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# Membership conditionality in an occupational community: Identity, inclusion and exclusion at Shelton Bar Steelworks

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# Membership conditionality in an occupational community: Identity, inclusion and exclusion at Shelton Bar Steelworks

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Abstract:

Previous literature has highlighted the emotional shelter offered by occupational identities and communities during periods of hardship, where community members draw upon fraternal camaraderie to raise solidarity. While this research explores this process within a steelworker community, the exclusionary potential of occupational identity and community is revealed. Based upon narrative interviews with former steelworkers, this dissertation draws upon themes of social class, gender and deindustrialisation to offer a nuanced representation of a traditional working-class community. The central contribution of this thesis relates to membership conditionality within occupational communities, in which full membership was achieved through conformity to masculinised norms, while those unable or unwilling to reproduce masculine archetypes were 'othered' and excluded. While technical proficiency enabled steelworkers to signal communal membership, the mobilisation of symbolic knowledge was of greater importance to full acceptance, which bound workers to specific gender performances and identity resources. This research also highlights the emergence of social class within the steelworks, where occupational differences between craft, process and managerial staff generated an informal system of social stratification. Drawing on a processual approach to deindustrialisation, analysis highlights the protracted nature of Shelton's decline and closure to generate richer insights into workers' unique experiences of occupational community. The research demonstrates further boundaries to inclusion as departmental communities changed, in which the steelworkers altered their relationships as they coped with increasing precarity and discontinuity. Implications are raised for the study of occupational identities and communities, as the findings argue that researchers should consider how workplace communities come to discipline and control full members, while excluding those on the periphery.

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# Table of Contents

Chapter 1 – Introduction

1.1 – Introduction p. 1

Chapter 2 – Literature Review

2.1 – Occupational Identity & Community p. 5

2.2 – Social Class & 'Doing' Gender p. 18

2.3 – Deindustrialisation & Nostalgic Memory p. 35

2.4 – Chapter Conclusion p. 44

Chapter 3 – Research Methods

3.1 – Introduction: Background & Empirical Context p. 50

3.2 – Research Design: Practical Approach & Theoretical Positioning p. 55

3.3 – Research Philosophy: Ontology & Epistemology p. 66

3.4 – Research Philosophy: Practical Application p. 70

3.5 – Memory Studies: Epistemology & Design p. 74

3.6 – Research Ethics: Preventing Harm p. 79

3.7 – Chapter Conclusion p. 85

Chapter 4 – Occupational Identity & Community: Conditional Membership

4.1 – Empirical Themes: Individual & Occupational Identity p. 88

4.2 – Entering the Community: Fathers & Sons p. 91

4.3 – Technical Proficiency: "Hands On" p. 101

4.4 – Pubs, Clubs and Camaraderie: "We Had the Craic" p. 118

4.5 – Distance from Community: "Like a Copper's Narc" p. 131

4.6 – Chapter Conclusion p. 144

Chapter 5 – Masculinity & The Community: Being 'Man Enough'

5.1 – Empirical Themes: Masculinity & 'Doing Gender' p. 146

5.2 – Male Breadwinning: The Wife, The Kids p. 151

5.3 – Masculine Bravado: "Men Were Men in Those Days" p. 165

5.4 – Occupational Danger: "A Pile of Burning Rags" p. 177

5.5 – Dirty Work & Taint Management: Fine Red Dust p. 190

5.6 – Chapter Conclusion p. 199

Chapter 6 – Managing Decline: Management & The Community

6.1 – Empirical Themes: Managerial Identity & 'Organisational History' p. 202

6.2 – The Action Committee: "A Case for Flexibility" p. 205

6.3 – Shelton in the 1970s: "The Constant Need for Meetings" p. 220

6.4 – Nationalisation & Working-Class Conservatism: 'Kick Up the Arse' p. 243

6.5 – Chapter Conclusion p. 261

Chapter 7 – The Road to Closure: Community Erosion

7.1 – Empirical Themes: Enterprise & Enterprising Selves p. 263

7.2 – Erosion of Community: Winding Down p. 267

7.3 – The 2000 Closure: Down to the Wire p. 285

7.4 – Relocation: Scunthorpe Steelworks p. 298

7.5 – Precarious Employment: Grafting and Getting On p. 306

7.6 – Chapter Conclusion p. 317

Chapter 8 – Industrial Memory: The Influence of Regeneration

8.1 – Empirical Themes: Industrial Memory & Nostalgia p. 320

8.2 – Narrating Discontinuity: “In the Core of the Man” p. 324

8.3 – Discourses of Change: The 1986 National Garden Festival p. 341

8.4 – Industrial Memory & Regeneration: “I Go Back and… I Despair” p. 352

8.5 – Chapter Conclusion p. 365

Chapter 9 – Conclusion

9.1 – Chapter Introduction p. 367

9.2 – Summary of Findings p. 368

9.3 – Research Implications & Future Research p. 375

9.4 – Research Limitations p. 383

Reference List p. 390

Appendices p. 456

# Chapter 1 – Introduction

## 1.1 – Introduction

Occupational identity and community are the core theoretical themes of this dissertation, which lead an analysis of the workplace culture created at Shelton Bar steelworks, formerly located in Stoke-on-Trent. The thesis argues that while steelworkers experienced solidarity from participation in a shared occupational identity and community, workers' communal membership was conditioned upon conformity to masculinised norms. Consequently, though the workplace community offered shelter from the hardships of heavy industry, inclusion was not guaranteed, but was instead earned through the reproduction of specific behaviours. The disciplinary nature of community emerges as a key theoretical theme, whereby group members were compelled into social conformity, thereby limiting their free expression and opportunities for resistance. Camaraderie and status were essential for progression through the steel industry's internal labour market, meaning those on the periphery faced both social and professional disadvantages. By enacting and enforcing masculine archetypes, workers at Shelton Bar created an organisational hierarchy distinct from rational managerial authority, which allowed community leaders to wield power and discipline those disrupting the informal hierarchy.

While social othering and exclusion have featured within studies of workplace cultures and communities (Rawls & David, 2005; Yoder & Berendsen, 2001; Olofsson, 2016), daily processes of conditionality and conformity have not yet led a study of occupational identity and community, which creates an important absence for the current research

to fill. Though marginal group membership is acknowledged by McLachlan et al in their study of a steelworker community (2019), these themes are secondary to the primary exploration of workplace restructuring. By exploring the uneven provision of solidarity within a steelworker community, this research will highlight how discipline and conformity underpin occupational identity and community. Conclusions will provide a detailed picture of daily life at Shelton Bar steelworks, while similarly developing scholarly understandings of workplace communities by expanding upon processes of conditionality and exclusion.

Since closed and demolished in the wake of Britain's industrial decline, Shelton Bar steelworks offers a unique, though archetypal case study of an industrial community. The works experienced a gradual decline throughout the late 20th century, which involved capacity and workforce downsizing following the 1974 oil crisis. This offers an opportunity to study the effects of protracted decline upon occupational identities and communities, in which rationalisation and wider economic change altered the steelworkers' relationships with each other and their work, and how solidarity was raised and experienced over time. Qualitative data was collected during fieldwork, which involved narrative interviews with 14 former steelworkers from Shelton Bar, and 2 members of the Community Union, formerly known as the Iron and Steel Trades Confederation (ISTC). Adopting an oral history approach to interviewing, core aspects of the steelworkers' occupational identity and community have been recorded, leading to a thorough analysis of intersectional themes and workplace identities.

Though Stoke-on-Trent possesses a rich industrial heritage, academic and artistic attention has primarily focused upon the decline of the pottery industry, leaving

Shelton Bar steelworks comparatively overlooked. Built in 1839, Shelton expanded across Etruria Valley as regional demand for iron and steel grew. Neighbouring Josiah Wedgwood's pottery factory on the Trent and Mersey canal, Shelton Bar was an expansive and fully integrated site possessing and operating mines, foundries and rolling mills to manufacture iron and steel.

This research focuses upon Shelton's history from the mid-twentieth century before and following the steel industry's second nationalisation in 1967. During this period, the British Steel Corporation (BSC) sought to close Shelton under a plan to centralise production at five coastal sites. Having recently modernised under private ownership, Shelton steelworkers organised to counter the BSC's notice of closure, and later earned a reprieve which boosted morale (Clarke, 1975). Wider industry turmoil dampened their success however, as restructuring led to the 1978 iron and steel plant closure which left only the rolling mill in operation (British Steel News, 1978). The downsizing preceded further rationalisation and de-manning, which diminished the steelworkers' community and undermined cultural solidarity. After a protracted decline, Shelton closed in 2000, reflecting the UK's gradual deindustrialisation and relative economic decline (The Observer, 2000). For more contextual detail, a short introduction to Shelton's history can be found in Appendix F.

The purpose and rationale of this project was to explore Shelton Bar's workplace community, which enabled an accurate representation of the steelworkers' occupational identity and community. This was important as it gave voice to workers of an industry key to Stoke-on-Trent's industrial legacy and to the UK's wider economic history. The rising mortality of the traditional industrial working-class added additional

importance to this project, as a practical need to record the working lives of steelworkers before they pass away also underscored the completion of fieldwork. Though designed and completed inductively, the main research questions reflected intrigue into daily life at the steelworks. Consequently, interview data was guided by questions such as: what was it like to be employed at Shelton Bar? How did former workers understand and express themselves as steelworkers? And how do former workers remember and narrate Shelton's decline and closure? These questions subsequently informed the narrative interview technique used during fieldwork, as this enabled interviewees to tell a coherent story grounded in a chronological experience.

The dissertation argues that while many enjoyed social camaraderie and solidarity, access to occupational communities and the 'steelworker identity' depended upon conformity to classed and masculinised norms. Social conformity and acts of exclusion emerge as disciplinary mechanisms, which highlight the punitive nature of occupational identity and community for both core and peripheral members. Consequently, when interviewees recall experiences of camaraderie and fraternity, they reveal their position as group insiders by narrating a particular view of Shelton and its workplace community. Though benefiting from their membership, this entailed conformity and self-censorship as workers reproduced idealised versions of social class, gender and skilled manual labour.

# Chapter 2 – Literature Review

## 2.1 – Occupational Identity & Community

Occupational identities can offer individuals a common understanding to rationalise and articulate a sense of self at work, while occupational communities have been understood as social groups arising from the social structures created by paid and unpaid employment (Salaman, 1974; 1971; Jenkins, 2014). From specific workplace relations and task content, occupational identity and community grant individuals and groups with a distinct 'us and them' dynamic, which creates distinction and exclusivity from outsiders (Turnbull, 1992; Westergaard et al, 1989; Marshall et al, 1988). Identity is inferred through work-related task content, heightened or particular occupational hazards, the application of technical skill, or exclusive labour processes (MacKenzie et al, 2017; Perrott, 2019; Bechky, 2006). Occupational communities have long been understood as binaries which include those inside the organisation, while outsiders are assumed as synonymous with all those outside of the workplace. This understanding neglects how 'others' may exist within the organisation, and how negotiated norms may construct conditions defining community membership, rather than the task content associated with members' labour. Literatures concerning occupational identity and community have focused primarily upon traditionally working-class occupations to include dockworkers, steelworkers, railwaymen and coalminers, likely an outcome of the solidaristic potential of classed relationships (Turnbull, 1992; MacKenzie et al, 2006; Strangleman, 2012; 2001).

In light of the collective nature of occupational identity and communities, influential literature has previously highlighted the liberating potential of workplace cultures, where group solidarities offer shelter from collective hardships. These themes emerge in articles such as MacKenzie et al (2006) and McLachlan et al's (2019) work with steelworker communities, both of which share a collaborative dataset of interviews with 125 redundant steelworkers. While these studies have separate aims in exploring class solidarity and experiences of restructuring, each illustrated how solidaristic networks were mobilised as steelworkers navigated redundancy and organisational downsizing, which led many to rationalise their experiences in collective terms. In a similar study, MacKenzie & Marks (2019) explore occupational identity and community reproduced by present and former BT telecoms engineers, again demonstrating how collective networks were utilised during periods of change. Older workers mobilised workplace communities following restructuring and widespread redundancies, with the community providing "a sustained collective identity resource, which both afforded a means of dealing with organizational change and facilitated the performance of work" (ibid., p. 40).

Similarities are found in the communities of practice literature, which details how workplace communities can form around particular occupational skills and task content (Pyrko et al, 2017; Bechky, 2006; Parker, 2006). Especially relevant in technical occupations, the acquisition and deployment of specific knowledge underpins group membership, where members possessing technical proficiencies form solidaristic bonds and impart knowledge via situated learning (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 2000). Julian Orr's (1996) influential work *Talking About Machines* explored occupational

cultures reproduced by photocopier technicians. When repairing machinery, technicians in Orr's study avoided technical manuals and data sheets, and instead turned to their colleagues for guidance and advice. This avoidance of formal working practices also enabled greater communal autonomy, as it allowed technicians to guard specific knowledge and competencies from managerial control, thereby creating occupational closure and protective labour hierarchies (Pyrko et al, 2017; Brown & Duguid, 1991). Like literature on occupational identity however, work on communities of practice often invokes a limited interpretation of group membership, where those possessing similar skills naturally form workplace groups and solidarities. While the possession and use of technical skill is important here, the literature neglects how symbolic knowledges and norms are mobilised alongside tangible aptitudes, and how the enactment of performances denoting skill underpin the solidarities identified within workplaces.

While literature on communities of practice has illuminated the insulating force of occupational groups, they also remain limited by a binary view of workplace relations and management-employee power, as workers are depicted as ever vulnerable to the rational authority of managerial superiors. For example, though senior technicians occupy a privileged position in Orr's study, they remain presented as individual figures of authority, rather than actors within a localised system of power. Further insights into workplace control and power can be generated by exploring the essence of exclusion and othering at the communal level (Rawls & David, 2005), where workers signal their membership through the enactment of implied norms and use their community as a disciplinary tool against perceived others. By accounting for the use of power at all

levels of organisational hierarchies, dichotomies between management and employees can be avoided (Gabriel, 1999).

Due to disproportionate rational authority and leadership responsibilities, managerial staff negotiate identity differently to their peers, and often incorporate organisational narratives into understandings of the self (Sveningsson & Larsson, 2006; Corley, 2004). Tasked with guiding and discipling those under their remit, managers must signal legitimacy and articulate convincing narratives to a range of organisational actors (Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010; Bridwell-Mitchell & Mezias, 2012). Consequently, management are constrained by competing organisational and personal pressures, where organisational strategy theoretically supersedes any communal loyalties. Studies have thus demonstrated that managers often experience loneliness as they encounter conflict with colleagues (Redman et al, 1997; Dopson & Neumann, 1998; Sims, 2003).

Managers must also negotiate the inherent ambiguity of delegative work, alongside the social hierarchies embedded within their occupational position, again creating competing sources of identification (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003; Knights & Clarke, 2014). Possessing a marginal relationship with their subordinates, managers are often excluded from the social fraternity of occupational communities, which limits their potential engagement with workplace solidarities. Accordingly, camaraderie and group membership are experienced differently by managerial staff, leading to alternative articulations of community, solidarity and organisational success. In line with their strategic responsibilities, management instead seek to influence and challenge workplace cultures, in which they attempt to inspire widespread identification with organisational goals by "regulating employees 'insides' – their self-image, their feelings

and identifications" (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002, p. 622). Questions regarding agency are particularly acute in debates on how managers organise and realise competing responsibilities and opportunities for identity formation.

In workplaces experiencing sustained periods of restructuring, collective identity may be negotiated and understood through conditions of uncertainty, which leads some workers to adopt instability as a feature of their community during a period of change (Mackenzie et al, 2017; Gardiner et al, 2007). Accordingly, strong occupational groups can offer support to members in and outside of work even through adversity and decline. While successful in depicting occupational community as a unifying social apparatus, these studies and the wider literature fail to explore the inherent conditionality of group membership, in which inclusion is afforded only to those conforming to controlled norms. By overlooking boundaries to group membership, scholarship risks romanticising workplace cultures and communities grounded in masculine archetypes. This should be avoided in research output, as romanticism can problematise holistic explorations and representations of diverse communities, and can similarly disserve those marginalised by communal exclusion.

The few studies that acknowledge exclusion and discipline are yet to examine the circumstances, contexts or routine processes by which individuals become marginalised, and instead focus upon outright rejection. Examples of communal rejection and stigmatisation can be found in studies of female firefighters, where masculinised norms exclude femininity (Yoder & Berendsen, 2001; Olofsson, 2016; Childs, 2006). While this and adjacent literatures may acknowledge exclusion within occupational communities, marginality and membership conditionality remain

comparatively unexplored. For example, though McLachlan et al detail how white-collar workers at a UK steelworks experienced “marginality in their relationship to the occupational identity” (2019, p. 927), routine processes of exclusion are overlooked, with focus directed upon the varying implications of organisational restructuring. As much of this literature discusses outright rejection and discrimination, nuanced accounts of group inclusion are constrained. MacKenzie et al’s (2017) study, for example, presents class solidarity as underpinning group cohesion, but neglects to explain how class is understood and invoked by group members, nor how individuals on the margin become excluded.

To enable a comprehensive understanding of group solidarities, it is essential that daily processes of marginalisation are considered directly, as doing so will more accurately demonstrate the negotiation of group membership and inclusion. Works concerning group ‘othering’ and workplace bullying may offer some potential in developing these themes (Rawls & David, 2005; Wallinder, 2022), though these studies often differ in focus to those of occupational identity and community. Consequently, writers on occupational identity should begin to consider how workplace communities can become factional and exclusionary, and how implied norms and symbolic knowledges define conditions of inclusion and exclusion more so than task content and shared work patterns.

Current scholarship is also limited by a narrow theorisation of identity, in that conceptualisations of occupational identity remain implied or incomplete. MacKenzie and Marks (2019) avoid this trend however, as they review literature conceptualising identity as an individualised project, where understandings and articulations of the self

are constructed during a reflexive process (Ashforth et al, 2008; Alvesson, 2000; Alvesson & Willmott, 2002). The authors later acknowledge the shared nature of occupational identity, where individuals come to understand and articulate a sense of self via collective negotiation (Collinson, 2006; Howard, 2000). Though MacKenzie and Marks later expand upon the limits of individualised understandings of identity, it is unclear if themes of conscious agency remain within their research analysis and arguments. Forthcoming analysis will argue that when seeking membership of a collective entity, individual autonomy is eroded as individuals become subject to prevailing norms and cultural hegemony. Such norms and hegemonies remain navigable however, meaning individuals retain a degree of agency as they interact with communities and construct a coherent identity, though this underpins the potential for social othering.

In the behaviouralist tradition, individual identity is conceptualised as a performance, which follows Erving Goffman's work on dramaturgy that depicts individuals as possessing front and back-stage identities (Goffman, 1959). Under this framework, identity is reflexively performed according to situational contexts, with individuals enacting differing identities to meet the demands of particular audiences (Ashforth et al, 2008; Creed & Sully, 2000; Beech et al, 2008). Applied to organisational settings, behaviouralist theories have influenced work such as Hochschild's *The Managed Heart*, where workers selectively invoke identities as they perform tasks in front of differing audiences (1983). Maintaining each performance requires significant identity work and emotional labour, whereby individuals embody behaviours physically, while

provisionally experimenting with new identities to portray desired and acceptable forms of the self (Alvesson, 2001; Ibarra, 1999; Ibarra & Petriglieri, 2010).

An adjacent division of identity scholarship relates to critical and discursive understandings of the self. Under this perspective, identity is constituted by discourse and rhetoric, which assigns meaning via the use of collectively negotiated description (Allen, 2005; Carroll & Levy, 2010; Snow & Anderson, 1987). Rather than forming a definitive entity, representations and articulations of the self can be understood as fluid and continuously negotiated as individuals engage with complex social environments (Gioia et al, 2000). In organisational settings, operational duties and unpredictability necessitate the flexible adjustment of an unstable, malleable identity, making individuals vulnerable to managerial control over identification. Discursive theories are influenced by Foucault's work on discipline and punishment, where an individual's identity is governed via *technologies of the self*, these referencing the internalisation of surveillance and relational power (1977; 1980; 2008). The potential immediacy of managerial oversight creates an organisational panopticon, which encourages individuals to reproduce organisational discourses as they negotiate a sense of self (Townley, 1993).

A number of scholars have illustrated subtle forms of identity control, in which organisations employ normative rhetoric to continuously govern the unfolding process of identification (Kärreman & Alvesson, 2004; McCabe 2014; Rose, 1999). These disciplinary mechanisms are less overt than the labour controls described by behaviouralist writers such as Hochschild, and involve the mobilisation and manipulation of organisational culture to guide behaviour via rhetorical discipline and

panoptic surveillance (Townley, 1993; Fournier, 1999; McNay, 2009; Lorenzini, 2018). Rather than existing as an autonomously selected resource, identity emerges from a continuously negotiated process, and is inferred through the subconscious embodiment and enactment of organisational structures (Kelan, 2010).

The dissertation thus adopts a Foucauldian approach to power and identity, where language and discourse underpin the realisation of a coherent sense of self. Rather than an object or tangible presence to be wielded and employed, Foucault conceptualised power as a relational process occurring between individuals (Foucault, 1977; Clegg, 1989; Knights & Willmott, 1989). Under this perspective, power is networked both within and across social systems and institutions, where individuals at all levels engage with the creation, reproduction and exercise of discipline and authority (Townley, 1993; Feldman, 1997). Power is subsequently enacted in discourse and knowledge, where categories negotiated by subject experts imbue social meaning, subjectivity and morality (Townley, 1993; McKinlay & Starkey, 1998). Discipline is central to this theoretical position, as without a definitive or singular authority figure, subjects conform to the roles and norms established as model behaviour in their respective fields (Jacques, 1996). This involves considerable self-monitoring and censorship, where ideals and behaviours are modified and presented in an acceptable fashion.

While Foucault's most cited work focuses upon the enactment of discipline and punishment (1977; 1980; 2008), Foucault produced a range a works which built a complex and evolving view of power and the self (1971; 1977; 1979). This has led scholars to categorise and define subdivisions within Foucault's work; these relating to his early 'archaeological' writings, followed by a 'genealogical' phase, and finally an

'aesthetic' phase (Burrell, 1988; Starkey & Hatchuel, 2002). Though Foucault critiqued and revised his writing over time, a common theme of power and discipline ran throughout his scholarly output. Within his early writing, Foucault was particularly interested in how social categories arise from power relations, in which individuals and discourses are inseparable from their respective histories (1963; 1966; 1969). Under this reading, power thus relates to social categorisation and the 'order of things', where discourse arranges and defines both individuals and objects according to social hierarchies and implied norms (Lemke, 2014; Townley, 1990).

Management and organisational studies have drawn extensively from Foucault's work when conceptualising identity. The book *Discipline and Punish* (1977), which belongs to Foucault's 'genealogical' phase, is particularly influential among these researchers. The theory of relational power has been used to chart managerial surveillance within just-in-time production systems (Sewell & Wilkinson, 1992), to explore the disciplinary nature of workplace routines (Brown & Lewis, 2011), and to demonstrate how personnel policies create classification and hierarchy between workers (Townley, 1993). Each of these processes influence how individuals relate to their employment and raise workplace solidarity, thereby underpinning the formation of occupational identities and communities.

Key to these readings on relational power is Foucault's work on the panopticon, which serves as both a tangible example of, and metaphor for power and control across society (Fox, 1989). Reflecting Jeremy Bentham's concept of a central prison tower overlooking a circular perimeter of cells, panoptic control relates to the ambiguity of surveillance, where disciplinary observation could be present at any time. Likening

relational power to a panopticon, Foucault argued that individuals are governed through the constant gaze of hierarchical judgement, in which the 'central watchtower' reflects the hierarchy of social institutions (1979; 1980). Facts and knowledge are subsequently rendered as disciplinary tools, these defined and wielded by leaders possessing expert knowledge. Field experts such as scientists, industrialists, doctors and civil servants thus control social systems through discourse, which then governs the conduct of the observed (Ibid.).

Though he discussed the creation of 'docile bodies', the realisation of complete domination and totalitarian control are not what Foucault conceptualised when he wrote about power. Instead, Foucault spoke of the inevitability and necessity of both freedom and control, where each exist in a mutual relationship (Foucault, 1997; Allen, 2002). For Foucault, discipline within society does not equate to a 'disciplined society', and that acts of resistance are necessary for relational power to exist and function (1997). A society without freedom or power is inconceivable to Foucault, as the absence of autonomy denotes complete domination; this being a state without power relationships, rather than totalising forms of power. Instead, power is wielded by everyone and exercised through the normalising judgements of prevailing norms and expert discourses (Clegg et al, 2006; Rose, 1999). Acts of resistance are similarly bound to contextual power relationships, as the manner in which an individual conceives of and enacts resistance is wedded to negotiated histories and categorisations influencing their actions (Foucault, 2007; Knights, 2002). Therefore, while individuals retain conscious autonomy over decision making, the methods used to resist and chart a preferred sense of self are expressed through disciplining power relationships.

In his later work, Foucault dedicated much of his writing to governmentality and biopolitics, concepts which focus upon the relational power achieved by governments and institutions as they influence individuals' bodies. Foucault's theory of 'technologies of the self' is particularly influential for critical management researchers, who have drawn upon this concept heavily when theorising identity (McLaren; 2002; McKinlay & Starkey; 1998). Regarded as actions taken in conformance with or resistance against disciplinary norms, technologies of the self enable individuals to construct their identities (Foucault, 1985; Rabinow, 1984). Rather than a fixed entity or defined end state, identity is subsequently understood as fluid and unfolding, negotiated as individuals navigate social settings (Gioia et al, 2000; Allen, 2005; Carroll & Levy, 2010). Like resistance, technologies of the self may be employed with conscious agency, though actions taken again reflect wider relations of power and expert discourses. From this perspective, how an individual understands themselves and behaves depends upon normative discipline, where competing discourses govern through hierarchy and conformity (Kärreman & Alvesson, 2004; McCabe 2014).

Conscious of Foucault's position on freedom and autonomy, management researchers have critiqued the overstatement and misrepresentation of relational power across the field, where panoptic control has been presented as inescapable (Mennicken & Miller, 2014; Raffnsøe et al, 2016; Knights, 2002; Clegg, 1998). Others have critiqued Foucault more directly, with Barad (2007) targeting Foucault's underutilisation of materiality within his theories, while Rowlinson & Carter (2002) reiterate a belief that relational power demonstrates 'ambivalence to truth'. Adding further ambiguity to the 'proper' use of his theories, Foucault himself regarded his writing as a collection of

'indecipherable and disorganised' theories, which together created an analytical toolset to be used imprecisely (Foucault, 1980). As a result, some Foucauldian studies appear preoccupied with managerial efforts in shaping workplace behaviour, rather than charting how power is available to, and used by all members of an organisation (Gabriel, 1999; McCabe, 2014).

To avoid this limitation, this research demonstrates how members of Shelton Bar's occupational community resisted managerial control through the creation of informal hierarchies. This generated a separate disciplinary mechanism however, by which workers were pressurised to conform to masculinised norms set by community leaders, limiting expressions of self on site and at home. Findings connect to the dissertation's central argument, which states that the solidaristic bonds and relationships narrated by interviewees rest upon the enactment of particular forms of identity, these prescribed by the expert power of influential community leaders. By acknowledging that power operates at all levels of social hierarchies, analysis accurately depicts resistance across the community, while also charting the limits to inclusion and group membership. Everyday processes of conformity and resistance will be uncovered, in which the steelworkers governed behaviour through normalising judgements. Rather than demonstrating outright acceptance or rejection, analysis presents a layered community with multiple tiers of membership. In providing a nuanced representation of a solidaristic workplace culture, arguments contribute to the literature on occupational identity and community by highlighting the conditional nature of workplace communities.

## 2.2 – Social Class & 'Doing' Gender

Throughout much of the 20th century, sociologists turned primarily to occupation when theorising social class, in which they drew from Marxist interpretations of working-class domination by the capitalist bourgeoisie (Wright, 1985; Szreter, 1984). Influential scholars such as John Goldthorpe developed employment-based frameworks to stratify differing professions, and incorporated task content and contractual relationships into considerations of social class (Goldthorpe et al, 1980; Erikson & Goldthorpe, 1992; Marshall et al, 1988). Those at the top of occupational hierarchies included skilled professionals, technicians and 'white collar' workers, while those lower down the hierarchy included unskilled manual workers, often engaged in routine tasks with limited contractual security.

Occupational determinants of social class have long been criticised however. For example, E.P. Thompson's *The Making of the English Working Class* (1963) demonstrated a growing sense of consciousness and identity among England's disadvantaged communities, which emerged as much from pre-industrial rural protest as a form of early industrial relations. This was further extrapolated by Stedman-Jones in *Languages of Class* (1983), in which he critiqued Marxian interpretations of social class by charting the emergence of classed languages and identities resulting from revolutionary industrial politics. These historic accounts each describe a cultural experience of social class, while Davidoff & Hall (1978) wrote of classed experiences felt beyond the workplace in domestic and leisurely environments. Instances of working-class conservatism further obscure the Marxist notion of distinct social classes defined by common or unifying interests, whereby individuals commonly deemed 'working-

class' may resist associations with class stratification or actively identify with the politics of capitalist production (Brandt, 2013; Lerner, 1980; Jost et al, 2017).

Goldthorpe's system of class measurement has also received direct critique, notably for its failure to fully explicate classed experiences and the transmission of class outside of workplaces (Devine, 1998; Savage, 2000; Le Roux et al, 2008; Joyce, 1991). As the post-industrial labour market continues to blur traditional parameters of social class, new systems of stratification appeal to sociologists exploring occupational, social and cultural change (Savage et al, 2013; Standing, 2011). In light of this, theorising and defining social class remains a contentious task, one made more complex by the decline of traditional occupational communities (Savage, 2010; Weeden & Grusky, 2005).

Though Marxian interpretations remain influential when conceptualising social stratification (Erikson & Goldthorpe, 2010), occupational characteristics such as task content and working conditions may be more usefully conceptualised in discursive terms, where classed languages and symbolic knowledge define individuals' class position. The way individuals articulate and present themselves within a disciplining hierarchical epistemology constitute important aspects of the English class system, thereby adding a cultural element to class hierarchies (Gunn, 2005). Pierre Bourdieu's concept of *cultural capital* explores the sociocultural facets of social class, in which class is theorised in terms of taste, dispositions, and the possession of non-financial assets (1984; 1987). Although an individual's occupation and financial resources facilitate the realisation of cultural capital, Bourdieu's analysis suggests that the mobilisation of cultural aptitudes, education and social networks are of greater significance to how class is understood and experienced (Bourdieu, 1993; 1996; 1997). Consequently,

working-class individuals become subjugated not just through disparate financial resources, but through structural constraints upon their ability to obtain and reproduce valuable cultural capitals that are critical for class mobility (Savage et al, 2005; Atkinson, 2009).

When discussing cultural capital, Bourdieu distinguished between incorporated, objectivated and institutionalised capitals; these relating to the status afforded by personal attributes and skills, the possession or appreciation of art and material items, and an individual's belonging or connection to formal institutions such as schools, universities or the civil service (Bourdieu, 1997; 1996; Robbins, 2000; 2005). Belonging to prestigious social circles accompanies significant cultural capital, whereby class is signalled not just through the possession of material wealth, but through the display and reproduction of classed behaviours. Alongside an individual's employment, leisurely pass-times are also demarcated into pursuits of high, middle and low society, where individuals are assessed according to their engagement with and subsequent ownership of corresponding social capitals (Bourdieu, 1984).

While social mobility can be achieved through educational attainment and increased earnings, the layered nature of cultural capital can highlight an individual's comparatively humble origins to distinguish people by 'old' versus 'new' money. As Bourdieu argued, the bourgeoisie create further distinguishment through accumulated cultural capital, in which their aptitudes and gait are perceived as natural and intuitive, rather than acquired or learned over time (Bourdieu, 1993). This highlights the important role of family within experiences of social class, where an individual's

background and classed origins have significant implications for their future trajectory (Gunn & Bell, 2002; Bourdieu, 1996; Bell, 1968).

A notable example of 'cultural capital' in action can be seen in Paul Willis' *Learning to Labour* (1977), where he identified groups of working-class schoolboys resisting formal education by recreating 'shop-floor' industrial subcultures. Rejecting classroom-based learning, the 'lads' in Willis' study subsequently entered industrial employment, thereby fulfilling implied and consciously accepted social norms regarding their academic, familial and employment prospects. While the lads appeared satisfied with their decision to favour vocational learning over academic achievement, Willis' argument focused upon the apparent rigidity and implicit nature of the English class system, which seemingly filtered children into defined classed pathways.

With Bourdieu analysing French society when developing his cultural capital thesis, its direct application to the British class system may be problematic due to national socioeconomic and historical disparities. This critique rests on the assumption that British society is comparatively 'cultureless' however, a position echoed by Perry Anderson as he charted Britons' apparent disregard for the arts and intellectualism (Anderson, 1992). More recent Bourdieusian analysis has resisted this characterisation however, leading writers to identify cultural categorisation across British society. Analysing the rise of the middle-class from the late 18$^{th}$ century, Simon Gunn's work has highlighted how an appreciation for cultural pursuits was a key indicator of social class, with the middle-class demarcated through an interest in the arts and attendance of leisurely events (Gunn, 2005; 2000; Gunn & Bell, 2002). Education and 'taste' also signalled membership of the nascent middle-class, with the wealthier classes

participating in science and philosophy societies, in addition to purchasing subscriptions to libraries and literary outputs (Morris, 1990; Brewer, 1997). Focusing upon social class in the 20th century, Savage et al (2005; 1992) invoke Bourdieu's cultural capital theory to further develop an understanding of class which incorporates financial resources, material assets and cultural capitals together.

Bourdieu's cultural approach to class has also received critique however, particularly in the primacy afforded to the upper-class in defining key cultural capitals, in addition to the perceived inability of working-class communities to create alternative forms of value (Skeggs, 2011; Blackshaw, 2016). In light of this, Beverly Skeggs forwards the theory of *circuits of value*, this relating to localised social hierarchies circumventing prevailing notions of taste and acceptability (1997; 2011). Under this position, disadvantaged and subordinated groups create spaces to negotiate and acquire alternative forms of cultural capital, which leads individuals to "attach value to themselves *to* defend against misrecognition and devaluation" (2011, p. 503, emphasis original). In occupational communities, for example, technical proficiency and masculine archetypes may constitute valuable capital resources (Orr, 1996; Lave & Wenger, 1991). Despite acknowledging cultural capitals created across the class system, Bourdieusian analysis is often limited to the domineering effects of upper-class cultural capital, where high-society norms and ideals continue to dominate classed hierarchies (Jones, 2010; Tyler, 2008; 2013; 2015; Skeggs & Loveday, 2012).

To explore the formation and reproduction of social class at Shelton Bar, this research will adopt a Bourdieusian approach to social stratification. This is appropriate for the primary analytical focus upon occupational identity and community, as full or periphery

access to the workplace community depended upon conformity to implied social norms. This suggests a cultural underpinning to group membership at Shelton Bar, in which workers rewarded specific behaviours with inclusion and solidarity. This theoretical position works in tandem with the Foucauldian framework outlined previously, which conceptualises power and identity as operating through discourse and observation. While Foucault's theory of relational power primarily relates to the enactment of discipline, it possesses utility for class analysis; as social class plays a significant role in defining behavioural norms across a range of institutions, and therefore underpins disciplinary discourses by which individuals are assessed (Bourdieu, 1997; Clegg et al, 2006; Rose, 1999). Disciplinary power is embedded within classed hierarchies which emerge throughout society, all of which denote classification between individuals and groups as they navigate education, employment, and wider social settings (Burrell, 1988; Townley, 1993). Consequently, while this research is not a 'Bourdieusian study' of a workplace culture, it utilises Bourdieu's understanding of social class to complement the Foucauldian view of discipline and identity.

Analysis will also draw upon the steelworkers' occupational task content when extrapolating class and identity at Shelton, in which workers used their role as a form of currency to accrue status and avoid exclusion. Analysis will remain grounded in a cultural approach to class however (Bourdieu, 1984; Savage et al, 2005), to argue that these physical attributes granted symbolic value within a localised system of power in which steelworkers mobilised particular epistemologies of masculinity to define outsiders, discipline members and justify exclusion (Skeggs, 1997; 2011). By combining these perspectives, additional depth is added to cultural understandings of social class,

in which task content and working conditions are acknowledged as important providers of cultural capital. While recent class analysis has focused upon middle and upper-class denigration of working-class communities (Tyler, 2008; 2013; 2015; Skeggs & Loveday, 2012), this dissertation will subsequently demonstrate how steelworkers utilised their stratification system as a disciplinary tool, thereby enabling acts of inter-classed domination.

The term 'Epistemologies of masculinity' is used here to describe the steelworkers' individual and shared understandings and reproductions of masculinity. Invoked both consciously and unconsciously, a constructed view of 'maleness' underpinned interaction between workers on site and at home, and therefore imposed limits upon their free expression and identity formation. Considering the wider context of inclusion and membership conditionality, these understandings of masculinity acted as both a core source of identity resources, and a mechanism of discipline. Masculinity, understood here as behavioural norms which confer idealised stereotypes of 'being a man' in industrialised society (Wester & Zimmerman, 1987; Butler, 1990; 2004), subsequently defined much of the steelworkers' identity work and how communal conditionality was raised and maintained. Experiencing pressure to conform with idealised masculine archetypes, steelworkers again adopted and reproduced gendered norms with both agency and unconscious internalisation, derived from a desire for community belonging.

'Epistemologies' as a plural is used as interpretations of masculinity differed between departmental communities, again contributing to inter-group boundaries, inclusion and exclusion. While sharing behavioural and attitudinal similarities with masculinities

observed in other white working-class communities, namely in the valorisation of manual labour, technical skill and familial provision (Ackroyd & Crowdy, 1990; Hughes et al, 2017; Townsend, 2002), the strength and frequency of masculinised behaviours at Shelton Bar varied per member. Hinting to the malleability of gender performance (Butler, 2004; Adams, 2022), workers at varying positions in the steelmaking process interpreted and expressed their gendered identities differently, with those closest to the danger and grime of production most vocal in their expressions of masculinised behaviours. Accordingly, though adopting a manner reminiscent of other industrial subcultures, the steelworkers developed localised interpretation of manhood, with sub-divisions and discrepancies emerging between members to form alliances, boundaries and difference.

Following the above discussion, parallel to issues of social class is gender performance, which influences how individuals understand and mobilise languages of class. Gender is widely conceptualised as sets of norms and behaviours, with social expectations differing between sexes (Linstead & Pullen, 2006; Bruni et al, 2004). The act of 'doing gender' emerges from these debates, where "a complex of socially guided perceptual, interactional, and micropolitical activities cast particular pursuits as expressions of masculine and feminine 'natures'" (West & Zimmerman, 1987, p. 126). Within masculinised social hierarchies, men may engage in behaviours traditionally associated with physical strength, aggression and male domination; attributes reflecting discourses of archetypal masculinity (Butler, 1990; 2004). Translated into organisational settings, gender norms influence daily behaviour and working practices, and embed specific gendered attributes into hierarchies and systems of power (Hancock & Tyler, 2007;

Schultz et al, 2000). This disembodied 'ideal worker' varied across workplaces, with traditionally male occupations forming cultural norms reflecting male archetypes, while roles associated with women reproduced feminine behavioural customs (Acker, 1990; Martin, 2006; 2003). Much like social class, while economic and cultural change leads to alterations in the way gender is conceptualised and performed, traditional norms remain pervasive and will frequently re-emerge to form new systems of power (Gherardi, 1994; Cross & Bagilhole, 2002).

Competing perspectives on the 'undoing' of gender have also emerged, which expose differences between interactionist and discursive interpretations of gender performance (Kelan, 2010). While West and Zimmerman's 'doing gender' has spawned a wealth of academic interest, many have since adopted a more discursive approach to mirror the work of Judith Butler (1990). Butler argues that gender is constructed and enacted discursively, where legitimacy and status are inferred through conformance to prevailing social discourses (1990; 2004). Much like gender, Butler argues that sex is also constructed, as biological demarcations between men and women are understood through discourse and assumptions regarding scientific method. Accordingly, Butler argues that multiple genders exist beyond the binary of masculinity and femininity, which allow individuals to construct and perform gender in an open manner (1990). Despite differences in conceptualisation, scholarship on the undoing of gender remains focused upon dismantling gender binaries, and efforts to remove socially constructed demarcations between men and women. In an organisational setting, this includes the desegregation of traditionally gendered occupations, while also enabling more

egalitarian levels of remuneration and occupational status (McDonald, 2013; Simpson, 2005).

As this research focuses upon Shelton Bar steelworks, the reproduction and display of masculinised behaviour is of most concern, as this workplace was operated primarily by men. When making comparisons and illustrating arguments, this thesis often refers to 'traditionally male occupations', this referencing employment which has historically been completed by men, and continues to be associated with masculinity despite female entrants into the workplace. Examples of this work include heavy industrial roles in the mining and steel industries, and craft labour in construction and manufacturing industries. While female representation in industry may have persisted or since increased, such workplaces may still be regarded as 'male' or 'masculine' due to historical connotations with men, or cultures which valorise male bodies and exclude feminine others (Childs, 2006; Yoder & Berendsen, 2001). Within these organisations, whether experiencing female participation or not, specific activities such as proximity to dirt and danger, and the use of specific, often strength-based technical skills mark these professions as 'male' endeavours (Olofsson, 2016), while male camaraderie further exacerbates the sense that these places are in effect 'for men' (Collinson, 1988; Simpson et al, 2014). As a result, 'traditionally male' does not denote the total exclusion of women from a workplace, but rather combines both a heavy male demographic composition, and an imagined construction of a workplace as masculine due to its creation and reproduction of gendered iconography.

Paid employment remains a powerful signifier of masculinity, as waged work allows men to fulfil stereotypes regarding the 'male breadwinner' figure, whereby they act as

the financial figurehead of their family unit (Dolan, 2011; Townsend, 2002). Male breadwinning and the significance of men's employment followed Britain's industrial development, where before the expansion of heavy industry, men shared greater responsibility for domestic labour and childcare with their female companions (Horrell & Humphries, 1997; Francis, 2002; Martschukat & Stieglitz, 2005). While the cultural importance of male employment generated exaggerated accounts of male breadwinning, many heterosexual working-class families sustained dual-income households; though again, the relative importance of men's labour was raised by comparatively higher wages against their female counterparts (Giles, 1993; Jordan, 1999). Returning to the notion of 'traditionally male occupations', male breadwinning arguably reached its peak in the mid-20$^{th}$ century, which coincides with the period of Shelton Bar's history this thesis examines. Accordingly, this term is grounded in the workplace relations of post-war Britain, and is similarly informed by the lasting legacy created by heavy industry.

The decline of male breadwinning following deindustrialisation suggests the possibility of altering and even 'undoing' gender, a term used by Judith Butler to highlight the malleability of gender roles and their flimsy societal construction (2004). Accordingly, rather than something permanent, gender roles and their reproduction across society are ever changing (Sánchez-Mira, 2021; Peukert, 2018), though familiar patterns may emerge and prove stubborn (Willott & Griffin, 2004; Gush et al, 2015). This is seen in the continued idealisation of certain spaces as male or female, which take particular effect at work and at home, where defined gender roles may persist in setting behavioural norms.

Social stratification and gender identity intersect with mutual dependency to create distinctively classed forms of 'doing gender' (McDowell, 2003; Nixon, 2009). Within professional services employment, for instance, employees and management celebrate the perceived heroism of high-stakes sales and negotiation, which requires strict emotional control, personal tenacity and the possession of acute occupational knowledge (Kerfoot & Knights, 1993; Cooper, 2000; Hodgson, 2003; Hawkins, 2008). Despite drawing from traditional masculine archetypes, professional labour creates a form of middle-class masculine identity, thereby defining alternative understandings and expressions of manhood.

Those in manual occupations come to express working-class masculinities, defined instead by the valorisation of technical proficiency and a commitment to dirty, arduous labour (Ackroyd & Crowdy, 1990; Hughes et al, 2017). These groups engage in 'engineering humour' as a form of coping mechanism, which provides insulation against occupational dirt and associated social stigma (Collinson, 1988; Simpson et al, 2014). While masculinity is approached differently between classed groups, similarities are shared in appeals to paternalism, homeownership, marriage and career prioritisation (Townsend, 2002; Burnett et al, 2013; Perlow, 1998), which perpetuate norms regarding male and female gender roles. Social mobility also highlights variance in gender performance, as the upwardly mobile often encounter symbolic conflict as they enter middle-class professions (Curl et al, 2018; Reay, 2013; Sennett & Cobb, 1993).

Working conditions are an important contributor to occupational identity and community, as workplace dirt may be linked to an individual's social status; this being implied by the normalising judgements of observers. Classic literature on 'dirty work'

has defined three categories of dirt, including physical, social and moral taint, where it has been noted that while some occupations are physically disgusting, social and moral dirt are symbolic and constructed (Hughes, 1951; Douglass, 1966). Consequently, dirty work involves workers physically interacting with grime or stigmatised environments, in addition to encountering the shame, alienation and personal devaluation accompanying dirty roles (Kreiner et al, 2006). Interaction with different types of dirt may not be mutually exclusive, as the presence of physical dirt may imply the presence of moral taint, in which a dirty body degrades an individual's perceived moral worth and vice versa. Recent scholarship has expanded notions of dirty work to include emotional taint, where customer service requires prompt and appropriate emotional management (Boyle & Healy, 2003; McMurray & Ward, 2014; Schaubroeck et al, 2018). This literature often focuses on overtly stigmatised or morally ambiguous occupations however, including exotic dancers (Grandy, 2008), refuse collectors (Hughes et al, 2017), casino dealers (Lai et al, 2013), and butchers (Simpson et al, 2014).

To combat stigmatisation, those completing dirty work must find ways of negotiating and minimising the filth they interact with. This leads to a process of *taint management*, in which workers accentuate or distance themselves from certain aspects of their role, and negotiate a new, preferred identity by reframing a job's "physically dangerous aspects into badges of honor" and "dealing with disgust through humor and self-deprecating talk" (Tracy & Scott, 2006, p. 32; see also Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999). Taint management is achieved in different ways according to organisational contexts. Grandy has argued, for example, that exotic dancers project disgust onto their clients and clubs (Grandy, 2008), while elsewhere, refuse workers and butchers draw upon masculine

archetypes of toughness and endurance (Hughes et al, 2017; Simpson et al, 2014). Those engaged in grimy work encounter greater physical and social taint, rather than the moral judgements associated with dubious, deceitful or sexualised roles (Ashforth & Kreiner, 2002). As men and women frequently engage in different types of dirty work, taint management is subsequently gendered (Ackroyd & Crowdy, 1990). Much like the negotiation of workplace danger, men in dirty occupations employ masculine identities to recast their labour, in which they articulate pride in paternal sacrifice and a willingness to engage in unpopular work.

Elsewhere, previous studies have explored the role of masculinity within occupational communities to demonstrate how male archetypes are transmitted between community members, and how these subsequently impact the labour process (Parker, 2006; Paechter, 2003). The exclusionary character of masculinity is a core theme within this literature, which details the subjugation of women within traditionally male environments, these again referring to workplaces commonly associated with men (Yoder & Berendsen, 2001; Olofsson, 2016). Masculinity also disciplines men however, where gendered norms exclude those who cannot or decline to meet community expectations regarding male archetypes. Insights will subsequently focus upon how the steelworkers disciplined their male peers at work, while similarly dominating women publicly to signal and boost their communal membership. Analysis will therefore expand scholarly understandings of masculine communities as disciplinary instruments by showing how men excluded and disciplined their peers through peripheral membership.

To aid analysis, Raewyn Connell's theory of *hegemonic masculinity* will be employed when exploring the steelworkers' interpretation of gender norms (2005). Mirroring arguments regarding competing forms of masculinity however, it will be shown that multiple masculinities were reproduced across the steelworks, with differences between staff grades contributing to a competitive social hierarchy (Schrock & Schwalbe, 2009; Eastman, 2012; Adams, 2022). In line with Adams' (2022) and Ely & Meyerson's (2010) work on offshore oil rigs, differences in the expression of gender emerged between process, craft and managerial staff; in that both process and craft workers invoked traditional forms of working-class masculinity to cope with harsh working conditions, while managerial staff aimed to limit their subordinates' exposure to unnecessary danger. While this negotiation of masculine norms created animosity between hierarchical layers, distance and insularity among departmental groups also emerged as varying craft and process workers attempted to boost the status afforded by their labour.

Much like 'traditionally male occupations', 'traditional forms of working-class masculinity' is a term used to describe the industrial relations of the mid-20$^{th}$ century, in which many white working-class men were employed in heavy industry and manufacturing. However, this thesis does not surmise that all white working-class men worked in heavy industry. Rather, in heavily industrialised areas, working in industry and possessing tangible skills was, and continues to be, an attractive route for men to pursue and express a masculine identity (Walkerdine, 2015; 2010). In Stoke-on-Trent for example, an industrialised area famed for pottery manufacture, notions of traditional working-class masculinity are intimately connected to industrial labour.

However, the pottery industry was female intensive, with women employed not just in the decorating of ware, but across the production process, thereby 'de-gendering' this industrial work as men and women mixed. While Stoke-on-Trent is most famous for pottery, the city also hosted manufacturers of rubber and electrical wiring, for example, each of which employed both men and women. Separately, significant local concerns in the coalmining and steel industries offered comparatively masculinised employment, enabling men to develop and express masculinities less contested than those emerging in the pottery and light manufacturing industries. 'Traditional working-class masculinity' is therefore grounded not just in manufacturing labour, but also in the gendered identity resources attained through male labour and companionship. As discussed, familial provision, graft and sacrifice were central to this, yet with women also working in productive endeavours, further demarcation to achieve distinction from women is inferred.

While masculinised industrial stereotypes possess origins in Victorian heavy industry, the notion of a white male breadwinner as the head of the household is grounded in the idea of the 'nuclear family', this being a product of post-war economic development (Giles, 1993; Bingham, 2015). As a result, the 'traditional working-class man' discussed in this thesis is a distinctly post-war construction, defined as much by their labour as by the cultures and attitudes they encountered and reproduced. Classed and gendered leisure activities similarly emerged and defined the subcultures commonly associated with the male industrial working-class, with sports and drinking cultures fostered in pubs and employer-sponsored sporting clubs (Clark, 1983; Collins & Vamplew, 2000); with nationalised industries establishing a link between industrial subcultures and the

state. This again was linked to post-war development, where the rise of the welfare state similarly inspired greater concern for employee safety and welfare. Consequently, the traditional working-class masculinities mentioned earlier represent not only an experience of mid-20th century heavy industrial labour, but also how these experiences are remembered and narrated today, where deindustrialisation, changing gender roles and resulting communal change canonised such experiences into idealised folklore.

As formerly dominant industries and their subcultures were valorised anew as they declined, the classed folklore of danger, dirt and craft labour further embedded an understanding of masculinity as sacrifice and provision (Linkon, 2018). When examining these forms of working-class masculinity and their reproduction across communities, a degree of idealisation is thus visible, in which white working-class experiences of graft and industry are celebrated uncritically. When remembering working-class communities, some commentators, admirers and community members alike invoke memories fitting classed, racial and gendered stereotypes of hard-work and sacrifice, in which perceived cultural homogeneity erases nuanced heterogeneity (Strangleman, 2001). Though this thesis discusses an industrial subculture easily defined as working-class, the sentimentality which often accompanies oral history is acknowledged and thus absent from analysis, thereby avoiding any idealisation of the men at Shelton Bar steelworks.

Despite extensive attempts to understand the formation and nature of the British class system, Shelton Bar steelworkers had little difficulty in generating stratification systems which spanned departments and formal hierarchies. Class and gender underpinned much of the steelworker's occupational identity and community, which created

membership conditionality as they excluded those unable or unwilling to reproduce masculinised norms. Accordingly, themes of class and masculinity strengthen arguments regarding membership conditionality, as they demonstrate how communal bonds are facilitated by the exclusion and punishment of others. Working-class masculinity was a key mechanism underpinning this process, as these norms disciplined those unable or unwilling to internalise and express masculinised behaviour. Mobilising their role as a form of currency, steelworkers valorised the ownership and display of technical proficiency, engagement with intense overtime schedules, and the dismissal of occupational hazards and poor conditions. An exploration of full community membership will subsequently present a comprehensive view of the steelworkers' occupational identity and community, and will reveal membership conditions, systems of stratification, inter-group punishment and factors influencing rejection.

## 2.3 – Deindustrialisation & Nostalgic Memory

As an economic phenomenon, deindustrialisation refers to the sustained decline of a nation's manufacturing output and employment, which often leads to a structural realignment towards a post-industrial, service-oriented economy (Bluestone & Harrison, 1982; Tregenna, 2008; 2014). Decommissioned industrial capacity is substituted by foreign production, located predominantly in emerging or newly industrialising economies. Lower wages and looser environmental and labour standards offer important cost advantages, which attract organisations seeking to reduce expenditures. In light of this, deindustrialisation is associated with globalisation, where national interconnectivity leads to economic and political liberalisation, which

subsequently exposes traditional industries to foreign import penetration (Harvey, 2005). These changes characterise the UK's economic history during the final quarter of the 20th century (Tomlinson, 2016), particularly under the premiership of Margaret Thatcher, where alongside political shifts away from state subsidy and control over key industries, large nationalised entities were privatised and exposed to market forces, leading to sharp declines throughout much of the manufacturing sector (Green, 1999; Dintenfass, 1992; Gamble, 1988; 1994).

While some have disputed the role of globalisation within Western deindustrialisation (Rowthorn & Ramaswamy, 1999), others have linked the rise in foreign imports to the erosion of domestic industrial capacity, further indicating the important cost and regulatory advantages enjoyed by offshore production (Saeger, 1997; Alderson, 1999; Autor et al, 2013). The resulting implications of industrial decline are no less severe however, with the UK's former industrial heartlands continuing to struggle with unemployment and poverty related sickness (McCartney et al, 2016; McLean, 2016; Telford, 2022). Following industrial closures, former workers and local residents experience greater risks relating to alcohol and substance abuse, which leads to declines in living standards and heightened mortality rates (Rhodes, 2009; McCartney et al, 2016; McLean, 2016). This is coupled with the 'slow violence' of environmental pollution which leaks into natural habitats to cause prolonged and toxic effects for industrial communities (Nixon, 2011).

Economic regeneration in former industrial areas has done little to alleviate issues of poverty related sickness and unemployment, as employment growth has concentrated in low-waged, low-status warehousing work; while underemployment and

unemployment in these areas remains higher than national averages (Beatty et al, 2019; Gregg & Gardiner, 2015; Sadler, 1992). Guy Standing has produced particularly sharp critique of the rise in low-wage, contractually precarious employment, which he theorises as creating a new 'precariat' social class, characterised by those stuck on a revolving carousel of low-quality, poorly paid work (2011). Similarly, Alex Wood has noted how flexible employment has increased managerial power across many workplaces, whereby contractual precarity, coupled with managerial authority over hourly scheduling, create an unequal and exploitative power relationship between themselves and workers (2018; 2020). Though industrial employment remains present in areas of the former heartlands, opportunities are uneven and sporadic, as the closure of large industrial sites leaves behind only small workshops and warehouses (Beatty & Fothergill, 2020). Financial and professional services have offered national economic growth, though prosperity is largely contained within large cities and South East England, which deepens national inequalities between the post-industrial North and the comparatively prosperous South (Möller et al, 2013; Baker & Billinge, 2004; Jewell, 1994).

Researchers and sociologists are increasingly interested in the prolonged effects of industrial decline, and the cultural and communal implications of economic change (Mah, 2012; Walkerdine, 2010; 2017; High & Lewis, 2007). This contrasts with a previous scholarly focus upon the immediacy of workplace closures and redundancies, of which has been criticised for a comparatively narrow view of deindustrialisation (Strangleman & Rhodes, 2014; Cowie & Heathcott, 2003). In light of this, Tim Strangleman conceptualises deindustrialisation as a protracted process, one which continues to

effect communities both tangibly and emotionally in the years following workplace closures (2017; Strangleman & Rhodes, 2014). Drawing parallels from E.P. Thompson's classic work, Strangleman argues that contemporary society remains influenced by the transition away from heavy industry, where deindustrialisation acts as "the negative bookend to industrialisation, a mirror image of change" (2017, p. 478). While E.P. Thompson charted the origins of social class in rural protest (1963), a comparable cultural process can be seen in industrial communities in the wake of deindustrialisation, where parameters of class and community change as traditional workplaces fade from memory. This perspective offers a useful paradigm to analyse contemporary economic life, as present trends can be viewed as the continuation of Britain's urbanisation and economic history, rather than isolated instances of change (Tomlinson, 2016).

A similar perspective emerges in Sherry Linkon's book *The Half-Life of Deindustrialisation* (2018), where the legacy of industrial employment continues to influence communities after site closures. Though depleting with time, industry and its associated social structures influence how community and employment are understood, which sustains modernist classed and gendered aptitudes in post-industrial localities. These themes also surface in Valerie Walkerdine's work with post-industrial steel towns, where older residents reproduce masculinised norms when socialising with younger men, thereby creating gendered expectations regarding paid employment and interpersonal relationships (2010; 2015; 2017). Men are pressurised to fulfil largely unobtainable norms associated with industrial employment, leading to

derision and shame when they fail to meet these expectations (McDowell, 2003; Walkerdine & Jimenez, 2012).

Others turn to the paranormal when characterising industrial decline by depicting abandoned sites as 'ghosts of the past', which terrorise local residents as they attempt to rebuild their lives (Edensor, 2005a; 2005b; Gordon, 2008; Mills & McIntosh, 2020). Scholarly interest in deindustrialisation demonstrates the profound emotional implications of economic change, where industrial decline represents not just the loss of economic opportunities, but the decline of social structures used to read meaning into individuals' lives.

To explore the personal and communal legacy of heavy industry, researchers frequently use oral history methodologies which draw upon the utility of memory and nostalgia (Meier, 2016; Mah, 2010; Blokland, 2001). Rather than seeking objective accounts of historical events, oral history studies record how individuals remember and narrate events after they occur, which reveal insights into an interviewee's life course experiences, perspectives and identity (Janesick, 2014; Baddeley, et al, 2015). Acknowledging this, oral history is best understood as socially constructed, where events, people and places are narrated according to assumed knowledge and languages. Narrations may subsequently reflect an individual's personal account of events or cultural figures, or they may reflect a shared narrative built through collective remembrance, where repeated folklore generates a hegemonic account of a shared history (Nora, 1989; 1996; Ryan, 2019). Memory is also influenced by individuals' contemporary experiences, where history is recalled and constructed according to perspectives formed in the years following an event's occurrence (Miller, 2000). For

stories of industrial decline, how community members narrate issues of workplace closures, redundancy and communal decline reveal insights into their lived experiences of change, and more importantly, how change is understood and negotiated across communities.

Tim Strangleman's research output is exemplary in demonstrating oral history methodology, as rather than characterising nostalgic memory as a regressive emotion, Strangleman explores how memory connects to individuals' understandings of economic and communal change (2012). In his research studying occupational identity among railwaymen, Strangleman uncovered communal narratives regarding a lost 'golden age', one spoiled by younger workers possessing little attachment to the industry (Ibid.). Rather than characterising older workers as simply longing for the past, Strangleman adopted Raymond Williams' position on nostalgia (see Williams, 1973), stating that "nostalgia almost always tells us about the present condition of the person rather than the past" (2012, p. 422). Accordingly, the workers' narratives were considered in context of the wider process of ageing, where the older railwaymen associated the 'golden era' with the vitality of their youth. Strangleman's wider research output builds upon these themes, in which nostalgia for work permanence and industrial decline are fused, again revealing attitudes towards economic and cultural change (2007; 2015; Strangleman & Rhodes, 2014).

While Strangleman's (2012) analysis revealed tensions as workers negotiated ageing, economic change, and the emergence of new occupational cultures, he also drew upon the 'end of work' debate (Rifkin, 1995). This relates to the belief that employment no longer offers an outlet for meaning and personal development, as rationalisation and

intensification have eroded workplace communities and identification with craft labour (Ibid.; Beck, 2000; Sennett, 1998; 2006). Proponents of this argument display unease with cultural and economic change, which leads to depictions of comparatively meaningless workplaces within the contemporary economy. Influencing literature on occupational identity and community, themes of organisational nostalgia are present in works such as MacKenzie et al (2006; 2017), MacKenzie & Marks (2019), Gardiner et al (2009) and of course Strangleman's varied research output (1999; 2007; 2012; 2015). Within these literatures, occupational identity and community are invoked during periods of change, decline or closure to highlight the endurance of solidaristic bonds and shared identities. Consequently, these literatures challenge narratives of meaningless work and the abandonment of collectivism, as the identified workplace communities demonstrate the continuing importance of employment to identity formation.

The perceived value of industrial capitalism has received similar critique however, with Gorz (1999) questioning the strength of social cohesion created in factories and foundries, leading him to characterise industrial workers as "functionally specialized cogs in an immense machine" (p. 55). Departing from nostalgic representations of industry, this perspective joins critique of capitalism as it changes over time, where new modes of production degrade workers' task content, pay and conditions. Significant depictions of deskilling include Marx's critique of the erosion of craft labour under mechanised production in *Grundrisse* ([1857] 1973), and Braverman's analysis in *Labour and Monopoly Capital*, in which he noted the corrosive effects of technology upon industrial workers towards the end of the 20$^{th}$ century (1974). Drawing upon Tim

Strangleman's view of nostalgia as social commentary, it is demonstratable that nostalgia for the past occurs alongside the morphing of capitalism, which reveals insights into how change is negotiated among those effected by its alterations. While writers such as Gorz are critical of nostalgia, the utility of nostalgic memory is evidenced in the wider deindustrialisation literature, where contemporary discontent raises sentimentality for the past.

Approaching deindustrialisation as a protracted process bringing economic and communal change, this dissertation will record Shelton Bar's lengthy decline preceding its final closure. Contrasting from examples of unity in the face of restructuring (MacKenzie et al, 2006; 2017; MacKenzie & Marks, 2019), analysis will argue that sustained precarity increased competition and hostility at the works, which led workers to enact self-interested behaviours as they battled to secure their position and lucrative overtime. As a result, Shelton's final closure was characterised by apathy, as workers avoided collective action to preserve redundancy and retirement payments. Analysis also identifies how heightened competition altered relationships between members of Shelton's occupational community, as many workers reproduced managerial objectives of flexibility and efficiency at the expense of group solidarity. This serves the primary exploration of occupational identity and community by demonstrating changes to group membership and conditionality. With traditional outlets of solidarity and camaraderie undermined, the steelworkers' community became divided and competitive, a narrative which contrasts from interviewees' memories of communal unity.

Interview respondents provide nostalgic accounts of the steelworks within their oral histories, and subsequently place themselves within a constructed narrative of the UK's industrial decline. Accordingly, many interviewees were critical of deindustrialisation and its emotional implications. Rather than approaching this as a romanticisation of the past, respondents' narratives will be analysed according to the outlined perspectives on nostalgia and oral history, where emotional displays and narrated events reveal processes of rationalisation and coping following communal decline (Strangleman, 2012). The final sections of this dissertation will subsequently record respondents' experiences of deindustrialisation and the emotional impacts of Shelton's closure, and will similarly explore the navigation of redundancy and alternative employment. It will be argued that the processual nature of industrial decline was experienced unevenly however, which adds further heterogeneity into representations of working-class communities.

Analysis will then establish a link between nostalgia and economic regeneration, illustrating how post-industrial change acts as a lens framing the recall and articulation of memory. Mirroring the hostility and conflict frequently emerging after post-industrial redevelopment (Clark & Gibbs, 2017; Stanton, 2006), insights will demonstrate how environmental changes following Shelton Bar's closure influenced how respondents understood and narrated deindustrialisation. The National Garden Festival of 1986 will be used to illustrate arguments, as this event occupied Shelton Bar's former workings after the 1978 downsizing and laid the groundwork for its transformation into the Festival Park retail site. Analysis will draw upon Sam Wetherell's critique of the Garden Festival scheme, in which each event served as a Thatcherite tool to erase the post-war

industrial age, and thereby shape attitudes towards post-industrial urban development (2021).

## 2.4 – Chapter Conclusion

Studies of occupational identity and community are limited by a binary view of inclusion and exclusion, where those inside of an organisation or workplace routine may experience solidarity, while all those outside may not. This study provides a more sophisticated view of occupational communities, in that conformity and conditionality create tiers of membership which exclude those on the periphery. Adopting a Foucauldian approach to identity and power, analysis will demonstrate how conformance with implied norms, languages and symbolic knowledge determines access to shared solidarities, meaning those mobilising and reproducing specific norms and idealised cultural archetypes gain full membership at the expense of perceived others. Social class and masculinity are key to this central argument, as the steelworkers at Shelton Bar used archetypal working-class masculinity to define conditions of inclusion and to subsequently discipline their peers. Findings will expand upon the study of occupational identity and community by exploring membership conditionality and the disciplinary function of group participation. This will remedy current gaps in the literature which neglect the internal function of occupational communities as disciplinary mechanisms.

The term ‘archetypal working-class masculinity’, used previously and throughout this thesis, refers to the amalgamation of male gender roles into a stereotyped figure, one

representing both the steelworkers' interpretation of the ideal industrial worker, and my subsequent efforts to represent this in text. Accordingly, while a degree of personal interpretation is inferred, I have based my understanding of this 'archetype' upon how respondents narrated esteemed peers and those deemed admissible into their respective departmental communities. The platonic ideal of a steelworker reflected masculine behavioural norms of strength, familial provision and endurance in the face of tough working conditions, yet highly localised attributes also underpinned how the steelworkers evaluated their colleagues. This included a specific interpretation of skilled labour, leading respondents to praise the technical competence of communal insiders, while similarly discussing their own skills in an effort to assert and guard their community position. Commitment to Shelton Bar itself was also an important behavioural standard which men used to evaluate others, where those dedicated to long working routines, alongside those campaigning to safeguard the work's future, were regarded as typecast 'Shelton Bar steelworkers'.

'Archetypal working-class masculinity' then, is described accurately by the literature used throughout this review and across the thesis, whereby men have been observed drawing upon the task content and symbolic resources of manual labour to understand and present themselves as paternal guardians. However, localised additions to idealised gender norms must be acknowledged when interpreting the steelworkers' oral histories, as their experience of work at Shelton Bar further added to their understanding of men and masculinity. Consequently, when discussing how Shelton men drew upon archetypal behaviour to set communal boundaries and evaluate their peers, the term archetypal working-class masculinity refers to this dualism, where an

individual's performance at Shelton added or subtracted against their overall standing as a 'man'.

By clearly outlining a Foucauldian approach to identity, this research also avoids a passive invoking of identity and power relationships, these being issues which have characterised previous occupational identity scholarship. This is important when understanding conformity and membership conditionality, as the steelworkers' occupational identity can be conceptualised as a set of norms and symbolic knowledges which infer social categorisation. This approach also accounts for the role of resistance against communal norms however, as a relational view of power acknowledges the possibility of individual autonomy despite domineering discourses and communal epistemologies. While previous literatures on workplace exclusion have depicted 'othering' based upon intersectional characteristics, this research shows how deviation from hegemonic norms and discourses can affect all members of workplace communities. This again serves the primary exploration of discipline and conditionality, thereby expanding scholarly understanding of occupational identities and communities.

Within each findings chapter, the term 'legitimacy' is often used when discussing community membership, inclusion and conditionality. In this context, legitimacy refers to displays of authenticity by the steelworkers, in which they attempted to signal their worthy of group membership. To do this, workers completed rites of passage, routines, and conformed to behaviours prescribed by community veterans. Failure to adequately reproduce masculinised norms and display technical competence resulted in varying consequences, these ranging from exclusion from social events, up to the blocking of formal promotions, while incurring the wrath of community leaders may have resulted

in the threat of violence. With men seeking to protect their status and sustain communal bonds via the reproduction of strict social norms, perceived authenticity was important, as those deemed inadequate or insincere would be located quickly in a subculture keen to enforce conformity. Consequently, men made an effort to appear 'legitimate', both in terms of their competence as craft labourers or hard workers, and in their outward fulfilment of masculine stereotypes.

Legitimacy followed the specificities of each departmental community however, with conditions for inclusion and exclusion differing between productive roles. For those in the main laboratory for instance, chemical expertise and sharp analysis defined competence and therefore acceptance, while for those in manual production roles in the work's rolling mill, physical strength, endurance and the aversion of injury instead garnered respect and inclusion. While steelworkers of all departments shared similarities in their behaviours and attitudes towards core tenants of masculinity, legitimacy was contextual. Therefore, while each department may have recognised and respected the work and hardships of others outside of their immediate unit, boundaries were nonetheless created, thereby contributing to distinct departmental communities where masculine credentials were cashed with different 'currencies'. Despite this, all members of the steelworks were engaged in an effort to attain and signal their legitimacy, as being perceived as competent was key to 'getting on' at Shelton Bar.

Though drawing upon themes of identity, social class, gender and deindustrialisation, empirical chapters each contribute to a holistic exploration of Shelton Bar steelworkers' occupational identity and community, and demonstrate how the workers gained communal status via classed and gendered norms. Similarly, the processual approach

to deindustrialisation and organisational nostalgia reveal diverse perspectives on economic change, in which respondents articulate and analyse contemporary issues through representations of the past. Empirical chapters are organised to follow Shelton's decline, with the chronology of site closure structuring the presentation of findings. Rather than representing the closure as a sudden moment within Shelton's history, the subsequent chapters will introduce key moments contributing to the work's decline, alongside the associated communal implications.

Before progressing onto the primary discussion, chapter three will outline the chosen methodological design. Approaches to data collection and analysis will be discussed, alongside the selected research philosophy and the resulting implications for fieldwork. Chapter four will analyse processes of identity formation at Shelton, with analysis drawing upon theories of occupational identity and community, alongside literatures concerning communities of practice and informal discipline. Chapter five concerns the role of masculinity in identity formation, to detail how masculine norms both enabled and constrained free expression in and out of the works. Detail on managerial identity and its reproduction across the occupational community will follow in chapter six, which incorporates themes of organisational history as a form of managerial discipline. Chapter seven will chart the erosion of Shelton's workplace community in the 1980s and 1990s, followed by chapter eight, the final empirical section which analyses the impacts of site closure, and how economic regeneration influences narrations of industrial decline. Each of these chapters contain analysis of research findings alongside relevant theoretical discussion, in which results are applied directly to the bodies of literature outlined previously. A conclusion in chapter nine will then reiterate core

arguments, contributions and implications, while an acknowledgement of limitations will ground analysis within its associated theoretical and practical boundaries.

# Chapter 3 – Research Methods

## 3.1 – Introduction: Background & Empirical Context

Beginning in May 2021, I interviewed 14 Shelton Bar steelworkers and 2 members of the Community Union, the successor trade union to the former Iron and Steel Trades Confederation (ISTC). Over a period of 12 months, semi-structured interviews were scheduled with former steelworkers, where I asked about their experiences of work and industrial decline. Though age and occupational differences were present between respondents and I, these were leveraged during data collection. To offset my industrial inexperience and outsider position, the interviewees offered detailed narrations of the steelmaking process and of the social solidarities experienced on site.

As this research utilised oral history techniques, I approached interview data as a source of constructed and narrated life course histories, rather than a precise account of Shelton Bar and its decline (Clark & Rowlinson, 2004; Frise, 2017). This approach assisted a thorough analysis of the steelworkers' occupational identity and community, as interpreting oral history as socially constructed revealed insights into how respondents understood themselves and their relationship to the workplace community (Baddeley, et al, 2015). By analysing how respondents remembered and narrated life course events, social class and gender performance were charted within the spoken language and inferred knowledges mobilised during interview encounters.

This methodology was distinctly interpretivist in its epistemological position, as respondents' narrations reflected the social relationships formed throughout their lives, alongside the socially constructed nature of explorative interviewing. Consequently,

data was considered co-produced, as my actions during research design, fieldwork and analysis contributed to the narratives generated and presented throughout this dissertation (Wang et al, 2007). Consequently, I interpret the term co-produced, and thus the contents of this thesis, to reflect a collaboration between myself and the research participants, in which their stories were analysed and interpreted through my academic knowledge and epistemological approach. As respondents' anecdotes and testimonies constituted the practical and empirical basis of this research, completion would not be possible without their cooperation. Accordingly, while I express gratitude simply for their interest and involvement, I also understand and approach this project as the meeting of bodies of knowledge, in which my own, alongside respondents' knowledge was combined and used to form research outcomes. Results and conclusions therefore depict a particular account of Shelton Bar and its workplace community, one defined by all parties involved and the circumstances behind data collection.

The term co-produced is most often used to describe research with more overt collaboration, such as community-based research using workshops and interactive methods to collect data, where participants may be invited to create art or media outputs as part of their contribution (Durose et al, 2012). Accordingly, when conceptualising this project, the term co-produced was invoked passively, as data collection was comparatively conventional and transactional, in that respondents answered questions posed to them, and their words were subsequently used to form conclusions. Despite this, describing data as co-produced remains appropriate, as the open-ended nature of questions asked, alongside the effects of the insider-outsider relationship experienced between myself and interviewees, invited respondents to

express themselves according to their interpretation and memories of events passed; with the recall and articulation of memory framed by the social structuring of each interview encounter. Consequently, while this project did not follow the workshop and arts-based approach commonly associated with co-produced research projects, the data collected was contextual to specific circumstances governed by power and community relationships, making data an inimitable blend of knowledge created by each party.

Informed by a familial link to Shelton Bar, I was intrigued by stories of camaraderie and friendship told by my grandfather, which developed my interest to know why the site remains so important to former workers. While I could not share the steelworkers' experiences, I offered them an opportunity to articulate their knowledge and position within Shelton's history. Similarities were raised in a shared interest in local industrial history which helped to reduce barriers to cooperation. I was aware of the romanticism surrounding traditional industries and was cautious of reproducing this within my research findings. Accordingly, analysis critiques respondents' narrations of community and camaraderie, though I do this without diminishing their personal memories. For an overview of interview respondents' pseudonyms and employment histories, see Appendix A.

Participants were recruited through purposive sampling, where potential interviewees were identified according to desired characteristics. For the primary research population, this involved possessing direct employment experience at Shelton Bar steelworks, while additional data was drawn from those with a passive connection to the works, leading to the recruitment of two trade unionists from the Community

Union. A combination of snowball sampling and calls for research on a Facebook community group were also used to recruit participants; this being an online space where former workers and their family members connect and reminisce. While snowball sampling has limitations in participant homogeneity, it offers benefits in efficiency and access to networked communities, with participants' referrals helping to establish rapport with prospective interviewees (Biernacki & Waldorf, 1981). This makes snowball sampling a useful tool when researching smaller and connected communities like the steelworkers.

These sampling techniques contributed to a particularly collegial narration of Shelton Bar, as participants remaining in contact with former colleagues have maintained social networks first established on site. Though this introduces homogeneity into the research sample, the effects of stratification and group membership upon data collection are demonstrated, whereby particular members locate and celebrate similarity and exclude difference. This enabled the exploration of membership conditionality, as by interviewing a largely connected sample, important similarities and differences were charted among core and periphery members. The narratives collected reveal aspects of work and community selected for commemoration and reproduction, which indicate what histories were important to interviewees. This again constitutes a specific account of membership and camaraderie, where a particular form of 'insiderness' was narrated.

In a practical sense, this research was informed by a need to record the stories of a rapidly declining industrial subculture, as many former Shelton Bar steelworkers are entering advanced old age; this being a trend which reflects the traditionally older

workforce of the broader steel industry (Hudson, 2000; Dawley et al, 2008). These circumstances led to challenges during fieldwork, as the total research population was limited by factors of ill-health and mortality (Rhodes, 2009; 2002), in addition to the lack of a physical research setting or meeting space. Many respondents spoke of progressing illnesses as they aged, alongside the mortality of colleagues and friends from the works. These circumstances likely influenced the narratives collected during interviews, as participants may have been motivated by the telling of 'their story' before passing. The communal Facebook group likely exacerbated these pressures too, as frequent funeral announcements reinforce concerns over personal mortality. Similarly, some responses can be characterised by a sense of duty, where respondents accentuated accounts of camaraderie and communal relationships to raise Shelton's repute. Rather than problematising data collection, these factors highlight the symbolic importance of the steelworks to community members, whose narratives commemorate a lost communal space.

Fieldwork was undertaken with a desire to explore processes of community, kinship and camaraderie at Shelton Bar, which afforded a broad focus upon membership and belonging. The research questions underpinning data collection subsequently relate to daily life at the steelworks, which include: what was it like to be employed at Shelton Bar? How did former workers understand and express themselves as steelworkers? And how do former workers remember and narrate Shelton's decline and closure? Following these broad questions, fieldwork was completed inductively to allow insights to emerge from open interview questions which focused upon oral histories. Rather than entering into the research project with a desire to test a specific hypothesis, I was motivated to

analyse the daily negotiation of identity at Shelton, and how respondents created and sustained group membership.

Interviews were organised into three sections: these concentrating upon daily life at Shelton, experiences of site closure, and the impacts of redundancy and demolition. Occupational identity and community constitute this project's core empirical focus, with themes of deindustrialisation, gender and social class supporting insights into identity formation. Consequently, direct questions regarding social class and gender roles were absent from the interview schedule, which can be seen in Appendix B. Instead, these themes were located within respondents' narrations of their employment, workplace community and daily routines. This was viewed as more insightful than overt questioning, as the passive emergence of classed and gendered narratives revealed how these norms and assumptions were embedded within respondents' ordinary lives. While direct questions relating to class and gender may have returned unconcealed responses, the narrative interview technique was regarded as conducive to the aim of charting daily life at Shelton Bar.

## 3.2 – Research Design: Practical Application & Theoretical Positioning

This study used semi-structured narrative interviews to collect qualitative data, where respondents were asked to narrate their experiences of key life events. This form of interviewing has distinct epistemological underpinnings (Blakely & Moles, 2017; Wolgemuth, 2013), in which narrative interview design can return particularly rich insights, as responses can be located within a broader stream of consciousness

(Riessman, 1993). By establishing a clear beginning, middle and end point, participants' experiences have been grounded and analysed within wider contexts to offer additional nuance and depth to findings (Gergen & Gergen, 1986; Sarbin, 1986). This strength is particularly useful when analysing periods of time, as respondents author stories and position themselves within processes of change. Narrative interviewing shares similar strengths with conventional interview approaches, where in-depth data uneasily collected by quantitative methods is recorded (Rubin & Rubin, 2012; Seidman, 2013).

Narrative interviews also possess limitations, as storied responses can be harder to manage and verify. Issues with validity, reliability and bias are also present, as interviewees may embellish or misremember events, while poor standardisation reduces the interviewer's control over narratives told (Mueller, 2019; Andrews et al, 2013). Despite this, the methods used were appropriate for this study, as storied interviewing complemented an analytical focus upon daily experiences of work and decline. Accordingly, while quantitative studies can produce broad, generalisable results, qualitative data can reveal insights into complex human experiences to aid the exploration of immeasurable cultural practices.

Narrative interviews were also useful in creating an accessible research process for interviewees, as by asking participants to tell stories about their employment histories, coherence and structure were built into their answers (Overcash, 2003). This was important when considering the research population's characteristics, as participants were largely unfamiliar with higher education or academic research. Accessibility helped to lower potential anxieties or suspicions arising within the cohort, which allowed men to tell stories and narrate their experiences in a familiar and comfortable

manner. Open-ended questions were used throughout interview encounters, involving the use of phrases such as “what can you remember about…” and “tell me about your experiences with…”. While structure can be narrated into these examples, the open nature of experience and memory allowed participants to exercise freedom over narratives told, and revealed insights into how respondents understood and articulated their identities as steelworkers (Mishler, 1986).

With consent being given by the participants, all interviews were recorded, transcribed and pseudonymised to remove identifiable information alongside any confidential responses (Saunders et al, 2015). This facilitated a process of data familiarisation, in which I became immersed within respondents’ narratives (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Thomas, 2006). While interviewees were rendered anonymous, the research setting was preserved, as Shelton Bar’s historic nature posed little material threat to participants. Although this meant that full anonymity was not possible (van den Hoonaard, 2003), the empirical themes uncovered did not undermine interviewees’ personal safety, livelihoods or mental wellbeing, though names of contemporary establishments or employers were censored. Data analysis was also completed manually, in which codes were assigned to verbatim transcripts for arrangement into coherent empirical seams. Findings were analysed and presented in a chronological manner, with chapters progressing through Shelton’s protracted decline. This complemented the theoretical approach to deindustrialisation, while also utilising the chronology built into the interview process.

Discursive thematic analysis was used to examine interview data, in which codes were assigned to significant insights, relationships and patterns (Braun et al, 2019; Miles &

Huberman, 1994). This was completed inductively to allow codes to emerge from the data intuitively, rather than in a predetermined fashion. Accordingly, findings and conclusions were drawn directly from qualitative insights to preserve interviewee voice. Analysis was completed in a staged process, with the completion of verbatim transcripts, followed by increasingly stringent filtering to select the most relevant quotes for presentation (Naeem et al, 2023). During this process, codes were used to describe trends emerging in the transcripts, and to note similarities and differences between interviewees and their responses. Codes were assigned according to both the frequency with which they emerged, and their relative importance to nascent conclusions. The importance of each code was determined by the insights provided into respondents' occupational identity and community, though importance was also assessed by personal intrigue, again highlighting my personal influence over the research project. Instances of dissent, emotional displays or significant anecdotes featured as important insights, while daily life and common aspects of the steelworkers' community appeared frequently throughout each transcript.

Assigning codes to interview data is a staged process, in which primary and sub-themes are generated as data is filtered. After building familiarity with each interview transcript, I identified four main themes: these included identity, masculinity, social class and deindustrialisation. Core themes were used to divide transcripts into actionable sections for further filtering. From this, around 6-8 sub-themes were identified in each main category. While individual codes may have differed between each transcript, codes were later reviewed and refined for greater specificity, relevance and consistency across each source (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017). This helped to define

the different codes and generate clarity over their analytical content. For example, rather than creating individual codes for the different social activities occurring outside of the steelworks, respondents' participation in clubs and leisurely events were condensed into the sub-theme 'community belonging', which denoted membership of departmental occupational communities. This differed from an adjacent sub-theme 'camaraderie/solidarity' which denoted the raising of a shared sense of identity among workers. For further detail on the coding process, a thematic analysis coding table can be seen in appendix C. This previews the analytical themes present within forthcoming chapters, and includes definitions and example quotes from each sub-theme.

In line with Foucauldian approaches to power and identity, language and discourse were essential to this project and its analytical content. Following interest in daily life at the steelworks, the manner in which respondents narrated their lives was of great importance, as classed and gendered attitudes were present within their daily routines (Mogashoa, 2014; Cheek, 2004). This approach revealed deeper insights into the steelworkers' occupational identity and community, and subsequently generated a comprehensive view of their cultural aptitudes. Accordingly, when completing the coding process, the language used by respondents was heavily monitored. For example, when discussing their female partners, many respondents made vague references to 'the wife' instead of naming their spouses directly. This indicated respondents' attitudes towards domestic gender roles, in which they acted as the familial gradian and authority figure. The focus upon discourse was essential here, as by analysing how and why specific words or phrases were used, class and gender were identified within respondents' narratives.

Drawing strength from its adaptability and accessibility, thematic analysis can be applied to a range of qualitative sources (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This makes it a popular method among qualitative scholars, where different approaches are employed according to a project's corresponding theoretical positioning. By focusing upon discourse and language, discursive thematic analysis served the Foucauldian ambitions of this project. This was achieved by uncovering the key knowledges and discourses emerging from participants' narratives, where thematic analysis was used to record recurrent themes, while discourse analysis interrogated these further.

Poor methodological standardisation creates limitations however, with thematic analysis weakened by inconsistent or ambiguous variable controls (Braun & Clarke, 2022). While this lack of control aids methodological flexibility, the potential to conflate and mix analytical approaches can weaken the validity and credibility of any conclusions made, which contributes to positivist ambivalence and mistrust of qualitative methods (Holloway & Todres, 2003). Rather than a defined method, thematic analysis can be regarded as a 'family of methods' (Braun & Clarke, 2023), which require appropriate and transparent application to capture nuance effectively.

Additional data were also gathered from organisational documents acquired from interviewees during fieldwork, which included quarterly newsletters written by Shelton Bar's general manager between 1973 and 1978. This additional material should be regarded as extensions of respondents' testimonies, as items selected for preservation reveal contextual insights into personal and shared narratives. Documents preserved or discarded indicate respondents' priorities and personal histories, thereby supplementing their articulated position (Karppinen & Moe, 2012). Accordingly, the

items and documents presented by respondents were recorded in a similar manner to their oral testimonies. The contexts upon which they were presented and discussed were important, as this again revealed insights into respondents' histories and when and why narratives were recalled. A similar approach was also applied to photographs and commemorative items, as when meeting in person, respondents often presented workplace awards or photos of friends selected for display, which again revealed important moments experienced throughout their lives.

Content analysis was used to analyse the presented documents and identify key themes emerging from written language; which further contextualised the circumstances and intentions underpinning their creation (Silverman, 2000; Atkinson & Coffey, 2004). These documents provided important contextual detail, thereby supplementing primary conclusions by offering institutional perspectives on important events, experiences and organisational leaders. Documentary data sources present further practical challenges however, namely in the rarity of complete collections and the allusive nature of written content, which often uses carefully selected language to describe organisational developments (Yin, 1994). While these limitations can restrict the utility of documentary evidence, content analysis helps to extrapolate detail and alternative readings (Bowen, 2009). By acknowledging the purpose of presented documents, narratives are contextualised in a wider empirical seam which expands the use of presented materials.

Interest in discourse and language infers an interpretive conceptualisation of history, where documents and oral history narrate specific constructions of organisational events, rather than offering objective knowledge (Clark & Rowlinson, 2004). Though the

occurrence of historical events and figures are accepted (Evans, 1997), this research does not intend to produce a history of Shelton Bar. Instead, historical documents and oral histories demonstrate the mobilisation of communal discourses which influenced identification and narrations of communal folklore (Eley, 2005). Documentary evidence demonstrates the articulation of managerial identity, where authored organisational history influenced behaviour by controlling shop floor communities and undermining collective resistance. This supplements interview data from managerial staff by evidencing institutional approaches to personnel management, organisational change, and Shelton's dispute with the British Steel Corporation which progressed throughout the 1970s.

A researcher's personal influence upon their project's design and resulting conclusions should also be considered when assessing methodological validity, as how analysis is approached both practically and theoretically will guide results and implications (Wang et al, 2007). This highlights the social production of qualitative inquiry, as alongside determining the presentation of empirical themes, findings are interpreted by individual researchers, which introduces perspective and potential bias. When conducting research of this kind, it is important to practice reflexivity and acknowledge how individual actions influence each stage of the research project (Briggs, 1986). This enhances credibility and reliability, as although readers may critique processes followed, accurate methodological recording creates transparency and clarity over how conclusions were drawn (Guba & Lincoln, 1989; Tobin & Begley, 2004). An open acceptance of personal influence over research design and outcomes can have a similar

effect, as ownership of theoretical positions and practical actions accurately contextualises conclusions made (Braun & Clarke, 2023).

Thinking reflexively, a personal interest and familial connection to the research setting influenced this project's creation. Like many descendants of industrial workers, I have listened to stories of work and community told directly by my grandfather, or vicariously through other family members. Hearing my grandfather's nostalgic stories produced a romanticised understanding of Shelton Bar in my mind, which influenced my initial desire to explore experiences of work, solidarity and decline. This focus would have differed without my prior introduction to the steelworks, while personal interest in the site generated a deeper connection to the research project. Though I critique aspects of the steelworkers' community, an understanding of Shelton as a communal asset informed this project's original conceptualisation, and therefore how I progressed though fieldwork. Familial connection also facilitated an initial start to data collection and sampling, as I was able to recruit respondents remaining in contact with my grandfather. As discussed, this generated a particular narration of Shelton, where similarity was accentuated among those referred by snowball sampling.

My familial connection to Shelton signalled a degree of insiderness to the research population, which helped to reduce aged and occupational differences by building rapport. I was conscious of invoking this connection too often however, as I aimed to meet respondents as 'myself', rather than as an extension of my grandfather. By presenting myself as a familiar, though uninformed researcher, I was able to ask questions as a tolerated outsider and gain broad detail into respondents' working lives and social solidarities. From this, I understood why many celebrated the works so

heavily, as many spoke of relative prosperity in a workplace possessing strong occupational communities. My position as an outsider revealed boundaries to inclusion however, as I identified similarities between interviewees and how this created membership conditionality. This challenged my initial understanding of Shelton Bar and its solidaristic community, and led to a nuanced account of membership and acceptance. Consequently, I chose to highlight membership conditionality during data analysis and presentation, as alongside representing a unique contribution, these insights had altered my initial knowledge and were therefore personally interesting.

Though I was able to invoke similarity, differences between respondents and I were overt. Aged and occupational differences were the most pronounced and framed the relationship created during interview encounters. As an example, one respondent commented on my relative lack of technical proficiency, which led him to make a comparison between himself and I when he was a similar age. Difference revealed important communal aptitudes however, as in accentuating difference, respondents revealed how they understood themselves, and what skills and capacities were important both personally and across the community. The relationship negotiated with respondents thus influenced the data collected, as men adjusted their narrations accordingly. Many offered explanations of the production process and their respective role within this, alongside histories of the site and nationalisation; details unlikely to be shared with someone possessing experience in heavy engineering. Though I built rapport and collaborated with respondents, my position ultimately defined data collection and directly influenced findings and conclusions raised. Accordingly, findings would have differed had I been female, gay or another ethnic heritage, as these

differences would alter my reception among interviewees. Being a white, locally born heterosexual male presented advantages during fieldwork, as my physical characteristics eased recruitment and participants' anxieties towards the interview process.

Data analysis was a comparatively solitary task, though nonetheless dependent upon my positioning and practical actions. As discussed previously, my decision to use inductive thematic analysis influenced how data was presented and analysed, with insights emerging directly from empirical material. The selection and discarding of insights were conscious choices made by myself, while the construction and layout of the dissertation embodies my assessment of presented material. Like respondents selecting what information to divulge, I decided which insights were most interesting and important to subsequent arguments, which makes this project an extension of myself. The inductive methodology was also important in relation to my personal positioning, as this reflected my goals and assumptions regarding quality research. Consequently, the methodological design was chosen according to my preferred approach to academic inquiry, in which my understanding of research as a social process informed fieldwork and analysis.

While my personal impact upon data collection has been acknowledged and accepted, the inductive approach to research design and fieldwork required distance between my personal beliefs and the stated research questions. In light of this, I avoided inserting my childhood understanding of Shelton into the design and completion of fieldwork, as this enabled a more accurate representation of respondents' narratives. While my actions have led to the creation and completion of this project, I took measures to

preserve interviewees' authentic narratives, in which qualitative insights emerged from their testimony, rather than from my initial understanding of the works and its community. To facilitate this, I appropriated my position as a communal outsider and asked respondents to narrate their lived experiences of work, community and decline. This limited personal romanticism within analysis, as my own understanding of Shelton was consigned to a beginning point in a protracted process of discovery.

Overall, this project has changed and grown as my understanding of the steelworks has developed, and this is reflected in the methodology chosen and employed. Remaining aware of my personal influence upon research design, I present conclusions as the embodiment of a stream of consciousness, one co-produced by relationships and interactions sustained between myself and respondents. Though analysis remains my own, findings were drawn from the experiences and oral histories of the research population, making this research a collaborative endeavour.

## 3.3 – Research Philosophy: Ontology & Epistemology

Research methodologies are underpinned by the philosophy of knowledge creation, which involves the identification, selection and justification of appropriate ontological and epistemological perspectives. Ontology relates to an individual's understanding of existence and social reality, whereas epistemology concerns approaches to knowledge creation, where distinction between fact and opinion varies between perspectives and methods (Bell et al, 2018). Prominent ontological approaches include positivism and interpretivism, which reflect objective and interpretive perspectives respectively.

Though equally valid and useful when selected with reflexive purpose, different academic disciplines carry varying expectations for positivist or interpretivist design, where conventions and codes of conduct determine scholarly output.

Positivist researchers argue that observation and scientific experimentation should remain theory neutral, in which practitioners act as non-bias vehicles in the discovery of measurable facts (Shapiro & Wendt, 2005). This philosophical grounding is often selected when demonstrating causality or recording a measurable phenomenon, or when testing a set hypothesis through systematic design. During investigation, subjectivities are eliminated by carefully controlling environments and removing personal opinion (Linstead, 1993; Brown, 1977). Popular in the life sciences, researchers may select standardised quantitative methods with relevant control variables, in which credibility and reliability are protected by removing perspective and partisanship. Supporters of positivism have accused interpretivist studies of misrepresenting reality, and have similarly criticised supposed biased representations of practically explainable phenomena (Armstrong, 2001; Lawson, 2008).

Where positivism appears insufficient to explore the field under investigation, a departure from objective ontology is necessary. Interpretivism provides this desired outlet, with its supporters arguing that there can be no understanding of the social world without subjectivity (Johnson et al, 2006). Also inferred is that observation and resulting knowledge are influenced by, and subsequently become outcomes of social relationships underpinning their discovery. By adopting this approach during fieldwork and analysis, the selected interpretivist design has helped to uncover hidden meanings behind interviewees' oral histories. This research project can therefore be likened to a

social process, as the act of data collection, analysis and the presentation of findings each contributed to the negotiation of resulting knowledge (Montuschi, 2003). While overt instances of bias can be muted or managed, research projects are intrinsically linked to their creators. Though problematic from a positivist approach, personal influence over research outcomes is not regarded as a limitation here, but is instead recognised as part of the research process.

As research is a human endeavour, the production of knowledge is inseparable from subjectivity and theory, meaning true objectivity is either limited to a select number of scholarly endeavours, or it is simply unachievable. As the researcher forms relationships with participants and becomes embedded within the empirical setting, active engagement in data collection and interpretation co-creates knowledge through the researcher's perspective. For this research project, findings have been induced by the relationship negotiated during fieldwork, thereby requiring a reflexive awareness of individual influences upon research outcomes. Rather than approaching research as an objective fact-finding mission, this project was conceptualised as a collaborative process. Accordingly, I am aware that my characteristics and aptitudes have influenced all stages of fieldwork, and that these influences create inimitability by locating outcomes within a specific mode of inquiry.

Positivist disciplines draw upon a humanist philosophical tradition, which places individual autonomy and discernment at the centre of scientific investigation (Norman, 2012). These Scholars claim to use their unique capacity for scientific discovery in an objective and unbiased manner (Christians, 2005). Interpretivism departs from this humanist grounding however to adopt a cultural post-humanist approach, which

critiques the authority of human reason in scientific research. Through this perspective, knowledge is co-created during the process of enquiry, where the circumstances of academic discovery influences conclusions made (Barad, 2007).

Rejecting the notion of social phenomena existing in anticipation of human discovery, post-humanism is underpinned by an ongoing process of materialisation, where researchers interpret the social meanings accompanying physicality (Haraway, 1988). This perspective shares similarities with post-modernism and post-structuralism, each of which critique the assumptions of modernist objectivity (Bolter, 2016). While my personal characteristics influenced respondents' narratives, it is also acknowledged that respondents' own ontological and epistemological assumptions influenced data collection, as memory is similarly articulated through an assumed approach to knowledge (Bruner, 1991; Savolainen, 2020). In light of this, qualitative interviews are not presented as objective fact, but are again understood as situated within a constructed social history.

Departing from objectivity should not be regarded as detrimental to an academic field, as the adoption of interpretive design facilitates new sociological knowledge and enables researchers to avoid the saturation and stagnation of their respective fields (Astley, 1984). Strict adherence to positivist ontologies can exclude complex questions from mainstream academic discussion, which may restrict understandings of intangible or mute aspects of human existence (Linstead, 1994; Easterby-Smith et al, 2008). Accordingly, divergence from numerical and objective methodologies is required to explore the nuanced social setting presented here, thereby necessitating flexible methods which utilise individual subjectivity. As argued by Morgan & Smircich:

> Once one relaxes the ontological assumption that the world is a concrete structure, and admits that human beings, far from merely responding to the social world, may actively contribute to its creation, the dominant methods become increasingly unsatisfactory, and indeed, inappropriate (1980, p. 489).

The authors reject rigid adherence to positivist methodological design and instead argue for more contextual approaches aligned with the social phenomena under exploration. Consequently, the 'case' for qualitative enquiry grows as researchers depart from objective positioning.

In sum, quantitative methods are best used when attempting to create measurable and generalisable results from an observed phenomenon, in which validity is drawn from the setting and testing of a defined hypothesis. Comparatively, the qualitative methods employed here are focused and specific, and gain insights from subjective sources to explore the human condition in a complex social environment. These methodologies diverge in purpose and scholarly remit, thereby requiring the contextual evaluation and adoption of an appropriate philosophical grounding. As a result, the degree to which a researcher's perspective acts as bias can be questioned, as subjective interpretation adds depth to research findings and conclusions, which subsequently diversifies results and wider implications (Alvesson, 2003).

## 3.4 – Research Philosophy: Practical Application

Beyond outlining approaches to social reality and knowledge creation, research philosophy has practical implications for fieldwork. This is especially relevant when

selecting a sampling strategy, as a researcher's approach to data sources indicates interpretations of validity, credibility and reliability. For qualitative studies, opinion is divided between the use of probability-based controls to recruit participants, and a more contextual approach utilising the principle of saturation (Curtis et al, 2000; Emmel, 2015). While creating clear targets for participant inclusion can increase perceived rigour, the use of statistical methods in qualitative projects can be problematic, as sufficient levels of participation depend upon the research context and conceptual grounding.

This project utilised convenience and purposive sampling, which are common non-probability strategies that recruit individuals based upon their perceived appropriateness to the research aims (Robinson, 2014). Respondents were assessed according to my discretion, though this was bound to a set criterion of desired characteristics. While lacking in numerical standardisation, credibility was enhanced through establishing clear boundaries to participant inclusion, this predicated upon direct employment at Shelton Bar, or a significant connection to the works through trade union activity. Given the relatively limited number of former steelworkers available for participation, a purposive sample was most appropriate, where an invitation to interview was based upon the fulfilment of a desired criteria.

Sampling was also completed inductively to avoid the adoption of statistical quotas and hypotheses. During data collection and analysis, an *a posteriori* approach allowed core themes to emerge from recorded data and generate insights in an inductive manner (Sim et al, 2018). This emergent methodology accounted for the contextual challenges faced during data collection, while also avoiding the positivism associated with

statistical analysis. Addressing concerns over rigour and validity, this project draws strength not from an ability to make generalisable claims, but instead from exploring interviewees' experiences of occupational community, decline and closure (Roulston, 2010). While relevant to the primary body of literature, conclusions are therefore limited to this empirical context.

Drawing upon the concept of data saturation, fieldwork was considered 'complete' when redundancy occurred in the generation of new themes, alongside practical considerations regarding time and resource constraints (Saunders et al, 2018). Though many researchers desire a definitive point where all themes are exhausted, saturation can be likened to an ongoing process of clarification, where research outputs instead become "stronger, more evident, more consistent, more cohesive, and more mature" (Morse, 2015, p. 587). While precise methods of measuring these considerations vary, saturation is commonly associated with the recurrence of core themes, with further data collection resulting in diminishing returns (Sandelowski, 2008). Under the *a posteriori* approach selected, saturation occurred when no new themes emerged from the material collected, which differs from an *a priori* perspective, where saturation results from the fulfilment of predefined categories. These contrasting conceptualisations further exemplify the malleable nature of qualitative design, in which a definitive point of completion and hypothesis building do not equate to research quality (Saunders et al, 2018; O'Reilly & Parker, 2013).

In line with the inductive approach selected, data collection was paused after 14 interviews with the main research population, as although additional participants could have been sourced with further efforts, core themes had reached saturation. This

number reflected Guest et al's (2006) arguments regarding data saturation occurring at around 12 participants, in addition to the scheduling constraints of doctoral research. Although occupying different roles, the steelworkers had similar working routines and domestic patterns, which meant themes began to recur towards the 12th interview. Instances of othering and periphery membership added heterogeneity; however, respondents enacted comparable gender performances and spoke of their respective departmental occupational communities in similar terms. By drawing upon saturation in an emergent manner, this study balanced competing needs for flexibility and control, thereby preserving validity in a manner consistent with interpretive design (Fusch & Ness, 2015).

An unfortunate reality of qualitative methods is that validity and credibility are difficult to define, which emboldens perceptions of insufficient quality control when compared to quantitative design (Schwandt, 2001). In a positivistic sense, validity refers to what degree research outcomes can be considered credible and objectively sound (Bell et al, 2018). Due to the diversity of qualitative data sources and the interpretive nature of subsequent analysis, qualitative projects are assessed according to different understandings of validity and credibility. While smaller sample sizes complicate assessments of validity, quality is associated with the strength of insights gained, and prioritises depth and detail over quantity. Though consistent interview schedules and standardised thematic analysis can boost reliability, assessing qualitative research remains abstract and subjective, with detail and nuance emerging as key measurements of success.

Standardising qualitative research should also be questioned however, as imposing positivist standards restricts the remit and possibilities of the humanities and social sciences (Freeman et al, 2007). Qualitative researchers should preserve methodological flexibility and empirical subjectivity to reject positivist standardisation of fields requiring depth and nuance. Accordingly, I am confident in the appropriateness and validity of the methods employed, while adequate quality control has been practiced in interviewee recruitment and the accurate preparation of transcripts. Research of all disciplines is an imperfect endeavour, impacting both numerical and qualitative studies (Bell et al, 2018; Roulston, 2010). Consequently, while overt issues in research design and execution are worthy of scrutiny, critique is best levelled at academic output and contributions, as these ultimately reveal a project's true competence and impact.

### 3.5 – Memory Studies: Epistemology & Design

Oral history studies draw strength and weakness from the nature of memory, a data source characterised by the social construction of narrative evidence. knowledge is stored and processed through the thoughts and memories of respondents, which prompts the recall and articulation of retained information (Frise, 2017). This raises debate regarding the credibility and nature of memory, leading to disagreement over whether recollection evidences an event's occurrence, or whether memory preserves a belief in its past existence (Papas, 1980; Annis, 1980; Goldman, 2009).

Without arousing this debate, this project recognises the socially constructed nature of memory, which is built and recalled in line with past and present experiences. This

process is both personal and shared, as research participants create and sustain private memories, while collective experiences form hegemonic accounts of a 'shared history' (Nora, 1989; 1996). Therefore, when remembering and narrating memories of past events, narratives may be influenced by those articulated by others, which embeds personal memories in popularised histories. Similarly, present experiences or outlooks can influence the recall of knowledge and memory, where the past is viewed through a contemporary lens (Miller, 2000). Distinct from reflection and comparison, present issues and experiences may be overlaid onto the past, complicating the narration of events, people, places and processes.

With its role in processing and articulating social experiences, memory is central to the formation and negotiation of identity (Baddeley, et al, 2015). Used to tell stories about the self, experiences and events are recalled according to understandings of their impact, which incorporates emotions experienced during and after their occurrence (Gaydos, 2005; Cohen et al, 2010). Experiences may be mundane or traumatic, though each build a coherent narrative underpinning the interpretation of information and memory. Meaning is negotiated and assigned to experiences in an ongoing process, again indicating how interview data reflects a socially constructed narrative history (Zerubavel, 1996). Events are narrated differently depending upon the speaker, as individuals alter their narration according to when, where and who they are articulating information to (Keightley, 2010).

From a positivist epistemological position, varying oral histories complicate objective data collection, as narratives are linked to individuals' personal aptitudes, knowledges and epistemologies. Consequently, respondents' credibility is difficult to assess, with

variation in their spoken testimony depending upon the circumstances of data collection. This is useful for this project's aim in exploring identity and community however, as understanding why and when particular narratives are articulated can expose greater insights into individual respondents, the communities they were represented in, and how they understand events occurring within their oral histories. By acknowledging the utility of memory and emotion, additional depth was gained from the oral history design, in which the emotive undertones of respondents' words were recognised and explored.

Despite these strengths, the nature of memory can present limitations for qualitative studies. Due to the social construction of history, memories may be conflated to form alternative stories and narratives which complicate the narration of events, people or processes (Baddeley, et al, 2015). Similarities between recollections can influence the misremembering of particular events, while narratives articulated by others may become appropriated into personal understandings of the self. Narrative accuracy is similarly influenced by emotion, where interviewees' emotional state informs data collection (Wilkinson, 1997; Keightley, 2010; Bietti et al, 2014).

These issues have implications for validity, reliability and bias, as misleading narratives can complicate the recording of specific events, or problematise impartial accounts of people, processes or concepts. Regarding validity, collected data must be regarded as accurate and applicable to the stated research questions, which requires researchers to assess their data and use methods of triangulation where necessary (Holloway & Todres, 2003; Leung, 2015). Accordingly, incomplete or inaccurate memories can result in findings which mislead or misinterpret the field under study. This limitation applies

primarily to positivistic studies however, where objective data is necessary to record measurable phenomenon and to test set hypotheses. As this study recorded daily experiences of employment and community, inconsistencies derived from nostalgia added additional depth to interview responses.

The strategic selection of methods can open researchers to accusations of bias however, as a contrived approach to research design and data collection can improperly enhance the researcher's personal influence over the project. Bias relates to inconsistencies within recorded data and conclusions resulting from the researcher's conduct, where a preference for specific data sources and methods, or inaccurate or improper analysis unduly influences the research project (Agabegi & Stern, 2008). While this influence may be unavoidable in certain fields, some disciplines may require restricted input from the researcher, as this prioritises participants' insight and preserves the control variables selected to verify conclusions made (Gerhard, 2008). Bias can arise at any stage of a research project (Pannucci & Wilkins, 2010), making a resilient and controlled data collection process critically important.

Researchers must also be mindful of their influence upon the recall of memory, as the way in which questions are asked can cause leading answers (Laney & Loftus, 2013). This is problematic in terms of reliability, as differing emotions can complicate the consistency of data collected (Miles & Huberman, 1994). To manage issues of reliability, the methods and approach selected to collect data must be appropriate, as methodological incongruence can similarly impact the conclusions raised (Leung, 2015). While quantitative data may be replicated easily, spoken word varies due to differences in respondents' inflections and mannerisms, in addition to their recollection and

judgements during interview encounters (Silverman, 2009). To manage this limitation, interviews followed the broad structure outlined previously, with questions focusing upon daily life at Shelton, respondents' memories of decline and closure, and the personal and communal impacts of redundancy. While respondents expressed differing emotions across interview encounters, the specified structure added consistency to the research process, allowing for comparison between recorded data.

For this research project, when and why respondents displayed certain emotions was important, as this indicated how history is understood and reproduced among the research population. More specifically, respondents' emotional responses to closure, decline and community helped to extrapolate the importance of shared cultural processes. This is not to infer that researchers should purposefully invoke emotional responses, but rather that when approached inductively, emotion can contextualise oral histories and offer greater insight into individual and shared outlooks. Consequently, associated limitations relating to validity, reliability and bias are again restricted to positivist studies, as the distortion of memory only problematises the recording of objective history. When investigating identity and subjective experiences, the blending of memory reveals how events and concepts are understood and negotiated by respondents. This strengthens the utility of oral history, as the manner in which events are remembered and commemorated are as important as their occurrence.

Though the limitations of memory are acknowledged, this study embraced the imperfect nature of narrative interviews. Anecdotal evidence was used to build a picture of the steelworkers' community and shared identity, and similarly depict a

socially constructed space negotiated through individual and hegemonic memories. While participants' oral histories were not discounted, they were approached with cautioned analysis to acknowledge how details may be forgotten, omitted, contrived or conflated with similar memories. Where this occurred, rather than denoting memory as a flawed source of information, the socially constructed nature of personal narratives was explored. Experiences forgotten or emphasised revealed important detail, in which understandings were articulated through a composite of merging memories. This was particularly relevant for the exploration of community and identity, where the reproduction of communal folklore reflected a layered process of narrative formation. Common in narrations of deindustrialisation, oral histories reveal critique and reflection upon the past and present, where a constructed history is used to discredit contemporary change. Overall, interviewees' memories demonstrate important communal narratives, where events are negotiated and articulated through a retrospective filter.

## 3.6 – Research Ethics: Preventing Harm

Due to the inclusion of human participants, this project encountered ethical dilemmas requiring the prevention of harm. Adequate measures to protect respondents were subsequently employed, which accounted for the contextual vulnerabilities of the research population during data collection, analysis and the presentation of findings. As conducting fieldwork requires approval from Keele University's ethics board, adherence to a moral guideline was followed. Reflecting a normative ethical paradigm, the framework defined acceptable and proper moral conduct which guided behaviour to

ensure the prevention of harm (Christians, 2005). Ethical standards also determined pathways for recourse if harm were to occur, thereby benefiting methodological credibility by outlining proper conduct and establishing responsibility.

Normative ethics involves two main paradigms, the first being deontology, an actions-based approach espousing universal codes of moral conduct (Beauchamp & Childress, 2001). Comparatively, teleology is consequence-based and mirrors utilitarianism in the maximisation of benefits to large cohorts of people (Bell et al, 2018). These approaches are humanist in nature, as they prioritise individual agency in the definition and execution of moral judgement.

As discussed, posthumanism rejects the primacy of human reason and argues in favour of a continuously materialising world (Haraway, 1988). From this perspective, ethical practice is not something to be acquired by standardisation, but is rather a negotiated outcome unique to each empirical location. This problematises objective definitions of morality, as ethical practice in one context may be unethical in another. Drawing upon Foucault's concept of *apparatus*, institutions and social processes are not fixed entities, but are continually legitimised epistemologies negotiated in line with changing discourses and regimes of power (1980; 1966 [2005]). Consequently, the ethical review process has been criticised as a blunt instrument due to the resulting application of broad standards to varying research outputs (Christians, 2005). Despite this criticism, establishing clear moral guidelines benefited this project's credibility and permitted the proposed fieldwork, while cautious design did not limit the scope and remit of conclusions made (Christians, 2005).

Similarly, moral philosophies should not remain dichotomous, as combining humanist and subjective elements can create holistic research oversight (Morris & Morris, 2016). While moral guidelines were followed, I used subjective discretion to evaluate contextual dangers and the mitigation of potential harm. Both deontological and teleological approaches to morality were adopted, which conformed to academic best practice while maintaining the research population's collective health. Adherence to institutional standards was regarded as both mandatory and desirable, as this provided guidance and credibility to fieldwork and findings (Bell et al, 2018). As the interview design reflected best practice across qualitative studies, little resistance was encountered from the institutional ethics board. Following guidelines did not restrict research output or academic freedom, but instead set actionable boundaries to manage human contact.

Assurances of anonymity and proper data handling are important indicators of ethical research, as a range of factors influence respondents' desire to remain undisclosed. These can include involvement in sensitive or morally ambiguous research areas, or concern over potential consequences if their identities were to be exposed. To protect participants from harm, interview data was pseudonymised appropriately, which involved the removal of personally identifiable information from presented insights. Where requested by participants, additional information was removed from transcripts and discounted during analysis.

Guaranteeing complete anonymity is difficult however, as when investigating a specific environment, determined readers may use deduction or familiarity to "configure the chain of acquaintances who researchers have used to acquire data" (Van Den Hoonaard,

2003, p. 142). Consequently, achieving anonymity became a balance between protecting participants while maximising presented data, leading to pseudonymisation rather than full anonymity. This necessitated a reflexive evaluation of potential harms, in addition to the employment of effective mitigation efforts (Kaiser, 2009). Following the recommendations of Saunders et al (2015), I considered the audience of my research output alongside participants' needs to determine the level of vigilance necessary. Accordingly, as respondents were predominantly retired older men, their participation within this research posed little risks to their material wellbeing, while their collegial narratives of former colleagues and community again presented few risks if their identities were to be deduced.

In line with the ESRC's influential ethical guidelines, all projects directly gathering data from human subjects should seek informed consent, preferably in writing or in another verifiable format (ESCR, 2015). Achieving informed consent can reduce potential harm, as this process enables participants to fully understand and assess the terms of participation. Where appropriate, information sheets and written consent forms should be circulated to participants before they contribute to provide a full and transparent report of the research purpose and procedures (Bell et al, 2018). This provides an opportunity for participants to accept or reject the conditions of involvement, or to make requests for further clarity and reasonable adjustments. Participants also reserve the right to withdraw consent after data collection, which obligates the researcher to remove contributions and to destroy any data previously collected.

Fulfilling these requirements, I gained informed consent before beginning all interviews. Participants received an information sheet and two consent forms which outlined key details alongside individual rights to withdraw and request confidentiality. These measures removed duress from the research process and ensured respondents fully comprehended and agreed with the research procedures. Participants were also made aware of efforts to render their responses as anonymous with the use of pseudonyms and simplified job titles in presented data. While preserving occupational roles complicated full anonymity, identifiable information such as names and colleagues' identities were removed from presented data. These efforts were suitable and reasonable for this research project, as limited tangible harm can result from participation.

Alongside conventional issues of privacy and anonymity, participant vulnerability derived primarily from age, as the former steelworkers were aged between 50-80 when interviewed. When conducting research with older participants, investigators must be aware and sensitive to gerontological concerns, these relating primarily to declining health, mobility issues, and poor mental health (Zarit et al, 2004; Ory et al, 2003). Additional measures may be required during interviews to reduce the burden upon participants with health conditions. Groups such as the elderly may be displeased with being categorised as vulnerable however, as they may perceive this as undermining their faculties and autonomy (Levine et al, 2004). Vulnerability must therefore be considered in a contextual manner, with respondents determining their level of participation.

To accommodate any physical health issues, interviews were conducted in an accessible and convenient manner. After signalling a willingness to travel and meet at participants' leisure, I frequently commuted to specified locations such as homes or public spaces. As fieldwork was conducted following the Covid-19 pandemic, additional flexibility was afforded when scheduling interviews, leading to the use of video conferencing technology and participants' gardens and outside spaces. Working to the convenience of participants helped to reduce potential anxieties and limited the potential harm associated with interviews.

Researchers should similarly consider the emotional harms of their projects, as sensitive topics can cause psychological distress among respondents. Emotional harm was a legitimate concern for this project, as interviewees were tasked with recalling stories of redundancy and workplace closure. These memories can prompt feelings of anger and sadness, and similarly elicit deep resentments at perceived injustices within personal and shared histories. In light of respondents' emotional needs, I approached sensitive questions with care by retreating upon request or when participants displayed signs of despondency or aggression. To reduce emotional hardship, questions focused upon respondents' work and community, with only one section of the interview dedicated to Shelton's closure and decline. Respondents were also able to dictate engagement with each question and retained autonomy over the level of detail provided.

Emotional vulnerability is not exclusive to participants however, meaning the prevention of harm also extends to the researcher. With qualitative research requiring embeddedness within the selected empirical location, researchers can become emotionally affected by their fieldwork (Dickson-Swift et al, 2009). Accounts of

distressing experiences can lead to emotional strain during data analysis, as the researcher may be underprepared for upsetting discussions, or may possess comparative experiences which raises past trauma (Carroll, 2012). Interactions such as interviews and observation can be regarded as emotional labour, as researchers must manage and analyse a range of social encounters. I am confident in the measures taken to reduce harm however, as relevant ethical guidelines have been followed regarding informed consent, anonymity and confidentiality. Similarly, emotional distress is limited to instances of redundancy and displacement, meaning the research topic presents few material dangers for those involved.

## 3.7 – Chapter Conclusion

This research collected data through qualitative narrative interviews to facilitate a nuanced exploration of a layered occupational identity and community. Interviewees were identified and recruited via purposive and snowball sampling, with participation based upon employment at Shelton Bar steelworks. Interview data was transcribed and coded using discursive thematic analysis, in which data was assorted into descriptive composites for filtering and analysis. Rather than setting a defined hypothesis, research design and analysis were approached inductively to allow insights to emerge from the data freely. This mirrored the interpretive epistemological perspective underpinning fieldwork and constructed the research process as a social relationship negotiated between myself and participants. While my influence upon the design and realisation of fieldwork has been acknowledged, measures were taken to preserve interviewee

voice, with qualitative insights forming the basis of each empirical chapter and their corresponding conclusions.

While possessing limitations, the selected methodology was appropriate for the remit and focus of this study. Strengths were drawn from the narrative interviewing technique, as this collected rich insights on respondents' life course histories, while similarly facilitating the exploration of identity, community and processual decline. Credibility is associated with the depth and detail subsequently gained, while reliability derives from the procedures used to structure interview encounters. Though characterised as bias by some, the epistemological position of memory and oral history framed subsequent analysis, where inherent subjectivity and emotional variance added further nuance to presented insights. Verbatim transcription was used to limit my control over qualitative data and reduce personal interference over conclusions made. Ethical procedures were followed during all stages of fieldwork, with the reduction of harm built into research procedures. Though following institutional guidelines of best practice, I assessed interviewees' contextual needs, which led to further adjustments to ensure comfortable participation. Actions to smooth data collection were also taken, which allowed respondents to schedule interviews to their leisure.

In accordance with the narrative interview methodology, subsequent chapters will follow a chronological narration of Shelton's decline and closure; which firstly outlines core aspects of the steelworkers' occupational identity and community, and then progresses onto the 1978 downsizing. The undermining of cultural solidarity and shared identity will emerge in later analysis, which charts the lead-up to Shelton's 2000 closure and the following symbolic ruination of the works. Each empirical chapter is informed

by the inductive methodological design, in that core emergent themes guided data presentation and analysis. In light of this, structural chronology exists as a feature of the interview technique, where the inbuilt structure of respondents' narratives neatly framed the presentation of empirical material.

# Chapter 4 – Occupational Identity & Community: Conditional Membership

## 4.1 – Empirical Themes: Individual & Occupational Identity

Academic literature concerning the formation, display and articulation of identity is diverse and fractured, with multiple conceptualisations of personal, shared and workplace identities. In a basic sense, identity refers to an individual's efforts to define themselves and author meaning into their lives, which grants them "a sense of completeness or wholeness, and embrace of the essentially integrated nature of their selves" (Brown, 2015, p. 27; see also Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003). Though involving personal characteristics such as race and gender (Rodriguez et al, 2016), particular academic attention has centred around workplace and occupational identities, where the labour process influences how employees construct and narrate a sense of self (Alvesson et al, 2008; Dutton et al, 2010). Further attention has followed organisational attempts to control employee self-expression, in which management 'procure' workplace behaviour by selectively valuing and celebrating organisationally beneficial norms (Höpfl, 2002; 1994).

In vocational settings, groups with similar skills and attributes coalesce to form occupational identities, which are sustained in part by individual task content and membership of a workplace community (Bechky, 2006; Strangleman, 2001). Due to their former presence within the national economy, traditional and technical industries have received academic focus regarding the formation of industrial identities (Strangleman, 2012; Orr, 1996; 2006), though attention has since spread to

occupational identities and communities within the service sector (Sandiford & Seymour, 2007). In light of their connection to traditional industry, occupational communities can be overtly classed in nature, with vocational groups facilitated by trade union membership; or similarly formed to resist shared structural inequalities (Metzgar, 2000; MacKenzie et al, 2006). Previous scholarship has highlighted the role of occupational communities in cases of workplace closure and restructuring, where solidaristic relationships are mobilised to facilitate job transitions, to cope with career discontinuity, and to offer outlets for communal welfare (Mackenzie & Marks, 2019; Marks & Scholarios, 2007; McLachlan et al, 2019).

Acknowledging the collective origins of many occupational identities, much of this literature draws parallels from discursive interpretations of identity, in which the structural underpinnings of community and identity frame analysis. Common interests facilitate the formation of occupational identity, as with individuals connected through both vocational and structural alliances, a clear insider-outsider demarcation is created. Hierarchical relations also emerge within these communities however, as specific forms of 'insiderness' may be privileged, thereby resigning some to peripheral membership (Jenkins, 2014; Salaman, 1971; 1974). Daily processes of othering and community demarcation are mostly absent from the literature however, this being a limitation which forthcoming analysis will address and remedy.

Within industries requiring craft labour, occupational identity and communal membership are often transmitted during apprenticeship schemes and vocational training, where technical competencies are taught alongside group socialisation (Paechter, 2003; Parker, 2006). To explore this process, this chapter will outline core

facets of the steelworkers' occupational identity. Charting important cultural dispositions and practices, analysis will draw upon Foucauldian interpretations of identity formation, where technologies of the self are invoked to realise or resist power (Foucault, 1985; Rabinow, 1984). Foucauldian theory will offer an alternative reading of workplace community and camaraderie, in which group membership was facilitated by processes of discipline and punishment; this differing from previous scholarly accounts of solidarity derived from classed relationships. Though manifesting differently, the effects of disciplinary discourses were experienced by workers in full, partial or peripheral group membership. Despite mirroring cultures emerging within related heavy industries, processes of cultural acceptance, community membership and internal discipline unique to Shelton Bar will be demonstrated, each of which formed a highly localised steelworker occupational identity.

Opening this chapter, participants' entry into the community will be discussed, with emphasis falling upon the use of paternalistic recruitment and lengthy apprenticeship schemes to transfer both technical skills and classed dispositions to nascent community members. The importance of technical labour will then be discussed, alongside the role of clubs, societies and shared leisure activities in the building of fraternity and camaraderie. Finally, the disciplinary role of community and culture will be discussed, which highlights the consequences of nonconformance and peripheral membership. Community-led mechanisms of discipline and control will be revealed, in which steelworkers resisted managerial oversight by informally policing norms and behaviours. These efforts included the restriction of group membership, communal control over internal progression, and the use of violence to settle arguments and

transgressions. It will be argued that while the steelworkers' occupational identity and community offered protection against hardship and uncertainty, membership and identification was conditional upon conformance with masculinised ideals.

## 4.2 – Entering the Community: Fathers & Sons

Initiating the continued negotiation of community membership, newcomers enter a process of normative socialisation, in which they learn to reproduce accepted cultural norms and behaviours (Beck, 2001; Lave & Wenger, 1991). To sustain their membership, continued legitimacy and solidarity with group members must be signalled, again leading to the reproduction and celebration of hegemonic norms (Suchman, 1995; MacKenzie et al, 2006). Within industrial communities, this socialisation process began at an early age, with young boys enacting a 'counter-school culture' in an effort to resist an education system perceived as exclusionary (Willis, 1977). Full socialisation into industrial subcultures and communities occurred through vocational training and apprenticeship schemes, where senior tradesmen transferred their technical expertise and cultural dispositions to new recruits (Paechter, 2003; Parker, 2006). To explore this process, analysis will draw from Paul Willis' *Learning to Labour* to demonstrate respondents' similar ambivalence towards academic education. However, apprentices were not opposed to classroom-based learning in principle, but rather the middle-class cultural underpinnings of independent academic learning.

This section will follow interviewees' entrance into Shelton's occupational culture and community, in addition to their socialisation by senior men. The importance of

communal acceptance and membership will be demonstrated, with some respondents tacitly discussing the social and professional consequences of nonconformity; which included limits to their internal progression and disruptions to their ability to perform well in their respective roles. It shows that while Shelton's occupational community and vocational training offered an outlet to enact classed and gendered norms, requirements for conformity restricted free expression. This introduces themes recurring throughout the chapter, in which the occupational culture operated as a disciplinary mechanism which enforced certain codes and expressions of working-class masculinity.

Interview data included in this and in following chapters has been pseudonymised. A brief overview of each respondent and their pseudonym can be found in appendix A. Opening this discussion, Darius, a former mechanical fitter, recalled how his father introduced him to work at Shelton Bar:

> Me father comes to me and asks me, do I still want to work at Shelton Bar? The answer was of course, and he said well, follow me to work one day, this weekend, erm, and I'll introduce you to a foreman who I think… is an exceptionally good foreman, it's a good department, it's an engineering department what you'd like, and so I said yes, and erm… the interview, if you can call it an interview, walked up the office steps to meet this [Name], and erm, he said oh you're [Father's name]'s son are you? Well, start on Monday, you know, and it was as informal as that, erm, it broke down all the barriers of the previous… formality of trying to get on Shelton Bar… and that's how flippant it seemed to be.

Prior to his father's intervention, Darius had pursued job openings at the steelworks with little success, which provides evidence of the institutionally closed nature of Shelton's occupational community. This was underpinned by a preference among foremen to hire the descendants and associates of trusted community members (Catano, 2003), which also reveals a process of conditional socialisation and labour control, one predicated upon possessing the correct familial background. As heavy industries are reliant upon craft labour, apprenticeships became a common method of training junior labourers, with senior craftsmen transferring social aptitudes and cultural norms alongside technical knowledge (Beck, 2001; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Desmond, 2006). While some entered the works independently via apprenticeship schemes, many respondents had fathers and other close relations employed at Shelton who facilitated their opportunities and recruitment. Attending work with his father, Darius signalled his nascent suitability by appropriating his father's communal legitimacy. This led to his provisional acceptance into the works, in which full membership was linked to the recreation of his paternal superior's success.

These experiences also indicate a process of class transmission, in which classed sentiments and perspectives were learned and reproduced alongside craft labour (Walkerdine, 2015; Moore, 2001; Young, 1995). Departing from early conceptualisations of class transmission as the continuation of pauperism (Ashurst & Venn, 2014), respondents celebrated the familial bonds and socialisation hosted at the works, and attributed moral worth to the paternalistic system experienced during their early careers. Class transmission is visible within Darius' comments, as with his father's

help, he gained access to an occupation and community in which his family had close association. This continued a lineage in heavy industry and enabled Darius to learn and labour under the same conditions as his father.

Simon, also employed at Shelton as a mechanical fitter, entered the community via an apprenticeship scheme. Describing his lengthy formal training, he stated:

> We went into a school environment, for 18 months on Shelton Bar, so… it was like, you weren't daunted into going straight from school, into a massive big factory, you know, you were slowly… erm, taught… what industry was all about. We used to do things like, we used to have PE twice a week, like 3 hours a week was physical education, so, just as far as like going to school, but concentrating on… erm, engineering… you know, there was no history and geography… it was all engineering… Then after 18 months… you were then sent out, erm… three months at some departments, a six month spell at erm, the continuous kiln, and that was for give you an insight into what Shelton Bar was, what the work was like, what the blokes were like, what you were like… as an engineer, and then once your four years were up… they could decide… whether they wanted you, and if you wanted to work there… but you had to be accepted by them… because they had the choice of apprentices as well.
>
> Simon, Mechanical Fitter

Discussions of industrial apprenticeships often draw from the work of Paul Willis, whose influential book *Learning to Labour* (1977) followed a group of working-class lads through their secondary education, in which they resisted the educational conformity

of their middle-class *'ear'ole'* peers. Willis argued that working-class boys proactively adopted and enacted shop-floor cultures at school, leading them to reject academic learning in favour of manual work. With school leavers influenced towards certain vocational pathways, apprenticeships accentuated classed and gendered occupational cultures, subsequently creating strong demarcations between blue and white-collar workers (Altreiter & Flecker, 2020; Lehmann & Taylor, 2015). Alongside production processes, apprentices learned proper conduct within the community, which allowed them to communicate with their peers according to acceptable cultural dispositions (Paechter, 2003; Parker, 2006).

These processes emerge in Simon's contribution, as along with referencing vocational training, he also revealed the communal aspect of his apprenticeship by stating that senior workers decided if apprentices were accepted into their team. This introduces the disciplinary nature of the steelworkers' occupational identity and community, as senior members prevented progression and recruitment if they perceived an apprentice as insufficient to join their ranks. By rotating apprentices around the works, junior staff learned from their tutors and peers, generating familiarity with each department, technical processes, and the language of the steelworks. Their efforts were closely monitored and scrutinised by senior steelworkers however, who passed judgement according to negotiated norms and idealised behavioural codes.

Simon's direct reference to a school environment is particularly interesting when drawing upon Willis' work, as the lads followed in *Learning to Labour* rejected academic learning in favour of manual work (Trondman & Lund, 2018). Though apprentices at Shelton were fulfilling classed norms regarding waged labour and vocational training,

the school environment Simon described invoked relationships of authoritative teachers, structured learning, and most significantly, a degree of academic study. This appears to contradict rebellious working-class cultures identified by Willis, in that men like Simon were willingly entering and participating within deep situated learning which involved classroom-based lessons alongside vocational training. Classed backgrounds and vocational learning emerge as important distinctions, as this 'school environment' was replete with classed iconography and working-class labour. Able to utilise and develop their aptitudes in manual tasks and engineering, successful apprentices accepted the authority of their supervisors and engaged with educational programmes appropriately. This negotiated relationship established a 'frontier of control' among formal and social hierarchies, where alongside rational authority, technical proficiency and masculinised behaviour signalled seniority (Hughes & Dobbins, 2021; see also Goodrich, 1920).

Seeking to affirm their classed identities, apprentices recognised that conformity and subservience to senior tradesmen facilitated acceptance into the community, while resistance resulted in resignation to unskilled, low waged work (Jensen, 2012; Carter, 2006). Apprentices were subsequently transformed into working-class *ear'oles*, receptive to a mixture of vocational and academic learning. Rather than rejecting academic learning in principle, those like Simon rejected the middle-class culture of mainstream education. This encouraged his mockery of subjects like history and geography, and his comparative valorisation of engineering and physical activity (Voyer, 2018; Nixon, 2009). Much like Willis' work, class determined the behaviours and educational outcomes of the respondents studied. However, Shelton offered an

acceptable educational setting aligned with their classed upbringing, enabling their subsequent educational attainment and career progression.

For those meeting behavioural expectations and displaying burgeoning technical skill, progression through the internal hierarchy awaited them. Familiar with this process, Jonathan, who began his career in a work's laboratory before progressing into the prestigious fuel department, described how internal recruitment was commonplace at Shelton:

> After about two years in the lab… what used to happen, people from the lab… they chose who they thought were ok, then they moved them to the fuel department, which then… without describing what the fuel department was, they worked all over various parts of the plant, and… most of the managers on the plant… blast furnace manager, you know, the mill manager, whatever, came from the fuel department, that's the way it worked. In later years, they did start to bring some people in, but mostly, it was promotion through the ranks… they used their own people.
>
> Jonathan, Fuel Engineer, Mill Manager

To ensure continuity over sensitive production processes, steelworkers of the 19th and 20th century created and guarded a strong internal labour market, which limited promotion into key production roles to trusted community members (Wilkinson, 1977). While the choice to recruit internal or external applicants is often determined by degrees of labour specialisation, organisational politics also influences decisions regarding internal progression (Bidwell & Keller, 2013; Osterman, 2011). This emerged

within Jonathan's remarks, in which he described the fuel department as a pool of managerially selected talent cultivated and seconded to different departments to assist with technical problems.

Following Shelton's downsizing and privatisation however, the internal labour market weakened, with Jonathan noting the rise in external recruitment in later years. Though internal labour markets remain a feature of many organisations, contemporary redistributive labour schemes are frequently linked to restructuring programmes, in which employees are moved across roles as organisations reshape production and service offerings (MacKenzie & McLachlan, 2022; McLachlan et al, 2021). In these contexts, increased marketisation and rationalisation make employment less secure, with internal labour markets facilitating the degradation of pay and conditions (Grimshaw et al, 2001; McLachlan et al, 2019). Reflecting trends across the industry, Shelton's internal labour market safeguarded important positions and rewarded those deemed worthy of promotion. This incorporated an assessment of an individual's technical competence by senior managers, which were in turn influenced by their personal status among community leaders.

When Jonathan mentioned the later use of external hiring for senior positions, he tacitly acknowledged the weakening of Shelton's traditional promotion system. This insight supports coming analysis into Shelton's cultural decline, where reduced manning and marketisation degraded the steelworkers' solidarity and communal authority. Despite this, his comments remain focused upon the traditional use of internal recruitment, which highlighted the importance of community acceptance at the works. Failing to reproduce communal norms limited an individual's progression through the internal

labour market, as poor working relationships dampened community assessments of their technical competence. This incentivised conformity across the community, as communal rejection incurred tangible impacts upon workers' daily routines and potential earnings.

Describing this process in action, Greg, a former laboratory technician, commented on the importance of building trust with colleagues and departmental peers:

> On the water side, the water treatment plant… you'd go into the water treatment works, where you had people doing the day-to-day job who were just monitoring things… but you, you'd have to go in, interact with them, so I suppose a lot of it was getting them to like you, and become part of their team, because you'd go around and say well, you're not quite doing that right, you need to change that setting, or something… If you didn't have that relationship with them, they either A, wouldn't let you go in there, or B, tell you to f-off and clear out the way… or the second you'd gone they'd change it all back again.
>
> Greg, Laboratory Technician

Working in an isolated laboratory, Greg faced barriers to full communal integration, as his physical distance from core production processes weakened his hierarchical position. Due to this distance, Greg received partial access to departmental occupational communities, with his marginal membership sustained by a general association with the works (McLachlan et al, 2019; Salaman, 1974). Interacting with craft and production workers in an advisory manner, Greg oversaw his colleagues' work

and offered critique where necessary, creating adversarial relations as he evaluated his peers' technical abilities (Edwards, 1986).

In light of this, Greg recognised his need for legitimacy and communal acceptance, each of which determined how his technical input was received (Suchman, 1995). As he acknowledged, waning legitimacy would doom his technical guidance, leading to potential derision and severe constraints upon his professional performance. Accordingly, Greg communicated carefully with those he was assigned to assist, in which he conformed to communal norms in an effort to preserve his technical oversight (Ashforth & Gibbs, 1990). While unable to draw upon the core production process, Greg signalled his legitimacy through expertise in chemistry, and his shared experiences of hardship at the steelworks (Baehr, 2005). By accentuating his broad understanding and productive solidarity with others, Greg flattened perceived hierarchies while muting potential resistance; thereby overcoming the limits of his peripheral position through collaboration, rather than dictation.

To summarise, much like the guarded nature of entering Shelton's occupational community, full membership required concerted effort from new entrants, involving active participation and conformity to prevailing norms (Beck, 2001; Lave & Wenger, 1991). Junior staff firstly completed a lengthy apprenticeship scheme, in which they acquired the necessary skills for their chosen vocational pathway. This programme of training also incorporated classed and gendered socialisation, with apprentices learning how to conduct themselves and interact with senior steelworkers. Shelton was a powerful conduit for the transmission of social class, where young men occupied traditional positions as familial breadwinners by working in arduous, technical roles.

Failing to assimilate and reproduce these cultural norms limited workers' personal and working relationships, alongside an ability to effectively fulfil their role.

With many tasks requiring inputs from multiple workers, collaboration between peers suffered in cases of poor personal relationships, leading workers to disregard the legitimacy of those perceived as incompetent or on the periphery of the community (Suchman, 1995). Internal progression was also linked to communal acceptance, as managerial staff selected who to accentuate within the internal labour market, basing decisions upon both personal relationships and technical proficiency. Consequently, cultural assimilation and full membership were incentivised, as financial rewards were linked to the maintenance of community membership. While strong relationships generated fraternity and solidarity among steelworkers, a disciplinary tool was also created which limited the scope for expressing alternative forms of identity at work. A theme of discipline runs throughout the responses included here, where new entrants showed deference to their senior peers and followed their guidance closely, thereby safeguarding a position within the internal labour market.

### 4.3 – Technical Proficiency: "Hands On"

Technical and knowledge-intensive organisations generate *communities of practice* (Pyrko et al, 2017; Bechky, 2006), where membership is signalled and conferred via the acquisition and mobilisation of particular skills and aptitudes (Orr, 1996; Mutch, 2003). These are transferred via informal processes of *situated learning*, where senior community members engage in narrative storytelling to deliver lessons on vocational

topics (Hernandez-Serrano et al, 2002; Patriotta, 2003). As discussed, this includes both technical job content, and the social and normative aspects of group membership, thereby setting behavioural standards for junior colleagues to follow. From a Foucauldian perspective, technical proficiency can be understood as sets of localised discourses, where a 'skilled worker' is someone who can mobilise a body of knowledge symbolically alongside their practical abilities (Townley, 1993). For the steelworkers, while tangible proficiency in craft and manual labour signalled the possession of skill, this was equally inferred through the enactment of specific behaviours and languages. Individual communities of practice utilise different processes to transfer localised knowledge, requiring an awareness of their cultural specificities to chart situated learning in action.

This section will demonstrate how workers mobilised technical proficiency to signal legitimacy and gain respect at work, thereby sustaining their community membership. Informal processes of community membership will be demonstrated alongside the construction and composition of the steelworkers' occupational community and identity. It will be argued that in line with archetypal working-class masculinity, this referring to idealised interpretations of male industrial workers, technical skill was a key factor underpinning community membership and understandings of self, subsequently influencing how identity was embodied and displayed publicly. Pride in technical labour also underpinned workers' organisational and communal citizenship, which created deep commitments between community members and the production process. Notwithstanding efforts to resist managerial control, some respondents appropriated

and mobilised organisational discourses of efficiency and profitability as core to their identities, as Shelton's longevity inferred the positive results of their labour.

Beginning this discussion, Charles, who also began his career in the fuel department before progressing into personnel, recalled experiences of situated learning in the department's laboratory:

> I started in the fuel department, I got one mate, he went down to the rolling mill as an assistant manager, he knew nothing about rolling really, he learned it there, you know, and that was the same in the lab. The chemistry I did at school… in O-Levels, was nothing like we did in the lab, I said to the boss, I didn't get O-Level chemistry, and that was because I didn't take it, I didn't tell him that at the time [Laughs], he said well, don't worry about it, you'll learn… so I learned it there, you know… I mean, at one time, I could get a piece of steel, or a piece of metal, polish it up, and I could tell you what it was… by just looking through a microscope.
>
> Charles, Fuel Engineer, Personnel Manager

Throughout their tenure at Shelton, workers often required new technical competencies as they progressed professionally, which necessitated additional vocational training. As Charles stated, learning was mostly situated and localised, with workers gaining knowledge and experience 'on the job' while socialising with senior peers (Orr, 1996; 2006). Informal learning is an important process within communities of practice (Gherardi et al, 1998; Lave & Wenger, 1991), as employees' methods of working often differ from managerially mandated working practices, while exposure to

informal exercises and conversation builds familiarity and group membership (Stenmark 2000; Fleming et al, 2004; Wenger, 1998). Much like his friend seconded to the rolling mill, Charles possessed limited chemical expertise when entering the fuel department, however he soon received guidance from those well versed in chemical analysis.

Later discussing his ability to identify metals under a microscope, Charles proudly signalled his former technical proficiency which sustained his occupational identity and communal legitimacy. Under the stewardship of senior community members, localised knowledge was exchanged via social interaction, which provided recruits like Charles with technical guidance and association with group members (Brown & Duguid, 1991; Contu & Wilmott, 2003; Hargadon & Fanelli, 2002). Discussing his lack of qualifications in O-Level chemistry, Charles laughed as he recalled his supervisor's apparent disregard for his inexperience. This provides further evidence of communal attitudes towards academic education, where vocational training was more valuable than prior educational attainment. With technical training linked to community membership, acceptance and endorsement by senior figures remained critical, as strained relations complicated situated learning. For Charles, though his initial acceptance into the community enabled the transmission of technical skills, full membership rested upon the completion of his apprenticeship training and positive relations with peers.

Discussing the perceived virtues of engineering and technical skills, Simon compared situated learning with independent academic study. Celebrating the deployment of technical proficiency within the workplace, he stated:

> You were put with a mentor everywhere you went, so you learned things off him, or a number of guys you were put with, and that was far… better, I thought, than reading it in a book, you know… if something was broke and you've got a manual, erm, it was telling you in the manual what you should do, in my eyes it was far easier to go to a bloke who'd been doing the job for 15 years or whatever, and he could tell me everything of what I should be doing on the job… through experience, not through a bloke as had written it in a book, because… they can't write the things he's been knowing for 15 years, what he's picked up in all his… and that's what engineering was all about really, which is different nowadays, it's not as… everything nowadays is done by a manual, or… half the time, if a machine breaks down now, they'll send for the manufacturers to come out and fix it, more so than the lads on the shop floor.
>
> Simon, Mechanical Fitter

Seeking guidance from his older colleagues when experiencing technical difficulties, Simon rejected user manuals and information sheets, an attitude which shared similarities with the technicians in Julian Orr's *Talking About Machines* (1996). Much like the photocopier technicians in Orr's study, technical proficiency was key to the steelworkers' occupational community, where full membership was inferred through deploying vocational skill. While user manuals likely contained the details necessary to operate and repair machinery, a reliance upon experience and knowledge signalled competence and community membership, which privileged those with the greatest experience and deepest knowledge. While Simon's testimony highlighted the

importance of technical proficiency to the steelworkers, the role of situated learning within communities of practice is again demonstrated (Bechky, 2006). Accompanied by a mentor during training, junior colleagues were exposed to a range of vocational setting and scenarios, with information communicated via the narrative storytelling of senior technicians (Hernandez-Serrano et al, 2002; Patriotta, 2003).

Informed by his classed background and vocational socialisation, Simon disregarded the efficacy of academic learning, leading him to diminish the utility of books and manuals like the lads in Willis' study of working-class youth (1977). Though technical manuals are authored by those with intimate knowledge of respective machinery, the necessity of independent study denoted these resources as inferior to situated learning. In light of this, Simon valorised the experience and knowledge of his colleagues, indicating his deep respect for those in manual and engineering professions. Simon signalled his commitment to working-class archetypes of localised vocational training, as he appealed to traditional understandings of engineering as a fundamentally manual occupation (Roper, 1991). This reflected the steelworkers' language of resistance against middle-class culture and managerial imposition. Accordingly, Simon voiced conformity to an idealised image of an industrial worker, where he mobilised both his tangible skills and the associated symbolic knowledge exercised in tandem.

Working in maintenance and machining after leaving Shelton, Simon witnessed a process of decline occurring throughout the engineering profession, which led to his pessimistic assessment of detrimental change. Invoking organisational nostalgia, he mourned the loss of community-led learning and camaraderie, and contrasted this against experiences of tighter restrictions upon workers' responsibilities (Strangleman,

1999; 2007; 2012). Mirroring commentary on 'the end of work' (Beck, 2000; Sennett, 1998), Simon reflected upon the contraction of engineering professions, linking this to a relative decline in employee power and autonomy.

Contrasting from Simon's love of collegial situated learning, Bart, who joined Shelton in the 1990s as an electrical and automation engineer, discussed his use of technical manuals and independent learning. Although his role required specialised skills and knowledges, Bart enjoyed his relative insularity, as evidenced in the quote below:

> Good thing about British steel is… when I started working there, I was on me own, I was the only person who was doing what I was doing in the whole factory, and… it all come down to me, and that's actually been one of the biggest benefits for me out of the whole lot of it, because when you're working on your own, and you've got no one to rely on, you do learn to rely on yourself, and… work out how to do things by yourself, and sort of do your own research, find out how things are done… Little bit different now you've got the internet, but back then it was… finding the manuals, going through the manuals, reading up, doing that sort of stuff, seeing how things work, because it's one thing seeing it on paper, you never know when it actually is in the real word, when there's external forces going on, how things work then.
>
> Bart, Electrical & Automation Engineer

While Simon celebrated his communal training and socialisation, Bart, a younger former steelworker embraced independent learning and exulted in his technical autonomy and distance from management (Pyrko et al, 2017). Though specialism in automation

necessitated greater independence, Simon and Bart's differing experiences of situated learning were also influenced by communal and cultural decline. After Shelton's downsizing in 1978, management continued a programme of de-manning and rationalisation to reduce the work's total headcount. Consequently, fewer senior workers were available to train junior colleagues via situated learning, which degraded the occupational community and its ability to transfer knowledge. Entering Shelton in 1992, Bart experienced greater reliance upon technical manuals and independent learning, contrasting from Simon's experiences in the early 1970s (Braverman, 1974). Despite his comparative insularity, Bart celebrated his independent learning by referencing his strengths in self-motivation, initiative and problem solving, later crediting these skills to his role at Shelton. This indicated a gradual shift in attitudes as computers entered heavy industry, as competencies in automation and computing required a mix of academic and vocational learning.

Mirroring his peers however, Bart also valorised the practical and manual elements of his training and role, leading him to reference the strengths of real-world skill application. Remaining on the topic of skill and task content, Bart continued by discussing the various skills needed throughout the mill:

> From our point of view, electricians, technical people, if you would have put us in a pulpit and just said drive this mill for a 12 hour shift, or whatever, we wouldn't have been able to do that, but the operators, they could focus, and… it takes a different personality, so the operators could focus, 8 hours, they could get that shift running, and they were extraordinary at what they did… I could never do that, they used to be able to control it, I know the roughing

> mill, which was… they used to call it roughing, or breakdown mill, basically the very first mill the big bar came to… that was quite complex, because they used to have to literally manoeuvre it, put it in each of the different holes, and then crush it to certain shapes… It was an amazing job, but concentrating on that for 8 hours? No chance, I could not have done it, because it was the repetitive, mundane… complex, but still, repetitive.
>
> Bart, Electrical & Automation Engineer

Though denoting their work as repetitive and boring, Bart expressed respect and admiration for his colleagues operating cranes and machinery in the mill, and recognised their unique aptitudes and abilities. Attributing great value to his peers and their role in the production process, Bart rejected discourses which disparage working-class cultures and employment (Skeggs & Loveday, 2005; Lawler, 2005). With these communities routinely denied access to normative circuits of value (Skeggs, 1997, 2011), the steelworkers created their own value systems and localised social hierarchies, leading to the celebration and reproduction of technical skill and arduous labour. While scholarly examples of class derision have predominantly focused upon the post-industrial working-class, traditional markers of social class have also fallen in standing (Jones, 2010; Tyler, 2008; 2013; 2015). Stating an inability to fulfil this role himself, Bart recognised the skills necessary to operate machinery for long periods of time, thereby celebrating the mill workers' dedication and ability to concentrate. Unable to empathise with the operatives' task content, Bart invoked his shared communal association with Shelton and recognised similarities in shared hardships emerging from their labour (McLachlan et al, 2019; Salaman, 1974).

Within his praise however, Bart revealed an implicit social hierarchy, in addition to differences in how skills were stratified and celebrated among grades of staff. Characterising mill operations as repetitive and mundane, Bart's admiration is tinged with condescension, in which he implies greater status and importance to craft work. Reflecting the complexity of social hierarchy, achieving status and respect is not a linear process, as individuals must negotiate the intersection of rational authority and social relationships (Bunderson, 2003; Bunderson et al, 2016). Accordingly, hierarchy does not always follow a traditional pyramid structure, but may instead possess multiple avenues to acquire and signal status to others (Wellman et al, 2020). At Shelton, though technical proficiencies of all kinds were celebrated, specific skills and production processes carried more status than others. While Bart acknowledged the unique skills and aptitudes of the mill operators, his autonomy and craft skills influenced an alternative view of technical competence which denoted process work as secondary to his craft community. This view was not accepted by all grades of staff however, as process workers' critical position within steel production altered perspectives on skilled labour among their respective departmental groups. While perceptions differed between individuals, Bart's comments reveal departmental rivalry inspired by hierarchies stratifying technical competence.

The physical distance between craft and process workers is important to this insight, as limited interaction between departments underscored emerging conflict and prevented workers from fully appreciating the intricacies of each other's labour (Grey et al, 2023; Ziegert et al, 2022). Considering Bart's previous comments regarding his independence and use of manuals, his tacit critique is also underpinned by his ailing hierarchical

position. Although possessing valuable skills, insularity hindered his social status and placed him at the periphery of occupational groups. In the absence of situated learning and associated peer admiration, Bart can be seen self-authoring communal status by attributing significant worth to craft labour, with status partly achieved through the comparative derision of process workers. The valorisation of his craft skills thereby rationalised his periphery position and granted a feeling of superiority against his relative social isolation.

Discussing a unique cultural practice at the rolling mill's finishing end, Arnold, an operative and heavy labourer described how workers communicated despite noisy conditions:

> Ridiculously noisy, you'd got your ear muffs on and everything, so we'd got us own sign language, you know, simple things [Motioning with hands], I'm going toilet, and erm, like… the lad who was telling us how many bars were going on… like a railway wagon… [Name] would be like, [Signalling with fingers] 5, 3, 2, on top [Pointing upwards], so there'd be 5 rows on the bottom, so you'd… you know like, the first row going in the middle, then it's 2 either side, or you'd say 2, 1, 1, [Indicating placement with hands], which… then you'd skid up… wooden batons, then you'd put like, same on top, same again, then you'd go 2 on top again, erm, and it was all… got a hand signal… he could do that [Moving hand] and we knew exactly what he's on about, tell the crane driver, crane driver's watching anyway, he knows where put it… you know what I mean, so that's what it was, ace, I loved it, I really did.
>
> Arnold, Finishing End Operative

By creating their own method of communication, Arnold and his colleagues at the finishing end retained a degree of autonomy over their work and insulated themselves from managerial control (McCabe et al, 2022; Friedman, 1977). Arnold's contribution provides further evidence of departmental insularity however, as the workers' localised sign language was unique to the finishing end. While isolating management, this practice also excluded workers in adjacent roles by creating insider-outsider relationships between close working groups. While it was not necessary for those outside of the finishing end to understand this localised language, enhanced fraternity among finishing end staff came at the expense of those excluded. Departmental distance was subsequently deepened, which contributed to the fragmentation of productive solidarity. This had important implications for the communal hierarchy by entrenching differing perspectives and working cultures between craft and process workers.

Despite this, Arnold expressed great pleasure within his remarks, indicating the importance of autonomy and community in positive assessments of work. Excessive supervision can have corrosive impacts upon workplace dignity and employee self-esteem, as limitations upon task autonomy diminishes pride in technical proficiency, while also reducing organisational citizenship (Hodson, 2001; Ross, 2012; Schwalbe, 2016). Managerial control over the labour process can also lead to rises in workplace bullying and abuse, where rational and normative controls are used to belittle and harass particular workers (Roscigno et al, 2009; Rafferty & Restubog, 2011; Edwards, 1986). By reclaiming autonomy via the use of a personal sign language, Arnold and his peers reduced potential harassment, as this efficient communication system facilitated

effective operations, while also diminishing managerial oversight. Though conducive to capitalist production, these efforts were a form of employee resistance, as managerial power was diminished through employee self-governance (Hollander & Einwohner, 2004). A sense of autonomous dignity, alongside fraternity with colleagues, generated a willingness to perform within their roles however, with the smooth functioning of the stacking operations signalling a form of technical proficiency.

Building upon themes of displaying skill within group environments, Simon discussed the pride associated with technical labour and its tangible outcomes:

> If a machine had broken down… if you could get that machine going again, you'd done that, and when that machine breaks down, the company is making nothing, not a thing, so you were then going in, hands on, you'd get the machine going as quick as you can… if it was losing lots and lots of money, it wouldn't just be you on it, it could be like another three engineers that come with you, and you'd all be working on it to get it going, and… when that machine was up and running again, you knew that you'd done a good job… So it gave you a bit of pride in your work I think, and you could see the end result of it, not just like, talking to somebody on the phone, while thinking you know, do this do that, and everything else, you'd actually been hands on, erm, you'd used your tools, and everything else, to do the job.
>
> Simon, Mechanical Fitter

Preferring to witness the tangible outputs of manual labour, respondents like Simon celebrated the physical nature of their practical skills. Drawing a comparison to

cognitive labour, Simon degraded the task content of professional managerial work, in which he questioned the skill of delegating and directing tasks via telephone. Dismissing these roles with a diminishing "and everything else", Simon then praised the physicality of getting "hands on". Previous research has highlighted working-class men disqualifying themselves from interactive service employment, citing "difficulties engaging in emotional labour and hiding their true feelings without fronting up or shouting back" (Nixon, 2009, p. 310; see also McDowell, 2003). For many men, higher paid professional service work also remains inaccessible, as lower educational attainment and cultures of resistance create similar barriers to recruitment (Alcock et al, 2003; Nixon, 2006). Consequently, respondents' disparagement of the service sector was not surprising, as unfamiliarity with purely cognitive labour created puzzled hostility towards non-manual employment.

Of greater significance is Simon's reference to capitalist production however, in which he stated his pride in restoring machines back to working order, which resulted in financial rewards for himself, but also for his employer. Appearing to contradict Marxist thinking on the alienating nature of mechanised employment (Marx, [1857] 1973), Simon attached satisfaction to the restoration of production. Underpinning this willingness to engage with capitalism was employee consent to organisational rules and participation within workplace communities (Burawoy, 1985). While employee resistance and avoidance behaviours frustrate production (Edwards, 1990; Thompson, 1983), consent is bound to workplace citizenship, which leads employees to invoke pride in their labour and communal solidarity (Hodson, 1999). Technical proficiency and a strong workplace community generated a localised 'moral economy', leading men to

attribute additional value to the nature of their work and its productive ends (Sayer, 2000; Hughes et al, 2022). For many, employment at Shelton was not just work, but was rather a social and moral endeavour where solidarity and personal achievement could be realised.

Citizenship is visible in Simon's remarks, as he celebrated using his hands and tools to solve complex technical problems while sharing this pleasure with fellow engineers. Pride is attributed to the collective use of technical proficiency, which granted satisfaction in the knowledge that their skills had directly resulted in financial success. The workers' classed background was an important factor underpinning their organisational citizenship, as their preference for manual and technical labour influenced the satisfaction derived from repairing broken machinery (Altreiter & Flecker, 2020; Lehmann & Taylor, 2015). Therefore, while the steelworkers' efforts contributed to inequalities within the labour process, opportunities to fulfil classed and gendered norms generated consent among many, while membership within the occupational community strengthened communal solidarity. Similarly, Edward, a fuel engineer who later progressed to become Shelton's health and safety manager, also discussed his pride in serving organisational objectives:

> Fuel engineering, we were the technical guys, if there was a technical problem on the works, we were expected to put an input into it, help solve it, make suggestions, that sort of thing… anything technical, any technical thing. The main job is, I suppose, when you look at the costs for making iron and steel, a third of it was raw materials, iron, coke, and so on, a third of it was fuel… which was extremely expensive, and then another third of it would be labour. So,

> when you've got a third of it as fuels, if you can increase that efficiency you can reduce costs quite significantly, it makes a big difference to the… to the company. You know, a 10% reduction in fuel saving can… can make a massive difference to the profit line at the end of the day, so that's why we were there.
>
> Edward, Fuel Engineer, Health & Safety Manager

The contradictory nature of capitalist labour again emerges within Edward's remarks, as much like Simon, Edward found pride in serving organisational aims (Friedman, 1977; Burawoy, 1979). Rather than resisting the enrichment of his employer, Edward dedicated his time to cost efficiency and technical problem solving, and later acknowledged his purpose within the labour process. Alongside developing and utilising his practical skills, his role in arresting operating costs was a source of considerable pride. Consequently, Edward's organisational citizenship and productive consent were bound to his personal contribution to Shelton's financial performance, which influenced him to work towards the betterment of the organisation's productive interests (Hodson, 1999; 1996). Though it is possible that Shelton's public ownership increased this willingness, like many older respondents, Edward's tenure begun before nationalisation. Furthermore, intense dissatisfaction with the British Steel Corporation undermined older workers' relationship with the state, adding further complexity to their organisational citizenship.

Serving Shelton's profitable concerns also supported Edward's position within the steelworkers' social hierarchy, as failing to meet organisational needs would jeopardise not only his legitimacy as a fuel engineer, but also the roles and livelihoods of his peers. Adding a sense of duty to his labour, Edward balanced personal and collective

responsibilities, which allowed him to rationalise his labour more successfully. Importantly, Edward can be seen reinserting practical labour into his predominantly advisory position, in which he stressed the technical element of his fuel engineering role. While highlighting the importance of technical competence to the steelworkers, this also served as a reminder of the disciplinary potential of workplace communities, where an individual's value is assessed according to localised hierarchies and behavioural norms. Consequently, identification with production connected to the prevailing system of normative discipline, as by gaining personal fulfilment at work, workers became objectified within a process fetishizing technical skill (Knights & Willmott, 1989).

Building upon the previous section, this discussion has explored the steelworkers' occupational community to highlight practices denoting community membership. Creating their own 'circuits of value' (Skeggs, 1997, 2011), steelworkers praised the possession and deployment of technical proficiency and used their skills as currency within the occupational community. Varying forms of technical skill were celebrated by respondents, underpinning an appreciation for experienced colleagues possessing expert knowledge. Consequently, the display of technical proficiency was a key method in signalling legitimacy and sustaining community membership. This led some into staunch repudiations of independent learning and user manuals, and a comparative preference for technical experience (Orr, 1996; 2006). Analysis has also demonstrated a pervasive social hierarchy at Shelton however, with workers stratifying technical skills differently according to their position. Task content and vocational skills were assessed

differently across departments, which led to differing levels of value and respect being afforded to craft and process labour by each departmental community.

This discussion has also argued that for many, pride in technical labour and community membership encouraged organisational citizenship, which influenced workers to safeguard the production process. Though resistance was shown in establishing distance from managerial authority, respondents were largely supportive of organisational aims and objectives. The perceived dignity and autonomy granted by the occupational community facilitated production, inspiring many to work towards the betterment of Shelton's financial position. While personal remuneration can explain respondents' commitment, admiration and devotion to Shelton and its community suggested additional motivation. In light of this, though providing a collective sense of belonging and purpose, the steelworkers' occupational identity and community reproduced classed and gendered inequalities, which often went unnoticed by group members. This was experienced in both a coercive relationship with waged labour, alongside workers' limited scope for open identity formation and self-expression at work.

## 4.4 – Pubs, Clubs and Camaraderie: "We Had the Craic"

Alongside the labour process, interpersonal relationships and social interaction influence an individual's identification with their work. Accordingly, occupational communities are also facilitated by activities occurring outside of the workplace, where colleagues can engage in shared leisure to develop their personal relationships. Across

the UK, pubs and alehouses have acted as meeting points for many workplace communities, with workers long participating in leisurely drinking and sporting cultures (Clark, 1983; Collins & Vamplew, 2000). Acknowledging the important role of social activities and shared leisure experiences, this section will demonstrate how the steelworkers' occupational community insulated members from the hardship of heavy industry. Camaraderie and fraternity allowed steelworkers to develop close bonds through additional activities outside of work that accentuated their working relationships. Social activities within and outside of the works remained highly classed and gendered however, with steelworkers congregating in largely class-homogeneous, male-dominated spaces. Along with overtly masculinised labour, communal leisure activities entrenched a culture of working-class masculinity, which further defined the restrictive Shelton steelworker occupational identity.

Opening this discussion, Arnold recalled the fraternity enjoyed between his peers, where he detailed how teamwork and humour allowed many to cope through adversity:

> The craic with the lads, there were… some characters, you know what I mean, some… they were mad as a box of frogs some of them, erm… the money was obviously good at the time as well, erm, makes a difference I suppose… It was just… the teamwork, I suppose… you'd got work as a team, or it wouldn't work… Just, the camaraderie and the lads… erm, there was arseholes, there's obviously arseholes everywhere, erm, but the majority of lads were absolutely ace… used to have a laugh, get away with murder really… some of the things… the lads were great, it was horrible, dirty, noisy… but, the craic was there, we had the craic… got on with the job, we fell out, we had us brawls… a fight was

> no problem, sorted it out, carried on with the job, you know what I mean… good, very good, I loved it.
>
> Arnold, Finishing End Operative

Heavy industries such as steel foundries are inherently dangerous places (Johnston & McIvor, 2004), leading workers to mobilise occupational resources and interpersonal relationships for processes of community coping (Giardini & Frese, 2006). Friendship and camaraderie between workers insulated many from the harsh conditions of the steelworks, which reduced the physical and mental stress of arduous labour (Korczynski, 2010; Collinson, 1988; Linstead, 1985). This emerged in Arnold's remarks, as when referencing poor working conditions, he drew upon the support generated by camaraderie and teamwork. While scholarship concerning stressful workplaces primarily focuses upon emergency services, similarities can be drawn from the work of the steelworkers, as extreme conditions and intensity raise comparable emotional and physical strain (van der Ploeg et al, 2003; Bennett et al, 2005; Jonsson et al, 2003). Throughout his interview encounter, Arnold repeatedly invoked memories of 'the lads', in which he appropriated Irish slang for fun, informal conversation. Camaraderie, or in this case, "the craic", was essential in buttressing the steelworkers from shared hardship and enabled them to insert enjoyment into an otherwise dull environment (Cowman et al, 2004; Holgate & Di Pietro, 2007). The strength of these relationships influenced how respondents evaluated their time at Shelton, with those heavily immersed within shared occupational cultures narrating positive experiences of joviality and enjoyment.

Espousing stereotypically masculine norms, Arnold described the ease with which his peers argued and employed violence during disputes. His narration depicted masculinity as embedded within Shelton's organisational hierarchy (Acker, 1990), but it also revealed employee resistance, as workers avoided managerial discipline by creating a parallel system of informal arbitration (Hollander & Einwohner, 2004). While serious accidents or misconduct incurred managerial discipline, workers resolved mild trespasses amongst themselves, which led to violence where perceived as necessary. Although designed to preserve their autonomy and reduce managerial authority, a new form of internal discipline was created by hegemonic men. This provided community leaders with disproportionate powers of punishment. The system also altered existing frontiers of control negotiated between management and workers, where power was transferred to those with limited or no formal disciplinary authority (Hughes & Dobbins, 2021).

While violence represented a form of rational authority, normative control operated throughout the community (McCabe 2014). This created a governmental regime which coerced steelworkers into monitoring their own behaviour to avoid becoming victims of violence (Miller & Rose, 1990; Rose, 1999). Similarly, a willingness to deploy violence was also necessitated, as this enabled workers to signal and defend their hierarchical position. Arnold's comments are significant, as though masculine norms often feature within occupational cultures, these may be endorsed or facilitated by management in the pursuit of organisational aims (Kerfoot & Knights, 1998; Hodgson, 2003). For the steelworkers, communal discipline emerges not to preserve capitalist production, but rather to preserve the internal communal hierarchy and its gendered underpinning.

While powerful men like Arnold reflected positively upon communal mediation, those on the receiving end of verbal and physical violence narrated alternative viewpoints, though doing so publicly further eroded their position in a culture valorising physical discipline.

Similarly discussing fraternity and workplace relations, Eliot, also employed as an operative at the finishing end, contributed by introducing the role of communal drinking at local pubs:

> The wife used to moan at me all the time when I was on noons, obviously I did 2pm-10pm, and when you got work, you got changed into your work gear, and put your gear in the locker, on noons we used to erm… go there, shower up, and go out on the lash with the lads [Laughs], you know what I mean, from around Cobridge, there used to be pubs around Cobridge, local pubs, what we used to call old man pubs that we used to go in, and then we always used to end up in Cobridge club and there'd be loads in there that we knew from work, you know what I'm saying, yeah, and we had some great times, we did ah, really did.
>
> Eliot, Finishing End Operative, Crane Driver

British pubs have a rich, pre-industrial social history, with alehouses acting as important centres of community cohesion, and as meeting points for 'plebeian recreation' (Vamplew, 1988; see also Clark, 1983). Following the advent of heavy industry, the role of British pubs changed with industrial subcultures by transitioning into viewing spaces for football games and other modern sporting events (Collins & Vamplew, 2000; Weed,

2007; 2008). Intimately linked with working-class communities, the pub remained a gendered institution, with communal drinking the preserve of working men (Hey, 1986). Though female ownership of pubs and alehouses was common (Oakley, 1974), women were expected to visit pubs with male guardians or in groups of married women, with women who drank alone experiencing stigmatisation (Clark, 1983).

Facilitating workplace fraternity, communal drinking at pubs and clubs was a common pastime for the steelworkers, with many interviewees discussing nights out with 'the lads'. While some respondents mentioned the occasional accompaniment of their wives to social gatherings, these events were infrequent and reserved for special occasions, meaning pub meets were largely exclusive to male colleagues. Reflecting this, Eliot recalled large groups of steelworkers crowding into 'old man' pubs, leading him to laugh cheerfully as he recalled good times drinking with colleagues. How Eliot narrated these outings is also important, as he used gendered language when representing his wife's displeasure. By depicting his wife as habitually moaning at him, Eliot underplayed her disapproval with his domestic absence by weighing the comparative importance of meeting colleagues for drinks and joviality. While attending these events reinforced relationships and individuals' social standing, communal drinking allowed men like Eliot to avoid domestic labour by leaving household responsibilities to their partners. Continuing this discussion, Allen, who was formerly employed at Shelton as a mechanical fitter, recalled trade union involvement in communal drinking at the pub:

> When we used to pay our union subs, it was at erm, a pub, erm, bottom of Cobridge road, right by the flyover… I think it used to be called the Wagon and Horses… I think it was the Thursday night we used to go there, pay the subs

> and then we'd have a drink in there, then… probably move on, you know, to somewhere else… erm, yeah, I mean… that was one aspect of social life as we used do, I think that was once a fortnight we used to do that. So it was always up to Hanley or, Newcastle… I mean, there was quite a lot of pubs around Hanley at the time, and Newcastle was quite buzzing as well.
>
> Allen, Mechanical Fitter

Introducing an overtly classed component to the steelworkers' social outings, Allen highlighted the important role of the trade union movement. Meeting together for a common purpose, workers used their membership and ideological association to recognise shared interests and injustices, and subsequently negotiated collective identities as they resisted socioeconomic hardship (Kelly, 1998; Gahan & Pekarek, 2013). The active participation of the ISTC union in social affairs generated additional solidarity, as along with representing employees' economic interests, the presence of a unifying ideological body deepened group distinction. This is not to profess nor assume that the steelworkers conformed ideologically however, as individual involvement and belief in trade unionism differed between community members (Strangleman, 2001). Rather, the union acted as a meeting point both physically and symbolically for many, in which members convened to negotiate a shared identity. In light of this, the union was an important social force within the occupational community (Metzgar, 2000; Salaman, 1971). Pubs and clubs emerged as key institutions in this process, with workers meeting to drink and discuss the formalities of their working day, which facilitated friendships and working relationships.

When discussing clubs and camaraderie, David, a senior furnaceman from Shelton's rolling mill, again insinuated a classed element to the steelworkers' relationships. Recalling how departmental communities networked to share information regarding potential site closure, he stated:

> I mean, it wasn't just the work, it was the erm, the camaraderie you know… the camaraderie was terrific, you always worked under the threat of closure, for years really, you know, I think you got used to it, you got used to hearing like, ooh, in fact, there was a thing as went round, it was chalked up… 'ast 'eard 'owt? That was… you'd see it on the walls like, someone would have chalked it up, 'ast 'eard 'owt? That meant, have you heard anything about the future like? Or the lack of a future [Laughs]… Same as I say, you know, we had a welfare department, swimming clubs, football clubs, cricket, bowls, things like that, people could… get involved with them different things, you know, it was much more than just a workplace, it was a community… there was community activities… we had erm, angling clubs, golf… golf societies, all the things as, you know, revolved around that works, and it disappeared, so, it was a sad day.
>
> David, Senior Furnaceman, ISTC Union Representative

During periods of restructuring and decline, classed communities can offer individuals an outlet to cope against change and seek support, which creates collective identities grounded in shared hardship (MacKenzie et al, 2006; McBride & Martínez Lucio, 2011). Though discussing clubs and community activities, David highlighted how workers utilised their occupational communities to insulate themselves from precarity, where

the threat of site closure and communal destruction contributed to group solidarity. Recognising an external threat to their livelihoods, the steelworkers drew upon a distinct 'us versus them' dynamic to create solidarity against potential site closure (Turnbull, 1992; Westergaard et al, 1989). Writing the phrase 'ast 'eard 'owt?' on the walls of the works, workers used social networks to disperse critical information across the site, which kept colleagues informed of developments and progress towards the safeguarding of their roles. While participation in social activities enabled many to build cultural capital and signal community membership (Bourdieu, 1984), purposeful social contact generated class consciousness which inspired community members to meet and distribute news regarding Shelton's future.

On the fraternity and enjoyment created by social clubs, Charles contributed by discussing his participation in photography and beermaking clubs:

> Everybody in the lab, we all used to make our own beer, so we were all into beermaking, all into photography, we never bought any chemicals for our films, we did them all…. In fact, I used to make everything, milk of magnesia, we never bought anything… we used to make our own [Laughs], we had a saying, if it isn't at Shelton Bar, then it hasn't been invented yet [Laughs]… that was a common thing we used to say, and a lot of people will relate to that… and you know, we all had darkrooms at home like, we were all doing pictures and that, it was just one of those things, we had a photographic club and most of us were in that, you know, erm… then obviously the football, cricket.
>
> Charles, Fuel Engineer, Personnel Manager

While sporting clubs were sponsored and endorsed by Shelton's management, independent clubs and societies also emerged; some of which are referenced in Charles' comments regarding the use of company chemicals to develop 35mm film. Like social drinking at pubs, hobby clubs and societies facilitated important group cohesion, which again contributed to employee welfare and positive evaluations of the works (Bakker et al, 2005). While the steelworkers formed trust and camaraderie as they laboured under dangerous conditions, clubs and societies developed these relationships further, leading workers to devote leisure time to activities with colleagues.

Enhanced trust between employees can improve their operational performance, as open communication and teamwork can generate organisational citizenship (Kramer, 1999; Smith & Barclay, 1997; Brower et al, 2009). Employer sponsored sporting events, clubs and societies can therefore benefit organisational aims. Consequently, some believe that employers have used physical activity to sponsor an artificial sense of belonging, thereby frustrating workers' attempts to mobilise and inspire class consciousness (Wheeler, 1978; McQuarrie, 2010). Though this detrimental impact is possible, a clear working-class sporting identity emerged from state and employer sponsored activities, which fostered independent leisure groups outside of industrial workplaces. Workers' sports clubs were even appropriated by labour movements to generate activism and cultural unity through sporting fraternity (Kidd, 1985). At Shelton, with respondents valorising communal activities in a similar manner to their paid labour, the importance of shared fraternity and camaraderie is demonstrated, with participants enjoying benefits over those electively or deliberately excluded. Highlighting the associated potential for workplace resistance, Charles continued:

> There was some things we shouldn't have done as well, we were always erm, we used to make this stuff that you could paint on the light switch, and it would… [Reaching his arm forward]… bang! [Laughs], like with the cleaners, they would come around and [Poof!], [Laughs]… their hands all black… what a dangerous… but we'd spray it around the corridor, and they'd be going… bang!… trying to get down the corridor without it going off [laughs], oh you'd be sacked if you did it now.
>
> Charles, Fuel Engineer, Personnel Manager

Described in Charles' account of workplace mischief, workers engaged in acts of causal resistance, which involved subtle disruption to production processes and managerial authority (Chalari, 2013; Hollander & Einwohner, 2004; Munro, 1999). While acts of nonconformity and resistance are met with displeasure from disrupted colleagues (Hawkins, 2008), casual resistance is often unnoticed as it may involve private ridicule or unspoken criticism of organisational actors (Ewick & Silbey, 2003; Archer, 2003). The effectiveness of casual resistance can be questioned, as with limited impacts upon organisational outcomes, organisational hierarchies go unchallenged (Gabriel, 1999). As Charles indicated however, pranks involving mild explosives were used for entertainment, in which they brought joy to the group as an unexpecting colleague was startled by a chemical reaction. Similarly, the personal use of company resources also uplifted the community, as this facilitated clubs and subcultures dedicated to taking and sharing photographs (Meek, 1988). While not directly undermining production or managerial authority, these forms of resistance strengthened collegial relations, which subsequently bolstered the lab workers' occupational culture and community (McCabe,

2023; Taylor & Bain, 2003; Sanson & Courpasson, 2022). Mild resistance granted steelworkers with additional power over management, as through strengthening their bonds and cultural unity, powerful solidarity was raised and exercised in communal alliances.

While workplace pranks are recalled as harmless fun, it should be acknowledged that these communal rituals depend upon processes of exclusion and othering, in which employees test and provoke their peers, or those deemed acceptable to tease and belittle (Søndergaard, 2017). Mirroring previous valorisations of violence, pranks are likely remembered differently by those falling into rhetorical or physical traps. This again indicates that communal strength can be bolstered via the exclusion of others, where rejection and othering is rationalised through humour. Though it is disproportionate to label these acts as workplace bullying, humour and banter are significant contributors to communal boundaries, meaning the subjectivity of fun creates broad potential for bullying at work (MacLeod, 2019; Kitterlin et al, 2016). While Charles did not elaborate upon the gender of the cleaners in his anecdote, he mentioned that he and others were present when the mild explosives were detonated, indicating that this act often had an audience. This can be interpreted in a number of ways, as although an audience can insinuate a shared light-hearted joke, it also adds to the ridicule of the cleaners, as multiple people were enjoying an individual or group fall victim to a startling prank. Whether male or female, the cleaners were performing a feminised role within a masculine environment, which disadvantaged their esteem among the steelworkers.

Communal membership can be achieved through the 'correct' response to pranks and teasing, again necessitating conformance with specific behaviours and aptitudes. This often occurs during initiation ceremonies with young workers or new recruits, where pranks or violence are deployed in increasing severity, and targets are required to tolerate and feign enjoyment of their maltreatment (Mayhew, 2007; Plester et al, 2022). Much like Collinson's work on 'engineering humour' (1988), verbal and physical abuse are concealed as victimless fun, which normalises derogatory speech between community members (Plester, 2015). For the cleaners in Charles' contribution however, departmental separation and stigmatised labour placed them outside of the lab's localised community, adding a dynamic of power to the steelworkers' play. According to the lab workers' localised social hierarchy, cleaners were deemed an acceptable target of ridicule, thereby indicating a lack of respect for their services and presence within the community (Bunderson, 2003; Bunderson et al, 2016).

In summary, fraternity was built both in and outside of Shelton, with leisure activities contributing to the steelworkers' solidaristic bonds. Many participated in sports and additional physical activities, and congregated in male dominated pubs and clubs to share in informal conversation. Accordingly, the steelworkers' occupational community buttressed members from precarity and physical adversity, while also contributing to organisational citizenship. This mirrors previous work by MacKenzie et al (2006) and McLachlan et al (2019), in which occupational identity and community were mobilised to raise solidarity and ease experiences of precarity. Opportunities for resistance were also presented by communal membership, with workers avoiding managerial authority via the use of informal disciplinary mechanisms. Consequently, while labour provided

respondents with remuneration and vocational skills, the occupational community fostered a shared sense of identity, which underpinned how many understood themselves as steelworkers.

Fraternity also served the communal hierarchy however, as those engaging in leisure activities received benefits in full group membership and communal status. Those electively missing social events were disadvantaged, alongside those intentionally excluded by communal leaders. Though presented as optional, social events and clubs acted as disciplinary tools, which encouraged steelmen to assess their peers according to levels of participation and communal engagement. Failing to participate harmed an individual's standing within the social hierarchy, which resulted in repercussions not just upon their social relationships, but also upon their progression and performance at work. With many of these pastimes occurring in male dominated spaces, expected and resulting behavioural norms were framed by masculine archetypes, again constraining free expression and identity formation. These findings contrast from solidaristic depictions of occupational communities provided by MacKenzie and McLachlan, as camaraderie and fraternity were reserved for full community members.

### 4.5 – Distance from Community: "Like a Copper's Narc"

While solidaristic communities can alleviate hardship, membership is often narrow and conditional. Acceptance into groups may be predicated on conformity to behavioural norms or favoured physical characteristics, each of which influence the accumulation of cultural capital necessary to impress community members (Wallinder, 2019; Huot &

Rudman, 2010; Bourdieu, 1990). For those falling outside of overt and implied membership requirements, physical and cultural differences can cause social 'othering' and lead to ridicule and rejection from communal spaces (Rawls & David, 2005). This reveals the disciplinary function of occupational communities, where members use technocratic and normative methods to control behaviour within and beyond group settings (Kärreman & Alvesson, 2004; Foucault, 1977). While rejection and othering reproduce inequality and exclusion, inter-group hierarchy and conformity work to discipline insiders, as group members must continually signal their commitment and worthy of association. Similarly, community leaders may subordinate fringe members, which subsequently generates tiers of inclusion across an implicit hierarchy.

Drawing from interviewees on the periphery of Shelton's occupational community, this section reveals processes of othering and inter-group hierarchy. Analysis will demonstrate how shared culture was mobilised by both workers and management to shape workplace communities. Contrasting from depictions of communal unity, findings show that occupational identity and community membership disciplined workers by policing their behaviour, thereby protecting the production process and gendered hierarchy. Othering and rejection were used by community members to generate conformity with masculine archetypes, while managers manipulated the steelworkers' cultural loyalties to pursue organisational goals; in which they used the allocation of lucrative overtime to obtain obedience and curry favour among organisational members (Wood, 2018).

Introducing this discussion, Darius recalled his ambivalence to the communal tradition of role permanence, of which underpinned his exit from the works. By discarding

communal norms associated with the internal labour market, Darius disrupted his manager's succession planning and thus his esteem among management circles. Narrating the fallout of this disagreement, he commented:

> So I said to me foreman, is there any chance I can… have a transfer into the machine shop? [Changing his voice] You can't just walk in here and ask for a transfer you know. Piled it on a bit, you know, we were… happy little family… nobody wandered about… you're a plater for life, you're an electrician for life, you were a fitter for life, plumber for life, you know. I said well, I've been sent up quite a bit at Cobridge Road and I like the machine shop, so I just wondered if I could have a transfer up to there. He says… it's a different job altogether, just can't do that, you know… He says, leave it with me, I'll see what I can do. Well, I kept asking and asking, you know, he says, I can't just do it like that, it doesn't work, you're going down this route to be a plater, you can't change halfway through. So… I thought, well I'm not going get anywhere with this, so I went and… looked for a job.
>
> Darius, Mechanical Fitter

Discussing his motivation to exit Shelton, Darius described the restrictive practices governing the steel industry for much of the 20th century, where staunch trade unionism prevented workers from sharing tasks and changing roles. Resulting from labour disputes of the 1880s, contractual inequalities between leading-hands and labourers prompted a departure from previous output-based payment systems, which led to the introduction of crew-based modes of production (Wilkinson, 1977; Ellbaum & Wilkinson, 1979). These restrictive arrangements were based upon the theory of job

closure, in which occupational entry is tightly governed by trade and state bodies to protect members' wages and conditions (Johnson, 1972; Weeden, 2002). By restricting the supply of labour, industry insiders can enhance their collective bargaining power and govern new entrants. Common in medical fields, closed occupations fall under strict regulations and licencing agreements, though they often experience greater stability and higher remuneration (Shackleton, 2017; Williams & Koumenta, 2020).

Within the steel industry, job closure was used to protect technical production processes by allowing production workers to carefully select those deemed capable for succession. By requesting a move to an alternative role, Darius upset this traditional industrial relations system, which prompted the rebuttal from his foreman and the subsequent straining of their relationship. By disregarding this occupational tradition, Darius weakened his position within the community, as questioning the custom of occupational permanence signalled personal inadequacy and deviance from established norms. This cultural mismatch was noted by his colleagues, which made communal acceptance and progression through the internal hierarchy unlikely. After failing to transfer departments, Darius exited Shelton, as he was unwilling to conform to the practice of job permanence.

Also experiencing restrictions upon his internal progression, Bart detailed how he was repeatedly unsuccessful when applying for managerial positions at Shelton:

> One thing that I did sort of, yearn for, was going up in the ranks, because I was an electrician, you know, that was where I was… that was it, so I did try to move up in the ranks, I did do… a part time degree, me… electrical engineering degree, erm, as I say, I got all me electrical qualifications, no matter what I did,

> I was never ever gonna move from where I was. So, erm, I used to see other graduates coming in straight from university, and immediately promoted and become my boss, and… it was like, wait there, I'm doing all this work, I'm… training them, and then still, they're becoming my boss, and I'm never going to move from where I am… and I just thought… this is… not going anywhere, I'm not getting any… progression in a career, yes, I'm comfortable, it was… really good pay, so don't get me wrong, but there was no real progression.
>
> Bart, Electrical & Automation Engineer

Though the crew-based system deteriorated during the 1970s and 1980s (Blyton, 1992), belief in the 'job for life' orientation largely endured, leading to the occupational stasis Bart described. For Bart, this constrained his professional development, as a cultural expectation for role permanence solidified his position as a craft worker. Subsequently, Bart considered his position at the works, as he remained troubled by his lack of progression and ailing popularity. Comparable to Darius' resistance to role permanence, Bart's communal status degraded as he protested, which deepened restrictions placed upon his professional advancement. This again highlights the connection between group membership and financial rewards, with those favoured by senior figures experiencing greater benefits. Following successive rounds of rationalisation after Shelton's downsizing, job closure also declined, which led to British Steel's heavy use of contracted labour (Fevre, 1986; 1987; Weeden, 2002). Reducing the steelworkers' bargaining power and control over the production process, management wielded greater technocratic controls, thereby eroding the steel industry's internal labour market (Blyton & Bacon, 1997).

In his role as the site health and safety manager, Edward possessed powers of rational authority and routinely disciplined workers who failed to uphold safety standards. This placed him at the periphery of fraternal workplace communities. Describing the use of private investigators to collect information on injured employees, he shared an anecdote relating to covert managerial surveillance, and subtly revealed its impacts upon his popularity:

> So, [Sighs] there were loads and loads of examples like that, where… we had a foreman, something had happened and he hurt his neck and his shoulder, and he could hardly… [Straining] move his arms, and erm, we had a private detective showing him walking from his house, down his drive to his car carrying two heavy suitcases, putting them into his boot, and erm, driving off to go on holiday, you know… When somebody had a serious accident I always visited their house if they were at home, see how they were, see if they needed any help and so on, but also to get a statement from them, and we've had the guys who've had serious back injuries, and you go to their house and they're up a ladder painting, you know. People would try and cheat the system, you know, like a copper's narc at times, I'm afraid.
>
> Edward, Fuel Engineer, Health & Safety Manager

Progressing into the personnel department after the 1978 downsizing, Edward frequently exercised disciplinary action over those breaking health and safety protocols, which placed him in a unique position within the communal hierarchy. Possessing tools of technocratic control, Edward's managerial role and tangible power distanced him from his colleagues and limited his scope for normative influence (Kärreman &

Alvesson, 2004). Present within his comments above, Edward discussed the frequency with which he hired private investigators and contracted them to follow injured employees in an effort to dispute the severity of their ailments.

These methods are a particularly interesting use of panoptic control, as alongside monitoring employees at work, management at Shelton extended their control beyond the workplace to govern the conduct of wounded colleagues (Foucault, 1977; Sewell & Wilkinson, 1992). Classification was subsequently assigned to the absent workers, which denoted many as cheaters of the system to be controlled and minimised. Though Edward discusses instances where he approved of employees receiving compensation, he gave lengthy anecdotes of reportedly disabled men appearing able-bodied, leading him to perceive their demands as an attempt to extort British Steel (Parker, 1995). In light of this, Edward appeared presently aware of his poor standing among certain quarters of the workforce, as he referenced his position as a "copper's narc" deployed to gather damning intelligence; thereby limiting British Steel's financial liabilities. Despite his ability to shape the occupational culture via rule setting and formal discipline, Edward possessed limited influence over the community, which led to his reliance on technocratic control.

Building upon themes of managerial discipline and control, Bart recalled how his manager used the allocation of overtime to control the conduct and schedules of his colleagues:

> He was really good at playing guys off, so he'd say something to one guy, then say something to the other and… it was a way to control them as well I think, and he also used to control them from the fact that… he would say which one

> gets the overtime, erm, and I used to notice that erm, most of the guys, they used to… live their life, based on how much money they've earned off their overtime… I was one of the weird ones, I never did overtime… or never really wanted to do overtime, so if I did overtime, I'd say well, I'll have some time off instead… and he said to me, I just don't understand you, I can't make you do things based on the fact that… I can't promise you overtime [Laughs].
>
> Bart, Electrical & Automation Engineer

While higher remuneration enticed many into working additional shifts, masculine archetypes of breadwinning and arduous labour made overtime a cultural norm, which led workers to compete for overtime allowance (Ashley & Empson, 2017). Contriving conflict among the community, the manager in Bart's contribution deployed this cultural facet to his advantage. By leveraging the steelworkers' aggression and desire to maximise their wages, managers inspired competitive behaviour conducive to organisational aims, which allowed them to avoid the use of formal control which eroded their communal status and influence (McLoughlin et al, 2005; Willmott, 1993). As Bart identified, many steelworkers treated overtime as an economic necessity, as despite intensifying their wage compulsion and encouraging self-interested behaviours, additional hours enabled workers to raise additional income while signalling occupational commitment and avoiding domestic responsibilities (McCabe, 2011). Armed with this knowledge, managers like those described by Bart undermined cultural solidarities by controlling the community and generating obedient economic subjects (Edwards, 1986).

Resistance to this cultural norm was possible however, as Bart rejected pressures for additional working hours. With cultural norms regarding overtime linked to working-class masculinity, resistance to these standards was predicated on differing interpretations of gender norms, in addition to relative material stability. Consequently, Bart's avoidance of overtime can be understood as resistance to prevailing gender norms at Shelton, which enabled him to criticise the practice of long hours. For those with stronger masculine identities, opportunities to enhance their communal and domestic status muted potential resistance, as long hours were exchanged for greater cultural capital and higher living standards (Gabriel, 1999; McCabe, 2014).

Bart's aversion to working additional hours cast him as an organisational outsider however, as these actions confused his peers and superiors as he broke from cultural expectations. While working his standard shift pattern endangered his legitimacy among colleagues, this seemingly unusual behaviour also threatened the efficacy of managerial control, which upset established relations of power and thus Bart's relationship with his foreman (Wood, 2018; 2020; Hughes & Dobbins, 2021). Declining to fulfil cultural norms regarding overtime, Bart relied upon his technical skills for occupational legitimacy and security, allowing him to partially offset some of his perceived shortcomings (Tatlu & Özbilgin, 2012). Despite this, Bart was disadvantaged within the occupational community, as by neglecting to accept overtime, he was less able to accumulate cultural capital. This insight also underpins Bart's previous comments regarding limited opportunities for progression, as compounding upon his specialist skills in automation, his strained reputation prevented advancement. Hierarchy and membership conditionality are again revealed, as although Bart received

recognition for his skills and contributions to the mill, he was assessed with suspicion due to his disregard of cultural norms (Wallinder, 2022; Lehmann & Taylor, 2015).

Working in a small workshop connected to the mill, George, a roll and centre lathe turner, also experienced periphery group membership due to his separation from occupational communities hosted in the mill. Breaking from the praise frequently voiced by previous interviewees, George was critical of Shelton and its departmental communities:

> Yeah, some people… they do forget the bad times, that's like most people, tend to remember the good times, don't they? But, one thing I remember, a few of the bad times and… mostly good times, that was probably because I was stuck in that one department all the time, didn't know that many people, and erm, the only people which I saw was… just a few people in that department… and when we had that [Manager's name] take over, it became hell in there for a certain few of us… but erm, when he left, it got good again… But erm, apart from that, I'd say it's no different from anywhere else, the only difference was the money was better.
>
> George, Roll & Centre Lathe Turner

Organisational 'outsiders' have commonly been understood in the context of migrant labour, in which issues of race and class dominate the perceived differences between full community members and those on the periphery (Wallinder, 2019; Huot & Rudman, 2010; Marshall & Foster, 2008). At Shelton Bar however, gender performance and interpretations of skilled labour were more relevant. Consequently, while the

communal distance observed in George's contribution did not originate in racialised differences, similarities can be drawn from the reproduction of institutional hierarchy, where psychological distance acted as the creator of factious workplace relations. In his remarks, George described physical separation from those in the mill, thereby preventing participation in acts of community. With limited opportunities to interact with his peers, George was unable to build sufficient cultural capital, which placed him within the lower stratifications of the social hierarchy (Bourdieu, 1990). His ability to build relationships outside of work was also limited, as with few connections to his peers in the mill, George was unable to attend frequent social events and gatherings.

In the absence of camaraderie and community membership, George gave a comparatively sober account of life at Shelton, where he described the works as comparable to alternative employment in any industrial setting. George subsequently authored his own mechanism of validation and cultural capital, in which he reappropriated his difference to others by valorising a lack of sentimentality. By denoting his foreman as a source of organisational conflict, George also created a physical outlet for his frustration, leading him to blame his social demotion on others (Erel, 2010; Samaluk, 2012). Drawing upon this turbulent history, George made a conscious effort to remember the "bad times", which differed from other respondents' festive organisational nostalgia. By creating their own hierarchy within the roll shop, George and his peers muted their communal distance by exercising power over managerial staff, thereby affording a localised form of cultural capital. Also experiencing physical and psychological distance from his peers, Bart contributed again by discussing the effects of alternating shift patterns:

> We used to do six on, two off, so your days off each week would move, erm, whereas the shift electricians used to do the same thing, but they'd do days, then nights, then noons, then two off, so… that's why theirs was the continental shift, erm, it just meant that when they went from days to nights, they had virtually a full day off… so you didn't sort of say, let's all go out this weekend, because the electricians… essentially there was five groups, four groups on the shifts, and then a day shift, and you didn't generally have the same time off, so, you'd sort of, when you go out, you may meet some of us.
>
> Bart, Electrical & Automation Engineer

Differing from Bart's previous nonconformity, this example of communal distance originated in alternating shift patterns which constrained the development of interpersonal relationships outside of work (Rawls & David, 2005). As a consequence of these scheduling constraints, Bart's socialisation with work friends was limited primarily to organisational settings, though occasional nights out led to inconsistent meetings with his craft colleagues. Later discussing a prominent work's golf club, Bart stated his lack of interest in this group activity, in which he declined invites from his peers. Aware of his absence from evening excursions and daytime golf trips, Bart was conscious of his distance from others, which subsequently informed his narration of disputes and social hierarchies at the works (Schegloft, 2007). Resulting from his middling position within the estimation of his peers, Bart appraised his tenure at Shelton reflexively, and similarly broke his praise with criticism of rigid industrial relations and communal skirmishes over additional shifts.

Much like George's contribution, Bart's communal othering also demonstrated layers and factions between departmental occupational communities, in which workers primarily socialised with their immediate and adjacent peers, rather than forming one collective block of steelworkers. Consequently, though a general association with the works generated a broad steelworker identity and community, individual departments possessed localised groupings, thereby layering communal membership and belonging. While Bart spoke highly of his colleagues, his nonconformity and periphery membership indicated that many viewed him suspiciously, of which likely informed his occupational stasis and comparative insularity (Shrikant, 2021; Stokoe, 2012). As mentioned, his aversion to overtime weakened his masculine credentials, while absence from social gatherings created suppositions of asocial behaviour. With masculine archetypes informing a wider framework of conduct at the works, Bart negotiated his position as a peripheral community member. While this denoted benefits in his ability to resist hegemonic behaviours, his disadvantaged position impacted his progression through the hierarchy (Fox et al, 2023).

Though participants featuring within this section did not experience outright rejection, their questioning of communal practices, use of managerial power, and physical distance from others contributed to their peripheral position, thereby revealing the disciplinary function of occupational communities. In line with their differing institutional power, management exercised rational authority over employees via technocratic controls, while the steelworkers themselves policed community membership via normative control (Kärreman & Alvesson, 2004; Foucault, 1977). Standard behaviour largely followed archetypes of working-class masculinity, and the

steel industry's traditional working practices reinforced rigid adherence to the demarcation of labour. Behavioural norms involved a commitment to long hours, occupational permanence, and engagement with social events outside of work.

While resistance to hegemonic norms was possible, this accompanied degrees of social othering. Observed consequences ranged from distance and exclusion from peer groups, to limiting an individual's progression through the organisation, thereby demonstrating the power communal leaders possessed over the internal labour market. Core community members narrated their work experiences with high praise and nostalgic memories, while those on the periphery cited more sobering assessments of their work and colleagues. In summary, while the occupational community insulated many from monotony and hard labour, membership conditionality prevented others from full integration, which led to varying degrees of inclusion and exclusion.

## 4.6 – Chapter Conclusion

Seeking to fulfil classed and gendered norms regarding technical skill and paid labour, new recruits entered Shelton's masculinised community of practice. Initiated through a lengthy apprenticeship process, recruits learned not only how to operate machinery and use craft tools, but also how to interact and socialise with others. A shared sense of identity was created, which allowed workers to draw upon common associations with production processes, industrial hardships and potential threats to group cohesion. Shared leisure activities such as communal drinking and sports clubs solidified fraternal relationships, with steelworkers using Shelton as a meeting point to engage in

stereotypically masculine pass-times. These activities added additional layers to the workers' relationships and influenced varying accounts of fraternal solidarity and group membership.

Failure to participate in communal activities limited progression through Shelton's internal labour market however, as though workers valued technical proficiency, group participation similarly impacted an individual's position within the social hierarchy. Defined by both masculine norms and traditional interpretations of technical skill, the workers' stratification system afforded status and currency unequally across the community. Privileging full community members, the disciplinary nature of occupational community was revealed, in which nonconformity was punished with social othering. Accordingly, while communal outsiders were disciplined through exclusion and occupational stasis, established group members were also subject to the disciplinary pressures resulting from conformity and panoptic surveillance. This necessitated the continued signalling of group membership through the performance of classed and gendered norms, which required concerted efforts to remain in the esteem of community leaders. While managers possessed tools of technocratic control, the steelworkers themselves exercised significant normative control over their peers, leading many to deploy both physical and rhetorical discipline over those they perceived as disrupting communal interests. Consequently, though occupational identity and community offered shelter from hardship and precarity, inherent conditionality limited members' free expression by prescribing norms of working-class masculinity, of which framed steelworkers' conduct both at work and at home.

# Chapter 5 – Masculinity & The Community: Being 'Man Enough'

## 5.1 – Empirical Themes: Masculinity & 'Doing Gender'

Shelton Bar steelworks was a male dominated workplace, with men controlling the main production processes, while a small female population worked in clerical and office positions. Unsurprisingly in such an environment, the steelworkers reproduced gender norms reflecting idealised working-class masculinity. They celebrated male bodies and physical strength, a commitment to male breadwinning and long hours, and adopted forms of humour accentuating their heterosexuality and masculinity as a coping mechanism against hardship and danger. This chapter will discuss the core components of the steelworkers' masculine identities. Empirical sections will outline and analyse how masculinity was conceptualised and enacted by men at Shelton Bar. These individual aspects combined to assist the formation of the 'steelworker identity' which guided conduct by setting behavioural norms.

The chapter will argue that as the steelworkers reproduced idealised forms of working-class masculinity, these traditional gender norms disciplined the wider occupational community, as such norms bound men to their work and exposed them to unnecessary danger. This disciplinary effect was twofold, as masculinised behavioural norms contributed to the conditionality of group membership, where steelworkers' access to solidarity and camaraderie depended upon the reproduction of a localised masculine identity and positive relationships with group leaders. Accordingly, membership of the occupational community accompanied significant self-monitoring, conformity, and

deference to established community figureheads, all of which placed constraints upon existing members' personal autonomy over identity formation.

Literature on men and masculinities emphasises the performative character of gender identity, where men and women enact particular traits and behaviours according to a prevailing gender binary (Kelan, 2010; Linstead & Pullen, 2006; Bruni et al, 2004). As a foundational text, West & Zimmerman's (1987) article *Doing Gender* remains influential in this debate, where it argues that daily interactions are highly gendered. By demarcating behavioural patterns and activities as masculine or feminine, gender is constructed and negotiated around perceptions of what men and women should respectively 'do', which results in the entrenchment of traditional gender roles. Gender is subsequently embodied and enacted within institutions and wider society by coding interactions, language and daily practices, thereby privileging actors possessing relevant gendered resources (Martin, 2006; 2003). Within the workplace, this translates into gendered organisational structures and cultures which attribute gender norms to a disembodied ideal worker (Acker, 1990; Hancock & Tyler, 2007; Schultz et al, 2000).

Raewyn Connell's theory of *hegemonic masculinity* argues that a dominant form of masculinity emerges within typically 'male spaces' and manifests in overtly masculinised gendered behaviours (2005). Operating at the top of gendered hierarchies, hegemonic masculinities employ traditional interpretations of manhood, which include overt displays of heterosexuality, aggression, physical strength, emotional control and indifference to danger (Hinojosa, 2010; Iacuone, 2005; Courtenay, 2000). Those unwilling or unable to enact gender in this manner are

subordinated, meaning women and deviant men are subject to domination by those embodying the localised hegemon (Paap, 2006).

The theory of hegemonic masculinity has received criticism however, most prominently for its rigid approach to defining hegemonic ideals and its often-contradictory application to empirical settings (Coles, 2009; Duncanson, 2015). Connell & Messerschmidt (2005) have since developed the theory by incorporating academic commentary depicting hegemonic masculinities as fluid and competing with other gender identities. Rather than exerting absolute control over gendered hierarchies, hegemonic masculinity can be understood as a dominant, yet competing identity, where "different constructions of masculinity at the local level may serve as tactical alternatives" (ibid., 2005, p. 847). This interpretation has benefited theories of *multiple masculinities*, where men employ behaviours falling outside of a prevailing hegemon, subsequently allowing the enactment of masculine identities according to alternative gender norms (Schrock & Schwalbe, 2009; Eastman, 2012; Adams, 2022).

While alternative forms of masculinity afford subordinated men individual and collective status and power, their place within the gendered hierarchy remains below that of the negotiated hegemon, meaning they still experience fewer privileges compared to those in full conformance with prevailing norms (Bridges & Pascoe, 2014; Sumerau, 2012; de Visser et al, 2009). Attention has also gathered around the potential to 'undo' gender at work, where workers in masculinised occupations alter their behaviour to dismantle hegemonic masculinities and replace these with less problematic norms and hierarchies (Ely & Meyerson, 2010; Deutsch, 2007). In these contexts, environments can also become more welcoming to those subordinated,

though remnants of traditional gender norms remain influential in guiding behaviour and hierarchy.

While shifts have been observed in earnings and the emergence of a 'new', involved form of fatherhood (Sánchez-Mira, 2021; Peukert, 2018; Humberd et al, 2015), binaries remain for many households and organisations; which leads to the continuation of men as the primary economic providers (Willott & Griffin, 2004; Gush et al, 2015). Consequently, though gender roles are not inevitable and may shift according to socioeconomic changes, recognisable binaries persist and limit how individuals may renegotiate their domestic and professional roles (West & Zimmerman 1987). This sustains existing inequalities and generates further disciplining effects, where both men and women experience pressure to perform roles assigned through traditional gendered assumptions (Gherardi, 1994; Cross & Bagilhole, 2002; Williams, 1995; 1992).

Building upon previous analysis of the steelworkers' occupational community, this chapter will examine hegemonic masculinity at Shelton Bar, alongside interpretations of masculinity still present within ex-worker communities. To analyse respondents' memories of the steelworks, Connell & Messerschmidt's (2005) revised theory of hegemonic masculinity will be employed to enable a full extrapolation of gendered hierarchy and how it was produced and sustained by the steelworkers. Wickes & Emmison have been critical of applications of hegemonic masculinity which take a 'ceremonial approach' to masculinity, where researchers invoke gender passively without "any further conceptual work regarding 'doing gender' in their research" (2007, p. 317; see also Nentwich & Kelan, 2014). To avoid this, analysis will identify core attitudes and practices adopted by the steelworkers during their daily routines, which

will highlight gendered organisational structures and hierarchies that existed within departmental occupational communities.

Data is presented in four subsections, which analyse: male breadwinning, masculine bravado, occupational danger, and dirty work. Together, they demonstrate the disciplinary nature of working-class masculinity, where conformity to gendered norms limited steelworkers' free expression and bound men to extreme work schedules which undermined their familial relationships. A hegemonic masculinity will be charted within analysis, in addition to alternative forms of masculinity practiced across departmental occupational communities; which created differences between process, craft and managerial staff. To rationalise the harsh conditions of steel production, process and craft workers afforded currency to the toleration of occupational hazards. As craft workers encountered differing threats according to their specific trades however, masculinity and danger were approached differently across the community. Comparatively, managerial staff fell outside of this hegemon and experienced distance from their manual peers. For this group, the need for safety procedures, formal labour controls and discipline generated a relatively muted approach to masculinity, where the physicality of labour was subdued against cognitive managerial work. Although managers were subordinated within process and craft worker communities, the emergence of competing masculine identities supports academic work regarding divergence from hegemonic ideals, while similarly critiquing rigid understandings of hegemonic masculinity.

5.2 – Male Breadwinning: The Wife, The Kids

Paid employment remains key to the construction of masculine identities, as alongside male fraternity and communal status, waged work allows men to fulfil male breadwinner archetypes (Dolan, 2011; Townsend, 2002). Grounded in the labour relations of early industrial development, breadwinning men toiled in dangerous workplaces requiring physical strength, which led to the demarcation of men as the primary earners and household leaders, and women as childbearing homemakers and secondary earners (Horrell & Humphries, 1997; Horrell & Oxley, 1999). This gendered division of labour is a relatively recent phenomenon however, as prior to the mid-19th century, men were more involved in the upbringing of children (Francis, 2002; Martschukat & Stieglitz, 2005). Industrial capitalism recast men's domestic responsibilities and created cultural expectations for male waged labour (LaRossa, 1997). Comparatively, women were primarily employed in domestic settings and in light industries, which returned fewer financial rewards compared to their male partners (Jordan, 1999).

Later emerging during the inter-war period, the modernist housewife figure entrenched the male-breadwinner figurehead, in which men sustained nuclear families through a single wage (Giles, 1993; Bingham, 2015). Women were not excluded entirely from paid labour however, and in some places dominated factory work (Coles, 2009; Woolacott, 1994; Summerfield, 1977). During the late-19th century, women in the matchstick and textile industries mounted successful strike action and formed female-exclusive unions, though their collaboration and integration with the wider Victorian labour movement encountered resistance (Satre, 1982; Bottomley, 1988). Despite women's employment

and labour activism, the status afforded to male employment perpetuated traditional gender roles, while greater remuneration denoted men as the main family earner (Demantas & Myers, 2016).

Following the UK's industrial decline towards the end of the 20th century, traditional gender demarcation began to degrade. Though debate surrounds the exact causes behind the morphing of traditional gender roles, feminist campaigning for equal remuneration and employment conditions have been credited for egalitarian progress throughout the 20th century (Smith, 1996; Turk, 2010; Snell, 1979). Rising female employment and industrial decline led to the growth of dual income households, pooled financial resources, and female breadwinning, which challenged the primacy of male waged labour (Vogler et al, 2006; Reid, 2018). However, women's increase in employment opportunities often resulted in the 'double-burden' of productive and reproductive labour, in which disproportionate responsibility for domestic labour was paired with poorly-paid work (Chen et al, 2007). A parallel revaluation of male identity also occurred, where some men renegotiated a more equal masculine identity and role as fathers (Humberd et al, 2015).

Where men are unwilling to abandon masculine identities connected to familial and financial control, unemployment and rising spousal incomes can have significant and toxic effects upon their personal relationships, leading men into intense stress from identity discontinuity (Kelan, 2008; Neely, 2013). Consequently, some men may appeal to traditional gender norms to defend their masculine identity, in which they retain an assumed position as the main family breadwinner (Willott & Griffin, 2004; Gush et al, 2015). While they may still earn less than their female partners, traditional

interpretations of gender enable these men to renegotiate the stigma connected to unemployment and disparate spousal incomes.

This section will introduce respondents' experiences and attitudes towards male breadwinning and fatherhood, while similarly outlining the embodiment of gender across the steelworkers' occupational community. Findings will argue that steelworkers saw their domestic role as male breadwinners and familial guardians, leading to the acceptance of significant overtime schedules. As a result, many steelworkers avoided domestic and childcare responsibilities, which meant daily household tasks fell almost entirely to their female partners. The interview data also provides evidence for the decline of male breadwinning, which generates another perspective to understand and analyse deindustrialisation. Scholarly understanding of male breadwinning will be expanded, as respondents' experiences differ from narratives outlined in much of the current academic material. Much of this literature has focused upon men's experiences of declining incomes relative to their partners (Reid, 2018; Scheepers et al, 2009; Brennan et al, 2001), though this was not the case for the respondents interviewed. Instead, interviewees have not experienced a personal decline in their relative economic position, though broader decline in the cultural value associated with male breadwinning places their identities in outmoded and marginalised terrain. As a result, respondents viewed their identity as under threat from contemporary changes to masculine norms.

Introducing this section, Bill, formerly an operative and union representative at Shelton Bar's finishing end, introduced his experience of waged work at Shelton by referencing the significance of his renumeration and collegial working practices:

> Overtime was endemic on the works, and… if you needed to earn extra money, there was always an extra shift to pick up… I mean, in 1990 when the wife wasn't too well, erm, I was working 60 hours a week, keeping a family of 5, you know what I mean, that's what you do… I don't really know what else I can say, it was, it was a special place… for somebody who'd left school with no qualifications, and it was an all-male environment, so you get the banter and the… and the friendships, I mean, being a shop steward in the finishing end, I virtually knew everybody… there wasn't many people I didn't know, apart from one or two in the office, who never came out of the offices.
>
> Bill, Finishing End Operative, Furnaceman, ISTC Union Representative

Mentioning his wife in a passive manner, Bill recalled his commitment to long hours and harsh working conditions, where his casual commentary denoted these as frivolities to be tolerated (Hodgson, 2003). Though Bill invoked imagery of a compassionate provider, acting as the sole household earner provided him with domestic power, which enabled greater control over household expenditure (Vogler, 1998). This emerged within his remarks, as the phrase "keeping a family of 5" denotes ownership over the domestic sphere. While there is no further indication that Bill abused his position as the sole earner, the sacrificial nature of his working arrangements is clearly incorporated into his masculine identity, and informed how he enacted and subsequently articulated his role as a male breadwinner and father figure.

Importantly, Bill referenced his wife's period of sickness when discussing his dedication to work, indicating that paid labour was his main priority even if it resulted in increased household labour for his unwell spouse. Rather than increase his time at home in

support his wife and children, Bill completed overtime at the steelworks to raise his monetary contribution, again suggesting that he viewed his domestic role as a financial provider. While it is unclear if Bill's wife received tangible support from family members or friends, it is curious that Bill denoted additional time at work as his primary means of supporting his ill wife and family.

Bill's acceptance of long hours as "what you do" demonstrated the strength of this position, as his lack of criticality suggested not only pride in his sacrifice, but also how ingrained this position remains within his conscience. While failing to earn would impact his family's standard of living, his personal value under traditional interpretations of masculinity would also be undermined, thereby impacting his domestic authority and communal status (Garcia, 2021; Warren, 2007). Although Bill's account of spousal illness suggests a potential for familial benevolence, the disparate power enjoyed by male breadwinners remains a primary motivator, as generating the bulk of household income can lead to personal financial advantages (Pahl, 1989; Vogler & Pahl, 1994). Even in marital relationships with pooled finances, unequal contributions can influence control over expenditures and privilege the implied owner of the shared pile (Burgoyne, 1990).

Continuing the discussion of male breadwinning, Eliot contributed by describing his overtime routine, where he implied a sacrificial nature to his commitment to paid labour:

> It was noisy, hot, cold… because even though you were in the shed, you were open to the elements because the freights were going in and out, so they were never closed, and erm, yeah, it was quite a bad environment, but you know… it's just one of them things you put up with if you wanna earn some decent

> money, and me family were young at that stage, so you know, you just go out and do it, don't you… Yeah, I used to work overtime I did, because I'm a bit of a… well, me family have called me a nutter [Laughs], particularly… because if I used to work… let's say I was on nights, erm, I would go in after me weekend off, and go in on the noon shift from 2pm-10pm, then obviously my shift would come on, and work 10pm-6am, I did that on a Monday, but also on a Friday, you know what I mean. So, without that it was good money, but obviously at the time… young family, and erm, everything else that goes with it, it erm, gave us a great standard of living.
>
> Eliot, Finishing End Operative, Crane Driver

Invoking themes of stoic sacrifice, Eliot discussed his toleration of harsh conditions in exchange for familial security, which led him to celebrate his reputation as a "nutter". Importantly, when discussing his routine of working double shifts on Mondays and Fridays, he admits that even without this arrangement, his regular working week was sufficient to provide a good quality of life for his family. This demonstrates Eliot's interpretation of masculinity and fatherhood, as despite having the option to work fewer hours, Eliot continued to work overtime and justified this via appeals to his young family and to his reputation as a hard worker (Williams, 2013). The sacrificial nature of his working schedule can subsequently be questioned, as additional time at work increased his wife's domestic responsibilities and allowed him to avoid domestic labour. This was absent from his narration of overtime and breadwinning however, indicating that he lacked awareness or was ambivalent towards the impacts upon his spouse, or that he wished to conceal these impacts due to a sense of shame or embarrassment.

Eliot was also motivated by career prioritisation, as while additional financial resources safeguarded household stability, working overtime propelled his status within the steelworks; a process mirrored in other organisations (Ranson, 2001). The worker's shared interpretation of masculinity and fatherhood created a culture of long hours, where those tolerating arduous labour were valued and praised. Consequently, men participated in extreme overtime schedules, as diverging from these norms signalled deviance from traditional understandings of manhood; which risked communal discipline via ridicule and rejection (Kärreman & Alvesson, 2004; Garcia, 2021). Alongside communal pressure, employers often expect greater commitment from male employees, which creates an institutional perpetuation of traditional gender norms which "give the impression, if not the reality, that work comes first" (Cooper, 2000, p. 403; see also Holter, 2007; Burnett et al, 2013). Therefore, though Eliot elected to complete additional shifts, cultural and organisational expectations influenced this decision, ultimately reducing autonomy over his work-life balance.

Time at work entrenched how Eliot understood and enacted his interpretation of fatherhood, and similarly perpetuated his focus upon financial provision, rather than time actively spent with his wife and children (Shows & Gerstel, 2008). To enable his overtime routine, Eliot's spouse faced no choice but to double her domestic labour by completing daily household tasks and childcare responsibilities alone. By identifying with the male breadwinner archetype, Eliot constructed himself as a passionate and considerate father, in which he sacrificed physical contact with his children to ensure their quality of life; yet he rarely acknowledged the sacrifice this also forced upon his spouse (Gerson, 1994; Weiss, 1990; Townsend, 2002). Accordingly, Eliot made

reference to his family's buoyant lifestyle, where they lived comfortably and dined out with frequency. Notably, he only discussed spending prolonged time with his children as they reached adulthood, when he helped them to buy, refurbish and sell their homes.

Eliot's children may have experienced their father's domestic absence differently, whereby the sacrificial nature of his overtime was likely lost against a desire for social contact. Eliot's long hours were not unnoticed by his family, who in labelling him a 'nutter' expressed sardonic resentment towards his regular absence. While higher wages influenced Eliot's desire to maximise his working hours, the extreme devotion he demonstrated to employment is indicative of 'doing gender', in that he saw his domestic role as an economic provider, rather than a giver of intimate care (Romero-Balsas et al, 2013; Stone, 2007).

Similarly, Frank, a former boilermaker at Shelton and union representative for the Amalgamated Society of Boilermakers (ASB), also revealed the intergenerational relationships at the heart of male breadwinning:

> I was happy to… pleased and proud to provide for my family… and I got a sense of erm, sense of achievement, if you like, doing it… I mean, my dad, my father… I always said my dad was me best friend, and he was… me dad was a boiler fireman, he worked on the pots, erm, all his life… coal fired boilers he fired, and I can never ever remember, growing up, I can never remember my dad having a day off, apart from erm, an occasional holiday… never remember, and then, you know… even then more than when I was working, later in my working life, if he didn't go work, he didn't get paid… and that focuses your mind.

Frank, Boilermaker, ASB Union Representative

When discussing his family background, it became clear that Frank idolised his father as a faultless masculine role model. Frank's father inspired similar behaviour in his offspring and encouraged Frank to fulfil the core cultural archetypes associated with masculinity: working long hours, becoming a father, getting married and owning a home (Townsend, 2002). By articulating pride in his own breadwinner position, Frank revealed a life-long process of classed and gendered socialisation, which began with his introduction to the indomitability of industrial breadwinning.

Frank also revealed a process of labour exploitation however, in which his father was engaged in perpetual industrial production, and had few if any breaks for illness or leisure (Cooper, 2000; Burnett et al, 2013). In organisational contexts, management frame workplace commitment as an inherently masculine and noble endeavour, and so render familial provision as a means of normative control (Hodgson, 2003; Perlow, 1998). Consequently, those unwilling to work long hours may be emasculated and derided, which results in both personal and social implications upon an individual's esteem. Rather than criticising the drudgery of his father's toil as a coal-boiler fireman, Frank celebrated the intensity of this commitment by attributing great currency to personal sacrifice and domestic absence. Frank sought to emulate this masculine success through dedication to paid employment, which led him to conform to archetypes of the ideal industrial worker, steadfast in his commitment to masculine norms and paid labour (Reid, 2015; Turco, 2010). As a result, Frank possessed a similar experience of industrial employment, in which he similarly rationalised his working life through appeals to male sacrifice and masculine stewarship.

Like Eliot's Children, Frank's interaction with his father was limited and conditional, bound by the scheduling patterns of industrial production. While Frank did not elaborate on his father's working hours, his description of limited time off suggests significant domestic absence. Recent literature on paternal absence has highlighted the interpersonal harms fatherly absenteeism can have upon children, where young boys develop behavioural issues or substance dependency as they develop (Demuth & Brown, 2004; Harper & McLanahan, 2004; Parker & Benson, 2004). Harsh parenting from father figures is similarly damaging, and often predicts poor behaviour in male children and adolescents (Simmons et al, 2018; Bronte-Tinkew et al, 2006). These findings cannot be applied directly to familial contexts of the mid to late 20th century however, meaning the effects of fatherly absence upon those like Frank may be more ambiguous.

Frank's long career in engineering indicates an economically productive life, while Eliot spoke of his children's success in the construction industry. These economic successes tell relatively little of the emotional harm caused by absenteeism however, as Frank and Eliot's children may instead have experienced emotional scarring. This is reflected in the largely economic behavioural boundaries set by Frank's father and Eliot respectively, where the extent of their paternal guidance related to work and masculine archetypes, rather than a strong interpersonal relationship. Consequently, rather than questioning the necessity of his father's industrial graft, Frank celebrated the nobility of his paternalism and rationalised his father's absence alongside his own committal to employment. Discussing the decline of male breadwinning from its industrial peak, Frank continued:

> It makes me feel really… really sad, erm, when I think of what we've lost… locally, I suppose not only locally, nationally… I think the best way I can describe it… I think we've lost our conscience… erm, and I don't want to be political, Harvey, but… my view of late has been that, the country and the government in particular, right back from Tony Blair… have not allowed people to be responsible for themselves… and I honestly, I feel that very, very strongly, that people are not allowed to be responsible for themselves, for their families, you know… that didn't happen in my working life, even on Shelton, if I didn't go to work to provide for my family… nobody else did, you know, there was none of this erm… I really don't want to get political at all but, if I didn't provide for my family, the government wouldn't… ok, you could get some help, but nothing like… people now, they're getting more money, people I know, are getting more money in benefits… than it would be possible to go out and earn after you've paid tax… that cannot be right.
>
> Frank, Boilermaker, ASB Union Representative

Following the rise in female employment, men's relative economic importance began to decline (McDowell, 1991; Irwin & Bottero, 2000). The erosion of this economic orthodoxy is important in understanding respondents' narratives of loss, as many expressed sadness and discomfort towards their changing role within society. Frank's stigmatising rhetoric on declining responsibility and welfare provision are examples of this anger at contemporary socioeconomic change. When discussing welfare and personal responsibility, Frank drew from notions of the deserving and undeserving poor, these being endemic during post-financial crash welfare reforms (McDowell,

2014; Anderson, 2010). Frank's working-class background make this criticism particularly cutting, as rather than originating in middle-class denigration (Skeggs, 2004; Tyler; 2013; 2008), anger is directed at those sharing his class origins. Instead of empathising with those less fortunate, Frank reproduced societal discourses which stigmatise unemployment, these connected to a wider governmentality prescribing full employment and financial independence from the state (Miller & Rose, 1990).

Though influenced by his masculine commitment to waged labour, these remarks are also informed by Frank's personal sense of loss, as wholesale industrial decline damaged his identity built upon male provision. Anger and resentment are subsequently directed at his interpretation of a bloated welfare state, where men are unable or unwilling to provide for their families as he once did. These accounts are divorced from the punitive turn of welfare provision, in addition to the individualising rhetoric used to justify reform (Wright et al, 2020; Fletcher & Wright, 2018), though they illuminate a present frustration with the decline of modernist gendered structures.

Discussing similar themes, Jonathan commented on the decline of what he viewed as stereotypically 'men's jobs' and the implications of this for working-class men. Also invoking notions of pride and belonging, he stated:

> I think there's an awful lot of… men's jobs, for reasonable money, and pride, gone… and I don't know what blokes are gonna do these days, you know, blokes who aren't academic, but wanna feel some, you know, some pride in bringing home the bacon, and erm… I don't know what they're gonna do, stacking shelves and… I dunno. But maybe that's a good thing, maybe people will be more healthy, will they? Sitting in front of a computer all day… no, I

> don't think so. There's a lot of bad about the old industries I must admit, pollution and whatever, erm, danger in many ways I suppose, to health, from accidents and so on… but, there's a lot, that hasn't been replaced in terms of camaraderie, erm… belonging, feeling of being part of an entity that you're proud of… you know, reasonable pay.
>
> Jonathan, Fuel Engineer, Mill Manager

Although Jonathan primarily discussed the loss of economic opportunities for men with practical skills, his words are highly gendered, this being visible in comments regarding "men's jobs" and 'blokes' "bringing home the bacon". By discussing paid employment and male breadwinning together, Jonathan revealed his understanding of masculinity and valorised the pride associated with familial providence. For working-class men, norms and expectations regarding skilled manual labour and breadwinning remain pertinent, and encourage individuals to select vocational pathways and discredit academic study and feminised work (Altreiter & Flecker, 2020; Ghaill, 1994; Walkerdine, 2017; Ward, 2015). These sentiments were present in Jonathan's remarks, as although he did not disparage men directly, reductive criticism of the service sector is present. Retailing and office work were assessed with tentative derision, which indicated his lack of respect for roles requiring interpersonal skills and servitude (Yavorsky et al, 2021; Nixon, 2006; 2009).

Jonathan's commentary can also be viewed as an indictment of contemporary opportunities, this being articulated via nostalgic accounts of belonging and pride. Criticising the relative quality of service opportunities, he referenced issues of poor pay and working conditions, in addition to worker anomie in the absence of camaraderie

and tradition. These issues are widespread in the UK's polarised labour market, where increasing numbers are engaged with low-level interactive service employment; which is frequently characterised by inequality, low wages, regressive managerial practices and contractual insecurity (van Eck et al, 2023; Kalleberg, 2018; Davis, 2017). This indicated a deep sadness towards the loss of his own masculine outlet, where Shelton's closure corresponded with a decline in paternalistic family structures and employment relations.

Literature discussing male breadwinning often highlights the emotional implications of declining economic status to argue that when men act as secondary earners to their female spouses, divergence from masculine archetypes creates lasting stress (Reid, 2018; Brennan et al, 2001; Scheepers et al, 2009). This can translate into poor health outcomes, as out-earned men are more likely to develop chronic illnesses during mid and later-life than their spouses (Springer, 2010; Springer et al, 2017; Kim & Luke, 2019). With gender performance linked to men's declining health, the literature also acknowledges the mediating effect of gender identity, and indicates that those with more egalitarian beliefs suffer fewer impacts to their health (Saunders & Peerson, 2009). Respondents' experiences diverged from much of this literature however, as many did not lose their breadwinner position relative to spousal income, but instead felt threatened by changing interpretations of masculinity and the declining importance of men's waged labour.

Rather than discussing a personal loss of breadwinner status, some respondents expressed confused sadness at a perceived lack of masculine paternalism. Some, such as Frank and Jonathan, appeared unable to comprehend productive futures for

working-class men. This highlighted another disciplinary aspect of traditional gender roles, as idealised interpretations of masculinity sustains coercive relationships with waged labour. Accordingly, many steelworkers were locked into a gendered framework which defined their behaviour at work and at home, thereby limiting their autonomy over identity formation. In a contemporary sense, although able to retain their personal identity as familial providers, either through past earnings or current pension incomes, the rise of dual income households and female breadwinning represent, for them, another form of identity threat. Respondents feeling threatened by, or fearful of change employed a defensive form of masculinity, in which they rationalised traditional gender roles in an attempt to cope with their seemingly threatened perspectives. Therefore, analysis expands upon experiences of male breadwinning; here, more important than relative income was that men mourned the loss of their privileged gender position, despite retaining their status within individual households.

## 5.3 – Masculine Bravado: "Men Were Men in Those Days"

In gendered organisations, men subjugate women and subordinate others through overt displays of masculinity and by instigating instances of verbal and physical aggression (Connell, 2005). When institutions adopt these gendered norms without challenge, they promote an idealised 'universal worker', which rewards those who reproduce the masculinised behaviours and norms the disembodied worker represents. This ideal marginalises and excludes women in particular, "who cannot, almost by definition, achieve the qualities of a real worker because to do so is to become like a man" (Acker, 1990, p. 150). Workplaces espousing masculine values celebrate displays

of strength, stoicism, physical aggression and heterosexuality, which results in the creation of disciplinary masculine identities (Hinojosa, 2010; Iacuone, 2005). One of these forms of display can be described as 'masculine bravado': where men amplify their heterosexuality and sense of humour to meet an exaggerated archetype of manhood (Collinson, 1988). This section will explore a number of such gendered practices observed and employed by interviewees, and will note their effect upon social hierarchies, identities and disciplinary mechanisms.

Within their wholly male environment, shop floor steelworkers created cultural expectations for masculine behaviour, which subsequently informed accounts of sexualised bravado and 'male humour'. This section argues that while a hegemonic masculinity emerged within the steelworks, diverse roles and responsibilities created different approaches to gendered identity. Consequently, the intensity of aggression and exaggerated bravado was uneven and practiced differently among departmental groups. Differences emerge between managerial and process staff, with those engaged in manual work more inclined to reproduce and display traditional forms of masculinity commonly associated with mid-20$^{th}$ century industrial relations. Accordingly, differing perspectives on the acceptability of masculine bravado and sexualised banter arose, while the enforced 're-doing' of masculinity further demonstrates the malleability of gender performance. These processes were not always broadcast across the works however, as conformity to hegemonic norms remained important for workers in realising cultural status.

Providing an example of overtly masculine behaviour, Edward recalled men resolving issues via aggressive confrontation, and how he anticipated physical retaliation for his decision to dismiss a colleague:

> How can I say this… erm, men were men in those days, so on site… if somebody had a problem with somebody else, they wouldn't go through management, they would sort it out amongst themselves, if you like, there were many arguments… fights, things got physical sometimes, yes… There was one particular time… unfortunately, I had to let somebody go, they had done something quite silly and dangerous, and so… when I came home that night, I said to [Wife's name], if the phone rings tonight… or if the doorbell goes, don't answer it, because there may be some trouble, you know… it didn't happen very often, but yes, it happened.
>
> Edward, Fuel Engineer, Health & Safety Manager

Witnessing and experiencing the threat of violence at work, Edward depicted Shelton as an arena for archetypal masculine performance (Acker, 1990). When stating that men settled arguments amongst themselves, Edward confirmed the existence of communal disciplinary mechanisms beyond his managerial remit, which involved the use of violence during interpersonal disputes. While management formally punished and dismissed workers, steelworkers regulated behaviour and conduct on site too by penalising those who transgressed against them (Collinson, 1988). In line with Edward's assertion that "men were men in those days", this behaviour indicated the presence of a hegemonic masculinity, where workers employed masculine archetypes to dominate others (Connell, 2005; Hinojosa, 2010).

Some steelworkers also deployed masculinity in acts of self-preservation, where enacting masculine archetypes both reduced their chances of experiencing violence, while also rendering them as non-threatening to the gendered hierarchy. Divergence from behavioural norms incurred communal penalties in exclusion and othering, while conformity made men 'invisible' to community members on the lookout for difference. This relates to Edward's contribution, as his use of managerial discipline differed from the steelmen's proclivity to informal arbitration, thus making his decision to dismiss this individual visible across the community. After breaking from implied norms at work, Edward subsequently ordered his wife not to answer the phone or door before his arrival at home, as he feared retaliation from the colleague he dismissed previously. Edward's decision to dismiss his colleague possessed both material and symbolic consequences, as disrupting his colleague's waged employment undermined their masculinity, which led to a cautious expectation that retaliatory aggression was forthcoming (Bosson et al, 2009; Vandello & Bosson, 2013). Although no issues arose, Edward's caution indicated the presence of a disciplining culture at Shelton, this underpinned by men valorising physical strength and competing for masculine status (Berdahl et al, 2018).

Many steelworkers were willing to use confrontation as a defence mechanism to prevent attempts to undermine or demean their hierarchical position, and in doing so perpetuated masculine norms. George demonstrated this process in action during a long running managerial dispute:

> There was some whatsit, some fun times on there, quite a few… quite a lot of bad times on there that people forgot about, a lot of victimisation, and I mean

> a heck of a lot, like, if a boss didn't like you, you'd got no chance… The last manager we had in my department, he come in off the shop floor, and erm, we had a saying about him… he's not fit to breathe [Rolling his eyes], because he wasn't. There was three of us, there was the tractor driver, the erm, temp-hook maker, and myself, that [Manager's name] hated, so that was it, if I went the toilet, I'd get a written warning, and he kept carrying on and carrying on, so in the end I went, go on [Sits up in his seat], carry on, try and sack me, I said that to his face, so he did, got down to the work's manager straight away… he finished up on a month's suspension. He just, did anything he could to get at you.
>
> George, Roll & Centre Lathe Turner

Throughout this interview encounter, George frequently discussed his poor relationship with a particular manager, whom he described disparagingly and blamed for ailing departmental performance. When at work, rather than settling their differences amicably, George and his colleagues assessed their manager's competence in sharp, ruthless terms, and later confronted him with defiant aggression (Reid et al, 2018; Pyke, 1996). The ensuing argument formed part of a wider *masculinity contest* (Berdahl et al, 2018), where George's manager sought domination over colleagues he perceived as inferior. Resisting this, George challenged his manager and engaged in a deeply personal and protracted dispute over workplace autonomy (Hollander & Einwohner, 2004; Edwards, 1986). Confronting injustice is not inherently gendered, but George's actions towards his manager indicated a hidden organisational culture, where aggression denoted conformity to idealised norms. (Prokos & Padavic, 2002; Acker,

1990; Reid, 2015). Despite his initial subjugation, George benefited from his defiance, as his manager received an immediate temporary suspension. In an alternative organisational context, both parties may have received greater formal punishment, but George's aggression was seen as appropriate and proportionate, again indicating the embeddedness of masculine archetypes of defiance and aggression within Shelton's institutional structure.

Alongside acts of aggression and violence, masculinised behaviour also includes overt displays of heterosexuality, where men may amplify their attraction to women or seek to physically impose themselves on others. Discussing issues of sex and a sexualised incident which resulted in disciplinary action, Edward recalled another instance where he acted to dismiss a colleague and identify boundaries to sexualised bravado:

> Sex reared its ugly head at work sometimes unfortunately… you know, men would often go home during the evening shifts to make sure… that their wives weren't entertaining anyone else [Implying infidelity], you know… I remember on one occasion… there was a section of the works that went over the top of the canal, like this [Stacking his hands diagonally], and as it was a canal, people used to walk through… Now, every morning, she must have worked at where Festival Park is now, or in Hanley, but this woman walked through every morning. In the personnel department, we received a complaint that… as she walked past, someone had exposed themselves to her … so we did an investigation, and we found out who it was… I called him into a meeting, and I said, look, I can't let you stay, I'm going to have to let you go… and he says, well, what am I going to tell my wife? I said, oh… you know, we can say it was

> for poor time keeping, and you were warned previously. When his colleagues found out, they were furious and got the union involved, so, we… rather discretely said, this is what actually happened, and that… settled things down.
>
> Edward, Fuel Engineer, Health & Safety Manager

As few women worked at Shelton Bar, steelworkers predominantly interacted with women in domestic and leisurely environments, where they socialised and built interpersonal relationships. Respondents rarely mentioned women directly however, in which they made only vague and often unnamed references to their wives and family relationships. This makes Edward's contribution particularly valuable, as it revealed a variety of gendered behaviours. First, some men working at Shelton Bar monitored their wives by returning home during the evening: this being a subtle form of subjugation accepted and embedded within their occupational routine (Martin, 2006). By monitoring women, these men signalled and maintained their hierarchical position, and asserted their authority by policing spousal behaviour. Unexpectedly entering the home during working hours, these men accentuated and extended their power by exerting panoptic surveillance over their family, thereby constructing both the workplace and the home as spaces of masculine control (McDowell, 1989; Acker, 2004). Through such behaviour, members of steelworker communities also devalued women by questioning their commitment and sexual fidelity, thereby casting them as mischievous and deceitful actors requiring control (Gherardi, 1994).

Denoting these acts as ugly and unfortunate, Edward clearly found this activity problematic and disruptive to Shelton's operations. While it is not clear if he was criticising unfaithful women as underscoring this practice, his positions voiced

elsewhere during the interview encounter suggest disapproval towards the men and their distrust. Consequently, though his dissatisfaction also derived from men temporarily abandoning their responsibilities, Edward's comparative egalitarianism influenced his remarks. While other respondents commonly referred to their partner as 'the wife' during interview encounters, Edward mentioned his spouse by name, which afforded greater respect to his female partner. Similarly, he understood and criticised the issues posed by sexualised bravado and wished to remove sex from the workplace. Though disciplining more severe acts of misconduct, however, Edward did little to challenge problematic cultural practices and humour. This suggests a personal sense of futility or a lack of cultural authority needed to alter communal behaviour, although his pessimistic reflection may also stem from regret at having not presented a stronger challenge to his colleagues.

Within his contribution, Edward also described an incident involving indecent exposure which constituted a serious case of sexual harassment. In targeting a female passer-by, the perpetrator engaged in the overt sexualisation of female bodies (Linstead & Pullen, 2006). It is unclear if this person was alone or with colleagues when exposing himself, which makes forming definitive conclusions regarding his intent more difficult. Despite this, as he felt able to conduct this act at work, a culture of organisational masculinity is again insinuated (Acker, 1990). Whether done for sexual gratification or communal bravado, or indeed both of these outcomes, actions such as this demonstrate a clearly misogynistic desire to subordinate women. Furthermore, the perpetrator likely intended this act to strengthen his hierarchical position via an expression of heterosexuality (Connell, 2005; Paap, 2006; Martin, 2003).

Though Edward later dismissed this individual, the tentative way in which he communicated this decision indicated the strength of the communal hierarchy, as by quietly informing union delegates, the act of exposure was not publicly condemned, and the impact on the survivor played no role in the men's deliberation. However, Edward's willingness to employ formal discipline indicated a limit to acceptable forms of bravado and sexualised banter, in that the perpetrator 'crossed a line' when exposing himself. Though illegal and placing Shelton in danger of litigation, it is significant that a limit to acceptable behaviour was demonstrated, a view shared not just by managerial staff, but also by union representatives who possessed considerable influence among shop floor communities.

When exiting masculine occupational cultures, men must renegotiate their identities and domestic gender roles, which in turn alters their behaviour and daily routines. Discussing his retirement from industry, Frank contributed by outlining his struggle to adjust to a lack of male companionship:

> I struggled when I finished work, Harvey, erm, I missed it… I'd suddenly gone from dealing with… I'd been in an environment where… everybody, or… it was predominantly male, and I'd worked in that environment from 15, from me 15th birthday, right through, 50 years, and then suddenly… it's predominantly women… because [Laughs], my wife would have, you know, oh, so and so's coming around for coffee or, erm… let's go… shopping, which was… something I'd never done [Laughs], something I hadn't done, you know, I wasn't used to going around supermarkets or, I wasn't even used to going clothes shopping, erm, but suddenly it comes from… being in… I dunno if a macho environment

> is the right word, but… from an environment where it's predominantly men, to an environment where it isn't, and… well, you get used to it, I joined a… golf club, started playing golf, and that's obviously predominantly men, which I enjoy, I still do that.
>
> Frank, Boilermaker, ASB Union Representative

Retiring into environments predominantly occupied by women, Frank underwent a process of 'undoing' gender, where new experiences challenged and dismantled many aptitudes connected to industrial labour and male camaraderie (Deutsch, 2007; Ely & Meyerson, 2010). This involved becoming acquainted with the 'feminine' activities that enabled his former domestic absence, which included shopping for groceries and clothes, in addition to socialising with friends in a domestic setting. Separated from the hegemonic masculinities encountered during his industrial employment, Frank had little choice but to alter his behaviour, which led him to renegotiate his masculine identity in the absence of paid employment (de Visser et al, 2009).

Rather than becoming entirely 'undone', Frank's working-class masculinity was renegotiated and applied to the domestic sphere, where his role transitioned from the male breadwinner to involved familial companion (Hirschauer, 2001; Kelan, 2010; Garcia, 2021). Having successfully provided for his family, Frank stated his desire to spend more time with his wife and children after retirement by accompanying them on leisurely endeavours. Their perspectives on this arrangement are unclear in Frank's testimony, and, after prolonged absence, his newfound domestic enthusiasm may not have been wanted. Despite this, Frank stated his own desire to spend more time with his family, indicating that he remembered this decision as largely self-authored; while

for his family, this arrangement was compulsory. With retirement clearing his schedule, Frank was able to insert himself into his family's domestic affairs, and demonstrate his relative familial power in his ability to impose himself upon their routines. Stating his difficulty adjusting to life without work, Frank was challenged by his changing economic role, which placed him outside of a masculine hegemony that privileges young men (Dolan, 2011; Bowman et al, 2017). Accordingly, Frank balanced his new life with male companionship and joined a male-dominated golf club, where he might recreate the homosocial kinship experienced at Shelton and beyond (Kaplan, 2005).

The above analysis complements the hegemonic masculinities debate, as although a powerful masculine identity influenced behaviour at Shelton Bar, different cultural interpretations of masculinity were present. For example, by punishing his colleague, Edward at least understood that direct sexual abuse towards women was unacceptable, and thus deviated from occupational cultures condoning sexist bravado (Iacuone, 2005; Paap, 2006). Enforcing disciplinary action indicated limits to masculinised behaviours, even if they exposed differing perspectives on acceptable conduct at work. However, Edward's discrete approach to announcing this decision suggested an unwillingness to cause further disruption, which highlighted the strength of the men's social hierarchy. Furthermore, neither Edward nor the union delegates informed the police of the sexual assault occurring at their workplace, while each party appeared more concerned for the implications upon the perpetrator's home life. In light of this, it cannot be said that Edward and the union defined this limit to masculine bravado themselves, but that they instead sought to protect their workplace by quietly disposing of the liability. Despite this, differences between managerial and shop-floor grades of staff were

demonstrated, which indicated alterations in the enactment of gender identity and how these performances afforded status in Shelton's gendered hierarchy.

Scope to 'undo' and 're-do' socialised behaviour also emerged, though this was contingent upon appropriate environmental circumstances and the bar here was very low. Men often conform to different norms encountered as they age (Calasanti & King, 2005), which suggests potential to negotiate and invoke differing versions of masculinity (de Visser et al, 2009). As an example of this, during his retirement, Frank negotiated feminine companionship with an enhanced emotional commitment to his wife and family, in which he reappropriated aspects of a paternalistic masculine identity. This reflected the heterosexual and paternal undertones of his previous familial relationships, where his identity as a masculine provider transitioned into a masculine companion. Efforts to reshape his gender performance indicated engagement with 'multiple masculinities' (Schrock & Schwalbe, 2009; Bridges & Pascoe, 2014), as while Frank attempted to reproduce masculinised relationships, adaptation to new environments and activities was necessary; although these too were bound to a wider masculinised framework of acceptable conduct. Consequently, though a hegemonic steelworker identity dominated the men's communal hierarchy, scope to manoeuvre and negotiate gender norms offered opportunities for resistance and a degree of autonomy over identity formation and expression. Changing forms of masculinity can still be problematic however, as greater domestic presence may predict renewed spousal domination.

## 5.4 – Occupational Danger: “A Pile of Burning Rags”

In traditional and contemporary industries, workers in manual and technical roles are subject to an array of occupational hazards, which include extreme heat, moving mechanical parts, falls from height, and chemical poisoning (Johnston & McIvor, 2004; McIvor, 2020). Within these roles, men have traditionally seen poorer health outcomes than women, however, men are often reluctant to express pain or seek medical attention, as doing so “can reduce a man's status in masculine hierarchies, shift his power relations with women, and raise his self-doubts about masculinity” (Charmaz, 1995, p. 268, see also Courtenay, 2000; O’Brien et al, 2005). Male bodies are subsequently evaluated according to their physical fitness, strength and technical competence, as these factors indicate toughness and a willingness to tolerate harsh conditions (Monaghan, 2002b; 2002a; Wacquant, 1995). While danger can result in death or cut short workers’ ability to earn over the long term (Brown & Coupland, 2015), occupational hazards can facilitate identity formation (Chávez & Altman, 2017; Hanna et al, 2018). At Shelton, the wide range of occupational hazards forced men to acknowledge danger and negotiate its presence within their daily routines.

As the following discussion will demonstrate, the methods used to cope with danger were highly gendered and contributed to a masculine hegemony by encouraging the celebration of risk taking (Connell, 2005). Danger thus influenced the steelworkers’ social hierarchy, as those working on the shop floor sought to prove their masculinity via stoicism, physical strength and mental fortitude, with sometimes fatal results. These findings further evidence the disciplinary nature of working-class masculinity, where danger is accepted and reproduced as a form of currency. To begin this discussion,

Charles recalled witnessing two fatal accidents on site and revealed how these events affected him:

> First week I was there, I saw a… I was walking down to the mill, and there was a guy lying on the track with his right leg severed, he'd been run over in the night by a loco and nobody had seen him, you know, I thought, Christ, where have I come to? Then there was another one where erm, they were doing some… because what they did with the Kaldo, the Kaldo was like a big cement mixer basically, same shape as a cement mixer with a ladle, and they poured the iron into the ladle, and one of the hooks came off… it just twisted like a piece of cotton, and it all… all the iron came through one of the metal cabins, and there's people in there, and there was a lad named [Name] at one end, and the door was over there, he had to run through molten pig iron… when he got to the end he was down to his knees, just burnt him away, unbelievable, then he hit the end rail, went over the top… we just thought he was a pile of burning rags.
>
> Charles, Fuel Engineer, Personnel Manager

Breaking from his usual joviality, Charles delivered this contribution with a seriousness previously unseen, which indicated his shock and trauma at witnessing the death of two colleagues. These events introduced Charles to the hegemonic masculinity present at the steelworks, where the need for mental fortitude, physical strength and endurance created an acceptance of extreme workplace danger (Connell, 2005; Chávez & Altman, 2017; Ely & Meyerson, 2010). Expectations to engage in risky behaviours contributed to the masculinised social hierarchy, as danger was present within the steelworkers' daily

routines and thus how they understood their peers' technical proficiency and competence (Hinojosa 2010; Iacuone, 2005). To perform and progress in their roles, workers would subsequently encounter and accept risk and hazards without hesitation or shying away, this being reflected in Charles' continued tenure at the steelworks despite his frightened internal monologue.

While stoicism can be explained by the need for vigilance in an inherently dangerous workplace, overt masculine displays of strength and risk-taking remain highly gendered practices. To prove their personal worth and suitability for communal membership, the steelworkers supressed their fear and emotions, and this underpinned Charles' shocked, but unemotional recollection of severe injury and death on site. When discussing the fatal incident involving molten iron however, Charles then described how he and those around him ran to take cover, causing him to suffer mild scrapes and bruises as they all scrambled to safety. Interestingly, this indicated that it was acceptable to show fear in the moment, but that these fears were supressed once accidents had been investigated and resolved. Consequently, how Charles narrated this incident when in the presence of others was more important to his communal membership, thereby influencing his stoical recollection of the fatal event.

With much of their work involving danger, workers in the iron and steel industry invoked indifference and stoicism as coping mechanisms, which allowed those engaging with occupational hazards to minimise and ridicule the dangers they faced (Haas, 1977). This also allowed workers to control labour processes by influencing entry requirements to dangerous tasks, in which they used indifference to danger as a form of cultural capital to signify their masculinity (Ibid., 1977). Subordinating those afraid of danger,

steelworkers preserved their gendered hierarchy by safeguarding important roles for those deemed 'man enough'. Demonstrating this process in action, Arnold detailed his recruitment into the mill's finishing end, where his acceptance was conditional on filling a role opened by a severe injury:

> There'd been quite a bad accident in the main plant, and erm, [Name] had lost one leg and his other leg was knackered, and erm… I was walking down the canteen with the foreman, he says [Arnold], what do you want do? I said I don't mind, I'll go work in there if you want. He went… really? Yeah. What, 3 shifts? I went, yeah. He said… start on days Monday then. I was like… days? Can't I do noons or nights? No, start on days on C shift… He says, you've heard about [Injured colleague]? You've got his job. Right, ok [Laughs], and that's how it was, that was the steelworks, the brutality of it, I suppose… But erm, I'm actually one of the few that's got their digits to be honest, there's loads of lads who'd got fingers missing… I broke them two [Pointing at fingers], smashed the end of them two, erm… so, it was part of the job really, just being clumsy, it wasn't anything what went wrong, it was just… you not being sharp enough. But loads of lads had got, loads of lads were like that [Places hands on the table, tucking in fingers to simulate missing digits], but it was good, part of the job.
>
> Arnold, Finishing End Operative

Combining his managerial authority with languages of masculinity, the foreman pressured Arnold to begin working on day shifts, which created an expectation of accepting danger and arduous labour. Arnold's agreement completed the first phase of

an initiation process. To avoid ostracization and protect his earnings, Arnold acknowledged and accepted the brutality of his situation, and adopted a veil of stoicism in an effort to signal his masculinity. Engaging in behaviours and beliefs legitimised across the works, Arnold entered the mill with enthusiasm to signal viability to his foreman and new colleagues (Schrock & Schwalbe, 2009; Ezzell, 2012). From this, Arnold was able to progress and join the night-shift workers, who received greater remuneration for their unsociable working hours.

Despite offering group status, stereotypically masculine behaviour often endangers men's health and wellbeing, while the reproduction of workplace inequality contributes to the 'slow violence' experienced by disadvantaged groups (Hanna et al, 2018; Nixon, 2011). Though injuries are unavoidable in heavy industries, Arnold's account of this being "good" and "part of the job" indicated a willing acceptance of harm. This demonstrates the potential for danger and injury to discipline perceived wrongdoing, as Arnold insinuated that injured colleagues were lacking in skill or were clumsy when working. These remarks reflect the cultural importance of technical proficiency, as by narrating personal injury as individuals "not being sharp enough", Arnold associated accidents not with the inherent dangers posed by heavy machinery, but with individual failings. While community members condemned excessive or overtly dangerous behaviours, danger remained influential in the formation of masculine identities, as those operating without fault or injury were perceived as highly competent. Accordingly, occupational communities forced workers to accept and celebrate danger, and in doing so, workers like Arnold reproduced danger's role within the community.

Accepting risk also helped to form the boundaries of occupational groups, as this allowed men to resist institutional governance hierarchies imposed by management.

Informed by his tenure as the site health and safety manager, Edward discussed the dangers of noise at Shelton's finishing end and how men working there neglected their protective equipment:

> Noise was a real problem in the finishing end of the rolling mill… When the beams and columns had been cut to length, they'd got to cool and be straightened, and they were pushed across… a bank of railway lines, and as the erm, the steel was pushed across the banks it made a lot of noise, so much so that people as far across the other side of the valley would complain about the noise, you know, particularly at night, very, very loud, 117 decibels, which is knocking on a bit, it's like a jet engine, you know. People working there would go deaf very quickly, so they had to wear erm, very good ear defenders, look at this you see [He takes out his hearing aid momentarily], and I wore very good ear defenders, so… that's it, everybody was given ear defenders, but it's no use giving somebody a pair of ear defenders and saying, wear those or else you'll go deaf, because they won't, because everybody else goes deaf, they won't [Simulating indifference], so you've got to train them.
>
> Edward, Fuel Engineer, Health & Safety Manager

As Shelton's health and safety manager, Edward, occupied an outlier position due to his enforcement of procedures, training schemes and formal discipline that directly threatened assumptions of what it meant to be a man at the steelworks. Unprompted,

another respondent stated his displeasure with “that fucking annoying health and safety guy”, which suggested that at least some steelworkers regarded limits over their personal autonomy with contempt. Despite his peripheral position to the shop floor occupational community, Edward articulated feelings of privilege in his retention as the health and safety manager, and narrated a strong desire to improve workplace practices (Ely & Meyerson, 2010).

When discussing the deafening noise produced by the rolling mill, Edward noted the indifference many workers displayed towards their protective equipment (Arcury et al, 2014; Johnson et al, 1998). While appearing counterproductive to their longevity as family breadwinners, indifference to danger was incorporated into the steelworkers’ hegemonic masculinity, which rewarded conformity with communal affirmation and status (Iacuone, 2005). By demonstrating indifference to, or outright avoidance of safety procedures, workers signalled that they were ‘sharp enough’ for the job (Paap, 2006). Almost all respondents mentioned the intense squeal emitted as steel bars passed over the elevated skid banks; sounds which were a pervasive presence with obvious health implications. Despite causing nuisance within the wider community, many fondly remembered the sounds of Shelton Bar, which also shaped the identity of Stoke-on-Trent as an industrial city (Lewis, 2020; Adams et al, 2006). Therefore, nostalgic memories also contributed to respondents’ acceptance and dismissal of various occupational hazards, and led many to articulate a passive inevitability to the dangers they faced.

In removing his hearing aid to demonstrate degrading health, Edward emphasised the bodily connection between danger and masculinity. Physical health, appearance and

mobility have important symbolic meanings, as strong muscular development signifies an ability to labour competently and efficiently (Thurnell-Read & Parker, 2008). The ageing process slowly erodes men's conformity to these norms however, as an ailing body reduces an individual's ability to labour, which leads men to enact their age in a similar manner to gender (Perrott, 2019; Calasanti & King, 2005). Although age can signify experience, different expectations fall upon older men, including exiting employment to make way for younger entrants and thus reinforcing the hegemonic preference for young, able-bodied men (Monaghan, 2002a; 2002b). Even in professional settings, appearance and physicality remain important, with fit, healthy bodies implying proficiency and longevity (Riach & Cutcher, 2014). Though muscular development is superfluous to service-oriented occupations, its symbolic value remains, as fitness again signals an ability to consume and labour under capitalism (Nayak 2006; Bauman, 2005).

By articulating a strong stance on occupational health and safety, Edward demonstrated an alternative, managerial approach to masculinity, one separate from the norms practiced by the shop floor workers he endeavoured to keep safe. While Arnold and his colleagues sought to exhibit their masculinity, Edward placed greater emphasis upon bodily preservation; enough for his more performatively masculine colleagues on the shop floor to marginalise him from their social network. Appearing untroubled by this, Edward narrated his marginalisation from colleagues against his contemporary health, having exited the steelworks with only minor hearing loss. Digits and limbs intact, Edward lives an active life, where he maintains a healthy body and a functional mind.

Other male managers found different ways to demonstrate a masculine identity, as evidenced by Jonathan in the following contribution. He recalled being approached by recruiters during the 1978 downsizing, though when he visited their sites for job interviews, he was unimpressed by their comparatively smaller machinery and capabilities. Invoking the size and power of Shelton's operations, he commented:

> It wasn't just [Pottery company], I was offered a job at [Company name] foundry, which was melting steel of course, erm… in an electric arc furnace. I went there once, and they were ever so good, they took me around, and I thought… the boilers are like a kettle… and the furnaces were so small compared… even there… and it was quite a hefty place, even that seemed like… playing with dinky toys, and I thought… no… I don't want go there, and that's a similar feeling I had for [Pottery company], and they offered me quite a lot… I said, will I have my own office? Yeah, we'll do that for you. What about my salary? Yeah, we'll match your salary. Hmm, very good. But I didn't want go, I thought, I've seen pottery kilns, I know what temperatures they run at, they don't have massive cranes… We had a crane in the mill that could lift 200 tonnes [Smug smile], whew! [Rolling his head in a clockwise motion], It was as big as this room… you can see what I'm saying, can't you? It spoils you for everything else…
>
> Jonathan, Fuel Engineer, Mill Manager

In his mid and later career as a senior manager in the mill, Jonathan was insulated from many occupational hazards, which influenced a different interpretation of masculinity and its relationship with danger (Connell, 2005; Chávez & Altman, 2017). Differing from

his craft and process colleagues, Jonathan instead celebrated the size and power of the works itself, rather than his personal engagement with the extremes of steel production. Jonathan compared the capabilities of adjacent industries to “dinky toys”, thereby infantilising the seemingly unimpressive machinery of local industry, and invoking a ‘mine is bigger than yours’ attitude. These remarks express immense pride in Shelton’s facilities both before and after the downsizing, and suggest the coexistence of multiple masculinities across departmental occupational communities (Schrock & Schwalbe, 2009; Eastman, 2011; Adams, 2022).

Jonathan’s broader focus upon Shelton as an entity is significant, as his reverence suggests an acute awareness and vigilance towards potential danger, though an active desire to avoid encountering these perils; thereby removing the embodied link to danger and potential death whilst sustaining its masculine associations (Martin, 2006; 2003; Monaghan, 2002a; 2002b). Though this is to be expected in a role largely removed from occupational hazards, Jonathan invoked his seniority to offset his distance from others. Instead, he linked the work’s stature with his own rational authority, and subsequently expressed masculine archetypes in a manner fundamentally different to his shop-floor colleagues.

For other managerial staff, some attempted to reinsert danger into their advisory roles, which led them to emphasise the dangers they faced earlier in their careers. This emerged within another of Charles’ contributions, where he again reflected upon widespread indifference to danger:

> On the blast furnace, erm, if you made too much gas, you had to burn it off, and if you burn carbon monoxide… in the atmosphere, you can’t see it because

> of the blue flame, so erm, there was a chimney, it was 3 foot wide it was, steel chimney… with a ladder outside, and erm… it wouldn't happen now, and there's me and [Edward]… me and him were the only two that would dare go up it, and we had to go up to run a cable up to the top, to put a thermocouple in the flame, so we knew that it was on, you know, and when you got up there, it used to sway… an inch every ten mile an hour of wind… you know, so you were like this at the top of the ladder [Swaying side to side, laughing]… Some of the things they did then, absolutely no chance now… absolutely no chance, but the lads weren't bothered… and asbestos, you go somewhere, and you could be covered in asbestos, you come in… and blow it all off.
>
> Charles, Fuel Engineer, Personnel Manager

In this anecdote, Charles discussed tasks he completed when employed as a fuel engineer; a role which he performed for around half of his tenure at the steelworks. In claiming he and Edward were the only people willing to climb the narrow chimney, Charles revived a historic masculinity contest with the other men, in which he aimed to prove his willingness to face dangers that others avoided (Berdahl et al, 2018). This reinserted danger into a predominantly advisory role, which enabled Charles to build cultural capital and offset his distance from the extremes of steel production. This was important for the fuel engineers who later progressed into management, as danger was less present within their daily routines. Emphasising experiences of danger in later narration, those like Charles lessened the communal disadvantages accompanying their managerial progression, as this enabled Charles and others to establish similarity and empathy with shop floor colleagues.

However, by acknowledging that these practices are absent from contemporary workplaces, Charles recognised the fluidity of masculinity, where gender performance is renegotiated in line with organisational and societal change (Filteau, 2014). Rather than criticising the rise in health and safety standards, Charles made these comments when reflecting upon the absurdity of former working practices. Though accepting the identified risks at the time, this contemporary reflection indicated changing interpretations of masculinity, where advances in workplace safety contrast from unnecessary danger, thereby challenging identities grounded in accepting and navigating risk (Ely & Meyerson, 2010; Abrahamsson & Johansson, 2020). Scope to 'undo' and renegotiate gender is again demonstrated, as though some respondents continued to celebrate workplace danger, others reconstituted certain practices as archaic and unnecessary (Deutsch, 2007; Peukert, 2018; Garcia, 2021).

This analysis does not infer that the steelworkers were intentionally reckless, but instead highlighted a gendered culture that embraced occupational danger. While not intentionally harmful, this culture remained problematic, as men unnecessarily placed themselves in danger to achieve admiration from their peers. Providing feedback on a pilot study conducted for my MSc postgraduate dissertation, Jonathan was particularly disapproving towards commentary on Shelton's occupational hazards, leading him to insist that British Steel were "red hot" on health and safety, especially towards the end of the work's operational life. He supported this claim by referring to the extensive health and safety reports and documentation he had kept in his personal collection of files, which indicated an increased focus upon quality and managerial control as Shelton aged.

Also inferred is that men attempted to maintain a connection to danger even after progressing into managerial roles, or where in advisory positions, as how men spoke about their roles and experiences mattered to their hierarchical position. Consequently, those able to narrate stoic stories and present unharmed bodies signalled both masculinity and technical competence, which boosted their esteem among peers. Alongside the tangible harms associated with occupational danger, this again highlights a disciplining quality of community and of masculinity, where men sought conformity to idealised norms in order to realise status and achieve upward mobility. This is a process which continues into the present day, as although some respondents reflected negatively upon danger, many continued to express indifference and pride in their toleration of occupational hazards.

In line with Adams' (2022) and Ely & Meyerson's (2010) work on offshore oil rigs, this section has demonstrated that despite the presence of a hegemonic masculine identity, multiple masculinities coexisted at Shelton. Both craft and process workers subscribed to masculinised ideals of accepting and dismissing danger, and appealed to technical proficiency when explaining injuries. Managerial staff differed in their approach to danger, in which they articulated the need for proper safeguarding through preventative regulations and protective equipment. Despite good intentions, the protection of colleagues generated distance between managers and manual workers, as training, protective equipment and discipline challenged the logic of masculinised working practices. Reflected in Edward's narratives on the use of ear defenders, this revealed differing interpretations and approaches to health and safety practices, and therefore to masculine identities. To summarise, though the steelworkers were not

homogenous, a hegemonic interpretation of masculinity existed across Shelton's departmental occupational communities, which led men to perform their gender in a manner reflecting these idealised norms.

## 5.5 – Dirty Work & Taint Management: Fine Red Dust

A burgeoning literature surrounds the issue of 'dirty work', possessing a central argument that while those engaged in dirty work face stigmatisation, physical and symbolic dirt is reappropriated and mobilised as a cultural resource. This allows occupational groups to create a shared identity offering shelter from the humiliation of social othering, whereby "sacrifice and self-denial may therefore give value and meaning to work" (Simpson et al, 2014, p.767; see also Hughes et al, 2017; McMurray & Ward, 2014). For the steelworkers, extreme heat, physical grime and harmful pollutants bolstered their appeals to masculine archetypes, which created pride in their sacrifice and arduous labour. While many respondents acknowledged Shelton's harsh conditions, these did not dampen their occupational identities, as much like physical danger, dirt influenced the creation and maintenance of their community and shared identity.

The following discussion will demonstrate this process and argue that masculine archetypes offered a coping mechanism against filth and environmental risk. However, as the act of 'getting dirty' has become devalued following industrial decline, respondents' continuous process of taint management enters a challenging new phase. This section argues that respondents' continued pride forms part of a defence

mechanism, in which men like the steelworkers of Shelton Bar preserve their identities as new moral stigma falls upon carbon intensive industries, and coal and heavy fuels are rendered as 'matter out of place' (Douglas, 1966). This reveals a retrospective taint management process as central to the memory-work of the interviewees, where those formerly engaged in dirty work sought to retain their positive reframing.

For many steelworkers, the manner in which they rationalised dirt and poor working conditions reflected their approach to workplace danger. Arnold demonstrated this when reflecting upon the working conditions at Shelton's finishing end, where he approached dirt and hard labour with dismissive inevitability:

> Dirty, noisy… horrible really… erm, depressing, cold in winter, hot in summer, ridiculous, erm, they were horrible, but… it's what we did, you know what I mean, it was the job, you get on with it. I work outside now so, I'm pretty much the same anyway [Laughs], erm… it was dirty and horrible, noisy, hard work, physical hard work, you were mauling your tits off at times… when you think how thick them chains were to carry that 12 tonne of steel, and you've gotta drag them out of the wagons and stuff, erm, it was physical hard work, but… it's what you do [Shrugs shoulders].
>
> Arnold, Finishing End Operative

Arnold described his proximity to physical grime at the finishing end by detailing extremes of heat and the filth created by hot metal bars. For him, such "depressing" working conditions clearly diminished his job satisfaction (Jervis, 2001; Baran et al, 2012). While these conditions imply a tainted identity, respondents like Arnold

remained proud of their former workplace and community, as they enjoyed status both within and outside of the works. The steelworkers' self-appointed role as family breadwinners provided another motivation to accept difficult conditions, as the fulfilment of this perceived duty was framed as a personal sacrifice offset by the enrichment of their family (Simpson et al, 2014; see previous discussion on male breadwinning). Accordingly, Arnold accepted dirt with an attitude of inevitability, leading him to shrug at the thought of grime and manual labour. The ease with which Arnold dismissed his experiences indicated proficient taint management, again leading him to appeal to masculine archetypes in an effort to reframe his role in positive terms (Tracy & Scott, 2006; Hughes et al, 2017). Remaining outwardly stoic and indifferent, Arnold fetishized his arduous toil in exchange for high wages and communal membership, and basked in the occupational and domestic status this afforded. Therefore, steelworkers asserted and broadcast their social status and generous remuneration to eliminate the stigma of physical grime, which required intense mental fortitude as they disassociated from the physical demands of their roles.

Like occupational danger, dirt was reappropriated and rationalised differently between departmental communities. Demonstrating this difference among craft worker communities, Frank recalled the red dust produced by Shelton's blast furnaces:

> So I'd have a shower at work, change into me going home clothes, get home, depending upon what time of day have a meal or, but I'd always, always have a bath… either before or after I'd eaten… and if we were going out in the evening, the dress code then was a white shirt and tie, erm, if my wife and I were going out with friends… you'd see around the inside of the cuff… and

> around the collar… would be a red line when I took me white shirt off, and it was the red dust that come off, and it was still coming out of your pores… you know, and that used to worry me a bit, that erm, I used to think, flipping heck, how's it… it must be getting into your system, either in your lungs or into… just into your body tissue, it must have been. But anyway, having said all that Harvey, I still enjoyed working there [Laughs].
>
> Frank, Boilermaker, ASB Union Representative

Employed as a craft boilermaker, Frank constructed and maintained boilers, gas holders and other vessels at the works, which produced hazards primarily in the form of smoke and fume inhalation. Accordingly, Frank cited many instances of intense grime caused by heavy fuel oil and the by-products of welding, in addition to the ever-present red dust mentioned above. Although concerned about the implications of metal particulates, Frank frequently praised Shelton and his colleagues, where he drew upon social class and masculinity to negotiate his challenging working conditions (Slutskaya et al, 2016; Hughes et al, 2017). Different experiences of danger and dirt subsequently altered Frank's taint management process. While still drawing from masculine archetypes of stoic indifference, Frank focused less upon the immediacies of overt occupational hazards, and instead sought to rationalise the prolonged effects of bodily poisoning.

Communal hierarchy also emerged in the different approaches to dirt, with processes workers affording currency to their tolerance of imminent grime and danger, while craft workers invoked the specificity of their trade. Accordingly, while masculinity offered a shared coping mechanism against arduous labour and dirt (Ackroyd & Crowdy, 1990;

Simpson et al, 2014), differences emerged between departments and grades of staff; which indicated multiple masculinities spanning the internal hierarchy, in addition to localised methods of assessing occupational dangers and their cultural implications. Frank expressed shock and concern for his health after the continual absorption of iron dust, which led him to articulate a level of concern unseen in process workers. This reflected what Rob Nixon has described as the 'slow violence' of 'insidious' dangers connected to heavy industry, dangers that followed men like Frank home as they leaked from his body (Nixon, 2011). Separated from the heat and hazards of steel production, chemical poisoning lingered and gradually degraded craft workers' health, thus effecting their bodies differently to the external scrapes, knocks and breakages sustained by process workers. Later in his narratives, Frank dismissed the slow dangers of fume and metal inhalation, and instead voiced enjoyment and pride in his work; with his celebration underpinned by the task content and skill base of his specific trade, alongside communal membership and fraternity.

When recalling the conditions at Shelton's finishing end, Bill narrated similar experiences outlined previously by Arnold and Eliot. However, Bill was far more descriptive when discussing his tenure at Scunthorpe's ironworks, where he worked as a furnacemen before retiring in 2013. Discussing the extreme conditions he faced working on the blast furnaces, he stated:

> Horrible… I mean, if you can imagine the hottest day you've ever come across standing outside… in the sun, it was like that, and you have to wear something akin to an Axminister carpet to protect you from iron splashes and everything… there's the fumes, and it's dirty, and… you were governed,

> everything was governed by the cast times, erm, you cast your furnace, your furnace would start blowing, it's brilliant… I mean, how can I put it, if you ever go on YouTube and watch the starting sequence to The Deer Hunter, the film with Robert De Niro… that'll give you an idea of what it was like… Yeah, the furnace would blow, you'd got a… hydraulic clay gun, so you'd seal the tap off, and then you'd leave it… it would blow because the furnace was empty, so you'd gun it up, the levels would go back up again, and then you would go out and… big hydraulic drills, and drill a hole out and tap it again.
>
> Bill, Finishing End Operative, Furnaceman, ISTC Union Representative

After Shelton's closure in 2000, Bill transferred to Scunthorpe steelworks, where he worked firstly in the plate mill, and then later in the ironworks as a furnaceman. When asked about conditions on the blast furnaces, Bill was quick to state his disgust by noting the extreme heat, danger, and intense grime caused by fumes, slag and clay. Despite this, Bill discussed the visual brilliance of the work, where masculine archetypes of strength and endurance underpinned a toleration of extreme conditions. Furnacemen's necessity within the steel making process also afforded greater communal status, which boosted Bill's identity as a masculine provider and hard worker (Braedley, 2009; Simpson et al, 2014; Hughes et al, 2017). Bill remained steadfast in his condemnation of furnace work however, in which he appeared unable to offset searing heat with his higher wages and occupational privilege.

Bill's experience also provides evidence of the stress that new work regimes and workplace intensification place on occupational communities. Alongside poor working conditions, work intensification resulted from strict cast timings, which tightly governed

Bill's labour to ensure continuous production. While influenced by the operational need to release molten metal and its by-products, intensification and strict time management are indicative of tightening workplace control, where efficient production erodes employee autonomy and health (Bacon et al, 2010; Caddick et al, 2017; Hughes & Dobbins, 2021). Maintaining a high molten output to feed continuous casting operations similarly led to labour alienation, while also increasing the physical dirt encountered by Bill and his colleagues. Unable to normalise the conditions faced on the blast furnaces, Bill rejected identification with the role and sought an early exit from the industry (Schaubroeck et al, 2018). Comparatively, Bill reminisced fondly when discussing Shelton's finishing end, as though danger and dirt were present, he regarded working conditions there as favourable when compared to Scunthorpe's ironworks.

As Bill's comments indicate, taint management is a difficult process to realise, as consistent interaction with poor conditions can challenge efforts to rationalise and reappropriate dirt, danger and alienation. Consequently, those with access to a coherent or shared workplace identity may still struggle to rationalise labour which interacts with pollutants and corrosive discourses. Also struggling against poor conditions and alienation, Eliot described the repetitive process of loading finished steel for transport in the 1990s. Though he did not discuss dirt in this excerpt, his commitment to Shelton and his paid labour wavered as he remembered repetition and predictability:

> They [Steel bars] were dragged across the banks by these things that sticked up, skids they were called, and anyway, they were put inside a hole, and the next one come along and was stacked on top of it, so they made a stack, and

> then that was lashed on by the overhead crane and sent onto the rail freight which was where I was. So you'd sit there waiting for them to stack up, and there'd be two rows in a lift, which would be 10 tonnes, and then it would come across, and then it would be lowered down over the rail freight, and my job would be to position it, and then pull the chains out, which was obviously… because they were heavy chains, you know what I mean, [Sharp inhale] it was hard work. But that was a typical shift, and that was repetitive, you know what I'm saying.
>
> Eliot, Finishing End Operative, Crane Driver

Echoing Arnold's experiences, Eliot recalled the physicality of lifting heavy chains and moving hot metal into place, which required physical strength and endurance. However, Eliot labelled this process as repetitive and described the monotony of waiting for steel to be stacked and loaded in the same predictable pattern. Encompassing not just the minimisation and reworking of dirt and stigma, taint management also includes the negotiation of alienation, where the degradation of an individual's identity and self-esteem is rationalised against a consoling narrative. Acknowledging the arduous physicality of their employment, steelworkers at Shelton Bar valued the perceived honesty and dignity of a tough day of work, and so avoided the emasculation of unemployment (Charlesworth, 2000; Connell, 2000). Moreover, their role as familial providers added additional moral value to their employment, as by tolerating the alienation of their labour, communal admiration was granted in meeting masculine archetypes (Sayer, 2000; Townsend, 2002; McDowell, 2003). The boredom Eliot felt was subsequently renegotiated through narratives of sacrifice, honesty and

paternalism, subsequently allowing him to maintain a positive outlook in the face of dirt and hard labour.

While this personal and communal value enabled some to manage their wage compulsion, others remained aware of their physically denigrating relationship with work, leading to aforementioned feelings of inevitability and repetition. Variation in task content later predicted participants' job satisfaction, though it is clear that symbolic value was key to respondents' identification. Eliot's boredom and grim working conditions question the inherent value of his labour however, as while offering remuneration and familial security, work at the finishing end led to his slow alienation via repetitive, deskilled tasks (Braverman, 1974). Admitting that his typical shift was repetitive and boring, Eliot tacitly engaged with debate over the value of his labour, where his memories of long, tiresome shifts were set against the familial security they provided. To cope through dirt and tedium, men like Eliot attached their own meanings to work and community membership, again indicating a process of taint management through gender performance.

Despite poor conditions, respondents remained largely positive in their narratives of working at Shelton Bar, with many articulating fulfilment across their careers. Following the UK's industrial decline, the meanings attached to occupational dirt and taint have changed, with the moral value of 'getting dirty' subordinated against the cleanliness and purity of professional service employment (Bolton & Houlihan, 2009). Accordingly, traditional industries have become renegotiated as morally tainted environments, particularly in light of their incompatibility with low-carbon futures (Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999; 2002; Douglass, 1966). This has been acknowledged by respondents, with one

mocking contemporary rejections of coal as a power source. Resisting stigmatisation, many renewed their commitment to classed and gendered identities, which in turn influenced celebrations of their resolve against harsh conditions and their position as familial breadwinners. Positive receptions to grime and graft constituted a wider defence mechanism against industrial decline, which led to a retrospective taint management process. Like those employed in stigmatised roles, respondents worked hard to maintain their dignity by offsetting dirt against enhanced communal and domestic status. While others celebrated rising workplace standards and safety, this accompanied appeals to economic and environmental progress, rather than a rejection of their former occupational experiences.

## 5.6 – Chapter Conclusion

While at work, men gained status via aggression and overt displays of strength and heterosexuality, which created a powerful hegemonic masculinity. This dominant gender performance was most pronounced in workers' attitudes towards occupational danger and dirt, as how community members responded to and subsequently narrated these artefacts impacted their status among colleagues. The completion of long hours and the utilisation of gendered language also inferred status however, which again led to specific interpretations of manhood at the steelworks. Accordingly, steelworkers at Shelton Bar adopted masculinised behaviours as a form of currency and attributed communal privilege to those who willingly embraced danger.

Differences emerged between manual and managerial staff, as while craft and process workers embraced and reproduced archetypal masculine performances, management used their organisational authority to enforce procedures, training and disciplinary action. Disruption to communal autonomy disadvantaged managerial staff in shop floor communal hierarchies, which meant that despite their advantageous organisational position, workers often viewed management as emasculated and different to their manual peers. Masculinity was critical to this social hierarchy and privileged those who conformed to masculine norms while excluding perceived 'others'. Despite this, differing approaches to danger and dirt indicated different interpretations of masculinity, which undermine an interpretation of the steelworkers as a singular homogenous community; further evidencing the layered and factious nature of occupational communities.

Beneath the steelmen's pride and bravado lay a disciplining undercurrent. With men gaining status and power through conformity to masculinised norms, autonomy over identity formation was severely limited. To achieve both communal membership and tangible career gains, workers signalled their masculinity in a commitment to long hours, indifference to arduous labour, and in the deployment of technical proficiency. This had the simultaneous effect of binding men to their work, thereby creating a culture of long hours endorsed by management. Due to the steelworkers' position as familial breadwinners, many felt pressure to maximise their working hours, which often had detrimental impacts upon their familial relationships. Steelworkers subsequently conceptualised their domestic role as economic providers, which led to the dereliction of their share of household labour and childcare responsibilities. In an effort to reclaim

a positive framing of their roles, respondents reappropriated dangerous and repetitive labour as noble and for the betterment of their family, which reproduced an understanding of themselves as masculine providers and hard workers.

Although bravado and breadwinning allowed many to attribute meaning to their work, uncritical acceptance of danger and dirt condemned men to brutal conditions. These cultural meanings continue to underpin respondents' positive assessments of the works, as despite shifting societal narratives regarding male breadwinning and carbon intensive industries, traditional gendered values remain pertinent to the dwindling industrial working-class.

# Chapter 6 – Managing Decline: Management & The Community

## 6.1 – Empirical Themes: Managerial Identity & 'Organisational History'

Many behaviourist analyses have concluded that managers employ agency in the narrations they craft and articulate when communicating, delegating tasks and interacting with staff (Watson, 2008; Collinson, 2003; Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003). With greater expectations regarding professionalism and leadership, managers must place additional effort into controlling their emotions at work, where they are required to present a sense of self congruent with organisational aims (Hill, 1992; Parkin, 1993; Fineman, 2000). This must be balanced against a need to signal legitimacy and manage personal loyalties against the protection of their employer's capital (Clarke et al, 2009; Bruner, 1990; Somers, 1994). Navigating additional responsibility suggests reflexive negotiation and articulations of identity, which involve conscious efforts to present different versions of the self.

A Foucauldian approach to identity problematises much of this agency however, as this approach argues that managers are instead subject to alternative and competing epistemologies of the self. As managerial work requires closer alignment with organisational norms and objectives, managers are influenced to enact behaviours conducive to capital accumulation (du Gay, 1996; Fenton & Langley, 2011). While agency is seen in varying forms of resistance and unease with competing demands (Foucault, 1980; 1988), discourses of effective leadership and commercial interests influence managers more acutely and underpin the symbolic knowledges by which they are assessed (Ford & Harding, 2007; Rost, 1991). Consequently, personal ambiguity and

insecurity results not from a conscious juggling of performances, but rather the ongoing negotiation of competing organisational knowledges, where diverging hierarchical priorities result in split loyalties and isolation.

Managers themselves can also wield organisational knowledges and can similarly craft narratives to exercise power over others. When influencing organisational culture for example, management can draw upon organisational history to craft expedient representations of the past, in which history is used as a means to "rebut certain practices and legitimate others" and "revive successful legacies from the past" (Foster et al, 2017, p. 1181; see also Foster et al 2011; Brunninge, 2009). By selectively remembering and forgetting historical events and influential figures, organisations can legitimise and discard certain cultural positions to influence present operations and future outlooks (Chreim, 2005; Gabriel, 1993). For example, by drawing upon and emphasising an organisation's long history, managers can craft narratives of strategic longevity, which aim to encourage employees to identify with organisational objectives to preserve shared heritage (Aeon & Lamertz, 2021; Burghausen & Balmer, 2014). With age often signifying legitimacy and prestige, the past can be an effective tool in constructing consent towards organisational ends, as it can be used to invoke identification, pride and organisational citizenship.

In light of these uses, scholarship has identified how organisational history can inspire organisational change (Ravasi & Schultz, 2006; McDonald et al, 2006), create 'official histories' through corporate museums (Nissley & Casey, 2002; Casey & Olivera, 2011), and bestow strategic benefits in marketing communications and differentiation from competitors (Foster et al, 2011; Blombäck & Brunninge, 2009; Rowlinson & Hassard,

1993). Though differing in scope and focus, these studies demonstrate the social construction of organisational history, and identify how managerial narrations of the past are underpinned by strategic aims.

This chapter will explore managerial identity formation at Shelton and the resulting implications for the steelworkers' occupational community. Analysis will focus primarily upon a period between 1973-1978, known amongst respondents as the *Fight for Shelton Bar* period (see Cheeseman, 1977 [1974] for a verbatim theatre production following the steelworkers' efforts to resist closure). The chapter analyses organisational newsletters and stakeholder communications, in addition to interview data from managerial staff. Analysis will follow the Shelton Action Committee's efforts to resist the British Steel Corporation's programme of site closures, in which a coalition of managerial and shop floor staff worked together to demonstrate Shelton's continued financial viability. Internal newsletters chart events following the British Steel Corporation's (BSC) committal of investment for electric arc furnaces in 1974, while interview data presents reaction to the eventual mothballing and cancellation of the investment programme.

The central argument states that the dispute with the BSC, alongside the workers' experiences of decline and downsizing, led to widespread conservative politics among affected occupational communities. These attitudes were also influenced by managerial discourse, as management mobilised knowledges of efficiency to legitimise redundancies and intensification. The language used within organisational documents demonstrates the development of organisational history and its relation to managerial identity formation, which differs from the comparatively materialist field of business

history, in which such histories are assumed to be instrumentalist in their creation and objectives (Eley, 2005; Evans, 1997; Clark & Rowlinson, 2004).

Shelton's senior management used internal documents to infer a coherent managerial identity, one supportive of organisational aims to remain as a small, independent steelworks. Management filtered these aims into the community as they galvanised workers against the BSC, which created widespread opposition to state ownership. However, managerial efforts to demonstrate Shelton's viability also served as a form of discipline, as it allowed managers to frame those resisting rationalisation processes as endangering the site. Consequently, steelworkers appropriated organisational aims regarding profitability and efficiency, and subsequently demonstrated varying engagement with the politics of capitalist production.

## 6.2 – The Action Committee: "A Case for Flexibility"

In September 1971, management at Shelton Bar received advanced warning of the potential closure of the work's steelmaking capacity, which prompted management and organisational leaders to form a works Action Committee. Tasked by senior management to demonstrate the site's continued viability to the BSC, this committee grouped representatives from all departments and core production processes. Together they produced a comprehensive analysis of the corporation's notice of closure, and later presented a counter argument for investment in electric arc furnaces. The committee, trade unions and the BSC maintained frequent communication, which intensified upon the publication of the BSC's ten-year plan in 1973. This outlined plans

to centralise production at five main coastal steelworks and close in-land satellite plants such as Shelton (Hudson, 1989). From the late 1960s, management at Shelton had lobbied the BSC for investment in electric arc steelmaking, noting potential for enhanced efficiency and manpower reductions. Resisting enforced closure, the Action Committee deepened their bid to secure investment.

This section will argue that alongside constituting managerial identity, the proverbial *Fight for Shelton Bar* period generated significant organisational history, and contributed to the steelworkers' occupational identity via the production of solidarity. The widely circulated booklet, *Fight for Shelton Bar, A Case for Flexibility* (1974), articulated core aspects of this managerial identity and strategically used languages of efficiency and productivity to protect the works from closure, while also attempting to discipline workers towards relative non-militancy. In its opening pages, the booklet contextualised the committee's motivation for action and depicted Shelton's workforce as united and allied with external stakeholders:

> The Committee is not politically motivated, nor is it overtly militant. It has continued to put forward constructive argument[s] and has been met with respect at all levels. Meetings have taken place with members of the Government and of the Opposition, with Trade Union Leaders and with officials of the B.S.C. A great deal of sympathy has been gained for its cause and wide publicity has resulted via all the media.
>
> The workforce at Shelton is united against the B.S.C. proposals and the Action Committee is not prepared to accept the closure as proposed. The Committee has always maintained that an overwhelming case exists for the retention of

> steelmaking at Shelton and expects the B.S.C to recognise this by showing some flexibility in its approach.
>
> Fight for Shelton Bar, A Case for Flexibility Booklet

Though opposing the position of their parent organisation, the language used by the committee was carefully selected to emphasise a lack of militancy and political motivation. This is significant when considering the wider industrial relations context of the period, as Shelton's dispute with the BSC progressed through the 1972 Miners' strike, a seven-week dispute resulting in defeat and humiliation for Edward Heath's government (Darlington & Lyddon, 2001; Ashworth, 1986). During this time, many in the Conservative Party and the national print media characterised the miners as militants, with Margaret Thatcher later claiming that the strike was a 'victory for violence' (Phillips, 2006; Wallington, 1972; Thatcher, 1995). The 1972 strike was later vilified within conservative circles, and informed the ambition to tame industrial unions that led to the 1984/85 Miners' strike.

Though the grass-roots influence of union members has since been acknowledged, print media characterised union leaders as the chief drivers of industrial action during the 1972 Miners' strike, a belief popularised in "the memories and memoirs of Conservative leaders, but also in mainstream historical literature, where emphasis has been placed on 'violence' and disorder" (Phillips, 2006, p. 201; see also Hughes et al, 2019). This created risk for Shelton's Action Committee as they challenged the BSC. The committee sought to avoid negative media coverage by emphasising their lack of political ambition and by constructing their efforts as pragmatic. Accordingly, the committee boasted of their "constructive arguments" and respected position, which added legitimacy to their

position of retaining Shelton's steelmaking capacity and opposing the BSC's strategy. By demonstrating productive relations and evidence-based arguments, the committee presented themselves as a trusted and rational negotiator, which contrasted against portrayals of militant trade unionists in the mining and automobile industries (Claydon, 2000).

After rising through the managerial hierarchy in the fuel department, Jonathan was selected to fulfil an important role in the Action Committee. Discussing his personal involvement with the committee, Jonathan commented on the group's collective approach to negotiations, and how he managed his perceived distance from his trade union peers:

> Loads of works then, started with action committees, and they inevitably had protests, sit-ins, maybe strikes… you know, all that sort of, traditional trade union… protest… and we thought that we were wasting time in doing that… it won't make any difference, protest all you like… you know, that's the master plan, and if we don't fit in then we're gonna lose. So we thought we would start a campaign… based on… logic and economics... [Action Committee leader] was staff, staffs' union, all that… that's fine, [Action Committee Secretary] was… a trade union man… but erm, I was part of management, so I hadn't got this sort of, trade union shield… and, I'm part of British Steel management, in effect, so I can't really start… knocking the British Steel Company. But we got everyone involved, got everyone on side, that's how we did it, we didn't want internal squabbling, and so we started to gather

> information… we acted responsibly, there was no [jeering] … any of that, we thought… it didn't work… and we sort of, made the arguments.
>
> Jonathan, Fuel Engineer, Mill Manager

Mirroring the committee's broadcast position, Jonathan questioned the efficacy of strikes and protests, leading him to celebrate informed mediation. Managerial identity is present here, as rather than engaging with traditional forms of protest, Jonathan articulated a desire for diplomacy and evidenced economic arguments (du Gay, 1996; Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003). The committee's positive reception among trade allies and coming achievements influenced the steelworkers' identity and community, as discourses of logic and structured arguments were paired with successful campaigning. The Action Committee thus created important organisational history, which valorised Shelton's independence and the initiative of managers and workers alike. In light of this, the Action Committee's booklet and wider arguments possessed a dual purpose, in that they intended to influence both the BSC and Shelton's occupational communities (Foster et al, 2017; 2011). Communicating their actions to the steelworkers and allied parties, repeated calls to reason and logic set behavioural expectations and constructed the ideal workforce as tame and receptive to diplomacy (du Gay, 2000; Kunda, 1992; Alvesson, 2002; Hughes & Dobbins, 2021).

Jonathan also discussed his unionised peers, who, while engaged in a common cause, occupied a different position within the occupational community. In stating his direct connection to British Steel, Jonathan acknowledged his managerial responsibilities, and subsequently dampened his public critique of the corporation. This influenced his cautioned approach to the dispute, in which he offered economically informed

arguments to avoid accusations of union militancy (Phillips, 2006). Beyond attempts to preserve amicable negotiations however, Jonathan's unease with the committee's trade union association was linked to inter-group stratification. Aware of his peripheral communal membership, Jonathan balanced competing responsibilities by attempting to guide negotiations while managing Shelton's immediate operational needs. Clear discomfort can be detected within his contribution, especially when he likens trade union membership to a protective shield, one offering a collective benefit from which he was excluded.

In the booklet, the committee then outlined the strengths and profitability of the plant itself. Drawing upon performance figures, it is argued that:

> Shelton has a wide reputation for flexibility, efficiency and quality of product. The Works is extremely profitable, producing a net return of 11 per cent for the last financial year despite a five-month recession in steel demand. Performance figures during the recent period of restricted power supplies again demonstrated the inherent flexibility and efficient nature of the plant and the resourcefulness of the men at Shelton.
>
> The Steelplant and Universal Beam Mill are modern and compact and Shelton relies entirely on Continuous Casting. These are undisputed facts which defy all arguments for closure based on projected figures relating to coastal sites.
>
> Fight for Shelton Bar, A Case for Flexibility Booklet

Modernised in 1964, Shelton's North Works was a new and efficient plant, able to perform during downturns in demand and wider industrial turmoil. Highlighting the

innovative continuous casting system and dedicated workforce, the Action Committee framed closure as operationally short-sighted. They employed organisational history as a powerful resource, with the committee drawing upon Shelton's private successes to create a narrative of viability (Rowlinson & Clark, 2004; Balmer, 2013). The Action Committee's narrative served to delegitimise the BSC's strategy of coastal expansion, and render Shelton's smaller, agile operations as a legitimate alternative (Brunninge, 2009). Emphasising the work's favourable age and financial performance contrasted the site against the struggling BSC, whose expansion programme entrenched structural overcapacity. Though the strength of managerially authored history has been questioned (Walsh & Ungson, 1991; McCabe, 2010), memory was used by the Action Committee to influence organisational culture, as Shelton's previous successes were mobilised to critique an uncertain future. While successful in raising opposition to the BSC, it is unclear if workers fully engaged with wider managerial discourses, or if the committee's legitimacy came from its protection of communal longevity and union connection. Despite this, the dispute raised solidarity among Shelton's departmental occupational communities who remained threatened by closure.

As Jonathan was a core member of the committee, he met frequently with BSC leadership and spoke directly with the chairman "Monty" Finniston. In the following contribution, he discussed a meeting in which the committee presented their rebuttal to the corporation. Importantly, the members present were amicable and welcoming, albeit satirical and playful:

> We were compared with Scunthorpe, and our steel would be cheaper… even though we were in Stoke-on-Trent… which was quite embarrassing for the

> British Steel Corporation. But what we did before that, because there was going to be a big meeting with Monty Finniston… and by this time we had written this document… and we took it down to London, we took it to a merchant bank, and said have a look at that… and they said… yeah you're right, so we had the backing of a well-known London merchant bank, which was nice… So when Monty came with his entourage… and then all of the Action Committee gathered, room was full, the whole canteen full, one table, chairs all around, you know, and he came in, we welcomed him with a Doulton figure, a statue of George and the dragon, which was very apt I thought… and he started his spiel and all that, and then we said well, take a look at that one [Leaning across, simulating handing over a document], and his face went… [Forlorn expression] and his mates were all going… [Shifting in his seat] and away he went.
>
> Jonathan, Fuel Engineer, Mill Manager

Drawing upon the symbolism of a small works repelling a larger entity, the meeting Jonathan described constituted an important moment in Shelton's organisational history (Clark & Rowlinson, 2004). Remembered and recalled among the community, the committee's success over the BSC emboldened communal opposition, while simultaneously reinforcing a shared belief in Shelton's commercial viability (Howard-Grenville et al, 2013). Having gained a reprieve from the BSC, the committee demonstrated tangible achievements from their aptitude and initiative, thereby validating their non-militant approach. Consequently, while managers occupied a peripheral position within the communal hierarchy, narratives of success via consensus

and negotiation were acknowledged and appropriated by other employees of the steelworks.

Independent verification from an investment bank also supported the committee as an economically sound actor, which allowed men to narrate a story of credibility over the BSC (Chreim, 2006; Sonenshein, 2010). Taking the initiative to verify their calculations with a third party, the committee employed a similar tactic of financial bureaucracy used by the BSC, which signalled further legitimacy in the design and realisation of a comparable organisational strategy (Wooldridge & Floyd, 1990; Porter, 1996). Managerial identity is again inferred, as the ideal manager is conceptualised as someone economically informed and competent in financial management (McCabe, 2016; Oakes et al, 1998; Kornberger & Clegg, 2011). Like gender, managerial legitimacy involves the enactment of particular behaviours and competencies, these being negotiated and reproduced in line with available discourses (Fenton & Langley, 2011). For the wider community, managerial staff were assessed according to their protection of Shelton's productive interests, while senior leaders attributed managerial success to the prioritisation of organisational aims.

The Action Committee's strategy also relied on exposing BSC representatives as incompetent or short sighted. By drawing attention to shortcomings in BSC plans, the committee raised their comparative legitimacy among the steelworkers and trade allies. Articulating a lack of trust in the corporation, Charles also described a meeting with the BSC's chairman:

> I got… voted onto SINAC, which is the Steel Industry National Advisory Committee, so I used to go down to London a lot, and I've sat there with erm,

> the chairman of British Steel at one end of the table, and me around the other with shop stewards from steel plants around the country… when Finniston was there, he asked us a question, well, we asked a question of Finniston, and he hadn't got a clue, so there's a little bloke at the end with a big pile of books, and he's scouting through [Laughs], it was him that did the meetings, Finniston knew nothing, he wasn't a steel man, he was a business man.
>
> Charles, Fuel Engineer, Personnel Manager

Criticising Finniston for his lack of industry knowledge, Charles characterised the BSC's chairman as an outsider unfamiliar with Shelton and the wider steel industry (Rawls & David, 2005; Jenkins, 2008). By characterising Finniston as a businessman, Charles accentuated the difference between BSC leadership and the steelworkers, thus signalling a lack of legitimacy in the corporation's position. This indicated poor institutional trust in the BSC, an issue which deepened as the Action Committee negotiated with a partner they perceived as rigid and unassailable (Maguire & Phillips, 2008). Rejecting Finniston as a capable organisational leader, Charles placed his faith in Shelton's managers and the Action Committee, and attributed intimate knowledge of the steelmaking process to personal competence and legitimacy. The committee subsequently emerged as the acceptable guardians of Shelton's future (Meindl et al, 1985; Rost, 1991).

Though the Action Committee were instrumental in opposing the BSC, Charles also revealed the role of trade unions and other collective bodies in the negotiation process. Often suspicious of the state as an economic actor, traditional labour unions negotiated on a platform of self-governance, this underpinned by a belief that government

intervention within industry was "too 'intrusive', and a threat to working-class independence both collective and individual" (Thane, 1984, p. 899; see also Pelling, 1968; Marks, 1989; Hyman, 2001). From these strained relations, central government and nationalised entities began to dismantle the independence of labour organisations from the mid-1970s, with the aim of replacing the role of collective bargaining with greater employment legislation and governmental mediation institutions (Howell, 2015; Baccaro & Howell, 2011; Levy, 2006). While the Action Committee successfully negotiated against a state body, the BSC's attempt to unilaterally close Shelton demonstrated a desire to bypass the collective bargaining process, which signified growing governmental reluctance to engage with industrial unions and collective groups.

In their campaign against a state body increasingly understood as bureaucratic and inflexible, those working to save Shelton Bar increasingly drew on a capitalist language of adaptation and innovation. In the summary booklet, the committee invoked themes of flexibility and inordinate public expense when discussing the potential site closure:

> The Action Committee has shown that the cost to the taxpayer resulting from partial closure would roughly equate to the Capital Investment required for Arc Furnaces. This cost would be made up of Redundancy Payments, Re-training Costs, Unemployment Benefits, etc.
>
> It is recognised that a primary aim of the Corporation should be to make money and by intelligent planning invest in a secure future for the whole industry. More important, however, is the well-being and security of its workforce. Nationalised industries should obviously take the lead in this field

> by setting an example to all others. It is manifestly wrong to destroy the lifestyle of employees and their families by rigidly adhering to a plan when a modicum of flexibility would make no significant difference to the end product.
>
> Fight for Shelton Bar, A Case for Flexibility Booklet

Throughout their analysis, the committee appropriated and reversed the BSC's managerialist language, where localised understandings of flexibility, profitability and commercial interests were used to combat the corporation's strategy (Mueller et al, 2004; Cheney & Tompkins, 1987). In order to construct themselves as rational and informed economic actors, the committee appealed to ideals of organisational agility, and requested flexibility from their comparatively rigid superiors. This again invoked Shelton's previous independence under private ownership, while also authoring a future full of localised potential. By appropriating managerialist discourse, employees could similarly vocalise their resistance against the BSC.

Turning to the social responsibilities of nationalised industries, the committee then accused the BSC of failing to uphold high standards as a national champion. Framing the corporation as reckless, committee members denoted themselves as communal protectors, and attributed moral value to their efforts (Clarke et al, 2009; Chreim, 2006; Jackall, 1988). The Action Committee argued that the BSC should "take the lead" in protecting employees' interests, which insinuated a current failure to safeguard British steelworkers. Repeated use of managerialist discourse indicated the committee's concern for organisational profitability however (du Gay, 1996; 2000), leading to the reproduction of this knowledge by both managerial and shop floor communities.

Importantly, while the committee explored multiple options for retaining Shelton's steelmaking capabilities, both the Action Committee and Shelton's senior leadership sought the installation of electric arc furnaces, which would enable substantial cuts to Shelton's workforce. Consequently, though the committee wished to safeguard production, their vision retained an overarching desire to economise and improve Shelton's financial performance, of which undermined the job security of process staff.

Alongside managerialist language, the Action Committee also drew upon Shelton's economic and communal importance to local residents. Discussing the range of implications associated with site closure, the committee argued:

> Shelton is a major attribute to the community. It is the largest single ratepayer. Hundreds of local businesses rely to some degree on trade with the Works. Steelworkers could not be absorbed by other local industries in the short term and there is grave doubt whether they could be absorbed in the long term. The Pottery Industry is female intensive and few suitable alternative job opportunities exist. To summarise, Shelton may be small to the B.S.C but it is very big to the local community. Shelton men want to work in steel. Emotive areas such as pride, traditions, job satisfaction and fear for the future cannot easily be conveyed by the printed word. Local feeling is strong and the whole area is concerned for the future of the Works.
>
> Fight for Shelton Bar, A Case for Flexibility Booklet

While these narratives reminded steelworkers of their attachments to Shelton Bar, the excerpt defines them and their wider community as inseparable from the works (Clegg

et al, 2007; Humphreys & Brown, 2002). With the Action Committee composed of members from all departments and managerial levels, arguments regarding identity were particularly pertinent, as Shelton's operational longevity was a personal investment for all involved. Therefore, while enforced closure tangibly impacted steelworkers' quality of life, it also disrupted how meaning and purpose were read into their lives. The threat to collective identity was thus used to build resistance against the BSC, as by stressing a lack of alternative employment, employee commitment was maintained during a period of instability (Gioia et al, 2000; Dutton et al, 1994). Emerging from the excerpt above, the dual purpose of the committee was to control both the BSC and Shelton's employees. In the latter objective, it was successful: many appropriated the committee's narratives of viability and non-militancy, and critiqued the BSC as divorced from their pragmatic needs (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002; Jenkins, 2008). Shelton's closure represented not only the loss of income, but also the loss of individual and shared identity, thereby disrupting a valued way of life.

Despite their layered critique, the Action Committee remained diplomatic in their communications with the BSC. This was apparent in the summary that concluded the *Case for Flexibility* booklet:

> The case for the retention of steelmaking at Shelton cannot be 'proved' in the legal sense. However, the Action Committee is not alone in its belief that the Works should continue. Visitors to the Plant – including Senior Trade Union Officials, M.P.'s, Trade Representatives, etc. – are literally amazed that closure should be contemplated.

> The Action Committee are not 'anti-B.S.C.' and are asking only for flexibility. The sheer weight of evidence in Shelton's favour when examined by the Corporation must surely result in a re-examination. In return would be gained long-term benefits to the community, to the Corporation and to the Nation as a whole.
>
> Fight for Shelton Bar, A Case for Flexibility Booklet

While the committee's earlier analysis charted the BSC's strategic misgivings, this conciliatory conclusion shifted the tone back towards amicable negotiation and mutual benefit. Indicative of the Action Committee's negotiating style, this linguistic tactic again framed the committee and wider steelworker community as positive and constructive actors, who were able to present arguments without the militancy associated with industrial unions (Chreim, 2006; Sonenshein, 2010; Phillips, 2006). Drawing upon the support gained by allies, the Action Committee characterised the BSC as strategically and morally misinformed in their pursuit of a cause rejected by countless others. With the BSC losing its institutional legitimacy, steelworkers looked to the committee and senior organisational figures for guidance, which influenced the development of a strong managerial identity (Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010; Bridwell-Mitchell & Mezias, 2012).

After a protracted negotiation, the Action Committee were victorious over the BSC and received a commitment for investment in electric arc steelmaking. While this provided certainty to a beleaguered workforce, the period following this decision also proved challenging, with industrial turmoil accelerating after the 1974 oil crisis (Tsoukalis & Strauss, 1985). As this section has argued, prolonged protest and negotiation

strengthened the steelworkers' occupational identity and community by generating solidarity as they attempted to save their livelihoods. A strong managerial identity also emerged however, which was inferred in the committee's actions and in the communications presented to the wider workforce.

The Action Committee's *A Case for Flexibility* booklet articulated the managerial style employed by Shelton's senior leaders, which stressed non-militancy and a focus upon economics and financial data. These characteristics filtered down throughout the works to create an expectation for tame industrial relations, alongside a joint effort to demonstrate Shelton's continued viability. The legacy of the dispute contributed to important organisational history, which led workers to understand themselves as successful underdogs in a national conflict where they prevailed against larger forces despite their small odds. Nationalisation was subsequently remembered as placing Shelton in a precarious position, thereby accentuating the relative stability of its privatised past. This established resistance to authority as a core cultural aptitude across departmental communities, and emboldened a tradition of independence and communal discipline.

## 6.3 – Shelton in the 1970s: "The Constant Need for Meetings"

While organisational history can be constructed by managers and senior leaders to build culture and identification, it can also be used by the same actors to establish control, in which the past is invoked and appropriated to progress strategic change (Foster et al, 2017; Chreim, 2005; Ybema, 2010). Accordingly, organisations can use nostalgia to

justify programmes of rationalisation and intensification, though employees may equally draw upon a "warm and loving reconstruction of the past" to resist change (Gabriel, 1993, p. 135; see also Ravasi & Schultz, 2006). Like the previous section, the following analysis will demonstrate how managerial identity was negotiated at Shelton, with organisational documents again used to disseminate narratives across the community. Data is drawn from quarterly newsletters circulated around the steelworks between 1973 to 1978. Written by Shelton's general manager, the newsletters contain operational details and commentary on industrial developments, and provide rich insight into the events preceding the work's downsizing.

It will be argued that after the Action Committee's initial success over the BSC, management at Shelton employed memories of their orderly, non-militant negotiations as a form of normative control. Having generated important organisational history, management utilised this to influence organisational culture (McCabe, 2010), particularly in calling for employees to accept de-manning and work intensification. As the electric arc programme was linked to workforce rationalisation, Shelton's management followed the BSC's wider strategic goals of de-manning, which diverged from their previous aim of generating communal resistance. This changed towards the end of the decade however, as management drew upon organisational history to discredit the BSC as industrial disorder increased, which ended with the abandonment of Shelton's investment scheme.

The 1970s began positively for Shelton Bar. Although early warning of closure was made in 1971, the steel plant and mill both achieved record levels of output and productivity. In a January 1973 newsletter, Shelton's general manager was optimistic and

congratulatory, and referenced buoyant trading conditions and a BSC-wide recognition of Shelton's success. Such optimism is apparent in the following excerpt, which discussed the BSC's 1973 ten-year pronouncement:

> We are not in the least dismayed by the recent Government announcements which have sent a tidal wave round parts of the industry. Could we really expect a correct "yes" decision to our electric arc furnace scheme to be announced at this level with all the major closures, etc? It is our view that we shall have to wait longer for a decision and this will surely depend in the long run on what the precise demand is in the latter part of the decade. This position need not trouble us at all. There is plenty of life left in the plant and it can be kept operational as long as is required. There is, of course, no question concerning the future of the mill; it is recognised as being by far the best and most effective mill in the country for the lighter beams and columns. Developments planned for the Finishing End will increase its overall capacity still further and there is then the possibility of working 20 shifts per week.
>
> Newsletter 27, January 1973

Referencing their 'correct' position on electric arc installation, management struck a jovial and confident tone. Assured of Shelton's place within the industry, the works was positioned as an outlier to other sites marked for closure, a position probably intended to generate optimism across the workforce (Aeon & Lamertz, 2021). By outlining a promising future, the general manager sought to downplay the ongoing precarity of uncertain negotiations. As a backdrop to these comments, the recently formed BSC, who sought to retain their position as a leading European steelmaker, produced a 10-

year expansion plan in 1973, which diverted investment to five large coastal steelworks (Hudson, 1989). Buoyed by post-war reconstruction and the burgeoning automobile market, steel demand grew across the industrialised west and USSR, which influenced large producers to invest in capacity expansions (Paoli, 1984; Hayward, 1974). Competitiveness quickly centred upon economies of scale, leading to the development of large plants designed to capitalise upon bulk material procurement and new furnace and casting technologies.

After receiving approval from the BSC for an investment in an electric arc furnace, Shelton's internal communication altered in purpose and tone, as the planned investment accompanied redundancies and capacity mothballing. These outcomes, had they gone ahead, would have impacted process communities the hardest, and therefore required careful justification to avoid acrimony with a workforce who had recently fought for their survival.

As electronic arc furnaces smelt charges of scrap metal, requirements for a dedicated ironworks and ore preparation plant are removed, thereby reducing workforce requirements substantially. This is implied within the newsletter, as Shelton's general manager references the "life left" within the steel and iron plants, indicating a desire to render these redundant with labour efficient production. As this corresponded with the BSC's strategy of de-manning, management were now in support of the corporation's aims, which contradicted their previous opposition to the BSC. Consequently, management invoked history in a manner conducive to communal cooperation by linking rationalisation to the flexibility and agility employed during the dispute.

Jumping to 1975, the subsequent extract depicts a significant downturn in the steel industry and wider British economy. Discussing the potential of redundancies and cuts to Shelton's productive capacity, the newsletter reads:

> On the labour front we have gone through extraordinary changes over the quarter, commencing with the Chairman's pronouncement that there would have to be 20 to 22,000 redundancies in the industry due to the severity of the recession, which would have entailed the complete cessation of iron and steelmaking here at Shelton with the Mill remaining on a single shift; following this, a meeting took place between the BSC and the TUCSICC unions on May 19th at which the steel unions put forward alternative proposals to mass redundancies incorporating the maintenance of the guaranteed week.
>
> Newsletter 37, July 1975

Exacerbating industrial overcapacity across Europe, the global steel industry was shaken by the 1974 oil crisis, which imposed a sudden impact upon heavy fuel and steel-consuming industries (Tsoukalis & Strauss, 1985). Coinciding with the expansionist projects of the early 1970s, the sudden drop in steel demand placed heavy burdens upon stretched capital investment and placed the global steel industry into disarray. Many European steelmakers believed the crisis was connected to cyclical demand fluctuations however, which influenced a committal to capacity expansions in preparation for a return to favourable trading conditions (Pichierri, 1990). Production capacity was also rapidly increasing in Japan, which further undermined the competitive position of European producers (Moro, 1984). The extract above addressed some of these concerns by drawing upon the words of the BSC's chairman, with Shelton's

management acknowledging coming redundancies across the sector. This commentary intended to prepare Shelton men for a period of contraction, whereby job losses were rationalised against turmoil originating beyond local managerial remits. Also a possibility was the cancelation of the electric arc investment programme, though this threat served managerial efforts to maintain workforce discipline and workers' commitment to organisational aims.

Highlighting the BSC's weak position, the newsletter then discussed budgetary cuts and financial constraints to be placed upon the works. Making reference to austerity and "belt tightening", the newsletter continued:

> The BSC is in an extremely grave financial state with losses currently running at £4 million per week. Orders appear to be no better and the forecast is that the recession could well last until mid 1976. In view of international competition, prices cannot be put up any further and so we have to effect the most stringent economies in every possible direction if we are to survive this period.
>
> In what must be the greatest "belt tightening" situation since the North Works started, our policy is to purchase only those things which are absolutely vital or concerned with health and safety; to economise in the use of all fuels and to reduce shift working. We must continue meaningful discussions on permanent de-manning if we wish to remain viable and competitive long term. The greater the rate of inflation the more difficult it is for a small unit to remain viable and we certainly wish to be of the late Chairman's [Lord Melchett] "lowly manned but highly paid labour force".

Though Shelton's management announced the policy of austerity, the BSC's poor financial position was used to justify and forward the resulting organisational change. Parallels are drawn with the construction of the North Works, which invoked organisational history intending to strengthen communal resolve and compliance with managerial control (Ravasi & Schultz, 2006; Foster et al, 2017; 2011). By drawing upon this period, the steelworkers' occupational identity was appropriated and mobilised by management, as remembering shared folklore encouraged the recall of solidarity and thrift experienced during past hardship. Attempting to insert coherence into the rationalisation process, management constructed austerity as a shared endeavour, one canonised and succeeded over in previous experiences. This pronouncement also contained undertones of managerial benevolence, where cost cutting is likened to tough punishment employed for mutual benefit, and that workers will eventually thank management for limiting their expenditures and activities.

The later admission of coming redundancies suggested cynical intentions on the behalf of Shelton's management however, as this advanced a managerial desire to normalise industrial rationalisation. By constructing a narrative of viability through austerity, the general manager invoked notions of a lean, adaptable organisation, and linked Shelton's past to its contemporary hardship (Rowlinson & Hassard, 1993; Casey & Olivera, 2011). Differing from the Action Committee's aim of raising resistance to the BSC, management were now supporting the corporation's desire for redundancies, which had the potential to reignite adversity experienced between formal hierarchical layers at Shelton (Edwards, 1986; Hughes & Dobbins, 2021). From the perspective of Shelton's

senior leaders however, adherence to strict economy signalled local managerial competence to the BSC, which may have reduced the precarity of Shelton's status as a satellite plant. Though working to prolong Shelton's operational life, managerial efforts also sought to realise efficiency and profitability gains, which negatively impacted the workforce and undermined their position as communal guardians.

Demonstrating the competing epistemologies encountered by managerial staff, extracts from the quarterly newsletters depict management struggling to navigate the industrial downturn, while also attempting to justify redundancies to a threatened workforce. Though Shelton's leaders wished to retain local steelmaking capacity, it is clear that their desired future differed from those authored by shop floor workers. The priority to reduce manning was again emphasised in the following quarterly announcement, which also attempted to raise solidarity through veiled punitive rhetoric:

> Long term it would seem that trade is unlikely to pick up until mid 1976 at the earliest. It is absolutely essential for our survival that we manage the plant with less people, both staff and manual grades; no longer will be have the ability to increase our prices to cover our own cost increases. Competition internationally is intense and we can, and must, become more effective. This need not be a painful operation as natural wastage and already agreed voluntary redundancy will largely take care of the situation, but we must be prepared to "close ranks" as people leave as this is the only feasible way of remaining viable and yet maintaining our current standard of living.

> Every possible economy must be exercised in the use of all fuels, spares, stores, refractories etc – there is no such thing as "cheap fuel" anymore! Economies put in hand are already beginning to bear fruit but we must have the total commitment of all the work force in order to achieve the results we are looking for. "Belt tightening" now will both help preserve our jobs for the future and will be less painful than if applied at a later date – If this had been practiced in other quarters we might not have found ourselves in the present national plight!
>
> Newsletter 38, November 1975

Insinuating that workers' apparent wastefulness contributed to Shelton's plight, the general manager deployed a form of normative control to critique steelworkers' previous actions, while similarly setting behavioural norms around adherence to austerity and de-manning. Work intensification and lean operations were again raised and constructed as inevitable, this being accompanied by the argument that if specified measures were implemented sooner, contractions could have been avoided. Responsibility for organisational survival is subsequently passed onto the community, in which management denoted the steelworkers' behaviour as decisive in achieving future stability and prosperity (Ezzy, 2001; Lockyer & McCabe, 2011; Alvesson & Willmott, 2002). The call for unified commitment thus served to mute potential resistance to austerity and restructuring, whereby collective action and subterfuge were rendered as endangering the living standards of the entire workforce. Despite industry uncertainty, the BSC committed to plans for electric arc steelmaking at Shelton, leading local management to repeat calls for labour reductions.

Interestingly, despite the pressure to reduce Shelton's workforce, job security was also used as a device of control, in which management again reproduce narratives of stability through non-militancy (McCabe, 2011; Casey, 1995; Lebas & Weigenstein, 1986). Efficiency and cost reduction are subsequently valorised, alongside pragmatism and stable working relationships between managers, workers and union officials. Restraint over the use of materials, fuels and labour were cited as key to Shelton's operational longevity, with the responsibility for control passed onto the workforce. The fate of production workers in the iron, steel and ore preparation plants are noticeably absent from the newsletter however, as overt threats to specific groups may have encouraged collective resistance. This again roused the careful rhetorical balance being struck by management, in which redundancies and industrial hardship frustrated their control over the narration of unfolding events.

With the BSC committing to investment in Shelton's steelmaking capacity, local management were able to author stability into a period of wider disorder. As the following newsletter reads however, the committal of investment accompanied further appeals to austerity, in which management continued to use disciplinary discourse:

> We now have a secure future in the form of arc furnace steelmaking which should be ready for commissioning for the latter part of 1978. This is the goal on which we must set our sights and in the course of the next 2 years agree sensibly and responsibly an effective level of manning for the whole works. It has been completely agreed between the Corporation and the Unions that in order to secure our long-term future as steelmakers we must achieve international standards of manning and output. We already have probably the

> finest beam mill of its size in this country and we are to have one of the most sophisticated types of arc furnace in the world, out of which operators in certain areas are able to get very considerable tonnages and it will be up to us to attain similar standards.
>
> This will not necessarily be easy as we will have to achieve a considerable change in outlook, in attitudes, inbuilt traditions and acceptance of standards of flexibility and co-operation which do not exist at present. With the common sense which has prevailed at Shelton over the years we have every confidence that we can succeed in this and the job security gained by doing so should be the reward we are all looking for.
>
> Newsletter 39, January 1976

Drawing upon employees' "common sense", Shelton's general manager can be seen invoking a history of pragmatism to engender support for desired change, though operations at the time of writing were framed as insufficient to tackle industry turmoil (Suddaby et al, 2010; McDonald et al, 2006). With resourced diplomacy viewed as definitive in the Action Committee's success over the BSC, histories of managerial-employee cooperation were authored and accentuated, again influencing appeals to consensus among the whole workforce. Calls for a change in outlook and greater flexibility signalled Shelton's uncertain and precarious position however, which led management to draw upon the work's tangible capabilities and the steelworkers' shared solidarity to mute resistance against change. Although these extracts point to an industry in crisis, it is significant that rationalisation is constructed as a beneficial process, in which redundancies are presented as sacrificial for community stability

(Chreim, 2006). By linking de-manning to Shelton's survival, communal loyalties were mobilised as a form of discipline, which denoted resistance to rationalisation as endangering communal longevity.

Although the newsletter mentions replicating international standards of manning, which were lower than those of UK steelmakers, the aspiration to match international levels of output is significant. This reaffirmed the BSC's commitment to increase capacity against foreign competition, where hope was placed upon greater economies of scale (Pichierri, 1990). Differences in international manning standards, especially those set by Japanese producers, contributed to foreign price advantage, with the UK comparatively overmanned when compared to overseas competitors. As Shelton was a smaller works, competing on scale was impossible, which influenced the local desire for labour efficiency and the adoption electric arc furnaces.

With managers focusing upon Japanese production and industrial relations management, the 1970s and 1980s saw the 'Japanisation' of Western workplaces (Keys & Miller, 1984; Oliver & Wilkinson, 1992). Competing against Asian manufacturers led to the proliferation of 'business process re-engineering', which underpinned a managerial preoccupation with cost reduction, organisational restructuring and the suppression of collective bargaining (Hammer & Champy, 1993; Grint & Case, 2000; McCabe, 1999). At Shelton, this translated into work intensification, where workers' responsibilities were increased following widespread redundancies (Wasson, 2004; Harney et al, 2018). Though workforce contractions accelerated after the 1978 downsizing, the period preceding this involved considerable precarity. Many exited the

works due to decreasing working hours as production capacity was mothballed, while others were exited through voluntary redundancy schemes.

In a familiar tone, the following newsletter extract again called for workforce reductions and heightened efficiency. Attempting to link satisfaction with the additional efforts required following workplace intensification, the newsletter stated:

> Nobody likes reducing manpower and being asked to put in more effort but this is vitally necessary if we are to remain competitive and indeed it is more satisfying and rewarding in the long term as anyone who has experienced this will confirm. We may, before too long, be more than appreciative of having gainful employment. One thing is absolutely certain, without a considerable change of attitude both the industry and the country cannot continue along their present course without a disastrous lowering of the living standards of all of us.
>
> Newsletter 40, April 1976

Alluding to enhanced gratification from work intensification, management continued to use discipling rhetoric as they pursued corporate restructuring, which involved attempts to rationalise and justify job losses among the community (Willmott, 1993). Seeking to eliminate resistance to restructuring, intensification was branded as an honourable reward, thereby contriving the steelworkers' pride and organisational commitment as tools to establish control. Throughout the rationalisation process, Shelton's general manager frequently demarcated between two organisational outcomes: one characterised by present inefficiency and waste, and another by security

and prosperity (Ybema, 2010; 2014). After achieving a committal of investment from the corporation, overt criticism of the BSC became infrequent, with management at Shelton instead taking aim at the wider national economic outlook. A history which promoted an institutional desire for streamlined production was used to guide and motivate those following its logic, in which economisation and sacrifice were established as authoritative organisational knowledges (McDonald et al, 2006; Chreim, 2005).

Again authoring stability into wider sectoral woes, Shelton's general manager presented the installation of the electric arc furnace as an end point to instability. Still on the path to this narrated goal, the newsletter reads:

> We have firm orders until the end of March and the outlook for the next quarter is certainly reasonable at the moment. We also have the installation of the arc furnace ahead of us and our financial results on our reduced level of activity must augur well for the future.
>
> It is absolutely vital that under these conditions we do everything we possibly can to satisfy our customers, whether at Home or Overseas, both in terms of quality, delivery and general reliability. Our reputation in this respect is better than many but there is still room for improvement. It is virtually committing industrial suicide to make our customers suffer as a result of some local disagreement or problem which we may have. Remember that they are far more important than any of us and they do not have to purchase our products.
>
> Newsletter 43, January 1977

In an effort to inspire non-militancy at the works, labour disputes and resistance to organisational change were framed as frivolous and inconsequential against wider industry turmoil. Making a direct appeal to customer satisfaction, the general manager subsequently diminished local issues arising at the steelworks by raising the comparative importance of fulfilling orders and satisfying paying customers. This inferred a managerial identity primarily concerned with profit and effective operations, whilst these epistemologies were filtered down into departmental communities to inspire identification with meeting market demands. The minimisation of local disputes is significant, as this belittled steelworkers' communal interests and concerns over employee welfare, and damaged solidarity by diminishing employees' willingness to invoke collective action.

While the BSC's financial position continued to degrade, Shelton oscillated between a modest profit and loss throughout this period. In a newsletter dated January 1978, it is noted that profit for 1977 was £1.1 million, though this was revised against stock revaluations and cumulative losses. Periods of modest gain were thereby accentuated by management to sustain narratives of viability throughout the economic and industrial downturn. Signalling the strategic and selective use of history, organisational actors subsequently 'forgot' periods of substantive and sustained losses, and this was reflected by interview respondents, who reported and remembered advantageous financial figures throughout the turbulent 1970s.

Accordingly, narratives of profitability were celebrated throughout the community, with older interviewees frequently recalling how Shelton "always made money", even when the corporation as a whole was faltering. This history reignited previous

opposition to the BSC, with managers and workers keen to distance themselves from the corporation's failures. Strong folklore regarding Shelton's comparative profitability was created and mobilised, which allowed workers to discursively separate themselves from the BSC's financial difficulties (Fournier, 1999; Ybema, 2010). This differentiation was important in developing the steelworkers' occupational identity, as not only did Shelton occupy an outlier position as a satellite plant, but their ability to generate modest returns diverged from the BSC's perceived and real failings.

Towards the end of the 1970s, the turmoil within the steel industry continued to worsen, as did the UK's wider economic prospects. The following newsletter excerpt discussed the dire industrial outlook at the time, and began to consider the declining likelihood of realising Shelton's electric arc investment scheme:

> The international scene for steel is grim in the extreme and our own situation within the Corporation is certainly no less so. It is now totally apparent that the future demand for steel will not require the levels of capacity which we ourselves and many other western nations were preparing to install. The losses for the first 6 months of this year are twice that of the whole of last year and the forecast for the second 6 months is even worse. The anticipated increase in order load has not materialised and with our ever-increasing costs a great deal of the export market has also been lost.
>
> As many will have seen from the Press our own Chairman has declared that we would be a totally bankrupt organisation if we were not nationalised and this in turn demands a drastic re-appraisal of the long-term strategy of the Corporation and undoubtedly severe pruning of the aspirations of the

> previous plans. Whether or not we at Shelton will be affected we do not know… but unless we all satisfy our customers totally and completely further inroads will be made into our own markets.
>
> Newsletter 46, October 1977

Increases in demand predicted earlier in the decade had not materialised, which exposed the structural nature of the oil crisis and the declining position of Western steelmakers (Pichierri, 1990). Realising this, Shelton's general manager considered the potential impacts upon local investment prospects and future operations. Importantly, the security provided by public ownership was acknowledged, which suggested an appreciation for the aid received from the state. This problematises managerial narratives of a self-sufficient, profitable works, and again indicated the strategic use of memory in organisational history (Chreim, 2005; Gabriel, 1993). Though Shelton's precarious position was recognised, communal opposition to the BSC subsequently erased state support from the work's history and privileged a narration of independence and success. The newsletter again emphasised customer satisfaction and a committal to 'responsible behaviour', which intended to govern conduct as the industry encountered further hardship and rationalisation.

In 1978, the European Economic Community (EEC) shifted to a policy of managed decline by committing to the *Davignon Plan* for a smaller European steel industry (Pichierri, 1990; Trappmann, 2015). The EEC formally began a significant rationalisation process to curb state aid to struggling nationalised entities. In the same year, the BSC abandoned their expansionist investment strategy after completing only a number of projects at the primary coastal sites (Hudson & Sadler, 1985). Consequently, the BSC

suffered capability and capacity gaps at important production centres, which contributed to the UK's weak performance against Japanese competitors (Suzuki, 1991; Roberts, 1987). Later announced in the 1979 *slimline plan*, the BSC reduced capacity from 21.5 million tonnes to 15 million tonnes per annum, this being achieved by a number of partial and full site closures (Blyton, 1993). The abandonment of the 1973 expansion plan also resulted in the cancellation of Shelton's investment programme, which was discussed in the following newsletter:

> We have now at long last had the Government pronouncement on the arc furnace which is that this will be shelved until a later period and a decision to install would then only be taken if the demand warrants it. I think we have to accept that this increase in demand is unlikely to occur.
>
> Looking back at the scheme which was first put forward in 1968 for 3 conventional 80 ton arcs at £4.3m the pattern of events since then makes very unhappy reading. The decision has been made and re-made far too many times and there has been continuing frustration and procrastination in implementing the plan following the Beswick review of the industry. Under these conditions it has to be appreciated that even the most responsible work force is justified in becoming rather explosive at times. In general, however, the Works has been renowned for the responsible, reasoned and logical way in which the case has been presented.
>
> Newsletter 48, March 1978

The scrapping of Shelton's electric arc proposal was set against a particularly stark industrial backdrop, with UK steelmakers experiencing mounting losses during a period of high inflation. In light of the BSC's strain upon public finances, investing in projects deviating from official expansion plans became untenable, while these too were abandoned in the following year. For Shelton, not only did this end plans for more efficient steelmaking, reverting back to conventional blast furnace production was also not possible. Much of the ore processing infrastructure had been demolished, and the ironworks was similarly decommissioned. Manpower had also been reduced as capacity was dismantled, which meant that the technical skills required to produce steel were mostly lost.

In this final address, Shelton's general manager authored a solidaristic history by reiterating the tame relations seen throughout the protracted dispute. Making reference to steelworkers' "responsible, reasoned and logical" conduct, a distinct managerial identity was again inferred, as narratives of non-militancy and undisrupted production were celebrated (du Gay, 2000; Kunda, 1992; Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003). This history ignored instances of resistance, disputes or stoppages, where precarity and intensification undoubtedly frustrated relations between managers and workers.

Narrating news of the inevitable closure in the first person, a personable and sympathetic message is conveyed, likely to generate an emotional link between fractured workplace communities. Referring to the BSC's apparent procrastination on advancing the electric arc scheme, the general manager then attempted to avoid accountability for coming redundancies, and instead blamed more senior figures for the

scrapping of their long-awaited plan of investment. This redirected liability for decline and closure towards the BSC, rather than with local management, though this erased their previous support of rationalisation and austerity.

While steel production was to end at Shelton, the rolling mill remained an attractive asset to the BSC. Acknowledging this, the general manager continued by discussing hopes for the mill's future:

> The Mill I am utterly convinced has a very great future and I would expect it to be in operation for a great many years ahead. It has probably the lowest through cost of any beam mill in the country and also has an unrivalled reputation for reliability and delivery on time. With Lackenby No.10 mill these are the only two beam mills which cover the entire range and one has to appreciate that this is a non-growth market; in fact with the loss of exports it is likely to be contracting. Our Mill is the only one with interchangeable housing and apart from Lackenby is the only one laid down on a completely new site unattached to any existing mill. We excel at the lighter, more difficult and more pricey beams and columns and provided we keep our costs right, with a competitively priced bloom we should be in the forefront for receiving orders for any sections in our own range.
>
> Newsletter 48, March 1978

Shelton's mill remained as a viable asset to the BSC, as with foreign competition slowly dominating bulk steelmaking (Moro, 1984; Stora, 1979), rolling and finishing operations generated higher financial value. After the downsizing, Scunthorpe steelworks supplied

Shelton with cold blooms, which negated the operational loss of local steelmaking while consolidating production at a larger site. The noted decline in demand for construction beams remained a challenge however, and indicated that despite a capable workforce, issues of poor profitability were likely to persist in the medium-term. Price sensitivity suggested additional vulnerability by highlighting the tight margins underpinning production, in addition to the cyclical nature of steel demand. These compounding pressures led to entrenched precarity at Shelton, with those retained after 1978 unsure of the mill's long-term prospects.

Concluding the final newsletter released before the downsizing, Shelton's past successes are highlighted, with the general manager articulating bitter pride upon his departure. Discussing the rebuilding of the North Works and the new capabilities this brought, the extract reads:

> I shall certainly look back on my days at Shelton, especially the earlier ones, with considerable pride and pleasure. We were a particularly united workforce and our relations were in general first class. We achieved a very great deal in particular with the rebuilding of the Works when we were the first people in the entire world to rely completely on the continuous casting process. We were, of course, casting sizes which had never before been achieved in the world and had this failed the Works would certainly have been doomed. Our success brought visitors from all over the world, indeed far many more than those who came from our own country.
>
> Newsletter 48, March 1978

To commemorate Shelton and its workforce, the site's successes as a smaller, technologically advanced works are remembered. Bitter opposition to nationalisation re-emerges, which led the general manager to draw upon a shared pride in Shelton's formative years. These narratives privilege a specific representation of the past however, in which Shelton's successes are depicted as exclusive to private ownership, and that this good fortune was disrupted by nationalisation. Differing from previous newsletters, this final broadcast sought not to influence or lobby for change, but instead commemorated the steelworkers' productive achievements and Shelton's role as a communal centre. Organisational nostalgia emerged when discussing the innovative North Works, which again contrasted from the difficulties experienced under public ownership.

Nationalised in 1967, Shelton's North Works was a new asset differing from the predominantly older plants inherited by the BSC (Blair, 1997; Silberston, 1982). Therefore, it appeared illogical that Shelton was marked for closure only 9 years after being reconstructed. This dispute was important in shaping the steelworkers' occupational identity and community, as Shelton's dismissal against larger coastal sites invoked feelings of pride, proficiency and independence. Accordingly, the shared sense of urgency created by the dispute strengthened communal solidarity, in which precarity was incorporated into communal folklore and processes of inclusion (Mackenzie et al, 2006). While this was appropriated and mobilised as a form of managerial discipline, the sheltering effect of occupational identity and community was again demonstrated.

This section does not attempt to debate the merits and limitations of nationalisation, but it is worthy to acknowledge that for Shelton, public ownership accompanied

disorder and decline. This contributed to a prevailing sentiment among many that Shelton's best days were under private ownership, and that if granted the same autonomy from the BSC, the works would have performed more advantageously (Aeon & Lamertz, 2021). Consequently, a sense of pragmatism and enterprise emerged during interviews with former workers, who regarded themselves first and foremost as 'Shelton men', rather than employees of the BSC. While these sentiments originate in opposition to the BSC's programme of closure, this section has argued that by authoring histories of pragmatic non-militancy, Shelton's management influenced employees to reproduce organisational objectives. Organisational history was subsequently mobilised to enhance managerial control, with management aiming to mute resistance to rationalisation and restructuring. While this does not indicate that workers were entirely accepting of managerial order and organisational objectives, interaction with managerial epistemologies was present within shop floor communities. Consequently, workers were cognisant of a coherent managerial identity, and reproduced the associated discourses to varying degrees.

By framing workplace disruption as endangering Shelton's longevity, management contrived the steelworkers' communal loyalties into a disciplinary tool. This had the effect of establishing non-militancy as model employee behaviour, though worsening sectoral precarity challenged the stability of management-employee relations. Written by Shelton's general manager, quarterly newsletters sought to normalise and justify organisational change, and recast rationalisation as a noble and pleasurable endeavour. Resistance to the BSC was reintroduced by management as the corporation's financial position degraded however, which led managers to characterise Shelton as a worthy

asset to maintain within an otherwise troubled industry. Rather than privileging the point of closure, the insights included here illustrate an industry grappling with its demise, whereby those managing the decline battled against competing discourses and personal loyalties.

## 6.4 – Nationalisation & Working-Class Conservatism: 'Kick Up the Arse'

Counter to the hopes and narratives of Marxist thinkers, scores of the working-class have not organised and revolted against capitalism, but instead support and reproduce the very values and systems which contribute to their exploitation (Stacey & Green, 1971; Pugh, 2002). Perplexing sociologists and historians alike, working-class conservatism has been observed throughout Britain's economic history, with multiple explanations theorising why individuals engage against their self-interests (Brandt, 2013; Lerner, 1980). While some equate this phenomenon to *system-justification theory*, others draw upon the classic Marxist theory of the *labour aristocracy*, each of which influence blue-collar workers into ambivalence towards, or active engagement with capitalist production (Jost et al, 2017; Post, 2010; McLennan, 1981).

Throughout the 20th century, working-class support for the British Conservative Party has been crucial to its electoral success, while the Labour Party, traditionally thought of as a 'working-class party', has struggled to gain consistent support despite increasing enfranchisement (Stacey & Green, 1971; Pugh, 2002). This trend continues to influence contemporary politics: whereby former Labour Party strongholds in post-industrial Northern England defected to the Conservatives in the 2019 general election; leading

some to theorise a more permanent political realignment among the nation's working-class (Cutts et al, 2020; Hart, 2021). While themes of working-class conservatism have emerged throughout previous chapters, this section will explore respondents' varying political sentiments, and will analyse responses which valorised organisational aims of profitability and efficiency. The exploration of managerial identity will continue, while commentary from process and craft workers will demonstrate how these narratives filtered into the community.

Analysis contributes to the central argument regarding group stratification and membership conditionality, as working-class conservatism and the appropriation of managerial narratives highlights further specificities which signified group membership. Following previous analysis, differences emerged between managers, workers and active trade union members, though many shop floor communities were conscious of Shelton's operational needs and celebrated profitable industry. The motivations underpinning these sentiments differed however, with management prioritising profitability to safeguard their legitimacy as leaders, while workers attributed profitability to the continuation of their workplace community. Despite these variances, it will be argued that the principles of private enterprise featured heavily within the steelworkers' occupational communities, with this being influenced by continued efforts to demonstrate Shelton's viability to the BSC.

Introducing this section, Jonathan discussed the operational changes observed at Shelton after nationalisation. In his comments, he complained of increasing bureaucracy and constraints upon managerial autonomy, and even expressed embarrassment at the losses incurred by the BSC. He stated:

> When I started at Shelton, it was probably overmanned and so on, but there was always… it made money, even right through that terrible time during nationalisation when we were losing a million pounds a day, and it was very embarrassing to work for British Steel, Shelton was making money… After nationalisation, things changed, it became far more bureaucratic… we were lucky in some ways, because we were a satellite plant, you know, we weren't part of the great… steel networks in Wales, Scunthorpe… so in some ways we could be left on our own, but we became part of this group, and then a part of another group… all of that… then they centralised purchasing, then we had to have a training school… always done very well without one thank you.
>
> Jonathan, Fuel Engineer, Mill Manager

Equating nationalisation with unnecessary bureaucracy, Johnathan insinuated that Shelton's efficient operations were imposed upon by new burdensome processes. Expressing embarrassment towards Shelton's public ownership, he strained over the BSC's significant financial losses, which led him to contrast Shelton's individual performance against that of the wider industry. Stressing the need for sound finance and efficiency, Jonathan displayed his managerial identity and his political affiliation with conservatism, where a desire to be 'left alone' indicated disdain for state intervention.

Drawing similarities with system justification theory, Jonathan rationalised and celebrated an economic system which creates inequality, while he criticised the comparative egalitarianism of public ownership (Jost et al, 2008; 2017; Brandt, 2013; Lerner, 1980). Used in literatures exploring working-class conservatism, this theory

suggests that wage compulsion coerces the working-class into protecting their employer's interests (Jost et al, 2017). Individuals subsequently express highly meritocratic views and attribute poverty and systemic oppression to personal choice; which contribute to an understanding of inequality as the outcome of "the differing economic contributions made by various individuals in a market society" (Wisman & Smith, 2011, p. 991; see also Kelly & Enns, 2010). These themes emerge from Jonathan's remarks, as by emphasising the importance of independence, profitability and efficiency, he characterised private enterprise as the most rational and effective form of economic management. Similarly, he critiqued the need for a state-sponsored training school, and again invoked a history of private success to support his position.

Working-class conservatism has also been linked to worker's sense of powerlessness to change, which influences some to find citizenship within a certain stratification or role, and therefore discourages acknowledgment of oppressive relationships experienced personally or vicariously (van der Toorn et al, 2014; Lane, 1959). While this may underpin conservativism among others, Jonathan's perspectives were more ideologically engaged, as his managerial position and active role in the Action Committee suggest an emboldening of his personal values, rather than a meek acceptance of organisational objectives.

Though more diplomatic and muted in his critique of the BSC and public ownership, Edward also voiced opposition to Shelton's nationalisation. Comparing public and private ownership, Edward mused over the BSC's expansion strategy and its implications for Shelton:

> Nationalisation… there are good things to say about it, I suppose, and bad things… it removes the competition, why be efficient when you've got a bottomless pit to dig money out of? The government will always back you. If you're an individual company, you've got to innovate, become lean, invest and so on, and British Steel lost that… at one stage they were losing a colossal amount of money, a million pounds a day… so, it's a very difficult one, I think the individual companies were competing against each other, and because of that there was a lot of investment. When we were nationalised, erm, the British Steel Corporation were given a lot of money, and they started investing very heavily… rightly or wrongly, they took decisions that they were going to import iron ore from abroad, and they tended to concentrate their works near to those, so, Scunthorpe, Teesside, and those in south Wales that were all on the coast, and us little satellite plants, you know, our future was numbered.
>
> Edward, Fuel Engineer, Health & Safety Manager

Like Jonathan, Edward drew upon issues of private enterprise and invoked themes of agility and profitability as he compared private and public ownership. Stating the need for organisations to "become lean" and innovative, he rationalised organisational efforts to economise wherever possible, and reproduced managerial discourses broadcast during Shelton's dispute with the BSC (Richter & König, 2017). Likening nationalisation to a 'bottomless pit of money', Edward's sarcasm indicated unease with state subsidy and the disruption this brings to free market competition. While state support may be conducive to institutional security, for Shelton, a deeper relationship with the state disrupted a tradition of independence, which informed Edward's criticism

of the perceived inefficiencies of state control (Hyman, 2001; Flanders, 1974). Shelton's position as an in-land satellite plant complicated this relationship further, as the site's poor fit with the BSC's expansionist agenda designated the works as an outlier marked for closure.

Edward and Jonathan share important similarities both in terms of their position at Shelton, and in their childhood backgrounds. Despite his managerial position, Jonathan was archetypal of the industrial working-class: born into relative poverty to a coalmining family, and living a life of frugality and thrift. Similarly, Edward also experienced a disadvantaged childhood, as he was raised solely by his grandmother after his mother died shortly after childbirth. Both were employed at Shelton Bar for their entire working lives, where they each entered the fuel department as apprentices and progressed through the internal labour market.

Drawing upon his managerial experience, Edward diplomatically considered the merits of nationalisation before offering critique, in which he declined to overtly criticise the BSC's strategic position (Jost & Hunyady, 2003). Jonathan was comparatively bolder in his criticism however, which indicated a more overt connection to political conservatism. These contributions offer further insight into the perspectives of managerial staff, as although possessing similar upbringings to their peers, managerial experience created greater affiliation with market ideologies.

Reflecting upon the politics of industrial closures, Greg contributed by voicing opposition to the state retaining declining industries. Arguing in favour of economic change, he said:

> What a lot of people tell me now is, oh it was closed by the Conservatives, but I seem to remember it wasn't, it was closed before Maggie Thatcher came to power, which a lot of people thought… everything was closed down by Maggie Thatcher, but the steelworks wasn't, no, it was done by Labour, which I suppose… if you told somebody now, they'd be surprised, that they actually shut something down that was nationalised… But I think, it was because you couldn't expand it [Shelton Bar], so it didn't become cost effective, because even thought it was big for the area, in terms of steelworks, it was quite a small one… I think long term, it's always been proven that whoever tries to keep these things going, you know, they keep it going for another five years and then it collapses. In the 80s and 90s you had to have coal, everybody was saying it was absolutely mad to close it down, and now nobody wants coal [Laughs]… if you ever said your job now was to go down a hole and dig, they'd think you were mad, so… things change, you just have to get on with it.
>
> Greg, Laboratory Technician

For many participants, the Labour government of the 1970s contributed to feelings of political alienation, as workplace closures and spiralling industrial action signalled the abandonment of the party's traditional platform, while others continue to associate the Labour Party with the failings that led to the 1978-79 winter of discontent (Hay, 2010; Heath, 2018; Lilleker, 2002). In light of this, Greg highlighted Labour's role in Shelton's downsizing, and commented on the perceived inevitability of industrial decline. Greg was untroubled by subsequent economic change however, in which he described the plight of coal mining communities with sarcastic ambivalence. Throughout his interview

encounter, Greg was frequently unsympathetic towards post-industrial communities and stressed the need to move on and accept the principles of market reform. In later critique, he characterised communities as 'stuck in the past' and unwilling to change.

After being made redundant following Shelton's 1978 downsizing, Greg moved into a sector which experienced high growth throughout the 1980s. From this, he achieved a lucrative managerial career, where he travelled abroad frequently to advise on projects and liaise with clients. Having achieved upward mobility, Greg was unsympathetic towards those unable to recreate his success, which inspired meritocratic views of accepting and working with change (Wakslak et al, 2007; Chichocka et al, 2018). Against a backdrop of deindustrialisation and economic hardship, Greg rationalised the changes which resulted in his personal gains, in which he attributed the misfortunes of others to a lack of graft and thrift (Jost et al, 2017). Articulating narratives similar to Jonathan and Edward, Greg's comments again reveal the influence of occupational communities and their associated status upon political affiliation, as Greg's post-Shelton managerial career inspired his disregard for ailing industrial communities.

Later in his interview encounter, Jonathan discussed the present hardships faced by the steel industry, where he expressed concern for the longevity of Scunthorpe steelworks. In this discussion, he again criticised state ownership however, and critiqued the state's perceived lack of managerial acumen. Weighing the perceived limitations of nationalisation against the prospect of site closure, Jonathan contributed again:

> They don't know how to run things, they don't know how, they're not the experts on, you know… everything goes wrong. The Coal Board, massive debt, British Steel, massive debt, wasn't when we were privatised… we were making

> profits… There's a balance… I don't think we should let that Scunthorpe plant go, do you? I really don't, but, don't take it over as a nationalised thing, because you know, you've got to kick them up the arse, you've got to keep them… on their toes… or else they'll sit back, oh we're 'orate now, the government will pay, we're 'orate, dunna have to do much. It's true, that's the attitude that pervades, erm… so, I dunno how but, yeah, they should prop it up, make sure it doesn't close.
>
> Jonathan, Fuel Engineer, Mill Manager

Equating public ownership with a decline in employee initiative, Jonathan reaffirmed his belief in managerial discipline and establishing limits to workers' autonomy. Drawing a distinct periodisation between Shelton's public and private ownership, Jonathan praised the changes occurring after the BSC's privatisation in 1988, in which he celebrated a seemingly dramatic influx of profit. While many steel producers were able to improve their financial performance following privatisation, the industry shortly returned to a period of recession, with private ownership doing relatively little to counter industrial decline (Parker & Wu, 1998; Sadler, 1992). Also absent from Jonathan's remarks is the significant de-manning which underpinned this enhanced rate of profitability, though this suggests an acceptance of, and support for the corporate restructuring undertaken by Shelton's senior management (Richter & König, 2017). While his criticism reflects the tradition of independence maintained by 20th century industrial workers (Hyman, 2001; Marks, 1989), Jonathan's remarks are similarly grounded in Shelton's organisational history, where nationalisation preceded the work's decline. Consequently, though his managerial identity inspired critique of the

state, Jonathan's personal experiences of nationalisation inform his contemporary political sensibilities, which led him to discredit a hypothetical public ownership of Scunthorpe steelworks.

Discussing Shelton's nationalisation in 1967, Darius contributed by outlining the disruption experienced among shop floor communities:

> It was a bit of a bone of contention, because when it was John Summers, it erm… it was profit making… erm, the workshop-management relationship was excellent, it couldn't be bettered, you know what I mean, we were on first term names with most of the very senior management, you know, it was comfortable. Then all of a sudden, they wanted nationalise it and sort of, tear up the game plan, and this is what we're gonna do now, it… there was obviously things what we didn't understand that was going on, you know, foreign competition must have been massive, we didn't understand anything about that, we were a little community in Stoke-on-Trent, that was quite happy with things… and I talked to a lot of friends who I worked with who stayed on until the redundancy came along, they were disgruntled at leaving the Bar, they felt as though they'd been kicked in the teeth.
>
> Darius, Mechanical Fitter

Narrating positive relationships held between workers and management, Darius described a workforce formerly at ease with its relationship to capitalist production. Fairly remunerated in a defined occupational community, tradesmen at Shelton occupied a privileged economic position, which influenced a willingness to protect their

employer's interests. In light of this, Darius' contribution invoked the Marxist theory of 'labour-aristocracy', in which a select group of workers are privileged with disproportionate remuneration, and share in profits unduly gained by their capitalist employers (Post, 2010; McLennan, 1981; Stedman-Jones, 1975). Seeking to preserve their higher wages and benefits, these workers turn to political conservatism and reject the perceived radicalism associated with collective labour (Elbaum & Seltzer's, 1982).

Differing from their managerial colleagues however, craft workers such as Darius were more selective in their appropriation of managerial discourse, which made their association with working-class conservatism less overt. In order to preserve their communal autonomy and individual hierarchical position, craft workers maintained a social distance from managerial colleagues, which allowed workers to appease managers without joining their ranks. This is seen in Darius' reference to a 'happy little community', where steelworkers interacted with management positively, despite remaining settled in their departmental loyalties.

Stating a personal and shared unfamiliarity with rising competition from foreign steelmakers, Darius and his peers' primary concerns were in the maintenance of their community, and in personal remuneration. Consequently, Darius later recalled how many of his colleagues left Shelton shortly after nationalisation, as the change in ownership accompanied changes to overtime arrangements. New limits were placed upon lucrative overtime allowances and remuneration rates, which again created opposition to state ownership and its implications for their community. A history which privileged private ownership was subsequently authored by affected communities, where Shelton's former owner, the John Summer's Group, was canonised as the source

of Shelton's previous successes. The shared need for remuneration and financial stability resurfaced in Darius' remarks however, which served as a reminder of the steelworkers' individual wage compulsion (Post, 2010). Beginning a search to replace their lost wages, many of his peers exited the works for alternative workplaces, while Darius himself would soon leave due to his aforementioned managerial dispute.

Narrating the impact of nationalisation upon Shelton and other 'satellite plants', David criticised the BSC's expansion strategy and handling of site closures. Drawing upon Shelton's efficiency and profitability, he commented:

> I think it was just an overall… national decision… and I mean they weren't just looking at Shelton then, they chose Shelton to close first, but obviously there was other works in the frame, it was a massive downsize, and all the satellite plants if you like, Workington, Skinningrove, erm, Shelton, there was one in Irlam, and they'd just made a decision, that's going first, that's going next, that's going next [Pointing]. It was all about the business plan… that's why it went. There wasn't an argument… to say that Shelton wasn't one of the best steelworks they'd got… best rolling mill, definitely best rolling mill, very versatile, quick turnover, you know, they could be rolling one section part of the shift, an hour and a half later be rolling another section, nobody else could do that.
>
> David, Senior Furnaceman, ISTC Union Representative

While David regarded Shelton's operational agility as an organisational strength, he did not articulate personal satisfaction in achieving these ends, which differed from

Jonathan and Edward's support of ever-increasing efficiency and profitability. Instead, David invoked organisational aims in a manner comparable to Darius, where he acknowledged the importance of profitability, but he remained cautious of the implications of this upon shop floor communities. Working in a process role on Shelton's re-heating furnaces, David experienced workplace intensification preceding the 1978 downsizing, in addition to the subsequent de-manning taken in the following years. Elsewhere, David acknowledged the steelworkers' efforts in achieving extreme efficiency, which similarly underpinned his criticism of the BSC.

Elected as an ISCT representative, David participated in the collective bargaining process, in which he also liaised with and represented injured colleagues during settlement agreements. This meant that unlike many others, David witnessed the injustices faced at work, which provided limited scope to justify or downplay systemic oppression (Jost et al, 2008; 2017; van der Toorn et al, 2014; Lerner, 1980). Influenced by his union duties, David became involved with the Labour Party during retirement and was elected as a councillor for his local area. Retaining an overt affiliation with Labour, David again differed from his more conservative peers, which led him to share solidarity with the decline of mining communities, and later voice support for state intervention in strategic industries. Alongside occupational position, trade union involvement was another important differentiator between respondents, as those with more overt links to collective bargaining were less likely to engage with political conservatism. This pattern also challenges arguments by Brandt (2013), who regarded working-class conservatism as randomly dispersed and based upon cognitive dissonance, as respondents' occupational experiences influenced expressed ideological leanings.

While David was an active member of the Labour Party, he stated that he was not an unwavering supporter. Instead, the party's history of trade union activism created an expected affiliation. For many former industrial workers, this partnership has since soured, leading many to voice scepticism and critique of the Labour party since its New Labour rebirth. Others have more deeply held critique however, like Frank, who became disillusioned with Labour due to their oversight of Shelton's decline and closure. Commenting on his disappointment in local political leadership, Frank discussed the 1978 downsizing and the BSC's seemingly undeterrable strategy:

> The cost of installing electric arc furnaces was £4.4 million, and I only know that because I was secretary of the union, and erm, we were promised by [MP, Stoke-on-Trent Central], [MP, Stoke-on-Trent North], and… who was the MP, local… I can't remember his name… anyway, they said they would fight for Shelton Bar, and… they would do their very best to keep it open… and… no… it was cut and dried from day one. Monty Finniston, who was the head of British Steel at the time… they'd already got it in their mind what they wanted… But then what did they do when the blast furnaces closed? They kept the mill open, they shipped steel in from Scunthorpe, which… no one in their right mind could tell me that was cost effective… that cannot of been cost effective.
>
> Frank, Boilermaker, ASB Union Branch Secretary

Drawing upon his involvement with the Action Committee, Frank reproduced a shared history which depicts Shelton as a profitable enterprise, leading him to articulate anger towards the BSC alongside a common belief in the work's commercial viability. Though

Frank's criticism is sharpest towards the corporation, his disappointment in local political leadership is palpable. Quickly recalling the names of two local MPs active during the dispute, it is clear that Shelton's closure remained present in Frank's mind, which led him to directly assign blame towards specific individuals and their political agendas. Describing the closure as "cut and dried from day one", Frank expressed anger at the seemingly undeterrable BSC, in which not even direct political pressure altered their planned strategy. Consequently, Frank's remarks are tainted with political disillusionment, as those elected to represent his interests failed to adequately protect the works (Lilleker, 2002).

Though Frank did not reveal any party-political affiliations, his remarks reflect the contemporary disconnect between industrial workers and the Labour Party. Emerging particularly towards the end of the 20th century, changes in party composition and deindustrialisation predicated growing working-class disenfranchisement from Labour (Evans & Mellon, 2020; Heath, 2018; O'Grady, 2019). Accompanied by the fracturing of left-wing political movements (Surridge, 2018), successive disappointments in the Labour Party have influenced those like Frank into despondency, which generates greater scope for the adoption of political conservatism. Frank's contribution is characteristic of these political realignments, this being influenced not by the reproduction of managerial rhetoric, but rather by the emotional scarring of decline, disappointment and disillusionment. Also commenting on his disconnect from the Labour Party, Bill contributed by discussing the perceived change in Labour's political platform:

> I was always erm, staunch Labour guy… I wasn't sung socialist, but I believed in… again, it's fairness, I can't get away from fairness, things have to be fair, and Labour always offered that… level of fairness… to the working man, and I've… I haven't voted Labour now since Tony Blair, erm… I just, I see the Labour Party as lost its way, it's not for the working man now… and the thought of voting Tory… horrifies me, and I couldn't vote for the Liberals if me life depended on it, so I'm a bit lost, I'm at a bit of a loss at the moment as where to put me vote… but erm, the Labour party's lost the working man, and I don't know how they get them back, I mean, they've lost Scotland, now they've lost the North, if it wasn't for the big cities… Labour would be a non-entity.
>
> Bill, Finishing End Operative, Furnaceman, ISTC Union Representative

During the 2019 general election, traditional Labour strongholds in the North and Midlands contributed to a Conservative landslide win, with some areas electing Tory MP's for the first time in their constituency's history (Cutts et al, 2020; Curtice, 2020; Carreras et al, 2019). Though debate continues regarding the causes and permanence of these shifts, voters largely cited dissatisfaction with Labour's leadership and a desire to realise the Brexit withdrawal process as influencing their vote (Hart, 2022). With the Conservatives making large gains in areas formerly allusive to their campaigns, social class has re-emerged on the agenda of political commentators, which deviates from commentary declaring the unimportance of class within post-industrial societies (Lilleker, 2002).

With this in mind, Bill's comments are more nuanced than his apparent disinterest in the Labour Party, as although he stated a lack of voting intention for Labour, he also

articulated disgust towards the Conservatives. This suggested that rather than losing or renegotiating his class consciousness and identity, Bill perceives the main political parties as divorced from his socioeconomic interests; of which supports arguments that "strategic ideological convergence by the main parties" has eroded classed voting (Evans & Tilley, 2012, p. 158). Later describing himself as politically homeless, Bill shared the sense of estrangement articulated by Frank, which resulted in an affiliation with local independent candidates, rather than a defection to the Conservative Party.

This sense of being 'left behind' by mainstream political parties features heavily within contemporary political debate, particularly influencing explanations for Brexit's electoral success (Goodwin & Heath, 2016; Chan et al, 2020; Walkerdine, 2020). While some have disputed a strong preference to leave the EU among working-class voters (Antonucci et al, 2017), others have demonstrated high concentrations of leave supporters within former industrial heartlands (Carreras et al, 2019). Stoke-on-Trent was dubbed the 'Brexit capital of Britain' following the referendum, with 70% of voters favouring leave (Wallis, 2019). Although now living in the North East, Bill later made his support for Brexit clear by stating that regardless of current and potential economic consequences, he will continue to support leaving the EU.

The manner in which Bill narrated his political beliefs revealed a sense of personal grievance and loss, of which reflects deep tensions emerging across disadvantaged communities (Corbett, 2016; Bhambra, 2017). Proclaiming that Labour have "lost the working man", Bill mourned the loss of heavy industry and its accompanying social order, again indicating nostalgia for the permanence of an imagined past (Strangleman, 2012). Differing from his managerial peers however, Bill rejected political affiliation with

the Conservative Party, and cited their historical role in overseeing the UK's industrial decline. Despite this, he proved sympathetic to contemporary changes within the political landscape, namely in disassociation from Labour and staunch support for Brexit. Like Frank, frustration and disillusionment underpinned this realignment, which has resulted in greater illiberalism and Euro-scepticism as the UK continues its relative decline.

As demonstrated within this section, affiliations with working-class conservatism varied among respondents, with some making overt appeals to private enterprise, while others simply acknowledged the importance of profitability and efficiency to Shelton's survival; where they chose not to reproduce nor celebrate these strategic goals in a personal capacity. Participants' political sentiments are an emerging picture, with some settled in their ideological position, while others engage with changing societal perspectives. Despite their differences, the re-emergence of managerial discourse indicated a conservative undertone to the steelworkers' present and former community, where in order to preserve the site's longevity, managers and workers alike reproduced organisational aims of profitability and efficiency. This is especially present in commentary regarding nationalisation, as those resisting the BSC's programme of closure stressed Shelton's advantageous financial position, and used this as evidence of long-term financial viability.

For the younger workers entering Shelton after 1978, most had few direct experiences of state intervention, though some repeated remarks made by their older peers. Bill, for instance, recalled how the BSC "flooded the place with workers", a narrative told vicariously through his father's experiences. This indicated that the legacy of Shelton's

dispute was passed down colloquially through the community to form important and influential folk lore. With workers seeking to preserve their livelihoods through thrift and economy, organisational aims and objectives were internalised and reproduced in varying forms. The role of occupational identity and community in influencing working-class conservatism is thus demonstrated, leading some into closer affiliations with the politics of capitalist production.

## 6.5 – Chapter Conclusion

The 1970s was a critical juncture for Shelton Bar, with success, uncertainty and eventual defeat having marked effects upon the steelworkers' occupational identity and community. The Action Committee's initial victory over the BSC canonised the role of resistance and initiative across departmental communities, however, the manner in which this success was achieved proved more influential. Having discredited the BSC's planned closure with amicable negotiation and economic forecasting, non-militancy was celebrated among senior management, thereby generating narratives of the workers' rationality and responsibility. This narrated history was mobilised as a form of normative control, in which those departing from idealised behaviour were characterised as jeopardising Shelton's continued viability. A powerful disciplinary mechanism was subsequently created, which led many into acceptance of workplace intensification, restructuring and widespread redundancies.

As Shelton's workforce diminished in preparation to install the electric arc furnace, managers attempted to legitimise redundancies via repeated references to wider

industry turmoil. Continued efforts to prove Shelton's financial viability introduced many to the politics of capitalist production, which later inspired instances of working-class conservativism. While overt identification with conservative politics varied among interviewees, many sympathised with issues of profitability, efficiency and flexibility, while similarly noting the perceived virtues of private enterprise. Though influenced by contemporary political realignments, direct experiences of nationalisation and decline informed interviewees' political positions. These sentiments displayed the strength of managerially authored histories, as although many distanced themselves from management to protect their communal position, narratives of Shelton as a profitable enterprise influenced how many remembered the steelworks and their departmental communities.

# Chapter 7 – The Road to Closure: Community Erosion

## 7.1 – Empirical Themes: Enterprise & Enterprising Selves

The 1980s was a contentious period of the UK's economic and political history, which witnessed Margaret Thatcher's premiership divide public opinion as Britain was recast by deindustrialisation. Though Thatcher's tenure is associated with industrial decline, historical accounts of her political rise chart a nuanced view, where Britain's relative economic decline predated the Conservatives' 1979 electoral victory (Green, 1999; Gamble, 1988; Dintenfass, 1992; Rose et al, 1984). While the monetarist policies of Thatcher's first term increased industrial closures and unemployment (Maynard, 1988), the UK's economy had experienced prolonged stagnation throughout the 1970s, emboldening conservative criticism of Keynesian economic management; this being the predominant economic model used since the end of the second World War. While Keynesian policies had generated growth during the post-war years, high inflation, taxation and rising unemployment undermined the principles of British social democracy.

Keynesianism subsequently experienced a 'crisis of legitimacy', which emboldened the nascent 'new right' of the Conservative party who sought to reverse the UK's decline via market liberalisation (Hay, 2010; Worcester, 1989; Gamble, 1994). Searching for a leader to successfully challenge post-war collectivism, the Conservative party selected Thatcher to replaced Edward Heath as party leader in 1974. Elected in 1979, Thatcher's principal aim was to reverse the state's role in economic management, as she argued that from market-led reform, growth could be achieved in new sectors as the UK closed

its heavy industries. Consequently, although Thatcher's rise was enabled by growing opposition to the post-war consensus, this in itself was bolstered by the UK's economic decline and social unrest of the 1960s and 1970s.

Contrasting from depictions of a comprehensive and coordinated programme of change, some have argued that Thatcher's successes rest primarily in the discursive realm (Phillips, 1998; Hall, 1988; O'Shea, 1984). The prominence of 'Thatcherism' underpins this argument, in which free market rhetoric created a penetrating 'enterprise culture', which steadily altered how individuals related to the state and enterprise (Garrett, 1992). By curtailing government intervention in economic planning, Thatcher's administration ended the 'mixed economy' and strengthened private enterprise. Enterprise culture is key to her legacy as prime minister, as this legitimised a form of government conducive to free market liberalism. Rather than forming an industrial strategy that collaborates with industrial and engineering sectors, the state can 'manage from a distance' to allow free market forces to "shape the economic or social conduct of diverse and institutionally distinct persons and agencies without shattering their formally distinct or 'autonomous' character" (Miller & Rose, 1990, p. 14).

Regarding tangible policy changes, Thatcher was successful in weakening the welfare state and expanding homeownership via the *Right to Buy* policy. Through purchasing council homes at reduced rates, former tenants may engage with capital accumulation and abandon social democracy in favour of private property. Though successful in achieving the aim of state retrenchment, Thatcher appears less calculated and more opportunistic, in that her government employed rhetoric to supplement targeted policy

(Rose, 1999). The emergent character of this legislative agenda is indicative of apparent opportunism, with commentators pointing to the flagship policy of privatisation as evidence; this being notably absent from the Conservatives' 1979 election manifesto, though pursued heavily towards the end of the parliamentary term (Gamble, 1988). While Thatcher was the public face of economic change, the ideological wrestle between Keynesianism and liberalism was embodied within political discourse and debate, of which emerged before her premiership and continued after her resignation in 1990.

With the state largely removed from economic management, individualism superseded state paternalism, thereby individualising responsibility for personal economic and social wellbeing (Smyth, 1999; Beck, 1992). While some have attributed entrepreneurialism with economic regeneration, others criticise these changes by noting their role in reducing welfare spending (Cross & Payne, 1991). Organisations and institutions are also influenced by enterprise discourse, with previously non-commercial entities adopting entrepreneurial practices such as workplace intensification and market consolidation. These efforts were spurred by rhetorical devices contrasting bureaucracy against a 'positively coded' interpretation of entrepreneurialism (du Gay, 2004; Ritchie, 1991). While familiar to private organisations, these pressures involve public sector austerity, heightened competition and marketisation.

Following market-led reform, institutions such as hospitals, universities and local governments became accustomed to *new public management*, which involved the application of entrepreneurial values to create operational and cost efficiencies

(Chandler et al, 2002). Managing public services in a commercial manner also changed how individuals interacted with the state by transforming citizens into consumers of state products, thereby removing the utilitarian nature of welfare provision. Exchange and commerce between individuals and the government was subsequently normalised. This recast the public as sovereign consumers, while also enforcing institutional change to meet the needs of a transaction-based relationship (du Gay & Salaman, 1992).

The lived impacts of enterprise culture often contrast from depictions of market liberation and personal freedom, as marketisation creates workplace intensification, while the degradation of trade union power facilitates increased precarity (Wasson, 2004; Gee et al, 1996). Against these changes, individuals form an 'enterprising self', which involves conformance to market rhetoric, engagement with consumerism, and the enactment of self-disciplining behaviours; often invoked to protect their position against heightened workplace competition (du Gay, 1996). Analysing interview data from those retained or arriving at Shelton after 1978, this chapter will chart the impact of economic change upon the steelworkers' occupational culture and community. Offering a unique insight into the decline of a traditional heavy industry, analysis will detail how entrepreneurialism undermined a culture grounded in post-war collectivism. Underpinned by a Foucauldian approach to power and identity, analysis will similarly demonstrate how managerial discourses of profitability disciplined workers at Shelton Bar, and subsequently altered how they identified with their work and raised solidarity. It will be argued that enterprising knowledges eroded the steelworkers' community by undermining tradition, solidarity and the internal labour market. While similarly

disrupting workers' willingness to collaborate and socialise, these changes also muted collective resistance against the final closure in 2000.

Later drawing upon deindustrialisation literature, this chapter will demonstrate a nuanced account of industrial decline, where a protracted process of decline preceded the final site closure (High & Lewis, 2007; Linkon, 2018; Mah, 2012). Analysis will depict a workplace culture experiencing a gradual deterioration, alongside multifarious experiences of site closure. Interview data recording Shelton's final closure in 2000 will explore this narrative, leading an analysis of how workers chose to narrate acts of ceremony, protest, and the immediate impacts of redundancy. It will be argued that in line with the economic changes of the 1980s, the British Steel Corporation (BSC) injected enterprise culture into the works to intensify operations as the industry prepared for privatisation. The impact of these changes upon the occupational community will be evidenced, whereby interviewees discuss increased individualism among colleagues as they battled for job security and schedule gifts. Shelton's closure in 2000 will feature heavily in this chapter, as its origins can be traced to the changes occurring after 1978.

## 7.2 – Erosion of Community: Winding Down

Following the election of Margaret Thatcher in 1979, the British Steel Corporation announced changes to the 1980 national pay offer and introduced performance-based pay for individual sites (Hartley et al, 1983). Adding to the pressure faced by domestic steel producers, restrictions on government support further eroded the industry's

commercial viability. These changes inspired the steel strike of 1980, which led steelworkers across the nation to strike over pay and conditions, in addition to concern over future job losses. Guided by neoliberal marketisation, Thatcher's reforms established free market economics as the basis for political decision making, which replaced the centrally planned, Keynesian approach to post-war economic management (Martinez-Lucio & Mackenzie, 2004; Crouch, 2009). During this period, the government took a combative approach to nationalised industries and organised labour, and subsequently antagonised unions to contrive industrial action (Milne, 2014).

Neoliberal reforms and deindustrialisation altered membership and identification within Shelton's occupational community, with the 1980 strike initiating a new era at the works. Drawing upon theories of enterprise culture, analysis will illustrate the erosion of collectivism among the men, leading to a rise in individualism as the workforce continued to contract. It will be argued that though rising Asian production undermined Shelton's competitive position, Thatcher's attack on the post-war consensus eroded the steelworkers' occupational community, and altered how members interacted with each other, the state and industry.

The 1980 steel strike was the first instance of industrial action called by the ISTC since 1926, and the first strike of Thatcher's premiership. Although initiated over a rejection of 1980's national pay offer, the industrial action grew to include workers' concerns over site closures and mass redundancies; and as Bill argues in the following quote, also became contrived into a test of the government's resolve against collective labour (Hartley et al, 1983). While the ISTC were successful in negotiating an improved pay

offer, the strike did not alter the BSC's strategic direction, nor the state's approach to nationalised industries. Introducing this discussion, Bill recalled his experience of the ISTC's 13-week walkout:

> The first of January 1980… we went on strike for three months, which was erm… a complete and utter disaster, we give 'um three months' notice, there wasn't a piece of steel left on the steelworks by the time we went on strike, and I'm standing on the gate trying to stop… there was nothing to stop [Chuckle], you know what I mean, we'll go on the gate and stop the steel going off, yeah… We went to erm, one or two stockholders, did a bit of picketing, I was never… I couldn't see the point, I think the strike was contrived… by Thatcher, and… McGregor who was then in charge, had done his business at Leyland before he moved to the steel industry, and then he moved onto the pits, and took Arthur Scargill on, you know what I mean, and we all know where it went, don't we? The working man got his arse kicked, erm, and we come back after the strike, there was a lot of… people who never recovered, they'd gone into a lot of debt, a lot of people had left while we were on strike, and from 1980… you were just managing decline right through the industry.
>
> Bill, Finishing End Operative, Furnaceman, ISTC Union Representative

Between 1979 and 1986, 100,000 jobs were lost across the steel industry, with closures occurring at large production centres in England and Wales (Blyton & Bacon, 1997). At remaining sites, manpower reductions were commonplace alongside restructuring and intensification. To secure costs and enhance productivity, management replaced the traditional crew system with a new teamworking structure, which supressed internal

hierarchies that formally controlled task content and delegation (Blyton, 1992). This also ended the work to rule demarcation of labour and enhanced labour utilisation by encouraging production workers to share responsibilities, while also allocating additional tasks to craft and maintenance workers. The change to teamworking dealt a significant blow to the traditional internal labour market, and subsequently enhanced managerial control by stripping labour autonomy (Blyton & Bacon, 1997; Hughes & Dobbins, 2021).

Changes experienced across the steel industry exemplified the neoliberal reforms initiated by Thatcher's administration, which accentuated free markets and political individualism, and expanded corporate power by undermining trade unions (Connell, 2010; Harvey, 2005). Therefore, the steel strike offers a useful starting point for steelworkers narrating these changes, leading Bill to locate this point as a key moment in the industry's decline. When discussing Thatcher's approach to industrial action, Bill identified the class-based conflict of the dispute by citing previous and subsequent battles between organised labour and the government (Hung & Thompson, 2016). Specifically, he named Ian McGregor as a key belligerent in the dispute; this being a contentious figure who chaired the BSC during a period of contraction and mass redundancies, and later headed the National Coal Board during the Miners' Strike of 1984/85. Reflecting upon these events, Bill stated that "the working man got his arse kicked", indicating that defeat and loss characterise his memories of the 1980s.

When remembering the steel strike, Bill narrated his experience with the knowledge of subsequent losses within his own and adjacent industries, thereby constituting a retrospective construction of history (Bruner, 1991; Savolainen, 2020). This is seen in

references to managed decline after 1980, a narrative informed by subsequent experiences of site closures and redundancies, rather than of the solidarity experienced during the strike. While men at Shelton drew upon their occupational community to insulate themselves from adversity, steel communities were harmed by decline, subsequently impacting their resolve and ability to raise solidarity.

Also discussing the steel strike, George recalled workplace change occurring after the dispute, where fewer departmental labourers signalled the beginning of consistent manpower reductions:

> Up until the steel strike, erm, we all, skilled blokes all had their own labourers, they did all the menial tasks… like bloody, greasing your lathes, making you a brew and stuff like that, and erm, I got back and it was totally changed, you'd got one labourer for the whole department, he'd do anything for you if he could be bothered to get off his arse, so we more or less did it all ourselves then… You'd still got the same amount of roll turners, but that slowly… went down until they turned to CNC, then it dropped down to four.
>
> George, Roll & Centre Lathe Turner

Resulting from the BSC's agenda of fiscal constraint, management at Shelton sought to minimise costs to safeguard the mill's future, while also flattening hierarchies to mute steelworkers' collective power. This emerges in George's remarks, as his description of fewer labourers and intensification indicates greater economisation, involving the continued shedding of labour and mechanisation of manual tasks. Intensification and additional responsibility altered individual and shared relationships with the works, as

knowledges of entrepreneurialism and initiative led many to accept higher workloads as a condition of Shelton's survival (du Gay, 1996; du Gay & Salaman, 1999). Consequently, rather than working for the betterment of their collective interests, steelworkers were recast as responsible for Shelton's fortunes, which made them vulnerable to disciplining rhetoric regarding potential closure. To avoid managerial and communal punishment, workers employed self-disciplining behaviours as they prioritised the mill's profitability, this being demonstrated in George's begrudging acceptance of additional responsibility in the absence of a personal labourer.

Though degrading the roll shop's labourer through hierarchical interpretation of skill, George's negative reaction reflects employees' lived experiences of marketisation and restructuring, where intensification results in "enhanced employee exhaustion and decreased job satisfaction" (Harney et al, 2018, p. 248; see also Wasson, 2004). While resistance to enterprising rhetoric is possible (Fournier & Grey, 1999), the steelworkers' scope for resistance was constrained, as their desire to protect the works and their community had become appropriated; meaning rhetoric of efficiency and enterprise were incorporated into communal membership and belonging (Rose, 1999). Consequently, resistance was seen in unauthorised downtime and interpersonal disputes with managers and colleagues, which exerted few material effects upon production and Shelton's financial position (Contu, 2008).

Continuing with themes of intensification, Edward discussed the pressure to accept additional duties as colleagues exited the works:

> The other thing that happened at Shelton was that, as people left, they were very very reluctant to replace them, and they tried to share the jobs out

> between other people to make us more efficient, and… you got very very stretched. For example, I ended up purely as a safety advisor, but erm, I then had to become part of the personnel department, I had to do a personnel training course, and when the personnel officer was away, I had to stand in for him, erm… when the man in charge of security left… it was taken over by personnel if you like, which was the personnel officer and myself, so we would liaise with the erm, we used [Company name] security then, contractors, but we would be in charge of those contractors, and monitor them and make sure that security was working… loads and loads of little things that we got as extras because, you know, people had left, somebody had got to do their job.
>
> Edward, Fuel Engineer, Health & Safety Manager

Efficiency and intensification became normalised at Shelton, which created an expectation for employees to extend their efforts when colleagues exited the works. By constructing intensification as a matter of survival, management were able to discipline workers discursively (Fournier, 1999), as those unwilling to accept higher workloads were framed as endangering Shelton's future. In light of this, a cultural norm of accepting additional responsibilities was created, leading those like Edward to sacrifice spare time and capacity for a perceived greater good. The steelworkers subsequently become neoliberal subjects within an enterprising regime, which policed their behaviour in a manner beneficial to both the organisation and the neoliberal state (Foucault, 2008; 1977; Miller & Rose, 1990). Though experiencing discipling norms during previous disputes, these changes altered the steelworkers' occupational community, as although intensification was justified as a collective effort to safeguard

the works, de-manning strained relations between community members. Localised change reflected the wider socioeconomic shifts occurring under Thatcher's premiership, where relationships with enterprise and the state underwent significant transformation (Lazzarato, 2009; Watson, 2009).

Within his contribution, Edward also discussed the growing role of contractors at Shelton, where outsourced labour supplemented the dwindling capabilities of a lean workforce. Preceding privatisation in 1988, the 1981 Iron and Steel Act introduced market reforms to the then nationalised steel industry to liberalise workforce and operational requirements (Sadler, 1990). This legislation ended the BSC's statutory obligation to provide a comprehensive range of products, while also permitting individual sites to sell assets to the private sector. Although specific to the steel industry, these reforms reflected a wider governmental desire to alter the state's economic role, in which nationalised industries were guided away from central planning and then prepared for privatisation (Worcester, 1989). Consequently, the political motivations of these changes have received critique, as although domestic steel producers were declining against foreign competition, market reform enabled the government to alter British industry and civil society towards neoliberal ends (Sadler 1990; Gamble, 1988; 1994).

This experience was mirrored across the manufacturing sector, with adjacent industries also impacted by state retrenchment. Unrest in coal mining communities was particularly acute during this period, as although the oil crisis had shifted energy investment back into coal power, the government did little to protect the coal industry against European overcapacity (Beynon et al, 1991). Alongside redressing trade union

and corporate power (Hung & Thompson, 2016), the privatisation of nationalised industries also sought to cut state expenditures hamstrung by high inflation. Accordingly, despite the steel industry's rationalisation beginning under public ownership, Thatcher's government accelerated this process by advancing a broader transition away from centrally planned, subsidised industry (Luxton & Braedley, 2010).

Also discussing Shelton's growing use of contractors, Jonathan commented on the organisational benefits of using flexible, outsourced labour. As a senior manager, his remarks are particularly important, as they reflected the enterprising discourses employed by Shelton's management team:

> I understood it really, because… what it was aiming for, is… high productivity, we wanted to keep that mill going, it was always under threat, because we were positioned in Stoke, in the middle of nowhere, because we had to import the blooms from Scunthorpe, or Teesside, a hell of a long way you know, to bring the steel in… So… we were trying to make the plant as efficient as possible, and by using contractors… they're only there when you need them, and if you get good contractors and you get a good relationship, I could ring up in the evenings and say, I need a couple of guys, come on, I've got a problem here, they'd send somebody out. You're not paying them for, you know, five or seven days a week or whatever, just when you need them [Clicks fingers], and it worked very well.
>
> Jonathan, Fuel Engineer, Mill Manager

Following the 1981 Steel Act, subcontracting became more widespread throughout the BSC, with temporary labour completing functions lost to rationalisation (Fevre, 1987). This included tasks such as site maintenance and refurbishment, where specific trades were utilised as and when they were needed. The increasing use of subcontracting initially emerged in the construction industry, where weather dependency created costly stoppages, leading contractors to remove downtime pay and union representation (Bresnen et al, 1985). These trends then spread to engineering and service sectors, again influenced by increasing price sensitivity and the subjugation of trade unions (Mattera, 1985). Prior to the 1980s, the BSC utilised contractors in a limited capacity by restricting the tender process to a select group of trusted partners. Contracts were often awarded to organisations with an established relationship with the BSC, rather than those offering price sensitivity. Material prices and wages were also calculated in line with previously negotiated rates. BSC management later liberalised the contracting system however and invited new contractors to tender with greater emphasis upon cost reduction (Fevre, 1986; 1987). Established contractors faced competition from lower cost alternatives, as BSC work was predominantly awarded to subcontractors utilising non-unionised labour.

At Shelton, this proved useful in realising extreme flexibility and productivity, influencing Jonathan's praise of the economising benefits of temporary labour. Clicking his fingers, Jonathan insinuated the instantaneous nature of contracted work, and depicted Shelton as a customer of productive labour, rather than a provider of stable, full employment (du Gay & Salaman, 1992). This constituted a marked departure from former work to rule practices, further eroding the cultural tradition of role permanence

and task demarcation. The presence of organisational outsiders also disrupted the steelworkers' occupational community and entrenched uncertainty as workers interacted with cost effective labourers. Notably, Jonathan celebrated the utilisation of contractors and characterised this as an intelligent solution to financial pressures. Though influenced by his managerial identity, his comments indicate the reproduction of austerity across the works, where cost reductions were viewed as paramount to Shelton's continued operations. Discussing the BSC's privatisation, Jonathan continued:

> When we knew eventually we were going to close [Steel and ironworks], after we'd won the battle but lost the war, their [BSC] plan originally was for… I think, 750 men to run the mill, and we got it down to about… less than 400, hmm… and then eventually, we were privatised again, and boy did things change… erm, numbers went down, profits went up, tonnages went up and up and up, striving for more and more efficiency. Which as a private company we had to do, because there was an awful lot of, erm… every sort of… emerging nation, they all wanted a steelworks… British Steel were advising on all of those as well, and of course China… so erm, the world was becoming… flooded with steel, and so to keep up, we had to keep becoming more and more efficient.
>
> Jonathan, Fuel Engineer, Mill Manager

After almost a decade in power, Thatcher's government privatised the BSC in 1988, subsequently forming British Steel (BS) in its place (Sadler, 1990). The 1980s was a period of redundancies and decline for British manufacturing, and this was set to continue for the steel industry, as rationalisation did little to stabilise plant closures or

improve overall competitive positioning. Despite a brief period of profitability following BS's privatisation, the UK entered a recession in the early 1990s which led to another drop in demand for steel (Parker & Wu, 1998). Facing more financial difficulties, BS closed Ravenscraig steelworks in 1991, ending steelmaking in Scotland, while simultaneously announcing the closure of Dalzell plateworks (Sadler, 1992). Set against industrial decline and foreign competition, management at Shelton remained committed to economisation and efficient production.

Displaying his managerial identity, Jonathan commended privatisation by citing an increase in profitability and output as the works competed domestically and internationally. This attitude links to older workers' attachments to private ownership under the John Summers Group, where independent operations generated prosperity and saw the construction of the North Works site. However, the way privatisation is narrated indicates an acceptance and internalisation of enterprising rhetoric, in that Jonathan endorses leaner, intensified production (du Gay, 2004; Rose, 1999). Contrasting from his previous remarks regarding state bureaucracy and heavy financial losses, Jonathan hails privatisation as a return to sensible and effective operations; an action perceived as necessary to counter the strategic threat of rising steel production in emerging economies. In light of heightened competition, Shelton's dwindling workforce experienced the ever-increasing intensification of their productive labour, as evidenced by those such as Edward and George in their accounts of accepting higher workloads. Intensification also accompanied greater responsibility for the success and profitability of the works, where the threat of closure was internalised and reproduced by many.

Also reflecting upon foreign competition, Eliot recalled Asian delegations visiting Shelton as part of cultural exchange programmes:

> I knew it was going anyway… I knew that the place was shutting down, we used to have the Chinese… the Japanese and the Chinese coming in, and sitting with people because… we were making guide rails for them, obviously they wanted to make them over there, but they couldn't do it like we did it, so they were coming in to learn how we did it actually, which I remember the old guys saying, what are we doing with these bloody lot here? They're gonna be nicking all our work off of us! We're rolling this and it's going to China, and they're here while we're doing it. But from what we heard, they'd actually mastered it by coming down to Shelton, yeah, it was one of those.
>
> Eliot, Finishing End Operative, Crane Operator

Threats from foreign competition emerged as a recurring theme across interview encounters, however when discussing the period following privatisation, respondents frequently mentioned the growth of Chinese steel producers. Reflected in Eliot's remarks, China's economic growth generated important communal folklore (Hudson & Swanton, 2012), with many attributing Shelton's closure to Chinese competition. While some researchers dispute the effects of globalisation upon western deindustrialisation (Rowthorn & Ramaswamy, 1999), others are more confident in proclaiming a link between the two, citing a fall in western manufacturing employment following rising imports (Saeger, 1997; Alderson, 1999; Autor et al, 2013). In light of China's dramatic industrial expansion, some respondents articulated bitter resentment towards globalisation, this being expressed in veiled racism and hostility to foreign production.

In the quote above, Eliot recalled the aggression shown towards visitors from a cultural exchange delegation, in which men expressed their opposition to foreign economic integration. Although grounded in a desire to protect Shelton's longevity, the foreign visitors were othered and derided as thieves, demonstrating the animosity generated by heightened competition (Rawls & David, 2005; Whitehead, 2009). The precarity and desperation felt across the community is clear, as under increasing pressure from foreign competition, the presence of outsiders reinforced the men's precarious position.

Importantly, Eliot appears to mix and conflate the arrival of Asian delegations, which reveals a process of retrospective narrative construction. Throughout the 1980s and early 1990s, management circles were infatuated with Japanese industrial relations and production methods, inspiring a turn to leaner, *Just in Time*, *Total Quality Management* systems (Womack et al, 1990; Oliver & Wilkinson, 1992). A wealth of critical literature thus spawned on the 'Japanisation' of Western manufacturing, which ranged from the threat posed to employees and trade unions, to the uninspiring performance of management programmes hastily grafted onto British workplaces (McCabe, 1999; Knights & McCabe, 1998; Delbridge, 1995; Berggren, 1993). In light of Japan's cultural and economic relevance during this period, it makes sense for Eliot to reference Japanese delegations at the works, yet he directs his attention to Chinese visitors and competitors, stating that he knew production was being transferred to China.

Though growing in economic importance throughout the 1990s, China only emerged as a net steel exporter in 2006, which followed their ascent into the World Trade Organisation in 2001 (Holloway et al, 2010). Therefore, when Eliot narrates his

experiences of foreign cultural exchanges, his narratives are influenced by contemporary shifts in global production, where China emerged as the world's predominant industrial force. This indicates a present concern with global industrial realignment, as by associating Shelton's closure with China's economic rise, Eliot reveals frustration with the UK's relative decline. These sentiments were common across interview encounters, with many linking China's immense production capacity to Shelton's final days in 2000 (Bruner, 1991). As fieldwork was completed in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic, hostility towards China may have also originated in rising geopolitical tensions, where China faced fierce critique from the West for their handling of the disease.

Describing growing communal hostility as workers experienced greater precarity, Bart discussed how his craft peers retained trade secrets to safeguard their position:

> Every electrician would have a book, where they'd all noted down erm, if you get this happen, go and do this… we used to have all these books, and it was like a crib sheet on how to fix all these things… But then, a lot of the electricians it was, erm, look after yourself, so what they'd do is, they'd find out something, and they'd keep it to themselves, because that then guarantees their job, its… we used to say, knowledge is power, and that was an absolutely big thing at British Steel. So, if you find out something, take that note and keep it to yourself, and I see that in a lot of other industries by the way, it wasn't just… British Steel, but… I worked opposite, like, if I find something, I'll actually share it around.
>
> Bart, Electrical & Automation Engineer

As Shelton inched towards closure, experiences of protracted decline and precarity altered relations between workers to influence acts of individualism and self-preservation. This is present within Bart's comments, where he describes electricians withholding information from their colleagues. As he later explained, management came to regard craft workers as replaceable, which led men to retain trade secrets and critical information to secure their position. Rather than working as a team, competition and hostility emerged between groups, again detracting from an occupational culture once defined by its comradeship. Although continuing to draw from their communal heritage and culture, the remaining steelworkers competed for dwindling positions and overtime availability, thereby contributing to the normalisation of extreme flexibility, self-regulation and discipline (du Gay, 1996). Competition was made particularly acute due to the wider context of industrial decline, as an exit from Shelton saw men enter a post-industrial labour market. In light of this, threats presented during Shelton's final years propelled workers into a state of constant alertness, necessitating acts of self-preservation to retain a spot within a valued, though tired occupational community (Giddens, 1991).

Despite the steelworkers' continued admiration for the works, Shelton closed on the 27th of April 2000, displacing the remaining workforce. Arnold, who was present on the final shift, discussed a brief period of rationalisation before the closure:

> About 9 months before we finished, they kind of… we all had to reapply for us jobs, erm, they did a points system, where obviously… how many years you'd been there, and all that, so… them lads who'd only been there a couple of years hadn't got the points, so they ended up leaving… they ended up making

> them redundant, so that was shit because you were losing some good lads… Then towards the end, erm, they started winding it down… we went on like 10 shifts, and… and it was just shit, I shed a tear I did when we shut, it was like [Hmm]… I mean, there was some good lads, some great lads. Then, they split us all up, don't they, we get made redundant, they put money in the bank, and they tell us… no, not a nice, not a nice thing at all really, plus, it was another big industry gone, wasn't it, you know, 7,000 men, to 220, to none… shit, shit.
>
> Arnold, Finishing End Operative

After being forced to reapply for their roles, steelworkers entered direct competition against each other for what they believed was greater job security, again leading workers to mobilise their skills and aptitudes for self-preservation. Under this round of rationalisation, junior colleagues were offset against their senior peers, which links to Bart's comments regarding the perceived expendability of staff. Reflecting upon his time with "great lads", Arnold appeared sorrowful and resentful towards the following redundancies, in which he acknowledged the impact upon his esteemed peers. This demonstrates the continuing importance of the steelworkers' occupational community, with Arnold's memories of site closure immediately populated by the loss of fraternity. Rather than preparing for closure, men steeled themselves for a familiar process of de-manning, adding to the shock and hurt emerging within the quote above.

While Shelton's culture changed with marketisation and privatisation, men largely retained their admiration and respect for each other and the works, again highlighting the insulating effects of occupational identity and community (MacKenzie et al, 2006; McLachlan et al; 2019). What this section has demonstrated however, is that while

grounded in collective efforts to save their livelihoods, the steelworkers' culture became contrived and disciplining, in which their orientation towards flexibility was co-opted by management for the betterment of British Steel, and by extension, the legitimacy of the neoliberal state. Therefore, while foreign competition and wider industrial decline directly challenged Shelton's competitive positioning, communal precarity was largely manufactured and originated in the market reforms of Thatcher's premiership (Doogan, 2009). Contending with both economic and political threats, market rhetoric altered relationships between men, leading to greater individualism in the face of existential decline.

After the closure of steelmaking in 1978, Shelton entered a period of protracted decline where its workforce and core manufacturing capabilities atrophied away. The resulting turmoil was exacerbated by Thatcher's monetarist policies of the early 1980s, as Sterling's appreciation harmed Britain's industrial exports and contributed to the ailing position of domestic steel producers (Maynard, 1988). Most profound however was Thatcher's influence upon the state and civil society, which resulted in the introduction of enterprise culture as subsidies and welfare provision tightened (Garrett, 1992). Nationalised industries and public sector bodies became subject to greater market forces, which affected a cultural shift as institutions sought to economise and become profitable; this prompting intensification and greater discipline among their workforces (Chandler et al, 2002; Wasson, 2004).

Shelton's final closure in 2000 was preceded by two decades of significant hardship, this involving the intensification of foreign competition, alongside broader industrial restructuring and decline. The much-depleted site experienced continued de-manning,

which resulted in higher workloads as additional responsibilities fell to remaining staff. With men seeking to retain their position and secure lucrative overtime, collectivism within the community was eroded, leading many to restrict their cooperation to preserve a place at the works. With fewer personnel and growing concerns regarding Shelton's operational longevity, Shelton's occupational culture and community was undermined. The implications of these changes contrasted from narratives of communal fraternity used to characterise Shelton's earlier years. While many interviewees continued to celebrate the camaraderie enjoyed between peers, competition and resentment had emerged between men, which generated greater individualism as they pursued personal gain.

## 7.3 – The 2000 Closure: Down to the Wire

British Steel continued to deteriorate throughout the 1990s, leading to capacity and employment cuts at major production centres. To combat widespread decline, European steel producers entered a period of diversification and acquisition, which led to the consolidation of Dutch Hooghoven and British Steel in 1999 which formed Corus Group (Hudson, 2002). This signalled further industry rationalisation, greater specialisation and capacity utilisation, alongside familiar reductions in employment. Corus Group's ownership of British Steel was short however, as the company sold their remaining assets to Tata Steel in 2007 citing difficult trading circumstances (Hudson & Townsend, 2003). Underpinning this divestment was China's rapid expansion in steel production, with the nation become a net exporter of steel products in 2006 (Holloway et al, 2010). By the mid 2000s, China's steel output had eclipsed both American and

Japanese production, reaching 272 Million tonnes in 2004 (International Iron and Steel Institute, 2005).

For Shelton, Corus Group's acquisition of the works preceded its closure, with the site falling victim to industry rationalisation. The closure represented the culmination of enterprising discourse and worsening competitive prospects upon a faltering heavy industrial workplace, which led Corus group to condemn Shelton and its workforce due to profitability concerns. This section will include narratives from interviewees present during this period, and will record their experiences of Shelton's final closure. Incorporating analysis from previous sections, it will be argued that prolonged cultural decline created an acceptance of site closure, with political apathy and waning solidarity dissuading collective action. Interviewees' diverse narrations of closure will also be demonstrated, where personal circumstances before and after redundancy led to competing and contradictory accounts of closure.

Introducing this analysis, Bill discussed his appraisal of communal sentiment prior to the closure, where he assessed his colleagues as opposing the move to shut the site. Describing the closure as a mistake, he stated:

> I stayed there [Finishing end] from when I started until it closed… in 2000. I was actually… on the negotiations at Teesside, erm, back down on the works, and I was doing a familiarisation in the plate mill in Scunthorpe, and I came back to watch the last bar roll… I always thought they'd made a mistake, and I was thinking they were gonna change their mind, that was stuck in me head for a good while, up until the closure… I thought they'd change their mind,

> erm, quite a few people… there was erm, a lot of ill feeling… I think with the closure, because it was such a good mill.
>
> Bill, Finishing End Operative, Furnaceman, ISTC Union Representative

Concluding Shelton's protracted decline, the final closure represented a tangible point of departure for the occupational community. Those present until the end, including those with past working histories at the site, had their relationship with the works permanently altered. Marking an important moment in workers' experience of deindustrialisation, the closure transformed individual and shared memories of Shelton, leading those displaced to view the site as an industrial ruin, rather than a place of economic productivity (Mah, 2012; Nora, 1989). Consequently, steelworkers entered a complex relationship with local and national interpretations of economic change, as their experiences of work joined the UK's history of relative decline (High & Lewis, 2007).

Alongside individual understandings of Shelton's decline, many saw the final closure as symbolic of their collective struggle, subsequently influencing folklore of profitability and flexibility to feature in narrations of closure (Hill, 2013; Desilvey & Edensor, 2013). This emerges in Bill's contribution, as he reiterated his personal and shared belief in Shelton's viability and denoted the decision to close the site as a mistake. These sentiments continued to emerge throughout the interview encounter, with Bill criticising globalisation and programmes of rationalisation, while he later acknowledged his place within class hierarchies and a globalised labour process (Devine, 1992). Discussing Shelton's final day, Arnold recalled the last shift at the finishing end:

> We were rolling… 10 by 8's, so what's that in metric? 254 by 180… we knew it was the last bloom, erm, last roll, so obviously the mill had rolled it 2 hours earlier… they'd all gone, and it was just us, shit that was… I was on bottom job, my choice, I loved it, erm… the lads, they stacked it up, we put it on a rail, went on rail, erm, then they'd like, the last stack of bars, probably 10 high, erm, [Name], [Name] sling it, and me and erm… [Name], erm, we dropped it, dropped it on a rail wagon, all wrote on, chalk, obviously… write everything with chalk, erm, and that was sad… very sad.
>
> Arnold, Finishing End Operative

Present on Shelton's final operational day, Arnold described his involvement in a ceremony commemorating the work's closure, with him and his colleagues signing the last roll with their names and a farewell message. This final act signalled the end of their occupational community and solidarity as steelworkers, while initiating a new post-closure relationship between men (Mackenzie et al, 2006; Mackenzie & Marks, 2019). During the turmoil of closure, many drew upon communal networks and memories of comradeship, which helped individuals to cope with the material and emotional effects of loss (Strangleman, 2001; Walkerdine, 2017). The final roll created important folklore for those present, as although remembered as a sad occasion, the communal ceremony of signing the last bars with temporary chalk messages offered personal closure (McCabe, 2019). This is present within Arnold's remarks, as while admitting the emotional toll of the process, the shared moment strengthened post-closure kinship and solidarity, this being evidenced by his sustained contact with work friends in the years following redundancy. Presenteeism also allowed men to author a coherent exit

from the works, again emerging in the quote above, where Arnold stated that 'bottom job' was his choice and main preference (Gabriel et al, 2010). Describing the end of the final shift, Arnold continued:

> End of April I think, 2000, erm, that was it, gone, last day at Shelton Bar… We slung us hats, obviously got your own… slat 'em [Gesturing throwing helmet at ground], all pissed off, erm… proper pissed off actually, when I think about it, and them steel bars were still making money for British Steel 2 years later, when they sold them… the lad who'd got me the job, because he was such a good engineer, [Name], they moved him to Teesside, and he went in a meeting, erm, and obviously got Scunthorpe, South Wales, Teesside, where they're making a lot of steel… then you'd still got Shelton, Skinningrove, and some of the mills what were still there, and [Name's] in this meeting, Shelton… was shut fucking 2 years… and we were still making profit on the steel we'd rolled.
>
> Arnold, Finishing End Operative

Differing from the stoic signing of the final roll, Arnold described another act of ceremony commemorating closure. Throwing their hardhats at the ground in unison, the steelworkers displayed a final act of opposition towards their fate. Symbolic of the community's destruction, this ceremony can be understood as an embodied response to personal and communal struggle, in which men articulated physical pain and loss via the destruction of protective equipment; perhaps representing anger at their equipment's inability to protect them from redundancy. This response belonged to a wider process of community coping following closure, where many sought to preserve

a semblance of solidarity and membership in the face of coming change (Walkerdine, 2010).

Arnold subsequently drew upon the work's shared history of commercial success by referencing the sale of their final roll at a profit. The recurrence of this important folklore, now contrived into a bitter story of Shelton's untimely closure, haunts Arnold and his colleagues by reminding them of their personal and shared loss (Gordon, 1997; Bright, 2016; Hill, 2013). In this context, rather than generating pride and reverence for the works, narratives of profitability invoke anger, with Arnold displaying resentment towards Shelton's decline. Unlike the 1978 downsizing however, Shelton's final termination was constructed as inevitable by many respondents, indicating a comparative lack of determination to preserve the works.

To explore this further, Paul, formerly the lead negotiator for the ISTC's West Midland's division, offered an outside perspective on Shelton's closure. As the lead negotiator, Paul was intimately involved and present during this period, and later negotiated the steelworkers' final terms and conditions with Corus. Appraising the situation, Paul stated:

> So when they announced the closure, I do remember attending erm… a mass meeting, of all the workforce, at erm… a club in Shelton, erm, and personally, honestly, you know… I was up for the fight, I wanted to fight, I said this is a terrible decision, Shelton Bar is probably one of the best mills in the whole of Europe, a superb mill, erm… it was a fantastic, sort of… productivity… brilliant workforce, erm, and the union were absolutely up for the fight… the fight wasn't there because most of the members were of an age, and that's the

> problem with the steel industry, is that it's quite an aged workforce… and people were looking over their shoulder and thinking, well, do you know what, you know, I'm in my 50's, I'm gonna get a year's money, I'm gonna get me pension and me pension pot, do you know what, this… this is the right time for me [Laughs].
>
> Paul, ISTC Negotiator, Senior Leadership at Community Union

Despite their reverence for the works, the toll of protracted precarity led many older workers into fatigued acceptance of closure, with others capitalising upon fortunate timing for an early exit. Though Shelton's older workforce reflected industry demographic trends (Dawley et al, 2008), the rationalisation previously described by Arnold suggests that the final workforce composition was less than coincidental, and that younger workers were removed by management to prevent potential opposition. The steelworkers' individual circumstances varied however, with some workers realising financial benefits from early retirement, while others experienced hardship and unemployment (Gardiner et al, 2007). Due to these disparities, the workers' traditional approach to retirement was disrupted, with enforced exit creating further discontinuity as individuals navigated their next steps (Vickerstaff & Cox, 2005).

Paul's description of a subdued reaction to closure is particularly important however, as this contrasts markedly from the previous *fight for Shelton Bar* dispute with the BSC. These observations also differ from Bill and Arnold's contributions, who narrate a workforce outraged and opposed to closure. Reflecting the wholesale decline experienced throughout the occupational community, the steelworkers' attitudes were transformed from a collective passion for the works, to a stance of self-preservation.

Lacking their former power and determination, workers voiced opposition to closure, yet failed to engage with effective direct action (Contu, 2008). Many departed from their collective traditions and enacted individual agency over retirement and financial affairs, actions indicative of greater individualism among the community (Beck, 1992; Sennnett, 1998). Continuing this discussion, Eliot commented on what he perceived as older colleagues happy to leave the works:

> The guys who were older, who'd been there and started as young men, and got to their 50's, mid 50's, I mean some of them for instance, left there, massive lump sum, erm… went on then to work 2 days pushing trolleys around at the supermarket for the rest of their days, do you know what I mean. So you know, they might have lived in a, worked in a horrible noisy environment… and you didn't get to retire naturally, you were made to retire in your 50's, you had a lump sum, pension each week coming in, and erm… find yourself a little bit of a job elsewhere, you know what I mean. But they were absolutely over the moon, most of the guys I knew were over the moon, at the right age, yeah.
>
> Eliot, Finishing End Operative, Crane Operator

Like Paul, Eliot identified complacency within his older colleagues, suggesting that many were happy to exit the works with generous redundancy payments and pension provisions. In light of these benefits, many older workers located alternative employment via downward mobility, where they accepted low wage, temporary roles until they reached state pension age (Wilson & Hadler, 2017). These diverging narratives reveal fractures in communal solidary, as factions of the workforce rejected

collective action in order to protect their redundancy payment. This again points to the erosion of collectivism within the occupational community, influenced in part by the economic changes occurring during and beyond the 1980s which emboldened sentiments of self-reliance and individualism (Gamble, 1994; Beck, 1992).

For those benefiting from early retirement, the convenience and financial benefit of Shelton's closure provided a suitable exit from the community, one framed as inevitable and out of their control. This allowed some to passively accept the terms of closure without overtly revealing their self-motivation, thereby reducing the likelihood of inspiring direct action or communal rejection from their younger counterparts (Chreim, 2006). Eliot's memories of ecstatic steelworkers are also informed by his personal experiences however, as his relatively seamless move into the construction industry provided material and emotional stability. Unlike those experiencing significant hardship, Eliot remembered and constructed the closure as a minor inconvenience, in which he narrated men receiving large payments in return for accepting lower status, part-time work (Gabriel, 1993; James, 2000).

Differing from the narratives told by Paul and Eliot, Arnold recalled how his colleagues struggled both emotionally and financially after the closure. Discussing cases of mortality among his older peers, he commented:

> A few of the blokes didn't survive after it, erm, lad I knew, [Name], lovely bloke, loved the place… he'd be at work 24 hours a day if they'd let him… at 55 he should have retired, he was still there at 60, we shut when he was 61… died… within 12 months, gone… his lady's a very rich woman [Laughs]… she got everything. But… blokes loved the place… it's like, gone from working… 40,

> 50, 60 hours a week, to not doing anything, quite a few of them, of that age, just… perhaps they didn't like their wives very much [Laughs]. But no, a few of them… gone, another one, [Name], he died, he only lived across the road here… well, this is where it was, isn't it [Turns in chair and gestures towards the window], just there wasn't it… was just there, yeah… when it closed it was shit…. a few of the lads struggled, we had a reunion about… 4 years after we finished, erm, loads of lads struggled after.
>
> Arnold, Finishing End Operative

While redundancy is impactful at all ages, older workers are particularly vulnerable to the material and emotional impacts of job loss, as an individual's age can erect barriers to retraining and redeployment (McFall & Garrington, 2011). This emerges in Arnold's contribution discussing the untimely death of two older colleagues, in addition to the material struggles of his remaining peers. Especially for those with long tenures, redundancy can disrupt how individuals understand their sense of self, leading to declines in mental and physical health as they navigate "being cast into the wilderness after a lifetime of committed service" (Gabriel et al, 2013, p. 62). For Arnold's deceased colleagues, separation from their role and community severed an identity grounded in heavy industry, this being uneasily replaced by downward mobility into the service sector. However, Arnold's account contrasts sharply from Eliot and Paul's narratives of men happily departing the works, indicating disparity in how many coped with the closure (Portelli, 1981; 1998).

Unlike Eliot, Arnold struggled with unemployment following redundancy, leading him to remember and reproduce adversity when discussing the past. This highlights the

important role of individual circumstance, which frequently predicted emotional responses to the closure. For those able to construct a coherent and consoling narrative, redundancy was minimised and managed against new opportunities (Gabriel et al, 2010). While older workers able to retire and live comfortably constructed their exit as timely and convenient, those too young to retire, in addition to those with few job prospects, instead interpreted their exit as an untimely departure. In light of this, it is likely that Arnold's deceased colleagues were unable to author satisfactory narratives regarding redundancy, leading them into insurmountable grief (Ainsworth & Hardy, 2009).

Arnold's account also highlights issues of ill health following workplace closures and industrial decline, where the absence of economic opportunity creates a 'risk environment' (Rhodes, 2009; 2002). Particular threats are presented by alcohol and drug dependence, where local job losses correlate with increased resident mortality (McCartney et al, 2016; McLean, 2016). In the two cases Arnold refers to, it is unclear whether these deaths were caused by substance abuse, occupational ill health, or pre-existing conditions. However, the post-closure death of older workers is significant not just in demonstrating poor health outcomes, but also in its symbolic value, as it personifies the severance of the occupational community. Separation from colleagues worsened the material impacts of redundancy, as the sudden absence of communal membership compounded against their loss of income. Ill health and the passing of colleagues influenced how some respondents understood Shelton's closure, with connotations of bodily decline encouraging nostalgia for the past (Strangleman, 2012). Therefore, depictions of Shelton as site of fraternal solidarity can also be understood

through this process of embodiment, in which some respondents constructed positive histories which feature the comparative vitality of their youth.

Reflecting upon Shelton's operations before the closure, David revealed the extent of workplace intensification experienced across the mill:

> In regards to working practices, we'd taken it to the wire, you know… we were working grossly undermanned… longer hours, we were switching from two erm… shifts… switching shift patterns, you know, to suit the order demand, we couldn't have done anything more really, it probably was the most flexible steelworks they'd ever had, but… it just came to an end. There 'int an argument you could make, as could secure the future, the die had been cast and we were gonna be closed… there was no way they were gonna be moved from their plans… disgusting really. But as I say, it was a sad day, the closure was a sad day, and it did erm, such a lot of work… not just Shelton… Shelton in the community, you know, it was a place where… we had a welfare club, football teams, cricket teams, you know… it was part and parcel of Etruria.
>
> David, Senior Furnaceman, ISTC Union Representative

In their endeavour to preserve Shelton's longevity, steelworkers like David had become commodified by British Steel, which led to their objectification within the production process. As discussed, this had a profound effect upon the steelworkers' occupational identity and community by altering relations between peers and the works itself. Although this pressure contributed to the undoing of communal solidarity, physical hardship and precarity generated a temporary 'community of fate' (Baehr, 2005). This

constituted the final iteration of the steelworkers' occupational culture at Shelton, one divided and eroded, but offering a shared experience of intensity and decline. This had the effect of buttressing members from the protracted turmoil of uncertainty, with collective membership forming around mutual hardship (McLachlan et al, 2019; MacKenzie et al, 2006).

While this offered support for some, others grew weary to the effects of precarity. Consequently, despite this final boost in identification, structural changes across the works and wider industry had dampened cultural solidarity, leading to the relatively passive response to closure (Turnbull, 1992). Within his account however, David reiterated Shelton's position as a communal asset by reaffirming the importance of sports teams, clubs, and social events. This constituted an attempt to author solidarity back into Shelton's story of decline, in which David drew upon organisational nostalgia to combat narratives of intensification. While some remembered a united workforce until the end, others recalled a comparatively fractured history, evidencing the disparate effects of workplace closure.

With their power for collective bargaining depleted, the remaining steelworkers failed to mount a successful campaign to save Shelton Bar. Although many opposed the final shuttering of their workplace and occupational community, others gainfully consented to its demise and utilised the moment to author an acceptable exit from the works. Indicative of the erosion of solidarity and fraternity, rising individualism and self-motivated behaviour again signalled changes to the steelworkers' occupational community. Representing a tangible point of departure, the 2000 closure also altered

how men narrated their experiences of work, in which narratives of decline changed into those of closure and severance.

For many, depictions of a successful, profitable works endured. Grounded in nostalgic memories, these narratives constituted a discursive construction of the past, where Shelton's ailments were strategically forgotten (Gabriel, 1993). For others, relative mobility post-closure provided insulation from discontinuity, which enabled them to minimise the closure and its communal impacts. In sum, rather than uncovering one distinct account of Shelton's decline, competing and contradictory narrations have emerged; with some emphasising ill feeling and defiance, while others recounted complacency and indifference (Strangleman, 2017; Portelli, 1981; 1998). These accounts introduce individual subjectivity into a shared experience of closure, subsequently revealing the role of personal perspectives on the recall of site closure and communal decline (James, 2000; Thomson, 2007).

## 7.4 – Relocation: Scunthorpe Steelworks

As part of Shelton's closure settlement, all workers were offered redeployment to alternative Corus sites, leading some men to relocate to Scunthorpe and Teesside steelworks. However, this proved too impractical or undesirable for many, meaning only a small number of Shelton steelworkers accept the offer. The ability for each worker to relocate varied according to family structures and support networks, with relative mobility and the deployment of resources differing across the displaced community (Gardiner et al, 2009). With redundancy already generating considerable

discontinuity, moving away added additional pressure to a period of change (Hareven, 2000). For others, redeployment was an attractive offer, as this provided new employment, alongside much needed life course continuity in the steel industry (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998; Giddens, 1991). Workers opting for redeployment at Scunthorpe or Teesside sustained their masculine identities, which helped to preserve a sense of self as they engaged with their preferred form of work.

As the following section will demonstrate however, entering new occupational communities was not easy, as adapting to larger, fully integrated sites presented challenges for Shelton's mill men. Opening this discussion, Paul recalled the relocation package offered to Shelton steelworkers, of which he had helped to negotiate:

> We had secured with the company… a commitment that any… employee from Shelton Bar… who wanted to continue employment… with what was then British Steel, then they would be afforded an opportunity. Now, the company had at the time… quite a good relocation package… so, probably the nearest erm, works that was setting on… that was looking for a significant number of new employees was at Scunthorpe steelworks, you know… they ran trips, we had a number of coaches, that went up to Scunthorpe, erm, to see the works… to have a good look around, to walk around the local area, they even helped people with house searches… erm, people that go up, they can take their families to walk around with, you know, the area… at housing, and in the end, erm, we had had 35… is a number that comes to mind, we had 35 workers from Shelton Bar who did relocate to Scunthorpe.
>
> Paul, ISTC Negotiator, Senior Leadership at Community Union

Despite deep attachments to the industry, relatively few men relocated to Scunthorpe, with Paul estimating that only around 35 workers chose to move. This can be explained in part by Shelton's relatively older workforce, as men with young and established families sought to avoid familial discontinuity, while others saw little value in relocating before retirement. However, the role of occupational identity and community is also present, as the steelworkers' connection to the local area created attachment to place and space (Brown et al, 2003). With Shelton steelworkers embedded in Stoke-on-Trent's social and economic history, many understood themselves in place-based terms, which strengthened local bonds preventing outward migration (Low, 1992; Mah, 2009).

These sentiments emerged across interview encounters, with many respondents' pride and community membership creating strong incentives to remain in place. Many respondents articulated a sense of home when discussing Shelton Bar, generating emotionally charged narratives of individual and shared prosperity (Mallett, 2004; Cresswell, 2004). Consequently, relocation involved workers leaving their homes both figuratively and symbolically, and abandoning an identity drawn from their place in local heritage, alongside support networks providing shelter from displacement and discontinuity. Whilst those who did relocate were able to navigate or rescind their place attachment (Gustafson, 2001), for others, the tangible and emotional draw of home strengthened local commitments.

Discussing his experience of relocation, Bill described his arrival at Scunthorpe's plate mill, where he encountered difficulties in assimilating into his new work group:

> Some of the thick plates, they buckled as they cooled, and they had to be flattened and squared, I erm, I was crane driver in there, that was… that was

> alright, you were up in the roof out of the way, you know what I mean, shuffling plates around and loading trailers up, but… I mentioned it before about fairness and favouritism, the plate mill… favouritism was rife, unfairness was terrible, and I was banging my head against a brick wall. The shop steward, because he didn't have to work, I mean… if they wanted me, I was always out on the shop floor… this guy had got his own little office, and he worked 9 'til 5, and he got paid as though he was a shift man, nice little… and that's how the bribes went into it, I always viewed it as a bribe… and, favouritism and unfairness, it was rife, if your face didn't fit… no, you'd got no chance, and I've got a nasty habit of speaking me mind, so I wasn't a popular guy anyway.
>
> Bill, Finishing End Operative, Furnaceman, ISTC Union Representative

Out of the interviewees present during Shelton's closure, Bill was the only respondent who relocated to Scunthorpe, with the others citing family disruption and inconvenience as barriers to redeployment. Bill worked at Scunthorpe for 12 years until he retired at 59, working initially in the plate mill before moving onto the blast furnaces. He spoke negatively about his time at Scunthorpe however, in which he recalled workplace conflict between himself, his colleagues and managers. Hostility is common among merging organisations, as when two autonomous groups are combined, differences in social contexts and aptitudes can heighten perceived distance between groups (Chreim, 2007; Jenkins, 2008). This can result in tension as each party navigates acceptable forms of self-expression, thereby complicating the formation of a collective identity. Upon their arrival at Scunthorpe, Shelton steelworkers were vastly outnumbered, meaning Scunthorpe men had little reason to alter their behaviour to

welcome the newcomers. Instead, Bill and his Shelton comrades had to fully assimilate into Scunthorpe's occupational culture.

Assimilation was difficult however, as Bill's comments regarding "if your face didn't fit" indicated othering and communal rejection (Rawls & David, 2005). For Scunthorpe steelworkers, interaction with perceived outsiders hardened their reaction to Shelton's mill men, while their sudden arrival meant neither community had the opportunity to develop a transitional relationship (Clark et al, 2010; Kovoor-Misra & Smith, 2008). Consequently, both Shelton and Scunthorpe steelworkers navigated the meeting of two distinct occupational cultures and communities, which resulted in varying degrees of acceptance and membership. For those at Scunthorpe, the new arrivals represented a small, though not insignificant threat to their existing hierarchy, in that job openings were given to perceived outsiders rather than locally selected candidates. The resulting conflict highlights the specificity of occupational identity and community, as although working in the same industry, membership was not guaranteed for Shelton's mill men. Like those formerly entering their community, Shelton steelworkers entered a new process of socialisation and acceptance, in which they acted as junior peers and outsiders in Scunthorpe's established community.

Despite his newfound peripheral position, Bill was able to find identification through his work, as Scunthorpe's plate mill paralleled Shelton's finishing end. In light of this familiarity, Bill preserved a sense of coherence and identity during this period of adjustment, which enabled him to relieve personal tensions arising from discontinuity (Ullrich et al, 2005). However, task identification cannot generate or sustain social integration, meaning Bill's rejection ultimately led to disidentification and renewed

conflict. This is observable within his comments on rampant favouritism, as without acceptance and membership of the plate mill's occupational community, he perceived his position as inferior to that of full members, further impacting his sense of belonging and identity (Ashforth et al, 2008). This downgrading of his communal status was particularly challenging, as Bill's previous role as a shop steward and union representative granted significant privilege at Shelton's finishing end.

Indicating a numbness to his arduous tenure in heavy industry, Bill departed Scunthorpe a year before his planned exit. After describing his last day at Scunthorpe in emotionless detail, Bill continued to speak positively about Shelton, signifying strong identification with his role and former community (Steigenberger & Mirc, 2020). Bill's lack of identification with Scunthorpe and its community incentivised his early exit, which again demonstrated the importance of identification and group membership in positive assessments of an individual's employment (Conroy et al, 2017). This experience is significant in the wider exploration of membership conditionality, as Bill's rejection and othering mirrors that of periphery members at Shelton, a process hidden behind respondents' depictions of fraternity and solidarity. Those falling out of favour with popular group members received treatment of this kind, leading to feelings of exclusion and disillusionment. Therefore, Bill's experiences develop understandings of conditionality used throughout this dissertation, as they highlight how peripheral members come to understand their relationship with community leaders. Discussing the perceived cultural differences between Scunthorpe and Shelton, Bill continued:

> When Shelton closed, if there was 250, 260 people there, Scunthorpe… it was everything, I mean you're talking 3,500, 4,000 people… you know what I

> mean… so it was a lot bigger concern, and erm, it never compared to… how can I put it, it never compared to… as comfortable as Shelton was, yeah, Shelton was comfortable. I mean, we used to have a shutdown for two weeks, we used to have Potters' Fortnight off, last week in June, first week in July, everybody went on holiday, all the maintenance and repair work was done on that fortnight. I was always ready to go back after I'd had two weeks away, I didn't sort of sit in and go ooh, got go work… I was quite up for it, you know what I mean, strange, strange, but yeah, it was good.
>
> Bill, Finishing End Operative, Furnaceman, ISTC Union Representative

With Shelton shrinking in size before the 2000 closure, the work's culture changed to reflect the focusing of operations and the shedding of personnel, generating a departure from the pre-1978 era of full integration. For men choosing to relocate, Scunthorpe's size and scope proved jarring, which subsequently made the intensity of Shelton's mill appear easy-going. While both sites possessed similarities, the cultures and communities originating within each works were unique and inimitable, thereby generating barriers to full integration and mutual acceptance. This emerges in the quote above, as Bill recalled the periods of downtime enjoyed while at Shelton, and contrasted this against the bustle of Scunthorpe's mass production. Though both works produced steel, the unique history and trajectory of each site created distance between the joining workforces, subsequently impacting identity formation in a specific, localised manner.

Although indicative of Shelton's comparatively slower pace and lower production volumes, the scheduled downtime Bill discussed also contained cultural significance, as

this aligned with a two-week shutdown within the pottery industry. Grounded in the ceremony of local working practices and cultural rituals (Dandridge, 1986), distance from this tradition contributed to feelings of estrangement, leading to nostalgic identification with the past. In Bill's experience, although relocation afforded an opportunity to remain within the steel industry, his arrival at Scunthorpe's plate mill was met with hostility, which later progressed into conflict as he battled his stigmatised status as an outsider (May, 2004). Like many selecting redundancy or retirement after closure, Bill reflected upon his time at Shelton favourably, in which he drew from nostalgic memories as he navigated discontinuity at Scunthorpe.

In summary, Bill's contributions are significant in demonstrating processes of membership conditionality within occupational communities. His difficulty assimilating into Scunthorpe's community revealed important insider-outsider relations, where his initial difference and the proceeding conflict with his new colleagues defined their subsequent working relationships. Bill was excluded from processes of camaraderie, which denied the emotional support needed to cope with extreme working conditions (MacKenzie et al, 2006; MacKenzie & Marks, 2019; Strangleman, 2001). Due to his outsider position, the benefits of full community membership were perceived as undue rewards, leading Bill to characterise these relationships as bribery and favouritism. Stating a habit of 'speaking his mind', it is likely that overt criticism of preferential membership further degraded his hierarchical position, contributing to his lack of 'schedule gifts' and enhanced remuneration (Wood, 2018). This outsider position contrasted sharply from Bill's communal status at Shelton's finishing end, where his role as a shop steward granted privileges and authority over others. Relocated into a larger

works, Bill entered Scunthorpe steelworks on the lowest rung of the steelworkers' social hierarchy, which necessitated the reestablishment of cultural capital built over decades of employment. This frustrating process contributed to Bill's poor assessment of his new employment, in which his outsider disadvantage was perceived as favouritism and unfairness, rather than the outcome of periphery membership.

## 7.5 – Precarious Employment: Grafting and Getting On

Following the decline of traditional industries, many now experience low wage, irregular or precarious employment (Smith & McBride, 2021; Standing, 2011; Burgess et al, 2013). Concentrated in customer-facing interactive service sectors, these roles are often non-unionised, tightly controlled, or aestheticized for customer appeal (Strangleman, 2015; Price, 2016; Warhurst & Nickson, 2007). Exploring the implications of precarious employment, this section will record the material impacts of Shelton's closure upon younger interviewees to demonstrate a plurality of post-closure experiences (Gardiner et al, 2009). It will be argued that with redundant workers remaining in traditionally masculine employment, many attempted to recreate the fraternity experienced at Shelton, leading to reproductions of the steelworkers' diminished occupational identity.

Though grounded in an avoidance of feminised service work (McDowell, 2003; Nixon, 2009), the attempted recreation of masculine occupational cultures created a coping mechanism which shielded men against the devaluing of their technical skills (Cappelli, 1996). Like previous steel closures, redevelopment efforts largely created low status,

poorly paid employment, which displaced highly skilled employees as they moved down occupational ladders (Sadler, 1992; Beaudry et al, 2016). Consequently, many younger respondents encountered hardship as they traversed a post-industrial labour market, resulting in both tangible and psychological impacts as their living standards declined. Adopting a processual understanding of industrial decline (Strangleman & Rhodes 2014; Strangleman, 2017), the impacts of Shelton's closure are considered beyond the initial point of redundancy, in which interviewees draw upon diverse implications occurring before, during and after closure.

Introducing this section, David commented on the retraining schemes offered to redundant workers, though he acknowledged that many subsequently entered poorly paid roles:

> A lot of the supportive companies, you know… contractors, obviously after we weren't using gas for our furnaces, and electricity and you know, refractories, companies as to come and reline the furnaces and things like that… I mean, I think it was a big loss for the area… People, erm… they did get up-skilled, as they were leaving their jobs, there were sort of, schemes for them to go on and retrain… you know, some people went like, retraining to be carpet fitters… or, various other functions… fitting windows… there were opportunities, but I mean, there's nothing… Shelton was one of the higher paid companies in the area, compared to the jobs as were available to that… workforce, weren't… pay wise, couldn't get anywhere near it.
>
> David, Senior Furnaceman, ISTC Union Representative

Discussing the provision of retraining, David argued that while workers were able to acquire new vocational skills, job opportunities were scarce, low status and poorly paid, which contrasted from their previous roles at Shelton (Dobbins, 2014). Although sharing similarities, David's remarks emphasised key differences between redundancies in 1978 and 2000, as those made redundant in 2000 entered a dramatically different labour market. After widespread deindustrialisation, opportunities in technical fields had suffered decline and deskilling, while job growth was most predominant in low wage interactive service sectors such as retailing and hospitality (Cappelli, 1996; Gregg & Gardiner, 2015). Consequently, men were less able to enter well paid industrial work or retain their standard of living, leading many into periods of discontinuity in precarious employment.

David's observations also criticise the supply side assumptions of British Steel's retraining package, in which poor market demand and limited opportunities eroded the utility of retraining (Keep & Mayhew, 2010). Similarly, as argued by Livingstone (1997) in his work studying underemployment, workers' labour and skills are often underutilised or allocated to unproductive ends. Grounded in human capital theory, retraining programmes assert that redundant segments of the labour market can be redeployed into alternative productive outputs, which return mutual benefits for both workers and employers (Becker, 1993). However, as David suggests, skill acquisition and redeployment proved challenging due to diminished industrial opportunities. In support of David's argument, Arnold discussed his post-redundancy experience with multiple employers:

> I went work for a builder's merchants driving a wagon, 7 and a half tonne wagon, that's what I went do, erm, that took some getting used to, I had, to be honest, I had… about another 4 or 5 jobs in them first 2 or 3 years after I'd finished, erm. They [BS] offered, they asked us if we'd go and relocate to… Scunthorpe, and some of the lads did, erm, but the wife at the time had just had a baby, it wasn't practical, I didn't go, so I took me redundancy, erm, but a few of the lads went… yeah… I bobbed around, did quite a few different jobs… building swimming pools, making… whatever you wanna call them, lining swimming pools, I did that… builder's merchant, then I went back into an engineering place called [Company name], was alright, but I didn't like a couple of the bosses, I fell out with a couple of them, to be honest… because once I've had enough I'll fall out with you, you know what I mean, erm, that's me.
>
> Arnold, finishing End Operative

For Arnold, Shelton's closure resulted in great career discontinuity which led him into multiple short-lived roles and temporary employment. In terms of skill content and remuneration, Arnold experienced downward mobility, as he engaged in employment where his industrial experience and expertise were largely unused (Wilson & Hadler, 2017). Recalling his time as a large goods delivery driver, he revealed difficulties in relinquishing his hard-earned industrial aptitudes, resulting in material and emotional distress as he navigated unstable, flexible employment (Smith et al, 1997; De Stefano, 2015). In addition to lower wages, the comparatively independent nature of driving was a departure from Shelton's collegial atmosphere, which informed Arnold's remarks

about “getting used to” work post-closure. In the absence of social fraternity, Arnold did not enjoy status in an organisational hierarchy like he did at Shelton, leading to feelings of tedium and alienation.

Arnold’s experience of temporary employment reflected the growing labour market precarity occurring at the time of Shelton’s closure, which worsened during the 2008 financial crash and the resulting era of austerity (Cunningham, 2016; Grover, 2019). Employment of this nature is characterised by low pay, flexible contracts and low skill content, which creates polarisation between full-time and temporary workers (Wilson et al, 2008; Autor et al, 2002). Arnold’s reflection on multiple short-tenure roles revealed a struggle against precarious employment, while his admitted predisposition to conflict indicated attempted resistance. While Arnold’s defiance originated in opposition to precarity and managerial control (Edwards, 1986; Hughes & Dobbins, 2021), it was also influenced by his enduring occupational identity, as downward mobility disrupted his negotiated social status at work and his domestic position as the primary family earner (Hakim, 2004; Steiber & Haas, 2012).

Discussing his defiant attitude, Arnold admitted to experiencing workplace conflict within one of his post-closure roles, while his rapid turnover within the others is indicative of similar experiences. For many working-class men socialised in overtly masculine environments, abandoning their gendered attitudes can be particularly challenging and can prevent assimilation into service sector employment (Kenway et al, 2006; Nixon, 2009). In Arnold’s case, the steelworkers’ culture of resistance caused conflict when enacted in a new environment, directly leading to his departure from at least one workplace. Moreover, the steelworkers’ valued camaraderie and relatively

high wages denoted swathes of low paid service work as materially inferior, similarly influencing the labour market churn described above. Also present within Arnold's remarks was an implicit desire to remain in traditionally masculine employment, in which he turned to delivery driving, construction and then engineering.

To preserve their masculine identities, working-class men have been observed disqualifying themselves from employment perceived as feminine or overly docile (McDowell, 2003). Employers may also avoid their recruitment due to cultures of disobedience and disengagement (Alcock et al, 2003). This avoidance of 'feminine' work is observable throughout interview encounters, as almost all respondents remained in some form of manufacturing or engineering employment at smaller workshops and factories across and beyond Staffordshire. With only two respondents entering professional service roles after leaving Shelton, interviewees largely demonstrated a commitment to industrial employment, which often led to periods of discontinuity as they located suitable roles within a constrained labour market.

Though he minimised the impacts of redundancy, Eliot discussed his move into construction and site maintenance, alongside the financial assistance he received:

> Because I'd been made redundant, the building society paid me mortgage… the whole package they'd put together… was erm, was great, you know what I'm saying, so, until I got myself on my feet… I'd got help, because it was all in the system…they helped me all the way up, which was great really, couldn't knock it at all. Because obviously I was 40 then, when it shut, erm… in my instance I knew where I was going and I knew I'd be alright, you know what I'm saying, I'd always worked with me brothers anyway… in the building

> game… so I knew where I was going, and erm, I did just that like, you know, and went into maintenance with various housing associations, as regards to maintenance man and what have you, and just got on, grafted and got on.
>
> Eliot, Finishing End Operative, Crane Driver

Differing from Arnold's hardship, Eliot downplayed his redundancy by stating that alongside generous financial support, family connections in the construction industry offered economic stability. Like many others, Eliot sought to remain in traditionally masculine employment, in which he worked sporadically as a self-employed tradesman, and then as a maintenance man for a local housing association. As Eliot later explained, self-employment involved traveling to building sites across the Midlands and into Wales, leading to more time away from his family. This remained preferable to local service opportunities however, as comparatively poor pay, abstract task content, and subservience to customers rendered such roles as inadmissible (Lindsay & McQuaid, 2004; McDowell, 2003). The rhetoric Eliot used is also gendered however, as comments regarding grafting and 'getting on' indicate a stoic commitment to hard labour. Mobilising aspects of his former occupational identity, masculinised norms of sacrifice and commitment to work defined Eliot's post-redundancy experience, again leading to time away from his family. This was similarly justified through notions of masculine provision, where his family's material comfort accompanied renewed emotional distance.

For others, redundancy accompanied significant hardship and financial difficulties. As George stated in the following contribution, redundancy led to the loss of his home and his resignation to low skilled employment:

> I used to live down the road there in a semi-detached… I couldn't afford to bloody pay it after that so, I sold it to one of them rent-back companies… and erm, started working through agencies, and every job they give you was for less bloody money, and I couldn't get me own permanent job because… I was a specialist trade, well, you've got your qualifications and that, because I've got me HND, but… what's roll turning? And they wouldn't set us on because of that, so I finished up with bloody… the last job I had, was at erm, [Company Name] in [Local area], on the paint line, just masking parts up, putting bits of bloody tape on parts before it went on the paint line… and that was on erm, minimum wage. So then… within 6 months of the closure, I'd gone from… not sure whether it was £15 or £16 an hour, down to minimum wage… and then, I think it was within 2 years, redundancy had gone, rent in loads of debts… I'd lost the house… it was everything I'd worked for gone.
>
> George, Roll & Centre Lathe Turner

Of those interviewed, George suffered the greatest financial impact upon redundancy, leading him to characterise his specialised trade as a barrier to alternative employment. George chose not to retrain and remained in machining, though he was unable to find stable employment and fell victim to low wage, precarious work (Standing, 2011). This led to severe financial difficulties, resulting in the loss of his home, and his subsequent early withdrawal from the labour market due to ill health. Resulting from barriers to full employment, George was also unable to engage with workplace training, as organisations often "focus the efforts of permanent employees on core competencies, while the temporaries perform peripheral work" (Von Hippel et al, 1997, p. 95; see also

Gallie, 1991). Consequently, George was unable to develop professionally and escape growing labour market polarisation, which made his struggle as an organisational outsider more acute (Kalleberg, 2003).

Although given the opportunity to retrain or relocate to Scunthorpe steelworks, George stated that managerial conflict inhibited his transfer, while his preference for machining led him to reject British Steel's alternative offerings. Remaining in place, George possessed his specialised skills and education in an otherwise weak labour market, leading him into employment where his aptitudes were underutilised and largely unrecognised (Dobbins, 2014; Livingstone, 1997). Despite his experience in machining, George was unable to sustain his standard of living, as the remaining opportunities within his field had been eroded and deskilled by industrial decline (Lloyd et al, 2008; Keep & Mayhew, 2010). Precarity and low wages exacerbated his poor health, while peripheral membership at Shelton excluded him from post-closure support networks. These factors contributed to George's isolation and economic hardship following his redundancy, and influenced his narratives of communal conflict and animosity.

Expanding upon the issue of poor employment opportunities following steel and industrial closures, Chris, a senior director from the Community Union contributed:

> You know, steelworkers are proud people [Laughs], very proud people, erm, I can tell you, and you know, the idea of having this… this big part of this industry, which is so… part of peoples' identity, and then… to be asked to put that aside and get, you know, treated like shit in a call centre, no unions to protect you [Puffs]… really difficult for people to take, lots of people, you know, quit jobs once they started and that kind of thing. So… if there is going

> to be industrial change, you need good quality employment for people to move into, and no one has ever squared that circle, I mean, there's lots of talk of a just transition, but I've not seen any evidence of new jobs being comparable quality or pay… to erm, to what's currently there in steel.
>
> Chris, Senior Director at Community Union

Reflecting upon communal pride and economic wellbeing, Chris criticised the degradation of pay and conditions occurring after steel closures. These comments resonate with previous contributions, as Chris's account of workers quitting roles and struggling with poor conditions mirror Arnold's labour market churn, in which he entered and exited roles in quick succession (Adamson & Roper, 2019; Dolan et al, 2008). Communal decline after site closures further highlights the issue of employment quality, as Shelton steelworkers evaluated alternative opportunities not only by their pay and conditions, but also in terms of the social solidarities and camaraderie offered by workplace communities. These issues remained at the forefront of Chris's concerns, as previous steel closures have demonstrated consistent declines in employment and income opportunities (Knox et al, 2011). Chris also raised the issue of trade union decline, where poor employee protection erodes working conditions and group solidarity. Concluding this discussion, Paul drew upon similar themes and illustrated his arguments with the 2016 closure of Teesside steelworks:

> I mean, you look at Teesside… Teesside steelworks closed, then we had all these promises and commitments, they were gonna reclaim the land, they were gonna create 20,000 jobs… and the other issue for me Harvey is, well… that's brilliant if you can create 20,000 jobs… what kind of jobs? What quality

> of jobs? Because the thing about the steel industry, and again, whether the union was a victim of its own success, they were bloody good jobs… the people who worked in the industry… we always used to say, they were like kings in their communities… in a sense that, the salaries were good, terms and conditions were good, you know, pension, holidays, sick pay, sick benefits… they were good jobs, they were good… quality manufacturing jobs, which this country has decimated.
>
> Paul, ISTC Negotiator, Senior Leadership at Community Union

Following industrial decline, many workers now experience contractual insecurity and irregular employment, while the unemployed encounter punitive welfare to work schemes which forward undesirable employment (Standing, 2011; Wiggan, 2015). Expanding on these issues, Paul discussed the relative quality of employment in post-industrial areas and articulated his argument via the example of Teesside steelworks. Closing in 2016 after the collapse of Thai steelmaker SSI, steelworkers from Teesside experienced significant hardship following redundancy, with many struggling to find employment of comparable remuneration and relative job quality. As Paul mentioned, despite promises from local leaders to redevelop the site and surrounding area, subsequent job creation has not recreated the standard of living provided by the steelworks, which has led redundant workers into low wage, low status employment (Sadler, 1992). Throughout his interview encounter, Paul frequently criticised the private sector and the neoliberal state, in which he cited failures in market ideology and supply side economics (Brown et al, 2011; Mincer, 1995). Informed by their active role in policy research and collective bargaining, comments from Paul and Chris represented

a more coherent ideological critique of contemporary employment, which underpinned their focus upon the material implications of site closures.

In summary, the 2000 closure coincided with widespread labour market polarisation, where deindustrialisation eroded the market value of traditional craft and manual labour (Beaudry et al, 2016; Cappelli, 1996). With many younger steelworkers seeking to remain in traditionally masculine roles, experiences of discontinuity followed, leading to downward mobility, precarious self-employment and underemployment. As the steelworkers' occupational identity and community offered shelter from hardship, some attempted to recreate industrial subcultures within their new roles. Though influenced by working-class masculinity, many desired the fraternity and camaraderie experienced at Shelton, this being reflected in comments regarding 'getting used' to comparatively insular work, alongside commitments to traditional interpretations of masculine labour and family provision.

With respondents restricting their pool of alternative employment, many encountered varying levels of discontinuity, as stable opportunities proved challenging to locate and secure. Even when finding an alternative role, experiences of workplace conflict, precarity and managerial control often followed, leading to high turnover and downward mobility. While self-employment offered stability for men like Eliot, differing personal circumstances and occupational skills erected barriers for others, which further constrained available opportunities (Gardiner et al, 2007; 2009). This encouraged the reproduction of the steelworkers' occupational identity and community, where nostalgia offered a mechanism for coping against experiences of insecurity.

## 7.6 – Chapter Conclusion

Shelton Bar experienced a gradual decline before ceasing operations in 2000, which resulted in material and emotional hardship for those made redundant. The decline reflected the political and economic changes occurring in the 1980s, where support for nationalised industries was withdrawn (Green, 1999; Gamble, 1988; 1994). Also precipitating Shelton's deterioration was a rise in foreign competition, in which steel producers in East Asia eroded the UK's manufacturing base, thus compounding upon the state's retreat from economic intervention. This chapter's central contribution involved charting the associated cultural changes, where Shelton's downsizing and privatisation eroded important tradition and collectivism. This led to increased individualism among many, with workers competing to protect their position and secure lucrative overtime. At the point of closure, the altered relationship between steelworkers resulted in a muted opposition to site shutdown, where older workers resisted collective action in order to preserve redundancy payments.

This process of deterioration is significant, as it demonstrates the prolonged effects of enterprise culture and individualism within a traditional heavy industry, and provides a rich example of cultural decline and discipline following economic and societal change (Garrett, 1992; du Gay, 1996). This chapter joins writers such as Steven High, Tim Strangleman and Sherry Linkon in highlighting the processual nature of decline, where communal relations eroded before the final act of severance. While workplace closure and demolition are significant both materially and symbolically, Shelton's cultural decline invokes nuance within histories of deindustrialisation, and broadens

understandings of industrial closures and how these experiences should be approached by researchers (Strangleman & Rhodes, 2014).

# Chapter 8 – Industrial Memory: The Influence of Regeneration

## 8.1 – Empirical Themes: Industrial Memory & Nostalgia

Building on foundational texts such as Bluestone & Harrison's (1982) *The Deindustrialization of America*, the processual nature of industrial decline has been emphasised in recent scholarship, with writers noting how post-industrial communities continue to be affected by their past (Strangleman, 2017, Strangleman & Rhodes, 2014; Linkon, 2018). Exploring communal change, researchers have studied experiences of unemployment, the emotional and symbolic consequences of decline, and reactions to subsequent economic regeneration (Walkerdine, 2010; 2017; High & Lewis, 2007; Meier, 2016). The role of memory and narrative history are foregrounded into analysis, thereby revealing the lasting legacies of industrial subcultures (Strangleman, 1999; 2007). With these studies frequently utilising oral history methodologies to record accounts of industrial decline, the nature of memory and nostalgia are of great importance to research output.

Although oral history complicates the collection of objective fact (Portelli, 1981; 1998), recording and analysing memories can reveal individual and communal perspectives on a range of issues, which aids the exploration of culture and emotion. Memory and nostalgia constitute a unique form of knowledge which is informed by individual experience, shared communal narratives, and contemporary events; each shaping how the past is remembered and articulated (Nora, 1989; 1996; Miller, 2000). When remembering the past, residents of post-industrial communities draw from individual

and shared narratives of decline, constituting memory as negotiated sets of knowledges and discourses (Zerubavel, 1996).

Competing narrations of industrial memory can invoke conflict, especially when used in published heritage, or in the promotion of economic regeneration (Dicks, 1997; Paddison, 1993; Clark & Gibbs, 2017). Tension can emerge from the appropriation of history and the perceived erasing of cultural traditions, contributing to the 'symbolic violence' experienced in the wake of workplace closures (Skeggs, 2004; Bright, 2016). Previous literature has highlighted conflict emerging from industrial heritage museums, where historic sites are transformed into commercialised service offerings, while publicised historical narratives eliminate dissent or exclude specific groups or individuals from representation (Dicks, 2008; Smith, 2006; McGuigan, 1996). Others regard heritage as giving voice to significant figures and events, which allows younger generations to learn about their economic and cultural history (Pretes, 2002; Waterton, 2010). Celebrations of working-class heritage can offer an alternative narrative to those of protracted decline, where ordinary lives are presented as honest, industrious and admirable (Bauman, 1998; Skeggs, 2004). Although the heritage industry does not monopolise how the past is remembered, these debates highlight concern over historical authenticity and the competing discourses which influence understandings of events, cultures and historical figures.

Rising interest in industrial heritage has also spawned critique from veteran scholars, with Cowie & Heathcott (2003) labelling affection for industrial ruins as 'smokestack nostalgia'. Artistic and leisurely interest in so-called 'ruin porn' has attracted similar derision, with commentators criticising outsider curiosity into the misfortunes of

working-class communities (Clemens, 2011; High & Lewis, 2007). These critiques are primarily levelled at photographers and 'urban explorers', who according to those cited above, enter sites to create aestheticized art or to fulfil a morbid curiosity. Opposing these sentiments, Tim Strangleman suggests that nostalgia and a desire to explore the past reflects emerging backlash against late modernity, where "manifestations of smokestack nostalgia are symbols of unease in contemporary culture" (2013, p. 33). For industrial communities living with decline and dereliction, the legacy and cultural importance of industry remains significant, adding to the contention accompanying industrial memory and representations of the past.

Understanding memory and nostalgia can assist the exploration of occupational identities and communities, as nostalgia often reveals contemporary sentiments and frustrations which further illustrate the impacts of loss (Strangleman, 1999; 2007; 2012). Considering this, idealised memories of workplace cohesion and stability connect to criticism of contemporary capitalism, where some have argued that increasing precarity has eroded the social primacy of employment. This has led to what some regard as 'the end of work' as an outlet for meaning, creativity and personal development, which contrasts with the apparent opportunities for fulfilment and community fostered by modernist industrial employment (Beck, 2000; Sennett, 1998; 2006; Rifkin, 1995). Within traditional workplaces, nostalgia for the past can contribute to the formation of occupational identities, as narratives of change and decline generate mutual hardship which strengthens solidarity and cohesion (MacKenzie et al, 2006; MacKenzie & Marks, 2019).

Commemorated events and artefacts assume socially constructed meanings depending upon where, when and how information was collected and organised (Tunbridge & Ashworth, 1996). Memories and narrations of the past, although limited by prevailing historical imaginations, therefore exist within a contested and retrospective view of history (Urban, 2001; Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 2004). Mirroring concern and conflict over heritage authenticity, literature exploring industrial decline is similarly underpinned by a desire to record nuanced stories. In light of these concerns, this chapter will present interviewees' perspectives on industrial and communal decline. Informed primarily by Shelton's downsizing and closure, the plurality of post-closure experiences will be highlighted, alongside the important role of discourse in the narrative construction of oral history. The implications of decline and regeneration upon respondents' identities will feature in analysis, with experiences of redundancy undermining the principles of their masculinised community and identity.

This chapter will build upon work denoting industrial decline as a continued, emergent process which remains influential over post-industrial communities (Strangleman, 2017). Rather than presenting a homogenous understanding of decline, it will be argued that this process is understood differently by community members, as the plurality of post-closure experiences influences diverging perspectives on site closures and decline. Drawing an example from the 1986 National Garden Festival which redeveloped Shelton Bar's former workings, the following sections will then consider how economic regeneration influences nostalgic memories. Here it will be argued that despite the festival's attempts to construct a coherent narrative of economic renewal from industrial decline, interview respondents remembered the festival differently,

indicating that the festival programme was ineffective in controlling narratives of decline. The resulting implications for community and identity will be analysed, with memories of the Garden Festival invoking and emboldening different narrations of employment and industrial society. From this analysis, a nuanced and layered understanding of industrial decline will be presented, in which the industrial past is remembered and recalled differently among respondents.

## 8.2 – Narrating Discontinuity: "In the Core of the Man"

Following Western deindustrialisation, many writers have acknowledged the communal importance of industrial workplaces for both men and women, in which factories, foundries and pits are depicted as important social institutions (Blyton & Jenkins, 2012; Strangleman, 2001; Walkerdine, 2010). As this section argues, when remembering the past, working-class communities often draw upon the fraternity and camaraderie enjoyed between peers, and subsequently use these memories to sustain identities formed through technical and manual labour. When discussing industrial decline, narratives of loss extend to the erosion and breakup of occupational cultures and communities, thereby expanding memory studies beyond the tangible impacts of workplace closures. Though much of this dissertation has illuminated experiences occurring before both the 1978 downsizing and 2000 closure, these moments are nonetheless critical to interviewees' narrations of industrial decline. Consequently, this section will record respondents' memories of closure, redundancy and demolition, focusing primarily upon the intangible and emotional impacts of community severance and identity discontinuity. In keeping with the chronology of presented data, Shelton's

closure is approached retrospectively, with respondents narrating perspectives informed by their post-closure experiences.

It will be argued that while Shelton's downsizing and closure carried shared importance, narrations of closure and decline were informed by the plurality of respondents' post-closure experiences, in which redundancy or elective exits framed narrated histories. The circumstances of an individual's exit from the steelworks carried both tangible and emotional implications, as those made redundant faced additional challenges when compared to those who left willingly; challenges which resonated throughout family and home life to impact workers' spouses and their children. In line with literature conceptualising deindustrialisation as an unfolding process (Strangleman, 2017, Strangleman & Rhodes, 2014), analysis will demonstrate how this was experienced differently and unequally across the community, adding individuality into an otherwise shared phenomenon. While previous literature has taken a broad view to stress the collective hardship of site closures, this analysis will detail individual experiences of decline and the resulting implications for community membership, which subsequently humanises the processual approach to deindustrialisation.

Beginning this discussion, Jonathan recalled the emotional strain of Shelton's decline and closure, in which he expressed regret at avoiding significant moments in the site's history:

> I was asked to go down on the last day, to watch the last bar go through and all that, and I bottled it… I couldn't go, sad about all that now, you know… You've seen that little piece of steel I've got in there, I got someone to save me a piece… I couldn't go… I hadn't been since, not inside the plant… no, I

> couldn't go… isn't that strange, because… it's only a set of tin sheds, you know, but no, so I never saw the last bar, now I regret it. I saw the last cast on the blast furnaces, I was there all night when we blew that out, I was there and saw it, stayed all night, early in the morning that iron went up to the steel plant, and I bottled that as well, I was tired mind you, so I never saw the last cast on the casting plant either, I thought oh, I can't bear it… broke my heart really, I couldn't do it, erm, and I don't think I'm a particularly emotional guy, but… meant a lot you know.
>
> Jonathan, Fuel Engineer, Mill Manager

Declining his invitation to watch the final roll, Jonathan's narrations of decline are filled with regret, as he never received emotional closure by witnessing Shelton's final moments. These remarks indicate the importance of ceremony in personal and communal grieving, as even when marking painful events or memories, ceremony and formal occasions can carry great symbolic meaning (Bright, 2016; Emery, 2018; McCabe, 2019). As the interviewee with the longest tenure, Jonathan's absence on Shelton's final day led to feelings of having 'missed out' on a deeply personal and important moment. Later reflecting upon the perceived absurdity of feeling empathy for "tin sheds", a reflexive awareness of this emotional process is demonstrated, in addition to his lasting attachment to place, space and community (Brown et al, 2003; Mah, 2009).

Much of Jonathan's discussion of closure hinted at a lingering feeling of something unresolved, adding a sense of untimeliness to his narration of loss. Jonathan's experience of closure remains present and uncertain, as although he avoided events denoting finality to lessen his emotional distress, the emotional implications of missing

these events caused additional pain in his later life. Contrasting from earlier accounts provided by Arnold, who witnesses and participated within the final roll, Jonathan was particularly saddened when narrating Shelton's decline, while Arnold grew aggravated as he remembered destroying his hardhat (see page 131).

The lack of resolution in Jonathan's account of closure is important, as it illuminates a number of processes, both personal and shared across the community. Nostalgia for the past, especially among older individuals, can emerge from declining health and prosperity, leaving individuals nostalgic for periods of fixity and relative wellbeing (Strangleman, 2012). Aged 79 when interviewed, Jonathan expressed frustration at his declining health, stating how he became easily tired and was noticeably frailer, which contrasted from a lifetime of physical activity. Grounded in contemporary frustration, regret is similarly associated with an awareness of his mortality, where a longing for emotional closure accompanied a want for better health.

Narrations of decline are also influenced by relations of power, where an individual's loss of status or perceived value can invoke the recall of idealised memories (Massey, 2005). For Shelton's steelworkers, site closure was symbolic of their declining economic and cultural importance, exacerbating the distress felt upon the enforced downgrading and breakup of their occupational community (Massey, 1995). Narratives of loss and pain can be understood not only as sadness with environmental decline, but also as an embodied link with workplace closure, in which decline and demolition act as a powerful metaphor of the steelworkers' coming redundancy.

On his sense of loss after being made redundant and moving into alternative employment, Frank discussed his lack of community with his new colleagues:

> How did I cope with the closure? Erm… I suppose the honest answer is not very well… I thought I'd found my erm, I don't know what the word I want to use is, but I thought I'd found my… life path, if you like, when I was working there, and erm, we were reasonably well paid… and I missed the… I missed the men, more than I, you know, I missed the interaction with my peers, do you know what I mean? And even when… I was invited to apply for that job, but even when I was managing the factory, the small engineering works… it wasn't the same… I never felt part of a team, I felt as if I'd always got tell these guys what to do and, you know, I… never felt, I suppose I never felt accepted as one of them.
>
> Frank, Boilermaker, ASB Union Representative

Differing from retirement or resignation, redundancy was an event of severe discontinuity which necessitated new understandings and expressions of identity (Haynie & Shepherd, 2011, Brown, 2015). As detailed in Frank's comments, community is an important element of identity construction, as communal membership determines access to shared traditions and group solidarity (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003). Those made redundant after Shelton's downsizing or closure were forced to confront their sudden loss of membership, as while they could remain in contact with former colleagues, they could not participate in workplace fraternity or specific labour processes as they once did. While some managed to sustain a coherent sense of self by entering new occupational groups, separation from the steelworker community again blunted former workers' association with Shelton's men, which cast them as respectable 'former members', but not active community members.

Entering new communities and forming new solidaristic bonds was not possible for Frank however, as detailed in his post-redundancy struggle to fully assimilate into new workplace communities. Despite remaining in engineering, Frank's managerial position at the small workshop created distance between himself and his new colleagues, which denied him access to valued shopfloor camaraderie. This contrasted from his experiences at Shelton, where association with his craft peers granted membership of a masculinised community.

Frank's unease with delegation demonstrated a clear struggle with seniority, as his newfound authority cast him as a peripheral community member. Conflict of this kind is common among the upwardly mobile, as previous loyalties and classed dispositions must be managed alongside new responsibilities, subsequently undermining established identities and community membership (Curl et al, 2018; Reay, 2013; Sennett & Cobb, 1993). This contrast disrupted how Frank understood himself and his classed position, resulting in narratives of loss, unease and estrangement from his peers (Bauman, 1998). Depictions of Shelton as one cohesive team are tinged by nostalgia however, as Frank's experiences of discontinuity are juxtaposed by the perceived continuity of the steelworks. Consequently, Frank has constructed Shelton as largely class homogenous, a misconception often made during acts of remembrance for late communities and cultures (Blokland, 2001). Constructing a fraternal narrative to ease his emotional discomfort, Frank neglected the inherent conditionality associated with occupational communities. Recalling his last day at Shelton, Frank continued:

> I went down to the… head office, which was Granville house I believe it was called, and you had to sign some forms and… everything was explained about

> what was happening with my pension… and I got in me car after I'd gone through everything, and we lived in Kidsgrove, I got in the car at Shelton… and I drove up to Leek, to The Roaches… and I parked me car where I was looking out over The Potteries, and I cried… erm, so I can remember vividly my last day… and then I went home, by then we'd got… three small children, the eldest one was… 12… 10, and 5… and I went home, drove myself home from there… and I went in, and I thought right, everything's fine, and I tried to be as cheerful as I could, as if nothing was wrong and everything was going to be fine, you know, because the last thing you want do is burden your… kids with… how you're feeling, so… you're the only person I've ever told that to… I've never said that to anyone else, but that's how… and I get emotional thinking about it now.
>
> Frank, Boilermaker, ASB Union Representative

Acknowledging the adverse effects masculinity can have upon interview data collection (Schwalbe & Wolkomir, 2001; Pini, 2005), Frank's emotional display is significant, as it reveals the deep sorrow he continues to feel when remembering Shelton's downsizing. Although many respondents were emotionally forthcoming, Frank's contribution remains particularly impactful, as his emotional concealment from family and friends added further depth to his masculine identity. Invoking his role as a familial guardian, Frank rationalised his initial secrecy as an effort to protect his children, thereby avoiding the perceived emasculation of breaking character in front of his family. Describing this as "burden", Frank denoted male emotion as something to be concealed and buried within to maintain a stoic masculine exterior. The prolonged keeping of this emotional

secret also reveals a continuing sense of shame and embarrassment, where the loss of income, alongside fraternity and communal membership, dealt a significant blow to Frank's identity and self-worth as a male breadwinner.

For many working-class men, relinquishing their male breadwinner identity is untenable, leading some to continue identifying as the main familial provider even in cases of unemployment, or when earning less than their female partners (Willott & Griffin, 2004). In these cases, traditional gender norms are preserved, as the renegotiation of masculine identities leads to devaluation against disciplining rhetoric (Canaan, 1996; Connell, 1987). When Frank remembers Shelton's downsizing, he is reminded of the pain associated with his loss of income and camaraderie, but also of his loss of economic and communal status. This links to his previous contribution where he discussed not feeling part of a team, as painful memories of redundancy accentuate the stability and fraternity associated with his time at Shelton. It is likely that Frank felt comfortable confiding in a researcher he was unlikely to meet again, enabling him to navigate his shame without fear of judgement or emasculation.

Discussing the implications of redundancy for process workers with specialised skills, David considered the endurance of industrial occupational identities:

> Those jobs… in this area, weren't replaceable, I mean, they're skilled blokes in the steel industry, them blokes were really skilled at what they did… but outside the steel industry, they were labourers, you know, you couldn't transfer them skills… it's like miners, a miner's a miner, you shut a pit, they're still a miner. I think it's the same with steelworkers, skilled blokes doing what they did, but outside the steel industry, them skills… you couldn't apply them,

> other than like, obviously you had engineering department, they were transferable skills, erm, electricians, fitters, them were transferable skills, but, the basic steelworker, the guy as put the stuff through the rolls and sent it through the mill… as skilful as they were, they weren't transferable skills, so basically, they'd got to be retrained, and that's what they tried to do with a lot of them, but it was a body blow, a real body blow.
>
> David, Senior Furnaceman, ISTC Union Representative

Although focussing upon the tangible impacts of redundancy, David's comments on miners and steelworkers are all the more pertinent. By stating that "a miner's a miner" even after pit closure, David recognises the endurance of strong occupational identities and their continuing importance after site closures, alongside the bodily implications of redundancy; where job losses similarly annul workers' muscle memories and knowledges specific to Shelton's productive operations (Emery, 2018). Much like coal mining communities, similar emotive endurance has been observed within steel towns, with redundant steelworkers remaining committed to their occupational identity and community after losing their roles (MacKenzie et al, 2006; McLachlan et al, 2019). By continuing to draw upon their previous occupational identity, redundant steelworkers like those identified by David lessened the emotional distress of closure, as stability and coherence were authored into a period of discontinuity to maintain a connection to a valued community. Though discussing their skills and aptitudes, David acknowledged Shelton's emotional importance to his peers, and described the closure as a physical blow to the body.

When narrating Shelton's downsizing, David spoke very little regarding the impact upon himself. Instead, he focused upon the difficulties faced by his colleagues as they sought new employment. Retained in the mill after 1978, David retired from Shelton in 1999, allowing a comparatively seamless self-authored exit. Consequently, when recalling Shelton's decline and closure, David's memories are populated by the plight of his peers in production-oriented roles, who were unable to utilise their unique knowledge and abilities outside of the steel industry (Dobbins, 2014). Differing from Jonathan and Frank's experiences of personal loss, David's role as an ISTC representative also oriented his memories towards the misfortunes of others, as the allocation of retraining and redundancy payments fell under his remit. Though exhibiting feelings of loss and frustration, David appeared resigned to Shelton's closure, indicating that he had learned to accept the circumstances underpinning the work's decline. This connects to his self-authored exit, as retirement infers discourses of having served a productive lifetime at work, while knowledge of redundancy is associated with abrupt and undignified endings.

Darius also commented on iron and steel production workers, and contrasted their experiences against those of craft workers like himself:

> I know steel production workers are an ilk, they are one of a kind, and they deserved the highest redundancy rates, so they [British Steel Corporation] did that… they put that into a monetary value, you know… Steel and iron workers, their jobs, they aren't gonna go down, you know, instead of going down Cobridge Road, they aren't going along Leek New Road and find another job, erm, when they've spent all their life producing steel, they've gotta have

> financial backing to… supplement a job which I looked on as inferior really. If they were gonna go in a warehouse packing, which I know a few did, or local supermarkets, there might have been a reasonable amount of happiness with them, but I think… the steelmaking process was in their blood… in the core of the man, so, regretful. But some of the maintenance, skilled maintenance personnel, virtually had a decent, erm… redundancy payment, and walked into another job just along.
>
> Darius, Mechanical Fitter

Sharing David's concerns, Darius reiterated the uneven impacts of redundancy upon iron and steel production workers. Reflection upon occupational identity is more overt within this contribution however, in which Darius personifies the production process, stating its existence within the workers' bodies and in the core of their being. Redundancy has been likened to bodily harm in adjacent scholarship, a conceptualisation used in Valerie Walkerdine's work on Welsh steel towns, where the trauma of industrial decline is said to pierce the protective skin of community (2010; 2017; Walkerdine & Jimenez, 2012). Just as skin holds the body together, communities form a 'second skin' by drawing from a shared identity, creating "a profound containing function and a strong sense of continuity of being" (Walkerdine, 2010, p. 98; see also Anzieu, 1989). While redundant craft workers like Darius were able to utilise their skills in smaller workshops, production workers faced additional challenges during retraining and redeployment, as few suitable job prospects foregrounded the redundancy of their skills and identity. This exacerbated the sense of loss many experienced, as underemployment forced individuals into a state of uncertain identity transition

(Conroy & O'Leary-Kelly, 2013). Also selecting a self-authored exit from Shelton, Darius later stated his relative ease at finding alternative employment, again influencing his primary concern with his redundant colleagues.

Also commenting on the perceived inferiority of alternative employment in the service and warehousing sectors, Darius argued that production workers' unique skills and occupational culture prevented fulfilment in post-redundancy roles. These comments critique post-industrial employment, where in the decades following widespread site closures, employment growth has centred on low-wage sectors (Gregg & Gardiner, 2015). Historically, steel closures have led to persistent underemployment and economic inactivity, with many redundant workers unable to utilise their skills in industries with comparable pay and conditions (Markusen, 1977; Sadler, 1992). Due to the steel industry's geographic concentration and traditionally older workforce, these problems became more acute, as the impacts of redundancy were concentrated in particular regions and population brackets (Hudson, 2000; Dawley et al, 2008).

Darius' criticism is also classed and gendered however, as his comments reflect how masculinity can prevent men from entering alternative employment in the service sector; as the servitude required for customer facing roles contrasts with idealised working-class masculinity (McDowell, 2003; Nixon, 2009). These themes are present within Darius' remarks, as his comments regarding "in the core of the man" indicate a belief in traditional gender norms. Drawing examples from warehousing and supermarkets, Darius acknowledges the decline in both pay and relative job quality for many of his peers, leading him to attribute a lack of satisfaction to these arrangements. His assessment of alternative employment is informed by unfolding issues of

underemployment, economic inactivity and falling living standards however, where contemporary economic change is projected onto the 1978 downsizing.

Alongside the personal impacts of redundancy, industrial decline has disrupted traditional markers of class and life course continuity, as site closures have eroded the paternal stewardship characteristic of industrial subcultures. As Greg identifies in the following contribution, not only did this have an economic impact in the loss of secure employment, but important inter-generational tradition and cooperation were also eroded. In light of these changes, youth from all backgrounds experience more complex transitions into adulthood, where pathways into employment and education are less demarcated and increasingly unpredictable (Fenton & Dermott, 2006; du Bois-Reymond, 1998). These themes are previewed in Greg's remarks included below:

> I think there was a loss there, because there was a… I suppose there was the steelworks, there was the potteries where whole generations used to work at the same place… that sort of thing has gone completely now, so you don't have a generational link where you carry on working… the father worked there, then the son… those things have all gone nowadays. I suppose it tended to be, in theory, a job for life, where once you got on to those places, that was it, you were on those places… and again, that doesn't happen now, things have changed so quickly.
>
> Greg, Laboratory Technician

Although social class continues to influence available educational and employment opportunities (Macdonald et al, 2005; 2001), youth transitions are increasingly non-

linear, leading young people to stagger between education, training and employment (McDonald et al, 2013). These changes contribute to sentiments of loss and unease expressed by many respondents, as their experiences of work and community have become marginalised by industrial decline. This inspired some to reminisce fondly upon the past, constituting efforts to rationalise and buttress themselves against contemporary change. Although vocally unsympathetic towards industrial decline and its communal implications, Greg discussed the declining availability of job permanence, in which he noted how economic change has made long service either unviable or unappealing. Though many workers find stability by remaining in a professional field, those in low paid employment experience greater role fragmentation, leading to participation in numerous low wage roles, rather than a stable career with one employer (Fenton & Dermott, 2006). This again departs from respondents' experiences of stability at Shelton, underpinning assessments of contemporary employment as meaningless and poor quality.

The changing nature of employment Greg describes has important implications for occupational communities, as the erosion of full industrial employment impacted the passing of traditions and communal folk lore. Accordingly, nostalgia for the past also links to the psychological burden of incomplete and redundant communal rituals, leading respondents to invoke organisational nostalgia as they mourn the finality of their community experiences. With many respondents sharing employment at Shelton with their fathers, the contemporary absence of paternalistic rituals is another factor underpinning narratives of loss.

These themes link to debate regarding the 'the end of work' as a site for identity formation and personal development, encouraging some to characterise the post-industrial economy as devoid of comparative meaning (Rifkin, 1995; Beck, 2000; Sennett, 1998; 2006). When Greg discussed the "job for life", he acknowledged changes occurring not only in how work is organised and completed, but also in how social class is negotiated and understood in the absence of heavy industry (Rifkin, 1995; Savage et al, 2013; Walkerdine, 2015). With this in mind, as male providence and paternalism were foregrounded into the steelworkers' industrial subculture, the perceived absence of these themes from contemporary society was regarded by many as evidence of moral and economic decline. This again influenced the reproduction of nostalgic memories, where the perceived achievements of industrial capitalism were accentuated and celebrated. Expanding upon themes of community cohesion, comments from Chris, a senior director from the Community Union, conclude this section:

> It is absolutely devastating and erm, so much of the community is based around these big sites, it's you know, it's not just an employer, it's also the… the social club, it might be the sports teams, it's certainly… you know, a hub for… friends and family, and in many cases there's lots of generations working alongside each other… That's not properly recognised I don't think, you know, often it's economic factors, and people might recognise that, you know, they're well-paid jobs, and they're not quite as well-paid jobs which could replace them, but the… what it means to the community and their identity and sort of, sense of… belonging and place in the world, is not properly understood.

Chris, Senior Director at Community Union

Though mentioning the loss of income and economic prosperity, Chris acknowledges the communal function of large industrial employers, in which he characterises these sites as key facilitators of social interaction and communal identity formation (Blyton & Jenkins, 2012). Key to his observations is that community infrastructure, in addition to abstract notions of pride and belonging, cannot be immediately replaced or replicated, meaning alternative employment does little to heal communal ruptures caused by a loss of identity. As inferred in previous chapters, sports teams, social clubs and workplace camaraderie were important elements sustaining Shelton's social infrastructure, with respondents frequently demonstrating the insulating qualities of occupational communities. Chris's contribution captures many themes present within this analysis, in addition to the literature concerning industrial memory, indicating his deep familiarity with steel communities and the implications of site closures (Walkerdine, 2010; 2017; Walkerdine & Jimenez, 2012). Like prior responses, plurality is demonstrated in the way Chris narrated industrial decline, as his position as a union representative influenced a primary concern with alternative employment and communal degeneration.

While respondents' experiences of closure differ in severity and impact, a theme of loss can be traced throughout all interviews. This included a tangible drop in living standards, losing a sense of identity, or changes to how many identified with subsequent occupational communities. Due to their retrospective nature, narrations of Shelton's closure are replete with nostalgia, though they reveal important insights into varied life histories following redundancy, retirement and elective exits from the works.

Diverging from critique depicting nostalgia as a paralysing emotion (Atia & Davies, 2010), the analytical utility of nostalgic memory was recognised and employed throughout this section, demonstrating how idealisations of the past are often underpinned by psychological distance from a desired state (Lowenthal, 1989; Strangleman, 2007; 2012). While some participants discussed the emotional implications of site closure, others focused upon the hardships of their peers, again representing the plurality of experiences and perspectives formed after Shelton's demise.

The diversity of perspectives and experiences observed is significant, as this demonstrated that the ongoing process of deindustrialisation is experienced and narrated differently across the community. Diverging post-closure experiences were important here, as narrations of closure were influenced by the circumstances leading to an individual's exit from the works, alongside wider life course trajectories following industrial decline. For some, an amicable, self-authored end to their employment led to saddened, though accepting narrations of decline, while the hurt of redundancy or personal regrets led others into comparatively pained narrations. Consequently, though respondents shared emotions of sadness, anger or apathy, the negotiation of nostalgia and industrial memory is an individualised process, influenced by experiences occurring in the wake of economic transformation.

## 8.3 – Discourses of Change: The 1986 National Garden Festival

Far from unique to contemporary political discourse, economists are familiar with the process of economic regeneration, this being repeated to combat the transience of production and capital accumulation (Silver, 2005; High & Lewis, 2007). Drawing from the post-war period, examples of regeneration include the physical reconstruction of the Marshall Plan, in addition to the social reforms which created the welfare state and the National Health Service (Hogan, 1987; Vickers, 2000; Bean, 2010). Similarly, the protracted decline of coal mining from the 1960s generated land reclamation and slum clearance schemes, with local authorities regenerating polluted landscapes to counter perceptions of national decline (Falk, 1978; Ebke, 2018). Throughout the 20th century, Stoke-on-Trent City Council made frequent use of central government grants for land reclamation projects, leading to the redevelopment of vacant collieries and quarries into public parks and industrial estates (Kivell, 1993). The most significant local reclamation project was undertaken for the 1986 National Garden Festival, which converted the largest wasteland in the West Midlands into a horticultural leisure epicentre. Inhabiting land formerly occupied by Shelton Bar, the Garden Festival promised to eliminate the wrongs of pollution, abandoned mine workings and industrial sprawl.

Due to the Garden Festival's direct connection to Shelton Bar, this section will draw upon the 1986 event to explore the intersection of economic regeneration and industrial memory, alongside the disciplinary discourses which accompany economic change. Like the finality of workplace closures, the after-use of derelict land contributes to how industry and workplace cultures are remembered, underpinning differing

interpretations of Shelton's legacy (Mills & McIntosh, 2020). This section will preview these themes by outlining how the Garden Festival shaped narratives of Shelton's 1978 downsizing. The Garden Festival's grounding in Margaret Thatcher's economic agenda meant the arrival of enterprising rhetoric, with discourses of economic change and growth used to conceal local hardship resulting from industrial closures. These themes are present within the 1986 event's official guidebook, which will be analysed through a discursive content review. It will be argued that while this programme of regeneration served a tangible need for economic and social development, narrative and ideology were woven into the delivery of environmental change. This assisted in the transition away from heavy industry, as workplaces such as Shelton Bar were constructed as outdated and harmful to local and national prosperity.

Drawing upon Sam Wetherell's critique of the Garden Festival movement (2021), the highly commercialised nature of the 1986 event will be emphasised, illustrating how environmental change served as a 'trail run' for consumer capitalism. While land reclamation schemes of the 1960s and 70s accompanied utopian rhetoric of urban renewal (Smith, 2023; Ortolano, 2011), the Garden Festivals and wider regeneration efforts of the 1980s were imposed with similar, though distinctively 'Thatcherite' discourses, indicating how those in power understood industrial decline and its implications for economic and communal change. By locating the festival in a wider history of economic change, regeneration schemes can be better understood as transient economic events, which exist in a string of urban renewal projects preceding the contemporary 'levelling up' agenda (HM Government, 2022).

By the end of the 1970s, inner-city decline was evident across the UK, seeing the return of widespread urban poverty and dereliction (Andrews, 2020). Liverpool was particularly infamous for its debility, though other Northern cities were suffering with deterioration and unemployment. Upon the Conservatives' general election victory in 1979, solving the 'urban crisis' received priority attention, leading to targeted investment in certain localities, while others were placed into 'managed decline' (Smith, 2019). After successful lobbying from the Joint Council for Landscape Industries, the government considered the viability of garden festivals in declining cities, with the aim of preventing further economic deterioration via inward investment (Beaumont, 1985). Before coming to Stoke-on-Trent in 1986, the first Garden Festival was held in Liverpool two years earlier. This decision was not coincidental, as the original 1982 feasibility study was completed in the wake of the 1981 Toxteth riots.

Michael Heseltine, then Secretary of State for the Environment, stated that attracting private capital into city centres was key to the UK's economic regeneration (Heseltine, 1981). Following this statement, feasibility plans for two garden festivals were released. Though themed with horticulture and environmental restoration, economic regeneration emerged as the principle aim of the programme, reflecting the growing problem of urban decline. Inspired by the West-German *Bundesgartenschauen*, a programme of post-war reconstruction, a festival was held once every two years between 1984 and 1992 (Theokas, 2004). British Garden Festivals had shorter lead times between planning and delivery, indicating the economic and political sensitivity of the moment. Inspiration was also drawn from the Great Exhibition of 1851 and the 1951 Festival of Britain, each showcasing British achievements and inventions,

alongside imperial force projection (Wetherell, 2021). With the UK now in its post-colonial period, this design inspiration highlights the role of discourse within regeneration efforts, where particular narratives are evoked to promote an imagined future (Smith, 2023).

The organisation of each festival mirrored the economic changes experienced throughout the 1980s, as formal preparations were completed by regional development companies, born from local authorities partnering with corporate entities (Beaumont, 1985). In preparation for Stoke-on-Trent's Garden Festival, the City Council created a limited company to engage with contractors and consultants (Holden 1989). This reflected the state's transition away from post-war central planning, which was replaced by the believed efficiency and innovation of the private sector. Corporate partnerships were large contributors to each festival, in which private organisations provided additional revenue via advertisements and sponsorship of individual events. Exhibits from private house-building companies were common, a bedfellow created by the 1980 Housing Act, which expanded homeownership under the controversial Right to Buy scheme (Wetherell, 2021). At Stoke-on-Trent's 1986 festival, a number of show-homes were built around the canal-side marina, an area clasping the main formal display gardens.

By examining the 1986 guidebook, further insights into the knowledges employed by the event's management can be gained. Stating the purpose and objectives of the festival, the introduction reads:

> Whether you want an exciting, entertaining day out with something for all the family, if your main interest is horticulture, or if you are just curious to know

> how an ugly, derelict steelworks can possibly have blossomed into a place of enchantment, you'll find satisfaction here.
>
> As you admire the wooded hills, the sparkling lakes, the elegant pavilions and tents and the myriad planting, you'll find it hard to believe that only a few years ago next to nothing grew here, and the place was full of twisted metal, dirt and decay.
>
> The festival has changed all that, and is helping to change the image and the commercial potential of a city so often ill-used by industry in the past. Almost every tree and flower that you see even the soil that they are growing in, has had to be brought here and tended.
>
> 1986 Garden Festival Official Guidebook

Emblematic of the festival's overarching theme, references to horticulture and growth symbolise local economic decline and the event's regenerative aspirations. Characterising the past as ugly, the festival organisers demarcate between a dreadful era of steel production, and the clean, natural growth of post-industrial leisure and commerce. Appeals to nature and environmentalism denote the blossoming of a leisurely site for visitors, a narrative told through the symbolism of progression from comparative decay. Like the upward trajectory of the floral exhibitions, it is implied that the festival will propel Stoke-on-Trent into a future free from industrial grime, where its residents can enjoy fresh opportunities. This is reinforced by references to twisted metal and the ill-use of industry, suggesting an unnatural and harmful quality to Shelton's productive and extractive activities, and indeed to the wider industrial

concerns across the city. Stoke-on-Trent's industrial heritage is portrayed not only as historic and outmoded, but as a blight to the natural world, worthy of complete eradication to the fresh start offered by the festival.

Though undeniably harmful to the natural environment, emphasis upon industrial pollution lingers in impact and alludes to ills beyond the physical environment. The necessity of transplanting soil and plants from healthier territories suggests a moral failure, in which natural imports cleanse and remedy the taint of polluting industries (Skeggs, 1997; 2004 Sayer, 2005). Also implied is that external intervention was required to save ailing industrial areas, minimising local autonomy and authority over economic planning. These arguments are echoed by Sam Wetherell's critique of the Garden Festival programme, where the link between neoliberal capitalism and environmentalism is made (2021). In what he defines as *market environmentalism,* Wetherell argues that the festivals served as an implicit critique of 19th and 20th century industrial landscapes, and subsequently covered cities with a layer of soil both physically and metaphorically. He stated:

> As highly artificial environments, engineered on former industrial land that had been urbanized over centuries in the past, the festivals were hardly an exercise in conservation. Rather, they offered their visitors a cartoonish hyper-reality, a simulacrum of nature built to smother the unsightly polluted relics of Britain's industrial past and mobilized as a critique of urban industrial life. (2021, p. 87).

The Garden Festivals sought to shape the look and feel of post-industrial cities by privatising public space and infrastructure. Similarly, local industrial heritage was erased

and reproduced in aesthetic forms for leisurely marvel (Dicks, 2008; 1997). As Wetherell argues, the festivals can be understood as a Thatcherite tool for reshaping British society, as corporate partnerships and the planned commercial after-use of each site introduced communities to consumer capitalism. These ideological principles were embedded in subsequent regeneration programmes, where public and private investment sought to visually improve urban environments. As dereliction and physical decline were attributed to Liverpool's misfortunes, further aesthetic regeneration of the Albert Docks occurred throughout the 1980s, leading to the development of private residential and commercial space (Andrews, 2020). This transition to post-industrial, consumption-led regeneration mirrored the gentrification seen across North American cities in the 1970s, where the grime of industry was removed and appropriated in up-market living spaces (Podmore, 1998; Mathews, 2019).

Signalling the hope of economic growth attached to the 1986 festival, a statement from Stoke-on-Trent Central's MP is included within the guidebook:

> For us this Garden Festival is an important event. It marks a new phase in what has been a long and varied industrial history, in the city as a whole and in particular on this, the site of Josiah Wedgewood's original pottery manufactory and next door to the old Shelton Bar Steel Works.
>
> In the last six years our pottery industry has lost 26,000 jobs and three of our local coal pits have closed, causing high unemployment and increased social problems. The reclamation of this land gives us great hope and points towards a better future

Mark Fisher, MP for Stoke-on-Trent Central, 1986

By 1986, Stoke-on-Trent was experiencing widespread deindustrialisation, which was made particularly acute due to the structuring of the local economy; which possessed a historically weak service sector, though high employment in traditional industries such as pottery manufacturing, coalmining, and iron and steelmaking (Rosenthal & Lawrence, 1993). This structuring made the area vulnerable during periods of contracting demand, and later set the scene for significant hardship as industrial workplaces closed. Discussing job losses alongside creating "a better future" with the Garden Festival, Mark Fisher's comments indicate the economic subtext underpinning urban greening and aesthetic redevelopment. As he alludes to, the after-use of the site was important to the festival organisers, reflecting the council's record of using land reclamation as a vehicle for economic regeneration. Accordingly, Mark Fisher makes explicit reference to the land reclamation efforts within his statement, rather than discussing the festival in detail. Drawing upon similar themes, a statement from the city council's leader then follows:

> The short term and in due course the long term employment opportunities initiated by this event and the many other benefits will provide a great boost to the future fortunes of Stoke-on-Trent.
>
> Those areas of the site which are to remain after the festival closes will provide a magnificent leisure asset for the inhabitants of the city to enjoy and be justifiably proud of. It will also provide a lasting reminder of what skilful design and resolute endeavour can achieve.

Ron Southern, Stoke-on-Trent City Council Leader, 1986

This quote again draws upon knowledges of economic change and transition away from heavy industry. Against a backdrop of rising unemployment in the industrial heartlands, the Garden Festival programme introduced leisure and commerce into deindustrialising localities. Alignment is subsequently observed between this narration of the festival and the wider political agenda underpinning its creation, which reflected Thatcher's desire to recast relationships between labour, capital and the state (Worcester, 1989; Gamble, 1994).

Towards the end of the 1980s, public and political support for the Garden Festival programme was declining however, leading to its discontinuation after the 1992 Ebbw Vale festival (Wetherell, 2021). Criticised for their expense and perceived wastefulness, one Liverpool councillor called the 1984 festival "the most expensive job creation programme since the space race" (Miller, 1982). This critique was emboldened as the site fell into disrepair, having no major impact upon the city as envisioned. Laying derelict for several decades, it was only in 2019 that Liverpool City Council submitted planning to redevelop the site into a residential estate (Tobin & Clements, 2020). Even the Department of Environment were sceptical of the programme's achievements, arguing that the economic impacts were ambiguous (DoE, 1990). Similar issues were seen at Glasgow and Gateshead, each hosting events in 1988 and 1990, leading to ineffective after-use and few tangible impacts upon the cities' wider fortunes. Consequently, though pacifying immediate problems of urban unrest, the festivals were largely ineffective at inspiring economic regeneration.

The event at Stoke-on-Trent was an outlier however, as the site was immediately repurposed by private developers to create a commercially successful mixed retail area. The festival's commercial partner St Modwen secured a 150-year lease on the land, and subsequently delivered upon an array of leisure, office and retail space (Holden 1989). Known as 'Festival Park', the site is characteristic of many large, out of town retail areas across the nation. Directly employing around 6,700 people across varying service functions (St. Modwen Properties, 2016), Festival Park has offset the direct job losses caused by Shelton's 1978 downsizing, which resulted in around 3,000 redundancies (British Steel News, 1978). Despite favourable levels of employment, it is unclear how these roles compare in regard to relative quality, remuneration and benefits, in addition to the sense of community felt by employees. Along with issues regarding masculinity and pride in manual work (Nixon, 2009; Pleasant, 2019), new opportunities in retailing and commerce were incongruent with the steelworkers' skills and aptitudes, meaning those displaced were unlikely to find work provided by Festival Park's post-industrial regeneration.

By pairing redevelopment with a large public event, inhabitants of a deindustrialising locality were familiarised with commercial leisure and consumer services, alongside discourses of economic progress through dispatching seemingly outdated industry. These offerings and messages were absent from a city formerly defined by manufacturing. The Garden Festival was aligned with the economic changes occurring under Thatcher's premiership, which were designed to alter relationships with the state and private enterprise. Consequently, this economic regeneration accompanied a specific agenda and disciplinary knowledges, which sought not to remedy urban decline,

but rather to shape local economies and influence how communities responded to deindustrialisation (Smith, 2023). The discourses used to inspire and justify economic change are important to how industrial workplaces and their communities are remembered and narrated, as the after-use of an industrial site, alongside the circumstances of its decline and closure, each contribute to individual and shared memories of the past; an effect particularly pronounced in coalmining towns, where even 'successful' redevelopment can rouse the antagonisms underpinning the industry's decline (Rodwell, 2008). Due to Shelton's direct association with the Garden Festival, the site's reclamation and regeneration informed communal memories of the steelworks, including how former workers remember the site and its decline.

As economic regeneration returns to local and national political agendas, it is worth acknowledging that these concerns are not unique to Britain's current economic outlook, but exist in a continued process of capital accumulation and divestment. Accordingly, past and present regeneration can be understood as a continuation of the wider process of deindustrialisation, where alterations in the allocation of state and private resources, alongside the structuring of state welfare and employment patterns, reflect the shift in modes of production (Tomlinson, 2016). This was exemplified in Shelton's 1978 downsizing, as the surrounding land was reclaimed into a site emblematic of post-industrial development, replete with leisure, shopping and service sector employment. This effort was disguised with epistemologies of economic and environmental progress, as the 1986 National Garden Festival offered a green façade to conceal the degradation of local industry and the transition to consumption-led economic growth. Though this shapes how industrial sites such as Shelton Bar are

remembered across the wider community, the economic reality for displaced steelworkers was different, as the closure and erasure of their occupational community severed a shared sense of belonging, identity and group solidarity.

## 8.4 – Industrial Memory & Regeneration: "I Go Back and… I Despair"

With traditional industries almost entirely absent from the national economy, their remaining influence upon post-industrial communities are primarily psychosocial, though the tangible effects of decline remain in constrained employment opportunities. While memories of heavy industry have faded from the national consciousness, sentiments of loss and frustration continue (Linkon, 2018). In this process, industrial ruins, official heritage and the memories of older community members serve as reminders of economic decline. Conceptualised usefully as 'ghosts of the past' by Tim Edensor, crumbling and abandoned sites remain "part of an unfinished disposal of spaces and matter, identified as rubbish but not yet cleared" (2005a, p. 842). Ghostly ruins initiate 'social hauntings', where unresolved communal hardships are resurrected to remind residents of adversity and social violence (Gordon, 2008; Mills & McIntosh, 2020). Sentiments of loss and decline signal the continued impact of industrial closures, though they also represent contemporary unease, where nostalgia is used as a vehicle to critique the present (Strangleman, 2013).

Despite social hauntings and communal decline, some continue to identify with place-based identities, leading individuals to draw from nostalgic memories to sustain attachment and belonging to their local area (Mah, 2009; 2010). This was observed

across interview encounters, as even in the face of personal and communal hardship, many respondents retained their pride and commitment to Stoke-on-Trent. As communities change, so do shared understandings of place and space, meaning industrial sites gain new meanings as they are removed and repurposed (Wheeler, 2014). While others elsewhere celebrate and engage with the reworking and appropriation of communal assets (Nayak, 2003), many turn to melancholic nostalgia, which subsequently influences hostility to change and perceived outsiders (Walkerdine & Jimenez, 2012).

To explore perceptions of change and decline, the following section will again draw from respondents' experiences of deindustrialisation. Analysis will demonstrate how past and present economic regeneration influences narrations of industrial decline, with interviewees returning a range of responses to the changes occurring with redevelopment. Accordingly, an overt link between regeneration and deindustrialisation will be generated, in which industrial decline is recalled through the lens of subsequent redevelopment. Respondents' narratives vary, with some expressing a personal and shared sense of loss, while for others, the economic progress of neighbouring regions elicits frustration. Introducing this section, David, who worked at Shelton Bar for 39 years, noted the loss of social infrastructure after the closure and contrasted this mockingly against the site's contemporary use:

> There was a social element, you know, we had a Steelmen's club, where people would go with their families at weekends, erm, friend of mine had his wedding reception there, we had… swimming clubs, fishing clubs, tennis club…

> there was a real community that got involved with them… We've got a marina there now in its place… [He smirks and rolls his eyes].
>
> David, Senior Furnaceman, ISTC Union Representative

Rolling his eyes when mentioning Festival Park's canal-boat marina, David criticised the after-use of land formerly occupied by Shelton Bar. Built for the 1986 Garden Festival, the marina was repurposed to form part of the wider retail park, bringing change which departed from the productivity of Shelton's steel and ironworks. Contrasting this against Shelton's social infrastructure, the marina symbolised a negative departure in David's narration of closure, in which friendship, marriage and economic opportunity were superseded by leisure and consumer services. This comparison exemplifies changes seen as areas deindustrialise, in which formerly productive sites are cleared or repurposed into aestheticized products for consumption. This has the effect of displacing local identities as new uses and users occupy redeveloped space, subsequently raising communal conflict and nostalgia (Mathews, 2019; Smith & Graves, 2005). Accordingly, though the marina connects to local industrial heritage by expanding the Trent-and-Mersey canal, its association with the Garden Festival suggests a purely leisurely purpose, which contributes to a sense of antagonism caused by its occupation of space once belonging to the steelworks.

While his critique of Festival Park's marina demonstrated dissatisfaction with Shelton's decline and closure, David's remarks are important when highlighting the link between economic regeneration and deindustrialisation. Redevelopment occurring in preparation for and after the Garden Festival is incorporated into David's memories of Shelton, while his wry indignation indicated disappointment with the perceived

inadequacy of post-industrial regeneration. Though communal backlash against regeneration is common among post-industrial communities (Clark & Gibbs, 2017; Stanton, 2006), David's momentary criticism is important, as his memories of communal fraternity are accentuated not just by contemporary absence, but by the failure of service sector employment to create comparable subcultures. While the 1986 festival aimed to control narratives of deindustrialisation and generate identification with new industries, David's remarks indicate that these efforts have since failed, and that for steelworkers at least, memories of Shelton and industrial Britain remain pertinent. Economic change would be understood differently had Shelton been succeeded by another industrial concern. Instead, David's experiences of closure and decline are narrated through his displeasure in subsequent redevelopment.

Also commenting on Festival Park and its connection to Shelton Bar, Simon, formerly a mechanical fitter at the works, contributed:

> The area itself, Shelton Bar, when it was being flattened, you know, ended up being the Garden Festival when all that was down there. I suppose, it was its one last fling really, and like it is now, it's Festival Park now, so it's still an area that is making money… so the area itself was converted into… to being useful for us, at the end of the day, and it's still there, for old Shelton bar workers and everything. When you go down Festival Park, you can still visualise in your mind what it was like, I don't think anybody will ever forget, especially old workers, they'll never forget Shelton Bar, it will never be cast aside that it was never there… it will always remain in their minds for ever and ever, it does in mine, I think back all the time about the area, and what it did for me.

Differing from David's critique, Simon characterised Festival Park as a useful and productive area. His narration is bound to a commemoration of the steelworks however, in that Festival Park's contemporary productivity exists as a continuation of Shelton's profitability. By stating that the Garden Festival and the resulting development was Shelton's "one last fling", it is implied that these successes were contingent upon the works, and that commercial viability was transferred symbolically as the area was reclaimed and redeveloped. Like David's contribution, Festival Park accentuated Simon's memories of Shelton Bar, however in this example, the retail park's profitability emboldened an understanding of the steelworks as a productive and viable enterprise. Once again, Stoke-on-Trent's industrial history remains celebrated, meaning regeneration has done little to reframe the legacy of industrial sites among former steelworkers like Simon and David. Though drawing upon nostalgic memories, Simon did not disparage the changes occurring after Shelton's downsizing and closure, which departs from negative characterisations of nostalgia as a socially paralysing force (Natali, 2005; Watson & Wells, 2006). Instead, both the past and present are considered positively, influencing the narration of continuation and productivity.

Though economic and environmental change can heighten attachment to place and space (Mah, 2009; Harrison, 2017; Milligan, 1998), others may grow irritated by worsening prospects and seek to exit declining localities to escape deprivation. Leaving Stoke-on-Trent for Scunthorpe in 2000, Bill discussed how he continued to move areas after his retirement, as he sought a lively and economically active place to live.

Considering redevelopment efforts in his local area in the North East, Bill contrasted this against a comparative lack of change in Staffordshire:

> Everywhere you go [North East England], something's happening, roads are closed, they're putting new stuff in, houses being built… and you go back to Stoke, and I mean they're building houses, but they don't do anything with the infrastructure… all the roads are the same… so, I just… I don't know where it goes, I don't know where Stoke goes… Up here, things are buzzing, there's lots of families, there's lots of young people, and they're all… working… I mean, rush hour, the main road's just behind me, rush hour… and they're all going somewhere, they're all going work, so, the things alive, do you know what I mean, the place is alive. Stoke… I just look at Stoke and I think it's on its last breath…
>
> Bill, Finishing End Operative, Furnaceman, ISTC Union Representative

Directly implicating regeneration within narrations of industrial decline, Bill compares Stoke-on-Trent's ills against economic activity occurring in the North East, perceiving this as the successful redevelopment of a similar post-industrial area. This invokes anger as he negotiates the lack of comparable economic activity in his hometown. While grief and dissatisfaction arise independently, these feelings are exacerbated by the emerging economic fortunes of his new local area, seeing Bill acknowledge the comparative absence left by Stoke-on-Trent's industrial decline.

Bill's narration also raises conflict for his place-based identity, in which protracted decline erodes his memories of Stoke-on-Trent as an industrial city (Cresswell, 2015;

Massey, 2005). Witnessing economic regeneration in his new residence, new meaning is granted to a landscape formerly experiencing decline and site closures, renewing a generative process of identity formation (Darby, 2000; Wylie, 2009; Bender, 2002). A lack of similar investment in Staffordshire further undermines Bill's attachment to the region, influencing nostalgia and his wilting assessment of the area's contemporary prospects. Accordingly, Stoke-on-Trent is condemned as irretrievable, thereby continuing a story of stagnation and poverty in the wake of deindustrialisation.

Also discussing the slow pace of redevelopment, Greg criticised local nostalgia and the emotional legacy of industry, leading him to apportion blame upon residents he perceives as 'stuck in the past':

> It's so inherent here, not just the steelworks, but the potteries and the mines and everything else, a lot of people didn't want to change, so they got stuck in this… 'we've got to find a way of going back'… well, it's never going back, so, that's why it's taken so long to change, it's got left behind more than anything, really, because the people haven't wanted to change, and now you've got different generations coming out now, and I suppose slowly it will change, and it isn't just in Stoke, you go up areas of the North into smaller cities than Stoke, it's the same with all of them… I think, they're all sat there waiting for the past to come back, but it's never coming back. Whereas both of my sons went down to work in London, they just get on and… they've never actually known… well, they have known being here, they worked here short term, but they soon left, and it didn't make any difference to them, they didn't worry about it, they just left.

Greg, Laboratory Technician

Voicing opposition to nostalgic place attachment, Greg criticised communal sentimentality, expressing exasperation at the slow pace of local economic change. Rather than targeting the structural factors inhibiting regional prosperity and productivity, Greg blamed community members for their misfortunes, arguing that poor attitudes and hostility to change have prevented regeneration (Wisman & Smith, 2011; Kelly & Enns, 2010). In his remarks, Greg disparages those nostalgic for the past, subsequently ignoring the socioeconomic processes underpinning attachments to place and space (Brown et al, 2003; Low 1992; Milligan, 1998). Later emphasising his individual effort and intuition post-redundancy, Greg articulated a desire for continued progression and mobility. Influenced by his advancement into senior management in a professional field, Greg's sentiments are tinged with meritocracy, in which he attributed his success to an abundance of pragmatism and ability (Gillies 2005; Littler; 2018). Although his efforts and initiative are not doubted, Greg's attitude towards his fellow community members is significant, as he disdainfully allocates blame upon disadvantaged communities for their own misfortunes.

Stigmatising those perceived as failing to adapt and prosper, Greg insinuates a moral failure to an apparent lack of graft and drive (Skeggs, 2004; Tyler, 2013; 2008). Having achieved success outside of Shelton, Greg distanced himself from the steelworkers' industrial community, instead choosing to identify with his comparatively longer and more lucrative professional career. In this, he draws upon his greater occupational privilege and stigmatises those perceived as arresting economic progress. Acknowledging Greg's periphery position at Shelton, these attitudes correlate

with his constrained membership and weak association with his peers. Consequently, Greg others and derides his former community in an effort to rationalise his distance, leading him to attribute greater worth to his professional employment and to his achievement of prosperity after redundancy. Celebrating personal success, experiences of conditionality and othering are reappropriated and reversed, allowing Greg to feel power over those formerly enjoying communal status.

Greg also articulated considerable pride when discussing his two sons, who he viewed as having beaten the trap of sentimentality to achieve mobility in London. His sons' experiences reflect communal changes occurring after deindustrialisation, where contracting regional opportunities entice young professionals to large city centres. Breaking from the relative fixity and class homogeneity of the industrial heartlands, career paths in globalised cities involve greater mobility and flexibility which contrasts from the rigid paternalism of industrial subcultures (Skrbis et al, 2014; Skrbis & Woodward, 2007). Cultural heterogeneity also erodes traditional geographic and classed boundaries, altering place-based identities as different cultural and ethnic groups meet (Savage et al, 2010; Power et al, 2013). These changes contribute towards sentiments of loss expressed by many respondents, as the relative flux of contemporary life contrasts with nostalgic accounts of a formerly static community.

For Greg however, the scorn with which he describes local attachments to place and the past illuminates his indifference. Departing from many of his peers, Greg narrated industrial decline with willing acceptance and inevitability, in which he discussed economic and cultural change with unsympathetic judgement of others. The implications of deindustrialisation were understood and articulated as individual

failings, where poor prospects and poverty were individualised. These sentiments are similarly intertwined with economic regeneration, as his desire for tangible change influences his perspectives on industrial decline, informing a view that communities were blocking the necessary remedy to post-industrial ills.

Lamenting the decline of the pottery industry, Bill again voiced pained frustration at the lack of industrial opportunities in Stoke-on-Trent. Rather than blaming local residents for persistent economic ills, Bill instead indicted the offshoring of manufacturing to East Asia:

> There's a factory outlet place where I live local to [North East England], and it's a thing about people who are from Stoke, if you see a piece of wear [Pottery], the first thing you do is turn it over [Laughs], look at the back stamp, and it was Portmeirion, and I worked on Portmeirion for a bit and I know a lot of their wear, and I hadn't seen this one before and I thought ooh, that's nice, and I turned it over and it was made in China… and Doulton's, Doulton's was another one… there used to be a small industry in buying and selling Doulton figures, even that's gone, but you look on the bottom, made in China, made in Indonesia. They've got a little design place down on the erm, the old Forest Park… where they do the design and whatsit, but they don't do anything else… no… and it was never replaced, was it, in Stoke… I mean, the steelworks, the pits, the pottery industry, erm… I go back and… I despair.
>
> Bill, Finishing End Operative, Furnaceman, ISTC Union Representative

Bill's contribution reflects wider political and social disenfranchisement emerging in the wake of deindustrialisation, where deepening regional disparities create a growing sense of crisis among working-class communities (Edwards et al, 2012; Koch et al, 2021). Frustration and anger feature heavily within Bill's remarks, as narrations of loss foreground the waning relevance of his industrial skills and background, contributing to his perceived disconnect from the contemporary economy (Mollona, 2009). For many, the uneven coverage and benefits of regeneration exacerbate feelings of displacement, factors lost to those like Greg whose upward mobility creates ambivalence towards disadvantaged communities.

Mirroring David's earlier contribution, Bill illustrated his experience of deindustrialisation with a sardonic anecdote, this time relating to the offshoring of the pottery industry. While his dissatisfaction is derived from the loss of local prosperity and opportunity, deeper anger emerges from the lack of new industrial opportunities in emerging technical fields. Stating that the traditional industries were "never replaced", Bill indicated angered frustration at the rise of service sector employment, viewing this as insufficient to counter local decline. These changes prompt an angered narration, as they again invoke the finality of industrial subcultures and modernist social structures formerly used to structure a coherent identity.

Concluding this section, Frank similarly reflected upon the pottery industry and the implications of its decline:

> I understand that you are, erm, focusing mainly on Shelton Bar, the demise of Shelton… but I also feel very sad about the demise of other industries in the area, erm, particularly the potteries, you know, and… well, I think I told you

> my grandfather's pottery working history, erm… and, my father and my mother worked on the pots, 3 of my sisters worked on the potteries, my brother worked for a company, erm, [Company name], they did all pottery kilns and… its devastated, devastated the area from an employment point of view… the demise of the pots.
>
> Frank, Boilermaker, ASB Union Representative

Highlighted in Alice Mah's work on place attachment, post-industrial communities often sustain shared place-based identities after widespread decline, where understandings of "family and 'home' also represent a form of nostalgia", which constitute "a way of trying to hold onto fading social structures amidst socioeconomic change" (Mah, 2009, p. 289; see also McKenzie, 2012; August, 2014). While evident in many interview encounters, Frank's contribution articulates these sentiments succinctly, as despite the devastation of loss, he continues to identify with communal heritage. Proudly discussing a long family history in the pottery industry, Frank situated himself within local industrial heritage. Consequently, his identity is intimately connected to nostalgic understandings of place, leading to his pained reaction to local deprivation (Low, 1992; Smith & Campbell, 2017). Deindustrialisation represents a direct affront to his sense of self, irreparably altering his identity from a position of proud industrialism, to one indomitably linked to decline.

Attachment to place and space influenced how Frank narrated his experiences of deindustrialisation, leading him to reflect upon the impacts on his immediate family members. This familial connection to industry further exacerbated Frank's emotional response, as his empathy for his family populated memories of workplace closures.

While Frank did not directly reference regeneration, his memories of deindustrialisation connect to an awareness of contemporary economic decline, where communities continue to suffer the consequences of constrained employment opportunities. Drawing similarities from Bill, the devastation Frank discussed has not been remedied, influencing frustration and sadness at local decline and stagnation. For Frank however, this manifested in sorrowful nostalgia for the past, seeing him contemplate the prosperity once offered by traditional industries, rather than the lack of post-industrial redevelopment.

Literature examining deindustrialisation is vast and varied, indicating the profound impacts upon individual communities and the wider public consciousness (Ebke, 2018). This is reflected throughout this chapter, in which both tangible and psychological impacts have featured in respondents' narrations of Shelton's downsizing and closure. What this section has identified however, is that contemporary changes to the built environment influence how decline is narrated. This is observed through processes of nostalgia, where present economic change renegotiates understandings of industrial landscapes (Cresswell, 2015; Massey, 2005; Wylie, 2009). As established cultural meanings fade, experiences of contemporary change fill lapses of memory and solidify or alter positions formed following site closures, leading industrial decline to be narrated alongside reactions to past and present redevelopment.

Programmes of economic regeneration influence how industrial decline is understood, contributing to the reproduction of nostalgic memory. While previous studies have identified communal conflict resulting from regeneration (Clark & Gibbs, 2017; Stanton, 2006; Paddison, 1993), this section has demonstrated how redevelopment directly

influences how former industrial workers narrate experiences of site closure. Despite varying emotional responses, many narrated their perspectives and experiences through the retrospective lens of contemporary redevelopment, where economic change informed subsequent acceptance or rebuttals of industrial decline. While the influence of contemporary events is to be expected in oral history studies, the contributions included here are particularly insightful, as they indicate that for many, post-closure redevelopment contributed to how Shelton's closure and decline were remembered and narrated.

## 8.5 – Chapter Conclusion

Rather than a singular event denoting economic change, deindustrialisation can be conceptualised as a continuing process which influences communities in a multitude of ways (Strangleman, 2017, Strangleman & Rhodes, 2014; Linkon, 2018). The individual and communal impacts of these changes are both tangible and psychosocial, with post-industrial areas losing sources of monetary prosperity and communal fraternity. While this chapter has engaged with literature denoting the processual nature of deindustrialisation, it has been argued that this process is experienced differently and unevenly across post-industrial communities, leading to diverse perspectives and narrations of industrial decline. For Shelton Bar steelworkers, the circumstances preceding an individual's exit influenced narrations of closure and decline, while post-closure experiences of prosperity or discontinuity similarly determined the severity and focus of narratives told. Respondents' diverging experiences accompanied different

discourses and knowledges, leading to the reproduction of differing narratives as they engaged with the politics of industrial closures and economic transition.

The manner in which interviewees narrated experiences of industrial decline revealed further insights into the negotiation of occupational identity, in addition to understandings of communal belonging. Of particular importance was the role of economic regeneration, whereby past and present redevelopment influenced how industrial sites and subcultures were remembered. The 1986 National Garden Festival served as an important example here, as the redevelopment of Shelton Bar's former workings, in addition to the contemporary usage of the Festival Park site, influenced how respondents narrated the works and its closure. While some celebrated the continuing productivity hosted by Festival Park, others noted the lack of social infrastructure offered by service sector employment, which underpinned a broad rejection of the regenerative narratives accompanying the festival. Despite this divergence, the narratives interviewees told largely reinforced nostalgic memories of Shelton Bar, where the contemporary absence of industrial subcultures intensified positive memories of former prosperity and camaraderie. These insights contribute to the field by acknowledging the link between industrial memory and regeneration, where symbolic and environmental changes following redevelopment embolden narratives of loss, fraternity and former prosperity.

# Chapter 9 – Conclusion

## 9.1 – Chapter Introduction

Chapters throughout this dissertation have demonstrated the conditional and contradictory nature of solidaristic occupational communities hosted at Shelton Bar steelworks, in which full group membership and acceptance depended upon conformance with masculinised norms. Those unable or unwilling to reproduce these cultural expectations were excluded and disciplined according to normalising judgments. The research found that rather than offering an inclusive space to resist change and managerial control, solidaristic networks generated opportunities for othering and exclusion, with full membership granted at the expense of those on the periphery. Workers in privileged communal positions and networks developed a solidaristic steelworker identity and found sanctuary within their community, leading to the mobilisation of camaraderie and fraternity to protect other group members from the hardship of heavy industry (MacKenzie et al, 2006; Salaman, 1974; 1971; Collinson, 1988). During protracted disputes and periods of precarity, insiders drew upon communal support networks to share critical information, raise solidarity, and maintain morale (MacKenzie & Marks, 2019; MacKenzie et al, 2017; McLachlan et al, 2019).

The findings show tiers of group membership which privileged those with generational links to the steelworks, alongside those displaying and reproducing the 'correct' cultural attitudes and behaviours. Having fathers, uncles and family friends employed at Shelton signalled a nascent suitability to join the community, while an ability to perform technical manual labour further strengthened an individual's standing among

community members. The lengthy apprenticeship process completed by junior staff allowed senior steelworkers to train, socialise and evaluate recruits accordingly. As one respondent commented, senior tradesmen and operators decided who were suitable to join their ranks, meaning that alongside the possession of technical competencies, 'fitting in' was of equal importance. Like the steelwork's molten produce, workers at Shelton Bar were similarly moulded by their environment and labour, which created an 'idealised worker' and steelworker identity.

This final chapter will reiterate the central contribution of the dissertation and will provide a summary of individual findings emerging from each chapter. The findings and central contribution will be considered in relation to the research questions which guided fieldwork and analysis. Implications of this research will then be discussed, where both theoretical developments and practical tools are recognised for their potential to advance future research into occupational identity and community. A discussion of core limitations will close this chapter and offer reflexive balance while contextualising conclusions within their theoretical boundaries. Though acknowledged as constraining aspects of the presented analysis, limitations are justified against the practical and theoretical remit of this study.

## 9.2 – Summary of Findings

This dissertation has presented a holistic, nuanced picture of Shelton Bar steelworkers' occupational identity and community by highlighting how community can both shelter members from hardship, while also disciplining and excluding those deemed unworthy

of full membership. In doing this, analysis has avoided romanticising a traditional working-class community, a danger commonly associated with organisational nostalgia. Beginning with a desire to explore kinship, community and camaraderie, this research has progressed by revealing processes underpinning acceptance and membership conditionality. Consequently, findings have responded to the research questions outlined previously, these being: what was it like to be employed at Shelton Bar? How did former workers understand and express themselves as steelworkers? And how do former workers remember and narrate Shelton's decline and closure? By conducting narrative interviews with former workers, daily life at the steelworks has been explored, alongside respondents' narrations of identity, gender roles and their understandings of social class. Narrations of Shelton's decline and closure were similarly illuminating, as they demonstrated how nostalgia and identity frame the recall of industrial subcultures.

At Shelton Bar steelworks, community members continually signalled their membership through labour and camaraderie, leading to the valorisation of technical proficiency and masculinised relationships (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 2000; Bechky, 2006). This generated a localised system of social class, where conformity to communal norms afforded important cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1984; 1987). Occupational tasks and working conditions also offered hierarchical status, with those completing technical, dirty and dangerous tasks rising in the esteem of their peers (Simpson et al, 2014; Hughes et al, 2017). Technical proficiency was assessed differently according to craft, process and managerial staff, contributing to departmental boundaries and hierarchies.

Traditional interpretations of working-class masculinity underpinned much of the steelworkers' occupational identity, alongside organisational history and industry-

specific labour processes which created insider-outsider relations (Turnbull, 1992; Haas, 1977). At Shelton Bar, men also engaged in masculinised bravado and gendered leisure activities, which cemented their bonds at the expense of female companions and those deemed inferior to join their ranks. While a commitment to strenuous overtime schedules enabled male workers to avoid domestic responsibilities, male breadwinning and long hours were a form of currency used to enhance each steelworker's credentials as a masculine provider. Accordingly, the research respondents justified their domestic absence through appeals to paternal sacrifice, in which paid labour was regarded as a man's defining purpose in life (Townsend, 2002; Dolan, 2011; Cooper, 2000).

The acceptance of danger featured heavily in the steelworkers' interpretation of masculinity, which subsequently influenced the internal social hierarchy and membership conditionality. Occupational danger was used firstly in hazing rituals, in which workers faced varying hazards with unbothered acceptance to signal their bravery and emotional control (Johnston & McIvor, 2004; McIvor, 2020). Following the cultural importance of technical proficiency, avoiding injury became an identifier of an individual's competence, with injury linked to personal failings of astuteness rather than unfortunate circumstance. Proximity to danger also granted communal status, as those completing the most dangerous tasks were afforded greater respect and admiration from their peers (Haas, 1977). Accordingly, respondents progressing into managerial and advisory roles often reinserted danger and technical labour back into their work, constituting attempts to preserve core providers of communal status. Indifference to hazards was critical to achieving this status however, reflecting a hegemonic form of masculinity (Connell, 2005; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005).

Strong and hegemonic masculine identities faced opposition by managerial staff however, this being experienced in rational control over labour processes which set limits to behavioural norms at work. Managers attempted to influence workers' conduct on site, and therefore how masculinity was conceptualised and employed at Shelton. While a hegemonic masculine identity defined the internal social hierarchy, differences between craft, process and managerial staff encouraged varying assessments of technical competence, leading to different approaches to occupational danger (Adams, 2022; Ely & Meyerson, 2010). Due to their powers of delegation and capacity to disrupt workplace politics, managerial staff experienced peripheral communal membership and subsequently occupied a constrained position within the social hierarchy (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003; Alvesson & Willmott, 2002; Clarke et al, 2009). Despite this, managers remained influential in defining the steelworkers' community, where they influenced identity through writing and enforcing organisational policy and procedures, in addition to formal communications and organisational history.

During the *Fight for Shelton Bar* period, opposition to the British Steel Corporation's notice of closure generated important communal folklore. Sharing a desire to resist site closure, steelworkers and managerial staff campaigned jointly to preserve Shelton's longevity. Wrapped up in their efforts to resist nationalisation and closure however, managerial staff appropriated communal solidarity to discipline the steelworkers. This was seen in repeated calls for rationalisation and enhanced profitability, with managers constructing disruption and dissent as endangering Shelton's future (Lockyer & McCabe, 2011; Foster et al, 2017). While this again impacted managers' esteem among

shop floor communities, workers remained conscious of Shelton's profitable concerns, leading many into willing acceptance of capitalist production (du Gay, 1996; du Gay & Salaman, 1999). Notwithstanding high trade union membership, working-class conservatism also emerged across the community, with groups of varying staff grades espousing the perceived virtues of private enterprise, meritocracy and profitability (Jost, 2017; Wisman & Smith, 2011).

Succumbing to compounding industrial turmoil, Shelton lost its iron and steelmaking capacity in 1978, which resulted in around 3,000 redundancies as all but the rolling mill was shuttered. Subsequent workforce downsizing and intensification severely affected the steelworkers' occupational community, as continuing redundancies and capability reductions impacted levels of membership. With fewer personnel, processes of socialisation were disrupted, which reduced the workers' ability to recruit new members and continue important traditions. Concurrent political and economic changes exacerbated communal decline, as Shelton's privatisation and increasing use of contractors departed from preceding labour relations, thereby eroding the steelworkers' power of collective bargaining and control over the internal labour market (Sadler, 1990; 1992; Parker & Wu, 1998). This raised managers' ability to control labour processes and make decisions over recruitment and retention, marking an important shift in established power relations at Shelton and across the steel industry (Hughes & Dobbins, 2021).

Work intensification and industrial precarity led to competition and hostility between Shelton's workers, leading many into self-interested behaviours which broke from a tradition of solidarity. Seeking to maximise overtime schedules and safeguard their

roles, some craft and process workers retained trade secrets from their peers, while tightly following managerial orders to curry favour and receive schedule gifts (wood, 2018). Due to a protracted decline preceding the 2000 closure, the parameters of collaboration and community membership altered with intensification and economic change. Resulting from increasing hostilities and self-preservation among workers, Shelton later closed with little opposition; where some respondents noted the relative apathy of their peers and avoidance of collective action. Weary from years of toil and uncertainty, many were persuaded into stasis by a desire to preserve redundancy and retirement payments, leading workers to forego a coordinated effort to preserve the works.

Conceptualising deindustrialisation as a protracted process (Strangleman 2017; Strangleman & Rhodes 2014), findings of this research join a body of literature revealing how industrial closures can continue to afflict disadvantaged communities by creating an ongoing relationship with economic and environmental decline (Walkerdine, 2010; Walkerdine & Jimenez, 2012). Analysis has demonstrated how post-industrial economic regeneration influences this relationship, in that changes to the built environment influence how specific sites and communities are remembered (Mills & McIntosh, 2020). To illustrate this process, analysis drew upon the 1986 National Garden Festival and the contemporary usage of Shelton Bar's former workings. When discussing the 1986 festival and its development into Festival Retail Park, respondents drew upon localised changes to emphasise their perspectives on economic decline, and contrasted these narratives against memories of their former industrial community. With this in mind, deindustrialisation can also be understood as a lens through which

socioeconomic change is analysed, which offers a useful paradigm to study how communities cope with and rationalise change.

Experiences of daily life at Shelton, alongside those of closure and redundancy, have raised conclusions which depart from conventional depictions of community cohesion and solidarity, where group membership offers sustained relief from hardship (MacKenzie et al, 2006; 2017; MacKenzie & Marks, 2019). This research has instead presented the dynamic nature of a conditional and complex workplace community that has been largely overlooked. By forwarding the notion of membership conditionality, findings have explored the boundaries and limits of group membership, thereby avoiding a culturally homogenous depiction of a dynamic, layered workplace community. To achieve this, analysis adopted a Foucauldian approach to power and identity, where language and discourse infer social categorisation (Clegg et al, 2006; Rose, 1999). This approach emphasised how all members of Shelton's departmental occupational communities wielded power to resist authority and dominate others, and that conformity to normalising judgments constituted the main disciplinary mechanism operated by management and community leaders.

Joining scholars such as Steven High, Sherry Linkon and Tim Strangleman, this research has demonstrated a protracted process of communal decline resulting from deindustrialisation. Rather than ending abruptly, the steelworkers' occupational community suffered marked decline following Shelton's 1978 downsizing, with programmes of rationalisation and capacity reductions impacting group size and strength; subsequently disrupting social hierarchies and the workers' control over the internal labour market. Compounding upon these communal ills, the political and

economic changes of the 1980s further entrenched precarity at the steelworks, as increasing use of contracted labour and the 1988 British Steel privatisation led to workplace intensification. These insights demonstrate a community in crisis and decline prior to the final closure, offering a unique perspective on Britain's processual industrial decline, alongside the gradual transformation of solidaristic bonds and parameters of inclusion.

Far from offering an inclusive haven for Shelton Bar Steelworkers, membership of the workers' occupational identity and community was conditional and precarious (McLachlan et al, 2019; Salaman, 1974; 1971). Steelworkers continually signalled their membership through conformance with masculinised norms, which limited free expression on site and at home. Though differences emerged between departments and grades of staff, conformity defined the workers' relationships and informal hierarchy, which created both individual and hegemonic interpretations of masculinity. Consequently, while many expressed considerable pride and admiration for their work and colleagues, positive responses should be recognised as the voices of communal insiders which narrate a collegial and solidaristic interpretation of Shelton Bar steelworks.

## 9.3 – Research Implications & Future Research

This research possesses implications for the study of occupational identity and community, alongside broader management and organisational research. By exploring the exclusionary and disciplinary potential of solidaristic workplace communities, the

research advances the evaluation of the parameters of inclusion and group membership, and offers a deeper understanding of when, how and why shelter is granted to organisational members. Acknowledging membership conditionality offers a holistic view of diverse communities, as even those perceived as welcoming and inclusive will possess boundaries to full membership. Uncovering where these limits arise is important for creating nuanced understandings of workplace identities and communities, as this presents richer insights into how workplace identities are formed and maintained.

Though sharing similarities, findings of this research differ from previous literatures investigating solidaristic occupational communities, where shared identities and group membership offer shelter from adversity (MacKenzie et al, 2006; 2017; Mackenzie & Marks, 2019). While the limitations of these literatures have been discussed previously, it is important to note the theoretical implications raised by this dissertation. The central contribution of this research highlights the conditional nature of communal belonging and participation. This signifies a change in the field of inquiry by highlighting the role of boundaries in developing group cohesion and membership, thereby necessitating an acknowledgement of when and where community membership may be partial, denied or revoked.

While previous studies of steelworker communities have featured themes of periphery membership (McLachlan et al, 2019), they have overlooked daily processes of exclusion and marginality, and have similarly lacked a full exploration of community belonging and conditionality. In contrast, this dissertation presents a holistic approach to the workplace community studied, as while factors determining membership and inclusion

have been explored, layers of inclusion and the consequences of nonconformity are central to the conclusions made. Adopting a Foucauldian approach to identity was useful here, as this contributed to understandings of occupational identities and communities by presenting these as disciplinary mechanisms which control members' behaviour and aptitudes. While previous literatures draw strength from their exploration of solidarity, the field of occupational identity and community can progress by acknowledging membership conditionality and limits to inclusion.

This central contribution has additional implications for research into social class and gender, key themes often invoked when exploring occupational identity and community. While previous Bourdieusian analysis has highlighted the denigration of working-class communities by the middle and upper-class (Jones, 2010; Tyler, 2008; 2013; 2015; Skeggs & Loveday, 2012), the current study shows how acknowledging group conditionality can strengthen the exploration of inter-group domination. Developing the field of class analysis, exploring parameters of inclusion can more accurately chart the raising of solidarity, as the conditions required to participate in and benefit from solidaristic acts can be located. By acknowledging conditionality, limits to accessing classed support networks can also be identified to highlight instances of inter-classed domination. This develops the field by demonstrating how class solidarity may be uneven or exclusionary, as individuals must signal relevant cultural capitals to receive membership of groups which span classed hierarchies.

Similarly, an accurate understanding of masculinised communities can assist efforts to record and aid the renegotiation and 'undoing' of harmful masculinities (Butler, 2004; Deutsch, 2007). As shown in this research, a hegemonic masculinity was crucial to the

building of cultural capital and the understanding of how workers interacted with each other as they attempted to climb social hierarchies. As boundaries to inclusion differed between grades of staff and levels of seniority, understanding the negotiation of full and partial membership aided the exploration of social class at Shelton, in addition to the undoing of gender as members negotiated varying norms at work and at home as their community changed. Consequently, class and gender analysis can benefit from a deeper understanding of workplace cohesion and group membership, with discussions of conditionality and periphery membership poised to assist these endeavours.

This research contributes to a growing body of academic work charting the processual nature of Britain's industrial decline, where the prolonged effects of site closures continue to afflict post-industrial communities (Strangleman, 2017; Walkerdine, 2010; Mah, 2010; 2012). Research following workplace closures will benefit from the findings of the current study, which demonstrates the importance of the events and cultural changes preceding site shutdowns. This focus diverts attention away from the primary point of closure and redundancy to widen the potential of subsequent scholarly output. While workplace closures create critical moments in respondents' histories and understandings of shared cultures, closures cannot be considered in isolation, as decline and mismanagement often underpin these defining events. As mentioned, this has been achieved in literatures discussing the processual nature of deindustrialisation (Strangleman, 2017; Linkon, 2018), though application to broader organisation studies could be strengthened through a similar approach. This research offers a useful example here, as prior to Shelton's 1978 downsizing and the 2000 closure, important

cultural change influenced how these incidents transpired, and how they were subsequently perceived and narrated by community members.

Methodological implications are also presented by this research, namely in the selected interviewing technique and in the presentation of findings. While narrative interviews have been utilised in oral history research (Meier, 2016; Strangleman, 2012), management and organisational studies could draw more effectively from life course narrations. By asking respondents to create a timeline of their employment histories, a strong narrative can be woven into the presentation and analysis of data. This has been achieved throughout this dissertation, which opens with respondents' entry into the community, before moving gradually towards Shelton's closure and redevelopment. By analysing experiences occurring throughout respondents' lives, the continued negotiation of identity and community was charted, where a mix of tradition, early and mid-career events, and contemporary events all contributed to how former steelworkers understood their experiences at work and at home. Analysing respondents' career histories can therefore improve the study of occupational identity and community, as individual and shared experiences occurring throughout the life course contribute to the continued negotiation of identity inside and out of work. Accordingly, those studying workplace identities may wish to expand the remit of their interview schedules, in which the origins of workplace identities are explored in greater detail.

Delving into life course histories can better serve the exploration of localised workplace cultures, as members' motivations to join or exit communities can be better understood. Influential moments from individuals' formative years and their family

backgrounds can also be considered in a contemporary context. This is especially useful when analysing social class and gender, as an individual's classed upbringing can reveal further insights into identity formation. For example, emerging throughout this dissertation, respondents frequently discussed aspects of their childhood and parental relationships, with many noting strong paternal role models underpinning their masculine identities. While these insights can naturally emerge during a standard interview encounter, life course narrative interviews signal relevance and interest on behalf of the researcher, which may prompt respondents to divulge information otherwise neglected in a comparatively focused discussion. Consequently, when seeking to explore identity and cultural change within complex communities, researchers may adopt storied methods of interviewing, as this enables the collection of contextual detail which builds an accurate prediction of identity formation.

When considering future research into occupational identities and communities, it is useful to 'take stock' of the current literature landscape. Scholarship concerning occupational identity and community focuses primarily upon traditional industries, with Tim Strangleman conducting research with railwaymen and coalmining communities (2012; 2001), and Mackenzie and colleagues conducting studies with steelworkers and engineers during periods of restructuring (2006; 2017). Though offering insights into the decline of traditional working-class communities, a comparative lack of academic attention has coalesced around the now dominant professional services sector, creating a knowledge gap within the field. This dissertation possesses the same limitation by focusing upon a steelworker community housing an overtly classed, gendered and collectivist culture. As traditional workplaces possess links to craft labour and trade

unionism, strong social solidarities are easily charted and illustrated, making their exploration alluring and opportune to researchers of occupational identity.

While studies of organisational culture have successfully analysed white collar employment, direct inquiry into occupational identity and community within varied service occupations remains limited, with Sandiford & Seymour (2007) exploring identity and community in UK public houses, and Parker (2006) similarly exploring communities of practice within professional sports teams. Though insightful in the exploration of workplace culture, organisation studies often fail to fully explore the creation and maintenance of definitive occupational identities. To advance the study of occupational identity and community, researchers should uncover and analyse strong cultures emerging in professional and interactive service roles, and combine developments in adjacent scholarship such as class and gender analysis (Savage et al, 2013; Ely & Meyerson, 2010; Adams, 2022).

Research opportunities are present in professional fields such as human resources, sales, recruitment, IT and digital services, each of which possess varying levels of occupational closure, gendered norms and conditions of group membership. Though these workplaces feature in broader organisation studies literature, further inquiry into occupational identity and community should be pursued. Similarly, unique cultures in hospitality, retailing and distribution require comprehensive exploration, again acknowledging conditions of full and peripheral membership, in addition to how issues of social class and gender influence entry into specific occupational communities. While Nixon and Roberts have respectively explored the negotiation of masculinity within interactive service industries (2009; 2013), direct study into conditions of acceptance

and exclusion in these workplaces remains allusive. Comparably, though studies highlighting white-collar masculinity in professional service environments depict strong gender roles (Cooper, 2000; Holter, 2007; Burnett et al, 2013), direct exploration of specific occupational identities and communities remains lacking. The implications of this dissertation can assist future research in a number of ways, as storied interviewing, alongside a focus upon membership conditionality and group discipline have demonstrated further nuance into the formation and maintenance of workplace groups.

To address the limitations emerging from this study, future research should also consider how gender influences membership conditionality within occupational communities. Differing from explorations of female rejection and othering (Yoder & Berendsen, 2001; Olofsson, 2016; Childs, 2006), research should focus upon partial or constrained access within diverse occupational communities, as this would demonstrate how different members negotiate physical heterogeneity and where the boundaries to acceptance lie. This would also illuminate how women wield power within occupational groups, adding further depth into Foucauldian studies of discipline, power and identity at work. For traditional industrial subcultures, opportunities are also presented by female dominated workplaces or social movements. This has been achieved in studies with miners' wives, who famously joined their striking husbands to protest against pit closures (Merithew, 2006; Spence, 1998; Dicks et al, 1998; Rowbotham & McCrindle; 1986). Women's acceptance, rejection or peripheral association with traditionally male industrial subcultures offers significant opportunities

for researchers of class, gender and identity, opportunities which should be capitalised upon before these communities expire.

To conclude, much of the current scholarship approaches workplace identity and community in a compartmentalised manner by assessing single elements of shared cultures exclusively, rather than holistically exploring processes of group membership. To address this limitation, writers on occupational identity and community should capitalise upon opportunities presented by the service sector, and identify new workplace communities and how they include and exclude members within contemporary spaces. Though focusing upon a traditional workplace community, the approach used in this research can assist this future direction, as a focus upon membership conditionality can accurately depict boundaries to inclusion, and chart how idealised norms create disciplinary cultures.

## 9.4 – Research Limitations

Research with human participants involves practical, ethical and theoretical concerns, each of which present challenges to successful data collection. Whether selecting a qualitative or quantitative design, limitations accompany all methods of data collection, necessitating an active awareness of their potential weaknesses (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004). The practical and theoretical limitations of this research have been acknowledged previously in chapter two, where design choices and their associated implications for fieldwork were explored and justified. It is worthy to acknowledge again that this research project reflects my positionality and physical characteristics as a

researcher. Conscious design decisions at all stages of fieldwork, alongside my reception from interview participants, defined how information was collected, analysed and arranged in this dissertation. While this can be considered as a limitation under a positivist epistemological perspective, these human elements are regarded as strengths here, making this research a specific articulation of a social phenomenon, interpreted and told through my understanding as a researcher.

Interviewees' narrations of community were framed by my comparative outsider status, which led to the exclusion of specific technical detail, though overt valorisation of masculine archetypes and bravado. While this suggests the exaggeration of participants' masculine identities, my fieldwork recorded the values and attitudes presented to communal outsiders, of which were important in establishing boundaries to group membership. Acknowledged previously, insights may have differed had I been female, gay, or an alternative ethnic heritage, thereby problematising the reliability of data collected. However, this research gains inimitability and strength by reflecting my personal characteristics and aptitudes, as these physical circumstances added contextual depth to the storied interview responses collected.

Though reflecting modest and focused research aims, the relatively small interviewee sample size is another research limitation. I interviewed 16 participants, 14 from the primary sample of former steelworkers, with a further 2 from the Community trade union. Smaller sample sizes constrain the scope and perceived validity of conclusions, which ultimately limits impact and repute (Bell et al, 2018). Although this sample size is justifiable and conducive to the research aims, smaller samples will attract scrutiny upon review, especially from quantitative scholars. Without a large sample size, findings

and conclusions are limited to specific contexts and environments, thereby removing scale and generalisability from presented insights (Taylor et al, 2016). Despite this, I am confident in the methods employed, as the selected methodological design reflected the aims, scope and theoretical nature this project pursued. As steelworkers reported similar experiences and insights, data saturation was observed within the achieved research population, with anecdotes inductively generating thematic categorisations.

The absence of female respondents is a core limitation of this research, as the wholly male research population privileged masculinised narratives regarding historical events, community participation and family life. Despite revealing processes of male fraternity and gendered bravado, this limitation constrained further insights into the construction and performance of gender at Shelton. With gender norms influencing institutional structures (Carrigan et al, 1985; Acker, 1990; Hancock & Tyler, 2007), recording women's experiences would be useful in expanding understandings of the occupational identity and community studied, and would further contextualisie conditions of acceptance, rejection and membership negotiation. Women's experiences would also highlight alternative gendered socialisation and performance, processes of membership conditionality, and the enactment of specific roles and norms within and beyond the organisation (LaRossa, 1997).

Considering this analytical potential, it should be stated that female exclusion resulted from practical constraints upon fieldwork, rather than any deliberate action taken. Locating and recruiting female participants was particularly challenging, primarily due to the steel industry's traditional workforce composition. Interviewees frequently commented on Shelton's male demographic and found pleasure in the "all male

environment". While present at the steelworks, women were largely employed within clerical or secretarial positions, though one older respondent recalled a number of women working in the by-products processing plant. Due to this constrained availability, opportunities to recruit female workers were limited, especially in the absence of a tangible empirical location to visit and build networks. Furthermore, with the steelworkers' occupational culture heavily tied to shopfloor relations, female workers were likely disadvantaged and excluded from communal spaces of this nature, constraining participation within the community and potential qualitative insights (Salaman, 1971; 1974; Fox et al, 2023). Though revealing boundaries to group membership and exclusion, outright communal rejection limits insight into periphery membership and daily experiences of conditionality. Consequently, the absence of female interviewees was manageable within the remit of this study, as with few women present at the site, the core experiences of Shelton steelworkers were captured without difficulty.

During active fieldwork, a woman previously employed in an administrative position at Shelton was invited to an interview, however this invitation was declined. As her reasons for declining participation were not specified, it is unknown whether general ambivalence or disinterest influenced this decision, or if other factors dissuaded involvement. With knowledge that the "gender focus of the research, and the gendered context of the research environment are also critical factors in mediating the relationship between interviewer and interviewee" (Pini, 2005, p. 202), female participants may have viewed a male interviewer with suspicion due to previous communal distance. Similarly, peripheral or constrained community membership likely

dampened interest in the project, potentially leading female workers to perceive their input as secondary to that of male production workers. Whether unconscious or deliberate, it is likely that these factors dissuaded the identified person from participating, though simple disinterest remains an alternative explanation.

With few female workers available for participation, alternative opportunities were presented in several male participants' immediate family members, including their wives or daughters who offered support during Shelton's downsizing and closure. A similar methodology was employed in Mackenzie et al's (2006) study of Welsh steel closures, where supplementary data was gathered from steelworkers' female partners. However, recruiting respondents' wives and daughters accompanies challenges, these resulting from both practical constraints and familial gender roles, in addition to the relevance of their experiences outside of the workplace community. Paternalism and male breadwinning feature heavily in studies of working-class communities, with men often adopting the position of familial provider and protector (Dolan, 2011; Townsend, 2002; Walkerdine & Jimenez, 2012; McDowell, 2014). As psychological distance defined my relationship with the steelworkers, attempting to recruit their female family members may have aroused further suspicion, potentially damaging rapport built during the recruitment and interview process.

Although respondents appeared enthusiastic and excited to share their experiences in a research setting, limits to their openness and trust must be acknowledged and respected. In light of this, it was determined that attempting to recruit family members could be viewed as a breach of trust, potentially inviting accusations of undue prying into participants' private lives. This was particularly relevant when considering the

emotional implications of closure and redundancy, as some respondents had not disclosed their emotions to family members and female companions, and had instead chosen to retain these as secrets. Consequently, turning to respondents' family members could be viewed as attempts to confirm or share sensitive interview details, which would undermine respondents' privacy and masculine identities. The building of rapport is critical in qualitative studies, and although difference and conflict can be used strategically (Hathaway & Atkinson, 2003), it was assessed as unwise to pursue these leads when considering the project's gendered and classed context.

Norms and roles negotiated during the interview process also complicated the recruitment of respondents' family members, as interview respondents often perceive their participation as exclusive or transitory (Cotterill, 1992; Sallee & Harris, 2011). When seeking to utilise a respondent's social network, disapproval can result from the passing of research interest, as this disrupts the interviewee's role as the principal subject of investigation. These pressures were observed during fieldwork, as although many respondents remained in contact with former colleagues, hesitancy was often shown in facilitating communication. This likely derived from a polite unwillingness to cause nuisance for referrals, or from a fear that their responses will be discussed with their peers. Consequently, interviewing steelworkers' wives and female relatives may be perceived as a loss of control over their negotiated role as the main research subject. Despite assurances of anonymity and confidentiality, participants' perceptions of a researcher's motivation ultimately determine levels of engagement (Pomerantz & Ziemel, 2004; Silverman, 2001). Accordingly, if participants viewed the recruitment of

female family members as suspicious, thorough explanations of research purpose and protocols are unlikely to resolve their anxieties.

Overall, the absence of female participation limited further insight into how women wielded power and negotiated community membership, though it did not constrain the primary aims of this project nor dampen the findings raised. As Shelton Bar was a male dominated workplace, male domination of the research population was expected. Therefore, female absence should not be regarded as a significant limitation, but should instead be recognised as a challenging opportunity for supplementary data collection limited by both practical and emotional barriers. Efforts to seek female participants were made, indicating an awareness of this opportunity and a desire to mitigate the limitations raised. As specified in the discussion above, identified avenues in participants' family networks were regarded as impractical, leading to the focus upon the primary male demographic.

The listed considerations justifying this focus could be regarded as over-analysis, and that an attitude of 'no harm in asking' should be applied to maximise data collection. Though tempting, respondents retain the right to withdraw any data previously collected and refuse subsequent contact, again highlighting the importance of maintaining relationships to enable future research opportunities. Therefore, while it is important to acknowledge the potential to strengthen this research, the completed fieldwork generated strong results and impactful conclusions despite these limiting factors.

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Appendices

Appendix A – Interview Respondents: Pseudonyms & Overview

| | Respondent Pseudonym | Age (During Interview) | Job Role(s) | Tenure (Years) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Jonathan | 80 | Laboratory Technician, Fuel Engineer, Mill Manager | 40 |
| 2 | David | 76 | Furnaceman, Senior Furnaceman<br><br>ISTC Union Representative | 39 |
| 3 | Simon | 68 | Mechanical Fitter | 4 |
| 4 | Greg | 68 | Laboratory Technician | 7 |
| 5 | Edward | 79 | Laboratory Technician, Fuel Engineer, Health & Safety Manager | 38 |
| 6 | Eliot | 61 | Finishing End Operative, Crane Driver | 11 |
| 7 | Darius | 74 | Mechanical Fitter | 8 |
| 8 | Bart | 50 | Electrical and Automation Engineer | 6 |
| 9 | Bill | 68 | Finishing End Operative (Shelton)<br><br>Furnaceman (Scunthorpe) | 21 |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | ISTC Union Representative | |
| 10 | George | 63 | Roll Turner | 17 |
| 11 | Frank | 78 | Boilermaker<br>ISTC Union Representative | 13 |
| 12 | Arnold | 57 | Finishing End Operative | 14 |
| 13 | Allen | 67 | Mechanical Fitter | 8 |
| 14 | Charles | 77 | Laboratory Technician, Fuel Engineer, Personnel Manager | 14 |
| 15 | Paul | 62 | Community Union Senior Leadership<br>ISTC West-Midlands Lead Negotiator | - |
| 16 | Chris | 43 | Community Union Senior Director | - |

## Appendix B – Interview Schedule

The Works:

How did you become employed at the works? When did you start?

What can you tell me about your apprenticeship?

What was your role at the works?

Tell me about a typical day at the works, what could you see and hear?

- What was it like to work there?

What did you enjoy about working at Shelton? – Was there anything you disliked?

Do you have any particularly strong or favourite memories from your time at Shelton?

How did the works change after the 1978 steelmaking closure?

Closure of the Works:

What can you remember about the closure of the works?

Can you remember the demolition?

How did you feel when the works closed?

How did the closure impact you personally?

What was the feeling among colleagues at the time, what were they saying?

How do you think Shelton's closure impacted the area?

After Shelton:

Tell me about your career after you left Shelton, where did you work?

What was a typical day like at […]? What was it like to work there?

Did you enjoy your work? – Was there anything you disliked?

What encouraged you to change career paths to […]?

Do you have any particularly strong or favourite memories from your time at […]?

How did your time at Shelton prepare you for your subsequent career?

Retirement:

What can you tell me about your retirement, how did it happen?

Were you ready for retirement? – did you want to retire?

How did you feel when you retired?

How do you fill your time? – Daily life / average day

Close Interview: Do you have any closing remarks on anything we have discussed?

Appendix C – Thematic Analysis Coding Table

| | Main Theme | Sub-Theme | Description | Example Quote |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Occupational Identity & Community | Understanding the 'self' | Examples of respondents articulating a coherent occupational identity and sense of self. | *"Maintenance on Shelton Bar was the cream of the area, really… people used to dream about it, you know." – Darius* |
| | | Community belonging | Evidence of group membership and belonging to Shelton's occupational community. Included participation in clubs and societies. | *"It was much than just a workplace, it was a community, you know, there was community activities." – David* |
| | | Camaraderie / solidarity | The raising of shared solidarity through camaraderie and group membership. | *"Generally, it was… it was like a bunch of guys going out, and they did, so… at weekends and whatever, yes, they would be going out." – Bart* |
| | | Organisational history | Respondents incorporating Shelton's organisational history into how they understand and articulate a sense of self. | *"That's the master plan, and if we don't fit in then we're gonna lose. So we thought we would start a campaign…* |

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|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | *based on… logic and economics." – Jonathan* |
| | | Resistance against management | Examples of respondents using their community to resist managerial authority, or individual acts of resistance. | *"Got on with the job, we fell out, we had us brawls… a fight was no problem, sorted it out, carried on with the job, you know what I mean." – Arnold* |
| | | Distance / rejection | Respondents' experiencing distance from their peers and the occupational community, or rejection and 'othering'. | *"Quite a lot of bad times on there that people forgot about, a lot of victimisation, and I mean a heck of a lot." – George* |
| | | Community decline | How respondents narrated communal change after Shelton's downsizing and prolonged rationalisation. | *"They ended up making them redundant, so that was shit because you were losing some good lads… Then towards the end, erm, they started winding it down." – Arnold* |
| 2 | Masculinity | Male breadwinning | Male respondents earning the bulk of their household income, often at the expense of domestic responsibilities and time spent with their families. | "I*t's just one of them things you put up with if you wanna earn some decent money, and me family were young at that stage, so you know, you just go out and do it, don't you." – Eliot* |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | ‘Engineering humour’ | The use of masculinised language for comedic effect. This can include banter and light teasing, to practical jokes and pranks. | “W*e had a saying about him… he’s not fit to breathe [Rolling his eyes], because he wasn’t.” – George* |
| | | Physical strength | Respondents using their physical strength to complete work tasks or signal their masculinity. | *“Hard work, physical hard work, you were mauling your tits off at times… when you think how thick them chains were.” – Arnold* |
| | | Heterosexuality | Examples of respondents discussing women and their personal heterosexual relationships. | *“We had a lot of free time, so I loved it. I even sneaked [Wife’s Name] in on evening shifts sometimes, while I was at work, it was great.” – Jonathan* |
| | | Ambivalence to danger | Respondents dismissing or accepting danger as inevitable in their daily life, often as a form of coping mechanism. | *“Some of the things they did then, absolutely no chance now… absolutely no chance, but the lads weren’t bothered.” – Charles* |
| | | Hegemonic masculinity | A dominant form of masculinity existing across Shelton’s occupational community, often punishing those perceived as inferior. | *“Men were men in those days, so on site… if somebody had a problem with somebody else, they wouldn’t go through management, they would sort it out amongst themselves, if you like.” - Edward* |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Multiple masculinities | Despite the presence of a hegemonic masculinity, other forms of masculinity existed in competition and were enacted differently. | *"I was one of the weird ones, I never did overtime… or never really wanted to do overtime, so if I did overtime, I'd say well, I'll have some time off instead." – Bart* |
| 3 | Social Class | Childhood upbringing | Respondents' experiences of childhood in relation to their relative household affluence. | *"We'd got little money, obviously couldn't afford to go to university or anything like that, I'd got to find a job." – Edward* |
| | | Education | Respondents' experiences of, or attitudes towards academic learning. | "*it was a special place… for somebody who'd left school with no qualifications, and it was an all-male environment, so you get the banter." – Bill* |
| | | Employment prospects | Opportunities available to respondents following their schooling. | *"I left school on Good Friday… when I was 14, and I started work on the Monday, which was my 15th birthday, and I started work at a factory." – Frank* |
| | | Technical proficiency | Respondents understanding a sense of self through skilled manual labour or craft skill. | *"So you were then going in, hands on, you'd get the machine going as quick as you can." – Simon* |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Class mobility | Respondents experiencing upward mobility. | *"I was lucky, I left there after 7 years, so I was still only 24, so I had plenty of time to change and do something else." – Greg* |
| | | Precarity / redundancy | Experiences of precarity following Shelton's downsizing and closure. | "T*o be honest, I had… about another 4 or 5 jobs in them first 2 or 3 years after I'd finished." – Arnold* |
| | | Classed politics | Respondents expressing traditionally classed political views relating to work, trade unionism and redistribution. | *"But you know, nothing was… in the nasty 80's of the Thatcher years, you know, where I was made redundant." – Darius* |
| | | Working-class conservatism | Working-class respondents articulating sympathy for, or affiliation with conservative politics. | *"[The State] They don't know how to run things, they don't know how, they're not the experts on, you know… everything goes wrong." – Jonathan* |
| 4 | Deindustrialisation | 1978 Downsizing | Respondents' experiences of Shelton's 1978 iron and steel plant closures. | *"Especially for some of the older guys that had been on there all their lives, perhaps weren't ready for retirement and erm… I was sad, it was sad for it to close down." – Allen* |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | 2000 Closure | Respondents' experiences of Shelton's final closure in 2000. | *"End of April I think, 2000, erm, that was it, gone, last day at Shelton Bar… We slung us hats, obviously got your own… slat 'em [Gesturing throwing helmet at ground]." – Arnold* |
| | | Physical impact of site closure | Examples of tangible hardships following redundancy. | *"I'd got 2 kids, 8 and 6 at the time, and erm… I thought Christ, we aren't going make it, you know." – Charles* |
| | | Emotional impact of site closure | Examples of the emotional pain caused by Shelton's decline and closure. | *"I never saw the last cast on the casting plant either, I thought oh, I can't bear it… broke my heart really, I couldn't do it." – Jonathan* |
| | | Nationalisation / mistrust of the BSC | Instances of opposition to the BSC following the early warning of site closure, and the strategic changes occurring under public ownership. | *"Shelton was always John Summers, and I can remember him [Father] saying it was nationalised, and they just flooded the place with workers, they overflowed it… I don't think nationalisation did it any favours." – Bill* |
| | | Local industrial decline | Respondents' perspectives on industrial decline experienced throughout Stoke-on-Trent. | *"I understand that you are, erm, focusing mainly on Shelton Bar, the demise of Shelton… but I also feel very sad about the demise of other industries* |

| | | | | |
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| | | | | *in the area, erm, particularly the potteries, you know." – Frank* |
| | | Nostalgia | Nostalgic memories roused by the recall of industry and industrial subcultures. | *"There was community activities… we had erm, angling clubs, golf… golf societies, all the things as, you know, revolved around that works, and it disappeared, so, it was a sad day." – David* |
| | | Economic Regeneration | Perspectives on post-industrial regeneration, and how these influenced the recall of nostalgic memories. | *"You go back to Stoke, and I mean they're building houses, but they don't do anything with the infrastructure… all the roads are the same… so, I just… I don't know where it goes, I don't know where Stoke goes." – Bill* |

## Appendix D – Information sheet

### Information Sheet

Version: 1.1 Dated: 21/05/21

**Title of Project**: *Deindustrialisation and Precarious Employment? The Case of Shelton Bar Steelworks*

**Lead Researcher**: Harvey Cottrell Email: h.w.cottrell@keele.ac.uk Tel: 07908037468

**Research Supervisors**: Dr Deborah Kerfoot – d.kerfoot@keele.ac.uk Dr Philip Catney – p.j.j.catney@keele.ac.uk

**REC Reference Number**: HU-210107

Invitation

You are invited to participate within this research project. Participation is voluntary and involves a formal interview conversation of around one hour, in addition to potential follow-up conversations at a later date. Please read this information sheet and ask any questions where further clarity is needed. If you agree to participate, a consent form will be provided requiring a signature; this document is for record keeping purposes and will be retained securely by the researcher for the duration of the project.

Research Summary & Purpose

This research project is concerned with deindustrialisation and the resulting impacts of economic change, specifically focusing upon the closure of Shelton bar steelworks in Stoke-on-Trent. Studying traditional industrial employment is important both scholarly and practically, as implications can be applied to local regeneration efforts and management practice. Therefore, the main purpose of this project is to collect narrative accounts from former Shelton Bar employees, in addition to supplementary insight from those closely associated with the works, regarding experiences of employment, redundancy and retirement. Principally, occupational identity is considered, investigating how older individuals process and cope with workplace closure and industrial loss.

Research Procedures

Participants are recruited based upon conformance to desired characteristics, including previous employment at Shelton Bar steelworks, or close association with the works through artistic, scholarly or historical interest. As informants are identified through gatekeepers, participants are encouraged to refer or suggest any other eligible individuals they may be in contact with. A total sample size of around 15-20 participants is desired.

As mentioned, data will be collected through qualitative interviews. Here, the researcher will ask questions regarding three main themes, these include employment at Shelton Bar, workplace closure and retirement. In contexts where respondents were not employed at Shelton, questions will be altered to reflect their specific circumstances. The location of the interview encounter is flexible and set by each participant; the researcher is happy to accommodate and can travel easily. If you wish to proceed with the research project, you can expect the following procedures:

- A written consent form will be provided. Before signing, you should ask any remaining questions.
- The formal interview will then begin, where you should answer questions freely and without duress. No questions are compulsory, meaning you can refuse to answer if you feel uncomfortable.
- With your consent, the audio from interviews will be recorded for transcription and analysis purposes. Audio data will be secured according to GDPR regulation, limited only to academic use. You may still participate in interviews if you decline audio recording, as all procedures are voluntary.
- After interviews have been transcribed, the researcher may contact you again for further comment. If you do not wish to be contacted again, please articulate this.
- Verbal contributions will be used within the researcher's thesis and other potential research papers. When referenced in text, participants will be rendered anonymous through the use of pseudonyms.
- Where consent is provided, direct quotations from interview transcripts will be used to support arguments and to preserve respondents' authentic accounts. Although the risk is minimal, direct quotations may be identifiable to informed readers. If this concerns you, please indicate this to the researcher.
- This research project will be active for around three years. Feel free to contact the researcher at any time if you have any queries or wish to withdraw from the project.

Data & Confidentiality

All sensitive data, such as contact details and audio recordings, will remain confidential and viewed only by the researcher. Names and contact details will be recorded in a physical notebook and stored in in a locked storage box. Audio recordings will be stored on a password protected computer and backed-up on a similarly protected and encrypted external hard drive. Participants reserve the right to request confidentiality over additional materials if deemed appropriate. This means that if you wish to limit certain excerpts of anonymised data, for example, relating to specific quotes or verbal accounts, you must contact the researcher to request their removal.

Within all written research output, participants will be rendered anonymous to protect privacy and prevent potential harm. This will be achieved through the use of pseudonyms and simplified job titles, meaning readers will not be able to deduce personal details that may reveal participant identity. Participants can have absolute confidence that no sensitive information such as contact details will be viewed by any other persons. If you have any further questions about privacy and confidentiality, please ask the researcher.

Data Usage

The data collected is limited in both scope and purpose, meaning a limited volume of data will be generated for subsequent analysis. The researcher is only interested in verbal accounts relating to the specified research topic, meaning excessive probing into other sensitive or personal matters will not occur. Data is collected for academic purposes only, contributing to a PhD thesis and associated research papers. Consequently, data will not be sold or utilised for any additional endeavours under any circumstances.

Personal information will be maintained for a minimum of 6 years, subject to a review for archival purposes upon the passing of this term. Where no archival merit is observed, personal data will be destroyed through appropriate means.

GDPR Compliance

The researcher has completed GDPR training and is aware and sensitive to issues regarding data privacy and safe handling. Personally identifiable information such as names and contact details are covered by GDPR regulation, subjecting them to strict rules regarding storage and use. Please be assured that the researcher has evaluated the risk associated with collecting data and has taken appropriate measures to minimise these risks.

Withdrawal

Participants are reminded that they are free to withdraw from the project at any time and for any reason, however acting early may be most beneficial. To withdraw, please contact the researcher through the details provided at the beginning of this document. If you decide to withdraw, data collected before this point will be destroyed and no further contact will be made. Personal data, audio recordings and interview transcripts will be discarded, unless you articulate that certain pieces of information can be retained.

Please be aware that upon the completion of this project and publication of the written thesis or associated research output, some data may be unable to be discarded. Although you will be able to request the deletion of records retained by the researcher, published works cannot be edited. Therefore, please specify if confidentiality is desired for certain responses, preventing their potential inclusion within research output.

Covid-19 Notice

Due to the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic, some conventional research procedures such as close contact or face to face encounters may be unavailable or undesirable. As a result, participants reserve the right to dictate the physical conditions of formal interviews. If you have a preference for a certain medium of communication, location or distance under which interviews may take place, please articulate these to the researcher.

Physical interviews are subject to rules and advice regarding social gatherings and interactions. Depending upon the active measures in place at the time of this interview, interaction may take place virtually, socially distanced, or uninterrupted.

Thank you for volunteering your time and effort for this research project. I am personally and professionally grateful for your compliance and willingness to participate. Verbal accounts, however seemingly mundane or unimportant, are greatly appreciated. Please complete the following consent form and retain a copy for your personal record keeping.

## Appendix E – Consent Form

### Consent Form

**Version**: 1.1 **Dated**: 21/05/21

**Title of Project**: *Deindustrialisation and Precarious Employment? The Case of Shelton Bar Steelworks*

**Lead Researcher**: Harvey Cottrell Email: h.w.cottrell@keele.ac.uk Tel: 07908037468

**Research Supervisors**: Dr Deborah Kerfoot – d.kerfoot@keele.ac.uk Dr Philip Catney – p.j.j.catney@keele.ac.uk

**REC Reference Number**: HU-210107

Before you consent to participating in the research, please read the participant information sheet and then mark each box below with a tick if you agree. If you have any questions or queries before signing the consent form, please speak to the researcher.

**Please tick the boxes**

1. I have read and understood the information sheet presented (dated 21/05/21, version 1.1), or the project has been fully explained to me. If you will answer No to this question, please do not proceed with this consent form until you are fully aware of what your participation in the project will mean. ☐
2. I have been given the opportunity to ask a range of questions about the project and have had these answered satisfactorily. ☐
3. I understand that my participation is voluntary. I also understand that I can discontinue participation at any point and can withdraw myself and my data from the research. I am able to request withdrawal at any time, although I acknowledge any responses published may be difficult to remove. Following my removal, all data collected will be discarded and therefore absent from all future publications. I do not have to give any reasons justifying withdrawal and there will be no adverse consequences if I choose to withdraw. ☐
4. I understand that data collected during this research will be processed in accordance with data protection law as explained in the Participant Information Sheet ☐
5. I consent for my interview to be audio recorded. The recording will be transcribed and analysed for the purpose of academic research. Audio recordings will be stored securely on a password protected computer and subsequently disposed of after an initial archival period lasting 6 years. ☐
6. I understand and agree that my words may be quoted in publications and other research output. I understand that I will not be named in these outputs, but that there is a risk I could be identified. ☐
7. I agree that the data I contribute may be retained for any future research that has been given a favourable opinion by a Research Ethics Committee. ☐
8. I am happy to be contacted again in the future to arrange a follow-up interview. I agree for my personal details to be retained securely for this purpose. ☐
9. I agree to take part in the research project ☐

| Name of participant [printed] | Signature | Date |
|---|---|---|
| | | |

| Name of person taking consent [printed] | Signature | Date |
|---|---|---|
| | | |

Both the researcher and participant will keep a copy of a signed consent form for personal record keeping.

1

# Appendix F – Ethical Approval

Keele University HumSS Faculty Research Ethics Committee
humss.ethics@keele.ac.uk

Keele UNIVERSITY

23 March 2021

Dear Harvey Cottrell,

| | |
|---|---|
| **Project Title:** | Deindustrialisation and Precarious Employment? The Case of Shelton Bar Steelworks |
| **REC Project Reference:** | HU-210107 |
| **Type of Application** | Main application |

Keele University's Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee reviewed the above project application.

**Favourable Ethical opinion**
The members of the Committee gave a favourable ethical opinion of the above research on the basis described in the application form, protocol and supporting documentation.

| | |
|---|---|
| 1. | Apologies for the slight delay in getting back to you. This application is very well put together. Please make sure that the information sheet and consent form are on Keele headed paper; unless there is a compelling reason why they should not be. |

**Reporting requirements**
The University's standard operating procedures give detailed guidance on reporting requirements for studies with a favourable opinion including:

- Notifying substantial amendments
- Notifying issues which may have an impact upon ethical opinion of the study
- Progress reports
- Notifying the end of the study

**Approved documents**
The documents reviewed and approved are:

| Document | Version | Date |
|---|---|---|
| Consent Form Harvey Cottrell - Harvey Cottrell | 1 | 23/03/2021 |
| Humms Ethics Application Harvey Cottrell - Harvey Cottrell | 1 | 23/03/2021 |
| Information Sheet Harvey Cottrell - Harvey Cottrell | 1 | 23/03/2021 |

Yours sincerely,

**Professor Helen Parr**
**Chair**

Appendix G – Shelton Bar Steelworks: 1839-2000

Thanks to the generous North Staffordshire coalfield and local ironstone deposits, Stoke-on-Trent and the wider borough of Staffordshire was an early hotbed of industrial activity. Stoke-on-Trent is most famous for the manufacture of ceramics, with an abundance of clay leading to the proliferation of countless pottery manufacturers across the city, known locally as potbanks. These raw materials enabled Stoke-on-Trent to become a multi-industry city, differing from isolated pit villages of the North and single industry towns. With a history dating back to the 1600s, the ceramics industry has shaped Stoke-on-Trent significantly, as much of the built environment and reclaimed green space has been touched by the creation of pottery. Just by viewing 19th century ordinance surveys, the ubiquity of small earthenware works can be seen, in addition to the ample marl holes and clay pits from which raw materials were drawn. Federated into a city in 1910, the area is comprised of six individual pottery towns (Warrillow, 1953; Greenslade, 1993). Due to these separate origins, regional cultural attitudes reflect that of a relatively insular small town, described previously as self-referential and inward-looking (Johnson, 1993). Consequently, a strong local identity emerged from the prominent pottery industry, seeing the creation of an esoteric regional dialect unique to 'The Potteries' (Leach, 2021).

Although appearing subordinate to the pottery industry, iron and steelmaking were important for Stoke-on-Trent's industrial development, as metal manufacture aided the sustainability of the pottery and mining industries. Small iron foundries emerged across Staffordshire in the 18th century, serving emerging demand for steam driven machinery, and later for railway construction in the 19th century. These foundries were dispersed

and primitive however, fed primarily by charcoal to produce small tonnages of iron (Lead, 1993). Seeking to increase yields and centralise production, the first Earl Granville purchased a site in Etruria occupied by a number of coal mines, and immediately began construction on an ironworks in 1839.

Neighbouring Josiah Wedgwood's Etruria Hall, this site became Shelton Bar iron and steelworks, growing to accommodate the needs of full integration from extraction to metal finishing. Existing mine workings supplied the foundry, while immediate proximity to the Trent and Mersey canal served as a crucial transport link for materials and finished goods. The site became operational in 1841, beginning a tradition of local metal manufacture which continued until the late 20th century. Subsequent expansion took the works from the bottom of Etruria to the edge of nearby Cobridge, with adjacent coal mines stretching into Shelton, and rolling mills reaching the edge of Hanley. During this period, the works was known colloquially as Shelton Bar, though this name was formally succeeded in 1866 when Shelton Iron and Steel Company Ltd was formed (British Steel, 1991). Despite subsequent 19th and 20th century title and ownership changes, the works remained known as Shelton Bar amongst the workforce and local area.

After the First World War, additional financial capital was required to service debts and cover increasing wage bills at Shelton, leading to the sale of the works. Remaining under the ownership of the Earl Granville family until 1920, the site was subsequently purchased by John Summers and Sons Ltd, a major steel producer formerly based in Shotton. The John Summers Group invested heavily in capacity expansions and modernisation, building a new ironworks and an associated by-products processing

plant. Shelton Bar continued under this ownership structure until the first steel nationalisation in 1951, however the works was returned back to the John Summers Group in 1953 following denationalisation.

By the end of the 1950s, Shelton was struggling to compete against newer, more efficient plants, leading the owners to invest in a substantial redesign of the works. In 1961, £18.5 million was spent on the construction of the 'North Works', containing a new and innovative steel plant, in addition to an adjacent rolling mill (British Steel, 1991). The steelworks used Swedish designed Kaldo Converters to produce molten steel, feeding this into continuous casting machines, the first to be deployed globally. Completed in 1964, the North Works consolidated production and expanded capacity significantly, leading to the closure of older mills across the sprawling site. At this time, around 3,000 people worked at Shelton Bar, with full integration providing opportunities for employment across the whole production process. To the detriment of the John Summers Group, Shelton became state owned following the second steel nationalisation in 1967, signalling a turn in fortunes for the site.

In line with wider industry turmoil, the 1970s proved consequential for Shelton Bar, as the newly formed British Steel Corporation sought to close the works as they initiated a programme of industry rationalisation. Announcing a schedule of closure in 1971, plans to close Shelton were formalised in 1973 after the BSC published a ten-year industrial strategy, aiming to expand and consolidate production at five coastal locations (Upham, 1980). In response, a local taskforce was created to present a case for Shelton's continued viability, while simultaneously lobbying for investment in efficient electric arc furnace technology. Comprised of managerial and employee

representatives from varying departments, the *Shelton Action Committee* calculated the unit cost of local steelmaking and compared these against BSC figures justifying closure.

The committee argued that steel produced and rolled at Shelton was more cost effective than planned capacity replacement at Scunthorpe, and that this cost advantage will be accentuated following investment in electric arc furnaces. Representing a fraction of the BSC's coastal project spending, the committee's proposal would cost £10 million and reduce manning by 800 personnel (Clarke, 1975). Negotiations continued until 1975, when the BSC conceded to Shelton's viability and committed to investment in electric arc steelmaking, providing a future for the inland satellite plant. As the decade progressed and industry misfortune grew however, the deal for electric arc steelmaking was abruptly scrapped. This led to the closure of iron and steelmaking on the 30th of June 1978, resulting in around 2,000 redundancies (British Steel News, 1978).

The struggle to keep Shelton open achieved significant local and national publicity, with Peter Cheeseman, director of the Victoria Theatre, adapting the industrial dispute into a verbatim production. *The Fight for Shelton Bar* (1977 [1974]) articulated the perspectives of workers, their families, and the committee's arguments, while committee members were invited to performances to provide updates on the negotiation. The fight also attracted national attention when the BBC created a shortened, televised adaptation of Cheeseman's play. The then chairman of the BSC, Sir Monty Finniston, attended a performance at the Victoria Theatre after a meeting with

the committee, aiding the effort to express the economic and social importance of the site.

After the closure of iron and steelmaking in 1978, Shelton's North Works rolling mill remained in operation, supplied with cold steel blooms imported from Scunthorpe steelworks (British Steel, 1991). Steel blooms, also known as billets, are large slabs of unfinished metal which are re-heated and rolled into finished products. This arrangement prolonged Shelton's lifespan and safeguarded around 750 jobs, with the mill specialising in lighter sections; including guide rails for elevator shafts, and other small construction beams. Returning to private ownership in 1988, British Steel's Shelton works saw additional rationalisation and productivity increases, achieving relatively high yields from a small plant.

The former iron and steel plants, in addition to older mills scattered across Etruria and the border of Cobridge, were redeveloped into mixed retail and professional service units, constituting what is now the Festival Park retail site. Preceding this, the land was reclaimed and redeveloped in preparation for the 1986 National Garden Festival, the second iteration of the national event following the 1984 festival in Liverpool (Knapper, 2021). Occupying much of Shelton Bar's former workings, the festival was emblematic of the dramatic changes wrought by industrial decline, seeing an economic shift from productive industries to consumption-led leisure and interactive service employment.

In the face of continued market volatility, British Steel's then parent organisation, Corus Group, closed what remained of Shelton Bar on the 27th of April 2000, resulting in around 216 redundancies (The Observer, 2000). The works had contracted markedly in size and manning from its height in the early 20th century, mirroring industry trends of

protracted decline. The site was cleared in 2005, leaving behind a large wasteland, a railway bridge formerly connecting the sinter plant to the ironworks, and a few forgotten pieces of infrastructure. Redevelopment of the rolling mill site began in 2020, two decades after the final closure, seeing the construction of a strategic link-road to the Festival Park retail area, in addition to a number of large warehouse units (Stoke-on-Trent City Council, 2020). At the time of writing, the primary construction phases have been completed, while commercial operations are beginning to commence within the adjacent distribution centres.

Pottery, coal mining and steel production were the three pillars of Stoke-on-Trent's economy and shared communal identity, making deindustrialisation significant not just in terms of employment opportunities, but also for communal cohesion and identity. This experience reflects those of countless industrial communities across the UK and neighbouring Western nations, who since shedding their industrial bases, have struggled with persistent socio-economic ills in former industrial heartlands.