

Introduction

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This is a book about another book, *Divisions of Labour*, written by R. E. (Ray) Pahl in 1984. There are several good reasons for returning to that book. First, it contains themes of enduring interest. It is about ordinary people and how they get by in difficult economic and social circumstances. It shows what can be learned about people's everyday lives when ordinary activity is investigated in an imaginative and sustained way. Second, it has been an extraordinarily influential book in British sociology and in countries and disciplines beyond. The path-breaking arguments that it contains meant that it became, and remains, a significant reference point in the sociological sub-fields of work, households, gender, class and stratification, community and social history, while also providing numerous insights into broader theoretical debates. Healthy citation rates of a book well into its second quarter century since publication are unusual and thus indicate something special. The book tells us numerous things about how a particular piece of research can come to stand out as extraordinary. Third, we have a methodological interest. We have returned to this book because of what it reveals about the craft of conceiving, planning, undertaking and presenting research. Ray Pahl was more frank than most social and economic investigators either then or now about research practice. The book provides an account of serious mistakes made and how these problematic situations were retrieved. It is a story of a research project, warts and all, but not only warts; the book also includes gems that help to set it apart from other research monographs. Together, these three elements persuaded us to revisit *Divisions of Labour* following the death of its author in 2011. Our task has not been to bring out a new edition of the book, although we have done that in part through selective excerpts which are intended to give a sense of the style and content of the original. The more important purpose has been to explore from a variety of angles what has gone into making the book a modern sociological classic.

We have undertaken this task as a collaborative project because the book's significance is acknowledged by many different people for a variety of reasons. One powerful rationale for revisiting it is to explore how it provided a springboard for subsequent debates through its sheer audacity and provocativeness. Its themes are certainly ambitious. Pahl was looking to do nothing less than to re-think what we understand by 'work'. In doing so he was bound to upset not

only common-sense perspectives but also analytical frameworks that had been evolved and invested in by scholars, commentators and policy-makers over previous decades. By the mid-1970s it was increasingly apparent that these established frameworks were failing in both theory and practice. In the UK and other advanced industrial societies unemployment returned to levels not seen for more than a generation, to widespread surprise and dismay. At the same time the lack of attention to unpaid work, owing to a concentration on formal employment, was being questioned by feminists concerned with the issues of housework and family care, and by other social scientists with an interest in informality in the spheres of production and exchange broadly conceived. Together, these changes around not just paid work but divisions of labour in all processes of getting things done (at home as well as in the public sphere) struck Pahl as being potentially as significant as anything since the development of modern industrial societies. He was prompted to speculate that: 'It is just possible that the remaining two decades of the twentieth century will be a period of revolution in everyday life' (Pahl 1980: 17–18) while also noting that existing understandings appeared to stand in the way of the appreciation of this unfolding transformation. Mindful that the profundity of the changes wrought on families and households by the industrial revolution was not fully appreciated at the time that those changes unfolded, Pahl was wondering aloud whether a shift of similar historical proportions was afoot. Subsequently, others have pursued the idea that the third quarter of the twentieth century was distinctly favoured (Hobsbawm 1994), and that the 1970s witnessed a pivotal 'great transformation' (Blyth 2002) in economic thinking and institutional practice that led to a new and less comfortable set of arrangements.

Pahl's preparedness to re-think the various configurations of 'work' was coupled with unconventionality and inventiveness in research design. He saw the possibilities of following in the tradition of community studies or of conducting a policy-driven project as others around him were doing in the context of rising unemployment and social connections coming under corresponding strain. He opted to do neither, and chose instead to follow a more ambitious (and by implication more risky) route. Pahl was clear that he was not undertaking a conventional community study, a genre that had been critiqued as 'atheoretical and uncumulative' (Pahl 1980: 1). Of the six topics that were the core interests of Robert and Helen Lynd in 'Middletown' and which set the agenda for community studies, work and home figure prominently in *Divisions of Labour*, but education and leisure are mentioned only sporadically, while religion and community action are, by and large, absent. As a result the book is not an exploration of how the various constituent parts of community fit together on the Isle of Sheppey in Kent, the selected fieldwork site. The study was to be narrower than that, but also much wider as Pahl sought to place changing divisions of labour in broader historical, geographical and philosophical contexts. This concern to develop a far-reaching comparative perspective meant that the questions that interested Pahl

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went beyond the search for policy solutions to the immediate situation on the ground, important though he recognised that was. The project combined wide-ranging reviewing of several literatures (that it took the first third of the book to report upon) with a pioneering combination of fieldwork methods that included ethnographic observation, qualitative interviews, a large-scale formal survey, analysis of historical documents, oral history, essay-writing and photography. The research design that underpins the book was characterised by methodological innovation long before that term came into vogue.

Ray Pahl's route to Sheppey

The full extent of the book's ambitious methodological and theoretical agenda can be conveyed by tracing the book's gestation within the context of Pahl's unfolding career. This is summarised in the timeline of Pahl's life included at the end of this Introduction. Obituaries (e.g., Harloe 2011; Wallace 2011), career histories (e.g., Crow and Takeda 2011), and interviews with Pahl such as that in the *Pioneers of Social Research* collection (<http://discover.ukdataservice.ac.uk/catalogue/?sn=6226>) confirm that he was already a well-established mid-career academic by the mid-1970s when the ideas that formed the basis for a decade of research on Sheppey started to crystallise. They did so around the question of how people were getting by in the unfamiliar and challenging context of rates of unemployment that had been unknown for a generation, occurring at the same time as unprecedented rates of inflation. The conventional wisdom of the time, known as the Phillips curve, was that the reduction of either unemployment or inflation came at the cost of an increase in the other, so the simultaneous increase in unemployment and inflation was an indication of having entered a new and more perplexing era.

These changes threw into doubt the previous certainties following the Second World War settlement, namely secure employment (at least for male heads of households) and steadily rising living standards. All watershed moments, turning points and reversals of long-term trends are a challenge to contemporary observers who seek to understand them as they unfold (Abbott 2001b: chapter 8), so we should not expect it to have been immediately apparent at a time when the sustained move towards the reduction of social inequality in the UK that had been a product of the development of the welfare state was going into reverse. There were, even so, sufficient straws in the wind to suggest that some fundamental shift was occurring. By the 1970s the post-war settlement was clearly 'in trouble', and although it was less clear that the changes would be the precursors of 'Thatcherism at work' (MacInnes 1987: 26), it was apparent that the 'long boom' of the post-war decades had come to an end (Glyn and Sutcliffe 1972: 98). These developments were thrown into sharp relief not only by the break with past experience but also by being at odds with popular predictions of the direction of social change.

The American sociologist Daniel Bell's influential book *The Coming of Post-Industrial Society* (1973) was careful not to endorse the idea of the end of scarcity which had some currency at the time, but it nevertheless embodied a discordantly optimistic tone in mid-1970s Britain in which the word 'crisis' appeared more appropriate (Turner 2008). Bell had already focused attention on what might be expected by the end of the century in his and Stephen Graubard's *Toward the Year 2000* (1997 [1967]). When they returned to this project in 1997, Bell and Graubard conceded that although many of their predictions had been correct, they had 'failed to deal with the changing role of women' (Bell and Graubard 1997: xvii), particularly in the workplace. By the early 1970s the issue of gender and work had already attracted Pahl's attention in his and Jan Pahl's 1971 book *Managers and their Wives* in which the tensions around wives' opportunities for careers were noted. At the same time, Pahl was aware of significant changes occurring in both the housing and labour markets. Owner-occupation was becoming established as the majority tenure, and the benefits of property ownership relative to renting in an inflationary context meant that owner-occupiers 'may gain more from the housing market in a few years than would be possible from savings from a lifetime of earnings' (Pahl 1975: 291). In such circumstances, existing thinking about social class divisions as well as gender relations would be bound to need reassessment.

Like all good social scientists (indeed, all scientists), Pahl had an inquiring mind. He was curious about what was happening in the world around him, including things that were, for one reason or another, hidden from public view (something reflected in his interest in the writings of Erving Goffman (Pahl 1973)). His curiosity was coupled with a relaxed approach to speculation about what research might find, incorporating a certain frisson about the possibility of discovering something unexpected or troubling to existing ways of thinking and acting. It was a favoured maxim of Pahl's that researchers should 'always begin with history', and this concern to locate research in its appropriate historical context was complemented by his preparedness to speculate about emergent social trends. This speculative tendency was expressed in initial position statements that preceded his empirical investigation into the meaning of contemporary friendship (Pahl 2000; Spencer and Pahl 2006), for example. Here he pondered the idea that relations between friends were becoming 'an increasingly important form of social glue' (Pahl 2000: 1) as conventional family and place-based community relationships went into relative decline. The possibility that ideas put forward speculatively might turn out to be wrong was for Pahl an occupational hazard with which he was already acquainted by the time of the Sheppey project. One of the things for which he was best-known in his pre-Sheppey career was his writing on urban managerialism, but he was unabashed to acknowledge in a 1975 essay reconsidering this work that his approach of only a few years previously 'lacks both practical policy implications and theoretical substance'; it was wanting because: 'It ignores

the constraints of capitalism' (Pahl 1975: 265, 268). This self-criticism is on a par with his earlier demolition of the rural–urban continuum in one telling sentence: 'Any attempt to tie particular patterns of social relationships to specific geographical milieux is a singularly fruitless exercise' (Pahl 1968: 293). The quest for truth requires unsparing criticism, including (where appropriate) self-criticism.

In the case of the Sheppey research, there are several expressions of speculative ideas that were formulated and published early on, including in his article with Jonathan Gershuny, 'Work outside employment: Some preliminary speculations' (Gershuny and Pahl 1981), which had first appeared in the *New Universities Quarterly* in the winter of 1979/80. The timing of this article is important because it pre-dates the great bulk of the Sheppey research, and it came out before he was prepared to disclose the location of his fieldwork (Pahl 1980: 2, fn. 1). This did not constrain Pahl from claiming that he, like Gershuny, had 'undertaken studies in urban areas which reveal buoyant communities coping with job losses through informal economic activity' (Gershuny and Pahl 1981: 83). This was a preliminary conclusion that Pahl would later concede was overly optimistic about the situation on Sheppey which the fuller investigation reported on in *Divisions of Labour* revealed to be a long way from 'buoyant'. His justification would have been that he and his co-author were setting a research agenda. Indeed, they declared the development of a better understanding of work outside of employment as 'the most urgent priority for research in the social sciences' (1981: 88), and were led to this conclusion by their speculations about the profundity of the changes unfolding around them.

Already in this piece are the key questions that underpinned *Divisions of Labour*, namely 'Which work? in which economy? for which member of the household? for how long?' (1981: 87, emphases in original). In posing these questions they were prepared to look beyond the certainties of the post-war corporatist settlement that had promised full employment and general improvements to wellbeing but which was showing unmistakable signs of being unable to continue to deliver them. Such a scenario required radically different fresh thinking, and Gershuny and Pahl's speculations about redefining 'work' and the possibilities for developing flexible patterns of sharing that work certainly fitted that bill. A pithy expression of these ideas in the journal *New Society* saw Gershuny and Pahl express the view that: 'We need new concepts as well as more detailed ethnography. The scale of adjustment in intellectual frameworks is enormous' (Gershuny and Pahl 1980: 9). They also argued that while some scenarios associated with the move away from the formal economy were 'grim', a more 'pleasant' one was also available in which the move from formal to informal economic activity could be seen as 're-skilling' rather than the more fashionable idea of 'de-skilling' (1980: 8), and linked to the potential to 'extend the range of genuine options open to people' (1980: 9).

In a similar vein, Pahl's 1980 article 'Employment, work and the domestic division of labour', published in the *International Journal of Urban and Regional*

Research, buzzed with speculative ideas. In a particularly provocative statement, he proposed that 'unemployment could, under certain specified conditions, be a positive benefit'. The logic of this argument was that the conditions of work as an employee can sometimes be 'bad', and that formal employment is only one of several ways in which people with skills can gain access to the necessities of life and affirmation as a worker. Income may be generated and the identity of a worker achieved through informal work. This may be remunerated by undocumented payments (undeclared to the tax authorities), or recompensed in kind. People may also produce things for themselves, which Pahl makes much of in *Divisions of Labour* as 'self-provisioning'. In these and other cases, unemployment pay may also be available, and this can also contribute to an individual who does not have formal employment nevertheless not being 'in such a vulnerable position' (1980: 5) as classic accounts of unemployment would lead us to believe. Pahl acknowledged that his thinking was open to challenge as mere 'travellers' tales' (1980: 2), that it included anecdotes and trivial examples, and that: 'The criticism that I am basing my argument on a handful of cases in one labour market is inevitably correct' (1980: 16). His defence was that there was at least something that needed to be explained about the material that he (and, by the time he wrote the article, Claire Wallace) had started to collect, which suggested that fundamental changes were unfolding.

Adopting the device of presenting case studies of two contrasting couples that would work so effectively in the stories of Linda and Jim and Beryl and George in chapter 11 of *Divisions of Labour*, Pahl devoted a significant part of the article to describing the contrasting patterns of relationships to work (in all its forms) that the Simpson and the Parsons households had. This discussion included the suggestion that Mr Simpson had turned away from the world of formal employment and 'reverted to a pre-industrial pattern of hunter and gatherer' (1980: 13), for example by bartering wild duck that he had shot on the marshes. Pahl's argument then rowed back to the more cautious statement that: 'It is unlikely that my theme constitutes a paradigmatic shift ... despite the confident assertions of some of the authorities I cite' (1980: 191). This step in his argument emphasised his role as the empirical investigator, obliged to explore the more outlandish speculations of others, even though he had elsewhere in the article engaged in just such speculation himself.

The contrasts between these early speculative pieces of writing and the more fully formed analyses put forward in *Divisions of Labour* are striking. In the book Pahl acknowledged that as the research proceeded and robust data were collected and analysed, the initial hypotheses had needed to be discarded. The book refuted the 1980 article (Pahl 1984: 11 fn. 23). He conceded that: 'my ideas in 1980 were, I was told, plausible, sociologically interesting and challenging. I have since had to modify them substantially' (1984: 13). His disarmingly upbeat assessment of this reversal of his position was captured in the remark, 'I am as delighted

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that I have been proved wrong as I would have been if I had been proved right. Perhaps more so' (1984: 200). This tells us several things. First, it confirms the narrative of his study of Sheppey that Pahl provided in the Introduction to the book. There was not one overarching plan at the outset, but a succession of research projects that grew seemingly exponentially from small beginnings as hunches. The acorn out of which the oak tree that is *Divisions of Labour* grew was a period of research leave in 1977 in which Pahl read extraordinarily widely, thought imaginatively, talked and argued with colleagues a lot, and undertook some very preliminary fieldwork in the nearby Medway towns, where the idea of 'urban pirates' gave early expression to the speculative position described in the 1980 article that the informal economy opened up opportunities for people to get by without formal employment.

The focus on the Isle of Sheppey resulted from the practical considerations which the funding body (the Nuffield Foundation) required as a condition of their support for two years' pilot research. Commencing in 1978 this included further ethnographic interviews and observations by Pahl and also Wallace, and 141 essays written by 16-year-olds about to leave full-time education for inauspicious employment prospects (Pahl 1978). Additional projects followed, including an ambitious survey of one in nine Sheppey households conducted by Social and Community Planning Research, a historical analysis of the Admiralty dockyard and the rise and fall of the occupational community that grew up around it (Buck 1981), a survey of local employers' attitudes, and other researchers and research students pursuing further issues. This research team grew sufficiently large to warrant Pahl buying a property in the fieldwork site, thereby following in the footsteps of other social scientists, such as Erving Goffman on Unst and Herbert Gans in 'Levittown'.

Had there been an overarching plan of work at the outset, *Divisions of Labour* would have been a very different book. Arguably, what holds the book together is the engagement by Pahl and his team with things thrown up by the fieldwork that do not quite fit established ways of thinking. Sheppey was neither straightforwardly urban nor rural but 'a curious mixture' (Pahl 1980: 14) of the two. Middle-class visitors would see it as 'an ugly and polluted industrial wasteland' (1980: 16), but the geographical space was treated with some affection by its inhabitants. And despite the constrained nature of their situation, people on the margins of the formal labour market could be seen to be responding pragmatically (Pahl 1982) and with 'a different rationality' (1984: 200), not a lack of rationality. Certainly, Pahl was under no illusions about the research process being neat and tidy. He was a contributor to the path-breaking book *Doing Sociological Research* (Bell and Newby 1977) which set out to de-bunk the sanitised narratives of methods 'cook books' whose recipes misled readers by leaving out the personal dimension of research. Pahl was setting the research agenda according to what struck him as curious and interesting. A key prompt in this respect was the presence of 'a

disjunction between ... [people's] personal experience' (Pahl 1984: 5) and inherited sociological wisdom. Murray Davis's aphorism that 'interesting ideas are novel because they externally contradict a conventional baseline' (Davis 2000: 113) is pertinent here. Pahl's sense was that established divisions of labour were breaking down. Informal ways of working were developing as a more flexible alternative to formal practices, and gendered norms associated with different types of work were coming under strain from both economic and cultural pressures to change. In short, existing arrangements were losing their capacity to convince in a time of endings and new beginnings. At such a moment of crisis, experimentation with speculative ideas carried more appeal than the reproduction of established agendas.

Pahl's speculations, which he acknowledged were presented in a 'polemical' (1984: 247) style, certainly captured people's attention. He recounted how the 1980 article was disseminated widely including through translation, and prompted many invitations to speak abroad as well as in the UK (1984: 10). He wondered whether it may have generated interest because it provided the sort of good news story that people at a time of difficulty wanted to hear (1984: 11). As a result, the publication of the book was eagerly awaited, to see whether the evidence supported the challenging idea of an unfolding revolution in everyday life that took people 'beyond employment', to use the title of one of the books in which findings from the Sheppey project were published (Redclift and Mingione 1985). It was the point at which 'empirical research caught up with theoretical speculation' (Edgell 2006: 145).

For a book of its size and scope, it was written and put into the public domain remarkably quickly (Pahl 1984: viii). Given the amount of material collected on Sheppey, the publication could have stretched to several volumes and Pahl had been happy to countenance this, but his publishers and his university were keen to see speedy publication. Numerous reviews appeared, commending Pahl's willingness to challenge sociological wisdom and his engaging and accessible writing style. It was 'sociology at its penetrating best' (Marshall 1985: 450). For Peter Saunders, the subject matter made for 'bleak reading', but the book was nevertheless 'delightfully well written' (1985: 645, 646). Linda McDowell called it 'an interesting and provocative book' in which Pahl managed 'to not only produce a masterly synthesis of existing debates but also to extend the ideas in an exciting and scholarly way' (McDowell 1986: 182). David Morgan also used the word 'provocative' to describe the book, along with 'informative' (1985: 615), while Michael Harloe found it 'absorbing and stimulating' because of its development of an approach 'at variance with much recent sociology' (Harloe 1985: 273). Damaris Rose described it as 'a bold attempt to tackle an important and neglected set of themes' (1986: 335). Following its publication, *Divisions of Labour* quickly generated widespread interest and comment, and this has continued down to the present.

Considering *Divisions of Labour* as a modern sociological classic

Citations provide one indication of a book's prominence. According to A. H. Halsey (2004: 176), citations showed that *Divisions of Labour* was among the ten most influential books in UK sociology in the 1980s. Halsey had already lauded Pahl (and J. Gershuny) as among the small group of researchers in the sociology of work who, standing on the shoulders of the preceding generation, could see 'further into the nature of urban labour markets and work organization, clarified theoretical puzzles, adopted new refined techniques of quantitative analysis, and established new connections between the sociology of production and the sociology of the family, household and community' (Halsey 1989: 369). Google Scholar gives a figure (December 2016) of 1,460 citations for the book. This figure is impressive in its own right and broadly on a par with other classic works of British sociology.

It is also noteworthy because of the range of disciplines that the citations of *Divisions of Labour* show the book reaching, the range of languages in which the citations occur and the duration of this influence. On the first of these additional points, we can note that the ideas contained in *Divisions of Labour* have been engaged with by scholars not only in sociology but in anthropology, development studies, economics, geography, political science, psychology, social history, social policy and beyond. This extraordinary ability to speak across disciplinary boundaries prompted the application to Pahl of the term 'interdisciplinary sociologist' (Crow and Takeda 2011); the term 'boundary spanner' also captures his role in promoting dialogue across disciplinary borders that are restrictive when overzealously guarded. On the second point, it is readily apparent from the Google Scholar data that the book's influence has extended far beyond the English-speaking world, aided in part by its translation into Spanish. When Anthony Giddens listed seven British sociologists who had a worldwide reputation (1996: 6), Pahl was among them. Third, it is instructive that the book has been cited at a remarkably steady rate; it has achieved at least 200 citations in each five-year period since 1984, and its citation figures actually rose after the turn of the century. Figures have not tailed off markedly in the 2010s but merely returned to the levels of the 1980s. It can also be argued that these are not superficial 'ritual' references made for form's sake but rather have been prompted by active engagement with the book's ideas.

The things that lead to a book becoming widely known are of general interest. John Madge's work *The Origins of Scientific Sociology* looked at an earlier generation of 'seminal books' (Madge 1970: 524) that have played key roles in the development of the discipline. Madge highlighted three aspects of successful books relating to methods, theories and relevance to social problems. He looked for methodological rigour and empirical applicability but he also sought 'explanations rather than enumerations' (1970: 524), and as a result excluded studies that

were reluctant to venture beyond description. Conversely, the studies included stand out for the rich 'heritage of concepts' (1970: 542) they bequeathed to subsequent generations of researchers. Madge also draws on Robert Merton's concept of 'practical curiosity' (1970: 514–5) to argue that the studies included in his volume produced knowledge that was of value not only for its own sake but also for the policy implications that might be drawn from that knowledge. For Madge, sociology's potential lies crucially in the power of its ideas, and the history of the discipline can be written through instances of the most far-reaching ideas that practitioners of the subject have generated.

Efforts to identify outstanding books to come out of British sociology in more recent periods include Gordon Marshall's *In Praise of Sociology* (1990) and Fiona Devine and Sue Heath's *Sociological Research Methods in Context* (1999). These authors follow Madge in selecting books that report on research projects that are theoretically and methodologically sophisticated with a distinctive purpose in commenting on the social world in ways that have some practical significance, and written in such a way that readers are made aware of how the research was actually undertaken. Although *Divisions of Labour* did not feature in these collections, there is no reason in principle why it could not have done.

W. G. (Garry) Runciman's reflections on the variety of things done by sociologists also support the case for treating Pahl as the author of a modern sociological classic, because of the range of its ambition. Runciman summarised the most usual and most important aims of sociologists to be 'reportage, explanation, description and evaluation' (Runciman 1989: 9), all of which can be considered to be present in *Divisions of Labour*. Runciman later went on to produce a fuller description of the sociological agenda that includes 'refining statistical methods, categorizing social relationships, ruminating about the human condition, championing the oppressed, rewriting the history of sociology, undermining the reputations of rival sociologists, [and] prophesying the future of the world' (1997: xiv). This extensive list was drawn from sociologists in general, but there is a sense in which each of these elements of sociological practice plays a part in Pahl's *Divisions of Labour* (which is, incidentally, included in the bibliography of Runciman's book). Pahl's ambition in the Sheppey study can be gauged by considering each of these items on Runciman's list in turn.

The development of statistical methods can be found in Pahl's efforts (with the assistance of Spyros Missiakoulis, acknowledged as joint author of chapter 10) to capture the complexities of the domestic division of labour. Pahl's interest in work in all its forms led him to present a rudimentary model of the different combinations of types of work that households can include in their work strategies, but even with simplifying assumptions that Pahl recognised to be unrealistic, the model still produced some forty-nine options (Pahl 1984: 149). The analysis of the survey results undertaken by Pahl's team required sophisticated statistical analysis including devising a new index of the domestic division of labour, called

'the DOMDIV index' (1984: 257). Without this, the results derived from the survey data on the gendered patterns of who does what in households would not have been presentable in the way that they were.

The development of the DOMDIV index in turn relied upon Pahl's **categorisation** of types of work, his efforts to develop 'new ways of looking at work' (1984: 139). Morgan's review of the book noted that: 'The familiar categories of work, class, family and household are broken up and reassembled in new and informative ways' (Morgan 1985: 615). The purpose of this endeavour was to look beyond paid employment in the formal economy to paid and unpaid work in the informal economy, and unpaid work in households using the term 'self-provisioning' as a more extensive category than 'housework'. At the outset of the Sheppey projects that culminated in *Divisions of Labour* there were the early indications of what would be known as the breakdown of the post-war settlement that had been built around nuclear families, the full employment of the male 'heads' of those households, and a redistributive welfare state. Pahl's research agenda was fleshed out incrementally, but was already germinating in the sense that he 'had in the early 1970s that the pattern was starting to shift and that a world [he] had got used to for twenty-five years would never be the same again' (1984: 2). The dismantling of the corporatist settlement and the movement into reverse (beginning in 1976) of the long-term trend towards the reduction of income inequality in the UK, the insistence of the women's movement that housework and care work should not be excluded from counts of work simply because they were unpaid, and the onward march of technology that was opening up opportunities for people to do more things for themselves all pointed to the need to fundamentally re-think 'work' and its associated social relationships.

Work in all its forms is a vital element in the human condition, and Pahl's style in *Divisions of Labour* and elsewhere included **ruminations** about this. His later edited volume *On Work* (1988) included contributions from philosophy, as well as his own challenge to readers to consider why unenjoyable work is not better rewarded than enjoyable work. Starting out the main Sheppey project with the broad questions: 'how do all forms of work get done?', 'whose work?', 'and how is it changing?' (1984: 13) inevitably created scope for philosophical reflection, such as the observation Pahl made that: 'People have to grapple with the material circumstances of their existence' (1984: 155). Philosophical musing occurs throughout the book, as in the suggestion that conventional forms of social solidarity are in decline as 'the citizens of the middle mass are asserting themselves in their private lives' (1984: 326), the imaginative identification of similarities between the people of Sheppey and the inhabitants of the (then) Soviet Union in terms of patterns of self-provisioning (1984: 330), and the prediction made on the final page of the book's concluding chapter that: 'If there were a national minimum wage instead of the present system of benefits and allowances, the total amount of work done would almost certainly increase' (1984: 336). How much

subsequent developments in UK labour market policy could be attributed to this latter sentence having 'impact' would be hard to determine, but it does illustrate the point that impact may be a very long-term phenomenon, and also one to which many incremental contributions may be made. (It was not until 1998 that modern minimum wage legislation came into effect in the UK.)

Championing the oppressed follows on directly from some of Pahl's ruminations about the perversities of the welfare benefits system as it operated on individuals whose acquaintance he made in the course of the research. This is most readily apparent in the story of Linda and Jim, which was used to portray the side of social polarisation that propels people downwards towards the disadvantaged position of 'a deprived underclass of between 20 and 25 per cent in poverty' (1984: 320), in contrast to the processes that take Beryl and George to the relative comfort and security of the middle mass (revisiting an unconventional distinction Pahl had developed in another context (1984: 6)). In what is arguably the most compelling part of the book, Pahl used Linda and Jim's story to convey the wastefulness and suffering that accompanies people who unquestionably possess the work ethic but whose efforts to secure work are frustrated at every turn. He also chronicled how he took on the role of championing their cause with the authorities: 'Casting aside the dispassionate observer role, I raised the matter at the highest level in the county' (1984: 302). Linda and Jim epitomised the plight of people who were losing out as deindustrialisation and welfare state reform made their existence ever more uncertain and precarious. The next book publication with which Pahl was associated, *Faith in the City*, would develop this theme of social polarisation, and also adopt an explicit campaigning stance on behalf of the downtrodden and dispossessed.

The elements of *Divisions of Labour* devoted to **re-writing the history of sociology** are not systematic but take the form of asides about past and current shortcomings and missed opportunities. It can therefore be rolled up with Runciman's category of **undermining the reputations of rival sociologists**. The book's themes on these points are that the discipline in general, and research in the field of community in particular, have suffered from the preference for 'higher-level theorizing' (1984: 3) over the type of empirical research that gets close to ordinary people's experience. Sociology has also been held back by unwarranted attachment to what Ulrich Beck was later to call 'zombie categories', which had outlived their usefulness and stand as an obstacle to the creative process required to capture new social and economic forms as they emerge. For this to happen, Pahl suggested that sociologists should practise two of Charles Wright Mills's injunctions in *The Sociological Imagination*, namely to link personal and public levels of analysis, and to think comparatively. At one point in *Divisions of Labour* a footnote bemoans sociologists' unfortunate capacity to keep separate 'personal experience and anecdote and general formulations' (1984: 3, fn. 5), while the comparative perspective that historians and anthropologists have to

offer is celebrated for its encouragement of 'escaping from established categories' (1984: 12). The whole of Part One of the book moves between past and present in the analysis of forms of work, while the latter parts of the book consider material relating to several countries (including Italy, Hungary and the Soviet Union) for comparative purposes. At the time that *Divisions of Labour* was written the framework that located countries in one of the western capitalist, state socialist or third (underdeveloped) worlds held sway, but Pahl was not confined by this. By drawing on material about the informal economy from eastern Europe and the concept of strategies being developed by social anthropologists working in the global South, Pahl anticipated the need to go 'beyond the three worlds' (Crow 1997) in our understanding of the contemporary era.

This leaves the remaining element of Runciman's list of sociologists' activities, **prophesying the future of the world**. Pahl in *Divisions of Labour* was happy to do this, notably in Part III in a concluding section entitled 'All Forms of Work towards the Year 2000' (Pahl 1984: 334). In this as in his other forays into futurology, his style was self-consciously polemical. He was determined not to concede anything to forms of argument that bemoaned the downward descent of social arrangements from supposedly golden ages in the past (Crow and Takeda 2011), and also not given to extrapolation of indications of change for the better, certainly not where claims were made that attributed such developments to the benevolent effects of social engineering. Instead of 'a benign or a malign historicism', he recommended 'the kaleidoscope theory of social life' (Pahl 1984: 2) in which the search for new ways of looking at things was constantly renewed. The things that Pahl's 'sociological nose', as it has been described, sniffed out in the look ahead with which the book finishes include comments on new forms of social stratification as work in all its forms and property ownership in housing continue to evolve. The potential for the emergence of 'a more humane society' (1984: 336) is recognised, but with no illusions about its inevitability.

Using Runciman's catalogue of what sociologists do as a benchmark helps to illuminate the ambitious, varied and occasionally idiosyncratic character of *Divisions of Labour* and the grounds for considering it a modern sociological classic – all the more so, perhaps, when it is remembered that Runciman was definitely not expecting any sociologist to attempt all of the activities in a single project. The standards for this accolade ought to be demanding, but not impossibly high. One criterion for consideration as a sociological classic is that a book's agenda 'transcends its context to address perennial concerns' (Runciman 2010: 127). To ask about the nature of work and who does it (including the further question of who is prevented from working) is as vital a question as the related one posed by Pahl's PhD co-supervisor John Westergaard, *Who Gets What?* (Westergaard 1995). In this tradition Pahl had already asked *Whose City?*, and within that collection of essays used the formulation 'how much of the cake and for whom?' (Pahl 1975: 8).

These are the types of awkward questions that form the bedrock of social science by setting research agendas and using the results to promote debate. Pahl's sense of history and of the impermanence of apparently settled social and economic arrangements led him to topics that need to be posed anew with each generation, such as a society's work and inequality profiles. In the final quarter of the twentieth century it was apparent that certain categories of people were becoming systematically disadvantaged in their search for access to secure, rewarding and meaningful work, among them the young people whose marginal position in the labour market was focused on by Claire Wallace (1987) in her study *For Richer, For Poorer* which followed *Divisions of Labour* as a further major report on the body of Sheppey research undertaken by Pahl and his team. Three decades on, the wide interest generated by Guy Standing's (2014) work on the 'precariat', a social class among whom young people are disproportionately located, suggests that Pahl and Wallace's agenda was as prescient in this as it was in several other respects.

Classic status may also be judged by the way in which other researchers adopt and seek to address and develop the same agendas. This is the criterion of academic impact on thinking and research practice. Several examples of researchers seeking to make use of the research instruments of the Sheppey project could be cited. These include Marilyn Porter (1993) replicating the self-provisioning survey in her investigation of women's lives in eastern Canada, for which she offered the rationale that she 'wanted to examine Pahl's Sheppey findings in a different context' (Pahl 1993: 154). This she did, and although this presented challenges over what to do with activities like woodcutting that were somewhat removed from practices found on Sheppey, the comparisons were nevertheless instructive.

In north-west England, Alan Warde and colleagues treated *Divisions of Labour* as marking the start of a new phase of research into the division of labour within households, and first repeated and then duplicated and extended Pahl's approach in their own fieldwork (Warde and Hetherington 1993: 29). In the case of Dawn Lyon and her colleagues, the imagined futures essays written by school leavers on Sheppey in 1978 were not only re-examined as archive material three decades on from their collection; they were also complemented in a repeat study on Sheppey (Lyon *et al.* 2012). The high profile immediately achieved by *Divisions of Labour* is indicated by John Scott attributing his revised focus in his research on elite networks to Pahl's book's exposition of the case for a focus on households (Scott 1985: 256); Chris Harris's acknowledgement of the Sheppey project's influence on the central research questions of his study of redundancy in South Wales (Harris 1987); John Westergaard and his colleagues' engagement with the 'black economy' perspective which Pahl's work had shown to be 'shaky' (Westergaard *et al.* 1989: 15); and Jan Pahl's (1989) exploration of financial arrangements within households. The career of the concept of 'household work strategies' could also be mentioned here as an idea given significant impetus by Pahl's book. Even if it

originated earlier and in different hands – Pahl's acknowledgements in *Divisions of Labour* to Sandra Wallman and Gershuny are relevant here – it remains true that his application of the idea prompted researchers to be more mindful of the merits of focusing on individuals as members of households, in which context the rationality of their actions may become more apparent (Crow 1989; Wallace 1993, 2002).

Impact beyond academia is harder to gauge, but not impossible. The fact that passages of the report of the Archbishop of Canterbury's Commission on inner cities, *Faith In The City*, are direct echoes of what *Divisions of Labour* has to say about social polarisation is one example of such impact, facilitated by Pahl's membership of that Commission. If others examples of impact beyond academia are less well known, it was not for want of trying on Pahl's part as he sought to influence policy-makers in areas such as apprenticeships, using arguments grounded in the analysis presented in his book. Apprenticeships had been the cornerstone of the occupational community that had grown up around Sheppey's Admiralty dockyard, and the effects of the closure of the dockyard in 1960 were still being keenly felt two decades on when Pahl and his team's fieldwork was being undertaken. Pahl can be credited with being ahead of his time in terms of pursuing the impact agenda through seeking to influence the attitudes of local employers and educationalists towards young people's acquisition of workplace skills. His efforts as a pioneer in archiving the data from the Sheppey project should also be noted, because this was far from standard in the 1980s, but has subsequently become a norm, providing significant resources for the growing community of users of social science archive material (Corti *et al.* 2014: chapter 10).

In proposing *Divisions of Labour* as a modern sociological classic we are not pretending that it is perfect. Its coverage of relevant literature was far from exhaustive, which was bound to be the case given the breadth of the project's agenda. Nevertheless, Sheppey's association with the early nineteenth-century pioneers of the co-operative movement (Brown: no date) is one curious omission. The choice of Sheppey as a fieldwork site was in some ways a constraint on the pursuit of developments in all forms of work. David Byrne rightly noted that the book reports on an interesting study of 'a rather unusual place' (Byrne 1989: 24), as Pahl himself seems to suggest in saying that 'in some respects the Isle of Sheppey can be seen to have some of the characteristic problems of a de-industrializing Britain in a particularly extreme form' (1984: 195). The pursuit of 'typical' fieldwork sites is, of course, problematic (Savage 2010: chapter 6), and the case for the *Affluent Worker* study's location in Luton because of that population's 'prototypicality' (its indicativeness of coming patterns) rather than its typicality is well known (Goldthorpe *et al.* 1968b: 10; Devine 1992).

Developments on Sheppey may have heralded the future in several respects, but the population's atypicality in terms of socio-economic profile meant that it was never going to throw up phenomena such as the work of au pairs, which

have become a prominent feature of households in more affluent areas (Búriková and Miller 2010), nor be an ideal location for the re-emerging demand among the middle classes for nannies and cleaners (although Pahl's work is cited as helping to understand the expanding supply of such workers (Gregson and Lowe 1994: 130–2)). Furthermore, the account of the Island and its people was not consistently sympathetic; the description of the 'small elite of red-faced men with large stomachs, large Fords and tinselly wives with long fingernails patronize the Playa Club on Minster Cliffs and drink many gins before their steak or scampi and chips' (Pahl 1984: 154) is particularly unflattering and revealing of researcher bias (and indiscretion). The book may also have been unfair to other authors in attributing arguments to them that they did not necessarily recognise as their position, or in not making attributions for ideas as meticulously as people working in the same field might have considered appropriate. That said, the book still meets Michelle Lamont's standards of work characterised by clarity, originality, methodological rigour and innovation, significance, and general 'quality' (2009: 167) by which judgements are made about what constitutes the best social science.

The structure of *Revisiting Divisions of Labour*

Our intentions in putting together this book have been to bring together commentaries on various aspects of *Divisions of Labour* and the legacies of its analyses, and to place these alongside extracts from the original publication in order that readers may gain a flavour of Pahl's writing at first hand. We have placed these extracts after this Introduction and interspersed among the new contributions that discuss the case for revisiting *Divisions of Labour*, and readers are encouraged to move between the two. Readers do not have to go through the contributions in the order in which we have presented them, though there is a logic to that order. It begins with Tim Strangleman's account of how Pahl's characterisation of Sheppey as an 'industrial island' (1984: chapter 6, and reproduced here in the excerpts) can be read as an early analysis of 'deindustrialisation'. Pahl did not coin this term, but he was among the first to pick up on the significance of the phenomenon and one of the pioneers of its usage. Strangleman shows how *Divisions of Labour* involved not simply using but developing this concept. Deindustrialisation has several facets, and Strangleman shows how these are brought out in the local context at the same time as global connections are highlighted. The Japanese cars imported into the UK through the port at Sheerness that had once been an Admiralty dockyard provided a stark reminder of how the old order was changing, and Pahl's treatment of this phenomenon helped to pave the way for many subsequent studies of deindustrialisation that have mapped the evolution of the process around the world. The excerpts from chapters 6 and 7 of *Divisions of Labour* have particular relevance for Strangleman's contribution, as well as for the contribution from Dawn Lyon that comes later.

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Chapter 2 by Jonathan Gershuny begins by rehearsing the discussion about the early speculations out of which *Divisions of Labour* arose. Gershuny's collaboration with Pahl grew out of their shared interest in the very broad question of what would come after the pattern of industrial society that was showing signs of unsustainability in its then current form. The chapter here conveys something of what it was like working with a colleague who was by turns engaging, enthusiastic, questioning, respectful, unconstrained by the niceties of academic convention, and always on the move in search of answers to an ever-shifting agenda. Gershuny's chapter then goes on to describe how that initial dialogue continued down the years, and has its latest instalment here as connections continue to be made and the effort to put records straight goes on. Nor has this dialogue been purely academic, because among its legacies can be included influences on the development of some key parts of the social science infrastructure. Gershuny's chapter considers the excerpts that precede it which are included to convey the mechanics and the fruits of Pahl's survey of 730 Sheppey households and the extensive quantitative data on work practices and strategies that this generated.

The chapter by Claire Wallace also involves tracing back an ongoing dialogue that began in the early days of the Sheppey 'laboratory'. Her conversations with Pahl and also with Gershuny have continued and expanded well beyond their initial reference points on Sheppey. Thus the discussion of work strategies has relevance to the understanding of how households endeavour to 'get by' in a range of contexts across the world, in many diverse contexts, including societies that have never had the norm of formal, waged labour and societies forced to go through rapid, radical reorganisation, such as in the former communist countries (Pahl and Thompson 1994). One of the enduring lessons of the study of strategies is that strategic action does not guarantee success. Wallace's Sheppey-based book *For Richer, For Poorer* differentiates between those young people who are 'swimmers' and those who are 'sinkers' (Wallace 1987: 140), reflecting the fact that the process of social polarisation which featured so prominently in *Divisions of Labour* did not hold off until adulthood to make its presence felt. The gendered nature of the uneven distribution of benefits and costs is also something that has been just as apparent around the world as it was on Sheppey. Richard Sennett's statement that: 'In the last quarter of the twentieth century, modern capitalism changed' (2000: 119) is presented as a global statement, but it is studies like Pahl's and Wallace's that confirm its veracity at a local level. The excerpt that precedes Wallace's contribution conveys the value of Pahl's reflection on his reading widely around the literature on gender and work, and his awareness as a result that scholars were failing to appreciate the significance of the widely noted phenomenon of the growth of women's employment during the long boom.

Dawn Lyon's contribution reflects on the potential of re-studies to inform the understanding of contemporary society. In an age now routinely referred to being characterised by globalisation, it is instructive to go back to the Sheppey study

to gain a sense of how things have changed in the interim. In fact, despite Pahl's description of his fieldwork site as 'isolated' (1980: 2), this did not mean that its inhabitants were unaware of the wider world. The 'imagined future' essays that Pahl collected in 1978 included 10 per cent of the 141 envisaging living abroad, and many more going beyond the UK's shores for work purposes (notably through recruitment to the armed services), or for holidays. Put another way, 'globalisation' was understood in lay terms before the concept became an everyday term. Lyon shows how it was revealing to collect further material on Sheppey and compare that with the original Sheppey project materials that are archived. Given the scale of the original Sheppey project and the sheer amount of the data generated and archived, the work that she and her colleagues undertook could only ever have been a partial re-study, but the passage of a quarter of a century since the original fieldwork provided a rationale to return to Sheppey (Crow *et al.* 2009), even if the team were able to engage with only a fraction of the material available.

Working with archived material is also the subject of Chapter 5, where Jane Elliott and Jon Lawrence discuss the pivotal role played by one household in the Sheppey study, that of Linda and Jim. Readers of *Divisions of Labour* are not introduced to these individuals until the penultimate chapter of Pahl's book, but this merely serves to heighten the impact of the discussion of how they epitomise the downward social mobility that comes with the polarisation of workers' fortunes. Some working-class households did more than simply 'get by' in the challenging circumstances of the period, moving up into what Pahl called the 'middle mass' of households characterised by comfortable material circumstances that contrasted sharply with those of 'a deprived underclass of between 20 and 25 per cent in poverty beneath them' (1984: 320). In Pahl's analysis the upward movement into the middle mass is represented by Beryl and George, but it is Linda and Jim who have more of his attention. The analysis of Pahl's developing relationship with Linda and Jim was foreshadowed in a passage written well before the Sheppey project in which he noted the tendency of researchers to be 'on the side of the lower participants who may have suffered at the hands of insensitive local officials. It is understandably very easy for the researcher to view the situation through the eyes of disadvantaged local populations' (1975: 267). This is difficult ground for both researchers and researched, and tracing what happened to Linda and Jim in the period following the publication of Pahl's book, undertaken by Elliott and Lawrence, serves to underscore the bleak message of the book about life at the bottom of the socio-economic order. The excerpt from chapter 11 reveals Pahl's sympathetic engagement with what Karl Marx called 'the dull compulsion of economic relations' (Marx 1954: 689) as it plays out at the level of individual households.

The contribution from John Holmwood (Chapter 6) moves from the micro level of the implications of changes at the level of individual households like

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Linda and Jim's to the macro level, and to Pahl's conception of sociology's role in engaging with issues of social stratification. Pahl was familiar with the concept of polarisation from his first publications onwards (Crow and Takeda 2011: 3.4), and well used to making the case that theories should serve the purpose of illuminating and de-mythologising the realities of the social and economic world that forces like social polarisation produced. Holmwood shows how *Divisions of Labour* was a continuation of Pahl's concerns to make sense of evolving patterns of stratification, and that this ongoing debate continued long after the book's publication, with Pahl an active participant in the process. In this respect, *Divisions of Labour* was not Pahl's final word, but rather an interim statement of ideas that he had by no means worked through fully. Sociologists at the time of the Sheppey project were deeply engaged in soul searching about the nature and purpose of their discipline (Abrams *et al.* 1981), and Pahl's contributions to these discussions regarding what Holmwood (following Andrew Abbott) calls sociology's 'jurisdiction' were if anything emboldened by his Sheppey experiences, as the short excerpt from Pahl's book's conclusion that precedes Holmwood's chapter conveys.

Our book concludes with an Afterword by Mike Savage in which he reflects on re-reading *Divisions of Labour* three decades on from having first done so. In the interim he has engaged with much of Pahl's other work, which makes him uniquely placed to reflect on the questions that have driven the other contributors to *Revisiting Divisions of Labour*, notably the issue of what makes the original book stand out. Part of his answer points to the importance of Ray Pahl the person for the way that the book turned out. Pahl was deliberately 'polemical' (1989: 710) not only in his Sheppey project but his subsequent engagement with class analysis which continued to think through the implications of the Sheppey project. In a 1988 paper in the *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* he had returned to the themes raised in his speculative article that had been published in that journal at the start of the decade and before most of the Sheppey research had happened. He conceded that the empirical evidence required him to undertake 'a radical shift from the stance I adopted in my earlier paper' (1988b: 264). The indications of a shift in the pattern of stratification to one in which 'the middle of the onion is getting fatter but the top and the bottom may be visualized as being sliced off and are moving up and down respectively from the middle' (1988b: 258) had wider implications than simply for Pahl's understanding of social class; it also mattered to the consideration of policy options. His conclusion that revising his position in the light of new evidence and argument was preferable to maintaining an initial position with 'an unswerving commitment to consistency' (1993: 256) provides an insight into his approach to research that it is useful to bear in mind when reading the excerpts from *Divisions of Labour* reproduced in this book. They have been selected to convey something of the original work's breadth, ambition and style. Pahl did not

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want his readers to accept his arguments uncritically, but to engage with them, and to approach them with scepticism, which he called 'the sociologist's greatest strength' (1977: 147). To persuade a sceptic who has an argument placed in front of them to re-think their views is an ambitious aim, but that was what he set out to do. He was well placed to do this having lived and breathed Sheppey for the best part of a decade. It is also why we are encouraging readers to revisit and engage with this modern sociological classic and its provocative, at times infuriating, but always stimulating author.

Timeline of Ray Pahl's career

17 July 1935	Born in London National Service with Royal Air Force
1956–59	Undergraduate student in Geography at St Catharine's College, University of Cambridge
1959–64	PhD student London School of Economics and tutor for the Board of Extra-mural studies, University of Cambridge
1965	Publication of PhD thesis as <i>Urbs in Rure</i> ; appointed lecturer in Sociology, University of Kent
1970s	Active in the International Sociological Association, helping to set up research network on urban and regional development; advisory and assessor roles for government and development plan for Greater London
1970	Publication of <i>Whose City?</i>
1971	Publication with Jan Pahl of <i>Managers and their Wives</i>
1972	Promotion to Professor of Sociology at Kent
1978	Fieldwork on the Isle of Sheppey commences; imagined futures essays collected from 141 sixteen-year-old school leavers; first of nine recorded interviews with Linda and Jim
1979–81	Joint publications with Jay Gershuny on the informal economy
1980s	Advisor to University Grants Committee
1984	Publication of <i>Divisions of Labour</i>
1985	Publication of <i>Faith in the City</i>
1988	Publication of <i>On Work</i>
late 1980s–1990s	Helped to establish the Institute for Social and Economic Research, University of Essex and the Central European University in Prague; research materials from Sheppey project and other projects archived with the forerunner of the UK Data Service at the University of Essex
1992	Final recorded interview with Linda and Jim
1995	Publication of <i>After Success</i>
1996	Retired from post at University of Kent

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- 1998 Interviewed as a pioneer of social research (further interview 2009)
- 1999 Made Visiting Professor at ISER, University of Essex
- 2004 Elected to the Academy of Social Sciences
- 2006 Publication with Liz Spencer of *Rethinking Friendship*
- 2008 Elected to the British Academy
- 2011 Received lifetime achievement award from the British Sociological Association
- 3 June 2011 died in Churchstoke, near Montgomery, Powys