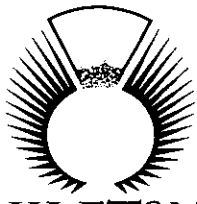

THE ARKLETON TRUST

Popular Images and the Reality of Deprivation in Rural Areas

by

Brian McLaughlin.

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PREFACE

By tradition the Arkleton Trust seminar includes a lecture attended both by the seminar participants and by people from the locality. This year Brian McLaughlin gave the 8th Arkleton lecture on Popular Images and the Rality of Deprivation in Rural Areas. The seminar was held at the MacRoberts centre, Douneside, Aberdeenshire.

Brian McLaughlin is at present Head of Land Use for the National Farmers Union, but was both lecturing and attending the seminar in a purely personal capacity. His work on deprivation was undertaken early in the '80's, and never received the recognition it deserved. What he had to say then and what he has added now is of great importance. Very little sturdy statistical work has been done on the topic of rural deprivation as our seminar acknowledged. Here is a first rate study which highlights the "arithmetic of woe" and stresses the point one of our participants made that "the poor are not people looking for a hand out but people with potential".

The Arkleton Trust is very grateful to Brian both for the lecture and for the very real contribution he made to our seminar.

Lady Higgs
Chairman
The Arkleton Trust

December 1990

POPULAR IMAGES AND THE REALITY OF DEPRIVATION IN RURAL AREAS

The extent to which deprivation can be said to occur in any society is always a matter of conjecture and debate given the difficulties of defining and measuring what we mean by deprivation.

The extent to which deprivation can be said to occur in rural areas of the United Kingdom in the latter half of the 20th century is even more difficult to establish. In addition to the theoretical and methodological problems of defining and measuring deprivation, there is the problem of trying to do so in a context where the prevailing imagery makes it impossible for many to accept that the two concepts of *rural* and *deprivation* can or should be related in any way.

In this paper, I want to do three things

i) Examine some of the prevailing popular images of both rural areas and of the concept of deprivation as a means of establishing the width of the conceptual gap between these two main components of my paper.

ii) Describe some research findings from my earlier work updated by more qualitative, observational analysis which illustrate some of the realities behind much of the popular rural imagery.

iii) Explore some possible explanations for the continuing adherence to and reinforcement of these images and the implications for the rural policy debate now and in the future.

In presenting this paper, I recognise that necessary generalisations imposed by time constraints will allow my audience a wealth of opportunity to identify considerable differences between some of my arguments

and their own particular experience of rural life. I can only crave your tolerance and your acceptance that the canvas is broad enough to accommodate differences rather than deny their existence.

PREVAILING IMAGES OF RURAL AREAS AND DEPRIVATION

For many people the concepts of rural and deprivation are contradictory and that perception has long historical antecedents. The representation of rural life as changeless, affluent and idyllic goes back a long way even to the time when patrons of the visual arts selected out the less desirable aspects of rural life in the commissioned landscape paintings that subsequently adorn the walls of country houses.

More recently in inter-war Britain when recession posed serious problems for the social, economic and physical fabric of rural areas, rural poverty and deprivation remained largely undefined as a major social policy issue. Indeed major policy debates of that period appear to have been driven by a greater concern for the appearance and conservation of the landscape with little regard for the condition of an equally endangered species of the time - homo sapiens ruralis.

It is in the post-war period however and especially in the last two decades that we see the conceptual gap between rural and deprivation at its most extreme. On the one hand, change and decay in many of our cities has produced a catalogue of poor social conditions characterised by bad housing, derelict factory buildings, visible unemployment and all the social malaise that we come to associate with these conditions. That image is often more easily identified in the U.K. when many of its victims display distinctive ethnic features. By contrast, the rural condition has continued to be represented by images of well-being and affluence. Significant levels of investment initially in the improvement of rural infrastructure and the support of

primary industries such as farming but laterally by the private sector primarily in improving the housing stock have helped to sustain this image of the rural idyll and accentuate the gap between town and country.

Given this situation, it is somewhat ironic that one of the policy issues which dominated the rural agenda in the 1970s was rural deprivation. Why was this the case? It is worth dwelling on this issue not only to explain it but also to demonstrate that even when the same policy issue appeared on both the urban and rural agenda, the image and definitions of it differed. It is also worth looking at the origins of the rural deprivation debate more closely because I believe that the experiences which forced rural deprivation on to the political agenda in the 1970s are being replicated in the early 1990s.

DEPRIVATION IN RURAL AREAS – THE BACKGROUND

The growth and development of the policy debate on rural deprivation in the U.K. was a complex political and administratively contrived debate which was orchestrated largely by local authorities in rural areas, their associations and related pressure groups. More specifically, the debate represented the response by these bodies to a series of crises which developed and intensified in the decades post 1960 around two major areas of concern:

1) A crisis of identity which focussed on the importance of local autonomy and the need to retain decision making responsibilities and execute functions at the most local level of government.

2) A crisis of fiscal equity which centred on the level of central government financial support to local authorities and its distribution between urban and rural areas.

THE CRISIS OF IDENTITY

The crisis of identity had its origins primarily in the reorganisation of local Government which came into effect in April 1974. The justification for this reorganisation rested mainly on the issue of achieving a balance between the "localness" of government on the one hand and efficiency in the provision and delivery of services on the other. Overshadowing these two concerns was the changing nature of the fiscal relationship between central and local government and the increasing dependence of local administrations on central financial support.

Although the rhetoric of the political debate made much play of the importance of maintaining local democracy and the need for delegation to the most local level, the eventual re-organisation produced local authority administrative areas which were significantly increased in size. The new county and district councils were created by the amalgamation of existing authorities into new larger units and hitherto distinct and often antagonistic urban and rural councils were forced into single administrative entities.

This enlargement of local government units and the subsequent centralisation of administrative functions created fertile seed beds for the cultivation of concern about the future of rural areas. The loss of rural district councils - an administrative and executive tier of government whose rural specificity was inherent in its title - was not just the loss of a symbol of local authority. It also represented the erosion of a power base in rural areas which posed a threat to the size and significance of controlling interests in local government. The growth in the size of local constituencies reduced the value of the personal vote by which many rural councillors had gained political power prior to 1974. This gave rise to the assertions that the reorganisation

of local government was discriminatory against rural areas.

THE CRISIS OF FISCAL EQUITY

Arguably of greater significance in the development of the rural deprivation debate in the U.K. was the problem of local government finance. Although the reorganisation of local government addressed the issue of administrative boundaries and the re-allocation of executive functions between tiers of government, it did not embrace the question of local government finance. As a result, the new authorities remained locked into a financial structure that itself had been the subject of debate and concern much of which centred on the increasing dependence of local authorities on central government financial support to allow them to carry out their functions.

Despite this emergent pattern, *the local rate* levy has long had a political sensitivity which far outweighs its objective statistical magnitude.

Consequently when, as a result of revaluation, the new local authorities demanded rate increases of up to 120 - 150% on the previous year, ratepayers in rural areas reacted vociferously. Their concerns focussed on issues such as value for money and the unfair nature of a new local government system that required them to pay for services which were often not available to rural people.

Rural unrest about rate levies and service provision was particularly relevant to the then Conservative Government which depended to a large extent on rural support.

In response to this growing concern, the government increased the allocation of central support to rural areas via the Rate Support Grant. This decision was justified on the need to assist the county and district

councils to implement the re-organised local administration.

The Conservative Government lost the General Election in 1973 and the incoming Labour Administration immediately revised the priorities for Central Government support to local authorities. The need to combat deprivation in inner cities became a primary objective and consequently, central funds were re-allocated to the benefit of the urban metropolitan authorities where deprivation was seen to be at its worst.

This decision had important implications for rural areas and especially for the development of the rural deprivation debate. The word "deprivation" became a key concept in the argument about the allocation of funds to urban and rural areas. Indeed deprivation became the necessary word in discussions with central government ministers and civil servants in order to demonstrate that either you deserved extra money or that your authority or department should be protected from cuts.

The rural deprivation debate took off at that point and became focussed on arguments about fiscal equity and territorial injustice. The challenge to public authorities in rural areas was to demonstrate that rural areas also experienced deprivation which was just as bad as that which had merited financial priorities to be given to urban areas. Given the origins of the concern, the rural deprivation debate focussed on the decline of service. Herein lies a major difference in the two debates.

The debate about urban deprivation had highlighted problems of social injustice and the need for policies which targeted socially deprived individuals and groups.

By contrast, the debate about rural deprivation concentrated primarily upon concepts of spatial injustice in resource allocation and highlighted the need to help rural local authorities to deliver the services that

would prevent rural areas from becoming deprived.

The remaining years of the 1970's were characterised by furious activity amongst public authorities and rural interest groups as they catalogued the decline of services in the countryside as indicators of deprivation. At times it almost seemed that counties and districts were competing to outdo each other in the arithmetic of woe.

Central Government finally responded to the growing pressure and released a package of research projects in the late 1970s aimed at identifying the true nature of rural problems. The Deprivation in Rural Areas research project was part of that package and part of its remit was to provide sufficient information to Government to allow them to assess the comparative level of problems in urban rural areas.

The Study Method

From the outset, a number of important points have to be recognised when attempting to assess the incidence of deprivation in rural areas:

1) Although social policy analysts and researchers have succeeded in compiling an acceptable list of socio-economic indicators to measure the extent of deprivation in urban areas, those indicators have little value in the rural context. Indeed some of them can be potentially misleading when applied in rural areas e.g. households with a car in urban areas are often considered to be less deprived whereas in the rural context, a one-car household can still be deprived depending on the availability of that car to various members of that household at any time.

2) Even if a set of indicators could have been compiled, the national data sets do not always have sufficient comprehensive coverage in the rural

context. More common is the problem of the spatial scale on which they are collected. They are often insufficiently fine-grained to allow the identification of deprived groups.

3) Thirdly and perhaps most importantly, the indicator approach has serious shortcomings in helping to identify the more qualitative aspects of deprivation. It also makes identification of "within-household deprivation" difficult to say the least.

4) Finally it will be remembered that a deprivation debate was already well under-way which was based on an entirely different set of indicators. Not only did this make direct comparisons impossible but it created a suspicion in some decision makers of any new attempt to assess deprivation which might detract from their "proven case". That suspicion tended to be highlighted when that new attempt approached the problem through an assessment of the incidence of poverty.

A major premise upon which our work was based is that deprivation, whether in urban or rural areas, is a reflection of the resources available to individuals and householders to allow them to participate in the standard of living which society would define as acceptable. Invariably this raises a number of questions about the level of that standard and who sets it. We considered it prudent to start from some measure of minimum standards which in much of the work done on deprivation is usually defined as some form of poverty measure.

Although there is no official poverty threshold in the U.K. the state has defined a number of income levels below which it feels a need to intervene in order to bring that level up to a defined minimum standard. As a result we have (or at least did have in early 1980!) a range of benefits in the form of pensions, child allowances, supplementary benefits, and family income supplements as

direct payments. In addition there were other state payments in the form of various rebates, medical allowances etc.

There is usually much controversy about such state payments and especially their value as indicators of the minimum necessary to maintain living standards. For our study however they had two advantages:

(1) They are nationally defined and as such comparable across urban and rural space.

(2) They are also state instituted and therefore they provide some explicit indicators of what the state recognises as a minimum standard.

These were important considerations when undertaking research sponsored by a Department of State.

As the basis for analysing the incidence of poverty in rural areas, a major component of our research programme was the completion of an intensive and comprehensive household questionnaire covering a wider range of issues and designed to elicit information across all members of the household. Five study areas were chosen for the application of the questionnaire survey. These areas were chosen on the basis that they were experiencing processes of adjustment and change in their socio-economic fabric which, it had been argued, gave rise to conditions within which people experienced deprivation.

The study areas selected were as follows (Fig 1).

- A metropolitan rural area in N.W. Essex
- An intensively farmed arable and livestock economy - N. Suffolk
- A remote upland economy - N Yorkshire Dales

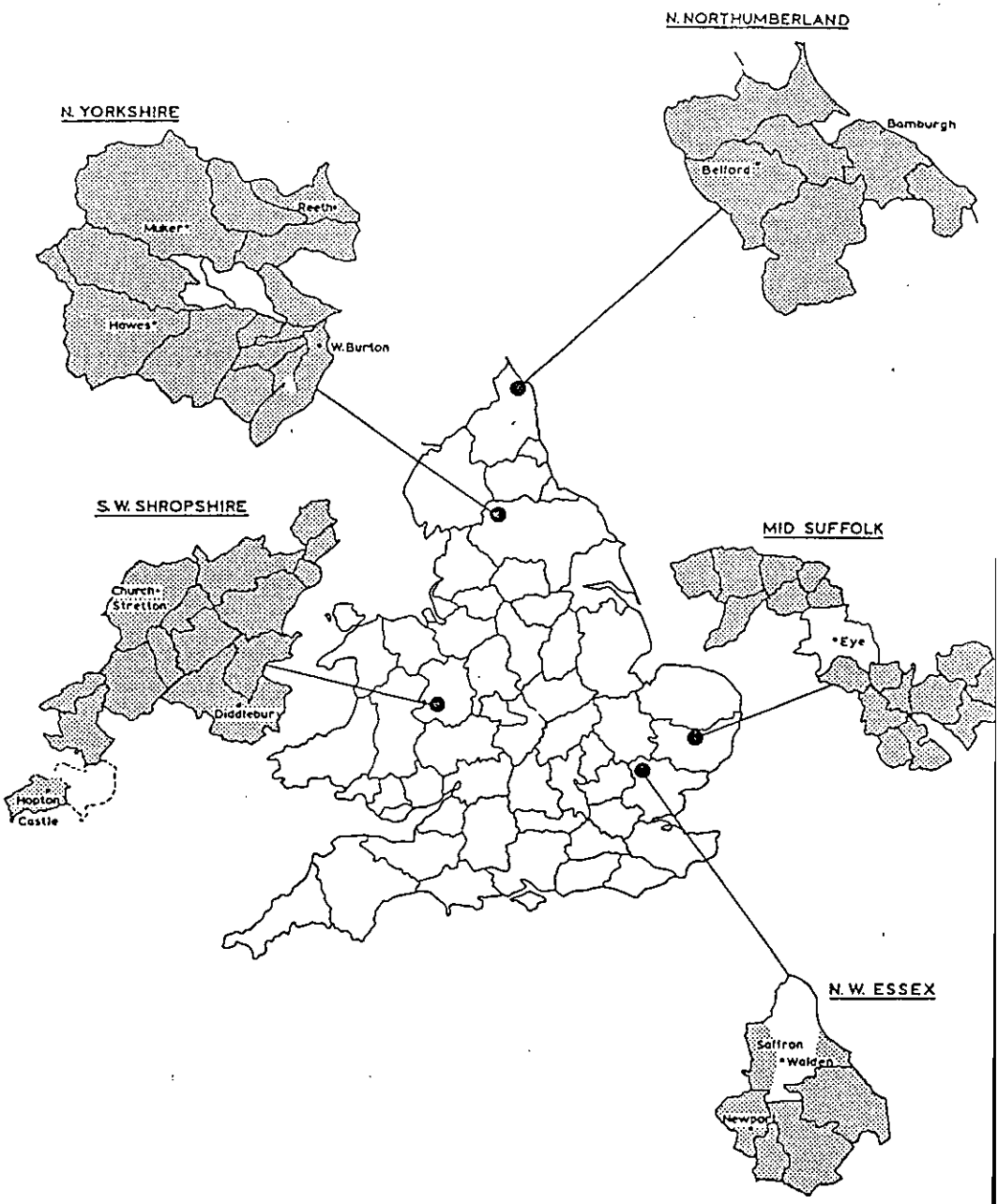
- A coastal economy based on tourism and a declining fishing industry - (N. Northumberland coast).

In practice these areas displayed a considerable degree of overlap in terms of their economies and the social changes that were occurring there. A total of 876 questionnaires were completed in these areas which produced what I understand to be the most detailed and comprehensive data set on the lifestyles of rural people ever to be compiled in the UK.

THE POVERTY ANALYSIS_- For each household and for each individual in the study, a state benefit entitlement was calculated and their gross disposable income was then expressed as a percentage of that state benefit level. Those who are familiar with social policy analysis will recognise this approach.

FIG. 1

LOCATION OF PARISHES INCLUDED IN THE HOUSEHOLD SURVEY



For those who are not, such calculations allow us to identify not only those who are on or below a poverty level (100% of S.B. entitlement or lower) but who may also be living on the margins of poverty (i.e. up to 139% of S. B level). The application of that computational process provided the following results (Fig 2).

1) A fairly consistent proportion of households in our sample areas (approximately 25%) were living in or on the margins of poverty according to the State standards.

2) A significant degree of inequality in wealth distribution within each area as measured by gross disposable income.

Three issues are worthy of comment at this point. Firstly I doubt if anyone realised that as many as one in four households in rural England in the 1980s could be living in or on the margins of poverty. This is not to suggest that we discovered rural poverty. What is important about the statistic is the contrast that the reality provides with the prevailing images of rural Britain in the 80s as epitomised by the coffee table publications or magazines such as Country Living. The second point is the extent of poverty compared with the historical dimension. We know that poverty was rife in rural England in the past but often it was a shared experience i.e. it was an experience familiar to the majority of the rural populace. By the 1980s, the rural poor had become marginalised to a small but significant minority. Thirdly is the question of inequality. Bearing in mind the comparatively small geographical areas covered in our study, the findings indicate that considerable degrees of inequality could be found within very short distances, a concept which Newby describes as "two nations in one village". This stands in some contrast to the pattern of urban deprivation where the process of ghettoisation often means that the poor inhabit the same physical as well as socio-economic landscape.

Fig. 2

% OF HOUSEHOLDS ACCORDING TO GROSS DISPOSABLE HOUSEHOLD INCOME EXPRESSED AS A PERCENTAGE OF THE S.B. SCALE RATES PLUS ACTUAL HOUSEHOLD COSTS FOR EACH HOUSEHOLD

% of S.B. scales & actual housing costs	N.W.Essex	Yorkshire Dales	Mid Suffolk	S.W. Shropshire	N'umberland Coast	All Areas
900+	1.2	1.2	2.4	5.3	3.4	2.7
700-899	1.8	1.8	3.0	2.4	1.7	2.1
500-699	3.6	6.0	3.6	6.0	1.7	3.6
300-499	19.4	15.6	20.9	17.8	16.4	18.1
140-299	49.1	49.7	48.8	43.8	50.0	48.5
<139%	24.9	25.8	21.4	24.9	27.3	24.9
N =	165	167	168	169	176	845

Fig. 3

% OF PERSONS ACCORDING TO GROSS DISPOSABLE HOUSEHOLD INCOME OVER THE PREVIOUS YEAR EXPRESSED AS A PERCENTAGE OF THE S.B. SCALE RATES PLUS ACTUAL HOUSING COSTS FOR EACH HOUSEHOLD

% of S.B. scales & actual housing costs	N.W.Essex	Yorkshire Dales	Mid Suffolk	S.W. Shropshire	N'umberland Coast	All Areas
900+	1.8	1.4	1.9	5.6	4.3	3.0
700-899	1.6	2.4	2.7	2.7	1.2	2.1
500-699	3.5	5.1	5.1	5.4	1.4	4.2
300-499	20.1	16.9	24.1	16.8	17.1	19.2
140-299	54.1	54.1	51.9	47.0	54.7	52.2
<139%	19.1	20.0	14.3	22.4	21.2	19.2
N =	453	414	518	481	420	2,286

If we look further into these statistics (Fig 3) you will find another interesting feature. Although 25% of households were found to be in or on the margins of poverty, that accounted for 20% of rural people. This apparent statistical anomaly is explicable by the fact that a considerable proportion of poor householders were single person households. Many of these householders were elderly and particularly elderly women. Herein lies another contrast with the available urban data. Whereas most research to date has identified families with children as the major victims of poverty and deprivation, in the rural context, the most vulnerable were elderly households.

I am loathe to construct a league table of the most deprived not least because we are dealing with a dynamic situation in which people can fall in and out of poverty as result of changing circumstances. Nevertheless our analysis suggested that sole elderly women were perhaps most prone to poverty in rural areas. Sole elderly men, elderly couples and then families would constitute the next most vulnerable groups. One group that is worthy of mention is single person households. Although our sample included only 8 single person households, 7 of them were found to be living in or on margins of poverty.

EXPLANATIONS OF POVERTY IN RURAL AREAS

As far as elderly households are concerned, the most common explanation for their state of poverty was related to the non-take up of supplementary entitlements in addition to the state pension although the impact of inflation on index-linked private pensions was also a consideration. For many rural elderly, the thought of seeking anything other than basic entitlement was regarded as "welfare".

For the remainder of the rural poor however, the primary

explanation of their state of poverty was the income levels of those employed in the rural economy.

Fig 4 shows the distribution of average gross weekly earnings for various employment groups compared with the G.B. average. It is clear that the hierarchy of earnings for the rural employed match the national situation i.e. full time non manual male employees receive highest average earnings and part-time manual female employees are at the bottom of the earnings league. What is perhaps most significant about the rural data is the level of inequality between that and the national picture. In absolute terms, most at the top in rural areas are better-off than the national average whereas those at the bottom are well below their national equivalent.

A synoptic illustration of the inequalities in earnings in a relative context can be seen in Fig 5 which standardises average gross weekly earnings for various categories of employment status against the full-time male non-manual average for Great Britain. All the rural non-manual groups (including part-time female) are indexed higher than the G.B. equivalent indicating perhaps that the more affluent in these categories choose to live in the countryside. Perhaps what is more significant is the comparison between men and women. The highest area average for women falls below the lowest real average for men in every case.

The idea that income differentials between groups in rural areas are somehow reduced by the liberal availability of fringe benefits is also largely mythological. As Fig 6 confirms, if anything the distribution of fringe benefits increases the differential in that the value of benefits received at the top end of the income scale e.g. free medical insurance, company cars, school fees etc is invariably worth more than those benefits that characterise the bottom end of the earnings bracket e.g. free overalls or wellington boots. What is perhaps equally relevant from this table is that a significant proportion of low

Fig. 4

AVERAGE GROSS WEEKLY EARNINGS (£) FOR VARIOUS CATEGORIES OF EMPLOYMENT STATUS BY AREA

	N.W. Essex	North Yorkshire	Mid Suffolk	S.W. Shropshire	N'umberland	All Areas	G.B.
F.T. Male - non manual	205.6	206.3	201.4	291.5	159.3	215.2	163.1
F.T. Male - manual	121.6	103.3	125.8	131.3	102.8	117.2	121.9
F.T. Female - non manual	108.3	113.1	119.2	96.9	83.1	104.1	96.7
F.T. Female - manual	48.2	69.7	78.3	71.4	56.8	66.3	74.5
P.T. Females - non manual	42.7	52.8	48.7	57.1	45.2	48.7	43.5
P.T. Female - manual	27.2	20.9	22.7	15.7	27.5	21.7	33.0

FIG 5.

Standardisation of Average Gross Weekly earnings for various categories of employment status (relative to G.B. F-T Male Non-Manual Worker - 100)

F-T	Male	Non-Manual	G.B.	£163.1= 100
F-T	"	" "	All Areas	£215.2= 132
F-T	"	" "	Shropshire	£291.5= 179
F-T	"	" "	Northumberland	£159.3= 98
F-T	Male	Manual	G.B.	£121.9= 75
F-T	"	"	All Areas	£117.2= 72
F-T	"	"	Shropshire	£131.3= 80.5
F-T	"	"	Northumberland	£102.8= 63
F-T	Female	Non-Manual	G.B.	£96.7 = 59
F-T	"	" "	All Areas	£104.1= 64
F-T	"	" "	Suffolk	£119.2= 73
F-T	"	" "	Northumberland	£83.1 = 51
F-T	Female	Manual	G.B.	£74.5 = 46
F-T	"	"	All Areas	£66.3 = 41
F-T	"	"	Suffolk	£78.3 = 48
F-T	"	"	Essex	£48.2 = 30
P-T	Female	Non-Manual	G.B.	£43.5 = 27
P-T	"	" "	All Areas	£48.7 = 30
P-T	"	" "	Shropshire	£57.1 = 35
P-T	"	" "	Essex	£42.7 = 26
P-T	Female	Manual	G.B.	£33.0 = 20
P-T	"	"	All Areas	£21.7 = 13
P-T	"	"	Northumberland	£27.5 = 17
P-T	"	"	Shropshire	£15.7 = 10

Fig. 6

DISTRIBUTION OF EMPLOYEES FRINGE BENEFITS BY INCOME

Gross Average Weekly Earnings	No Fringe Benefits	Medical Expenses	Loans/ Grants	Free Life Insurance	Education Expenses	Free/Reduced Travel	Free/Reduced Goods	Free Shoes	Other Benefits	N
Less than £40 per week	83.2	1.1	0.5	-	-	-	12.4	1.1	1.7	178
£40-£65 per week	66.2	-	-	2.6	-	1.3	20.8	1.2	7.8	77
£65-£80 per week	77.7	0.8	0.8	0.8	-	0.8	11.9	1.7	5.6	56
£80-£100 per week	67.8	1.6	4.1	0.8	-	.8	13.0	6.5	4.9	123
£100-£120 per week	60.4	-	1.9	3.8	-	-	13.2	13.2	7.5	53
£120-£160 per week	59.5	2.9	2.9	2.9	0.9	5.2	10.3	4.3	10.3	116
£160-£200 per week	65.3	4.0	4.0	5.3	1.3	2.7	14.7	-	2.7	75
£200-£300 per week	50.0	15.8	13.2	7.9	2.6	-	2.6	-	7.9	38
£300+ per week	48.3	20.7	10.3	10.3	-	3.5	3.5	3.5	-	29

income earners received no fringe benefits of any kind.

There is one important connection between the elderly poor and the low paid poor in this distributions of fringe benefits. The low paid jobs do not have pension funds attached so that when retirement comes, the state pensions will be the low paid workers main source of income. In that context it might be suggested that todays low paid poor household can easily become tomorrows elderly poor household.

Whatever significance these data may have in their own right they really take on meaning when set in the context of the debate on rural deprivation which characterised the 1970s in the U.K. I will illustrate this with selected findings from our analysis.

HOUSING

The question of deprivation in housing conventionally focusses on problems of housing quality and standards although in rural Britain the debate has tended to become a discussion of the problems of access to the available rural housing stock. This is not to suggest that poor housing is no longer a problem in rural areas. Indeed the national House Condition Survey (1981) indicated that some 6% of rural housing in England and Wales was unfit or substandard. On aggregate, the proportion of households in our rural sample living in substandard accommodation was broadly comparable to the national picture although aggregate data concede variations between areas.

What is perhaps most significant for the purposes of this paper however, is the distribution of poor housing across different social groups. As Fig 7 illustrates, the highest incidence of poor housing was found amongst the less well off.

Fig. 7

HOUSING DEPRIVATION (PHYSICAL STANDARDS) BY POVERTY STATUS

	<139% S.B. Level	140-199% S.B. Level	200-299% S.B. Level	300-399% S.B. Level	400%+ S.B. Level
No Housing Deprivation	46.2%	41.9%	45.9%	54.6%	63.0%
Slight Housing Deprivation	47.6%	52.7%	49.1%	43.5%	36.1%
Moderate Housing Deprivation	6.2%	5.4%	4.5%	1.9%	0.9%
Severe Housing Deprivation	0.0	0.0	0.5%	0.0	0.0
	N=210	N=186	N=222	N=108	N=119

ACCESS TO HOUSING

The aggregate data for our rural sample displayed a profile that is generally very familiar in rural areas i.e. a higher than average proportion of owner occupation (especially fully owned properties) lower proportions of public sector rented housing and high but declining proportions of private rented stock. (Fig 8).

It goes without saying that the owner occupied sector offered few if any opportunities to low income households although comparatively high property values in the countryside means that middle income groups can also be disadvantaged.

What is perhaps most significant for households at the bottom end of the income scale is the availability of housing for rent. Although the private rented sector accommodated a significant proportion of low to middle income households, 40% of all private rented housing was job tied thus reducing it's availability for general letting. As the remainder of the private rented sector often provided the only alternative for these unable to enter owner occupation, the latter tended to outbid lower income groups in terms of the rents being sought for these properties.

On aggregate it was the public rented sector which proved to be the most significant source of housing for many low income households although this sector did not meet the needs of all household types to the same extent. 70% of all council tenures were held by adult household, 40% being retired. Consequently only 30% of a limited stock of public sector housing was occupied by families with children under 18 years.

Within this overall housing profile, the housing opportunities for low to middle income family households in our rural survey were severely limited. For single

Fig. 8

TENURE STRUCTURE: PROPORTION OF HOUSEHOLDS IN SELECTED TENURE GROUPS

	ESSEX	YORKS	SUFFOLK	SHROPS.	N'LAND	ALL AREAS	G.B.
OWNER OCCUPIED (fully owned)	30.6	58.3	43.3	51.7	29.8	42.8	23.0
OWNER OCCUPIED (mortgage)	45.1	10.0	21.1	17.2	12.9	21.1	31.0
PUBLIC RENTED	14.4	15.0	14.6	5.7	27.0	15.4	33.1
PRIVATE RENTED	6.9	8.8	10.5	18.4	21.3	13.2	9.3
RENT FREE	2.9	7.2	10.5	6.9	8.4	7.2	2.0
OTHER	0.0	0.5	0.0	0.0	0.6	0.3	0.0
	N=173	N=180	N=171	N=174	N=178	N=876	

persons wishing to establish their own household they were non-existent. Trends in housing availability in rural areas since that survey suggest that the situation has worsened although I will return to that point later.

EMPLOYMENT

Here we find another illustration of the value (or lack of it) of conventional indicators of deprivation in the rural context. Normally the level of unemployment is used as a key indicator in deprivation in studies in urban areas. In the context of our rural analysis, unemployment did not emerge as a significant problem although this statement must be treated with some caution. It must be recognised for example that rural people have traditionally solved their unemployment problems by leaving rural areas. Without that approach the construction industry, the urban service industry and even the armed forces would have serious recruitment problems!

There is another explanatory factor that must also be taken into account and that is the strength of the work ethic in rural areas. In that context, unemployment is often considered to be a sign of character weakness or deficiency or even downright laziness - a situation summarised in a long remembered phrase from our study - "There's work for them as wants it!" -

In such a climate the pressure to take work (whatever its quality) is immense.

This latter point is also related to the lack of job choice in many rural areas. The study indicated that many rural people had genuine difficulties finding jobs in the local labour market especially those specialist or skilled jobs for which they held particular academic or professional qualifications. One result of this was the tendency for higher than average levels of academic and professional attainment to be found amongst the labour

force employed in manual occupations.

Generally however the real issue of relevance to the rural deprivation debate is the quality of rural jobs. As indicated earlier, the rural labour market is characterised by a preponderance of low paid jobs, especially but not exclusively in the manual occupations and amongst women. The wider implications of this situation scarcely need a comment, suffice it to say that if we have a low level wage structure in what is essentially a high cost economy, it should really come as little surprise if we uncover a significant incidence of poverty and deprivation amidst the prevailing images of rural affluence.

RURAL SERVICES

It is really only in the context of the analysis of poverty that the service dimension of the rural deprivation debate takes on any meaning. One or two examples will help illustrate the point.

1. Shopping: Central to much of the deprivation policy debate of the early 1970s was the decline in the number of village shops. From our analysis of rural shopping opportunities and patronage however, the decline of rural shops argument was a somewhat crude indicator of deprivation. As Fig. 9 illustrates, a significant proportion of our rural sample lived in areas which still retained a shop although the extent to which it was used as a primary source of food shopping was comparatively small. As Fig. 10 confirms, it was those at the bottom end of the income scale for whom the village shop was a vital local service and therefore, the most vulnerable when these shops closed.

Even when the shop remained, the poorer households were comparatively worse off in rural areas as the proportion of their weekly shopping bill was higher compared with

Fig. 9

AVAILABILITY AND USE OF VILAGE SHOPS ACCORDING TO HOUSEHOLDS

	Essex	Yorkshire	Suffolk	Shropshire	Northumberland	All rural areas
Households living in parishes without a shop (%)	18.5	18.0	15.4	26.6	9.0	17.4
Households in parishes with a shop but not using it (%)	62.4	40.4	66.1	62.4	23.6	50.3
Households using their village shop (%)	19.1	41.6	18.5	11.0	67.4	32.3

Fig. 10

PROPORTION OF HOUSEHOLDS IN SELECTED S.B.LEVELS ACCORDING TO WHERE THEY SHOP (ALL AREAS)

	Up to 139% S.B. Level	140-199% S.B. Level	200-299% S.B. Level	300-499% S.B. Level	500%+ S.B. Level
Local Village Shop	42.1	31.7	27.9	25.2	23.7
Shop in Nearest Centre	38.8	41.9	42.8	38.4	48.7
Shop in Other Centre	14.8	22.0	24.3	33.1	25.0
Supermarket/ Hypermarket/ Out of Town Centre	4.3	4.3	4.9	3.3	2.6
	N=209	N=183	N=222	N=151	N=76

the national average. (Ironically many of the better off households in our sample chose not to use local shops because they considered them to be too expensive).

A similar pattern emerged for all the rural services that were analysed. The loss of a local service outlet was a problem mainly for those poorer households for whom no real alternative opportunity existed. For middle income households, the loss of service was often an inconvenience and for the better off in rural areas, it bordered on being an irrelevance.

What is important to note at this juncture however, is the different experiences of individuals within particular household groups which often resulted in deprivation within households that might not be considered deprived by other criteria. Age and gender are two issues that immediately spring to mind. For example for those in rural households who did not have a car or a driving licence, there were some real problems arising from lack of choice. Women were particularly vulnerable in this context of "within household deprivation". Quality of jobs, levels of pay, car ownership, ability to drive are but four examples of situations where women in rural areas were relatively and absolutely worse off than men.

It is also important to make an important point about the question of localness. A popular argument in the rural deprivation debate is that it is "locals" who are the deprived group in rural society. Indeed much of the subsequent policy debate has targeted local populations as the group in prime need. Whilst our research in 5 rural areas of England identified that many local people were deprived, we concluded that not all the deprived in rural areas were local and not all the locals were deprived.

WHAT IS HAPPENING TODAY

It is now some 10 years since we started to investigate

the incidence of poverty and deprivation in rural areas and 5 years since I submitted my report to D O E. Although a new study of 'Rural Lifestyles' is about to begin sponsored jointly by the Economic and Social Research Council and the Rural Development Commission, the findings of that investigation will not be available for some 2 years. What I would like to offer this evening however, is a qualitative assessment of how things have changed in rural areas since my earlier research and what those changes might mean for the deprivation debate. Before doing so, let me say at the outset that the 1980s has seen the continuation and introduction of a number of successful local community initiatives throughout the U.K. all of which are managing to maintain local services, support local schools and even help in the provision of affordable housing. When we look at the big picture however, I would suggest that trends over the past decade have really done little to assist the deprived in rural areas as the following indicators will demonstrate.

Housing You probably do not need me to describe what has been happening to the housing stock in rural areas throughout the 80s. In the owner-occupied sector, rural housing was somehow moved from being "shelter" to an "investment" and with the ongoing repopulation of many areas of rural Britain by people with city money, the result has been a considerable increase in the "affordability gap". For many rural workers that is something of an academic question as their wage levels never allowed them to be serious competitors in the owner-occupied housing stakes. For middle and even upper income households however the escalation in house prices often means that either house ownership is beyond them or is only sustainable on joint incomes. This situation raises a number of key questions about the sustainability of such lifestyles. It also poises a serious challenge to one of the most popular images of rural living which is based upon the idea of a "stay-at-home wife" who is always available to participate in community affairs.

Increasingly it poses a more serious challenge to some of our social welfare policies especially but not exclusively the principle of care in the community.

For lower income households in rural areas however the most significant event of the 1980s has been the continuing erosion of public sector rented housing following the 'Right to Buy' provisions of the 1980 Housing Act. The decline in the availability private-rented housing has also been problematic as an increasing proportion of that stock is either sold off into owner-occupation or in many areas is transferred across to the more lucrative tourist/holiday rented sector. The end result of these two processes has been a serious decline in the availability of housing for rent in rural areas and this problem tends to be underplayed in the growing debate about affordable rural housing.

Although the political rhetoric surrounding the rural housing debate has increased considerably throughout the decade and the visibility of Housing Associations in rural areas has grown accordingly, the fact remains that the housing access issues identified in our earlier study do not seem to have improved over time. Indeed it might be suggested that the level of relative and absolute deprivation has increased as far as housing is concerned.

EMPLOYMENT

Here again I am concerned when I examine what is happening in the economy of many rural areas. The primary sector industries such as farming, forestry, fishing etc continue to shed full-time jobs in the U K. but it isn't just primary sector jobs that are lost. The current recession in agriculture is also having an effect on jobs upstream and downstream of the industry and many of the jobs lost are in rural areas and market towns. In the present and forseeable future, I can see no improvements to that trend.

Against that, it has been argued that rural areas (or at least some of them) have experienced some of the highest growth rates in job creation over the decade and indeed statistical evidence exists to demonstrate that point. If you define rural areas to include towns of up to 35,000 people then the data are correct. But if you believe (like I do) that the inclusion of towns of this size is stretching the credibility of the concept of rurality somewhat then perhaps the available data are at least contestable. I wonder what happens when you adjust the data to include towns of say up to 20,000 population or even 10,000 or even 5,000. There are some parts of rural Britain where a settlement of 5,000 population is probably perceived as a conurbation by the local population!

Leaving aside my concerns about the statistical evidence, I am also concerned about the identity of the beneficiaries of these new jobs. Hi-tech employment is often an important part of this rural job creation but how many incoming firms employ local labour and how many bring their already highly skilled labour with them with all that entails for rural housing etc. My own limited research on this subject suggests that although much is made of the impact of hi-tech jobs on the economy of rural areas many of these jobs do not reach the levels of greatest employment need in our rural areas - in the words of the modern commercial "They do not do a Heineken". this raises important questions about training and re-training in rural areas to which I will return.

The other perceived growth area in the rural economy is Tourism and Heritage. Given the recent growth in the nostalgia industry, it is becoming increasingly difficult to recognise the Geography of Britain as County Durham becomes Bede County, Exmoor becomes Lorna Doone Country, Nottingham is Robin Hood County and Sussex is 1066 County. As we re-package Britain for the Tourist industry it is clear that there is job creating potential

in many rural areas. However let us look beyond the *numbers* of jobs and examine their *quality*. When we do we will find that one of the dark sides of the tourism industry is that many of the unskilled and semi-skilled jobs within it are low paid. That prompts me to pose just one question - what do we really achieve if we continue to create low paid jobs in a high cost economy?

Services - This is a wide ranging issue on which I will make some general comments.

i) Public Transport Despite the rhetoric which surrounded the introduction of the 1985 Transport Act, it is becoming clear from the available research that the free-market has not delivered the transport revolution in rural areas that was promised. On the contrary I think time will demonstrate that rural services have suffered more than any other post 1985 and with increasing pressure on county council budgets, I predict that service decline will continue.

ii) Shops Although there have been numerous well publicised examples of village shops surviving throughout rural Britain, the fact remains that shops continue to close although perhaps not at the rate which has been recorded in earlier decades. Competition from out-of-town shopping centres, problems with maintaining supplies from wholesalers and changes to the status of some rural post offices have all combined to undermine the viability of many rural shops. More recently the introduction of the Community Charge and Uniform Business Rate seems destined to place even more shops in rural areas on the "at risk" list.

iii) Public Services - Rural areas have not been left out of the general changes in public services provision throughout the country. The general winding down of the public sector and of the provision of statutory services across the country has had its

particular implications for rural areas where problems of distance and/or isolation add a particular twist to the debate. It is perhaps sufficient to note that a recently published report by the Rural Development Commission entitled 'English Village Services in the Eighties' painted a picture that suggested a continuing decline in the availability of many key services although not all services face the same problems. I suspect that the pattern in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland is broadly similar.

I could go on but I think I have made my point. Looking at the rural condition in the widest possible context, and notwithstanding the achievement of many local initiatives often with the encouragement of bodies such as the Rural Development Commission or H.I.D.B, the general picture is one of declining opportunities for the less able and less well off whilst for the more affluent, rural life is lived in a manner which comes as close to their rural idyll as they can manage. I cannot see that situation changing. Indeed, the introduction of the Community Charge, the Uniform Business Rate, privatisation of services such as Water and the introduction of the single market after 1992 are all changes that can (and will) result in the maintenance of the gap between haves and have nots in the countryside. More immediately, we must also look at the rural power base and the identity of those making decisions that affect rural areas and their inhabitants. It seems to me that many rural areas are now being subjected to no change policies in pursuit of what is crudely described as environmental protection. Herein lies something of an interesting contradiction. Policies which emphasise no change and as a result deny housing or employment opportunities to those who need them in rural areas tend to overlook the fact that the landscapes and environments which they seek to protect are in fact by-products of past and present economic activities. They are also landscapes of people. What is the long-term sustainability of a policy which does

not recognise the dynamics of the system that it seeks to protect?

WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

It is always much easier to analyse and describe situations and circumstances than it is to identify what should be done to put things right. I am no exception to that general rule but I feel obliged to offer some thoughts on how we might proceed.

How Rural Is The Problem? Arguably one of the biggest mistakes we make is trying to look for a particular rural angle to something which in reality is non-spatial. The deprivation debate is no exception. Although there are particular rural circumstances that give a special twist or nuance to many socio-economic issues, the fact remains that many of the issues that are identified in the rural deprivation debate are not uniquely rural. To give but one example - the situation in which incomers outcompete locals for housing and subsequently influence the availability of jobs and services is just as relevant to what is happening in London docklands today as it is to rural areas of the country. My first comment therefore is Beware of the false dichotomies. We will not necessarily solve something within a narrowly defined set of rural parameters if that problem is national.

Identify Problems Rather than Symptoms - In all areas of policy, we have a tendency to treat those issues which are more visible or easier to define. In many situations we end up treating the symptoms of the problem rather than the problem itself. This is a common characteristic in the rural policy debate and one which to some extent, my earlier research attempted to address. Perhaps we see this most marked in todays debate on rural housing. Much as we might feel comfortable that some progress is being made on the affordable rural housing front, the fact remains that it was a piece of political dogma i.e. the

sale of council housing which has exacerbated the housing problem in rural areas. It is another piece of political dogma i.e. the Government's attitude to staircasing in shared-ownership housing which continues to stand in the way of some solution to that problem.

We must also recognise that many of the problems facing people in rural areas derives from the fact that it is a low paid economy. To my mind this leaves us with two options:

i) We strive to change that situation through programmes of training and retraining so that rural populations can participate in the new labour markets that might be available to them.

ii) We also recognise that perhaps some jobs in the rural economy will remain low paid but we strive to ensure that services and facilities are in place to ensure that rural areas remain habitable for those who hold those low paid jobs.

This is perhaps where we have not confronted realities sufficiently in the past. We have assumed that rural life was too much like the popular image and devised policies which gave insufficient attention to the socio-economic diversity of rural Britain. This brings me to my third point on the need for local involvement.

Who Defines Issues and Policies - Perhaps the third point I would make is that we have relied on information bases and policy mechanisms that are too crude and coarse grained to allow us to handle many of the key policy issues. Whilst I would not suggest that we need to do studies of the kind of detail that I undertook across the whole country, the fact remains that some of the key issues in the rural debate do not become immediately apparent from existing information sources. The increasingly important role of local needs housing surveys is a good illustration of that. I believe that

the success of these surveys does not only come from the fact that they are done at a local scale but also because they create and require a very high degree of involvement from those most directly affected. If we are going to ask local communities to become more actively involved in solving their own problems, can we really deny them the opportunity to tell us what it is they think they should be solving.

The Need for Integration - My final point relates to how policies in rural areas have been devised and implemented in the past. It seems to me that rural Britain has suffered from policy apartheid to date. Even at the most local level of representative government, individual programmes and budgets have often been drawn up and implemented without much regard to other programmes in other departments in one's own authority or in neighbouring authorities. It seems to me that the issues to be confronted in rural areas are so inter-related that we can only approach them in an integrated manner having determined the necessary goals and objectives for our policies. On that basis, the countryside seems as appropriate for the application of a system of corporate planning as our towns and cities were two and three decades ago.

Ultimately how we address issues in rural areas depends on what role(s) we want rural areas to play in the future. At present, it would seem to me, that debate is not taking place with the result that our future in rural areas seems to be determined by the most articulate and/or by those who can afford the best advocates.

I would suggest that if we continue with that approach then we must accept that one of the consequences is that country folk will increasingly be replaced by folk who live in the country. It we do not want that to be the outcome, then we need to think quickly about the nature of intervention required to change that. Hopefully the material put forward in this paper will assist that thought process.

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