

ARTICLE

# Pearl Jephcott's 'Troubled Areas'

## From Nottinghamshire to Notting Hill

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### Abstract

The work of largely forgotten sociological researcher Pearl Jephcott is increasingly being recognised for its methodological complexity, innovation, and community-orientated approach. Here we revisit two of Jephcott's lesser-known works. Both work around issues that attracted great sociological interest in the 1950s and 1960s but were in many ways pioneered by Jephcott. The authors begin by exploring her study of youth delinquency in a Nottinghamshire village, Hucknall, and move on to revisit her work on North Kensington in the late 1950s, widely viewed at the time as what she called 'a troubled area'. Alongside this we offer some examination of Jephcott's biography, as well as some of the history of this particular area of sociological research. This closes with a review of the 'lessons' contemporary researchers can learn from Jephcott's two studies.

### Keywords

ethnography, sociology, Pearl Jephcott, delinquency, community studies

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### INTRODUCTION

*It is always distressing if a piece of research is left to gather dust among the archives of a department (Spratt 1954: 2).*

The sociogenesis of ideas, research designs, theoretical work or past research findings is a central concern in the history of sociology and the justification for revisiting such work is certainly not new or novel (Halsey 2004; Platt 2014; Fleck 2015; Kiem 2022). Yet, Spratt (1954) points to an important challenge for those researching the history of sociology. Given the sheer volume of published work from the growing community of researchers and writers in the post-second world war era, it is inevitable that a significant amount of past sociological research has been disregarded and gathers dust in archives and libraries. The consequence is that the process of looking back to utilise past research remains partial and incomplete – if such work is considered at all. Moreover, where past studies and writers are considered, the focus tends to be on the established scholars, the 'canon' or key institutions or significant individuals. As Law and Lybeck (2016: 8) argue, documenting the history of sociology has failed 'by restricting its historical self-conception to canonical figures' and by neglecting 'the actual history of its discursive developments'. Focusing on the canon ignores the very real impact of power differentials on careers, publishing, grant capture or broader academic life.

*Who* becomes part of the cannon, and *whose* ideas are championed is not a straightforward reflection of academic value. As such, turning our analytical gaze back to the past, and engaging reflexively with non-canonical figures, are important 'to produce more accurate understanding' (Fris 2009: 326) of both 'then' and 'now'. Relatedly, there is a danger that past research relegated to 'context', or a version of 'sociological common sense' can be ignored given the privileging of the contemporary lens. This, as we have argued elsewhere, is not only wasteful (see Goodwin and O'Connor 2015), but epistemologically problematic, as it positions time as the sole arbiter of relevance, rigour and quality. Past studies should not be viewed as 'historical artefacts' somehow sealed in the vacuum of time, but part of a holistic process of sociological knowledge production connecting the past and the present (and possible futures). From this perspective, considering past studies becomes less about 'context' or what happened 'at the time' but asking what analytical possibilities do they retain for contemporary understanding? Such lessons are not minor concerns for the history of the discipline but part and parcel of the whole process of what we have become or 'how did this/we come to be' (Goodwin, Hughes and O'Connor 2016).

It is against this backdrop that, for the last ten years or more, we have been arguing for a re-evaluation of the works of a largely forgotten British sociologist Pearl Jephcott (1900-1980) (see Goodwin and O'Connor 2015; 2019). To contribute further to this re-evaluation, we focus in this paper on what can be learned from two of her lesser-known community-based studies of 'delinquency'. These studies, written ten years apart, deal head-on with issues of social class, housing, community, ethnicity and crime: *The Social Background of Delinquency* (1954) and *A Troubled Area: Notes on Notting Hill* (1964).<sup>1</sup> Jephcott, certainly not a canonical figure who has been overlooked since her death; is significant in this regard, as her approach to studying delinquency was something of a corrective to the pathologised, attachment-based models so dominant in the 1950s and 1960s. Rather than offering a 'quick fix', Jephcott sought to understand the underlying issues associated with urban areas which had come to be seen as 'troubled'. Jephcott analytically prioritises the lives and experiences of communities, families, women, mothers and children, and considers issues of gender, class and race at a time of major social change. Perhaps uniquely, Jephcott dealt with '*people as people, not as abstract conceptions of social action or social systems*' (Goudsblom 1977: 6-7).

Our intention is to underscore: *why* these studies of troubled areas are important, and *why* they retain contemporary relevance. In so doing, we reveal some of the core, substantive concerns and methodological devices that have come to characterise Jephcott's sociology: an orientation to document and explore *in order to explain*. It is an approach to sociology where the researcher offers *evidence-based recommendations* rather than political tracts. We begin by offering a brief biographical sketch of Pearl Jephcott before proceeding to consider the studies and their significance.

## **A BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF PEARL JEPHCOTT (1900–1980)**

Pearl Jephcott was born on May 1st 1900 and grew up in Alcester, Warwickshire, in the United Kingdom. Her father was Edward Arthur Jephcott (1862–1926), a local auctioneer who lived in

<sup>1</sup> *A Troubled Area* (1964), as a research site, is connected to what would become the area of the Grenfell Tower tragedy of 2017. The issues Jephcott documented, such as errant landlords and multiple occupancies, poignantly foreshadow a tragedy that was to so devastatingly impact this part of North Kensington.

Alcester all his life, and her mother was Agnes Amelia Boobbyer (1862–1952), from Llanfrynach, Brecknockshire, Wales. Jephcott attended Alcester Grammar School where she wrote for the *Alcester Grammar School Record*. In 1918 she attended the University of Wales, Aberystwyth, to study Latin, French, English, history and economics before graduating with a degree in 1922 in history. She later returned to Aberystwyth to complete an MA in 1949 on '*Studies of Employed Adolescent Girls in Relation to their Development and Social Background*'. There are two phases to Jephcott's professional life. First, she began a career as a worker in the youth and community sector, becoming one of the first organising secretaries for the Birmingham Association of Girls Clubs as well as working for the Durham Association of Girls Clubs during the economic recession of the 1930s. During this period Jephcott wrote two books focused on young women, their work and leisure time – *Girls Growing Up* (1942), *Clubs for Girls* (1942) and *Rising Twenty: Notes on Ordinary Girls* (1948). The second stage of her career began at the age of 50 after accepting a post at the University of Nottingham to work on *The Social Background of Delinquency* (1954). Jephcott published the book, *Some Young People* in 1954, and moved to the London School of Economics (LSE) where she wrote the book *Married Women Working* (1962). Jephcott was later funded by The North Kensington Family Study, to examine the long term impact of the Notting Hill race riots via an immersive ethnography, resulting in another publication, *A Troubled Area* (1964).

Jephcott's employment at the LSE ended abruptly in 1962 (see Oakley 2015), leading to a move to Scotland and the University of Glasgow. There she led a project on youth leisure in Scotland, published as *Time of One's Own* (1967), and her highly influential study on high-rise living, *Homes in High Flats* (1971). Jephcott subsequently continued her research career with projects in the West Indies, Czechoslovakia, Guiana, and Hong Kong. Her final research project for the Birmingham City Housing Committee focused on high rise living in the city centre of Birmingham. The report *Young Families in High Flats* (1975) was published when Jephcott was 75. Pearl Jephcott died aged eighty on the ninth of November 1980. A productive life, with richly detailed books, show Jephcott as methodologically creative, and an innovator who used her sociological imagination in inspired and inventive ways to offer 'reality congruent' analyses. That is, research that captures the 'mundane' or 'ordinary', 'everyday' lives, stories and experiences. This research approach occupies no 'side' or 'angle', but empowers respondents to speak. At the same time, we can see a complex, non-standard academic career of many institutional moves and short term, insecure jobs with limited permanent prospects. Despite her productivity, Jephcott's marginal status rendered her increasingly invisible during and after her career (see Goodwin and O'Connor, 2015; 2019).

## **THE CRIMINOLOGICAL MILIEUX: LOCATING JEPHCOTT'S 'TROUBLED AREAS' STUDIES**

Delinquency, juvenile delinquency, anti-social behaviour, gang violence, racially-motivated riots and associated urban decay and disintegration, were central themes within the social science literature of the 1950s and early 1960s in Britain and the USA (Stott 1950; Glueck and Glueck 1950; Scott 1951; Ferguson 1952; Malcolm 1958; Elias and Scotson 2008). This seems to reflect a growing interest in criminology, crime and delinquent behaviour from the 1930s onwards (with the establishment of the 'Institute for the Scientific Treatment of Delinquency', or ISTD, in 1932 in Britain), and which reached a peak in the 1950s with the establishment of the journal *British Journal of Delinquency* in 1951 (Bowling and Ross 2006). Major concerns of this research included issues of cause and treatment, leading to questions such as; why do some people become criminals or behave

delinquently? Is delinquency an 'individual' problem or a 'social' problem? Stott (1954: 368, 366) refers to this as the dilemma of 'determinism versus free will' leading to a 'moral dilemma' of responsibility. Who or what is responsible for the problem of delinquency, and how can this problem be 'treated'? These questions led to much policy intervention, with many different disciplines and approaches tussling for influence (Goldson 2020).

The works of Scott (1951) and Malcolm (1958) are illustrative of some of this research. Scott (1951: 5), in discussing the treatment of juvenile delinquents, encapsulates the prevailing view suggesting juvenile delinquency as a result of 'psychological' failings in individual young people who 'are apparently at the mercy of their impulses'. Likewise, Malcolm (1958: 366) documents the social basis of racially-motivated gang violence and signals towards the long-term consequences of racism within British society, but does so by positioning this as an issue with 'trouble-seekers' and 'thugs'. In these two examples, delinquency and community 'troubles' are conceptualised as problems of individuals. This approach is aligned with the influential intellectual orientation towards delinquency and criminology between the 1930s and 1950s, psychoanalysis (Bowling and Ross 2006), as well as developmental psychological approaches more broadly, including attachment theory (e.g., Bowlby's 1944 juvenile thieves study). Such approaches take, as their starting point, the way in which children and later adults become 'maladjusted' to the social world via 'insufficient' family environments and/or relationships. As such, individual 'problems' tend to become emplaced and explained as 'problems' of family and environment, leading to common-sense ideas that 'bad' environments or 'bad' families lead to 'bad' (delinquent or criminal) individuals. Prevailing views about the appropriate role and place of children, and child-parent relations, were crucial in this. This is significant given that the notion of juvenile delinquency in particular had become more prominent from the turn of the twentieth century, with levels of youth delinquency rising during the second world war: and not abating after the war ended, as many had hoped or assumed (Bradley 2014).

It is perhaps no surprise, then, that a critical engagement with the 'pathologising of delinquency' and detailed explorations of the social location of anti-social, troubled or violent behaviour, became key motifs in Jephcott's work. However, these two studies are part of a rising tide of studies in social psychology and sociology which challenge the assumption that criminal or delinquent behaviours are examples of deprivation (Bradley 2014) among individuals or groups of individuals (be it circumstantial, familial, material or individual). A very early example of this approach is evident in Glueck and Glueck's (1930) research in America which saw the authors follow the 'careers' of criminals for five years after their release from prison. The study ultimately concluded that it was administrative and policy issues that influenced the 'success' or 'failure' of a criminal, more so than the character of an individual 'criminal'. Although Jephcott's work in this area didn't receive a similar level of attention as her research on women, class, work, housing, or leisure (see Jephcott 1962 and 1971) (with these works now largely over-looked), the contribution Jephcott made to understanding issues of delinquency are no less significant. Also important is that it is undergirded by many of the key characteristics of 'Jephcottian research' (see Goodwin 2015; 2019; Goodwin and O'Connor 2015; 2019). We will now turn to an overview of the two Jephcott studies; *Social Background of Delinquency* (1954) and *A Troubled Area: Notes on Notting Hill* (1964). Figure 1 provides an overview of the shared areas of concern within these two studies.

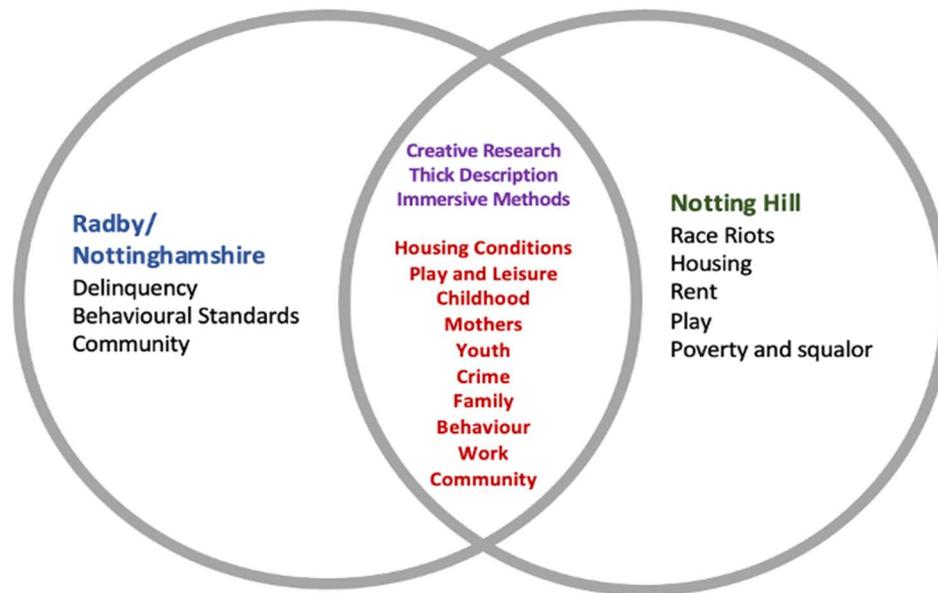


Figure 1: Shared Concerns between *Social Background of Delinquency* and *A Troubled Area*

## THE SOCIAL BACKGROUND OF DELINQUENCY (1954)

*The Social Background of Delinquency* (Jephcott et al. 1954), funded by the Rockefeller Foundation,<sup>2</sup> was an exploration of juvenile delinquency in the Nottinghamshire mining town, 'Radby' (Hucknall) between 1952 and 1954. Although the report remains unpublished, it has come to exemplify Jephcott's approach to research. Like her other research in male-dominated sociology of that time, she was not directly allocated the funding. The Rockefeller Foundation awarded \$7,500 to Professor W.J.H. Sprott at the University of Nottingham. Despite this, it was Jephcott, along with Michael Carter, who designed the study, committed significant time to the field, collected extensive and varied data, developed the analytical and interpretative framework and who, finally, wrote up the subsequent report and its findings. As Sprott suggests, 'their report is entirely their own work' (Jephcott et al. 1954: i). Central to their analytical approach was an orientation to 'delinquency' that moved away from the dominant discourses individualising delinquency, so prevalent at the time. Instead, Jephcott sought to offer a more sociological understanding of delinquency by locating delinquency relationally, as grounded in specific family 'standards' emerging from within certain class-based communities or streets. Here they begin to develop the argument that the behaviours a

<sup>2</sup> Philanthropic foundations such as the Rockefeller Foundation provided significant funding that supported the postwar reconstruction of social science research in the UK. This occurred to such an extent that the Foundations defined the nature of sociology and acted as gatekeepers for the research and the researchers. For example, according to some (see Fisher 1980; Platt 1996; Haney 2008), the Rockefeller Foundation tended to prioritise quantitative, scientific, realistic approaches to research that 'provide unbiased, objective solutions to social problems' (Fisher 1980: 224). The funded research also had something of an American flavour, given the individualised and the pathologised aspects of anomie preoccupying American sociology of that time. Additionally, funding decisions relied heavily on personal connections (see Haney 2008). Indeed, here it is evident from the Rockefeller Foundation archives that the funding for 'The Social background of Delinquency' is rooted in Edward Shils letter introducing J.W. Sprott to the Foundation in 1952 and the subsequent character reviews and assessments. One reads '...an "academic", a pupil of Ginsberg, but good of his kind' (Rockefeller Foundation June 18<sup>th</sup>, 1952).

local community defines as 'delinquent' are socially situated and arise out of processes of social interaction and imitation. They state the study was:

... concerned with testing the hypothesis that within working-class areas different standards are upheld, and with relating this to the distribution of delinquency (Jephcott et al. 1954: 26).

Or, reflecting their broader sociological orientation, the study represented:

... much more than a study of delinquency: an enquiry, as Professor Sprott puts it in his Foreword, into 'the social climate from which so many of our delinquent come (Tong and 'HM' 1954: 307).

This social climate, these different social conditions and standards, were examined in 'Radby', a working-class mining town in Nottinghamshire, in the English east midlands. In 1954 Radby had a population of 24,000 of which 3,000 were miners working at three local collieries. Radby was recorded as a long-established community established in 1086 which expanded massively due to its proximity to the east midland coal seams. Following industrial expansion, the town initially developed within clearly defined boundaries between railway lines, and within these boundaries was a combination of Victorian terrace houses, poor quality housing and some social housing. The area had 20 churches and chapels and 13 public houses, with the public houses and other drinking establishments being central to social life of the community. In 1947 a social housing 'estate' was built to house workers migrating from London. The estate soon developed a notorious reputation for delinquency and criminality. The *Nottingham Evening Post* for 1950 details assault charges, stabbings, attacks with razor blades, indecency, poaching, murder, illegal gambling and theft; with one article in the *Post* suggesting:

[Radby] stands by officials – discourteous people are warned. [Radby] council have decided to take a strong line with housing applicants who abuse and threaten their officials and housing clerk (Nottingham Evening Post, May 1950).

The research design of Jephcott's study is multifaceted, ethnographic in orientation and includes interviews with local officials and those identified as key informants. It includes interviews with residents, comparing personal histories to explore the standards of conduct in working-class homes, as well as participant observation and direct engagement with community activities. Both Jephcott and Carter relocated to Radby and took up work in the local area: Carter at the post office and Jephcott at the local school. Surveys of leisure time were conducted. Jephcott also deployed what she described as 'the playroom method', which enabled her to meet local families. As part of this she encouraged children to write, draw or paint in response to images provided:

Then there were the writers, children who made up stories about a given picture. Their stories revealed what things these children noticed, and what they regarded as commonplace. The girls of 11 to 13 wrote of love, kissing, and husbands, of rows between husband-and-wife and of remarriage. Crime, hangings, jail, murder, theft, accidents at the pit, the police – came into many of the tales of both boys and girls. Considering the age of the writers (none over 13) they seem to interpret the pictures they were asked to write about in a very unchildlike way. Their world of imagination was nearer that of the "News of the world" than of fairy tales and adventure stories (Jephcott et al. 1954: 93).

The result of this extensive and detailed fieldwork is a rich, ethnographically detailed case study, in which they were able to piece together the different standards of conduct in Radby as a whole, and

in detail in focused research sites. Relationships between family members and neighbours are spotlighted. Jephcott notes:

The streets do not have much to do with each other. The children do not play together and do not seem to know each other. The busy main road that lies between them is probably the real barrier though Charlotte Street has not much opinion of Carnation Street. 'It's very quiet up here', say Charlotte Street residents, or, 'they are a rough lot in Carnation Street – you should hear them down at the Plough [local pub]' (1954: 159).

The findings of the study are drawn around comparisons of pairs of streets identified as 'good' or 'bad', depending on delinquency rates. The themes highlighted are those through which the various standards of the streets are most visible. For example, it's noted that children in 'bad' streets are more likely to witness or be involved in the arguments of parents, whereas in 'good' streets parents take pains to hide their arguments from children. Perhaps the most significant concluding point drawn here is that many families in 'bad' streets seem to be 'living for the present', and that this plays out in how these families spend their money, approach work and leisure, and importantly how residents across all the streets understand themselves and each other. Residents of Radby all note, for example, that one of the bad streets, 'Dyke Street', is known as being a 'unit', with a great deal of loyalty to their street and their community. Jephcott notes that these families live in very close proximity to one another (with kinship groups and relatives often just up the road), and don't place as much emphasis on privacy as in other streets (namely the 'good' streets). There is easy communication amongst the families on this street and a great deal of support for one other, especially in difficult times and especially between women. Without this kind of clearly bounded network, many of these families would struggle. Jephcott notes that this is a positive thing which encourages a tight-knit set of standards based on community support, but the struggles of Dyke Street are also part of the social conditions which contribute to delinquency rates.

Jephcott also highlights the commonplace nature of delinquency in 'bad' streets. In contrast, in the 'good' streets, parents and neighbours made efforts to 'train' their children in particular behaviours. In these streets, Jephcott notes, occurrences of delinquent behaviour, such as stealing, were arguably more problematic for their uncharacteristic nature. In noting this, Jephcott asks us to consider why we focus on the statistically 'high' areas of delinquency rather than 'anomalies' in areas with an otherwise respectable reputation and generally 'non-delinquent' standards of behaviour; 'this suggests that measures designed to prevent the occurrence of delinquency should be closely related to the particular factors which give rise to any particular type of delinquency' (Jephcott et al. 1954: 287). The question of how social problems are framed, treated and understood as part of local social conditions is centralised. The prevailing issue becomes that of community responsibility and empowerment, similar to *A Troubled Area*, as we highlight later in this paper.

The closing sections of the report compare and evaluate the findings of the Radby project to two community projects from the time; the Chicago Area Report led by Clifford Shaw in the 1930s in America, and a study Sprott had been involved with on the relocation of prisoners back into small community neighbourhoods in China. The focus of this discussion is on how neighbourhoods take responsibility for and treat delinquent and/or criminal behaviours, and what the potential is for community action. Jephcott importantly notes that although the potential for collective action is possible in Radby, particularly on some of the 'bad' streets, the focus would have to be practicality rather than morality. Jephcott notes that residents of Dyke Street, for example, are more likely to ask 'does this work?' rather than 'is stealing bad?'. Practical issues such as inadequate housing, the

physical and financial dangers and inconsistencies associated with particular types of work, and poverty, would have to be addressed first. Above all, Jephcott points us towards how such issues affect a person's mindset; she notes that in most of the 'bad' streets, an attitude of 'there is no justice in this world' prevails; 'Why then, abide by the laws when life is weighted against you, and when reward is not related to merit?' (Jephcott et al. 1954: 294). We see here an emphasis on the lives and experiences of residents of the area, of their needs and priorities, rather than on broader 'narratives' of the area itself.

### **A TROUBLED AREA: NOTES ON NOTTING HILL (1964)**

The second study of Jephcott's considered here is *A Troubled Area: Notes on Notting Hill* (1964: 18); a consideration of 'the causes of the general malaise of North Kensington' carried out between 1962 and 1963. The location for the research was the part of North Kensington known as 'Notting Dale', which had become synonymous with the race riots of 1958 and labelled a 'poor troubled area', that was socially disintegrated and lacking in cohesion and community. 'Troubles' often referred to in this area included criminal activity, forgery, theft, fighting, prostitution, child neglect and more. Jephcott's study emerged as a direct consequence of the riots which, as explained in the foreword to the book, had: 'brought North Kensington into the limelight as a district where people came to live because they had to and left as soon as possible because they wanted to' (1964: 11).

The aftermath of the 1958 race riots saw North Kensington labelled as an area populated by 'troubled families' with multiple problems. The troubled families moniker emerged in the post-war era and has been used by successive governments to target social policy interventions by identifying families perceived as problematic. As Lambert and Crossley have argued, during this period:

Problems of neglected and 'unruly children', household squalor, poverty and delinquency were located in the family, and services framed intervention by finding the cause of these problems and the social work solution in the mother. The publicity that these 'rehabilitation' services generated over their purported 'success' shaped post-war family social work policies and interventions, despite their limited evidential basis (2017: 88).

In the aftermath of the riots, attention focused on the borough and the mayor set up a committee to investigate the underlying causes of the unrest, with a particular focus on community relationships. Although the committee itself proved to be short-lived, it led to the establishment of the 'North Kensington Family Study' (NKFS).

The NKFS committee, which included Marie Jahoda and Eileen Youngusband, appointed Jephcott as the lead investigator and invited her to write the book of the project. In typical style, Jephcott set out to investigate the social problems of the neighbourhood in great detail, with an emphasis on the experiences of local residents. She focussed not on the episode of unrest or tension between different parts of the local community, but on the daily lives of residents and how the community could be supported to make changes themselves. This, importantly, seems to go beyond the initial policy priorities of the project.

The research began with a mapping out of what was referred to as 'the Circle area' of 39 streets within a radius of seven minutes walking distance from Ladbroke Grove Tube Station. In 1962 Jephcott

rented an office space locally and made a point of 'walking the field' to familiarise herself with the area. Finding ways to integrate and become part of the community were a trademark of Jephcott's research. This quotation exemplifies some of the reasons for this in the Notting Hill study:

...the writer [Jephcott] was quite unfamiliar with Notting Dale. The first few months' work indicated some of the complexities likely to be involved in attempting even an impressionistic study. It also pointed to the need for establishing continuity of contact with the local people if the problems common to the district were to begin to emerge (Jephcott 1964: 35).

The first four months of the project were also spent consulting 60 people in 'official' positions (unspecified in the book, although reference is made to health visitors and social workers) about the perceived problems of the area. This enabled introductions to 90 households, mostly derived from snowball sampling, since officials advised the team that 'door knocking' would not generate responses from local residents. The condition of the housing in Notting Dale was a primary preoccupation of Jephcott and the research team, who recognised that over-crowded, multi-occupancy housing, and exploitative or inept landlords created problems of poverty, squalor and generally terrible living conditions which in turned created:

seemingly overwhelming problems for the public services and voluntary organisations, and distorted human relations for those forced to live the kinds of lives described in this book (Jephcott 1964: 12-13).

A more focussed exploration of residents living in 20 multi-occupied houses (MOHs) emerged from this observation. One hundred and twenty four homes were identified within the 20 MOHs. Jephcott sought a richly detailed picture of the homes of these residents, including physical characteristics of the homes and the buildings, social characteristics of the tenants and the value for money (e.g. rents, landlords, furnishings, amenities) of such squalid living conditions. These observations demonstrate Jephcott's approach:

the room looks on a filthy yard where the children scratch about among the dustbins. The mother has four children under five and hardly gets out at all. An official's record book notes her as 'often depressed' (Jephcott 1964: 53).

Jephcott identified poor quality housing conditions as 'the most urgent of the problems and that from which many of the other troubles derive' (Jephcott 1964: 19).

Two months after the initial project started the second phase of work began. This phase aimed to establish cooperative action projects to mobilise 'short-term and small-scale action concerning specific problems'. Again, Jephcott's key concern here was to ensure that local residents were involved in plans to improve the local living conditions. She was at pains to avoid top-down activity that didn't reflect the concerns of the community and instead encouraged an element of self-help. Jephcott was concerned that:

Some of the current effort smacks overmuch of 'we' and 'they'. It takes for granted that certain reforms are desirable before ascertaining the views of those who will be most involved (Jephcott 1964: 140).

Therefore, her aim in initiating the three projects was to empower and encourage local residents to define local problems for themselves, and see how far they would go in acting on them. The three projects were chosen based on issues most referred to by residents:

- Loneliness of old people;
- Unsightliness of the dustbins;
- Lack of outdoor play-space.

A social worker led these three projects and devoted considerable time to them. The three projects varied in their success. The most successful initiative, the drive to provide more outdoor play-space, resulted in the establishment of playgroups in the district and the founding of the Play Groups Committee chaired by a local resident mother. Outside spaces were identified and requisitioned for the purposes of establishing outdoor play facilities (one in a communal garden and one in a housing estate forecourt). The schemes ran initially for a thirteen-week period and although attendance was low, the mothers involved 'at first suspicious and sceptical' became engaged and enthusiastic about the facility and committed to maintaining the groups. At the end of the project two outdoor playgroups had been established, both with employed paid staff and involving plans to establish permanent buildings. Some years later, correspondence from the North Kensington Family Study offices reveals the on-going success of the project demonstrated by the establishment of two further groups and the greater involvement of outside agencies such as the Greater London Council and the Save the Children Fund. At this point, the NKFS office had plans to extend the work already completed with the aim of including 'adequate play facilities ... in redevelopment plans' (Godfrey-Isaacs 1966: 2) in the neighbourhood. Thomson refers to the importance of this project as 'reflective of the desire to move beyond an era of welfare and charity, to one of participation' (2013: 208). Indeed, he highlights that this initially voluntary movement, started by Jephcott as part of this project had led, by 1970, to a shift from the provision of children's play being a voluntary parent-led and largely unfunded activity to it becoming a local government responsibility.

What is striking about Jephcott's style and approach to research, and to 'action', is that she was concerned with the well-being of the residents. In contrast to much of the activity at the time which, in common with current government policy, focused blame on the families and residents themselves, Jephcott's concern was far broader. Throughout the study she highlights the challenges faced by the residents and the inequalities in these communities and broader society. Her interest lies with the individuals often most maligned or ignored at the time – single mothers, adolescents, young children, newly arrived citizens, people of colour. Indeed, Jephcott is critical of those who place the blame on the residents: 'it is easiest of all to put the blame for the bad conditions on the people themselves...'

In the concluding recommendations, her concern for social justice is evident. She writes at length about the migrant population and the welfare of this community:

Another urgent matter and one which ought not to be permitted to harden, is the possibility of Notting Dale's migrant population being allowed to settle for lower standards than those of the white one... constant reminders are needed about the democratic principle of equal opportunity for *all* citizens (Jephcott 1964: 133).

## LEARNING FROM JEPHCOTT'S STUDIES OF 'TROUBLED AREAS': CONCLUDING REMARKS

It may seem to social scientists now, seventy years later, obvious – even naïve – to suggest some of the ideas and practices highlighted in these studies and their effects. However, even today, it is still embedded in imaginations that crime, poverty and other 'troubles' are the problem of individuals or individual families, and this view becomes part of the geographical character of particular areas. Some suggest there has been a resurgence of this in the UK since the mid-2010s (see discussion in Shildrick et al. 2016). In line with this, interventions still take place which emphasise 'rehabilitating' or 'working on' individuals or particular families without paying sufficient attention to their social environment or their self-articulated needs or worries. In avoiding this type of approach and demonstrating alternatives, Jephcott's work continues to problematise this highly individualistic, divisive and pathologizing imagining of delinquent or 'troubled' behaviours and areas. Her work remains vitally instructive for a number of reasons.

### *Lesson 1 – Prioritising 'social worlds'*

Others have argued that Jephcott resists pathologizing narratives about people and communities (see Hazely et al. 2019; McCarthy 2019; Batchelor 2019). This point is also evidenced in these studies. *The Social Background of Delinquency* includes a wealth of high-quality data and, as a body of work, it rivals that of any of the more well-known community and delinquency studies from that time and stands alongside classics such as *A Village on the Border* (Frankenberg 1990) and *The Established and the Outsiders* (Elias and Scotson 2008) amongst others. Indeed, Wilson (1958) highlights the significance of the findings of Jephcott and Carter (1954):

contiguous and similar-looking working-class streets might live by different codes and have different habits (Wilson 1958: 96).

This refers to Jephcott's proposition that areas, and their residents, have a 'different scheme of priorities' (Jephcott et al. 1954: 26). Citing Pearce, Jephcott (1954: 4) argues 'a child who has grown up in a society of thieves may have a character which would make a community of Puritans shudder. Nevertheless, this child in his way is just as mature as any other'. Importantly, the differing priorities of people aren't positioned as any more or less 'right' or 'wrong' by Jephcott, but shown as a reflection of social conditions which in themselves have no inherent morality, and do not imply tainted, stunted or problematic psychological 'development'. In these studies, Jephcott prioritises the 'social worlds' (Jephcott et al. 1954: 9) of people in an area rather than diagnosing the psychological troubles of an individual or groups of individuals.

### *Lesson 2 – Listening to Residents' Voices and Perspectives*

Both studies explored here destabilise, even ignore, dominant narratives about people and places in order to get at the 'heart' of the matter: the people themselves, their lived realities and the 'social worlds' (Jephcott et al. 1954: 9) they form together. Part of the reason for engaging with Radby and Notting Dale, for example, was that they had become *known* as 'troubled' or 'problem' areas and that many local interventions had done very little to help. Jephcott acknowledges the role of research in dismantling problematic assumptions in order to better understand people's lives and work to help improve them *on their own terms*. Jephcott's approach to this was fairly radical for its time: instead of imposing ideas on residents about what is 'wrong' with their area, she instead asks residents *about their perception of the area*. Jephcott prioritises 'what these things mean' (Jephcott et al. citing Plant

1954: 78) to local residents, rather than centralising prevailing concerns or perceptions about an area. Above all, it seems Jephcott was a good listener; she heard and amplified the voices of the communities she worked with in an empowering process that aimed for change.

### *Lesson 3 – Evidence-informed and Data-Driven Facilitation and Practice*

Unlike other examples of community and delinquency studies of the time (see for example Elias and Scotson 2008), Jephcott's orientation was to meaningfully assist communities. This is not to say that other research has not been transformative or helpful. However, Jephcott embraces and questions her 'footprint' as a researcher in local communities. In *A Troubled Area* (1964), the intention is clearly to support members of the local community to make changes which are relevant to their own lives. In contrast, in *The Social Background of Delinquency* (1954) published ten years earlier, Jephcott made preliminary observations on the impact of the ethnographic research tools employed, particularly focusing on whether they seem to benefit the community. Speaking of the playroom method, Jephcott says one of their drawbacks was that it was 'extremely disappointing' to the children when it ended, and remarks that the parents must also have felt 'let down' (Jephcott et al. 1954: 93). Jephcott is drawn to the ways that the lives of the families are altered through research, positioning 'research' as intertwined with 'real life', and uses 'data' to inform her approach and assess its impact. Jephcott embraces this impact as an inevitability, and seeks to *increase* the possibility for meaningful change. She does this by playing a facilitator role, a role which limits her place in defining 'problems' or 'troubles', either in behaviour or in an area. Both the 'problem', and Jephcott's role as investigator, are re-orientated.

### *Lesson 4 – Revealing 'truths' through 'ordinary lives'*

Jephcott doesn't use the same conceptual or epistemic language or frameworks social scientists of the past and present often rely upon. Instead she explores how the lives of people can be understood (and transformed) through the mundane, the ordinary and the everyday. This is something which others have already pointed out about Jephcott's work (see for example, Goodwin and O'Connor 2015, and the Special Edition of Women's History Review 2019), and is linked to lesson one. 'Everyday' in this sense refers to the 'trivial, commonplace and seemingly insignificant' (Crow and Pope 2008: 597) aspects of social life; it is the 'daily round of encounters and interactions' and 'rituals and repeated behaviours'.<sup>3</sup> In *A Troubled Area* (1964), waste disposal, laundry, cooking arrangements, bathroom facilities and family activities (e.g., children's playtime), are all highlighted. Jephcott also notes, in Notting Dale, that migrant families are generally in lower quality accommodation. Yet, she argues, 'constant reminders are needed about the democratic principle of equal opportunity for *all* citizens' (Jephcott et al. 1954: 133, original emphasis). It seems that local authorities, including social workers and police, were unaware of this, or else didn't want to acknowledge or act on it. In Jephcott's formulation the 'problem' is re-orientated from a problem of community disintegration to one of basic provision and systemic inequalities, including racism.

<sup>3</sup> Crow (2002) highlights this as a fairly common feature of early community studies. However, the level of detail and data obtained by Jephcott far exceeds that which can be seen in other examples from the time (Goodwin and O'Connor 2015).

### *Lesson 5 – 'Doing' Research Creatively*

We have begun to argue elsewhere that Jephcott's research is extremely creative (see Goodwin and O'Connor 2019). Creative, in this context, means thinking differently about how to approach research, often in a way which runs 'out-of-step' with mainstream approaches. This is something Jephcott is now becoming known for. This creativity partly comes from Jephcott's immersive and data-driven approach already highlighted. In seeking to explain, to respond, and address issues and problems from *within* local communities, 'standard' practices may not be the most suitable. In the Radby study, this creativity is embodied in the immersive, participatory way that Jephcott and Carter conduct the study. They sought to reveal information of a 'different order' to statistical data, or to the 'usual' data produced in community studies. In *A Troubled Area* (1964), a series of photographs were taken to capture the conditions and experiences of residents in the area. Contrasting photographs of hallways, clothes on the back of a door, mothers with their children, overflowing bins and cluttered (inadequate) outdoor spaces, and a vibrant market scene. People are often featured in these, although not always. These photographs act as a tool to exemplify the 'social worlds' (including the materiality) of the local residents, and creatively illustrate some of the descriptions and observations offered by Jephcott, or by residents in her interviews and informal discussions.

Overall, Jephcott was attuned to the lived realities of the people in these studies and thus sought to collect a vast range of rich data from a variety of perspectives. Such research and data contribute to our understanding of how things have come to be. This begins to signal the ways in which some things have changed, but significantly, the ways in which some things have *stayed the same*.

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