Consumption and standards of living
since the eighteenth century

economic history, social history, cultural history

Generously supported by a grant from the Economic History Society
Getting to the University of Huddersfield

Train is recommended: four trains run per hour from Manchester and Leeds. From the station, turn right along Railway Street, left down Westgate and Kirkgate, then right (opposite the parish church) down Cross Church Street and Queen Street, bringing you out on Queensgate (dual carriageway). Cross at the pelicans, and the University is in front of you. This is a ten minute walk.

On reaching the main university entrance (a campus map is displayed here), go into West Building, the second building from the right.

Driving is not recommended: on-site parking is difficult, though parking is available at reasonable all-day rates nearby, for example in Queen Street South and Firth Street. Our postal address is Queensgate, Huddersfield, West Yorkshire HD1 3DH.

Huddersfield is also served by National Express coaches; they call at the bus station in Upperhead Row, adjacent to Merton Street (see map above: this is slightly nearer to the University than the railway station is).
Programme

9.30 Registration and coffee  Room WG/27

10.00 Welcome Barry Doyle  Room WG/13

10.05 Opening address Ian Gazeley, Professor of Economic History, University of Sussex: Standards of consumption, real incomes and nutrition in Britain, 1900-1940

10.50 Presentations I – three strands of presentations will run simultaneously:

A: The material culture of elites before 1800  Room WG/13

Chair: Wouter Ryckbosch, University of Antwerp

Imported horses in India: using visual sources to determine trends in material culture and market demand, c.1650-c.1850
Jagjeet Lally, University of Cambridge

‘Books do furnish a room’? Meanings of book ownership in eighteenth century England
Ian Mitchell, University of Wolverhampton

Metropolitan desires? Attitudes to London-centric notions of refinement in the eighteenth-century Northwest
Ben Wilcock, University of Manchester

B: Consumption from social surveys and national accounts  Room WG/28

Chair: Nicola Verdon, Sheffield Hallam University

Patterns of consumer expenditure at the end of the seventeenth century: Gregory King’s consumption and income estimates revisited
John Dodgson, formerly NERA Economic Consulting and the London School of Economics

Production and consumption: social inquiry, political economy and late nineteenth-century London
Donna Loftus, the Open University

Consumption patterns and their determinants during the first half of the twentieth century: a historical and comparative approach
Carolina Román Ramos, Universidad de la República (Uruguay)
**C: Retailing and the construction of gender roles** Room WG/29

Chair: Laura Ugolini, University of Wolverhampton

Gender in French narratives of shops and shopping from 1880 to the 1920s
*David H Walker, University of Sheffield*

A Trans-Atlantic Mrs Consumer? Television advertising, domesticity and the housewife, 1955-69
*Sean Nixon, University of Essex*

Care and convenience? Exploring cultural meanings in the consumption of chilled ready meals
*Josie Freear, University of Leeds*

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12.20 **buffet lunch** Room WG/27

A bookstall will be available in room WG/30

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**12.50/13.10 Presentations II** – please note session A starts earlier than B and C

**12.50 A: Using family documents to recover eighteenth-century material culture** Room WG/13

Chair: Ian Mitchell, University of Wolverhampton

Social structures and material cultures: a case study of Aalst (Southern Netherlands), 17th-18th centuries
*Wouter Ryckbosch, University of Antwerp*

Changes in the consumption patterns of calicoes amongst the middle and low classes in Catalonia during the 18th century
*Lidia Torra, University of Barcelona*

Textiles and clothes with a ‘foreign denomination of origin’ in Castilian clothing, 1700-1860
*Máximo García Fernández, Universidad de Valladolid*
13.10 **B: Anthropometrics: interpreting consumption from records of height and weight** Room WG/28

Chair: John Dodgson, formerly NERA Economic Consulting and the London School of Economics

Received wisdom versus reality: height, nutrition, and urbanization in mid-nineteenth-century France  
*Laurent Heyberger, University of Technology of Belfort-Montbéliard*

Using consumption evidence in research on living standards and household economies in wartime Germany: an anthropometric approach  
*Mary Cox, University of Oxford*

13.10 **C: The firm and its impact on consumption** Room WG/29

Chair: Donna Loftus, the Open University

Beer consumption and local brewers: the development and impact of commercial brewing in nineteenth-century Manchester and Salford  
*Deborah Woodman, University of Huddersfield*

Modernising the factory, modernising society: the Consultancy Office for Olivetti Employees’ Houses in Ivrea from the 1950s to the 1970s  
*Patrizia Bonifazio, Politecnico di Milano*

14.20 **Tea** Room WG/27

14.40 **Presentations III**

**A: The consumption of workers and the poor, 1790-1930** Room WG/13

Chair: Deborah Woodman, University of Huddersfield

Davies and Eden and the characteristics of rural poverty in late eighteenth-century England  
*Nicola Verdon, Sheffield Hallam University*

‘Death in the teapot!’: tea-drinking and working-class culture in the British Isles, c.1860-1900  
*Ian Miller, University College Dublin*

The Good Life? The living standards of the northern rural population, 1830-1930  
*Stephen Caunce, University of Central Lancashire*
**B: Class and consumption in England since the 1860s**  
Room WG/28

Chair: Sean Nixon, University of Essex

‘Bringing the children up in decent surroundings’: family size and the working-class home in northern England before 1914  
*Paul Atkinson, University of Huddersfield*

‘I’m as good as the Coopers’: consumption, class and respectability in the post-war Black Country  
*Rosalind Watkiss Singleton, University of Wolverhampton*

Class, childhood and clothing: Puritanism, pleasure and home production in professional families, 1900-2000  
*Mary Clare Martin, University of Greenwich*

**C: Twentieth century war and the consumer**  
Room WG/29

Chair: Mary Cox, University of Oxford

Growing fat? Middle-class men and food on the English home front, 1914-1918  
*Laura Ugolini, University of Wolverhampton*

Food goes to war: the legacy of Britain’s utility diet 1940 – 1954  
*Paul Cleave, University of Exeter*

Cinema-going in a port town: the impact of the second world war on the consumption patterns of Portsmouth’s naval and working-class cinema audiences  
*Robert James, University of Portsmouth*

**16.15 Closing address**  
*Jon Stobart, Professor in History, University of Northampton*

Elite consumption in eighteenth-century England: fashion, status and personal preference  
Room WG/13

17.00 close
Abstracts

Ian Gazeley, Professor of Economic History, University of Sussex

Standards of consumption, real incomes and nutrition in Britain, 1900-1940

On the eve of the Second World War, most working people in Britain had higher real incomes, were better fed and lived in less over-crowded conditions than previous generations. Nevertheless, John Boyd Orr was to famously claim in Food, Health and Income (1937) that 4.5 million Britons had a diet deficient in every nutrient he examined. Malnutrition was not confined to those who were out of work, sick or old, but was pervasive among the working class. His conclusions were based upon comparing household diets to contemporaneous dietary recommendations. This standard incorporated advances in scientific knowledge concerning the significance of vitamins and minerals for well-being that were unknown to investigators at the turn of the twentieth century.

The question as to whether Britain in the 1930s was healthy or hungry has continued to stimulate debate among historians and the answer is sometimes seen as providing a judgement on capitalism itself. This paper re-examines this question using data derived from two official household expenditure surveys carried out in 1904 and 1937/8 in conjunction with evidence from the 1906 and 1938 earnings censuses.

Session one:

Jagjeet Lally, University of Cambridge

Imported horses in India: using visual sources to determine trends in material culture and market demand, c.1650-c.1850

The imported (Persian or Central Asian) horse had multiple significances to the Mughals: as a connection with their Eurasian heritage, as symbols of kingship, as the focus of ceremonial display and sporting events, and as an object of economic value and aesthetic beauty – to be adorned, decorated, studied and painted. The empire of the Great Mughals was in decline by the later seventeenth-century and the eighteenth-century in India was a period of transformation: the unitary Mughal empire fragmented into a number of successor state kingdoms and – according to more recent histories – many of the new regional powers showed evidence of rising trade and prosperity by mid-century. This paper uses visual sources to examine: (1) the (dis)continuous and/or (un)changing significance of the Eurasian horse, (2) the extent to which there was a diffusion of the consumption, material culture and practices surrounding the horse from the imperial centre to the new regional rulers, their courts and nobilities – and to wider elites and, ultimately, (3) what this widening consumption imparts about living standards of the “intermediate classes” and the elites as well as about the strength of demand in South Asia for imported horses at a time when the trade was entering decline.
‘Books do furnish a room’? Meanings of book ownership in eighteenth century England

In 1710 a continental visitor to an Oxford bookshop got into conversation with the owner who told him that he ‘had seen an Englishman purchase a yard or ell of books as they stood, because that was the exact amount of blank in his bookshelf at home’. The eighteenth century saw a substantial increase in book production and book ownership. But how similar to, or different from, other items of fashionable consumption were books? They were often front stage objects displayed so as to make a statement; but they were not new goods (unlike some textiles or ceramics) and their value could increase in the second hand market.

This paper explores some of the ways in which books were perceived as objects of material culture rather than as literary texts in the eighteenth century. A book owned was not necessarily a book read. It looks at the way in which access to books might be a marker of respectability and politeness, both through ownership and through book clubs; at book collecting as a type of conspicuous consumption; and at the eccentric, almost obsessive, fringe of book buying – that ‘passion for collecting books; not so much to be instructed by them, as to gratify the eye by looking at them’. Books were one of the objects that revealed, or perhaps created, important aspects of the taste and socio-cultural status of their owner.

Metropolitan desires? Attitudes to London-centric notions of refinement in the eighteenth-century Northwest

Historical research on consumption and the making of respectability in the British long eighteenth century has been too focused on London, a city so unique and culturally specific as to distort a wider understanding of British consumption in this period. Developing on the work of scholars such as Prof. Jon Stobart, Prof. Amanda Vickery and Prof. Hannah Barker, this paper aims to address the need for regional case studies in eighteenth-century Britain by exploring the nature of consumption in the North West c.1720-c.1770. Drawing on primary evidence including newspaper advertisements, trade cards, personal account books and diaries, this paper will explore the nature of consuming high-end goods in the region, and will identify the extent to which this consumption was driven by the fashionable capital.

Regional consumption and ritual as markers of respectability are ignored facets in the wider discourse of eighteenth-century consumerism, and through analysis of regionally specific accounts of polite consumption, I will demonstrate how towns in the North West were influenced by each other rather than centralised, metropolitan ideas of politeness and respectability.
Patterns of consumer expenditure at the end of the seventeenth century: Gregory King’s consumption and income estimates revisited

This paper considers the detailed figures on consumer expenditure patterns produced by Gregory King at the end of the seventeenth century. These figures show estimates of spending on different types of food and drink, clothing and other commodities by households in different income ranges. Sir Richard Stone subjected these estimates to statistical analysis in 1988 and demonstrated that they represented plausible patterns of expenditures given later work on how household expenditure patterns vary with household income. The present paper will demonstrate how (and why) King appears to have created his estimates. It will look at how he thought that patterns of expenditure varied as household income rose from poverty levels, with particular emphasis on his views on the expenditure by the emerging middling income group which plays a major role in de Vries’ analysis of the ‘industrious revolution’. The paper will also consider evidence on expenditure by gender, primarily from King’s detailed figures on expenditure on different types of clothing. (This paper forms part of a larger study I am conducting on the reliability of King’s data and on the structure of the late seventeenth century English and Welsh economy. Preliminary results of this larger work are to be presented at an Institute for Historical Research seminar in November.)

Production and consumption: social inquiry, political economy and late nineteenth-century London

Charles Booth’s inquiries into industry in late nineteenth-century London revealed a complex, constantly moving world of small manufacturers catering for a range of markets which was difficult to describe. Particularly troubling for Booth were the large numbers of petty capitalists working mostly from home and producing cheap goods for local consumers. Rather than seeing such small manufacturers as a dynamic part of the London economy, Booth saw them as disruptive forces subverting laws of supply and demand and causing poverty by catering for uncertain or speculative markets. This paper argues that Booth’s inquiries uncovered practices that failed to fit with contemporary understanding of the market but, in working through the contradictions between theory and practice, contributed to new directions in social thought and economic theory that attempted to incorporate consumption into analyses. As such Booth’s inquiries need to be understood in the context of broader shifts that recognised the economic significance of the desire for consumer goods but were wholly uncertain of its moral value and its impact on poverty.
Carolina Román Ramos, Universidad de la República (Uruguay)

Consumption patterns and their determinants during the fist half of the twentieth century: a historical and comparative approach

Consumption is an important component of social welfare and constitutes an aggregate measure of the economic dimension of standards of living. Food spending, calories consumed, consumption shifts toward more sophisticated goods and services, can be understood as indicators of the standards of living of a society and may allow us to compare development levels among regions in the long-run.

This paper studies the characteristics of the consumption patterns during the first half of the twentieth century for a group of countries and explores the relation with some of its main determinants. We based our analysis on the information provided by the studies about standard living conditions of the working classes that were carried in the thirties for several regions in the world. We used two types of sources: the Labour Statistics Yearbook of the International Labour Organization (ILO) and national studies. We focus on consumption patterns as the share of each type of expenditure (food, housing, fuel and light, clothing and miscellaneous) on the family budget (in percentage and current prices), as well as the calories consumed. In addition, we aim to explain different consumption patterns among regions considering some of the main economic determinants such as wages, income per capita, prices, demographic structure and urbanization. The results are consistent with our theoretical expectations and motivate new hypothesis to be tested in following steps of this research.

David H Walker, University of Sheffield

Gender in French narratives of shops and shopping from 1880 to the 1920s

Taking as its source material four French novels published between 1880 and the mid 1920s, this presentation considers the evolution in gender roles in relation to shops and shopping over this period. Broadly women are initially depicted as the targets – indeed victims – of manipulation and exploitation both as customers and as employees. And yet from the first creation of department stores, the effect on the character of the men employed in them generated misgivings, by virtue of the work they were called upon to do and their relations with female customers. In Emile Zola’s great novel 'Au Bonheur des dames' the fiercely macho culture of the owner and management is tempered by a female presence developed through a love story. The assertion of female resistance to the influence of the big store is articulated in ‘M. de la Nouveauté’, a novel by Rachilde (Marguerite Aymery), which also denounces the effect on men of the retail environment. By the 1920s women are seen to have the upper hand, as is seen in the story of the lesbian shop-owner in Victor Margueritte’s novel ' La Garçonne’; while Valmy-Baysse writes a novel , ‘Les Comptoirs de Vénus’, about the world of the big retail store in which women have found it possible to flourish and men are subordinate and mere auxiliaries.
Sean Nixon, University of Essex

**A Trans-Atlantic Mrs Consumer? Television advertising, domesticity and the housewife, 1955-69**

The paper explores how television advertising helped to disseminate the ideals of the housewife and the 'new household'. I focus on the representation of 'Mum' within commercials, and on the depiction of the kitchen, a central aspect of the new home. Amongst advocates of the 'new household', the kitchen was seen as central to healthier, more hygienic and less labour intensive forms of living. The paper explores the ways in which TV advertising represented this key aspect of modern domesticity by focusing on commercials which promoted washing powders such as Persil and convenience foods such as Oxo cubes. Both campaigns reveal how the forms of TV advertising developed by agencies in Britain had an important impact on the TV depiction of post-war consumption and growing material affluence.

My argument about the way television advertising depicted the 'new household' fits into a larger contention concerning the need to locate post-war commercial and cultural change in Britain in a wider transatlantic picture. I show how US ideals were tailored to the British market: depictions of kitchens both embedded them in recognizable social settings and downplayed any explicit American association. In a similar vein, the images of the housewife within television advertising rendered her as a distinctly British social type. It was through casting and the verbal cadences of British actors that the indigenous character of the advertising was established.

Josie Freear, University of Leeds

**Care and convenience? Exploring cultural meanings in the consumption of chilled ready meals**

In 1979 Marks & Spencer launched the first chilled ready meal in the UK, the chicken Kiev, creating a pre-prepared food sector valued in 2009 at £2bn p.a. Whilst largely overlooked as a subject of research by historians of consumption, the study of chilled ready meals casts light upon a wide range of social, cultural and economic issues. These include the rise of women in the workplace, changes in the size of households, decline in basic cookery skills, the place of food and cookery in the home and geographical variations in consumption.

Doel and Wrigley have considered the significance of the chilled ready meal within networks of supply, distribution and retailing, but neglected to examine the social construction, both materially and culturally, of these consumable commodities. The paper attempts to fill this gap in existing research, taking Fine’s concept of the ‘system of provision’ to its logical conclusion. It will consider the cultural meanings of consumption of these products by drawing upon scholarship across a range of disciplines including Hilton’s work on consumerism and Warde’s sociological assessment of the ‘antinomies of taste’. It will draw on evidence from M&S checking lists, advertisements and packaging together with government sources such as the General Index of Retail Prices to explore how, why and by whom the cultural significance of these consumable commodities has been constructed.
Session two:

Wouter Ryckbosch, University of Antwerp

Social structures and material cultures: a case study of Aalst (Southern Netherlands), 17th-18th Centuries

The long-term changes in material culture and consumerism that swept over Europe during the early modern period have sparked considerable debate among economic, social and cultural historians. Whether emerging in 16th century Italy (Goldthwaite; O’Malley & Welch), the 17th century Dutch Republic (De Vries) or 18th century England (McKendrick; Weatherill; Overton), early modern consumer change is invariably seen as having important social consequences. What these consequences entailed is however far less clear. Scholars from different vantage points have seen the emergence of a ‘modern, active consumer’ variously as the fatal turn towards western materialism, as the harbinger of modernity and civilization, or merely as the ‘natural’ result of rising living standards and material democratization. Apart from the recurrent contention that consumer change was surprisingly widespread, there seems to be little agreement on both the social prerequisites and consequences of early modern consumerism.

In this paper I set out to explore the seeming paradox of the inequality-ridden social structures of early modern (urban) society and the emergence of – supposedly – widespread consumer change. How did new forms of consumer behavior take root within their proper social context? And did perhaps this shifting material culture and its related structures of socialization begin to transcend and alleviate the prevalent problems of social disjunction; or did they rather serve to reflect and confer diverging social meanings and identities?

I present evidence from a case study of socially contextualized probate inventories from a provincial town in the southern Low Countries between 1670 and 1750.

Lídia Torra, University of Barcelona

Changes in the consumption patterns of calicoes amongst the middle and low classes in Catalonia during the 18th century

The paper presents the preliminary findings of a project on the forms of distribution of textile goods, consumption levels and patterns from the end of the 17th to the 19th centuries in Catalonia. It concentrates on the growth of calicoes textile trade, and changes in trends in consumption during the 18th century in Catalonia.

Post mortem inventories are the main source for this project. They can be considered a good indicator of supply and demand changes in textile clothes in the Catalan society of the Modern period. The paper explores the potential of this source of evidence on the basis of a sample of 20 inventories of large specialized retail stores in Barcelona and nearly 3.000 post mortem inventories from the local population.
The supply of calicoes increased in quantity and variety throughout the eighteenth century. These goods aided in shaping the choices of new consumers and in the construction of new concepts of needs, innovation, fashion and desirability throughout the urban population. The upper class groups constituted the bulk of the clientele of the retail stores, but we can see evidence of an increasing segment of artisans, dealers and workers thanks to new commercial strategies. They could afford these goods buying by credit. They would be the main protagonists of growth and changes in consumption patterns at the end of the century.

Máximo García Fernández, Universidad de Valladolid

Textiles and clothes with a ‘foreign denomination of origin’ in Castilian clothing, 1700-1860

The aim of this study is to highlight the abundant presence in Castile of both textiles and of masculine and feminine clothes produced throughout Europe and imported into Spain, that are to be found in both lower and upper class bridal portions and other sources on household textiles. Included are products that through its names can be related to a foreign origin, such as ‘oxford’, ‘manchester’, ‘londres’, ‘londrina’, ‘limiste’, ‘jersey’, ‘inglesina’, ‘estanfort’, ‘chester’, ‘cheviot’, ‘alconchel’, ‘irlandesa’, ‘bristo’, ‘hibernia’ or ‘escocesa’. Though these imports can already be traced during the Renaissance period, they became much more abundant from the 18th century onwards.

The inventories after death, the inventories of merchants and shopkeepers, as well as the bridal portions, offer us the type of the textiles and clothes most frequently used. The analysis also gives us the possibility to identify the regions of origin of those products and whether they were known in Castile by the same denomination of origin. Based on these sources, of both urban and rural origin, we can study more profoundly the spread and commercialisation of those varieties, and when and where they were most used, and its cultural meanings.

Laurent Heyberger, University of Technology of Belfort-Montbéliard

Received wisdom versus reality: height, nutrition, and urbanization in mid-nineteenth-century France

The received wisdom would have it that, if mean height is a reliable indicator of the standard of living, nineteenth-century France, unlike most Western countries, did not pay an urban penalty. Thanks to a substantial set of individual data (105,324 observations), based on the draft lottery of Frenchmen born in the year 1848, we are able to prove that this "French exception" did not, in fact, exist. The larger the town, the shorter the conscripts: the phenomenon culminates in Paris. By combining individual data with the agricultural survey of 1852, not to mention a few other ancillary sources, we are able to identify those factors that compensated for this urban penalty -- that is, that were positively correlated with height: nutritional availability, proximity to railway lines, the literacy rate, and life expectancy. Our results apply both to the mean height and to the stunted proportion of French conscripts.
Mary Cox, University of Oxford

Using consumption evidence in research on living standards and household economies in wartime Germany: an anthropometric approach

Germany imported much of its food at the turn of the twentieth century. Once the First World War began, such imports decreased dramatically due in great part to a blockade imposed by the British navy. The effects that this blockade had on the German populace are well documented through qualitative means. Using a source first collected by Doctors in Leipzig during and immediately following the First World War, I examine the Hungerblockade in a more quantitative way by tracing the consumption patterns of 239 individuals in Leipzig from 1916 – 1919. Each individual recorded their food consumption and were measured over a period of time in both height and weight. The individuals are grouped within families, which allow for an intimate look at household economies during the First World War in Germany. Additionally, thanks to the richness of the sample, social class can be traced. This permits a nuanced view of the relationship between social class and caloric distribution within families under stress. The results are somewhat surprising, as an initial view shows that in general the elites of society lost a greater percentage of their bodyweight than those of lower classes.

Deborah Woodman, University of Huddersfield

Beer consumption and local brewers: the development and impact of commercial brewing in nineteenth-century Manchester and Salford

This paper examines the production and consumption of beer in Manchester and Salford during the nineteenth century, with particular reference to the complex relationships between public house, publican and commercial brewer. The nineteenth-century brewing industry underwent considerable transformation both nationally and locally. It was a rapidly changing time for both publican and commercial brewer who were faced with an array of complex matters that included technological development, increasing economic competition within the brewing industry, together with changes in legislative control and strategy. The impact of these factors was particularly evident on the role of the publican, whose former brewing function declined, leading to the domination of commercial brewing, as publicans and beerhouse keepers entered a retail-only occupation. The effects of these changes were seen in pubs and beerhouses throughout the country, though this paper focuses on changes in the brewing industry at local level. It will illustrate the development and impact of commercial brewing in Manchester and Salford, and how changes in the brewing industry shaped how we obtained our beer and the management of pubs and beerhouses.
Modernising the factory, modernising society: the Consultancy Office for Olivetti Employees' Houses in Ivrea from the 1950s to the 1970s

In the years after the Second World War in Italy, industry played a central role in national modernisation policies. The city was not only the location of production, but also where new social relations and new identities were forged. The home, in particular, is a site of social identification and cultural self-expression, its location and design can also express or shape residents’ social identity, and the factory is often the engine and the client of this location and design.

This paper describes the programme of the Consultancy Office for Olivetti Employees’ Houses (UCCD in Italian), which operated in Ivrea from 1948 until 1970. It managed the planning and construction of around 400 homes for employees, and ran innovative housing programmes. The Office’s homes, spread across the town, were produced on the basis of a catalogue of projects: clients were able to make suggestions and changes, thanks to facilitated loans provided by the company. The paper analyses the catalogue of UCCD projects and the inhabitants who participated in the housing programme. It aims to reveal how ideas, models and experiences gleaned from North American government housing programmes are to be found in this innovative Italian experiment, and how this programme contributed to identifying parts of the city and to modernising the standard of living of a socially composite emerging middle class.

Session three:

Nicola Verdon, Sheffield Hallam University

Davies and Eden and the characteristics of rural poverty in late eighteenth-century England

The plight of the labouring poor at the end of the eighteenth century was famously documented by David Davies and Frederick Eden. Their surveys are well-known to historians and have been exploited widely by those interested in labour markets, wage levels and standards of living during the early industrial revolution period. Despite their prominence however these sources have not been fully reappraised from the point of view of their original rationale – an investigation of the characteristics of poverty in the late eighteenth-century English countryside. This paper will firstly explore Davies’ concept of ‘tolerable comfort’ – the level at which families earned enough to meet the expense of daily necessities and avoid the vagaries of local poor relief systems – and apply this standard to the 195 agricultural workers’ budgets collected by Davies and Eden between 1787 and 1797 to assess how far families lived in poverty in the late eighteenth-century countryside. It then goes on to explore what characteristics explain the extent to which households were or were not able to meet Davies’ standard of tolerable comfort, analysing the impact of household composition, female and child earnings and region. Agricultural labourers were the largest single occupational category in late eighteenth-century
England and this new attempt to quantify their standard of living is an important addition to the economic study of household budgets.

Ian Miller, University College Dublin

‘Death in the teapot!’: tea-drinking and working-class culture in the British Isles, c.1860-1900

Pre-existing histories of British tea consumption have typically highlighted the drink’s function as an index of middle class civility, and its positive role as a marker of national identity. In this paper, I maintain that a set of anxieties surrounding tea co-existed throughout the late nineteenth century which focused in particular upon the impact of increased access to tea throughout working-class communities in the British Isles. Working class tea usage challenged middle-class codes of tea-drinking behaviour, becoming closely intertwined with apprehension surrounding national decline, physical and mental deterioration, the subversion of gender roles in the domestic sphere, and Imperial expansion.

Multiple meanings came to be associated with the purchasing and consumption of tea. Accordingly, multifaceted cultural meanings became ascribed to it throughout the British Isles. I argue in this paper that tea, when drunk to excess or relied upon (with bread) as a staple dietary article, transformed into a dangerous substance which could lead to an array of physical and mental disorders, and which threatened notions of domestic harmony. In doing so, I identify how differential tea drinking practices came to acted as a marker of class, and played a formative role in the construction of working class gender identities.

Stephen Caunce, University of Central Lancashire

The Good Life? The living standards of the northern rural population, 1830-1930

Half a century ago, investigating living standards meant collecting hard data, but in practice no agreement could be reached on general patterns. The very large numbers who worked on farms in northern England in the century after 1830 form a particularly knotty but interesting and stimulating case study of both unexpectedly good living standards and distinctive consumption patterns that diverge sharply from accepted national norms. Classic accounts of agriculture generally took southern England as their model and asserted that by 1850 conventional wage work was all but universal, but modern research has shown how different the north was in its variety, its family farms, and above all in its preservation of yearly and half-yearly farm service contracts, most of which included board and lodging. Also, northern farming was thoroughly commercial, and very successful, so farmers could pay wages that were much higher than in the south to counteract the urge to migrate to industrial towns in search of a better material rewards. Overall, assessing the living standards of this very diverse rural population requires a recognition of the importance of intangible cultural factors, rather than relying on a purely monetary model.
Paul Atkinson, University of Huddersfield

‘Bringing the children up in decent surroundings’: family size and the working-class home in northern England before 1914

It is surprising how little of the modern interest in consumption has been directed towards the working class, although between the mid-nineteenth century and the first world war it formed the large majority of Britain’s population. This paper will illustrate a few of the insights into wider social and economic issues which the study of working class consumption in this period can provide.

Starting from evidence showing how the material culture of working class homes became richer and more varied over these three generations, the paper argues for a new understanding of the cultural changes involved. Rather than accept the self-justifying belief of the better-off that they alone were the bearers of taste and culture, which working people then copied as best they could, it suggests that the emergence of a self-confident, distinctively working class, aesthetic was central. This was based on a growing sense of entitlement to a better standard of living: one that included ‘bringing the children up in decent surroundings,’ in the words of a working-class mother in 1914. Among the social and economic consequences of this successful push for better living standards, I argue, was the deliberate limitation of working-class family size.

Rosalind Watkiss Singleton, University of Wolverhampton

‘I’m as good as the Coopers’: consumption, class and respectability in the post-war Black Country

Before 1945 methods of consumption and the acquisition of personal possessions may, to some extent, have provided one of several indicators of class. However, the improved living conditions and the general affluence of the period enabled both working and middle-class families to “purchase similar products in similar ways from similar suppliers,” during the second half of the twentieth century. Consequently, it is possible to argue that although some class distinctions remained the acquisition of specific essentially classless items played a role in their reduction. However, oral testimony reveals that both the items purchased and the methods of payment were inextricably linked to the somewhat nebulous concept of respectability. Within the comparative affluence of the Black Country, when the escalating wages of skilled working-class men facilitated conspicuous consumption on an unprecedented scale, respondents revealed conflicting views upon the relationship between consumption, respectability and money-management. This paper argues that, whilst admitting that the ownership of consumer durables from televisions to fridges conferred status, purchasing these items on credit demonstrated a lack of foresight and a degree of fecklessness. Conversely, however, the ability to make cash purchases from the accumulation of regular saving denoted respectability and enhanced the reputation of the family within their immediate community.
Mary Clare Martin, University of Greenwich

Class, childhood and clothing: Puritanism, pleasure and home production in professional families, 1900-2000

Despite recent interest in cultures of consumption, little attention has been paid to traditions of “make do and mend”, or of the economic value of “passed on” clothes, in middle or upper class families in the twentieth century. Yet Victorian cultures of childcare, which included not spoiling children, or dressing them in very plain or “cut down” clothes persisted for decades after 1900.

This paper will draw on one case study of females from four generations of one family from varying professional backgrounds, the army, medicine, the Church of England, and school-teaching or university lecturing, from 1894-2000. This evidence will be contextualised with other contemporary sources including children’s literature, and autobiography. It will highlight dependence on “passed on” or home-made clothes within family budgets, and consider how this might have changed over the twentieth century, and whether it was class or gender specific. It will also explore the psychological costs, described in fiction, of parental indifference to peer-group consumption trends. Finally, it will relate the experience of growing up in the 1990s to Naomi Klein’s critique of globalisation, and consider the desirable aspects of “passed on” clothing as being “vintage” fashion amongst specific late twentieth century youth cultures.

Laura Ugolini, University of Wolverhampton

Growing fat? Middle-class men and food on the English home front, 1914-1918

Middle-class men are notably absent from accounts of First World War ‘food politics’. Indeed, although studies focusing on the British home front feature middle-class men on official bodies dealing with food supply, membership of organisations such as Food Control Committees is generally seen as the outcome of men’s occupational or civic identities, not as consumers. This paper, part of a wider research project that explores middle-class civilian men’s home front experiences, aims to question this image of middle-class men as disengaged from personal concern, and investigates the relationship between middle-class masculinities and food consumption.

The paper considers men’s responses to the changes forced on middle-class diets by wartime high prices and shortages. It suggests that men were fully involved in purchasing decisions and practices, but found that these consumer activities often threatened to undermine their authority and power. It then considers self-provisioning, which seemed to promise a better – and more conventionally masculine – way of supplementing families’ diets, but in fact often revealed the limitations of men’s abilities and physical capabilities. ‘Economy’ appeals, then, threatened to ‘reduce’ middle-class men further, perhaps beyond endurance. The paper will conclude by suggesting that middle-class men had no qualms about embracing identities as food consumers, but in the particular circumstances of the wartime home front, this eroded their sense of authority, expertise and even physical powers.
Paul Cleave, University of Exeter

Food goes to war: the legacy of Britain's utility diet 1940 – 1954

Much has been written about rationing and the British wartime diet during the Second World War, and the following years of austerity. However the story is often incomplete and frequently overlooks the wider social implications and legacy of the period for researchers.

This paper will utilise period data and oral histories and aims to show how the rationing system was devised and operated. It will discuss the influence of pre war surveys and investigations into diet and nutrition showing how these contributed to the subsequent rationing system. Starting with the research conducted by the British Medical Association (1933), Crawford (1938) and later recommendations of Drummond (1939), Boyd-Orr (1943) the role of food in the utility consumer consumption scheme is evaluated.

Feeding the public, whether in British Restaurants, school meals, works canteens, or at home introduced them to new foods and culinary skills. The team that made the system work, scientists, government ministers, dieticians, home economists, chefs, bakers and housewives is examined and reveals how it was developed and communicated to the population.

The legacy of a system that affected a way of life and consumption in an era provided a framework for improved nutrition and is an important chapter in our social history.

Robert James, University of Portsmouth

Cinema-going in a port town: the impact of the second world war on the consumption patterns of Portsmouth's naval and working-class cinema audiences

While historians have written widely on the impact of the Second World War on Britain’s film industry and society’s cinema-going habits, limited research has been conducted into consumption patterns at the local level. This paper broadens existing local research by analysing booking patterns at the Queens Cinema, Portsmouth to evaluate the types of film consumed by its naval and working-class patrons.

The trauma caused by the Second World War had a significant impact on the tastes of Portsmouth’s cinema-goers. Harper has identified a ‘deep schism’ between the way the Regent cinema’s lower middle-class patrons responded to films in the pre- and post-war periods. This paper argues that the war had an equally significant impact on the consumption habits of the working-class patrons. Pre-war booking patterns reveal a distinct preference for dramatic films. In the post-war period, the number of dramatic films shown declined significantly. Comedy films were now the biggest draw. In the pre-war period, a primarily male audience was targeted. In the post-war period, a greater number of female-orientated films were booked, suggesting a more equal targeting of the sexes.
This paper shows that the social changes precipitated by the Second World War were not ignored by the Queens’ managers. They recognised that a different type of film was needed. The Queens’ managers regularly booked the types of film that helped their customers deal with the traumas of war, films that helped them negotiate a path through changing social conditions, and films that reassured them of their place in the post-war world.

Jon Stobart, Professor in History, University of Northampton

Elite consumption in eighteenth-century England: fashion, status and personal preference

In recent years, consumption has emerged as a key meta-narrative in historical enquiry; one which carries with it a great deal of theoretical and conceptional baggage variously borrowed from economics, sociology and increasingly cultural studies. Notions of conspicuous consumption, trickle-down effects and social emulation brought consumption to the foreground in the 1980s and linked different levels of society into a single, integrated consumption system. More recently, historians have become increasingly interested in the performative nature of consumption and its link to identity; much emphasis being placed on the symbolism and meaning of goods and consumption practices. Others have focused on practical issues, including the utility of goods and, increasingly, their afterlife in terms of reuse and the second-hand market. These revisionist perspectives have tended to fragment the social context and impact of consumption, weakening the link between the consumption practices of the elite and those of the middling sorts.

Given this, it is perhaps surprising that much historical analysis of the elite and their material culture makes little reference to these wider debates and perspectives. The elite are seen as connoisseurs and collectors; their houses as emblematic of an elite culture: the physical manifestation of aristocratic status and power, but also of their sense of taste and fashion. In contrast, little thought is given the processes of consumption or to the motivations which underpinned the choices of individual consumers or the elite as a group.

In this paper, I want to explore some of these ideas in the context of the English country house. Specifically, I want to consider the role of fashion and status in driving consumption decisions and shaping material culture. These are traditionally seen as central to elite consumption, but to what extent were they mutually compatible? Building on this, I look to examine the extent to which such forces for change were mediated by the extant material culture of the house: in short, how were new goods fitted into existing schemes of decoration and furnishing? Lastly, I want to consider how these various forces were moulded by individual taste and preference. To what extent is it possible and helpful to consider the elite as a monolithic group?
About the University of Huddersfield

Huddersfield has a rich history of vocational education, which is still a cornerstone of the present institution, and this dates back to the creation of the Huddersfield Scientific and Mechanic Institute in 1825. The determination to aspire was extended further in 1841 when the Young Men’s Mental Improvement Society was established through the inspiration of German merchant Frederic Swann, who conducted an export business in the town. By 1884, the Society had merged with the town’s Female Educational Institute to become the Technical School and Mechanics’ Institution and had moved into new premises, now the Ramsden Building on the University’s Queensgate Campus. In 1896 it was renamed the Huddersfield Technical College.

Over the first fifty years the curriculum changed significantly. Its early success was based on elementary education, but it subsequently provided technical and scientific support for the town’s industries. By the turn of the century both chemistry and textiles were well established, along with the ‘commercial’ subjects needed by many of the manufacturing firms of the day. Science, technology and business studies characterised the institution a century ago. By 1914 about 1,800 students were taught at the college, including students for final honours in Arts and Sciences of London University.

From 1914 the Technical College continued to evolve in both size and character. Advanced research, especially in chemistry, was an early feature. Student numbers rose steadily, requiring additional premises both on the present campus and elsewhere in the town. In 1958 there was a further change in name and status to the Huddersfield College of Technology, and the international reputation of the College began to grow.

In 1947 a new Huddersfield Technical (Teachers) College had been located within the institution, becoming one of only four in the country. Established in its own premises in 1958, it played a key role in the training of technical teachers not only in the north of England but in many countries overseas. Later, in 1963, the Oastler College of Education was established as a day training college for school teachers. Both merged with the University during the 1970s.

In the last fifty years the Queensgate campus has been transformed and expanded to accommodate the rise of student numbers and the creation of new academic departments. By the institution’s 150th anniversary year in 1991 student numbers had topped 10,000. In 1996 the former West Yorkshire College of Health Studies was incorporated into the School of Human and Health Sciences.

Today, student numbers have reached over 24,000. Students from over 130 countries are represented on campus and the University has a £120 million turnover, contributing £300m to the local economy. University campuses have been established in Barnsley and Oldham to encourage participation in higher education in areas where many people have not traditionally taken up this option.