Deindustrialisation on the margins

Remembering working lives and the long closure of Dover Mill

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Abstract

In June 2000, Buckland Paper Mill closed its doors after more than two centuries of papermaking in Dover, Kent. Buckland Mill represents an atypical case study of industrial work and factory closure that offers insight into the distinctiveness of twentieth-century industrial employment and the continued significance of its decline. Located in the 'Garden of England,' far from the 'heartlands' of traditional industry, and closing relatively late in the UK's process of industrial decline, the mill is spatially and temporally removed from examples of factory closure generally presented in studies of deindustrialisation. The nature of the work and composition of the workforce are also marginal in existing research: papermaking jobs performed by men and women in roughly equal measure, albeit in the context of a rigid sexual division of labour. All of this allows for an exploration of how time and place inform processes of industrial work and closure, while inviting a sustained analysis of gender and women's work that has been largely missing from the literature to date. Oral history interviews with former mill workers are employed to tap into accounts of working life and industrial closure. Archival and documentary materials complement and complicate oral testimonies while providing additional texture to the narrative(s). The research sits within the oral history tradition of understanding memory not a repository of historical facts but as an active process of sense-making shaped by conditions over time. In this thesis, I explore how a strong sense of stability and permanence at Dover Mill provided the foundation for an occupational community that blurred the distinction between work and non-work lives. I further explore everyday working lives at the mill to understand what it meant to work in a range of roles, arguing that the identities and meanings derived from mill work were thoroughly shaped by gender as well as degree of skill and autonomy. Finally, I explore the closure of Dover Mill, which I argue had its roots in a restructuring of the workplace from the 1980s that was met with little worker resistance, and which saw women most vulnerable to job loss.

Dedication and acknowledgements

This work is dedicated to the memory of my best mate, Ryan Lammond, who saw me start but not finish this project. I know he was already proud of me – as I was of him – and he would be chuffed I saw it through. I was among many who adored him and will continue to be shaped in ways big and small by his friendship and its loss.

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The image on the front page of this thesis was provided by Dover Museum and Bronze Age Boat Gallery: Buckland Paper Mill archive.

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1. Introduction

Prelude

'*The jobs were gone, basically . . . But [long pause] it was progress. You know, as a responsible union, we couldn't, we wouldn't and we didn't oppose any of these changes in technology.'*

In *Watermark*, a feature-length documentary about Buckland Paper Mill filmed a decade after its closure, former worker Dennis Featherstone speaks at length about the changes he witnessed long before the mill finally shut its doors in 2000. What was striking about his testimony was the air of inevitability about job loss. If new methods of production were being developed, there would be fewer jobs for people to do; there was something neutral and uncontroversial about this idea. But while technological 'progress' was made and output and profits increased, a great deal was also being lost.

Indeed, the film places loss front and centre. It opens with footage of the factory site in a state of decay and disrepair. We see vast, desolate spaces, empty except for scattered debris and overgrown plants. These images are contrasted with audio of humming machinery and worker testimonies that suggest this was once a place of constant activity – productive but also social. It looks 'dejected, if a factory can look dejected,' comments a former woman worker featured in the film, a symbol of the now 'depressing' 'ghost town' it sits within. Another striking contrast is between the sombre tone of discussions around closure – overlaid with melancholic music – and accounts of working life in the form of oral histories, photographs and video footage that emphasise happiness and harmony.

Loss didn't just come in the form of redundancy or closure. Dennis goes on to give an evocative description of changes in the papermaking process that suggest mill work over time had lost some of its intrinsic value:

> From when I was a young lad, they were making paper piece by piece, like my mother would make a cake. A very good cake [he chuckles]. And in the end, papermaking was just a quick recipe. One ton of wood pulp, so many pounds of clay, so many of this, so many of that – all shoved in, beaten up for so many hours or so many minutes. Ready

> or not, that's where the paper was made and that's how paper's made today. You wouldn't believe it.

While never fully articulated, former workers in the film convey a sense that quantitative changes in the production process had altered the meaning of mill work. Not only were fewer people needed to make paper, but less skill and human input, too: 'everything was push buttons' by the end.

Watermark is about lost work; but it is also about what that work gave people and made possible. It is about community, family, place, skill, making and the social value of a job. What struck me about the documentary, and what has stayed with me since I first saw it in 2015 well before I embarked on this PhD, is how it foregrounds worker accounts of the mill. It is guided by memories of working lives, albeit in the context of the absence of the work that once sustained them. These accounts, and the documentary more generally, raise a host of questions around work and working lives. What explains such overwhelmingly positive narratives of working life, and the melancholic tone of discussions around closure? What did this workplace provide that others would or could not? What were relationships like within the factory – among workers but also between workers and management? In what social, economic and political context did the mill close? And why make a film about this workplace over any other? These are questions that lend themselves to sociological and historical analysis.

This research takes the *Watermark* documentary as its starting point and builds on its insights by exploring broad questions around work, community, gender, memory and industrial change through the narrow lens of a single paper mill on England's south coast. I begin the introduction to this thesis with a brief historical review of employment in Kent with a particular focus on its industrial history, placing my research in its regional context. Kent is rarely associated with industrial employment, yet the county has a long history of industrial activity that historians and sociologists are increasingly exploring and documenting. Next, I review Dover's labour market and industrial base. Dover has historically been home to a range of industries and, while the Kent Coalfields have been included in national accounts of industrial employment, other local industries such as papermaking have received relatively little attention. I then explore both Kent's historically important role in the British paper industry and the place of papermaking in Dover's industrial history. After briefly introducing Buckland Paper Mill, I conclude the chapter by providing some context and rationale for my research project and an outline of the thesis.

Historical review of industry in Kent

Kent's economy is perhaps best known for its agriculture and production of food, drink and plants, and the county has long been described as the 'Garden of England.' However, there have been some recent attempts to complicate this narrative by (re)discovering Kent's industrial history. In a short popular history book titled *Kent's Industrial Heritage*, James Preston notes that Charles Dickens in *The Pickwick Papers* describes the county as one of 'cherries, apples and hops' and that its representation as the Garden of England has persisted to this day. But, he argues, while 'much of the county was, and is, purely agricultural, historically large swathes of Kent have supported important industrial activity' (Preston 2016, p. 5). In addition, two volumes in the Kent History Project commissioned by Kent County Council have drawn on extensive historical research into the county's economy, documenting and arguing for the importance of industrial employment in Kent going back to the seventeenth century (Armstrong 1995; Yates 2001). Academic research on industry and deindustrialisation in Kent has also emerged in recent years, including PhD theses on the Chatham Dockyard and the Kent Coalfields by Pleasant (2019) and Rowland (2019), respectively, and a study by Nettleingham (2018) on a former shipyard in Faversham[1].

What role, then, has industry played in Kent's economy historically? Armstrong (1995) writes that in 1911 industrial work in Kent accounted for 38.9% of all employment, 'well over twice the figure for agriculture and correspond[ing] closely to the national proportion' (Armstrong 1995, p. 268). Indeed, 'production' accounted for 39.3% of employment in 1961, while the 'primary' sector employed just 6.5% of the total workforce (Booth 2001, p. 30)[2]. Employment statistics alone do not provide the full picture, though, and definitions are important here. A central reason for the neglect of Kent's industrial history has been, according to Armstrong (1995, p. 268), a definition of industry adopted by historians that associates industry narrowly with the 'conspicuous 'leading sectors' in certain parts of the country.' This, he writes, has tended to 'understate the economic significance of small-scale, often traditional forms of manufacture, of the kind that abounded in Kent' (ibid). Furthermore, while industrial activity in the county was often 'conducted on a small scale, in plants with comparatively few

[1] A forthcoming book by urban studies scholar Phil Hubbard titled *Borderland: Identity and Belonging at the Edge of England* also reconsiders the history and identity of Kent.
[2] Production is defined in the 1961 census as 'manufacturing plus construction,' while the primary sector is comprised of 'agriculture, forestry and fishing plus energy and water.

employees,' it was 'nevertheless important locally and in the aggregate, [and] made a significant contribution to economic growth and development' (Preston 1995, p. 122). Clearly, then, Kent has a rich history of relatively small-scale industrial employment that was important to local economies.

We should be careful, though, about drawing simple equivalences between Kent's industrial base and those of more recognised 'industrial' regions. There are significant differences between and within these regions in relation to the nature and scale of industrial work and the diversity of local economies. Indeed, Armstrong stresses that 'manufacture' is defined very broadly in the census data he draws on, including within it the making up of clothing (tailors, etc), generation of gas and electricity, processing of food, furniture makers etc, though it was common to define manufacturing in these terms (Armstrong 1995, p. 268). Perhaps more significantly though, Kent's economy broadly defined has been characterised by its diversity, with strong agricultural and service sectors compared to more established industrial regions (Armstrong 1995; Booth 2001). Finally, the county's industrial employment has also been relatively dispersed. Pockets of industrial activity could be found across the county and, while manufacturing tended to concentrate predominantly in North Kent, Canterbury, Ashford and Dover (Preston 2016), the county 'lacked a real manufacturing heartland' (Booth 2001, p. 35). These three factors – scale, economic diversity and concentration – probably go some way to explaining Kent's marginal role in accounts of industrial history.

The relatively small-scale and fragmented nature of employment in Kent makes it difficult to provide a succinct account of the county's major industries. However, it has been argued that four of the oldest-established industries in the county are the manufacture of iron, woollen cloth and paper, along with shipbuilding (Richardson 1995, p. 247). While these industries date back centuries, industrial employment appears to really take off in the late-nineteenth century. Richardson (1995) observes that although a limited amount of employment in the county was provided by papermaking, brewing and shipbuilding up to the early nineteenth century, 'it was only during the latter part of the century, when the railways had been laid and the brick, cement, paper, engineering and shipbuilding industries were undergoing a remarkable period of growth, that the industrial labour force began to come of age' (Richardson 1995, p. 246). This labour force continued to grow into the twentieth century and was concentrated in industries such as shipbuilding, engineering, papermaking and coal mining. Booth (2001) provides a useful summary of Kent's twentieth century economic

development in which he indicates why Kent was at an advantage compared to other regions across the country:

> The economic development of Kent in the twentieth century is essentially a story of the continuing relative contraction of agriculture which had begun in the 1870s, growth and crisis in manufacturing, and growing domination of the service sector. In every respect, the economy of Kent has been buttressed by the proximity of London. The pattern of Kentish agricultural production, of the manufacturing industries of north Kent and of the service sector benefited profoundly from the closeness to either the wealth and scope of the London market or the levers of power and the discretionary spending of the government machine. (2001, p. 27)

Clearly, then, Kent's proximity to London defined the nature of its industrial base (and broader economy). The county's geography and geology are regularly cited as crucial in shaping a wide range of industrial activity. As the country's largest market, Kent's proximity to London was key to the growth of many of its industries, including building materials and papermaking, while its long coastline and access to mainland Europe meant it was (and is) well-placed for international trade (Preston 2016). In addition, as we will see, its rivers and streams were also crucial in the development of industries such as papermaking. But, while there is reason to believe Kent's smaller-scale and more locally-oriented manufacturers were historically 'decidedly less exposed to the vicissitudes of cyclical influence,' late-twentieth century trends in industrial employment in appear to mirror Britain as a whole. Booth describes the ups and downs of Kentish industries throughout the last century, stating that there are

> some major discontinuities in Kent's economic development since 1900. The twentieth century has seen the rise and fall of the Kent coalfield; the growth and collapse of the long-established arms producers; and the revitalisation of Kent's manufacturing sector followed by late and steep 'de-industrialisation' (2001, p. 27)

While the manufacturing sector accounted for about 30% of all employment in Kent in 1961 and 1971, by 1991 that had dropped to 14%. This was clearly, writes Booth (2001, p. 50), 'the low point for Kent's industrial economy.' In line with national trends, by the end of the century it was clear that the county's economy was more heavily reliant on service sector employment than at any point in its history (ibid).

Historical review of Dover's labour market and industrial base

It is difficult to give a satisfying account of Dover, past or present. One can point to famous tourist attractions – Dover Castle or the White Cliffs of Dover – or to its important geographical position and activity across Britain's military history, or indeed to its labour market; but in identifying the many disparate features of the town, it feels as though you are not quite getting at the whole story. A useful place to start, though, is the port.

Dover is sometimes nicknamed the 'Gateway to Europe' and 'Gateway to England' owing to its proximity and access to mainland Europe[3]. As the closest port to the continent, the Port of Dover has long been a major site for the transit of passengers and trade to and from Europe and beyond. Unsurprisingly, then, Dover's proximity to Europe was historically important for both economic and population growth in the town (Brandon and Short 1990).

Further, despite its coastal position, the advantages of Kent's proximity to London were felt by Dover from the mid-nineteenth century as a result of improved railways links, notably the South Easter Railway (SER) link in 1844 and London, Chatham and Dover Railway (LCDR) link in 1861 (Brandon and Short 1990, pp. 304-7).

Historically, though, Dover has had a diverse economy that has included an important industrial base. Accounts of Dover's industrial heritage have cited its history of shipbuilding, brewing, flour milling, coal mining, engineering, textile manufacturing and papermaking (Armstrong 1995; Preston 2016). What is clear, and significant for this study, is that Dover was never a 'monoindustrial' town defined by a single employer.

Kentish papermaking

Despite playing a central role in the development of the industry globally, only a handful of scholarly works have been written on the history of the British paper industry. While prominent historian of the industry Donald Coleman wrote in the 1950s that 'economic historians have paid little attention to this industry' (1954, p. 32), more recently Särkkä (2012, p. 168) has observed that today there is still 'a notable lack of systemic research' regarding the British paper industry, and the second half of the twentieth century is particularly under-documented.

In the economic histories of papermaking available to us, it is widely accepted that Kent was once a central hub of the British industry in what was the leading papermaking country in

[3] The town has also been called the 'Lock and Key of England' due to its geographic position and role in various wars over centuries (Dover Museum and Bronze Age Boat Gallery 2022). This is symbolised by Dover Castle, itself sometimes referred to as the 'Key to England' (English Heritage 2022).

the world; indeed, the county has been described as the 'early home of papermaking' (Coleman 1954, p. 40; Coleman 1958, p. 35). To understand why Kent became an early centre of papermaking we must briefly go back to the early seventeenth century and identify the requirements of papermaking at this time.

Early papermaking required an abundant supply of two things: water and rags. Water was crucial as both a source of power and a central ingredient in the paper itself, while rag was a vital raw material and one that was often in short supply (Shorter 1971). Kent's geography was key here. Its proximity to London as both the biggest supplier of rags and largest market for paper allowed papermaking to thrive in the seventeenth but especially eighteenth century (Ormrod 1995, pp. 100-1; Coleman 1958, p. 49; Magee 1997, p. 9). As Preston (1995) writes, Kentish manufacturers were 'able to exploit the exploding market for high quality white papers, such as writing, ledger and security papers for banknotes and official documents needed by London commerce' (Preston 1995, p. 117). Unsurprisingly, then, the strong pull of London brought about a concentration of mills in not just Kent but the other Home Counties of Buckinghamshire, Middlesex, among others (Coleman 1958, p. 49).

But crucial, too, was Kent's geology, especially its streams: the county possesses a number of 'quick streams of clear, hard water' – notably the Darent, Medway, and Dour – 'derived from contact with the region's limestone' (Magee 1997, p. 9). This water provided an abundance of power to early mills, but was particularly important for high-grade papers, as it was said that pure, hard water in the limestone and chalk districts 'enhanced composition of the best-quality papers' (Shorter 1971, p. 32). Furthermore, paper mills which were adjacent to navigable waterways or ports 'were well placed for supplies of materials and for marketing their paper'; mills were therefore established in or close to the ports of Dover and Southampton, among others, and there were groups of mills situated along tributary streams, such as the Medway tributaries and the Darent in Kent, and the Wye in Buckinghamshire (Shorter 1971, pp. 32, 33-4).

What is clear from historical accounts is that, like much of Kent's economy and industrial base, the county's geography and geology were decisive factors in the early development of the paper industry. But what about later developments? Kent was still an important player in the British paper industry throughout the late-nineteenth and early twentieth century (Shorter 1971; Magee 1997). There was a trend towards specialisation and a significant growth in large-scale, high-speed newsprint manufacture, much of which was located in North Kent (Särkkä 2012, p. 179; Shorter 1971). However, some smaller, more traditional mills survived. Shorter (1971) believes that 'there is no short answer' to the question of why some

of these mills survived, but notes that a mill's ability to meet the specific requirements of a customer was very likely an important factor in the survival of some firms (p. 180). Furthermore, many survivors demonstrated a high level of specialisation: 'many of the machine mills on old paper-making sites also now concentrate on high-quality or special papers' (p. 181). Interestingly, Shorter also observes that a large share of the old establishments still functioning in 1969 were situated in non-industrial regions and that, in contrast, many of the mills that began operating after 1861 were of 'industrial, coastal, or estuary types' (1971 p. 177).

Buckland Paper Mill

It is widely accepted within economic histories of the British paper industry that early mills tended to concentrate along rivers and streams with clear, fast flows of water, the likes of which were in plentiful supply in Kent. One such river is the Dour. While the Dour is marginal in published histories of papermaking, several unpublished histories have documented the mills that once ran along this river in Dover. One of these histories, written under the pseudonym Mylor Bridge and titled *Paper Mills on the River Dour, Kent. 1638-1934: A History of the Mills and their Papermakers*, suggests that 'Dover and its near villages embraced a unique papermaking centre comprising six mills during the 19th century.' However, of the six mills – Bushey Ruff, River, Crabble, Buckland, Lower Buckland and Charlton – only Buckland Paper Mill remained at the time of writing in 1978 'to carry on a tradition founded some 300 years ago.'

The early history of the Buckland Mill – also known as Dover Mill – is, according to several 'unofficial' histories written on the mill, somewhat uncertain. The first mention of papermaking at Buckland is 1638, and there is a 1770 water-colour painting of 'Buckland Paper Mill from the Churchyard.' Often noted in these histories is the 1887 fire that destroyed the existing building – the second time the mill had been burned down that century. According to a brochure published by owners Wiggins Teape in 1996, it was following the subsequent rebuild that the modern history of the mill began. It was in this year that 'Conqueror' was produced for the first time: 'the paper was an immediate success and Wiggins Teape bought the mill in 1890 to ensure continuity of supply.' The brochure is titled 'Buckland Mill: The Home of Conqueror' and, while it produced a range of products that included base papers for decorative laminates, map papers for the British Army, and chart paper for naval use, it was

the Conqueror brand of high-grade stationery that remained the mills' flagship product throughout the rest of its history.

While unpublished histories tend to foreground the mill's output, technological change, and owners across its early history – perhaps attempting to write this workplace into the narrative of the industrial revolution – what is of particular significance here is the workforce. Throughout much of its history, Buckland employed hundreds of women to 'sort' – both rags and paper. We will see what this work entailed, but the large female workforce relative to many other mills in the country is indicative of several things, including the raw materials that were used, the product being manufactured, the degree of mechanisation, and other local industrial employment (Magee 1997; Shorter 1971). Coleman (1958, p. 293) observes that it was mills outside of Britain's industrial heartlands and which had 'few other opportunities for industrial work,' such as Kent or Devon, which tended to employ a comparatively higher ratio of females. Lancashire, by contrast, had a much lower proportion, with women far more likely to find employment in the county's cotton industry (ibid, p. 293; Shorter 1971, p. 136) Importantly, while rag sorters had been removed from the process during the mid-twentieth century, one indication that Buckland in the 1960s and 70s was less mechanised than other paper mills in the UK was the size of the female workforce employed to 'sort' the paper (Shorter 1971, p. 136). As Shorter (1971) writes, more manual mills in the south tended to employ more women to perform tasks machines were doing in other papermaking hubs like Lancashire (ibid).

Buckland's workforce appears to have peaked at around 500 in the 1950s. Interestingly, while many mills around the country were closing in the second half of the twentieth century, Dover Mill remained operational and profitable. However, the mill underwent a significant process of restructuring in the 1980s and 1990s that saw significant changes to the workplace, including a huge expansion in the automation of the production process and marked downsizing of the workforce. In 1999, then-owners Arjowiggins decided that Dover would close the following year. In June 2000, 150 people were made redundant.

The research project

This research emerged, in part, out of the sociological questions raised by the *Watermark* documentary and the need to better understand and document Kent's industrial history. But there were two other important reasons for choosing to pursue this project. The first is the limitations in current deindustrialisation research. As I will show in the following chapter, it is

now acknowledged that women workers and gender analysis is seriously lacking in existing studies (High 2013, p. 1002; Clark 2017, p. 335), even if this is beginning to be addressed by scholars such as Jackie Clarke (2011, 2015, 2017). To address this limitation, I wanted to explore the gendered nature and experience of industrial and deindustrialisation in the context of a workplace with a significant female workforce. Buckland Paper Mill, with its long history of employing women to 'sort' paper alongside male papermakers, was an ideal fit for this task.

Another limitation in existing research is its overwhelming focus on those places where deindustrialisation has been most visible. This has usually meant studies of a single industrial employer, upon which the local economy relies heavily. On the face of it, this is unsurprising: it is vitally important to understand the implications of job loss for regions once based on industrial manufacturing or extraction. But it limits our understanding of the far-reaching, complex process of deindustrialisation. What are the impacts of factory closures in towns outside the industrial 'heartlands,' or in more diverse economies? Again, Dover Mill in the 'Garden of England' represents a useful lens through which to explore these questions.

The second reason relates to my biography. Like many scholars studying deindustrialisation today, I am from a working-class background. Of course, it doesn't follow that I would necessarily be interested in studying industrial employment, factory closure and wider industrial decline. But I am not just working-class; I am working-class in a particular place at a specific point in history. Put simply, the type of work available to many of my class in the roughly three decades of 'social democratic consensus' is now to many a second-hand memory at best.

It was in my conversations with workers in jobs probably among the closest to this 'lost' form of work today that my interest in deindustrialisation emerged. I am from Harwich, a port town in Essex, and I worked at Harwich International Port for five consecutive summers until 2015. I was in a zero-hours customer service role, but I regularly worked alongside dockers on the gangway or transporting luggage onto whichever cruise ship had come to town. Talking to dockers, I was struck by the sense of identity and security they derived from this work. Most had worked at the port for decades and had no intention of leaving, they earned good money, and it hadn't required a degree, let alone a master's degree – all in Harwich! The contrast between their life trajectories and mine – more specifically, the difference in the range of options available to us – just a generation later seemed incredible. It was the contrast between dock workers and customer service assistants at the port that I explored in my MA dissertation. What I have had that they did not is academic opportunities; so, instead of doing manual work, I am researching and writing about it.

Manual, skilled work, of course, still exists; as do rewarding, well-paid and secure jobs. Indeed, so does manufacturing work: 7.7% of the employed workforce (or 2.7 million people) was in manufacturing in 2019, albeit down from a peak of 30% (or 8.9 million people) in 1966 (Beatty and Fothergill 2020, p. 2). But the idea of entering a well-paid 'job for life,' with no formal qualifications, as part of a local community embedded in a one's hometown seems, frankly, absurd. This is not to be nostalgic for work I never experienced; there was nothing inherently good about industrial employment and there is nothing inherently bad about its absence. But has something been lost without being replaced?

In an important sense, this is less about work than the political-economic conditions in which certain kinds of employment can exist. But jobs are not experienced at that level, and it is the task of sociology to locate the experiences and agency of individuals within wider structures, including of political economy. It is important to connect economic processes that can be abstract – deindustrialisation, neoliberalism, globalisation – with lives of workers, and grounding it in a specific place and time. To that end, this research seeks to answer four central questions:

1. What can an atypical or marginal case study of deindustrialisation reveal about industrial employment and closure?
2. How are experiences and narratives of industrial work and deindustrialisation gendered?
3. What is the role of memory in oral historical accounts of deindustrialisation?
4. How useful is the concept of the 'half-life of deindustrialisation' in exploring these issues theoretically, methodologically and empirically?

This thesis is structured and organised as follows. In the following chapter, I review salient themes and studies from two broad bodies of literature – industrial and work sociology and deindustrialisation – to draw on and locate my research in relation to existing debates. Next, I discuss the methodological approach of this research in two parts. The first is a review of conceptualisations of memory within sociology and oral history; the second is a fieldwork review that engages with the practical components and philosophical underpinnings of my research. I then provide three substantive pieces that present and analyse my empirical findings. The first of these is concerned with the relationship between work and non-work lives at Buckland Mill; the second explores everyday working lives at the 'Home of Conqueror,' engaging with the identities and meanings derived from this work; the final analysis chapter is

on the closure of Dover Mill, which I have called the ‘long closure’ that involved a protracted period of downsizing and automation as part of a process of workplace restructuring. I conclude by considering what has been learned and the implications of my research.

2. Literature review

This chapter engages with salient themes, concepts and empirical work in the fields of work/industrial sociology and deindustrialisation. I am particularly interested in how sociological writing on work and deindustrialisation has approached issues around gender and women's work. Both fields draw on and are in dialogue with other disciplines. This is especially true of the 'inherently interdisciplinary' study of deindustrialisation (Strangleman and Rhodes 2014, p. 419), which is dominated by historians, geographers and anthropologists. Meanwhile, sociologists of work have increasingly directed attention towards the study of industrial closures and deindustrialisation. This could be seen as something of a complicated return home for a discipline that in the post-war era focussed disproportionately on industrial work, specifically heavy industry in male-dominated factories and mines.

A central concern here is the ways sociologists and, more recently, scholars of deindustrialisation have (and have not) engaged with issues of gender and women's work. Has deindustrialisation research repeated the mistake of only seeing women and gender through the lens of men's work? That is, as wives and mothers doing the work of social reproduction, activists on the streets and picket line defending men's jobs, or workers doing 'women's work' – i.e. relatively light, repetitive, 'low-skilled' labour with few opportunities for advancement or to exert power?

There are certainly some interesting parallels to be drawn between the two fields in their default object/subject of study. While the sociology of work broadened its scope in the last third of the twentieth century to include analyses of gender and women's work – and indeed expanded the very definition of 'work' – following sustained feminist critique, the scholarship on deindustrialisation arguably fell into a similar trap by making the displaced male industrial worker the archetypal subject in the narrative of industrial closures and decline. There is a danger, then, that even in its absence men's manual labour in factories and mines becomes the implicit definition of real work, against which we measure other 'atypical' forms of labour. It is important that we do not see industrial employment as disconnected from other forms of work and spheres of life, even while continuing to understand the value and potentials of this work for workers, families and communities. As we will see, this is beginning to change in light of a recognition that deindustrialisation is a gendered process that has affected men and women inside and outside of (industrial) employment.

2.1 Industrial sociology and the sociology of work

Work was core to sociology from its inception and to its founding theorists. Marx, Weber and Durkheim all grappled with the unfolding social consequences of capitalism and industrialisation, laying the groundwork for subsequent sociological inquiry. The discipline of work – or industrial – sociology, however, only emerged in Britain after the end of the Second World War (Warren 2016, p. 46; Halford and Strangleman 2009, pp. 811-812; Brown 1992, p. 5). Sometimes referred to as its 'golden age', the post-war period (especially from the mid-1950s) saw the sociological study of work begin to thrive and become a major concern within sociology (Savage 1999; Bradley 2016, p. 73; Strangleman 2016, p. 19; see Stephenson et al. 2019 for an in-depth critique of the notion of 'the golden age'). There were good reasons for this. Trade unions enjoyed significant political power in a post-war period where many industries were nationalised. Both Conservative and Labour governments struggled with major industrial action in the context of a commitment to full employment, in part to help fund the welfare state (Wrigley 2002; Reid 2004). There was, then, huge potential for conducting sociological research at this time. There was a strong appetite to understand worker perspectives in this context, and researchers gained relatively easy access to workplaces to conduct their studies. The discipline included a range of theoretical traditions, methodological approaches, and substantive interests, but some of the most celebrated studies of this period were ethnographic in their approach and generally located within Marxist or Weberian schools of thought (Strangleman 2016, p. 20; Edwards 2014, p. 488).

I focus briefly here on several of the most influential studies from the post-war era that provide a necessary backdrop to further debate and concerns within the sociology of work while also pointing to enduring questions around class and community. These were very much products of their time, reflecting concerns around industrial occupations and communities, as well as the significance of increasing affluence among sections of the British working class (see Goldthorpe et al. 1968). I then discuss the concept of occupational community, developed in the mid-twentieth century but more recently adopted in very different social and economic conditions. Finally, I engage with critiques directed towards the discipline from feminists in the 1970s and some of the work that emerged in their wake, ending by engaging with some pioneering studies of industrial women workers. Taken together, we see some of the resources sociologists of work can build on – including in research on deindustrialisation.

Questions of class and community were a key concern within post-war industrial sociology, reflecting an interest in the role of (male manual) work in giving rise to cultures of

collectivism (Savage 1999). Dennis et al.'s (1956) *Coal is Our Life* is a standout example here. Based in a Yorkshire coal community and emerging out of the field of community studies, the book focusses on the relationship between work, family and place. Interestingly, this study demonstrates a relatively holistic concern with life beyond the workplace and the relationship between industrial employment and wider community, with some appreciation for the role of women within mining families. As Savage (1999) notes, by recognising the highly gendered character the community's collectivism, Dennis et al. 'were unusually prescient in emphasizing the patriarchal nature of mining culture.'

One particularly influential study was Huw Beynon's *Working for Ford*. This ethnographic research, conducted at the Ford Motor Company plant in Liverpool between 1963 and 1971, shed light on working conditions and relations between workers, management and the shop stewards who stand between them. Taking a Marxist approach, Beynon (1973, p. 98) describes a 'politics of the factory' and a 'factory consciousness', in contrast to a class consciousness, whereby class relationships are understood 'in terms of their direct manifestation in conflict between the bosses and the workers within a factory'. Beynon is interested here in the contexts in which industrial action takes place, with an appreciation of the specific politics of the factory. Beynon was also witnessing early signs of the breaking-up of the post-war consensus.

These studies were important in addressing some of the core concerns of the time, shedding light on issues around class relations and consciousness, community, and orientations to work. They might also be seen, though, as symbolic of what the sociological study of work tended to neglect at this time. While often situating work within wider contexts of family, community and place, what these two studies had in common was a primary focus on men's employment. As we will see, by the 1970s this was becoming increasingly untenable under sustained criticism from second wave feminist scholars.

Occupational community

The concept of occupational community has an interesting history within sociology. While the term was being used in the social sciences at least as early as the mid-1950s to describe the 'convergence of informal friendship patterns and colleague relationships' (Gerstl 1961, p. 38), it wasn't until Graeme Salaman's development of the concept in the early 1970s that it gained

currency within sociology. The irony here is that its (re)emergence came at a time when the phenomenon of occupational communities was becoming increasingly rare (Salaman 1986).

I draw here on the conceptualisation of occupational community proposed by Salaman (1974) and subsequently developed (albeit modestly) by sociologists and others. In his touchstone study *Community and occupation: An exploration of work/leisure relationships*, Salaman (1974) defines an occupational community as representing

> a particular relationship between men's work and the rest of their lives – a type of relationship which in its extreme form is probably increasingly rare in modern societies. Members of occupational communities are affected by their work in such a way that their non-work lives are permeated by their work relationships, interests and values. (Indeed it is likely that members of some communities would not approve of the separation of work and non-work.) Members of occupational communities build their lives on their work; their work-friends are their friends outside work and their leisure interests and activities are work-based (Salaman 1974, p. 19).

Occupational communities, then, represent a blurring of the distinction between work and non-work lives. As Salaman notes in this passage, in their purest form these were increasingly rare even in the mid-1970s. Also implied here is that the concept was implicitly used to explore *men's* work. Indeed, this continued to be a limitation of the concept into the twenty-first century. As Sandiford and Seymour (2007, p. 212) write in their exploration of the value of occupational community for understanding work experience in face-to-face service occupations, 'Many of the studies of occupational communities which have sought to provide a rich understanding of a particular occupation have been carried out in work dominated by men.' The authors also usefully point out that a utility of the idea is its capacity to 'capture the intensity of work involvement' (ibid).

More recently, work sociologists have revisited the concept and applied it to a wide range of occupations, including steelmaking and, indeed, papermaking. Some have placed greater emphasis than Salaman on the ways occupational communities socialise workers into the culture of a workplace. In their research into experiences of industrial restructuring at a UK steelworks, McLachlan et al (2019) recognise socialisation into the workplace culture as a key function of occupational communities insofar as they transmit 'shared values, norms and attitudes that reflect the occupational identity' of the workplace (McLachlan et al 2019, p. 918; MacKenzie et al 2006). Non-work activities are important in this process: 'the diffusion of workplace experiences is typically supplemented by socialization of members into the community given the interpenetration between work and nonwork spheres' (McLachlan et al

2019, p. 918). Lupo and Bailey (2011, p. 426), in a study of factors affecting occupational community in two pulp and paper mills in Alabama, characterise it as 'a bounded work culture that conveys its norms, work practices, values, and conceptions of identity from one generation of participants to another.'

A further elaboration of Salaman's conceptualisation of occupational community has concerned class. While Salaman (1974) only hints at the potential class implications of this phenomenon, MacKenzie et al. (2006) give sustained attention to the relationship between class identities and solidarities and occupational community among redundant steelworkers in Wales. While class-based identities are resilient in their findings, they acknowledge the potential for an inhibition of class solidarity 'if the 'us' in the 'them and us' divide is defined by the occupational group [including management] and not in broader class terms' (2006, p. 842). Here, then, occupational community can blur distinctions between not only work and leisure but levels of workplace hierarchy.

In a consideration of the continued utility of the concept in a context of declining 'real-world' occupational communities, the MacKenzie et al. (2006, p. 838) point out it continues to offer insights into 'subjective collectives' and the link between work and non-work lives and its consequences for identities, relationships and solidarities. Further, they argue, even where the employment relationship is more individualised and fragmented, work continues to both dominate the lives of worker in temporal terms and shape people's sense of themselves and others (ibid, p. 849). Indeed, Salaman himself notes that it is more useful to consider occupational communities in terms of degree rather than their presence or absence, allowing us to attend to the 'interesting and significant aspects of occupations as collectivities' (Salaman 1974, p. 127, 1971b, p. 390). Occupational community continues to provide a useful framework for exploring the inter-relationship between work and leisure in a specific workplace, especially in those relatively 'closed shop' workplaces that even in the mid-1970s were increasingly rare (Salaman 1974).

Feminist critiques and the broadening of the field

Between 1945 and the 1970s, under the label of industrial sociology, the vast majority of attention was given to male manual works in manufacturing industry (Gallie 1988, xii cited in Strangleman 2016, p. 22). The neglect of other areas of the field came under increasing criticism in the 1970s and 80s. Leading these criticisms were second wave feminists like Ann

Oakley and Veronica Beechey who sought to broaden the discipline to include areas such as women's employment, domestic labour and service work. Second wave feminism was the first social movement to significantly influence the sociology of work (Strangleman and Warren 2008, p. 160). A main critique advanced by feminists was that the discipline focussed almost exclusively on male industrial work and workers, and on paid work. As a result, the male industrial worker was treated as the 'standard' worker, while the labour done by women – both paid and unpaid – was largely ignored.

As Gottfried (2006, p. 123) writes, while its thinkers have not adopted a unified or singular approach, feminism has been united by "the shared recognition of the interrelationship between reproduction and production". This is made clearest by second-wave feminism in its "critique of narrow approaches to the study of work" hitherto:

> Feminists took aim at the canon for giving priority to production over reproduction, public over private, paid over unpaid labor, and class over gender. Early second wave feminists criticized gender-neutral analysis of capitalism and other related economic categories, and developed the notion of patriarchy in relationship to capitalism. (Gottfried 2006, p. 123)

By prioritising such areas, Gottfried argues, work sociology was complicit in "the male bias in the definition, constitution and organization of work" (2006, p. 121).

Some of the earliest criticisms concerned the disregard of domestic labour in sociological inquiry. Ann Oakley's (1974) survey of London housewives and their attitudes to housework sought to rectify the neglect of women in sociological analyses of work. Oakley launches a strong attack on sociology, branding it a sexist discipline where "woman as a social group are invisible or inadequately represented" (1974, p. 1). She saves her strongest criticisms, however, for the sociology of industry and work, where "women are conspicuous for their absence as data" (1974, p. 19). While women constituted thirty-six percent of the labour force at the time, studies of employment remained "almost wholly male-oriented" (ibid). The invisibility of women in this field, Oakley argued, was "guaranteed by the choice of predominantly masculine jobs in research design"; notably, the intensively studied automobile industry (ibid). Sociology's failure to give adequate consideration to women's paid employment was matched by its neglect of domestic labour. Again, Oakley accuses sociology of subscribing to the stereotypes of wider society: "because work is not a component of the feminine stereotype housework lacks any conceptualization in sociology *as* work" (1974, p. 26). Oakley thus proceeds to remedy the "distorted impression of women's situation" conveyed

by the sociology of work by providing an influential account of the importance of housework to women (1974, p. 4).

Building on the work of Oakley, Feldberg and Glenn (1979) provide a strong critique of the sociology of work. The authors took issue with the paucity of studies addressing women *as* workers, the sex-biased interpretations offered by the few studies that did include women, and the distorted analysis of work arising from the sex-differentiated approaches to analysing employment (1979, p. 524). At the heart of all these issues, Feldberg and Glenn (1979) argue, was the formation of "two sociologies of work: the *job model* for men and *gender model* for women" (1979, p. 525, own emphasis). These models "bias[ed] the entire direction of research", determining *what* is studied and defining which issues did, and did not, count as problematic. Further, researchers all too often followed "the path of least resistance", favouring explanations most consistent with either the job or gender model. In response, Feldberg and Glenn called for a reconceptualization of 'work'. The new concept of work would cover both paid and unpaid work and recognise the connection between these, rather than divorcing employment from all other forms of work (p. 532). Importantly, such a reconceptualization would also allow work to be located within the context of people's lives as a whole (p. 532). By directing inquiry into areas previously ignored or taken for granted, such as housework, these reformulations were intended to "enrich the sociology of work" (1979, p. 535).

Feminist critiques of were effective in broadening the agenda of work/industrial sociology. But calls for greater attention to different forms of work and workers also coincided with a decline of the very work the field had disproportionately with in the post-war period. As Strangleman and Rhodes write:

> During the 1980s, there was a collective realisation within and beyond British industrial sociology that a focus on industrial work was unduly limiting in terms both of who and what the subject of study was. Indeed one could make the argument that it was the early wave of deindustrialisation that had partly provoked this reflection. What was suggested was that a focus on work more broadly rather than industry and industrial work allowed researchers to study paid and unpaid work, to look at different forms of labour and crucially to shift focus to those groups hitherto ignored (Strangleman and Rhodes 2014, p. 412)

Trends of industrial decline, then, were also an important factor in the field's evolution. However, some of the early studies that emerged in the wake of feminist critiques approached their subject with similar concerns to those of the previous era, addressing gaps in our knowledge left by post-war industrial sociologists. As Edwards notes, one aspect of a 'gender-

sensitive analysis entailed studies of female workers in the kinds of semi-skilled factory jobs addressed in earlier studies' (Edwards 2014, p. 497). Two landmark studies in in this genre were published within a year of one another in the early 1980s. Anna Pollert's *Girls, Wives, Factory Lives* and Miriam Glucksmann's *Women on the Line* focussed in different ways on experiences of working-class women performing manual labour in factories, and in doing so broadened our understanding of both women's working lives and mass production work.

Glucksmann (first publishing under the pseudonym Ruth Cavendish) (2009 [1982]), who initially entered a factory that made car parts not as a researcher but as a disillusioned academic seeking out experience of blue-collar employment, viscerally conveys both the complexity and intensity of work on the production line in late-1970s London. While the work of women on the line was deemed unskilled or semi-skilled and opportunities for advancement were limited, men seemed to be afforded more training, authority and status: '[men] were not a homogeneous group – but from where we were on the line, anyone with skill or training was a man, anyone in authority was a man, and any man had authority' (Glucksmann 2009 [1982], p. 48). Among many other insights, this study demonstrated how women workers – especially those who were black British or migrants – were confined to jobs that were defined as less skilled, worthy of relatively low pay, and prevented progression up the organisational hierarchy.

Glucksmann's study, along with Pollert's *Girls, Wives, Factory Lives*, was important in developing discussions about industrial women workers (and we can add Westwood 1984 to these studies). Their projects provided much needed empirical insight into the women's work in manufacturing, gendered experiences of industrial employment, and the relationship between this work and other spheres of life. Crucially, Bradley (2016) argues, both authors explore 'how class and gender came together to structure working-class women's lives':

> Capitalism and patriarchy were seen to combine to construct women as a cheap form of labour; profits for the owners were increased and men were able to maintain their dominance in the family because of their superior earnings. This partly explains men's resistance to allowing women to enter 'their jobs'. Whatever women do tends to be devalued just because it is done by women. Depressingly, the tobacco workers studied by Pollert seemed to accept that men 'deserved' to earn more. It would take decades of feminist campaigning to change this attitude in any way at all. (Bradley 2016, pp. 75-6)

These early case studies, writes Bradley (2016, p. 76) 'laid the ground for the study of gender and work for the next three decades. Since then a massive body of work, firmly grounded in

empirical research but backed up by theoretical analysis, has accumulated, studying the processes of gendering.' Looking back, we can also see how structural changes in the economy were beginning to challenge work sociologists to rethink their primary set of concerns. As noted by Strangleman (2016, p. 23), the early 1970s also marked the end of 'an unprecedented era of rise in living conditions for working people across all industrial nations' – what is sometimes called the 'long post-war boom'. We could think of this process of change as 'undermining an unproblematic attention and focus on the blue collar working-class male industrial worker, who had been the core subject of interest within work sociology, or more usually industrial sociology. Indeed the label work sociology becomes more popular during the 1980s, reflecting a broader set of interests and foci' (Strangleman 2016, pp. 23-24). We can observe then two key factors – second-wave feminist critique and structural economic shifts – as challenging the association between 'work' and 'male'.

2.2 Legacies of industrial work and deindustrialisation

Academic writing on 'deindustrialisation' emerged in the 1970s and 1980s in response to the accelerated decline of employment in manufacturing and basic industries in North America and Western Europe (High 2013). This work initially focused on the political and economic causes of widespread factory closures and their immediate social and economic impact, and often 'straddled the line between academic work and activism' (Lawson 2020, p 2; High 2013, pp. 995-997). Led by economists and labour geographers, scholarship in the 1980s was primarily concerned with what Cowie and Heathcott (2003, p. 5) notably called the 'body count', meaning the quantitative fallout of industrial closures and wider decline. As Strangleman and Rhodes (2014, p. 413) write, 'interest often lay in the number of job losses, shifts in the rates of unemployment, changes in employment within the various sectors of the economy and the spatial distribution of industry and its loss.'

An early contribution that went beyond the 'body count', and a foundational text in the field, is Bluestone and Harrison's (1982) *The Deindustrialization of America: Plant Closings, Community Abandonment, and the Dismantling of Basic Industry*. The authors, both economists, define deindustrialisation as 'a widespread, systematic disinvestment in the nation's basic productive capacity' (1982, p. 6). Despite their background in economics, Bluestone and Harrison demonstrate a deeply sociological concern for the social consequences of macro-economic change and the moral issues it raised. It was also emblematic of writing

towards the end of the century insofar as it conceived of deindustrialisation as a struggle between locally rooted communities and increasingly mobile capital (see High 2005 for a critique of this framing). In some ways, this approach has endured in a field that continues to recognise the importance of connecting individual experiences with larger structural processes.

Over the last two decades, however, attention has shifted decisively towards the medium- and long-term social, cultural and economic impact of industrial decline, and the cultural legacy of industrial work (Lawson 2020, pp. 2-4; High 2013, pp. 997-1000). While studies were already beginning to focus on deindustrialisation's longer-term consequences (see Dudley 1994, Byrne 2002, Linkon and Russo 2002, and High 2003, for example), Cowie and Heathcott (2003) in the introduction to their edited collection provide a rallying call for scholars to go 'beyond the ruins'. They argue that

> the time is right to widen the scope of the discussion beyond prototypical plant shutdowns, the immediate politics of employment policy, the tales of victimization, or the swell of industrial nostalgia. Rather, our goal is to rethink the chronology, memory, spatial relations, culture, and politics of what we have come to call "deindustrialization." . . . What was labelled deindustrialization in the intense political heat of the late 1970s and early 1980s turned out to be a more socially complicated, historically deep, geographically diverse, and politically perplexing phenomenon than previously thought. (Cowie and Heathcott 2003, pp. 1-2)

The argument signaled a necessary shift in focus, one that recognised deindustrialisation not simply as the loss of industry but as both an historic transformation within capitalism and an ongoing process whose legacy would be both long and complex – socially, spatially and temporally. We can see the influence of this intervention in studies that have attended to deindustrialisation's longer-term social, cultural, and economic implications, even if some have refused to go 'beyond the ruins' by treating factory ruins themselves as part of the 'cultural meaning of deindustrialisation in the aftermath' of closings (High and Lewis 2007, p. 2).

More somberly, though, the argument put forward in *Beyond the Ruins* can be read as an admission of defeat. The authors concede that the fights over workplace closures that animated early writers were broadly over – many ending in devastating defeats for workers, their families and local communities. After commending the 'benchmark' set by *The Deindustrialization of America*, Cowie and Heathcott (2003, p. 6) state that 'the struggle to preserve basic industry that fired Bluestone and Harrison's project is all but gone.' In addition to a greater focus on deindustrialisation as an ongoing process, this admission prompted critical

reflection on understandings, stories and myths of the industrial era. Important here is the understanding of industrial society, far from the historical norm, was as an exception, a brief moment. Since *Beyond the Ruins*, scholars have been reflecting on the illusions of permanence cultivated during the post-war consensus, problematizing how we represent this subject in our work. As Cowie and Heathcott (2003, p. 5) wrote, 'the solidity of factories and tenements and steeples masked a fundamental impermanence,' one that is endemic to capitalism. Importantly, by foregrounding the testimonies of displaced workers, their families, and local people, many of these authors have been able to usefully link personal experiences of industrial closure to wider changes in the nature of work, both at home and abroad.

The half-life of deindustrialisation

The academic study of deindustrialisation consolidated in the second decade of the twenty-first century through a combination of empirical, theoretical and historiographic work. One interesting development has been the emergence of a range of metaphors as scholars attempt to grapple with the longer-term legacy of industrial decline. Writers invoke 'crumbling cultures' in the wake of deindustrialisation (Strangleman et al. 2013), 'ghosts' that haunt industrial ruins and 'hauntings' where the past 'bubbles up' to haunt the present (both Edensor 2005a and Strangleman 2017, p. 465 draw on Avery Gordon's (1997 [2008]) *Ghostly Matters*). Similarly, Alice Mah adapted the concept of 'ruination' to denote both an ongoing process of decline and the embodiment of industrial and urban decline in 'local people's experiences, perceptions, and understandings [which] emerge in unexpected, indirect, or diffuse forms: as ambivalence, as nostalgia, as trauma (Mah 2012, p. 199). What these metaphors have in common is their attempt to understand the relationship between the past and the present – material and immaterial. As Emery (2018, p. 5) notes, 'existing work is particularly united in arguing that "legacies" of the past continually intervene in the present to shape and unsettle formations of identity, place, inclusion, and expectations of the future in post-industrial space.'

One concept in this category that has recently gained currency is that of the 'half-life of deindustrialisation'. Developed by literature scholar Sherry Linkon to explore the emergence of "deindustrialisation literature" in the US, the 'half-life' is increasingly being used in empirical studies of deindustrialisation interested in the longer-term legacy of industrial closures and decline. In *The Half-Life of Deindustrialization*, Linkon writes that for communities in former industrial regions,

> deindustrialization is not an event of the past. It remains an active and significant part of the present. Like toxic waste, the persistent and dangerous residue from the production of nuclear power and weapons, deindustrialization has a half-life. Its influence may be waning, slowly, over time, but it remains potent, and it cannot simply be forgotten or ignored. (Linkon 2018, p. 2)

This is not a process experienced only by workers. Invoking the radioactivity metaphor, Linkon (2018, p. 6) notes that, 'like the diseases caused by exposure to radiation, the injuries of deindustrialization are shared'. Ailments that inflict deindustrialised towns and regions include the long-term unemployment and economic struggles, the 'slow, continuing decline of working-class communities [and] internalized uncertainties as individuals try to adapt to economic and social changes', population decline, physical and mental health issues, growing rates of addiction and suicide, political disillusionment and resentment, and the deterioration of buildings and infrastructure (Linkon 2018, p. 6; Linkon 2014, p. 2 in Strangleman 2017, p. 475).

For former industrial workers, the half-life can be found in memories of working lives and the circumstances surrounding factory closure. These memories are, invariably, coloured by present circumstances – individual and social – and therefore remain active and liable to change over time. As Linkon recognizes, there is a tension, wrestled with by workers and those researching their experiences, 'between the memory of an era when being a worker had social value and the difficult reality of a present in which wages have stagnated, jobs have become more tenuous, and workers feel they have lost status and power in society at large and especially in conflicts between capital and labor' (Linkon 2018, pp. 2-3).

In addition to the memories of workers and material circumstances of communities in deindustrialised areas, Linkon stresses the importance of taking seriously the representations of past industrial work and deindustrialisation. Linkon focusses predominantly on fictional writing in the form of stories, essays and poems, but also explores how films can develop our understanding of the long-term impact of industrial closures and decline. All of these forms of representation are themselves products of the half-life, both 'emerging from and contributing to the cultural context of the half-life' (Linkon 2018, p. 14). They constitute qualitative and subjective evidence of 'how deindustrialization and its aftermath have affected people and how they have made sense of that experience' (Linkon 2018, pp. 13-14). We should engage with them, argues Linkon, 'not for what they show us about the past but for what they reveal about what the past means in the present' (2013, p. 39).

It is the stress on current meanings of the past, meanings that evolve over time, that makes the concept of the 'half-life of deindustrialisation' so valuable. Unlike 'post-industrial' and 'post-Fordist', which do at least 'define the present in relationship to the past,' Linkon argues that the term avoids suggesting 'a clear break between past and present (Linkon 2018, p. 5). The value of this idea, then, is that it helps us think in more historically informed ways about current economic processes and how they are experienced and negotiated, not only by those who lost their jobs, but also by families, communities, and subsequent generations. I would also suggest that one of the great appeals of the 'half-life' – and indeed the other metaphors mentioned above – is that they can be thought of in terms of degree rather than their presence or absence. As such, they offer a framework for increasing our understanding of most, if not all, instances of industrial decline.

Finally, I would suggest that it has been necessary to conceptualise the legacy of deindustrialisation through metaphor due to the problems inherent with attempting to render an *absence*. Those researching how industrial closures and decline continue to impact working-class communities are often exploring something that is no longer there – at least in complete, material form – and so metaphors of 'ghosts', 'hauntings', of an often intangible 'half-life' stand in for what is missing. This is particularly apparent in studies of young people growing up after industry has disappeared.

Broadening the spatial and temporal scope of deindustrialisation research

Research and writing on deindustrialisation has been very attentive to the significance of place in the context of industrial work, change and loss. As we have seen, early studies highlighted the importance of place by framing deindustrialisation as a struggle between local, relatively fixed communities and increasingly mobile capital. Often, the focus has been on buildings and landscapes altered by factory closures, decay and destruction, and their relationship to identity and memory (for example, see Edensor 2005b, Linkon and Russo 2002, Barton 2015).

In *Corporate Wasteland: The Landscape and Memory of Deindustrialization*, High and Lewis (2007) combine photography and oral history to 'delve into the landscape and memory of deindustrialization' (p. 2) at various sites across Canada and the US. The study offers useful ideas around the significance of place in the context of deindustrialisation. Places, for these authors, are 'constructed out of a particular constellation of social relations that meet and weave together at a particular locus' (2007, p. 32). Place attachment, they write, is 'a complex

phenomenon that involves affect, emotion, feeling, and memory (2007, p. 32). Workplaces, then, are produced through the social relations that play out within them. The closure of a plant often severs the 'symbolic bond between people and place' (as well as between colleagues and product), which is felt most deeply by long-service workers. Further, the demolition of industrial landmarks can cast into doubt 'many of the cultural symbols, beliefs, and values that once fortified a sense of industrial order' (2007, p. 32). Following industrial closure people have attempted to recreate their attachments by reflecting on and talking about the places where they have lived and worked (High and Lewis 2007, pp. 93-4). The authors note that such strong attachment to industry has surprised some commentators who view mills and factories as little more than alienating and polluting spaces (High and Lewis 2007, p. 94).

But there have been more recent attempts to broaden the geographical scope of inquiry. This comes in response to critique regarding the field's narrow focus on the mono-industrial 'heartlands'. High (2013, p. 1002), for example, argues that 'the field has focussed primarily on those places where deindustrialization was most visible: towns of single-industry located in the industrial heartlands of North America and Europe. The automotive, steel and mining industries have received the lion's share of public and scholarly attention.' *The Deindustrialized World*, itself co-edited by High, signalled a renewed appreciation for the ways place (and time) shape processes of deindustrialisation. 'Industrial decline and erasure', write the editors, 'are often studied in places where the signs of ruination are most visible' (High et al. 2017, p. 6). This has 'resulted in a disproportionate number of studies that focus on small or medium-sized industry towns, where nothing has filled the void left by departing industries' (ibid). With this in mind, *The Deindustrialized World* brings together essays with the goal of 'considering how deindustrialization unfolded in particular geographic and political contexts during the second half of the twentieth century', attending to the 'particularities of industrial decline in different geographies' (High et al. 2017, pp. 8-9). The central concern of the fifteen essays, write the editors, is 'the spatial and temporal *unevenness* of these global events and how people live in and with, and respond to, economic and political ruination' (High et al. 2017, p. 4, emphasis 26riti). The contributors demonstrate that there have been a range of responses to factory closures and that this has invariably been informed by where and when it takes place.

In a similar vein, Nettleingham (2018) encourages us to go 'beyond the heartlands' by exploring more marginal – or marginalised – examples of deindustrialisation. His study, based in the former shipbuilding town of Faversham in Kent, problematises the accepted understanding of both where and when processes of deindustrialisation have occurred. What

can we learn from the closure of a shipyard in a region not generally associated with industry? How do we make sense of a closure that took place prior to the wave of closures of the 1970s and 1980s? Faversham, Nettleingham (2018, p. 2) writes, 'feels not just geographically, but culturally distant from the experience and legacy of the industrialized north, midlands, Scotland and Wales'. Faversham's marginality shapes how industrial work and the town more generally can be remembered – locally and nationally. Deindustrialisation, Nettleingham argues,

> has impacted upon a more geographically diverse and widespread range of former industrial locations than are commonly represented. The narratives that surround some sites are complicated by their displacement in time, space and discourse: industrial loss occurring under markedly different political and economic conditions. (Nettleingham 2018, p. 2)

Nettleingham believes sites such as Faversham are fertile ground for developing a richer understanding of deindustrialisation:

> Foregrounding marginalized and lesser-known sites, allows us to view a range of important new facets to deindustrialization as a social and cultural process, and the complex relationships to time and place that emerge. . . . Without the out-of-place and out-of-time, without broadening how we frame what constituted and reconstitutes the 'industrial', the experience and impact of deindustrialization as it progresses can never be fully understood. (p. 16)

It is worth exploring the importance of time here. Time has long been central to analyses of factory closures and their legacy. By advancing the notion of an ongoing process, scholars broadly in the tradition of Cowie and Heathcott (2003) have understood that deindustrialisation was not a discrete event of the 1970s and 1980s but had implications – including continued closures and redundancies – into the twenty-first century. Further, concepts such as the 'half-life' acknowledge that the salience of industry and its loss decays over time, often stretching far beyond closure. What Nettleingham argues, however, is that we give attention to cases that do not fit within the usual timeline. Of course, factories, mills, mines and shipyards have been closing almost as long as they have been opening. Taking a broad view, Cowie and Heathcott suggest that

> deindustrialization and industrialization are merely two ongoing aspects of the history of capitalism that describe continual and complicated patterns of investment and disinvestment. These patterns respond to new politics, technology, and cultural conditions, but in the end the seeds of deindustrialization were in every

> instance built into the engines of industrial growth itself. (Cowie and Heathcott 2003, p. 15)

Some questions we might ask here are: is a specific closure part of the same process of deindustrialisation that has animated scholars since the 1970s – itself one component of a wider phase of economic restructuring in the last third of the twentieth century? If not, what do they reveal that more conventional examples of closure do not? Nettleingham's argument is useful in that it helps us avoid drawing clear boundaries between periods, and places, of economic change. Strangleman et al. (2013, p. 14) make the slightly broader argument that 'we can no longer draw boundaries of time, place, or discipline. If we are to understand the continuing significance of deindustrialization, we must look across time, compare what is happening in different localities and nations, and read and discuss with colleagues across the disciplines.' A nuanced understanding of the way time and place are implicated within processes of deindustrialisation is certainly welcome.

Gender and women workers in the deindustrialisation literature

It has long been acknowledged that gendered experiences of industrial closure have received insufficient attention. While some important issues around the gender implications of economic restructuring have been examined, albeit often by geographers, discussion of women as *workers* has been limited. (Indeed, this was a central concern of the 2018 international workshop hosted by Jackie Clarke and colleagues at University of Glasgow, titled 'Gendering the closure of industrial workplaces: towards a comparative European perspective.') In this sense, until recently the emerging field of deindustrialisation mirrored the limitations of post-war work sociology by giving insufficient attention to the issues of gender and women's work (and, in this case, displacement).

I identify three broad strands of research on gender and deindustrialisation: economic restructuring and 'feminisation' of work; renegotiating gendered divisions of labour; and gendered experiences of industrial displacement. I will review literature addressing each of these areas in turn.

Economic restructuring and the 'feminisation' of work

One implication of the shift from manufacturing to services widely acknowledged in academic debate has been marked changes in the gender composition of the workforce. In brief, the loss of manufacturing jobs has resulted in redundancy and unemployment primarily for men, whilst 'the growth of service sector work has created job opportunities that have been taken up far more by women' (Strangleman and Warren 2008, p. 136). In the UK, while employment rates for men declined from 92% to 76% between 1971 to 2013, women's rates rose from 53% to 67% in the same time period (ONS 2013). In this sense, then, the feminisation of work refers simply to the decline of male participation and increase in female participation in the labour market.

However, another common argument is that work itself has become 'feminised', that the nature of the service employment that now dominates Western economies – as early as 2003, 'two out of every three British workers . . . [were] employed in the service sector' (McDowell 2003, p. 27) – requires workers to possess skills and qualities 'stereotypically associated with women, or rather with traditional notions of femininity' (ibid, p. 29). Attributes essential to service sector work, particularly at the low-end retail work, include care, deference and docility – 'characteristics that are more commonly identified as feminine rather than masculine traits' (ibid, p. 3). Here, the feminisation of work is a term used to denote 'the trend for an increasing number of workplaces to emulate the work and working conditions that have historically pertained to the "female" retail and service sectors' (Kenway and Kraack 2004, p. 83).

Several influential studies in former industrial towns and cities have explored the relationship between work and gender identities in the context of marked changes in the nature and composition of local labour markets (for example, see McDowell (2003) and Nayak (2006)). One such study, located firmly within the deindustrialisation literature, is *Gender, Work and Community After De-Industrialisation*. Of particular interest in this research is the so-called 'crisis of masculinity' in a de-industrial community. This study attests to a crisis of masculinity in the context of a former steelmaking town in South Wales. They do so by addressing two central questions:

> What happens to men's sense of themselves as masculine when the sort of work associated with masculinity disappears, as it has in many ex-steel communities? To what extent will young working-class men be prepared to undertake service work for low wages in common with increasing numbers of young women? (Walkerdine and Jimenez 2012, p. 101)

The young unemployed men in Walkerdine and Jimenez's study were deeply averse to the service jobs that had become their main employment option, with some expressing that they would sooner remain unemployed than work in the local supermarket, which was seen as "women's" work. Under pressure from their former steelworker fathers, these young men all shared the same aspiration: to gain the type of employment that was no longer available (2012, p. 120).

Studies such as these which explore work and gender identities in former industrial regions can be seen as early adopters of the 'half-life of deindustrialisation'. They are interested in the status of past values and identities associated with masculine industrial work, such as the importance of manual labour and the male breadwinner ideology, in a context where they are no longer sustained. In the case of young men in Walkerdine and Jimenez's study – and indeed in the young white working-class men in Nayak's (2006) study who in the absence of manual employment performed a masculinity through leisure and consumption – the social remnants of the past exist in the conditions of the present (Linkon 2018, p. 4). The existing scholarship in this area has, however, been criticised for concentrating 'overwhelmingly on the experiences of young, white working-class men' (Strangleman 2013 et al., p. 13-4). According to Strangleman and colleagues, this disproportionate attention, evident in the US but particularly in the UK, can be seen as a reflection of "the centrality of the white male manual worker in the imaginary of industry and its loss" (ibid.).

Renegotiating gendered divisions of labour

Several deindustrialisation scholars have explored the question: 'what [is] the relationship between economic restructuring and the sexual division of labour?' (High 2003, p. 105). An early attempt to answer this question can be found in Ray Pahl's (1984) *Divisions of Labour*. While Pahl is rarely cited as a scholar of deindustrialisation, this text was prescient in its appreciation of processes of deindustrialisation (Strangleman 2017) on the Isle of Sheppey in Kent in the early 1980s. The research was also important for its emphasis on unpaid domestic labour, as well as paid employment. Pahl (1984) identified that while most of the work in the household was still often done by women, new divisions of labour were emerging – or being renegotiated – on the island. This was largely a result of the narrowing of the differential between the numbers of men and women – particularly married woman – in paid employment

(1984, pp. 85, 89). Pahl was among the first to explore the relationship between deindustrialisation, the increase in women's paid employment, and the gendered division of labour, and echoed second-wave feminist scholars by criticizing the 'systematic neglect of women's work' up to that point (1984, p. 139).

Perhaps the most extensive study in this area, however, has come out of Canada. Luxton and Corman (2001), in *Getting by in Hard Times*, explore the relationship between economic restructuring and gender relations in Hamilton, Ontario. The authors argue that '[t]he period from 1980 to 1996 was a transformative period for women' insofar as their two major options up to that point – 'secure support from husbands to stay at home . . . [and] secure, well-paid jobs' – became increasingly hard to realise (2001, p. 251). They found that, for communities in Hamilton, economic restructuring meant the widespread loss of steelwork for predominantly males in the region. It also meant that women increasingly took on regular employment, often to supplement their household income (2001, p. 37). With more women in employment, men found themselves under more pressure to contribute to domestic labour, prompting some men and women to renegotiate long-standing divisions of labour (2001, p. 37). Less encouragingly, their research also found that women in paid employment typically had less power than men to resist the double burden of paid and domestic labour, whether from dominant gender discourses or 'economic clout' (2001, p. 184). Like *Divisions of Labour*, this study has been largely absent from discussions of deindustrialisation. While the authors prefer the term 'economic restructuring', it nonetheless has a great deal to offer scholars interested in gender implications of deindustrialisation.

Gendered experiences of industrial displacement

My final concern is with how gender shapes the experience of industrial displacement. While questions of gender are often addressed implicitly in the deindustrialisation literature, few studies engage with the specifically gendered experience of redundancy. Research on workplace closures has often focused on males who have experienced redundancy from their industrial work and largely overlooked the gendered dimension of industrial displacement. One explanation for this could be that it is a symptom of another wider issue with the existing scholarship: that it has focused almost exclusively on monoindustrial towns and cities located in the industrial hubs of Europe and North America (High 2013, p. 1002). As High (2003, p. 105) notes, '[m]ost women worked in small- and medium-sized establishments on the margins

of industry, whereas men were concentrated in the largest industrial plants' (High 2003, p. 105). This is surely part of the reason why plants and factories with large female workforces have thus far been largely overlooked. Unfortunately, it has meant that our understanding is arguably 'framed by the perception of industrial labour as being the preserve of men, and therefore its immediate impact in terms of status, identity, and resistance are understood in primarily male terms' (Clark 2017, p. 335)

Interestingly, one study that does recognise the gendered experience of industrial change is Bluestone and Harrison's (1982) *The Deindustrialization of America*. This research had the advantage of providing a macro account of deindustrialisation in America, rather than exploring a single region as in many more recent works. Even in the relatively early stages of this period of deindustrialisation, the authors recognised that in general women were faring worse than men (1982, p. 81). Drawing on early studies in the US, they found that women were far more likely to experience an industrial 'demotion', meaning a sharp drop in earnings, and were also far more likely to be unemployed for longer than a year after displacement (1982, pp. 54, 61).

Perhaps the most sustained exploration of the gendered nature of industrial job loss can be found in Cowie's (1999) *Capital Moves: RCA's Seventy-Year Quest for Cheap Labour*. Cowie traces the movements of RCA (Radio Corporation of America) as it searched for cheaper, non-unionised labour across the US and finally to Mexico. In contrast to most of the literature on worker experiences of deindustrialisation, most of the participants in this research are women. Cowie (1999) highlights how RCAs young woman workers, who had initially been integral to the building of these consumer electronics, had subsequently become disposable (1999, p. 135). In light of this, he believes that it is necessary that we

> adjust the popular image of the unemployed male steel or auto worker as the quintessential victim of deindustrialization. Women, whether at the shrinking center or growing periphery of industrial production, have borne the brunt of the process of restructuring both past and present. (Cowie 1999, p. 5)

High (2003) too challenges the common perception that men fared the worst during the height of economic restructuring. While men lost a greater number of manufacturing jobs in both the United States and Canada, High notes that 'women were more likely to lose their jobs', and that two practices in particular "conspired to put women at a disadvantage to their male co-workers": separate seniority lists that restricted job mobility for women; and sex labelling of jobs which stopped women from applying for what was designated as men's work (High 2003,

p. 105). As previously noted, women tended to be employed in smaller plants and factories than men. For this reason, as High recognises, they "were far less likely to benefit from the statutory regulations introduced to protect employees in plant shutdowns" (2003, p. 187-8). Thus, "women were particularly at risk in times of industrial restructuring and disproportionately affected by runaway plants" (2003, p. 105).

As previously noted, compared with industries which 'employed the classic male proletarian work of the industrial age', such as 'the auto, steel and mining industries . . . women in the rapidly deindustrializing clothing, textile and electrical industries have received far less scholarly or public attention' (High 2013, p. 1002). By neglecting the experiences of women workers, we risk portraying deindustrialisation as something experienced and negotiated almost exclusively by men. However, recent work has started to address the relative absence of industrial women workers. Jackie Clarke's research has been central here. Clarke explores themes of memory, nostalgia, representations, place and much more through an exploration of a consumer electronics factory in rural France that closed in 2001 (Clarke 2011, 2015, 2017). Domestic appliance company Moulinex employed a large number of women on the production line in workplaces that maintained a 'stark sexual division of labour' where they were overrepresented in 'low-grade' jobs (Clark 2015, p. 109; Clarke 2011, p. 450). Clarke's research focusses predominantly on these women, rather than the men employed by Moulinex, in a self-conscious attempt to bring into view 'an under-explored aspect of the history of deindustrialization' – 'highly feminized areas of industrial activity' (2015, p. 109).

Conclusion

This research is concerned with the ongoing meaning and legacy of work and factory closure at Dover Mill. To understand what this work and its loss has meant, differential experiences, and why these have taken a particular form, it is necessary to engage with issues around gender, community, time and place in the context of work and deindustrialisation. Existing literature in the fields of work/industrial sociology and deindustrialisation offers a platform for this inquiry, while also revealing limitations in a number of important areas.

A great strength of 'deindustrialisation' as a concept is that it encourages us to recognise both change and continuity with the past, avoiding an ''all-change-change' or 'no-change' dichotomy' that characterise some debates around work (Strangleman 2012, p. 414). This is particularly true of concepts that invite us to explore the significance of the past in the present,

such as Linkon's (2018) idea of the 'half-life of deindustrialisation.' I draw on this concept to explore the meaning and legacy of mill work and asking why closure took the form it did and with what effect. As Linkon recognises, documenting this is not a straightforward task and must involve an appreciation of complexity: 'the relationship between the past and the present is messy and evolving, and our language should reflect that' (Linkon 2018, p. 5).

While deindustrialisation research has until recently given disproportionate attention to displaced men in the monoindustrial heartlands of Western Europe and North America (High 2013), this research broadens the scope on inquiry by exploring an atypical or marginal case study: an industrial workplace outside of the UK's 'heartlands' that employed significant numbers of women and which closed long after the period generally associated with industrial decline. In order to fully understand the process of deindustrialisation, it is important that we do focus on people and areas that have often been invisible in narratives of both industrial work and deindustrialisation. In this sense, I am building on recent work that has taken seriously the need to complicate existing understandings of the social, temporal and spatial meanings of industrial work and deindustrialisation, not least those studies which address experiences of industrial women workers in the context of industrial displacement. The following chapter reviews how I approached these issues methodologically. I begin by engaging with sociological conceptualisations of memory that informed by fieldwork before reviewing the practical components of the empirical research.

3. Methodology

This chapter is separated into two sections: a theoretical discussion of memory within sociology and oral history followed by a review of the practical components of my fieldwork.

3.1 Sociological conceptualisations of memory

I am drawing on sociological and oral historical conceptualisations of memory. Authors in these fields have understood memory not simply as an *individual* faculty, but as inherently *social* to the extent that we recall past experiences as members of social groups and in a given social context – in other words, the reconstruction of the past always depends on present-day identities and contexts. Furthermore, our memories are often shared, reinforced, and even altered with others if they are to be preserved. Oral historians have also emphasised the inherent *fallibility* of memory, recognising that oral testimonies are not simply a reflection of experience and often tell 'us less about events as such than about their meaning'. Importantly, these writers have understood memory as an active process of sense making, shaped by individual and societal circumstances over time.

Memory has received significant attention within sociology in recent decades (see Olick 1999, 2007; Jedlowski 2001; Zerubavel 1996, 2003; Misztal 2003 Coser 1992; Conway 2010). Departing from more scientific or psychological approaches which tend to focus exclusively on the individual mind, the sociology of memory has emphasised role of social context in remembering, arguing that our social environment frames even the most primally "individual" memories (Olick 2007, p. 6). Importantly, it has also recognised that the past is not static; it is constantly revised in light of present circumstances (Jedlowski 2001). Memory has also been at the heart of many discussions within, and criticisms of, oral history since the proliferation of the discipline in the 1960s. By its nature, all oral historical research is charged with the task of confronting the multitude of issues that surround memory. This piece engages with some of the main conceptualisations and applications of memory within sociology and oral history.

Sociology of memory

Sociology has departed significantly from psychology and psychoanalysis in its conceptualisations of memory. While the latter has tended to treat memory solely as a faculty of the individual, the former generally emphasises the distinctively *social* nature of remembering. Thus, according to Conway (2010, p. 443), 'what sets the sociological standpoint apart' from the range of academic disciplines interested in memory 'is its sensitivity to the fundamentally social bases of memory' – its recognition that it is individuals who remember, but that they do so in a specific social context that shapes the way this remembering is done.

Attempting to establish a more coherent sociology of memory, Zerubavel (1996, p. 283) attempts to construct 'a comprehensive framework to examine memory from a sociological perspective'. For Zerubavel, this "sociology of the past" must first and foremost recognise that our social environment invariably conditions the way we remember the past (1996, p. 283); more specifically, that our *remembrance environments* – which lie 'somewhere between the purely personal and absolutely universal' (p. 284), and include the workplace, the religious community, and the family – come to bear upon how individuals remember past events.

But is our past stable and fixed? A further contribution sociology has made to our understanding of memory is its acknowledgement that the present invariably shapes the way we recall and reflect on past events. In this manner, Jedlowski (2001, p. 30) notes that memory within contemporary thought is conceived not as a store, but rather 'as a plurality of interrelated functions' where the past is in constant dialogue with the present:

> What we call 'memory' is a complex network of activities, the study of which indicates that the past never remains 'one and the same', but is constantly selected, filtered and restructured in terms set by the questions and necessities of the present, at both the individual and the social levels. (Jedlowski 2001, p. 30)

Thus, to quote Durkheimian sociologist Maurice Halbwachs, 'the past is not preserved but is reconstructed on the basis of the present' (1992, p. 40). This is a crucial point for any research interested in how people experienced past events, and how these events inform lives in the present.

While these insights are valuable in that they help us appreciate the ways in which individual memories are conditioned by social setting, they do not explain the existence of shared or *collective* recollections. As Zerubavel notes, the *collective memory* of a community is not the same as the sum total of the individual recollections of its members, 'as it includes

only those that are commonly shared by all of them' (1996, p. 293). It is this 'collective memory' that has dominated the sociological discussion of memory in recent decades.

Collective memory

While he did not coin the term, Maurice Halbwachs was the first theorist 'to have used the concept of collective memory systematically' (Confino 1997, p. 1392). Often regarded as the 'founding father of contemporary memory studies' (Olick et al. 2011, p. 5), Halbwachs and his attempts to go beyond individualistic accounts of memory remain hugely influential over 70 years on from his time of writing, and his seminal work, *On Collective Memory*, is invoked within most if not all sociological studies of memory today. Halbwachs' concept of collective memory was developed both beyond philosophy and against the individualistic approaches of psychology (Olick and Robbins 1998, p. 109). Thus, as Olick and Robbins (ibid, emphasis added) write, for Halbwachs, studying memory did not entail 'reflecting philosophically on inherent properties of the subjective mind; memory is a matter of how minds work together in society, how their operations are not simply mediated but are structured by social arrangements.' 'It is in society,' writes Halbwachs, 'that people normally acquire their memories. It is also in society that they recall, recognize, and localize their memories' (1992, p. 38). Thus, even when we remember alone, we are remembering as social beings with social identities, using languages and symbols that we inherit (Olick et al. 2011, p. 19).

It is worth considering here relationship between individual and collective remembering for Halbwachs and contemporary memory scholars? While Halbwachs is rejecting purely individualistic accounts of memory, he accepts that it is individuals who remember. He is, however, arguing that these individuals, 'being located in a specific group context, draw on that context to remember or recreate the past' (Coser 1992, p. 367). To quote Halbwachs, 'while the collective memory endures and draws strength from its base in a coherent body of people, it is individuals as group members who remember' (Halbwachs 1951, p. 48 cited in Coser 1992, p. 367). Thus, while individuals remember, groups – which can include families, social classes, armies, occupations, and so on – have their own shared memories. Put simply, and usefully, by Olick (1999, p. 346), 'there is no individual memory without social experience nor is there any collective memory without individuals participating in communal life.'

So, how does this type of memory operate on a practical level? As Green (2004, p. 38) recognises, collective memory does not suggest that all group members 'would remember the same events or with the same intensity'; rather, individuals tend to remember 'primarily those memories which [are] "in harmony" with those of others', merging and submerging the memories of the individual within the group (collective) memory. This process occurs over time and is linked to the telling of collective stories. As Smith (2002, p. 714) writes, when telling a popular collective story, individuals feel the need to remove those elements which evoke opposition or indifference and enhance those that are well-received. This over time fashions the story of a given event into a coherent and collective narrative and, thus, memory.

Halbwachs makes an important distinction between 'autobiographical memory' and 'historical memory.' The events of our own life which we remember because we directly experienced them are what constitute autobiographical memory (Olick et al. 2011, p. 19). Coser (1992) stresses the importance of regular 'reinforcement' for the continued vitality of autobiographical memory. This type of memory

> tends to fade with time unless it is periodically reinforced through contact with persons with whom one shared the experiences in the past. If there is a long span of time during which we have not had any contact with a specific set of once-significant others, the memory of them tends to fade. (Coser 1992, p. 368)

It is possible for autobiographical memory to be 'lost altogether' as a result of long intervals without contact with former associates; only through renewed contact can memory be brought back to awareness (ibid). This type of memory is therefore, for Coser, always embedded in other people, and becomes all but extinct if group members 'do not get together over long periods of time' (ibid, p. 368-9). This is a particularly significant insight in relation to my project; it will be interesting to see if, how, and when former mill workers 'reinforce' their first-hand experience of industry.

Memory in oral history

Oral history – 'the interviewing of eye-witness participants in the events of the past for the purposes of historical reconstruction' (Grele 1996, p. 63) – is a research method that has had a major impact on the way history is practiced (Perks and Thomson 1998, p. ix; Thomson 1998, p. 584). Giving voice to those groups of people who have often been 'hidden from history' has arguably been oral history's 'most distinctive contribution' to contemporary history (Perks and

Thomson 1998, p. ix). Paul Thompson argues that oral history, while not always used as an instrument for change, certainly has the capacity to transform 'both the content and purpose of history' (2000, p. 22). Most importantly regarding this project, it can be used to make contact between generations, and 'in the writing of history . . . it can give back to the people who made and experienced history, through their own words, a central place' (ibid, p. 22). Thus, 'through oral history the community can, and should, be given the confidence to write its own history' (ibid, p. 27).

The work of Luisa Passerini and Alessandro Portelli, along with Michael Frisch and Ronald Grele, has helped oral historians 'move beyond what people remember' and recount in the interview setting, 'to why they remember, or the meaning of people's recollections' (Hamilton and Shopes 2008, pp. viii-ix). Moreover, one of the things that is unique about oral history is that it tells us more about the meaning of events than it does about events themselves (Portelli 1998, p. 67).

This does not mean that the oral historian is not interested in events themselves. On the contrary, 'an aspiration toward "reality," "fact," and "truth"', argues Portelli, is essential to the practice of oral history: 'though we know that certainty is bound to escape us, the search provides focus, shape, and purpose to everything we do' (1991, p. ix). A way in which practitioners have pursued a fuller understanding of a given event is by using other historical sources to corroborate their oral histories (see Thompson 2000). It is common for practitioners to combine memories/narrations with other historical sources in an attempt to find out what really happened in the past (Thomson 2007, p. 43). This can cast new light on the accounts provided by narrators and facilitate a better understanding of their, often latent, meanings.

Oral history and memory: the unreliability of memory

The approaches and developments outlined above were, in part, a response to some of the criticisms levelled at oral history in the early 1970s. These criticisms concerned the inherent "unreliability" of memory, and at their core 'was the assertion that memory was distorted by physical deterioration and nostalgia in old age, by the personal bias of . . . [the] interviewee, and by the collective and retrospective versions of the past' (Thomson 2007, p. 53).

Oral history's primary interest in the meaning of events – rather than the events themselves – has led many to question the factual validity of oral history. For a period, this prompted many practitioners to appease their critics by pursuing objectivity in their research.

Since the late 1970s, however, oral history has somewhat redefined itself by embracing the so-called unreliable nature of its sources. In what Thomson (2007) calls oral history's 'second paradigm shift', some oral historians began to argue that memory's "unreliability"

> was also its strength, and that the subjectivity of memory provided clues not only about the meanings of historical experience, but also about the relationships between past and present, between memory and personal identity, and between individual and collective memory. (Thomson 2007, p. 54)

Accordingly, many in the field now hold that 'wrong' statements might be just as significant as factual accounts to the extent that people believe them to be true (Portelli 1998, p. 68). Thus, far from striving for objectivity, oral history sees the 'inherent nonobjectivity of oral sources' as a resource to be utilised (ibid, p. 70).

The unreliability and subjectivity of memory has been recognised and deployed in a number of influential oral history studies. In *Fascism in Popular Memory*, for example, Luisa Passerini (1987) combines oral history interviews with archival sources to explore the memories of fascism in the Italian working class during the interwar period. While historical studies hitherto had documented accounts of Benito Mussolini's regime as recalled by of intellectuals, the middle classes, and working class activists and militants, Passerini sought to 'make room' for the memories of less politicised factory workers (1987, p. 4). Whilst conducting her research, Passerini began to realise that, rather than gaining access to 'the factual aspect of social history', what she was actually tapping into was 'forms of cultural identity and shared traditions' (1987, p. 8). When a person is asked for their life story, Passerini writes, their 'memory draws on pre-existing story-lines and ways of telling stories' (1987, p. 8). Thus, for Passerini, memory 'refers to the transmission and elaboration of stories handed down and kept alive through small-scale social networks – stories which can be adapted every so often in a variety of social interactions, including the interview' (1987, p. 19). The vital contribution Passerini makes through this study, Thomson (2007) argues, is that she brings attention to 'the role of subjectivity in history – the conscious and unconscious meanings of experience as lived and remembered – and showed how the influences of public culture and ideology upon individual memory might be revealed in the silences, discrepancies and idiosyncrasies of personal testimony' (2007, p. 54). It is the task of the researcher, argues Passerini, 'to sort out what is true from what is distorted by memory' (1987, p. 181).

Alessandro Portelli's *The Death of Luigi Trastulli and Other Stories* similarly makes a virtue of the fallibility of memory in his study on the death of a factory worker in Terni, Italy.

Making clear his position on the "unreliability" of oral history accounts, he states early on that 'the oral sources used in this essay are not always fully reliable in point of fact. Rather than being a weakness, this is however, their strength: errors, invention and myths lead us through and beyond facts to their meanings' (Portelli 1991, p. 2). Portelli found that many of his interviewees "misremembered" the date and context of Luigi Trastulli's death, recalling it as a martyrdom during a large and catastrophic strike in 1953, 4 years after his death during a small anti-NATO demonstration. He argued that this was an important clue to understanding what these events meant to these individuals and the community as a whole, and that we would actually know far less about the death of Luigi Trastulli if the oral sources had provided factual reconstructions of the events (1991, p. 26). Memory for Portelli is therefore 'not a passive repository of facts, but an active process of creation of meanings' (1991, p. 52).

Nostalgia in the deindustrialisation literature

Nostalgia has emerged as an important theme and subject of contestation within the writing on deindustrialisation over the last fifteen years. This discussion has often called into question what it meant to work in industry, what this work gave – and took from – people, and the extent to which accounts of industrial working life have been idealised by former workers and deindustrialisation scholars in the wake of factory closures. Some have stressed the importance of foregrounding the harmful aspects of industry in academic accounts of deindustrialisation. Cowie and Heathcott (2003), for example, in their edited collection *Beyond the Ruins*, urge commentators to avoid indulging in an unreflective 'smokestack nostalgia' whereby academics lament the loss of a type of employment which was in fact often tough, monotonous, and dehumanising (2003, pp. 14-5). The authors point to Milkman's (1997) study of former autoworkers at a General Motors (GM) assembly plant in New Jersey, US which began downsizing in the mid-1980s. Rather than bemoaning the loss of their jobs, most interviewees who had accepted GM's buyout did not express feelings of nostalgia for the company, despite many moving on to relatively low-wage employment. Milkman notes how the former employees in this study provided an 'overwhelmingly positive outlook', and goes on to argue that industrial workers 'mostly yearned to escape [the] relentless and dehumanising rhythms' of factory work (1997, pp. 12, 14). Crucially, however, as Milkman points out, her interviewees had a number of significant advantages over most displaced industrial workers: 'they were self-selected; they lived in a region with low unemployment; and crucially, they were relatively

young (typically in their thirties) when they reentered the labor market' (Milkman 1997, p. 13). What is evident here is that context matters; in this case, age and geography were two key factors which fundamentally shaped the experience of industrial loss.

Other scholars have challenged the somewhat pejorative charge of nostalgia. While acknowledging merit in Cowie and Heathcott's (2003) central point, High (2005, p. 194) points out how such a perspective risks 'minimizing workers' remembered attachments', noting how many former employees in his own research were deeply attached to their former work, often invoking 'metaphors of home and family to communicate their deep connection to the workplace and to each other' (ibid, p. 194). Elsewhere, High and Lewis (2007) draw a distinction between nostalgia on the part of academics on the one hand, and displaced workers on the other. For these authors, when indulged in by historians, nostalgia 'empties out history's meaning and, ironically, serves to depoliticize the past' (2007, p. 94). In contrast, they see little issue with displaced workers looking back on their former working lives 'through gold-tinted lenses. Why not? Their lives were often better' (ibid, p. 94). They argue that dismissing the positive or sentimental narratives of ex-workers as simple nostalgia is the real concern: 'at its worst, it belittles working people's attachments to their work and their cultural worlds' (ibid, p. 94). Similarly, Strangleman and Rhodes stress the importance of engaging with the positive accounts of industrial work given by displaced workers. While it is vital that we interrogate claims of value, they argue, 'it is equally important to recognise what was valued about those types of jobs; security, availability, provision of health care and other benefits and above all relative stability' (Strangleman and Rhodes 2014, p. 417). What is clear is that oral historians have an important responsibility to both recognise and interrogate narratives of industrial working life and deindustrialisation.

A further crucial point to make is that attachments to the past often tells us two things. As Strangleman writes:

> First, many commentators have argued that nostalgia almost always tells us more about the present than it does about the past. Secondly, nostalgia is hardly ever "simple" in form but is more often a vehicle for reflection or critique rather than uncritical celebration. Therefore, the manifestations of smokestack nostalgia are symbols of unease in contemporary culture, viewing a relatively stable past as offering some form of fixity. (Strangleman 2013, p. 33)

This is evident in High's (2015) reappraisal of narratives provided in the aftermath of the closure of Sturgeon Falls paper mill in Ontario, Canada. Following closure in 2002, the interviewees reflect on a relatively stable and intelligible workplace culture that had now disappeared. This, notes High, was to be expected: as the former workers struggled with the deindustrialised, unstable and uncertain present and future, the industrial past appeared more stable secure than ever (2015, p. 20). Thus, experiences of industrial closure prompt 'complex reflection on industrial work and its meaning' (Strangleman and Rhodes 2014, pp. 417-8).

3.2 Fieldwork review

This is a study of deindustrialisation that explores working lives and the closure of Buckland Paper Mill in Dover, Kent. It draws on Linkon's (2018) concept of the 'half-life of deindustrialisation' to understand the meaning and legacy of mill work and its loss. The research has been guided by a set of core questions:

1. What can an atypical or marginal case study of deindustrialisation reveal about industrial employment and closure?
2. How are experiences and narratives of industrial work and deindustrialisation gendered?
3. What is the role of memory in oral historical accounts of deindustrialisation?
4. How useful is the concept of the 'half-life of deindustrialisation' in exploring these issues theoretically, methodologically and empirically?

This chapter reflects on the methodological approach of this project. I begin by discussing my chosen research design, considering the value and limitations of a case study approach to answering my research questions. I then reflect on my epistemological framework and consider the implications of an interpretivist approach to this research. I consider the strengths and limitations of my sample – at the level of the town, the mill, former mill workers and documentary and archival source material – in addressing my research concerns. Finally, I review my chosen data collection methods – oral history and archival research – and the fieldwork conducted before discussing the analysis and interpretation of my data.

Research design

This research is a case study of industrial work and factory closure in Dover, Kent. A case study approach in qualitative research, writes Creswell (2007, p. 73), 'involves the study of an issue explored through one or more cases within a bounded system (i.e. a setting, a context).' In adopting this approach, the researcher commits to a process of 'detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information (e.g. observations, interviews, audiovisual material, and documents and reports)' (ibid). Importantly, the researcher also seeks to 'situate this system or case within its larger "context" or setting' (Creswell 2007, p. 244).

The emphasis in this form of research is on description and understanding of a particular case. The aim, writes Simons (2009, 24), 'is particularisation – to present a rich portrayal of a single setting to inform practice, establish the value of the case and/or add to knowledge of a specific topic.' Drawing on Robert Stake's influential writing on the qualitative case study method, May (2010, p. 224) notes that within an interpretivist approach, the singularity of a case study approach is considered 'a strength that enables a focus on the particularity and complexity of a single case and coming to understand its activity within important circumstances.' This approach was particularly appropriate for my project, which sought to explore a number of broad questions around work, gender, marginality and economic change through the narrow lens of a single workplace in Dover, Kent, and to place this example in the wider context of deindustrialisation and socio-economic change in the UK, Europe and North America. This is common in studies of deindustrialisation, which often seek to investigate in-depth the site of a single factory closure and the community and region (see High 2015).

An inherent limitation of the case study approach is it does not lend itself to wider generalisations about the phenomenon in question (Babbie 2013, p. 340). In other words, while this research design can reveal a great deal about a particular case, its potential to explain a broader set of experiences or processes is limited. Thus, I am not seeking to make broad claims about how processes of economic structuring and deindustrialisation has been experienced across time, place and industry, for example. I am also limited in my ability to account for how place/marginality comes to shape experiences and narratives of deindustrialisation. My research does not provide an in-depth exploration of other regions that provide a useful point of comparison with Dover/Kent, though there is scope for comparisons to be drawn with my case study in future research.

Epistemological framework

This qualitative study is grounded in an *interpretivist* epistemology and is therefore concerned with 'how the social world is interpreted, understood, experienced, produced or constituted' (Mason 2002, p. 3). Rather than producing 'evidence' of 'universally perceived objective realities,' my research is premised on the assumption that it is important to engage with the ways people 'understand and interpret their social reality' (Ritchie 2003, pp. 2-3). Through an interpretivist approach, I seek to foster understanding by placing accounts (and the understandings, interpretations and meanings that underlie them) of mill work and closure

within their wider context – social, political, economic, temporal and spatial. The goal in doing so is to understand, and help others understand, the social world people have produced and the 'meanings and interpretations given by social actors to their actions' (Blaikie 2000, p. 115).

While qualitative research in general is closely associated with the interpretivist sociological tradition (Mason 2002, p. 2), the field of oral history in particular has embraced what some have called a 'methodological and interpretive turn' (Abrams 2010, p. 33). This shift has been characterised by a greater appreciation of personal or subjective documents – such as memoirs and oral history narratives – and increased recognition of the complexity of life stories (ibid). In an early attempt to refine and consolidate the epistemological (and political) dimensions of oral history, Luisa Passerini (1979, p. 85) considered it productive 'to assume that oral sources refer to and derive from a sphere which I have chosen to call subjectivity.' More recently, stressing the importance of subjectivity to the field, Abrams (2010) writes that while not unique to oral history,

> subjectivity – defined as the quality of defining or interpreting something through the medium of one's mind – is what oral history is. The oral historian is not just looking for 'facts' for her or his work but is looking to detect the emotional responses, the political views and the very subjectivity of human existence. We go looking for the personal experience, sometimes as an antidote to generalised accounts of events or to versions of the past produced by those with power. (Abrams 2010, p. 22)

One of the interesting ways oral historians have made use of subjectivity is through interpretations memory and myth. This study also makes use of ideas around myth and the influence of public discourses on personal narratives (Samuel and Thompson 1990; Summerfield 2004). As Summerfield (2004) writes,

> The starting point of the cultural approach to oral history is to accept that people do not simply remember what happened to them, but make sense of the subject matter they recall by interpreting it . . . The challenge for the historian is to understand the cultural ingredients that go into accounts of a remembered and interpreted past. Or to put it another way, the oral historian needs to understand not only the narrative offered, but also the meanings invested in it and their discursive origins. (Summerfield 2004, p. 67)

The sample

This research addresses two limitations in existing deindustrialisation research: the overwhelming focus on single-industry towns in the industrial 'heartlands' of Western Europe and North America, and the lack of attention given to women workers in the context of industrial closure and decline. It also contributes to recent efforts to better understand Kent's industrial history, a region generally overlooked in accounts of British industry and deindustrialisation.

My fieldwork was conducted in Dover, Kent and centred around Buckland Paper Mill. Until the late twentieth century, regions across Kent supported light and heavy industrial activity, including shipbuilding, coalmining, engineering and papermaking. One centre for this activity was Dover, which has a long and diverse history of industrial work ranging from coalmining and engineering to brewing and, indeed, papermaking. I chose Buckland Mill for a number of reasons including my encounter with *Watermark* (2011), its location in a 'marginal' industrial region and time of closure, 2000, which allowed me to contribute to broadening the scope of deindustrialisation research. Crucially, it historically employed a large workforce of women to sort paper which allows me to address a limitation in the literature that has seen industrial women workers largely overlooked. More practically, the factory and those workers still living nearby were accessible from where I was living in Canterbury and Folkestone.

Studies of deindustrialisation have often drawn on the testimonies of displaced industrial workers to understand how factory closure and job loss is made sense of by those directly impacted (see High and Lewis 2007, High 2015, Strangleman 2019). In line with these studies, this research places former mill workers at the heart of its empirical inquiry. I conducted in-depth oral history interviews with 22 former workers – 16 men and 8 women – at Buckland Paper Mill about their experiences of mill work and the closure of the factory in 2000 (see Appendix C for an indicative interview schedule). These interviews were wide-ranging and often lasted more than two hours. In total, I recorded over 42 hours of interview audio with former workers. I also to spoke to other mill workers in person and via email and, while their words do not feature in this thesis, they nonetheless informed my understanding of the mill.

By interviewing ex-workers, I was able to gain valuable insights into working lives and the closure of Dover Mill, and how these were made sense of almost two decades after closure. Broadly, it allowed me to trace connections between large-scale political-economic processes and how these have been experienced 'on the ground'. More specifically, workers offered a window into the ways everyday working lives at Dover Mill were impacted by global processes of economic restructuring and deindustrialisation. Their memories and narratives are part of

the half-life of deindustrialisation, helping us understand the meaning of this work and its loss today. They were therefore uniquely well-placed to address my research questions.

I employed purposive and snowball sampling strategies that involved first identifying participants with suitable characteristics and requesting an interview, and then using established contacts to secure further interview (Babbie 2013). I gained access to a director of Watermark through Tim Strangleman, and was able to contact mill workers through her. I used a participant information sheet and consent form (see Appendices A and B) and ensured anonymity throughout through the use of pseudonyms and secure interview file storage.

I encountered several problems recruiting research participants which limited the number of mill workers, especially women, with whom I was able to record oral history interviews. I had hoped to interview a roughly equal number of men and women for this research. However, very few of the women I approached to participate were willing to be interviewed. Some eventually agreed to meet in a large group in public but would not agree to a recorded interview.

The sample: former mill workers

Name	**Age**	**Joined mill**	**Left mill**	**Main job(s)**
Bill Jacobs	77	1958	1989	Machineman, foreman
Richard Sullivan	90	1950	1989	Colourman
Sally Edwards	80	1956	1976	Sorter
Albert Peters	93	1946	1992	Laboratory technician
Dorothy Waters	75	1962	1965	Sorter
Scott Fisher	82	1954	1989	Guillotineman
Trevor Chambers	69	1966	2000	Machineman, shift manager
Charlotte Birch	74	1964	1960	Sorter
Susan Pettifer	67	1968	1999	Sorter
John Pettifer	68	1967	2000	Pulper
Ed Matthews	74	1962	1977	Colourman
Margaret Summers	82	1956	1961	Sorter
David Summers	81	1955	1965	Fitter, maintenance
Ted Aldridge	80	1965	1999	Colourman, warehouse

Charlie Fletcher	76	1960	2000	Engineer, production manager
Penny Smith	74	1961	1964	Sorter
Wayne Simmons	72	1963	1999	Cutterman
Warren Baker	63	1978	2000	Guillotineman, production supervisor
Barbara Little	71	1964	1970	Sorter
Jean Andrews	92	1953	1974	Sorter
Steve Jones	69	1965	2000	Finishing, foreman, shift manager
Henry Simpson	76	1984 & 1991	1987 & 1996	General manager, assistant manager

This project emerged in part out of and in response to the *Watermark* documentary. I was given a copy of the DVD by Tim Strangleman, who had conducted oral histories with ex-workers in 2010 as part of his involvement in the project. Before meeting a worker, my understanding of the mill was based primarily on my interpretation of the film (how I approached analysis is discussed below). I wanted to understand the origins of *Watermark* and how workers had received the project from the perspective of those involved. For this reason, I conducted two further in-depth interviews with the director and producer of the project.

Furthermore, I conducted in-depth archival research on the Buckland Mill archive at Dover Museum and Bronze Age Boat Exhibition library Buckland Mill. I reviewed their digital data database of 2,800 photographs and their three boxes of physical documents that included company brochures, histories and paper samples.

Data collection

My fieldwork sought to gain an understanding of industrial work and factory closure in the context of Buckland Paper Mill. Here, I was particularly interested in subjective accounts of working life almost two decades after the mill's closure. To address these issues, I employ the methods of oral history and archival analysis.

Oral history

Oral history is a method and field which 'collects memories and personal commentaries of historical significance through recorded interviews' (Ritchie 2014, p. 1) and 'for the purposes of historical reconstruction' (Grele 1996, p. 63). Seen by leading practitioners as a means of challenging and transforming the very practice of history, the field of oral history has long offered 'access to undocumented experience,' to the 'hidden histories' of oppressed or marginalised groups, and provided 'rich evidence about the subjective or personal *meanings* of past events' (Perks and Thomson 1998, p. ix; Thomson 1998, p. 584). Groups particularly well-represented in these studies have included workers, women, ethnic minorities and indigenous peoples (Thomson 1998, p. 584).

Importantly, oral history interviews have become a valuable tool for connecting lived experiences of individuals and communities to a general social, cultural and economic context (Roberts 2002, p. 102)[4]. As Portelli (1997, p. 6) writes, oral history's 'role is precisely to connect life to times, uniqueness to representativeness.' This is one reason for its extensive use in studies of deindustrialisation: it can reveal the often very personal experiences and consequences of nation- and world-wide socio-economic processes. As Dublin writes, oral history allows for 'the recovery of information about industrial decline as experienced by ordinary individuals' (Dublin 1998, p. 5).

It is important to note, however, that oral sources do not simply reflect historical 'facts' but are shaped, to varying degrees, by the subjectivity of narrator. The testimonies we collect, writes Portelli (1998, p. 67), reveal 'not just what people did, but what they wanted to do, what they believed they were doing, and what they now think they did.' Thus, a key characteristic of oral history and, for Portelli, the first thing that sets the field apart from conventional history, 'is that it tells us less about *events* than about their *meaning*' (ibid).

Oral history's rejection of positivist, empiricist approaches in favour of subjective meanings attached to events and experiences. What, from the perspective of the present, did mill work mean to workers? What did mill work offer? What did it make possible? By collecting worker testimonies, I sought to gain an understanding of what mill work meant to them almost two decades after factory closure. In line with McIvor (2013), I take the approach that

> working with personal narratives gets us closer to the everyday lived experience and what work *signified* to those who were directly involved in it. The discourse

[4] It is also interested in how people connect their own 'individual experience and its social context' (Frisch 1990, p. 188).

> embedded within such narratives act as a barometer of shifting workplace culture, elucidating mutating work identities and signifying the degree and limits of erosion of the work ethics – of attachment and commitment to work . . . In such accounts nostalgia for a lost 'golden' past or more meaningful and secure work, of camaraderie and a 'job for life' intermingles with a sense of progress and positive change – more opportunities, less hard physical labour, more education, more choice. (McIvor 2013, p. 279)

Analysis and interpretation

I conducted in-depth analysis of my interview data using NVivo software. This involved identifying key transcripts to analyse for particular purposes – perhaps because of interest in a specific theme or knowledge of the papermaking process – before drawing on insights from across the remaining transcripts. The interpretation and reflexivity of the researcher was an important factor in the direction of analysis. However, the role of interpretation and reflexivity was crucial at all stages of fieldwork. As Smith (2002, p. 728) writes:

> The first step in analysing oral history interviews is to recognise that they are not raw sources of information. Oral sources are themselves already analytic documents structured with complex codes and achieved meanings. An analyst can make visible neither the limitations nor the critical capacity of those meanings without delving into the text of the interview and beginning a process of dialogue with its narrator.

Furthermore, oral history recognises that 'knowledge is situated and contextual,' and that data and knowledge are (co-)constructed in the interview setting through dialogic, intersubjective interaction (Mason 2002, pp. 62-3). The role of subjective interpretation, then, is not limited to the participant. In their useful definition of qualitative research, Denzin and Lincoln (2005) stress the interpretive and contextual nature of this form of inquiry. Qualitative research, they write, is

> a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible. These practices . . . turn the world into a series of representations, including field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings, and memos to the self. At this level, qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them. (Denzin and Lincoln 2005, p. 3)

Over the past forty years or so, this research paradigm has gained popularity and esteem across the social sciences. Abrams (2010, p. 14) argues that 'whatever kind of historians we are, we all go through the process of selection and interpretation that pulls the interview apart for analysis and edited quotation'. Christine Borland explains:

> Oral personal narratives occur naturally within a conversational context, in which various people take turns to talk, and thus are rooted most immediately in a web of expressive social activity. We [the oral historians] identify chunks of artful talk within this flow of conversation, give them physical existence (most often through writing), and embed them in a new context of expressive or at least communicative activity (usually the scholarly article aimed towards an audience of professional peers). Thus we construct a second level narrative based upon, but at the same time, reshaping the first. (Borland 1991, p. 63)

'[O]ral history is a dialogic process; it is a conversation in real time between the interviewer and the narrator, and then between the narrator and what we might call external discourses or culture' (Abrams 2010, p. 19) . . . 'narratives of the self can say something personal and meaningful about identity but at the same time draw on public discourses' (ibid, p. 48).

In qualitative inquiry, reflexivity demands that the researcher reflects on 'how their role in the study and their personal background, culture, and experiences hold potential for shaping their interpretations, such as the themes they advance and the meaning they ascribe to data' (Creswell 2014, p. 186). As well as mitigating (insofar as it is possible) against advancing one's own values and biases in the research, a reflexive researcher will demonstrate a keen awareness of how their own background might guide the very direction of the study (ibid).

This is particularly important in oral history insofar as the oral historical interview is an intersubjective encounter, a negotiation. The narrative and, thus, text is co-constructed; asking different questions, or asked the same questions in a different form or order, and the narrative would also be different (Roberts 2002, p. 94; Portelli 1997).

4. Data analysis

4.1 Manufacturing community at Buckland Paper Mill

> The only thing you can say about the paper mill: it was like one big family. Not necessarily the Baileys and the Buddles or anything like that. It was just – when you was there, it was like a big family. Everybody was there to help each other. If somebody was working and he had something to do and he was struggling with it, you wouldn't just walk past. You'd help. (John Pettifer, colourman and pulper)

A strength of the research and writing on deindustrialisation has been its engagement with the relative stability offered by industrial work and its social and cultural implications. Some of the most interesting studies in the field have shown how industrial employment in the post-war 'long boom' created conditions in which people could 'embed' themselves in their place of work and what this meant for the lives of workers, their families, and local communities (see High 2015, Strangleman 2019). Crucially, this literature is careful not to exaggerate the degree of stability of working lives in this period, recognising that the past can appear more fixed, certain, and intelligible than the present - something which is true for former industrial workers and academics alike[5]. With this important caveat, there is no question that industrial employment often did provide *relatively* high levels of stability when compared to other forms before and after and, more significantly in some ways, also gave workers a *sense* of security and permanence. The promise of a 'job for life' in a factory with a decades- or centuries-long history employing generations of local people instilled in workers an impression of the factory as an enduring institution. Many firms were 'model employers' who saw value in investing in the broader security and recreation of the workforce, providing social welfare and leisure provisions, placing work at the centre of people's lives (Jeremy 1991). In this context, one's job could be an axis around which life could be organised and a rich source of identity, meaning, and community. This sense of permanence was often painfully exposed as an illusion by widespread industrial closures in the last quarter of the twentieth century. Indeed, as several scholars have recognised, deindustrialisation 'raises questions about the meaning of an industrial culture built on illusions of permanence' (Barton 2015, p. 153; see also Strangleman et al. 2013, p. 10, High 2013, p. 1001).

[5] The stability and security of the industrial era has often been juxtaposed with a precarious and meaningless world of contemporary work in constant flux. See Strangleman (2007, 2012) for a critique of the 'end of work' debate.

This chapter uses these concerns and insights to explore the role of work in the lives of papermakers at Buckland Paper Mill[6]. It is interested in notions of work-based community that emerge in the accounts of former workers and how social relations within the factory were informed by the conditions in which people laboured and lived. Furthermore, I explore how a work-based community was actively nurtured by the mill's management and its implications for class identities and solidarities. After outlining how I am conceptualising and utilising the concept of occupational community, the chapter engages with the above issues by exploring four themes. First, it considers the significance of 'family' in two senses: the symbolic framing of the mill *as* a family; and the importance of kinship in the factory's workplace culture. Second, it explores the process of joining the mill and early experiences of work to gain an understanding of the ways in which people were socialised into the factory. The chapter then evaluates the role of out-of-work social activities in fostering relationships among co-workers and a sense of work-based community. Finally, it assesses the extent to which the firm actively cultivated an apparently vibrant and harmonious social life, to what end, and with what effect.

I argue that there was a clear interlinking of the work and non-work lives of papermakers at Buckland Mill, a blurring of the distinction between work and leisure – what Salaman (1974) calls 'occupational community'. A key component of this occupational community was an emphasis on family that contributed to a sense of familiarity, togetherness and cooperation that went beyond the workplace, as well as a degree of discipline and parochialism. I further argue that the mill's occupational community was made possible by, and further reinforced, a strong sense of security, stability and permanence that invited workers to embed themselves in a fixed place over an extended period of time and across generations. Notably, a sense of security and community was directly and indirectly fostered by the company through a range of paternalistic management practices, including the hiring of workers' relatives, the promise of a 'job for life', provision of a wide range of social activities, and recognition and perks for members of the workforce. I suggest that the mill's occupational community functioned to limit class identification, with workers perceiving themselves and management as part of a 'mill family' with common material interests.

[6] 'Papermakers' here refers to all manual workers at the paper mill, including those who 'finished' the paper. While workers would sometimes draw a distinction between paper*makers* and those in other manual roles, this only became apparent to me when my interviewees discussed their labour, which is the subject of the following chapter.

Occupational community

The concept of occupational community offers a framework for exploring the role of employment in the lives of individuals and collectivities in a specific workplace. In particular, it invites us to explore the relationship between work and leisure, and the conditions in which they intertwine. The seminal text for sociologists drawing on this concept is Graeme Salaman's (1974) *Community and occupation: An exploration of work/leisure relationships*. In it, occupational community is defined as representing

> a particular relationship between men's work and the rest of their lives – a type of relationship which in its extreme form is probably increasingly rare in modern societies. Members of occupational communities are affected by their work in such a way that their non-work lives are permeated by their work relationships, interests and values. (Indeed it is likely that members of some communities would not approve of the separation of work and non-work.) Members of occupational communities build their lives on their work; their work-friends are their friends outside work and their leisure interests and activities are work-based (Salaman 1974, p. 19).

In addition to the 'relationships, interests and values' cited above, Salaman recognises the role of work in providing a sense of *identity* and *belonging* to members of an occupational community. Members see themselves in terms of their occupational role, and choose to associate with other members of their occupation over outsiders (Salaman 1971a, p. 55; Salaman 1974). Indeed, these workers 'not only select their friends and associates from among those who do the same work, they also frequently talk about their work outside of working time, indulge in work-connected reading and have work-connected hobbies or belong to work-connected societies or clubs' (Salaman 1971b, p. 59). Workers within the community are, to some extent, 'separate from the rest of society' and 'present a degree of convergence in work and non-work activities, interests and relationships which is in marked contrast to the work/non-work relationship demonstrated by many other workers' (Salaman 1974, pp. 19-20). As Salaman goes on to argue, rather than thinking of occupational community in terms of its presence or absence, it is more fruitful to think in terms of degree, inviting us to attend to the 'interesting and significant aspects of occupations as collectivities' (Salaman 1974, p. 127, 1971b, p. 390).

I am using occupational community as a framework for understanding the role of work in the lives of former workers at Buckland Paper Mill. I suggest that the concept can help us get at the 'embeddedness' of workers in industrial employment and the forms of work

identities, meanings and attachments made possible in this context. Here, it provides a lens through which to interpret, among other things, the significance of 'family' in the mill's workplace culture, as well as the function of leisure activities connected to the mill in strengthening relationships and transmitting the values of the workplace. I also suggest that occupational community helps us understand labour relations at the mill, an issue which has been underexplored in the existing literature, as well as worker attitudes towards their former employer decades after closure. I will identify how work permeated identities, relationships, interests, and values by assessing the role of employment in giving mill workers their 'life organisation,' how workers were socialised into the mill, the extent to which their values and norms are seen as common sense, and the 'intensity of work involvement', as Sandiford and Seymour (2007, p. 212) put it[7]. We will see in subsequent chapters how this changes in the context of restructuring. But I also want to develop this concept by giving greater attention to the relationship between occupational community and class. Drawing on McKenzie et al (2006), I will explore how class identities and solidarities are shaped by Buckland Mill's occupational community. Central to this is the role of management in cultivating a sense of work-based community, something which is underexplored in the literature.

A family concern

Having already seen the *Watermark* documentary, I was aware of a sense of togetherness felt by many who worked at Buckland Paper Mill. In the film, former workers convey memories of a close-knit workforce comprised of relatives in a 'family company'. Roy Buddle worked alongside many of his relatives and emphasised the importance family in a passage of the film:

> Buckland Mill used to be a family mill. Everybody who worked at the mill had some relatives there. It was basically run by Buddles, Englishs and the Baileys. Everybody – I had a father, two brothers, my wife at the time- later. My sister-in-law, my brother married an English, which was another papermaking family. And that's basically what it was: it was a family concern. And if you was there, you had a job for life.

[7] 'Life 'organisation' is a phrase used by Salaman (1974, p. 18) quoting Hughes (1958, p. 25), *Men and their Work*.

And yet, I was still struck in my early interviews by how regularly 'family' was invoked by ex-workers when describing the mill and their relationship to it. It was often used metaphorically, without reference to the 'papermaking families' mention by Roy Buddle. It quickly became clear to me that many at the mill saw themselves and their co-workers as part of a large, extended family, one that was rooted in the workplace but which also went beyond it. Interestingly, this was often either one of the first things they wanted me to know or the final, concluding point they wanted to make. Warren Baker held many roles in his 22 years at Buckland, eventually leaving as a foreman when the factory closed in 2000. Towards the end of our long discussion in 2019, he sums up his time at the mill:

> The people were good at the mill. We used to fall in and fall out at times. But it was a – it's a cliché to say it, but it did seem like a big family as well. You know, you could walk around the mill and know everybody. As a foreman you would walk around and know everyone, on all of the shifts, in all of the departments. Which was good. And they knew you as well. It was a big family, yeah.

Warren's position as foreman afforded him a greater degree of mobility and interaction around the factory than most. As we will see, those who could not move around as freely, such as the women in the 'Salle', could get to know their co-workers in other ways, often outside of work hours. But he is expressing something here that came up repeatedly, regardless of job role[8]. If you worked at the mill, you knew everybody, and knowing all your workmates was an important part of what made the mill 'one big family'. Of course, this wasn't literally true for everyone, but it indicates the sense of connection that working life at the mill bestowed.

The mill 'family' manifested itself in several notable ways. The first is mentioned by John Pettifer in the opening passage of this chapter. If someone was struggling with a job, perhaps they were running behind with their work or trying to find a solution to a problem or mistake, you would lend a hand rather than walk past, focussing only on your own job. This was a recurring theme, especially among the men who worked in production. But the principle of helping others in need also went beyond the factory gates and into the personal lives of workers, and this was true of men and women across job roles. I heard examples of people knocking out chimney breasts for workmates, putting up shelves, teaching a father how to drive a car so he could transport his disabled daughter. Clearly, there was an understanding among these workers that the people they worked with were more than co-workers, people with whom

[8] The 'Salle' (French for 'room' or 'workplace') is primarily where women would 'sort' the paper.

they shared a workspace but who were ultimately incidental to their work – and, indeed, non-work – lives. Relationships with fellow workers were seen as long term, with a history and a future, and therefore needed to be nurtured and maintained. They mattered in a way that could be difficult to appreciate from the outside.

It would be easy to give a simplistic account of relations between workers. As I have pointed out, whether one is a former industrial worker or academic, the past can appear more one-dimensional than the present – an example of what Fred Davis (1979) calls 'simple nostalgia'. Warren Baker alludes to fallings out in the above passage, acknowledging that it was not always a happy family, and there of course would have been those who did not fit in for one reason or another. It was common for people to allude to conflict without recalling specifics, maybe hinting at a poor work ethic or a disagreement about the best way to carry out a task. This lack of detail is understandable given the amount of time that had passed since the events in question. But the overriding feeling among my interviewees was positive, chiming with the mood conveyed in *Watermark*, and the dominant narrative was one of a big, generally happy, family. Much like an actual family, you might fall out with each other at times, but you remain family.

As we learned from Roy Buddle, the 'family' metaphor was rooted in something much more concrete. In addition to invoking family when reflecting on the mill and their relationship to it, family or, more specifically, kinship, was also an important aspect of the factory's workplace culture. A number of 'mill families' were known to be particularly well-represented and influential over many years. Bailey, Buddle, Dyer, English, Langley, Walsh – these surnames were seemingly familiar to everyone and could be found throughout the mill at various points in its history. Charlie Fletcher, an engineer and production manager, believed he was one of the few who did not have any relatives at the mill. He had seen the influence of mill families during his 40 years at Buckland: 'the whole place was dominated by half a dozen families. English's, Bailey's, things like that. In my knowledge, there were three of four generations of one family working there.' It was surprisingly difficult to track down members of some of these mill families, but I was able to speak to a few, including Richard Sullivan. Richard was a 'colourist' for paper machine one for 39 years until 1989. 90 years old at the time of our conversations in his retirement home, he explained that his father had worked at Dover Mill for 50 years before retiring in 1962. He goes on:

> His father [Richard's grandfather] worked there for 51 years. That's the way things go in any industry, quite frankly, isn't it? It's always in the family, the father, the

> son and so forth. Yeah, so he had two sisters that worked there for a time. My grandfather's brother also worked there, and he had twenty-one children, and I think – well, there must have been at least a dozen of those that worked there, and probably ten of those worked there, each of them, for fifty years, but that's the way it was. There was the Baileys, the Walshs, the Englishs, the Dyers, all big local families were a very common name in the mill.

Richard was not alone in seeing this dynamic simply as the way things were in industrial employment. There was an understanding among some that industrial workplaces were more family-oriented than others, with some pointing to the nearby Kent Coalfields as another example. That these mill families were remarked upon so frequently suggests that it was considered quite exceptional compared to other forms of employment locally, and an important part of the factory culture. The presence of family members over time was certainly one of the ways that a sense of community and family environment was maintained and reproduced. To my surprise, I didn't get the impression that this was seen as problematic in any sense by other workers. Nobody complained about the outsized influence of a handful of families. But the Buddles and Baileys were not alone in benefitting from what might unsympathetically be called nepotism.

Figure 1 The Crick sisters describe the process of 'sorting' paper in Watermark

The prevalence of 'mill families' was in large part an outgrowth of the explicit hiring practices of the company. Another very common theme in my interviews concerned the importance of

having a family member already working at the mill to stand a chance of gaining employment. In fact, having a family connection seemed to almost guarantee being taken on, providing a space was available, with the interview process seen largely as a formality. If there were no jobs going, people would find a stopgap – at Woolworths or Crundles, the local box makers, for example – until a space invariably opened up. Bill Meadows' experience seemed typical of the time: 'I started in 1958, when I was 15. And the only way you could get in the mill in those days was: family. . . . My mum was working there, all me uncles, me grandfather, they was all working in the mill.' It was striking just how straightforward getting into the mill could be for those with a family connection. Bill went on to explain how easy his interview process was: 'I had to go for an interview, to [mill manager] Fred Meadows, and I had to prove to him I could write my name and address – haha . . . And maths. But basically I was in anyway, cos I had all the family, you see.' Everyone I spoke to cited the importance of a family connection to one degree or another. Some, such as Bill, claimed it was the only way to get a job, while others, such as Richard Sullivan (whose family was perhaps more represented than any other) suggested that it was not a closed shop but that it didn't harm your chances if you were following a relative into the mill. Nobody took issue with this. These workers were, after all, beneficiaries of these hiring practices, both directly and, later, indirectly when they too could arrange a job for their daughter or nephew. It was also clearly a crucial factor in what made the job satisfying on a day-to-day basis, contributing to a sense of familiarity and community among co-workers.

I wanted to get a manager's perspective on the mill's hiring practices. Was this an active choice or simply tradition? Did it benefit relations between workers and management? Was this emphasis on family common in papermaking? Henry Simpson was a senior manager at Buckland Mill first from 1984 to 1987, and again from 1991 to 1996. He had previously worked in Wiggins Teape mills across the country and therefore offered interesting an interesting perspective on the subject of hiring relatives and how practices changed over time. I asked him how Dover compared to other mills in terms of its family orientation and hiring practices:

> I would say because it's in the countryside that – you know, I'm saying in the country; it's very provincial, that's – yeah, Chartham [in Canterbury] and Dover were very much like that, everybody was related. In Dartford, where I worked, not so much, although there was always the question that if you were going to employ somebody, you should always look at an employee's son or daughter first, which was difficult because, you know, as you became more skills orientated you couldn't do that. In the olden days when you just wanted somebody to do heavy lifting which is basically what they wanted to do, you just took anybody on, and therefore you

> were quite happy to take an employee's son on because the employee was happy about it.

Henry elaborates on what changed in his time at Dover:

> But if the employee – you know, in the sort of '80s and '90s, if they were not educated, if they didn't have an understanding of maths and English and – or some IT understanding, you couldn't employ them, so – but all of that changed through those periods. And Chartham was the same to a certain extent, because we did some modernisation there and there was some resistance to it. But Dover I would say had been left untouched for an awful long time. Nothing had happened there for a long, long time, so yeah, it was more difficult [to implement changes].

Henry alludes to some interesting issues and developments here, some of which will be explored further in the following two chapters. What I want to introduce here though is the importance of place in the work culture of Buckland Mill. Henry suggests that at paper mills in both Dover and Chartham, relatively 'provincial' areas, there was an expectation that relatives would be hired. It was clear that the culture of the mill was once quite traditional and insular. This was reflected in some of my discussions with older workers who were hostile to change – in machinery, techniques or management, for example. There was a way things were done at Buckland Mill and it had worked for years – so why change?

Giving preference to relatives over 'outsiders' was not uncommon in industrial workplaces, but it seems to be particularly prevalent in paper mills; we see something very similar in other studies of mills, both operational and closed, where family members would work side by side and play a role in securing employment for relatives (see Lupo and Bailey 2011; Barton 2015; High 2015). However, family connection was no longer such an important factor in the hiring process from the 1980s onwards. This was due to various developments at the mill, some of which are alluded to by Henry, and these will be addressed in the final analysis chapter on factory closure.

Of course, not everyone who worked at the mill would have felt part of the 'mill family'. In this regard, this research is limited by something of a self-selecting sample, with more active and invested workers most likely to be connected to other workers involved in the study. These might also be the people who feel that they (still) have something to say about their time at Buckland Mill two decades after closure. However, the significant point here is that these kinds of relationships were available and regularly obtained through one's employment and that they were emphasised in both *Watermark* and my interviews.

While conflict between workers was largely absent or downplayed in my interviews, I did get a get a flavour of how those who went against the grain might have been received. In response to her prominent role in *Watermark*, several interviewees expressed disapproval at one interviewee's characterisation of women in the Salle. Apparently, Barbara Cloke, herself a sorter, had claimed that Salle women were 'always looking out for men passing' and waved at soldiers driving past, which supposedly portrayed her co-workers in a bad light. 'She is a cow!', remarked one former sorter, 'every one of us is annoyed about that.' There had clearly been discussions between workers about this topic following the documentary's release. Chris Sedgwick went as far as to edit his copy to remove her contributions! He passed me a copy:

> This is the *Watermark* DVD, only I've taken some stuff out because there's one girl there who, erm, was degra- err, the way she spoke, it made all the mill girls sound like tarts. She only worked in the mill for three weeks. And a lot of the girls didn't want it put in there but Joanna [DAD director] said, 'well, no, she turned up for the interviews so she was put in there.' I've deleted her out of my DVD.

I revisited what Barbara had said in the documentary: she claimed that women in the Salle would look out the window and wave and cheer at the soldiers in their lorries. Later, Barbara would say she wouldn't have 'gone out' with a mill worker because 'you worked with them', choosing to be with the soldiers instead of 'the Dover boys'. I didn't speak to Barbara and can't corroborate if she only spent three weeks at Buckland Mill (though it seems unlikely based on her contributions in the film). Whether or not her characterisation of events is accurate, though, there was clearly a desire on the part of former mill workers to be seen in a certain light. More specifically, I think this example reflects a general desire on the part of mill workers to be perceived as respectable in some sense. We might add to it the strong and repeated emphasis on quality – of paper and machinery, for example – and an insistence on a good work ethic. Perhaps Barbara was not sufficiently embedded in the community, too connected to outside the mill's sphere of influence. For what it is worth, I certainly didn't come away from the film thinking Barbara had painted her workmates in a bad light. It is important to recognise that community functions to unite people who share common characteristics or circumstances but, as Anderson (2016) demonstrates with regard to nationalism, that it also works to exclude those who do not meet established criteria. How this is policed can vary, but community always to some extent requires defining oneself against others and, therefore, a degree of exclusion.

It is not unusual, of course, for 'family' to be used as a metaphor to describe a workplace. It continues to be employed today, often in the context of highly exploitative or

otherwise degrading and exhausting jobs that we are nonetheless encouraged to enjoy and invest with meaning – even love (see Jaffe 2021 for a popular account of this phenomenon today). When a workplace is comprised of family members, though, this takes can take on added weight. We can see then how the interaction of work and family at Dover Mill moved in both directions, reinforcing one another. Relatives, often the children of workers, joined their kin at the mill, with the workplace becoming a 'family' outside the home. What is significant here, and what struck me in my interviews, is the extent to which 'family' framed mill workers' understanding of their job, the dominance of a handful of 'papermaking families', and the general role of kinship at the mill. I would suggest that this family framing is indicative of an occupational community. The family metaphor here is an expression of community; it speaks to the embeddedness of mill workers and intensity of their work involvement. It also engenders a sense of stability and permanence, reminding workers that they are part of an institution with a history and (one would hope) a future.

But this metaphor can also function to (re)produce inequality and exploitation within a workplace. A notion of 'factory as family' was evident in Jackie Clarke's interviews with women workers at the French domestic appliance company Molineux, which closed in 2001. If anything, this was more explicit at Molineux than at Dover, with the popular former boss and founder Jean Mantelet casting 'himself as a father-figure to 'his' workers, even addressing them as 'tu' (the informal pronoun one would use with a child) or 'mon petit' (my little one)' (Clarke 2011, p. 112). Clarke writes:

> The lost atmosphere of working life is often described by Moulinex workers in terms that cast the factory as a family. In the paternalist vision of social relations, this metaphor serves to naturalize class and gender hierarchies and to delegitimize conflict. (Clarke 2011, pp. 112-3)

But, as Clarke argues, 'factory' doesn't necessarily mean the firm or the bosses; it can mean fellow workers or a factory space that has been invested with meaning. As we will see, workers at Dover are more open in their admiration for their employer.

'You're going to the mill'

Young people's transitions from school into employment have been a topic of considerable sociological debate over the last two decades. Some have called into question the received wisdom that, while pathways into paid work are increasingly complex and fraught, young people from working-class backgrounds in the 'long boom' of the twentieth century could expect 'smooth, unproblematic' transitions into secure, lifelong employment (see Vickerstaff 2003; Goodwin and O'Connor 2005). Clearly, the picture was more complicated than it might appear looking back. But what were these transitions like for the relatives of Dover Mill workers who would join their family member(s) in the factory?

With the promise of a job, many would leave school at the earliest opportunity to start work at the mill. Boys and girls as young as 14 and 15 would demonstrate that they had secured employment with Wiggins Teape and so would not be required to stay on for a final year of secondary school. But I was interested in what people had planned to do after leaving school. Did they always know they would go to the mill? Did they have other plans or ambitions? What was the influence of parents? I certainly saw the appeal of mill work: a well-paid, secure, job close to home, in a relatively familiar workplace recommended by at least one family member. But, unsurprisingly, I received a range of responses when I asked my interviewees to recall whether they had always planned on working at the mill.

Some received their introduction to the mill from an early age. Wayne Simmons told me his father did 'the full 50 years [working at Buckland Mill] apart from his service when he went to war', with an uncle and two great aunties working alongside him. Wayne already had a familiarity with the mill and some of its families from an early age:

> Well, I used to go to the social club. The sports and social club of the mill used to run children's parties, so every Christmas you met all the other kids and all the rest of it, and some of those then went to work in the mill and their parents you knew. I mean, there were several living up Tower Hamlets [a residential estate in Dover], where I lived, that worked in the mill. Hundreds of people worked in the mill in those days so there's always a certain number of people you knew anyway.

These parties would provide a degree of pre-socialisation into the workplace. They also got children thinking about the mill from an early age. In these cases, the decision of where to spend one's working life was straightforward.

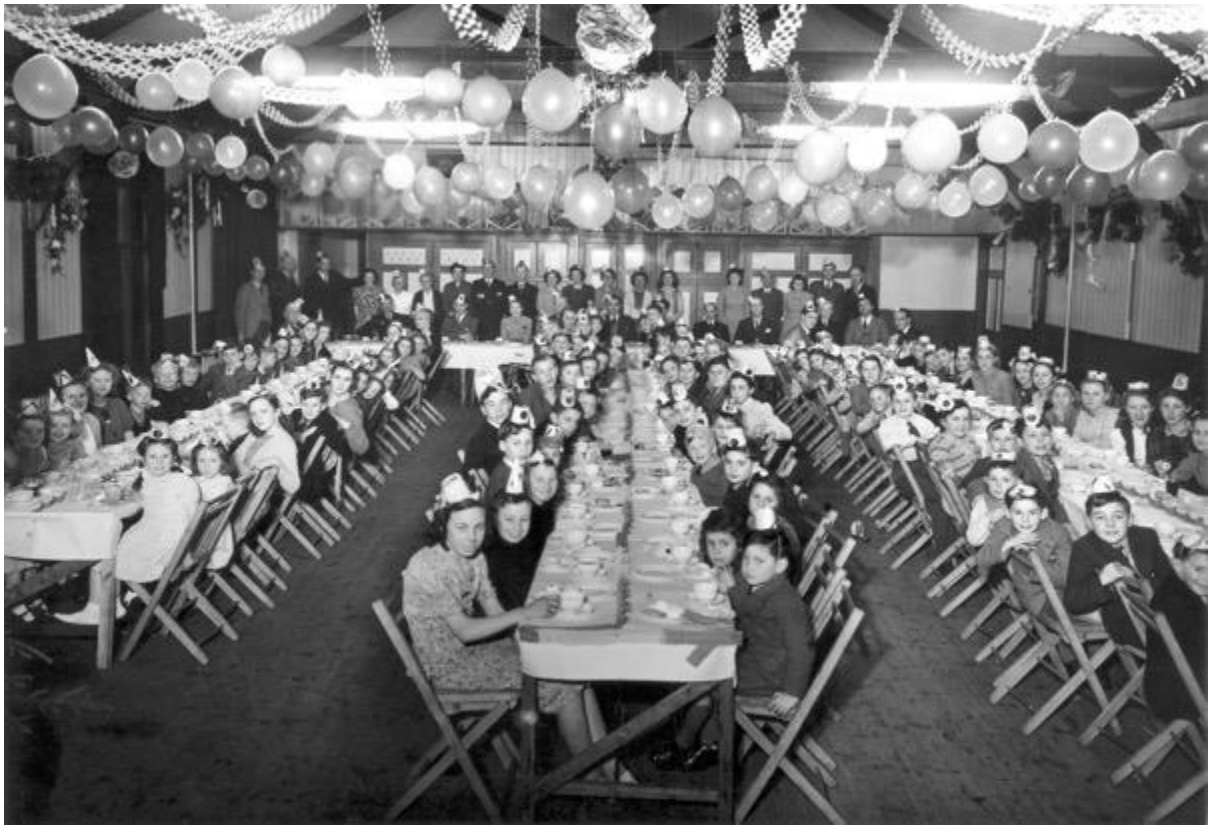

Figure 2(Dover Museum and Bronze Age Boat Gallery: Buckland Paper Mill archive 2022)

Unsurprisingly, then, some always thought they would go to the mill once they left school. For some, like Trevor Chambers, going into the mill was 'all I ever thought of doing' – even if his mum wanted him to be a postman. In other cases, there was a more passive assumption that a family member would get them in. Asked if she had planned to work at the mill while she was at school, Sally Edwards suggested it seemed like the natural thing to do and draws connections with other employment past and present:

> Yeah, I think I did. You think, 'oh, my aunt works up there, she'll get me a job up there.' You know, weren't like today – you can be choosey, can't ya? But, as I say, the jobs, I think all the jobs in Dover at the time, you just asked relations or – and you got there. But today you've got all this what's-it's-name, haven't ya, writing it down and emails and got knows what isn't it. I wouldn't know what a CV was.

Some had other ideas. Steve Jones and Richard Sullivan had aspirations of joining the RAF and becoming a health inspector after their National Service, respectively. Unfortunately, Steve lost an eye in an accident at school which ended his hopes of joining the air force. While he didn't know what to do after that, 'my mother seemed to': he would join her at the mill. 'I just went along with it. It was just something you did. It was something to do. And I would say it's

probably the best thing that ever happened to me,' Steve told me. In Richard's case, his father arranged for him to be taken on by the Buckland Mill manager after three months on the dole struggling to find work (you only needed one health inspector per local authority, apparently!). What is significant here is that regardless of job aspirations, going to the mill was always an option. Clearly, children of workers had a kind of base level security that meant, in most cases, they were guaranteed employment with Wiggins Teape.

As we might expect, employment wasn't necessarily at the forefront of the minds of these 14- and 15-year-olds, even if their compulsory education was drawing to a close. From what they could remember, they didn't know what they would do and hadn't given it much thought, either. In this context, parents played a pivotal role. In some cases, they would persuade their children to accept this option, while in others they would even take it upon themselves to put their name down for an interview. Some told me it was less about persuasion and more about doing what they were told. This was stated most clearly by a Kelly brother in *Watermark*. At the age of 15, he was told, 'don't look for a job, son. You're going to the mill. So I had no option, I was going to go.'

In general, though, I got the sense that going to the mill was something people were neither especially in favour of or opposed to and was not part of any plan; it was simply the obvious choice when the time came to find a job. At least that's how it was remembered. In his study of Sturgeon Falls Paper Mill in Ontario, High (2015) talks of the 'gravitational pull' of the mill for those with a family connection. While the mill was effectively the only option for High's interviewees, with Sturgeon Falls dominating the local economy, a similar gravitational pull was at play in Dover. This applied to those who were set on joining the mill, those who were indifferent, and even those with other ideas. If you had to work, why shouldn't it be at the mill? Indeed, why take the time, effort, and risk to pursue something else? Going to the mill was the path of least resistance.

Figure 3(Dover Museum and Bronze Age Boat Gallery: Buckland Paper Mill archive 2022)

Having a family connection to the mill did not necessarily mean that young workers would arrive on their first day on the job feeling comfortable and prepared. I learned that it was common to feel nervous at the prospect of going to the mill. While they invariably had some sense of what to expect, both the nature of the work and the workplace culture could come as a shock. Workers recalled with remarkable clarity their first day on the job, describing in detail what they did and how they felt as a teenager some five, six or even seven decades ago in some cases. In the case of young men, their nerves seemed somewhat justified based on their recollections:

> It was terrifying! Haha . . . I'd left school on the Friday and then you go to work with, to put it mildly, hairy-arsed blokes who took the mickey and did all sorts of things. (Steve Jones)

> And of course, workers being what they are, I would get sent over the boiler house to get a bucket of blue steam. It was a joke. Haha, I [went] as well! Now, you see, when you're 15 you think, 'oh Christ…' Or you go over to the fitter's shop, go and ask him for a long weight. And you go there and you think, 'oh no.' Cos you would come in – 'what d'ya want?' 'A long weight.' Oh yeah, OK. Ah, no. And, used to get quite cheeky as well. I won't tell you one of them, but… (Bill Jacobs)

We will explore what the initial training and tasks consisted of shortly. More than anything, though, the early days for young men were much more about introducing them to the ways of the factory than developing papermaking skills. This seemed like something of a sink or swim moment that would reveal who would fit in and adapt to the norms and practices of the factory (for a discussion of the socialisation aspects of apprenticeships in Britain, see Vickerstaff 2007).

As well as confronting the challenge of dealing with senior male papermakers, young male workers also had to get used to working alongside the women in the Salle. I learned that young men often felt intimidated by older sorters in particular, and spoke of dreading being sent up to collect something from the Salle for fear of being teased or worse. Steve Jones gives a flavour of how the Salle was viewed by young men:

> there used to be, when I first went to work there, there was about 150 women worked there, up in Salle. They used to sort every sheet of paper. And they were awful. They really used to take the Mickey out of ya. As soon as they see a youngster, that was it. Nothing untoward really, but nowadays it would make the front pages of every newspaper in the country I think.

Bill Jacobs elaborated on this extraordinary practice:

> when you was a cutter boy, you never went up the Salle on your own, especially if you was a new boy . . . 'cos if you was a new boy and they knew you was coming, they'd wait for you to come up – 'cos you used to have to go up and get sledges . . . Well, if the girls knew you was coming up, the new one, they would chase you round the bloody Salle, get hold of you, put you in what they called a shaving basket, take your trousers down and put grease all round your…round your testicles! Haha!

This was the first I had heard of this practice, but I went on to receive several similar versions. I didn't know quite what to make of it – to be honest, I'm still not entirely sure. It immediately struck me as an unusual gender dynamic, though. Women appeared to be using the threat of embarrassment and their collective physical dominance to exercise a degree of power over young men. At the risk of misreading this, frankly, bizarre practice, I would suggest that, given it would seemingly only happen once to young male recruits, it represented something of a rite of passage into the mill. In this way, it is reminiscent of the practice of Guinness workers initiating recruits by putting them into empty beer barrels in Strangleman's (2019) study. While grease is mentioned in Bill's version of events, others told me the substance was in fact caustic soda. In addition to a rite of passage, then, this could be interpreted as an act of physical and

symbolic violence that establishes a degree of power among the women over the young men in a workplace that, as we will see, at times devalued women's position in the mill hierarchy. In any case, there was a correct sense among those recounting these stories that things have changed and that this kind of practice would today come with much greater risk of censure.

From the outset, young men and women were placed in separate areas of the mill for a period of training. These early experiences of the mill were markedly different for men and women. Men typically began sweeping up, cleaning and running errands for senior papermakers until a job opened up assisting in one of many stages of the production process. Women, on the other hand, had a much more structured and pre-determined journey ahead of them. They would go straight into the 'Chafford' building for training in how to 'sort' the paper. Six women would spend anywhere between three and six months developing the technique and speed needed for sorting in the Salle. Barbara Little joined the mill at 15 and recalls her experience of training in Chafford in 1964:

> you learn a lot as you go along, you know . . . you had a stop clock, so you had to get a certain speed up in them three months . . . I didn't find it difficult, but I think some of the girls used to have to go back and – because they had, you know, they got their speed and then they went back down the Salle and it got slow so they go back up the training. … when you first start you're a bit, you know, you don't know what to do but you soon got used to it.

I will focus on the technical skill and physical demands involved in sorting in the next chapter. Here, it is just worth saying that during this training period women were required to become proficient in a very specific and repetitive task that involved lifting large, individual sheets of paper and inspecting them for imperfections before approving them to be guillotined, packaged and shipped. For most, this was the central task they carried out for the entirety of their time at Buckland Mill, with very few opportunities to try their hand at something else.

In contrast, young men entering the mill straight out of school could expect to hold a variety of roles in different corners of the factory over the course of their working lives. It was common to start off sweeping before moving onto a role in the machine houses or finishing department, depending on what position became available and, to some extent, the wishes of the worker themselves. This process was sometimes called going 'through the mill' (not with any negative connotations) and could mean spending several years working as an assistant or replacement on each of the various processes. In the passages below, Steve Jones, who started in 1965, explains the options available to him, while Bill Jacobs recounts what he and others did when they first arrived in the late 1950s:

> Everyone started off as a cleaner. And then you went to different places. I went through the finishing end. Cos in a paper mill you have the papermaking part – the paper machines – and the finishing end – they finish all the paper and cut it. I went in as an assistant on one of the reelers, which re-reeled the paper and then it went out to the customer. And I just worked up through that – from an assistant and went onto running the machine. Cos back in them days there was no such thing as training – formal training. If you had half a brain cell you suddenly realise that the next one up was always easier than the one you were doing. Cos being an assistant, you did all the donkey work. And back then it was donkey work.
>
> I left [a job at Crundles] and went to the paper mill, sweeping up. Now, you saw that photo of the mill there. Now, I went there as a, you know, when I was 15 and a half as a gofer basically. Basically, you went there just to keep the place tidy and go, if somebody wanted something you would go and get it. And it was a way of learning your way around the paper mill. So, I used to sweep to that end of the mill right the way down here. And the corridor was as wide as this. And I used to have to do that every morning. Take away bags of rubbish, do all sorts of things.

In addition to giving us a sense of the papermaking process, Steve and Bill describe what was apparently a common experience of training in the 1950s and 1960s. It was about learning your way around the mill, adjusting to the workplace culture, discovering what interested you and eventually working as an assistant on a machine or more manual part of the production process. Few formal skills or qualifications were needed upon entry during this era of the mill, with training taking place on the shop floor through observation and assisting. Importantly, it was not just technical skills that were developed through this process. Just as importantly for the long-term prospects of new workers, the cultural norms, values and practices of the workplace were being learned through daily interactions with senior co-workers. As alluded to above, this process of socialisation often began before the first day on the job, especially for those from embedded mill families, but began in earnest once workers were immersed in the everyday life of the mill.

My sense of how women workers were socialised into the mill during their period of training was less clear. My impression is that their contact with Salle workers was limited, and their interactions were mainly with fellow trainees and whoever was teaching them to sort paper in Chafford. In this context, they may have become more familiar with new recruits than their established sorters. This would suggest that women to a larger extent than men learned the norms and values of the workplace after they were fully trained. What is clear, though, is from their first day at the mill the experiences of workers were thoroughly shaped by gender. Women entered the workplace with the expectation that they would remain in one room for the

entirety of their time at the mill. While men had many opportunities to progress and try their hand at a range of jobs, women had very limited options to do anything but sort paper. And, while forces that go beyond the mill were obviously at play, there was an expectation that while men had a 'job for life,' women's work was on a more casual basis. Gendered orientations to work were therefore built into the job.

Dover Mill can be seen as an example of a workplace that did ensure a relatively smooth transition from school to work for those fortunate enough to be connected to the factory through family. For these workers, limited agency and choice was offset by a sense of security and community. This was heavily contingent on having an existing family connection to the mill. Some always planned on following their relatives into the mill; for others, it simply felt like the logical next step. Others recall being either indifferent or having other plans but the mill had something of a gravitational pull, similar to High's (2015) mill workers who were displaced in 2002, albeit in a context of a wider range of employment options. In any case, the lucky few with a family connection were all but assured a job if they wanted one. The practical guarantee of a job for these people provided a base level of security to young people and their families. Even if following their mother or uncle into the workplace wasn't their preferred option, there was an understanding that a relatively secure, well-paid local job was there waiting for them.

A workforce that plays together

The close relationship between work and 'non-work' lives was never more apparent than when my interviewees recalled the activities available to them outside of work hours. The range and extent of these social activities, provided by the mill, was striking. Workers told me of coach trips to Margate, Ramsgate Market, the town hall at the Leas in Folkestone, and even yearly trips to the pubs, clubs and exhibition at Earl's court. They mentioned fireworks displays and pantomimes. More than anything though, they told me about two things: sport and dances.

Recreational activities were often facilitated by Wiggins Teape, located on mill grounds and organised by a committee of workers. The sports and social club at Crabble Mill, a site less than a mile from the paper mill and owned by the firm, regularly hosted a range of events and

clubs for workers[9]. There were clubs and teams for bowls, football, darts, tennis, rugby, cricket, shooting and more. Dover Mill would compete with other paper mills at various sports, or even go up against other workplaces like Kent Police. Sports days were held at a different mill every year and would involve travelling to places like Glory Mill in Buckinghamshire, Ivybridge in Devon, or even Fort William or Stoneywood in Scotland.

Naturally, some involved themselves in sports more than others. Among my interviewees, men tended to participate in more sports clubs and competitions and described it as an important part of the job. But there is lots of historical evidence of women participating in mill sports. I came across many photographs of women competing in what look like sports days in the 1930s. However, while I found many black and white pictures of sports days from the 1930s and earlier in the Dover Museum archive, to my surprise I didn't come across any from after that period, and more recent photos were not among the many shown in *Watermark* either.

Figure 4(Dover Museum and Bronze Age Boat Gallery: Buckland Paper Mill archive 2022)

Figure 5 Mill sports day, 1930s

[9] I heard from one worker that the recreational hall was built in the 1910s following a fire that destroyed the existing building, but wasn't able to corroborate this information. Apparently, it was rebuilt as the mill's social club in honour of the rag sorters who tried to put out the fire, only to be sold for housing in the 1990s.

Figure 6 (Dover Museum and Bronze Age Boat Gallery: Buckland Paper Mill archive 2022)

Figure 7 Women's tug of war

Figure 9(Dover Museum and Bronze Age Boat Gallery: Buckland Paper Mill archive 2022)

Two people that were heavily involved in various sports clubs were Chris Sedgewick and Trevor Chambers. Both saw the mill's recreational activities as more than something additional to enjoy outside of work hours; they were a key component of what made the job so appealing, contributing to the family atmosphere of the workplace and making work such a central part of their lives as a whole. Chris, for example, associated the sports teams with the sense of family: 'I mean, there was tennis, we even had an athletics team. We used to go and challenge other mills with our athletics team, football, cricket, darts, everything, you know. Your whole life was – I mean, the environment, you know, it's a family thing.' When we spoke, Trevor Chambers had been playing bowls for 44 years after joining the mill bowls club in 1975. Going to play bowls with workmates was a weekly ritual: 'Wednesday, we get our wages, go over to the pub, have a couple of pints and then go out and have a roll up. And it sort of got us – got me – into the game.' On what the strong social side added to the job, Trevor told me:

> it gives people something common to talk about, something common to do, you know. Something to look forward to. You know, if you're just going to work and coming home again, you don't get as involved as you do when you're actually in the mill. You know, if you know people through the social club, and you get involved with them, you'll help them out when they was in a bit of bother, you know. If somebody's busy, you'll give them a hand. Which you wouldn't necessarily do if you didn't know 'em.

Interestingly, Trevor suggests here that to be 'actually in the mill' required participation in these social activities outside of work hours, as opposed to those who merely worked *at* the mill without making the most of the recreational activities on offer. It is clear that for many these events were not tangential to the job but an integral part of what could make working at the mill so appealing and fulfilling, as well as all-encompassing. It was also where people developed friendships with co-workers.

In addition to sport, the mill hosted regular dances and parties in the recreational hall at Crabble. These were a good opportunity to get to know workmates better. It was also at these events that workers would sometimes meet and develop relationships with future partners. Several of the workers I spoke to met their long-term partner at a mill dance or party. Trevor Chambers reflects thoughtfully on how the dynamic played out:

> You know, they got to know each other because they worked at the mill. And more often than not, it wasn't because of contact within the mill, it was contact with the mill social side. You know, someone from the sorting department upstairs, a girl from the sorting department upstairs, wouldn't necessarily meet a bloke on the

> machines because you never go that far, sort of thing. But then when you got a social, they'd meet each other, and because they knew each other they'd seem to go out of their way to see each other at work as well. And these things build.

While interactions at work could be limited, dances and parties provided a chance for men and women to get to know each other. Romantic relationships developed with people they would otherwise have limited opportunity to meet at work.

In general, there was a sense that the mill went above and beyond to provide out-of-work activities for its workforce. Lorraine Amos, the wife of a deceased papermaker, was featured in *Watermark*[10]. She sat next to her daughter and father, a former mill worker, and reflected on the activities hosted by the mill when her dad worked there in 1968:

> We used to have father Christmas parties. The workers of the paper mill – all the children – the paper mill paid for us to all have a party at the mill social club. Near enough everybody turned up, didn't they, cos obviously the paper mill paid for everything. You know, the meal, the bottles of wine on the tables, the music, you know – they did go out for… And they made everybody feel like it was a family orientated thing, made everybody join in. It's like the two-week shutdown. You know, that was for the men to take their families on holiday for two weeks.

One anecdote about a mill dance gave me a flavour of the values of the mill – what we might call its moral order (Strangleman 2012). Both workers involved in this story recounted a gesture that took place some 50 years earlier. Bill Jacobs:

> Anyway, he was in the – he was working at the mill, 'cos his wife worked at the mill, you know, in the canteen. And I was having a drink, I said, "Are you going to the mill dance?" "No," he said, "I can't get a ticket." "Oh, I'll get you one." So, I got him one, and he's never forgotten that, you know, all those years ago, about 1968. I said, "I'll get you a ticket." And this one particular dance, I can't remember whether it was Christmas or not, but as I said, tickets were like gold dust.[11]

Ted Aldridge told this story in remarkably similar terms. This relatively small gesture gives an indication of the kind of values of the workplace, values of reciprocation and mutual aid.

After-work events broadly declined over time, with the social club apparently closing some time before the mill eventually shut down. It is unclear exactly how, when and why this decline occurred, but the final chapter on the factory's 'long closure' offers some strong clues.

[10] It was implied in *Watermark* that the man had died from a condition caused by mill work but this was not elaborated upon. I wasn't told of any mill-related deaths in interviews.

Some workers suggested the social side remained strong, while others told me very few out-of-work events were held towards the end. Bill Jacobs, who had once been so involved in social activities, spoke of sports teams packing up or resorting to asking people from outside the mill to make up the numbers. Dances, too, 'gradually petered out' as those once responsible for their organisation retired without being replaced. Asked if the sense of a mill community declined, Bill responded:

> Yes, it did, yeah. It wasn't the same loyalty, you know. Whereas we – I would say to Chissy or Dave Benton, "Oh, I'll see you down the pub tonight," or John, you know, "I'll meet you in the Bull," or something like that, that didn't happen in the latter years, no.

As we will see in the following two chapters, it was often difficult to get a sense from my interviewees of how, when and why changes that could be characterised as 'decline' took place – in this case, in terms of a diminished social life. This was the first time I had initially been given the impression that an aspect of mill life had remain intact until closure in 2000. It would later become clear that what I was receiving was a version of working life that had frozen in time what we might call the heyday of the mill. It was this version that was foregrounded, with subsequent, less fulfilling or meaningful experiences emerging only after significant digging.

It was clear that social activities outside of work hours were an important component of the social life of the mill. They helped strengthen existing relationships and foster new ones. If their emphasis on them is any indication, they were also valued by workers. But what other purposes did these activities serve? How, for example, did they affect labour relations? It is very difficult to know, especially so long after the event. Some worker testimonies give us some clues, though. In *Watermark,* David Langley explains the role of sport as he saw it. 'We've always incorporated sport in the thing [job] – even with the bowls', he says. Eventually, he and some other workers started challenging the staff to bowls. This was open to anyone who was salaried, and 'people in the offices that you wouldn't normally see would come and have a go at bowls':

> You'd have, like, the supervisors. And even the undermanager came and had a go at it. So, there were people that were normally ordering you about were then on the bowling green with you playing bowls. And the undermanager at the time was Henry Ralph. And he always reckoned that a workforce that played together, worked together. And I suppose to an extent that was the case.

Trevor Chambers similarly reflects on workers interacting with managers at social events:

> And they were very good. We had a mill Christmas dance every year, and everyone socialised, and in situations like that, there wasn't really managers and workforce. You know, you was all the same (Trevor Chambers, machineman and eventually a shift supervisor and shift manager)

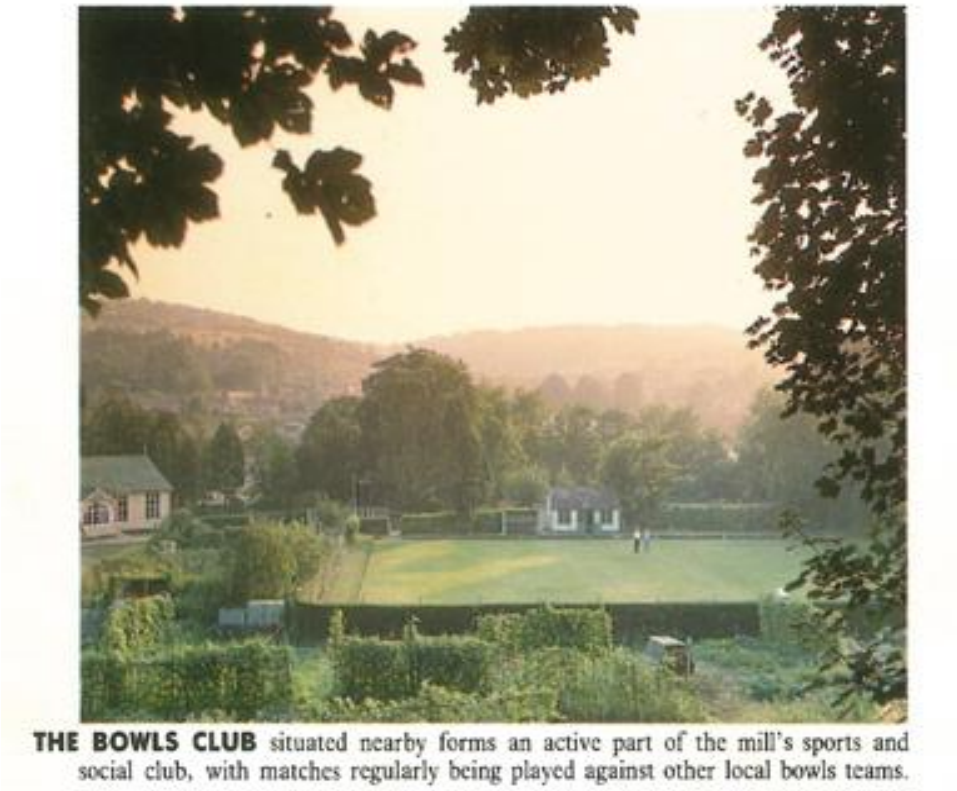

Figure 10 From a booklet on Buckland Paper Mill produced by Wiggins Teape circa late-1980s

These recreational activities played an important role in the mill's occupational community, blurring the boundaries between work and non-work lives. But they may have also blurred the lines in the mill hierarchy. Trevor shows an awareness of how management viewed these events: 'they realised that the social side was as important as anything, you know'. As a manual worker who eventually took on a management role, he was well-placed to understand both sides of this dynamic.

These kinds of worker amenities were certainly not uncommon in industrial settings during the 'long boom.' They represent a more comprehensive concept of working life than we are likely to see today, and a form of management wherein human considerations are an important part of the equation of the employer. Sometimes this would extend out into the community at large. International Harvester, the Chicago steel company in Walley's (2013) study, provided electricity to local churches, paved streets and funded adult sports teams in an

attempt to 'create a sense of identification and common purpose between workers and the mill' (p. 67). The wider Southeast Chicago steel industry had, Walley argues, encouraged employees and residents to view the mills 'like family' by emphasising a 'commitment to place and community and of the need to work together,' albeit here 'for the patriotic causes of war and social and industrial progress' (ibid).

There are also parallels between Buckland Mill and other paper mills in the industrialised world. The pulp and paper mill studied by Barton (2015) in Burnie, Tasmania went even further in what she calls an 'industrial welfarism and a paternalistic approach to their workforce.' In addition to offering high wages, the company – the Collins House group – provided 'a range of worker amenities such as dentists, banking facilities, a gymnasium and 25 metre small bore rifle range. There were football teams for the men and baseball and netball teams for the women.' Combined with good wages, it is unsurprising that this work was keenly sought by people on Tasmania's North West coast. Barton notes that 'work in industrial settings such as this built friendships and fosters a sense of community and meaning' (p. 155). For some at Buckland, these leisure activities were integral to the job and a central part of what made it so appealing and fulfilling – and part of what differentiated it from other work. They constituted a large part of people's overall social live, offering a space where workers could interact with people from other areas of the factory or get to know each other in a different, 'non-work' space.

Manufacturing a mill community

> You would never get another place look after you worker like they did. Well, I don't know cos I haven't worked anywhere else but, you know . . . You'd never get it again. I don't think one person would have a bad word against that – against the mill. (Ted Aldridge, colourman)

We have seen some of the ways management practices contributed to a work environment conducive to a sense of community, identity and meaning-making, including the mill's hiring practices and the leisure activities available to workers. Here, I will focus more explicitly on the role of the firm in Dover Mill's workplace culture and 'occupational community'. I will then consider the consequences for class identities and solidarities among those on the shop floor.

I was initially surprised by the overwhelmingly positive terms in which workers spoke of their former employer. While, as we will see in the final chapter, there was plenty of ill feeling towards the mill's eventual owner Arjowiggins, long-time owner Wiggins Teape was by and large portrayed as the ideal employer. Given the sense of regret and disappointment I knew many had felt about the mill's closure and primed by some of the more bitter and combative responses to factory closure in the academic literature, I expected more criticism of the mill's management and ownership. Aside from issues around the mill's closure, I also anticipated hearing more stories of labour disputes or even more minor grievances over work conditions or conduct. I was surprised and, frankly, disappointed that accounts of a more antagonistic relationship between workers and management were not forthcoming. Weren't workers supposed to oppose their bosses, especially bosses who had shut down such a popular workplace? I was reminded of Burawoy's (1982) struggle to understand why people in the Chicago factory he had entered worked so hard for the "people upstairs" who "will do anything to squeeze another piece out of you?" (1982, p. xi).

As I learned more about the mill, however, I began to understand why ex-workers held the company in such high regard. In addition to the more fundamental advantages of the job, such as relative security, good pay and pensions, training opportunities, and provision of jobs for relatives, the perks outlined above in the form of the sports and social club, dances and parties, free usage of the recreational hall for events such as wedding receptions, and so on, all contributed to a seemingly satisfied workforce. They were certainly cited regularly as things valued about the job, often with the implication that they were working for an exceptional employer. Perhaps most important here, though, is the terms on which many eventually left the mill. The redundancy and pension terms were considered very generous, the significance of which will be explored in the final chapter. For now, it is noteworthy that mill workers are keenly aware that these are conditions not experienced in many other jobs, and it is in this context that they praise Wiggins Teape as a good employer.

In some respects, the company clearly went beyond what might be expected of an employer to ensure the workforce were provided for. This came in many forms, big and small, and we have already seen the extent of social provisions facilitated by management. Some of the more minor perks of working at the mill included the access you were afforded to mill-owned items and facilities. Workers could request free boxes of Conqueror paper, for example. According to some in *Watermark*, you 'could get whatever you wanted': bricks, wood, nails, felt from the machines that could be used to make blankets and carpets, and so on. Wedding receptions, such as that of Margaret and David Summers, were regularly held free of charge at

the Crabble clubhouse. Ted Aldridge, whose words opened this section, described Buckland's management as 'very generous':

> Every year – well, quite a few years, back end [not so much] – we used to have a social day where all your family would go, all the kids and that. They'd have a BBQ and everything. And it was all free. The mill was very, very generous. Management were very generous. It was never tight with money. If it hadn't been for…the one that took it over, the French.

Leaving aside Ted's last point for now, that the mill treated its workforce generously beyond the working day was something communicated to me time and again. Whether through social events, mill facilities, or the provision of useful materials, workers felt looked after.

More fundamental, though, was the sense of job security provided by mill work. The belief that one's job was secure was central to Dover Mill's workplace culture. This security was not taken for granted, and there was an appreciation that not all jobs, then and (especially) now, afforded the same level of security for workers and their families. Albert Peters joined the mill in 1946 and worked as a laboratory technician for 46 years until he retired in 1992. He expresses his thoughts on Wiggins Teape as an employer and what their treatment of workers afforded him and others:

> They were a very good firm. In lots of ways, they were a very good firm to work for and people used to join them as youngsters and stay with them all their life. You don't get that these days because the firms don't look after their – they don't have people for life like they used to, that whole families used to you know, they used to work there and their granddad worked there, and their father worked there, and their sons worked there and it used to go on through the family. But I joined when I was eighteen and my brother was two years older than – not eighteen, I was nearly twenty, but my brother was two years older than me, but he worked there before I did as one of the new employees. And so there was a hard core of people who worked there before the war, and they taught all the young ones who joined up, they taught them what we know.

It was not unusual for workers to compare the mill favourably to other jobs like this. Often, it was in comparison to what they understood other forms of employment to offer – in this case, the *relative* security afforded by the mill – that workers valued their jobs. In this passage, Albert is articulating the kind of working lives and relationships that are only possible in the context of secure employment. This sense of job security allowed mill workers and their families to embed themselves in the local area, building connections with fellow workers, and maintain

and develop relationships that extended into the local community and across generations. In short, it was the foundations on which a meaningful work-based community could be built.

This sense of security, the belief that working at the mill was a job for life, was further illustrated by how exceptional people thought it was for someone to be sacked based on conduct. I spoke to two people who had family members – a brother and a son, respectively – sacked by the mill, and both were quick to say they deserved it! I was taken aback when Scott Fisher, who I knew had eventually been made redundant following a series of disputes with management, also spoke highly of them in this regard:

> SF: they were very good management. You had to do something pretty bad to get the sack in Dover Mill, I tell you. I never knew many people who got sacked. And they only got sacked, believe you me, because –
>
> PC: They deserved it? [Laughs].
>
> SF: You said it – I didn't! . . . it was known as a good employer, you know, where you had a job and if you kept your nose clean, you kept that job.

Scott told me that because fathers and sons worked there, the mill 'never had any job recruiting people' and 'was a sought-after job'. I found this combination of accounts interesting: a sought-after job that was difficult to be sacked from. I would expect an awareness that the mill would have little trouble replacing you would in itself act as a form of discipline. The family environment also played a role here. It was widely understood it would take something very serious to be sacked, but it was clear that working alongside family could have a disciplining effect because bad behaviour could reflect poorly on others, especially elders who had played a role in getting their younger relative through the door. Sally Edwards' son was apparently one of the few who was let go because he used to 'bugger about up there'. Asked if she was concerned because it reflected on here, she said:

> Yes, course I was, because you ask for 'em don't ya? And all you wanna do is ask for 'em to get a job for 'em. And I say, 'you better work good when you get up there. Don't you show me up.' Which he was alright. He was just playful, you know, Dylan. And, erm, course he got messing about, and then he got the sack. (Sally Edwards)

While it clearly didn't deter Dylan, it would be surprising if working in a family environment, where a relative effectively acts as a reference of character, did not shape conduct in the workplace. In the context of an occupational community, Salaman (1974, pp. 24-25) cites the

‘powerful social sanctions’ of one’s reference group (meaning the people with whom one shares values and whose support is so important). This was reflected in Lupo and Bailey’s (2011) study of the factors affecting occupational community in two pulp and paper mills in Alabama. In the largely male-dominated Gulf States mill, the authors found that ‘most workers have family members working at the mill, and were recommended by family members’ (p. 389). Drawing on a worker account, they write: ‘‘But,’’ one worker said, ‘‘when they come here they better wanna work!’’ Another mill worker says, ‘‘Somebody worked hard to get most of us jobs, we have to respect that.’’ Newer employees, then, experience a pressure ‘to work hard out of respect for other family members and friends who used their pull to get the new employee their job’ (p. 389). Whether out of respect, pressure, fear or something else, a good work ethic – and contributing to the mill’s success – was important to Buckland Mill workers, especially for those who spent many years in the factory. We will return to importance of ensuring the mill’s success, even if it meant job losses, in the final chapter.

A sense of control over one’s work also contributed to the relatively stable labour relations of the mill. Workers were made to feel as though management took seriously the views, ideas and concerns of those on the factory floor. According to some more senior male workers, management would take on board suggestions for improving the production process, for example. This gave some workers a sense of power and democratic agency over their labour. It also contributed to an understanding that workers and management had the same interests, were part of the same team, working towards the same goals. Crucially, though, Scott Fisher here shows an awareness of the dynamic at play between management and workers. Asked if management took the views of workers on board, Scott responded:

> Oh, Christ, yeah. But, well, because they knew if they wanted to produce a product, you know, on time, every day, or whatever, it’s easier if you've got somebody reasonably happy making it. If you've got somebody who don't give a toss, you never get the quality you really need, perhaps. You know, I wouldn't say there was people sabotaging or anything like that, no. But if you have an happy workforce, they pull together, don't they? You know. Simple as that. And they were very good, Henry Simpson and the management team.

It is important to recognise that workers were not simply acted upon and shaped in this relationship or unaware of the dynamic between themselves and management. Scott’s recognition of the interests and motivations of management was common, and there was clearly an awareness of hierarchy and their place within it. Crucially, workers saw it as being in their interest to participate in this system.

That said, it was at times clear that workers perceived their managers as their superiors. When recalling their interactions with management, workers sometimes spoke of them in somewhat deferential terms, almost as if they were rightfully above them in some sense. This was illustrated in several ways. Some, in recounting instances wherein management had given them a hearing after approaching them with ideas on how to alter an element of the production process, conveyed a sense of gratitude that implied a degree of inferiority. A particularly striking example of deference came when a worker recalled his experience of reaching the 30-year mark at the mill. Workers would receive long-service awards when they reached certain milestones. These awards would come with a gift of some description, such as a watch, and a dinner paid for by the company. Ted Aldridge's story was illustrative of a certain kind of deferential relationship between mill workers and management:

> 15 years, you get an award – only a small present like, you know. And they take you out for dinner. But on your 34 years – 30 years – they took you out for a special dinner. And your wife was invited and that. Taxi laid on. And the wife said, 'oh, I don't fancy that.' 'Nah, you'll be alright.' Anyway, we went to it, like. Well, one of the directors was there with his wife . . . A really posh place, posh place. You need plenty of money. Anyways, we went there, taxi picked us up and we went there. And as we got in the car, the manager just had to get out of his car. And he said, 'hello John.' Met the wife, like, and said, 'you looking forward to this, love?' She said, 'Yeah. I'm a bit nervous.' 'Forget that,' he says, 'this is John's evening.' And there's about 6 of us with partners, all done the same period of time. He said, 'this is John's evening, and yours.' He said, 'enjoy yourself.' Anyway, we sat down, we had dinner and the presentation were done and I got a gold watch. Beautiful gold watch.

Ted went on to describe the evening, recalling a conversation between his wife, who was feeling quite nervous, and the managing director, who apparently 'was a multi-millionaire': 'He said, 'look, Joan, if I cut myself I'll bleed. If you cut yourself, you'll bleed. It's no difference.' And they really made her feel welcome.' He goes on:

> I said to the manager, 'oh, I'm on, in the morning I'm on at six o'clock.' And he said, 'don't worry. If you're not here by six, come when you're ready.' He said, 'bring your card, he says, 'I'll sign it.' That's the way they were, you know. He said, 'don't spoil your evening or anything. Enjoy your evening. And if you overlay in the morning, don't worry about it.' And that's the way…honestly.

I want to be careful here. I certainly don't want to invalidate the pride justifiably felt by Ted here in his accomplishments. I also don't want to deny the way Ted and his co-workers were made to feel valued and respected by their employer. This was (and is) clearly exceptional and,

in many ways, preferable to more authoritative forms of management. As Bradley (1990, p. 188) points out, ‘at the level of common sense it is hardly surprising if people prefer a concerned boss to an uncaring one!’ In addition, mill management, acting on behalf of Wiggins Teape, objectively did hold more power in this relationship and so a degree of deference on the shop floor and indeed outside of work could well be necessary to remain (happily) employed. But they held no such power in our interview almost two decades on. Was Ted concerned criticism might get back to their old bosses, or that it might reflect badly on the mill as a whole? I don’t think so. Rather, I think his account speaks to a genuine felt respect towards his managers. Indeed, Ted’s story speaks to something I regularly encountered in my discussions with workers. Management were respected to a degree I was not expecting from an industrial workforce, especially one that had ultimately been shut down (with all the caveats around redundancy and pension terms). Over time, it occurred to me this relationship was not seen in the class terms I was bringing to the research.

Figure 11(Dover Museum and Bronze Age Boat Gallery: Buckland Paper Mill archive 2022)

Figure 12 Workers receiving long service awards

This was further illustrated by attitudes towards the use of first names on the shop floor – of both workers and managers. John Pettifer told me he didn't like having to call managers by their first names, which he suggested wasn't always the case. This was because 'they've got their job for a reason, 'cos they've been, you know, doing it, and that's what they've trained up for.' Ted Aldridge remarked on either calling the mill manager addressing them by first names:

> The manager, he'd come round, like, you know, most days and he'd talk to ya. And if you tried to pull the wool over his eyes, don't try it. He started off from nothing and worked his way up, so he knew everything, you know. And he'd come on first names. First names and see how you're getting on and, you know.

There was certainly greater respect for those who had 'worked their way up'. This route to management seemed common, especially until the mid-1980s, and somewhat complicates the relationship, blurring the lines between worker and manager. Workers, particularly the more aspirational among them, perhaps saw themselves in these figures. But we can also see an attempt to personalise or casualise the relationships between worker and manager. This was surely most apparent in the context of social events where, as we learned from Trevor Chambers, 'everyone socialised, and in situations like that, there wasn't really managers and workforce, you know, you was all the same.' This was complicated later on, certainly from the 1980s, when managers would be brought in across the country. While manual workers would continue to be locals, managers would sometimes come from other Wiggins Teape mills (from Stoneywood in Scotland, for example) and were more likely to be university graduates than papermakers who had come through the ranks – with foreman being drawn from both groups. In the following two chapters, we will see that this was just one of a host of changes introduced across the 1980s and 1990s workplace.

Class and community in a paternalistic factory

Far from an antagonistic relationship between worker and boss, we can observe a blurring of the mill's hierarchy alongside a degree of deference towards management. But it is worth further interrogating both the conditions under which this dynamic could exist and the potential class implications. As we have seen, conditions at Buckland Mill were relatively favourable to workers. While we might see this as merely relative – to other local jobs, for example, or other

eras at the paper mill – workers felt that they were treated well, provided for and listened to. The overwhelmingly positive light in which mill workers put their former employer can indeed be seen as a reflection of the conditions in which they worked and interacted. Wiggins Teape considered the *human* needs of its workforce, not just its bottom line. But why? And with what effect? I suggest that the 'paternalistic' management practices of Wiggins Teape played a central role in the mill's occupational community, creating a context in which mill work could permeate non-work lives.

The concept of paternalism, Fleming (2005, p. 1469) notes, 'has been extensively researched as a mode of organizing the employment relationship in industrial firms.' However, it is generally accepted that paternalism has for the most part ceased to be a salient feature of management practices, and it has gone somewhat out of fashion within industrial relations. In fact, paternalism in its purest form is often seen as a nineteenth-century phenomenon that was eroded by modern bureaucracy and rationalisation throughout the twentieth century. Ackers (1998) engages with the features, uses, strengths and limitations of paternalism as a social science concept. The term can be applied to a wide range of experiences and settings and has taken different forms throughout (industrial) history; it should therefore be used with nuance to avoid being reduced to a mere 'loose descriptive term'. For Ackers, the characteristic company features of a paternalistic employer are

> hereditary family ownership, personal relations between employer and workers, a sense of religious mission, and a commitment to social welfare and public service. The ideal-type paternalist workforce matches these with family employment through large kinship networks, which are embedded in a surrounding occupational community, isolated from major metropolitan industrial centres, and produce a collaborative style of trade-unionism. (1998, pp. 176-177)

These forms of paternalism, according to Ackers (1998, p. 177), eroded throughout the twentieth century as society and industry modernised and 'as public limited companies and professional managers replaces the founding family. Moreover, such change often took a sudden and traumatic, and therefore decisive form . . . exposing the economic fist of business profit within the social glove.' However, Fleming (2005, p. 1471) drawing on a range of recent scholarship in the area, argues that while paternalistic management is 'best periodized as a bygone practice that has been superseded by Human Resource Management or Business Process Re-engineering . . . significant remnants of paternalism can be found in contemporary organizations.' Bradley (1990), too, argues that while industrial paternalism is 'always

diagnosed by historians and sociologists as doomed and dying', paternalism 'has obstinately refused to die' (1990, p. 178).

In any case, paternalism certainly offers a useful lens through which to view management practices at Dover Mill in the 'heyday' (especially to the 1980s) foregrounded by former workers and, crucially, to understand how the workplace was able to be comprehensively restructured, and ultimately closed, with the near-total cooperation of the workforce. If one was to visit Buckland Mill in, say, 1970, I would suggest some degree of most of the features outlined by Ackers could be observed – not least 'family employment through large kinship networks . . . embedded in a surrounding occupational community'. We have seen the importance of social and recreational provisions and sense of job security in the accounts of workers, along with relatively informal relations between management and workers that blurred hierarchical distinctions. Of particular resonance, though, is both the family networks and symbolism emphasised in writing on industrial paternalism. For Bradley (1990, p. 188), 'a unifying strand in all variants [of paternalism] is the persistent use of a family framework for making sense of industrial life. This use of family symbolism, the appeal to family links and loyalties, I take to be the defining feature of paternalism in industry'. The framing of the mill as a family seemed to emerge somewhat organically through generations of family employment, rather than through any explicit attempts to cultivate this symbolism (through company literature, for example). But it served management well. The metaphor of family was used with enough ambiguity to include within it every person in the factory – even the very institution itself – so that even your boss could be considered family. What explains this? Bradley (1990) writes that, in an East Midlands hosiery community once riven by conflict, social harmony was achieved in part by

> emphasising family identities and family loyalties in opposition to class identities and loyalties; thus, employers committed to preserving the family firm and workers committed to ensuring family survival can indeed be seen to share common interests, in this respect over-riding class differentials and antagonisms. (Bradley 1990, p. 189)

Bradley argues that historians of class and labour relations have not sufficiently recognised the effectiveness of the family metaphor in promoting industrial harmony and class pacification. Indeed, its emphasis appears to go some way to explaining the lack of antagonisms I had expected to find. In the absence of strong class identities, there was a clear sense that everyone

in the paper mill, and the owners elsewhere, were united by a set of common values and interests.

Finally, how might we understand the relationship between occupational community and class in the context of a paternalistic workplace? MacKenzie et al. (2006) note that 'the development of strong occupational solidarities could inhibit the emergence of class solidarity if the 'us' in the 'them and us' divide is defined by the occupational group and not in broader class terms' (2006, p. 842). Their study of redundant steelworkers in Wales provides a useful point of comparison. Their participants demonstrated a sense of identity based on both occupational community and class, drawing a distinction between themselves as workers ('us') and management as representatives of the employer ('them'): 'despite a recognized material interest in the well-being of the organization, this did not extend to a unitarist view of the employment relationship. The traditional view of a clear contradistinction between management and worker prevailed' (ibid). In contrast, workers in my study drew no such distinction between themselves and management. There was, of course, an awareness of different roles and levels of seniority within the workplace; but, ultimately, people regardless of position were seen to share a set of common interests and worked toward the same broad goals. Occupational community, in this case, served to blur the distinctions not only between work and leisure but between workers, management and the firm. In this context, class distinctions were downplayed in favour of a more harmonious family environment. A strength of paternalism as an analytical tool, Acker (1998, p. 178, 187) argues, is its capacity to go beyond purely economistic accounts of working-class attitudes and behaviour arising from the labour process by 'drawing on the wider circles of community, family, religion and politics.' Engaging with the role of paternalistic management practices not only helps us understand how management contributed, directly and indirectly, to a workplace that permeated the out-of-work lives of workers, but complicates the dynamic between workers, managers and the company, going some way to explaining both harmonious workplace relations and the positive terms in which workers continue to speak of their former employer.

While it was not clear how gender functioned in the mill's occupational community, gendered involvement in and orientations to the job itself were built into expectations. Women were generally employment on a more temporary base, often either leaving permanently after having children or returning when they were of school age, sometimes on a flexible basis. Some became social reproducers while male partners worked; women confined to the Salle while men had opportunities to change jobs and move around factory.

Finally, it is important to recognise that not all of this can be seen as a cynical attempt to create a docile and productive workforce. The benefits and conditions enjoyed by Dover Mill workers should be placed in the context of a post-war political-economic consensus in Britain and across much of the West that sought to strike a balance between the needs of labour and capital. This included relatively high pay, generous pensions, employee protections, training and social provisions for workers maintained by a strong labour movement and governments that took their needs seriously and maintained a consensus around the need for a robust welfare state. Workers had a relatively high degree of agency in this context, recognising the importance of their labour and their right to a fair share of the value they produced. That said, 'industrial paternalism' was a strategy used by employers in an attempt to ensure good industrial relations, to limit labour militancy, ensure high levels productivity, and to encourage workers to view themselves as sharing important common interests with their management and employer.

4.2 Working lives at the Home of Conqueror

> Now, when it closed, it was purely automated. When the wood pulp was put onto a conveyor belt, it would go up into a slusher. When it was put on that conveyor belt it was never touched again by hand until it came out the other end on pallets. (Bill Jacobs, machineman)

For all its insights, the literature on deindustrialisation could at times tell us more about a fundamental issue: work. On the one hand, if the overarching aim of the field today is to understand and document the complex *legacy* of industrial closures and wider decline and the ways the past informs the present, the relative lack of focus on the day-to-day working lives of (now former) industrial workers can be understood. Indeed, the circumstances around factory closure and its ongoing implications remain central concerns of this research. But a greater emphasis on remembered working lives could also reveal a great deal about not only the past but the present, too (see Strangleman 2018). The work people did and the skills they deployed, the conditions in which they did so, the degree of autonomy and job security, the significance of 'making' concrete things and using a broad range of senses, the work identities, meanings and attachments derived from this work – by telling us about their working lives, sometimes decades after they clocked out for the last time, they may also be revealing a great deal about work today, actual or perceived. Indeed, displaced workers are perhaps uniquely placed to improve our understanding of the value of a now lost or transformed form of employment. While there are many observable manifestations of deindustrialisation (unemployment, long-term economic problems, abandoned factories, and so on), in many cases, memories could be all that is left of these working lives. An approach informed by sociological ideas around memory and critical nostalgia is thus important here.

This chapter explores everyday working lives at the 'Home of Conqueror'. It seeks to understand the nature and meaning of mill work, led by the accounts of those who did this work almost two decades after closure. More specifically, it sets out to develop an understanding of what it meant to work at the mill in a range of manual roles and the kinds of identities fostered through this work. It does this by exploring the division of labour in the production of paper, the skills deployed by workers and how these were defined and valued, the technology and machinery involved and how this informed the experience of work over time, the significance of 'making' and handling a material product, the conditions in which people worked and the kinds of relationships that emerged between workers on the shop floor.

We will follow the paper's journey through the factory, from liquid 'stuff' to finished product, to gain an understanding of the various specialised tasks involved in the production process and the everyday working lives of the people who carried them out. After 'placing' the mill and developing a sense of the layout and conditions of the factory, we begin our journey by observing the work done in the machine houses, especially by those in the prestigious roles of beaterman and machineman. Once the rags have been sorted, pulp washed and beaten and wet sheets of paper formed and dried on the paper machine, the paper is reeled and transported to the finishing department. Here, it is cut to a size manageable for sorters in the Salle to lift and inspect before being counted and sent to the guillotinemen to be cut to a size ready for storage or shipment. 'Making', 'sorting', and 'guillotining' are of particular interest here.

I argue that the nature and meaning of mill work was transformed throughout the late-twentieth century in the context of technological change. Historically important roles were effectively automated out of the production process through the span of a single working life, while once coveted jobs were reduced from hands-on, skilled roles to ones consisting largely of pushing buttons. I further argue that everyday working lives at Buckland Mill were thoroughly shaped by gender, with clear evidence of a social definition of skill that served to maintain a rigid gendered division of labour. I suggest that a sense of skilled identity persisted among older workers involved in senior papermaking roles despite a diminishing role of craft skills over time, and that the role of the senses, once central to prestigious papermaking jobs, also diminished as the role of machinery increased. Further, while a variety of work identities and orientations existed at the mill, these were strongly shaped by gender as well as role and seniority, as was what was foregrounded about the job in worker accounts.

Lastly: a lot went into making paper – more than I imagined. There was a wide variety of manual tasks, though fewer over time as automatic and semi-automatic machinery came to dominate. This chapter explores some of the most salient job roles in both my interviews and the *Watermark* documentary: making, sorting, and guillotining. These roles are worth engaging with for two main reasons: clearly, they are key to understanding the overall production process; and, crucially, the accounts of those who did them provide a window into some of the major quantitative and qualitative changes that took place at the mill in the final third of the twentieth century. There were, of course, many other manual jobs involved in the manufacture of paper. These included the dryerman, reelers, cutters, fitters, packers, warehouse workers, and the memorably named 'dandy man' and 'supercalendarman.' They all fulfilled crucial roles in the overall process of production, storage, and distribution, and I give an overview of these roles where possible.

The Home of Conqueror

Figure 13(Dover Museum and Bronze Age Boat Gallery: Buckland Paper Mill archive 2022)

Figure 14 Dover Mill from the main road while operational

Buckland Paper Mill was part of the landscape of Dover for centuries. Located in the centre of Dover and running along Crabble Hill, the main road leading in and out of town, it could hardly be missed by anyone who spent time in the area. Not all passers-by would have known quite what was going on within the factory – the processes, skills, products, relations – but they would have seen the brick façade of the finishing department (more on that to come), a peak into the grounds through the gate, and the clocktower that locals once relied on[12].

Buckland Mill, as we saw in the introduction of this thesis, was sometimes referred to as 'Conqueror Mill' or 'The Home of Conqueror' because it was the birthplace of the famous paper in 1888. This was certainly emphasised in the company's literature. Conqueror is/was a high-grade business stationery paper and was undoubtedly the mill's flagship product

[12] Former manager Jim Lowe in *Watermark*, recounts instances of local people/businesses calling the mill complaining the clock was slow, fast, or had stopped working altogether.

throughout the 20th century. A brochure produced by eventual owners Arjo Wiggins in 1996, titled 'Buckland Mill: The Home of Conqueror', reads: The Conqueror range of business stationery is internationally recognised as a quality brand and a product companies large and small can depend on to project a professional corporate image. So, what set it apart? According to the brochure, it 'Contains only premium quality raw materials sourced from suppliers all over the world.' While it 'Originally contained cotton rags, it continues to contain 'pure cotton fibres to provide the crispiness, 'rattle' and surface texture that are among its most distinctive qualities.'

Figure 16 Aerial view of Buckland Paper Mill

Figure 15(Dover Museum and Bronze Age Boat Gallery: Buckland Paper Mill archive 2022)

Why is place important in the context of work? In sociology, place or space has largely been treated as a container for social life or a backdrop to concerns about social divisions and power relations. Economic geographer Kevin Ward, in his theorising of place in the context of work and employment argues that: 'Places are not given, rather they are socially constructed, the product of a host of human practices. It is the ways in which these practices overlap over time that lends these places their distinctiveness' (Ward 2007, p. 269). Places, then, are produced through social activity and specifically for our interest here, the socio-economic activities of work.

The mill's location is important in another sense. Specifically, its geology. A running debate in both the *Watermark* documentary and my interviews was around whether the Conqueror paper manufactured at Buckland Mill could only be made in Dover, or if, with the right inputs, it could be produced to a satisfactory standard elsewhere. The debate hinged on the quality of water in the region. The argument of some workers was that the local water used in the production process allowed Dover to make the bright white Conqueror papers customers demanded. Elsewhere, it would either be impossible to replicate or financially unviable to use the filters/additives needed to purify the dirty water. But, as we will see in the next chapter, not everyone subscribed to this argument. It is unclear whether this debate was live while the mill was open, but it gained significance when Buckland's order of Conqueror was relocated to Stoneywood mill in Scotland when it closed in 2000, and we will explore the potential meanings behind the narrative in the following chapter.

Throughout this chapter, I want to give a sense of the inside of the factory – the space, atmosphere, and conditions. On one hand, this presents a challenge; I never saw or set foot inside the mill while it was in operation (I was, after all, a seven-year-old living in Essex when it closed). The reader is, presumably, less familiar with the factory still. I have developed a sense of place based on a combination of worker testimonies, video footage, archival photographs, and my own visits to (the remnants of) Buckland Paper Mill. However, I have seen and photographed the mill's remnants from various vantage points: along the main road, the public footpath that runs between the rear of the mill and the church/graveyard, and inside the mill grounds, where overgrown weeds swayed in the sun where machine houses used to stand.

As an engineer of 35 years, Charlie Fletcher got to see all corners of the mill. I will let Charlie's description of the physical conditions and safety of the mill in his earlier days take us into the mill:

> There were bits of it that were very, very wet. There were bits that were very dry. If you were in the dry end of the paper machine, it was very hot; if you're at the back of the machine it's very hot, dusty. The wet end, obviously, is wet and cold, damp. And I suppose, those days, it's pretty lethal really if you think about it. Holes in the floor and drain gullies, and very little guarding and that kind of thing. The safety aspect in the early days was – it wasn't non-existent. People were aware of it. But the standard at the time wasn't very high. If you put your finger in something it was your own bloody fault, basically. Don't do it. But obviously that's not good enough.

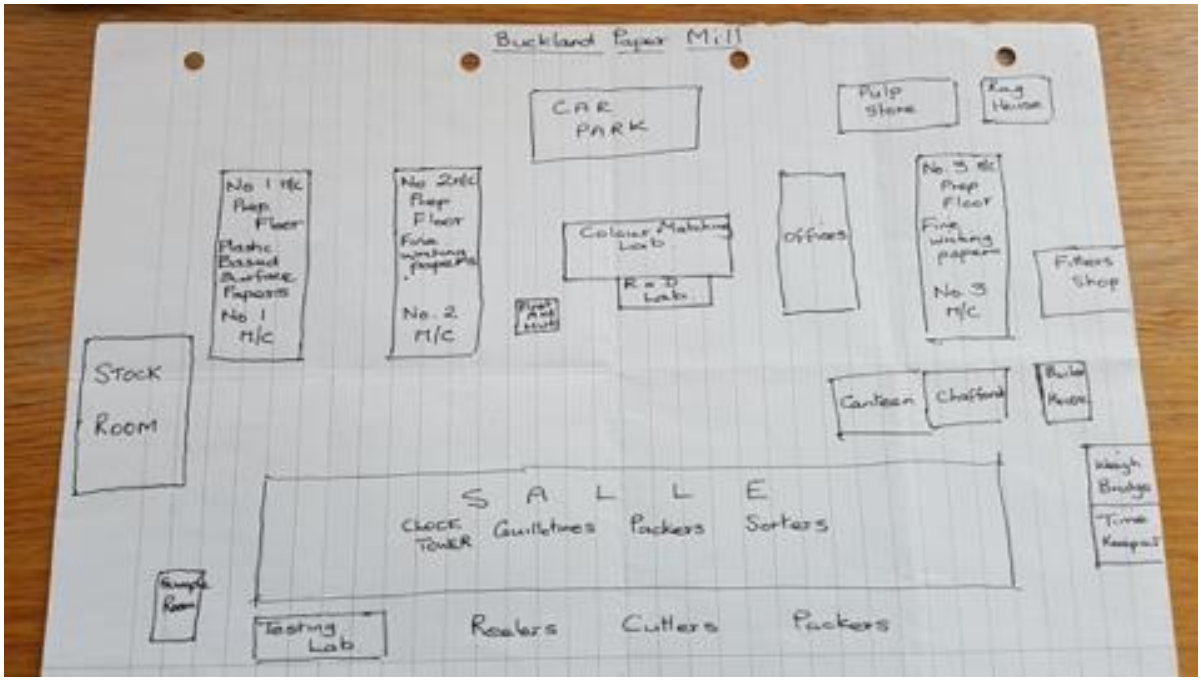

Figure 17 Sketch by Bill Jacobs, made to help me understand the layout of the factory

Making Conqueror

The most interesting and illuminating areas of the factory for the purposes of this chapter are the three machine houses where paper was manufactured and the Salle where paper was then sorted and guillotined to size. I will focus on the division of labour within these areas of the factory, the tasks involved in making and finishing paper and the conditions in which these tasks were carried out. What skills did the job require? How physical was this work? How much control was permitted over one's labour and movement in the factory? How did people interact with co-workers on the job? Throughout, I will pay attention to what is emphasised as important by workers and the kinds of identity and meaning derived from this work.

Buckland Mill's three machine houses were long, rectangular buildings in the heart of the mill where the paper was made. The raw materials would enter the machine houses and come out as paper wrapped around large 'jumbo reels'. The buildings housed large papermaking machines that stretched from one end – the 'wet end' – to the other – the 'dry end'. These machines were operated by a small team of men that included machinemen,

dryermen and assistants. Before engaging with the work involved in making the paper, though, we will first explore one step earlier in the process: how the pulp was prepared.

Washing and beating: 'he was a God on the stage'

I was fortunate enough to speak to people who worked at the mill at various points between the end of the Second World War and 2000. This gave me a sense of some of the major qualitative and quantitative changes that took place across this period from the perspective of those working on the shop floor. One interesting example was the replacement of the 'washers' and 'beaters' who had previous been responsible for ensuring the 'stuff' was sufficiently clean, coloured and broken down before being released onto the machine.[13] Despite never having done these jobs themselves, male papermakers told me about the once-important roles of 'washerman' and 'beaterman'. Former machineman Ted Aldridge recalled:

> You had the washerman, which was on one level. Which was the washers – big vats. And then down below that was the beaters. And once the pulp was ready it would drop down into the beaters and it would all be mixed up. And then the beaterman, the one in charge, would test it, like, and say, 'yeah, it's OK.' And he would pump it down then into the machine. And then the machine would take it . . . Oh, it comes with experience, yeah. Yeah, you don't get that overnight. It's years of experience.

Bill Jacobs explained that the beaterman was a prestigious job in papermaking and one of only two 'class one workers':

> to process the fibre, it was a skill on its own. You know, a beaterman could go along and feel it and say, 'oh no, not yet, that needs about half an hour,' or what have ya. Cos the treatment of the fibres. Because, in the early days, you only had a small refiner. So, err, he would know when it was ready to drop into the machine chest so they can make the paper. So he was skilled. He was very skilled to a point that he was a god on the stage. What he said went.

I found it interesting that workers chose to draw my attention to the work of washermen and beatermen given that they themselves had never performed either role. Clearly they had been

[13] 'Stuff' is how workers generally referred to the composition of materials at the start of the production process. Terms such as 'pulp', 'stock', and 'raw materials' were also used to describe the mixture of materials that at various points in the mill's history would include cotton rag, wood pulp, dyes, and other chemicals.

an important part of the production process in their early years at Buckland Mill, and they would have worked alongside people who did have first-hand experience of washers and beaters, but the role had been automated out of existence decades before the mill's closure. I would suggest there were two main reasons for wanting to discuss this work. First, the job of beaterman in particular was historically seen as one of the most senior, prestigious and skilful jobs in papermaking. Second and most interestingly, it was a very 'touchy-feely', messy job that involved an intimate physical and sensory connection to the pulp. It seemed to symbolise what papermaking should be but no longer was.

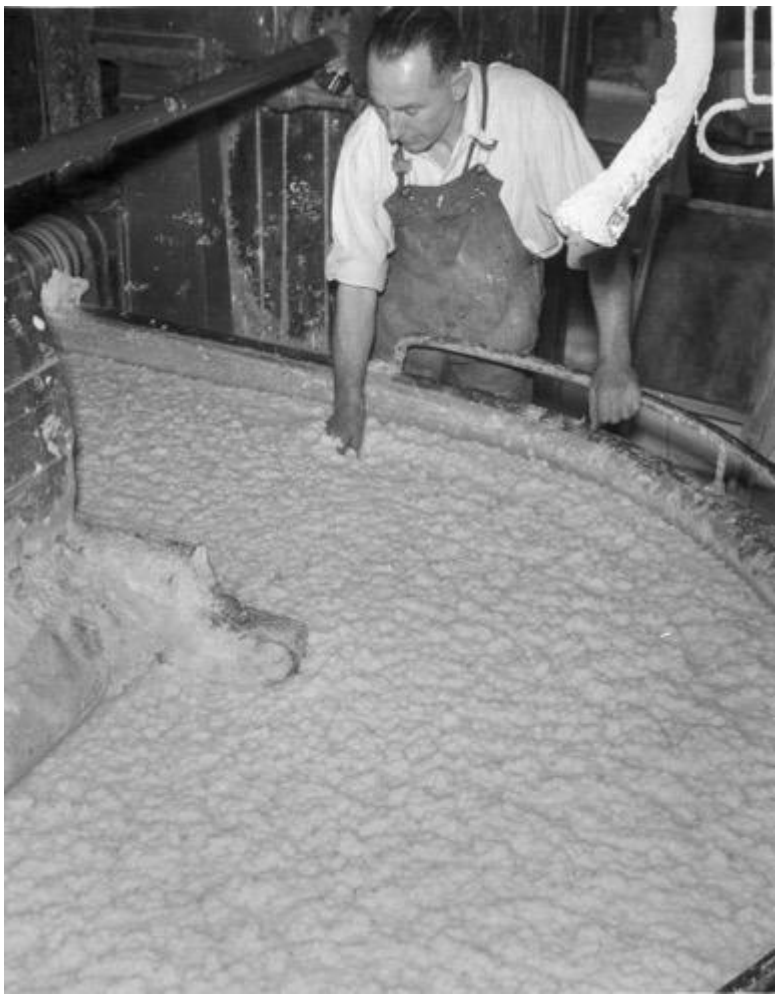

Figure 19(Dover Museum and Bronze Age Boat Gallery: Buckland Paper Mill archive 2022)

A change in the raw materials used to make paper and the development of new machinery led to the work of washermen and beatermen becoming redundant. There was no need to wash cotton rags once rag was replaced with hard and soft woods, and the 'stuff' that was once beaten manually could now be 'refined', 'pulped' or 'slushed' mechanically. This increased efficiency while reducing the number of workers required. As Bill explained:

> You had four men up there: a washerman and his mate, beaterman and his mate. You also had a – oh, what's it called? It's like a big mincer where it used to do the broke, there was him there, then there used to be a guy used to make the chemicals up[14]. Then they started doing away – when they started doing away with rags, you didn't have washers. So, in other words, the pulp used to go straight into the beaters, so you would get rid of a man there. So eventually, when they got rid of the beater floors, you only had a slusher, so you got rid of four men there and just had one man. Now like I said, I used to do pulp - you know, work the slusher, put the chemicals in, so one man used to do what four men used to do.

The replacement of cotton rag with wood pulp also meant the end of another longstanding job at Dover Mill. Rag sorting had once been a crucial task in the preparation of raw materials for making Conqueror. A team of women at Crabble Mill, a converted flour mill, would receive cotton clothing, remove unnecessary items like buttons and send suitable rag down to Buckland to be washed, beaten and sent through the machine. As far as I am aware, the job of rag sorter had not existed since the 1950s or 1960s and I didn't meet anyone who had any firsthand experience of the role, but it was historically important to papermaking and especially in mills that made higher-grade papers that required high rag content.

[14] 'Broke' is paper that has been recycled from a previous batch of production due to defects

Figure 21(Dover Museum and Bronze Age Boat Gallery: Buckland Paper Mill archive 2022)

Perhaps the most interesting 'unofficial' history of the mill I discovered was given to me by Susan and John Pettifer in one of the last interviews I conducted. This document, titled 'DOVER MILL – THEN AND NOW', is another historical account of the mill that is unattributed and undated, but this one differs to others in its focus. I find it the most interesting because it foregrounds people, notably the workers who have disappeared or had their working lives transformed by changes in technology. It is also certainly the most poetic of the written histories of the mill, as well as the most problematic in its depiction of rag and paper sorters. The changes it covers in its two-and-a-bit pages suggest it was written in the mid-1990s – after the merger between Wiggins Teape and Arjomari but before any announcement of closure. I will refer to sections throughout this chapter. On rag sorting, the unknown author, who starts their story in 1949, writes:

> In the Rag House, twenty women are removing buttons, elastic and other objects from clothing supplied by rag merchants. On another floor, Betty and Sheila, pale ghosts in tightly-buttoned overalls, are feeding filthy rags into a revolving wire cage from which rises a thick cloud of grey dust. It is rumoured that the girls removed their underclothes before starting work, replacing them only after a long hot shower!

Later, in the context of a 'transformation' of the mill, they write:

> When man-made fibres replaced cotton, linen and silk, "rags" were no longer acceptable, so the former Rag House has become a store. Gone are the days of moving bales of pulp and sack barrows, forking out trucks of boiled rags and feeding pulp sheet by sheet into the beaters – and the backaches! Now, bleached cotton linters and eucalyptus pulp, go by conveyor to a new preparation plant. Two large pulpers, a bank of refiners and compact cleaning plant have replaced all the old cumbersome equipment.

We can see the fate of the washerman, beaterman and rag sorters as early examples of the type of change that would continue in fits and starts throughout the second half of the twentieth century.

Machinemen: 'actually making the paper'

When the stuff is refined by the slusher, it is released from the 'head box' and fed onto the 'wire' where the machineman takes charge. The machineman was considered the most senior manual worker in the mill. Along with his assistant, he oversaw the production of paper at both ends of the paper machine – the 'wet' and 'dry' end (processes involved in the wet and dry ends are depicted in the diagram below). The machineman required comprehensive knowledge of the papermaking machine in order to resolve any of the multitude of problems that could arise. This included needing to know how to dismantle and reassemble the machine.

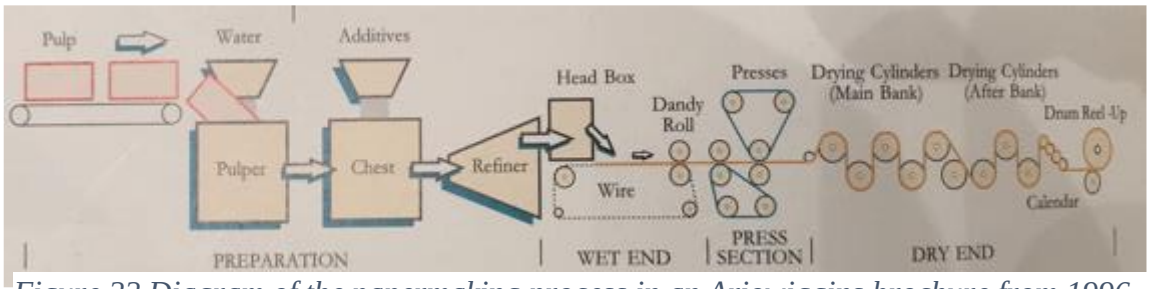

Figure 22 Diagram of the papermaking process in an Arjowiggins brochure from 1996

Bill Jacobs, a long-time machineman, was keen to stress the importance, status and seniority of the machineman. Asked to name his main job at the mill, he stated with confidence, 'running number three paper-making machine. That was the pinnacle. Cos I was God.' Bill reaffirmed the point in response to my involuntary laugh: 'No, machineman were Gods. There was only two class-one workers. That was the machinemen and the beatermen.' He later elaborated on why he believed the role warranted such respect:

> it's just that the machineman, he was in charge. You know, you didn't challenge the machineman. Or if you did, you'd have to know what you were bloody doing, simple as that. See, it's not just making paper. You had to be able to strip the machine down, take it apart, to put a new wire on or a felt. So you would actually have to instruct people – of course, you was health and safety officers as well. You had to train them to be – how to be – if they could change a wire, used to take all the stuff what was inside, you'd cut the wire off, take it all out and wash it, then rebuild the machine again, so that was – you had to do that as well.

Bill told me proudly that he could observe the fibre running across the wire and identify any problems 'just by looking at it' (see below for an example of this on machine house one). What struck me was the amount of control those in this role had over their work. Machinemen like Bill would have licence to adjust the process as they saw fit with seemingly little supervision. What also stood out to me, particularly after looking through archived photographs, was the space in which these workers operated in the machine houses. Machinemen were among only a small group of men in these long buildings, dominated by large machinery, and would move around freely checking the various stages of the papermaking process.

Figure 23(Dover Museum and Bronze Age Boat Gallery: Buckland Paper Mill archive 2022)

Figure 24 Machineman J Taylor inspects the paper on the wire on number one machine

Bill was very happy to help with my project and I spent a lot of time talking to him across a handful of meetings. He was always keen to move our conversations onto the technical side of papermaking. He would often use terms and describe processes I had never heard of before pausing to say something like, 'I've lost you again, haven't I?' Clearly, it was not easy to communicate the intricacies of papermaking to a layperson over a cup of tea. But I also suspected he quite enjoyed confusing me; this was an opportunity to demonstrate that he knew things I (and basically everyone else) did not. After all, it is not everyday someone comes to your house and takes an interest in something you spent your entire working life doing, especially decades after you stopped doing it. 'I've got books [on papermaking] there, you know. I could talk to you for hours, honestly, but I just want to give you what you require,' he told me. It was clear that Bill still identified strongly with papermaking and remained knowledgeable in the production process – not just the jobs he did, but in other stages of papermaking he would read about in books. That he maintained this interest some 30 years

after leaving the mill spoke to the sense of identity and meaning Bill derived from his work. And, if opportunities to discuss – indeed, be interviewed about – what he did at the mill were few and far between, there was no sense that it was not a topic worthy of interest. It was apparently taken for granted by Bill and the other (male) mill workers that I would be interested in Dover Mill.

One debate that emerged in workers' accounts of mill work was the extent to which papermaking was a highly complex process, inscrutable to most, or a technical process that basically involved taking the right steps. Some emphasised that it was a complex, technical process that could only be done well by few skilled experts, while others maintained that it was actually a scientific practice that just required inputting the right ingredients. Steve Jones recounted a fascinating story about an older, more 'traditional' machineman he had encountered. In contrast to Bill, Steve did not want to portray papermaking as an inscrutable practice only accessible to a select few:

> Papermaking – some people will try and convince you it's a black art. But it's the same as anything in this world. If something's going wrong, there's something causing it to go wrong. And all you have to do is find out what the cause is. Sounds simple but not always. But sometimes it is. If you just think – everyone had their own idea of how to make paper. The same paper. 'No you don't do it like that, you do it like this.' So sometimes all you needed to do was say 'ok, look – shut, go back to basics, as it should be, and start again.' And the times that you'd do that and it just runs, it's fine. It's because everyone's having a tweak and this and that.

Asked if they were tweaking with it needlessly, and whether it would have been the older guys that would have been more likely to do that, Steve said

> Yes. It's because they used to think, 'well, this is how you do it.' Because that's the way they have been taught how to do it . . . Even before I was shift manager, and I was working in the finishing end as an operator – cos we used to talk to the machinemen. Cos we were finishing their work for them. And if you had a problem, you'd know if it was a papermaking problem or your problem. So you'd go up and say 'look, this or that and something else is happening.' 'Oh it's that bloody Mike again!' Cos yeah, this particular guy used to have a book. And every setting for every type of paper, he had in there, that he thought was right. So you could tell when he'd come in, changed shift. If you had the reel of paper. As soon you got to where he'd come in, he'd go up, change it all, and it'd be totally different. Cos you'd suddenly go from running, no problems at all, to just – goes off the scale, you just can't do anything with it.

Steve's experience provides an insight into the relationship between changing technology and qualitative changes in the experience of papermaking at Dover Mill. While older workers would pass on their knowledge and skills to those less experienced, they could also resist changes in the nature of their work. Did they see these changes as undermining the knowledge and skills they had developed over many years? Were they simply continuing to make paper the way it 'should' be done? Trevor Chambers gave his perspective on how the job of machineman changed during his time at the mill and how the meaning of the job changed as a result. Trevor was of a subsequent generation to the machineman in Steve's story; presumably the latter would have seen this later version of papermaking as too pre-determined and involving too little judgment. Trevor describes his time as machineman on number two machine as 'probably one of the most technically satisfying jobs' he did, because

> you're actually making the paper yourself, you're in charge of making the paper. You set the machine up to make the paper. And there was some really nice sheets of paper, and I was really proud of that. And course, not long after I came off and went as foreman, they started computerising everything. And so you basically had a computer setting for certain types of paper and the computer just automatically set it all up for ya. Which I thought took a lot of the skill away. You've still got a decent sheet of paper but the skill wasn't there. It made it easier for anybody to do the job.

This passage reveals a great deal – about skill, 'making', and the identity and meaning derived from this work. It is indicative of a general sense that papermaking had become too formulaic, too computerised, too easy. In *The Craftsman*, Sennett (2008, p. 8) poses the question: what does the process of making concrete things reveal to us about ourselves? Mill workers – especially machinemen – appeared to find a great deal of meaning from their visible contribution to the making of paper. Indeed, this was not just paper; it was Conqueror, an internationally recognised, high-quality product. Minor changes made at the 'wet end' of the machine resulted in tangible differences in the paper that was eventually dried and reeled. It is in the things we can *change*, Sennett argues, that we become particularly interested and invest thought (2008, p. 120). Whether in the earlier days of Steve Jones' machineman or those of Trevor Chambers, the capacity to act on and change the nature of paper was gradually diminishing through the course of their working lives.

To stress this point, I want to draw on Tim Ingold's notion of a 'regression of the hand'. Bill Jacobs opened this chapter by telling us how by the time the mill closed in 2000 paper was not touched by hand throughout the entire production process due to increased automation. So,

what did papermaking jobs now entail? That the job had just become 'pushing buttons' was a recurring theme in both my interviews and *Watermark*. Bill Osborne's wife told viewers that 'at the end, everyone would call Bill Crocodile Dundee because the job became more lax'. 'I mean, you just had to push a button', Bill responds. 'Everything was push buttons then, you know. The size plant – you push a button and it used to mix it up. When it was ready, when you go over, the pulper's over, you push a button.' In *Making*, Ingold discusses this process in terms of a regression of the hand, a regression which has deeply human (dehumanising or post-human?) implications. Drawing on archaeologist André Leroi-Gourhan, Ingold (2013, p. 123) suggests that the machine changes what it means to be human:

> Having spelled out the technological progression leading from manipulation with bare hands, through the hand's directly (as with a handheld instrument) or indirectly (by way of a pulley or crank) working a tool, to its initiating a motor process (driven by water, wind or animal power) and eventually to its merely pushing a button to set off a preprogrammed process (as in the automatic machine), Leroi-Gourhan concludes that by the end of it, something is indeed lost as well as gained.

In short, Ingold argues, 'the button-pushing finger that operates the automatic machine is part of a hand that, although still anatomically human, has lost something of its humanity. Herein lies the problem of regression of the hand. Technicity has become 'demanualized'' (ibid). The emphasis on pushing buttons and the sense, stated by Trevor, that 'anybody could do it' represented a real loss in the meaning that could be derived from making paper. There is also a sense in which making a tangible contribution to the papermaking process increased quality, or perhaps character, of the paper. Questions of quality emerged repeatedly in my research. Mike Grigsby, an engineer, provides something of a counterweight to the narrative provided by those producing the paper here:

> It was a touchy-feely job in the old days when people [would] look at the stuff and feel it and smell it and things. But in fact, that was tripe, really, because it's a mechanical process. You bash it up with a machine, you make it wet, you flatten it out and you call it paper. So, you know, what they say about the good old days – it was probably good old days. But what they were making wasn't very good. And if you actually look at some of the old pictures of the old piles of paper in the stock rooms you could see how bad it was, in fact. But the old guys would never admit it. (Mike Grigsby, mill engineer, in *Watermark*)

Drying and reeling the paper

Before entering the finishing department, I will briefly explain what happens to the paper once it reaches the dry end of the papermaking machine. While I didn't meet any dryermen, Wiggins Teape and Arjowiggins literature and some descriptions from workers in other roles have given me some understanding of what this process entailed. In the 1996 'Buckland Mill: The Home of Conqueror' promotional booklet, it explains that in the wet end water is drained out of a very wet sheet of paper before being watermarked by a hollow, wire mesh rotating cylinder called a 'dandy roll'. It is then pressed by two giant 'mangles' that reduce the paper's water content to around 50%. Finally, the dry end uses a series of steam-heated cylinders to dry the paper down to its final moisture content before being wound onto a 'jumbo' reel ready for conversion into sheets or reels. I will let Warren Baker, who worked in many roles over decades at the mill, give a very useful overview of paper's journey from pulp to guillotine:

> from the paper machine, it comes in wet and it goes through a series of dryers to take most of the moisture out of it. And it's coated with a size mix on either side to stop the ink from feathering out, from spreading out. It's then dried again to a certain moisture content. And then it's reeled up on huge jumbo reels that weigh three and a half tons or something like that. Some of the other, bigger mills, they're a lot more than that. Those reels are then cut down on cutters to make sheets of paper, you're probably aware of that. And then those sheets are stacked on the end of the cutter and they're counted. And there's tabs put into it, so that every 250 sheets there's a tab put into it. That used to be done by hand, by ladies, at one time. And then it would go to be cut down.

Warren was among those who left when the mill closed in 2000, which could be why this version of the papermaking process involves very little human contact with the paper (though he acknowledges where some more hands-on work was once done). No stage of this process was immune from technological change that invariably led to fewer workers and more button-pushing. The unattributed history of the mill from the 1990s laments the automation and computerisation of work in the machine houses:

> In the machine house, speeds and settings are largely automatically controlled, and the operation of the new style dandy roll ensure accurate watermark registration. Size vats have been replaced by presses and the drying cylinders enclosed. The crew no longer get their hands or clothing dirty, but sit in cool, clean control rooms receiving information and instructions from a VDU and making adjustments by pushing buttons.

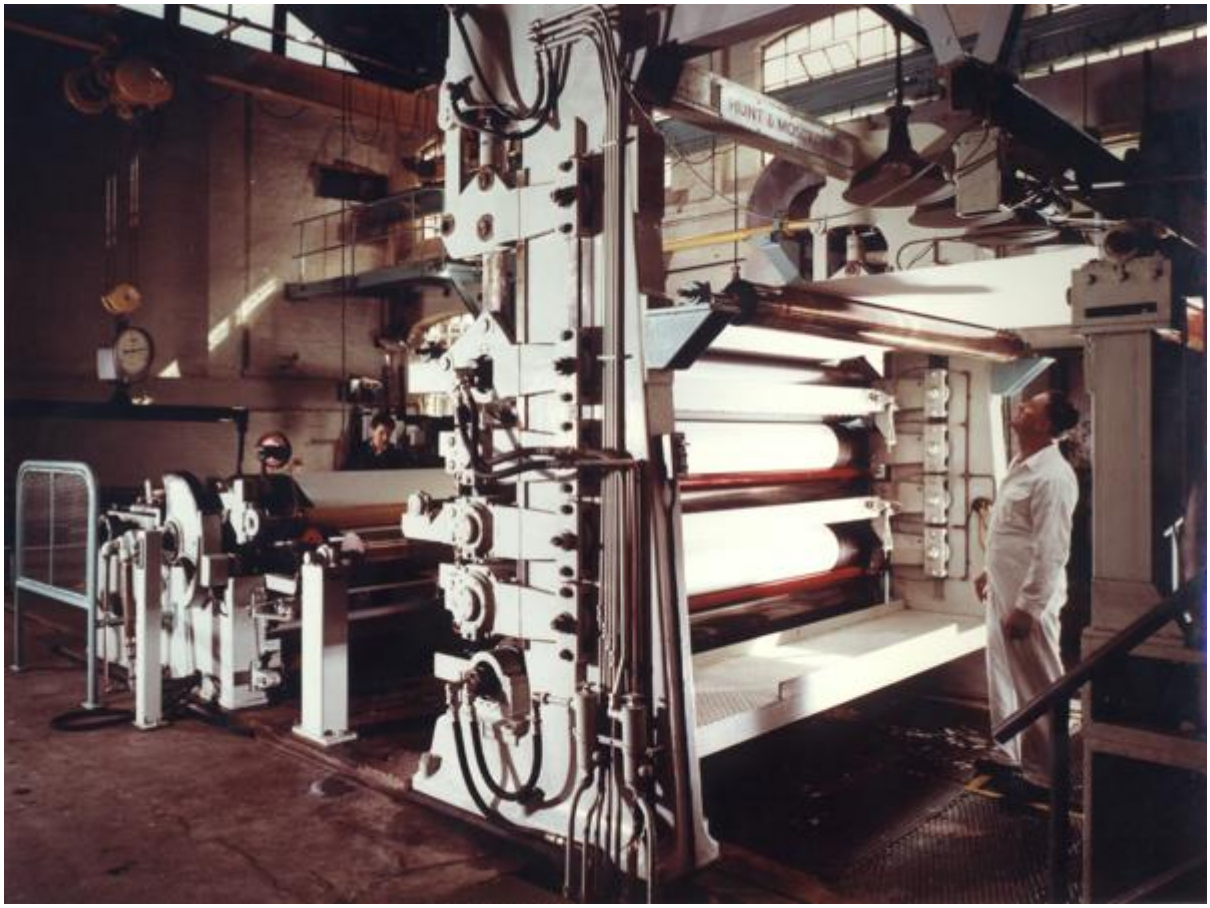

Figure 25(Dover Museum and Bronze Age Boat Gallery: Buckland Paper Mill archive 2022)

Figure 26 Worker inspecting the paper at the dry end

Figure 27(Dover Museum and Bronze Age Boat Gallery: Buckland Paper Mill archive 2022)

Figure 28 The dry end, 2000

Finishing Conqueror

The finishing department is where Conqueror was received on huge reels and turned into a product ready to be sold. This happened through several processes. First, the paper had to be cut into sheets that could be lifted and inspected by hand. Next, these sheets would be examined and approved (or rejected) as a form of quality control. Stacks of sorted paper were then counted and sent to the guillotines where the paper was cut to its final size specification before wrapping, storage and shipment. We focus here on the work of sorters before moving onto the guillotinemen.

Sorting Conqueror: 'it just come natural in the end'

We have seen that paper mills in Kent historically employed a higher proportion of women on average than those in other papermaking regions across Britain. There are several reasons for this, but a central factor is the type and quality of paper being produced. While Lancashire, for example, had a large output of common papers, printings and wallpaper, a high proportion of the production in Kent in the mid-nineteenth century consisted of better-class papers that necessitated a more elaborate process of 'finishing' to ensure the product was of appropriate quality and specification (Shorter 1971, p. 136). Women were often employed to fulfil a key role in the finishing of high-grade papers, a form of quality control called 'sorting'.

Buckland was one of Kent's mills that specialised in high-quality papers, certainly following Conqueror's success after 1888, and therefore employed a sizeable workforce of sorters in its finishing department. While changes in the raw materials used to make paper in the mid-twentieth century made obsolete the work of many women in Dover's rag mill, women continued to be employed in the 'Salle' sorting Conqueror. Sorters constituted a significant proportion of the overall manual workforce and by most estimates there were around 100-150 women working in the Salle in the 1960s.

Figure 29(Dover Museum and Bronze Age Boat Gallery: Buckland Paper Mill archive 2022)

Figure 30 Sorters in the Salle pose at their workstations, 1947

The name ‘Salle’ – meaning ‘room’ or ‘hall’ in French and pronounced like ‘sall’ by Dover Mill workers – was commonly used for the sorting room or ‘examining department’ in paper mills. Dover’s Salle was located on the top floor of the long, two-story building facing out onto the main road, either side of the Buckland clocktower. The façade (displayed above) remained largely unchanged when I visited in 2018.

As noted, women sorters carried out their work at a distance from the male papermakers. The only men they would regularly encounter on the shop floor were the guillotinemen and male finishing supervisors. The sorters’ section of the Salle was divided into three rooms – one for each of the mill’s papermaking machines. Workers were positioned side by side in a line that ran parallel to the main road. Their workstations were directly in front of large windows that let in the natural light that helped sorters spot defects in the paper. Charlotte Birch described the three ‘Salles’ where the paper was sorted and guillotined:

> There was three great big rooms, and we were all lined up one side and the other side on our benches. And that went into the other one as well. And then the next one is the guillotine and you took all our paper and you cut it into the right sizes that people wanted.

Figure 31(Dover Museum and Bronze Age Boat Gallery: Buckland Paper Mill archive 2022)

Figure 32 Sorters at work in the 1950s/1960s

Before engaging with the work done in the Salle, it is worth focussing on two findings I think give an indication of the identities, meanings and attachments derived from this work. The first relates to my experience recruiting former mill workers to participate in this research. I quickly discovered that women were much more reluctant to speak about their time at the mill than their male counterparts. While men were by and large keen or at least willing to sit down and be interviewed about their working lives, it was consistently a struggle to get women to agree to participate in the research. There could be any number of reasons for this and were probably a combination of factors. The first that came to mind, though, was the gender dynamic. Were they uncomfortable with the idea because I am a man about whom they knew very little? Was the potential disapproval of spouses a factor? It is also important to note that for various reasons the women I contacted generally spent less time at the mill than the men in this study. However, there were also clear indications from some that they had little of value to contribute to my research. In some cases, I sensed that they didn't feel as though their experiences of work were worth sharing – indeed, some outright asked me why I'd want to talk to them about their work.

With the help of one former sorter I had already interviewed, I managed to arrange a meeting with a group of sorters at the Morrison's café in Dover, along with a couple of men from the mill. This felt like a good compromise and I was very grateful for their time. However, it quickly became clear that I wouldn't be able to retain much of what we discussed. The former co-workers, of course, used the opportunity to catch up over a cuppa, as they sometimes did anyway. Eventually, I managed to commit a handful (three women and both men in attendance) to a recorded interview at a later date.

Sometimes the notion that sorters had little to contribute to my research was communicated subtly; other times it was quite explicit. One extraordinary example came in my interview with Sally Edwards. Sally worked at Dover Mill for 25 years in total after following her auntie into the Salle in 1956, and she struck me as someone with a huge amount of experience of and connection to the workplace. However, just 18 minutes into our interview Sally thought she had just about exhausted her knowledge of mill work: 'I don't know what else I can tell you about it, really.' That interview eventually ended after a very insightful one hour and 40 minutes!

The second finding of note relates to what was foregrounded by workers in their accounts of working life. That it was the people that made the job so enjoyable was a position held by workers regardless of job role. But it was noticeable that while men, especially those who 'made' paper, tended to focus more on the work itself (the labour and skills involved), the

overall process of paper manufacture (the stages, machinery, raw materials), and personal achievements (papers they had made, innovations they had been involved in introducing, even sporting achievements) the sorters I met regularly emphasised the collective rewards of the job – the 'happy', 'friendly' or 'wonderful' atmosphere of the Salle, the fun they had with their workmates, the social side of the job. I should be careful here; I do not want to make any generalisations, especially given the relatively few women interviewed in this study. But I came away from my interviews with a much better sense of the social environment of the Salle than the machine houses, and I would suggest the different emphases reflects the arrangement and density of the respective areas of the factory and degree of autonomy rather than 'gendered' narratives of work. The Salle was a place where talking to the person next to you, even if discouraged, was always an option, perhaps even a way to make the time go faster. Some sorters, like Barbara Little, enjoyed the gossip passed between workmates: 'there was always gossip going around. It was lovely, there was always something going on! Somebody was pregnant or somebody had fallen out with their boyfriend or something! Yeah haha! Oh it was quite interesting working up there.' Most recalled singing along to the radio, including Penny Smith: 'Every morning we had "Music while you work" broadcast over the speakers. We used to all join in singing along with the radio and when that wasn't on we used to sing all the latest pop songs.'[15]

> The girls would be singing along there. And we had somebody high up come in and the manager was coming, and of course everything had to be neat and tidy. And I was there singing, and I turned round and this guy's stood there, and I went red, and I says, "Oh, I am sorry." He said, "I like it when my workers are happy. I like it when my…" Yeah.

They also usually told me what they would get up to when 9:40am came around and their 20-minute break began. Charlotte Birch was just one who mentioned smoking in the toilets: 'if you were a smoker you joined the girls in the toilet !!! Others up to the canteen for a cup of tea.'[16] This was against the rules of the factory – paper mills have historically been vulnerable to devastating fires (as you might expect), and Buckland had its own history of serious fires – but it was regular source of fun and excitement. The toilets were also where some went to get ready for a night out. I met Penny Smith and Barbara Little in the café opposite Dover police station, and she told me a funny anecdote:

[15] This is from a written account of Penny's time at the mill handed to me during our interview
[16] From Charlotte Birch's written account, emailed to me following my request for an interview

> I blew the electrics one time. We were going out. We used to have rollers in our hair during [while we were working]. And then you'd go into the toilets before you went out . . . But one time, I think it was Gloria [that] said it to me, 'who's got a hair dryer?' Hair dryers were quite new things then. I said, 'oh, I've got one.' So I took it in. Course, the mill had its own electricity. So I plugged it in and I blew all the electrics! It shut all the Salle electricity down. Luckily it was the end of the day!

A common theme was sorters doing small things that broke the rules in what was a constraining work environment. As noted, in contrast to men in the machine houses, who were more scattered and relatively free to move around the workspace, women in the Salle would stand in the same spot all day, every day, next to the same two workers (or one worker if they were at an end!). They were more closely monitored, too, with a supervisor (or undersupervisor) walking around all day checking the standard of their work, inspecting every person's load for defects at 30-minute intervals. Their work was timed: sorters had to complete a ream (500 sheets) or other specified amount (maybe 144 or 250 sheets) within a certain time period that varied depending on the size and type of paper, or risk being sent back to Chafford for additional training, and were encouraged to work quickly to earn a bonus. As we will see, apart from sorting different types of paper, there was also a lack of variety in sorting paper; the job was very repetitive and was sometimes described as boring. In this context, I got the impression that these small acts of rebellion were a way of breaking up the working day, small distractions that served as a release from the monotony of the job. I am reminded of the women workers in Jackie Clarke's study of Molineux domestic appliance factory. For them, writes Clarke (2015, p. 112), 'to share a moment of conviviality in the workplace was thus to reclaim a degree of autonomy and to humanize an environment which otherwise allowed little interaction'. Talking, exchanging gossip, singing, sneaking into the toilet for a cigarette – all of this added joy to work that often lacked excitement or variation.

The physical labour involved in sorting paper was also an interesting topic of conversation. My interviewees were happy to explain what sorting paper entailed, though they would often mime the movements in front of them as they did so because it was difficult to put into words. This description was put in writing by Penny Smith:

> This involved standing all day with a piece of rubber hose pipe on the end of the middle finger pulling large sheets of paper of a deck, checking for any flaws, putting the flawed ones aside and pulling the perfect ones into a box. Once we had a nice pile we would then fan it to get air between the sheets, then jog the paper into perfect pules with corners straight. With the help of your partner we would

> then pick up a pile of the sheets and lay them on a pallet. The paper was very sharp and most of us had plasters on our fingers by the end of the day.

Incidentally, Penny ended that paragraph with, ‘We were all proud to be part of the finest paper making mill in the country.’ Once inspected and approved, sorters had to ‘fan’ the stack of paper, getting enough air into it to be able to adjust it all into a neat pile. ‘All the corners had to be dead right, like that [points to the stack of paper in a picture]. And if it weren’t dead right, they would come along and make you do it again’, Sally Edwards told me. Asked to describe the task of sorting, Barbara Little explains while gesturing with her arms out in front:

> The paper’s here on, on a like a box. And then it goes into a lower box and you used to have a rubber on your finger and you used to pull every sheet off and you used to have to check it for defects and you had to make sure that the watermark was so many inches to the top and the middle. You got used to knowing, you know, you didn't have to measure it and that. And um, and then you had a box at the back that we called a broken box for the defected paper. That went over the back into another box, you know? Yeah, it was, it was all wooden and, and, and you sort of stood there and it was a little bit harder than the bench.

Barbara goes on to explain what these defects in the paper would be:

> Oh, if I had like, um, um, well it would be the watermark wasn’t in the right place, [that was] one of the things, but sometimes the paper would have like a, as if it had got creased and it got a um, a line in it. Or, um, sometimes when they came off the reels they had um, spots on them, water spots where they hadn't dried properly, you know, and yeah, we didn't have an awful lot of um, what they called broken paper.

Figure 34(Dover Museum and Bronze Age Boat Gallery: Buckland Paper Mill archive 2022)

It struck me as an incredibly difficult skill, but it had clearly become second nature to those who had done it for years. Partly in response to the men who had marvelled at the prowess of sorters, I wanted to know whether women considered what they did to be technically difficult or impressive. Asked whether it was difficult to pick up the technique for sorting paper, Sally Edwards echoed others who said it was just something you developed over time but that certain types of paper were more challenging than others:

> I suspect it was [difficult]. You know, I couldn't tell you how long it took me. But it was something that you picked up. And it just come natural in the end. I mean, every day you was having to do about four or five of those loads of that big stuff. And then the smaller paper, oh, and umpteen loads we used to have to do . . . Map paper, they call it don't they. Wet strength . . . Admiralty chart was a thicker paper; that was heavy too.

There was one type of paper that multiple people told me was particularly difficult to manage:

> Then they used to do one called 'Air Conqueror'. You know, like you write on air mail paper to send away cos it's light? It's like, 'onion skin' they used to call it. Oh, that was the worst paper of all. It was the worst of all. You only had to touch it and it flew up in the air, didn't it. You know what I mean? It was horrible. And you had to jog that down, and it all stuck together. And I remember, one of the

> woman in the bench, she used to lose her rag with it. And in the end she used to swear and pick up the sheet and screw it up and throw it across the bench.

There were some curious contradictions between narratives of sorting paper and the way this work was evaluated. This was present in the accounts of women workers but was especially striking in the way men spoke about sorting. On the one hand, men marvelled at the technique of sorters (and counters, who were invariably women) in the Salle. They were amazed at the speed and seamlessness with which they would pick up each sheet of paper, inspect it, and place it in the appropriate box before swiftly moving onto the next. When it came to the value of this job in the broader context of the mill, however, there was a sense that sorting paper was secondary to other roles. The high-status roles were in the machine houses and involved *making* paper; sorting was impressive but ultimately a formality.

Another contradiction emerged in discussions around the gendered division of labour in the factory, especially regarding the physicality of various paper mill jobs. I wasn't surprised to encounter relatively conservative ideas around gender and work. What made these narratives stand out was the chasm between perspective and, by all accounts, reality. Aside from technical skill, women regularly raised the physical nature of the work, describing it as heavy and tiring, even sharing the short- (such as daily papercuts from the razor-sharp paper) and long-term (including back and stomach problems) injuries sustained by either themselves or their workmates through sorting paper. Male workers, in contrast, were less likely to describe their own work as particularly heavy or physical, and in fact admitted that the job increasingly became one of pushing buttons in a clean, comfortable environment. That is not to say these jobs were not physically demanding, especially when more work was done manually, but the physical nature of sorting and its effects on the body were emphasised repeatedly in my interviews. Lifting large loads of paper onto the work bench was particularly heavy work. On the heavy nature of the job, Sally Edwards told me: 'Oh yeah, when I think about it…But it was a job. It was hard, it was heavy, but you done it . . . It was all lifting, actually. I think a lot of people must have ended up with stomach trouble there, especially the women'. She went on:

> It was very heavy at times, yeah. It was that heavy that you used to pull your stomach to pieces. And I think I ended up having a hysterectomy cos of that. Quite a few women have had back troubles, shoulder troubles, and I think it's repetitive strain, you know, using your arm all the time, like that, shoulder trouble.

Arthritis in the fingers and neck were also attributed to years of sorting by Penny Smith and Dorothy Waters, respectively. While memories of the job being very heavy and tiring were universal, so too was the understanding that sorting was women's work, while papermaking – and indeed any manual role that wasn't sorting or counting – was for men. Some old tropes were used when I would ask people why they thought men and women had very different jobs in separate areas of the factory. Scott Fisher spent 35 years guillotining paper. He had seemingly never considered why there were no women papermakers or men sorters:

> Do you know what? I suppose it's historically, that's what it was. They used to employ young women who had keen eyes, nimble fingers, to sort paper, sheet by sheet, so they could spot a speck of dirt on a sheet of paper from a yard away, chuck it out, or for whatever defect there was. Blokes, I don't know if blokes have got the temperament or a technique to do it, especially older blokes.

This response was typical of both men and women. Sally, who told me of the injuries caused by the strenuous work she had done, responded: 'Oh, I just can't see a man sorting paper. No, I couldn't see a man sorting paper. It was more of woman's job. I should imagine your fingers had to be a little bit more, erm…men had the heavier jobs.' While not used to encountering these ideas around gender and work in my own life as a 20-something-year-old PhD student, I was not surprised to find that they were prevalent among former Buckland Mill workers. Firstly, because the division of labour was so clearly and permanently divided along gender lines. But also because of the historical and sociological literature around these issues.

Contradictions in the ways jobs were discussed, and how the gendered division in the mill was so strict over generations, can be better understood though an engagement with sociological conceptions of skill and job sex-typing. The ways skills are defined and ascribed has long been a concern within sociology and other social science disciplines, with a social construction approach constituting a particularly influential strand of thought. As noted by Hampson and Junor (2015, p. 454), a social construction approach has also been an especially strong theme in feminist writing on skill. Second wave feminist scholars were particularly critical of existing thought for treating skills as 'objective' and accepting the notion that what women did was unskilled. For example, Gaskell (1983) wrote that

> Most discussions proceed as if skill were an easily identified and quantified characteristic of a job, like pay and prospects for advancement. But skill is a socially constructed category and we need to inquire about how it is constructed. What counts as a "skill" and why? (p. 13)

One strand of the social construction approach views skill definitions as 'saturated with sexual bias', with 'little relation to the actual amount of training or ability required' (Phillips and Taylor 1980, p. 79). Skill, rather than an objective category, is a political label that gives some workers more economic power and status than others (Gaskell 1983). Feminist writers argued that ''objectively' skilled jobs performed by women were often denied skills recognition because of the job incumbent's gender, while 'male' jobs, typically in the manufacturing sector, were more likely to enjoy skills recognition in qualification and pay' (Hampson and Junor 2015, p. 450).

We can also recognise the ways ideas around gender helped maintain a strict division of labour over generations. Jobs, feminist writers have argued, are sex-typed, with supposed masculine and feminine attributes coming to be associated with particular jobs. There are countless gendered characteristics that could be drawn on to sex-type a job, but masculine examples could include strength, stamina and logic, while patience, sensitivity and supportiveness might be among feminine examples (Warhurst 2017, p. 72). Gendered attributes can also shift to justify a particular division of labour – for example, manual dexterity might be associated with either men (Sennett 2008, p. 23) or women (Roldan 1996, p. 80). These associations can be used as justification for why women cannot and should not do certain work (Warhurst 2017) – and can and should do others – and can be internalised by women themselves (see Greene et al. 2002).

The mill's strict gendered division of labour could not have been maintained without the clear sex-typing of papermaking jobs and social construction of skill. Women's work was skilled and physical, requiring significant dexterity, strength and stamina. As we will see in the following section, the task of sorting paper manually was all but removed from the production process following the introduction of automatic machinery that also made redundant the role of guillotineman. I was struck by how little this featured in the accounts of sorters at Dover Mill. This machine all but automated their role out of existence, and yet it was barely remarked upon. Part of the explanation, I contend, lies in the devaluation of sorting that rendered this work as less important to protect. However, the period during which these workers were at the mill, often leaving long before the machinery was introduced, was also an important factor. It is not that they were unaware of the development, though. There was also very little expression of solidarity or concern in the accounts of male workers when explaining the process by which this transformation of the finishing stage of the production process occurred. In any case, our unattributed history, problematically, takes us from sorting to the next stage in the papermaking process:

> the women "sorters" must play their part, standing at long wooden benches, each with a pile of paper in front of her. At first, it would appear that each woman is performing some weird oriental dance routine, but she is, in fact, examining each sheet of paper on both sides by passing it at high speed from one pile to another and turning it over at the same time! Fascinating to watch, especially if the woman has the right body contours.
>
> Bill Plater, the Finishing Manager, makes his tour of inspection and the women complain bitterly about the quality of the paper. As he passes the guillotinemen, Bill utters the immortal words, "if only the so-and-so machines could make it properly in the first place, we wouldn't have all this bloody work to do!"

Guillotining: 'papermaking is in the finishing'

Now that the paper has been inspected and approved by sorters, and counted into reams or another specified quantity, it is ready to be cut to size. This was done using large, semi-automatic guillotines operated by a shift of 'guillotinemen'. The guillotines were stationed in the upstairs Salle in a separate room to the sorters and generally used by men, though I was told women (perhaps sorters or counters) would sometimes guillotine paper. The guillotines are worth focussing on for a few reasons. First, of all the manual workers at the mill, it was the guillotinemen who were most characterised as 'other' in my interviews, as people with different interests and motivations. But the guillotinemen, along with the sorters, were on the sharp end of the mill's automation push in the 1980s and are indicative of wider workplace change from this period onwards. For this reason, they act as a bridge from this chapter to the final chapter on the long closure of Buckland Mill.

As mentioned above, Paul Chiswick worked in many roles in his 22 years at the mill and spent a lot of time in the finishing department, including guillotining, and his insights on the various stages of the production process were very informative. He tells me what he did as a guillotineman. After the stack had been counted,

> it went to the guillotine, the guillotine man would take the 500 sheets, or sometimes, some of them could take 1000 sheets, two reams. Huge amounts of paper that they could swing underneath the knife and square it up in the back, and it would cut it. Turn it round, cut it again, and turn it round, cut it again. Split it and then, you know, cut it down to size.

Scott Fisher worked in the finishing department from 1954 until he was made redundant in 1989 at age 51. He is one of only two guillotinemen I interviewed, but his account of working life and perspective on the mill stood out for several reasons that will become clear and so I draw on him extensively here. Scott had been put off working in the machine houses from a young age:

> I didn't know nothing about making paper. It's a nasty, messy, smelly business [both laugh]. Yeah, 'cos papermaking is the finishing, you know. That's what I was always taught . . . We was – I don't want to say proud, but yeah. And we used to earn more money 'an a papermaker, which always rubbed them up the wrong way.

As a 'guillotine operator', Scott held a class 1A job, one below the top grade and behind only a papermaker, I was told. But guillotine operators earned more, Scott told me, because while the whole mill was on a bonus system, workers in the finishing department could 'make your own bonus', as opposed to papermakers who were part of small team in the machine house and so 'had to go with the flow'. He was among the men who did describe his job as very physical:

> I had a reasonably good job at quite an early stage. I was in me twenties when I got it. And it was well paid, but it was hard work. Manual work, lifting paper, trimming it, lifting it back down, you know. And it was hard work. But well, I enjoyed it, you know. I did. And you could earn a good bonus doing it if you got your finger out and didn't sit about.

Figure 36(Dover Museum and Bronze Age Boat Gallery: Buckland Paper Mill archive 2022)

Figure 38(Dover Museum and Bronze Age Boat Gallery: Buckland Paper Mill archive 2022)

He could have sat about if he'd wanted to, though, because other than the eight hours a day supervised by a foreman, the rest of the day guillotinemen were left to work unsupervised, as was tradition in the finishing department. The foreman supervising production downstairs over the remaining 16 hours a day would be a papermaker who 'didn't know nothing about' what Scott was doing: 'upstairs was a different world to them. They didn't want to get involved in anything to do with finishing 'cos they didn't know what they were talking about.'

The job of guillotining stayed much the same through long periods of Scott's 35 years at Dover Mill. The paper would come through from the counting machines on sets of rollers of four each side. Whatever had been counted and sent to Scott, that's what he would guillotine. He would have a box of manufacturing cards. He'd find the order number, get a card, look at it, and that would tell him what had to happen to that particular order. Scott would be dealing with regular orders and so came to know what was required when he received a certain kind of paper. Like the machineman of an earlier era who kept his papermaking knowledge in a book, guillotinemen kept ledgers with handwritten notes:

> what we did there was quite repetitious because we made paper for loads of purpose but on a regular basis. So, you know, and I'd see a paper, I'd know what it was, but always checked the card. That was the Bible. Always check the card. And you just guillotined it as required and sent it down to the packing station. And he would

> have a card to say what's got to happen to it. So, it was reasonably well – well, it was well organised for what was happening. But very sticky in the mud, you know, and they used to keep ledgers there and – of what was kept and it was all handwritten in big, old books and that, you know [laughs].

I asked Scott to explain what he meant by 'sticky in the mud' and he eventually decided 'traditional' was a better way of putting it. 'You know, lot of the blokes there had worked there all their lives, you know, and if it ain't broke, don't fix it, 'cos, you know, that was the mentality. But like everything else, you know, the world moved on, least of all to the printers, you know, who bought the paper, basically.' He explained that whereas once they could get away with selling a product with slight variations, over time the paper's dimensions needed to be more and more precise. Asked if it was the older guys that tended to be stuck in their ways, Scott responded: 'Well, yeah, I think we all were to a certain extent because things changed very, very, very slowly in the finishing departments, you know. It was labour-intensive and that was it.' We have noted a relative lack of mechanisation in Kent paper mills compared with counties such as Lancashire. This perhaps gives an incomplete picture of Buckland's technological development, which by many accounts was advanced in terms of its papermaking machinery. It is in the finishing department that work remained relatively labour-intensive. A lack of investment in the finishing end meant that the jobs at this end of the mill changed very little over the years. Scott contrasted this with investment in the mill's papermaking technology:

> Paper would come up in a lift, go through to the girls where they would sort it and then it would move through to have it counted then it would move on to the guillotine. And then it would go up to the end till it was packed. Then it would go back down again into the warehouse, yeah. Christ. But that went on for years and years and there was no investment in it, you know. It was labour-intensive. That's the word I was looking for. It was labour-intensive. It was – they'd spend money on machines. Oh, yeah, everybody loved the papermakers. But when it come to finishing end, ooh, no. There was no money.

It is here that people from across the mill had had something to say about the guillotinemen. Significant investment was made into the finishing department in the 1980s, but probably not in the way those working in the department would have wanted. I was told about an ongoing dispute with management over the amount of paper being guillotined relative to the amount of paper being produced. One version of events is that guillotine workers were refusing to work more than absolutely necessary, completing only their agreed quota regardless of how much paper was sitting waiting to be cut. This created a bottleneck in the output that was costing the mill money. This resulted in disgruntlement among foremen and the mill hierarchy seeking

ways to remove guillotinemen from process entirely. Chris Sedgewick, a former machineman but a foreman at the time, was one person who was clearly fed up with the backlog of paper waiting to be guillotined and tied. There was an element of boastfulness in his tone when he explained his role in the removal of his co-workers. 'I put 22 men out of work', he told me. Chris claimed to have come up with the idea of creating a machine that cuts registered paper, meaning paper with a watermark in the middle. He was increasingly frustrated by the guillotinemen not 'pulling their weight' and costing the mill vast amounts of money:

> They were doing overtime, just doing their quota and that's it. Course it meant the machine being shut down. For my machine to be shut used to cost £600 a minute. What I made in an hour used to pay for everybody's wages in the mill, all the administration staff, and everything else. Number two and number three was jam, butter and jam. But my machine paid all the bills and made a profit. So in terms of the paper mill it was £600 a minute to be shut.

There were clearly various power dynamics within the mill that are difficult to capture so long after the fact. It is worth noting though that Chris spent many years as a machineman before becoming a foreman. Tensions between papermakers and guillotinemen would sometimes underlie discussions without coming to the fore. Aside from any possible longstanding tension, as a foreman Chris would have had different interests and priorities to Scott, who was also known as an active figure in the union. Indeed, another foreman told me 'these guys held us to ransom', suggesting Scott, as 'the union guy', was something of a ring leader among the militant guillotinemen. But what about the senior managers? I spoke about this issue with someone at the centre of implementing comprehensive changes at the mill around this very time. As mentioned in the previous chapter, Henry Simpson was assistant mill manager between 1984-1987 and general manager from 1991-1996 and was tasked with modernising Dover Mill. He describes the battle he and his management team had with guillotine workers, together with tyers:

> The mill was basically controlled by the guillotine men and the tyers . . . The output of the mill – they were the last process, and they controlled the output of the mill. So, quite often the paper machines would run quite well, and these rough cutters would run quite well, and there would be so much paper lying around, we'd have to shut the paper machines because the tyers and the guillotine men would only work at a certain rate.

Henry says that the guillotinemen were supposed to get through, say, six ton of paper an hour over their eight-hour shift. They would claim that 'it was quite an imposition to do this, and it

was hard work, and we knew it wasn't'. Henry says he would go back to the mill some evenings and catch them slacking:

> They'd come in at ten o'clock and they'd work for three hours like crazy and then the next five hours they'd put their feet up, much to the annoyance of the rest of the mill. Not just the management, but the rest of the mill as well'. So, you had all of this machinery, the really heavy capital-intensive machinery, producing stuff quite efficiently…

Whereas the machines could turn out paper at, say, tens tons a shift, the guillotinemen and tyers would only work at six tons a shift, meaning that 'after a couple of weeks there'd be lots of paper lying around that was unprocessed.' While changes were already underway at Dover Mill, it was this issue that seemed to act as a catalyst for the complete overhaul of the finishing department that effectively put an end to several historically important roles. Automatic machines such as the 'Pasaban', 'Pemco' and 'Wrapmatic' were introduced that made redundant not only the job of guillotining but also sorting, counting, packing and tying.

I briefly remarked on the striking lack of concern expressed over the effective abolition of sorting. I was equally surprised by how good-natured both mill manager Henry Simpson and guillotineman Scott Fisher were when recounting the dispute and their views on each other. We saw in the previous chapter the positive terms in which workers spoke of their former employer, and we will see something similar in the next chapter on narratives of closure. What is worth highlighting here is the notion that what is good for the mill is, ultimately, what matters. Workers wanted the mill to run smoothly and strive to be the best it could be, drawing comparisons between itself and other mills. This was not only the implicit stance of workers broadly but, according to Dennis Featherstone in the opening passage of the introduction to this thesis, the 'responsible union,' too.

Before concluding, I end this section with the final paragraphs of the unattributed history which convey a sense of loss amid the workplace change:

> Up in the Salle, gone are the counters, packers and guillotinemen. Only a few women remain to inspect the occasional doubtful stack . . .
>
> This tremendous improvement in quality, and reduction in costs, is largely due to rationalisation of the product mix and the use of different raw materials. Credit must, however, be given to successive managements and the workforce for the introduction of improve technology and major expenditure on the best available equipment that has significantly improved working conditions for the employees.

Now Bill Plater can look down and appreciate that the so-and-so machines have got it right at last, but he cannot have his job back because it no longer exists. For me, the place is now too compact but safety, quality and efficiency is the name of the game. I would miss the people of the past, the “grey ghosts”, the “dancing girls”, the strange names like “Papel Sellado” and “Etheral Bond”, and the whole made chaotic struggle that paid the share-holders their dividend.

However, the trout still play happily under the bridge, and the spirits from the graveyard still come over the wall to assist the nightshift. We are now European and when one telephones the Mill, a voice answers “Arjo Wiggins” instead of “Wiggins Teape, Buckland Mill”. At least we don’t yet get “Oui Monsieur! Je vous ecoute”!

Figure 39(Dover Museum and Bronze Age Boat Gallery: Buckland Paper Mill archive 2022)

Figure 40 Worker operates the ‘Pasaban’ in 2000

Conclusion

It was in accounts of everyday working life that gender became particularly salient within my interviews. In addition to determining what work was available at the mill, gender shaped one's autonomy, skill – as defined within the factory – and the meaning and identity derived from mill work. This itself informed what was important about the job and in turn what was emphasised in oral testimonies. It was perhaps also a factor in women workers' reluctance to be interviewed. However, a more convincing explanation is that sorting was largely removed from the production process by the mid-1980s, with very few still employed when the mill closed in 2000. They also tended to work for shorter periods, often leaving to have their first child before returning on a more flexible basis. Both facts – the loss of sorting work and significantly shorter tenures on average – only emerged over time and were not made clear in either *Watermark* or most of my conversations with mill workers until I began exploring the issue.

In general, men in the machine houses clearly had a greater degree of autonomy – spatial as well as decision-making – and could derive pride and identity from their role in the 'making' of paper. Women in the Salle, in contrast, were more closely supervised and their agency was limited, but took pride in doing the job well and, more notably, gained meaning from their interactions with the workmates with whom they worked in such close proximity.

A defining mission of oral history has been to uncover the 'hidden histories' of marginalised or overlooked groups, documenting the perspectives and achievements of people formerly neglected in official histories. Women's work, in all its forms, has certainly been neglected historically within the sociology of work. In one sense, here women were to an extent writing themselves out of the (or at least *a*) story of the mill. In fact, while women workers generally showed a reluctance to talk on the record about their time at the mill (undoubtedly for complex reasons), men usually came forward confident in the belief that their work was a worthy topic of discussion/study. When they did agree to be interviewed, women often had a great deal to say about their working life.

It took me time to realise that the testimonies I was hearing were often implicitly about the heyday of the mill from the perspective of the workforce. Despite feeding off scraps at times, I eventually understood that mill work generally became less meaningful over time. And, as in the previous chapter, I suggest that the mill's occupational community (with paternalistic characteristics), that included management, effectively foreclosed the possibility of a challenge to widespread job loss. It did not, however, prevent more militant workers from refusing to complete more than their agreed quota of guillotining, much to the ire of

management and some workmates. I suggest that in place of a sense of class identity and solidarity in the face of industrial dispute, was a sense that workers were part of a mill family/community that included management and ownership.

To say that we need to pay more attention to working lives is not to say these types of accounts are absent in recent studies (see High 2018, Strangleman 2019). Sometimes it is a question of emphasis. Is our primary concern with documenting past forms of work as a political endeavour in the tradition of much oral history? Or are we using the past to both inform our understanding of the present and to draw lessons for our political work – such as what we are organising and advocating for in employment? Of course, we can do both. But greater emphasis on the latter in what is an inherently political field is encouraged.

We have seen how each role changed to the point of becoming unrecognisable in the space of a working life, related to changes in raw materials, methods, machinery, physicality and human involvement. The final chapter will explore the long closure of the mill. It begins by picking up where this chapter ends, exploring the qualitative changes to working life brought about by technological change, automation, smaller workforce, some roles (all but) removed, and certain types of workers kept on.

4.3 The long closure of Dover Mill

Figure 41 A still from the opening of a film of Buckland Mill made by a group of workers after the announcement of closure in 1999. Text over footage of the River Dour

This project was initially conceived as a study of the closure of Buckland Paper Mill. I wanted to explore how closure was understood by those who worked in the factory and the legacy of mill work and its loss for workers, their families and the local community. Essentially, the mill was to be a case study of deindustrialisation that asked how its atypicality and marginality in terms of time, place, industry, and workforce informed the nature and experience of factory closure. Through the course of conducting interviews, however, it became clear that former mill workers offered valuable insights into a wider range of issues around work and that the emphasis of the research would need to shift to do justice to the accounts of my interviewees. The insights they offered around, for example, work-based community, embeddedness in secure employment, and the role of skill and autonomy in work identities, demanded a greater emphasis on everyday working lives at Dover Mill.

This chapter addresses some of the questions that have concerned me from the beginning of this project through an exploration of the nature and narratives of Buckland Mill's closure. It is especially interested in how the process of workplace restructuring from the mid-1980s shaped the nature of closure but also mill work in those final years; how workers responded to the decision to close the mill and why it took the form it did; how the circumstances around the mill's closure are understood by workers almost two decades on;

how workers relate to a factory site that is in the process of redevelopment but remains largely in decay; the place of Buckland's closure in the wider story of 'decline' in Dover; and the short- and longer-term impact of redundancy on workers.

I argue that while Dover Mill shut its doors in June 2000, a process of 'decline' (not in every sense, such as company profits) began through a process of restructuring many years earlier. This process, what I have called a 'long closure', downsized the workforce and eroded many of the intrinsic benefits of mill work encountered in the previous two chapters, as well as the wider importance of the mill to Dover. As with the nature and experience of mill work, the mill's long closure was a thoroughly gendered process that saw women's jobs in the Salle disproportionately at risk. I also argue that a striking lack of resistance to closure on the part of workers can be put down to numerous factors, but that a sense of powerlessness and the offer of a very advantageous redundancy package contributed to an acceptance of the company's decision. Further, while there is some common understanding of why the mill closed, contradictions and possible exaggerations can be put down to a need to rationalise an experience of loss and make sense of a local experience that has national and international roots.

In the case of Buckland Paper Mill, we might understand the 'half-life' of deindustrialisation to have a different starting point to those usually found, or proposed, in studies of industrial closures and their legacy. The political-economic changes of the 1970s and 1980s (processes of globalisation, neoliberalism, deindustrialisation) were, of course, experienced differently by workplaces depending on a host of factors – sector, geography, viability in new conditions, decisions of shareholders, to name a few. But, what happened in those factories that survived the wave of closures in the 1970s and 1980s? The factory remained in operation while many others across the country closed, but not without compromise or cost.

Finally, some voices are especially prominent in this chapter, especially those of Trevor Chambers, Steve Jones and Warren Baker. These were all long-time manual workers who went on to become managers and all experienced the final days of the mill. They have a great deal of insight into the period following the announcement of closure (and much more besides). As we will see, the near-total loss of sorting in the 1980s meant that very few women were on the shop floor when the mill closed in 2000. For this reason, women workers are often absent from this story.

Winds of change

In the previous chapter, we saw fundamental changes in the nature and meaning of work as told by those in the key roles of making, sorting and guillotining. Some of these changes were gradual and relatively minor (such as moving from sorting sheet by sheet to 'running down' reams of paper); others were sudden and major (the introduction of the 'Pasaban' machine that made redundant the historically important role of guillotineman). These developments were indicative of comprehensive changes in the mill that rendered much of the papermaking process unrecognisable from a few decades earlier. These changes were not natural or inevitable, though; they were actively pursued by ownership and management as part of a process of restructuring. While the restructuring of Dover Mill should not be seen as inevitable, it is useful to locate this process in both wider shifts in Britain's political economy in the 1970s and 1980s.

In a set of political-economic shifts that came to be known broadly as 'neoliberalism,' the British economy in the 1970s and 1980s was to place significantly greater emphasis on international competition, capital mobility, deregulated labour and commodity markets and increased privatisation of public services and utilities, while rolling back the state's role in social provision and curbing trade union power (Harvey 2005; Hall 2011). While presented as pragmatic solutions to the economic problems of the time, such as the persistent 'stagflation' of the 1970s, these reforms were grounded in thoroughly ideological notions of competition, flexibility, efficiency, innovation and individual freedom (ibid). This period is generally characterised as the end of social democratic consensus that underpinned the post-war 'long boom'. However, it is important that we avoid viewing this period as an 'all-change' moment without historical roots. Neoliberalism was not an 'event,' and it should be understood in the context of longer-term processes than has often been recognised (Hilton et al. 2017; Davies et al. 2021). Further, while these processes have at times been attributed to Thatcher or conflated with 'Thatcherism,' economic historians have recognised the role of 'neoliberal' economic policy within the British economy before Thatcher, pointing 'to the importance of actors from the business community, as well as economists and politicians, in bringing about the 'neoliberal revolution' well before Thatcher came to power' (Hilton et al 2017, p. 150). In short, write Hilton et al (2017, p. 146), there are 'other, longer, economic, technological, social and cultural trajectories that account for historical phenomena occurring during the decade.' Finally, we should recognise that these changes were not confined to, nor did they emerge solely from, Britain. Changes in the international economic order that pre-dated the 1970s have been

identified as one cause of Britain's political-economic transformation in the late-twentieth century (Sutcliffe-Braithwaite et al. 2021, pp. 16-17).

It was in this period of marked political-economic change that we can trace the emergence of academic scholarship (as well as labour activists and politicians) concerned with a 'deindustrialisation' of developed Western economies including in Britain. As noted, early writing was predominantly concerned with attempting to categorise and explain the macro-economic changes that were starting to take place in the 1970s (Lawson 2020, p. 2). On the ground, many industrial workplaces faced a fight for their survival, one that was heavily stacked in favour of (international) capital. Despite often fierce resistance from labour unions, workforces and communities in these countries, widespread factory closures ensued throughout the final decades of the twentieth century. While drastically eroded, though, industrial work in Britain didn't completely disappear, with millions still employed in manufacturing at the turn of the millennium. So, what happened in those factories that remained open through this wave of deindustrialisation, who were working in changing social and political-economic conditions?

At Dover Mill, perhaps the earliest indication of a changing economic landscape was the acquisition of long-time owners Wiggins Teape by multinational corporation British American Tobacco (BAT) in 1970. Some cite this as a turning point in the history of the mill, ushering in major changes on the shop floor. Steve Jones witnessed a great deal of change at the mill between 1965 and 2000. He described this development as a 'gamechanger' that precipitated a big rise in investment:

> But then BAT – British American Tobacco – bought Wiggins Teape. Gamechanger, that was. They had so much money washing about that you could actually go out and buy things. We used to joke that you could put in for something, about 2,000 quid, for an electric truck or summit, and you wouldn't get it. But if you put in for something about £100,000, [they'd say] 'yeah, alright.'

This investment had to be directed, though. I have already noted Henry Simpson's key role in changes in the production process, and his role in changing the paper mill is emphasised by Steve:

> And that's where the Simpson days come in, because BAT owned us then and the money was there to spend. He spent millions. £3.5m on the finishing end, just bringing it up. Which was an awful lot of money in them days. But he had the right idea. Cos everyone argued, 'you should be spending that money on the paper machines.' And his argument was 'what's the use of spending it on the paper

> machines? We can then produce 50% more paper, but what's the use if we can't finish it?' His idea was that we upgrade the finishing end and then that drags all the paper through. So then we could start improving the paper machines. And he was right. What's the use of just creating your own bottleneck? So he had the knowledge and forethought to do something about it.

Investment was not distributed evenly across the paper mill. We heard Scott Fisher in the previous chapter discuss the lack of investment he had witnessed during his time in the finishing department – until, that is, the introduction of the Pasaban machine in the mid-1980s. While paper machines were already relatively efficient, it was the finishing end that required investment if it was to keep up with both the output of the papermakers and demands of shareholders.

While paper mills across the country were closing in this period (Shorter 1971), some were able to adapt to remain 'viable' in new economic conditions. According to former general manager Henry Simpson, Dover was identified as a mill that could meet the demands of the market, but only if it was modernised. A long-time Wiggins Teape employee, Henry was sent to Dover in 1981 with a specific aim:

> I was there for four years as the deputy mill manager and the – it was a very fortunate time to go there. And the reason I was chosen was because my engineering background enabled Dover to modernise, and that's what it had to do. It had something like 350 employees at the time, it was very old-fashioned in what it was doing.

Conqueror was at the heart of this push to modernise. Dover, Henry told me,

> had suddenly found itself as the centre of attraction because the company had always made Conqueror the business stationery which you've probably heard of. And the managing director had done a lot of marketing research on what is called business stationery, which is Conqueror, and had identified lots of opportunities for it and how to outgun the competition. So, all of a sudden, Dover, which had kind of invented Conqueror a hundred years previously, was the centre of attraction because it couldn't make enough Conqueror, and it couldn't satisfy the marketplace that had been created at that time. There was a huge advertising campaign in the Sunday newspapers, it became a brand that people recognised. So, they needed someone to go there with an engineering background to basically double the capacity of the mill, and they thought it would be good for me to do it from my production kind of position that they'd given me, and to influence the engineers in what was really required to achieve the outputs.

In addition to the automation and downsizing we have already seen, the mill introduced the 'Deville,' and 'Wrapmatic' machine which automated the process of packaging the paper

before storage and shipping. In addition to developments in production, there was also a push to improve the mill's environmental standards, not least with the introduction of the 'combined heat and power plant (CHP) in 1995 (something often cited with pride by workers who saw it open), which made the mill more energy self-sufficient and significantly more environmentally friendly – and also provided energy to Dover's Harbour Board.

'It all worked out very well,' Henry told me. 'After about four years the mill was running very well and we'd adopted some new practices, we'd put in a lot of electronic equipment.' No one on the shop floor at the time contradicted Henry's sentiments. On the contrary, workers praised the changes implemented during this time: the mill was running more smoothly than ever, with increased productivity and profits to show for it. But Henry did sense some early scepticism to what he and the company was trying to do. He cites the importance of tradition and family here:

> you know, you really are walking across tradition that's gone on for dozens of years. You know, Buckland Mill's been there since – has been there what, since 1780 or something so, you know – and they'd all worked in there and if you cut one employee, they said they'd all leave because they're all related to each other, you know.

Alan was ultimately able to win over enough of the workforce to implement the planned changes. If there was notable resistance to restructuring, it did not come through in my interviews or those included in *Watermark*. On the contrary, I came away with the impression that the changes introduced by management were largely welcomed on the shop floor – or, at the very least, accepted. There was a sense among workers that it was necessary for the mill to adapt and improve in order to stay competitive and, most importantly, remain in operation. In their accounts, workers often claimed with pride that Dover was one of, if not the, most technologically advanced and innovative mills in the country, if not the world. Its technological 'progress' was facilitated by an 'enlightened' trade union that understood the realities of the paper industry and what was required to keep the mill competitive. There is a section in the *A Celebration of Excellence: Buckland Mill* album titled *A Culture of Continuous Improvement*. The document, whose text and images are printed on 'Conqueror Laid high White 120gsm', was produced in June 2000, the month of closure, as 'a tribute to the aspirations and achievements of the many hundreds of men and women who have worked at Buckland Mill. The section opens with the words:

> Buckland Mill has long been renowned for the quality of its products and the Conqueror range of paper is highly regarded by fine paper users all over the world.

> This proud record of achievement is the result of the willingness to change, flexibility, loyal service and effective management

I am sure that this brushes over instances of conflict and is not a sufficiently complex assessment of the culture of the mill over its entire lifespan. It is, however, the version of the mill I got from workers. Workers presented themselves as part of a workforce that valued improvement and 'progress', even if (and when) that meant a threat to jobs. Ultimately, they wanted 'the mill' to succeed, for everything to run smoothly, and to contribute to that end. The following page reads: 'Over the last ten years the drive to improve performance has focused on planned and predictive maintenance, multiskilling and flexibility'. Profit, ensured through 'improved performance,' was the priority – for the company, management and workers. As argued in the first analysis chapter, the mill's occupational community not only blurred the distinction between work and non-work, but also between workers and management, obscuring class divisions and limiting the degree to which workers saw their interests to be at odds with those of the company. It seems clear that this was a central factor in workers' cooperation in implementing changes that, in fact, led to worse outcomes for the workforce over the long term. While, for the most part, workers continued to see management and the firm as on their team throughout this period of restructuring, the French company that merged with Wiggins Teape in 1990 were regarded with widespread suspicion and resentment.

In hindsight, we could view the restructuring of Buckland Mill as the beginning of the end of the factory, as part of a 'long closure' that took place in stages. This reflects the view of one worker who witnessed changes, big and small, on the shopfloor over decades. Albert Peters, who saw a great deal of change in his 46 years at the mill, placed the blame for closure squarely at the feet of the French company:

> [The mill] closed in stages. They didn't just close the mill, what they did – you must excuse me saying this, but I don't like the French, right – they decided that they was going to unite a French firm called Arjo, called Arjomari, and they went in with Wiggins Teape, so they called them Arjowiggins. But the French were doing very badly at the time. Now this is political now – I don't like getting political, but it is a fact. You couldn't help noticing when they joined with Arjomari and called theirselves Arjowiggins, the French decided that this paper mill here didn't turn out enough to make it viable.

The first stage in the closure of Buckland Mill, according to Albert, was the decommission by Arjowiggins of number one paper machine:

> they decided that number one machine, which was this fifty-inch thing, number one machine wasn't paying its way, so they you know, it was all part of a big story. So they decided to shut it, and they shut it in 1987, and it was making plastic-based paper, which they then sent to the mill down in Devon could make it, 'cos it could make more, and so Dover machine shut then.

The closure of number one machine Len refers to here actually occurred in 1989, at least a year before Arjomari merged with Wiggins Teape, and we can perhaps see this as a small example of the way the circumstances around the eventual closure in 2000 have the potential to distort the way these events are remembered. I should also note that this way of framing the mill's closure was not common; no one else I spoke to put it in quite these terms. Some did, however, reference the closure of number one machine as part of the overall contraction of the mill. This was the mill's oldest machine and it sat somewhat separate from the others insofar as it did not make Conqueror business stationery; it was a specialist machine that produced coloured plastic-base paper for companies such as Formica. Its decommission in 1989 was a major stage in the restructuring of the workplace that saw a significant number of redundancies and a narrowing of the work and production that took place at Dover.

Everyday working life inevitably changed significantly in the context of workplace restructuring. While it was not always made explicit in worker accounts, with the earlier, more rewarding days at generally foregrounded, there is clear evidence that day-to-day experiences of the mill were vastly different in the final two decades. As noted, over time, it became apparent to me that many of the intrinsic benefits of mill work, the things that made it such a fulfilling job, were in fact largely memories (or narratives) of the pre-1980s mill. Again, while a sense of decline was not always made explicit, it was apparent when workers would, for example, comment on the relatively small workforce running the mill in the latter years. The workforce was never large by industrial standards; by final few years, though, it was a fraction of the size:

> When I started there in '66, there was 550 people work there. Alright, admittedly we only had two machines at the end, or near to end. But it was down to less than 150. And when it shut down, we had one machine running, there was about 70 or 80 people working there. But we were still turning out much more paper than we did in the first place. You know, it was all good stuff. (Trevor Chambers)

Steve Jones, too, described a shrinking workforce, one whose composition had changed considerably in the context of increased computerisation/automation:

> when I first went there, there was 350 people worked there. And when I left – I think when it shut there was just over 100. But I'm saying that, just over 100 people, but probably under 40 were actually making the paper. All the rest were day workers . . . You had a lab and all sorts of things. And the warehouse – the whole warehouse was all day work. The office staff – there was always lots of office staff [bemused].

Steve notes that this reduction in numbers was particularly dramatic in the Salle, where the '150 girls' sorting paper when he started was probably down to less than ten by the end. Polly Osborne, who sorted paper for 38 years until an injury, unrelated to work, forced her to leave in 1999, said she was actually one of only two doing the job before she left, and by that point she was only sorting 'special' paper that could not be inspected by machinery.

> at the end, it got so automated that – so, we would, right, find the dirt in the paper, and then it would go to the counters, then go to a guillotine, and the men would tie 500 sheets, reams at a time. But then it become automated, which I think was a shame. They put an eye on the machine, it could take the paper out [laughter], so that job was gone. But that – counter machines. And they also had a counter fitted on the machine that – it would count the 500 sheets. So, the machine was sorting it, counting it, and you didn't want a guillotine man, did you? So then, when the paper come off, it was ready to go out, and it was shrink wrapped on pallets, and they'd send it out like. And I think that's what . . . closed the mill down, 'cos they didn't want sorters, they didn't want counters, didn't want tiers. (Susan Pettifer)

The introduction of the Pasaban machine in the mid-1980s impacted many mill jobs, but perhaps none more so than sorting. With the introduction of a single piece of machinery, the age-old practice of sorting paper was effectively removed from papermaking. I was told that this was a relatively gradual process – it took time to realise the full potential of the Pasaban. But by the 1990s there seems to have been very few women sorting paper at Buckland. This finding was remarkable to me. Firstly because I had come away from watching the Watermark documentary with the impression that men and women had been employed in roughly equal numbers and that sorters were still around to experience closure in 2000. This could well have been an editorial decision that allowed women workers an important voice in the narrative of the mill. What is less explicable is that, for the most part, this is the story I was given by my interviewees. Not only were women on the sharpest end of economic restructuring here, consistent with arguments made in writing on deindustrialisation (e.g Cowie 1999), but their displacement was barely remarked upon.

There is an interesting tension here in the accounts of workers. On one hand, there is a narrative of a thriving, efficient, technologically advanced paper mill; on the other, the reality

of a shrinking workforce losing many of the intrinsic benefits that had made the job so rewarding. For the most part, the positive aspects of the mill are recounted as if they existed simultaneously. In actuality, the sense of security, community, nature/diversity of tasks and product that mill work once provided were necessarily eroded through a process of 'modernisation' in which remaining workers took a different kind of pride and satisfaction.

I find it interesting that the marked qualitative changes in everyday life at the mill from the mid-1980s were not more prominent in my interviews. In some cases, if I hadn't probed, I would have come away with the impression that the mill was essentially business as usual from, say, the 1970s until 1999, with the major changes coming in the areas of technology and cleanliness. Certainly, these were key developments. But why were they foregrounded ahead of the decimation of the workforce of women in the Salle? Or, indeed, the other workers in the finishing department replaced by machines? Or the marked decline of an occupational community that once informed the whole lives of so many?

While it was never put in these terms, perhaps in the context of widespread factory closures (not least in the paper industry) over the preceding two decades, people were glad to have a factory at all. For those who remained, the job was still considered a good one. This is hardly surprising; it continued to be a well-paid job close to home. But what was lost in the absence of the sorters, the guillotinemen, the cutters and tyers, and many others?

To frame these changes in terms of 'decline' might entail admitting some potentially uncomfortable truths: that the workers who remained throughout the 1980s and 1990s had watched their workmates go with seemingly little collective resistance (and, as we have seen, even facilitating redundancies in some cases); that being a 'forward-thinking', 'forward-looking' factory also meant signing the redundancy papers of many including, potentially your own down the line; that management, part of the mill community, had overseen a downsizing of the mill and a rolling back of the paternalistic practices of the previous decades. Lupo and Bailey (2011) argue that in the context of restructuring, 'occupational communities form the basis for worker solidarity to resist workplace changes that threaten to undermine their central role in the production process and help them adapt to the stressors of change.' Clearly, these kinds of changes are not always greeted with acceptance. But as we have seen, occupational communities also have the potential to undermine class identities and solidarities if the distinction between workers and bosses is blurred. I would suggest that the latter point goes some way to explaining responses to restructuring on the shop floor at Buckland Mill.

Closing time: 'it was a bomb out of the blue'

Buckland mill Dover.
1770-2000
RIP

Above is the title of a document I received by email in January 2018. A few days after receiving my invitation to be interviewed, Bill Jacobs took it upon himself to put into writing an account of his working life and the circumstances around Dover Mill's closure. The document ultimately did not address the subject of closure, and while Bill assured me it was unfinished and an exploration of the mill's closure was forthcoming, I never received the finished version. Nonetheless, the opening paragraph reads:

> In June 2000 closed its doors after over 200 years of trading, this document is going to try and see if it could have been avoided or that it was a sign of times and nothing could have stopped this from happening. I will go back to the year I started at the Paper mill and explain the true value of the products.

The question posed here by Bill, of whether closure could have somehow been avoided, reflects a sense, common among ex-workers, that it was a mistake – perhaps one that did not need to happen. This was the subtext of a lot of points made by workers who spoke with regret about the developments that led to the mill closing its doors. It caused confusion, raised questions, and gave rise to theories. Who made the decision and why? Wasn't the mill still very profitable for the company? When did a job for life turn into redundancy? Could Conqueror even be made elsewhere?

The closure of the mill contradicted a sense of permanence that had been reinforced over decades of secure employment. As we saw in my earlier chapter on work-based community, it was the understanding that people's jobs were secure, that the mill would continue to be there, that mill work could continue to be passed from one generation to the next, that underpinned a relatively content, amicable and productive workforce. In this context, the announcement came as a shock to those workers who remained at the mill in 1999. Despite (or perhaps because of) the comprehensive changes that had taken place over the previous 15 years, not least the significant reduction in numbers on the shop floor, it seems as though few were prepared for this decision. Below are accounts from three manual workers who had taken

on senior roles by 1999 – two shift managers and a production supervisor, respectively – recounting their initial response to the announcement of closure. We can see how they try to reconcile the decision with the sense that everything was running smoothly – indeed, better than smoothly if profits and recent recognition of Dover Mill was anything to go by. Here is Steve Jones who spent 35 years at Buckland Mill:

> It was like a bomb out the blue! As I say, who in their right mind would think somewhere that's making so much money with so few people would shut a money pit like that? Brilliant place. And boom – they did. All I have to say is that I think within two and a half years all the directors that were involved in that, none of them were there any longer. (Steve Jones, shift manager)

I asked Trevor Chambers what his first thoughts were when he heard the news:

> It was pretty devastating, really. Not so much for me but for future generations. We'd just celebrated our centenary – 100 years of making Conqueror. We'd got really, sort of, leading in technology – everywhere, both chemically and mechanically. We'd just won an award for Best UK Factory – I mean, that was only about a year before they announced it was gonna to shut down [that] we won the award for Best UK Factory! You know, so, to us, we were doing well. I knew that we were doing well because I knew that the figures off the paper machines were good, everything else was coming along, you know, nicely, so… We were making more profit per person than any other mill in the group. But, obviously it wasn't good enough for 'em. Cos Stoneywood is a bigger mill, it's on quite a big site, whereas Buckland Mill, the site was quite small. You know, you wouldn't be able to put another paper machine in or anything like that. So, I think that had its implications – the fact that you couldn't grow, you know, you had to stay the same. But it was devastating. The fact that we knew we were doing well, and they were shutting us down anyway.

I asked Trevor if it was a surprise:

> Oh yeah! We was all staggered, we really was. Cos there was no sign of anything running down before they made the announcement. Everything was running normally. In fact, we were making more paper than we'd ever made. It was amazing, really. That in itself was difficult – the fact that, you know, we all knew that we were losing our jobs. And, you know, [there was] nothing we could do about it apart from just get stuck in and carry on doing our jobs and get our money. (Trevor Chambers, shift manager, 34 years at Buckland Mill)

Warren Baker hadn't seen the decision coming and didn't think anyone else had either:

> People now say, "I knew it was going to take place." They didn't . . . A lot of people say, "Oh yes, I could see that was [inaudible]" There's people who were working on the – one of the packing lines saying, "Yes, I knew that was going to happen." They didn't know it was going to happen. It came out of the blue. We were – in hindsight you can see that there were things going on. Because the orders were diversifying. We weren't making as much of the Conqueror paper that we used to. We were making more, smaller grades of cheaper paper. And so, in hindsight you could see it. But at the time, well, I didn't know. Maybe I'm just naïve; I didn't see it coming. (Warren Baker, production supervisor, 22 years at Buckland Mill)

These accounts reveal a great deal about the outlook from the shop floor prior to the announcement. These were very experienced mill workers in senior roles who had no idea this was coming. From their perspective, the mill was doing well, better than ever in some respects; shutting it down just didn't make sense. That Buckland Mill had won a 'Best UK Factory' award in 1997 was cited by workers, in my interviews and *Watermark*, as evidence that they must have been doing something right! The write-up in the November 1997 edition of the *Management Today* magazine describes a mill punching way above its weight, 'contributing slightly over 1% of the [Arjo Wiggins] group's turnover but a pleasing 10% of its profits' with only 220 of the group's 19,000 employees. The piece praises Dover's quality of paper, the computer-based defect monitoring system, and housekeeping standards – cleanliness, efficiency, competition – among other things. Reading this account, it is hard to believe the announcement of closure was less than two years away.

It is no surprise, then, that many workers were shocked and confused. Nor is it surprising that they would search for explanations. We get a flavour in the accounts above of how some made sense of the decision. Steve put it down to poor decisions made by the board, decisions which ultimately cost them their jobs; for Trevor, it was because Buckland was unable to expand like some other mills, including the Stoneywood site to which Dover's Conqueror order was transferred. We will explore rationalisations of closure in more depth below. But here it is worth noting that there didn't seem to be one clear narrative of what happened – at least from the vantage point of the present – which was perhaps because of the confusion it gave rise to. It also meant there wasn't a single thing or person that could be challenged.

Something that initially stood out to me while talking to mill workers was the apparent lack of resistance to closure on the part of those who were still employed in 1999-2000. Trevor gives an indication of the response on the shop floor above when he says that there was nothing they 'could do about it apart from get stuck in and carry on doing our jobs and get out money.' I learned that the workforce was for the most part cooperative in the period between

announcement and closure, showing little animosity or dissent. I asked Trevor whether there was any resistance to the decision. After something of a laugh/exhalation, he said, 'Not really. The way the union looked at it was, because Arjo Wiggins was a big group, they didn't want to rock the boat. I was done out of a bit of redundancy money…' Trevor then gave me a detailed description of his personal redundancy dispute with the mill. It became clear that the terms of redundancy offered by the firm was a central factor in the compliance of the workforce post-announcement. I asked Trevor what the atmosphere around the mill was like after learning of the company's decision:

> Initially, it was a bit frosty. But once everyone got it in their head what was gonna happen, they knew how much money they were gonna get, it settled down and, to be honest, the last year – 9 months to a year – that place run as sweet as it had ever run. Because – just let people get on with their work. There was no sort of managerial types that were trying to make a name for themselves or anything like that. Everyone was just letting everything run nicely. Let the machinemen run the machine, and cuttermen run the cutters, and it really did run sweet . . . I knew the people. I knew the blokes. I knew that I could rely on people. And I knew no one was gonna do anything silly because they'd lose their redundancy money. So, yeah, it was sweet. I had everything going my way, because I could run it how I wanted to run it. And it's a dream, really, if you think about it, anyone in any job, if they can do it the way they wanna do it.

This chimes with other descriptions of how workers responded. It was more a matter of coming to terms with what was going to happen than challenging it and keeping the factory open. By all accounts, the mill ran smoothly in those final months, with everyone working together to 'get the best closure we could'. Why not enjoy the opportunity to experience of working without the same pressures and competition? Trevor gives us an idea of why there was little resistance in the intervening time between announcement and closure: people didn't want to 'do anything silly' because their redundancy money would have been put at risk. I learned that the redundancy terms on offer were a key factor in the overall response of workers. I asked Ted Aldridge why he thought the workers didn't resist the closure. He was adamant:

> Well, what could they do? Nothing. Nothing you can do [but] accept it. And the deal they offered you was so good it was unbelievable. As I say, it ran into thousands. Nobody I've known in Dover, or anywhere, has had the same…it were like a golden handshake. It was like a golden handshake. I've been finished now 19 years – I'm still getting a pension. And never paid into it. Never paid into it.

Asked if he meant the redundancy terms and the pension was like a 'golden handshake', Ted says:

> Oh yeah, yeah, yeah. The less you took in the redundancy, the bigger your pension was. Well, they said to me, when they offered the redundancy, it was £90,000 plus £700 a month until I retired, until I was 65. Then after 65 it'd be cut in half and you'd have half of it. And it was index-linked, so it would go up every year, which it does. And if anything had happened to me, the wife would have got half the pension still. But if I die now, it dies with me.

Clearly, the possibility of losing one's job before June 2000 and, therefore, a hefty sum of money ensured a cooperative workforce. This severance pay was cited by many – workers and managers alike – who were at the mill in that final period. Often it was raised as a way of implying closure wasn't an unmitigated tragedy for workers; if anything, they came out of it quite well. In Watermark, former manager Jim Lowe tells us that the 'very, very handsome package' is the reason former workers have 'got their big smile on their face'. And there is no question that workers left the job on unusually good terms. But it does beg the question, what about future generations? What about the work that was once passed from father to son and mother to daughter? Yes, those being laid off were financially secure, but no one else would get to have the job so valued by these very people. In reality, as we have seen, this was hardly a feature of mill work by this point anyway. The workforce was gradually shrinking, and few new faces were being brought in. In any case, while the proposed terms of redundancy secured the cooperation of workers, some resentment remained. Trevor recalled a small but telling example of dissent:

> It's quite funny in one aspect. Towards the end, we were making special runs of paper for the people in the mill to take home. And we run a special run of paper of A4. And the A4 line cut it and boxed it and put labels on it. And then we had an open night for relatives to have a last look at the mill before it shut down. And we left a load of paper – a couple of loads of paper – there so that they could help themselves to these boxes of A4. Only trouble was, on the label, the blokes on the A4 line had put: 'UK Best Factory – bollocks.' We all thought it was hilarious.

I asked Trevor if the open night was well attended:

> Lots of people come and had look around, yeah. Because I was fortunate inasmuch as, being a shift manager, I had contacts outside the mill as well. Our warehouse up in Erith, and other mills. And I got some quite nice specialised paper . . . I've still got quite a bit of it, yeah. I made sure I've got enough paper to see me out [laughs].

In the first instance, that an event was held for relatives to look at the mill, and that workers wished to take home boxes of paper, speaks to a meaningful connection to a workplace that goes beyond labouring for a wage – and indeed beyond the workers themselves. We have seen in the previous two chapters some of the sources of this attachment. Workers, especially those who had spent decades at this mill, knew that it had a long and rich history; indeed, in many cases it had been a livelihood and way of life for their ancestors. It was a workplace that was made meaningful by local people through their activity – productive and social – over decades and generations. The paper itself is also significant here. As noted in the previous chapter on working lives, making concrete things can reveal something to us about ourselves (Sennett 2008). It can also serve as tangible, enduring evidence of what we have done; in this case, what some people spent most of their adult lives doing. I was shown some of the boxes of paper still kept by workers when I visited their homes and was given a few sheets. Sometimes they would hold it up to the light to reveal the Conqueror watermark in the middle; Bill Jacobs showed taught me that the fibres in a torn piece of paper told you which way it had travelled through the machine. By making sure he had 'enough paper to see me out', Trevor preserved concrete evidence of his work and the mill in which it was made.

The small act of rebellion by A4 line workers is indicative of a general sense of disappointment among those still working at the mill in 2000. While, as we have seen, intrinsic benefits of the job had been gradually eroded over many years (not least the human input into papermaking and social life inside and outside of the factory), there were still strong attachments to the job. I think the labels – 'UK Best Factory – bollocks' – also speak to a sense of confusion and contradiction that could not be erased or fully supressed despite the promise of personal economic security. It was possible to buy off workers' resistance to closure, but not a degree of resentment, disappointment and distrust. It might be telling, though, that while it was generally seen as mistake and perhaps one that could have been averted, no one raised the possibility that workers themselves could have done more to oppose closure. What was the use? The decision had been made. It was over. While in theory, we might be able to think of actions that could have made a difference – worker and public campaigns that put pressure on the company – there was obviously a belief that nothing could be done about it. And, of course, any meaningful resistance on the part of workers themselves put one's redundancy at risk.

It is also important to place the response in its context. This was 1999-2000, roughly two decades after the industrial disputes and wave of factory closures that had signalled a major shift in the UK economy away from manufacturing. The heat of those battles had long since passed, with industrial work in most cases being lost. While it wasn't a salient theme in

interviews, this was the context in which the factory was closing. The state of the paper industry, as well as local industry, also played a role in resignation. Jim Saunders placed the closure of Buckland Mill in the context of industrial job losses in the area:

> I realised [that] nationally the paper industry was going down the drain a little bit anyway . . . As I say, you had the pits, you had the engineering works, you had the boats, and those jobs are all disappearing in front of your eyes. So you realise then you was getting into a slump in that respect . . . I mean, we kept going as long as we did purely and simply because of the innovation that we was bringing in. You know, bringing in new ideas and new ways of doing things.

Again, although the broader paper industry and local industrial decline was not commonly referenced, there was definitely a sense among some that they were just the next in line in a long list of closures. Internalising the protracted deindustrialisation in the local area could well have contributed to an acceptance of, in the first instance, technological and workplace change that led to a great deal of loss and, ultimately, resignation to eventual closure. This is another indication that the time of this dispute informed the response of the workforce.

Making sense of loss

So, the mill was going to close. By all accounts, everything ran smoothly in those final months and some, as we learned from Trevor, used it as an opportunity to enjoy the job free of the usual pressures. But it could not last. When June 2000 came around, it was time for the last remaining mill workers to clock out for the last time. Workers describe a sombre atmosphere with little fanfare, almost anticlimactic. Warren Baker said he was one of two people from the personnel department who handed out the cheques to workers. People were scheduled to arrive, one by one, at a specific time:

> there were some people that would cry at that. But there was, you know, there was others that just took it and went. And, you know, people have all different emotions with things like that. If you've worked somewhere all of your life and all of your friends have worked there and your husband or wife or whatever, you know, the family have worked there as well, and previous generations of the family have worked there, it's a big thing to lose. But it happens, it happens. So that last day was a funny old day, funny old day.

Asked whether he remembers that last day when he closed the mill down, Steve Jones describes an emotional day:

> Yeah! It was very emotional, I have to say that. I worked there for 35 years, and you had to shut everything down knowing that it would never start up again. And a lot of the blokes were quite emotional as well. Yeah, it was devastating, to be honest. Let's face it, I had a really good life from there and was looking forward to an even better one.

While emotions were high, there was no disorder. In *Watermark*, engineer and production manager Mike Grigbsy commended workers for way they conducted themselves in those final months, and thought it said something about the character of Buckland Mill workers that they had not expressed anger the day the factory closed. According to Mike, the guys on the shop floor were 'fantastic.' 'Once we realized it was inevitable, everyone worked together to get the best closure we could.' Walking around the factory after closure, he was impressed by how tidy workers had left the place: 'no one had written 'Wiggins Teape are bastards' on the wall'. No one had smashed a window or broken a cup.' They left it as it was when it was working, and this was a testament to the people that worked there.

Given the harmonious relations (and blurred distinctions) between workers and management historically, as witnessed in my first analysis chapter, not to mention the pay-out workers were about to receive, it is unsurprising that the final day came and went without conflict. But financial security would not stop ex-workers speculating about why the mill closed and whether mistakes were made. Some of the most interesting and revealing conversations I had with workers were around the question of why the mill closed. As we have seen, there was a strong sense that it should not have happened, that something had gone wrong – whether through error or malice. A common argument, one I had encountered in *Watermark*, was that it was the fault of Arjomari, the French company that merged with Wiggins Teape to become 'Arjowiggins' (its name to this day). Steve Jones traces the closure back to the merger in 1990/1991:

> Well, we know why it closed. I must admit, I was guilty as well, but I just thought 'well…' As I say at the beginning of all this, making Conqueror was a license to print money. We used to charge so much for it. And it was good paper. But it wasn't *that* good. But we got into bed with Arjomari, a big French paper firm. They say that we were competitors but we weren't really. But our chief executive at the time – I think his bonus depended on the share price going up, so he went over to France, they signed an agreement to say 'yep'. It was supposed to be a 50/50 thing but they had all the money so it ended up Arjomari more or less took over.

The decision to close Dover Mill was sometimes framed in terms of a malicious act by an enemy hostile to British (or English) papermakers. In *Watermark*, Dennis Featherstone says the mill 'was taken over by a French company who don't particularly like English papermakers.' Workers sometimes referred simply to the 'the French' when the company would come up in conversation.

Another claim I heard repeatedly was that a mistake had been made by the board, and that those responsible for the decision had soon lost their jobs as a result. We saw Steve Jones suggest that board members had been sacked when it became clear that their decision to close Buckland had not had the desired effect. Steve was one of several workers who told me this version of events, though interestingly it was not present in the *Watermark* documentary in its section on why the mill met the fate it did. I wondered if it was an idea that had developed more recently, but its omission may simply have been an editorial decision.

There were also some more sober assessments of what led to the closure of Dover Mill. These tended to be based on an assessment of the paper industry at the time and the lack of scope for the mill site to expand. We saw Bill Jacobs, in his attempt to explore whether closure could have been avoided, try to draw a connection between the fate of Dover Mill and the 'times' in which it unfolded. Trevor Chambers was someone who paid attention to trends in the international paper industry. Asked why he thought the mill closed, he first draws a connection between the British paper industry and the fate of the mill before citing the size of Dover's site and machines in relation to Stoneywood Mill in Aberdeen:

> I think it was because the paper industry in this country was dwindling anyway. Because we could import paper cheaper than we could import wood pulp. So it didn't make sense. A lot of the low value paper we couldn't make anymore because, you know, the Scandinavian countries and what have ya, they could export cheaper than they would export the wood pulp. So I think the paper trade was dwindling anyway.

He goes on to consider the size of the respective mill sites – Stoneywood in Aberdeen and Dover – and the role it played:

> And with Aberdeen, they had a machine shut, they had another machine that was sort of running one week and shutting another week. And because of the size of their site, and the size of their machines – the two machines I'm talking about were both bigger than our biggest machine – because of that, I think they decided that, in their wisdom, that they could make everything that we make on this one

> machine. And, as it turned out, they couldn't because they couldn't make the bright white papers, haha. So they ended up taking that down to Ivybridge in Devon. And now Ivybridge is shut as well! Haha. So, it's just a thing with the paper industry in this country: you can only make high value papers – high value-added papers.

The connection made between the mill's closure and trends in the paper industry demonstrates an awareness, present among some senior workers, that this wasn't a decision made in a vacuum or a personal vendetta against their workplace. Similarly, some realised the size of the mill site had become an issue for the company. Dennis Featherstone admitted 'the mill itself had its boundaries' so once all possible improvements had been made to the papermaking process, there was nowhere to go 'except down'. Clearly, with the main road at the front, a church at the back and the River Dour running through the middle, Buckland had limited scope for expansion and significantly less than the site in Aberdeen. But did it need to expand? Wasn't the mill still profitable? There was an acceptance that, in the long term, moving Dover's production to a mill with more capacity was the best way to ensure company profits. Workers had long since accepted that this was the priority – of themselves as well as management.

So, what about Conqueror? Trevor alludes to an idea we have already encountered – that the Aberdeen mill couldn't make the Conqueror papers that had once been important to Dover's profits and identity. This widely held theory, that the quality of water in the area allowed Buckland Mill to make the bright white range of Conqueror wanted by customers, was closely tied to the claim that board directors had been sacked for their role in closing Dover. Steve Jones explains that Stoneywood Mill was unable to make paper white enough to meet the growing demand:

> See, we had our own wells down there. Water – that's the backbone of making paper. Took it up to Stoneywood in Scotland, [which] just happened to have very brackish water. So they couldn't make any of the bright whites. That was it: 'diamond white' was what we finished up on. It hurts your eyes to look at it when you're working with it. They couldn't make it because the water was brackish. They spent hundreds of thousands of pounds cleaning the water up, got god knows how many filters on it to clean it up. And because all their water runs through peat, the actually water itself – you couldn't distil it enough to get it all out. And they just couldn't make the really bright whites. So they come up with this brilliant decision – 'oh we'll stop making them.' And that's the final nail in the coffin cos that was really taking off.

As noted, it is unclear whether this debate was live before Arjowiggins' decision to move production out of Dover. If it did, though, it certainly took on added weight in the aftermath of closure. Some believed Conqueror had stopped being made altogether following the failed

attempt to replicate its production at Stoneywood. But this had been challenged eight years earlier in *Watermark* by Mike Grigsby who argued that 'the idea that it [Conqueror] can't be made anywhere else is untrue.' I also heard later in my interviews that they were already making some Conqueror at Stoneywood in the 1990s alongside Dover's output, though it is unclear whether that included the 'bright whites' in question. What was going on here? I was curious to get Henry Simpson's view on the matter. He was someone with both strong ties to Buckland Mill and sat on the Arjowiggins board at the time in question. Henry challenged the dominant narrative in writing:

> Stoneywood takes water from the River Don which is duller than the water from the Dover artesian wells. For a short time brighter pulps were used for the brightest Conqueror whites until the installation of extra filtration for the river water. These were in no way disastrous to the reputation of Conqueror as customers readily accepted Conqueror from Stonewood, as indeed they had for many years.

He also addressed my question regarding the widespread belief that board members who made the decision to close Dover being sacked:

> I can confirm that there was not a wave of sackings of directors related to the closure of Dover which was considered to be a successful project . . . The number of Directors was reduced from about 14 (quite untenable) to about something like 6. None of these business managers were concerned with product from Dover or its closure.

A 'successful project' clearly has different meanings depending on who you ask – this might well have been a neoliberal success story but it left a bitter taste in the mouths of many. In any case, to be clear, I do not want to give more weight to this account than those of ex-workers. Nor am I trying to establish the definitive 'truth' of what 'really happened'; whether it was 'true' or not is really beside the point. The fact that it was foregrounded by so many, with a certainty that is perhaps unfounded, provides an insight into the *meaning* of this story. I am therefore more interested in why such a narrative spread to become received wisdom with seemingly little evidence.

The half-life of a paper mill

> [It is] just another factory closure like many others. The sad thing is that it's never coming back. You can open a Tesco or call centre whenever, but these aren't real jobs for real people, exciting jobs. (Mike Grigsby in *Watermark*)

> You look at it now, it's all been pulled down. It's all been made into flats now. But behind there was the rag house [and] places like that [where] they used to make the paper, and all the reelers, and where all the reels were, where the paper used to go around, that's now a garage underneath. It's amazing when you look in there. I can't believe – I told you, where I stood is a flat now. They're all flats. And there I'm standing. And that is now a flat. (Sally Edwards, sorter of 25 years)

Before the factory closed its doors, at least two films were made by workers depicting the work still being done in those final months. I was given 'Buckland Mill' on DVD by Bill Jacobs. In the film, ex-workers Derek Brown uses a handheld camera to follow the paper through the mill from pulp store to boxed product. I must admit, I could not tell you what some of the various machines were doing in the footage; I would suggest it was made either for someone who already knows the mill/papermaking, or for someone to supplement the footage with commentary for the layperson. But I was struck by two things: the noisy papermaking machine and how few workers appeared on screen. It illustrates points made by some in this and the previous chapter on how spacious and clean the mill had become in its latter days, with workers essentially assisting the machines where necessary at all. The final scene is Derek Brown's retirement. We see Derek standing next to an unnamed man, seemingly the mill manager, congratulating Derek on his working life in front of a crowd of his co-workers. The second is titled 'Buckland Mill: End of an Era' and was produced by Len Perren. This is a more accessible film that overlays footage of working papermaking machines with commentary of exactly what is happening.

Figure 42 Sleeve of the video produced by worker Len Perren

A website was also set up to remember Buckland Mill by former worker Glenn Hatfield. It provides a history of the mill along with photographs from across its history. In both the writing and images, there is a disproportionate focus on earlier (pre-1970s) periods of the mill. Most of the photos are in black and white and captioned as being from the 1950s and 1960s, while the 'brief history of Buckland Paper Mill' focuses on the period between 1770 and 1887 before skipping to the announcement of closure in 1999.

We can see these as 'deindustrial documents', products of and contributions to the half-life of deindustrialisation (Linkon 2018). Why make these films before the factory finally closes? Why document its history online in the wake of closure? I tried to secure interviews with the film producers, unfortunately without response. Indeed, why make a film about a paper mill that closed a decade ago? *Watermark* itself can be seen as a deindustrial document – part of the 'half-life' of Dover Mill and its closure. One of its legacies is this research project, which would likely not exist if not for the documentary. Furthermore, while impossible to measure, there is little doubt that the film will have reinforced certain narratives of the mill while weakening others through their absence, narratives that are included in this thesis.

In *Watermark*, former sorters lament the abandoned factory, just wishing *something* would be done with it. That was in 2010 when the mill site had been left to decay for a decade. Many of the buildings, including the machine houses, had been torn down; the remaining

buildings had windows boarded up; the clocktower had been stripped of parts following a break-in; nature – including birds and plant life – was allowed to reclaim the space. At the end of the film, a local businessman responsible for clearing the site tells us that once the buildings were demolished seagulls had started nesting in the shape of the now-absent factory. Even the birds had grown used to the mill.

Figure 43 A still from Watermark depicting derelict mill grounds with Dover Castle in the background

By the time I met workers in 2018, those who wanted the site to be put to use were starting to get their wish. In 2013, plans were published for one- and two-bedroom apartments to be built on the former mill grounds, converting some of the remaining buildings. Named 'Clocktower Lofts', they use the site's history of papermaking as a selling point. Ruth Barton writes that industrial buildings and their ruin, demolition or retention are imbued with a 'multiplicity of meanings and memories' (2015, p. 165). Central to the preservation and conversion of industrial buildings, she writes, is a desire to preserve what is viewed as the town's history while symbolising the move from industrialisation to deindustrialisation (ibid, p. 164). Meanwhile, large sections of the site beyond the façade remained untouched and in decay, a condition that 'acts as a testimony of the powerlessness of working people' (ibid). Some former mill workers accepted an invitation to attend the opening of the apartments in 2014. But this gave rise to some mixed feelings. I asked Sally Edwards how it felt to stand in the flats that used to be her workspace:

> A shame. A shame, really, yeah. But I don't think they're nice flats. I don't think they're very good at all, really. They're modern, very modern. But it's the way they're built. Because it's, like, spiral staircases, the baths are sunk into the floor. It's a weird place, it is. It is, it's weird.

An estate agent Sally knew had invited her and her sister to have a look inside. He had known they both used to work there, and Sally went along 'for curiosity':

> Where we stood, there's a corridor, and now, can you imagine, it's all modern, lovely hallway, the doors all reach off, you know like either side. And when we all used to stand in there, side by side, there was one bench along that way, benches across this side, like you'll see that, girls standing that side, girls standing this side.

While the inside of the mill had been largely gutted, the buildings that ran along the main road remained surprisingly intact – physical remnants of where paper was once finished by cutters, sorters, and guillotinemen. Apart from some boarded-up windows, the condition of the façade could give the impression that the mill was still open for business. The clocktower remains and is now working again after its restoration in 2018 by the developers of Clocktower Lofts, something commended in the local news. It would seem that a version of the factory will continue to sit in the heart of Dover for some time.

Figure 44 The mill from the main road, 2010

The closure and physical decay of the mill seemed to reflect a sense of wider decline of Dover. Workers, most of whom had lived in the town their whole lives, reflected on the changes they had witnessed. The dominant, if not universal, narrative was one of long-term deterioration. Markers of decline came in many forms: fewer shops, fewer pubs, more immigrants, less work – not least industrial work. In *Steeltown U.S.A*, Linkon and Russo (2002) use the phrase 'constitutive narrative' to denote a story that defines a place. What is its character? What is its raison d'être? What happens when this narrative is thrown into question? In the context of Steeltown, Ohio, they explore what happens when the constitutive narrative of a place is no longer viable following the loss of the industrial work that once defined it. Dover has a long and rich history, with many competing stories to tell about itself. It can draw on its military history, international port, connection to the continent, its industry. More recently, though, Dover has indeed come to be associated with decline. The town's economic and social decline were ever-present themes in the accounts of workers.

Going into my interviews, I was interested to see the extent to which workers would place Buckland's closure in the context of wider deindustrialisation locally. I thought perhaps it was less likely because of the somewhat fragmented and protracted nature of closures in the area and the marginal place of the town and county more broadly in the story of industry and deindustrialisation. However, some did draw a connection between the closure of Buckland Mill with a wider decline in (industrial) employment in Dover. Trevor Chambers describes the effect he believed the mill's closure had on the town:

> I think, if you go back to when I started there, there was the pits, engineering works, the ferries, and the mill – [they] were the four big employers. And the pits had already shut, the engineering works had got vastly downgraded and there was hardly anyone working there, the ferries, they weren't working for the Harbour Board anymore, they were working for ferry companies. So we were really the last big employer in the town. So it affected people, but not too badly, because there was other jobs. No one was leaving there thinking 'oh, I'm never gonna be able to find another job.' Cos at the time Pfizer's were open, they was taking on people. Quite a few of our people went over there. That's in Sandwich. So, in that respect, it was a question of, you know, we've left one job, most people would have a little bit of a holiday and got another job.

We have seen that, while the mill was not a casualty of the big wave of industrial closures in the 1970s and 1980s, its workforce declined throughout the 1980s and 1990s in the context of sustained restructuring. As a result, redundancies were staggered over this period, limiting the number of people sent back into the labour market in June 2000. The incremental downsizing of the workforce over a 15–20-year period is likely to have softened the impact of the ultimate closure in 2000. Employment statistics indicate no significant increase in unemployment in this period, suggesting neither mill workers or other businesses locally suffered were put out of work in large numbers. Indeed, my interviewees gave the impression that the roughly 150 people who did lose their jobs either retired or found local employment without difficulty. I was surprised by this given that former worker Vic Matcham in *Watermark* talks of the devastation of losing multiple jobs in one family overnight. Vic had given me the impression this experience had been quite common. That is not to say this devastation was not real, just that he was the only person I heard say something like this.

Dover's Harbour Board, owner and operator of the Port of Dover, and Pfizer pharmaceutical company in Sandwich (part of the wider Dover District) were two employers that took on some former mill workers who were not in a position to retire. Some remnants of Kent's papermaking heritage still existed in the county. Chartham Paper Mill, just outside of

Canterbury, was (and is) another centuries-old mill owned by Arjowiggins. The mill is known for making 'Gateway' tracing paper for markets in China and Asia more widely, and was a natural destination for Dover Mill workers looking for work. On what workers did following closure, John Pettifer told me:

> A lot of them went to Pfizer's, and some of them went to Chartham Paper Mill. In fact, even some of the chaps from off the machines and that and the foremen went to Chartham Paper Mill. That's shutting down now, or it may be shut now, I'm not 100 percent certain.

Chartham avoided closure in 2019, saving 80 jobs, and remains open today. Someone I spoke to went to a mill in Ashford that specialised in recycled paper – in fact, the guy who ran it used to buy broke paper from Buckland. I didn't meet anyone that struggled to find work in the wake of redundancy and, while there could well have been some who did, the workers I spoke to believed people generally found other employment quite easily. Warren Baker was one of the younger mill workers to lose their job in 2000. He was in his mid-forties when it closed:

> I was sort of mid-forties, I guess, when it closed. But there were a number of people, obviously, who were younger than that. And I think the majority of them got work of some sorts locally. I don't know. I don't keep contact with a lot of them, if I'm honest with you. I bump into them and I struggle to remember some of their names as well. But I think the people generally got employment.

As noted, many workers were themselves financially secure, either due to their redundancy package and pension or securing other work locally. However, despite no longer needing the money, or even being of working age, some still missed mill work. 'You'll hear everybody say that they won't get another job like it', 80-year-old Sally Edwards told me. Long-time machineman Chris Sedgewick, himself 69 when I met him, gives an indication of what mill work still represents to him and the people he still speaks to:

> There was a good atmosphere. And, no matter who you've seen since the mill shut down – I mean, some people have got really good jobs after the mill shut down – but it doesn't matter who you talk to, they'd all go back. And that's nothing to do with the mill; that's to do with the people. It really is. Everyone you talk to, they'd all go back. It's an environment that grew. You know, it's not something – I mean, you go back to the 1930s, 1940s, and there was that sort of attitude then. And, you know, they all got on well.

We see here the attachment still felt towards this work almost two decades after the mill's closure and a sense of loss for the intrinsic benefits of the job. Even those who were financially secure following closure wanted to go back. Why? According to Chris, for the people. I would suggest that nostalgia for mill work is intensified by two factors, both of which are implicit in what Chris says here: this work provided the foundations for connections with others, over generations, that are not found in other workplaces, especially today; and, in retirement, some people are recalling a time in their lives when their social lives were richer than the present day. An exaggerated sense of past security and community can arise in the context of deindustrialisation (High 2015, p. 20). Reflecting on present-day employment in relation to mill work, Trevor provides some interesting interpretations:

> I think that side of it – camaraderie, loyalty – I think it still goes on, but not to the same extent, because there's not too many sort of actual physical jobs now, where you rely on each other. . . . I think there's a lot of competition now, particularly in office jobs and things like that where you think you're in competition with other people . . .

He reflects on his son-in-law's experience of work compared to his own:

> We always used to think of jobs [as] being jobs for life. But there's no such thing as a job for life now. My son-in-law used to work for Superdrug. He was a well-respected manager for Superdrug, and he got headhunted to go to work for Mercedes, opening a shop up at Bluewater, which lasted 6 months and then the shop shut. So he ended up going and getting a job at Mercedes in Dartford. And then he was made redundant from there. He now works for Vauxhall in Canterbury. But, you know, there's no such thing as a job for life. You can think to yourself, 'oh, I've got a long future here.' But things change so quickly now.

Is this simple nostalgia? Were some things really better in the past? If so, better in what sense? The work available to the Chambers family does, according to Trevor, represent some kind of decline. This is felt at the level of security, which, as we have seen, can in turn provide the foundations for a wide range of meaningful connections to people and place. Surely, then, former mill workers, themselves the last in a line of family members who inherited mill work from their relatives, would regret being deprived the chance of passing mill work on to their son or daughter? According to my interviewees: no. No one told me they had wanted to continue a tradition that had been so central to their earlier accounts of what made mill work so meaningful. In fact, some said they hadn't even considered it. What explains this? It is

complex, of course, but High (2015) offers one convincing explanation upon encountering something very similar:

> Clearly, their employment horizons were more bounded by class and locality than that of their children. What is interesting here is the extent to which working people's expectations appeared to be changing. Randy Restoule was one of those who did not want his sons to follow him into the mill. Asked why not, he replied after a long pause: "I wanted them to improve themselves. I found it was a kind of a dead end place…. there is monotony on the job because it's production, and the only way I guess that we went through all that is because you know the people in there, in the mill. I guess you could say they provided friendship and made the job interesting at times but the job itself was pretty monotonous." Clearly, industrial work does not hold the same public value that it once did. (2015, p. 35)

My participants went even further, claiming that it was never something they wanted. This could well be a view arrived at decades after mill work ceased to be an option. It is also being said at a time when their adult children have already pursued something else – often university followed by a profession – and so it would require imagining an entirely different set of life trajectories, and indeed identities. I would suggest something else that does not necessarily contradict High's findings and analysis. I think the lack of interest in passing on mill work represents an insecurity, perhaps an internalised insecurity, that was fostered at least as early as the mid-1980s, but possibly earlier. While mill work had once been passed on from generation to generation, the gradual erosion of job security made in increasingly difficult to imagine there would be work for their children to do. And, in this sense, their instincts were correct.

Conclusion

Where do we place Dover Mill in relation to the deindustrialisation literature? In this case, the 'half-life' of deindustrialisation can be understood as beginning before the factory even shut its doors. Through a period of widespread economic restructuring that saw a wave of factory closures, the mill remained open; but it was thoroughly transformed by the very same forces. Closure (and relocation) is just one example of capitalist change/development. We saw workplace change that fundamentally altered the nature and meaning of mill work; for some, such as the beatermen, those changes were the end of the mill, at least as they had known it. We see parallels in other studies of deindustrialisation. The Guinness factory in Tim

Strangleman's study went through similar processes of restructuring, including significant downsizing and outsourcing of many roles that had once been Guinness jobs. Strangleman's case study, and his conceptualisation of its experience of closure, is particularly useful here. He, too, recognising that the half-life of deindustrialisation begins not when the factory doors finally close but when the processes of which industrial decline is a part begin to erode the conditions, as well as the meaning, of industrial work. We might take this one step further, placing these intrinsically related processes – of workplace restructuring, deindustrialisation, and wider neoliberalisation/economic restructuring – in the history of the inherently unstable and uprooting capitalist mode of production.

Far from stability and permanence, in many ways the only constant at the mill was change. It is possible to understand the change that took place at the mill from the mid-1980s in several ways: in terms of a decline of paternalistic management/ownership; a 'flexibilisation' of mill work; a 'rationalistation' of the production process. But I think we can reasonably describe the process more broadly as a 'neoliberalisation' of the factory – while also recognising the other forces at play, such as those longer-term trends in the paper industry. The movement away from paternalism began much earlier than the mid-1980s, though. We can see the early role of neoliberalism in the mill's acquisition by British American Tobacco (BAT) in 1970. The implicit bargain of management appeared to be: we are going to automate, specialise, downsize, 'modernise', but we will remain open. This was surely a key factor in cooperation of workers implementing change. Workers continued to see management/the firm as on the same team, but French company that merged with Wiggins Teape became an enemy, at least following closure.

We might also ask the question, does the deindustrialisation literature adequately engage with the concept of neoliberalism? Is deindustrialisation treated as one component of wider political-economic changes? These are not separate processes; the process of deindustrialisation does not take place without the neoliberal reforms of the 1970s and 1980s. The field is in some ways plugging a gap that was left by more economistic accounts of post-1970s socioeconomic change. The subtitle of *The Half-Life of Deindustrialization* is *Working Class Writing on Economic Restructuring*; along with Lawson's (2018) PhD thesis which recognises a need to further attend to the relationship between neoliberalism and deindustrialisation, this is an indication that more recently there has been a subtle shift in emphasis.

5. Conclusion

Introduction

The focus of this thesis evolved over time. Whilst initially conceived as a study of factory closure and its half-life, it developed into a study of work – albeit lost work. As the research progressed, it became clear that Buckland Paper Mill's closure and its aftermath was unlike many in the existing literature. Rather than the social and economic devastation following factory closure found in other studies (see Linkon and Russo 2002; Mah 2012; Walley 2013), this was primarily a story of the long-term, staggered downsizing of a factory and an ageing workforce content with their redundancy packages and pensions. These factors limited the impact of the 2000 closure on its workers and the local community.

Whilst the project evolved in light of emerging findings, my emphasis also shifted to explore what was prioritised in the accounts of workers, who were always keen to recount their memories of mill life. Indeed, it was memories of work and working lives, rather than the impact of job loss on themselves and the local area, that were generally foregrounded by my interviewees. Interestingly, it took time to realise that the 'good times' workers tended to privilege in their accounts were in fact distant memories of mill life decades before closure. Somewhat nostalgic accounts of working life in the 1960s and 1970s often obscured the reality of long-term decline over the last two decades of the mill. I therefore wanted to shift the temporal window compared to other studies of deindustrialisation to reveal what lies *behind* the attachment, nostalgia, and indeed more critical accounts of work. In doing so, themes of work security, embeddedness and community became increasingly salient.

Both the first and second analysis chapters, on the mill community and working lives, respectively, could be read as in-depth explorations of what informs the accounts of former workers following factory closure. Here, we find nostalgic accounts of working life that articulate an exaggerated sense of stability and community, but also more critical accounts of working life that stress boredom, fatigue, frustration and other negative emotions and experiences. In the third and final analysis chapter, we find narratives of loss against the backdrop of closure, and resentment and confusion around how and why the factory was closed, despite a general sense that they had been looked after by their former employer.

This final chapter will conclude the thesis by assessing its significance in relation to my research questions, existing literature and developing theory. It will also provide insight into how the research evolved over time while pointing towards opportunities for further research

in light of its findings. It will do this first in relation to the concept of the half-life of deindustrialisation, evaluating the value of this concept in understanding this case study. It will then assess what an atypical or marginal case study of deindustrialisation can reveal about industrial employment and closure before exploring how experiences and narratives of industrial work and deindustrialisation are gendered. Reflections on the role of memory in oral historical accounts of deindustrialisation will be provided at various points throughout. I conclude the chapter with some final remarks regarding research and writing on deindustrialisation and the contribution sociology can make to the field.

The half-life of deindustrialisation

Some of the most interesting research and writing on deindustrialisation aims to document and understand this process of macro social and economic change while exploring how it is negotiated by individuals and communities. It also seeks to identify the enduring *legacies* of the industrial past in the present, often using metaphors to frame our understanding of this process at different spatial and temporal levels. The concept of the 'half-life of deindustrialisation' offered one such framework in which to explore the longer-term impact of Buckland Paper Mill's closure. The 'half-life' understands deindustrialisation as 'an active and significant part of the present', rather than a past event, that continues to have a potent influence on workers, their families and entire regions even as its significance wanes (Linkon 2018, p. 2). Its emphasis on what *remains* of lost industrial work, often in a lesser, deteriorating form, on the continued presence of the past in the present, ensures that we do not simplistically characterise deindustrialisation as a past event. This was crucial for this research as I wanted to depart from sociological theories of work, prominent at the turn of the last century, that neatly divide economic epochs into 'industrial' and 'post-industrial' eras. By conceptualising deindustrialisation as a *process*, one whose most documents phase may have begun in earnest in the mid-1970s but which by no means ceased once industrial job losses began to slow down on a national level, we can recognise the continued significance of industrial closures and decline even as the traces of this work begin to fade.

The 'half-life', then, invites us to explore the longer-term consequences of deindustrialisation. The implicit starting point here is when a factory or mine shuts its doors. The resulting displacement of an entire workforce can lead to complex social, cultural and economic consequences that stretch decades and generations into the future. But what about

the factories that remained open long after so many across the country had closed? Industry did not vanish entirely, after all. The half-life of deindustrialisation in this study, I argue, begins some time before the mill's ultimate closure in 2000. A comprehensive restructuring of the factory from the mid-1980s saw increased automatisation of the production process, specialisation that reduced the number of papers made and decommissioned an historic papermaking machine, the significant downsizing of the workforce and an emphasis on flexibility among those who remained. This process of workplace restructuring coincided with the period of mass closures nationally and offers insight into the impact of wider economic restructuring on an industrial workplace that survived the major wave of deindustrialisation.

A growing sense that the mill had undergone a 'long closure', beginning while many were still employed in the factory, was a main reason the focus of this research shifted away from the aftermath of closure and towards the working lives of mill workers. However, despite the far-reaching nature of these changes, some of their effects were not immediately obvious in the narratives I encountered. While it was made clear in *Watermark* and my own interviews with workers that significant technological advances were made in the final decades of the twentieth century, with major quantitative and qualitative consequences for the work done on the factory floor, what was less immediately apparent were the social implications of workplace restructuring. Some potential explanations for this will be explored in the following discussions on the significance of marginality and gender, but suffice to say here that workers tended to foreground an era of the mill that was characterised by a vibrant social life amongst men and women still employed in large numbers and a strong sense of job security and work identity.

Another reason for the shift in emphasis away from the ongoing legacy of closure was simply a lack of evidence of its long-term socioeconomic impact. As we have seen, the long closure of Buckland Mill limited the economic effects on workers and the wider community. In addition to the staggered nature of job losses, many of the workers who remained were nearing retirement by 2000 and received, by all accounts, generous redundancy packages in addition to their good pensions. For those who wanted or needed to continue in employment, there was also some other papermaking work nearby that was taken up by some involved in this research. Thus, the remnants of industrial closure in this research were generally fewer and less tangible than those found in other studies of factory closure and its aftermath (Nayak 2006; Linkon and Russo 2002; Walkerdine and Jimenez 2013; Clarke 2011).

The half-life here was manifested in the memories and stories of those who worked at Dover Mill. I have argued that, in the absence of more tangible remnants of mill work and its loss, the memories of former workers were among the few significant traces of the industrial

past, and it was the firsthand memories of working lives, along with stories and theories about how and why the factory closed, that formed the basis of much of this thesis. Memory, as we have seen, is not fixed or static, and is shaped by both current social context and its encounters with other versions of the past (Jedlowski 2001; Zerubavel 1996). It is also framed by the places in which events took place. Perhaps the most tangible remnant of the mill's half-life, though, was the factory itself. Like so many former industrial sites, the mill grounds had been left in a state of decay and only now, almost two decades on, was it going through its long-promised redevelopment. The factory had become a symbol of decline and neglect – not just of mill work but of Dover more broadly – and contributed to the melancholic tone of discussions around the mill's closure. It was a reminder that the experience of deindustrialisation and what happens next are buffeted by other factors – in this case, taking place in an already economically disadvantaged area. It is therefore important that the wider socioeconomic context is taken into account when researching industrial closures.

One of the most interesting manifestations of the mill's half-life was the document that prompted this study in the first place: *Watermark*. The film, made a decade after closure, played multiple roles in this research. For one, it was my first encounter with Buckland Paper Mill, and it therefore constituted my initial understanding of the mill and its legacy. From its opening scenes, the evocative images, sounds and testimonies from workers gave me a sense of what this work and workplace had been and what it meant to those who made it run. In this research, I wanted to build on what the film offered viewers by further exploring some of its themes, such as the mill's vibrant work-based community and the security the job offered; but, more importantly, I set out to place the mill and its closure in historical context while drawing on sociological concepts to better understand the experiences and narratives of former mill workers in the film.

What became clear over time is that *Watermark* had informed my own understanding of the mill in ways I had not been fully aware of. I came to realise I had developed some assumptions about the mill that started to come into question, and that the film had led me to give undue weight to certain issues in my primary and secondary research. A notable example of this was my assumption that women continued to be employed in roughly equal measure to the men up until 2000, when in fact women's jobs had been all but removed from the production process by the late 1980s. Whilst necessarily edited to tell a coherent story, the film was made up of many individual narratives and documentary materials that added weight to this particular version of events. It was some time into the collection of my own primary data that I was able to challenge with confidence my own initial interpretation of Dover Mill's story.

Indeed, was perhaps only my prior interest in the gendered experience of mill work and closure that led me to ask the questions that clarified this process had occurred. However, once I heard this for the first time, I was able to consult other documents, such as archival materials, and ask subsequent interviewees to establish how events had transpired.

What is interesting here is the role the film played in the memory of Buckland Mill – and indeed on my contribution to the half-life of the mill. There is, of course, no singular story of Buckland Paper Mill that would be universally subscribed to and agreed upon. However, in the absence of other common forms of industrial memorialisation, such as a museum or space for ex-workers to periodically meet and retell their stories, and with relatively weak ties among many former workers two decades after closure, *Watermark* may have taken on the role of an official history. I was told stories in my interviews that I had already heard through watching the documentary – sometimes employing the same language and rhetorical style. This was particularly noticeable in conversations around the idea that Conqueror could only be made in Dover and the suggestion that the transfer of the product had been a failure. It is not surprising the film had this effect – the narrative, told by a collection of trusted voices, can be stronger and broader than any individual experience or distant memory.

This thesis contributes to existing research and writing on the half-life of deindustrialisation by exploring a factory closure that raises new and interesting questions about industrial decline and the place of less typical examples of industrial closure. Indeed, Dover Mill raises new and interesting questions about the half-life as a concept. What are the longer-term effects of industrial closures and wider decline in more diverse economies? How is industrial work remembered – by workers, their families, and the local community – in areas not typically associated with or represented as 'industrial'? For those factories that continued to operate beyond the major wave of closures, how was work quantitatively and qualitatively changed by processes of deindustrialisation and neoliberalism? How did the backdrop of major deindustrialisation and labour movement defeats shape workplace restructuring and worker responses?

By exploring a factory that does not quite fit within the dominant narrative of industrial decline, particularly given that the mill continued to operate during a period of widespread deindustrialisation and neoliberalisation, the research also raises questions around processes of workplace restructuring and the role of atypicality, marginality and gender in shaping the nature and experience of these processes.

One way to engage further with the half-life in Dover would be to research subsequent generations, both those within mill families and school leavers in the town, to understand their

trajectories and options vis-à-vis those who worked at the mill. This would provide a sense of the changing economic landscape in the area and how it is being navigated by local people. Sherry Linkon writes that we can see the half-life in local places through a 'lack of good work, the fracturing of communal identity, the difficulty of becoming an adult in a time and place that offer few options and limited stability' (Linkon 2018, p. 5). A problem that this case study raises is that the decline of industrial employment in factory settings is just one element in the story of Dover's wider economic context, but further research in this area would be welcome.

Finally, it is important that deindustrialisation is placed in the wider context of economic restructuring. Further, we need to factor in other economic developments – for example, the 2008 recession and subsequent austerity measures in the UK, and the COVID-19 pandemic of the 2020s and the cost-of-living crisis that resulted from both the recovery from the pandemic and the Russian invasion of Ukraine – into our discussions of the half-life. This is particularly important when studying factories that closed after the initial wave of deindustrialisation or continue to operate today. There is sometimes a sense that these processes are taking place in isolation from one another when they of course interact to shape the social and economic landscape. This is important in studies of deindustrialisation that seek to capture how the past and present interrelate – how contemporary employment compares to industrial employment in what it provides and how workers orient themselves towards it, and how the past is seen and remembered is informed by present circumstances.

Deindustrialisation on the margins

Buckland Paper Mill shares many characteristics with mid-twentieth century industrial employment as presented in academic and popular discourse (McIvor 2013; Nayak 2006; Jones 2010, p. 166). As in factories and mines across the country, the mill offered a combination of good wages and a degree of job security that allowed workers and their families to embed themselves in their workplace and local area. While this security was ultimately undermined by widespread redundancies and factory closure, what is more important is the *sense* of security, stability and permanence among these workers, who firmly believed they had a 'job for life' in a factory that had provided employment to local families for centuries. This sense of security in turn made possible the development of strong work identities and community ties that were made and remade across decades and generations. Buckland Mill was also a typical example of industrial work in terms of the route often taken by working-class boys –

and in this case girls, too – who left school as young as 14 and 15 years of age to go straight into the factory. This 'smooth transition' from school to work was followed by on-the-job training from senior paper mill workers who transmitted not just technical skills but cultural values, practices and knowledge. Finally, the mill was typical of industrial employment insofar as it was transformed by processes of automation, financial deregulation and workplace restructuring that impacted other factories across the country and beyond, leading to its eventual closure.

Despite all of this, Dover Mill represented an unusual case study of deindustrialisation. Some of its atypical characteristics were evident from the early stages of this project. Immediately obvious was the mill's geographical location: the south-east of England, after all, is not generally associated with industry in popular, historical or academic discourse, and is certainly not considered an industrial 'heartland'. Dover Mill also closed in 2000, around two decades after the period generally associated with deindustrialisation, and long after the height of high-profile industrial disputes and closures. Further, throughout its history Buckland Mill employed a large number of women in various manual roles. Finally, while paper mills have been researched in the US in particular (High 2015; High and Lewis 2007), papermaking does not play a central role in the dominant narrative of industry and deindustrialisation in the UK in the same way as coal mining, steelmaking, shipbuilding and car manufacturing. Dover Mill, then, differs from and potentially challenges dominant representations of factory work and deindustrialisation in several key respects.

From the outset of this project, then, marginality and atypicality were important to the way I conceived of Buckland Mill and the wider context in which it existed. Indeed, an important part of the rationale behind the project was to contribute to the excavation of Kent's hitherto under-researched history of industry and deindustrialisation. In this regard, I was building on, and in dialogue with, research being carried out in this area by existing and emergent scholars, including Nettleingham (2019), Pleasant (2019) and Rowland (2019), which framed Kent as something of a neglected, marginalised industrial region.

As a sociologist, I wanted to tap into experiences and accounts of industrial work in this 'non-industrial' region to explore how macro processes of economic restructuring were experienced, negotiated and remembered 'on the ground'. Further, I was keen to attend to the ways the mill's marginality or atypicality, particularly its displacement in time and place, shaped the nature and experience of this example of industrial closure and decline. This prompted a range of questions: What did it mean to do industrial work in Kent, so far from the country's supposed industrial heartlands? How did workers understand themselves and their

work in this context? How did Kent's marginality or atypicality shape the nature and experience of the workplace and closure, and the effect of closure on workers, their families and the local community? What were the effects of industrial decline on a region with a relatively diverse economy, where one or two industries did not dominate the economic landscape? How is industrial work and decline remembered, understood, or made sense of in this context? And how does the mill's displacement in time and place inform worker responses to restructuring and closure?

First and foremost, the simple fact that Dover continued to operate throughout the height of deindustrialisation – and through wider processes economic restructuring and neoliberalism – during and after so many other factories were closing, meant that mill workers who remained witnessed drastic changes on the shopfloor not experienced by those who lost their jobs in the 1970s and 1980s. This gave me as a researcher an opportunity to explore how Buckland Mill's relatively late closure informed experiences of industrial work and closure. Dover Mill workers witnessed what I have called the 'long closure' of the factory, a recognition that the same forces that drove the wave of deindustrialisation in the 1970s and 1980s also transformed the nature and experience of mill work from this period onwards.

While factors such as the importance of place were sometimes elusive, worker accounts were at times more explicitly tied to and embedded in place. Workers spoke with pride about the paper made in Dover. There was an emphasis on quality, in terms of the product they manufactured but also the work they did and the machinery they used. This, I was assured, was one of the most technologically advanced paper mills in the country. Further, the fast, clear streams of hard water they sourced from the River Dour meant Buckland Mill could make the 'brightest whites' demanded by their corporate clients. It was a source of pride that they had produced high-quality map papers for the British Army, chart papers for naval use and security papers used in banking, for example. What seemed important here was a sense that the mill, and their labour, was making a contribution to society by providing the materials for others, in the UK and beyond, to transact their business. While Buckland Mill was not a well-known factory in one of the 'heartlands' of industry, its workers nevertheless manufactured high-quality products that were used and respected around the world.

Furthermore, it often seemed in defence of Dover that workers spoke of the failure to transfer Conqueror from their town to Aberdeen. There was an air of vindication in the way this failure was discussed. It was at Dover Mill, after all, that Conqueror had been invented – it was its home. Clarke (2011, p. 446) argues that deindustrialisation marginalises, occludes and disqualifies industrial workers from discourses that inform public understanding of the

social world. A sense of felt marginalisation, coupled with betrayal, was palpable in worker testimonies. In the context of a relatively low-profile factory closure, *Watermark* and my research offered displaced workers a rare opportunity to express their hurt, resentment and enduring confusion.

As the focus of the research shifted towards remembered working lives, I grew increasingly interested in how Dover Mill's geographical location informed the nature and experience of mill work, particularly in terms of its distance from the industrial 'heartlands' and relatively provincial character. It soon became clear that Dover's location played a key role in the character of social relations at the mill. I was struck by the extent to which former mill workers framed their relationships with their co-workers in terms of a 'family'. At the heart of this was the composition of the workforce, which had been made up of 'mill families' that often went back generations. When recruiting new employees, the mill typically favoured family members of existing workers. In fact, relatives of mill workers would often find stopgap employment until a position invariably opened to join their family member in the mill. A consequence of this policy over time was that generations of local people from the same families constituted the vast majority of the manual workforce of the paper mill, with a small number of families particularly well-represented.

The sense that the mill was a 'family' contributed to, and was reinforced by, a blurring of the distinction between work and non-work. Indeed, for many, there was no clear separation between work and leisure. In what I have argued was a strong 'occupational community' (Salaman 1974) social events would be arranged by a committee made up of workers and managers and routinely took place on mill grounds. Workers would clock off and make their way into town to frequent the local pubs, in the case of some sorters after getting ready in the Salle toilets. Co-workers would regularly go out of their way to help one another – on the shopfloor and outside of work – in what at times felt like a form of mutual aid based on reciprocity.

This occupational community was built on a foundation of job security, embeddedness in work and place and thick social networks formed over generations. The vast majority of mill workers had lived in Dover all of their lives before entering the mill (indeed, most continued to live in the town when I visited their homes to conduct my interviews). Furthermore, many had followed parents and grandparents into the workplace, themselves livelong Dovorians. Children who would eventually go on to gain employment at the mill would develop a familiarity with one another that would later smoothen their entrance into the occupational culture of the factory. As we have seen, if they did not meet while attending one of the local

schools, mill children often met others at Christmas parties held at Crabble or gatherings between mill families. Social relations were then developed both through encounters on the shop floor and at the many social events facilitated by the mill. Crucially, what made these bonds particularly strong and enduring was the extent to which workers felt rooted in the their work and the local area. The security afforded by mill work allowed workers and their families to embed themselves in Dover – owning homes near the mill, joining local organisations, sending their children to school locally, maintaining large networks of friends and acquaintances, and so on. The local connection to Dover among the manual workforce, and the relatively provincial nature of the town, provided a context in which a strong occupational community could develop and endure.

A key question that emerged when considering the mill's strong occupational community was its implications for class identities and solidarities. I have argued that a crucial function of this strong sense of work-based community was that it obscured the conflicting class interests of workers on one hand and management and ownership on the other. Indeed, one of the most striking themes to emerge through the course of my oral history interviews was the relatively harmonious relationship between workers and the mill hierarchy. I had anticipated an antagonistic relationship; instead, I found a degree of respect, even deference, articulated by former workers towards mill management that took me by surprise. Even more surprising was that, despite a general sense of resentment around the closure of the mill, workers consistently spoke in glowing terms of their former employer. The company was, by all accounts, a good employer; they always looked after their workers. I heard few complaints around pay or conditions, and mill workers always felt as though their jobs were secure and, just as importantly for these workers, that they were valued as both people and workers. It was reminiscent of Burawoy's (1982) *Manufacturing Consent*, in which the author tries to make sense of the exceptional work ethic of his exploited colleagues. Perhaps I should not have been so surprised. I had seen in *Watermark* the way former workers valued the social life of the mill, something actively facilitated by management and in which members of the management team participated alongside workers. I had also heard of the near total absence of resistance, and even open dissent, in the run-up to the mill's eventual closure. Instead, their resentment regarding closure was generally directed elsewhere, such as towards 'the French' or a bad decision by a handful of executives, if it had any specific target.

The lack of animosity and resistance to closure forced me to think carefully about the nature of mill relations and why they might have emerged in this particular way. While a strong occupational community and family environment has been common in paper mills (Lupo and

Bailey 2011), the relatively isolated, 'closed shop' nature of Dover Mill was conducive to a paternalistic style of management that promoted 'family employment through large kinship networks . . . embedded in a surrounding occupational community' (Ackers 1998, pp. 176-177) that was strengthened through social and recreational activities and a sense of job security and value. Crucially, managers, some of whom were local people who had once worked on the shopfloor, were often considered a part of this occupational community, something which I have argued obscured the competing class interests within the workplace. We can therefore see how the types of relationships formed through mill work were facilitated by Dover's relatively provincial character and the particularly insular character of the mill itself.

It is important to note that neither the mill's occupational community nor its paternalistic employment relations were static or unchanging. The workplace changed significantly across the three-decade period that culminated in its closure. While still serving as a reference point in the narratives of workers, what I view as the 'heyday' of the mill in which a sense of work-based community, not to mention job security and meaning, was eroded over time.

As we have seen, Dover Mill's displacement in time make this study somewhat atypical of case studies of factory closure, particularly in terms of exploring the significance of a factory continuing to operate through and beyond a period of accelerated deindustrialisation and neoliberalisation. By remaining open throughout the 1980s and 1990s, Dover Mill experienced a decline in the intrinsic rewards of the job that were not witnessed in the same way by industrial workers displaced at the height of deindustrialisation. There were other factors that explain the lack of resistance to closure beyond management's inclusion in the mill's occupational community. For example, the mill's displacement in both time and place, I argue, goes a long way to explaining the lack of resistance to closure. Indeed, the displacement in time and place from the industrial disputes of the 1970s and 1980s likely played a role in the acceptance of workplace change and closure.

Marginal case studies of factory closure can provide a more complex and nuanced picture of the ongoing legacy of deindustrialisation. There is a tendency, understandable if not inevitable, to focus on those places where industrial decline leads to the most significant *damage* – social, economic, environmental. This has often been, in part, a moral mission led by working-class people, often with personal ties to lost industries. In the UK, these have generally been places with the most industrial employment historically in the most economically and symbolically important sectors – coal mining, steelmaking, car manufacturing, shipbuilding. Industrial

activity, however, was never limited to these sectors or places. It is therefore encouraging that interest in spatially and temporally atypical examples of deindustrialisation has grown in recent years (High et al. 2017; Nettleingham 2019). Even if it is more difficult to capture and conceptualise processes of deindustrialisation in these contexts, it is important to recognise how they complicate dominant narratives of deindustrialisation. They help us to avoid stereotypes and oversimplification – particularly around the history and character of regions. It also challenges us to problematise the notion of the 'heartlands' and how it tacitly frames our understanding of industrial employment and deindustrialisation.

Gendering the half-life of deindustrialisation

Social scientists have been attentive to some of the gender implications of economic restructuring since the 1970s. Following significant job losses for men in manufacturing and a growth in employment for women in the expanding service sector, scholars across a range of disciplines have explored questions around changing gender identities, gendered divisions of labour and the nature of contemporary work (Strangleman and Warren 2008, p. 136; McDowell 2003, p. 27; Kenway and Kraack 2004, p. 83).

Research and writing on deindustrialisation, however, has been less attentive to the gendered nature and experience of industrial decline. Indeed, that insufficient attention has been given to both women workers and issues of gender has been a central criticism of the deindustrialisation literature to date. In making this critique, prominent scholars in the field have drawn attention to the disproportionate focus on industries historically dominated by men, particularly white men, in heavy manufacturing and extraction (High 2013, p. 1002; High 2003, p. 105). Mirroring problems historically within the sociology of work, women and women's work have been marginalised in this literature, which has arguably framed our understanding of industrial work as being the preserve of men (Clark 2017, p. 335)

I set out to better understand the place of women workers and gender in the story of deindustrialisation, and in turn address the critique made by High and others. I wanted to explore how gender informed experiences of this industrial work and factory closure. What was the gendered division of labour in the factory? How did 'women's' jobs compare to 'men's'? To what extent were the identities, meanings and attachments derived from work shaped by gender? Whose jobs were most at risk in the process of workplace restructuring and closure? How did gender identities manifest in the workplace and in oral history accounts?

By exploring these questions, the research would provide insight into an example of women's industrial work from the view of the deindustrial present. Further, by exploring both men's and women's experiences in a single factory, the research would reveal the significance of gender in processes of industrial work and closure. In doing so, it had the potential to challenge the characterisation of the industrial worker as a male employed in heavy manufacturing or extraction in the industrial 'heartlands'. Further, the research would contribute to recent work that is beginning to address the lack of attention to women workers and gender analysis in the deindustrialisation literature while potentially challenging received wisdom.

Buckland Paper Mill represented a useful case in which to explore gendered experiences of industrial work and deindustrialisation, though not entirely in the way I had anticipated. Prior to collecting my empirical data, my understanding was that men and women were employed in roughly equal numbers. This was primarily informed by my reading of the *Watermark* documentary, which portrayed the closure of Buckland Mill as something experienced similarly by men and women workers in 2000. A contributing factor was that the footage and images used in the film were predominantly from the 'heyday' of the mill and therefore depicted a factory that included a large number of women working in the Salle. In this sense, the documentary was an act of memory. Further, as an arts project with inherent limitations in scope, the film did not provide a gender analysis of the mill's closure, and there was no indication that this event was experienced differently by men and women workers.

I have argued that it is useful to think of the closure of Dover Mill in terms of a 'long closure', a process characterised by, among other things, a protracted downsizing of the workforce leading up to the final shutdown. The loss of women's jobs in the Salle was an early phase in the long closure of the mill. This was not immediately obvious, however. It slowly emerged during my interviews that by the time the mill closed, the gender composition of the workforce had changed considerably. Women workers, I learned, were absent from the shopfloor by 2000. In fact, the jobs historically performed by women had been largely automated out of existence in the mid-1980s. Despite the relative lack of research into displaced women workers, some have argued that women have been at greater risk of job loss than men (see Cowie 1999). In keeping with this argument, women's jobs were among the first to be lost in the mill's 'modernisation' process, with the near-total loss of women's jobs in the mill generating seemingly little comment or resistance.

An interesting problem emerged whilst collecting data. To my surprise and frustration, I found it very difficult to obtain interviews with women who had worked at Dover Mill. While

men were generally keen to be involved in the project, the women I contacted directly or through their former colleagues were generally reluctant to speak to me, especially in a recorded interview. There was a general sense, even amongst those who did agree to be involved, that they had little information to offer, going so far as to question why I would want to interview them or refer me instead to a male co-worker who would be more useful to my research. Gender and generational differences, I am sure, were a factor, as were the fact that some had spent less time at the mill and had left much earlier than their male counterparts. But it also seemed to reflect the gender hierarchy of the mill which valued men's work as important and prestigious. Regardless of the reasons, women workers were effectively erasing themselves from the history of the mill – or one version, at least.

What was clear throughout my research was that this factory was always a highly gendered space. We see the clearest evidence of this in the rigid division of labour that persisted throughout the mill's history, but it can also be seen in the nature of the jobs done by men and women throughout the mill's history, the degree of autonomy these roles afforded and the opportunities to progress through or move around the mill. While not all men were 'papermakers', all papermakers were men – and papermaking was the work that commanded prestige. Indeed, it was taken for granted that only men would *make* paper and that women would *sort* (and sometimes count) it. This arrangement was naturalised using cultural and biological tropes regarding the work men and women were capable of doing – around physicality, dexterity, cleanliness – even as the production process changed to remove these factors. This was in firmly line with conceptualisations on the social construction of skill and sex-typing of particular jobs that disadvantage women (Phillips and Taylor 1980, p. 79 and Warhurst 2017, p. 72). While the mill's gender hierarchy did not go completely unchallenged, as seen when women in the Salle would routinely intimidate younger male workers to, I have suggested, reclaim a degree of power over their male co-workers, a gender hierarchy was persistent through the mill's history and even within my research.

Unsurprisingly, there was evidence that the gendered nature of mill work had implications for how this work was perceived and valued amongst workers and what was emphasised about the job and mill life more generally. I have suggested this was one factor behind the reluctance of women to be interviewed and deferring to men's version of events. However, there was evidence that identities and meanings derived from mill work was also strongly gendered. While men displayed strong work identities characterised by a pride in skill, in making, and in the status conferred by being a papermaker, women workers placed greater emphasis on social life on the shopfloor and the enjoyment and fun within the mill community.

I have to be careful, though, not to overstate these somewhat tentative findings given the relatively small number of women interviewed for this research.

Deindustrialisation has been a strongly gendered process. While it is often acknowledged that the contraction of manufacturing, coupled with an expansion of the service sector, has led to a shift in the gender composition of the workforce, there is scope to develop a more nuanced understanding of this process and its legacy. By using the concept of the 'half-life of deindustrialisation' to explore the experiences of displacement women workers, we can avoid portraying industrial employment as solely the preserve of men. Indeed, it is important to recognise that while men have accounted for the majority of job losses as a result of processes of economic restructuring, many women worked in manufacturing and were particularly vulnerable to job loss in the face of economic restructuring (Cowie 1999). One advantage of incorporating a gender analysis when utilising the 'half-life' is that it allows us to explore this argument.

This research addresses the marginalisation of displaced women workers in the deindustrialisation literature by exploring how women understand their work and its loss at Buckland Paper Mill. Documenting the experiences of displaced women workers also adds much-needed complexity and nuance to the debate around deindustrialisation and its legacy. Further, exploring women's experiences of industrial work and displacement is important if we are to address the dominant perception of industrial work as the preserve of men. By analysing how processes of industrial work and deindustrialisation have been gendered, this thesis also provides a gender analysis that has been largely absent from existing research and writing. Recent writing has done important work to address these limitations (see Clarke 2011; Clark 2017; Walkerdine and Jimenez 2013).

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Appendices

Appendix A: Participant information form

Paul Cook
PhD Student & Researcher
University of Kent
P.F.Cook@kent.ac.uk
07817730347

Dear

My name is Paul Cook and I am a PhD student and researcher at the University of Kent. I am currently working on a project exploring Kent's industrial history and the closure of Dover's Buckland Paper Mill in 2000.

Inspired by the 2011 feature documentary *Watermark*, the project is interested in what it was like working at Buckland Mill, the importance of the Mill to its employees and their families, and the impact of its closure on the local community.

I am contacting you because you worked at Buckland Paper Mill and I'd be interested in talking to you about your time there. I am keen to learn, among other things, how you came to work at the Mill, the specific jobs you did, memories of workmates and the social life around Mill, and how you remember the Mill's closure in 2000. You are also welcome to show or discuss any photographs or souvenirs kept from your time at the Mill should you wish to do so.

The information you provide will represent a valuable part of my research. This information may be used in my PhD thesis or in related publications in academic journal articles and books or online. To ensure your anonymity, your name will **not** be provided alongside this information.

Attached to this information sheet is a consent form which asks you to indicate whether you are willing to participate in this research. Please note that you have the right to withdraw your participation at any time without giving reason and can do so by contacting me on the email address or phone number above.

Thank you very much for your time,

Paul Cook

Appendix B: Informed consent form

This agreement is made between Paul Cook (the researcher) and you (the respondent) to ensure that your participation and/or recording is used in accordance with your wishes.

Please read the following statements and, if you agree, initial the corresponding box to confirm agreement:

	Initials
I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet for the above study. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily.	
I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason.	
I understand that my data will be treated confidentially and any publication resulting from this work will report only data that does **not** identify me.	
I freely agree to participate in this study.	

Signatures:

Name of participant (block capitals)	Date	Signature
PAUL COOK		
Researcher (block capitals)	Date	Signature

Appendix C: Indicative interview schedule

Research Project: Gender, Deindustrialisation, Memory at Buckland Paper Mill

Paul Cook, University of Kent

Interview Schedule for Former Paper Mill Workers, Buckland, Dover

Starting at the mill

1. How did you start at the mill? (also school – name, experience, qualifications…)

2. Did you have any family at the mill (before or after you started)? Did you need a connection?

3. What did you know about the mill before you started? (i.e. through family, friends, family events; did Buckland have a reputation locally?)

4. What can you remember about your first day? (what was your job? what were your first impressions? was it what you expected?)

5. Did you have other jobs? If so, why did you take that path?

Everyday working life at the mill

Ask*: what was your last/main job at the mill?*

6. Can you talk me through your daily working pattern, explaining what the work consisted of? (Could you show me?)

7. So what would you say you spent most of your time doing as _____?

8. What kind of skills did that job require? How did you gain those skills? Was it difficult to learn how to _____?

9. Why do you think you were suited to/good at that job?

10. Was it difficult or dangerous work?

11. Were you interested in the paper-making process (how paper was made)? Were you interested in paper (different kinds/qualities)?

12. Could you give me a sense of what the factory itself was like? (in terms of atmosphere: sounds, temperature, smells, light/dark; dirty; workspace)

13. Would you say the job/mill changed from when you first started? (process, workforce, social side, relations)

Relations between mill workers

14. How did you get on with other workers (humour, friendship, competition/cooperation, hierarchies, atmosphere)? What about supervisors?

15. I understand that the mill had a social club and held social events (dances, sports events, Xmas parties, trips, weddings, etc.). Did you get involved in these? (If so, what were they like? what did they add to the job?)

16. Did you socialise with workmates outside of work? If so, what did you do?

17. How did you feel about the job? (Imagine getting up in the morning…)

Gender at work and home

18. I understand that the men and women had different jobs in separate areas of the mill. Why do you think that was? Was it ever challenged?

19. Did the men and women generally mix or talk at work? (did you interact with the _____? how often and in what context?)

20. Did your partner/husband/wife work during your time at the mill? If so, what did they do?

21. Who was in charge of what in terms of housework/childcare?

Memories of closure

*(If made redundant in **2000**)*

22. Can you remember where you were when you first heard about the mill's closure? (what was your reaction?)

23. What was the atmosphere like around the mill when it was announced?

24. Can you remember what you planned to do after the closure?

*(If left mill **before 2000**)*

25. Why did you leave the mill? (did you have any expectations of how long you would work at the mill? 'Job for life'?)

26. What do you remember about your last day?

Aftermath of closure

27. What did you do after the mill closed? (other work, retirement, unemployment?)

28. How has Dover changed over the years? (e.g. work – then and now, social life, shops, etc…). Did you ever think of Dover as an industrial town?

29. How do think the mill's closure affected the local community/Dover? (a blow? knock-on effects? employment, socially, part of town's history)

30. Do you know why the mill closed? If not, why do you *think* it closed? (Did you link closure with national industrial decline?)

31. Did you keep any photographs or souvenirs from the mill? If so, why did you hold onto these?

32. Do you keep in contact with people from the mill? (who? what do you talk about/do?)

33. Watermark: good/accurate account of the mill?

Generations

34. What did your parents do for work?

If they have children

35. What did you want your children to do for work? (mill? If not, what did you want them to do?)

36. How do you children's jobs compare with the mill?

37. What do you think you would do for work if you were leaving school now?

Final thoughts

38. Is there anything I haven't asked about that's important in understanding what it was like to work at the mill?

39. Is there anything else you would like to add?

Thank you!

…do you think you'd know anyone else who might be interested in talking to me?