ‘negative’ about a father’s ability to act in a caring or ‘motherly’ way. As we saw, Scottish working-class fathers in the period between c.1900 and c.1940 were, to use her term, ‘marginalised’ by official and popular discourses ‘as incapable, feckless and frequently absent individuals’. The evidence examined here suggests that this is a too narrow conclusion.

The inter-war years must be seen as particularly important in explaining why there was, within fathercraft and, as the last chapter explored, to a lesser degree among lawmakers and judges, an increasing belief that fathers could act as caregivers. Before 1900 childrearing had been a private activity, best left to the mother and ‘inherited’ knowledge. Scientific and medical theories of childrearing introduced the idea that mothers not only ought to receive education, but needed to receive it, and were a danger to the child if left uneducated. However, if the skills of baby and childcare had to be learnt, then there was no particular reason why a father could not also learn those skills. A curious development for the period was the fact that motherhood was being raised on a pedestal at the very time that notions of a
‘mother’s instinct’ were being discredited. If the biology of the maternal bond was less important than the skills and knowledge learnt at welfare clinics then one longstanding prejudice against a father’s ability was removed. The implication of scientific babycare was that the door was no longer closed to fathers learning ‘mothering’ skills. The fathercraft movement could therefore sensibly, and rationally, hold the view that a father – with fathercraft education – could be just as effective as the mother in certain practical childcare tasks.

Yet, as suggested, we must not read a dramatic shift in the perceived responsibilities of each parent from such evidence. That fathercraft signalled a shift in the belief that fathers could perform domestic childcare should not be read as evidence that advocates believed such activity was part of a father’s functions. Just because lone fathers were perhaps seen as potentially capable as carers this does not mean that being the carer was part of the father’s function in ‘normal’ circumstances. A closer examination of the fathercraft message indicates that, in ‘normal’ circumstances, fathers were to be taught these practical caring tasks only so they could help ‘when occasion needed’, and not because practical care was to be part of the father’s ‘normal’ functions. Oral and documentary evidence from the period certainly suggests that a working-class father’s care for babies was usually the result of such necessity rather than because men believed it to be part of their function as fathers, as later chapters will explore. Advocates of fathercraft in no way contradicted this and, in fact, reinforced such a distinction. For example, the title of one a first-prize winning essay underlines the emphasis fathercraft placed on fathers as ‘helps’ to their wives: ‘How I Would Help My Wife To Be A Happy and Healthy Mother?’ The essay outlined how the author
would ‘take charge while she [his wife] rests for a while … I dive in and follow the instructions she leaves me’. 109

Fathercraft therefore offered a complimentary and not contradictory message to the message given to working class mothers within welfare clinics. This is important to emphasise because, as we have seen, although distinct, Fathers’ Councils were part of the overall welfare schemes in any particularly district. In a broader context, inter-war fathercraft in Britain should therefore not be seen as a forerunner of the ‘new’ fatherhood to emerge in the c.1970s. This is the opposite conclusion to that reached by LaRossa in his study of inter-war fathercraft in the USA.

The Father – Child Relationship

Perhaps the most striking aspect of the fathercraft message was an emphasis on a loving, friendly and affectionate relationship between father and child. The ‘fathercraft father’ was to be attentive to his child’s needs, understand things from his/her point of view and (echoing comments we saw articulated by judges and lawmakers in the previous chapter) was to understand that a child was not his ‘property’ but ‘a separate independent individual, with tastes, aptitudes, choices, determinations, destinies of his [/her] very own’. 110 The ‘fathercraft father’ was told he could not expect obedience and respect merely by virtue of his God-given position as father but had to earn such feelings by his actions. Rather than ‘command’ he was to ‘encourage’ and ‘guide’ and ‘explain’. Where, as the middle-class welfare workers perceived at least, the father was once shrouded in formality and authority, and often restrained by emotional bluntness, fathercraft declared that it
'was better for him to have his playtime with them [the children] and gain their respect and friendship'.

Similarly, although fathercraft advocates were careful to reinforce the fact that fathers retained their responsibility for more 'traditional' functions (they were still to be reliable, were to instil obedience and were to offer security and protection), too much emphasis on these functions was often criticised. For example, the characterisation of a father as a 'bogeyman', visited only for punishment that had been 'promised' by the mother, was labelled destructive: 'If the father is held up before his children as the person to whom all their misdeeds are related, and who administers punishment and correction' it was stated, 'then the children will grow up to fear him'. Other 'traditional' functions, like that of breadwinner, were also qualified with the statement that 'however busy you are, make time to play'. No matter how important the father for discipline, provision and authority, he was not to refrain from showing love to his children.

To this end those advocating fathercraft were keen to stress that the 'fathercraft father' was different from the more 'traditional' stern, distant, patriarchal father they perceived as typical of the Victorian and Edwardian eras:

I think there is little doubt that the modern father is more in touch with his children than his Victorian predecessor, who at home was "He who must be obeyed", "He who must not be disturbed", but all too rarely the one to whom the children looked for understanding and affection.

That fathercraft advocates believed their 'image' of father was a step away from 'traditional' fatherhood is of course significant in suggesting that there was a 'refocusing' in this period. Yet, we have to ask how far the working-class father was ever of the kind described as 'Victorian' in this quotation. Although, for the middle
class there have been studies which at least in part confirm that such fathers existed. It remains open to question whether the Victorian working-class father typically portrayed these characteristics.

The shift towards emphasising ‘understanding and affection’ within the father-child relationship also needs to be seen as a symptom of wider changes occurring in the inter-war years which allowed greater opportunity for interaction between father and child. As Chapter One outlined, completed mean family size fell, which perhaps tended to raise expectations and foster more satisfying personal relationships.116 The impact of changes to working class housing and leisure must not be exaggerated but were certainly arenas in which at least some working-class families experienced change. Although lacking detail, there is evidence that advocates of fathercraft understood that some broader changes might have an impact on fatherhood. As Dr. Geffen and Dr. Hyde wrote:

In the actual application of the science of fathercraft, moreover, we must take cognisance of modern trends in social life. We cannot be uninterested in the difference between the size of present-day families and of past generations, and we must alter our ideas and think of the father of one or two children rather than the father of a large family. The effect of the wireless and the cinematograph must be considered, and, furthermore, the political outlook, and the uncertainty of the times in which we live, must be given due consideration.117

There is also other evidence which links changing perceptions of fatherhood to the changes in society observed by contemporaries. As a letter to the Times in 1933 noted, ‘when hours of work and even days of work are restricted ... the elementary principle that the man goes out to work and the woman works in the home will need fresh revision’. While the mother, it was stated, continued to have the same level of work, ‘leisure will be forced on the man’.118 The question of concern implicit in
these comments was what would the working-class father do with his extra leisure
time?

Within the message of fathercraft a father’s time was to be filled with
interaction with his children. There was a great emphasis on play which, as Chapter
Five will explore, seems to have reflected (whether consciously or not) the way
working-class fathers and their children did spend their time together. Yet, as we
have seen, fathers were told that acts of childcare were still very much the mother’s
duty and only performed by fathers when necessity arose. To this end, within some
descriptions of the father’s functions as depicted by advocates of fathercraft, the
father was sometimes almost ‘relegated’ to a caricature of a playful ‘entertainer’:

(The father) will talk to the child, play with it, amuse it and keep it
occupied... At the story telling age he can stimulate the child’s
imagination by that old favourite, the fairy story; he can repeat rhymes
and jingles to him, sing or whistle or play some musical instrument. He
can draw and paint and stimulate his child to do likewise. Later he can
take the child swimming and play games of all kinds with him. He can
make bats, boats, bows, etc., and enter into the child’s own world.119

Concluding that the emphasis on play and affection within the fathercraft
message was limiting reflects the conclusion of LaRossa in his study of fatherhood in
the USA during this period. He suggests that an emphasis on ‘fun’ activity such as
play was recognition of the fathers’ ‘inferior’ status and importance as a parent in
comparison to the mother. That is, while the mother was being told she was of the
utmost importance in childcare and was tasked with the vital functions of childcare,
the father was in effect relegated to the status of playmate and effectively stripped of
important functions other than that of the breadwinner. The ‘father-as-pal’ rhetoric
and the emphasis on play were given prominence in childrearing literature because
this was in no way threatening to the mother in her primary position within the
'parent stratification' system.120

Certainly, as we have seen, the British picture has some convergence with
LaRossa's conclusion. For example, the father was told he was secondary in
importance in childcare and was told his principal function during a child's
babyhood and on childcare tasks was to 'support' his wife in her efforts. The
emphasis on play and affection could be interpreted as 'relegating' father to what
might be perceived as marginal activities.

However, the conclusion LaRossa offers is probably a narrow one when
applied to inter-war fathercraft in Britain, not least because it fails to recognise the
importance which advocates of fathercraft attached to play. Fathers were told to
spend time playing with children not merely because it encouraged time being spent
in each others company or because it was a 'non-threatening' parental activity for
mothers, but because such activity was perceived to be 'of utmost value to the child'
and important because the child could learn to behave naturally with its father'.121
Emphasis on play and a closeness between father and child was not merely a 'by-
product' of the greater importance placed on the mother's functions. And, of course,
from the children's perspective, having a father who was attentive and playful was of
great significance, a point LaRossa further fails to make.

Perhaps more significantly, the inter-war years witnessed the first inroads of
child psychology, with the emergence of Freudian psychoanalysis and the Child
Study Movement, which looked at the emotional and personal adjustment of
children.122 Such ideas demanded an interest in children beyond their mere physical
survival which was the focus at welfare clinics and which was largely seen as the mother’s concern.

Although perhaps not explicitly, such ideas permeated the fathercraft movement and suggested that special attention needed to be given to the father and not just the mother. While the mother concerned herself with feeding, bathing and cleaning, the psychological development of the child’s character was of at least equal concern to the father:

Fathercraft deals not only with physical, but also with the mental welfare of children. This is a matter of considerable importance, for whereas the actual care and handling of young children is of necessity in the hands of the mother, the psychology and mental welfare of the child is, even at the earliest times, often equally shared by both parents. 123

A father needed to play and be affectionate with his child because it was through such activity that his influence could be exerted on a child’s development. It was argued that the father’s absence could have disastrous results for his children’s psychological and emotional development. The ‘unfathered’ child was seen as ‘nearly always emotionally abnormal… His [sic.] character is permanently affected by the lack of a father’s influence and the effects carry on into the child’s married life’. 124 Moreover, the ‘same fate may befall the child who is persistently neglected by his father’. 125 By contact with his father, ‘a child could learn much that the mother could not teach him [sic.]’. 126 Such words were a clear warning for fathers who neglected their children or who spent too much time at work or outside the home pursuing their own leisure or who failed to give their children playful and affectionate attention.
The 'Fathercraft Father' and the Age and Gender of His Children

I think it will be accepted that in every culture or civilisation known to anthropologists the father has performed a specific function in relation to his growing child. This influence has been exercised all through childhood and youth, perhaps being at its strongest during the period from puberty to the beginning of manhood proper. (I imply, of course, that the father's influence is exercised predominantly on the male child).\[127\]

As Chapter Two outlined, the age and gender of a child was often viewed by lawmakers and judges to be the most 'common-sense' way to understand the functions and importance of the father. Sons and older children, it was suggested, had needs that more easily fell into the father's 'sphere of influence' than babies and daughters.

Advocates of fathercraft believed that, within the working class home, a child's age and gender were important factors in the way fathers treated and interacted with him/her. It was believed that 'the most common procedure' in the average working-class home was 'for a father to leave the up-bringing and training of the child to the mother until the child has passed the stage of infancy, and begins to be more interesting to the male eye'.\[128\] It was when the child required education and guidance about the public sphere that a father's interest and influence became important and this, it was observed, 'often coincides with the beginning of the child's school career'.\[129\]

In a number of ways the message of fathercraft upheld the perception. Fathercraft went to great pains to indicate that it was not trying to undermine the importance of the mother for a baby's day-to-day physical needs and it was never suggested that the father ought to be regularly involved in meeting those needs. As one author commented, 'any substitution of the father for the mother during
the first twelve months of the baby’s life will almost inevitably be a change for
the worse”\textsuperscript{130} Similarly, the father’s importance in play effectively stressed his
greater importance for older children. After all, play was very much restricted to
children within certain ages. Babies, for example, were not good playmates but, as
one author plainly instructed ‘as the toddler stage commences the father will
possibly be able and certainly ought, to take more active interest in the child itself
... he ought to spend an hour or two playing with it’\textsuperscript{131}

Yet, for fathercraft advocates, the lack of male participation during a child’s
early years was often explained as much by the dominance of the mother than the
desires and importance of a father:

Many women ... conceive it their right to monopolise the new baby; to
tyrannise over the situation, and to elbow the father out of the picture,
taking for granted the ancient mischievous notion that children are
exclusively ‘women’s business’\textsuperscript{132}

The fathercraft movement believed that men should fight against this mother
domination and aim to be involved in a baby’s life from its birth but, importantly, not
because they were suggesting that an active participation in babycare was part of a
father’s functions. Rather, a father was told to be close to his baby because it was
increasingly believed that psychological and ‘character’ development started in the
eyears and also, that the ‘bond’ between a father and his child could begin to be
formed during babyhood.

During the inter-war years the necessity of a father’s presence during his son’s
first years was seen as increasingly pressing given new evidence from Freudian
psychology that suggested gender identity began from birth and not, as had been
assumed, when a boy moved into adolescence. Dependence on the mother, shyness
of strangers and timidity in public life were increasingly seen as the result of an inadequate male role-model during early childhood and even babyhood. Fathercraft therefore argued that it was ‘not enough that a baby should have a mother; he needs his father – if he is a real father – as much in the beginning as he ever will’. One author explained that ‘the child soon begins to feel his father’s presence, the presence of the male as distinct from the female’ and that even a baby could ‘sense the difference at a very early age’. For advocates of fathercraft, a child’s normal development was ‘undoubtedly dependent on the steady continuance of the father’s influence’. Therefore, as Julie Grant has argued for North America in these years, ‘If mothers were smothering boys, fathers were enjoined to greater participation in the rearing of their sons.’

Yet a greater emphasis on involvement in his baby’s life did not negate the fact that a father was still believed to have a particularly important part to play as the child grew up. Indeed, one of the ways in which fathercraft was characterised as being different to mothercraft was that ‘it [was] concerned with the attitude of the father to his children throughout its [the child’s] life’. A father was told his responsibility to his child increased as the child became more and more independent from the mother and that he was to guide his child through its schooldays and adolescence. There is a notable correlation between the ‘fathercraft father’s’ influence and the migration of the child from the closed domestic world of the home to the harsher world of public life. Being a more ‘public’ being than the mother the father was perceived to be better equipped in aiding this transition. A father was told that ‘the importance of fathercraft does not end when the children leave school’ as the ‘problems of adolescence may be tragic and are seldom forgotten’.
Fathercraft advocates stressed that, in order for the father to have a rapport with his children later in life, he needed to have forged a bond with them when they were young. This is why it was seen as important that the child grew up with confidence and trust in its father; it was only a friendly and respected father that a child would approach for help and advice in its later years. As John Gravit Palmer told expectant fathers, ‘I tell you that the extent to which you are a companion, chum and pal during his babyhood will condition greatly the degree in which in the years to come he will be any of these things to you.’

Advocates of fathercraft perceived that some working-class fathers sometimes favoured sons over daughters but stressed that showing favouritism in this manner was to be guarded against. As John Gravit Palmer asked in his address to expectant fathers ‘If it be a girl, will you wash your hands of her and leave all that business to her mother?’ Such neglect could cause the father and his daughter to ‘drift hopelessly apart.’ Fathercraft authors thus urged fathers to ‘love them [children], whatever their sex’ and warned of the fact that ‘girls especially were cold shouldered because they were the wrong sex in their father’s eyes.’

But fathercraft also was explicit in reminding the father that he had particular importance for the development of his son’s ‘manly’ development. It was still suggested that the father’s vital function was to remove his son from the feminine world of the mother as soon as possible in order that he might develop properly as ‘a man’. To neglect this task was to deny the son the skills required fully to attain masculine status. As Dr Fenton described, ‘the father urges him to “be a man” and break free of the feminine apron strings.’ A prize-winning essay on fathercraft added that exposure to his father meant that a boy ‘will have been in valuable contact
with a male, his nearest male relation, and will have unconsciously and consciously assimilated many characteristics that are peculiar to males.¹⁴⁴ A father was the primary male role model for the son. His example of ‘being a man’ – how he treated his wife, conducted himself in public and, indeed, how he acted as a father – would have a direct impact on how his son interpreted ‘being a man’.

Conclusion.

The emergence of fathercraft in this period reflected the fact that doctors and health workers believed that the working-class father was often uninterested in his children’s welfare and perhaps sometimes even an ‘obstructive’ danger – perceptions that subsequent chapters of this thesis will address. But, more significantly for the context of the argument being put forward by this thesis, the birth of fathercraft also indicates that many welfare workers strongly believed that such disinterest was not acceptable because, they believed, father had important and specific functions to play in parenting. Fathercraft advocates recognised what they perceived to be the importance of the father as a parent of individual worth and they began to challenge the notion that he could fulfil his functions from the margins of family life. In this view we see an important divergence with the conclusion most often offered in the current literature which, as Chapter One outlined, suggests that ‘discourses’ on fatherhood portrayed the father in a negative way.

Within the confines of the middle-class ideologies of the infant welfare movement, advocates of fathercraft successfully highlighted the importance of
educating fathers so that, by 1939, fathercraft was largely accepted as an important and respectable component of the campaign to combat parental 'ignorance' among the working class. Yet, although there were many thriving Fathers' Councils and some enthusiastic claims about working-class fathers' interest in fathercraft, membership of Councils was typically low. We therefore should probably conclude that fathercraft never reached more than a minority of the working-class fathers and we have to ask how far an often identifiably 'middle-class' ideology would have caused working-class fathers to adapt their behaviour. There were many obstacles between the theoretical message of fathercraft and the day-to-day business of being a working-class father. The next section of the thesis thus uses documentary and oral evidence to examine some personal experiences of being a father and, in part, asks how widely the 'fathercraft father' existed among the working class in Britain in this period.

However, judging the 'significance' of inter-war fathercraft on terms of its 'reach' alone is misleading. What this chapter has shown is that working class fatherhood in the inter-war years was of enough interest for it to be the topic of debate and discussion (in some quarters). Fathercraft, while only one interpretation of fatherhood, was a departure from Victorian views about paternal authority, discipline and masculinity and indicates that gender divisions in parenting were beginning to be regarded as more complicated than a simple divide between the 'mother as carer' and 'father as breadwinner'.

Yet fathercraft was adamant in emphasising that fathers and mothers had distinctive responsibilities and functions and it showed cautious sensitivity to persistent notions about 'masculine' and 'feminine' activity. Therefore, although for
the USA context, Ralph LaRossa argues that many of the post Second World War developments in fatherhood have identifiable ‘roots’ in the inter-war period. We should perhaps conclude that British fathercraft should not simply be seen as having been a ‘forerunner’ to the later twentieth century concept of the ‘new father’, which Charlie Lewis and Margaret O’Brien define as a ‘man who is both highly nurturant towards his children and increasingly involved in their care and housework’. 145

Inter-war fathercraft never argued that mothers and fathers should be equally responsible for the same parenting functions and certainly it did not regard the father as being as well ‘suited’ to childcare as mothers. As one fathercraft advocate noted, ‘no one want[ed] the father to usurp the maternal duties’. 146 Fathercraft went to great pains to stress that, where father was to become more ‘involved’ as a parent it was to be the result of expanding ‘his’ areas of influence, importance and conduct, rather than ‘hers’ becoming acceptable for him.

We can however conclude that, according to fathercraft, while mothers remained responsible for baby and childcare and, while fathers remained responsible for more ‘traditional’ functions such as provision, fathers were increasingly expected at least to be able to offer help in babycare, to show affection to their children and to be a prominent part of his child’s life. It is therefore appropriate to see inter-war fathercraft as part of a gradual process by which fatherhood was ‘refocused’. That is, while fathers were not told to perform ‘new’, and certainly not ‘motherly’, functions, emphasis was shifted away from ‘traditional’ functions and on to more ‘cordial’ aspects of father-child interaction. Above all, this chapter has indicated that, in inter-war Britain, fathers were not neglected, shunned or forgotten by welfare workers and childrearing ‘experts’ as historians have, to date, led us to believe.
Dr. Geffen, Medical Officer of Health for Finsbury, addressing the London Workers' Section, 'Fathers' Clubs', National Health, November 1926, p.128.

J. Lewis, The Politics of Motherhood, p.61 [emphasis added].

See, for example, D. Dwork, 'War is Good for Babies'; A. Davin, 'Imperialism and Motherhood'; J. Lewis, The Politics of Motherhood; M. Gente, 'The Ideological Contribution of The Times in Favour of Motherhood in Great-Britain between 1910 and 1920', The Historian, 78 (2003). Childrearing literature was far more popular among the middle class. The extent to which working women had access to such books is usually suggested to be minimal. See, for example, D. Beekman. The Mechanical Baby.

S. Humphries and P. Gordon, A Labour of Love, p.49. See also, for example, C. Hardyment. Dream Babies, p.122.

P. Ayres and J. Lambertz, 'Marriage Relations, Money, and Domestic Violence in Working-Class Liverpool, p.207.

Although the international scope of fathercraft goes beyond the focus of this thesis there are references to the emergence of fathercraft in the USA, Canada, Japan, New Zealand, China, Greece, Germany, Hungary, Switzerland, Yugoslavia and Italy. For a comprehensive discussion of USA fathercraft see R. LaRossa, The Modernization of Fathercraft.

Lancaster Road Infant Welfare Centre and Day Nursery, Annual Reports, 1927-38; The Croydon Mothers' and Infants' Welfare Association, 18th Annual Report, June 1933. Minutes Books from 'Welcome Committee', 1930-1933 and 'Executive Committee', 1931-934.

R. LaRossa, The Modernization of Fathercraft, p.123.

H. Hendrick, Children, Childhood and English Society, p.31.


'How to Work a School for Mothers', National Health, January 1911, p.40.


'Fathers' Councils' was the most used term for meetings of fathers. They were also referred to as 'Fathers' Clubs', 'Fathers' Committees', 'Fathers' Bureau', 'Fathers' Conferences' and 'Men's Sections'.

See, for example, 'Editorial', Mother and Child, October 1932, p.2.


For detail on the formation of the Central Union, and its workings, see, for example, Mother and Child, April 1934, pp.1-2, 18-19, 28-30. For the Central Unions objectives see, for example, 'Fathercraft', Mother and Child, April 1935, pp.22-3.


'Editorial', Mother and Child, July 1939, p.118.

Mother and Child, April 1935, pp.22-23.

Mother and Child, April 1935, p.19.

Local Fathers' Councils met at an annual conference from 1929, and they continued to do so throughout the period. The CUFC meetings were additional to these. This is important, as those Fathers' Councils which were not affiliated to the CUFC would still meet at the Annual Conference of Fathers' Councils. Given concerns about the London-centric nature of the CUFC, this allowed a broader national scope.
30 'Editorial', Mother and Child, April 1934, p. 3. It must also be remembered that the total membership numbers in all probability included those (middle class) committee members who formed and ran the Council.
31 'Central Union of Fathers' Councils', Mother and Child, April 1933, p. 30; Annual Report of the Lancaster Road Welfare Centre and Day Nursery, 1933-34.
32 See Appendix ONE.
33 'New Fathers' Council Formed', Mother and Child, March 1933, p.452.
34 Ibid. See also, for example, 'Fathers in the Child Welfare Movement'. Mother and Child, July 1934, p.129.
36 'Preparation for Parenthood', Mother and Child, May 1937, p.42.
37 'Correspondence', Mother and Child, November 1938, p.312. See also, for example, National Health, November 1925, p.164.
40 Dr. Geffen and Dr. Hyde, 'Modern Aspects of Fathercraft'. Mother and Child, February 1939, p. 413.
41 'Pioneering Fathers' Committee', Mother and Child, March 1933, p.440.
44 Wives were described as often 'evasive in handing over to their husbands the importance of the useful lessons they learned at the infant welfare centre', 'New Fathers' Councils', Mother and Child, March 1933, p.452.
45 See, for example, R. Roberts, The Classic Slum, pp.53-54; E. Roberts, A Woman's Place.
47 Mary Read, Mothercraft Manual, (London: 1917), pp. 31-2 (emphasis added). Historians have similarly argued from analysis of conduct that a woman's desire to monopolise household management could be an important barrier (in some communities) against more involvement from husbands/fathers, as Chapter Five explores.
49 P. Ayres and J. Lambertz, 'Marriage Relations, Money, and Domestic Violence in Working-Class Liverpool'; p. 208.
50 Ibid., p.207.
52 I. G. Gibbons, Infant Welfare Centres, p.27.
53 'Pioneering Fathers' Committees' in Mother and Child, March 1933, p.440. (emphasis added).
55 The NSPCC is a good example of welfare initiatives that, in order to help children, often demonised the father. See, for example, G. Behlmer, Child Abuse and Moral Reform in England.
57 See for example, A. Davies, Gender Leisure and Poverty, Chapter 2; Mass Observation, The Pub and the People, p. 186.
58 See, for example, 'The Best Fathercraft Paper', National Health, October 1928, pp.134-36; Mother and Child, September 1938, pp.213-17; Mother and Child, April 1934, p.13; Mother and Child, July 1936, pp.148-49.
59 'An Examination in Fathercraft', Mother and Child, July 1936, p.148. This consisted of questions relating to issues such as nutrition, sleep and feeding patterns but also to issues such as 'overcoming shyness'.
60 Ibid.
61 Mother and Child, September 1938, p.206.
63. ‘Fathers’ Committees’, *National Health*, April 1928, p. 378. The aims of the Battersea Fathers’ Council are equally illustrative of the fact that Councils were often focused on aid. Four of the five aims, when it formed in 1929, were about fathers’ relationship to the welfare movement and the welfare clinic. Only one, ‘to bring home to the fathers that their part in running the home is more than the provision of income; they should take an equal share with their wives’, can be seen to be about educating fathers as to their responsibilities to children in the home, *Mother and Child*, April 1938, p. 28.
64. *Mother and Child*, April 1934, p. 2.
66. For example, Lancaster Road Fathers’ Council held concerts at which their male voice choir performed, and there were Christmas draws, annual dinners, *Annual Report of the Lancaster Road Welfare Centre and Day Nursery*, 1927-1939.
71. ‘Fathercraft’, *Mother and Child*, April 1935, p. 23 (emphasis in original). Of course, even with the extension of the franchise in 1918, the rhetoric being employed in such sentiments was very middle-class and probably only of real relevance to the ‘respectable’ working class.
79. ‘Correspondence’, *Mother and Child*, 8, 11 (1938), pp. 439-40. See also, for example, ‘Father’s Natural Fitness’, letter to *The Times*, January 4th 1938, p. 9.
80. ‘Fathers or Grandmothers?’, *Mother and Child*, 3, 7 (1932), p. 302. The effort of educating fathers. Booth continued, would be more sensibly focused on educating grandmothers because they were the ones who most directly influenced childrearing.
84. *Ibid*.
89. *Ibid*.

98. For example, lecture topics given at Putney Fathers' Council in the year up to September 1938 included themes such as: 'Housing in Relation to Maternity and Child Welfare'; "Existing Powers to Improve Housing Conditions"; "The First Eight Years of School Life" and "Physical Fitness Begins at the Welfare Clinic", all of which could be discussed and debated without any 'practical' involvement in childcare 'Notes from Kindred Societies', *Mother and Child*, September 1938.


107. L. Abrams, "There was Nobody like my Daddy"", p. 228.


110. 'To an Expectant Father', *National Health*, 225 (1928), p. 453.


114. 'To an Expectant Father', *National Health*, 225 (1928), p. 437.


119. 'Fathercraft', *Mother and Child*, September 1938, p.213.

120. R. LaRossa, *The Modernization of Fatherhood*.

121. 'Modern Aspects of Fathercraft', *Mother and Child*, February 1939, p. 413.


123. 'Modern Aspects of Fathercraft', *Mother and Child*, 9, 11 (1939), p. 413.


129. 'Modern Aspects of Fathercraft', *Mother and Child*, 9, 11 (1939), p. 413.


131. 'A B C for Fathers', *Mother and Child*, June 1939, pp.87-8.


134. 'Fathercraft', *Mother and Child*, 9, 6 (1938).


139. 'To An Expectant Father', *National Health*, 225 (1928), p.438.

141 Ibid.
Chapter Four
FATHERS, FATHERHOOD AND THE FIRST WORLD WAR

My darling Bubbles,

I thought this would make a nice letter to you, your first – the old French woman’s daughter made it at school and they gave it to me to write to you. Mummy writes and tells me you are a good girl, that’s right, and when I come home we’ll have some fine romps and games, and go up into the park among the buttercups and daisies, make chains of daises and have a good time... I was going to send a lovely present to you, a pair of dear little blue shoes, but the shopkeeper thought I was not used to buying such things and asked for tons of money ... so when I come home mummy, you and I will go and see if we can see what they have.

Well darling, it’s daddy’s bedtime now so good-night. Kiss mummy, Granny Hunter, Granny Hogg, Granddad, Uncle and Aunt Bess for me, don’t kick grandpa’s flowers down or pull the poor pussies [sic.] tale, be a good girlie always.

Daddy will soon be coming home.¹

(W. Hogg, May 1917).

This letter, written by Private W. Hogg (occupation unknown) to his seven-year-old daughter portrays many interesting aspects of the personal nature of fatherhood and Hogg’s relationship with his daughter. There is much sentimental affection expressed, the pet name ‘Bubbles’ for example, and Hogg’s daughter seems to exert a strong emotional pull over her father. Hogg describes fun activities, painting himself as his daughter’s friend and playmate. On a sterner note, Hogg has clearly been informed by his wife of their daughter’s behaviour and he seems to have felt compelled to encourage her not to misbehave again. The father’s association with ‘treats’ can be seen in Hogg’s promise of a gift and a future shopping trip with his daughter.
Yet the war kept Hogg away from his home and daughter and the letter also points to some of the stresses ‘war absence’ created. Despite the talk of a gift, for example, Hogg was unable immediately to provide such a treat for his daughter and was instead forced to promise a future shopping trip. Fatherly affection and playful activity was similarly reduced to a future promise and, no doubt, was not a substitute for Hogg actually being home. The fact that his daughter had apparently been pulling-up flowers and pulling on the cat’s tail perhaps indicates that his daughter’s behaviour was thought to have suffered because her father was away; after all, his wife had written to tell her husband of the misbehaviour.

This chapter addresses some of these issues. It is the first in which the focus moves away from ‘discourses’ on fatherhood and on to the experience and conduct of fathers. An analysis of letters written by men during the First World War identifies some the areas of children’s lives in which working-class fathers seem to have had an interest, rather than, as we have seen so far, the areas perceived to be their responsibility by others. The chapter suggests that the war created a set of, at the time, unprecedented and unique circumstances that allow the historian to gain some important insights into the father’s everyday importance to the family. That is, with a father missing from the family, his importance to it – at least as perceived by the letter writers we examine in this chapter – became more apparent. Enforced large-scale removal from the family meant that fathers had to try to maintain a position as head of the household, fulfil duties of the male parent, and more subtly, maintain a father-child relationship over a long period of absence. The war had potentially huge consequences for public and private understandings of fatherhood. On a broader level, the war’s impact on society more generally was also important.
As Richard van Emden and Steve Humphries comment, ‘Bald figures on casualties, dead, wounded, even the shell shocked, hide a mostly untold story of massive individual dislocation from family, friends, even society at large.’

The chapter does not however argue that the First World War should be seen as a rigid chronological marker between traditional and ‘newer’ patterns of fathers’ conduct or experiences. The argument is required to be more tentative that that. What it suggests is that fathers’ experiences during the war perhaps began a process of ‘refocusing’ among individuals which, as subsequent chapters explore, had strong echoes in the inter-war years. The term ‘refocused’, to recap, implies that there were fresh emphases and shifts in the relative importance of existing responsibilities and interests rather than any new responsibilities suddenly moving into the father’s ‘sphere of influence’.

There are, as Chapter One outlined, no existing studies of how the First World War might have had an impact on fatherhood and father-child relationships. What is offered here are thus the first conclusions to be drawn on the subject. This thesis is not concerned with the war but with fatherhood. There are many other issues related to the 1914-18 war which can be identified as being of potential relevance for an examination of fatherhood but these are too many to be given adequate attention within the scope of a PhD thesis. For example, the impact of wartime disablement on fathers seems to have been of importance but the issue is given only limited attention here. It is an avenue that would require further research that falls outside the primary focus of the thesis. It is also necessary to highlight that this chapter only briefly sketches some state and governmental responses to the challenge war posed to
families because our interest is primarily on the personal experiences of men, visible through the letters they wrote, rather than higher-level concerns.

Sources and Method.

This chapter draws on an analysis of 467 letters within 33 family groups written between 1914 and 1920. Within this, there are two distinct 'correspondence pairings' with 174 letters written between a husband and wife and 249 written between a father and his child(ren). The remaining 44 letters are between other family members, the most prominent being mother to son. The two principal 'correspondence pairs' usefully illuminate different aspects of fatherhood. For example, within letters written between husbands and wives the importance and responsibilities of the male-parent are identified because husbands and wives often discussed parenting issues (in itself interesting). Conversely, letters written between fathers and their children are useful because they illuminate more direct aspects of the father-child relationship and also can reveal affection and emotion.

The letters were not selected to be a random sample. Rather, letters were identified within the catalogue index of the Imperial War Museum (IWM) and the Scottish War Museum (SWM) as being likely to contain relevant information. It is however necessary to demonstrate that the letters written during the Great War were not simply letters written by soldiers detached from the realities of peacetime family life.

In many ways this is unproblematic because wartime enlistment swamped a small, professional army, which before 1914 recruited no more than 37,000 typically poorly educated, young and impressionable men a year, with millions of civilians.
from a spectrum of backgrounds and experiences. By the end of the war, according to J. M. Winter, the number of men who served was 5,215,162, a figure that amounted to 46.3% of the 1911 male population aged between 15 and 49 years. Research into recruitment patterns during the war has also shown that, by and large, these recruits were wholly representative of British society and certainly representative of the urban working class in which we are here interested. An initial ban on recruiting married men was, after 20 months, dropped when the Second Military Service Act extended conscription to married men in April 1916. As Beckett argues therefore, 'The army was more truly a "nation in arms" between 1914 and 1918 than before the war'. Volunteers and enlisted recruits were not soldiers but civilians in uniforms; they were sons, brothers, husbands and fathers. While the concerns of the pre-war professional army 'owed little to the values of British society', men who enlisted and who were recruited after 1914 remained attached and focused on homes, families and lives back home, 'Their values and their inspiration remained obstinately civilian'.

The issue of the socio-economic background of the letter writers is obviously important. As already stated, the selection of letters examined here was not a random sample but targeted several things, including social class. It was however not always clear what the socio-economic background of each letter writer was from the indexes. The detail given in the catalogue varied greatly. It was however often possible to ascertain class and in some cases even occupation from information within the letters and from the rank of the soldier where this information was not explicitly stated.
Not all men wrote letters home. Some men perhaps had little interest in their wives and children and were ‘only too glad to escape family, or indeed, the humdrum routine of civilian life’. The collected letters in the IWM and in the SWM eliminate such men from an analysis but the sheer volume of letters dealt with by the army postal service underlines just how common letter writing became during the war. At the start of the war, in October 1914, approximately 650,000 letters and 58,000 parcels were handled a week. Five months later that weekly figure had increased to 3 million letters and 230,000 parcels and by 1916 (by which time the army had of course significantly grown in numbers) to 11 million, and 875,000 parcels. In all, the Army Postal Service handled an estimated 2,000,000,000 letters and papers during the war. While men sometimes expressed frustration over late or delayed letters the admiration and gratitude to the postal service was immense. As Captain Alfred Bland enthused in a letter to his wife:

Do say you agree that the British PO works miracles. Here was I at ... a tiny village pub in a tiny village whose name you have never heard, and in it a letter from you. God bless the PO. Isn’t it marvellous?

Just as impressive was the frequency with which individual men wrote. While by no means representative for every man, the letter writing of Lance Corporal William Anderson (a stained-glass window worker with a wife and one young daughter) was certainly not uncommon; in December 1916 he wrote home 19 times. Similarly, Private Simms wrote to his mother in 1917 and informed her that ‘in exactly twelve months I have received 167 letters besides papers and parcels and have written 242 letters in the same time’.

The content of the letters examined in this study can be characterised as domestically orientated, making them useful for a study of ‘normal’ fatherhood.
They are full of ‘mundane’ or ‘routine’ enquiries about family life. The military censor of course made discussion of military life and events problematic.\textsuperscript{18} It is also relevant that the IWM and SWM indexes meant that the selection from which these letters were drawn had already been catalogued as ‘domestic’ or ‘family’ letters. However, there does seem to be a more important reason why the letters focused on home and family life. As Bourne argues, the amateur soldier never adopted military attitudes and ‘simply wished to return to civilian life as soon as possible’.\textsuperscript{19} Moreover, the circumstances of the war made men perhaps think about home and family life more than they ordinarily would have: ‘the dislocation of wartime experience made men yearn for the comfort and security of conventional domesticity’.\textsuperscript{20} Men perhaps discussed domestic and family matters to allay the fears of loved ones, or indeed their own fears, and could use home as a source of courage and patriotism.\textsuperscript{21} By focusing on home and family life, such men were perhaps attempting to cocoon themselves from the war and unpleasantness of military service.

As a source the wartime letters are invaluable and it is the peculiar circumstances of the war which make them useful for our interest. As Robert Roberts notes for Salford, ‘Thousands of adults who had perhaps had never before penned a single letter now felt the strongest desire to put words on paper.’\textsuperscript{22} Moreover, the letters necessarily reflected experiences that had occurred before the years of war. A letter writer’s frame of reference was not just the years of conflict but also pre-war experiences. The letters are therefore a ‘way in’ to the study of fatherhood outside the parameters of the war and wartime circumstances. It can safely be assumed that the image of fatherhood gained from the letters had its roots in Edwardian society.
Indeed, using letters as an historical source is particularly beneficial when assumptions and 'normal' life are the focus of enquiry. For example, unlike autobiography and oral history, the letters were not created for public consumption and therefore paid no attention to readership or audiences outside the family. Moreover, the letters were written at the time whereas both oral history and autobiography need to be viewed with caution because of the problems surrounding 'remembered' feelings and events. The immediacy of the letters gives a rare 'snapshot' of how men felt, what they worried about and where they felt their responsibilities lay - a 'snapshot' not coloured by hindsight or 'modern' notions of family and fatherly behaviour. Similarly, some letters offer one of the rarest gems; an insight into how children felt as children.

Of course, as historical documents the letters, like all documentary sources, need to be used with some caution. Letters conformed to literary forms and follow 'rules' of structure and convention. Misinterpreting style for content is therefore possible and dangerous. For example, focusing on the way letters were signed off - 'affectionately yours'; 'obediently yours'; 'always your obedient son' - could easily be interpreted as showing a more formal affectionate relationship but, in reality, such expressions were much-used stylistic forms. Therefore, as John Scott notes, 'interpretation requires an understanding of the particular definitions and recording practices adopted and the genre and stylisation employed in the text'.

Finally, there are further practical concerns about legibility of handwriting and some concern over the issue of why some letters have survived while others have not. Were, for example, letters which were full of emotion more likely to be saved for their sentimental value? There is an impression that daughters/wives were more
likely to keep letters than sons/fathers and also, letters showing men as bad or cruel were perhaps less readily handed over given the public access of the IWM and SW.

*Coping Without Father.*

Dad saw to all the little things, fastening the windows at night, locking the door, chopping the wood, bringing in the bucket of coal every evening, and Mum had to do all these jobs and Dad was greatly missed for that.24

Ruth Armstrong, the young daughter of a Manchester labourer, here recalls some of the practical day-to-day implications that her father’s ‘war absence’ had for her mother. Her father’s duties seem to have fallen squarely into the category of ‘masculine’ housework, which were seen as ‘appropriate’ domestic chores for men in many communities, certainly by the inter-war years.25 Conversely, however, there is no suggestion from Ruth that her mother missed her husband when looking after the children. Indeed, none of what was ‘missed’ in the home in Ruth’s memory involved childcare. If Ruth and her mother continued without their father/husband, if they ‘coped’ perfectly well, then could we perhaps conclude that his importance was questionable; perhaps he was not needed at all?26

In 1906 Helen Bosanquet, the middle-class leader of the Charity Organisation Society, outlined what she believed the father’s involvement in parenting to be:

While the woman’s mental energies are being dissipated over the thousand little details which are necessary for the successful management of a family, the man’s are free to ... concentrate on some course of action, to organise some business, to frame and follow out some policy... His authority remains, no doubt, as determining the basis of family life, and the main outlines of its movements ... If we accept the mysterious term “influence” ... we might apply it to describe the mode in which the man’s authority is normally exercised in domestic life.27
A father's 'war absence' perhaps accentuated the assumptions surrounding parenting outlined by Bosanquet. If, during peacetime, a father had little interest in the day-to-day detail of parenting then his 'war absence' perhaps made little difference. A father's absence would not have had a significant impact on the day-to-day care of his children, nor on the mother's 'burden' in administering such care. If a father had 'parented' via his wife then being absent meant that he was forced to rely on her even more. Certainly, the ability to act through the mother as a parent seems to have been more critical during the war and some men were explicit in telling their wives that their duty in looking after the children was as much for them as for the child. For example, William Anderson, who had one young daughter, wrote to his wife: 'Take good care of yourself and Toots and first think that it's me you're pleasing in so doing' and on another occasion, 'Look after Toots, and in doing that you will be doing me the greatest service possible.'

Bosanquet's assumption that the mother had the greater responsibility for the day-to-day detail of childcare is a perception which, as we have seen, lawmakers and, to a lesser degree, advocates of fathercraft often shared. While this perception must be viewed cautiously when applied to the working-class, it is a conclusion emphasised as being the experience of parenting and a taken-for-granted 'norm' of family life in this period by historians studying working-class motherhood. However, just because it was a common perception, this should not automatically lead us to conclude that fathers were uninterested in childrearing matters. The letters can be used to emphasise that even if the mother was ordinarily the parent who performed caring tasks this does not mean that the father had no 'interest or concerns' about such matters. It should not necessarily be assumed that simply
because a mother performed a parenting task that she had decided it should be done. or indeed made a conscious choice that it was her who should do it. It is however often difficult to discover what aspects of a child's life 'interested and concerned' a father in an historical context. When family life is remembered, in autobiographies and oral history for example, it tends to be action and 'incidents' which are the focus of recall and, as a result, the mother's interest dominates. When the autobiographer is male, his parenting is often a peripheral topic. This makes the First World War letters particularly useful because they provide a written account of some of the areas of children's lives in which fathers were interested.

It appears that many fathers were keen at least to be kept up-to-date with the day-to-day care their children were receiving. When husbands wrote to wives, and indeed their children, for example, requests for information were extremely common and often specific, focusing on the important years of child development. Fathers asked about illness and food intake, childcare, development and behaviour. In some cases fathers seem to have been more than just interested spectators, and actually provided input as to how their wives 'should' perform aspects of domestic care. Harold Bantin, whose son Ronnie was born while he was at the War, made a number of such references in his letters to his wife. For example, he suggested, 'don't start the bottle as it won't be good for him', and in another letter he instructed his wife to make sure she regularly took Ronnie outside because the air would be good for him. Similarly, William Anderson, whose daughter Lillian was 5 years old in 1914, wrote to his wife when Lillian was ill and suggested that 'it might be wise to keep rubbing her chest' and on another occasion that his wife should take her to the doctor. Indeed, some fathers' appetite for information
regarding their children was so great that their wives seem to have failed to satisfy them, and husbands resorted to repeated requests for information.39

Bosanquet’s suggestion that the father was the ‘overseer’ of his children’s lives and that he used his authority to guide their long-term development is perhaps useful in explaining why fathers were keen to be kept closely informed of family life. Of course, Bosanquet’s view reflects here middle-class perspective, but from the evidence of letters written during the First World War, it does appear that the ‘overseer’ idea was also the way some working-class men acted as a parent – during the war at least. By issuing advice to his child or by suggesting how his wife could best spend money or deal with the children, a man was at least partially able to maintain a place in family life during the periods of ‘war absence’. The point that needs to be emphasised is that fathers needed to keep abreast of day-to-day life in order to maintain this position of ‘influence’ as much as for personal interest. Their involvement in family life was often characterised by functions that perhaps did not necessitate direct involvement with children (being the provider took a father away from the home for example). Complete aloofness, however difficult to avoid during the war, could undermine paternal authority; men did not want changes to happen ‘behind their back’.40

Indeed, in a relevant comparable study, Sieder Reinhard has suggested that the absence of fathers in wartime Vienna sometimes meant that an ‘older son [or other male figures close to the family] moved suddenly into the position of the father … partially filling the power vacuum created by the father’s absence’.41 Even when absent therefore, in their letters fathers were sometimes explicit in asserting that they had the right to decide what happened to their children. For example, Harold Bantin
wrote in response to his wife’s letter which informed him about how the grandparents were trying to interfere with how the child was being raised that ‘NOBODY must interfere with me as regards Ronnie’.42

The government found itself in something of a contradictory position in the early period of the war. On the one hand it was keen and quick to underline the importance of the father to his family by tapping into the understanding that one of his functions was to ‘protect’ his children from ‘outside’ harm. As Susan Grayzel argues, ‘the defence of women and children, of family and honour, became one important way to define the reasons for the war on the Allied side ... and almost immediately found its way into the posters of the Parliamentary Recruiting Committee’.43 On the other hand, however, the understanding that working men were vital to their families because they were normally the primary breadwinner meant that the government was initially forced to act in a conciliatory manner towards married men. It promised to enlist bachelors first, for example.44

The idea that a father was principally responsible for provision was, as we have seen in the previous chapters, a common theme in discourses on fatherhood in this period. The reaction to recruitment by some men who had dependent children can be seen as evidence that fathers themselves regularly believed their responsibility was to provide. Some fathers would not pledge themselves to the war effort until separation allowances were paid to their families. As one Liberal MP argued in the House of Commons in 1914, the only way to achieve a ‘more speedy rally to the colours’ was if the government ‘relieved the minds of the men who, for many reasons, anxious to serve their country, have justly felt their first duty was to their home, their wives and their children’.45 Such evidence is important to highlight
because, within the current literature, it has often only been assumed that, because so much of the prescribing and perceived rhetoric said the father was to provide, that individuals shared this belief.

Certainly, taking married men away from their families proved to be controversial in the early period of recruitment. It was apparent that those with wives and children often believed that their first responsibility was not to King and Country but to making sure that family members were provided for. There were a number of organised protests by married men, demanding that the government first recruit single men. In the face of such protest, the first organised scheme for recruitment (though not yet conscription), the Derby scheme in 1915, incorporated a pledge that no married men would be considered for recruitment until there were no longer any single men left. As Arthur Marwick notes, this pledge had 'no moral or legal sanction, save perhaps loyalty to the ideal of the family unit'. 46 The importance of fathers, it seems, was at least tangentially acknowledged. 47

Susan Pedersen has argued that 'the experiment with separation allowances left its mark on post-war social policy, which gradually came to reflect more clearly the ideal of a male breadwinner and dependent wife'. 48 Certainly, for our concern, separation allowances reflected the normative assumption that the father had the responsibility and the right to provide economically for his children. However, for many individuals (in whom we are here interested) the experience of separation allowances probably did as much, if not more, to undermine the father's position as principal breadwinner as to uphold it. For example, Robert Roberts observed in Salford that 'many wives of fighting men discovered that they could manage far better on government allowances than they ever did on the breadwinner's meagre
Because the money was paid directly to women, for example, it did not vary according to a husband’s work or indeed the money he chose to hand over. Therefore, in many cases, as an investigation conducted by the Liverpool Women’s Industrial Council found, the health and care of children improved among women receiving separation allowances. This is a finding by and large substantiated by historical research. Importantly for our specific interest, the state had shown, by cutting out the uncertainties surrounding fragile labour markets and the passage of the wage from the male pocket to the household economy, that it could often be a more effective supporter of wives and children than men. It was perhaps showing itself to be often a better father - if of course the provider responsibility was seen as the exclusive defining characteristic of fatherhood in this period. If the mother could find a job, and the state could support his children, what was left for the father?

The fact that fathers were concerned about their position as economic providers during the war is backed up by evidence within the letters. Harold Bantin, whose first son, Ronnie, was born on 1st July 1917, made numerous references to material concerns when writing to his wife. These references were often explicitly financial, from an expression of relief that his wife was receiving the extra allowance when the child was born, to concern for the acquisition of material goods, such as a new cot for the baby. Harold’s first reaction to the news of his child’s birth was pride and excitement, but he soon began to worry about money, noting that he would have to cut back on other ‘extravagances’ and made references to having written, legitimated and posted his will. He quickly told his wife that she needed to go to the post office and collect the increased allowance now she had the baby. Eventually the financial situation for Harold’s wife became so bad that she was
forced to consider taking in work as a dressmaker. This greatly frustrated Harold, who perhaps keenly felt his failure as provider. When his wife suggested that she should return to work Harold wouldn’t hear of it.\footnote{57} When he finally conceded that the material needs of the family meant that his wife needed to work, it seems to have been a blow to his sense of worth as a husband and father: ‘It’s a damn shame, wait till after the war, I’ll show ‘em.’\footnote{58}

Similar frustration is apparent in the letters of William Anderson. His inability to provide adequately for his wife and young daughter resulted in his wife suggesting that she might have to move in with her parents. William’s reaction to this suggestion was uncharacteristically harsh. He sternly wrote to his wife and told her that ‘On no account let yourself or Toots go short of anything, or move our home, at least until I come home.’\footnote{59} When writing home he insisted that ‘on no account’ should his daughter ‘go short of anything’ because of his wife’s desire to send him parcels or money.\footnote{60} He refused to accept gifts sent to him and regularly encouraged his wife to save money to spend on their daughter rather than on goods for him.\footnote{61} Given the importance of small pleasures in the circumstances of war, William’s self-sacrifice is indicative evidence that part of the experience of being a provider for fathers could involve sacrifice.

Of course, and a key point, for most working-class men the switch from wages to army pay and separation allowances was a switch to an inferior income.\footnote{62} This is something George Smith (father of three), emphasised when he wrote home: ‘It says in our orders that soldiers are not compelled to contribute anything to their wives, but I am allowing you extra per day.’\footnote{63} Indeed, despite separation allowances, the evidence from the letters indicates that men were keen to continue fulfilling their
responsibility to provide by sending money home. For example, Joseph Owen, a father of five, reassured his wife that he would send her money.\textsuperscript{64} and Private J. Mudd (father of two) sent his wife money and outlined that he knew she had her ‘work cut out to keep things going’ while he was away.\textsuperscript{65} In a further letter he writes, ‘I have enquired about my money. I have only drawn 9/- in 4 weeks. They told me they had been stopping me 9/- per day, 6/- for you and 1 per day for each child, so you can guess I ‘aint got much.’\textsuperscript{66}

Fathers could even continue to please their children by the provision of gifts and treats. Those men who could afford to often sent home money or stamps to their children.\textsuperscript{67} Where this was not possible men also sent home other gifts like cigarette cards or interesting memorabilia they found.\textsuperscript{68} Sometimes these gifts were identified as a reward for a child’s particular effort,\textsuperscript{69} but mostly they were sent for no specific reason other than to give pleasure to the child. As we saw at the start of the chapter, even when Private Hogg was unable to afford a gift, he was driven to write directly to his little daughter to promise future gifts.\textsuperscript{70}

Turning now to a different area, the wife of one London labourer recalled how her friend’s husband’s enlistment had caused her trouble in parenting:

Eva Collins warned me it wouldn’t be easy to look after a family without a father. Her handsome husband had been called up some two months ago, and Eva was already having trouble with the two boys. Their teacher complained the boys were late in school, unruly and wouldn’t learn. They’d never been like that when their father was at home, said Eva. What they needed was some discipline. Too many children were running wild on the streets because the fathers were absent.\textsuperscript{71}

Paul Thompson’s oral study similarly suggests that, at least for older children of men away fighting, ‘there can be no doubt that the absence of fathers in the army gave them, as well as their mothers, unexpected liberty’.\textsuperscript{72} It seems that in these cases the
mother either could not control her children adequately alone or was less willing than her husband to try and do so. Indeed, the problem of children’s discipline when fathers were absent at war was apparent to contemporary commentators during the First World War. Rising levels of juvenile crime, for example, were sometimes explained by the fact that ‘many fathers are on active service, and often the unruly boy who roams the streets and is open to all their temptations is not very amenable to a mother’s discipline’.

The suggestion was that fathers were most responsible for instilling obedience in their children and that, conversely, mothers alone were unable to control unruly children.

Such an interpretation is backed up by evidence within the First World War letters. A number of men’s wives indicate their reliance on their husband in controlling their children. Agnes Anderson, for example, regularly wrote to inform her husband William about the misbehaviour of their young daughter Lillian, and not infrequently, showed a desperate tone:

Lillian is crying again and you never heard such a noise... I had to smack her for she is getting such a [pest]. I shall be thankful when I have your help with her for I do not want her to get spoiled.

By way of response, William often showed concern with his daughter's misbehaviour and instructed his wife to tell the child that he’ll ‘be annoyed if she doesn’t behave, and so make it easier for you’. Similarly, as we saw at the start of this chapter, W. Hogg wrote to his young daughter and told her she must behave while he was away. W. Hogg demanded some very precise things and it seems very likely that his wife had informed him about what their daughter had done. Whether a wife wrote to her husband about a child’s misbehaviour with the explicit hope that he would write in return to discipline a child is impossible to know but it does seem that
some wives turned to their husbands in such cases. And, once furnished with the information about a child’s action, fathers seem to have felt compelled to try and discipline their children, even from afar, reflecting perhaps how acutely they saw their importance for discipline. This does not necessarily suggest that the father was therefore the parent most often administering the punishment, but rather that he was the parent of whom children were more fearful and was a useful ‘last resort’ for mothers.  

Other aspects of parenting which, as previous chapters have shown, and according to some ‘discourses’, a father might be expected to perform, were more satisfactorily fulfilled by letter writing. For example, reflecting what the fathercraft movement and judges later came to stress in the inter-war years, some fathers in the war era seem to have believed that they had an important function in educating their children about ‘public’ life. It was part of their responsibility to ensure their children – especially sons – were prepared for the outside world. While the enforced ‘war absence’ made this difficult, it seem to have not been impossible. One key aspect was education.

Private Arthur Butling had four children at the time of the war. There were two older sons (George who was 13 and Eric who was 11 years old in 1914), a daughter, Grace, (who was 7 in 1914) and a ‘new baby’, Ben, who was just 2 when the war broke out. In many letters to his older sons Arthur encouraged or demanded ‘acceptable’ levels of effort in their schooling. For example, he wrote to his oldest son George that, ‘I am expecting you and Eric to be especially helpful, obedient and kind’ and that he ‘hope[s] you will do better next time in your arithmetic’. Arthur seems to have been particularly keen to comment on his sons’ progress at school.
because he felt he had to prepare them for the ‘outside’ world. In one letter to Eric he wrote that, ‘Of course you know it is essential in these days of keen competition to know something about figures and how to grapple with them’. Arthur obviously felt a responsibility to be involved in such matters. Even though absent from home he did not leave such a matter to his wife. There is of course no way of knowing if his wife was also keen to police school work and good behaviour but it does seem to have been Arthur’s greater knowledge of the outside world and the world of work which made him particularly well ‘qualified’ to advise his sons. His concern for his sons’ future career prospects is evident, and many times Arthur encourages, or demands, that either Eric or George try hard, and do their best at school.

William Haines had been a labourer at a Worthing (Sussex) factory. He wrote to his son on the occasion of his [son’s] first day at a new job. He wrote that, ‘The most essential duties [sic.] to steadfastly adhere to when starting your battle with life, that is earning your livelihood, is “Punctuality”, “Obedience” and “curiosity”… let those be the watchwords in your future life.’ William seemed to see this advice as more than just a few casual words, as he continued to write, ‘Do not destroy these few humble words of advice, for in a few years to come when you attain manhood, you will think of your father’s words.’ Such a concern for a son’s job, rather than education performance was, as the next chapter explores more fully with more appropriate evidence, something of which working-class fathers felt personally responsible. It was perhaps expected that a father would involve himself in his son’s occupation, while the expectation surrounding interest in schooling was less.

Fathers not only concerned themselves with advice about school and work, but also about ‘decent’ and ‘manly’ behaviour. Arthur Butling, clearly a religious
man, peppered the letters to his two oldest sons with such ‘advice’. He outlined his hope that his eldest, George, might take on more responsibility while he was away: ‘lead the others also in a channel which is both safe and sound alike in principle and deed’. 85 Other ‘advice’ reflected a visibly Christian ethos; ‘Be bright and cheerful always, and always truthful, honest and industrious … I always hope you will keep dear to God and trust Him, love and Fear him. This may not sound much to you now, but you will think more of it in years to come’. 86 It is clear that such comment in letters was more than mere ‘page filling’, and was to be taken seriously by his sons. Arthur believed he was being a responsible parent by giving his sons such advice, commenting in one letter to Eric, ‘You will find in George’s letter council [sic] that will probably be also useful to you’.87

Becoming a Stranger? The War and the Father-Child Relationship.

For individual father-child relationships the impact of ‘war absence’ could be devastating. In arguing that the circumstances of war forced a ‘refocusing’ of fatherhood, it is the geographic distance between children and their fathers which is of course at the centre. For fathers, there was the possibility of returning home to find themselves strangers to their children and also the realisation that their children had changed and grown. Men of course returned home on leave, but no doubt it was often a surprise that little babies fathers had kissed goodbye to had developed into quizzical infants. As Ruth Armstrong, the young daughter (c. 7 years old) of a serviceman, recalled, ‘Things had changed, even the most mundane aspects of life….My dad didn’t like to come back and see us altered and growing up … He still thought he was going to come back and see two children.’88
Within the letters there is a clear sense that fathers feared growing apart from their children, worrying about missing their development and being ‘forgotten’ by them. William Anderson, who had one young daughter, wrote to his wife that, ‘I like reading of Toots’ progress and I can quite imagine that she is most interesting. I do wish all were right again and I was at home to see our youngster coming along, which is as it should be. I know I am the loser by being away from home at such an interesting time in her life.’ Harold Bantin asked his wife in a letter, ‘Do you think I will know Sonny when I come up, has his hair grown longer, if so he’ll have to have it cut.’ John Wilson wrote to his daughter Jessie and told her not to expect to recognise him when he returned home for leave; ‘You’ll know a difference on your old dadda. Hair getting very grey all over.’

In this context, letters were of great importance for maintaining links between fathers and their children. In his study of Irish migrants to Australia during the nineteenth century David Fitzpatrick has suggested that letters were a ‘token of solidarity and an instrument of reassurance, confirming the durability of long-established familial groups’. The huge numbers of letters written suggest that this is a valid interpretation for wartime. Certainly, within the letters examined there are numerous requests for photographs of children and for updates on children’s progress from wives. Photographs seem to have been of particular importance to men. They could, as John Wilson (father of two older daughters) exemplifies, stir emotional responses; ‘I am delighted with the photo and will keep it with me always. It gave me a sore feeling, so much that I could not have spoken had I wanted to.’ Where the father wrote directly to his children there were many questions and discussions about growth and physical changes. For example, A. P. Gibbons
(occupation unknown) wrote to his son (approx. 12 years old) to ask about the baby's progress; 'Does Ruth walk yet? She will like anything by the time I come home.'95 Indeed, the desire for contact with children is underlined by Ernest Williams, who had a daughter of 5 years and a son of 12 years in 1914. He became very exasperated by his 12 years old son's (Harold) disinterest in writing to him. When there was apparently no increased letter writing from Harold, Ernest wrote to his daughter and resorted to threats, 'Tell that brother Harold old sport that he must send me more letters or I will spank him on his BT when he comes to Newark.'96

Physical changes in children during a father's 'war absence' were significant given that their age (which of course meant stage of physical development) often dictated the ways a father could 'appropriately' interact with them. This theme is given more detailed discussion in the next Chapter, but there is evidence in the letters that some fathers' concern for their children growing up while they were absent was related to the waxing and waning of father-child interaction age brought.

For example, some fathers seem to have not wanted their younger children to 'grow up' before they had chance to enjoy innocent play. Ernest Williams, from Bingley in Yorkshire, wrote to his daughter (who was c.7 years old) on a number of occasions referring to such innocent interaction. Within his letters Ernest made references to his daughter growing whilst continuing to emphasise that they could still have fun together: 'Mother says you are growing fast; won't it take me a long time to bath you when I come home ... oh we will have some fun. And I shall still be able to carry you on my back.'97

What is also illuminating in such comments is that Ernest is referring to interaction between himself and his child that have already happened. The evidence
is illuminating because it refers to things that were apparently often done, and enjoyed. Certainly the memory of playing with his daughter appears to have been of some comfort to Ernest Williams during his time away fighting.

On another occasion he wrote, ‘mother tells me your [sic] growing so big that she has to make 2 new dresses for you – never mind how big you grow I will put you on my shoulders when I come home because I am getting such a strong daddy… Oh we will have some fun, just like we used to.’\textsuperscript{98} Clearly Williams wanted to return home and be able to enjoy playing with his daughter like he had before the war, and this is of course in itself illuminating. As she grew, however, the appropriateness of such interaction became increasingly suspect. When it came to bathing his daughter (something he refers to as having done often) there is one particularly illuminating comment; ‘When I give you a bath I will remember to put your shirt I mean chemise on before I lift you out.’\textsuperscript{99} It is impossible to say why he makes this comment but given that his daughter has matured from a five-year-old into a seven-year-old, awareness of how appropriate it would be for him to see his naked child seems plausible. It seems William, as he writes to his daughter on her seventh birthday, wants to return to the daughter he left in 1914; ‘Fancy, she is 7 years old – she must be getting a big girl now and I cannot say little girl anymore, but if she grows as big as a horse she will always be her daddy’s own loved girlie.’\textsuperscript{100}

Another indication that many of the fathers within the evidence enjoyed good relationships with their children and were keen to maintain them was the numerous apologies and excuses for tardy or infrequent letter writing. Many of the letters reflect worry among fathers that their children might have felt forgotten. A. P. Gibbons, for example, wrote a letter to his son saying that he had no particular news
but wanted to be in touch because he had not written for so long. Arthur Butling always outlined how he enjoyed his two sons’ letters and often wrote comments such as ‘please do not think any less of me’ when apologising for not writing more often himself. And even more explicitly on one occasion, ‘I dare say you wonder why I don’t write but truth to tell I am very busy and love you just as much.’

Given the casualty rates of the war receiving no letter could easily be interpreted as an injury or death to the father, causing anxiety for children, as Elsie Oman recalled during her father’s (a labourer on Manchester canals) absence: ‘At the end of June a letter came from Dad. What a relief! It had been seven months since the last one.’ Indeed, Fitzpatrick has noted for nineteenth-century Irish migrants to Australia that long periods of silence were often interpreted as indication of death and fuelled reproaches and the need for an apology.

As we saw in the letters of Ernest Williams, the thought of family and children could offer men great comfort, and certainly post-war family life was a focus for many of the letter writers. William Anderson described how his daughter’s ‘funny little sayings’ were a comfort and wrote to his wife that ‘The prospect of seeing you and Toots is the one big thing in life these days.’ In a similar tone, W. Macdonald wrote to his wife that, ‘The thought of you and Sonny make me persevere, and makes things even bearable.’

For a small number of cases men became fathers for the first time while absent at the War. The short-lived bar on recruiting married men, plus deeper desires for marriage before it was ‘too-late’, meant that there was a rush to marry in the early years of the war. As Roberts has observed, ‘1915 held the palm for the highest number taking to matrimony ever recorded in Great Britain’. Although it has been
shown that the war witnessed a decline in the birth rate (continuing pre-war trends)\textsuperscript{108} the high number of marriages in 1915 nonetheless probably meant that the babies born were often to men away fighting. Therefore, a concern for new fathers was not just growing apart from their children but concern over the paternity of newly arrived children. Humphries and van Emden found from their oral history study of the British domestic front during the First World War that soldiers often feared for the fidelity of their wives.\textsuperscript{109} Certainly, there was considerable 'official' concern over the fidelity of servicemen wives. Wives' morals – which basically meant temperance and chastity – were tightly policed by the state.\textsuperscript{110} Between October 1916 and March 1920, for example, the Statutory Commission and Ministry of Pensions investigated over 40,000 women for various accusations of 'misconduct', resulting in 13,000 of them having their separation allowances terminated.\textsuperscript{111}

Concern for paternity or 'ownership' of newly born children comes across strongly in the letters of Harold Bantin, whose son Ronnie was born while he was away fighting, and he made many references to how his son resembles him. In one letter he wrote for example that, 'So our baby is still a good boy, I tell you, he takes after his father'\textsuperscript{112} and in another letter writes, 'Sonny has got Daddy's brown eyes, lovely colour that'.\textsuperscript{113} Moreover, and causing a deeper questioning of the importance of the father, other male relatives or friends could step in as 'father-substitutes'. For example, in a letter from his eldest son George, Arthur Butling is informed that his two-year old baby son had become very fond of an 'Uncle Tom' and would go looking for him whenever he was not around.\textsuperscript{114} The presence of such men perhaps
provoked the question of what it was that the father specifically – as opposed to other adult men - did for his children.

Concern for the ‘paternity’ of children was rare and should not be exaggerated. It also requires a degree of historical interpretation and is principally relevant to men who had children born during the war.

Much more common in the letters is the basic fact that fathers seem to have greatly missed their children. For example, Arthur Butling missed specific things, such as snowball fights and swimming with his sons. A. P. Gibbons similarly referred to activity such as swimming and play. William Anderson wrote that ‘I am glad Toots will be happy and sing when I come home, I’ll be happy to hear her ... I’d enjoy Toots singing, God willing.’ Indeed, one cosy description of home life emerges from a letter written to his young daughter by Arthur Butling: ‘Be comfortable in daddy’s chair. Some day I shall be able to sit in it by the fire and talk to you, shall I not [?]. And you will be able to talk to me, I am sure you have a lot to tell me.’ This of course indicates that Arthur had an interest in the day-to-day life of his daughter, an important point given that historians who have looked at Edwardian fatherhood have sometimes been reluctant to acknowledge such concern.

We can also examine some evidence that indicates how children experienced a father’s war absence. Some evidence highlights the marginal importance of fathers in some children’s lives. Jane Walsh, the daughter of an Oldham iron-dresser, recalled for example:

Father joined a Lancashire regiment, and fought in France... We missed him of course – but to be honest, there was much more peace and quiet in our household when he was away. Money came in regularly, and rations
– as they did in the Second World War – raised our standard of eating just as much as they lowered that of others.120

In other oral and documentary accounts however, there are certainly remembered feelings of loss: ‘He picked me up against him and put his arms round me and held me tight to him and he kissed my cheeks ... and that was the last I ever saw of him.’121 Similarly, others recall pining for their father when he was away. ‘I missed my dad so much - I used to cry every night for him and I used to say a little prayer and ask God to send him back.’122 In writing to their husbands, a number of wives informed them that their children were missing them. William Anderson commented in one letter, for example, that ‘I feel awfully sorry about poor little Toots missing me so much’123 and in another letter that ‘I hope you had a good night and I trust Toots has picked up some, and didn’t feel too disappointed at finding me gone in the morning, poor little girl.’124 Similarly, Private Fielder wrote to his wife Nell, ‘So the boy woke up crying for me. I suspect he will soon get used to not seeing me at home.’125 And Arthur Butling reassured his son Eric, ‘I know you won’t want me to leave when I come home.’126 Similarly, older children who wrote directly to their fathers also expressed their sense of loss at their absence. The daughter of William Hooper wrote to her father and often made reference to missing him. She was clearly aware of the importance her letters played in her father’s life. ‘you would much rather have me write in pencil than not at all.’127 She anticipates his return on leave, ‘I am very much excited about you coming home and as you are coming home I shall not go away with Grandma and Grandpa as I was, as I thought you would like me to be at home.’128

In remembered childhoods the letters from a father seem to have occupied an important place. One author, recalling little about her father’s wartime absence did
however write that ‘where dad fought in the war I do not remember now, but he wrote home regularly’. Gifts and sentimental messages were also important, in effect keeping the father at the forefront of the child’s mind. Daisy England, the daughter of a London labourer, recalls that ‘Letters from my father arrived at intervals, cards too with sentimental messages worked in silk, handkerchiefs and the like with regimental badge or the most recently sacked town garishly immortalised souvenir-style by the ever present opportunity.’

Such tokens of affection are indeed common within the letters analysed here. The letter quoted at the start of this chapter, by H. Hogg, for example is as much a gift in itself as a way of communicating, being written on paper with a beautiful ribbon border. In Appendix TWO are letters written by Private Wise to his young daughter. Although his occupation is unclear, such illustrated letters are a good example of a ‘type’ which were not an uncommon feature of the letters fathers wrote to their children. Wise’s letters make light of any danger he could be in (notice the cartoon explosion and reference to the whistle of shells as ‘music’) and are perhaps good examples of the way a ‘letter’ sent home could be a sentimental gift, personalised (to ‘curly wig’) and specific to a child. Such illustrated letters were by no means rare and served to outline to children that their father had not forgotten them and was thinking about them. Such tokens from their father were often kept by children, indicating further that they had deep sentimental meaning: ‘You are keeping all my letters evidently, my dear sweet child — you are a darling.’

However, we need to show some caution as to how we interpret such sentimental gifts and expressions of emotion during the War. Not all children expected their fathers to be emotional and were perhaps uncomfortable with them.
being so. For example, Daisy England indicated this when recalling her reaction to her father's emotional letters and regular gifts:

These tokens puzzled me, remembering the man I knew. Perhaps in the constant company of sudden death, gunfire and hailing bullets he did feel a tenderness for us, which deserted him on the quiet streets of home. Or did the legendary indescribable hell of the trenches falsify emotions?\textsuperscript{135}

For Daisy, the letters and gifts from her father revealed a side of his feelings that she had no idea existed, making them strange and puzzling. The war, in this case, perhaps created a different emotional relationship between father and daughter because it intensified emotions. Her father's lucid expressions of affection and tokens of affection were not seen as 'normal' behaviour. When he returned from the war, the peculiarity of the wartime correspondence was obvious because he was nothing like the emotionally expressive and loving letters he had sent Daisy: 'For several days we must have enjoyed the home life of a happy family, but gradually a tension and a quietness which was not of tranquillity took over, deliberating speech and action. This then was my father. In smouldering grievances he had drunk himself into a murderous state of intoxication to avenge his resentment of shackling domesticity.'\textsuperscript{136}

This begs an important question as to how far the circumstances of war made men more emotional in their relationships with their children. Joanna Bourke has suggested that 'the omnipresence of death enabled emotions'.\textsuperscript{137} Moreover, the ability to write down feelings rather than speak them may well have been important in any rise in emotional expression. Did the war create circumstances in which the father acted in a way that he ordinarily would have not done? Were there consequences for being more emotionally expressive when fathers returned home?
There are certainly letters within the collection analysed here which contain a level of emotional expression which would have been unlikely in 'normal' circumstances. When men were close to death, or on the eve of battle or in hospital, the outpourings were often intense. An extreme but illustrative example is that of F. H. Gautier (a docker) who wrote to his young daughter on his deathbed. The letter is a touching 'farewell' and expression of fatherly love. He writes, 'My letter is written in grief, I had hoped to spend many happy years with you after the war was over... I am writing because I want for you after years to know how dearly I loved you.'138 Other letters were written to babies or very young children; clearly not for them to read in the present. For example, Harold Bantin wrote a postcard to his two month old son and later explains to his wife in a letter; 'I am glad you like the PC I sent Ronnie. I knew it would be the first PC he would have. He will be able to read it when he gets a man.'139

The pertinent question in all such correspondence is whether the author would ever have expressed (or even felt) such feelings to their children in normal circumstances and if not, how far the change during war had any long-term impact. Although there are of course important variations, it would seem that the emotional expression of pre-war working-class fathers was perhaps more muted than the letters suggest. This is not to argue they were not actively involved or did not love their children, but rather that expressing such love could be hard, and indeed inappropriate for men. David Vincent has argued that emotional expression was rare among the working class in the nineteenth century for example.140 After the war we do seem to see an increased 'focus' on the emotional bond between father and child, especially, as we have seen, within the fathercraft movement. It is impossible to draw a direct
correlation between an increase in emotional expression during the war and an increased post-war emphasis on such expression within the father-child relationship. However, the experience of wartime seems certainly to have had an impact on the way individual men thought about their children, even if it was only short-lived.

While letters had great importance for the father-child relationship, and while they forced men to write about their feelings and attachment more explicitly than usual, there is of course evidence that ‘war absence’ did jeopardise the father-child relationship. Edith Hill, who was six at the outbreak of the First World War, wrote that ‘I did not see my dark-haired upright daddy again for three and a half years… and when I did, I called him “mister”’. ¹⁴¹ Indeed, a relevant, comparable experience from the Second World War outlines just how significant a father’s absence could be. Geordie Todd, a fisherman from North Shields, was away for three years without leave:

I don’t think he was quite three year old when I was called up for service and when I came home from abroad he was six or seven and he didn’t know me, he didn’t recognise me. At first, when he saw us on Newcastle Station he was shouting, “Which is me dad?”… He thought I was an interloper, I was coming in between him and his mama and he couldn’t see why I should, ‘cos he had been with his mother all these years. It grieved me terrible.¹⁴²

Geordie often came close to giving up trying to re-establish the relationship with his son, becoming frustrated and depressed¹⁴³ but eventually they grew close again – the catalyst for reconciliation being swimming lessons. His example indicates the real danger ‘war absence’ had for the father-child relationship. In order to repair such damage in the inter-war years, men were perhaps forced to act in a more involved or direct way with their children. Moreover, a father’s ‘war absence’ also forced the mother to take on a greater and unchallenged position in the child’s world – both in

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term of affection and the interaction with the child, but also in terms of parenting responsibilities, and this too could have longer-term implications.

**Conclusion.**

This chapter has offered an analysis of the wartime experience of a specific group of fathers (recruited servicemen) within only a few years of the period under review in this thesis. Any conclusions can therefore only be tentative. Moreover, as has been stressed, the war offered a unique set of circumstances that placed stresses on the father-child relationships and this makes it inappropriate to broaden out the conclusions from this evidence on to ‘normal’ family circumstances in the period.

However, a father’s absence during the war does provide at least a good indication of some aspects of the level and nature of his involvement as a parent. From the cases examined in this chapter we can tentatively conclude that fathers were not peripheral to family life or even childrearing in many families in the war years or in the pre war years – a conclusion which is at odds with the one often been put forward in the current literature.\textsuperscript{144} We have, for example, seen evidence that suggests that the father was often important for discipline within the home and also, that there is good evidence that the provider function was expected of the male parent - and not just, as we have seen, a prescribed function from ‘outside’ the family. We can even tentatively suggest that fathers were often interested in childrearing which was, as the previous chapters have outlined, not ‘traditionally’ seen as their concern. Men in these cases enquired about babies, their child’s health and even the routines of a growing child’s day. For many wives in these cases, the father occupied an important component in the parenting team – a finding that makes
us immediately question the 'mother-centric' emphasis of family life in much of the current literature.

Yet family life certainly did not descend into 'crisis' when fathers were absent during the war. Separation allowances often provided an adequate substitute for the male's wage, even if there was typically a drop in the amount. As Susan Pedersen outlines, it was only agricultural labourers who enjoyed a comparable income from allowances to wages. While there were perhaps a few areas of concern for mothers, such as discipline, the evidence suggests that lone mothers probably had few problems as a lone parent. Moreover, we have seen that the 'continuity' in family life was in part possible precisely because many of the expectations surrounding a father's conduct as a parent could be fulfilled, at least adequately, by letter writing. The wartime letters perhaps therefore add evidence to the conclusion that a father could fulfil his expected functions without having to be physically present. This in turn might be interpreted as further evidence for the conclusion put forward by Ellen Ross and others that men were marginal to family life.

Perhaps most illuminating however has been the evidence which points to a strong and often affectionate relationship between fathers and their children in these cases. While there is a valid question mark over how far this was perhaps a 'creation' of the extremes of war, the references to pre-war activity indicates that it was probably more than this. Given that the First World War is often presented as a 'watershed' in parent-child relationships among the working class, this conclusion seems more valid and, indeed, important. For example, Robert Roberts notes in his observations on Salford that it was after the war that 'the gulf that had stood so long
between parent and child began to narrow at last ... parents were less authoritarian and closer to their children’ after the war.146

Despite the tentative nature of these conclusions, this chapter has an important place in the overall argument being suggested in this thesis. That is, during the period between 1900 and 1939 fatherhood and the general experience of conduct of fathers underwent some elements of ‘refocusing’ which began to shift expectations. Within this argument the war seems to occupy an important place. It is clear that, while often hard to identify, and certainly not necessarily dramatic or permanent, the war probably did have an important longer-term impact on fatherhood and the conduct of fathers. Some specific outcomes seem immediately relevant, as Chapter One outlined. For example, Seth Koven suggests that ‘the experience of war bitterly reimposes [sic.] on wounded male soldiers the dependence, but not the innocence, of childhood’.147 Being a dependant, rather than a breadwinner, was the very antithesis of what many discourses, and personal accounts (as we shall further see), believed it meant to be a father.148 As Humphries and van Emden comment, ‘Young children, born just before the war, hardly knew their fathers except through letters and the odd leave from the front.’149 Many wives and children had to adjust to men again, being in the house, many of them who were short-tempered and ill. ‘Without a father figure, some children had been able to run wild and now resented having their freedoms curtailed.’150

Yet it would be rash to see the war as a watershed for ‘change’ in the history of fatherhood. It is probably more accurate to suggest that the war did not in itself create permanent change to fatherhood – leaving aside the immediate and permanent change enforced on disabled veterans – but rather that it created a situation in which
fatherhood was scrutinised, and the assumptions surrounding the father's importance both inside (as we shall see) and outside (as we have seen) the family were questioned. Therefore, while it is not being argued that the First World War was a rigid watershed, or should be seen as a chronological marker between traditional and 'new' ideas about fathers and fatherhood, it is suggested that it began a process that grew in importance during the inter-war years.

1 W. Hogg. May 1917, IWM 95/6/1.
4 Autobiographies and some oral history accounts are also used here. For a full discussion of the use of these sources see Chapter Five.
5 A small number of letters were also found at the Lancashire Records Office.
8 See for example, P. Dewey, 'Military Recruitment and the British Labour Force During the First World War', The Historical Journal, 27 (1) 1984; I. Beckett, 'The British Army, 1914-18: The Illusion of Change', in J. Turner (ed.) Britain and the First World War, (London: 1988); J. Bourne, 'British Working Man in Arms'; J. M. Winter, The Great War and the British People, Chapter 2. There were some variations, such as the tendency of the unemployed to enlist quickly in the early part of the war and the fact that trades and industries (such as coal) important to the war effort also gave-up, over all, fewer men. This reflected the importance of the trades to the war and not the willingness of the men working in these trades to enlist. However, for our concern, over the four years there was no massive skewing of those who enlisted and were recruited.
9 G. DeGroot, Blighty, pp.94-8.
12 Ibid., p.340.
14 J. Bourke, Dismembering the Male, p.21.
16 Bland, Captain A. E., IWM Con Shelf.

18 The censors forbade mention of where letters were written, military plans, defensive works, troop organisation and numbers, morale and physical conditions of the troops, details of armaments, casualty numbers and criticism of operations, J. Bourke, _Dismembering the Male_, p.22.


20 J. Bourke, _Dismembering the Male_, p.21.


24 Ruth Armstrong, quoted in R. van Emden and S. Humphries, _All Quiet on the Home Front_, p.31.

25 J. Bourke, _Working Class Cultures_, pp.81-9. This point is discussed in more detail in the next chapter.

26 Of importance here are the ‘silences’ in the letters. That is, there is value in emphasising the areas of parenting that were not mentioned in letters between husbands and wives. Aspects of the child’s life that did not cause wives to comment in letters – areas they were silent about – can, with care, be inferred as evidence that the father had insufficient involvement to warrant attention.


28 William Anderson, 3rd October 1916; also letter dated 11th October 1916, _IWM 96/24 I_.

29 _Ibid.,_ 27th June 1916.

30 For example, E. Roberts, _A Woman’s Place_; E. Ross, _Love and Toil_. Even these studies fail to examine the relative extent of the father’s participation in childcare by looking at how their wives ‘coped’ during the war.


32 ‘I am very sorry to hear the poor kiddie is queer’, George Smith, September 29th 1914, _IWM 93/25/1_; ‘Poor old tummy Harold, glad you are better. Tummy ache is nasty ‘aint it. Don’t eat a lot of sweets, eat your meals without hurrying, digest every mouthful’, Ernest Williams, 22nd March 1917, _IWM Con/Shefl_; ‘Mummy tells me in the letter that your cold is getting better. I am glad to hear it’. B. J. Fielder, 15th August 1914, _IWM Con/Shefl_. William Anderson suggests his wife tried to find some apples for daughter as these are more healthy, 19th April 1917, _IWM 96/24/1_.

33 ‘I am sorry to hear the kiddies have got colds. If you knew where to go you could get medicine and advice free’, George Smith, November 27th 1914, _IWM 93/25/1_; ‘Fancy giving Ronnie wood to suck’, Harold Bantin, 5th August 1917, _IWM Con/Shefl_.

34 ‘I’m glad Toots has got her backward tooth’, William Anderson, 6th December 1916, _IWM 96/24/1_; _Ibid.,_ 21st September 1916; Harold Bantin asks if his baby son has been crying all weekend, 10th July 1917, _IWM Con/Shefl_.

35 Harold Bantin, 20th August 1917, _IWM Con/Shefl_.

36 _Ibid.,_ 19th August 1916. In the summer Harold suggests his wife keeps Ronnie inside, ‘Don’t take baby out if it’s too cold, it won’t do him any good’, 18th October 1917.

37 William Anderson 9th February 1916, _IWM 96/24/1_.

38 _Ibid._ 14th October 1916. Like Harold, William also encouraged his wife to take their child outside and to keep her warm and covered up, and not to venture out if the weather was bad. See letters dated 12th February, 24th February.

39 ‘Tell me how you and Toots are, if the colds are better’, William Anderson, 12th July 1916, _IWM 96/24/1_ (emphasis in original). William showed delight when his wife finally did provide requested information, _Ibid._ 11th December 1916.

40 Joanna Bourke argues that some soldiers felt that changes (in terms of gender relations) had happened behind their back when they returned home after the war, _Dismembering the Male_, p.23, Chapter 4.

41 S. Reinhard, ‘Behind the Lines: Working-Class Family Life in wartime Vienna’, in R. Wall and J M. Winter (eds.) _The Upheaval of War. Family, Work and Welfare in Europe, 1914-1918_. (Cambridge: 1988), p. 116. Perhaps in an attempt to avoid this, some fathers seem to have explicitly encouraged their sons to take on more authority and responsibility. In his letters to his eldest son George, for example, Arthur Butling commented that ‘as you are the eldest I naturally look toward..."
you to protect her [his mother, Arthur’s wife] and to be guardian to both her and the others’. Arthur Butling, 25th February 1919, IWM Con/Shelf.

42 Harold Bantin, 29th August 1917, IWM Con/Shelf.

43 S. Grayzel, Women and the First World War, (London: 2002), pp.9-10. It was no co-incidence, for example, that one of the most persistently reported and elaborated atrocities allegedly performed by the German military involved the rape of women and the murder of babies in Belgium.

44 G. DeGroot, Blighty.


46 A. Marwick, The Deluge, p.117.

47 The scheme had been established on a voluntary basis and failed to meet the nation’s military needs. Even after the deadline for attesting had been extended by two weeks, over a million single men of military age had ignored Derby’s appeal. The Second Military Service Act extended conscription to married men.


51 Harold Bantin, 1st August 1917, IWM Con/Shelf.

52 Ibid., 1st July 1917.

53 For example, Harold Bantin, 21st and 24th June 1917, IWM Con/Shelf.

54 Harold Bantin to his wife, 20th July 1917.

55 Ibid., 7th, 9th September 1917. It should be noted that men were encouraged to prepare a will, especially before major battles.

56 Harold Bantin, 24th June 1917, IWM Con/Shelf.

57 ‘Don’t you talk about starting work yet, I won’t hear of it’, Ibid., 24th July 1917. Either way, Harold was acutely aware of the fact that it ’should’ be him who provided for the family. Similarly, William Anderson wrote to his wife that he wished he was home so that his wife would ’not have to think about earning money’, William Anderson, letter to his wife, 12th February 1916, IWM 96/24/1.

58 Harold Bantin to his wife, 23rd August 1917.

59 William Anderson, 5th July 1917, IWM 96/24/1.

60 Ibid. See also ibid., 11th October 1916. The need for William to prevent his wife sending him things was a recurrent theme in his letters. His wife seems to have stubbornly refused to bow to this wish. William suggested that his wife’s insistence on sending him goods they could ill afford was due to ‘the amazing inconsistency of women in love’, William Anderson to his wife, 7th December 1916 96/24/1.

61 ‘I think you are stretching yourself sending these parcels and I believe it would be wiser to get yourself bacon etc. Especially since Toots so much enjoys it’. William Anderson to his wife, 9th February 1916, IWM ‘Family’/ 96/24/1. Indeed, William writes soon afterwards to his wife that he was glad (really glad) to find you hadn’t encloped any money’. 24th February 1916, IWM ‘Family’ 96/24/1.


63 G. S. Smith, September 29th 1914, IWM 93/25/1.

64 ‘I shall send you some money as soon as I can and as much as I can darling wife’. Joseph Owen, 12th May 1917, LRO, DDX1872/1.

65 J. Mudd, 22nd October 1917, IWM 82/3/1.

66 Ibid., 27th November 1917.

67 For example, ‘I am sending you a penny in this letter for yourself to spend at the toy shop’. B.J. Fielder, 15th August 1914, IWM Con/Shelf. In a letter to her father, a daughter of c.12 years old even explained what she would like for Christmas, despite him being at the front, ‘I would like for my christ-mas [sic.] present, if you could get me, a little ring or necklace, from France’, William Hooper, November 18th 1918, IWM Miscellaneous 687.

68 For example, in a letter dated October 1st 1916, George Butling (son) thanked his father for the dragonflies and cigarette cards he had sent. Arthur Butling IWM Con/Shelf. In a letter to his father, Philip Gibbons thanks him for sending swan feathers and comments that if his father sends more he will make a swan model, A. P. Gibbons, IWM 86/36/1.
...It gives me great pleasure to send them to you. I hope you will continue your pleasing efforts and get top in your class if you can in all subjects’, Arthur Butling to his son Edward, Arthur Butling, 4th April 1917, IWM Con/Shelf.

69 W. Hogg, May 1917, IWM 95/6/1.

70 M. Powell, My Children and I, p.127.

71 P. Thompson, The Edwardians, p.281.

72 'The Bad Boys', The Times, 3rd Feb 1916, p. 5. Other reasons given for a rise in juvenile crime included the decline in police patrolling and the fact that police were less threatening than in peacetime, the dark streets giving more opportunity for crime, and the general excitabale atmosphere of the war.

73 William Anderson, 22nd April 1917, IWM 96/2/4/1.

74 ‘Sorry to read of Toots being bad again, and I hope she will get over these indispositions soon’. Ibid., 6th December 1916, IWM 96/2/4/1.

75 W. Hogg to his daughter, May 1917, IWM 95/6/1.

76 E. Ross, Love and Toil, p.192-9. This is discussed further in Chapter Five.

77 It is hard to gauge Butling’s occupation from the letters and there is certainly a sense that he was probably upper working-class given that has was a private and that the letters contain comments that suggest Arthur was from the working class – his house and friends’ occupations for example. His religiosity and concern for his children’s academic performance therefore probably indicate an upper working-class man.

78 Arthur Butling, IWM Con/Shelf. See also for example, ‘I hope you will continue your pleasing efforts and get top in your class if you can in all subjects’. Ibid.

80 Ibid.

81 Concern for a child’s schooling is common. For example, ‘Good boy to send such a well written letter … Stick to your school and sums’, Ernest Williams, 21st November 1916 IWM Con/Shelf: ‘Oh how glad I am to hear that you have been moved up, that means you have done excellently with lessons during last term’, ibid.

82 It is unclear what the job is, but it seems to be with in some kind of manufacturing firm.

83 William Haines, 15th March 1915, IWM 98/2/1.

84 Ibid.

85 Arthur Butling, 25th February 1919, IWM Con/Shelf [emphasis in original]. Instructing children to ‘look after’ their mother (by not misbehaving for example) was common, and certainly not just instruction given to boys. For example, John Wilson wrote to his two daughters Jessie (15 in 1914) and Helmie (12 in 1914), ‘Mind you take care of her [mother] until I return. Try not to worry her but love her very much’, John Wilson, 28th March 1915, SWM.

86 Arthur Butling, 13th May 1917, IWM Con/Shelf.

87 Arthur Butling, 28th February 1919, IWM Con/Shelf.

88 R. van Emden and S. Humphries, All Quiet on the Home Front, p.305.

89 William Anderson, 12th February 1916, IWM 96/24/1.

90 Harold Bantin, 29th July 1917, IWM Con/Shelf.

91 John Wilson Letters, SWM.


93 For example, ‘I would like a photo of Ronnie before you shorten him and another one in his shorts’. Harold Bantin, 2nd September 1917, IWM Con/Shelf: ‘PS, tell me how you and Toots are’. William Anderson, 12th July 1916, IWM 96/24/1 (emphasis in original).

94 John Wilson, 14th March 1915, SWM. See also for example, ‘I often look at my three loved ones and often a tear steals into my eye’, ibid., 28th March 1915.

95 A. P. Gibbons, 29th August 1916, IWM 86/36/1.

96 Ibid., 39th April 1917.

97 Ernest Williams, 3rd April 1917 (no.3), IWM Con/Shelf.

98 Ibid., 20th April 1917.

99 Ibid.

100 Ibid.

101 A. P. Gibbons, 7th January 1917, IWM 86/36/1.

102 Arthur Butling, Con/Shelf.
E. Oman, *Salford Stepping Stones*, p.27.

Fitzpatrick, *Oceans of Consolation*, p.481.

William Anderson, 17th July 1916, *IWM 96/24/1*.

W. J. MacDonald, 16th February 1918, *IWM 94/50/1*.

R. Roberts, *The Classic Slum*, p.191. J. M. Winter’s study of marriage rates leads him to conclude that there was a surge in the number getting married between March 1915 and March 1916. In 1914, the marriage rate in England and Wales was 15.9 per 1,000. A year later the figure had risen to 19.4 per 1,000. However, during the ‘second phase’ in the war, between 1916 and 1918 the figure fell to 13.8 per 1,000, the lowest then recorded. J. M. Winter, *The Great War and the British People*, pp.251-252.

Ibid., pp.253-54.


Harold Bantin, 15th July 1917, *IWM Con/Shelf*.

Harold Bantin, 27th October 1917, *IWM Con/Shelf*. While reading such comments as an indication of Harold wanting to highlight his paternity is an historical interpretation, when we learn that, after Harold’s death at the front, his widow quickly remarried a friend she met while Harold was away fighting, it does indicate the delicate nature of family life. This information comes from an account written by Ronnie Bantin, Harold’s son, Harold Banting, *IWM Con/Shelf*.

George Butling, No.5, *IWM Con/Shelf*.

Eric Butling, 28th February 1919, *IWM Con/Shelf*.

For example, he writes to his son that ‘I hope you learn to swim and that next summer we could have some swimming together’, 25th September (no year), *IWM 86/36/1*.

William Anderson, 24th February 1916, *IWM 96/24/1*.

Arthur Butling, *IWM Con/Shelf*.

Joanna Bourke, for example, observes that working-class men were marginal to the home and certainly to parenting before the First World War J. Bourke, *Working-Class Cultures in Britain*, pp.81-9.


Lucy Walter (10 years old), quoted in R. van Emden and S. Humphries, *All Quiet on the Home Front*, p.31.

Ruth Armstrong quoted in Ibid., pp.31-2.

William Anderson, 17th September 1916, *IWM 96/24/1*.

Ibid., 25th September 1916.

B. J. Fielder, 8th July 1914, *IWM family*.

Arthur Butling, November 1917, *IWM Con/Shelf*.

William Hooper, August 11th 1917, *IWM miscellaneous 687*.

Ibid., July 4th 1918.

J. Vose, *Diary of a Tramp*, p.10.


P. A. Wise, *IWM 90/7/1*.

The reference to ‘going into my office’ suggests a clerical worker for example.

For example, Frank Heath wrote to his young daughter (Aileen) a letter which was intricately illustrated with animals, Frank G. Heath, *IWM family*.

Ernest Williams, 30th April 1917, *IWM Con/Shelf*.


Ibid., p.24.

J. Bourke, *Dismembering the Male*.

F. H. Gautier, *IWM 86/19/1*.

Harold Bantin, 9th September 1917, *IWM Con/Shelf*.
141 Edith Hall, quoted in J. Burnett (ed.), *Destiny Obscure*, p.121. See also for example, ‘Never a well man since being gassed in world war one, I remember little of my father’, George Cook, *A Hackney Memory Chest*, (London: 1983), p.3.
142 Quoted in S. Humphries and P. Gordon, *A Man’s World*, p.188. For more good examples of how men were often like ‘strangers’ to their children after returning home from the Second World War see B. Turner and T. Rennell (eds.), *When Daddy Came Home: How Family Life Changed Forever in 1945*, (London: 1995), Chapter Four. There appears to be no comparable research for the impact of the First World War but the circumstances of enforced absence in both wars make the comparisons of experiences useful. Indeed, many more men were ‘absent’ in the First World War than in the Second World War.
143 ‘Many a time I felt as if I could have like half murdered him and when I got to that stage I used to just put me coat on and go out and have a pint... I was going through hell.’ quoted in S. Humphries and P. Gordon, *A Man’s World*, p.189.
144 See discussion in Chapter One.
146 R. Roberts, *The Classic Slum*, p.216, p.227. See also, for example, Jose Harris, *Private Lives. Public Spirit.*
148 ‘Women not only nursed their disabled husbands and took exclusive responsibility for housework and children but also, if the family budget required, went out to work’, D. Cohen, *The War Come Home*, p.107.
150 Ibid.
Chapter Five.

PERSONAL EXPERIENCES OF WORKING-CLASS FATHERHOOD.

So far this thesis has argued that the inter-war period witnessed a ‘refocusing’ of the father’s perceived and prescribed functions and that this was a parallel development with, and partly in response to, the legislative and welfare measures which focused primarily on the mother and child. Far from being ‘marginalised’ in such discourses, - as Lynn Abrams suggests happened in Scotland,¹ as others have inferred was a consequence of the ‘Whiggish’ move away from ‘Victorian’ paternal rights,² and as others have inferred in studies of motherhood³ – greater emphasis was in fact placed on how important a father was in some aspects of the lives of his children. This chapter uses autobiography and oral history to move the focus away from ‘discourses’ and on to the actual conduct of fathers. It attempts to show how and why fathers were often central in their children’s lives by exploring some experiences of men, their wives and their children. It challenges and develops the image we have from the current literature in a number of ways.

By adopting a structure relating to the age of the child it seeks to highlight that the experience of the father-child relationship dramatically altered over a child’s life-course. Related to this point, and to step away from viewing a father’s conduct through aspects of parenting which remained within the mother’s ‘sphere of influence’, the chapter also attempts to understand better what is meant by the term ‘involvement’. It indicates that a simple conceptualisation of the ‘private’, ‘public’ spheres as being rigidly gendered hides the fact that within each sphere there could be gender divisions in activity and that this was particularly pertinent when it came
parenting tasks. Some of the broad social trends - such as the decline in family size, a general rise in the standard of living and improvements in housing – that have been emphasised in changes to family life are examined in the specific context of the father. 4

The relationship between a father’s conduct and some of the ‘discourses’ on fatherhood is also given attention. Robert Towler suggests in his sociological study of religious belief that, ‘none but the tiniest minority in a population works out for himself or for herself a set of ideas: we respond to the available stock of ideas and symbols’. 5 Clearly, for the fathers under review here, the ‘available stock of ideas’ included those we have seen outlined in law and by the fathercraft movement. Yet no simple links between ‘official’ discourses and men’s behaviour can be drawn and, as historians have learnt, it is hard to establish whether didactic or prescriptive advice had an impact on personal action. 6 Moreover, the chapter stresses that men, their wives, their male peers and their children were all as important in constructing the expectations surrounding a father’s actions as ‘high-level’ discourses. What the chapter shows is how the competing images of fatherhood outlined in the previous chapters became ‘filtered’ through the circumstances of individual lives. The suggestion is that the experience of being a working-class father in this period is best understood within the framework of competing expectations and that men’s conduct can best be explained as an outcome of these, often contradictory, demands.

Sources and Method.
Over 70 autobiographies have been examined. These were in part found among the references in other historical works but primarily by using Burnett, Mayall and Vincent's annotated bibliography of working-class autobiographies. This bibliography enabled works that discussed domestic life to be identified more quickly and, given the tendency of male writers sometimes to shy away from discussing such matters, it proved to be a valuable asset. This bibliography also identified authors who were children and/or fathers in the appropriate chronological period and this allowed both a child's and a father's perspective to be seen – a point of importance, as we shall see.

The use of autobiographies as a source has been fully discussed elsewhere and there is little merit in repeating the general concerns outlined in these discussions. Rather, it is more useful to raise some specific issues relating to fatherhood and the theme of 'remembered' feelings, actions and incidents. But, given that such a discussion is equally pertinent for the use of oral history, a word on that first.

The primary oral history archive used here is the raw data and original interviews conducted by Steve Humphries and Pamela Gordon for their BBC TV series 'A Man's World'. This series had an accompanying book of the same title that printed extracts from the interviews, along with brief (and consequently general) analysis from the authors. There are some issues of methodological and interpretative concern, mainly the 'perils' of gleaning meaning from transcripts, and issues relating more generally to 'reusing' already recorded interviews, but these issues have been discussed elsewhere and have no specific relevance to warrant repeating here. Re-visiting interviews with a similar topic does however require
some justification. Humphries and Gordon have chosen to allow the interviewees to ‘speak for themselves’ in their book and TV series, and as such offer only minimal analysis; the scope for fresh interpretation is great. Moreover, of all the interviews recorded and transcribed only a tiny proportion appeared in either the TV series or the book.

Another series of oral history interviews used were archived at the North West Sound Archive (NWSA). However, the material from the NWSA was particularly poorly catalogued and often there was only minimal biographical information about interviewees. They were certainly working-class however, as they formed part of a scheme conducted by the NWSA to collect memories of working people from the North West.

Young children are receptive listeners and I was no exception. For this reason some of my own most vivid “memories” are of stories told to me about things that happened to members of my family before I was born. I internalised these “memories” and so to me they are “real”, but since writing them down I have come to realise that family stories can vary quite a lot according to who tells them and who listens.\(^\text{12}\)

Oral interviews and autobiographies are both forms of ‘remembered’ history and the passage of time can affect what we can term ‘detail’ and ‘impression’. The former of these is less problematic because it is rare for an author or interviewee to ‘misremember’ the details in which we are most interested, be it family size, age, location, or occupation. However, it remains a possibility, as one author quoted by Vincent confessed, ‘As I have written wholly from recollection, it can scarcely be expected that I could remember names of places and dates.’\(^\text{13}\) We thus need to be cautious in accepting all remembered detail as ‘fact’.
The second aspect, 'impression', requires more caution, as the quotation above indicates; how far 'remembered' feelings and interpretations accurately reflect feelings and interpretations at the time? The problem is not only that the child's frame of reference and mind is vastly different from the adult's - as Burnett tentatively suggests for example, full of fantasy and exaggeration 14 - but also that the years lived between childhood and adulthood inevitably affect recollection. Interviewees and authors are unavoidably bound up in modern ideas about fatherhood and might, for example, feel ashamed about what they believe would be interpreted by readers or interviewers as 'rough' behaviour, or conversely, might wish to impress with how 'enlightened' they were. Either way, as Lynn Abrams notes for oral history specifically but a point which is nonetheless true for autobiography, 'No oral history represents a truth independent of dominant discursive construction ... memories of fathers are invariably informed by...official and popular discourses on fatherhood.'15

Adult recollections are shaped by appreciation of a place in time. Certainly, in the oral interviews, a number of respondents compared their remembered experiences both backward to their understandings of 'Victorian' life, and forward to the modern day. Clearly, memories need to be viewed with caution. It is, after all, not the 'child self' who respond to questions or writes down feelings about aspects of that child's life, but the 'adult self'. As Vincent has noted (at least for authors recalling the nineteenth century) it is much more common for men to write about their own father than about their own experiences of being a father.16 While there is nothing wrong with building a picture of a father's conduct and feelings from the child's perspective, it of course hides much of what is important. After all a child
may perceive a father’s emotional distance as an indication that he/she was not loved, but the father’s account may reveal he felt it ‘inappropriate’ to express such feelings.

It must not be forgotten that autobiographies are forms of literary expression, and when published they often conform to a certain structure in order for them to be considered ‘readable’. Moreover, the desire for a respondent to ‘entertain’ in oral history interviews, though perhaps subconscious, is often obvious - a process not helped by an interviewer’s natural response to funny or amusing stories. To produce an engaging narrative, respondents may emphasis incidents because of their perceived ‘interest’ rather than how ‘typical’ they might have been. A relevant example might be when a father performed childcare. This may warrant mention because it was unusual and not because it was necessarily ‘normal’. As Jennifer Platt has noted, ‘A single reference to a phenomenon may indicate the start of a trend, or the existence of a pattern, but may just be historically idiosyncratic.’ As such, it could be an exaggeration to argue broader significance from ‘idiosyncratic’ examples.

But Platt further argues that, ‘there are certain types of anecdote that recur again and again’ and although ‘one cannot infer from this that such situations occurred in life more frequently than others … the fact that anecdotes of that type appear in many books may suggest they describe common experience’ Of course, making generalised arguments from such evidence can be tricky. Consider the comment of Charlotte Erickson, who studied a number of letters, another form of ‘personal document’:
This is an experiment in micro-history, and one is very conscious of its dangers... One could avoid the thorny problem [of typicality] simply by noting that these were historical cases, whether typical or not.20

Yet it is with such evidence that we are left and from it, whilst being aware of some of the shortfalls of the sources, arguments can be constructed which have relevance beyond the individual case.

*The Expectation to Provide and Experiences of being the Provider.*

Unlike the waxing and waning of father-child interaction as the child grew, the expectation that a father was primarily concerned with material provision remained prominent throughout a child’s life. Tom Parton, a builder in inter-war Britain with three children, plainly interpreted his responsibility in such terms: ‘When my family come I had to feed ‘em and I knew that, and I made it my business to do it, as much as I could.’21 Noah Prescott, a miner who started a family in the 1930s, similarly drew an unequivocal link between provision and being a successful father and husband: ‘If you were a good man you looked after your children and your wife.’22 Indeed, the overarching importance of the responsibility to provide meant that a number of men in the evidence recalled how, on the birth of a child, their emotional responses were often accompanied by an awareness of the pressing duty of the male parent. Alfred Jenkins, an inter-war tin worker from North Wales, recalled his feelings on the birth of his first child:

I was a father now and I had a lot more responsibility on me... I’d have to work hard and earn as much money as I could to look after the family. I had responsibilities.23
It was not just about ‘making ends meet’ that men worried, but also about maintaining an acceptable standard of living. As Geordie Todd, a fisherman from North Shields who had one young son born in the late 1930s, commented, ‘I had a job to do... to keep me wife and new family the way I wanted, therefore I had to go and work harder.’

This understanding was shared and upheld by children’s and wives’ belief that a ‘good’ father was first and foremost a provider. Clifford Steele, the son of a Yorkshire miner, recalled that ‘he was a good father in the sense that he never squandered his money’. Children could be critical of a father if the family went without. Jack Martin, the son of an Edwardian miner in Little Lever, Lancashire, commented that, ‘when he was in work we seemed to suffer more than ever because he spent more money on beer’. From the children’s perspective successful provision might ‘excuse’ other behaviour. Recalling her 1920s Burnley childhood for example, Mrs Unsworth, whose father worked in a foundry, commented that ‘even though he was a bit of a bully at times... he always saved up for holidays and he always saved up for Christmas’. Moreover, a father’s choice to save in order to treat his children could cause friction between him and his workmates. Ivy Corrigan, who grew up in Salford in the inter-war years, recalled that her father saved five shillings every week so that the family could go on holiday. However, some of his workmates believed that such saving ‘wasn’t right because if the bosses thought that you could afford to put five shillings away every week they’d think they were paying them too much’.

By continuing to save in the face of such criticism (as Ivy’s father did), a father could perhaps make it clear to children that their pleasure was a priority to him.
Of course, such an understanding could only be grasped by an older child or probably only through the hindsight of adult recollections. James Brady, the son of an Edwardian clog-iron maker, commented in his autobiography that, 'I am ashamed to admit that, at the time, I possessed no real appreciation of his worth.' However the evidence reviewed here suggests that younger children did have some understanding and could convey an expectation that their father was there to provide. Jim Bullock, the son of an Edwardian miner from Wakefield, recalled that some of the songs children in the village sang reflected this expectation:

My father was a miner down below
And little of him did I ever see.
There was a crashing of timbers, a fall of earth,
And my father lay cold and still on the ground.
Dead for bread.
Give us our daily bread dad.30

An even more compelling way younger children expressed and fuelled the expectation that their father should provide was through a desire for gifts and treats. Geordie Todd recalled, 'It was always he [his son] wanted this, he wanted that, his dad was the provider and that was the top and bottom of it.' Other historians have highlighted that gifts and treats could be a common component of father-child interaction and that they could be a useful way to ease guilt and emphasise a father’s place as provider - as John Tosh has shown for middle-class fathers in Victorian Britain and Humphries and Gordon record for this period. It is therefore enough to indicate that the evidence reviewed here confirms this.

However, a point that is not sufficiently stressed in the current literature is that children could view gifts and treats as a part of their expectation surrounding their father’s conduct. Daisy England, the daughter of a 'demobbed' solider who found only casual work after the First World War, remembered that gifts were seen as a 'a
faithful fulfilment of [her] greedy expectations on his return from a journey to town'. The expectation that his father would bring him a treat home after work meant that Ernest Wood, the son of a Liverpool printer, easily recalled a time when ‘father came home without any plaything in his pocket, and I looked disappointed’. As Kathlyn Davenport (born 1919), the daughter of a Preston printer wrote; ‘It really was a case of “Ask your dad” if you wanted a favour, like a supplement to the Saturday penny.’ Indeed, the expectation surrounding gift and treats meant that many fathers in the evidence made toys for their children. While the expansion in the number and availability of cheaper toys in the inter-war period was important (as we shall see) many fathers continued to build things for their children. Perhaps the most common of these creations were dolls, but fathers could be produce other playthings. Roy Kimberley remembered that ‘He used to make the toys out of wood. That was our Christmas present.’

A father’s experience of being the provider was not just related to the amount of money he could secure as a wage or the gifts he could provide for his children. It has been well documented that fathers could place economic stress on their families by their desire for personal ‘spends’ and leisure, and how far a father demanded and acted upon this ‘right’ could often be an important factor in how the whole family lived. Certainly, this was a recurrent concern of contemporaries and has been a common theme in feminist historiography.

However, the evidence reviewed here suggests that the ‘selfish’ father has perhaps been over-emphasised in the current literature; possibly because he provides a convenient contrast to the mother’s sacrifice in keeping the family economy afloat. While fathers often did have a greater ‘share’ of the family resources - their
perceived greater energy requirements as breadwinners meant that men had better access to food such as meat for example - it is a narrow interpretation to view parental sacrifice entirely as maternal sacrifice. 39 Pember Reeves observed in Lambeth before the war that ‘often the father … will sacrifice both food and sleep’.40 and there are many incidents in the evidence in which fathers remembered curbing their drinking when children were born or recalled sharing food to benefit their children.41 Such self-restraint could dramatically improve the quality of the father-child relationship and interaction. Nellie Priest (born in 1916), the daughter of London coachman, recalled that, ‘When dad was in work, he used to take us out quite a lot. He didn’t go down the pub, so while other men were spending their money … he could afford to.’42

But, as this last example highlights, the ‘sacrifices’ experienced by a father were in reality only possible because he was the breadwinner. The household money was never ‘the mother’s’ but belonged to the family. Therefore a mother was unlikely ever to be in a situation where she could give her child a penny as a treat. By contrast, a father had his own ‘spends’ or ‘pocket money’ that he could then ‘sacrifice’ for his children’s pleasure.43 The contrast between the mother and father is thus sharp. While a mother’s sacrifice perhaps ensured that children were fed, warm and clothed, the father’s ‘sacrifice’ allowed him to treat children - hanging about father might win some of his ‘choice-cut’ food, or the privilege of sitting in ‘his’ chair or reading ‘his’ paper for example.44

The current literature has emphasised that fathers expected to be the breadwinner and that wives expected their husbands to be the providers, and the evidence confirms this. Not only was it predominant in ‘official’ discourses, but it
was also usual for a man's wife and children to reflect this expectation. That is, despite the fact that some married women performed paid work, the father was virtually always to be the primary breadwinner and this therefore defined fatherhood in a more important way than married-women's work ever defined motherhood. As part of the total parenting function, therefore, no matter who else was contributing to the family economy, being the provider was what being father was most about.

_Babies._

Miss Loane was a prolific social investigator in Britain before the First World War, publishing six full-length books between 1905 and 1911 and scores of articles based on her observations as a Queen's Nurse among the 'respectable poor' in London, Derbyshire and Portsmouth. Two of her full-length books, _The Queen's Poor_ (1905) and _From Their Point of View_ (1908), give detailed and warm accounts of the working-class father, including his involvement with babies. Comparing the fathers she encountered as a district nurse to those of her middle-class acquaintances she wrote;

I can never get over the surprise with which I see working-class fathers snatch up a grimy, howling baby and walk about with it in their arms, pressing kisses on its cheeks, and crooning lovingly at it.  

Maud Pember Reeves similarly found in her study of Lambeth that some fathers helped with babies, and personal accounts from the period similarly indicate that some fathers helped with children of this age. However, if we compare these Edwardian fathers to some accounts from fathers in the inter-war period it appears
that the latter were perhaps less comfortable handling babies than those fathers Loane and Pember Reeves observed.

Alfred Jenkins, a tin worker from North Wales who became a father in the 1920s, commented that he was always ‘frightened of dropping or crushing’ his children when they were babies⁴⁸ and Mike Walters, a Bristol father from the 1930s, related that ‘I had very little to do with John when he was a baby. I know I never changed his nappy. I was frightened he’d roll off the table or that I’d hurt him in some way. I never bathed him either, I think I was frightened that he might drown.’⁴⁹ James Whittaker, a worker in a Rochdale woollen factory in the 1920s and 1930s, recalled:

Babies seemed to exert a paralysing influence over me, and whenever I found myself in their immediate presence, my normal faculties seemed to desert me altogether. I suppose this tied-up, embarrassing feeling came over me because I could not “goo” or talk “diddums” language.⁵⁰

In extreme circumstances fathers could sometimes be a positive danger when left in charge of the baby.⁵¹ Men might therefore be discouraged from performing such tasks, as Alfred Jenkins remembered when he attempted to hold his baby daughter.⁵²

The important point to emphasise is that help with babycare was part of the help given to a wife as part of a man’s conduct as a husband. At no point during the period under review here, so the evidence suggests, was babycare an expected function of a father. When fathers cared for babies it was therefore seen as chiefly being for the benefit of their wives rather than their children.⁵³ As Joe Croft explained, ‘It would have been an odd time if I did it when the wife was indisposed ... in an emergency, let’s put it that way.’⁵⁴ Moreover, the practicality of a crowded and busy home perhaps meant that it was sometimes necessary for father to tend a
baby in order for his wife to see to other matters: 'I gen'ly have to trot him round for a nower'n'half while my wife's getting the supper and washin'up.' Clearly the 'benefit' was seen as being for a wife.56

However if babycare was only normally done to help a wife it perhaps meant that fathers could be excused from doing it. Historians have shown that one of the most important privileges for men of being the primary provider was often an understanding that as the breadwinner they were 'entitled' to rest, and the evidence reviewed here suggests that this entitlement could extend to being explicitly excused from caring for babies. Maragret Powell, the wife of a milkman living in inter-war London, recalled a time when their first child was a baby: 'Albert slept so heavily at night that he never heard the baby cry, I was always the one who was woken up ... but of course he needed his sleep with a large milk round.'57 After a day of often noisy and dirty work, men themselves might demand their own leisure and space.58 Margaret Powell further recalled a friend's husband's attitude: 'A man's entitled to respect and attention, and he don't expect to come home after a hard day's work and mind the kids.'59

The evidence also suggests that wives were sometimes not willing to allow their husband to help with babies because they could be viewed as a 'bad' wife/mother by doing so. Alfred Jenkins recalled for his South Wales community, for example, that 'it would appear as if she was what we called in them days hen-pecking the man'.60 More subtly Joanna Bourke suggests that wives and mothers jealously protected the core domestic task as 'women's work' because these were functions from which they gained power and influence.61 Margaret Powell
remembered just this dilemma when she wanted to attend an evening class in the 1930s:

He was quite capable, he said, of minding the baby ... So I demonstrated how to fold and pin... I ought to have been pleased, but indeed I was rather piqued to find on my return that he'd made as good a job of nappy-changing as I did.62

We can also suggest that babycare remained specifically a 'mother's' job because it continued to be damaging to masculine identity for a man to be seen doing it. As Humphries and Gordon suggest, one of the most problematic challenges to a father's conduct was the existence of competing expectations surrounding 'manly' behaviour. Compared to interaction with older children, changing nappies or pushing the pram might more easily have been seen as 'women's work'. John Cadwell summarised his attitude as, 'I'm a man. I'm not one of these shilly-shally blokes you know, wanting to be in on something they shouldn't be in on.'63 Robert Williams, a dye worker from Bradford from the inter-war years, recalled that his male friends labelled him 'a bit of a pansy, sissy, whatever ... and a bit out of step' when he helped his wife with the babies.64 Alfred Jenkins similarly recalled that 'men didn't do these things, that was the general way of life ... he lost a bit of manliness in the eyes of the other men by doing it'.65 It is interesting to note that both Robert and Alfred show a similar attitude despite the fact they lived in different areas. Diana Gittins' argument that the gender composition of the labour market dictated men's 'involvement' in the home seems, from this evidence, to not extend to attitudes towards babycare.

It was not just the shared male-peer belief, as Alfred further commented, 'The wife wouldn't expect you to do it [pushing the pram], not in those days as she would
regard it as not manly. As Andrew Davies and Elizabeth Roberts have shown, children could quickly learn what ‘appropriate’ behaviour was for men and women. Even a man’s other children might therefore be quizzical of their father’s attempts to perform what they understood to be ‘mother’s’ job.

However, the evidence suggests that what fathers did in private, inside the home, often did not correlate to the ideas of ‘appropriate’ manly behaviour held within the community. Carl Chinn suggests that in London for this period ‘many men helped their wives in the house, so long as it was behind closed doors and workmates and drinking partners remained unaware of such assistance’. The evidence examined here allows us to expand this notion to include babycare specifically. As Alfred Jenkins commented, his wife ‘wouldn’t like the idea of me pushing a pram on the road … but she didn’t mind me nursing the baby in the bedroom in the night’. Edith Evans (born 1910), the daughter of a dock worker, recalled that her father refused to be seen in public looking after all the children but was relaxed about helping within the home. Humphries and Gordon may place too much significance on what was considered appropriate domestic activity for men, for example. As Alfred Jenkins speculated, ‘men probably did a lot [babycare] although they never said anything about it’.

It is if we characterise a father’s interaction with a baby as an extension of ‘wife help’ rather than an independent function of fatherhood that we can begin to suggest there was a chronological shift in conduct within the period. It seems that the inter-war years probably did not witness an increase in fathers performing such tasks and, indeed, it was possibly a period in which, for fathers in some areas, there was a decline in the incidence of tending babies.
A number of social trends in the inter-war years can be seen as having made the mother’s/wife’s job less demanding. Spring-Rice’s 1930s survey indicated that the domestic routine remained arduous for many women and there is debate over the point at which housework stopped expanding to fill the time available. Yet it is nonetheless evident that decreased family sizes, the modernisation of the home, and a general rise in the standard of living meant a mother and a wife’s daily life could be less time consuming. Melanie Tebbutt, for example, details that women often had time for ‘gossip’ or ‘chats’ during their work day and even suggest that ‘some [Manchester] women always hurried to put on an apron when their husbands were about to return from work’ in order to maintain the impression they had been hard at work. A result of having fewer children and better maintained and equipped homes was perhaps that fathers were not required to be involved with babies to allow wives to see to other chores or take a rest. Certainly, men who helped with babies were typically those who had large families, where the need was greatest. Mr. Gregory, who was a railway worker and coal deliveryman before the First World War, had seven children and was described as a ‘family man’ who ‘changed nappies, bathed and fed them’. This is not to argue that the fathers of all large families were more likely to help with babies. A number of miners in the evidence, from a section of the population which continued to have larger families even after family sizes had begun to decrease, often refused to help with babies. Nonetheless, it does seem that having many children and small housing increased the chance that a father might help in infant and babycare. In such cramped conditions a father might be ‘forced into close contact with the newcomer from its arrival, [and] must take his share in ministering to its needs’.77
For many of the same reasons, it is also plausible that during the inter-war years a wife might have been more protective of the domestic space and her position within it. We can for example emphasise the decrease in married women’s work, the decline in community support networks as new housing replaced the old neighbourhoods, and most importantly the emphasis within official and popular discourses on the woman’s functions as wife and mother by the inter-war years. As Bourke comments therefore, ‘Men were able to learn domestic skills, but only in contexts which did not threaten the predominance of women within the home.’ As babycare was within the mother’s ‘sphere of influence’ it was one of those skills in which wives were not always willing to allow their husbands to be involved.

Of course, the fathers’ conduct must also be placed within the context of the expectations of the ‘official’ discourses to which they were exposed. Fathers had long been perceived as secondary to mothers in babycare, in part because of a belief in a woman’s ‘natural’ caring qualities and because her own mother ‘schooled’ her in childcare but many of the medico-moral ‘experts’ of the day were giving apparent justifications for this view. Although advocates of fathercraft did not see men as incapable of caring for babies (remember the prize winning single father for example) the central message of fathercraft remained one in which babycare fell squarely into the mother’s ‘sphere of influence’. Indeed, the very existence of fathercraft was largely the result of suspicion among middle-class health workers and doctors that fathers were often a disruptive or even dangerous force on mothers and babies. The pattern of fatherly conduct identified can thus be seen as correlating with the images of fatherhood within the discourses examined in previous chapters. ‘Wife help’ was the way advocates of fathercraft framed instruction to fathers on babycare.
and judges who placed children of 'tender years' with fathers usually did so on the assumption that there was an adequate 'mother substitute' available.

Examining what fathers did is only part of the story. It needs to be stressed that we cannot judge a father's feelings towards his baby from his conduct alone. If we look at fathers' involvement in the birth of their child it would appear from their conduct that they had little emotional attachment to the new child. Only one father in the evidence was present at the birth of a child - and he was there because it happened unexpectedly. 80 Men were actively barred from the scene of the birth, even if a wife requested her husband's presence, and men thus often found the birth of their child a traumatic experience. 81

Yet a father's lack of involvement in the birth of his child owed more to conventions about what was 'appropriate' than to disinterest in the child. Miss Loane observed that 'working-class men always seem to rejoice over the birth of a child'. 82 Allan Jobson, an Edwardian father, wrote in his autobiography that, 'I can never forget the thrill with which I gazed at the little creature with dark hair, who appeared even at first sight to smile at me. I seemed to walk on air.' 83 Fathers marked the birth of their child in various ways. Evelyn Lees' father donated candlesticks to the church. 84 Richard Church recounts the peculiar reaction of his father whom, 'jubilant over [his] birth, could not contain himself within the usual routine. Three weeks after [his] arrival, he set off on his solid-tyred bicycle for a ride to Aberdeen and back [they lived in London!].' 85

Babies needed a lot of care and fathers were not expected to, and very often did not, help with this, but babies could also be fun and curious creatures. loved as much as older children. As James Whittaker recalled during a time of illness, 'in all sorts of
ways [his baby was] a blessing and a godsend to me as I lay in bed. His baby blunders, and those first reachings out which showed the awakening of independent thought in his little head filled me with wonder and amusement.\textsuperscript{86} Moreover, if taking charge of a baby could combine ‘wife-help’ with aspects of a man’s leisure time then, as Joe Croft, an inter-war miner, recalled in one obviously unusual example, it might be that father spent some lengthy time alone with his baby:

When he [son] was very small I used to go ... [to the] pub locally where you could go round the back, there was a nice garden and Sunday dinnertime all the boozing with the lads had gone ... I sat and had a pint, you know, and baby was there and he were contented and I were contented and you really enjoyed that part of it, you know, and got really involved with him.\textsuperscript{87}

This examination of a father’s conduct and interaction with babies in this period underlines that the simple conclusion that fathers became increasingly ‘involved’ with their ‘children’ from 1900 to the post Second World War period in fact hides important contours in patterns of conduct. It seems likely that in general fathers did not perform any more care for infants and babies than they had done before the First World War. Indeed, a plausible chronological change in the conduct of fathers may be that they helped less with children of this age after the war because changes to housing, leisure and, most of all, family size, meant that wives often required their help less.\textsuperscript{88}

*Young Children.*\textsuperscript{89}

The time a father spent away from his children because of work remained lengthy. Despite the reduction of the standard working week from 54 to 48 hours in 1919 there remained an important difference between ‘average’ hours and the actual
time men spent in the process of securing a wage.\textsuperscript{90} For many men, commuting times increased as new housing estates were built on the outskirts of towns and the threat of unemployment in this period could force men to accept jobs with longer-than-average working hours or which were distant from the home.\textsuperscript{91} Overtime became a common feature of working life because it remained an economically sensible way of maximising provision and this probably partly cancelled out the reduction of ‘normal’ hours.\textsuperscript{92} Joe Croft, a miner from a village just outside Sheffield commented: ‘I was doing a terrible amount of overtime … quite honestly I’ve gone down the pit at six o’clock in the morning and not come out till three o’clock the next morning.’\textsuperscript{93} Arthur Barton, the son of a Tyneside crane driver in the 1920s recounted that his father ‘always seemed to be going to work or coming back from it… Sometimes I hardly saw him for days.’\textsuperscript{94}

As we have seen, a tired husband might be less likely to help in the home, or was excused from doing so. However, from the young children’s perspective a tired father could mean he was in no mood or fit state to play with or entertain them.\textsuperscript{95} Even in studies focusing on fatherhood the importance of the ‘child’s perspective’ on this issue has not been emphasised. Yet, Arthur Barton, for example, recalled that his father’s night shift often meant he was asleep in the backroom and ‘liable to be cross if disturbed for frivolous reasons’.\textsuperscript{96} The need for rest outside working hours could even result in hostility being shown to a child, and the situation was especially damaging if the father worked ‘unsociable’ shift patterns like Dave Bowmen, an engine driver from Dundee in the late 1930s. He recalled that, ‘If I were on night shift I would sleep through the day. If I woke up I’d sometimes say, “Stop these bloody kids shouting, I’ve got to get some sleep”’.\textsuperscript{97}
Humphries and Gordon argue that such work related absence ‘set the pattern for a distant paternal role in which they [father] had precious little involvement in bringing up their children. This was an era when many dads were virtual strangers to their sons and daughters.’\textsuperscript{98} They also suggest that, ‘Few absent fathers …felt they had missed out on anything important.’\textsuperscript{99} However, as our analysis of fathers’ interaction with babies indicated, this is to assume that men’s actions correlated perfectly with their feelings; the suggestion is a simplistic assumption that ‘out of sight’ meant ‘out of mind’. Rather, many men in the evidence reviewed were involved in the sense that they had their children on their minds even when at work. Alfred Short, a bus driver, recalled how he would ‘look out in the different places I went to in the bus for toy shops and things I could save up and buy.’\textsuperscript{100} Phyllis Willmott, the daughter of a chauffeur also recounted that, ‘In his job Father went to many sales and sometimes for a few pence he would pick up boxes of books or toys.’\textsuperscript{101} Men who were unable to spend time with their children could become jealous of ‘substitute’ figures for example.\textsuperscript{102} Indeed, the importance of children for workers is outlined by Bill Copper who recounted songs popular with Sussex labourers:

\begin{quote}
When I get home at night just as tired as I be,
I take my youngest child and I dance him on my knee.
The others come around with their prittle prattle toys,
And that’s the only pleasure a working man enjoys.\textsuperscript{103}
\end{quote}

Far from being blasé about being away from young children, it seems that many fathers in the evidence could be distressed by such a necessity. Richard Heaton, a coal cutter in the 1930s who had two sons and one daughter lamented in his
autobiography: 'What a life! Most days in winter I never saw the children: they were in bed when I left in the morning and back in bed when I arrived home at night.'

However, the needs of the family often meant that fathers had little choice but to spend time apart from their children. As Joe Croft explained, overtime was 'not something you wanted more than spending [time] with the child, it was something you needed more'. Similarly, Tom Parton, an inter-war builder, explained how he believed being a father meant 'it was more important ... to feed 'em than play with 'em'. Of course, this 'need' was not just about keeping a family out of poverty, especially given that there was a general rise in the standard of living in this period. We have seen that fathers paid great emphasis on being able to 'treat' their children and overtime can be seen as evidence that fathers were sometimes making the choice that extra income was preferable to more time with children. We can suggest that they regarded the quality of the time they spent with their child to be important. The decision to work overtime (where there was a choice) was often as much about maintaining an 'appropriate' level of consumerism, as Geordie Todd's comment quoted above indicates. However, when the expectation to provide clashed with other expectations surrounding fathers of younger children, men in this period almost always felt their first responsibility was to earn a wage. It is nonetheless important to highlight that the very fact that there was a conflict in expectations indicates that men were aware of what they were sacrificing because of the time they spent at work. Moreover, these expectations seem to have emitted from younger children and their fathers' desire for each others' company and we have to assume that such expectations could only have emerged if, when they were at home, fathers interacted with their young children in such a way.
Tom Parton’s and Joe Croft’s comments of course remind us of the concern aired by advocates of fathercraft, who stated that men needed to be more involved with their children, suggesting for example, ‘however busy you are, make time to play’.\textsuperscript{107} Yet having middle-class doctors and welfare workers preach that he needed to spend time with children was likely to have been of little relevance for a man trying to meet his family’s day-to-day material needs. In this we see that the middle-class ideology behind the fathercraft movement could be at odds with the realities of working-class life: an important theme when comparing the conduct of fathers to the discourses on fatherhood we examined in earlier chapters.

Humphries and Gordon (rather contradicting their argument that men were disinterested in their children) also argue that father-child interaction was ‘compartmentalised’ into those times when father and children could be together: mainly weekends and special occasions such as Christmas and holidays. Indeed, they even suggest that events such as day-trips, holidays, weekend activities and Christmas were often the \textit{only} experiences of being a father recalled by most of the men they interviewed.\textsuperscript{108} Because weekends and holidays have been stressed elsewhere as important, it is enough to say that the evidence reviewed here confirms this. For example, Margaret Wharton, the daughter of an inter-war chauffeur, remembered that ‘Many a Sunday afternoon, rain or shine, while mother rested after her midday culinary efforts, he was delegated the duty of taking May and myself for a walk.’\textsuperscript{109} The Mass Observation survey of Bolton families in Blackpool in the 1930s observed that ‘father has a special function of guide and friend to the holiday child, while mother ... takes a comparative rest, and leaves games entirely to father’\textsuperscript{110}.
However to suggest that weekends and holidays were the only important time, especially for younger children, is to miss much of the important interaction between father and his child. While not denying that they were important, placing too much emphasis on such times is to suggest that the other 6 days of the week, or 51 weeks a years, were insignificant. The evidence reviewed here indicates that in everyday life many fathers occupied a prominent place in the lives of young children.

Children who enjoyed playing with a father on the beach, building castles for example (another observation in the Mass Observation survey), were of a particular age, as one ‘Worktown’ father commented: ‘When I was younger [a younger father]. I found the holidays with the family more enjoyable … young children are better company than grown-up children.’\textsuperscript{111}

A child could be more ‘enjoyable’ company for a father when its interests could be developed to be compatible with his own. Linking hobbies and leisure interests with interaction with children was far easier for fathers than it was for mothers given the limited opportunity most mothers had for outside leisure interests.\textsuperscript{112} Sharing ‘hobbies’ or interest outside the domestic setting can be seen as a ‘privilege’ of fatherhood, and something most commonly associated with the father. Indeed, as Richard Church recalled, his father’s affection for his children was almost inseparable from the pleasure he gained from the activities they shared:

It was impossible to separate our idea of Father from the ancillary one of bicycles. Here was the real interest in his life, dominating even his sentimental love for his wife and two boys. He was always trying to associate the two emotional pulls, and the home atmosphere was full of projects for getting us all mounted, so the whole family could take to the road.\textsuperscript{113}
Developing shared interests with children was more common (and easier) for fathers and sons than it was for fathers and daughters. Joe Croft believed that, ‘secretly most fathers wanted a boy… in your mind are the things you’re going to do with him if he’s a boy, you’re going to pass more physical time with him than you would with a girl’. A father could take his son, as ‘Jack’ did in Means Test Man, to the cricket, or, as Jimmy Wright recalled doing with his son Brian in inter-war Salford, to the football:

I actually used to carry Brian to the football match when he were only about four years old. I used to carry him on me back and we used to go to the same spot at Rockwell park … Their were quite a number of children who went with their fathers … at times they used to have to roll the children down the heads of the crowd.

Significantly, a shared interest in football with his son, for Jimmy Wright at least, allowed discussion and debate during the week that meant their football-related interaction transcended the confines of the weekly match.

Again, while the fathercraft message argued that fathers should not forget their daughters, the experience of working-class fathers indicates that there often were simply fewer activities that men could share with daughters. To an important degree, this was often a moot point for younger children because home-based affection paid little regard to a child’s gender before the differences between the sexes began to dictate the ‘appropriateness’ of interaction. However, Pember Reeves observed a father who had ‘no interest in the little daughter, but was proud of the boys’ and the daughter of another labouring man recalled how ‘father used to spend all his money on the boys. If anyone wanted best clothes, suits and that, he used to buy them all for boys. But us girls, we had to mend and do.’

Chapter Five: Personal Experiences of Working Class Fatherhood
While, as chapter one suggested, analysis of working-class autobiographies and community studies focusing on motherhood have often emphasised negative aspects of the father’s prominent place in a child’s life, the evidence reviewed here suggests that fathers more often played a much happier, fun role.\textsuperscript{120} Certainly many of the recalled childhoods at this age indicate that there was a strong desire for a father’s company. Arthur Barton recalled that he longed for his father so much that he spent much of his time ‘standing at his front door’ because from there he ‘could see a piece of the river and a half-built warship and Father’s little box travelling along its swinging cables… [which made it] possible to keep in touch with him’.\textsuperscript{121} Elizabeth Bryson recalled how she ‘ran to meet him when he came home, clung round his knees and swung on his hands and climbed up until he hoisted me on to his shoulder to enter the house in triumph’.\textsuperscript{122} Important to note is the father’s compliance in these ‘returning home’ incidents, suggesting that there was a \textit{shared expectation} that father and child would spend time together.

Within the working-class home the separation of ‘work time’ and ‘home time’ seems to have created times of ‘fun’ that were experienced by both fathers and children as being different in nature from the greater but routine time mothers and children spent together. Children could be a prominent part of a man’s leisure. Playing with children, as John Tosh has suggested for middle-class men in Victorian England, was often ‘a vital dimension of the healing power of home’\textsuperscript{123} and many men in the evidence enjoyed entertaining and playing with young children. Alfred Jenkins, a South Wales tinworker, recalled that ‘[I used to] play with them down on the floor, crawl around the floor with them on my back … as they grew older we
played in those days snakes and ladders and ludo. Rough-and-tumble play was also opportunity for father-child bonding:

We would chase each other ... there was a five-barred gate on which I would perch myself, clinging leech like to the top, whilst my father pushed the gate backwards and forwards, there was laughter in his voice and kindness in his face.

Although understandings of ‘appropriate’ behaviour meant they would be treated differently as they grew older, at this younger age both sons and daughters could enjoy such rough and tumble. One anonymous female respondent from Bolton recalled, ‘I can remember ... dad riding round the house, him on all-fours and me on his back, and when we came to the table I said “Right dad, over the top”.’

While it is impossible to say whether fathers played with children more than mothers for our specific period, what is clear is that in the minds of children this was the case. Miss Loane observed that children looked to their mother for care, while fathers were ‘loved as companions, as abettors of many forbidden practices’. Even work-weary fathers could find the energy to play. As James Kirkup, the only son of a Tyneside joiner from the 1920s recalled, ‘however tired he was he would always, after he had washed and eaten, take me on his knee and read to me’. A father was often the link to outside delights, and, as John Vose commented, this was often an activity that mothers were not involved in; ‘we would go for walks together – never with mother – and how we would chase each other through the grass’. Similarly, the son of one miner recalled that, ‘All miners go for walks on Sundays, whilst mother stays at home and makes dinner’. Fathers were often associated with entertainment, remembered in autobiographies and oral history with evenings of song and music, as well as stories and games. Moreover, such interaction was
often highly affectionate and intimate, no doubt a pleasure for both child and father.

James Kirkup further recalled for example that:

I would lean back contentedly against his waistcoat or the bib of his dungarees and smell the delightful aroma of pipe tobacco and wood shavings that always hung around him ... I would feel his military moustache against my cheek, giving me a sudden, ticklish kiss that made my spine shiver with pleasure.132

In the inter-war years there were a number of developments that could have allowed more opportunity for father-child interaction. As Chapter One outlined, there was a general rise in the standard of living helped by a decline in family size and for a number of working-class families there were improvements in housing which meant that for some men home-based leisure was increasingly valued. Therefore, while Joanna Bourke has argued that men were increasingly ‘involved’ in the home in this period, we can add to her tentative conclusion and suggest that this ‘involvement’ could specifically include more time spent playing with children. Although Bourke’s own explanation for men’s involvement in the home centres on the expansion of what she terms ‘masculine’ housework, such as DIY, decorating and gardening, what she does not emphasise is that much of these ‘new’ masculine domestic activities could involve younger children – for example there are many accounts of fathers and sons enjoying time together on allotments.133

However, increasing male leisure time in the home, be it weeknights, weekends or holidays, seems in itself insufficient to explain these aspects of father-child interaction. After all there were plenty of fathers who had little interest in interacting with their young children in their spare time, choosing instead to spend their leisure time as far away from them as possible. Frank Davies, the son of an inter-war metal worker from Salford remembered that; ‘Very rarely would he sit in
and kind of play games with you. His idea was he’d have his tea, he’d have his wash – you’d all move out of the way, and then it was out to the pub.' Margaret Powell remembered that her husband complained that, ‘doing the milk-round was far less tiring than taking out three boys and that the delights of fatherhood were perhaps overrated’. Not all fathers were welcomed home; for some children their father’s return was a time for worry and fear.

Men could do other things with their domestic leisure time. Harry Watkin recalled how, in inter-war Manchester, his father hated being ‘confined to the house’ and that ‘he would hurry to Jimmy Allen’s beerhouse to refresh himself’ as soon as he had repaired the family’s boots. Grace Foakes’ father spent his Saturday afternoons on his ‘masculine’ chores and even on Sundays, when her father performed no chores, he went to church and then went ‘back into his shell, and was tired and grumpy once again’. The ‘new’ forms of masculine home-based leisure could just as easily distance fathers from their children as bring them together. For example, Miss Loane reported that a father she had spoken with had banned his sons from the garden because they kept pulling up vegetables.

A more careful reading of Mass Observation also suggests that some fathers were disinterested and distanced during holidays, pursuing male activities rather than playing with their children. Oral history accounts of British holidays in this period also suggest that they were often times when husbands and wives enjoyed time together and, in this regard, children could be a nuisance. In one, admittedly dramatic example, Gladys Nuttall recalled that during a family holiday her mother tied her to the pier with rope, leaving her enough slack to play, but preventing her getting lost in the crowds. Gladys remembered that her mother would sometimes ‘see the
opportunity, when I was secure, to go to the pub with dad'. ¹⁴¹ We also must not exaggerate how common holidays at the seaside were in this period. Stephen Jones suggests that, during the 1930s, there was 'a considerable section of the working-class who could not afford a holiday' ¹⁴² and Andrew Davies concludes that 'there is widespread evidence confirming that in many working-class areas of Manchester and Salford, family holidays were unattainable luxuries throughout the period from 1900 to 1939'. ¹⁴³ Specifically, 'parents with young children frequently found that they lacked the resources needed for a week or even a day at the seaside'. ¹⁴⁴ If family holidays were less widespread than is sometimes believed, their importance for father-child interaction must therefore also be qualified.

However, simply being at home or with children did not necessarily mean that fathers had greater involvement with the children. This is an important criticism of the present 'Whiggish' view that decreased family sizes, improved housing and more leisure at home explains why fathers became more prominent in their children's lives. More time, more space and more activities were of course important but they, in themselves, do not explain why fathers and children shared time. After all, living with, and interacting with, are different things.

There were however some more subtle reasons why father-child interaction may have increased when the opportunity to do so presented itself during the period.

The least discussed reason why fathers wanted to spend time with their young children was that they shared an often deeply affectionate relationship. Studying emotions in history can be problematic, perhaps explaining why attempts to do so have 'remained peripheral to the historical discipline', yet their importance to human relationships should not be overlooked. ¹⁴⁵ As Theodore Zeldin comments, 'love
cannot be counted or measured, but it has to be incorporated into explanations of behaviour and events...[because] emotion fits into the same sphere that health and age do, as influences on conduct'.\footnote{146} A man who loved his children, who enjoyed their company and who gained emotional feedback from them was much more likely to spend time in their company. Babies were less likely to be seen as capable of being affectionate and, as children grew towards adulthood, tactile interaction often became less acceptable. Thus, children of a young age could be preferred company because they could be the most actively affectionate. Therefore, although Burnett has argued that ‘the degree of affection for the mother is generally much greater than that for the father’ the evidence suggests that the father was also often expressive in this way.\footnote{147} Without some comparable research on mothers (which falls outside the scope of this thesis) we cannot accurately gauge whether fathers were often more affectionate than mothers with children, but it is strongly indicated that they may often have been at least equally affectionate.

More subtly, displays of intimacy and affection perhaps became expected by children because they happened more often and, they happened more often because there was possibly greater opportunity within some families due to factors such as decreased family size.\footnote{148} The expectation that a father should act in a certain way was a powerful force in the experience of being a father. Indeed, a father who was actively disinterested could, as a result, be viewed as peculiar by comparison:

I can't ever remember when he sat and nursed you or asked you how d'you feel, or do you want to know anything, there was nothing like that, yet I heard other sons – I went in their houses and the father's been chatting away to them and I used to think why don't mine do it.\footnote{149}
The fact that this respondent’s father did not interact with him is seen as odd and, as another author noted, a father’s failure to show enough interest in his children could (in their eyes at least) make him a ‘bad’ father. ‘...he’d be sitting there in the armchair in that little cottage, and I used to think “Oh, I wish my dad would take me on his lap, and let me know he loved me and cared for me”. But no, I’d be telling lies if I said he was a good father, because he wasn’t.’

Interaction with young children cannot always be categorised as ‘care’ and therefore was not always perceived as ‘unmanly’ behaviour, for although, as we have seen, some fathers were often unwilling to be seen pushing a pram this did not mean that fathers were never seen in public with their children. Certainly, being seen with children was not necessarily detrimental to a man’s ‘manliness’ in itself, and public activities, such as walks, were one of the characteristics of their relationships. The fathers that Miss Loane encountered could be eager to interact with their babies but could refrain from doing so in public because it was not seen as ‘appropriate’ for them to be alone with father. Therefore, as she wrote, ‘I find one of the reasons why children are short-coated so soon is that their fathers wish to carry them when they go out doors, and no man... has the courage to be seen with an infant in long clothes.’ Indeed, the time when a child was ‘shortened’ could be of great significance to the father-child relationship, as was ‘breeching’, both being ritualised indications of a child’s move away from needing constant ‘motherly’ care. As Elizabeth Bryson, the daughter of a foundry worker recalled, ‘My father put the two ex-babies, my brother and myself, to bed... he told us endless stories... tucked us up secure from danger.’ The fact that Elizabeth and her brother were no longer babies
seems to have been an important factor in her father’s involvement in this bedtime ritual.

On a practical level, a father was likely to tend to the young children because a mother was busy with the baby, or because his long working hours meant that his time in the home might only accommodate preparing children for bed or bathing them. Perhaps most importantly, the line between domestic ‘care’ and play was less rigid when it came to interacting with young children. As one contemporary author noted, ‘‘For Fun’ was just a term villagers used to denote anything they did of their own accord.’155 As such, a husband could be happy to help with the children but could bluntly refuse to do other household chores.156 After all, changing the nappy of a baby who could not communicate and respond could be a very different experience to putting him/her to bed when he/she could communicate: ‘He has a penny whistle and that was how he got them to bed, playing Scotland the Brave on this penny whistle and they all marched, you know.’157

Emphasis on a father’s ‘authority’ in the home has been typically constructed through examining legislation and court cases that inevitably highlight extreme cases and, in short, are largely about the boundaries of fatherhood rather than the experience of day-to-day fatherhood.158 When examining a father’s conduct it is necessary to distinguish between, on the one hand the fact that a father held a nominal position of authority, and on the other, the day-to-day experience of being a father. Therefore, while some authors and interviewees indicate that their father was the undisputed head of the house in all matters and that their father’s right to control the children remained sacrosanct,159 the relative ‘authority’ of each parent must be seen as dependent on their perceived ‘spheres of importance’. Therefore, although
much of the public face of family life reaffirmed the man as the head of the household,\textsuperscript{160} when it came to aspects of home life and childcare very few fathers seem to have had a dominant voice, as community studies focused on mothers have highlighted. One respondent in Elizabeth Roberts' oral evidence recalled for example that:

My mother was the more dominant personality in the family. Although outside the family, father was an extremely powerful personality, ... at home mother generally prevailed.\textsuperscript{161}

This division in domestic 'authority' was perhaps at odds with the perception held among middle-class welfare workers that we saw outlined in the previous chapter.\textsuperscript{162} This perception underpinned the initial impetus for father education but the oral and documentary evidence examined here again highlights that middle-class perceptions of working-class parenting could be inaccurately coloured by what was the 'norm' in middle-class homes.

Young children needed much care and attention and even though a father might be looking after the child, it was still the mother who had responsibility for its care. As such, despite the fact that a father interacted with his young children a significant amount, the evidence reviewed here indicates that he often had first to consider his wife's needs and wishes. She might dislike a father 'distracting' children from helping her in the home and could often perhaps be hostile to disruptive, noisy or messy play between father and child. As a result some fathers in the evidence tempered their interaction with children.\textsuperscript{163} The shared belief that a man needed his rest might mean that wives forbade children playing with their fathers even when they were at home, perhaps believing that 'a man don't want yarney children when they come'.\textsuperscript{164} Ernest Wood's mother was particularly prone to worry in this regard,
forbidding Ernest and his brother from approaching their father for any energetic play:

She considered that after a hard [day's work] ... the attention of two boys in the evening might wisely be subjected to a little moderation, which she administered by telling us to be very gentle with our father, lest he fall ill and lose his employment and we find ourselves in the workhouse.¹⁶⁵

Of course, fathers and their children did not have to obey the mother/wife and in fact could conspire to play secret games or share the 'injustices' of domestic routines.¹⁶⁶ When fathers and children were outside the home, the mother's rules could more freely be broken. Agnes Fish recalled that she and her dad went visiting some pubs, and that she 'was instructed to tell my mother we had been calling at a few "coffee shops" because she had forbidden her husband to take their daughter to such places.¹⁶⁷ One author even recalls being part of her father's secret gambling habits, often being employed as lookout when he placed illegal bets, much to the annoyance of her mother.¹⁶⁸ The sense of conspiratorial freedom is also reflected in Means-Test Man. Brierley's 'Jack' and his son returned from a Saturday outing to the cricket:

'Come on, laddie. Buck up. Mam'll be waiting for us...'  
'Could ya carry me on ya back a bit, dad?' The child's voice was tired, not pleading, not hopeful, merely inquiring, ready to acquiesce in the refusal... His dad had carried him when they had been out walking, but his mam had grumbled. But his mam weren't there now...  
'Come on then, I'll carry you to the top.'¹⁶⁹

But even when they took their children outside the home, men had to be mindful of their wives' wishes with regard to them. Kathleen Dayus recalled how she would often go with her dad to the pub, happily 'filling a Woodbine packet with sawdust' and how she sang for other patrons to earn herself a few pennies. But these happy
father-child times were always cut short when her dad would suddenly say. "You better be off now before yer mum sees yer".  

It seems clear that it was in a wife's interest to ensure her husband's interaction with the children did not create more work for her. In one incident noted by Loane for example:

One day in early winter I saw a young fellow [26 years old] allowing his two-year-old son... to walk on muddy asphalt. Two more experienced men were passing, and one hastily interposed, "Hi! You hadn't ought to let the youngster walk on that there pavement. He's sopping up the mud all round". The father glanced at the child's clothes and then replied airily, "His coat's too long. It wants to get worn down a bit". The old hands simply gasped, and then exchanged a shrug and a wink, followed by a roar of laughter over the prospect of the scolding in store for him.

Yet it was often convenient for a wife to encourage father-child interaction. Much of the interaction between father and child served to allow a wife to focus on other matters. Richard Heaton, an inter-war coal cutter, remembered that he looked after their son so his wife could have an evening out: ‘On Tuesday Frances [wife] would go [to the cinema] while I minded Billy [son].’ Angela Rodaway, the daughter of a second-hand metal dealer in Islington in the 1920s, recalled how sitting on her father's knee listening to stories was encouraged because 'This kept us quiet and out of the way so mother could get on with the things that were more important.' As Miss Loane again observed: ‘In countless homes, the busy, many-childed mother breathes freely for the first time in the day when he [the husband] returns from work. “They’re sure to be hanging round their daddy” she says.’

What is important to note in these instances however, is that the father is not usurping his wife, but rather performing non-essential tasks with the children. This conduct finds convergence with the conclusions Ralph LaRossa makes for the North
American context in this period. He argues that a rise in the father as playmate ‘created a space for fathers that posed little threat to the position of mothers. It carved a niche for fathers that left the parental stratification system intact.’

A surprising conclusion to draw from the evidence is that, by often having more ‘free’ time than the mother did when in the home, fathers were sometimes able to be more attentive, affectionate and gentle than the mother. For example, fathers were often the ones who stayed with children at bedtime, reading a story or sitting in silence, because the mother did not have the time: ‘His mother never stayed with him, he never asked her to – she’d have been sharp with him. When his dad brought him to bed he’d usually sit in the chair a bit or even lay on the bed.’ Importantly, this does not mean that father had responsibility for such tasks, but rather that when he did perform them he could perhaps be more attentive than a mother. As Florence Atherton recalled of her Lancastrian Edwardian childhood: ‘Mother had not time to be as affectionate as my father because she was always busy ... She loved us but hadn’t time to pet us. My father did the petting.’ Having more time to be with children than the mother (outside his working hours of course) could also mean that fathers figured prominently in tending ill children, as Harold Smith, the son of a Manchester shirt-cutter recalled:

One way that he showed me affection was when I was ill and I was often ill as a child ... When I had the fevers he would carry me into bed and he would hold me very tight, he would put me in one of his night-shirts, his flannel shirts that he’d made himself, and I loved that.

Indeed, a father could be so tender when interacting with his children that, in one instance at least, it was annoying for a child. Allan Jobson recalled that he ‘did not appreciate his gentle touch [during bath time], much preferring Mother’s more
business-like approach'. For Allan’s mother at least, bathing her son was viewed as a chore that was best performed quickly and efficiently, no doubt because it was just one of a number of domestic activities she had to perform. Allan’s father, by contrast, could linger when he performed such childcare activities because he had more time which was perceived to be his leisure.

Not all father-child interactions were enjoyable and pleasant however. In the current literature much has been made of the father’s disciplinarian function and it is often suggested that this could hamper father-child interaction. Humphries and Gordon argue that ‘The distance between father and child was ... heightened by the part fathers played in imposing discipline in the home.’ Certainly within the evidence examined here there were stern fathers who demanded obedience from their children. Phyllis Willmott recalled that her father (an inter-war builder) ‘seemed so powerful that I almost believed that, like God, he too had the power and the right literally to strike us dead if he chose to’. He also ‘had an inviolable rule of never repeating anything he said to us. He felt it showed a lack of respect in a child not to pay attention to him sufficiently to hear what he said the first time.’ When such demands were not met, many fathers were not shy about using corporal punishment. One anonymous author recalled of his Edwardian childhood that, ‘Father was very strict with us, he had to be. I’ve had the strap plenty of times.’ There are many other examples of a father’s harsh discipline.

The father and mother also had distinct ‘zones’ of control over children. Trevor Lummis has noted for East Anglian fishing communities before 1918 that punishment was often ‘administered as a result of public pressures rather than private family rules’. Because it was the father who was ‘held responsible to the
community of which he is a member for the proper maintenance, conduct and upbringing of the family'; it was expected he would address child misbehaviour.\textsuperscript{186} Misbehaviour that was public and called the family's reputation into question often demanded a deliberate punishment from the father. Frank Davies commented that his father 'wasn't a strict man on disciplining, I don't ever remember him, you know, beating us up or anything like that', yet went on to say that:

The only time he'd discipline you was when somebody outside had complained, when you banged somebody's door in or given cheek to a neighbour.\textsuperscript{187}

Yet community studies focusing on motherhood have also shown that it was often she and not the father who most often handed out punishment and the evidence reviewed here upholds this view - or at least it suggests that fathers did not chastise their children any more than did mothers.\textsuperscript{188} The home could be a dangerous environment for young children and it was sensible to 'educate' them quickly in safe conduct, a job for the mother in the vast majority of cases. This of course was especially true for the younger children who are our focus in this section. Moreover, as Loane noted, 'The mother would find domestic life intolerable unless some obedience, however imperfect and little to be relied on, were yielded to herself.'\textsuperscript{189} Moreover, there is evidence that fathers would perhaps less frequently chastise because children were less willing to break their rules. Herbert Allen, the son of an unemployed labourer from Leicestershire, remembered: 'Dad didn't have to hit us. He just told us. What he said was. That was it. But at the same time... with her [step-mum] it was all smack, smack, smack, smack.'\textsuperscript{190}

Yet, whatever the actual frequency of chastisement fathers handed out, the association between the father and punishment remained strong in the majority of
cases. Helen Bosanquet outlined her belief that the ‘mere fact of his [father’s] existence is invaluable to the housewife by strengthening her hands in the management of children’. An anonymous respondent from inter-war St. Helens recalled that, ‘Your mother had to only say, “I’ll tell your dad about it” and that was enough.’ Mr. Band, the son of a railway worker living in Bolton in the inter-war years, similarly recalled that ‘father was in control, definitely. you know... mother used to say, “if you don’t do this I’ll tell your father” and that was the main discipline really’. As Alexander Paterson observed in his study of the south London working classes in 1912, ‘the child is brought up to fear the parent he sees so little’. Therefore, although Abrams does assert (for the Scottish context) that, although ‘it may have been convenient for mothers to use their husbands’ disciplinary role as a threat ... in fact men frequently shied away from meting out punishment to their children’, this fails to acknowledge that it was as much the threat of punishment which could colour the father-child relationship.

It was this association between father and discipline - perpetuated by mothers’ threats – which the fathercraft movement (and indeed other contemporary discourses on fatherhood) began to be concerned about in this period. Clearly many children feared their father’s corrective hand and this could make it difficult for him to be a loving, involved parent if he was viewed as unapproachable and stern and advocates of fathercraft were keen to move away from culture of ‘wait till dad gets in’.

Certainly, within the evidence examined here, many fathers were reluctant to administer harsh punishments. Some even adopted the more ‘understanding’ and ‘close’ forms of discipline championed by advocates of fathercraft: ‘I would deal
with that by taking her on my knee, cuddling her, giving her a little kiss, telling her a bedtime story, because I never believed in corporal punishment - I mean, I didn't think it was necessary to smack a child. Other men, such as James Kirkup's father, refrained from using harsh punishment because they feared they might cause serious injury: 'My father said he would "never lay hand on me", and he never broke his word... Mum sometimes said he was afraid, if he ever did hit us, that he would be in such a rage he would kill us.'

While the father normally saw to the most serious offences, and while this could disproportionately characterise him as stern, such occasions were probably rare. In the home, where the mother controlled the children, a father might be excused from day-to-day control of his children and move away from being the stern authoritarian figure criticised by fathercraft and others. While perhaps fearful of father if they did something particularly serious, children realised fathers could be more tolerant of minor misdemeanours, especially when they were younger. As Miss Loane commented, 'The ordinary father has never thought of trying to teach his playthings to obey him; their "shan'ts" and "won'ts" were a mere joke, to be overcome, where necessary, by bribery and circumvention.' Similarly, the son of a Tyneside joiner recalled how his father was less concerned with his 'misbehaviour' within the home than his mother: 'My father used to roar with laughter - to the fond exasperation of my mother - whenever she started "playing war" with me.' As we have already seen, this father also said he would never hit his children because he was scared of the damage he might inflict. Men were therefore often not the ones who dished out routine smacks allowing fathers to be far more 'chummy' than some contemporary discourses on fatherhood feared was possible.
We must also not judge the issue of child chastisement from our own perspective. No doubt there were many violent parents, but within the working class home occasional rebuffs and smacks from parents could be so commonplace that they were perhaps unlikely to undermine the way a child and father interacted. Indeed, one of the easiest mistakes to make is to assume that occasional acts of even fierce punishment completely clouded the father-child relationship. The evidence suggests that this was not generally the case, in no small part because children often expected their father to perform this function. As one anonymous respondent recalled of his inter-war Bolton childhood, his father was often strict, ‘Not that he lost my respect from it ... he gained my respect rather than otherwise.’ Even where fathers did chastise their children, it needs to be remembered that an act of discipline was a momentary thing and fathers could be chummy, playful and affectionate in the time between. One author remembered that ‘he was strict on discipline, yet gentle’. The point is that being the disciplinarian was not necessarily incompatible with the ‘progressive’ ideas about fatherhood, which stressed closeness between father and child. Children understood and expected that their father might chastise them when they did wrong: ‘My father was strict when we were children. We weren’t allowed to be saucy...Yet he was one of the nicest dads you could wish for.’

This section has argued that younger children often occupied a unique position in a father’s life and, indeed, that fathers were often particularly prominent in young children’s lives. Although baby and infant care remained within the mother’s ‘sphere of influence’, as both men’s conduct and the discourses on fatherhood have suggested, interaction between father and young child was frequent. We can tentatively suggest that because, during these years of childhood, the family
was at the least affluent point in the family-cycle, fathers were denied outside leisure pursuits and were perhaps in the home more. Father-child interaction took a variety of forms but the overarching point of importance is that it was very often expected and accepted that fathers interacted with children of this age. The expectation was in part created by the ‘discourses’ on fatherhood, such as fathercraft, which stressed that children needed their father more as they grew older. However, it was also created by wives’ needs, children’s demands and men themselves, who often found younger children could be entertaining and loving companions within the home. The expectation surrounding this interaction was rarely of the unquestioned kind we saw associated with the responsibility to provide, but it nonetheless could be a powerful component of the experience of being a father:

I doubt the average father is ever quite happy after his children begin regular attendance at school. Their daily absence is not the relief to him that it is to the mother [one has to assume because he was at work during the day anyway]. If they dislike school he is convinced they are unkindly treated; while if they enjoy the experience, he is more than a little bit jealous.203

Older Children.204

As children grew older the relationship and interaction between father and child once again began to alter. As they became more independent and moved towards the public world, their needs were more applicable to the father’s ‘sphere of influence’ and he could offer advice and practical solutions to their growing needs. The differences between sons and daughters also began to affect behaviours and interactions more; while a son required a masculine role model, a daughter’s development quickly restricted what was perceived as ‘appropriate’ interaction between her and father.
There was not a hard-and-fast 'cut-off' for the age at which a child began to require the type of attention that is here described as relating to the 'older' child. As with the shift from babyhood to 'young child', the transition was gradual and varied according to the individual child and the particular aspect of interaction being discussed. Certainly, the concerns a father could have for older children were not completely separate from the concerns he had for the child when he/she was younger. Being a male role model, for example, was something fathers were often aware of from the child's birth. The point is, however, that as children grew it became increasingly important to act in certain ways and, as such, these behaviours began to eclipse other forms of interaction.

Within the evidence, the importance of a father's concern for his child's future meant that even a father who had been distant through his child's younger years might feel obliged to become involved. As one anonymous male respondent from Bolton in the inter-war years recalled, his father never had anything significant to say to him as a young child:

The first time I remember anything like that was when I was about 10 or 11, did I want to go to grammar school... then later on, when I was leaving school, what occupation did I want to go to.\textsuperscript{205}

Similarly, John Edwin, an apprentice jeweller who became estranged from his child after separation from his wife in 1933, described feeling obliged to 'draw close to him [his son] and see that he learned a good profession or otherwise got himself well equipped for his life's journey'.\textsuperscript{206}

Ensuring that a son found work (or at least employable skills) was the common way that working-class fathers fulfilled the expectation for 'future provision'. Edward Foley, the son of an Edwardian Lancashire mill worker, believed
that a father’s involvement ‘was the only way you got a job’ and, even more forcefully, Bob Copper, the son of an Edwardian agricultural labourer, commented that ‘sons followed their father’s trade or calling without question, for it was considered the natural order of things’. Mike Savage has argued that after the First World War the importance of government schemes to find work for juveniles diminished the importance of family ties as the labour market began to change.

However, according to the evidence reviewed here, even after the war fathers (or at least family and personal contacts) remained important in the search for work. This did not necessarily mean that sons followed their father into the same occupation, but rather that a father offered an important point of contact to the labour market more generally. Trevor Griffiths has suggested that state-founded ‘formal’ recruitment agencies in Lancashire were often left unused. As late as 1933 it has been estimated that one-quarter of sons from poor or very poor backgrounds secured a job through their father. Moreover, it was not just finding a job, but also teaching a son employable skills that was useful in the labour market. And, even when they could not actually find their son a job, a father’s experience of the working world might mean he had valuable advice for his sons.

Ross McKibbin has argued that, in working-class families, it was the mother who was ‘decisive in the children’s education; or, at least, she was the one who had most ambition for them’. Certainly in the evidence reviewed here mothers helped with homework or quizzed a child on his/her day at school. By contrast, and unlike their middle-class counterparts, fathers were rarely interested in academic schooling. Indeed, a father could be hostile to his son’s continuing education, questioning its worth or indeed its ‘masculine’ credentials. Robert Roberts observed
in Edwardian Salford that an association was often made between learning and ‘effeminate’ or homosexual behaviour.\textsuperscript{215} Harold Smith, the son of a Manchester shirt cutter, recalled how his father reacted to his educational achievement in the 1920s: “‘What’s he doing all the time, where’s his tools, he’s not using his tools, his tools are in the cupboard… what’s he doing sitting around reading books, who wants to be a bloody clerk?'”.\textsuperscript{216}

The attitude portrayed by Harold’s father was however perhaps unusual in the inter-war years. It is unfair to paint all fathers as hostile or disinterested in their children’s education, certainly to the degree to being actively hostile to their success. A number of fathers were keen that their children did well at school in order that they might ‘better themselves’, perhaps not intellectually, but certainly in terms of being able to secure an ‘easier’ and better paid job. Some fathers did all they could to ensure children did not follow them into a hard and poorly paid occupation by encouraging (where the family economy allowed) them to stay in school: “‘I’ve done enough slogging my guts for nowt for one family” he would say. “Tha get thy feet under t’table”.\textsuperscript{217} Indeed, some men were adamant that their children would not follow them into a working-life they had endured. As B. L. Coombes recounted for the inter-war years, ‘It will not be more than a couple of years before my own boy will be seeking work, but if any sacrifice on my part will prevent it, he shall not go into the mines.’\textsuperscript{218}

While inter-war fathers might to some extent have been sidelined by education opportunities and provision, they still had important information to share about public life and the particulars of the community in which they lived.\textsuperscript{219} As one daughter recalled, ‘I learned far more from my father than I ever learned at
Providing for the future was, essentially, equipping older children with an understanding of the way the ‘outside world’ worked and how they would best operate in it. Both daughters and sons, even from a young age, associated their fathers with knowledge, experiences and events outside the bounds of the home. That such ‘education’ was primarily associated with fathers is evident, and even articulated, by Margaret Wharton, the daughter of an inter-war chauffeur, for example:

It is apparent, I hope, from what I have written that a feeling of belonging to a family was transmitted to us by our mother, while our father acquainted us with the world about us.\[^{221}\]

As the last chapter outlined, much of what fathercraft advocated with regard to the importance of the father’s position as a ‘masculine role model’ for sons was based on psychological concepts and theories which would very likely not have permeated the working class. However, on a less theoretical and more practical level, the evidence suggests that working-class fathers certainly thought it was important to provide a masculine role model. The evidence reviewed here highlights that the reciprocal expectation about what was ‘appropriate’ manly behaviour could have a significant impact on father-son relationships. Where a father may have once taken his young son on his knee or carried him during walks, father-son interaction often quickly became about instilling ‘manliness’ into a son. For example, teaching a son to protect himself and others was believed by some men to be the act of a responsible father. Bert Barnes, an electrician from north London, whose son was born in 1932 explained: ‘I think it is important for a boy to be able to protect himself and to protect his associates, family, sisters, I think it is all important a lad is trained to do that.’\[^{222}\] Respect between a father and son seems to have quickly become based on
shared ideas about proper, ‘acceptable’ and praiseworthy masculine attributes. as
Humphries and Gordon have shown:

I was bleeding in the nose, I was bleeding in the mouth, so I decided I had enough, so I quit... much to my shame, I saw my father standing there and he just walked away. He didn’t reckon on having sons to be quitters, no ... All the hurt I had off the other chap disappeared because I was more hurt because my father walked away.\textsuperscript{223}

The father thus shifted from being a fun loving playmate to being viewed with respect for his masculine characteristics. As Jim Bullock commented, ‘I felt love for my mother and a somewhat awesome respect for my bearded father.’\textsuperscript{224} Yet emphasis on respect and ‘manliness’ could mean that certain types of behaviour were no longer appropriate. A father who was overly emotional, for example, could undermine the respect his son had for him. When Tony Kildwick’s Yorkshire father began to cry and tell his son how much he was loved, Tony’s reaction is illuminating:

I thought it was frightfully unmanly and I am sorry to say that my father went down in my estimation at that time ... [the outburst] was something that was betraying the manly ethos, because he showed emotion.\textsuperscript{225}

However, contrary to what Humphries and Gordon argue, this does not mean that the relationship between a father and his growing son was devoid of emotion, just that there were increasingly barriers and ‘codes’ to expressing it. As Alfred Jenkins remembered, there was still room for ‘affection without slobbering...my father would pat us on the head, put his arms round our shoulders, take us out walking.’\textsuperscript{226} Joe Croft remembered that the men in his childhood mining village ‘loved their wives for the better part, and their children, but it was the way they dispensed the love, they didn’t show it openly if you will - it was as if they were
afraid to show it openly'. 227 Here again we have to highlight that the realities of many working class lives were often incompatible (at least outwardly) with the message of fathercraft. After all, fathercraft advocates had been explicit in suggesting fathers should not hide their affection.

While the nature of the evidence makes it hard to generalise and, while we must acknowledge the idiosyncrasies of individual relationships, there is some evidence which suggest that older boys and girls were treated differently by their fathers. George Short's daughter recalled that when she was bullied, or otherwise aggrieved outside the home, her father was 'never afraid of putting his arms around you and giving you a cuddle and never afraid of telling you that he loved you.' 228 By comparison, however, Frank Davies remembers that when 'somebody'd bashed you one, and you'd come in sobbing he really used to go to town on you, you know, shake you and say you're not supposed to cry'. 229 Older children certainly seem to have understood that the father-child relationship differed according to their gender. Daughters sometimes recall that being treated a certain way was to be treated 'like a son' for example. Daughters who showed 'manly' characteristics might be praised230 and a daughter might therefore perhaps try and impress her father with such 'masculine' virtues.231

As the child grew older it was more likely to develop interests and hobbies of its own and might perhaps require/want a father's company less as peer associations grew in importance. For example, while, as we have seen, there is evidence that some younger sons accompanied their fathers to football a match, regular attendance to games was rarely a universal activity due to the cost. Informal games on the street among groups of boys were far more common and, attending amateur games in the
locality (which meant a father's company was perhaps not needed because it was less ‘dangerous’ and free) was always an alternative to professional games.\textsuperscript{232} Certainly studies of youth culture from this period emphasise the importance of peer activity and the importance of independence from parents in this identity.\textsuperscript{233} The age at which a child was happy and willing to pass time with his/her father was often short-lived.

More generally, a father's control and discipline of older children could be problematic as older children were more likely to commit the kind of ‘serious’ offence that warranted a father's action. If a child was late returning home, or (for girls particularly) if they were too ‘free’ with the opposite sex, the family’s respectability could be brought into question, and indeed a father’s authority.\textsuperscript{234} However, when children began to earn a wage, a father’s ‘natural’ authority over them waned. Alice Foley, for example, described her father’s ‘shrinking kingdom of insignificance’ at a time when ‘the lads [her brothers] were wage-earners’.\textsuperscript{235} As David Fowler has argued, from the age of about 16 wage-earning children often occupied positions not too dissimilar from lodgers and thus expected and were freely granted new freedoms when they started ‘boarding’ yet, at the same time, were still to obey their father’s wishes.\textsuperscript{236} Indeed, while a father had an important part to play in his children’s lives, when they became fully integrated members of the adult world he was seen as having largely ‘succeeded’ in his primary function as a parent. When daughters were ‘given away’ to a husband, the responsibilities of provision and protection moved to the new spouse, and when sons established their own household it was the clearest sign of adult masculine identity. However, up to this point, as ‘diluted’ as a father’s control may have become, children were still normally under his control, as George Ryder, a builder from Liverpool during the 1920s, recalled:
When you got married your father more or less accepted you then as a full grown adult. Up to that time his word was law... when you became a married man with your own responsibilities it [seemed to]... break down a barrier of some sort and you could talk to him like you could a friend. That's when you became a man really, when you had your own family.237

It is doubtful that a father suddenly ceased to have important functions or stopped being at least an occasional companion to his children after they married and left home. Many studies have given great emphasis to the continuing importance of the mother-daughter relationship after the daughter married. Since this study has outlined that the father was more important to his children than has often been assumed, we can suggest that a father's importance also perhaps continued after his children entered adult life to a greater degree than such studies on the mother-daughter relationship have let us infer. However, the research required in discussing this falls outside the scope of this thesis. The point when a child left the parental home is, for us, a convenient point to conclude.

Conclusion.

Historians who have examined working-class fathers' conduct in the period from c.1870 to 1950 have presented a 'Whiggish' view in which it has been argued that men became increasingly centred and 'involved' within the home and family. However, while true in general terms, this chapter has highlighted that this interpretation has often failed to highlight important variations. What seems clear is that any shifts in a father's conduct cannot simply be seen as a linear progression from 'distant' to 'involved' fatherhood. Rather, his conduct fluctuated according to a
number of factors, not least the age and gender of his children and the competing and often contradictory demands being placed upon him.

Babycare never became an expected function of the father and male participation in babycare is perhaps best understood in terms of the husband’s functions and the desire of his wife to have help with activity that remained ‘her’ work. The broad social trends which have so often been seen as bringing the man into the home (such as the decline in family size) were in fact therefore just as likely to mean men were less likely to tend babies because, simply stated, their wives needed their help less. Yet those same trends probably underpinned an increasingly affectionate and cordial relationship between fathers and their younger children.

A father, his male peers, his wife and his children often had different expectations surrounding his conduct. While the areas where these expectations converged made the father’s conduct largely unproblematic and ‘clear-cut’, in other areas there could be conflicting and constraining demands. For example, the consensus among all family members (and of course within ‘official’ discourses) that a father’s first and primary task was to provide for his family meant that men did not alter their conduct to reduce working hours and any new emphasis being placed on play was not a replacement for provision, but rather in addition to it. However, the different expectations surrounding other aspects of interaction could make a father’s conduct troublesome. A child might expect his/her father to play but a father might expect to be able to enjoy his own leisure. A father might think affectionate interaction was ‘unmanly’ but his child might expect some tactile responses because it could be common for other fathers to act in this way.
To this end, a useful conclusion is that fathers continued to be responsible for their ‘traditional’ parenting duties, chiefly provision, but that they were increasingly expected to conduct themselves in more intimate, activity-based relationships with their children. Any discussion of alterations to a father’s conduct must be seen within the context of these shifting expectations.

Drawing any specific conclusion about the relationship between conduct and the discourses of fatherhood is difficult but the evidence does suggest that the conduct of fathers was largely in line with the message being propagated in ‘official and popular’ discourses. Of course, the middle-class and idealistic message of the fathercraft movement was often at odds with the realities of working-class life. Yet the ‘fathercraft father’ can be identified in the conduct of many of the men we have seen in this chapter. To this end we find important divergence with the view of Lynn Abrams and others, who argue that conduct and discourses diverged in this period. In contrast, it seems that the importance of the inter-war years for fatherhood was the way in which certain types of conduct became legitimised, acceptable and expected. After all, examples of virtually all the conduct in this chapter can be found before 1914. The point is that ‘occasional’ behaviours were increasingly becoming the ‘common’ and, in some areas by this period, the ‘expected’ conduct for a father.

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1. L. Abrams, “‘There Was Nobody Like My Daddy’”.
2. See, for example, I. Pinchbeck and M. Hewitt, *Children in English Society*, Vol.2.
3. See, for example, J. Lewis, *The Politics of Motherhood*.
4. Details of these trends are given in Chapter One.
6. J. Melching, ‘Advice to Historians on Advice to Mothers’. See also the discussion in Chapter Five.
8. David Vincent has argued that male authors in his collection of nineteenth-century autobiographies tended to focus on public life and personal achievement, neglecting domestic life, in which they believed readers would be little interested, ‘Love and Death and the Nineteenth-Century Working Class’, *Social History*, 5 (May 1980).


13 Quoted in D. Vincent, Bread, Knowledge and Freedom, p.5.

14 J. Burnett, Destiny Obscure, pp.23-66.


16 D. Vincent, 'Love and Death', p.221.

17 M. Doolittle gives a good review of the literature on this in 'Missing Fathers', pp.174-78.


19 Ibid., p.37.


21 T. Parton, 'A Man's World' Production Material, transcript to rolls 136-137, p.18.

22 N. Prescott, 'A Man's World' Production Material, transcript to rolls 64-66, p.36.


24 G. Todd, 'A Man's World' Production Material, transcripts to rolls 94-102, p.135 [emphasis added].


26 J. Martin, WNSA, cassette no. 1998.0264. Although it is not clear from this quotation, the point Jack expanded upon in the interview was not just that his father was more often drunk when in work, but that the money spent on alcohol deprived the family of other commodities.


29 J. Brady, quoted in J. Burnett, Destiny Obscure, p.302.

30 J. Bullock, Bowers Row: Recollections of a mining village, (Wakefield: 1976), p.34. Another song had a similar theme: 'Don't go down the mine dad / Dreams very often come true. / And Daddy you know it would break my heart / If anything happened to you. / So tell my dreams to your friends, Dad / Go tell my dreams to them all. / For sure as the stars that shine, Dad / Something is bound to befall. / So Daddy don't go down the mine / Oh Daddy, don't go down the mine', pp.33-34. The origins of these songs is not made clear by Bullock, but the point is that children were aware of, and recited such songs.

31 G. Todd, 'A Man's World' Production Material, p.139.


37 L. Oren, 'The Welfare of Women in Labouring Families: England 1860-1950', in S. Hartman and L. B. Banner (eds.), Cho's Consciousness Raised: New Perspectives in the History of Women, (London: 1974). Pember Reeves commented in 1910 that often a father did 'not understand that, though the first baby did not seem to make much difference, a boy of three, plus a baby, makes the old problem into quite a new one', Round About A Pound A Week, p.155. Not all contemporaries were convinced however. Miss Loane, argued that, 'The man who keeps half a crown, but buys nothing for the family out of it except an occasional paper of sweets for the little ones, may have quite as large a share as the man who pockets ten or twelve shillings, out of which he has to pay the club.

Chapter Five: Personal Experiences of Working Class Fatherhood
subscribers, provide all his own clothes and the boys' Sunday suits, settle the boot bill for the entire family, and save something for the summer holiday'. M. Loane, The Queen's Poor: Life As They Find It in Town and Country, (1905; repr. London: 1988), p.12.

M. Pember Reeves, Round About a Pound A Week; Spring-Rice, Working-Class Wives; Roberts, A Woman's Place, Chapter 5; Ellen Ross, 'Survival Networks: women's neighbourhood sharing in London before World War 1'.

E. Ross, Love and Toil. See also for example, 'We didn't get meat. My father had the meat'. G. Ottterspoor, quoted in M. Chamberlain, Fenwomen: A Portrait of Women in an English village, (London: 1975),p.35; 'His physical welfare was a matter of great importance and so it naturally followed that he is the best fed member of the family', B. Copper, Early to Rise: a Sussex boyhood, (London: 1976), p.11.

M. Pember Reeves, Round About a Pound A Week, p.158.

N. Prescott, 'A Man's World' Production Material, p.37. J. Croft, 'A Man's World' Production Material, rolls 67-71 and pp.79-81. T. Lummis also suggests that some family men curbed their drinking in East Anglian fishing communities, 'Historical Dimensions of Fatherhood', p.50. See also an incident in the novel Means-Test Man in which Jack gives up food for his son: 'The child nodded. And some marmalade'. 'Oh, your dad was going to have that'. Mrs. Cook said. 'Oh, he can have it, let him have it'. Jack broke in quickly', pp. 18-19. This is of course more about 'treat' food than about survival, but nonetheless the principle is the same.


If I couldn't get tuppance, dad would find it somehow'. Interview with man born in 1905, Hertfordshire Archives, SR/3/16, p.2.

Willmott, Growing Up in a London Village, p.16; M. Wharton, Recollections of a GI War Bride: a Wiltshire childhood, (Gloucester: 1984), p.23. See also, for example 'One of the chairs by the fireside in the living room was "Dad's chair" – certainly no-one else sat there when dad was in', K. Davenport, My Preston Yesterdays, (Manchester: 1984), p.28.

As a Queen's Nurse Loane was obliged to keep detailed records, including a case book and a register of cases, which she later incorporated into her social commentaries about the poor. Her position as a Queen's Nurse gave her privileged access to the poor where a climate of trust developed, enabling her to speak frankly and expansively. Her observations are thus based on detailed exposure to those she comments on, and her works can be given some weight.

Miss Loane, The Queen's Poor, p.21.

M. Pember Reeves, Round About a Pound, pp.151-152. Pember Reeves' evidence differs from that of Miss Loane because the latter actually interviewed fathers while the former was based on the wives'/mothers' perspective.

A. Jenkins, 'A Man's World' Production Material, p.79.


He had the baby in his arms and he went to light his pipe and there was a lot of lace about the mantelpiece and it caught alight', A. Harding, (edited by Raphael Samuel), East End Underworld: Chapters in the Life of Arthur Harding, (London: 1981), p.65.

If I held her close to me I was always warned to be very, very careful of her', A. Jenkins, 'A Man's World', Production Material, p.79.

While the thrust for 'aid' to the working-class mother/wife came from legislation and welfare reform in the inter-war years it was also understood that 'one of the biggest difficulties our mothers have is our husbands do not realise we ever need leisure time', M. Spring-Rice, Working-Class Wives, p.171.


M. E. Loane, From Their Point of View, (London: 1908), p.145. See also, for example, 'When he was about a fortnight old I went to find Joe pacing up and down the floor in his shirt carrying a screaming bundle', J. Walsh, Not Like This, (London: 1953), p.52; A. Harding, East-End Underworld, pp.30-31; M. Powell, My Children and I, (London: 1977), p.43.

Helping a wife could however also mean that children were out of the way more quickly and the couple could enjoy time together, C. Hall, 'Married Women at Home in Birmingham in the 1920s and 1930s', Oral History, 5 (1977), p.76.
57 M. Powell, My Children and I, p.47.
58 See for example, J. Hanley, Grey Children: A Study in Humbug and Misery, (London: 1937), pp.18-19; M. Pember Reeves, Round about a Pound, p.166. For Frank Davies' father the need for relaxation sometimes resulting in him storming out to the pub where he would seek out a refuge from his children, F. Davies, 'Man's World' Production Material, transcript to rolls 75-84, p.5. Such an incident indicates that changes to housing were important for the ability for fathers to combine leisure time and time at home.
59 M. Powell, My Children and I, p.47. This is the husband of the author's best friend, reacting to the news that the author had started to attend evening classes. See also, for example, 'the working man was the head of the house and wanted peace and quiet when he came home', cited in P. Thompson, The Edwardians, p.78.
60 A. Jenkins, 'A Man's World' Production Material, p.63. Robert Roberts also noted that many wives encouraged their husbands not to do housework, and 'proudly boasted that they would never allow the "man of the house" to do a "hand's turn"', The Classic Slum, p.54.
61 J. Bourke, Working-Class Cultures, (London: 1994), pp. 62-81. In her often cited comment A. Martin (writing in 1911) concluded that the working-class wife's position in the home lies in the physical dependence of her husband and children upon her and she is suspicious of anything that would tend to undermine this', The Married Working Woman.
62 M. Powell, My Children and I, p.43.
63 J. Cadwell, 'A Labour of Love' Episode One, cassette no. 8.019.705 AA. See also, for example, 'Well, when my first child was born my involvement was more or less hanging around, outside, downstairs, waiting for it all to happen. Men didn't go to births, didn't witness births in them days, it just wasn't done somehow', J. Croft, 'A Man's World' Production Material, p.75; 'No husband's eyes ... ever saw the delivery of a baby, never, they seemed to always be barred from it, it wasn't accepted, they shouldn't be there', A. Jenkins, 'A Man's World' Production Material, p.77.
64 R. Williams, 'A Labour of Love', Episode One. Robert Roberts similarly noted that, 'Men in the lower working class, aping their social betters, displayed virility by never performing any task in or about the home which was considered by tradition to be women's work', The Classic Slum, pp 53-54.
65 A. Jenkins, 'A Man's World' Production Material, pp. 67-68.
66 Ibid., p. 64.
68 'Our house was run on the dregs of my mother's energy and by father's bumbling erratic help', B. Andrews, quoted in Burnett, Destiny Obscure, p.128. See also, for example, J. Hanley, Grey Children, p.173-174; G. Anderson, Down the Mine at Twelve: a Netherburn childhood, (Hamilton: 1985), p.24. For the American context LaRossa has observed that fathers in the twentieth century were overwhelmingly depicted in cartoons as incompetent in performing babyscare; 'The Fluctuating Image of the 20th Century American Father'.
69 C. Chinn, They Worked All Their Lives, p.16.
70 A. Jenkins 'A Man's World' Episode 4, cassette no. 8.031 587 AA
71 'Mother had to meet father at the photographer's as he didn't want to be seen with all the kids', E. Evans, Rough Diamonds, (Leicester 1994), p.54.
72 A. Jenkins, 'A Man's World' Production Material, p.69.
74 M. Tebbutt, Women's Talk, p.62.
76 See, for example, G. Anderson, Down the Mine at Twelve; J. Bullock, Bowers Row; M. Wade, To The Miner Born, (Northumberland: 1984).
77 H. Bosanquet, The Family, p.278.
78 J. Bourke, Working-Class Cultures, p.70.
79 M. Wharton (born 1907), the daughter of a chauffeur, explained, 'Mother was a natural nurse Much of her skill was innate but she learned much from her own mother', GI War Bride, p.79. Learning to be a father, in comparison, even with the spread of fathercraft, was often about
emphasising a lack of involvement in childcare, E. Roberts, ‘Learning and Living: Socialisation Outside the School’, p.16.

80 'My baby was born with scarcely sufficient time to get upstairs ... Luckily, my husband was on night duty [and so was in the house at the time], and he must have performed more duties in that one day than in one week, plus the fact he was present at the birth', K. Pearson, Life in Hull from then till now, ( Hull: 1979), pp.99-100.

81 See, for example, 'I spent most of my time at the bottom of the stairs listening to my wife's agony ... I was so distressed that I fainted there and then', A. Jenkins, quoted in S. Humphries and P. Gordon, A Man's World, p.170.

82 Miss Loane, From Their Point of View, p.146. She continues, '...the welcome it receives may be to some extent the mere reaction of thankfulness for the mother's safety, but there is a genuine personal feeling for it in addition'.


84 E. Lees, NWSA cassette no. 1999.0318.


88 It should at this point be stressed that any attempt at a chronological analysis of a father's conduct such as this can only ever be generalised and the point to stress is that there was no monolithistic experience of being a father or of fathers' conduct.

89 The age referred to by 'young' children is not a rigid but refers generally to children after they moved away from the complete dependence of babyhood and up to the last years of school, so from roughly 2 to 4 to roughly 10 to 12 years of age. It needs to be stressed that the demarcation used for structuring this chapter are a convenient way to discuss the issues rather than being a reflection of the rigidity of the age divides in reality.

90 S. Jones, Workers At Play, p.16. There were of course important differences between industries, see table on p.17. See also, for example, R. Lowe, 'Hours of Labour: Negotiating Industrial Legislation in Britain, 1919-1939', Economic History Review, 35 (1982), p.255.

91 Glass wrote in 1935 for example, 'The early morning tube rides in London are filled with workers going from a residential suburb at one end of the town to an industrial suburb on the edge furthest away from it, so that these workers may spend as much as four or five hours a day merely in getting to and from work', quoted in A. Olechnowicz, Working-Class Housing in England, p.215. J. Kirkup, the son of a Tyneside joiner recalled that during the 1920s: 'To get there [to his work] in time he [father] would be up at four or five o'clock in the morning, and would return home dusty and exhausted, smelling of sawdust and shavings, late in the evening, long after I had gone to bed', The Only Child, (1957; repr. Oxford: 1970), p.46.

92 Indeed, part of the attractiveness of decreasing 'normal hours' had been 'not a shorter working week but merely a chance of getting overtime quicker'. The Ministry of Labour found in 1933 that (in the trades it examined) an average of eight hours of overtime were being worked a week, S. Jones, Workers At Play, p.16. The trades examined were the woollen industry, brick manufacture and boot and shoe manufacture.

93 J. Croft, 'A Man's World' Production Material, p.81.


95 G. Davies, the daughter of a tin worker in the Edwardian era, recounted how work affected her father: 'I saw my father often having to sit out in the back garden, to get his voice when he came home. And he'd have to go to bed before he could eat his dinner', quoted in Paul Thompson, The Edwardians, p.135. See also for example, Harding, East End Underworld, p.28.

96 A. Barton, Penny World, p.83.


99 Ibid., p.176.


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102 'He used to take them for walks and that to take them off Enid's hands for an hour or so. I would get home in the night and if they were still up they often used to tell me that they'd been out with him next door - Uncle, they called him. Really, I suppose you could say I was jealous. They used to think an awful lot of him', A. Short, quoted in S. Humphries and P. Gordon, *A Labour of Love*, p.107. See also, for example, R. Heaton, *Salford: My Home Town*, (Manchester: 1982), p.0. [sic] This is also a concern we saw expressed in our analysis of the First World War letters.


105 J. Croft, 'A Man's World' Production Material, pp.82-83 (emphasis added).

106 Tom Parton, 'A Man's World' Production Material, p.29.

107 'Modern Aspects of Fathercraft', *Mother and Child*, February 1939, p.425. More generally we have seen that advocates of fathercraft told fathers they should not 'slide into the position of a passive parent - a mere wage earner', *Mother and Child*, September 1936, p.233.


112 See, for example, A. Davies, *Leisure, Gender and Poverty*, pp. 55-61.

113 R. Church, *Over the Bridge*, p.30.

114 Joe Croft, 'A Man's World' Production Material, pp.76-77.


116 J. Wright, 'A Labour of Love' Episode Three, *cassette no. 8019.818 AA*.

117 *Ibid*.

118 M. Pember Reeves, *Round About a Pound*, p. 164.


120 For example, 'the father emerges almost as a stereotype - frequently drunkard, often thoughtless and uncaring of his wife and children, bad tempered and selfish, but occasionally over-generous and sentimental', J. Burnett, *Destiny Obsolete*, p.233.

121 A. Barton, *Penny World*, p.83.

122 E. Bryson, *Look Back in Wonder*, (Dundee: 1966) p.7. Another author described her dad as, 'A lovely, big beautiful man ... when he came through the door, the house lit up', quoted in J. Sarsby, *Misuses and Mouldrunners*, p.106; B. Horrocks, also an Edwardian child, remembered being 'stood in a doorway ... waiting for him to pass on his way home from work so that I could grab hold of his legs', *Reminiscences of Bolton*, (Manchester: 1984), p.2. Ernest Wood remembered of his inter-war childhood that 'Every evening, when we heard his key in the lock, we would rush to the lobby to greet him like a pair of young puppy dogs', *Is This Theosophy?*, p.15.

123 J. Tosh, 'Authority and Nurture in Middle-Class Fatherhood', p.57.

124 A. Jenkins, 'A Man's World' Production Material, p.71. See also for example, 'I used to chase 'em round a bit in the house and one thing and another, I took 'em to New Brighton many times', T. Parton, 'A Man's World' Production Material, p.30.


126 *NWSA cassette no. 56*.

127 M. E. Loane, *The Queen's Poor*, p.22.

128 J. Kirkup, *The Only Child*, pp.47-48. See also, for example, 'Oh I used to probably have an hours nod in the chair, something like that, then take 'em - in the evening - you know like, if it was a nice evening, take 'em for a walk along the roads', N. Prescott, 'A Man's World' Production Material, pp.30-31.

129 J. Vose, *Diary of a Tramp*, p.10.


132. J. Kirkup, *The Only Child*, p.43. See also, for example, ‘With the meal over, he would turn his chair to the fire and sometimes take us on his knee, while I explored the contours of his face … It was a familiar and reassuring landscape’, B. Copper, *Early to Rise*, p.12; ‘The times I liked the best of all, were when we were all sitting round the fire with my father talking …’. Bullock, *Bowers Row*, p.30; ‘I can see him now sitting with a little girl on each knee, transporting us to the uttermost ends of the earth with his stories’, M. Wharton, *GI War Bride*, p.19.

133. See, for example, Mr. Band, *NWSA cassette no. 65b*.

134. F. Davies, ‘A Man’s World’ Production Material, p.4.


139. M. E. Loane, *From Their Point of View*, p.152.

140. Consider the report of one ‘overheard’ conversation in Blackpool for example: ‘Conversation: difficult time the mothers had with kids, fathers cursed for selfish attitude, “boozing while we are struggling”’. G. Cross (ed.), *Worktowners in Blackpool*, p.157.

141. Mass Observation also found that groups of husbands and wives spent large portions of their time in pubs and ‘at different intervals, one of the fathers leave to see that the kids are alright’. Cross (ed.), *Worktowners in Blackpool*, p.157. Yet, even in this it is interesting to note in this that it is the father and not the mother who went to ‘check’ on the children.


148. John Burnett, in his analysis of working-class autobiography concludes that ‘the level of affection appears to have diminished with increasing family size’. *Destiny Obscure*, p.230.

149. F. Davies, ‘A Man’s World’ Production Material, pp.34-35. See also, for example, G. Foakes, *My Part of the River*, p.100.


151. See also, for example, ‘Oh I used to talk to them and take them for little walks when they were young’, Noah Prescott, ‘A Man’s World’ Production Material, p.29; T. Parton, ‘A Man’s World’ Production Material, p.30.


153. How widespread the importance of ‘shortening’ and ‘breecing’ was over the period is impossible to tell. One author recounted that, ‘Babies are shortened at six months - they could sit up by then - and this is a very proud day… [the mother would] have the baby sitting up in the pram or cot ready for the father to admire… as soon as he came in from work’, Powell, *My Children and I*, p.27.

154. Another author wrote that, ‘These long clothes were worn until the baby was six weeks or two months old, according to its size and progress. They were then “shortened”. Both boys and girls were then put in frocks and petticoats. Boys stayed in these until they were two years old. Then off came the petticoat and dress, and knickers took their place. This was called “being breeced”’, Foakes, *Between High Walls*, p.79. One father, writing home during the First World War indicates that this was a significant rite of passage for the fathers interest, ‘How does Sonny look now he’s shortened’. Harold Bantin, 28th September 1917, *IWM/Con Shelf*. See also letters dated 18th April. See also, for example, Burnett, *Destiny Obscure*, p.25.


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156 'Well, he was quite good with the children ... he was always good like that. But no, he didn't like doing anything in the house whatsoever. I remember that I went on holiday once ... and when I came back a fortnight later, there wasn't a thing in the house to use to drink out of... I've never seen so much washing-up in my life!', quoted in D. Gittins, *Fair Sex*, p.134.
159 When he saw me he was very angry and when I explained that my mother had made me come he ordered me "Repeat the fifth Commandment". Well, I did know my catechism, word perfect, so I stood there in the pub passage and began "Honour thy father and thy mother" and broke off and said "But dad, how can I honour you both?" He said calmly "Your father comes first and always remember that", D. Osherby, quoted in *Destiny Obscure*, p. 93.
See also, for example, 'Me father was, well, he was king of the house', G. Todd, 'A Man's World Production Material', p.7; 'Dad was the boss in our house', K. Davenport, *My Preston Yesterdays*, p.28.
160 For example, one author recalls that, 'We usually went all together [to chapel], my father and my mother first, with father just slightly in the lead. I suppose this was to show his authority'. J. Bullock, *Bowers Row*, p.20. Other symbols of a father's authority are equally common in remembered childhoods. Perhaps the most common was the symbolic importance of father's chair. As one author recalled, 'he always had his own chair, a rocking chair' and that the children used to have to make sure they were not in it when she returned home or they were likely to feel the back of his hand, Agnes Sutton, born 1900s, Bolton, *NWSA 1999.0312*.
162 As one fatherscraft advocate argued for example, 'despite the modern freedom of women, it was the man of the family who made important decisions', *Mother and Child*, 12 (March 1933), p.440.
163 'Dad would listen to us sometimes, but only when Mum wasn't about'. K. Dayus, *Her People*, pp.33-34.
165 E. Wood, *Is This Theosophy?*, p.20. See also for example, 'the attitude in the house was "now, behave yourself and be quiet, your father will be very tired when he comes home and wont want you making noise"', cited in T. Vigne, 'Parents and Children 1880-1918', p.7.
166 His wink of understanding support in my direction, when justice seemed to have gone astray', D. England, *Daisy, Daisy*, p.47. See also, for example, 'Father used to do the washing up and I the wipping. As soon as he had finished his meal, whether anybody else was ready or not, the things began to disappear from the table. "Come on, Harry. Let's get it over", he would say, and into the kitchen we hurried to begin the washing-up partnership', H. Polliit, *Serving My Time: An Apprenticeship to Politics*, (London: 1940), p.21; 'Sometimes on a Sunday evening when mother had gone to the service and I was left alone with him we would talk', A. Jobson, *The Creeping Hours of Time*.
167 A. Fish, *The Family Chatton*, p.15.
171 M. E. Loane, *From their Point of View*, p.147.
177 F. Atherton, quoted in T. Thompson (ed.), *Edwardian Childhoods*, p.111.
179 A. Jobson, *Creeping Hours of Time*, p.17.

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21 J. Bourke, *Working-Class Cultures*, p.94.

22 F. Boughton wrote that his father used to tell him that ‘I shall not leave you much money, but I will teach you every job, then you can always get work’”, quoted in J. Burnett, *Destiny Obscure*, p.299.


24 ‘We’d say “has he gone yet?” – to his pub – and then we’d all get out things out and start. Me mother would be trying to teach…’, ‘A Man’s World’, Episode Four, *cassette no. 8.031 368 AA*

25 Among ignorant men any interest in music, books or the arts in general, learning or even courtesy and intelligence could make one suspect … of homosexuality’, R. Roberts, *Classic Slum*, p.55.

26 H. Smith, ‘A Man’s World’ Production Material, transcript to rolls 46-49, p.15. See also, ‘Me mother would be trying to teach us chess, we’d be reading encyclopaedias, old Dickens books, H. G. Wells…’ But then we’d be looking at the clock and when it was kicking out time [from the pub] she used to say “now put these away, your father’ll be back soon”… But if he ever caught us he used to look at you with disgust, “What’s all this? You look like a bunch of bloody old women sat there”. F. Davies, ‘A Man’s World’ Episode One, *cassette no. 8.031 368 AA*.

27 H. Pollitt, *Serving My Time*, p.30. This reminds us of the notion of paternal ‘sacrifice’ which we saw outlined above.

28 B. L. Coombes, *These Poor Hands*, p.240. See also for example, J. Hanley, *Grey Children*, p.121.

29 For example, the school leaving age was raised to 14 years of age by Fisher’s 1918 Act. In 1907 free places at secondary school were introduced and by 1927 the proportion of free places was at 40 per cent. The Hadow Report (1926) introduced three-tier system of secondary education which began to be implemented in the 1930s, H. Hendrick, *Children, Childhood and English Society*, Chapter Five.


32 Bert Barnes, ‘A Man’s World’ Production Material, transcript to rolls 20-22, p.54.


34 Bullock, *Bowers Row*, p.3.


36 Alfred Jenkins, ‘A Man’s World’ Production Material, p.17.


39 F. Davies, ‘A Man’s World’ Production Material, p.8. See also, for example, ‘Once I remember I came home and said some big lads had hit me. He said “what are you crying for? Go back and knock bloody hell out of them and if you haven’t by the time I catch up with you I’ll give you another clout”. They probably thought they were making men of you”, quoted in N. Gray, *Worst of Times*, pp.88-89.

40 ‘I said I was very proud that she had been able to stand up and look after – not only look after herself but look after her brother Bill’, G. Short, ‘A Man’s World’ Episode Four, *cassette no. 8.031 587 AA*.

41 ‘The thing was that she [daughter] was not bothered about whether she’d got hurt or not, the most important thing she wanted to impress on me was that she’d got her own back’, G. Short, quoted S. Humphries and P. Gordon, *A Man’s world*, p.182.


44 Joseph Farrington recalled that, ‘Up to the age of 11 I was always in bed by 10 o’clock, unless I told him [father] where I was going’. On one occasion he was late home and his father locked him out, causing Joseph’s friends to complain and his father to respond: ‘Go home to your father. Go on Sling your hook. I’m in charge of him, not you’, quoted in N. Gray, *Worst of Times*, p. 20. Lebbutt gives good evidence that a daughter’s interaction with the opposite sex could be an important factor in
the families ‘respectability’, *Women’s Talk*, e.g. p.80, p.149. See also, for example, ‘Pit Brow Lass’. in C. Forman (ed.), *Industrial Town*, p.127.

235 A. Foley, *A Bolton Childhood*, p.43. Similarly, Alexander Patterson’s 1912 observed in his study of the south London working-class that, ‘It is natural that the authority of the father should not be quite so strong as in those other families where he is the only breadwinner’, Patterson, *Across the Bridge*, p.15.


237 George Ryder, ‘A Man’s World’, ‘Rites of Passage’, cassette no. 8.031 448 A.A. Tosh emphasises that establishing a household and having a family was central to Victorian ideas of middle class masculinity, *A Man’s Place*, Chapter Four.
Chapter Six
PERSONAL EXPERIENCES OF THE UNEMPLOYED FATHER.

As Chapter One outlined, from 1921, when the post-war boom turned to slump, until the first months of 1940, Great Britain suffered mass unemployment on an unprecedented scale, with never less than a million (one tenth of the insured population) out of work. At its peak in 1932, after the collapse of the American economy, the number of unemployed reached 3.4 million, or 17 per cent of all employees and 22 per cent of all insured worker.¹ Of course, unemployment (and the risk of unemployment) did not affect all sections of the working population equally. Men were more likely to be unemployed than women and older men were more likely to be unemployed than younger men. Regional and occupational variations were great, as Tables FIVE and SIX in Chapter One show. Workers in different areas and within different occupations could also be unemployed for varying lengths of time. In 1937, for example, 27 per cent of the unemployed had been out of work for more than a year but the average spell of unemployment was 42 weeks.² There was a general contrast in experience between the shorter-term and long-term unemployed. As the American sociologist Edward Bakke found in his 1931 study of Greenwich for example, length of unemployment was central to an individual’s experience of joblessness because the belief that a job might be found often dictated where their daily energies and ‘hopes’ might be placed.³ The numbers of unemployed in a given community could also be an important factor in dictating the experience of unemployment. As contemporary surveys indicate, where a community was dependent on one industry in which unemployment was high, the stigma of
unemployment often lessened because everyone around was shown to be in a similar situation. Conduct which was sometimes not acceptable or which was not expected might become more so. It was the worst hit areas of shipbuilding, coal, textiles, iron and some engineering works where long-term unemployment was most persistent and, typically, there was more long-term unemployment in the 1930s than there had been in 1920s.

Although at any one time the majority of workers were in employment, many workers experienced unemployment at some point. For example, in 1930 whilst the number of unemployed averaged 1.9 million, a total of 5 million were unemployed in the course of the year and about three-fifths of insured workers had experienced unemployment since 1920. More subtly, the threat of unemployment in such an unstable economy could be a cause of constant anxiety, as John Rankin, a shipyard worker on the Clyde, recalled:

> When Tuesday is passed you know you are safe till next Friday — and if Friday passed you know you're all right till Tuesday, and so it goes. But sooner or later the foreman will come up to you and tell you to get out.5

Overall then, the numbers of unemployed men in the inter-war period were so high, and the threat of becoming unemployed was so great, that it makes an investigation into the 'out-of-work father' an important aspect of this study. The experience of being unemployed would have been shared by a significant proportion of working-class fathers.

This chapter seeks to explore how far being unemployed affected the expectations surrounding a father's parental functions and also his conduct within the father-child relationship and therefore addresses many of the same themes as the last chapter. However, discussing the unemployed father separately is an important
recognition of the specific and unique circumstances unemployment created for men and their families. It is these circumstances which, this chapter argues, sometimes encouraged individuals and communities to ‘refocus’ their expectations surrounding a father’s conduct. However, while certain expectations and conducts could become ‘normal’ for an unemployed father, this should not necessarily lead us to conclude that they were ‘normal’ for the fathers more generally in the period.

It is also misleading to suggest that the experiences of unemployed fathers were totally unique or separate from ‘normal’ experiences. Many of the contemporary social surveys used in this chapter can be criticised for this, as they tend to view the unemployed men or communities ‘in a vacuum’. That is, they often make it unclear whether the conduct, conditions and expectations they describe existed prior to the onset of unemployment or if being out of work somehow ‘created’ them. An awareness of this conceptualisation is important when answering some of the questions posed in this chapter - did being out of work reverse or alter trends in fatherly conduct? Did it merely accentuate or accelerate those trends? Or, did the unique circumstances create conduct and expectations that would not have happened without fathers being unemployed? To this end, and in a similar way to the First World War, unemployment can be viewed as one ‘arena’ within the period between 1900 and 1939 in which fatherhood was placed under stress. Of course, personal experiences of unemployment varied greatly and individual responses to being unemployed also varied greatly; there was no uniform experience.

Within the current literature that examines the experiences of unemployment there is virtually no attention given to the impact on fatherhood and father-child relationships. The main focus of the current literature, as Chapter One outlined, has
been the experience of the adult-male in public life rather than domestic relationships. It is largely how unemployment affected a man's leisure, his political ideas, his 'morale' - that has been given attention. The wider connotations for family life are less well explored. This is not to suggest that we don't often gain an insight into the unemployed man's domestic life, but rather, that it is discussed from the perspective of 'filling time' in a workless day rather than within a broader context of fatherhood in the period. For example, John Burnett and Katherine Nicholas both give evidence that unemployed men sometimes performed domestic chores but neither author differentiates between domestic help and childcare. 6 When there are rare snippets of evidence relating to the father-child relationship during times of unemployment, the authors are unable to say if this was unusual conduct for fathers. Within the context of the thesis however, we can be more confident in suggesting that certain expectations or conducts were peculiar to unemployment.

Sources and Method.

The examination of the experiences of the unemployed father offered here is based on autobiographical accounts and contemporary social investigations into the problem of unemployment, predominantly from the 1930s. The use of such sources has been discussed in the previous chapter and need not be repeated here. 7 The only unique consideration has already been raised - the concern over how far studies on unemployment were conducted without due consideration to previous community and individual 'norms'.

In addition one novel is used, Walter Brierley's Means-Test Man. 8 This perhaps requires a specific word on its use given that the fictional plot need not
necessarily reflect any specific experiences or observations. However, it can be suggested that *Means-Test Man* illuminates some aspects of personal experiences because it is based on Brierley’s own experiences during his time as a unemployed miner in a Derbyshire mining village. The central character in the novel ‘Jack’ had a wife and one child, the same as Brierley. As Bernard Harris suggests therefore, *Means-Test Man* is a ‘thinly disguised “fictional” account’. Thus, the historian can view much of the incidental material in the novel as of relevance to the period and, while not purporting to be an autobiography, in the case of *Means-Test Man* there is a strong autobiographical element to the writing.

**The Unemployed Father and Parenting Functions.**

The current literature and contemporary social surveys all stress how disruptive unemployment could be for the adult man. Work was the centre and source of masculine identity and unemployment could mean that he lost his status, his sense of purpose and in extreme cases even his reason for living. Work structured a man’s day and provided a routine that compartmentalised his life into ‘work’ time and ‘leisure’ time which, as the last chapter explored, was a distinction that was important in shaping his domestic functions and activity as a husband and as a father.

Leisure participation and political and intellectual interests could be disrupted because they were often closely tied to the job a man did. And, of course, unemployment meant a loss of earnings that resulted in a decline in the standard of living for most (though not all) men and their families, stretching already fragile household economies and often causing domestic relationships to be strained.
Being unemployed robbed a man of his ability to fulfil his principal responsibilities as a husband and father. Economic provision, as the last chapter outlined, was understood by men, their wives and their children to be the father's foremost function. It is therefore unsurprising that the documentary and oral evidence indicates that many working-class men believed that they were failing as a parent when unemployed. Even if a man could interact with his children in other ways, or fulfil other exceptions perceived to be part of 'good' fatherhood, men seem to have often felt palpable despair when they were unable to provide. In sharp contrast to the many warm and affectionate 'return from work' incidents described in the last chapter, one unemployed boilermaker from Greenwich told Bakke of his feelings and experiences:

It gets on your mind, to see the kids around and you know you're not bringing anything to them. I used to like to have them run to meet me when I came home from work. But now...Well - I almost wish they wouldn't come. It's hell when a man can't even support his own family.  

As we have seen, children could be aware of their fathers' principal parenting function, and even where younger children did not fully understand the need for a father's work there could be a strong expectation that fathers were 'supposed' to provide such gifts and treats. Brierley's 'Jack' discovered a sense of failure when his son John 'complained that other dads gave their little boys pennies and took them to the pictures'.

The evidence suggests that the unemployed father was often in an untenable position because even long-term unemployment rarely altered the shared expectation that it was 'supposed' to be the father's/husband's responsibility to provide - unemployment just restricted his ability to do so. Other members of the family could of course move into the position of primary breadwinner (if there were adult children
earning, or if a man’s wife was able to secure an income) but this seems to have very rarely altered expectations surrounding a husband’s/wife’s and father’s/mother’s conduct. Some couples actively covered-up the fact a father was unemployed from children in order to maintain a sense of continuity in the home. A skilled wire drawer commented: ‘Our child is still too young to realise that it is her mother who works. We carefully keep her from knowing it.’ Moreover, the expectation that a husband/father ‘ought’ to provide could continue to be highlighted in no uncertain terms by the way a man’s family might treat his apparent ‘failings’. In one extreme example a father was ejected from his home: ‘Eventually, after the most heartbreaking period of my life, both my wife and son, who had just commenced to earn a few shillings, told me to get out, as I was living on them and taking the food they needed.’

Certainly within the family, blame for the situation was often attached to the father: ‘I married you and you’ve an obligation to provide ... and more besides – you’ve got a son.’ And, moreover, the fact that unemployment payments were paid to the man also perpetuated the understanding that he really ‘ought’ to be the one earning a wage. As Ross McKibbin observes, maintaining public appearances of respectability and unity was common, but, we can suggest, what seemed equally important was that within the privacy of the home being unemployed could cause severe tensions even when a public show of unity was maintained.

This conceptualisation is vital in understanding the impact unemployment might have on fathers. As the current literature highlights, although most families of unemployed men often struggled to make ends meet, unemployment rarely resulted in the kind of poverty which might cause death or ill-health. Inter-war social surveys
have indicated that poverty caused by unemployment was a serious problem, but it is important not to exaggerate or overly simplify the impact that loss of the male income had on many family economies. For some workers, for example, employment had been irregular and poorly paid anyway, making living on state hand-outs rather less of a problem. And, in many cases, a combination of charitable and state assistance and the ability of other members of the family to secure work might mean the actual drop in living standards was minimal. Indeed, although the general belief among historians is that there were some adverse effects on people's health, the numerous studies conducted at the time concluded that children only rarely suffered from ill-health or malnutrition as a direct effect of having an unemployed father.

The concern for an unemployed father could therefore be less about his children's survival and more about his ability to be a useful parent. As the wife of one unemployed man remembered: 'The dole prevented absolute starvation, but a long period of idleness did almost irreparable harm to a man by sapping his confidence, his independence, and his position as the bread winner.' The problem was that the 'dole', although paid to the man in recognition of his position as the wage earner, never felt like it came from a man's own efforts. Brierley's 'Jack' felt his position in his family was more akin to a woman's because he was 'providing for it with money which came from a pool into which all the bread-winners in the land threw a determined, compulsory amount'. Indeed, being unemployed could sometimes be enough (certainly for the more 'respectable families') for men to restrain themselves from marrying and becoming fathers at all. Jack Singleton, who became unemployed after an apprenticeship in Teesside, recalled that, 'Madge and I
were courting then, and I used to think we'd never get married, we'd never have enough money.'

Although the last chapter showed that, when it came to domestic matters, men normally gave way to their wives' wishes, the economic dependence of his family was still the bedrock of a man's authority and often allowed him to have the final say if he so wished. As Lillian Tunstall, the wife of a mill-worker recalled, 'The man was always the boss in my family. You looked up to your husband. He was the provider.'

During a man's unemployment however, when his importance within the family probably diminished, the mother's importance for the family's survival probably increased. Contemporary social studies and historical analyses have indicated the centrality of the working-class wife/mother in managing the family income and this importance was increased when she had to maintain standards as best she could on the meagre 'dole' allowance. John Rankin, a worker on the Clyde, commented that the task of stretching the decreased family budget was 'a problem for my wife, and God knows how she solves it.... a man hands in his money and knows in his heart it is a hopeless proposition to keep a house on it for week'.

The burden of keeping the family afloat often had negative outcomes for mothers/wives, and it is these that the current literature almost always emphasises. For example, The Pilgrim Trust found that in families of unemployed men it was most often the wife/mother who had the worst diet and that she had an increased burden of work, findings confirmed by historical analysis. However, the 'flip-side' of these negative outcomes of a husband's unemployment – the fact that the balance
in domestic negotiations might be altered in the wife’s favour – have not been considered.

Being even more pivotal to the family’s survival during times when her husband was out of work had the potential to increase a wife’s ‘power’ and further cemented her dominant position in parenting decisions. In an incident when Brierley’s ‘Jack’ is helping his seven-year-old son (John) to dress, his wife criticises him, saying the boy needs to learn to do it himself. ‘Jack’ concedes, telling his son that he should indeed try and dress himself. However, we later learn that ‘If he had been in work … he would have continued helping John dress, smiling and shooting banter with his wife.’\textsuperscript{31} Similarly, in other incidents, such as a conflict over their son’s use of the local dialect and a conflict when his wife quizzes their son over school work, Jack gives way to his wife as the superior parent.\textsuperscript{32} We only have to compare ‘Jack’ to the image of the strong, authoritative father found in other evidence – ‘there was no doubt about who dominated the home life, it was the mining father’\textsuperscript{33} – to indicate how unemployment could be undermining for fathers.

As we have seen, many wives in the period used the threat of the father as a tool when disciplining children and this was dependent on him occupying some position of authority, in the mind of the child at least. However, it is seems unemployment could undermine a father’s ‘authoritative’ position in the minds of children. As one unemployed house-painter recalled: ‘The idea seemed to be created in their minds that mother’s view was correct, with the consequent result that they were less apt to consider me worthy … or a fitting person to ask if they required advice or direction.’\textsuperscript{34} During times of unemployment there was even concern that children might be inclined to go ‘off the rails’ and some contemporary investigators
suggested that juvenile crime levels were related to a father being out of work. The Chief Constable of Middlesbrough concluded in 1933 that, 'I am of the opinion that one of the main factors [for the rise in juvenile crime] is the absence of rigid discipline in the home.' Such a concern echoes the fears we have seen during the First World War. Although Katharine Nicholas concludes that it is impossible to attribute the rise in juvenile crime levels to the fact that fathers were unemployed, the Save The Children Fund also voiced concern that the decline in paternal authority was causing a decline in discipline, suggesting it was an issue serious enough to warrant further investigation.

Many of the functions that were expected of a father were directly related to his higher public status (relative to the mother) in the community and to the fact that he was more 'integrated' in and knowledgeable of the 'public' world. It was he who might speak for children in the community and protect them from destructive 'outside' influences for example. However, as the inter-war studies all emphasise, and as the current literature also argues, a loss of work often meant a loss of status and 'influence' within a community and this could have an impact on the ability of fathers to perform these 'types' of fatherhood functions.

This is well exemplified by 'Jack' and his reaction to another man chastising his son. According to his wife, what 'Jack' was compelled and expected to do was obvious: 'Her voice changed, hardened. "Your dad'll go and see Mr. Jinks [man who hit their son]. He wants teaching to keep his hands off other folk's children."' We have seen the attitude that, as Jim Bullock summed up, 'Woe betide any man who tried to chastise another man's child.' But Jack is unable, or unwilling, to confront the man who chastised his son because of the fear that he will be called 'idle'. In his
wife’s eyes this reluctance amounts to his complete failure as a father,40 and Jack himself is angered by the realisation that being unemployed has made him fail his son by failing to live up to the expectations surrounding fatherhood:

He was angry at himself... he ought to have rushed down the street and confronted Jinks challengingly, for the man had hurt his child... [But] the man might have yelled and shouted about his condition, using the sneer “idle” as a powerful weapon... He was angry at his impotence, angry at the knowledge that in whatever direction he turned his level was most painfully lowered.41

Another important expectation surrounding working-class fatherhood was that fathers might help their sons find work and aid their integration into the adult masculine world surrounding employment and leisure. Being unemployed meant that a father was unable to find his son work in his own occupation and this could weigh on a father’s mind. John Evans, a Welsh miner, commented that it was ‘a heartbreaking business to watch your boy grow into manhood and then see him deteriorate because there is no work for him to do’.42 However, as Trevor Griffiths suggests, a father’s principal importance in the search for work was often his ability to provide contacts for employment opportunities - something he could do as a member of informal male networks.43 The Labour Exchanges, which managed to fill only one adult vacancy in five nationally in 1930, were often criticised for providing ‘poor fitting’ jobs. The unemployed knew that any public sources of information could only properly work if employers were compelled to register all vacancies. Moreover, juveniles were at a particular disadvantage in the Exchange because workers were only admitted after they reached sixteen when they qualified for unemployment insurance, and because Exchanges also tended to reserve worthwhile jobs for adults.44 Given this scarcity of employment opportunities of juveniles and the apparent short fallings of Labour Exchanges, the importance of a father’s
contacts was probably heightened in areas where unemployment was common. However, of course, a father’s unemployment could be a serious barrier to men being ‘tipped off’ about job opportunities. The unemployed man could ill afford to spend money socialising with (ex) work colleagues and, as investigators working on the New Survey of London Life and Labour found during the inter-war years found, ‘The activities discussed in the bar will be in any case mainly closed to them [unemployed man].’ As Mass-Observation discovered in the 1930s, such discussions were typically, for men, work-related.

Unemployment could have a significant potential impact on the ability of a father to fulfil what were normally expected to be his principal functions as a parent. Not only was his ability to provide greatly undermined, but the centrality of work to masculine life often meant that unemployment undermined many of the unique ‘characteristics’ or ‘privileges’ a man enjoyed which set him apart from his wife.

Fathers could of course strive to overcome such problems and, in doing so, provide good indications of how important their children’s health and happiness was to them. For example, a number of unemployed men within the evidence gave up their own pleasures to treat their children46 - a trend we saw in the last chapter but, given that a man had less income with which to provide for his own pleasures, it is perhaps better evidence of this trend. For example, Rowntree and Lasker recorded the comments of the wife of one unemployed man from York in 1911 that indicate that men refrained from drinking to benefit their children:

You don’t find a man who goes out many a morning at five fasting, because he wants to leave what crust there is for the children and me, dropping into the public with the first shilling he earns.47
Hilda Jennings also observed in her study of Brynmawr, in Wales, that
'in a surprisingly large number of instances ambition for the children remains a
real force where years of unemployment have left the father without much
hope of any improvement in his personal prospects'. Jennings discovered that
parents were willing to go against tradition, and personal ties of affection, in
order to send their sons away to gain training in a job for which the prospects
of long-term unemployment were less.

The Unemployed Father and Childcare.

Inter-war surveys of unemployment emphasise that the unemployed man
faced two problems: the search for work and the need to 'kill' time. Bakke's study of
Greenwich found that the unemployed man spent on average 4.2 hours a day for
five-and-a-half days, or twenty three hours a week, looking for work. This search
for work involved long walks and often disheartening vigils outside factories, docks,
mills and pits. Max Cohen (although himself not a father) recalled 'empty, boring,
monotonous days of walking about searching for a job ... as much to distract myself
as to find work'.

However, twenty-three hours a week spent looking for work was significantly
less 'occupied' time than the standard forty eight hour working-week, and, moreover,
the search for work was normally confined to early morning because, as one man
told Bakke, 'It's no use to look for a job after nine o'clock. All hands are taken on by
then.' Moreover, in areas dependant on a single industry that had collapsed it
quickly became fruitless to look for work.
How men filled the rest of the day was the concern of contemporary studies and middle-class commentators, the latter often portraying the unemployed as idle, 'dangerous' and generally problematic. Yet, despite this perception, there was little evidence within the contemporary social studies that many unemployed men were engaged in 'loafing'. Bakke concludes, for example, that less than 8 per cent of the unemployed men in Greenwich could be labelled as 'loafers', and of these the majority were under 21 years of age or pensioners. And, subtly reminding us of the need to view unemployment studies in the context of 'normal' behaviour, Andrew Davies reminds us that 'hanging out' on streets was a legitimate and common 'leisure' activity, especially for the young, in many areas during times of employment anyway.

The unemployed man had other ways to fill his time. For example, there was a requirement of personal attendance at the Labour Exchange to register availability for work, typically required two or three times a week. Many men found refuge in allotments or libraries, the billiard hall and some (typically single men) the cinema. There were various 'clubs' and organisations providing classes, exercise and various facilities to occupy the workless man, and other men passed their time in the street, in activities such as gambling. Indeed, although perhaps exaggerating the point, Ross McKibbin has suggested that the variety of activities available to, and required by, unemployed men often imposed a new form of routine to their lives.

Most relevant for our interest is the finding that unemployed married men spent more time in the home when they were unemployed. As Bakke concluded, 'the extra time which is on their hands after time spent looking for work is deducted, is spent by most of the men at home, not in the 'pubs' or on the streets'. This was not
simply because fewer hours were filled by working but, as we shall see, also because the outlets of traditional leisure were often reduced for the unemployed and, as Hilda Jennings found in her study of Brynmawr, the importance of the home and family relationship were often enhanced for men during periods of joblessness. For our interest though, the question remains how far these circumstances had an impact on the expected functions of the father within the home and if being unemployed had an impact on the father-child relationship more generally.

After his visit to Wigan in the 1930s, George Orwell concluded that:

Practically never in a working-class house will you see the man doing a stroke of housework. Unemployment has not changed this convention, which on the face of it seems a little unfair. The man is idle from morning to night but the woman is busy as ever ... Yet so far as my experience goes the women do not protest. I believe that they, as well as the men, feel that a man would lose his manhood if, merely because he is out of work, he developed into a 'Mary Ann'.

The delicate position unemployed fathers found themselves in when it came to greater participation in domestic life is clear from Orwell's comments. On the one hand the biggest obstacle to being more involved (long working hours) had been removed. Conversely, however, as Joanna Bourke has suggested, without the authority and masculine status obtained through being the primary breadwinner, a man who did 'women's work' was even less able to fend off taunts of unmanly or 'effeminate' behaviour. Unemployment did not therefore necessarily mean that long-standing divisions of domestic responsibility were altered and, the evidence suggests that in many homes women continued to perform housework without any additional help from their husbands, often to their detriment. As McKibbin comments, 'A conventional division of labour often doubled the miseries [of wives]: men would not do housework and had to find other ways to kill time.'
However, it is again necessary to be critical of the current literature for being too general about ‘domestic work’. There is, after all, meaningful evidence that men were very active in the home in performing ‘masculine’ household work when unemployed. In the Lancashire mill-town of Darwen, for example, Cecil Northcott found that men did various repairs around the house and tended outside spaces, and Joanna Bourke has suggested that in many areas unemployed men were particularly aware of the ‘masculine acceptability’ of the domestic work they performed. That men became focused on such ‘masculine’ household work could even be detrimental to wives and children. As Jennings observed in Brynmawr for example:

[Some men] do carpentry in their backyard or kitchen ... while their wives cook and tend to the children in a restricted space around the fireplace, uncomplaining because they realise the necessity of providing some occupation for their husbands in order to keep them even moderately content.

Conceptualising ‘housework’ in a general way also allows other contemporary observers to be cited, such as Spring-Rice, who observed that men did in fact help in the home more when out of work. Cecil Northcott also further noted that “‘Helping the missus” in many cases [was] a permanent occupation’. Indeed, the long-term unemployed man could adopt a routine that included regular contributions to domestic chores, even to the point when this became expected. Brierley’s ‘Jack’, for example, is described as having ‘become so accustomed to doing his blackening, scrubbing, bed-making and bread-making at times, tidying around, that he could not imagine himself doing any other work...his wife, too, left things to him quite naturally’.
More significantly for our interest, much of the evidence indicates that the unemployed father might involve himself in domestic childcare and, moreover, it appears that some jobless men might have felt compelled more often to perform those tasks which were perhaps perceived as ‘chores’. There seem to be a number of possible explanations for this.

The last chapter indicated that long working hours were often a barrier to a father helping with childcare. The greater amount of time the unemployed father had in the home could mean childcare was possible. They were ‘on-the-spot’ and able to deal with more of their children’s needs on a more regular basis. For example, during an interview with one unemployed Welsh miner in his 1930s study, James Hanley recalled how the father of two received his children when they came home from school, drying them and putting their clothes by the fire, even though his wife was also in the house.69 One assumes his ‘normal’ working hours would have made this impossible. Furthermore, being unemployed typically removed the distinction between ‘free’ time and ‘leisure’ time: although unemployed men might have more ‘free’ time, this was less easily seen as ‘leisure time’. The last chapter indicated that ‘leisure time’ was normally filled as a man chose, but ‘free’ time due to unemployment was more likely to be filled by chores required by a wife or the family. As Bakke discovered, ‘[work] provides him with the means of enjoying his spare time.’70 Without work it was hard to categorise a man’s time as ‘leisure’.

For many unemployed men performing childcare could become an unavoidable practical necessity if their wives managed to secure employment. In such circumstances even a reluctant father was likely to have to participate in childcare to a degree that he perhaps never had before. It was, using the
conceptualisation from the previous chapter, an extreme example of the need for
'wife help'. As Jane Walsh, the wife of an unemployed Londoner, remembered:

After sixteen weeks [of her husband being out of work] I just had to go
back to work. Charlie [husband] would have to look after Margaret [baby
daughter]. He went up in the air. He was so clumsy and she was such a
tiny thing. But we had to eat something, so I was adamant.71

The last chapter indicated that notions of 'acceptable' manly behaviour held
among a man's peer group could be detrimental to him performing 'feminine' caring
tasks, especially for babies. However, the evidence suggests that during times of
unemployment men could be less restrained by peer group beliefs because of the
greater necessity that he helped. The wife of one unemployed miner explained to
James Hanley that her husband helped a great deal with the children but that this was
not too problematic for him because 'he's no exception ... hundreds of men are
doing the same thing'.72 Studies have shown that experiences of unemployment were
to a very large extent dictated by community responses73 and within the current
literature emphasis has been placed on the fact that long-term unemployment in
severely depressed areas could alter what was 'normal' or acceptable. As Nicholas
writes, 'important was the experience of others around ... unemployment was much
easier to bear in the depressed areas, where communities of unemployed people
developed, and the stigma of unemployment lessened as everyone around was shown
to be in a similar situation'.74 For our specific interest we can suggest that, if only in
areas dependent on a single industry which became depressed, there could be at least
a temporary shift in what was 'acceptable' and 'expected' of fathers - a 'refocusing'
of fatherhood to match the expediency of the situation. For example, in Darwen.
where unemployment was severe with only twenty eight of sixty mills open.

Northcott observed that:

Where there are children, many men fill in an hour in the morning with the “prams” in the park. In one corner I have noticed the same collection of men day after day.\footnote{75}

As Diana Gittins has suggested, compared to the Lancashire mining areas which she also studied, in Lancashire mill towns men were often more accustomed to help with domestic work because the greater availability of female work in mill towns diluted the rigidity of the gender spheres.\footnote{76} We therefore must qualify the behaviour Northcott observed as not necessarily ‘new’ but rather as perhaps being an ‘exaggerated’ or ‘extended’ state of what was already often acceptable in that area. After all, what the unemployed father was prepared to do continued to reflect the community ‘norms’ of ‘normal’ life. Therefore, while the Lancashire unemployed men seem to have been comfortable pushing prams, for unemployed men in ‘harder’ areas such as Teesside, this type of childcare typically remained far less ‘acceptable’.\footnote{77} Unemployment, we need to say, was not dramatic enough to ‘invent’ conduct which was completely out of character with the community. As McKibbin has argued, the experience of unemployment was often informed by men’ experiences in ‘normal’ life.\footnote{78}

Yet, the act of very public care observed by Northcott in the Lancashire mill town is a significantly ‘involved’ act for a father. The image of men in easy association with babies in prams stands in contrast to the comments we have seen in the previous chapter, which indicated that public care, and especially baby care, was often to be avoided. Unemployment, we can tentatively suggest, therefore created circumstances in which fathers who were already accustomed to performing some
childcare performed such activity with less restraint and perhaps even performed a
greater number of those activities which were most commonly regarded as
'feminine'. But men who had never performed childcare were unlikely to start to do
so unless the necessity of their wives' work made it unavoidable.

It would certainly be misleading to suggest that incidents of fathers
performing childcare are evidence that there was significant long-term change to the
exceptions surrounding a father's functions. When a man's wife found paid
employment and he was forced to perform housework and childcare on a regular
basis the situation could be experienced as humiliating precisely because of the
inability to fulfil the expectations surrounding 'manly' and 'fatherly' behaviour. Not
only was the unemployed husband being supported by his wife, but he was required
to perform what were often perceived as 'feminine' tasks. As a skilled wire drawer in
such a situation rhetorically asked, 'Is this a man's life?'

The answer to such a question, the evidence suggests, remained firmly 'no'.
The evidence suggests that, while social investigators such as Cecil Northcott may
have perceived that there was often 'a complete reversal of function' between
husbands and wives, this seem to have been rarely the way it was experienced.
Although there was perhaps a greater acceptance of men having to do childcare and
domestic work, such functions were not becoming part of the expected functions of
'normal' fatherhood/husband and were still viewed as 'women's' work. As
Brierley's 'Jack' indicates 'To miners he would have become a woman, working in
the home.' Even wives, who often appreciated their husbands' efforts, understood
that childcare was not 'normal' for their husbands and was, ultimately, not manly, as
the wife of one unemployed miner commented when her husband finally found work:

He helps me in the house, and I’ll miss his getting the children to school and scrubbing the step and doing the windows for me. Mind you, I never asked him to do those things. He just did them himself. It’s not a man’s job at all, but a woman’s.82

When explaining why the unemployed father helped with the care of his children we again need to remember that ‘childcare’ was not necessarily experienced as a ‘chore’ - indeed, evidence in the last chapter suggested that it was rarely perceived as such by fathers. This very likely explains why, in some evidence, unemployed men were happier looking after their children than performing other ‘feminine’ housework activities. In her study of unemployment in Teesside in the inter war years, for example, Katharine Nicholas found that ‘few men helped much in the home if they were unemployed. Although a few looked after the children.’83 Similarly, Kate Mourby concludes that:

The Pilgrim Trust, in its thorough study of unemployed people in the thirties, found cases of unemployed men who said they gained great satisfaction from caring for their children. Although this was "women’s work" it was somehow more easily taken on than cooking and cleaning. It is interesting that most of the Teesside fathers who were described as looking after their children did not think of doing housework.84

Men were perhaps especially keen to perform childcare tasks because it made them feel useful as parents, and perhaps allowed them at least partly to replace their failures as a breadwinner. As the studies examining the ‘psychological’ impact of unemployment have concluded, a major problem of joblessness was feeling useless to family members.85 The Pilgrim Trust investigators believed that becoming actively involved in family life could fend of such feelings of uselessness.
A further factor doubtless which makes it easier for them to adjust themselves to unemployment is that any of those who have large families can do a useful job if they stay at home and help bring up the children.  

This feeling of being ‘useful’ seems to have underpinned some unemployed men’s efforts in childcare. Moreover, in the case of unemployment it appears that men were keen to feel ‘useful’ in the eyes of their children and not just to their wives. James Hanley reported the comments of a daughter of one unemployed miner in South Wales for example:

Her father washed both children every morning and saw them off to school. Although both children were capable of looking after themselves in this matter, they had yielded to the peculiar whim of the father. Apparently he was doing something for them by giving them their breakfast and seeing them off to school.

The Unemployed Father - Child Relationship.

George Tomlinson, a Nottinghamshire miner unemployed for four years, spent many of his days walking in the forests round his village, inventing stories with which to entertain his daughter:

Often in the summer I have been starting off for a long walk through the woods just as the men have been going to the pits, and frankly I admit that I have been glad that I was free to go where I wished... Even after four years of unemployment I get a thrill out of ignoring the pit buzzer.

His comments indicate that being out of work was not always debilitating and could have positive outcomes. From the children’s perspective, a man’s unemployment could bring benefits associated with play and interaction. Even enforced time away from work could translate into more father-child interactions, certainly compared to the time many fathers would have had to spend with their children when in employment, or, indeed, the attention they might get from a busy mother.
Allen, the son of an unemployed labourer from Leicestershire, remembered the ‘lovely feeling when you came home and you knew your dad was going to be there’. Mrs. Bell, the daughter of one Teesside unemployed man, recounted that, ‘He [father] spent hours playing with me on the mat ... He would read to me by the hour...He made me a board and played ludo with us ... we were happy playing.’

Phyllis Willmott, the daughter of a builder who suffered periods of joblessness, recalled that her father was unable to spend time outside the home in his own leisure pursuits when unemployed and that this became a great benefit to the children: ‘One gain to us when Dad was out of work was that he had to stay at home more in the evenings ... he – or we – would suggest a game of snakes and ladders, ludo, dominoes or cards.’

The greater time a father and child might spend together could have more than a cursory impact on father-child relationships. Joseph Farrington, the son of an unemployed iron moulder from Manchester recalled:

[Dad] put two of us in the pram ... to take us with him [to the Labour Exchange]... That's how I came to know him more than anyone else. I was called after my father. I loved my father. He was a good man.

However, we again need to be cautious in suggesting that this behaviour was 'created' by unemployment. The last chapter indicated that play and affectionate interaction was one of the central expectations surrounding father and it is certainly likely that the fathers in the evidence quoted above would have played and interacted with their children when employed. What we are perhaps again seeing is evidence that the circumstances of unemployment 'exaggerated' what was probably the 'normal' experience for fathers and children. This should not belittle the importance attached to such activity, as Joseph Farrington’s comments indicate. A child could
regard the greater play and interaction with father as a significant change. Yet, for our interest, it again points to a conclusion that there was no ‘change’ in the perceived functions of fatherhood, rather a shift in focus which the circumstances allowed or encouraged. That is, an employed father probably played with his children, but for the unemployed father such play could take on greater significance given the restraint surrounding his other parenting functions.

Indeed, viewed from the father’s perspective the evidence does suggest that time spent interacting with children when unemployed could take on greater significance than when employed.

Among the current literature there are some conflicting conclusions about the extent to which the unemployed man was excluded from ‘traditional’ leisure activities. Stephen Jones suggests that unemployed men ‘were not far removed from the products and services of the leisure industry’, claiming gambling and cinema, at least, provided escapism.93 Ross McKibbon outlines that unemployment did restrict men’s leisure activities but argues that ‘the dole was a kind of wage and it permitted a good deal of social continuity’.94 More recently, however, Andrew Davies has given detailed evidence which suggests men without work were often notably excluded from the mainstream of ‘traditional’ male leisure because they could not afford such luxuries.95 Overall, while there is a debate as to the extent to which unemployment disrupted male leisure, the fact that it did, to some degree, is generally agreed. Joe Loftus, a labourer from Leigh, Lancashire, described, ‘being unable to keep up with my old friends, with no pocket money to spare. Losing touch and knowing it’.96
With restrictions attached to other outlets for enjoyment, the pleasure of playing with a child could become more important. As Phyllis Willmott remembered for example, it was her father who often initiated games. Certainly if the numerous accounts of the search for work or the anxiety of attending the Labour Exchange, or the feelings of isolation among employed peers are examined, it is not hard to believe that spending time with children was a welcome relief for many men. Relationships with children might also have been less susceptible to the tensions and anxieties associated with unemployment than relationships with workmates or even wives. *Means-Test Man* is based around the growing tension ‘Jack’ and his wife feel as the visit of the means-test man approaches and we are shown that the husband-wife relationship suffered within this atmosphere. By comparison however, Bakke discovered in his study that ‘the children are the centre, the focus of attention in most of the workers’ interest’, as Brierley’s ‘Jack’ recounts: ‘In his soul he knew John [his son] was the only thing anchoring him to the world, to life... On the other hand his wife’s sharp words and bitter outbursts hardened him against her; each knew that love, emotional love, did not exist as a bond between them.’ Because fathers were less able to provide material gifts and treats, being able to play more could be some form of compensation – less problematic and more enjoyable than being ‘useful’ in childcare. Brierley’s ‘Jack’, for example, ‘tried to make up for his deficiency by love and attention’.

Despite these outcomes, it would be misleading to suggest that all father-child experiences of unemployment were positive. Bakke concluded that the effort of finding work was, in many cases, more of an overall strain on men than a day of hard labour, therefore making (we can assume) the desire to play or interact with
children less than if the father had been working. The important division between ‘earned’ leisure time and merely enforced free time is again important in this context. As Phyllis Willmott recounted of the time when her father was out of work: ‘Dad could enjoy sitting back in his chair, reading his paper or listening to the wireless… when it had been justified by a “good day’s work”’.\textsuperscript{101}

John Burnett has noted, ‘that the majority of unemployed people suffered, in varying degrees, anxiety, frustration and depression is beyond dispute and fully attested by autobiographers’.\textsuperscript{102} Such feelings could easily disrupt ‘normal’ patterns of fatherly conduct and interaction. As one respondent to The Pilgrim Trust study commented: “When he was out of work we were always having more rows over the children. He will never let them do anything. It’s much better now he is at work.”\textsuperscript{103} Similarly, Phyllis Willmott recalled that, “To find him at home in the middle of the day with no work behind, was a warning to us that, frustrated by inactivity, he was likely to be irritable.”\textsuperscript{104}

More broadly, The Save the Children Fund was concerned that the reversal of parental functions in some unemployed households could have a detrimental impact on a child’s health. Where a mother went out to work investigators were sceptical about the ability of the father to be as ‘capable’ as the mother:

The mother … has not time to prepare the food properly and the children get worse nourishment than they would were the father at work and the mother at home, even though the means of the family may not be decreased.\textsuperscript{105}

The Fund, although primarily focusing on health issues, also tentatively suggested that apathy among parents could be a problem, causing children to be ill-disciplined, late for school and poorly fed and clothed.\textsuperscript{106} It would be wrong to
overestimate this parental apathy however, and the more general conclusion was quite the reverse, that parents did all they could to maintain their children's standard of living. This extended even to affection: 'With remarkably few exceptions, the bond of paternal pride and affection has held firm.'

Conclusions

From the evidence, we can conclude that being unemployed could have a significant impact on the expectations surrounding a father's conduct and the experience of fatherhood for those experiencing joblessness in the inter-war depression. Even this broad conclusion is an important addition to the current literature focused on unemployed. While authors such as Nicholas and Burnett have given tentative accounts of the way joblessness might have affected a man's familial relationships, this chapter had provided some specific evidence which shows this was certainly often true.

More importantly, within the context of this study, the experience of the unemployed father has provided further evidence for a number of the arguments being outlined as part of this thesis.

Unemployment was one 'arena' that must be viewed as being unusual within the context of the whole period. However, the experiences of unemployment explored in this chapter further underline that a father's parenting function was principally related to being the provider. Men's reactions to being unable properly to perform this one function often led them to feel as if they were failing as fathers. Even when a wife went out to work and a father perhaps tended the home, provision was still the expected responsibility of the father. An inability to provide did not alter
the fact that it was a father’s responsibility and ‘blame’ could be attached to the father for this reason. Moreover, being excluded from the principal identifier of masculine status, and also the networks surrounding work, a father’s ability to perform other expected functions, such as helping a child find work and integrate into the ‘public’ world, could be undermined. A lack of work also meant that some of the ‘privileges’ a man enjoyed which set him apart from his wife, such as the ability to provide treats and relax in ‘earned’ leisure time, were also restricted.

When it came to childcare, the circumstances created by unemployment seem to have sometimes created a short-term shift in what was expected conduct for a father within certain communities, or at least within certain families. We have seen that the unemployed man was often involved in childcare and even participated in the most ‘feminine’ activities of babycare for example. However, we should not read this as a dramatic ‘change’ to fatherhood but rather as a greater tendency for men to perform some of the functions still seen as the mother’s. The way men and communities perceived performing these tasks – as often being humiliating and ‘feminine’ – indicates that they were still seen as principally being part of the mothers’ functions. Moreover, not all men were willing to perform childcare when unemployed and it seems that men who did were those who, in ‘normal’ circumstances’ would have probably done so anyway. What unemployment perhaps created was an exaggeration of the division of childcare duties, rather than a significant ‘change’ to them.

The unemployed father had more time on his hands and this seems to have often been beneficial for father-child interaction, with men playing and spending time with their children. However, the fact of being unemployed is unlikely to have
made men who had never previously played with, or cared for, their children suddenly start doing so. We cannot argue that being out of work altered a man's view of parenting or his relationship with his children to this degree. However, even if the frequency of a father playing and interacting with his children increased only a little, the evidence suggests that the significance of that interaction perhaps altered during unemployment. Men might try and 'compensate' for being unable to provide properly and for men deprived of other leisure outlets and often frustrated by the experience of the search for work, play with children could become even more enjoyable that it might have 'normally' been.

Looking at unemployment in a broader chronological context it is possible to suggest tentatively that conduct during unemployment had long-term significance. This falls outside the chronology of this study, but we can suggest that the fact that so many men faced a challenge to what they 'normally' did as fathers could have been important for the emergence of changes to fatherhood in the post-war era. For example, despite the persistent idea that childcare was not part of the father's function in this period, the tendency of men to care for children when unemployed indicated that men could be capable of doing such tasks. Moreover, despite persistent fears within the period that fathers were only attached and felt responsible towards their children because of material provision, the experience of unemployed fathers indicates that men were attached to their children in more intimate and varied ways than were suggested by the idea of 'responsibility' linked to being providers. Strong bonds of love were shown to exist between children and their fathers. In the period when judges and advocates of fathercraft were firmly pressing the idea that
fatherhood was about more than material provision, and that fathers needed to be more active in their children's lives, many unemployed fathers were doing just that.

In many ways the contradictory experiences of the unemployed father thus highlight the existence of competing discourses on fatherhood. The unemployed father failed by the standards of 'traditional' fatherhood, which placed emphasis on being the provider and the paternal functions stemming from the authority gained from occupying economic supremacy in the household. Yet, by the standards of 'progressive' fatherhood typified by advocates of fathercraft, the unemployed father's time at home, playing with, and even caring for, his children, were actions to be viewed as wholly positive.

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2 M. Perry, *Bread and Work*, p.64.

3 E. Bakke, *The Unemployed Man*.

4 M. Perry, *Bread and Work*, p.67.


7 Chapter Five offers discussion of the use of autobiography as an historical source.

8 W. Brierley, *Means-Test Man*.


10 B. Harris, 'Unemployment and the Dole', f.n. 15.

11 For detail of Brierley's life for point of comparison with the depiction of 'Jack's' life in the novel, see A. Croft, 'Introduction', in W. Brierley, *Means-Test Man*, pp.vii-xvi. Also, 'Frustration And Bitterness – A Colliery Banksman', in H. L. Beales and R. S. Lambert (eds.), *Memories of the Unemployed*, p.89-98, which is Brierley's account of his own experiences.

12 For examples of these feelings see H. L. Beales and R. S. Lambert (eds.), *Memories of the Unemployed*. J. Burnett argues that it is impossible to make a direct connection between suicide levels and unemployment, though he argues such a connection is likely, *Idle Hands*, p.234, but Matt Perry believes that there was a strong link between suicide levels and unemployment and offers good evidence for his claim, *Bread and Work*, pp.68-9.

13 See, for example, A. Davies, *Leisure, Gender and Poverty*, pp.43-8.

Chapter Six: Personal Experiences of the Unemployed Father
14 Quoted in E. Bakke, *The Unemployed Man*, p.70.
18 W. Brierley, *Means-Test Man*, p.201 [emphasis in original].
21 'Many employees experienced low or intermittent wages, and for such people unemployment benefit might have the double advantage of being more substantial and more dependable than the income they derived from work', B. Harris, 'Unemployment and the Dole'. p.213.
22 See, for example, B. Harris, 'Unemployment and the Dole'.
23 See, for example, J. Winter, 'Infant Mortality, maternal mortality and public health in Britain in the 1930s', *Journal of European Economic History*, 8 (1979); C. Webster, 'Healthy or Hungry Thirties?', *History Workshop Journal*, 13 (1982); B. Harris 'Unemployment, insurance and health in inter-war Britain', in B. Eichengreen and T. J. Hatton (eds.), *Interwar Unemployment in International Perspective*, (Dordrecht: 1988).
24 For example, The Save the Children Fund concluded that school meals, charitable work, state benefits and the fact that the cost of living fell meant that children rarely suffered ill-health, *Unemployment and the Child*, (London: 1933). Beales and Lambert, citing the Chief Medical Officer for Health, similarly concluded that, 'It is not, of course, suggested that the nutrition of children showing normal height and weight is perfect ... What is indicated is that malnutrition ... is declining rather than increasing', *Memoirs of the Unemployed*, p.20.
28 L. Tunstall, *NWSA, cassette no. 1996.0013*. This comment, coming from a textile worker, again questions the robustness of Diana Gittins 'structural' thesis regarding domestic ideology.
29 Quoted in F. Greene (ed.), *Time to Spare*, p.39.
30 Pilgrim Trust, *Men Without Work*. Matt Perry's oral evidence confirms that a husband's unemployment was particularly bad for wives because they sought to limit the impact of the short-fall, *Bread and Work*, pp.66-7.
32 Ibid., pp.22, 97, 143.
35 Quoted in K. Nicholas, *The Social Effects of Unemployment*, p.117.
36 K. Nicholas, *The Social Effects of Unemployment on Teesside: Save the Children Fund, Unemployment and the Child*, pp.33-34. The recommendation of the Fund was a detailed study of the home life of the 'ring-leaders' of juvenile 'crime' gangs.
37 See, for example, J. Burnett, *Idle Hands*; H. L. Beales and R. S. Lambert, *Memoirs of the Unemployed*. We must be careful not to over generalise this point however because, within communities where there was widespread unemployment and everyone was in the same situation, a man's 'status' (which is after all a relative social label) was less likely to be affected by lack of work.
40 'She raised from her chair and seized John's cup and from where she stood near the table she dashed the tea from it into the sink. "Can't you see that the lad's..." She paused for a moment, intense. "Bloody", "damned", was in her mind, but struggle as she would she could not force one of them out to give expression to her violence. She had never sworn in her life. "Tea's cold. Fat lot you care what happens to him. Might as well not have a father. Jinks was soon after them who were on to his child", Ibid., pp. 106-107.
41 Ibid., pp.108-109.
42 Quoted in F. Greene (ed.) *Time To Spare*, p.93.

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"It has not been the custom in mining communities in South Wales to send away young boys and girls to work, and the loss of home training and influence during the years of adolescence may well be feared by careful parents. It is a real test of unselfish affection and courage on their part when they meet their present situation by sending away their boys of 14 and 15 years of age when some chance of training or permanent employment offers", H. Jennings, *Brynmawr*, p.143.

E. Bakke, *The Unemployed Man*, p.138. This average figure hides some variations. Bakke found that some men spent up to forty four hours a week searching for work, and some as little as four hours, and more consistently that skilled men spent less time in the search for work than the unskilled.


Quoted in, E. Bakke, *The Unemployed Man*.


In Brynmawr and Greenwich the cinemas remained busy, though attendance did fall, J. Burnett, *Idle Hands*, p.229.

R. McKibbin, 'The "Social Psychology" of Unemployment'.

E. Bakke, *The Unemployed Man*, p.201.


G. Orwell, *The Road to Wigan Pier*, p.81.


McKibbin, 'Social Psychology of Unemployment', p. 239. For example also, 'He explained that his father and two brothers were out of work, that his father sat by the fire all evening and his mother did the washing and ironing in the kitchen', Hanley, *Grey Children*, p.177.

C. Northcott, 'Filling the Workless Day', in F. Greene (ed.) *Time to Spare*.


H. Jennings, *Brynmawr*, p.139.

'The unemployed man can and does generally give his wife some help in the housework'. M. Spring-Rice, *Working-Class Wives*, p.104.

C. Northcott, 'Filling the Workless Day'.

W. Brierley, *Means-Test Man*, p.23. The first things that 'Jack' thinks about when he wakes at the start of the book are the domestic chores he must do, pp.7-8.


E. Bakke, *The Unemployed Man*, p.177.

J. Walsh, *Not Like This*, p.79.


'On the other hand he would not have pushed a pram', quoted in K. Nicholas, *The Social Effects of Unemployment*, p.189.

R. McKibbin, 'The "Social Psychology" of Unemployment'.


81 J. Hanley, Grey Children, pp.134-35
82 K. Nicholas, The Social Effects of Unemployment, p.188. See also, for example. R. McKibbin, 'The
Social Psychology' of Unemployment'.
84 See, for example, J. Burnett, Idle Hands, pp.227-35.
85 The Pilgrim Trust, Men Without Work, p.171.
87 George Tomlinson, quoted in J. Burnett, Idle Hands, p.240.
88 Herbert Allan, in Gray (ed.), The Worst of Times, p.143.
89 Mrs. Bell, quoted in K. Mourby, 'Wives and Children of the Teesside Unemployed', p.59. This
quotation also underlines how important of being 'practical' could be for an unemployed man. In this
case making a ludo board allowed him to maintain the practice of giving his children gifts, which as
Chapter Five outlined, was an important aspect of the father-child relationship
92 S. Jones, Workers at Play, pp.118-20.
94 A. Davies, Leisure, Gender and Poverty, pp.43-5.
95 Quoted in J. Burnett, Idle Hands, p.232.
96 E. Bakke, Unemployed Man, p.246.
97 W. Brierley, Means-Test Man, pp.41-42.
98 Ibid.
100 P. Willmott, Growing Up in a London Village, p.103.
101 J. Burnett, Idle Hands, p.230.
102 The Pilgrim Trust, Men Without Work, p.147.
103 P. Willmott, Growing Up in a London Village, p.103.
104 The Save the Children Fund, Unemployment and the Child, p.29.
105 'The father may be completely unemployed; he therefore has no need to be up early in the
morning, and the result may be that the children go to school without breakfast', The Save the
Children Fund, Unemployment and the Child, p.23.
106 Jennings, Brynmawr, p.139.
Chapter Seven

CONCLUSION

In modern contemporary society the importance of the father still gains discussion. Pressure groups, such as ‘Fathers 4 Justice’, advocate the ‘rights’ of lone fathers and debate surrounding the issue of same-sex (female) couples parenting children are, for example, both indications that some of the issues examined in this thesis have current relevance, be it with a slightly different focus. Yet, as this conclusion outlines, the inter-war developments discussed in this study are significantly distinct from these modern concerns.

Ralph LaRossa reached the following conclusion from his study of inter-war fatherhood in the USA:

Mine is the story of how American fatherhood was reshaped and welded during the 1920s and 1930s into the modernized form that we see idolized today; a tale of how New Fatherhood emerged in the midst of the Machine Age to reanimate, at the cultural level if nowhere else, the father-child relationship.¹

The conclusions we can draw from this study on inter-war fatherhood among the working class in Britain share some important ground with these findings. We have seen that fatherhood was, in a manner, ‘reshaped’ in the inter-war years. It has been argued that, within some prominent discourses, a version of fatherhood was outlined which can be identified as having been different, at least in its emphasis, to that which preceded it. A number of socio-economic factors prominent in the period, such as decline in family size and, for a significant minority of workers, a move towards privatised housing and home-based leisure, have also been identified as
often important in this development. Moreover, the conduct of fathers within the father-child relationship underwent a degree of 'refocusing'. Fathers, certainly by the end of the period, were regularly associated with play, fun and entertainment in addition to 'traditional' paternal functions, such as attributes relating to authority and discipline for example. It was also increasingly expected within many of the families in the evidence reviewed here that fathers would involve themselves with childcare.

Overall, it is tempting (and not without merit) to see, as LaRossa does in the USA, the inter-war years in Britain as essentially an important 'stepping stone' in an overall development of fatherhood away from 'distant and stern' and towards 'involved and loving'.

However, such a 'Whiggish' view is simplistic, not least because an emphasis on 'change' within the period hides significant continuities in the way fatherhood was perceived, prescribed and indeed experienced. Also, when we compare inter-war fatherhood with the 'New Fatherhood' to emerge after the Second World War (as LaRossa does), we are forced to conclude that inter-war fatherhood was identifiably different. The development of fatherhood is, this thesis suggests, certainly not as simply linear as LaRossa implies and we need to draw more contoured and cautious conclusions than he reaches in his study.

The important point is that, viewed conceptually, inter-war fatherhood was, at least among the working class examined in this study, 'refocused' in a fundamentally different way than the label 'New Fatherhood' implies. After all, the 'New Fatherhood' to emerge in the c.1970s, as Charlie Lewis and others explain, encourages fathers to perform parenting functions which are 'traditionally' seen as the mothers - the nurturing aspects of care, especially in babyhood, and the mundane
aspects of daily housework to support children. By sharp contrast, in inter-war Britain, the 'refocusing' of fatherhood was not the result of an increased expectation that fathers should perform 'motherly' functions. We have therefore not witnessed a dramatic shift between the expectations surrounding 'mother' and 'father' functions or, to use the conceptualisation offered in Chapter One, we have not seen an increased 'overlap' between 'gender-specific' parenting functions. Rather, we can cautiously suggest, a more accurate conceptualisation of the 'refocusing' of fatherhood in Britain in this period is that there were shifts of emphasis within those functions already associated with the father. That is, 'discourses' on fatherhood and the conduct of individual fathers began to place greater emphasis on functions which, to some degree, had long been associated with the male parent.

The thesis has offered much evidence that backs up this conclusion. We have seen that lawmakers and judges, and certainly advocates of fathercraft, never blurred the 'traditional' gender divisions in parenting functions. Advocates of fathercraft did not tell fathers they should be looking after babies or providing day-to-day care. Judges who gave custody of children of 'tender years' usually did so with the belief that the father would not be the one providing day-to-day care, but that he would find a form of 'mother substitute'. Both the advocates of fathercraft and lawmakers outlined the continued belief that a father's principal function was to provide. Fatherhood and motherhood were seen as distinct and complementary. Indeed, in instances when there was a suggestion that one parent was being told to perform, or was performing, the functions associated with the other parent there was normally resistance. For example, as Chapter Five explored, working-class wives could be
hostile to their husbands’ conduct as parents if it was perceived as encroaching on ‘their’ territory.

Similarly, when it came to fathers’ conduct, the evidence reviewed in Chapter Five suggests that working-class fathers continued to distance themselves from performing childcare when it was perceived to be a ‘chore’ of parenting (especially babycare). Significantly, we saw that this was often legitimised by mothers’ and often children’s expectations. Although we have seen that many working-class fathers did perform some childcare, the thesis has argued that it is how we characterise this which is important. The evidence suggests that it was probably more to do with changes in the expectations surrounding a husband’s functions, perhaps the resulting of better understandings of the burdens on working-class mothers in the period, or when the necessity of circumstances (such as unemployment) demanded it. When a husband cared for his baby, or the unemployed father tended to his children’s routine needs, this does not seem to have been the result of fundamental shifts in the expectations surrounding fatherhood.

Using this interpretation it is possible to marry this study of fatherhood with the common perception within the current literature of the inter-war years as a period in which gender roles, certainly among the working class, were retained or even more deeply entrenched. Or, at least, the examination of fatherhood among the working class in inter-war Britain cannot be seen as evidence, as LaRossa suggests for the USA, that there was a greater fluidity in gender roles.

This conceptual framework for the way fatherhood was ‘refocused’ in the inter-war years finds divergence, not only with LaRossa’s study of the USA in the period, but also with the prominent work on fatherhood within the current literature.
particularly that which focuses on middle-class fatherhood in the Victorian period. In his study John Tosh argues that fatherhood was forced to ‘change’ as a response to the expansion of the mother’s ‘sphere of influence’ which gradually, he argues, encroached on the father’s ‘traditional’ parenting functions. In support of his view, Tosh offers the examples of religious instruction and education. However, it appears, for fatherhood in inter-war Britain among the working-class, that the ‘refocusing’ we have seen was not the result of motherhood encroaching on the functions of fatherhood. Rather, we can conclude, the relationship between the father and mother’s functions remained surprisingly static in the period.

From this general conceptual overview let us now turn to some more specific conclusions and suggest how this thesis has added to the current literature focused on the themes covered in this thesis.

The first section of the thesis examined perceived and prescribed perceptions of fatherly behaviour, what have been referred to as ‘discourses’ on fatherhood. The very fact that such ‘discourses’ on fatherhood can be identified is, in itself, useful evidence that fathers were, in some cases, valued as parents within the period and that, despite what is implied in much of the current literature, fatherhood was a topic that provoked discussion. The current literature has perhaps not given this point adequate attention because, as Chapter One argued, the focus of studies on family law and the infant welfare movement in this period have been the mother and/or children and have usually explored their perspectives. For example, authors such as Pinchbeck and Hewitt, and Sumner Holmes have examined the changes to the law governing guardianship and custody in the period and have concluded that emphasis was increasingly placed on the mother’s rights and the welfare of the child. Although
this is accurate, it is not, as Chapter Two outlined, the whole picture. We should not simply conclude that a greater acknowledgement of the mother’s rights and recognition of the mother’s importance to childrearing meant that fathers were excluded from such discourses. Judges and lawmakers, as we saw, were clear in outlining a belief that fathers had a specific importance in many areas, and in many circumstances, not least for older, male children.

Even more important in this context was Chapter Three, which dealt with the emergence of British fathercraft. This, in itself is an important contribution to the history of maternal and infant welfare which has been developed at length by authors such as Jane Lewis and Anna Davin, because even the fact that there was a British fathercraft movement has not to date been acknowledged. The impression gained is that infant and child welfare movements in the period were concerned solely with the mother. Clearly this is not the complete picture. Although, as was stressed, it would be wrong to exaggerate the significance of fathercraft – both its place in the infant welfare movement and its ability to reach working-class fathers – fathercraft did grow steadily within the period and it did provide one coherent and detailed understanding of the father’s functions.

The current literature has suggested that discourses on fatherhood within this period marginalised the father by suggesting that he was ‘incapable’ or by limiting his rights under law. However, this thesis has offered a very different interpretation. For the two discourses examined it seems that the father was neither believed to be marginal to family life, nor was it suggested that he should be.

Exactly what fathercraft outlined as the functions of the father, and exactly what we can infer was perceived to be his functions from the discussions

Chapter Seven: Conclusions

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surrounding the passing of the 1925 Guardianship of Infants Act, must be related to the argument outlined at the beginning of this concluding chapter. That is, it was not believed within either discourse that working-class fathers performed ‘motherly’ functions and they were not encouraged to start doing so. The discussion of the 1925 Guardianship Act and the discussion of fathercraft have both suggested that the principal responsibilities attached to fatherhood changed very little in the period. The father was, above all else, to provide and protect his children. However, while these responsibilities did largely remain static, the expectation that he should/would place more emphasis on functions which were perhaps, at the start of the period, marginal to fatherhood is evident. For example, fathers were told that they were mistaken if they simply believed that their functions ended after a wage was handed over. Even though they were responsible for provision, they were told that they should spend more of their time forming relationships with their children, through play, and fathercraft emphasised that, although not ‘their’ function, fathers should not shy away from ‘helping out’ with childcare.

The second portion of the thesis examined the conduct and experiences of some working-class fathers and suggested that a considered conclusion should be that the experiences of working-class fathers are best understood within the context of competing, and sometimes contradictory, expectations. We saw that what a father personally understood he ‘should’ do was shaped not just by his own interpretation of ‘discourses’ but also by his male peers, his wife and, perhaps increasingly most importantly, his children’s expectations. Within the context of ‘normal’ family life explored in Chapter Five we found that the middle-class domestic ideology outlined in the courts and by the infant welfare movement was often at odds with the
circumstances of working class life. The need to maintain an 'appropriate' standard of living, for example, meant that many men were still often absent from their children's lives for longer periods than they, and advocates of fathercraft, would have liked. We also saw that many working-class fathers had never been shy about helping with domestic childcare, and even caring for babies, because this 'wife help' was so often required in working-class homes.

Of course, no working-class father in this thesis can represent all working-class fathers from the period but the evidence strongly suggests that a useful general conclusion is that fathers were involved in their children's lives to a greater degree than most historical analysis has hitherto suggested; certainly more than the explorations of motherhood suggest. While the image of a father's conduct in the current literature is not inaccurate in many of the assertions relating to a mother's greater responsibility for care, especially for the young, this must not lead us to suggest that all interaction in the working-class home revolved around the 'chores' of daily routines. This thesis has shown that a father's 'involvement' with his children was normally principally centred around leisure, play and entertainment rather than the necessities of care.

For this reason, in the working-class home, fathers were, in the minds of children, wives and the men themselves, distinct from mothers. Many of the 'privileges' resulting from being the breadwinner made this so. Fathers, for example, were associated with gifts and treats, and a day's work might 'excuse' them from many domestic 'chores', allowing them the choice to play with children, or allowing them the privilege of lingering over the chores that they did perform for their children. Bathing and bedtime were perhaps the most common of these activities in
which the line between ‘chore’ and ‘play/entertainment’ could be thin. Thus, while working-class fathers often perhaps did try to avoid, or refused to do, cooking or cleaning or washing, as we have been told, this study has argued that they were often happy to look after children because, from their and the children’s perspectives, it was pleasurable.

As this last point indicates, this thesis has added an important and neglected perspective to our understanding of working-class family life in the period. It has explored how family life was perceived from the perspective of the father, rather than just piecing together the father’s conduct through the filter of the mother. From such a focus we have seen that fathers could have deeply affectionate relationships with their children and that such affection existed even if they were sometimes stern or often absent. We have seen that fathers were keen to please their children and that they normally focused a great deal of their energy (and ‘personal’ finances) on pleasing them, be it through play or through working overtime to maintain standards of living and provide treats. Certainly children, especially younger children, seem to have occupied a much more prominent place in the leisure hours of working-class men by this period than is perhaps sometimes suggested and, simply stated, many fathers enjoyed their children’s company. While feminist accounts have painted a man’s work-absence as a form of liberation from the more mundane and tedious features of domestic life, such as routine childcare, this thesis has hinted that, from the father’s perspective, the responsibility to provide could also be experienced as a restrictive barrier to father-child interaction. To this end unemployed men sometimes enjoyed the freedom to spend more time with their children.
Indeed, as Chapter Six explored, the significant periods of unemployment in this period were perhaps important for ‘shifts’ in fatherhood. The evidence suggests that unemployment exaggerated the process of ‘refocusing’ because joblessness undermined the ability of a father to fulfil the expectations surrounding his ‘traditional’ functions. Being unable to provide, and often relegated in status and authority in the family and community, fathers sometimes turned to play and care even more.

However, while short-term requirements during times of unemployment did sometimes mean that men performed more ‘caring’ functions, Chapter Six suggested that this should not be read as a permanent shift in expectations. Husbands and wives, despite the functions they were forced to fulfil, retained a belief in what functions they ‘ought’ to have been doing as parents. Moreover, even the circumstances of unemployment were seemingly rarely enough to engage disinterested and ‘uninvolved’ fathers. To this end unemployment probably merely exaggerated what was common in ‘normal’ circumstances.

The examination of the First World War letters offered the most tentative conclusions of the thesis. The areas it examined have not been examined before and, given the nature of the evidence and the principal focus of this study, the chapter had to be cautious in its conclusions. However, it does appear that the war forced individual families to face the question of the functions a father performed. The chapter also hinted that certain aspects of the war meant that these years were probably a unique period in the history of fatherhood. Enforced absence, heightened emotions and limits to the ability of a father to perform ‘traditional’ functions were all highlighted for example. The chapter also provided new evidence that men did
worry about financial provision and that mothers continued to rely on fathers for discipline. How the long-term impact of the war affected fatherhood can only be based on conjecture with the evidence examined here. However, developments that the current literature link to the war, such as a growing concern for infant and child welfare and, therefore child rearing practices among the workers, and the expansion of psychoanalysis, have been identified as issues of possible importance.

One of the most important themes of all the chapters has been the importance of the age and gender of a child when we try to examine fatherhood and the conduct of fathers in this period. As was asserted at the outset, this has been a much-neglected conceptualisation in much of the current literature and such neglect has caused often limited or ‘skewed’ images of working-class fatherhood in the period. The thesis has provided evidence that makes this assertion seem relevant.

In ‘discourses’ on fatherhood, the age and gender of children was central. It was, as judges and lawmakers outlined, perhaps the best ‘common-sense’ factor dictating father’s importance as a parent. Fathercraft also largely reinforced the idea that a father had special importance for his sons and older children, even if this was as much ‘by default’ (given the importance of the mother to babies) as a recognition of his involvement in ‘public integration’ and the development of ‘character’. Yet lawmakers and judges, and advocates of fathercraft, never suggested that fathers should interpret their greater importance for sons and older children as meaning that they should have no involvement with daughters and babies. This was, certainly for fathercraft, one of the most worrying patterns in working-class homes. Fathers might not have been preferred, or even been as ‘equal’, in babycare, but their presence in a child’s early life was deemed vital.
The age and gender of children permeate the analysis of conduct also. The waxing and waning of a father's interaction was, so it was argued, in no small part dictated by a child's age. Chapter Five argued that it was 'younger' children (aged between c.3-12 years) who seem to have been the most pleasurable company for fathers and, who in turn, probably revered their fathers the most. This pattern related to the 'appropriateness' of playing and being affectionate with adolescent children, and also to the suggestion that the more 'needy' a child the greater the threat of 'feminine' connotations in interacting with him/her.

The relationship between discourses on fatherhood and the conduct of fathers was, as this thesis has indicated, not a simple one and remains difficult for the historian to examine. The current literature generally argues that there was a notable dichotomy between 'official' images of fatherhood and the conduct of fathers (a view most forcefully put forward for the Scottish context by Abrams). This thesis has suggested that this is perhaps inaccurate and that there was probably much more of a correlation between the perceived and prescribed behaviour of fathers and their conduct. The fathercraft message outlined a pattern for a father's involvement in childcare that stressed it was to be done as a favour to the wife. The conduct of men seems to suggest that this was how individual fathers often framed their involvement in childcare. Both 'discourses' on fatherhood argued that fathers had, or should have, affectionate and loving relationships with their children, and the conduct of fathers certainly suggest that this was so. Both discourses were keen to stress that fathers and mothers were different and that any prescribed behaviour for fathers should not 'encroach' on the mothers' 'sphere of influence'. We have seen that within many
working-class homes the division in parenting was rarely about an 'overlap' and more about 'his' and 'her' functions.

Inevitably, this thesis has pointed to areas that would benefit from future research. Finally, therefore, it is perhaps useful to highlight a few of these areas which studies of fatherhood in this period, in the future, could focus on.

The exploration of fathercraft indicates that the theme of a father's involvement in infant welfare, and indeed child rearing theories more generally, was greater than has often been assumed. Fathercraft was, in the inter-war years, an emerging movement and it continued to grow after the Second World War. It would be fruitful to link fathercraft in the 1950s with the more 'popular' child rearing theories, such as Dr. Spock's work, which began to involve the father more. Fathercraft was also an international movement. The administrative and organisational side of the movement is only hinted at in this thesis, but the international 'exchanges' might be illuminating in explaining why, for example, the USA and Britain in this period, although so similar, had some different experiences in the development of fatherhood.

The First World War also offers scope for future research. As was found in researching this thesis, the evidence needed to examine fatherhood during the years of conflict is hard to come by. Useful comparisons were found in the Second World War so perhaps a study of that conflict could be easier. Indeed, given the developments in inter-war Britain, it is reasonable to suggest that a father's absence during the 1939-45 conflict would have caused more concern than his absence in the First World War.
The thesis, largely due to time and space, has examined fatherhood only up to the time when children reached adulthood. The question of whether fathers continued to be an important presence in their adult children’s lives would provide useful comparisons to the research on mother-daughter relationships into adulthood.

Overall, this thesis has provided the first detailed study of fatherhood and the experience of working-class fathers in Britain between 1900 and 1939. It has not offered an exhaustive account of all ‘discourses’ that might have given discussion of fatherhood in the period, nor has it been the intention to give a detailed account of one community within the admittedly broad range of people the term ‘working class’ covers. Yet the thesis has, on a number of key points, and with some new evidence, challenged the current image we have of fatherhood. It has suggested that, just as we now understand was the case for motherhood and childhood in the period, fatherhood was not a static set of expectations and, perhaps most importantly, the experiences, functions and concerns of fatherhood occupied a significant place in the lives of working-class men.

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2 For discussion of ‘New Fatherhood’ see, for example, C. Lewis and M. O’Brien (eds.), *Reassessing Fatherhood Modern Family*.
3 See, for example, S. Kingsley Kent, *Gender and Power*.
APPENDIX ONE: 'Flyer' Advertising the First Meeting of the Croydon Fathers' Council, 1932 [transcribed from original].

THE CROYDON MOTHERS' & INFANTS' WELFARE ASSOCIATION FATHERS' COUNCILS.

The question of forming a Fathers' Councils or Committees will be considered at the Meeting of the Welcomes Committee on Wednesday 7th December, 1932.

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OBJECT

The main object of Father's Councils is to ensure the best possible health for children. The fact that existing Father's Councils and Committees are all attached to Infant Welfare Centres indicates that it is to these Centres that such Councils look for the attainment of their object.

METHOD

In one district the practice is:-

1) To invite husbands in small groups to lectures in the evenings.

2) To give addresses to these groups on such subjects as dental and antenatal care.

3) To give lectures on subjects chosen by fathers themselves - friends are invited.

NOTE. Meetings are held not earlier than 8.30 p.m. Coffee and Cigarettes are provided.

FEDERATION OF FATHERS

Two delegates from each of the already established Fathers' Councils in London recently attended a Meeting convened by the Battersea Fathers' Council for the purpose of setting up a joint Committee of all the Fathers' Councils in London.

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1 The Croydon Mothers' and Infants' Welfare Association, Miscellaneous papers, memos, leaflets etc., ACC 402 no 20
APPENDIX TWO: Letters sent by Private Wise to his daughter.

"Daddy"

My dear little "curly wig"

I am so pleased with the nice letter and drawings.

That you sent me this sector shows me going to bed. You see I do not go upstairs like you but hope to someday.

Give my love to mother and kiss her for me.

Write again soon with lots and lots of love and kisses from

My own loving

Daddy
MY DEAR LITTLE ALICE. I AM PLEASED WITH YOUR SKETCHES AND LETTER. SO SEND ONE IN RETURN.

GIVE MY LOVE TO DEAR MOTHER WITH LOTS OF LOVE AND KISSES FROM YOUR EVER LOVING

DADDY XXXXXX
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F. H. Gautier, *Family/86/19/1*

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P. A. Wise, *Family/90/7/1*

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