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Neighbourhood Change, Deprivation, Peripherality, and Ageing in the Yorkshire Coalfield

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Abstract

Low-income neighbourhoods in contemporary England continue to be buffeted by roiling economic inequalities and social policy absences. Long-term residents have a unique perspective on this socio-spatial stress. This article zooms in to examine the condition of one spatial manifestation of these broader forces: peripheral council/public housing estates in the deindustrialised North of England—in this case the ex-coalfields of West Yorkshire. Neighbourhood conditions are seen through the eyes of residents aged between 60 and 85 years. The article explores their accounts of the local economic, social, and political changes which have interlaced their experiences of work, community, and place over six decades. It also examines how irregular regeneration projects, emergency initiatives and local organising have tried to address and ameliorate structural marginalisation in recent years, not least during the Covid pandemic. The article provides a historically contingent account of contemporary socio-spatial stress, one that emphasises the significance of long-term residence and feelings of not only loss and nostalgia, but hopeful and resilient attachments to place.

Keywords

coalfields; deindustrialisation; housing estates; marginality; neighbourhoods; oral history

1. Introduction

The UK remains in the grip of a cost-of-living crisis, housing crisis and growing socioeconomic inequality (Joseph Rowntree Foundation [JRF], 2024) and local government budgets have not recovered since the austerity of the 2010s (Institute of Fiscal Studies [IFS], 2024). These trends are intersecting with existing classed and raced hierarchies to produce differentiated landscapes of neighbourhood deprivation and

marginality (Office of National Statistics [ONS], 2021). Social scientists have long attended to such dynamics. However, the tumult of the 2016 Brexit referendum not only destabilised political culture in the UK, but it also introduced new readings of, specifically English, socio-spatial exclusion and vulnerability. At the most ideological pole, populist commentaries heralded peripheral communities for allegedly holding fast to "traditional" values and rejecting the imputed cosmopolitanism of the EU project (e.g., Goodhart, 2017). These accounts were bolstered by survey-based values research which posited a nation polarised between the conservative social and political inclinations of older, white working-class populations and the liberal pretensions of those living in cities and University towns (e.g., Sobolewska & Ford, 2020). Ethnography-inclined social scientists accepted some of these terms of debate and set about understanding dynamics of marginality and disaffection in post-industrial districts (e.g., Koch et al., 2021; McKenzie, 2017). At its worst, this research obscured and flattened understandings of working-class life within contemporary England just as socioeconomic inequalities and polarisations were intensifying (JRF, 2024). Further, it implicitly or explicitly ranged the attitudes and needs of poor whites against those of racialised migrants, refugees, and citizens of colour (see Mondon & Winter, 2020). This has been fanned by the neo-nationalist currents within English politics reflected in the Labour government's adoption of a "securonomics" agenda (see Reeves, 2023). According to Davies and Gane (2021), this amounts to a "post-neoliberal" mobilisation of England's "white natives" and is aligned with broader currents flowing through the Global North as elites compete to pose as sentinels of 'tradition' and 'security' in the face of accumulating social, political and economic shocks.

The upshot of these "culture war"-style, neo-nationalist accounts of socio-spatial deprivation, is that they deflect from the material deprivations and marginalities afflicting different communities and foreclose who is documented and represented as "working class." In response, white-coded, unitarist accounts of a "left behind" working class have been consistently challenged by critical scholars (e.g., Antonucci et al., 2017; Rhodes et al., 2019) as has the efficacy of "post-industrial" as a framework for contemporary, multi-polar class alliances (see Luger & Schwarze, 2024). Similarly, scholars have challenged whitewashed accounts of working-class histories as they pertain to industry, community and solidarity (e.g., Anitha & Pearson, 2018; Shilliam, 2018) and emphasised how racialised structures of the post-war British economy and culture hierarchised access to stable jobs, homes, and welfare services (e.g., Virdee, 2014).

This article exists in dialogue with these critical interventions. It attends to a "classic" location in the neo-nationalist imaginary: White British-majority neighbourhoods in the deindustrialised zones of Northern England. However, it does not do so to privilege the experiences or resentments of White British working-class people (not least because poverty is a deeply racialised structure of English society; see JRF, 2022), but to re-assert how some of the traditional matrices of analytical sociology—mechanisms driving wealth inequality, histories and patterns of social division, and the lived dynamics of urban deprivation—can help us understand the condition of people and communities living with gradual structural marginalisation. This is to focus on a specific fraction of low-income, working-class households. There are different English spatial geographies one could select to explore these patterns—struggling inner cities, coastal towns, rural communities, suburban fringes—but here I focus on the coalfields of Yorkshire. The article works in the spirit of a longitudinal, explanatory account of the currents that shape working-class lives, with the always-present possibility of everyday resistance. The article unfolds as follows. Next, I summarise the scholarly debates and lineages that frame the article and with which it should be read in dialogue. Then we learn more about the case study methodology structuring the article, before turning to the data which

explores: memories of deindustrialisation, interpretations of change, and resources of hope. We conclude with some methodological and analytical reflections.

2. Literature Review

My conceptual framework for understanding the specific problematic of council housing estate trajectories and conditions in post-industrial locations is informed here by several established areas of scholarly literature. Taken together, they help build an account of economic, political, and social change over time which we can place in dialogue with the dataset presented later in the article.

Firstly, there are a range of classic studies from the post-war period when researchers, working in nascent academic departments, interpreted working-class life through the lens of social change in industrial communities (e.g., Dennis et al., 1956; Hoggart, 1957; Jackson, 1968). To this, we can add more recent historiographies of the post-war era exploring how changing employment structures shaped working-class communities and identities (e.g., Lawrence, 2019). Secondly, neoliberal hegemony initiated the fragmentation and relegation of working-class communities, with scholars highlighting both the structural decomposition of post-war public or council housing estates (e.g., Watt, 2021) and disinterring the social, political, and emotional impacts of the "half-life" of deindustrialisation on industrial communities (e.g., Emery, 2020) and the place attachments of older people (e.g., Degnen, 2015). Given the significance of coal mining to the UK industrial economy and the monumental trade union defeat of the 1984–1985 Miner's Strike, community and marginality in and around now-defunct pits and coalfields has received specific attention (e.g., Bright, 2011; Walkerdine, 2010; Warwick & Littlejohn, 1992; Webster, 2003). Beyond the lens of industrial decline, the distinct territorial unit of the post-industrial Northern English town surfaces through profiles of racial diversity (Barbulescu et al., 2019) and the problematics of "community cohesion," Islamophobia and racist policing (e.g., Bagguley & Hussain, 2001; Miah et al., 2020; Wallace & Favell, 2023).

Thirdly, into the post-2008 austerity and Covid-19 periods, researchers in the UK have documented projects of ongoing urban securitisation and welfare state retrenchment undermining municipal safety nets and community infrastructures (e.g., Lewis et al., 2023; Patrick et al., 2022; White, 2020). The public and private rental housing stock on which poor households rely has been exposed as deadly (e.g., Apps, 2021) and substandard, especially for low-income migrants (Lombard, 2023) and refugees (Brown et al., 2022), whilst increases in food banks, warm banks, school holiday hunger, and bed poverty are now standard indicators of the UK's decaying social fabric (see Butler, 2024). The North of England was disproportionately impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic and associated lockdowns, demonstrating the ongoing salience of 'north-south' territorial divides in health and wealth inequalities (see Bambra et al., 2024).

Finally, social policy interventions in low-income English neighbourhoods are increasingly threadbare. The 1997–2010 Labour government was infamous for its plethora of area-based initiatives, aligning neoliberalised regeneration logics with community empowerment agendas as documented by, for example, Wallace (2010) and Watt (2021). The 2010–2015 Coalition government implemented a fiscal austerity regime that swept away these thickets of neighbourhood assistance, replacing them with voluntarist "localism" initiatives, and an extreme rise in food banks and their usage (see Lambie-Mumford, 2017). The last decade has seen further dwindling of local welfare budgets (Butler, 2024) and as a result, local authorities have been reliant on localised webs of Covid-era mutual aid networks, episodic charitable

funding, and severely under-funded statutory social work services. These austerities and abandonments have intersected with rises in food and energy costs to increase the number of households living in "deep poverty" (JRF, 2024) and a spreading mental health crisis (ONS, 2022), two trends which disproportionately affect minoritised households (e.g., JRF, 2022) and older people living in excluded neighbourhoods (e.g., Dahlberg, 2020).

3. Case Study Neighbourhoods

The article zooms in on the Metropolitan Borough of Wakefield, a sprawling urban region home to over 350,000 people. The Borough is part of the larger West Yorkshire conurbation that includes the economically dominant city of Leeds and its smaller neighbour, Bradford. The Borough is comprised of the historic, small city of Wakefield (population 109,000) and the "Five Towns" of Castleford, Normanton, Featherstone, Knottingley and Pontefract (see Figure 1).

The two case study areas are the East Moor and Warwick council housing estates. Both estates are scored among the 10% most socioeconomically deprived in England (Wakefield District Council, 2024) and have above-average numbers of children in poverty (Wakefield District Council, 2024). They are paradigmatic examples of English housing estates—purpose built in the early- to mid-twentieth century to stabilise the reproduction of labour supply for nearby industries—which have subsequently lost reliable sources of local employment and leisure. Understanding their condition through the eyes of long-term residents provides insights that can be extended to similar neighbourhood housing contexts in contemporary England.

East Moor is a large estate (pop. 3200) located close to Wakefield city centre. According to the 2021 census, the main ethnic groups are white British (66%), Asian British (13%), and white "Other" (in this case, Eastern

Figure 1. Map of the Wakefield District.

European households) 10% (Local Government Association [LGA], 2022a). The estate was built in the 1930s, less than a mile from Parkhill colliery. Our oral history testimonies suggest close interconnections between pit and estate right up until it closed in 1982. Today employment and educational attainment levels are poorer on the estate than the UK average (LGA, 2022a). Most people rent their home from a social landlord although some are "right to buy" leaseholders who either live in their home or have rented it on the private market (LGA, 2022a). East Moor is knitted, to some degree, into the fabric of Wakefield city by bus links or a 20-minute walk. Today, East Moor has tree-lined streets typical of a "garden suburb" and retains a local rugby team and two schools. It is increasingly surrounded by new-build housing estates as Wakefield city expands and seeks to attract salaried commuters.

By contrast, the Warwick estate is located in Knottingley (pop. 13,000), the most easterly of Wakefield's Five Towns (see Figure 1). The town has a distinct identity rooted equally in farming and heavy industry linked to coal mining, glassware manufacture, and engineering. The Warwick estate (pop. 3800) was built in the 1960s to house miners, working at the nearby Kellingley colliery (1.5 miles to the east and started production in 1965), and their families. From our oral histories and local research (Warwick Ahead, 2012, p. 3), it is understood that almost all the original Warwick households had a family member working at the pit. Kellingley was the last pit in the UK to be closed in 2015. The Warwick was extended throughout the 1960s and 1970s to accommodate more families, but parts were demolished in the 1990s (Warwick Ahead, 2012, p. 4). Today, according to the 2021 census, it is majority white British (87%), with white "Other" (6%) as the next biggest group (LGA, 2022b). There are some three-generation families living on the estate (Warwick Ahead, 2012, p. 3) There is an even split of households who rent from a social landlord and those who are "Right to Buy" leaseholders, some of whom have moved on and leased to tenants on the private rental market (LGA, 2022b). Employment and educational attainment levels are poor relative to both the UK (LGA, 2022b) and the Knottingley average (LGA, 2024). The Warwick is peripheral to other parts of Knottingley, and buses do not travel there after 5 pm due to episodes of violence (local warehouse employer TK Maxx sends a private bus to escort its employees). Like East Moor, the Warwick is also increasingly surrounded by new-build housing estates and there are fears locally that the estate might be demolished in the near future.

4. Methodology

The article draws on data collected during the 2018–2022 ESRC-funded project Northern Exposure: Race, Nation and Disaffection in "Ordinary" Towns and Cities After Brexit. Four towns and small cities (Wakefield, Preston, Middlesbrough, and Halifax) were purposely selected for investigation of long-run social, economic, and political change. To recruit our participants, we targeted distinct neighbourhoods each with varying degrees of racial diversity and socioeconomic deprivation in each town and city. This article reports on two of these neighbourhoods. In each neighbourhood, we interviewed ten residents aged between 65–80 years. All were White British although some had migrated 'internally' from Ireland, Scotland, Wales, and the North-East of England in the 1960s and continue to inhabit hybrid identities and cultures beyond those offered by the categories of "England," "Yorkshire," or "the North." Eighteen of the twenty had lived in, or near to, their current home for most of their lives. Two were incomers who had married local people. All identified as working class although there were stark variations in incomes and asset wealth, a typical legacy of the hollowed-out industrial employment structure in the UK (see Sutcliffe-Braithwaite, 2021). In Knottingley, all had connections to the local pit either having worked there, been married to a miner, or had family working there. In East Moor, half the sample had direct connections with the local pit.

We adopted an oral history methodology and asked participants to narrate their personal recollections of social and spatial mobility, family formation, employment, housing, political events, and everyday community life. This enabled us to build analyses of how macro-currents of social, economic, and political change throughout the last six decades interpellated individual biographies, household mobilities, and urban geographies. Oral history methodology is useful for understanding these intersections between private and public and is typically mobilised to produce historical records which are inclusive of "lay" voices to offset, challenge, or compliment "official" narratives (Bornat, 2012). Our interviews were loosely structured and lasted typically ninety minutes. They took place either over the phone, in a local community centre, or in people's homes. We also conducted informal interviews with stakeholders, working in local authority and NGO roles, familiar with each location. We also visited neighbourhoods on multiple occasions to help contextualise the oral history data, visiting community centres to observe everyday interactions in both cases and walking each neighbourhood several times to build our own understandings of social and physical conditions. The article is informed by these testimonies and interpretations, but draws largely from the oral history interviews.

5. Findings

Both East Moor and the Warwick are legacies of forces emergent during English industrial modernity: the centrality of coal mining to national and colonial economies, trade unionism, uneven welfare state settlements, and "down to earth" working class identities and solidarities (Savage et al., 2005). They are both located in West Yorkshire, a significant regional economic power underpinned historically by its abundant coalfields, farmland, and canal and river network which pass through both Wakefield city and Knottingley. The historic "whiteness" of both estates reflects, perhaps, the social homogeneity of British coalfields more generally (see Massey & Wainwright, 1985; Sutcliffe-Braithwaite, 2021), or the "everyday political whiteness" (Ambikaipaker, 2018) and racist exclusions undergirding industrial work (see Virdee, 2014) and municipal housing provision in England (see Henderson & Karn, 1987). That said, East Moor has been diversifying gradually since the 1990s whilst the Warwick was linked from the start to a "cosmopolitan" pit (see Phillips, 2017)—many of the original miners being incomers from Scotland, Wales, and the North-East of England. In any case, it stands to reason that the decline of coalmining would change these estates irrevocably (Warwick Ahead, 2012). Whilst the estates were indelibly linked with the two pits, these were by no means the only employment options available to residents:

> We had three…glassworks which probably employed about 1,000 people each. We had about eight or nine foundries which probably had 20 people each all backing up the glassworks with the moulding, etc. We had a couple of engineering works which trained a lot of apprentices, you know, good engineering works. We had a shipyard. We had a power station. And then, while all that was going on when I was in me early 20s, they built Ferrybridge power station and Eggborough power station…you could literally pack a job in on the Friday if you didn't like it and start somewhere else on the Monday. (Johnny, 79, the Warwick)

Whilst women from the Warwick recounted similar memories, of course paid work had to be negotiated around marriage and child-rearing. Over in East Moor, in the 1950s, local hospital laundries and textiles factories were major employers for women:

> A couple of my friends went to work at Double Two [shirt manufacturer founded in 1940] and they said: "Why don't you come and give it a go?" And I did and I stayed there until I got married…it used to be in Kirkgate, in a factory, and my sister worked at an engineering place, she was a secretary, and if we came out she wouldn't walk on the same side as me because I worked in the factory, but you know it didn't bother me, it was hard, so then one of my friends got a job at Stanley Royd Laundry and she said: "They want people, why don't you come?" So I went and I actually got a job before I got married in 1959…you did all the nurses uniforms and things you know, and all the patient's nighties and things, but it was a good company and it was a lot smaller than Double Two so you knew people, and I stayed there until I was pregnant, and I left there and I didn't work again for quite a while. (Stella, 82, East Moor)

Here, Stella exemplifies how intra-class tensions could play out in working-class families and communities in an era often coloured with nostalgia about homogeneity and solidarity (see Lawrence, 2019). If local economies were robust, social lives were also reported to be relatively full. Both estates had allotments, musical troupes, choirs, and several pubs and social clubs, albeit these could be tough environments with established divisions, codes and, possibly, exclusions (see Schofield, 2023; Sutcliffe-Braithwaite, 2021):

> At the weekend wives were allowed in. [Laughs] It's a bit sexist like, but that's the way it was. The wives went out on a Saturday night and Sunday night….But during the week the lads would just go out and have their crack together and you know that's the way it worked. But Kellingley club and the Warbottle and the SYD club were the three places that we used, you know, predominantly by all the miners and the wives at the weekend. You know, as I say everybody had their locals. (Sammy, 61, the Warwick)

Beyond the estate, there were a huge number of pubs in both Knottingley and Wakefield city and a network of dance halls, variety clubs, and sports venues across the region where passions for rugby league, dancing, and performance could be enjoyed.

The Thatcher Government was determined to defeat the National Union of Miners (see Gildea, 2023), completing the decline of Britain's pits as major employers (Bennett et al., 2000). However, the devastation wreaked by this project played out differently on each estate. The 1984–1985 Miner's Strike created untold hardship for families on the Warwick where dozens of families were connected to the pit. The few miners on the Warwick who broke the picket and returned to work early are still remembered vividly as "scabs":

> [They] moved very quickly because at the end of the day, whoever it was, windows through, scab written on outside of the house on the doors, you know. That happened, you know. I'm not saying I did it. I mean I know it happened because I know, you know, people who moved from the area because it happened. (Sammy, 61, the Warwick)

In East Moor, by the time of the 1984–1985 Strike, Parkhill had already closed. One participant connected the pit closure to wider patterns of deindustrialisation within Wakefield city, creating a growing sense of social instability:

> I just felt that families were breaking apart….And I think a lot of that started when, when we first came up here of course there were pits. There were [pause], there were a lot of engineering firms. There were

> railway. Lot of people worked for them. There were the big laundry where a lot of women worked. There were lots of employment for people. All that employment started to go fairly quickly in a short time, you know. Once the mines finished, the laundries finished, the engineers finished. And people were moving away out of the area, the older people were going into flat[s]. The miners a lot of them migrated to the Selby coalfields. A lot of the jobs at the laundry, which the local women used to have, the big laundry, were finishing. (Carey, 79, East Moor)

Although Kellingley pit stayed open until the 2010s, the Warwick, according to residents, never fully recovered from the 1980s. As jobs were cut, household incomes dwindled, and the fun, edgy, social dramas played out in pubs and clubs dissipated (compare with Dahlberg, 2019). Similarly, on East Moor the social spaces gradually closed and daily habits were forced to change (echoing the findings of Sutcliffe-Braithwaite, 2021):

> We didn't travel to work like we do now. All teachers that were at our school, they all lived local. So, that's shattered the community a little bit when pit shutdown…people moved away or didn't have any money. Clubs and pubs bit by bit found it more and more difficult and shutdown…like I said travel more to work don't they. They might travel an hour, an hour and a half in your car every day. Where it used to be local." (Simon, 61, East Moor)

The biggest employing sectors in the Wakefield region today are healthcare, manufacturing, and logistics (Wakefield District Council, 2024). Indeed, one policy stakeholder described the contemporary employment profile as a "shit jobs miracle" referring to the amount of low paid, insecure jobs now available in huge packing and picking warehouses, including Amazon near Knottingley. Further, many of the daughters and granddaughters mentioned by our participants work in the care sector and need cars to commute, bringing an additional expense. Participants also noted that Knottingley still has three glass factories albeit these were interpreted by one participant as offering unpredictable shift patterns, destabilising local webs of (masculinised) leisure and solidarity:

> Whereas in the old days everybody worked…eight hour shifts, now everybody who is working [is] on 12 hours. All the big factories are on 12 hours….So you're not going to come home from work at 7 o'clock and go training to play rugby, or take a rugby team, or be a scout master. Or if you're on nights you can't do it anyway, can you? So all that side of it's died…we've no rugby league team, when we've had two or three. We've got one team of cricketers where we used to have three. We've one soccer team where we used to have three or four. So all the sport's sort of gone you know. (Johnny, 79, the Warwick)

Elsewhere ex-miner Johnny—an experienced volunteer—mentioned how bureaucratic "red tape" around registering and running sports teams had become more onerous over recent years and speculated that the leisure, not just working, habits of young people had changed, suggesting other factors affecting local sporting cultures. More broadly, almost all participants expressed dismay at the lack of amenities and facilities on their estates and in nearby locations. In East Moor, where grocery shopping options are minimal—this was often focused on the recent loss of the traditional open-air market in Wakefield city. Markets offering vibrant spaces and affordable produce are a well-understood resource for low-income households (see Gonzalez, 2018) and for older people "ageing in place" (see Phillips et al., 2021). They can also be avatars for a problematic form of urban nostalgia (Watson & Wells, 2005). Gill, however, hankered

less for an imaginary past than a present less dominated by the shopping mall and out-of-town leisure park operators courted by Wakefield council since at least the 1990s (see Goodchild, 2023):

> It's so disjointed Wakefield now, you used to be able to walk round and you'd be able to see everybody and talk to everybody….I think these, like the Riding Centre and Trinity Walk [shopping malls], they've spoilt it, I mean we had a lovely big market where Trinity Walk is…it used to be buzzing, but now it's just dead, and it's so sad…they're just putting flats up. I mean we've got the cinema at the Riding Centre but it's nothing, we used to have four cinemas in Wakefield, and shops and that used to go down into Kirkgate and down Westgate and there's nothing now. I mean we've got the theatre which is nice, but other than that there isn't anything. (Gill, 74, East Moor)

This sense of loss and deprivation around secure, everyday consumption went to another level on the Warwick where food poverty is extreme (at one point in 2022 there were three food banks and a "recipe club" dispensing free meal kits in Knottingley). Whereas East Moor residents can, in theory, rely on city centre chain supermarkets, Warwick residents are dependent on estate amenities (where there are only two small shops) and on Knottingley high street where there have been recent closures of retail banks, independent grocery shops, and the post office. Wakefield council no longer has a presence in Knottingley either, meaning low-income Warwick residents must travel to the next town to attend meetings about welfare rights and social security benefits, an increasing source of mental health stress in the UK when entitlements have been gradually tightened (JRF, 2024). One Warwick participant described how ill health and bereavement had led to her isolation, intensified by a deteriorating but securitised social and environmental landscape:

> Yes, everybody that I knew that lived up here, everybody, we were all friends, neighbours. We used to go to one another's house, sit in garden, have cups of tea, kids used to play, sit on coal bunkers, have a chat…all I've got [now] is a big fence between me and next door houses. And a small fence that goes right out that council put up…it's like living in a prison camp….I went up for a walk last week up here, and it's just a dumping ground. It used to be lovely and clean. There's old fridges, mattresses, settees, cookers, washers, fridge freezers, old beds, it were just a dumping ground. And it isn't nice, it isn't nice to look at now, you know what I mean. (Barbara, 65, the Warwick)

Others on the Warwick told of how the local library and swimming pool had been recently closed by the council, something that made parents and grandparents anxious given the waterways which flow through Knottingley. This was made worse by the fact that the local secondary school had recently adopted a "three strikes" policy regarding uniform compliance. Some parents on the Warwick were unable to access or afford the 'official' uniform leading to inevitable suspensions and truancy. The community hub had plans to organise a uniform exchange in response to this specific issue. The contrast with school uniform arrangements during the pit heyday was striking:

> I mean, we had nothing, I could nae go shopping and buy all the school uniforms. But we used to go…the pit shop and order their uniforms and the shoes and they would get them for us and take the money off the men's wages….We used to go and get the kids' uniforms and their shoes and whatever else they needed. Any household stuff you wanted, an iron or a kettle. Did nae have the money to go and buy everything like that. And [name removed] used to moan it came off his wages so the more money

> I used on clothes for the kids, the less pocket money he got [laughing] you know what I mean. (Deb, 83, the Warwick)

Wakefield city has a legacy network of community centres within its council estates. Historically, the centres served a white British majority, but as the estates have diversified, they have become vital spaces for outreach to different communities. Funding for these centres is deeply uncertain but the Covid-19 crisis saw the council re-establish direct subsidies to set them up as crisis hubs, food banks, and vaccination centres. In Eastmoor, where the local school has a body of pupils speaking 31 languages, two community centre staff members are Kosovan and another is Polish and there are concerted efforts to build connections between nationalities and cultures. That said, one participant claimed that historic divisions within the estate can complicate "integration" efforts:

> It's always been an estate has this where it's 'that side of the estate' and 'this side of the estate.' Always been like that. And it's like this side of the estate has its own shops. And its pub. It ain't got a pub anymore. But that side of the estate had its own shops and its pub. And people walked into town from that side. And they walked into town from this side, you know. So it's always been that side or this side of the estate what you lived. (Carey, 79, East Moor)

Albeit Carey notes that today the issue here is more with the relative transience of households, compared to years gone by:

> You know apart from either side and a lady across the road and an odd person round the corner, I just don't know who these families are. But the families come and go so quickly, you know. Because a lot of these houses in the street were bought, you know, through the miners. And they've been rented and re-rented and it's now their children are renting the properties you know, that sort of thing. And people are just coming and going.

One community centre worker told us the scale of the challenge trying to engage these households, especially single older men, some of whom became extremely isolated during lockdowns. Over on the Warwick, three key spaces try to support the community in important ways. One is the Kellingley Club, the former miner's welfare club—which serves as a multi-purpose local amenity for the town. The National Union of Miners still holds advice surgeries there and the club has a bar, a job club, and hosts local boxing and dance clubs for children. During the pandemic, it was also repurposed as an emergency food bank. The club is run by one local man who used Facebook Live to encourage donations and publicise his food deliveries. The Club is meaningful for local people but there are concerns about its ongoing funding which this participant linked with political neglect of the local community:

> I think it should stay open. It was put there for a purpose. Okay, the pit's gone, it was miner's club, but anybody could join that club, the facilities were great, the artists they got in on an evening, brilliant. We had them coming from all over the world, you had Tom Jones, you had Gene Pitney, you know? Shirley Bassey, you had them all. It was brilliant…they had 10-pin bowling up the stairs. Then they made it into a dance area, then that fell apart so they allowed one of my ex-boxers to open a gym for boxing….I say the same thing as I say with this place, don't expect any help from your local councillors [pause] they won't help you. They may say: "I'll listen to you," [pause] but don't expect that they go any further than that. (Donald, 82, the Warwick)

On the Warwick itself, there is a community hub and "the Addy"—a children's adventure playground with origins in 1970s child welfare activism. The community hub is run on a shoestring of small grants and volunteer time and can be hired by Warwick residents for small initiatives. In the post-pandemic period, it was also distributing food parcels and meal kits to residents. The Addy mainly supports younger people, although it also provides cheap lunches and warm space for older people at lunchtimes as well as the occasional volunteer-staffed event and outing. Donald compared the support offered by these initiatives with that provided by Wakefield Council:

> If there's anything goes off in this estate, nowadays, it's because of the likes of…the Hub or the Adventure Playground. That's what happens, them people will try and organise it. You come to anybody here…you say: "I've got an idea, I want to put…" [and they will say:] "Tell us your idea." "Okay, I'll see if I can talk to people." They all say that to me, get involved, let's develop it, let's get it going. Try and ask for support off Wakefield [Council], you won't get it. (Donald, 82, the Warwick)

Where funding comes into localities, voluntary sector groups often lack the infrastructure for managing paperwork-heavy systems of bidding, delivery, and audit monitoring or the regeneration potential they bring. For example, on the Warwick, community workers at the community hub and The Addy receive funds from Big Local, a grant-giving body linked with the National Lottery Fund. However, there have been difficulties administering grants, with allegations of infighting and conflict with local authority officers. There are also ironies in what happens to national funding. Controversial government schemes, such as the anti-radicalisation "Prevent" programme and the darkly titled "Controlling Migration Fund," have been channelled into more progressive projects locally. One example is the Community Harmony project: a two-year programme funding four areas of fine-grained work in east Wakefield, including East Moor. The scheme was successful in bringing together a majority White British neighbourhood group from East Moor with a local South Asian British community organisation. These networks, who would typically work in parallel we were informed by one local stakeholder, came together to organise neighbourhood "clean up" projects to improve the physical environment of their respective areas.

In Wakefield city, churches pick up much of the needed community infrastructural work, particularly in relation to asylum seekers and refugees. City of Sanctuary volunteers support households living in East Moor, for instance. Across both estates, some older residents remain active on committees, in political campaigning and running volunteer projects where experience and long-term perspective can be important resources cutting through the promises of grants and investments that never seem to arrive. On the Warwick there were several examples of mutual aid and organising undertaken informally by residents whether it be fundraising, cooking, or looking out for neighbours. Barbara, from the Warwick, expressed a form of intergenerational (and possibly gender) solidarity when she told us:

> If I saw somebody struggling with kids…I'll give them me last bit of food and I'd do without like I used to do with me own. I've done it with a few people. I've helped them out if they've….I won't see anybody struggle at all. To me last penny I'd say, here, I'll give you that, go on, go get them some stuff as long as there's something to eat. I always have done. From growing up that's the way I was fetched up, to help, do what you can. I might struggle meself, but I wouldn't let on I was struggling. But I'd help anybody. And give them me last penny I've got rather than see them without food or kids suffering. (Barbara, 65, the Warwick)

6. Conclusion

Poverty and deprivation levels in contemporary England are high but unevenly concentrated in spatial terms (ONS, 2021). One typical location where this is playing out is in council housing estates located in ex-industrial areas. The combination of stresses on poor neighbourhoods derives from individual household poverty and wider structures of marginalisation and disinvestment. These are also historically contingent. In this article, I have explored how residents in two case study neighbourhoods have experienced and inhabited these stresses over time. I contrasted the insecure, low-wage economies, typical of post-industrial zones across the UK, with a perceived abundance of paid employment opportunities during the 1950s and 1970s period. Whilst recollections can mobilise nostalgia for a "golden age," it seems clear that in both cases paid work was plentiful in and beyond the local pits albeit these would have been shaped by gender, class, and race divisions, not to mention patterns of illness and disability which we know are pronounced in some coalfields (Bohata et al., 2020; Riva et al., 2011). I also examined how the loss of these employment structures in Wakefield and Knottingley, not least the decline of the pits, was understood by some participants to have impacted on the social stability of the estates, increasing transience among neighbours and limiting sociability. Not that the estates should be romanticised on these fronts, intra-community divisions being mentioned by participants recalling the 1950s and 1960s:

> They were all good company with one another you know what I mean [whispers] apart from the Yorkshires….We had a few problems with them, they didn't like us….They didn't like our language—"Don't know what you're saying." "You should go back to Scotland, what you doing here?" But we used to retaliate and say: "Our men's come down to show your men how to work." Being nasty like but they were nasty to us. "My husband works in the glassworks." I says: "Oh my husband works in the pits. He goes down about 3,000 feet." You know what I mean, tit for tat sort of thing. (Deb, 83, the Warwick)

Similar sentiments surfaced elsewhere about a loss of community if we consider anxieties expressed about the ascendancy of US-style retail and leisure landscapes, the hollowing out of high streets, and the apparent withdrawal of basic local services. Again, we should caution against nostalgia and note the volunteering practices mentioned by participants. Nonetheless, the readings of change noted here offer, I suggest, insights into everyday constraints and deflations regarding the possibilities of contemporary urban life for older people on low incomes. These ever-decreasing possibilities are intensifying pressure on estates as residents ageing in place, without means, struggle to travel distances, manage increasing health problems, and rely on threadbare localised amenities. The article touched on some of the ways communities are trying to support residents and build mutual esteem. The article has provided, then, a historically contingent account of contemporary spatial stress by emphasising the significance of long-term residence, introducing not only feelings of loss and nostalgia, but agency and a resilient attachment to place. The capacity to access relatively secure jobs, housing, and neighbourhoods was and is not experienced equally in England owing *inter alia* to endemic racism, patriarchy and occupational division. The estates and households discussed in this article are sediments of these structural hierarchies. The aim of this article was not to prioritise whiteness as *the* lodestar of social, economic and political marginalisation, but to critically explore how this fraction of the working class in England—ensnared in the predations of capitalist modernity and nationalist closure—interprets their unfolding socio-spatial affairs.

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Conflict of Interests

The author declares no conflict of interests.

Data Availability

For updates on the Northern Exposure project see: https://northernexposure.leeds.ac.uk

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