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Chapter 1. Portrait of a deindustrialising island

Tim Strangleman

Introduction

Ray Pahl's *Divisions of Labour* represents an influential, if somewhat neglected classic text for sociologists of work. Combining, as it does, formal and informal work patterns alongside discussions of both public and private realms, it was part of an upswing against a more traditional industrial sociology which privileged traditional, often male-dominated forms of employment (see Salaman 1986; Gallie 1988; Strangleman 2005). What Pahl realised in his writing was the need for a broader sociology of work which could encompass a wider set of pressures, influences, links and networks which shaped work, and were in turn shaped by work. As a piece of historically and sociologically aware writing about economic life it was in many ways prescient.

In this chapter I want to explore another way in which *Divisions of Labour* is a neglected classic, and this is in terms of its attention to the issue of deindustrialisation. Pahl was writing at a time when the label deindustrialisation was increasingly applied to the contemporary experience of industrial change. The word is one that crops up six times in the book's index, both as a general phenomenon, as well as specifically about Sheppey as a site of industrial loss. I want to argue that *Divisions of Labour* was a ground-breaking book in a number of ways precisely because of the way it understood the topic of deindustrialisation. Pahl realised that a tight focus on a confined geographical space could reveal a more general set of trends, and therefore understandings, about change. Although he didn't use the phrase, Pahl's Sheppey was in many ways a posterchild for deindustrialisation in the

UK as it contained within its boundaries many of the complex elements of deindustrialisation, indeed he did describe Sheppey as a 'post-industrial laboratory'. Rather than seeing the problem as 'simply' about job loss and industrial closure *Divisions of Labour* identifies and unpacks a whole series of often contradictory processes involved in deindustrialisation, processes which often occlude rather than reveal the reality at work. By developing his unusual temporal device of projecting forward, thinking through what developments might yield in the future, Pahl was, by accident or design, anticipating many of the ways in which deindustrialisation has been conceived of subsequently. Pahl was close-up to the developments he discussed, but he was able to put his contemporary observations in historical context and, crucially, able to think about how this process of industrial change might unfold into the future. What makes Pahl's book so important is that he senses that there is deep-seated change in the economy but avoids what he described as 'exagger-books' which argued that society was undergoing complete change. In what follows I look first briefly at the scholarship around deindustrialisation, both contemporaneously to Pahl's work and later writing. This will set the scene for a discussion of the theme of deindustrialisation within *Divisions of Labour* and how we can identify a number of distinct ways in which Pahl was thinking in very original ways about the process. Finally, using these ideas I want to explore how *Divisions of Labour* can in turn throw new light on to debates about both deindustrialisation and the sociology of work in our own time.

Deindustrialisation

Pahl's *Divisions of Labour* of 1984, and his research for it dating back to the 1970s, was right at the cusp of a profound change in Western economies. While the term deindustrialisation had been around for some time it really became an issue in the

early 1980s and, in academic and policy circles in particular, with the publication of Bluestone and Harrison's (1982) *The Deindustrialisation of America*. The novelty of Bluestone and Harrison's approach lay in the way they studied the economic, political and social effects of industrial decline, seeking to understand economic decisions as hedged around by a complex web of factors, both domestic and international. They identified important trends in North American disinvestment domestically, and the parallel investment in developing nations as at the heart of deindustrialisation. They called for moral and ethical questions to be answered by US corporations over these actions. Understandably much of the attention paid to industrial decline centred on what was rapidly becoming known as the 'Rust Belt', a corridor of disinvestment from the Northeast states – New York, New Jersey and Pennsylvania through to the Mid-West – Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, and Michigan. During the 1980s and 1990s interest in the process of industrial loss grew among academics, journalists and policy makers. Many of the early studies sought to understand the immediate effects of closure on local communities struggling with industrial loss. Often these accounts emphasised the vulnerability of mono-industrial towns or regions and the attempts to fight closure or reopen plant (Lynd 1982; Bensman and Lynch 1987). As time passed, greater emphasis was placed on linking the plight of individual places with broader issues associated with plant closure. These included a focus on internal migration, of white flight and racial ghettoization. Later still, attention was paid to the ongoing and long-term effects of change within and across generations. Deindustrialisation attracted the attention not only of sociologists like Pahl but also geographers, economists, anthropologists as well as humanities scholars interested in how reaction to this deindustrialising process was

increasingly being manifested in cultural creation such as creative writing, poetry and visual media (see Strangleman 2013).

Later there developed a trend towards making broader sense of deindustrialisation, to attempt to synthesise the more local, small scale accounts of change to try and capture the great meaning and significance. In a special issue of *Urban Anthropology and Studies of Cultural Systems and World Economic Development*, published in 1985, editor Katherine Newman envisaged the contribution that the field of urban anthropology could make to the study of deindustrialisation. Recognising what she saw as the transformative powers of deindustrialisation, as well as its social and economic costs, Newman saw it as a pertinent area of inquiry due to the way in which, 'it offers a means of integrating the study of urban subcultures into the larger economic landscapes which surround them' (1985: 14). She argued that the, 'deindustrialisation paradigm',

'... takes us beyond purely economic issues. Deindustrialization ultimately affects family life, the ways in which people age, the extent to which their communities remain intact or fall victim to outmigration, and the very nature of the urban dweller's worldview. In the most general sense, the research on deindustrialization turns the urban anthropologist toward the social problems side of our informants' lives, since many of the pathologies of city life can be traced to the effects of economic dislocation' (1985: 15).

This was echoed by Goch, who observes in relation to the study of deindustrialization in the German Ruhr:

'Whereas the economic dimensions of structural change were constantly discussed, certain other dimensions only became evident with time, needed

more time to be even recognized...These were the social and cultural, particularly political-cultural dimensions that arose with de-industrialization, the change and diversification of the economic structure, the emergence of service industries, the production of knowledge, and the accompanying pluralisation of the working world and life in general' (Goch 2002: 88).

In 2003 Jefferson Cowie and Joseph Heathcott published *Beyond the Ruins*, an edited collection bringing together authors from a range of disciplines and perspectives studying the phenomenon of deindustrialization across the United States. Cowie and Heathcott used their introduction to 'move the terms of the discussion "beyond the ruins"' (2003: 1). While the editors made clear they were not dismissing the important testimonies from workers caught in the midst of plant shutdowns, they instead argued 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"' (2003: 1-2).

They argued for a more considered view as to what this all meant: what were the longer term patterns and issues and what was at stake? This emphasis on the long-term consequences of industrial change coupled with a desire to reach back historically to ground an understanding of industrial culture gives a particular richness to debates and commentary within the USA, arguably one that is lacking in the UK. More recently still literature scholar Sherry Linkon has developed the phrase

the 'half-life of deindustrialisation', in order to grasp the medium and long-term impact of social, cultural and economic change. As she explains:

'Deindustrialization has a half-life, and like radioactive waste, its effects remain long after abandoned factory buildings have been torn down and workers have found new jobs. ... We see the half-life of deindustrialization not only in brownfields too polluted for new construction but also in long-term economic struggles, the slow, continuing decline of working-class communities, and internalized uncertainties as individuals try to adapt to economic and social changes. It is not yet clear how long it will take for the influence of deindustrialization to dissipate, but the half-life of deindustrialization clearly extends well into the twenty-first century' (Linkon 2014: 2).

As we will see Ray Pahl was alive to many of these issues and ways of exploring industrial change in the context of Sheppey.

Deindustrialisation and *Divisions of Labour*

The first mention Pahl makes of deindustrialisation is towards the end of his introduction to Part Two, where he notes his three primary reasons for selecting Sheppey for his study. After its sociological distinctiveness, and its reputation for informal economy, he notes:

'The third main factor that drew me to the Island was its pattern of unemployment. As an Admiralty dockyard from the late seventeenth century and also a military garrison, Sheerness had almost three hundred years of industrial history which might have produced a mature working-class culture.

The dockyard had closed twenty years before the fieldwork began, but it was in the front of the minds of all those who had been living on the Island at the time. There were other traditional industries, such as glass and pottery manufacture, and more modern plants making pharmaceuticals and electrical components. A very wide range of manufacturing industry made the Island a more attractive area in which to explore the implications of de-industrializationⁱ than any other alternative town within a reasonable radius of my home university. Furthermore, its level of unemployment was between 10 and 14 per cent in the early stages of the project, rising above 20 per cent in the autumn of 1983. In so far as other forms of work could serve as a compensation for the decline in employment, Sheppey seemed an appropriate choice to explore such a pattern' (Pahl 1984: 145).

There are a number of points to pull out of this extensive justification for choosing Sheppey. Most important for the current chapter is that Pahl makes the distinction between unemployment and deindustrialisation, a more obvious point now, but not quite so clear-cut in the early 1980s. Interesting too in his portrait of an industrial island (excerpted above) is how he pays attention to an industry which had disappeared physically from the Island some two decades before, but which at the same time continued to exercise a ghostly presence on its latter-day inhabitants. While that initial mention of deindustrialisation was essentially backward looking in the final section of his introduction he projects forward from the period of the mid-1980s to the turn of the millennium, and from the local context of Sheppey to the rest of the UK:

'... although the account of the process of de-industrialization on the Isle of Sheppey will surely prompt the reader to consider whether what the smaller

Island faces in the 1980s its larger neighbour will face, in increasingly acute form, towards the year 2000' (Pahl 1984: 151).

In both Pahl's historical sense of the process of deindustrialisation, and in his anticipatory projection forward over a quarter of a century into the future, he was at the forefront of discussions of the phenomena. A careful study of the bibliography of *Divisions of Labour* reveals little contemporary writing he could draw on to discuss the topic. The big exception was the collection *De-Industrialisation*, edited by Frank Blackaby (1979) which explored the issue through a variety of policy and disciplinary perspectives and Jonathan Gershuny's (1978) *After Industrial Society?*, which uses the term 'Post-Industrial', rather than 'deindustrial'. Interestingly he did not reference Daniel Bell's 1973 book *The Coming of Post-Industrial Society* in the 1984 book although he had in previous publications (e.g. Pahl 1980). Understandably given the timing of his writing Pahl seems to have been unaware of Bluestone and Harrison's (1982) *The Deindustrialisation of America* mentioned earlier.

Industrial decline was though a hot topic during this period as an ideological war was being fought out over the economy and how it might be reformed. Much was made of the nineteenth century antecedents of the 1980s recession, most notably seen in the publication of Martin Wiener's 1981 book *English Culture and the decline of the Industrial Spirit 1850-1980* and his assertion of the notion that the roots of Britain's industrial decline date from the 1880s and in particular the gentlemanly capitalism which failed to grasp fully the need to invest in new technology and efficiency. In sociological accounts of the economy contemporary researchers were more likely to discuss the issue of unemployment, usually in policy terms, rather than as sociologists of work (see Marsden 1982; Massey and Meegan 1982; Fineman 1987; Westergaard *et al.* 1989). Other sociologists of work and economic life were later to

use the term deindustrialisation as the economic programme of the Thatcher administrations gradually became clearer (see for example MacInnes 1987; Eldridge *et al* 1991). By contrast Pahl was not only using the term deindustrialisation, but was also differentiating between its various forms.

Three concepts of deindustrialisation

The most straightforward account of deindustrialisation in Pahl's book is in his discussion of industrial closure. His chapter entitled 'Portrait of an Industrial Island' gives a flavour of Sheppey's industrial past and present:

'Queenborough High Street has many of its period houses boarded up in bad repair, and in turning off down Rushenden Road, past the industrial estate, the impression is of a northern industrial town. Heavy traffic has pitted the roads; factories making fertilizer, lavatory pans or glass bottles make little attempt to look presentable to visitors. Railway tracks cross the road; huge metal objects lie outside the rolling mill and iron foundry ...' (Pahl 1984: 153).

He goes on to describe the Rushenden Road Estate in the language of the Marxist analysis of the time as 'an all too obvious machine for workers to reproduce themselves in' (1984: 153). If this is an industrial scene it is clearly one Pahl reads as in decline, just like scores of similar industrial communities of 'the north'. It is the process of industrial loss that attracts Pahl to the story of the dockyard and the way its fortunes wax and wane before the eventual terminal closure of 1960. Importantly Pahl draws attention to the peculiarities of naval dockyard employment wherein a particular form of secure vulnerability was engendered, a feature common to all the historic naval dockyards in the UK (see Lunn and Day 1999). These were workplaces that featured high levels of job security, relatively low wages, provision of

pensions and relative autonomy over work patterns. These then were secure 'good jobs', but vulnerable in the sense of being subject to government strategic review.

700 dockyard jobs were lost in 1960 although some workers transferred to the Chatham yard, which itself was to close two decades later as part of a more established wave of deindustrialisation. Pahl was clear that in order to grasp contemporary patterns of work on the Island he had to understand the legacy of the type of work culture that had been engendered by the naval dockyard. This was something that had grown up not over decades but rather centuries. In the interviews with employers he picked up the sense of legacy:

'One manager, in attempting to put his finger on what was most distinctive, thought that the dockyard had created a particular style of worker: "it gave employment with dignity." The new employment that came on to the Island in the 1960s and 1970s demanded different qualities from the Sheppey workers. It demanded regular hours; it introduced all kinds of controls and disciplines. There was little concern for the workers' dignity, and, very frequently, firms closed or workers were made redundant as a result of takeovers, mergers or the rationalizations of larger companies which decided that they could dispense with their Sheppey plant. No longer was there a clear and obvious boss – whether of the dockyard, the bottle works, the potteries or the glass factory. As the manager of one of the older companies, which has a long association with the Island, commented: "they're good workers but suspicious – and rightly so when they've been taken over three times in ten years." Now, he admits, despite attempts to explain to the shopfloor about the takeovers, there is still confusion: "they don't even know who owns them!"' (Pahl 1984:

175). (the excerpts from Portraits of an industrial island provide a fuller context for this quote.)

There was then a sense of earlier deindustrialisation and closure as making contemporary Sheppey vulnerable to new waves of closure; the original dockyard closure creating a pool of labour more at risk of insecure employment even in an era of virtually full employment. While *Divisions of Labour* more obviously focuses on the decline of industrial work Pahl also mentions the decline in non-industrial forms such as informal work on the land or in the tourism sector, all in serious decline by the time Pahl began his project.

Pahl's second conceptualisation was less straightforward than simple loss of industrial work. Scattered throughout the book are mentions of the new 'industry' whereby Sheppey was being developed as a place to off-load, store and prepare new Japanese cars before they hit the forecourts of Britain. Here the story was of Sheppey's role in undermining the domestic automotive industry. It clearly made a big impression on Pahl, in his description of the industrial nature of the landscape he notes in his portrait 'and the horizon is again dominated by the endless sea of Japanese cars' (Pahl 1984: 153). The presence of this particular trade flow was noted on the map of the island that Pahl included in the book (p.342) as 'parking areas for Japanese cars' (indicated by shading); the map is reproduced in Dawn Lyon's chapter in this book. Car importation was even captured in one of the images used to illustrate the book, with a picture of empty rail car transporter wagons returning to the Island to collect another load of imported cars. Pahl was explicit in his analysis of this trade that it was fundamentally linked to the wider process of UK deindustrialisation, as he argues later in the book:

‘Finally, the penetration of foreign products, consequent upon and encouraging the de-industrialization of Britain, led to acres of land changing from sheep pasture to enormous car parks for foreign-made (mostly Japanese) cars. It was estimated that, of the total of 800,000 cars a year imported into Britain in the early 1980s, 100,000 came through Sheerness, encouraging the local MP to say that this was putting Sheerness “at the centre of world trade” (Pahl 1984: 187).

Later still he again draws on this servicing industry to illustrate a wider point about economic change on the Island:

‘De-industrialization and jobless growth are not ideas that have to be introduced to the Islanders. The development of Sheerness as a port for importing Japanese cars makes the contrast transparently clear. On the same site where Pilkingtons once employed over 400 people, there are probably three times that number of Toyota cars driven there by a handful of workers. Certainly, the car-importing firms are expanding and firms may take on a few extra workers, but this is rarely likely to reach double figures in a year’ (Pahl 1984: 194).

By making these connections so early in the process of deindustrialisation Pahl was uncovering the complexity of what was happening to the wider economy in the UK through the lens of the process on Sheppey. As he notes:

‘Here it is simply worth noting that in some respects the Isle of Sheppey can be seen to have some of the characteristic problems of a de-industrializing Britain in a particularly extreme form. People, goods and capital are likely to flow through the Island, adding little to the quality of life of those living there.

The people come straight off the ferry and do not wish to stay overnight; the goods, mainly imported cars, cover much of the Island in an unsightly way or are moved out in heavy container lorries jamming the Island's roads; and the capital, from the plants employing the few, but relatively highly rewarded workers, goes to Chicago, Osaka or Rotterdam' (Pahl 1984: 195).

Pahl understood that this form of development added little value to the local or national economy, and tied in with his recognition of the significance of the fact that 'In 1983, for the first time in 200 years, Britain recorded a deficit in trade with the rest of the world in manufactured goods' (1984: 335). This was typically service sector work for low-skilled and low-paid workers. These were also flows of investment made by multinational companies which made Sheppey and places like it vulnerable to changing business decisions made far away. *Divisions of Labour* then makes the link between industrial decline and 'precarious' work nearly three decades before Guy Standing (2011) promoted the term in his writing.

The third main type of deindustrialisation identified by Pahl in his book was a form of what could be called, following Schumpeter, 'creative destruction'. This was the way in which industry on the Island was stimulated as part of the very process of wider domestic deindustrialisation.

'The rolling mill at Queenborough and the steel mill at Sheerness were partly encouraged to come to Sheppey by the establishment of shipbreaking yards on the Island. The post-war government granted a licence not only to break up ships but also to smelt them into raw material for the UK steel industry. The scrap from a de-industrializing Britain has helped to bring some new

investment to Sheppey. The Queenborough rolling mill has moved from ships to old track and wagons from British Rail' (Pahl 1984: 171).

Pahl does not mention that Dr Beeching, the architect of dramatic cuts to the UK's railway network in the 1960s, had been born on Sheppey, but the irony would not have been lost on him. Some of the expansion of the new activity was, Pahl notes, due to the cheap abandoned industrial land on the Island; Brownfield sites before that term became popular. What is striking about Pahl's insights three decades ago was how *Divisions of Labour* rehearsed many of the ways in which deindustrialisation is now discussed and understood. This example of industrial development stimulated by deindustrialisation – industrial development as both symptom and cause – is a common one in contemporary coverage of the topic, notably in the USA (see Walley 2013).

One of the best examples of this contemporary writing can be found in Paul Clemens' (2011) *Punching Out: One Year in a Closing Auto Plant*, in which the author spends twelve months working with a gang of skilled workers who strip out the capital equipment from a redundant factory. Clemens' account is a careful exploration of this process and is a sympathetic portrayal of the men who, having once been skilled fitters in plants like Budd (the automotive plant on which his study is based), now find employment using that skill and knowledge carefully dismantling the still operational machinery ready for shipping to Mexico or elsewhere in Latin America. Clemens is keen to make the distinction between the highly-skilled gang he observes and the scrappers – both legal and illegal – who now populate Detroit's abandoned industrial landscape. *Punching Out* places this trade in redundant machinery in its wider US context. He shows the way a whole industry has been created to systematically strip out plant from the US economy ranging from those

who actually dismantle machines and transport them through to the intelligence produced on where closures have occurred. Clemens talks at length about *Plant Closing News*, a twice monthly listing of industrial distress. At one point the paper was reporting on an average of 100 plant closures a month, but the figure is often reported as being much higher. In both the case of the skilled dismantlers Clemens reports on, and lower level scrappers, the impression is of an economy consuming itself; hastening its own decline, feeding off its own body fat built up over a century. Clemens is aware too of the irony of the workers he becomes close to as working themselves out of jobs as they finish dismantling Budd.

'I felt as if I'd witnessed an execution. I watched the process of dismantling a press many times, and never found the sight any less awesome, or any less saddening. At Budd, all of the skill of the Arkansas Boys - and of Jeff, Matt, Guy, and Nedaz [those he worked with] - was in the service not of making things but of taking apart the things that had made things. It seemed a waste of such talents, a wound somehow self-inflicted - an act of violence against the prospects of blue-collar Americans by blue-collar Americans, who had no other choice' (Clemens 2011, 253-4).

Pahl then understood what was happening on Sheppey in terms of the scrap management as a very real and poignant form of economic cannibalism in much the same way as Clemens was to nearly three decades later and over three thousand miles from Sheppey.

Reassessing deindustrialisation in *Divisions of Labour*

As we have seen, Pahl identified three distinct but interlinked forms of deindustrialisation underway in Sheppey in the late 1970s and early 1980s. In its

most basic form this was the simple loss of industry, the closure of plant which is what most of us, certainly at the time Pahl was writing, would have associated with the word. Secondly, he was identifying the way industrial depression was sucking in newer forms of investment attracted by cheap labour and plentiful land. Crucially Pahl recognised that this was not employment or economic activity that was likely to add much value, being neither highly-skilled nor well-paid. It was also, and perhaps most importantly, not sustainable in the longer term. Indeed this type of economic activity might even prevent the development of other forms of investment and job creation. Finally, *Divisions of Labour* saw the industrial activity in the scrap metal sector on the Island as symptom of an industrial cannibalism, a country systematically stripping out its productive manufacturing capacity. What was and still is impressive about this dissection is how it can simultaneously hold these developments apart but see them as interlinked and intertwined. They are all part and parcel of the same process of a wider deindustrialisation.

But what more can *Divisions of Labour* tell us about the process of deindustrialisation, and how it might throw new light on contemporary industrial decline? As the excerpts from chapters six and seven illustrate perhaps the most important aspect of what Ray Pahl was doing in his book and wider research was placing economic activity both into a geographic context as well as an historical perspective. As a geographer by training he was sensitive to an understanding of the relationship between place and human development. Space and place were not containers in which activity took place but rather each shaped the other over time. This temporal sensitivity was and is important, and is one of the reasons why *Divisions of Labour* has stood up so well as a study to return to. In examining economic activity occurring in the 1980s Pahl understood the deep roots of industrial

culture, the multiplicity of sedimented customs and practice and how these were accreted over time. Though he didn't use the phrase one could almost sum up this as a recognition of an industrial structure of feeling. Dave Byrne has used this phrase to explore the legacy of industrial work in the North-east of England after deindustrialisation (Byrne 2002; Byrne and Doyle 2004). Using Raymond Williams' work, Byrne charts the persistent traces of a culture shaped by specific types of work in a region – most notably in his research on the coal industry. In many ways Pahl was thinking in very similar ways about the development and decline of industry on Sheppey. Thus in talking about economic life in the 1980s, Pahl felt the necessity to revisit the creation of industry in the seventeenth century and thereafter trace the way that industry (especially the naval dockyard) grew, matured, declined and then finally closed. Crucially, though, he understood that the closure of the 1960s was not the terminal point of that particular story. As a good historical sociologist Pahl knew that two decades after that closure it still influenced economic, cultural and social life and would continue to do so. It still could be found in traces among those who had directly experienced closure as well as in subsequent generations shaped by their parents or grandparents. As Pahl notes in his introduction:

'Furthermore, the past may provide clues for the future: if de-industrialization is, in some sense, the reverse of the process of industrialization, then by, as it were, running the film of history backwards, we may discover a guide to the future. There may be possible parallels between what happens in the 1980s and 1990s and what happened two hundred years earlier' (Pahl 1984: 2).

Here again Pahl's work has powerful resonances with the way many scholars of deindustrialisation are thinking about their subject (Strangleman 2016). There is a general recognition that the study of industrial change has to, in the words of US

historians Jefferson Cowie and Jonathan Heathcott, move 'beyond the ruins' or the 'body count' approach to talking about deindustrialisation. As we saw above, authors such as Cowie and Heathcott wanted to move away from the immediacy of plant closure and the struggles to save them, important as they undoubtedly were or are.

By examining deindustrialisation that had occurred in 1960 Pahl was making some important points about its study. Again though he doesn't use the phrase, effectively he was talking about what US Literature scholar Sherry Linkon describes as the 'half-life of deindustrialisation', the ongoing intergenerational legacy of industrial work. As Linkon puts it:

'People and communities are shaped by their histories – by experience, by memory, and by the way the economic and social practices of the past frame the structures, ideas, and values that influence our lives long after those practices have ceased to be productive' (Linkon 2014: 1).

The past, she contends, remains both as a source of pride and pain and it is the tension between these that leads to a selective reworking of the past in the present.

As she continues:

'Thus, even as the active memory of industrial labor may fade, the landscape, social networks, local institutions, as well as attitudes and cultural practices bear the stamp of history' (Ibid.)

Pahl's writing is suggestive of just such a half-life existing on Sheppey when he explains his need to trace the history of the Sheerness Naval dockyard:

'Nevertheless, it is important to try and make sense of the context: people's real or imagined knowledge of the past colours, to a degree, their present

attitudes and pattern of behaviour. Newcomers to the Island have different traditions, to be sure, but Sheppey is a distinct milieu with its own distinct traditions, experiences, possibilities and constraints. People have to grapple with the material circumstances of their existence, and because the Island is so relatively small and insular, in more than one sense, people can readily have a consciousness of its distinctiveness. Working-class culture is not an ahistorical response to existential circumstances – rather, it is an intensely conservative and traditional set of household practices for grappling with material circumstances. In order to understand more of the complexity of the material context, it seemed necessary to gather a substantial amount of data on the historical development of the dockyard, the pattern of employment from 1960s to 1980 and a detailed analysis of housing development in the twentieth century' (Pahl 1984: 155).

In *Divisions of Labour* Pahl was then sensitive both to the history and chronology of deindustrialisation. He was very unusual for his time, and arguably still is unusual in actually talking about industrial change of the 1960s as deindustrialisation. Even in the 1980s the term deindustrialisation was a controversial one with some seeing such change as creative destruction, or a process of maturation, rather than something to be particularly concerned about. In a slightly different register Pahl's labelling chimes with the more contemporary trend towards tracing deindustrialisation's antecedents further back than the 1970s, to the early post-war period, the inter-war era or even earlier. Recent scholarship in the field such as David Koistinen's (2013) *Confronting Decline* for example is an historical account of deindustrialisation in the New England textile industry. He argues powerfully that the process of industrial retrenchment began during the 1920s as mills in the North-East

States came under intense competition from newly industrialising Southern US States. This competition in part was a function of newer technology, but was mainly due to lower wages commanded in the South as a result of a general lack of unionisation. Thus the relatively high wages of the North were progressively undermined through the 1920s and the Depression era of the 1930s. Indeed, Koistinen suggests that the first signs of the structural weakness of the textile sector in New England were detected in the 1890s, which brought the response of investment in textile schools to train workers and especially managers in improved industrial techniques. Even earlier evidence and use of the term deindustrialisation can be found in Johnson's (1995) *The Life and Death of Industrial Languedoc 1700-1920* suggesting decline in the 1820s.

In sum then, Pahl recognised relatively early on that we need to study the historic roots of industrial decline – both local and national. Like contemporary writers his stress was on process rather than deindustrialisation as a discrete event (see Mah 2012). He was aware of the way the industrial past continued to bubble up, to haunt the present. He even hinted at what would later be termed a form of 'smokestack nostalgia', where Island residents looked fondly back on more benign economic times, as he notes:

'Queenborough was a flourishing little borough in the seventeenth century, and Sheerness developed in the nineteenth century as a garrison, Admiralty dockyard and seaside resort. So much was built between 1850 and 1900 that people's memories of a much cleaner town are likely to be substantially true. It is understandable that many islanders cannot see the present except in terms of its decline from the past' (Pahl 1984: 152-3).

Conclusion

In this chapter I have made a sustained attempt to argue that Ray Pahl's *Divisions of Labour* represents an important contribution not only on how work is understood in all its forms, but that he was also a pioneer in his focus on deindustrialisation. It was by no means common to discuss economic change in the early 1980s using this term. Many of those talking about industrial decline during the late 1970s and early 1980s were in many ways too close to events to really be able to apprehend in all its complexity what was happening. Pahl's analysis stands out, even today, not only because of how he used the term but also the subtlety and complexity with which he engaged with the issues that confronted Sheppey and wider Britain. He recognised the complexity of the changes being wrought on Sheppey and that these were part of a long-term evolving process with its roots in the Island's initial industrialisation. He saw that the trajectory Sheppey found itself on in the mid-1980s had been shaped by events in the 1960s which continued to unfold into the future. He was also groundbreaking in terms of his ability to differentiate between different elements of deindustrialisation. In doing so he went beyond a straightforward account of industrial closure and loss. He also paid close attention to what often must have appeared as contradictory developments such as the stimulation of new industrial processes and services by deindustrialisation on and off the Island itself.

When people think about *Divisions of Labour* they often recall the way it calls for a sociology of economic life which takes seriously both paid *and* unpaid work. What Pahl and others called for as part of a move away from the strictures of industrial sociology's focus on paid, manual, often male work undertaken in factory settings, was a broader understanding of the role and context of household survival strategies. This was an acknowledgement that the division of labour in the private

sphere was as important as that which went on in public, in the formal employment relationship. In just the same way his discussion of deindustrialisation was rooted in place, context and community. He understood work culture, and its decline, as shaped by local and national events historically. As he noted:

‘Those who have commentated on the changes in British society from 1959-1984 have tended to aggregate the local into a national – or perhaps metropolitan – perspective. Thus, for example, discussions of de-industrialization, the decline of manufacturing and shifts in employment have been largely national in orientation. Yet it is clear that these larger processes of change have very distinctive local impacts’ (Pahl 1984: 197).

He went on to project, with great prescience, what might unfold in the future:

‘It is possible that variation in life chances between different localities will become much more marked in the next quarter of a century. Some areas will develop rapidly with new jobs and capital investment. Some areas will continue to decline. Patterns of geographical polarization, already in evidence, may well become more acute’ (Pahl 1984, 197).

Pahl’s genius in writing about deindustrialisation in the pages of *Divisions of Labour* was to recognise the complexity of the story that confronted him. In his later edited collection *On Work* (1988) Pahl indulges himself with a rant on what he describes as “‘The future-of-Work Industry”: a Polemic on Polemics’. Here he rails against the likes of André Gorz and Charles Handy and what he considered their naivety and superficiality, in discussing the nature of work. As he acknowledges:

'I agree completely with those in the future-of-work industry who urge us to look with fresh eyes at all forms of work. My fear is that too many will turn their eyes but not much will come into focus. Understanding the new strategies of employers and households and how they interact from the local to the global level is obviously a demanding and wide-ranging project' (Pahl 1988: 751-2).

One could make an argument that the relative neglect of *Divisions of Labour* has a great deal to do with Pahl's mission to not engage in what he describes as the 'future-of-work industry', or what I have described elsewhere as the end of work debate (Strangleman 2007). It was perhaps Pahl's insistence on focusing on change in an isolated Kent coastal community that made his insights seemingly less important than those that indulged in more Jerimiah-like predictions as to the future nature of work. For this writer it is precisely Pahl's ability to resist melodramatic conclusions that makes his work as relevant to contemporary readers as when it was written over three decades ago.

ⁱ I have kept Pahl's original spelling and configuration of de-industrialization for consistency.