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PREFACE

BY

JONATHAN BRADSHAW

FOR THE CENTENNIAL EDITION OF

POVERTY: A STUDY OF TOWN LIFE

BY

B. SEEBOHM ROWNTREE

I HAVE never managed to buy a copy of *Poverty: A study of town life*¹. Yet as a student of social policy, a teacher of research methods, and a research worker preoccupied with poverty, I have often needed to refer to it. I am therefore delighted that the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust decided to mark the centenary of the first publication of this important book with this facsimile edition, published by The Policy Press.

¹ The first edition was published in 1901 (by Macmillan). A second, third and fourth edition were published in 1902. In the second and subsequent editions Rowntree added an analysis of the probable effect of old age pensions on the poverty rate in York, York City Income and Expenditure Accounts, an appendix comparing marriage ages in various countries and some information relating to workhouse dietaries. Editions continued to be published until 1922.

The fourth edition is the one I have beside me as I write this preface. The volume that I have referred to in recent years in undertaking research on poverty has been the cheap Everyman Edition that was first published in 1902 and contained neither the Map of York showing the position of the Licensed Houses (which provides York social policy students with many amusing research opportunities), nor the photographs contained in the original. These have been faithfully reproduced in this edition.

The case for publishing this volume rests less on the need of scholars to have it to hand than on three important claims that can be made for the book:

- it had a remarkable impact on public understanding of poverty as well as on attitudes to the poor;
- it immediately had an impact on policy, influencing the spate of social reform enacted by the Liberal Government after 1906;
- Rowntree, in *Poverty*, established the British tradition of empirical social science research; he also established the tradition of social research designed to inform policy – to achieve what today is being called ‘evidence-based policy’.

Each of these claims for *Poverty* is discussed in this Preface, and the book is related to the modern context of poverty – nationally, internationally and in the City of York. But first let us start with the man and his lifetime work.

Social thought and social action

Social thought and social action is the title of Asa Briggs’ (1961, see also Briggs, 2000) biography of Seebohm Rowntree. It encapsulates the life and work of Rowntree very appropriately. In the spring of 1899 Benjamin Seebohm Rowntree, then aged 28, launched a survey of the population of working-class households

in York. It was his most important work and was to dominate the rest of his life. Benjamin Seebohm Rowntree was born in York in 1871, the third child of Joseph Rowntree (the Quaker who built up the York Cocoa Works and became a philanthropist), and his second wife, Emma Seebohm, the child of Danish Quakers. He was educated privately, then at Bootham School (a Quaker School in York) and then at Owen's College, Manchester (now the administrative centre of the University of Manchester) where he studied industrial chemistry (in order to become a nutritional chemist in the Cocoa Works) as well as history and literature. He returned to York in 1889 aged 18 without completing his degree to establish a chemical laboratory at the Cocoa Works. He became a member of the Board of Directors in 1897, and all his life combined his private research and involvement in public affairs with responsibilities as a hands-on manager of a thriving manufacturing business. Seebohm Rowntree made as important a contribution to the study and practice of industrial relations as he made to the study of poverty, being described by Urwick (1956, p 34) as "the British management movement's greatest pioneer". His experience in the manufacturing industry and his interest in the conditions of the workers (what he described as the 'human factor in business') is part of the background

that led to *Poverty*. His primary reason for writing *Poverty*, and more especially *The human needs of labour* (Rowntree, 1918), was concern about the efficiency of British workers – thus nutritional efficiency became the key criterion of his poverty standard.

The other two important influences in his background were Quakerism and Liberalism. The Quakers approach all political and social questions as moral questions. He followed in his father's footsteps as a regular teacher at the York Adult School, and visited the scholars in their working-class homes. For him "Christ's religion is no creed: it is life" (quoted in Briggs, 1961, p 13). The notes and lectures he left articulate his commitment to Quaker values: humility, attention to duty, the abnegation of self. As well as his contact with the poor in his factory and in the York Adult School, he was greatly moved by a visit he made to the slums of Newcastle in 1895: "The sense which remained with me after that night was that there is an overpowering amount of work to be done ... directly religious work, public work and social work" (Briggs, 1961, p 15).

Religious work was not to be his calling. But public work and social work were. He understood social work to be the need to study social problems, and to understand them.

His public work was undertaken mainly through his political commitment. Throughout his life Seebohm

Rowntree was a committed Liberal, active as an advisor to Liberal ministers in government between 1906 and 1923 and constantly in demand in the Liberal cause when they were out of office. His Liberalism was the new reforming Liberalism of the 1900s. His greatest political hero and close personal friend was David Lloyd George.

POVERTY: A STUDY OF TOWN LIFE

Rowntree was not the first person to study poverty in Britain. Henry Mayhew had popularised and stereotyped the poor in *London labour and the London poor* (1851). In *In darkest England, or, the way out* (1890), General William Booth of the Salvation Army had made parallels between the British poor and African tribes. Charles Booth published the first volume of his massive *Life and labour of the people of London* in 1889 and the last (17th) volume appeared two years after *Poverty*, in 1903. Booth's combination of humanitarianism with a quantitative approach heavily influenced Rowntree – "Booth's *Life and labour* made a profound impression on me, as it did upon the public generally in this and other countries, but I thought to myself, 'Well, one knows that there is a great deal of poverty in the East End of London but I wonder whether there is in provincial cities. Why not investigate York?'" (Briggs,

1961, p 17)². Booth was the first person to use large-scale surveys in Britain. He answered the question 'Who are the poor?' for the first time. He, perhaps reluctantly, espoused standards of minimum provision. But he was over-prolific, descriptive, judgmental and imprecise. As Kathleen Jones (1994) has said, "he provided only the 'dry bones' of the argument, there were others who could bring them to life" (p 62).

Rowntree had just married, and had been relieved at the Cocoa Works by the appointment of another chemist. He was free to devote the next two years to *Poverty*. He began the survey in January 1899 with most of the interviews undertaken between March and September, and the book was published in 1901³.

To a modern student of social science, *Poverty* may appear to be a rather curious volume, and it is worth drawing attention to some of its curiosities and

² Gillie (2000) claims that this is wrong (possibly a post-hoc rationalisation – a desire to be associated with the prestige of Booth's work). He argues that Rowntree was actually inspired to do the work as a follow-up study to the book by his father Joseph Rowntree and Arthur Sherwell, *The temperance problem and social reform*, published in 1899. He argues that the structure of the book is very similar and so is its emphasis on physical efficiency. The book contained discussions of dietaries and referred to the works of Atwater. Some of the fieldwork for *Temperance* was undertaken in York, and Gillie claims that the fieldwork periods for the two studies actually overlapped and was used in both studies. Certainly the reason given in *Poverty* for secondary poverty was primarily the consumption of alcohol.

³ A considerably faster process than *Poverty and progress*, which began in 1936 and was not published until 1941, though the outbreak of the Second World War was in part responsible for the delay.

reflecting on them before summarising the essence of the argument.

It was a study of poverty in one provincial city. Rowntree deliberately presented it as a study of a provincial town in contrast to London – in contrast to Booth's *Life and labour of the people of London*. However, he was at pains to claim:

Having satisfied myself that the conditions of life obtaining in my native city of York were not exceptional, and that they might be taken as fairly representative of the conditions existing in many, if not most, of our provincial towns ... I decided to undertake a detailed investigation into the social and economic conditions of the wage earning classes in that city. (p vi)

He also corresponded with Booth, and made efforts to compare his poverty estimates with those obtained by Booth. "The total proportions arrived at for the total population living in poverty in London and York respectively were ... London 30.7 per cent and York 27.84 per cent the proportion of the population living in poverty in York may be regarded as practically the same as in London..."⁴. Despite the claims for the typicality of York, York was chosen because Rowntree

⁴ This claim was disputed by MacGregor (1910), who argued that Rowntree had failed to take account of differences in the costs of living in York and London.

lived there, he was familiar with it, had some authority and influence (which was essential for obtaining the data he needed on wages), and it had the advantage of being small.

Poverty is based on a survey of the population – all working-class households in the City of York. His interviewers⁵ made visits to 11,560 households, containing 46,754 people. He distinguished between working-class households and others (on the basis of whether they kept servants). In modern terms it is a really remarkable fieldwork achievement⁶.

However, the schedule was very short, covering only:

- the number of the house
- the street
- the rent
- number of inmates (occupants)
- number of rooms
- number of houses sharing yards
- number of houses sharing water taps
- number of houses sharing closets
- whether the house was back-to-back
- whether there was a yard
- age and occupation of the householder and wife
- whether there were lodgers, and their occupation.

⁵ In fact, most of the data was collected by one paid visitor moving from house to house, helped by a team of part-time volunteers.

⁶ Peter Kaim-Caudle (1998) points out that if the investigator had worked 25 days a month for eight hours a day he would have spent about seven minutes with each family, including moving from house to house and making inquiries from neighbours.

Information on the gender and ages of children was collected under a column headed 'Remarks', together with interviewers' notes. These notes contain moral judgements (respectable, tidy, clean, sober and industrious, wife worse for drink – and so forth) that social scientists have since expunged from reports on household surveys.

Another reason why Rowntree was able to collect data on so many households was that he did not have to include an income schedule. The only income at that time (before even the old age pension had been introduced) was wages and outdoor relief, and he was able to obtain details of the wages paid by the major employers in York and attribute them on the basis of the information he had obtained about their job⁷. There was no need to collect information on deductions or benefits because there were none at the time.

The results are presented in a variety of different ways. Sections of the completed schedules are reproduced in full (see pp 16-25). Nearly 200 brief portraits representing different standards of living (A-D depending on their income and family composition) are detailed between pages 32 and 85 and there are more in the later chapters illustrating housing conditions. There are tables summarising the income and expenditure of individual families, and tables of

⁷ We now call this technique 'imputation'.

summary statistics. The latter generate the most admiration for they are produced without the benefit of a computer or even a mechanical calculator – imagine the labour involved in hand counting the number of people in 11,560 households, estimating the average earnings, the average rent, and the proportion falling below different thresholds. Rowntree made good use of tables, photographs, a map and graphics (including bar charts, pie charts and graphs, some in colour). He set a standard in his age, which continues in this age, for the clear dissemination of research findings.

The first 305 pages include a history of York (Chapter I) which Asa Briggs describes as “thin and scrappy” (Briggs, 1961, p 25). It then covers the methods of investigation (Chapter II), the analysis of the living standards of the households (Chapter III), the poverty lines and the estimates of the proportion in primary and secondary poverty (Chapter IV), the causes of poverty (Chapter V), chapters on housing and health (Chapters VI and VII), an investigation of the diets of 24 families using an expenditure diary (Chapter VIII) and a summary and conclusion (Chapter IX).

There follows over 100 pages of supplementary chapters and appendices including a long section on public houses (including the famous map), a description of elementary schools and their curricula soon after they were established in York (most still in use as primary schools), a church census, friendly

societies, poor relief, clergy deaths during the Black Death, clothing standards, and a comparison of York meat and milk supplies with those in Copenhagen and other cities. (The likely impact of universal old age pensions is discussed in later editions.)

The important findings

Rowntree introduced the distinction between primary and secondary poverty. In primary poverty were those “whose total earnings are insufficient to obtain the minimum necessities of life for mere physical efficiency” – 9.9% of the whole population of York (Rowntree, 1901). In secondary poverty were those “whose total earnings would be sufficient for the maintenance of merely physical efficiency were it not that some portion of it is absorbed by other expenditure, either useful or wasteful” – a further 17.9% of the population of the whole of York (1901, p viii). As we shall see, this distinction became a critical element in convincing the public that poverty was a structural rather than merely a behavioural problem.

“In order to arrive at a the minimum sum necessary to maintain families of various sizes in a state of physical efficiency”, he drew on his knowledge of nutrition⁸, in particular the work of Atwater at the US

⁸ Although, as Gillie (2000) points out, he was not the first person to do so to measure poverty.

Department of Agriculture. He allowed a diet that represented 3,478 calories per day for men, 2,923 for women and 2,634 for children. The diet for men was based on that required for moderate physical labour, despite the fact that he acknowledged that most men in his sample were heavy labourers. He also acknowledged that the diets (which excluded any butchers' meat) were less generous than the Poor Law menus.

In the context of the post Second World War reconceptualisation of poverty as relative, this 'quasi-scientific' quality of Rowntree's poverty line was criticised, even ridiculed. But at the time, the notion of physical efficiency gave authority to the threshold, coming as it did close to the emergence of public concerns about the physical capacity of workers in industry (in comparison with competitor nations) and the fighting capacity of recruits to the army. The details of Rowntree's dietary were not good – he himself revised them in the *Human needs of labour* and for *Poverty and progress* in the light of the advance of scientific knowledge. But his example of establishing a diet for nutritional adequacy, if not physical efficiency, still influences budget standards and studies of food poverty today (Parker, 1998). Perhaps one can be more critical of the lack of science involved in the non-food element of his budget – the allowance for

clothing and fuel which he based on rather casual enquiries of what working class families actually spent.

Rowntree's analysis of the characteristics of poor households is one of the most innovative and insightful elements in his work. He modestly says "It is no part of the object of this chapter to discuss the ultimate causes of poverty" (p 119). But that is what he does. He established for the first time that poverty was the result of structural not behavioural factors. Over half (52%) of those in primary poverty were in regular work, but wages were too low to maintain a moderate family in a state of physical efficiency. A further 16% were in poverty as the result of the death of the chief wage-earner, 5% as a result of illness or old age, 2% unemployment, 3% in irregular employment and 22% were poor due to being a large family. He presented this vitally important data in charts on page 121. He reinforced the point that low wages were to blame for most poverty.

It is thus seen that *the wages paid for unskilled labour in York are insufficient to provide food, shelter, and clothing adequate to maintain a family of moderate size in a state of bare physical efficiency.* It will be remembered that the above estimates of necessary minimum expenditure are based upon the assumption that the diet is even less generous than that allowed to able bodied paupers in the York

Workhouse, and that *no allowance is made for any expenditure other than that absolutely required for the maintenance of merely physical efficiency.* (p 133; original emphasis)

There follows the most evocative (and quoted) passage in the book:

And 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 anything to their church or chapel, or give any help to a neighbour which costs them money. They cannot save, nor can they join sick club or Trade Union, because they cannot pay the necessary subscriptions. The children must have not pocket money for dolls, marbles, or sweets. The fathers 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. (pp 133-34)

He deals in much less detail with the causes of secondary poverty – “Drink, betting and gambling. Ignorant or careless housekeeping, and other improvident expenditure, the latter often induced by irregularity of income” (p 142). Later he adds:

Though we speak of the above causes as those mainly accounting for most of the ‘secondary’ poverty, it must not be forgotten that they are themselves often the outcome of the adverse conditions under which too many of the working classes live. Housed for the most part in sordid streets, frequently under overcrowded and unhealthy condition, compelled very often to earn their bread by monotonous and laborious work, and unable, partly through limited education and partly through overtime and other causes of physical exhaustion to enjoy intellectual recreation, what wonder that many of these people fall a ready prey to the publican and the bookmaker? (pp 144-5)

He identified those living in secondary poverty by observation. They had incomes above the primary poverty line but were in obvious want or squalor – his investigator made notes when he saw family members undernourished or ill-clad (“the pinched faces and stunted bodies of the ragged children told their own tale of poverty” – p 116). Rowntree, probably accepting the weakness of this form of data collection, did not make much of secondary poverty. For his study of the unemployed (Rowntree and Lasker, 1911) he relied entirely on income in determining the poverty rate, and in the 1936 survey (1941) he again used only an income threshold, at the same time referring to the fact that some people above the income threshold will have been in poverty because of spending on non-essentials.

There follows immediately after this section Rowntree’s great insight into what has subsequently become known as the cycle of poverty. “The life of the labourer is marked by five alternating periods of want and comparative plenty” (p 136). They are described with a chart on page 137. People are more likely to be in poverty in childhood, when they are parents with dependent children, when children leave home and marry, and when they are no longer able to work

In *Poverty* Rowntree makes no policy recommendations, but in an important passage (at the end of Chapter 5) he gives a hint about his thinking:

The writer is not forgetful of the larger questions bearing upon the welfare of human society ... they include questions dealing with land tenure, with the relative duties and powers of the State and of the individual, and with legislation affecting the aggregation or the distribution of wealth. While the immediate causes of secondary poverty call for well considered and resolute action, its ultimate elimination will only be possible when these causes are dealt with as part of, and in relation to, the wider social problem. (p 145)

He returns to these themes in the conclusion, and adds:

... the objective of the writer, however, has been to state facts rather than to suggest remedies. He desires, nevertheless, to express his belief that however difficult the path of social progress may be, a way of advance will open out before patient and penetrating thought if inspired by a true human sympathy.

The dark shadow of the Malthusian philosophy has passed away, and no view of the ultimate scheme of things would now be accepted under which multitudes of men and women are doomed by inevitable law to struggle for existence so severe as necessarily to cripple or destroy the higher parts of their nature. (pp 304-5)

The chapters on housing and health tend to receive less attention, but they are no less impressive and pioneering.

The housing chapter reveals that some districts of York had very bad overcrowding and the slum conditions were as bad as the worst in London. It also reveals that overcrowding was related to the inability to pay higher rents. He estimated that the rents were absorbing an average of 29% of the income of families earning less than 18s per week. The findings on the state of York housing were to stimulate his father to establish the Joseph Rowntree Village Trust and the building of New Earswick began in 1902.

The health chapter traces the relationship between poverty and health, summarising data on the causes of death, and exploring mortality rates of adults and children by the social conditions in three different areas of York – the mortality rates in the poorest area are more than double those in the richer areas (echoes of the Acheson Report, 1998). It also includes the results of a survey undertaken by Rowntree of the physical condition of school children, giving height and weight curves by age and whether the children are classified as in the poorest, middling or highest class. This chapter also reports that the physical condition of half the people at recruiting stations in York, Leeds and Sheffield between 1897 and 1901 were not up to the Army's standard. He also refers to the threat to

the competitiveness of British industry of an underfed workforce⁹.

The final substantive chapter compares the calorific values of a sample of York families with those obtaining in the workhouse, prisons, and recommended requirements of Atwater (1895). He concludes:

... the labouring classes, upon whom the bulk of the muscular work falls, and who form so large a proportion of the industrial population, are *seriously underfed*. The average energy value of the diet in the case of the fourteen families selected for study being no less than 23 per cent below standard ... The inquiry, it is true, has shown that the money available for the purchase of food is not always spent in the most economical way, but the fact remains that unless an unreasonably stringent diet be adopted, the means to purchase a sufficient supply of nourishing food are not possessed by the labourers and their families. (pp 259-60, emphasis original)

⁹ A couple of years later the Inspector General of Recruiting was to report that a high proportion of recruits for the Boer War were medically unfit.

The impact of POVERTY on thought

In 1902 Samuel Barnett, a respected social reformer of his period, claimed "the gain of Booth's and Rowntree's work has been ... a certain modification of public opinion. The facts, disputed or not, are preparing the public mind for reforms and for efforts. Perhaps this is the best result of any work" (quoted in Meacham, 1987, p 117). The facts revealed in *Poverty* finally put the nail in the coffin of the ghastly calculus of the Charity Organisation Society (COS). Before *Poverty*, the COS, founded in 1869, had been most influential in public understanding of the causes of poverty and its solution. They made a sharp distinction between the 'deserving' and 'undeserving' poor, and blamed poverty in the cities largely on the behaviour of the poor themselves. They argued that charity towards the poor was foolish and cruel, and that the poor could only be helped by strengthening those "influences which make good character, good work and good wages" (Bosanquet, quoted in Briggs, 1961, p 21). The COS based their views on families they knew, and they *knew* that by wise guidance, through casework, the poor would respond to the principles of political economy. Rowntree may well have had them in mind and thought about their response to his study – in drawing the primary poverty line so tightly, in distinguishing so clearly between primary and

secondary poverty and in his careful assessment of the causes of poverty. He thought that his facts could not be argued with. He may have had the COS in mind in a particular footnote on page 135 that seems to speak to them directly:

Some readers may be inclined to say, upon reading the above, 'This surely is an overstatement. Look at the thousands of families with incomes of 18s to 21s or even less where the men do smoke and do spend money upon drink, and the women do spend money on dress and recreation, and yet, in spite of it all, they seem happy and contented, and the men are good workmen!' Such arguments against the actual pressure and consequences of poverty will, however, upon closer investigation be found to be illusory ... [this illustrates] the danger of forming arguments without thoroughly investigating them.... (p 135, footnote 1)

Needless to say it was the COS that led the attack on the results of *Poverty* when it was published. Charles Loch, the COS secretary, was scathing about "generalisations cloaked in numerical phraseology" (quoted in Briggs, 1961, p 35), and there was a correspondence in *The Times* and other newspapers (see Harris, 2000). There followed a detailed exchange by pamphlet between Helen Bosanquet, the wife of the

philosopher Bernard Bosanquet, and a leading member of the COS, and Rowntree, which was concerned with three issues; whether Booth's and Rowntree's findings were similar, whether the methods used by Rowntree to determine incomes was reliable, and whether the efficiency standard was too generous. Bowpitt (2000) has reviewed this debate and concludes that ultimately Rowntree had no way of refuting the COS arguments, because although they might be dressed up as arguments about evidence and method, they derived from a particular view of human nature. Indeed Rowntree seemed to accept this when he suggested that the fundamental difference between himself and Helen Bosanquet reflected her attachment to "the extreme wing of the Individualistic school [which] unduly magnifies what may be done for the amelioration of social conditions through the personal effort and self-reliance of the individual, and correspondingly minimises the sphere of State intervention" (quoted in Gillie, 2000, p 97)

These disputes about values were further to be fought out in the arena of the Royal Commission on the Poor Laws which included a strong representation from the COS (Charles Loch, Helen Bosanquet and Octavia Hill), set against the formidable Beatrice Webb, supported by the Fabians. Beatrice Webb was a cousin of Charles Booth and had worked on his surveys. The Webbs had visited Rowntree in York in 1899 while

he was working on poverty. In her diaries Beatrice Webb (1948) mentions only meeting Rowntree once ("at a pleasant and useful party") in 1906, when Rowntree promised to help with the collection of statistics about pauperism. She was a Socialist, Rowntree a Liberal. So it is difficult to be certain how influential *Poverty* was on the Royal Commission. But she had the same commitment to facts and research into the causes and consequences of poverty. "Facts, facts, facts. The Commission's work was extensive, partly because Beatrice drove on past the collection of opinions to the collection of empirical data" (Jones, 1994, p 87). There was an exhaustive statistical survey of the pauper population in July 1907 published as Part II of the report, and Beatrice Webb even raised money from Fabian sympathisers to set up investigations of a variety of topics. This was a war of ideas fought with great bitterness. The result of all this was the *Minority Report* (1909), which argued that poverty was not due to personal failing but due to capitalist organisation. The solution was to do away with Voluntarism, and the Poor Law. The non-able-bodied poor should become the responsibility of local authorities and the able-bodied poor of a Ministry of Labour. "The majority and minority proceeded from different views of Man, different views of society, different experience, different knowledge base" (Jones, 1994, p 93). Part of the knowledge base had been contributed by *Poverty*.

For the last 60 years, poverty in Britain (but not in the US) has been understood as a structural problem rather than a behavioural one. From time to time there have been vague echoes of COS ideology, for example when Sir Keith Joseph called on the ESRC to establish a research programme to investigate transmitted deprivation, or in discussions about the underclass (Smith, 1992) or more recently the socially excluded (Levitas, 1999). During the Thatcher years, Conservative ministers would from time to time argue there was no such thing as poverty and the Institute of Economic Affairs has published the views of some modern COS exponents such as Norman Dennis (1997) and the American Charles Murray (1984). But in general, in part thanks to the legacy of Rowntree, the tendency has been to blame poverty and not the poor.

The impact of POVERTY on policy

As we have seen, Rowntree's main objective was not idle inquiry but social reform – he sought to change minds and influence policy, not with rhetoric but with facts. That aspiration continues to this day in the work of many social scientists and those that support them, including the Rowntree Trusts.

There may be doubts about the influence of *Poverty* on the *Minority Report* but there can be no doubts about its impact on policy. Its findings contributed to the

hunger for reform that resulted in the Liberal election victory with a majority of 356 in 1906. The book had an immediate impact among leading Liberal politicians including the two key reformers – the ‘Heavenly Twins’ of Social Reform, Churchill and Lloyd George.

The young Winston Churchill bought a copy of the first edition of *Poverty*, and having read it, wrote to friends urging them to read it. “I have lately been reading a book by Mr Rowntree called *Poverty* which has impressed me very much, and which I strongly recommend you to read.... For my own part, I see little glory in an Empire which can rule the waves and is unable to flush its sewers” (quoted in Churchill, 1967, p 32). He told an audience in Blackpool in January 1902 “I have been reading a book which has fairly made my hair stand on end, written by a Mr Rowntree who deals with poverty in the town of York” (Churchill, 1967, p 33). Randolph Churchill mentions these in the context of a section of his biography of his father where he is in search of a middle way in British politics. In 1904 Churchill crossed the floor of the House of Commons and joined the Liberals. He was appointed President of the Board of Trade in 1908, in Asquith’s reforming Liberal government.

Lloyd George visited Rowntree in York in 1907, when President of the Board of Trade, and became a close personal friend. Briggs reports that in speeches

in 1909 and 1910 Lloyd George waved *Poverty* at the crowds, although Rowntree teased Lloyd George by suggesting that he had never actually read the book. In 1908, Lloyd George became Chancellor of the Exchequer, appointing Rowntree to a committee concerned with the rating of land, and later, in the First World War, he made him Director of the Welfare Department at the Ministry of Munitions.

Included among the spate of legislation that was inspired by the 'Heavenly Twins' and directly connected to Rowntree's concerns were the 1906 Education (Provision of Meals) Act, which among other things, empowered local authorities to provide school meals in elementary schools. This Act also included powers which eventually led to a system of school clinics that were effectively the beginning of a National Health Service. There followed the 1907 Workmen's Compensation Act, the Labour Exchanges Act of 1908 (implemented by a civil servant called William Beveridge), the 1908 Old Age Pensions Act and eventually the 1911 National Insurance Act, which provided unemployment and health insurance.

Rowntree continued to be active in public affairs during the interwar years, particularly as an advisor to the Liberal leaders on social issues. He became a member of the subcommittee that advised Sir William Beveridge about the level of subsistence income which would be used to fix the National Insurance and

National Assistance scales. Rowntree drew on the work that he had done for *Poverty and progress* (1941), his second survey of poverty in York. However, as with the Unemployment Assistance Board (Lynes, 1977), Rowntree's 'human needs' standard was not the only or indeed the most important determinant of the scales of benefit. Also critical were the wages paid to unskilled workers and the level of existing unemployment benefits. It was primary poverty rather than human needs – minimum subsistence rather than social adequacy – that determined the Beveridge scales. So the Beveridge scales have their basis in the 1899 primary poverty standard (Veit-Wilson, 2000). The scales recommended were uprated in line with prices and introduced as the National Insurance scales in 1946 and the National Assistance scales in 1948. National Assistance became Supplementary Benefit in 1966 and Supplementary Benefit became Income Support in 1988. So the social assistance scheme in Britain today which determines the living standards of one person in eight of the population owes its origins to Rowntree's 1899 poverty standard¹⁰.

¹⁰ Albeit that they have more or less doubled in value in real terms. However, in comparison with earnings, they remained remarkably stable until 1980, when the link with earnings was broken.

Rowntree and the British empirical tradition

It is also arguable that this work established the tradition of applied social research in British social science. Rowntree's book can claim to be the first quasi-scientific empirical study of the subject – scientific in the sense that it was based on the careful and systematic collection of facts, with a clearly specified poverty standard, which at the time had some scientific basis, and against which household income could be compared. It was, in fact, the first sociological survey of the population, and established a tradition of empirical sociological inquiry that it is perhaps particularly British.

Poverty inspired a host of other local studies of poverty including those in Oxford, Norwich, Merseyside, and Bristol, and by Bowley and Burnett-Hurst (1915) in five towns (Northampton, Warrington, Stanley, Reading and Bolton). Macnicol (1998) claims

The interwar years poverty surveys took a great pride in their empirical sophistication and accuracy of measurement. Following Rowntree, they made a fetish out of decimal points and calorific values, and their 'scientific' findings undoubtedly became a source of real concern to the national government in the 1930s, since they

forcefully revealed the inadequacy of benefits and wages in the case of large families¹¹. (p 273)

In the *Human needs of labour* (1918) Rowntree elaborated and refined the poverty line and further revised it in a new version published in 1937 (see Harris, 2000). It was this threshold that was employed in *Poverty and progress: A second survey of poverty in York* (1941), undertaken in 1936. In that study he found 3.9% of the total population of York were living below the primary poverty line and 17.7% were living below the 'human needs' standard. In 1950 he undertook a third survey of poverty in York, published as *Poverty and the welfare state: A third social survey of York dealing only with economic questions* (Rowntree and Lavers, 1951), using the 'human needs' standard with some modifications. The three York surveys constitute a unique record of poverty and how it changed in Britain over the first half of the 20th century. As we shall see, there are no studies or statistical series that enable us to monitor poverty in Britain over the second half of the 20th century.

As we have seen in *Poverty*, Rowntree went out of his way not to espouse any particular programme for reform. But his study was fundamentally aimed at achieving change. This has been misunderstood by

¹¹ He goes on to blame Rowntree for the neglect of poverty among elderly people in his own and other surveys, claiming variously that he was highly masculinist, male breadwinner, and-child centred.

those critical of the absolute notion of poverty, and in particular the harshness of Rowntree's subsistence diet. As Veit-Wilson (1986) has pointed out in his notable article 'Paradigms of poverty: a rehabilitation of Seebohm Rowntree', these critics of Rowntree have failed to distinguish between the methodological and technical issue of establishing a poverty line and the issue of the relief of poverty. Rowntree was using the poverty standard as "a heuristic device to convince individualists that the lifestyle of the poor was at least in part caused by low income and not by improvidence" (p 69). He knew his potential critics would be greatly challenged by his findings. He did not espouse the standard; indeed it is clear from some of the extracts quoted above that he thought it was completely inadequate. He was also not convinced of the distinction between primary and secondary poverty, and in the end made very little of the distinction, in the later surveys dropping secondary poverty altogether and replacing it with a more generous 'human needs' standard which included allowances for personal and social expenditure. Indeed the interwar poverty investigators failed to make any allowance for expenditure on personal sundries, and Harris (2000) claims that Rowntree was the first to argue that a family should be regarded as living in poverty if its income did not allow it to participate in at least some of the normal recreational activities of the day.

*Poverty research in the second half
of the 20th century*

When poverty research re-emerged after the Second World War it did so with a new conceptualisation and with new methods. If Rowntree had been the dominant figure of pre-war poverty research, Peter Townsend dominated post-war poverty research. He sought to create an understanding of poverty that encompassed both developing and developed societies and over time. The intellectual framework that he found was the concept of relative deprivation:

Individuals, families and groups in the population can be said to be in poverty when they lack the resources to obtain the types of diet, participate in the activities and have the living conditions and amenities which are customary, or 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, p 31)

Through this definition, poverty becomes not merely an inability to purchase the necessities for a meagre existence, but also the inability to grasp the abundance, comforts and opportunities in society.

Poverty is now a dynamic concept and will vary over time and between societies. Indeed poverty on this understanding is socially constructed through occupational, educational, economic and other systems that establish living standards.

In the post Second World War period a great variety of research techniques have been pursued in seeking to operationalise the notion of poverty empirically. Efforts have included the following.

Budget standards

Following the tradition of Rowntree, budget standards research has been reintroduced into the portfolio. Bradshaw et al (1993) used the method to construct a list of commodities, employing normative judgements, supported by a combination of scientific and behavioural evidence. They then priced the budget and used it as an income standard – anyone living at or below that standard is in poverty. In Britain budget standards have been derived to represent a *minimum adequate standard* (Parker, 1998) and a *modest but adequate standard* (Bradshaw, 1993). They have also been developed in the USA (Bernstein et al, 2000) and Australia (Saunders et al, 1998).

Component-and-multiplier approach

The US poverty standard was developed using a related concept – what one might call a '*component-and-multiplier*' approach. Orshansky took the costs of a

minimal food budget for different family sizes and derived poverty thresholds by multiplying these costs by three – that being the inverse of the share of money income spent on food by the average family (Orshansky, 1965, 1969). Bradbury and Jantti (1999) have applied the US poverty standard to (circa 1995) Luxembourg Income Survey data using purchasing power parities.

Expenditure data

A variety of poverty standards have been derived from *expenditure data*. So, for example, the point of the income distribution where households spend more than a given proportion on necessities can be used (Bradshaw et al, 1987). Or the point on the income distribution where all income is spent and/or nothing spent on non-necessities (Saunders et al, 1999).

Benefit linked income standard

Some countries have employed a *benefit linked income standard* to define poverty. The official social assistance scales can be used to define a threshold. A standard of this type became the official definition in the UK in a series of *Low Income Statistics* based on the Family Expenditure Survey produced by the government until 1985. Heikkila and McCausland (1997) tried this technique using OECD data. Another technique combining expenditure and benefits has been used to estimate the budget shares spent on necessities (food,

fuel and clothing) of those on Income Support and to fix an income poverty line based on that budget standard (Bradshaw and Morgan, 1987).

Social indicators

The main way that relative poverty has been operationalised has been using *social indicators*. Townsend (1979) was the first to seek to operationalise this approach. For a national survey of poverty carried out in 1968/69 he built up a list of 60 indicators of styles of living. He then reduced these to 12 items to form a deprivation index, and, for each respondent, he counted the numbers lacking items on the index. Townsend's work was subject to criticisms. In the light of these, Mack and Lansley developed the social indicator methodology in the Breadline Britain Surveys in 1983 (Mack and Lansley, 1985) and 1990 (Gordon and Pantazis, 1997). Mack and Lansley drew up a list of items and then asked a sample of the population whether they considered them to be necessities. If over 50% of the population considered an item to be a necessity then it was included as a socially perceived necessity (a 'consensual' indicator of poverty). The sample were then asked whether they possessed the item and if they did not, whether they lacked it because they could not afford it. Only those items which were lacking because they could not be afforded were included in the count of items lacking. Nolan and

Whelan (1996) developed the technique by using social indicators in combination with income thresholds. We have recently elaborated this method in a new survey of poverty and social exclusion in Britain (Gordon et al, 2000) which seeks to extend the range of indicators to encompass social exclusion as well as poverty. The European Community Household Panel Survey has questions based on the social indicator methodology and Dirven et al (2000) have been using them to establish a basic index of deprivation.

Subjective measures

These are where the population determine a poverty income threshold, which can also be used to measure absolute poverty. Thus, for example, after the World Summit on Social Development in Copenhagen in 1995, 117 countries adopted a declaration and programme of action which included commitments to eradicate *absolute* poverty and to reduce *overall* poverty, drawing up national poverty alleviation plans as a priority (UN, 1995). Townsend and others (1997) have attempted to operationalise this notion of absolute poverty and overall poverty using subjective methods and in more detail in the 1999 Poverty and Social Exclusion Survey of Britain (Gordon et al, 2000).

Household income threshold

However, the most common method used by national governments and international bodies to make

comparisons is to *relate household income to a threshold*. For example Abel Smith and Townsend (1965), in their 'rediscovery of poverty' study *The poor and the poorest*, applied the then national assistance scales to income data derived from the Family Expenditure Survey. They not only used 100% of the NAB scales but also 120% and 140%, on the grounds that the actual level of living of people dependent on national assistance was rather higher than the scales, due to the fact that some earnings and capital were disregarded in assessing social assistance and claimants were also receiving additional payments to cover the costs of heating and special diets. Following their study, a standard of this type was used by the British government in what became the *Low Income Statistics*, based on the Family Expenditure Survey and produced until 1985. The *Low Income Statistics* series was abandoned by the Conservative government after 1995 on the grounds that the thresholds of 120% and 140% incorporated too many people and that increasing the real level of social assistance (in order to help the poor) had the absurd consequence of increasing the number of people defined as poor. The *Low Income Statistics* series was replaced by the Households Below Average Income series (HBAI), with estimates now produced annually by Department of Social Security (DSS, 1999) derived from the Family Resources Survey. This series derives an estimate of the number of

households living below a proportion of the mean, usually 50%. Eurostat, in its first analysis of poverty derived from the European Community Household Panel Survey (ECHPS), also estimated the proportion of households, individuals and children living below a threshold of half national average income (Eurostat, 1997). More recently Eurostat has adopted 60% of the median as the EU poverty threshold (Eurostat, 1999). There have been a number of criticisms of this income-based standard:

- that it is a measure of inequality not poverty;
- that it is essentially arbitrary;
- that in some countries with dispersed income distributions it produces unreasonably large poverty rates;
- that income is a poor indicator of command over resources;
- and, for these and other reasons, the measure lacks the type of impact which had been associated with the findings of the studies based on more absolute notions of poverty.

It is remarkable how much more impact Rowntree had on policy than most of the poverty research in the post-war period. With the exception perhaps of *The poor and poorest* (Abel Smith and Townsend, 1965) which (significantly) used the social assistance scales as its poverty standard, research using relative measures of poverty have made little impact on policy. It was partly

for this reason that we sought to bring back to use the budget standards approach to the measurement of poverty (Bradshaw, 1993), but with little effect¹². Somehow the relative concept of poverty has failed to deliver the moral and political clout that Rowntree achieved with his absolutist standard.

One response to this is that in *Opportunities for all* (DSS, 1999) the government has begun to develop a range of indicators (for children, people of working age and older people) which it will use to monitor the success of its anti-poverty strategy. These indicators include the HBAI income thresholds but also a range of other indicators encompassing physical, cognitive and behavioural outcomes (see Bradshaw, 2000).

Trends in poverty in Britain

There is no series which enables us to trace trends in poverty over the whole post Second World War period¹³. However, the spate of legislation in the 1940s

¹² Peter Lilley, the then Secretary of State for Social Security, in reply to a challenge from the late Donald Dewar (Labour spokesman on Social Security) said, "The Hon Gentleman said that the Rowntree report spelt out an 'austere low cost budget' - a budget that allows the poorest only a video recorder, a camera, and a television set...." (See Bradshaw, 1993, p 238).

¹³ There is a series that traces inequalities in the distribution of income from 1961 (Goodman and Webb, 1995) and this shows that there had been periods of rising inequalities in the distribution before 1979, for example in the late 1960s, but that overall during this period the income distribution was relatively stable.

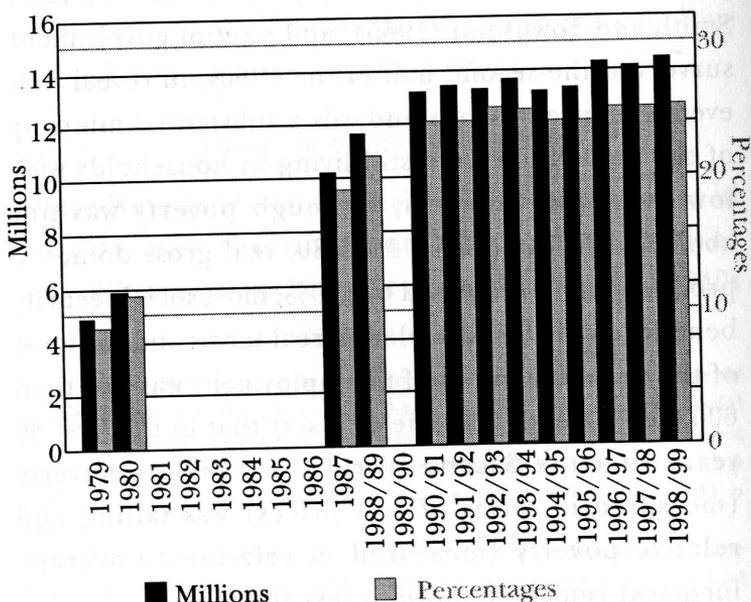
which led, inter alia, to the introduction of family allowances, national insurance, national assistance and a free health service, helped to ensure that the risk of poverty in post-war Britain was lower than the pre-war population had experienced. There was a certain degree of complacency in the immediate post-war period, as there was a widely-held belief that full employment and the welfare state had abolished poverty – partly informed by the results of Rowntree's third study of poverty in York in 1950 (Rowntree and Lavers, 1951) which found only 1.66% of the population of York in primary poverty. It took Abel Smith and Townsend (1965), and a set of government surveys in the second half of the 1960s, to reveal that even by conventional standards a substantial minority of the population were still living in households with low incomes. However, although poverty was not abolished in the period 1945-80, real gross domestic product (GDP) increased by 139%, most social security benefits more than doubled in real terms and for most of the period the level of unemployment was less than 600,000. Overall it is safe to assert that in the first 30 years after the Second World War absolute poverty (measured in terms of real prices) was falling and relative poverty (measured in relation to average incomes) remained more or less stable.

In the years since 1979 we now know that absolute poverty remained stable and that relative poverty

increased about three-fold. The main source of data over this period is the HBAI series.

Figure 1 shows that the proportion of individuals in poverty increased from 9% in 1979 to 25% in 1997/98. Most of the increase in poverty took place in the 1980s. Poverty rates have been fairly stable in the 1990s, although there is as yet no evidence of a decline in the face of the Labour government's welfare reforms introduced after 1997.

FIGURE 1: INDIVIDUALS IN BRITAIN IN HOUSEHOLDS WITH BELOW HALF AVERAGE INCOME



Note: Including self-employed, after housing costs

Source: DSS (2000 and other years)

There are three broad explanations for this sharp increase in poverty.

Economic factors

High levels of unemployment; the concentration of work in fewer households – more two-earner households/more workless households; the increase in part-time, episodic and insecure jobs; the increased dispersion of earnings – more low pay.

Demographic factors

Particularly the increase in the numbers of older people in the population especially poor, very old women; the 1960s baby-boomers seeking employment in an economy without enough jobs and the increase in the number of lone-parent families – mainly as a result of divorce and cohabitation breakdown.

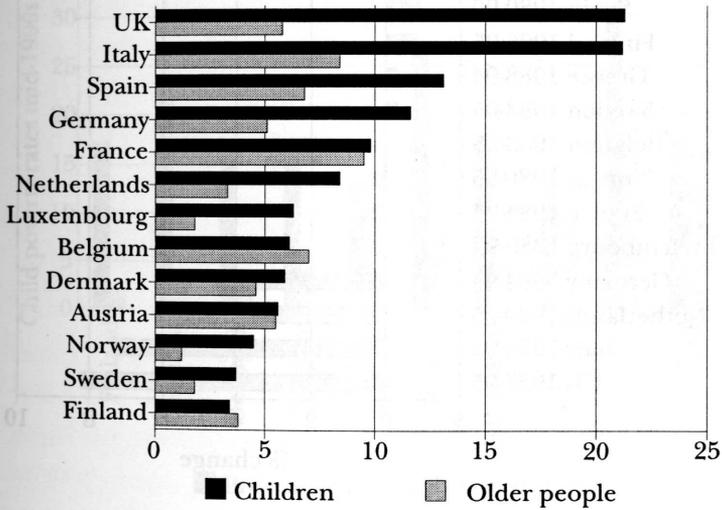
Policy factors

The Thatcherite policy of rolling back the boundaries of the welfare state undoubtedly left it less capable of protecting the population against economic and demographic change. Some benefits were abolished; others were frozen and/or uprated only in line with prices; there was a massive shift from direct taxation to indirect taxation; and cuts in some services – most notably housing subsidies – which resulted in a sharp rise in real rents.

How do we compare?

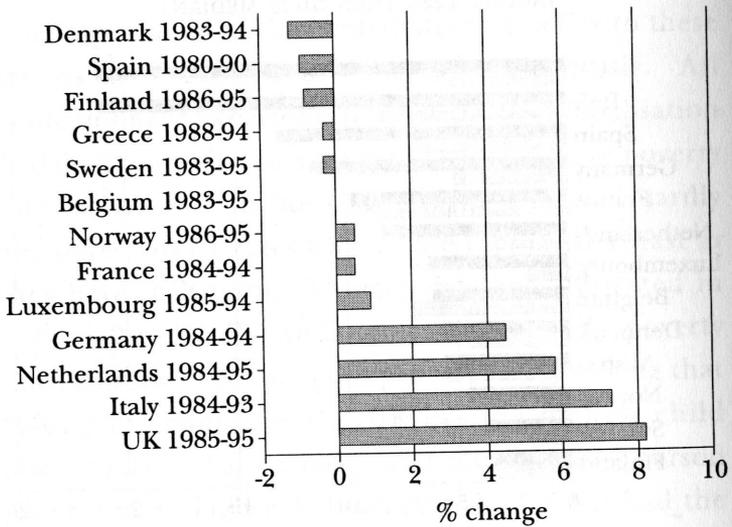
The importance of the contribution of policy to these trends is illustrated by comparative analysis. All countries have experienced the impact of globalisation and demographic transitions but very few have poverty rates as large as in the United Kingdom, and hardly any have poverty rates which have increased as fast as they have in Britain. These points are illustrated in Figures 2 to 4. Figure 2 compares the child poverty rates and the older people's poverty rate, showing that among EU countries the UK has the highest child poverty rate and also a comparatively high older person poverty rate. Figure 3 shows that the UK has had the second (only to Italy) fastest growth in the child poverty rate – about half the countries have had no increase in their child poverty in the periods covered. Figure 4 compares pre-transfer poverty rates with poverty rates after the impact of taxes and benefits. It shows that our market-generated child poverty rates are the highest of the countries covered, but also that the transfers – the package of social security benefits and taxes for those out of the labour market or in the labour market and low paid – are not as effective as those of other countries in mitigating market-generated poverty.

FIGURE 2: PROPORTION IN POVERTY (EQUIVALENT INCOME LESS THAN 50% MEDIAN)



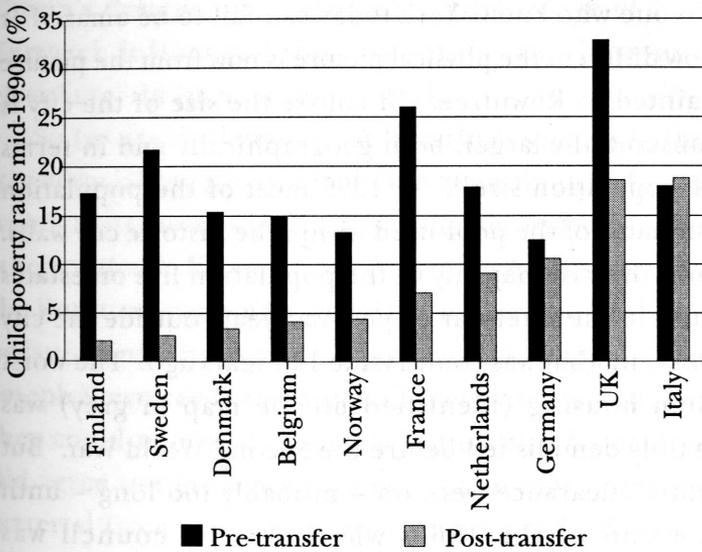
Source: Luxembourg Income Survey
(Bradbury and Jantti, 1999)

FIGURE 3: TRENDS IN CHILD POVERTY



Source: Luxembourg Income Survey
(Bradbury and Jantti, 1999)

FIGURE 4: IMPACT OF TRANSFERS ON CHILD POVERTY RATES



Source: Luxembourg Income Survey
(Bradbury and Jantti, 1999)

What about poverty in York today?

No one who knows York today can fail to be amazed at how different the physical picture is now from the picture painted by Rowntree. Of course the size of the city is substantially larger, both geographically and in terms of population size¹⁴. In 1899 most of the population and most of the poor lived within the historic city walls. Now the vast majority of the population live on estates built in the inter-war or post-war years outside the city walls, in what was countryside 100 years ago. The worst slum housing (identified on the map in grey) was mainly demolished before the Second World War. But 'slum' clearance went on – probably too long – until the end of the 1960s when the city council was persuaded to replace demolition with improvement. Many of the areas cleared in the heart of the city were left undeveloped until, thanks to a plan developed by Lord Esher, the sites began to be used for new town housing. This has slowly resulted in a drift back of (mainly affluent) people to the heart of the city.

In its slum clearance and new build policies York was lucky to have avoided entirely the erection of tower blocks and flats. Most of the people cleared from slums before and after the Second World War were rehoused in social housing in suburbs of semi-detached dwellings

¹⁴ In 1899 York covered an area of 3,692 acres, contained 15,000 houses and a population of 75,812. In 1991 it covered an area of 7,282 acres, containing 36,000 dwellings with a population of 101,436. In 1996 the boundaries were expanded and York became a Unitary Authority.

with gardens and parks. There is no doubt that Unwin's designs for Rowntree's model village of New Earswick influenced the local authority (here and elsewhere) in its planning in York.

So (to use the language of Beveridge's giants in the way of social progress), *squalor* has been abolished (and with it most *disease* – no claim is made for *ignorance*). But is York without *idleness* and *want*? As one way of celebrating the Rowntree centenary we might answer that question by launching a new survey of poverty in York today. The Joseph Rowntree Foundation, in their wisdom, felt that they could not justify a survey just of York¹⁵, but they did agree to fund a project designed to draw together material from existing sources on poverty in the City of York. The report on this work has been published (Huby et al, 1999). It drew on data on employment, earnings, welfare benefits, education, health and housing and explored the groups at risk of poverty. It also used the new techniques of geographical information systems to map the spatial distribution of poverty.

We concluded that Rowntree's claim that the conditions of life in York were not exceptional and were fairly representative, is remarkably true of the city a century later (with reservations on ethnic mix). In terms of the key determinants of living standards, including

¹⁵ They eventually agreed to fund a new Survey of Poverty and Social Exclusion in Britain undertaken collaboratively by the Universities of York, Bristol and Loughborough with fieldwork by the Office of National Statistics. The first results were published in 2000 (Gordon et al, 2000).

rates of pay, levels of unemployment, proportion of the population who are sick or disabled, lone-parent families, retirement pensioners or people who are in receipt of income related-benefits, York is extraordinarily close to the national average. The study found that in York:

- Average male earnings at £363 per week were £30 below the national average and average female earnings at £241 were £40 below the national average. Ten per cent of workers earned less than £165 per week and over 2,000 families were having to supplement their earnings with Family Credit. The nature of the jobs available is to blame for this picture. The service sector has been expanding at the same time as jobs in manufacturing have been declining.
- Male unemployment was slightly higher than the national average and female unemployment slightly lower, but there was a crude jobs deficit in York of around 6,000. Nearly a quarter of the unemployed were aged 18-24.
- Nine per cent of families in York were dependent on Income Support (or income related Jobseekers' Allowance) and 15% of children were receiving free school meals because their families were receiving Income Support. All the empirical evidence suggests that even those who receive Income Support for only short periods have trouble managing – the scales of benefit are inadequate to meet basic needs, let alone allow for full-time participation in society. Since 1980

Income Support had been tied to movements in prices, over a period when the real level of earnings had increased by over 40%. The result of this is that the living standards of those families dependent on Income Support have become increasingly detached from those of the rest of the population of the City.

The wage levels and employment conditions associated with these jobs are contributing to experiences of impoverishment, insecurity, mental stress and a poor quality of life for the people. York has experience of all the concomitants of poverty including ill-health, homelessness, debt, drug and alcohol misuse, crime isolation, personal and family insecurity and the breakdown of relationships (Huby et al, 1999).

We were able to do one original empirical survey as part of the study. The York City Council agreed to include the Breadline Britain indicators of socially perceived necessities (Gordon and Pantazis, 1997) in a sweep of their 'Talkabout' panel. We received responses from 750 respondents and this sample was reweighted to match the characteristics of the population as a whole. We found the proportion of people in the York sample who lacked socially perceived necessities because they could not afford them in 1998 was extraordinarily similar to the proportion who lacked them in the 1990 Breadline Britain survey. Nationally, in 1990, 21% lacked three

or more items and 8% lacked at least seven items. In York in 1998, 20% lacked at least three items and 6% lacked at least seven items. Given the improvement in living standards between 1990 and 1998 these results indicate that poverty in York might well be above the national average. Among those with a higher risk of poverty in York than was found nationally were part-time workers (possibly the result of low wages in the heritage and tourist industries), those aged between 25 and 34 (probably young families with children) and council tenants (possibly the result of the residualisation of social housing since 1990). There was some evidence that single pensioners in York are less likely to be poor than they are nationally.

Another indicator of poverty used in the York survey was the subjective definitions of absolute and overall poverty drawn up by the United Nations (1995) and operationalised by Townsend et al (1997). Respondents were given a definition of absolute and overall poverty and asked how much per week would be needed to keep a household such as the one they live in out of absolute and overall poverty. They were then asked how much below or above that level they are. The results we obtained are summarised in Table 1 below. It can be seen that the aspirations of the people of York expressed by the mean threshold are lower than the national sample. This may be a function of variations in the costs of living between York and elsewhere. A

slightly smaller proportion of York residents think that they are a lot or a little below the thresholds than nationally, but the proportions are very similar.

TABLE 1: ABSOLUTE AND OVERALL POVERTY IN YORK
AND NATIONALLY

	<i>Absolute poverty</i>		<i>Overall poverty</i>	
	YORK 1998	NATIONALLY 1997	YORK 1998	NATIONALLY 1997
NOMINATED THRESHOLD	£150	£175	£192	£239
% A LITTLE BELOW	8	12	11	14
% A LOT BELOW	8	8	14	14

We found that the exercise of mapping poverty at ward and enumeration district level revealed the highest levels of deprivation were to be found in patches of local authority housing in the Tang Hall, Clifton and Chapelfields areas – all areas of social housing. We also analysed the level of deprivation in wards in York using a variety of standard indices of deprivation. However, since completing that work the DETR's index of Social Deprivation produced by the Oxford Social Deprivation Unit has been published. Table 2 lists the York wards with their deprivation scores and national rank out of 8,414 wards. It can be seen that two York wards came in the most deprived quintile of wards in England and Wales and 10 York wards (out of 29) were in the bottom half of the national distribution of deprivation.

TABLE 2: 1999 INDEX OF MULTIPLE DEPRIVATION

WARD	SCORE	NATIONAL RANK (N=8,414)
COPMANTHORPE	4.46	8,150
WIGGINGTON	4.70	8,106
HEWORTH WITHOUT	5.37	7,946
WHELDRAKE	5.51	7,918
HAXBY	5.70	7,873
UPPER POPPLETON	6.54	7,618
FULFORD	7.11	7,412
HESLINGTON	7.56	7,252
DUNNINGTON	7.64	7,220
RAWCLIFFE	7.72	7,194
OSBALDWICK	7.94	7,120
STRENSALL	10.97	6,031
KNAVESMIRE	11.74	5,783
FISHERGATE	11.82	5,756
CLIFTON WITHOUT	12.05	5,675
BECKFIELD	13.38	5,227
HOLGATE	14.25	4,934
MONK	14.91	4,758
BISHOPHILL	15.89	4,469
MICKLEGATE	16.97	4,197
HUNTINGTON	18.39	3,879
HEWORTH	18.48	3,863
FOXWOOD	20.51	3,459
WALMGATE	22.59	3,066
GULDHALL	23.57	2,916
ACOMB	24.83	2,677
CLIFTON	26.21	2,469
BOOTHAM	31.67	1,809
WESTFIELD	32.57	1,714

Source: Social Deprivation Research Group, University of Oxford

Those who visit the City of York – to admire the glory of the Minster, the Viking remains, the superbly preserved medieval core – may find these facts shocking and extraordinary. Those who seek to represent the city and are responsible for marketing its qualities also have difficulty in coming to terms with these truths. Even after these findings were published the Labour controlled city council were reluctant to initiate the kind of local anti-poverty strategy that has been adopted by councils in so many other local areas. Heritage towns are reluctant to advertise their problems. But picturesque streets and buildings and the apparent affluence of the centre tend to obscure the social problems associated with low incomes and lack of resources. In York there are three or four specific streets, modern slums, in which no one should be expected to live (and no one wants to), mainly because of the anti social behaviour of the residents. But a much more serious issue is still poverty – dispersed, not amenable to neighbourhood or local action, requiring national redistributive social policies.

*Prospects for poverty*¹⁶

Predicting the future is fraught. Life is lived forwards but understood backwards. I doubt that Seebohm Rowntree in 1899 could ever have envisaged how

¹⁶ For a longer version of these arguments see Bradshaw (2000).

transformed his city would become by 1936 or 1950 – let alone today. For the last 20 years we have passed through a dark age in terms of acceptance of and political concern for poverty – an age not typical of what was achieved in the previous 80 years and not a good guide to what might be achieved in the next, say, 25 years. Three key factors will determine what happens to poverty.

Demographic prospects

They are mainly good – children and elderly people are high-risk groups: the number of children will fall and the proportion of older people does not increase as much in the next two decades as in the last two decades. However, family change will continue to generate poverty.

The economy

Prospects for the economy look as good as they have been for decades and, in particular, competition for jobs will decline, increasing the opportunities of those excluded from the labour market.

The impact of politics on policy

This is the key factor. Reducing poverty and abolishing child poverty in 20 years have become formal targets of the Labour government. Poverty is back on the domestic agenda in a very big way. Much has already been achieved. The major anxiety about the Labour anti-poverty strategy is that it relies so heavily on labour

market solutions. There will need to be more redistribution in favour of those who cannot get access to the labour market if their targets are to be achieved.

So, in conclusion, the prospects for reducing poverty are good – particularly if the government regains an appetite for redistribution in its second term.

It may be that the efforts that social scientists have made (with the support particularly of the Rowntree Trusts) in the last 20 years to reveal the size and nature of the problem¹⁷ may at last be bearing fruit. We try, Seebohm, we try.

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