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Part I

Surveying British Modernity

Chapter 2:

A Century of Progress? Inequalities in British Society, 1901—2000

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In this chapter I argue that people in Britain experienced incredible social progress between 1901 and 2000: a kind of progress that could not have been envisaged at the start of the century. However, at the same time there was far less progress achieved in reducing social inequalities over space and across society. The first half of this chapter looks at absolute progress in British living standards -- often overlooked in accounts of British social change. This is particularly true for the last 25 years, when average standards of living rose most rapidly. However, as the timeline in the associated boxes to this chapter shows, this recent progress was almost certainly built on earlier advances in social policy. The progress to which I am referring is that of people's standards of living in the round, from the most simple and quantifiable of measures -- life expectancy and wealth -- to much less measurable factors such as aspirations, hopes and fears. Much of what I am arguing is difficult to 'prove' conventionally. Instead what are presented here are conclusions derived from studying various aspects of inequality in British society -- most obviously those concerning health (Shaw et al. 1999). However, this part of the chapter also argues that progress has been coupled with very little change in relative inequalities between places.

The second half of this chapter concentrates on what has not changed. I argue that, roughly speaking, the living standards of the poor lagged behind those of the rich by a generation for most of the century and continue to do so. There were few people writing at the start of the century who suggested that social inequalities as seen then would have persisted to the end. There were, of course, pessimists who saw various brave new worlds developing in which increasingly large proportions of the population would be subjugated to the will of the state. There were also utopian writers who predicted technocratic or meritocratic futures. Hardly anyone anticipated that living standards would rise for all, but rise almost equally, maintaining the overall pattern of inequalities between social groups. Even at the extremes, we now have a 'new' super-rich and a new extreme poor, mimicking (but not as great as) inequalities at the start of the century. Inequalities may have narrowed slightly, to then widen again, but in this sense we are back where we started.

The social order was not greatly reordered at any time between 1901 and 2000. Lack of progress has been expressed in the geography of British society. Those places which were poor at the start of the last century were generally still poor at its end. Almost everything has improved, but the improvement has taken place in such a way that neither the geography nor the social structure of society has been fundamentally altered. Much commentary on social change has focused on exceptions to this generalization -- highlighting gentrification where it has (rarely) occurred, or searching for the growth and location of a supposed underclass. The long-term persistence of inequalities in British society has often been overlooked, as has the rapid improvement in average living standards.

British society has changed rapidly in some ways and remained remarkably rigid in others. This rigidity may not have been possible without the change, and the change may not have been possible without the rigidity. The change has been a sustained rise in the standards of living of all social groups over the last hundred years (Jones 1991). Had Britain experienced some kind of revolution at the start of the century then this little country (which relied and still relies for much of its wealth on exploiting poorer countries world-wide) may not have prospered from world capitalism as it did. Had Britain not prospered for most of the century and seen the living standards of generations rise so rapidly then the social (and spatial) structure may have been at more risk than it was. Had there not been a liberal interventionist tradition in Britain which at times helped some of the poorest places in the country to survive and which regularly improved the living standards of the poor, then Britain could have become a society as unequal as the United States.

Table 2.1: Booth's Classes and Registrar General's classes

Colour on 1896 map	Booth Description	Equivalent Registrar General Class
Black	Lowest class; vicious, semi-criminal	V
Blue	Very poor, casual, chronic want	V
Light Blue	Poor, 18s-21s a week for a moderate family	V
Purple	Mixed, some comfortable, others poor	IV
Pink	Fairly comfortable, good ordinary earnings	III
Red	Well to do. Middle Class	II
Yellow	Upper-middle and Upper classes. Wealthy.	I

Booth class	% 1896	Census Class	% in 1991
7	1.6		
6	4.0	V*	12.3
5	7.8		
4	16.6	IV	12.2
3	35	IIIN, IIIM	31.6
2	26.4	II	35.1
1	8.7	I	8.8

* Includes people of working age who have not worked in the last 10 years.

In short I argue here that there has been great progress -- and that progress allowed inequalities to continue, not to greatly widen or narrow. In making this argument I am drawing on recent collaborative work concerning trends in poverty, inequality and health, over the last two centuries, including a summary of key policy changes in boxes 2.1 to 2.4 (a truncated version of the timeline in Davey Smith et al. 2001). Here I present an argument that combines the events listed in that timeline, with the descriptions of society of contemporary observers (Miller 2000; Townsend and Gordon 1991).

Great Progress Coupled with Little Fundamental Change

Measuring social progress is only possible where there are two comparable sources of information at either end of the century. Such a situation does exist through a comparison of the 1991 census of population with Charles Booth's study of poverty in London conducted in the years leading up to 1896, published as the *Life and Labour of the People of London* in 17 volumes (Booth 1887, 1889, 1902a, 1902b). Booth's study included the *Descriptive Map of London Poverty* showing the streets of London colour-coded according to a novel social classification (Cullen 1979; Gillie 1996). Booth's classification system subsequently became the basis for the Registrar General's definition of social class, used in most subsequent population censuses. Thus, we have two points when people were allocated to social classes on a broadly similar basis and the results recorded geographically. This data was analysed to study the impacts of social material disadvantage on contemporary mortality rates (Dorling et al. 2000). Here we can look at it again in terms of social progress.

Booth and his researchers conducted a house-by-house survey of inner London in the 1880s and 1890s. They surveyed some 120,000 households, producing descriptions of household budgets, streets and classes of people (Bales 1996). This information was used to classify streets and houses by social class, and that data was then drawn meticulously onto detailed poverty maps of London (Fried and Elman 1969; Davies 1978). The *Descriptive Map of London Poverty* incorporated the sevenfold categorization of households as shown in table 2.1. Table 2.1 also gives the equivalent Registrar General's social class and the proportions of the population allocated to each social class for 1896 and 1991 within the area surveyed by Booth (see also figure 2.1).

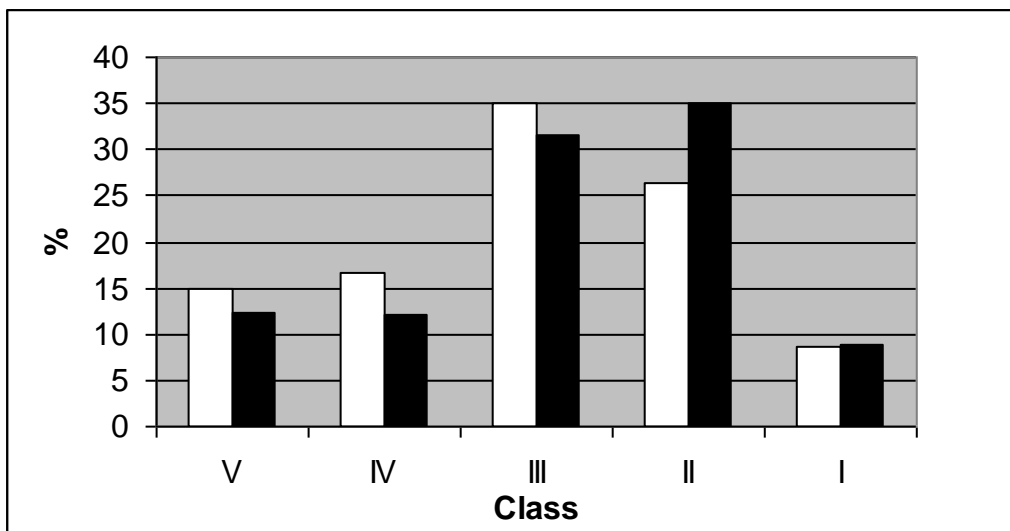
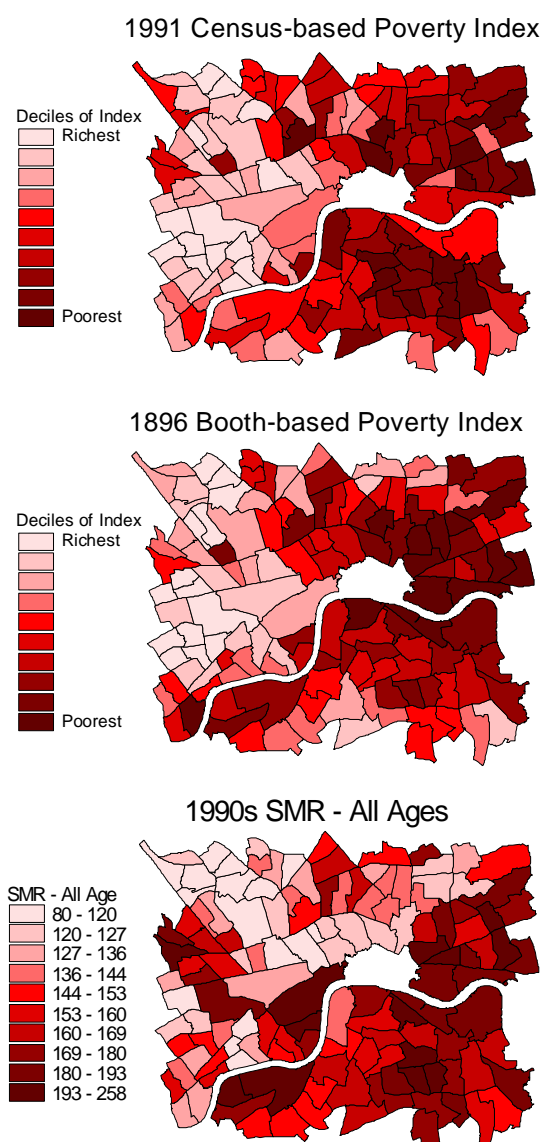


Figure 2.1: Distribution of 1896 Booth classes and 1991 census classes

Note: White bars = 1896, Black bars = 1991, see table above for definitions.

There are striking similarities in the proportions of the population allocated to each social class despite one hundred years of social change. The three poorest groups defined by Booth match most closely with 1991 social class V. The next four classes match each census class used a century later almost exactly in terms of the character of occupations they define. Both definitions used occupation as their primary means of classifying people (or occupation of spouse or parent). The Registrar General's scheme originally included three categories of the population defined on the basis of the industry they worked in rather than their occupation, but his distinction was dropped in later classifications (Stevenson 1928: 207--30). Being a member of any particular class implied extremely different living conditions, of course, between the two time points; but the fact that such similar groups of people were grouped together in similar ways is staggering. The Registrar General's classification as used today is far from an anachronism, and is widely used in the advertising industry where classes I, II, IIIN, IIIM, IV and V correspond to the letters A, B, C1, C2, D and E respectively. When you hear of television advertisements being aimed at A/B audiences you are hearing an echo of the 1890s. In net terms classes D and E are slightly smaller in inner London than they were a century ago and class B slightly larger. However, the similarities between the two distributions are more interesting than the differences.

Figure 2.2: Poverty in Inner London 1896 to 1991



To produce the tables and figure reported above, Booth's map was digitized and placed in a Geographical Information System. Next, 1991 London ward boundaries were used as spatial units within which the distribution of the population by social class could be measured at both points in time for the same areas on the ground. These data were then further aggregated to produce the totals shown above. A relative index of poverty was then calculated to examine the changing spatial patterns of social class in London. This was based on the proportions of the population assigned to each social class in each ward (Davey Smith et al. 1998). The index ranged from 0 to 1 and was highest in areas where social class V was concentrated, and lowest in areas where there were many people in social class I. This index can be used as a measure of relative poverty at each time point, and when mapped shows how little change there was in Inner London's social structure over the twentieth century (see figure 2.2).

It is clear from the maps how little change there has been between the nineteenth-century and twentieth-century distributions of affluence and poverty in Inner London. The third map shows all-age all-cause Standardized Mortality Ratios

(SMR) in these same areas in the 1990s. In the research for which these maps were originally constructed (Dorling et al. 2000) interest focused on the extent to which the 1896 map could be used to make better predictions of the spatial pattern of contemporary mortality rates than did the 1991 map. We found that all-age, all-cause SMR in the 1990s was better predicted by relative poverty as measured in 1896 than by relative poverty measured in 1991. In particular, deaths from stroke and stomach cancer (associated most strongly with childhood poverty) are better predicted by the nineteenth-century data. For other causes of death, poverty measured in 1991 provided a better predictor. The relationship with poverty in 1991 is strongest for coronary heart disease, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, and lung cancer. At ages under 65 the 1991 census provided a better predictor for all-cause mortality. Thus the two poverty maps correlate with the pattern of mortality in a way we might expect, given what we already know about particular diseases. This suggests, among other things, that the maps are probably good general representations of social inequalities across London for their respective time periods.

For my purpose here what is most interesting about the two maps of poverty is the stability they show rather than the subtle changes. The area that has changed the most in relative terms lies south of the river around Brixton. The effect of immigration from the Caribbean was perhaps greater than the impact of a hundred years of social policy, home-building and rebuilding and two world wars (including a great deal of bombing). However, even that response was slight and its mid-century effects are now diminishing as parts of the area re-gentrify.

How representative is change in Inner London of social change more generally? There are few places in Britain where social structure was mapped over a century ago and where the results were published in a way that can be compared to the situation today. Inner London is arguably an area where one might have expected most change. Being the centre of a major world city, being most directly affected by the Blitz in the Second World War and the huge decline and then turnover (and now some growth) of population that London has experienced. However, a hundred years of social policy initiatives (many listed in the boxes below) have had almost no impact on the spatial pattern of relative poverty in inner London.

The one obvious area that can be compared to London is York, surveyed by Rowntree in 1899 (Rowntree 1901). His map was much cruder than Booth's and cannot be compared over time in the same way. cursory comparisons of the York maps do, however, suggest that much more changed in York than in Inner London. York grew considerably over the century, unlike Inner London, and this is perhaps the most important factor in explaining the differences. The greatest differences of all in Britain are found where New Towns have been established; Milton Keynes experienced the greatest population growth in recent decades and consequently the greatest social change -- but this is to compare green fields with new-build estates. What the comparison of the social geography of London shows is that where space is constrained, change too has been constrained.

Three Choices

It would be very wrong to assume that little has changed over the course of the last century in anything but the relative positions, sizes and locations of social groups in Britain. One hundred years of social change have brought about enormous progress in absolute living standards to the population of Britain. Why can I say that? Well, let me ask you a simple question. Suppose you could choose to have been born in 1851, 1901, or 1951? You are not allowed to choose the family you are born into or where you are born -- just the year of your birth (such a choice following the logic most clearly set out in Rawls 1971). Imagine three upturned cups are placed before you and in each is one of those three dates. You are shown which date is in which cup. How carefully would you watch the cups being swapped around before choosing the one with your year of birth?

Box 2.1: Some key social policy changes in the first twenty years of the century

1901 Factory and Workshop Act dealt with health and safety, employment and education of children, dangerous and unhealthy industries, fire escapes, fencing of machinery, meal times, overtime, night work, homework, wages and administration and legal proceedings. The minimum working age was raised to 12. **1902** Midwives Act created the Central Midwives Board with responsibility for the registration of midwives, rules for their training and examination, and the regulation of their practice. **1903** Motor Car Act raised the speed limit to 20 miles per hour; required numbering, registering and lighting of all cars; and introduced an offence of reckless driving. **1904** Report of the Interdepartmental Committee on Physical Deterioration made recommendations on a wide spectrum of health matters. These included: standards of purity for all food and drinks; registration of stillbirths; health visitors to be appointed in every authority and more. **1905** Unemployed Workmen Act permitted local authorities to set up labour bureaux to help unemployed people to find work, and to finance the voluntary emigration of those out of work. The Act removed the disqualification from franchise of unemployed men. **1906** Education (Provision of Meals) Act allowed local education authorities to contribute to the provision of school meals. Trades Disputes Act laid down that no cases could be brought against unions for damages done by a strike and made peaceful picketing lawful. **1907** Notification of Births Act introduced, on a permissive basis, notification of births to the medical officer of health, thus enabling the mother and baby to be visited. **1908** Old Age Pensions Act provided for a pension of five shillings a week for people over 70 years old with incomes of less than £31-10s a year. Coal Mines Regulation Act for the first time, limited the hours of work of adult males; the limit was eight hours per day. **1909** Labour Exchanges Act led to the setting up of labour exchanges to provide information about available work. Trades Boards Act established the principle of minimum wages in defined occupations and powers to prosecute employers exploiting employees. **1910** Mines Accident (Rescue and Aid) Act provided for fire precautions, rescue work and first aid treatment to be available at mines. **1911** National Insurance Act established health and unemployment insurance to be paid for by contributions from the State, employers and employees. The health insurance, which came into operation on 15th July 1912, provided sickness, disablement and maternity benefits, and a medical practitioner for all insured people. **1912** Coal (Minimum Wage) Act set up district boards to fix minimum wages for workers employed underground. Trade Union Act allowed unions to use special, but not general, funds for political purposes under certain conditions. **1913** Report of the Departmental Committee on Tuberculosis recommended that dispensaries for the diagnosis and treatment of tuberculous patients and sanatorium facilities should be available. **1915** Increase of Rent and Mortgage Interest (War Restrictions) Act restricted such increases for the duration of the war. The act marked the beginning of rent control and the protection of the interests of tenants. **1916** Police, Factories Act provided for securing the welfare of workers in factories including the heating of workplaces; taking of meals; provision of protective clothing; seating; washing; accommodation; and the availability of first aid and ambulances. **1917** Royal Commission on the Housing of the Industrial Population of Scotland described the squalid state of much of Scotland's housing stock and emphasised the correlation between bad housing and poor health; also recommended that the State should accept some direct responsibility for the housing of the working classes. **1918** Representation of the People Act established a common franchise for parliamentary and local government elections and introduced enfranchisement of women aged over 30 years if they were ratepayers or wives of ratepayers. Education Act included: raising the school leaving age to 14 (though action was postponed). **1919** Ministry of Health Act established the Ministry "to take all such steps as may be desirable to secure the preparation, effective carrying out and co-ordination of measures conducive to the health of the people". In addition to its health functions the new ministry became responsible for the poor law, national insurance, local government, planning, housing, environmental health, and roads. **1920** Unemployed Insurance Act extended the scope of the 1911 act to include more than 12 million workers. Employment of Women, Young Persons and Children Act brought into effect conventions agreed by the International Labour Organisation of the League of Nations; amended previous acts; and raised the age of employment of children to 14 years.

Had you chosen 1851, if you were lucky you would spend your short old age at the start of the twentieth century -- most probably in what would be viewed now as unrecognizable squalor, cold, damp and not a little hunger and pain. Times were changing as you entered your fiftieth year, but all a little too late. Box 2.1 lists just a few of those changes. On your sixtieth birthday Parliament would pass the Contributory National Insurance Act, far too late for the spells of unemployment that you had lived through (and it wouldn't have been called unemployment then!). By the time you reached 70 you would qualify for a pension -- but you would be very unlikely to have lived that long. Among

other things, the dangers of childbirth mean that you would have had a better chance as a man than a woman to have reached your three score years and ten. Viewed from the end of the twentieth century your life does not appear enviable. Some comfort, however, is that you would never know most of what you were missing. Only a very small proportion of the population were rich and their riches only saved them from some privations. A wealthy 50-year-old in 1901 had a far worse expectation of life than someone of that age born just 25 years later -- irrespective of their social position. Put another way, the poor (widely defined) in Britain experienced the standard of living that the rich (widely defined) lived just a generation earlier. It's a gross generalization, but from health, to food, to holidays, to schooling -- when comparing the best-off, say, quarter of society with the worst-off quarter -- it took a generation to catch up. By which time, of course, the rich had moved on -- to ever better health, food, leisure, education and so on.

Box 2.2: Some key social policy changes in the 1920s, 1930s and 1940s

1921 Marie Stopes established the first birth control clinic in north London. **1923** Matrimonial Causes Act allowed wives to petition for divorce on the grounds of their husbands' adultery. **1925** Housing Act consolidated earlier legislation relating to housing of the working classes including their sanitary conditions; maintenance of buildings; closure of houses unfit for human habitation; and improvement and reconstruction schemes. Widows, Orphans and Old Age Contributory Pensions Act introduced contributory pensions for widows, orphans and men aged 65 and women aged 60 as from 1926. **1927** Trade Disputes and Trade Union Act followed the general strike in 1926 outlawing general and sympathy strikes. BCG vaccine against tuberculosis first used in the UK. **1928** Representation of the People Act lowered the voting age of women from 30 to 21 years. **1929** Age of Marriage Act raised the minimum age for marriage to 16 years. **1930** Housing Act and Housing (Scotland) Act made further provisions for slum clearance by local authorities, though implementation was delayed by the financial crisis of 1931. Unemployment Insurance Act removed some restrictions on claiming benefit. **1934** Unemployment Act improved and tightened up the national insurance scheme - eligibility for relief was widened but means testing on a family basis was continued. Cheap or free milk introduced on a national basis for all children at school. **1935** Housing Act defined "overcrowding" and made it an offence; and placed an obligation on local authorities to re-house persons from clearance areas and unfit houses scheduled for demolition. Similar provisions made for Scotland. **1936** Public Health Act consolidated the law relating to sanitation; drainage; nuisances; offensive trades; common lodging houses; water supplies; control of infectious diseases including tuberculosis; maternity and child welfare; child protection; registration of nursing homes; and the provision of hospitals. Education Act raised the school leaving age to 15 years (not enforced until 1947). **1937** Factories Act consolidated and extended previous legislation; limited the hours of work of young persons under the age of 16 to 44 per week, and of those aged 16 to 18 and all women to 48; and introduced new regulations regarding lighting, heating and cleaning. Maternity Services (Scotland) Act entitled every expectant mother to have the services of a midwife and a doctor, and, if the need arose, of a consultant obstetrician. **1938** Holidays with Pay Act enabled wage regulating authorities to provide for holidays and holiday pay for workers whose wages they regulated. **1939** All infants and nursing mothers to be provided with fresh milk, either free or at not more than 2d per pint. **1940** Food rationing (bacon, butter and cheese) introduced in January, followed by meat rationing two months later. **1941** The Minister of Health announced the Government's intention to ensure the provision of a comprehensive hospital service. Introduction of purchase tax. **1942** The Beveridge Report laid the foundations of the post-war welfare state. **1943** The Medical Planning Committee of the Society of Medical Officers of Health recommended the creation of a new ministry of health which brought together the health functions of all ministries. **1944** Education Act included the following: elementary schools to be replaced by infant and junior schools for primary education; secondary education to be provided free for all children in grammar, technical or secondary modern schools, selection for which was to be by an examination taken at age 11 (the 'eleven-plus exam'); school leaving age to be raised to 15 years. **1945** Family allowances Act provided an allowance for second and subsequent children to be paid to the mother. **1946** National Health Service Act established a comprehensive health service by providing services free of charge, except where the act expressly provided for charges; the NHS began in 1948. National Insurance Act established the welfare state on lines set out in the Beveridge Report (1942) with compulsory contributions to cover unemployment. **1947** National Health Service (Scotland) Act made provisions similar to those of the 1946 act for England and Wales. **1948** Criminal Justice Act introduced more leniency towards criminals and virtually abolished flogging. **1949** Housing Act extended the 1936 Act to enable account to be taken of the housing conditions and needs of all members of the community and not only of the 'working classes'.

Suppose you forsake the nineteenth century and opt to be born in 1901. A great war would be fought during your teenage years into which you could be unlucky enough to be drawn. In the year of your twenty-fifth birthday a general strike would be called. Life was grossly unfair, but at least people were complaining (in large numbers rather than a few agitators). You would have been obliged to bring up your family -- had you had one -- through the deprivations of the 1930s. But, again, at least when you were 51 you would have lived long enough to have seen a free health service established. See box 2.2 for a list of just a few of the seminal changes to society you would have seen during the first half of your adulthood. There would still be rationing from the Second World War, but there were jobs for all by your old age. On your sixtieth birthday you saw legislation tightening up health and safety further in your workplace. A little late perhaps for you, but good for your children, and a year later an act was passed that meant your grandchildren might go to university. A year later again and plans for building more universities were made. On your seventieth birthday you had to get to grips with a new decimal currency. However, 1971 was a world away from 1921 and your predecessor's experience of old age at your age -- had they reached it. Your chances of reaching 70 were very much better, but it was still not an expectation to be taken for granted. The world was changing rapidly as you aged further -- perhaps not all to your taste. But you had spent your young and middle age living through some difficult, or perhaps just a little monotonous and in all probability laborious times. You had watched your country retreat from leading an empire to being in hock to the Americans and uncertainties in the flow of oil. You had had an interesting, if not easy, life.

Choose again and decide to miss out half of the last century. Now you are born in 1951. Rationing, which was generous for children, ensures you received a good diet in your formative years, generally regardless of which family you were born into. Similarly your father was almost certainly in work (and you almost certainly lived with him), you had access to free health care and better education than your parents. Your teenage years were spent in the 1960s and the government lowered the voting age to 18 on your eighteenth birthday so you could vote in the general election a year later. Box 2.3 lists some of the great changes that you saw take place in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s. You perhaps got angry about issues like Vietnam -- but it was happening a long way away from you. In your thirtieth year up to 4 million people were out of work and you could have been one of them, but more likely you were not doing too badly. The country was sharply divided. However, most people were now living on the richer rather than poorer side of the line. They, and there would be a good chance that you, showed this by voting for a Conservative government throughout your thirties and half of your forties. By the time you were 50, your home (which you were odds-on to own yourself) was worth a small fortune. Were you unlucky enough to be in the minority who missed out on this accumulation of wealth there was still a good chance that you had flown abroad for some holidays. You probably owned a car and were not too old to be daunted by technology which -- from washing machines, to multi-channel television, to the internet -- had transformed your everyday world. Your children received the same schooling as most other children. There were inequalities and they probably did not get to go to higher education, but you thought it inconceivable that your grandchildren would not. That is, if they were not among the one in six said to be living in poverty at the start of the twenty-first century. But this poverty was a world apart from that seen by your grandparents a century earlier. Things could change greatly over the coming years -- but the thought that you would not live another 20 years to see these changes would have seemed overly pessimistic. Around you were people in their seventies and eighties, still enjoying life, in numbers that had never done so before.

On Progress

Let's change the game to something a little more realistic. People do not get to choose when they were born. The game of supposing that you are born into a family at random is traditionally used to ascertain people's reactions to inequalities in society at one point in time (again see Rawls 1971). Suppose that you could now choose into which family you were born in the year 2001. What kind of society would you like to be born into? One in which two-thirds were well off while a third were

poor, or one which was less affluent overall but a lot more equal? Equality is the usual answer expected of players of this game. However, as it was played out in British social history for most of the twentieth century the strategy was to raise the height of safety nets for those at the bottom of society while not constraining the growing affluence of those at the top. During unusual times this was not the case. At the start of the twentieth century many of the aristocracy lost their wealth to

Box 2.3: Some key social policy changes in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s

1951 The government increased housing subsidies and pledged to build 300,000 houses per year. **1952** Housing Act raised the subsidies on house building; encouraged council tenants to buy their houses; and allowed improvement grants to be available to private landlords. **1954** Mines and Quarries Act consolidated legislation dealing with health, safety and welfare, and the employment of women and young persons in mines and quarries. Housing Repairs and Rent Act extended previous acts; and set out details to be considered in defining houses as “unfit for human habitation”. **1955** Food and Drugs Act consolidated legislation relating to the sale of food to the public, prevention of food poisoning, milk, dairies, markets, and slaughter houses. **1956** Clean Air Act introduced smokeless zones. **1957** Housing Act consolidated previous acts dealing with inspection; sanitation; repair and demolition; clearance and redevelopment of areas; overcrowding; the provision and management of houses; and set standards of overcrowding. Rent Act abolished rent control on some houses, and allowed modest increases in rent on houses below certain rateable value. **1959** National Insurance Act introduced retirement pensions and contributions related to earnings. **1960** Offices Act was concerned with the health, safety and welfare of office workers. Noise Abatement Act made noise a statutory nuisance. **1961** Factories Act replaced the acts of 1937, 1948 and 1959; it dealt with cleanliness; overcrowding; lighting; sanitary conveniences; safety; welfare; accidents; industrial diseases; employment of women and young persons; home work; and the duties of factory inspectors and public health inspectors in factories not using mechanical power. **1962** Education Act imposed a duty on local authorities to make grants to students who obtained places on certain courses at universities and establishments of further education. **1963** The Committee on Higher Education recommended radical changes in the structure of higher education with the doubling of student places. **1964** A free vote in the House of Commons abolished the death penalty for murder, becoming effective in 1965. **1965** Rent Act reintroduced rent control for the majority of privately owned unfurnished accommodation; gave tenants security of tenure; and introduced a scheme for the assessment of fair rents. Race Relations Act prohibited discrimination on racial grounds in places of public resort and in regard to tenancies; made incitement to racial hatred an offence; and constituted the Race Relations Board. **1967** National Health Service (Family Planning) Act enabled local health authorities to provide a family planning service for all persons, without regard to marital status or medical need, either directly or through a voluntary body. Sexual Offences Act legalised homosexual practices in private between consenting adults in England and Wales. **1968** Clean Air Act prohibited the emission of dark smoke from industrial and trade premises. **1969** Representation of the People Act lowered the age of voting to 18 years. Divorce Reform Act introduced the criterion of irretrievable breakdown of the marriage. **1970** National Insurance Act extended the eligibility for widows’ pensions; introduced non-contributory pensions, as of right, to all people aged 80 years or more; and an “Attendance Allowance” for a disabled person needing frequent or continuous attention. Family Income Supplements Act provided for a new benefit, administered by the Supplementary Benefits Commission, for families with small incomes. **1971** Education (Milk) Act restricted the duty of education authorities to provide milk for pupils. First shelter for battered wives opened. **1972** Housing Finance Act required local councils to charge “fair rents” for subsidised council accommodation, and introduced rent rebates and allowances. Children’s Act prohibited the employment of children below the age of 13 years. School leaving age raised to 16 years. **1974** The Government agreed a ‘social contract’ whereby the trade unions would moderate wage demands in return for promises of increased government spending on pensions, the NHS, and child benefit, price control and restricted increases in council house rents. **1975** Social Security Pensions Act introduced earnings related retirement pensions. Sex Discrimination Act made discrimination on the grounds of sex in employment, training and related matters an offence; and established the Equal Opportunities Commission. **1976** Education Act required local education authorities to submit proposals for introducing comprehensive schooling. The Commission for Racial Equality was set up with a remit to promote the elimination of discrimination and the equality of opportunity for all racial groups; to support local community relations councils; and to undertake advisory and educational work. **1977** Housing (Homeless Persons) Act extended the duties of local authorities to house homeless people. Inner Urban Areas Act designated districts of deprivation for special treatment. **1980** Housing Act introduced the “Tenants’ Charter” giving council tenants the right to buy the houses they occupied.

Box 2.4: Some key social policy changes in the 1980s and 1990s

1984 Data Protection Act regulated the use of automatically processed information relating to individuals; required the registration of data users; and established new legal rights for individuals with regard to personal data processed by computing equipment. **1985** Pasteurisation of all milk for retail sale through shops and dairies became compulsory in England and Wales. **1986** Sex Discrimination Act strengthened the powers of the 1975 act, and brought the law into line with European Community law. Protection of Children (Tobacco) Act made it illegal to sell any tobacco product to children aged under 16 years. **1995** Disability Discrimination Act made it illegal to discriminate against disabled people. **1998** Human Rights Act enshrined the European Human Rights Convention into British law; it was to come into force in 2000. National Minimum Wage Act introduced a national minimum wage; to start on 1st April 1999. **1999**. In *Opportunity for All, Tackling Poverty and Social Exclusion* the Government announced plans to eradicate child poverty.

inheritance taxation. In the middle, wartime necessity levelled the playing field significantly; and at times before the last quarter it was proposed (and occasionally implemented) that the rich should be taxed far more greatly on their incomes. But between these times wealth was permitted to beget wealth. In the last 25 years of the century the average income of the poorest quarter of society fell in relation to the best-paid quarter. Comparing box 2.4 (above) on some of the key beneficial legislative changes in the 1980s and 1990s with the previous three boxes it is clear that government during this time was far less concerned about material inequalities and social disadvantage than before. It is extremely difficult to construct a list of government actions over the last 20 years that compares to the scale of previous achievements.

Table 2.2: Access to consumer durables of the bottom decile income group (%)

Percentage of individuals in household with access to a:	1962-63	1972-73	1982-83	1992-93	1999-2000
Telephone	8	20	58	78	95
Washing machine	-	54	79	89	91
Fridge or fridge-freezer	-	52	95	99	99
Car	-	26	44	56	71
Video cassette recorder	-	-	-	68	86
Central heating	-	20	46	73	90

Source: (Goodman, 1997) for 1962-63 to 1992-93, and ONS (2001) United Kingdom in Figures for 1999-2000.

Despite the growth in inequality, by the end of the twentieth century more than 90 per cent of the poorest tenth of society had a telephone, washing machine, fridge and central heating. They almost certainly had problems paying the telephone, fuel and water bills, or stocking the fridge with good-quality food, but they actually had these things. As table 2.2 shows, the situation had changed rapidly since the 1960s. I think it is worth examining this evidence about the material goods owned by the poorest tenth of British people closely. By definition these people are not rich. What has happened is that all the six material goods shown in the table are now necessities to live an 'acceptable' life. A century ago the table could well have consisted of the following six items: a postage stamp, cold running water, a meat box, a bicycle, a newspaper, coal. And a century ago a commentator might have

argued that some of these items were not necessary to live an acceptable life in Britain in 1901. Indeed, Rowntree in his *A Study of Town Life* of that year had to argue that being able to afford a stamp should be seen as a necessity of life (see Harris 2000):

“Let us clearly understand what ‘merely physical efficiency’ means. A family living upon the scale allowed for in this estimate must never spend a penny on railway fare or omnibus. They must never go into the country unless they walk. They must never purchase a halfpenny newspaper or spend a penny to buy a ticket for a popular concert. They must write no letters to absent children, for they cannot afford to pay the postage. They must never contribute to their church or chapel, or give any help to a neighbour which costs them money. They cannot save, nor can they join a sick club or Trade Union, because they cannot pay the necessary subscriptions. The children must have no pocket money for dolls, marbles, or sweets. The father must smoke no tobacco, and must drink no beer. The mother must never buy any pretty clothes for herself or for her children, the character of the family wardrobe as for the family diet, being governed by the regulation, ‘nothing must be bought but that which is absolutely necessary for the maintenance of physical health, and what is bought must be of the plainest and most economical description.’ Should a child fall ill, it must be attended by the parish doctor; should it die, it must be buried by the parish. Finally the wage-earner must never be absent from his work for a single day”. (Rowntree 2000: 133--4)

Rowntree’s phrase ‘merely physical efficiency’ refers to the living standards that could be attained by living just over the poverty line: a poverty line that Rowntree established in 1901. He admitted 40 years later that he had deliberately set his primary poverty line at a low level because of the adverse comments that any more generous line might have attracted: ‘It was a standard of bare *subsistence* rather than *living*’ (Rowntree 1941: 102). We have now made such enormous material progress in Britain that it has brought us to the point where having a video cassette recorder is increasingly viewed as a necessity (especially by parents of young children!). However, a century after Seebohm Rowntree wrote about the stamp, the foundation named after his father agonized about releasing the results of one of its surveys which did indeed suggest that a near majority of people in Britain saw having a video recorder as a mark that you belonged to society. Almost all households now feel the need for a car. Less than a third of the poorest tenth of society had no access to a car in 2000. Poor households do not run cars out of fecklessness. Massive material gains have brought about massive material reliance. Despite all this, the age-old problem remains: poverty means not having access to what is the norm. Too few people accept this. We have experienced enormous progress in some senses but almost no progress in how poverty is understood or accepted by society. The ‘undeserving poor’ are still viewed as such by perhaps the majority of the population and in government policy, which has recently introduced new safety nets for pensioner incomes and working families (with children), but has done far less for childless adults under retirement age -- the parents and pensioners of the future.

In terms of standards of living we now live longer, eat better, are warmer in our homes and safer in our workplaces, and are better entertained. But we are also much more reliant on wealth and what it buys. We do not recognize our reliance and so we see argument after argument claiming that people who are poorer in Britain can easily live without what others take for granted. We have passed law after law after law to improve living standards and to regulate the vagaries of the free market, and constructed a welfare state that does not see people starve (except very rarely) and which now educates most people up to the age of 18 or 19 and a large number up to 21. Read again though the boxes of policy changes listed in this chapter (which you might well have been tempted to skip!) to get a rough feel for a century of change. Now, however, we turn to lack of progress -- or why, despite all this apparent progress there is a feeling that little has been achieved. This is where a geographical turn is needed.

A Little More Geography

An aspatial approach to social progress can produce very positive reading. The list of progressive national achievements in boxes 2.1--2.4 makes for impressive reading, largely of Acts of Parliament, almost all of which had no direct geographical component. The systematic raising of the school-leaving age, the increased surveillance of working conditions by the state, improvements in government benefits and onwards and upwards (despite a few regressive moments not listed in the boxes). Similarly, comparing social groups can produce a quite positive, if rather misleading, picture of 'catch up', as table 2.2 suggested. And as demonstrated in table 2.1, these social groups have not greatly changed in size -- although this is a contentious opinion (in particular the 2001 census results will show a huge apparent rise in the proportions of people in high classes but this will almost all be due to 'grade inflation' in job titles and a failure to redefine classification systems appropriately). However, even the widening gap between social classes in Britain in recent years appears to be narrowing. For instance, in February 2002 the Office for National Statistics reported the life-expectancy gap between social classes to be narrowing (see Hattersley 1999 for its earlier widening). A spatial approach on the other hand is often much more pessimistic and complicated. At one extreme, the current life expectancies for men living in Glasgow are roughly equal to those experienced by all men in England 40 years ago.

Table 2.3: Population of five major cities (thousands)

	1911	1931	1961	1991	1999
London	7,256	8,216	8,183	6,890	7,285
Manchester	714	766	661	439	431
Liverpool	747	856	748	481	456
Leeds	446	483	510	717	727
Glasgow	784	1,088	1,055	663	611

Sources: 1801-1961: Bartley *et al.* (1997); 1991: ONS mid-year estimates; 1999: ONS and GRO(S) mid-year estimates for the contemporary boundaries for the cities (1961 and earlier data use pre-1964/1974 boundaries -- which is most problematic for Leeds).

Table 2.3 shows the populations of five large cities in Britain and how these populations changed over the course of the last century. Glasgow contained a million people in the 1930s and 1960s. Like Liverpool, it shrank dramatically in the last third of the century. People moved between these cities and out of them at a great rate. One product of that movement, I suspect, has been to maintain the relative hierarchy of average standards of living between these places. Liverpool and Glasgow were poor places a century ago, despite being regarded as economically successful. The relative positions of the people who live in those cities, as compared to people living elsewhere, has not greatly changed. Life-expectancy tables are just part of the evidence for this. My point is that a great selective movement of people has been necessary for such relative stability in the geographical social hierarchy. The net effects of that movement on population totals are highlighted in table 2.3 (see Brimblecombe *et al.* 1999, 2000).

In recent years Manchester and Leeds have been said to be 'on the up'. This translates into 'have not declined as we would expect northern cities to', in population terms. The slight relative changes in city hierarchy are interesting, but too much of an obsession with small changes in rank orderings blinds us to the overall stability of the geography of society: a stability maintained through change. A century and a half ago the two English towns with the worst living conditions were

probably Salford and Oldham. Their relative position has changed little since (Dorling 1997). The composition of their populations has changed dramatically to allow this, most obviously in their current ethnic make-up. Migration from around the world was necessary to maintain their social positions within England. Similarly within London, relatively poor people whose grandparents grew up in Africa, the Caribbean or the Indian subcontinent now live in areas which were disadvantaged for a very different population which preceded them (often themselves immigrants from Russia, eastern Europe and Ireland). The migration of large populations has been necessary to maintain spatial inequalities. It may well be the case that nowhere is the influence of selective migration more important than in London. Here is a city which table 2.3 suggests is roughly the same size as it was a century ago (using the contemporary boundaries which have widened). This stability of the social class system in London is in turn reflected in a relatively stable residential hierarchy of property prices. Prices shoot up in absolute terms, but relative differentials remain quite stable. The maintenance of inequality can be seen through this geography, and this maintenance requires movement.

At a national level, the work of Gregory et al. (2001) supports the argument that social inequalities between places tended to remain much the same over the twentieth century. There were exceptions. While Newcastle and north-east England in general did unusually well in the 1960s, within London, Notting Hill did unusually badly. However, these are exceptions and in the long term what is remarkable about British social geography is its consistency. Areas that do change have tended to revert a few decades later to their former position.

We are good at spotting change, but less good at seeing stability. Compare Peter Townsend's definition of relative poverty published towards the end of the century with Rowntree's published at the start (quoted above):

“Individuals, families and groups in the population can be said to be in poverty when they lack the resources to obtain the type of diet, participate in the activities and have the living conditions and amenities which are customary, or are at least widely encouraged or approved in the societies to which they belong. Their resources are so seriously below those commanded by the average individual or family that they are, in effect, excluded from ordinary living patterns, customs and activities.” (Townsend 1979: 31)

The 20 years after Townsend wrote this saw the rise of ‘social exclusion’ as the ‘term of concern’ for poverty. What Townsend describes is the same as Rowntree saw 80 years earlier and the same that contemporary commentators see now. What people are excluded from is the prosperity of others and other places -- for a generation. Then, by the time they are included at those levels, general levels of prosperity have risen again: the process of ‘catch up’ never results in any actual catching up.

The timeline followed in boxes 2.1--2.4 goes from 1901 to 1999. This is what an extended entry for 2001 might say:

“**2001** Government figures show that income inequality increased under the Labour administration. Tony Blair is re-elected as prime minister (Labour), but with a record low turnout of the electorate and widespread apathy. On 11 June Mr Blair awarded himself a 40 per cent pay increase, raising his salary to £163,000 a year. In an interview a week earlier in response to the question ‘Is it acceptable for the gap between rich and poor to get bigger?’ he would only answer by saying ‘It is acceptable for those people on lower incomes to have their incomes raised’. He was not concerned about the gap between ‘the person who earns the most in the country and the person that earns the least’. Research conducted on behalf of the Joseph Rowntree Foundation finds that 2 million children in Britain -- more than one in six -- are experiencing multiple deprivation and poverty.”

Conclusion

The central argument of this chapter is: that the twentieth century in Britain saw enormous social progress in absolute terms, but remarkable social rigidity in the basic structures of society, particularly in its inequities. This rigidity is reflected through a geography in which the relative positions of people living in different cities or different parts of cities tended to remain the same. The maintenance of inequality requires a great deal of change. This change has many components. One component is the large-scale systematic migration of people to maintain spatial hierarchies. For instance, those people who can, do leave poorer areas, while those who are well-off clamour to spend even more of their salaries to live in still richer places. There needs to be almost continuous absolute improvement in average wealth for continued inequalities between social groups to be accepted by the majority. Inequalities can be maintained as long as everyone is getting a little richer. Inequities in British society have been maintained while most have become richer. At the start of the twenty-first century there is little to suggest this process will not continue for some time.

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