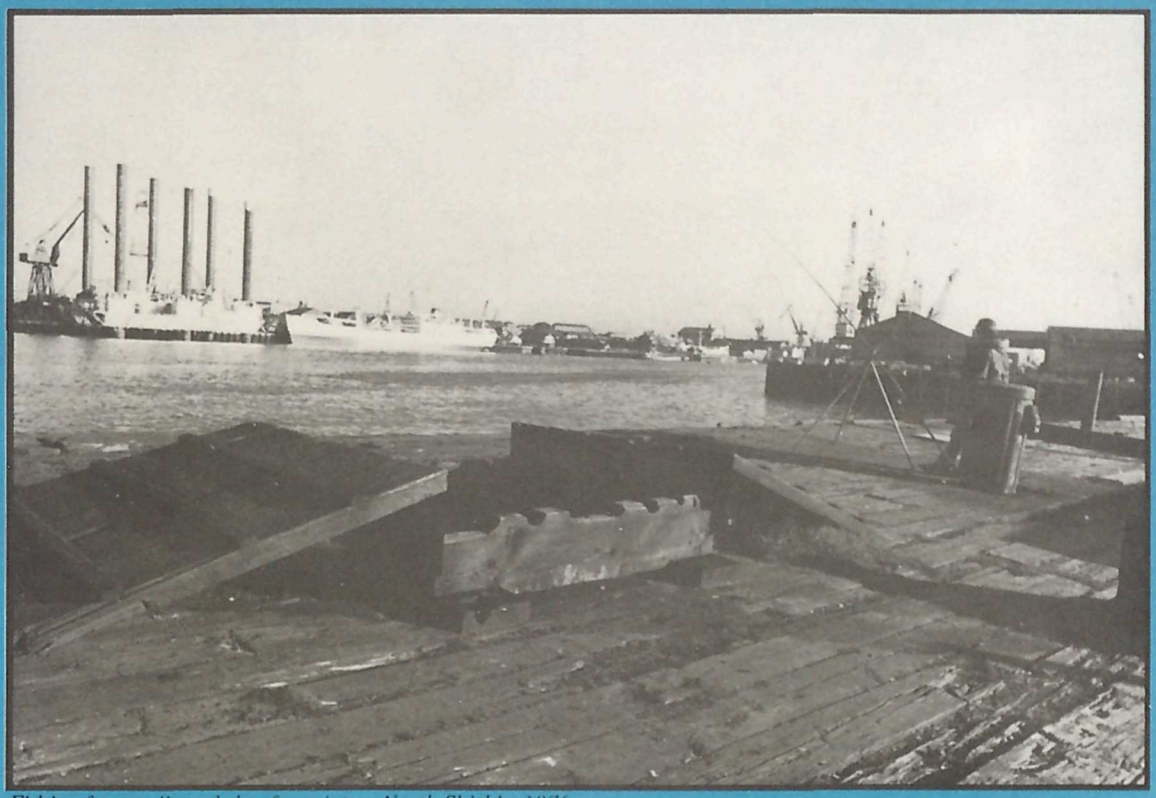
North Shields: Living with Industrial Change



Fishing from a disused riverfront jetty: North Shields, 1976.

North Tyneside CDP
Final Report
Volume 2

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Final Report
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Preface

The North Tyneside CDP was part of the National Community Development Project set up by the Home Office in 1969. The National Project was one of several experimental programmes initiated by central government at that time to combat urban deprivation. Twelve individual projects were established over a period of three years and located throughout the country; each had a five year lifespan. The North Tyneside Project, originally located within the area of the Tynemouth County Borough council, was one of the last projects to be established towards the end of 1972. The Project's five year life came to an end in September, 1977. The work of the Project, together with research material is written up in several separate documents:

North Shields: Working Class Politics and Housing 1900-1977. Vol.1.
North Shields: Living with Industrial Change. Vol.2.
North Shields: Organising for change in a working class area. Part I Vol.3.
North Shields: Organising for change in a working class area. Part II: The action groups. Vol.4.
North Shields: Women's work. Vol.5.

The views expressed in these volumes are those of the project workers and do not necessarily reflect those of our sponsors.

Bob Davis
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Introduction

This volume is presented in two parts. The first is an overview of the industrial context in which our work has taken place. It concentrates on North Shields as such, since this is the immediate industrial area relative to the location of the North Tyneside Community Development Project; and North Shields is still an area with a high degree of overlap between people's places of residence and their places of work. Around 60% of workers who lived in Tynemouth County Borough* (of which North Shields was the major town and industrial area) in 1971 also worked within the borough boundary; and these residents formed over 70% of the local workforce. The concentration on North Shields by no means denies that neighbouring areas are problem free. Wallsend, South Shields, Jarrow, all face similar and related problems, as do many other parts of Tyne and Wear County, and indeed, the North East region; and as the National CDP publication, *The Costs of Industrial Change* emphasised, these problems are not just experienced by residents and workers in the classic 'regions' (like the North East), but also by those in parts of the so-called 'prosperous' regions elsewhere in the country. However, the North East has often been focussed upon by researchers, and as we were first and foremost a local project we will take the opportunity here of examining in detail a local area – whilst bearing in mind that many of the issues and processes focussed upon are not unique to that area, nor their causes and solutions necessarily found within that area.

The second part is a report and review of our work in the industry/employment/trade union field. The order of the two does not imply that our 'action' work was based on the full picture of the context presented first. That picture has been developed and revised over the whole life of the project; and our 'action' work has likewise developed alongside it, and taken on a momentum of its own. However, it is easier to draw lessons from the latter with easy reference back to the context; as our conclusion to the second part probably demonstrates.

This is not the only piece of work on industry and employment to originate from North Tyneside CDP. Companion volumes in this final reporting series include a report on *Women's Work*. In the near future, too, the North Tyneside CDP *Income Maintenance Project* will have made its final report and that will deal in detail with male unemployment and the local labour market. To a large degree, all complement each other.

Prior to the publication of this final report series, too, the North Tyneside CDP has been involved in the publication of a number of local, and some national inter-project, reports dealing with industry and employment. These have included:

NORTH TYNESIDE CDP:

1. *Companies in North Tyneside – An Analysis of Ownership, Control and Profits.* (With North Tyneside Trades Council, April 1975).
2. *Unemployment and Young Workers in North Tyneside* (With North Tyneside Trades Council, January 1977.

NORTH TYNESIDE AND BENWELL CDP's

3. *Multinationals in Tyne and Wear* (2 Vols.). (With the Tyne Conference of Shop Stewards, October 1977.)

NATIONAL CDP INTER-PROJECT REPORTS

4. *Jobs in Jeopardy* (June 1974).
5. *Workers and the Industry Bill* (CDP 'PEC' Group, July 1975).
6. *The Costs of Industrial Change – Industry, the State, and the Older Urban Areas* (January 1977).

*In April 1974, Tynemouth County Borough was merged with other adjacent authorities to form 'North Tyneside Metropolitan Borough'.

Part 1.

North Shields: The Industrial Context

Introduction

Part 1

North Shields: The Industrial Context

Section One: Introduction

Chapter I The Background

1. The Regional and sub-regional context[1]

The Northern Region's development up to the First World War was dominated by the major heavy industries of coal-mining, iron and steel, shipbuilding and heavy industry, and in its seaboard parts by the related 'service' industries of shipping and dockwork. The depression of the 1920s and 1930s hit these industries, and the workers who worked in them, particularly severely. Since that time attempts have been made – relatively successfully in their own terms – to *diversify* the industrial base of the Northern Region. This has failed, however, to solve employment problems in the region; the 'traditional' industries still exist and employ large numbers of workers in particular areas of the region; and the 'new' industries which have come to face problems of their own and have contributed to the overall problem of employment in the region. The immediate context (for North Shields) is Tyne and Wear County, today the major employment centre in the Northern Region, providing some 40% of its jobs; again its industrial base was constructed on shipbuilding, coal and heavy engineering, with the related port and shipping industries. Again, the area has been subject to a programme of attempted change towards a diversified industrial structure since the 1930s. Despite this, in the period 1961-1976, when jobs in the country as a whole grew by some 2.3%, the county's job levels declined by 3%; and registered unemployment rose from 5% of resident labour in 1961 to 11% in 1976, compared to a national rise from 3% to 7%. In particular areas, this employment problem is worse, especially in the 'older urban areas', those which developed on a 'traditional' industrial base. North Shields is just one such area, and in general, although with particular variations, the story of its development is the story of the Northern Region, and is fairly typical of the kinds of changes that have overtaken many towns across the whole region.

2. North Shields – Early Development[2]

Coal and the sea are two factors of longstanding importance in the history of the development of the area. In 1390, North Shields had some 200 houses, and its inhabitants earnt a living from fish, salt and coal. The monks of Tynemouth priory also dug coal and fished for trade. A series of disputes over monopoly rights to trading between the people of North Shields and the burghers of Newcastle affected the growth of Shields, but around the 1630s the place revived with the growth of the salt trade and coal mining. The Tynemouth and Preston pits were worked by Peter Delaval, Earl of Northumberland, in the early 1600s; whilst Ralph Gardner worked a pit at Flatworth in the 1640s. This period saw a renewal of hostilities between the "hostmen" of Newcastle and people like Gardner, who sought to abolish their monopoly over trade; coal dug at Shields had to be shipped out at Newcastle, but the local merchants resisted these bye-laws and began to ship coal out from Shields. SALT was an important source of work and income. A "Society of Saltmakers in North and South Shields" existed in the 1630s; and the Earl of Northumberland worked salt-pans at the east-end of Shields in the 1670s.

Map of North Shields in the Seventeenth Century: from Ralph Gardner's 'England's Grievance' . . . , 1654.

The Newcastle burghers continued to wage their war on Shields traders, and the fortunes of the local populace ebbed and flowed. Although coals shipped at Shields were seized by Newcastle's authorities, shipments continued to be made. Staithes for the loading of coal were built, and in 1700 the town was described as *"large, well built, and prosperous . . . a haven for 1,000 ships"*.[3] What had become a big trade in salt, however, began to decline after about 1716. Between then and about 1726, the locus of the SE Northumberland salt-trade shifted northwards to Blyth.

Its place, however, was soon taken by the shipping and shipbuilding industry. The wars of the 18th century saw a great demand for ships. Masters and mariners from Whitby (a shipbuilding town in the mid to end 18th century), Ipswich and other coastal ports settled in Shields. An important naval dockyard, building wooden ships for the navy, was established at Howdon-upon-Tyne. In the 1750s, the American war resulted in the construction of some 30 ships per year from the shipyards of Shields. From this time onwards, the town – which had its core around the quayside – began to expand northwards. Terraced streets and public buildings were constructed. In 1778, a 'Union Society' was founded for the insurance of ships; and an ironfoundry and ropemakers was established in the town. North Shields came to be an important shipbuilding and shipping/shipowners town. Trade grew with places worldwide – the East Indies, the Baltic, and North America.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, a new wave of pits were developed. Early ones around the town were falling into decay. A new, winning, however, was sunk in 1799 at Percy Main, by the partners Lamb, Waldie, Walker and Maude; these were already associated with mining developments at Shiremoor, and some of them were the founders of various coal-mining family dynasties in the region. The Howdon pit was sunk in 1804; High Flatworth in 1817. Coal owners were never very scrupulous about the safety of their workers or their investments; in 1807 the Percy Main pit caught fire, and in 1839 it and the Howdon pit were flooded out. These were only setbacks in the growth of the SE Northumberland coalfield, however. The High Main seam was reached at Backworth in 1818, and a wagonway to Whitehill Point (North Shields) opened; this was originally for horse-drawn trucks, but these were replaced by rope-haulage in 1821.

The industrial growth of the area was reflected in the establishment of public buildings, societies, and financial institutions. In 1807 a subscription library was opened; in 1819, the North and South Shields Bank (partners included Robert Spence, closely connected to the coal trade; in 1836 this merged with the Newcastle, Shields and Sunderland Joint Stock bank). In 1825, a Scientific and Mechanics Institute was formed, becoming, in 1833, a Mechanics and Tradesmen's library. Schools were built. A "Shipowners Society" came into existence (1854).

At this time (i.e. the early 19th century), industry was centred around the Low Lights – including an iron foundry, a chain and anchor works and shiprepair yards. A wagonway connected the Cullercoats Main Colliery, and Whitley limestone quarries, with the Tyne at Low Lights; and coal and lime were shipped out. In the 1820s, the North Shields Gas Company provided gas lighting; the Union Quay and the Fish Market were built; a new graving dock was constructed by the Shields Engineering Company, and later on Smiths Dock began to be developed by the "Limekiln Shore", a local beauty spot. In 1839, the railway between Newcastle and North Shields was opened; in 1847, the Blyth and Tyne railway opened (from Blyth to Percy Main) bringing coal from the Blyth area to Hay Hole. (It became part of the North Eastern Railway in 1874).

In 1848, the ports of North and South Shields became independent customs ports: a year later, the County Borough of Tynemouth was "incorporated" by Act of Parliament. In the 1850s, the Tyne Improvement Commissioners built the Northumberland Dock (1857); and in 1865, the port of North Shields became a separate one in its own right.

Chapter II North Shields in figures: The Nineteenth Century to the 1970s

1. Population:

With the growing industrial employment opportunities available in North Shields* the nineteenth century was a period when the population grew rapidly, from 14,345 in 1801 to 51,336 in 1901. Particular growth periods were 1801 to 1821, when population increased on average by 3.65% per year, and from 1851 onwards. (See Appendix I, Table 1).

2. Occupations

Between 1811-1831, the numbers of families resident in Tynemouth and involved in agriculture decreased from 269 to 145; those involved in "Trade, Manufacturing and Handicraft" declined from 2837 to 1271; whilst "all other families" (presumably those selling their labour power) increased from 1327 to 4791. For males aged 20 or over, in 1831, the following occupations were followed:-

Table 1. Source: 1831 Census

Occupation	Number
Farming	78
Farm labourers	189
Manufacturing	39
Retail/handicraft	1918
Capitalists, bankers, professionals	442
Non-agricultural labourers	1431
Male servants	54
Other males	420

Some 738 families were occupied as servants, too – one of the few occupations open to women. (Unlike other coalfields, the Northumberland mines did not employ women[2]). From 1851 onwards, we are able to detail with more precision the occupations followed by the residents of Tynemouth, and to distinguish the sexes within these (See Appendix I, Table 2). There is obviously no uniform, linear development of trends. (If this were so, it would not bear out one of the general arguments underlying our portrayal of this local industrial area – that capital has no bounds, that its development is wholly uneven, and that a growth industry [in terms of the employment of labour] at one period of time is a declining one at another.)

*North Shields was the major town in Tynemouth Borough; census statistics always refer to 'Tynemouth'. Where we refer to Tynemouth, it is because of this; but for Tynemouth, read 'North Shields'.

From 1851-1901, perhaps the major period of Tynemouth's growth when the population grew from 30,000 to over 50,000, nearly all occupations which the resident population undertook expanded in numbers.

There was a rise in the numbers engaged in fishing, forestry work, and farming – mainly in fishing, we assume, as the already established industry grew in importance. The other primary sector occupations, mining and quarrying, also grew as new pits were opened in the area. The numbers of workers in iron-forging and furnace work remained much the same (Tynemouth has never been a centre for that kind of heavy engineering), but engineering (including shipbuilding and repair) saw an increase of large proportions – in the region of 350%. The numbers of production workers in food, drink and tobacco doubled (from 611 to 1272); construction workers virtually trebled, as the town was built up. There was a huge increase in the numbers of workers in Transport and Communications as the port grew to national importance. Workers in 'Sales' almost doubled; in 'Service' increased substantially; and the other categories of 'service' workers – professional/technical and admin/management-increased in numbers.

There were, however, some declining occupations; the numbers employed in glass and ceramics decreased in that period. (These industries were of importance at an earlier stage in Tynemouth's development, but had gone into decline in the nineteenth century). Also decreasing in numbers were textile and clothing workers and leather workers – the former by about 30% over the period.

In many respects, for this period, we are talking about the "making of the working class" of Tynemouth; and, in the majority of cases, it is a male working class. Some women worked in farming and fishing – but the primary sector in general was male dominated.* Other women (a few) worked in chemicals, glass, engineering, woodwork, leather – but again these, and the majority of "manufacturing" sector occupations, were male-dominated. The few female 'strong holds' (relatively speaking) were in the production of Food, Drink and Tobacco;

*For a full discussion on women's employment and occupations in the area over time, see the companion North Tyneside CDP report on *Women's Work*.

and particularly in Textiles or clothing, where women formed a majority of workers in this (at that time) declining employment occupation, (and the rate of decline was greater for those women workers between 1861-1900 than for men). In the 'Service' sectors, women played a greater role – in 'Sales' (although again declining in numbers whilst the sector, and men's employment in it, increased); in 'service' (which included domestic service and related occupations); and in 'Professional/Technical Services', which included Nursing and Teaching.

By the turn of the century, then, the population and occupational structure of the area had grown to reflect the establishment of an industrial base which had fishing, mining, port and sea transport, and shipbuilding and shiprepair, as major components. The pattern continued up to the First World War, with the population growing to nearly 59,000 in 1911 and to over 63,000 in 1921. However, breaks in the pattern occurred after that; we deal in some detail with what happened to the particular *industries* in subsequent sections, and on the problems of the 1930s and the phase of new development after the Second World War. Here, however, we continue to look at *demographic* changes since the turn of the century, with a particular emphasis on the recent stage of development (the 1960s onwards), to describe a general broadbush picture of the changing nature of the area.

3. Population 1901-1973

In the twentieth century, growth has been far less marked, and although the population of the area has increased by some 18,000 (1971 figures) since 1901, by the First World War it had really reached its peak. From 1901-21 it grew by 24.1% of 1.06% per annum; and from then until 1966, it only grew by 13.1%, or 0.3% per annum. However, between 1966 and 1971 there was a rapid loss of population (nearly 3000 in all) of 3.9%. The overall growth rate, 1921-71, then, was just 8.7%, or 0.17% per annum (See Appendix I, Table 1).

This decline in population has continued; between 1971-73, the population dropped by over 2000, down to 67,090 (mid-year estimate). The population is now down to, or below, the 1951 level.

4. Economically Active Population 1901-1971

The economically active population – broadly those between school-leaving age and retiring age – grew steadily up to 1966, but has declined since. From 20,762 in 1901 it reached 33,110 in 1966, but in 1971 fell to 31,410. One of the key changes in it has been the rise in the proportion of *women* who comprise the economically active population. In 1901, they numbered 4,506; in 1971, 11,180. Although between 1901-1921, the male economically active population grew by some 22.1% (over 4,600 increase), it has remained at a remarkably similar figure ever since, with only relatively small fluctuations (increases) at various times (1931, 1961-66). As a proportion of the economically active population as a whole, males have declined from 77.8% (1921) to 64.4% (1971); contrasting with females, who have increased from 22.2% (1921) to 35.6% (1971). (The most rapid period of increase (for women) was between 1961-66).[3]

5. Occupations of Residents, 1901-1971

The century has witnessed large-scale changes in the occupational structure of Tynemouth's residents. The primary occupations in forestry, farming and fishing (particularly the latter) and mining and quarrying – have lost their earlier importance. Whilst fishing as an occupation grew between 1901-1931, the post-war years have seen the numbers working in it drop severely. Mining, which grew up to 1921 – pits around the Tynemouth area were important components of the SE Northumberland Coalfield – has been declining since the 1920s, and very few miners now live in Tynemouth. (See Appendix I, Table 2).

The manufacturing occupations – i.e. Categories III-XIV inclusive (broadly speaking shop-floor production jobs) have seen a number of changes. As a whole, they grew to 1921, suffered a big setback between then and 1931 (the 1931 figures reflect the depression and imply large-scale unemployment), then grew again in the post-war period, especially between 1951-1961. Growth continued to 1966, but after that, there was a decline in manufacturing occupations. In the post-war period, the growth of women's manufacturing occupations is marked, whilst it is in men's manufacturing occupations that the post-1966 decline has mostly occurred. Particular sectors have changed more than others; "Forging and furnace work" is now wholly an occupation of the past as far as Tynemouth residents are concerned, whilst (apart from the 1920s-1930s) the electrical and other engineering sectors have increased in importance, for both men and (in the post-war period) for women. (Growth in engineering *generally,* however, obscures the decline in shipbuilding and ship-repairing jobs, which are included in this category). Woodworkers increased up to 1961, but have declined rapidly since. (This is probably related in part to new methods of ship construction requiring fewer woodworkers). The textiles and clothing occupations have developed unevenly; textiles has never been particularly important in the area, whereas clothing declined before the Second World War, for both sexes; after the war, occupations in clothing for women increased in numbers to something like the position in the early part of the century, though jobs for men remained at a low level. (Of course, the organisation of production for clothing will have changed dramatically over that period – from small-scale to factory production).

Latterly, however, there has been a tailing off of women living in the area with occupations in clothing production.

The number of workers in construction jobs shows marked fluctuations – such is its nature – expanding rapidly after the First World War, declining as rapidly with the post-war slump, growing through the 1950s and 60s (a period of large scale capital investment in 'infrastructure' in the area – roads, housing etc.) but declining in the 1970s. Labourers are now a much bigger part of the population than in earlier times – reflecting, perhaps, the tendencies of capitalism to require fewer skills on the part of its workforce, and the changing skill-base of the area's industries.

Transport and Communication occupations – these include those in the docks, in shipping, the railways etc. – maintained their importance in the area up to the Second World War, but since that time, there has been a large and steady decline in the number of workers in those (traditionally male) occupations. This contrasts with an increase in the number of workers in warehousing, storage, packing, etc. – especially in the post Second World War era – although that increase has latterly fallen away, particularly for men.

Occupations which have increased their representation amongst the residents of Tynemouth include the Clerical Occupations – from 1344 (1921) to 4210 (1971); and the increase has been most marked amongst women – from 614 (1921) to 2870 (1971), with the big years of expansion coming after the Second War. Whereas the number of men clerical workers has declined in recent years.

The numbers of sales workers has fluctuated – in fact, there were *less* sales workers in 1971 than in 1931. Generally, however, this is an occupational category in which, since 1931, men workers have declined noticeably, whereas the number of women workers has stabilised, making it a category that 'belongs' more to women than to men.

The 'Service' category shows fluctuations. An important occupation for women before the First World War, it decreased in the immediate post World War I period only to increase (for both sexes) in 1931. After the Second World War, in general it had declined in importance – especially for women workers, but not for men – but began to increase again in the 1950s and 1960s up to 1966 for both sexes. Since then, however, it has declined – again for both sexes (See Appendix I, Table 2 – *Occupational Category* XXIII). The category includes firemen, policemen, barmaids, domestic workers, hotel and restaurant workers, hospital workers, etc. Administrators and managers are well represented in the area, (the area, after all includes Tynemouth and Cullercoats, part of the wider conurbation 'commuter' belt and attractive places to live) – although again, the 1921 level was almost as high as the present one, and included a larger proportion of women. This declined through the twenties and thirties, however, and only expanded again in the 1950s and 60s. Latterly, (1966-71) the numbers of women workers in this occupational category have grown rapidly.

The Professional and technical services have been expanding since the turn of the century – for both sexes, with the main period of expansion being post Second World War. Latterly (1966-71) there has been a tail off in men's occupations in this category but a further increase in women's.

6. Economic Activity and Skills since the Second World War

The economically active in any population are those people over the age of 15 (now 16) who are in a position to work, whether they are in or out of employment, or sick, or whatever. The *inactive* include those in the same age range who are in full-time education, or are permanently sick or retired, etc. The economic activity *rates* are the economically active expressed as a percentage of the (relevant) population aged 15+.
In Tynemouth CBC in the years 1951-71, there have been a number of significant changes in these rates. For men, the years 1951-61 were relatively stable, the rate being 88% for both years. By 1966, however, the rate had declined to 85.8%, and by 1971 to 82.1%. For women, there had been a steady increase; from 30.5% in 1951, to 32.7% in 1961, and up to 39.5% by 1966 and on to 41.0% in 1971. Between 1966-71, the activity rate for *married* women went up from 33.5% to 40.1%, (contrasting with a *decline* for unmarried women from 49.0% to 42.6%). (See Appendix I, Table 3).

These changes have been accompanied by changes in skill levels. For all economically active residents (both sexes) the proportions in the grouped socio-economic groups for 1966 and 1971 remain similar (see Appendix I, Table 4), but with slightly perceptible variations in the Foremen and skilled manual workers categories (decrease in amount and proportion), the personal service/semi-skilled manual category (likewise), and the Unskilled category (numbers remaining much the same but the proportion increasing from 11.1% to 12.0%). (The only other marked change was the increase in 'Intermediate' white collar workers). If we look at the groupings for Economically Active and Retired males, we see that the decrease in the personal service/semi-skilled manual category and the increase in the unskilled category is more marked (see Appendix I, Table 5) – although there was a slight increase in foremen/skilled manual workers (but remember this includes retired men).

Some of these 1966-71 trends reverse those of 1961-66 (although with all 10% sample the findings have to be carefully interpreted). (See Appendix I, Table 6). If we

take men on their own, and the series from 1961-1971, the following pattern emerges for manual workers:-

a. **a rise in the numbers and proportion of foremen and supervisors (manual) 1961-66, followed by a fall 1966-71.**
b. **a slight rise in the numbers and proportion of semi-skilled manual workers 1961-66, followed by a significant fall in numbers and a 2% drop in proportion 1966-71.**
c. **a big decrease in the numbers of skilled workers (from 7370 in 1961 to 6380 in 1971) and a decrease in proportion (from 33.7% to 31.5%).**
d. **a decrease in the numbers and proportion of unskilled manual workers 1961-66, followed by a rise in numbers and a 2% rise in proportion 1966-71.**

The other category showing a marked rise was the 'Indefinite' or 'inadequately defined' group, which in 1961 and 1966 only accounted for 0.6% of economically active males but which by 1971 had risen to 2.2%.

To what socio-economic groups do the economically active fall into today? In 1971, there were 20,230 economically active *men* living in Tynemouth CBC. (See Appendix 1, Table 7).

3.3% were Foremen/supervisors (manual)	(SEG 8)
31.5% were skilled manual workers	(SEG 9)
2.8% were own account (non professional) workers	(SEG 12)
14.0% were semi-skilled manual workers	(SEG 10)
0.1% were agricultural workers	(SEG 15)
1.0% personal service (semi-skilled) workers	(SEG 7)
14.1% were unskilled manual workers	(SEG 11)

A total of 66.8%, then were "manual workers", broadly defined.

In 1971 there was an economically active *female* resident population of 11,250.

0.6% were Foremen/supervisors (manual)	(SEG 8)
4.4% were skilled manual workers	(SEG 9)
0.9% were own account (non-prof) workers	(SEG 12)
15.1% were semi-skilled manual workers	(SEG 10)
12.8% were personal service (s/sk) workers	(SEG 7)
10.0% were unskilled workers	(SEG 11)

A total of 43.8%, then, were "manual workers" broadly defined. (There was almost a complete absence of "professional workers" (SEG 4), among women, though a higher percentage than men in the "Intermediate non-manual" group (SEG 5) which includes nurses, teachers, etc. See Appendix I, Table 7).

Within this group of women were a 'sub-group' of married women, totalling 7,140. Of these,

0.8% were foremen/supervisors (manual)	(SEG 8)
3.9% were skilled manual workers	(SEG 9)
0.8% were own account (non-prof) workers	(SEG 12)
15.5% were semi-skilled manual workers	(SEG 10)
15.0% were personal service (s/sk) workers	(SEG 7)
12.6% were unskilled workers	(SEG 11)

48.6% then were "manual" workers (a higher proportion than of all economically active resident women, and therefore also of unmarried women).

Of *all* economically active residents of Tynemouth, 39.4% worked in Manufacturing industries in 1971, and 36.0% in Distribution and services.

The majority of skilled manual workers (58.1%) and of semi-skilled workers (59.4%), and unskilled v rkers (51.2%) worked in Manufacturing industry. The vast majority of non-manual workers worked in Distribution and Services (73.3% of intermediate non-manual workers and 52.8% of junior non-manual) – although 20.6% of junior non-manual workers also worked in manufacturing (see Appendix I, Table 8).

7. Journey to Work

All the above data refers to *residents* of Tynemouth County Borough. Of course not all residents of Tynemouth who are economically active *work* in the area; nor do all the workers who comprise the local work-force *live* locally. Just over a third of Tynemouth residents who are economically active work outside the local authority area (See Appendix I, Table 9). This has increased from 6,849 (1931) to 11,970 (1966); and from 35.8% of economically active residents in 1961 to 37.9% in 1966. The majority of such 'outgoing worker-residents' are males, but women too have increasingly found employment opportunities elsewhere. The majority of outgoing worker-residents work, however, in the Tyneside conurbation, and particularly in the areas closest to Tynemouth, i.e. Wallsend, and the metropolitan centre of Newcastle.

The Socio-Economic characteristics of those worker-residents working outside the local authority area are worth consideration. Between 1966-71, (see Appendix I, Table 10) the proportion of outgoing worker-residents (for each year) in each socio-economic group increased marginally. The only groups to vary from this pattern were Employers (SEG 1) who declined in proportion; skilled manual and unskilled manual workers (who stayed constant); and semi-skilled manual workers, for whom there was a marked decline in numbers and a drop from 13.2% to 8.4% in proportion to the total outgoing working-residents. The bulk of outgoing worker-residents in both years was comprised of junior non-manual, skilled and semi-skilled workers – 64.7% in 1966 and 59.9% in 1971.

In 1966, 45.7% of all outgoing worker-residents worked in manufacturing industries, especially shipbuilding and engineering; this proportion fell to 41.6% in 1971. (See Appendix I, Tables 11 and 13). Again, in 1966, as far as *occupational* groupings went, the main groups of out-

going workers were engaged in engineering (including shipbuilding), clerical, and professional and technical occupations (see Appendix I, Table 12).

In 1966, 65.7% of Tynemouth households were without cars; this dropped to 61.1% in 1971. (See Appendix I, Table 14). Of those worker-residents working outside the local authority area, the use of a car to get to work became much more prevalent between 1966-1971 – rising from 28.6% to 40.5% of total worker-residents working outside; likewise public transport became less used by those working outside – down from 56.8% in 1966 to 47.9% in 1971. Whether this reflects consumer choice or depressed transport services cannot be ascertained from these figures; what it may reflect however, is the increasing scope of the "journey to work" as residents are forced into looking for jobs over a far wider area. (See Appendix I, Tables 15 and 16).

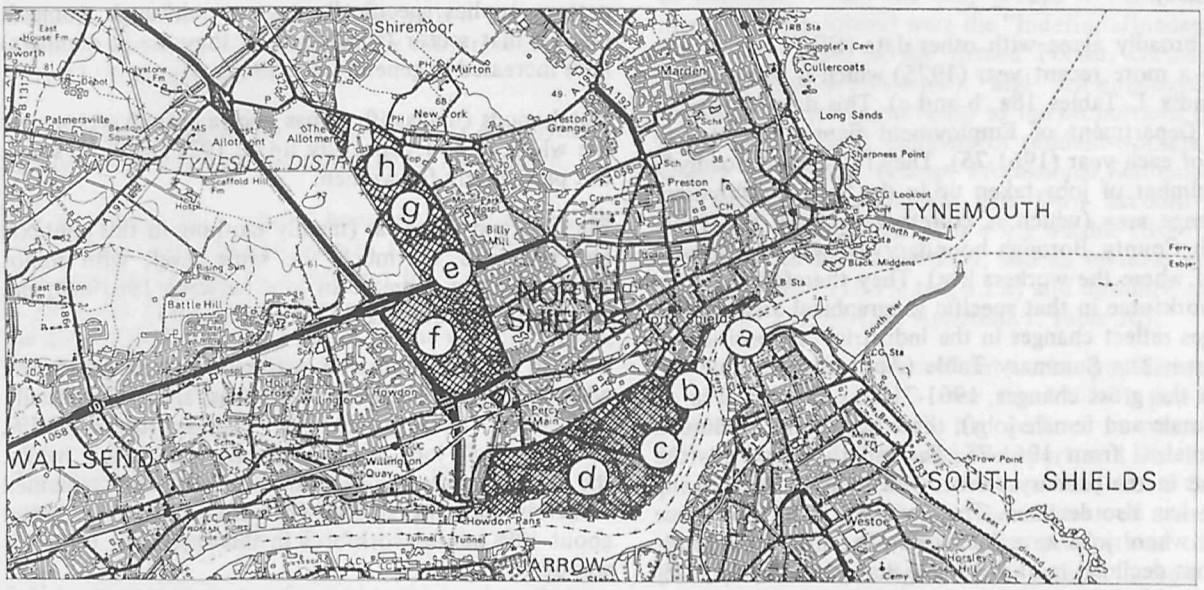
The above broad description gives some idea of the gross changes that have occurred within the population and occupational structure of the *residents* of Tynemouth over many years. However, as we have seen, not all residents *work* in Tynemouth, neither do all workers in the local workplace (which is largely 'North Shields') live in Tynemouth, although a high proportion actually do. To look at the changes in the local workplace, we have to look at a slightly different set of statistics, and this we do next.

8. Industry in Change: The Local Workplace

If we look at Tynemouth CBC as a place in which people *work* (regardless of residence) we find that the major concentration of workplaces is in and around North Shields – the riverside belt, the town centre and the industrial and trading estates. (See Map 1).

The standard analysis of the Northern region – of an area where traditional, heavy industry with a large exporting content has predominated and which has been undergoing long-term decline and job loss, and which has needed (and needs) 'reviving' with the introduction of new industries, firms and jobs – applies in broad detail to North Shields. The changes that have occurred in North Shields are reflected in a variety of statistics

MAP 1. Main Industrial Areas in North Shields



KEY

INDUSTRIAL AREAS

OLDER RIVERSIDE AREA.

a Fish Quay.

b Shiprepair Yard (Smith's).

c Docks, Scandinavian ferries.

d Port of Tyne Authority land- Esso Terminal, artificial quarry, etc.

NEWER INDUSTRIAL ESTATES.

e West Chirton Industrial Estates (EIEC).

f Tyne Tunnel Trading Estate (private).

g Tynemouth Industrial Estate (EIEC)

h Middle Engine Lane Industrial Estate (Local Authority).

collected by government agencies such as Employment Offices and the National Census. What do these show?

Broadly, since 1921, (see Appendix I, Tables 17a, b and c), major changes in the local industrial structure for all workers have been the decline in primary industries as sources of employment (mining and fishing); increases in manufacturing industries in general over that period, though decline in shipbuilding and vehicles; and increases in the service sector, except for Transport and Communication. The same general picture holds when we look at men's employment separately, except that public utilities have declined as well as Transport. For women, again, the same general picture applies except that there have been enormous increases in the number of manufacturing jobs filled by women in nearly all sectors, and increases in all service sector jobs except for 'Miscellaneous Services' and 'Public Administration and Defence'.

However, such gross figures obscure a number of important changes; and the post war period has seen the majority of these changes. These can be seen in the separate time period changes (i.e. 1921-51, 1951-66 etc.) presented in Appendix I, Tables 17a, b and c.

These figures are from the Census Tables from each of those years and are *workplace* based (i.e. regardless of residence).

They broadly agree with other data (ER2), which goes up to a more recent year (1975) which is presented in Appendix I, Tables 18a, b and c). This data is distilled from Department of Employment figures collected in June of each year (1961-75). They represent (broadly*) the number of jobs taken up in the local Employment Exchange area (which is *co-terminous* with the Tynemouth County Borough boundary) by workers (regardless of where the workers live). They therefore describe the workforce in that specific geographical area, and so changes reflect changes in the industrial composition of the area. The Summary Table (Appendix I, Table 19) shows the gross changes, 1961-71 and 1971-75. For all jobs (male and female jobs), there has been a decline in the total – from 1961-75. Particularly marked is the decline in the primary sector, whilst the manufacturing sector has also declined. This contrasts with the service sector where jobs have increased. The number of *male* jobs has declined markedly over that period – by 6.2% between 1961-71, and a further 8.6% between 1971-75. All jobs lost for men have been in the primary and manufacturing sectors, whilst (overall) the service sector has marginally increased. The situation for males contrasts noticeably with that for females, for whom there has been an expansion in job numbers – of 12.8% between 1961-71 and a further 8.2% between 1971-75. The major area of gain has been in the service sector, and whilst although the manufacturing sector in 1975 had expanded relative to 1961, there had actually been a decline between 1971-75 of some 11.1%.

Those, then, are the very broad trends. Detailed changes are shown in Appendix I, Tables 18a, b and c; and overall percentage changes in Table 20. Since the 1960s, we find that in the primary sector, mining and quarrying (especially the former in this context) have completely disappeared (Tynemouth's last pit – the Algernon – closed in 1966); and there are few jobs left in the fishing industry, with a marked decline since 1971.

In Manufacturing industries, food, drink and tobacco has declined since 1971, particularly for women workers. Mechanical, Instrument and Electrical Engineering increased in the period 1961-71, but has declined since; whereas male employment in these sectors remained relatively stable over the whole period, for women it was a growth sector up to 1971, but a declining sector afterwards. In shipbuilding and shiprepair (in this context, mainly shiprepair), there were big job losses between 1961-71, with a slight increase after that – and this pattern applies specifically to men, although women's jobs in that sector (small though they are in numbers) have increased in general since 1961.

Metal goods (unclassified) has been a growth sector over the whole period, especially up to 1971; for both sexes, but particularly for women.

Clothing and footwear (mainly clothing in this context) has remained on much the same level, with minor fluctuations (a decrease in jobs between 1961-66); and this is a female dominated industry locally.

Timber and furniture has suffered marked job losses; whilst it grew between 1961-66, it has fallen substantially since – by 41% between 1961-71, and a further 13.1%, 1971-5; men's jobs in particular have been lost, whilst the number of women's jobs has fluctuated but remained relatively constant, so that whereas in 1961 they formed about 17% of the workforce in this sector, in 1975 this was up to 31%.

In general, the Manufacturing sector in this period has shrunk – although it increased from 10,772 jobs in 1961 to 11,420 jobs in 1966, in 1975 it was down to 9,478 jobs. *Men's* manufacturing jobs follow the same pattern – a slight increase from 1961-66, and a more rapid decrease afterwards. Women's jobs in the sector, however, grew between 1961-71 (the whole period), but have only declined since 1971, though not down to the 1961 level. The sex change in the composition of the

*ER2 data does not, strictly, measure jobs as such, but are based on numbers of employees whose insurance cards have been exchanged; fluctuations from year to year may be more apparent than real, but they are the most comprehensive series of data available about the local workplace, and for our purposes here we regard them as (broadly) measuring jobs, and certainly (over the long-term) changes in jobs available.

manufacturing workforce is clear to see; in 1961, women comprised 30.6% of the manufacturing sector workforce; in 1975, this proportion was up to 36.7% – and in the context of a declining manufacturing sector in general.

In the non-manufacturing sectors, Construction increased between 1961-66 (there were big programmes of capital works going on at that time) but has declined since that time – mainly affecting men workers. Public Utilities – gas, electricity and water – increased between 1961-71, but there has been a big drop in numbers (mainly men) working in them since 1971. The Distributive Trades have fluctuated since 1961, and lately risen (1971-75); here, men's jobs have slowly but steadily increased over the whole period, but women's jobs declined markedly between 1966-71, although have risen again up to 1975.

Insurance and banking has remained relatively stable, although women's jobs have tended to replace men's over the whole period. Professional and scientific services have grown steadily over the whole period, especially for women where the increase has been far greater than for men. Miscellaneous services have also grown over the whole period, though in the most recent period (1971-75) men's jobs have declined whilst women's have shown a marked increase. Finally, Public Administration and Defence have also grown – steadily in the 1961-71 period and more markedly since then (up to 1975); women's jobs here, however, have grown by a much greater proportion than men's in the most recent period – by 211% as against 33%.

Overall, the service sector has increased its employment locally – and women's jobs in particular have grown.

The workforce as a whole, however, has declined. In 1961, there were 24,616 jobs in the local workplace. This grew to 26,309 by 1966, but fell back to 24,724 in 1971. By 1975, this was down to 24,230 – less than the 1961 figure. The sex balance of the workforce, too, has changed quite markedly during that period. Whereas in 1961, women formed 35.1% of the workforce, in 1975, this was up to 43.5% (see Figure A).

(The Census Tables – which go up to 1971 – bear this out – they will not be described in the same way here, however – see Appendix I, Tables 17a, b and c).

Still looking at 'Industry Groups' in the local workplace, not only has manufacturing declined absolutely in the period from 1961, it has declined as a proportion of the local industrial structure measured by the number of jobs. That is, between 1961 and 1975, those jobs in Manufacturing industries as a proportion of all industries fell from 43.8% to 39.1% – with the main period of decline being 1971-75. Whereas in 1961, 20.9% of jobs were in the service sectors XXIV-XXVII, these accounted for 33.6% in 1975.

9. Characteristics of those who live *and* work in Tynemouth

Over 60% of economically active residents of Tynemouth *also work* in the (local authority) area. This total has fallen since 1961, however, from 64.2% of total persons in employment resident in the area, to 62.1% in 1966 and 61.1% in 1971. (Whilst, conversely, the proportion of worker-residents going out to work, as we have seen has increased). There was also a substantial drop in the actual *numbers* of those resident and working in the area (who we will call resident-workers) between 1961-71 (2,100 in all) – at the same time as the total number of all residents in employment dropped by 2,700. (See Appendix I, Table 21).

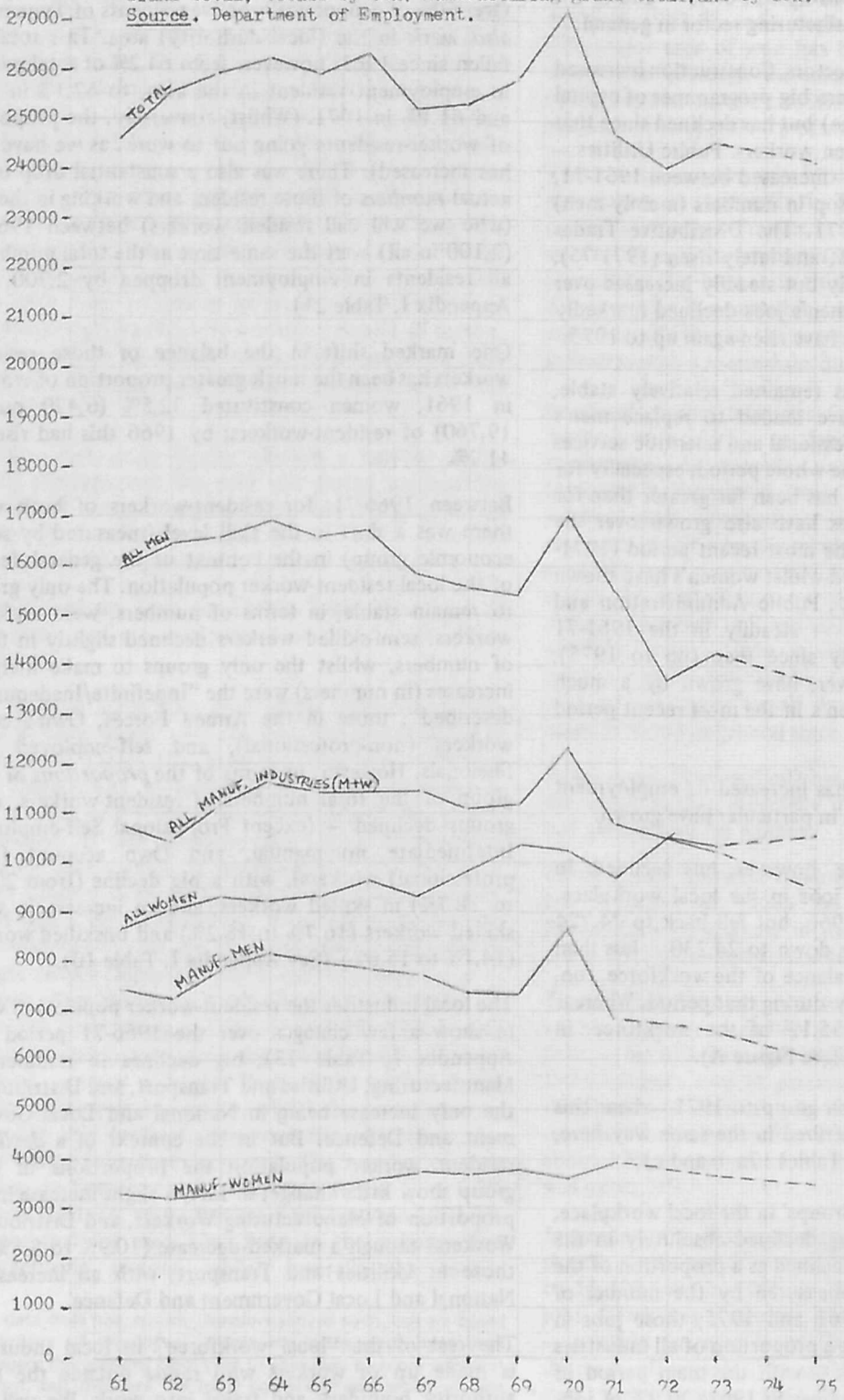
One marked shift in the balance of those resident-workers has been the much greater proportion of women; in 1961, women constituted 32.5% (6,420 out of 19,760) of resident-workers; by 1966 this had risen to 41.2%.

Between 1966-71, for resident-workers of both sexes there was a shift in the skill level (measured by socio-economic group) in the context of the general decline of the local resident-worker population. The only groups to remain stable, in terms of numbers, were unskilled workers; semi-skilled workers declined slightly in terms of numbers, whilst the only groups to make marginal increases (in numbers) were the "Indefinite/Inadequately described", those in the Armed Forces, Own-account workers (non-professional), and self-employed professionals. However, in terms of the *proportions* of each group of the total numbers of resident-workers, most groups declined – (except Professional Self-employed, Intermediate non-manual, and Own account (non-professional) workers), with a big decline (from 20.4% to 18.7%) in skilled workers; and an increase in semi-skilled workers (16.7% to 18.2%) and unskilled workers (14.1% to 15.6%). (See Appendix I, Table 10).

The local industries the resident-worker population work in show a few changes over the 1966-71 period (see Appendix I, Table 13); big declines in numbers in Manufacturing, Utilities and Transport, and Distribution; the only increase being in National and Local Government and Defence. But in the context of a *declining* resident worker population the proportions of each group show little change; in fact, a slight increase in the proportion of Manufacturing Workers, and Distribution Workers, though a marked decrease (10.9% to 8.5%) of those in Utilities and Transport; with an increase in National and Local Government and Defence.

The rest of the "local workforce" in local industries is made up of workers who reside outside the local authority boundary and travel into work. We will call these 'incoming workers'. In 1961, these comprised 27.1% of the local workforce, and 28.3% in 1966. (In

FIGURE A. NORTH SHIELDS EMPLOYMENT EXCHANGE. The Local workplace - Jobs, 1961 to 1975. Grand total, totals by sex; Manufacturing grand total, and by sex.
Source. Department of Employment.



other words, resident-workers made up 72.9% (1961) and 71.1% (1966) of the local workforce). (See Appendix I, Table 21).

Incoming workers – increasing in numbers over time, with an increasing proportion of them women (21.3% in 1951, 24.3% in 1961, and 30.5% in 1966 (See Appendix I, Table 21)) come mostly from adjacent parts of the (wider) Tyneside Conurbation, particularly Whitley Bay, Monkseaton, Wallsend, Newcastle, South Shields and Seaton Valley. (See Appendix I, Table 22).

Incoming workers were most prevalent in certain Industry Groupings in 1966 (see Appendix I, Table 11) especially Engineering and Electrical Goods (SIC's VII, VIII, IX), and Shipbuilding/repair, and Metal Manufacture and Metal Goods; also Clothing and Timber/furniture. They comprised 33.2% of all Manufacturing Workers; and 25.1% of Service Workers (though less than this figure in certain 'Service' Sectors – e.g. Distribution, Miscellaneous Services, and Public Administration and Defence). And the 'Occupation Orders' complement this (see Appendix I, Table 12), with incoming workers prevalent amongst Engineering workers, Clothing workers, Clerical workers, Administration/Managers and Professionals.

We have already looked at the total local workforce (regardless of residence) in some details – *e.g.* for Industry groupings and occupational categories; here we will deal briefly with socio-economic characteristics. Briefly, because the only full statistics presented are those for 1966, and so there are no time series to portray changes.

The 1966 workforce – which was a fairly "full complement" at that time (in general, we have seen there was expansion 1961-66) comprised (see Appendix I, Table 23):-

(Both sexes):

Foremen Supervisors (manual)	(SEG 8)	2.3%
Skilled manual workers	(SEG 9)	23.3%
Own account (non-prof workers)	(SEG 12)	2.5%
Semi-skilled manual workers	(SEG 10)	16.1%
Agricultural workers	(SEG 15)	0.1%
Personal Service (s/sk) workers	(SEG 7)	6.0%
Unskilled Manual workers	(SEG 11)	12.2%
Farmers-own account	(SEG 14)	0.1%
	Total:	62.5%

i.e. a total of 62.5% of workers in the local workplace (the area covered by the old Tynemouth CBC area/ and the "North Shields" Employment Exchange area) were (broadly defined) *Manual workers.*

The next largest group were junior non-manual (20.1%) – the 'white-collar' proletariat?

It is undoubtedly the case that since 1966, the socio-economic characteristics of the workforce have changed. Earlier, we noted how for *residents,* these had changed; and since around 70% of the local workforce *are* resident we can suggest, at least, that some of those trends identifiable in the population at large apply to the workforce. That is, that there is a trend towards a decreasing proportion of both semi-skilled and skilled workers, but an increasing proportion of unskilled workers in the local workforce. If we look at Table 24, Appendix 1, which is a breakdown of male engineering workers working in the Tynemouth workplace, 1966-71, we can certainly see some of these trends at work; not only in the decline in male engineering workers overall during that period, but in the big declines in specific categories, e.g. fitters, welders, metal plate workers, etc.

10. Unemployment in North Shields in the Twentieth Century

The North East, after the First World War, became known as a 'classic' depressed area, characterised by mass unemployment in the 1920s and 1930s. It is a characteristic which is depressingly persistent. In the earlier period, it was the 'heavy' industries which shed most labour – the coal, shipbuilding and ship repair and heavy engineering trades. Some towns – like Jarrow, have become almost legendary, their names immediately conjuring up images of the dole queue. In North Shields, the problem was just as bad, but perhaps less publicly known outside the region; unemployment rose to over 6,000 in 1931-32 in the North Shields Employment Exchange Area (see Appendix I, Tables 25 and 26). The 1931 Census also revealed extremely high levels of unemployment amongst Tynemouth residents, particularly in shipbuilding, water transport and the docks (see Appendix I, Table 27).

Unemployment persisted throughout the thirties, a period which witnessed large scale emigration from the region, but declined with the build-up to the war and the (belated) attempts by local and national governmental agencies to begin to tackle the problem. Following the war, a lengthy boom gave credence to the idea that Keynesian economic policies had "solved" the problem of unemployment in a mature, western capitalist democracy. In Britain as a whole, the unemployment rate averaged out at about 1.7% between the end of the war and 1965, although the men's unemployment rate increased to double the female rate over that period. However, this average pattern conceals marked distinctions between different parts of the country. Ever since the 1920s, unemployment in the North East has been above the national average; the gap between the two rates was 3% in the twenties and 6% in the thirties. After the war, when total unemployment was lower, the North rate kept about half as high again as the national rate; at the time of the 1962/3 recession (which prompted the

'Hailsham' report and his legendary cloth-capped visit to the region)[4] this rose to twice as high. In North Shields during 1963-4 the average unemployment rate for men (at the local Employment Exchange) was about 4% – or about 800 men in number. (The quarterly average for the preceding 10 years had been slightly less than 600 men, with less than 400 between 1955-57). In the recession period of 1962-3 this climbed to over 1100.[5]

Since then, there have been various fluctuations in the unemployment level in North Shields, as demonstrated in the accompanying graph (Figure B). The general trend, however, has been up – with the tops of the peaks and the bottoms of the troughs getting higher. Between 1964 and mid-1965, men's unemployment fell markedly; and women's unemployment halved. From then, however, men's unemployment rose steeply, (till the end of 1967), levelled off (to mid 1971) then rose sharply again (to mid 1972); whilst women's unemployment grew less dramatically but steadily nonetheless. Following that, both men's and women's unemployment fell fairly sharply, reaching the bottom of that particular trough in the autumn/winter/spring of 1973/4. That trough, however, was higher than the previous ones. From mid-1974 onwards men's unemployment has risen to a new high peak – over 1800 in August 1977, whilst women's unemployment increased five-fold between the beginning of 1975 and July 1977. (These figures include boys and girls', i.e. school leavers etc. registered at the Careers Offices). Whereas between 1964 and the start of 1975, women rarely formed over 20% of the unemployed in North Shields (mostly fluctuating between around 14%-18% of registered unemployed) since mid 1975 they have formed well over 20%; and in July 1977 this figure reached 29.63% (see Appendix I, Table 28). This steep rise in female unemployment has boosted the overall figure to a new post-war record – 2,528 people were unemployed during the peak month of July 1977.

If we isolate out the youth unemployment figures, we can see how this section of the working population – particularly school leavers but also the under 25's in general – have been hit by the dwindling number of available jobs in recent years. (See Figure C). Each July/

FIGURE B. NORTH SHIELDS EMPLOYMENT EXCHANGE.
Monthly Unemployment Totals, 1964 to 1977.
Men's includes 'Boys', and Women's includes 'Girls'.
Source: Department of Employment and Careers Office.

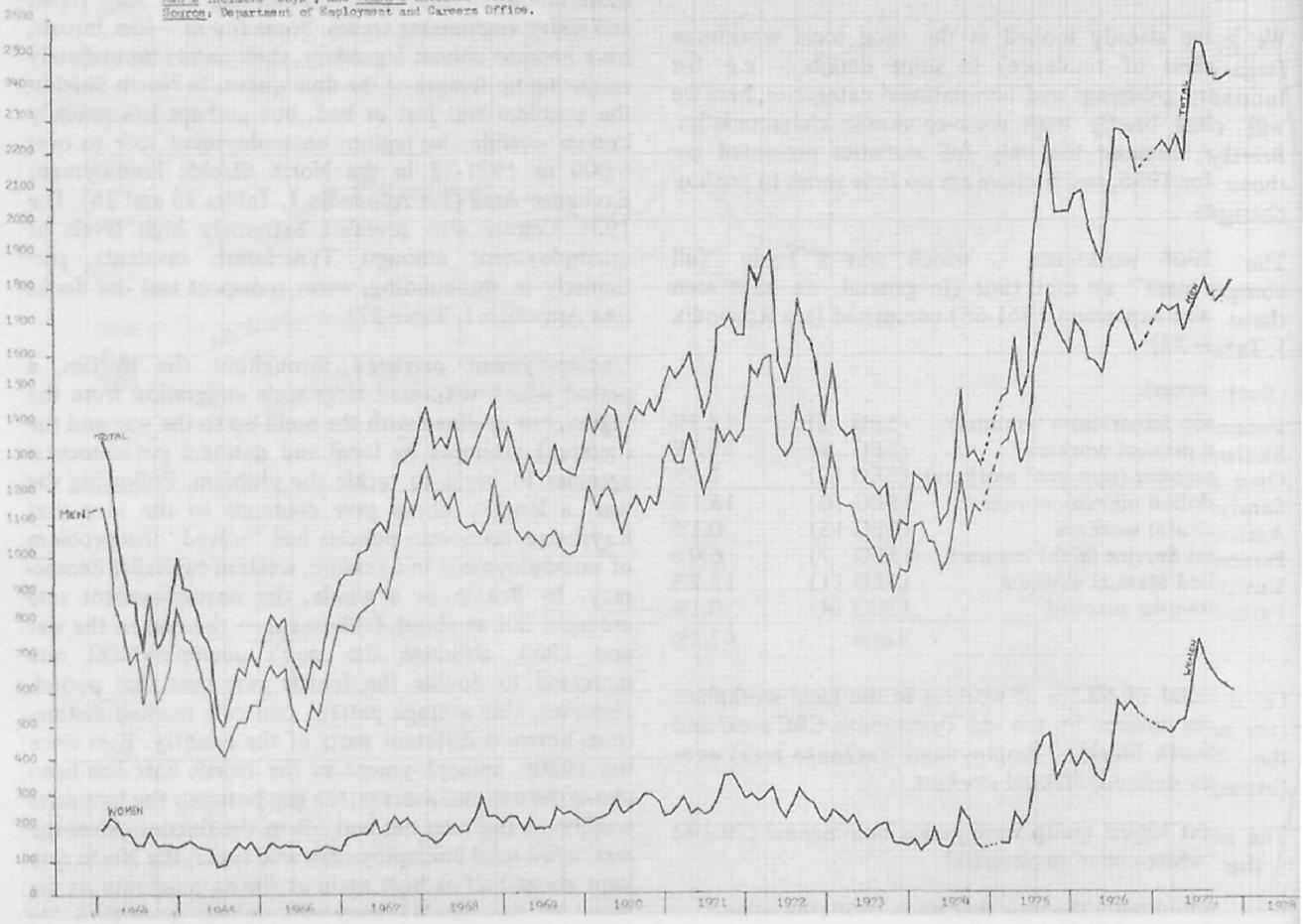
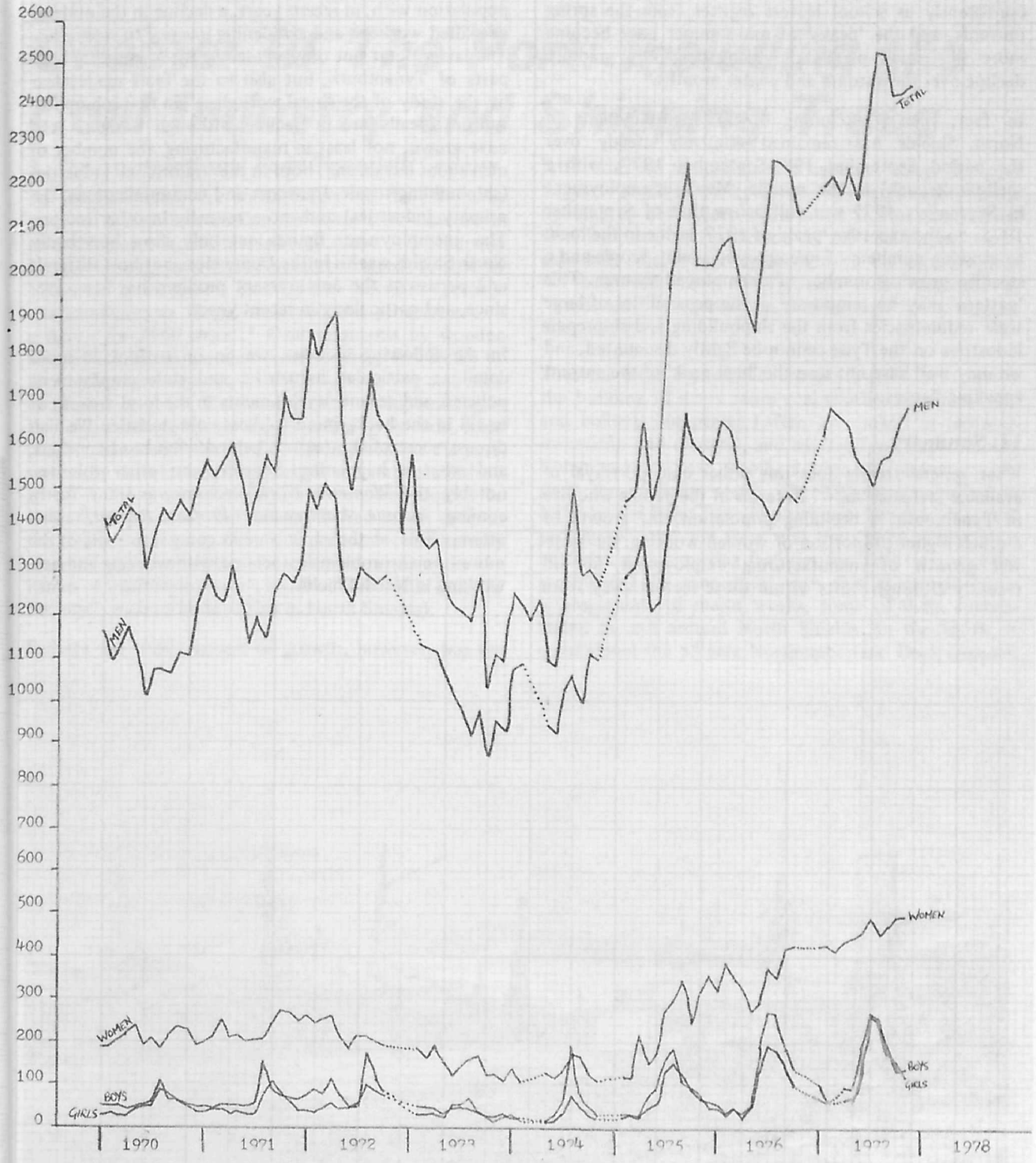


FIGURE C. NORTH SHIELDS EMPLOYMENT EXCHANGE.
Monthly Unemployment Totals, 1970 to 1977.
Source: Department of Employment and Careers Office.



August period since 1974 onwards has seen large numbers of young people registering at the Careers Offices, and the peaks have got consistently higher, and less sharply defined; i.e. the figures for 'boys and girls' have risen consistently as school leavers register from the spring onwards, and the 'peaks' of mid-summer have become more like small plateaux, which then only gradully decline over the autumn and winter months.[6]

In fact, men's (excluding boys') unemployment in North Shields has remained relatively steady over the period September 1975-September 1977, with a shallow 'trough' in the middle. Men's unemployment in September 1977 was still below that of September 1975. So the excessive 'peak' of 1977, is due in the main to growing numbers of unemployed young people and a steadily growing number of unemployed women. This 'pattern' may be temporary – the possibilities of large scale redundancies from the shipbuilding and shiprepair industries on the Tyne cannot be lightly discounted, and we may well have not seen the 'high peak' of the current appalling figures.

11. Summary

What general trends does this rather bald portrayal of available statistics show? In terms of the people who live in Tynemouth, a declining population, the growth of a much higher proportion of women working, the post-war growth of manufacturing employment up till recently although shifts within those sectors away from shipbuilding and repair, transport and communications etc; the growth of white-collar occupations as the 'commuter belt' part of Tynemouth grew, but the continued presence of a large manual working-class population with, in recent years, a decline in the number of skilled workers; and a widening journey to work area. The latter point not only relates to the 'commuter belt' parts of Tynemouth, but also to the facts made clear by the study of the 'local workplace', in that job opportunities locally are in decline; although women's jobs have grown, not least in manufacturing, the number of men's jobs has shrunk, both in the 'traditional' industries (shipbuilding/repair, transport and communications, the primary industries) and more recently in other sectors. The unemployment figures not only show how badly North Shields was hit in the Depression, but how difficult and persistent the employment problem has been ever since, and particularly in recent years.

In the following sections, we go on to look in more detail at particular industries, and state employment policies, and recent developments in the local area, so as to fill in the background to these cold statistics. We also discuss some of the reasons behind what has happened, and what is happening. Some of our other volumes, notably the *Women's Work*[7] volume, and the forthcoming *Income Maintenance Project Report,*[8] also attempt this, at the same time as going into some of the more human problems associated with working and not-working in North Shields.

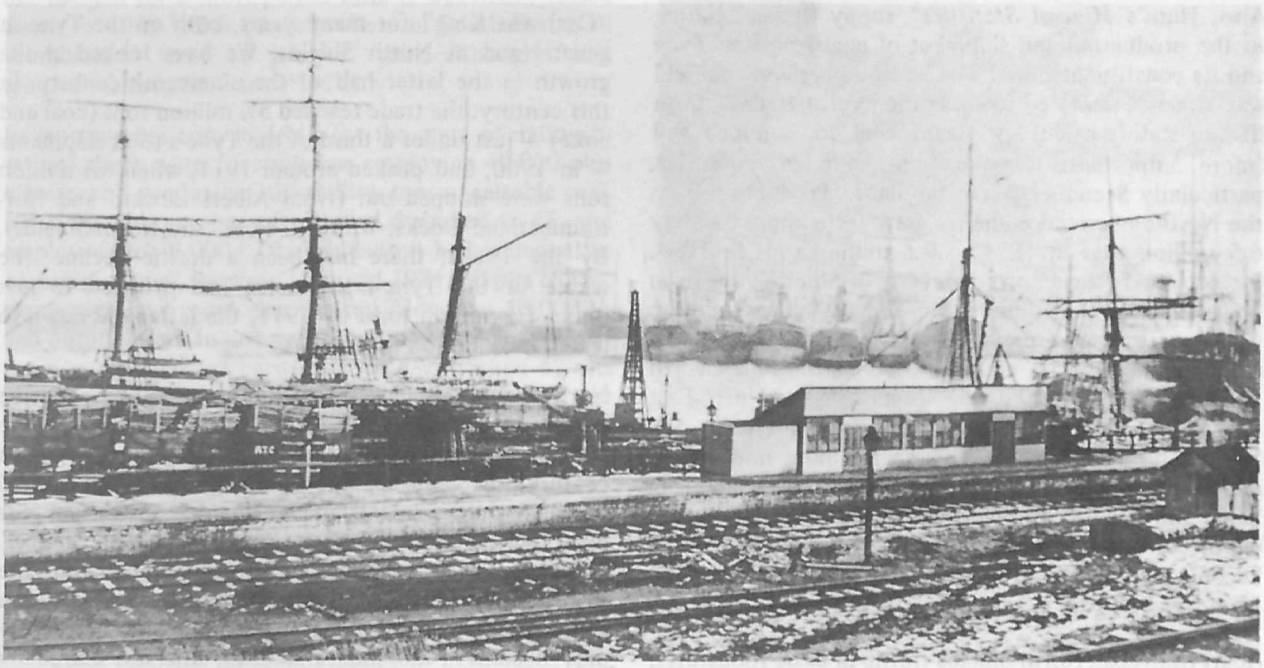
Chapter III The Port: including the Coal Industry and Shipping Trade

1. The Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Century

As we have seen, the conflict between the Newcastle merchants and their challengers down river resulted in coal shipments from Shields being seized and otherwise hampered, but never (permanently) stopped; so that by 1700, the town (North Shields) was described (perhaps exaggeratedly) as *"large, well-built and prosperous . . . a haven for 1000 ships"*.[1] Coal shipments by wooden vessels, loaded at wooden staithes along the banks up to which wagonways ran from the surrounding collieries continued to grow. The development of shipbuilding in the eighteenth century, and of shipping as such, went hand in hand with the further development of the port, so that by the nineteenth century it was well-established. In 1857, there were nine shipowners centred around the Howard Street area; and about 30 lived in the town at the end of the century. (Much of the commercial activity centred around shipping; the connection shows in the names of institutions today, e.g. the "Mercantile Building Society", with its Head Office in North Shields).

Perhaps the major period of growth, however, was the latter half of the nineteenth century, when the port began to reach its peak; this period relates closely to the opening up of the deeper pits in the SE Northumberland Coalfield, and the expansion of the coal export trade, especially the foreign trade; and to the establishment of those industries on Tyneside today regarded as "traditional" (shipbuilding, marine and heavy engineering, etc.).

Thus the latter half of the nineteenth century witnessed the building of many more coal staithes by the railway and colliery companies (often interlinked in terms of ownership and control), and by the Tyne Improvement Commission (whose members were also drawn mainly from the capitalist class). The TIC was established in 1850 by the River Tyne Improvement Act, which gave it jurisdiction over the river, and the duties of making it navigable and providing facilities for trade (not least the coal trade). In connection with this, it carried out a a programme of major works, some of them concentrated in and around North Shields. In the 1850s, it constructed the 55 acre Northumberland Dock (opened



A busy Albert Edward Dock, 1907.

1857), a loading dock mainly for the shipping of steam coal from the SE Northumberland collieries. (In 1905, the dock had 11 staithes, declining to 8 in 1925; these belonged to the London and North Eastern Railway Company and colliery companies, e.g. the Cramlington Company). In 1884 the Albert Edward Dock was opened. It contained 27 acres with coal staithes (belonging to the TIC) grain warehouses, railway sidings, etc., and a deep water timber quay of 58 acres. Other staithes for coal were built at points along the river frontage (e.g. Whitehill Point).[2]

(Since then the Tyne Improvement Commission built a fish quay in North Shields in 1886; a new riverside quay – the Tyne Commissioners Quay – at the Albert Edward Dock in 1928 (extended in 1937); Howdon Staith in 1932; and the Car Ferry Terminal in 1966).

Some idea of the scale of the port in the latter half of the nineteenth century can be gleaned from early census figures such as the following:-

Table 2. Tynemouth. Persons enumerated on vessels in harbours, rivers, etc. (1871 & 81). Source: Census

	On British Vessels		On Foreign/ Colonial Vessels		Total Persons		Total Persons	
	1871	1881	1871	1881	1871	1881	1871	1881
Willington	23	–	–	–	23.	–	3	–
Chirton	125	770	428	329	553	1099	63	135
N/Shields	306	429	474	124	780	553	113	63
Tynemouth	–	28	–	5	–	33	–	4

Also, Hunt's *Mineral Statistics*[3] suppy figures relating to the production and shipment of coal from the Tyne and its constituent ports. The Northumberland coalfield was largely orientated towards the export trade – both the coastal (particularly steam coal to London) and (more importantly) exports for foreign countries, particularly Scandinavia and the Baltic. Production from the Northumberland collieries grew from approximately 6.5 million tons in 1874 to 9.5 million tons in 1894. Exports to foreign ports from North Shields rose from approximately 0.5 million tons to just under 3 million tons over the same period, and the coastal trade from 0.1 million tons to approx. 0.5 million tons. North Shields was not in the 'big league' in the North-East for coastal shipments during this period (Newcastle, Sunderland and Hartlepool were far more important), and its coke exports were insignificant. However, from being the 3rd or 4th North-East port for the foreign export of coal in the 1870s and 1880s, by 1894 it had become second only to Newcastle, displacing Sunderland from this position.

Apart from coal, North Shields traffic in basic foodstuffs, timber and other bulk commodities grew; and of course the development of the port paved the way for the further development of the coal trade as the railway network extended into Northumberland. A significant proportion of the population of North Shields was dependent upon work related to the port activities. The 1901 Census recorded the following occupations pursued by male residents of Tynemouth CBC; (we can reasonably assume at this time that most of these residents *worked* locally as well).

Table 3. Tynemouth CBC Residents Occupied in Transport, 1901 (Order VI. Conveyance of Men, Goods and Messages). Source: Census

1.	On Railways	577
2.	On Roads	494
3.	On Seas, Rivers and Canals	2160 (inc. 1929 seamen)
4.	In Docks, Harbours etc.	519 (inc. 261 Dock & Wharf Labourers)
5.	In Storage, portage and messages	612 (inc. 318 coalheavers)

(This was out of a total of 16,256 males engaged in occupations; *i.e.* over a quarter (26.8%) of occupied males worked around the port).

In 1921, one in ten workers on Tyneside worked in 'water transport', and H.A. Mess[4] noted that two-thirds of the 12,500 engaged in this activity on Tyneside lived in Tynemouth (mainly North Shields) and South Shields. Since that time, however, there have been many changes. Here, we will look at several key sectors of the port trade, and then go on to generalise about these changes.

2. The Coal Trade

"Coal was King" for many years, both on the Tyne in general and at North Shields. We have looked at the growth in the latter half of the nineteenth century. In this century, the trade reached 5½ million tons (coal and coke) – just under a third of the Tyne's total shipments – in 1900, and peaked around 1911, when 6½ million tons were shipped out (from Albert Edward and Northumberland Docks, Whitehill Point and North Shields). By the 1960s, there had been a drastic decline; the whole of the Tyne's shipments had dropped to just under 1½ million tons; by 1971, the latter was down to less than ½ million tons.

North Shields itself was a coal-producing town, and the history of coal-mining in North Shields goes back to the monks of Tynemouth. However, during the nineteenth century, the locus of the South-East Northumberland coalfield shifted inland and northwards, as deeper pits were developed with better machinery and techniques. Mining survived, however, in North Shields until the 1920s, when Preston Colliery closed. The owners were U.A. Ritson and Co. Ltd., and at its peak the pit employed some 1400 men and boys; this was halved by 1925, and the pit was shut for most of 1925 and 1926.

Pitmen ready for the afternoon shift of the Eccles Pit, Backworth, 1976; this mine, just NW of N. Shields, is one of the few still being worked in this part of the Northumberland coalfield.

This was the end of the pits effective life, although it did re-open for a short period until it was finally closed down in 1929.[5] But pits elsewhere in South-East Northumberland were to prosper again, although for a relatively brief post-war period only.

In Northumberland, in 1947 (at the start of nationalisation) there were 61 collieries, employing 40,000 plus miners, and producing 10½ million tons of saleable coal. By 1960, the number of pits had dwindled to 45, and employees to 34,000+ (though output had increased to 11 million tons). Between then and 1971, 30 pits closed, manpower was more than halved (down to 13,000+), and output down to just over 5 million tons. The bulk of pit closures occurred between 1958-1969, when 42 pits were closed in those eleven years – including Tynemouth County Borough's last surviving pit, the Algernon (to the North-West of North Shields) in 1966.[6] In the post-war period, much of the coal handling trade in the docks was mechanized, and older staithes became derelict and disused. In the mid-fifties, the Northumberland Dock was closed; much of the coal-handling was transferred to the new Whitehill Point staith, opened in 1954 and costing £400,000 (then), which at the time was one of the most modern-equipped staithes in existence. This, however, lasted only 20 years, and was closed in 1974, marking the end of the coal trade as far as North Shields was concerned.

Whitehill Point Coal Staithes; opened 1954, closed 1974 marking the end of N. Shields as a coal port.

At the height of the coal-trade in earlier days, coal-

handling was fairly labour intensive. "Teemers" (on the staithes) and "trimmers" (in the vessels), combined with dockers and transport workers (e.g. railwaymen employed by the TIC and railway and colliery companies), made up a sizeable labour force operating in and around the docks. The decline of coal-mining in the post-war period, combined with the sophistication of new equipment (e.g. the new staithes, plus better equipped ships) reduced this labour-intensity. The following figures give some idea of reductions:-

Table 4. Tynemouth CBC. Coal Shipment Workers: North Shields (Tynemouth residents)*. Source: Census and National Dock Labour Board.

	Coal heavers (from Census)	Trimmers (from NDCB)
1901	318	
1911	363	
1921	279	
1931	261	
1950		102
1960		47
1970		7
1975		0

***We assume here the majority of coal-heavers work in Tynemouth as well as live there.**

3. Timber

The timber trade has always been of considerable importance on the Tyne, and has provided the basis of the long-standing Scandinavian/Baltic trade. It was linked in the first place to the import of wood for the pits, and for the shipbuilding industry. The Albert Edward Dock was the locus of this trade in North Shields; in 1934, there were 180 acres of open storage for timber. Some firms have located elsewhere in recent years – e.g. Armstrong & Addison's have concentrated at Sunderland and Pyman-Bell's at Tyne Dock on the other side of the river (after acquiring another firm, Osbeck and Co. in 1975); the repercussions of this are that pit wood no longer comes into North Shields, and the trade is more geared to the needs of the building industry, and thus fluctuates more depending upon the state of that. The handling of timber has also been modernised with the extensive use of fork-lift trucks and other mechanical equipment.

4. General Trade

Other cargoes handled included oil and petroleum products, paper, machinery, aggregates, foods and provision. In the post-Second World War period, Esso located a terminal to the north of the old Northumberland Dock – and oil is piped ashore to it from a landing stage. This requires little or no labour, and the bulk of the employees at that plant are drivers and others engaged in road distribution. Velva Liquids (owned by International Terminals, Nassau) have recently established a "tank farm" nearby, for storing chemicals, petroleum and oil. Aggregates come into a specially constructed "artifical quarry" by the old Northumberland Dock at Howdon Staith jetty from which distribution is carried out by road. (Again, this is a very recent development by Tilling Construction Services Limited, and it handles over a quarter million tons of marine dredged aggregates per year). The other 'general cargoes' are mainly concentrated around the Tyne Commissioners Quay and the Albert Edward Dock. Indeed since the PTA was formed in 1968 the Newcastle Quay has lost most of its trade to these points nearer the river mouth, and (in terms of tonnage) the port has been revitalised. Prior to this, there had been a general decline from the 1920s onwards and into the 1950s, emphasised not only by the closure of the coal-trade orientated Northumberland Dock in 1955 (it was filled-in in 1974), but also by the dwindling import/export trade between 1952-67 from the Albert Edward Dock. The "revitalisation" has not meant a gain in the number of jobs, however, but job loss, as it has been accompanied by rapid modernisation and rationalisation. Port mechanisation (fork-lift handling, and palletisation) was introduced in 1952 in the general trade; but the "container" revolution was yet to come, and has been most marked since the PTA took over; in fact, their policy is to rapidly modernise and rationalise existing ports. (These kinds of changes are happening in ports all over the country; in the Northern Region, the Northern Region Strategy Team state that "only in the more modern type of facility, such as container-handling, petro-chemical handling, roll-on-roll-off berths, etc., has the region expanded in the past few years" (in terms of its ports).[7]

The majority of the cargo handled in Shields today is containerised; and facilities have been provided in recent years to cope with this. In 1967, the heavy load berth (roll-on, roll-off) was built – virtually dispensing with dock labour. In 1969, the Danish trade – operating from Newcastle Quay – was transferred to a new roll-on, roll-off berth at the Albert Edward Dock; and a third "roll-on roll-off" was installed in 1972. Danish imports grew from 75,800+ tons in 1970 to 139,500 tons in 1975. And the transfer from Newcastle saw 15 men at North Shields unloading nearly three times the tonnage that 90 men at Newcastle had handled. Today, (end 1977) a further "Ro-Ro" berth is being constructed (by Sir R. McAlpine Limited) at Whitehill Point, North Shields adjacent to one of the existing Ro-Ro-berths. Tyne and Wear County Council made a loan of £1 million to the PTA to help finance the scheme; neither the PTA nor private interests were able (either separately or jointly) to raise such a sum, and the County Council viewed the loan as an important feature of its "retention" policy vis-a-vis employment in an area of declining employment like North Shields, and an opportunity to secure for Tyneside more of the North Sea cargo trade,[8] especially

Albert Edward Dock, 1976.

that between Scandinavia (including Sweden) and the UK.

The general cargo trade is also linked to the Scandinavian passenger trade which has increased in the last two years. A substantial proportion of this, however, was almost lost in 1975. The main two lines – the Bergen and Fred Olsen Lines – lost trade in the early 1970s.

Table 5. North Shields General Merchandise: Tons
Source: Port of Tyne Authority

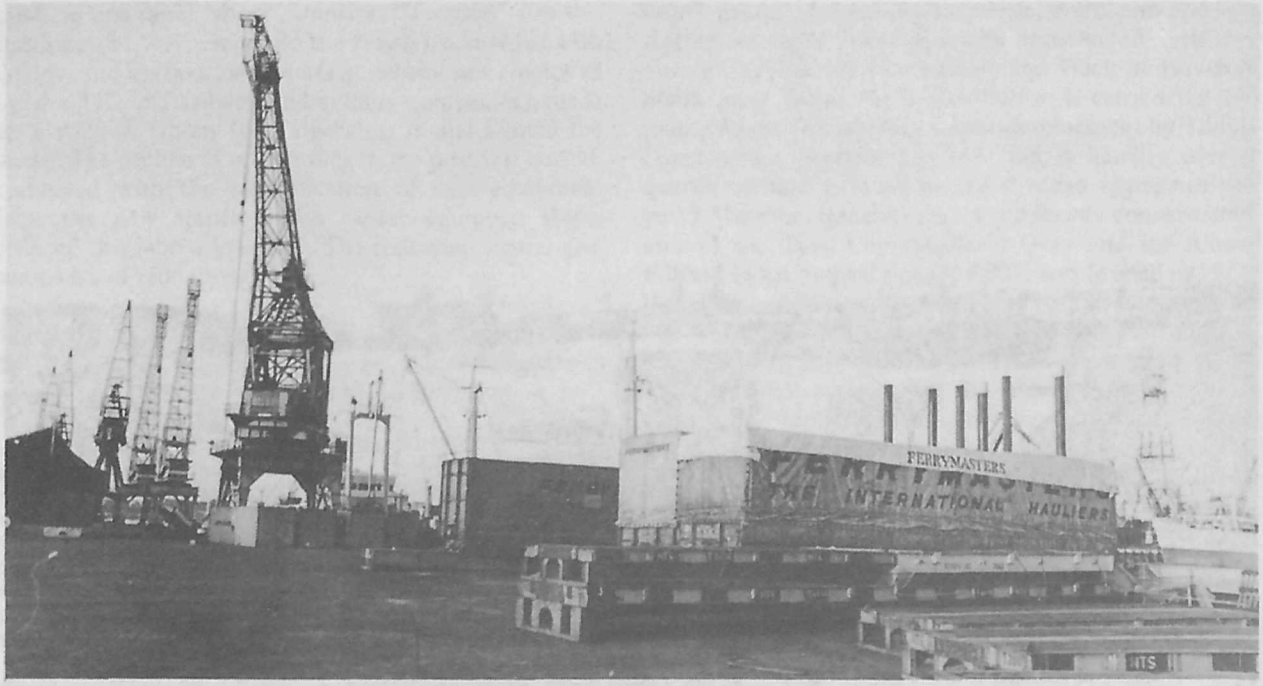
	1968	1972	1975
Bergen Traffic: Imports	26,190	22,213	12,425
(Bergen Line): Exports	20,806	12,101	25,739
Oslo Traffic: Imports	20,865	17,830	11,262
(Fred Olsen Line): Exports	29,865	21,433	14,512

(This contrasts with the (relative) 'success' story of the Danish trade, mainly carried on by the DFDS Shipping Line).

Traffic through Britain's ports in 1975 in general was severely cut – the recession and energy conservation restrictions contributing to this – and as we can see the Scandinavian trade hit an all time low that year. First, Fred Olsen announced that it was withdrawing its passenger and cargo services from the Tyne, and then the Bergen Line did likewise, saying that it was going to rationalise its port usage in Britain into the Humber port, at the expense of North Shields and also Harwich. Reasons given were "economic" and "marketing factors", and over-capacity; five ships were to be reduced to three. (Some members of local authorities were concerned that the Humber authorities had also dangled a carrot). If such a move had taken place, it would have affected up to 200 casual and full-time workers at the Tyne Commissioners Quay, and 70 other full-time workers and 100 dockers, porters and cleaners. P.H. Matthiessen, the Scandinavian Lines' agents, (established in North Shields 1930, though prior to that in Newcastle) would have had to have laid off almost its entire workforce. At the time, the Fred Olsen line ran one ship per week into North Shields, compared to the Bergen Line's three.

But the (local) state stepped in; valuable trade and tourism stood to be lost (Newcastle shops do quite well out of Scandinavian shoppers, especially Norwegians), and after protracted negotiations, the joint efforts of North Tyneside MBC and Tyne and Wear CC managed to persuade both lines to stay, to form a joint company (Fred Olsen – Bergen Line) and sign a ten-year agreement involving something like a £150,000 p.a subsidy from the local authorities. Following this, the line increased its sailings from and into the Tyne. In 1977 the line carried 134,000 passengers and 63,000 tons of cargo.

A subsequent deal was also carried out with DFDS Ltd.



The containerisation of cargoes has had its impact on North Shields Docks.

The same two authorities pay DFDS a subsidy for their promotional expenses in Scandinavia, up to a maximum of £23,000 p.a. DFDS also doubled their sailings in 1976. They have recently announced an extended service for 1978. In 1977, DFDS carried a record 38,000 passengers on the Danish run. (Further 'state' involvement includes the British Tourist Authority's and the Tyne Wear County Council's own advertising campaign in Scandinavia to attract tourists to the North East and thus into the Tyne). The Danish ships bring in butter and bacon in containers and refrigerated trailers – and take out all kinds of produce, including Scotch Whisky.

North Tyneside's own *Review of Trade and Industry 1976*[9] was able to state that *"The Scandinavian trade on the Tyne is very secure, and better links than ever before now exist . . . the TC Quay is dealing with an ever-increasing amount of container traffic from these countries . . ."* Exports jumped by 49% from the Port of Tyne in the first four months of 1976, and much of this involved the roll-on roll-off Scandinavian services. It has recently been announced that two Scandinavian shipping lines (DFDS and Swedish Tor Line) have agreed to jointly operate a new summer passenger service between Gothenberg and North Shields;[10] and Mr Erik Heirung, Managing Director of DFDS Ltd., predicted that North Shields would become one of the major ports in the UK within the next ten years, particularly because of the policy of the Tyne and Wear County Council to invest in its major port (in subsidies and investment in the new Ro-Ro berth). So there had been an upturn in the port trade, especially in general cargo; however, as we have seen, because of new technology, it is unlikely to generate anything like the employment opportunities which disappeared over the preceding years, but it will undoubtedly (at least) stabilise the existing situation.

5. The Port of Tyne Authority

The composition of the Tyne Improvement Commission from its earliest years was dominated by shipowners, traders and coal-owners – the people who needed to develop and maintain a viable port in relation to their industrial interests. Each of these three groups could elect five members to the Board. Even local authority representatives (e.g. from Tynemouth Corporation) – giving the TIC an apparently democratic "whiff" – came from the same background. For example, in 1908, commissioners included Richard Irvin (of the local fishing firm, and elected by Tynemouth Corporation), Walter Runciman (shipowner), R.O. Lamb (coalowner, Cramlington collieries), the Hon J.A. Joicey (coalowner, Durham), and 'traders' such as the Rt. Hon. W. Armstrong (of Armstrong's – later Vicker's – Elswick).[12]

In 1967-68, the TIC's last year, the structure of the Board was the same (more or less); 2 members were elected by the Minister of Transport, 3 by Tynemouth CBC, 5 by shipowners (including J.N. Burrell, SSW Dalglish and D.W. Souter), 5 by traders and 5 by the National Coal Board (before 'nationalisation' these were the 'coal-owners').

The transformation of the TIC into the PTA followed

on from the Rochdale Committee's recommendations (1962) that port facilities be rationalised. When the PTA came into being in 1968, it amalgamated the TIC and Corporation Quays along the river, in Newcastle, Gateshead and Tynemouth. At its formation, it had 16 members, five of them from local authorities. The Chairman was J.N. Burrell, a director of P.H. Matthiessen, the Olsen/Bergen Line and of Stag Line. Other members were nominated after consultation with the National Ports Council (3); nominated by the North of England Shipowners Association and Chamber of Shipping (2, including Mr Burrell); nominated by the Tyne & Wear Chamber of Commerce and the British Shippers Council (R.A. Cookson, of Associated Lead etc., and W. Reid ex. NCB, ex. director Northern Economic Planning Board, ex-Chairman of Victor Products (Wallsend) Ltd.); nominated by the Tyne, Tees & Blyth Shipbuilders Association and the NE Coast Shiprepairers Association (1); plus the local authority representatives.[13]

Mr Burrell has recently retired, but during his chairmanship the PTA oversaw some important changes in the port (referred to earlier) and indeed within its own set up. It took over from the TIC when *"the fortunes of the port (were) not at the heights of former years"*.[14] The principal problem facing the new PTA, as it defined it, was to *"examine and rationalise the port facilities which are in excess of traffic volume"*, and to seek to find trade to fill the dominant position formerly held by coal.[15] Remember, the coal trade was drastically reduced over the sixties, down from 80% of exports from the Tyne in 1950 to 43% in 1976, and totally disappearing from North Shields; and in 1974 the British Steel Corporation switched its Consett iron ore import point to the Tees (the North East's major port), and out of the Iron Ore Quay on the south bank. Both developments represented significant losses of income for the PTA, deriving as it did (and does) its revenue from dues on vessels using the port. The Authority itself could not create trade, but could encourage it; its function was to supply industry and shipowners with the port facilities they required.

The PTA "went for" modernisation in a big way (as we have seen). In the *North Tyneside Review of Trade and Industry, 1975,* Mr Burrell had this to say:-

"The task of identifying existing and potential port users' forward requirements is a difficult one. Tremendous technological changes involving ship design and cargo handling techniques are taking place, all of which are meant to minimise time spent in port and reduce the labour content and overall unit cost. (Our emphasis) *. . . It is the authority's task, despite the legislative restrictions on any reductions in the labour force, to turn the port users theoretical requirements into a practical reality."*[16]

He also mentions the developments of roll-on roll-off berths in this context *("the transportation of goods in the port designed to speed up the turnround time of vessels and thereby reduce port costs")* and the modernisation of the authority's fleet of fork-lift trucks and attachments to handle the traffic in packaged timber and paper, for which they had to implement training programmes to ensure that *"our men can handle the new types of equipment efficiently"*.[17]

The PTA, in the last three years, has not exactly been an uncontroversial public body. In August 1974 it was reconstituted with a membership of only 10; local authority representatives were dispensed with altogether, and all representatives were appointed directly by the Secretary of State (for Trade), not nominated as previously. (Mr J. Burrell retained his chairmanship). Not only was this controversial, but so was the authority's policy towards land use. As Mr Burrell put it:

"one of the main essentials is to retain and reserve sufficient land adjacent to the river berth to meet the variations in cargo handling techniques . . . The Authority's policy of retaining and reclaiming land adjacent to deep water for developments which will generate traffic through the port is firm and necessary for the future viability of the port."[18]

This policy has conflicted with the employment generating policies for industrial land use of the authorities, e.g. the District and County Councils. Because the Port Authority does not precept on the rates (unlike the Water Authority) it meets all expenses out of revenue, and thus has to maximise revenue by maximising the number of vessels using the port, etc. Commercial criteria dominate its operations; thus large areas of the (vacant) land around the docks will only be allowed to be used by port-users. Thus Esso's terminal, Velva Liquids, the aggregates plant at Howdon, etc. – all have low labour requirements but bring in revenue.

The broad policy of the PTA, then, is to only lease land by deep water to tenants who generate significant traffic through the port in addition to the income the Authority derives from the rent of the land. The Port Authority still holds up to about 180 acres for port related development. In addition to Esso, Velva Liquids and the Tilling aggregates plant, there is the Whitehill Point natural gas preparation station – again, not labour intensive; and this is due to be phased out in the near future.

(Perhaps the most controversial aspect of this land development policy has been the future of Jarrow Slake on the south bank, where the policy has been slightly relaxed after District and Country pressure.)

One labour-intensive development that has yet to materialise is Turriff-Taylor's plans to build a pipe-coating works at Whitehill Point with an estimated 500 jobs; this is for North Sea oil development work, and would

The port of Tyne Authority's policies on land usage have proved controversial. They own large areas of derelict dockland; where there is industrial use, it often requires low manning levels.

combine manufacturing land use with increased port usage, which is acceptable to the authority. Other land is used for storage – not only for timber, but for steel and equipment for William Press Production Systems Limited (who build oil rig modules at East Howdon). Further land is required for the containers, trailers, lorries etc., which the roll-on roll-off services generate. That there has been underlying conflicts between the PTA and the District and County Councils over industrial land usage means that it is difficult for the latter authorities to produce employment generating plans when prime industrial space is governed by another public body with separate and competing policies. Given the structure of the Port of Tyne Authority (and the Leader of North Tyneside Council has called for representation for the local authorities on it), there is little that local people – not least those living in e.g. East Howdon, Percy Main, the South Meadowell and their local representatives – can effectively do about it.

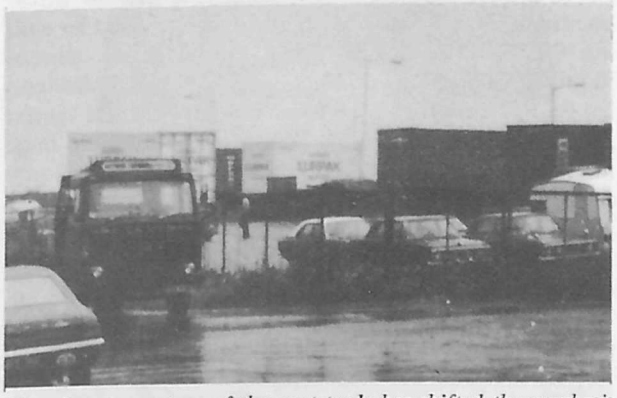
6. Jobs

As can be seen from the tables already presented, and the following ones, there has been a drastic decline in the number of jobs in the docks in North Shields. Not only has this affected dockers, but also railwaymen and other transport workers who serviced the requirements of the port trades. (See Appendix I, Tables 29-32). Table 32 (Appendix I) shows the decline in the number of railway workers employed in the local workplace, and those in sea and port transport, and this declining local workplace is reflected in the changing occupational structure of Tynemouth (Table 31, Appendix I). The switch away from rail and into mechanised handling, however, has created some jobs in road transport. As Mr Burrell again said:

"The increase in the number of roll-on roll-off vessels and services now operating places the emphasis on road transport rather than rail . . . The authority had foreseen this development and provided three rool-on roll-off berths . . . As a result of these improvements and the development of unit load systems, the authority have made provision at Albert Edward Dock for better marshalling areas and more adequate road facilities to deal with this type of traffic. This has involved considerable planning and expenditure . . ."[19]

The shift into road has been accompanied by the integration of several firms engaged in both shipping and dockwork with road transport operations, e.g. the DFDS line has links with Marsden Freight Services Ltd. (Willington Quay), and with Danish Bacon/Anglo-Danish Food Transport. Other big road transport groups are based in and around the docks – e.g. Lep Transport & Packing

(part of the Lep Group) and Trailer Express Ltd. The Transport Development Group too (one of the biggest hauliers) took over (in the early 1970s) the local firm of J.M. Burgess Ltd. William Swales is another large haulier company, though mainly Tyneside based.



The changing nature of the port trade has shifted the emphasis onto road transport.

So some jobs have been created in the road transport industry; but by no means sufficient in number to compensate for the jobs lost in the docks. Another aspect of this, however, is the 'labour process' one. These jobs have not been displaced and in part re-created in another form simply through "natural causes", or evolution. The "re-creation" occurred after dockworkers had become de-casualised and achieved a degree of trade union strength and control over their conditions of work, wages, etc. The National Dock Labour Scheme not only registered dockworkers but classified certain work as theirs alone. However, employers manoeuvred their way out of the docks (in London, on a grand scale), out of the sphere of influence of the scheme. (A process leading to the jailing of the "Pentonville Five" in the early 1970s).[20]

Attempts to extend the dock-labour scheme post-1974 by legislative means fell on the barriers of massive opposition from Tories, Liberals and right-wing Labour MPs. But the need behind such measures, from the point of view of working-class communities like North Shields is easily illustrated. Until the mid to late 60s the Dockers were a great working-class success story. By using industrial militancy at the port bottleneck they had succeeded in transforming the worst of all casual jobs into comparatively highly paid secure employment. An important impetus for the technological revolution in cargo-handling was to shift the labour away from locales typified by mass concentrations of working-class militants into small scattered sites without the formal protection of the dock-labour scheme or the real protection of industrial strength. Thus DFDS (UK) Ltd., employ registered dock labour on the roll-on, roll-off berth etc, in North Shields. This company has a direction (J.M. Atkinson) who in turn controls Marsden Freight Services Ltd., of Willington Quay, which is a wholly owned subsidiary of Neilson Anderson Ltd., the traditional stevedore for the Tyne-Denmark trade, and owned by Mr Atkinson, members of his family and family trusts. Marsden Freight Services Ltd., does not employ registered dock labour but does seem to function as a groupage depot doing work which corresponds to that which if done on the dock would be dockers work. There are other examples of this on the Tyne but the essential point is that the technological revolution has not *totally* reduced the labour involved in cargo-handling as much as would seem to be the case from a simple count of registered dockers. Instead some of the work has been "transferred" out of the protection won by dock-workers militancy over many years, a process ultimately detrimental to the working-class communities concerned.

7. Shipping

As we have seen, North Shields used to be an important town for shipowners. There were at least 30 owners in the town at the start of the nineteenth-century, and 9 in 1857 – not connected with fishing. Most of these would be small owners, but with the advent of iron ships and the greater capital required, ownership became more concentrated in shipping. In 1870, the North of England Steamship Owners' Association was formed; from this period on, close links developed between owners of industry in the region and shipping lines – the form of transport essential to their products. Today, there is only one local (North Shields based) firm – Stag Line. But historically, several major lines are connected with North Shields – particularly Sir James Knott's Prince Line (which in 1914 had 45 ships and which was merged with Furness Withy in 1916). James Knott (1855-1932) bought his first second-hand collier brig in 1878 at a cost of £185, and his first steamship in 1882. He formed the Prince Line in 1895 with an authorised capital of £500,000. The takeover by Furness-Withy in 1919 – only one example of growing monopolisation of the shipping trade – integrated the line with the major interests the company had in the region in coal, iron, steel, shipbuilding etc. (Christopher Furness was born in West Hartlepool in 1852, and became the largest individual shipowner in the world; when he was made 'Sir' Christopher in 1910, he owned 135 vessels).[21] The huge capital costs involved in shipping, its increasing multi-regionality and -nationality not to mention monopolisation, eliminated most of the small firms left in Shields at the end of the nineteenth-century by the 1920-30s. All the major Tyne Shipping companies were involved in the coal trade, either as exporters or bunkerers, and in many cases were closely associated with colliery companies. Today, as stated, only Stag Line remains; the original firm was formed in 1846, going public in 1918. It is still an independent firm, owning some half-a-dozen bulk carriers and a couple of coasting vessels. 40% of the shares are owned by the

James Knott, North Shields Shipowner.

directors from the Robinson family – the originators of the firm.

The UK shipping industry is not only now dominated by large multi-national companies (e.g. Shell, BP, Furness-Withy, etc.) but is nationally and internationally based. Seamen are employed in the industry rather than by a firm (although at any one point in time they will be working for a particular firm), and although they will be registered with a particular "pool" they may be hired at any port in the country or overseas. Thus the labour market does not *need* to be physically located near a port for employment purposes (although by tradition and ties – less strong nowadays – it does tend to cluster around coastal ports).

This development has accelerated since the end of the Second World War; in fact, the National pool was set up in 1947. Prior to that, men recruited at North Shields were employed mainly on foreign going tankers that docked there. But even then, between 1890 and 1939, Shields based firms were declining in the face of growing monopolisation (the port too, was declining over the latter half of that period, as we have seen). The declining profitability of British shipping has prompted the move towards highly capital intensive, low-labour requiring ships and handling equipment (just as in the docks – indeed, "turn-around" times are crucial to profitability).

The headquarters of the only shipping company based in North Shields today – the independent 'Stag Line'. (The building is one of the very few listed ones in the town).

Shipping companies have rationalised and diversified their activities; this has meant important technological changes in ships – e.g. increases in tonnage (i.e. much larger vessels), moves towards general-purpose vessels, a reduction in the number of ships, motor engines rather than steam, the use of automated systems, and changes in the cargo-handling methods on ships. (We must not forget, either, the increased competition from airlines for the handling of freight). These factors have led to big job losses for British seamen – mainly for ratings, but also for officers. In 1930, there were a total of 336,000 seafarers in Britain. In 1976, there were 87,000 (a third of whom were officers), and the average crew size per ship was 31.

The declining profitability was accelerated by the increased competition from foreign fleets, especially e.g. Japan and the Eastern bloc countries, although many countries have moved towards the operation of their 'own' fleets. Some – especially those mentioned – have been able to undercut British freight rates. British shipowners, however, have (until recently) been able to exploit foreign workers at very low rates of pay; the effect of this has been to reduce the job opportunities of British seamen and lower their wages (one reason why British seamen support the moves for proper rates of pay for foreign seamen).

The decline had been so marked in the post-war years that in 1965 the North Shields pool was closed, and ratings registered at South Shields. In 1971, the Newcastle and Blyth pools closed and were amalgamated into the South Shields pool which became *the* pool for the North of England, excluding Teeside. In 1965, at the time of transfer, there were 200 North Shields registered seamen on General Service Contracts, and 500 unestablished ones. Between 1966 and 1971 the number of ratings and officers working *from* North Shields declined from 600 (410 ratings, 190 officers) to 220 (140 ratings, 80 officers). (See Appendix I, Table 33). "Seafarers" in 1971 only constituted 1.6% of occupied resident males in Tynemouth CBC; compared with 4.2% in 1966, 6.7% in 1951, 9.0% in 1921 and 13.3% in 1901. The oil crisis – 1973-75 – also took the bottom out of the tanker trade, thereby affecting unemployment; 45 million tons (19% of the world tanker fleet) were laid up at the end of 1975 and orders for new ships cancelled. In 1976, there were at least 150 seamen registered as unemployed with the Merchant Navy Establishment at South Shields, out of a total of 1350 registered men. Whereas a typical seaman's career used to be punctuated by periods of work ashore, it is now extremely difficult to get back into the merchant marine service once having left it.[22]

As ships have become more mechanised, too, they have required more highly skilled personnel to run them. Whereas a number of ordinary ratings once operated the engine room, the technological revolution in shipping has seen them replaced by fewer workers, often time-served fitters, electricians, etc., who entered the merchant marine as 'uncertificated officers' and provided the more highly skilled workforce. In a place like Tyneside, this has meant that engineering workers who did their apprenticeship in the shipyards, or in marine engineering, have had alternative employment opportunities at comparatively high rates of pay in shipping. With the decline in shipping generally, this opportunity has increasingly been cut back, which, along with employment problems in the shipyards and marine engineering, has compounded the difficulties faced by this particular spectrum of workers.

Another important effect in this area of the decline in shipping has been the lack of orders for ships placed in the Tyneside shipyards. The collapse of the Maritime Fruit Carriers deal with Swan Hunter Limited is perhaps the most (in) famous example. Even ships that were completed under this scheme have failed to find owners and have been laid up. An owner for one of them, The Tyne Pride, was only found after many months of enforced idleness after launching day. Stag Line did place an order for a ship with Swan Hunter in 1977; but in general, many British shipowners have placed the majority of their declining orders with foreign shipyards in the last couple of years (see following section on Shipbuilding).

Chapter IV The Shipyards

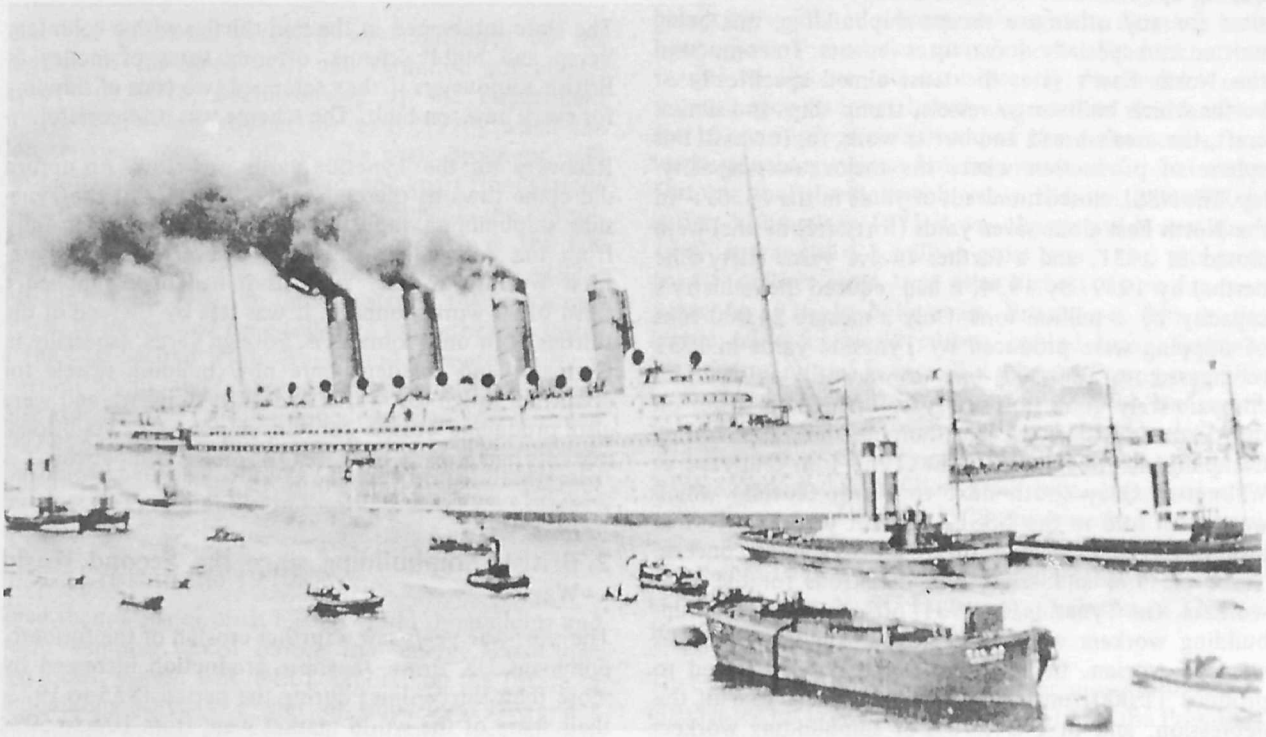
A. SHIPBUILDING

1. The Industry on Tyneside; the nineteenth century to the First World War[1]

Within North Shields today there is no shipbuilding yard; but the town has a history of shipbuilding. Many residents, too, still work in the industry, which is concentrated up river, around Wallsend. It is for this reason we take a brief look at shipbuilding. **North Shields** itself has a large and important shiprepair yard, which is one of the town's largest employers, and this is considered later in this section.

In the introductory section, we saw how North Shields (particularly Howdon) became an important shipbuilding centre in the eighteenth century, building wooden warships. It was from the mid-nineteenth century onwards, however, that the Tyne's shipbuilding industry was developed on a massive scale. From that time on, the strips of land all along the Tyne were taken over for shipyards, shiprepair work, slipways, pontoons, graving docks and marine engineering works. The older glass and chemical works (important industries at earlier times) sold other prime riverside sites to shipbuilders. The period 1880-90 was the heyday for the Tyne shipbuilders who turned out ships of simple cheap construction to meet the huge world demand for tramp ships and dry cargo vessels. By 1890, UK shipbuilding amounted to 80% of the world total, and up to half of these vessels came from the North East.

But after 1900, the peak years of shipbuilding gave way to a succession of increasingly serious slumps, alternating with shorter boom periods. Foreign competition was becoming more intense. Owners tried to reorganise to keep their share of the shipbuilding and shiprepair industry. Mergers and rationalisations characterised the period at the end of the nineteenth century and the early years of this century. In 1899, the Smith and Edwards firms merged, creating the then largest dry



The Mauretania – built by Swan Hunter and Wigham Richardson at Wallsend – leaving the Tyne in 1907.

dock for shiprepair in the world – Smiths Docks, North Shields. Up river in Wallsend, Swan Hunter merged with Wigham Richardson, and the new firm launched the *Mauretania* in 1906, built with state financial assistance and designed as a prestige ship to answer the growing competitive threat from the German shipbuilding industry. The booms and slumps of the early 1900s were relieved by the great demand for shipping during the First World War and immediately afterwards, but in the 1920s, shipbuilding on the Tyne began to collapse and the process continued and grew worse in the 1930s.

In 1890, the area's shipyards built a third of the world's ships. In the slump that followed soon after the First World War, the industry was drastically reduced in size. By 1922, 56% of UK berths were empty, and although the Tyneside firms struggled through the 1920s, the continuation of the slump into the thirties prompted action from the yards' owners. Headed by Sir James Lithgow, of Clydeside, they set up a company called National Shipbuilders Security Ltd, with the specific intention of reducing the capacity of the industry by closing down berths.

Directors of this company, or trust as it really was, were drawn from shipbuilding companies all over the UK, and they were backed by the Bankers Industrial Development Company, set up by the Bank of England. With a share capital of £10,000 in £1 shares, and with borrowing powers of up to £2½ millions, they set about buying up redundant or obsolete shipyards, re-selling the sites for any other use *except* shipbuilding, this being written into specially drawn up covenants. To compound the North East's fate, the trust aimed specifically at berths which built cargo vessels, tramp ships and similar craft, the area's bread and butter work, for it was in this sphere of production where the major 'over-capacity' lay. The NSSL closed hundreds of yards in the 1930s – in the North East alone seven yards (forty-five berths) were closed in 1931, and a further twelve yards (fifty-nine berths) by 1939. By 1934, it had reduced the industry's capacity by 1 million tons. Only a meagre 24,000 tons of shipping were produced by Tyneside yards in 1932 (compared to 300,000 tons as recently as 1928, a comparatively good post-war year). Yards to suffer on the Tyne included the Northumberland Shipbuilding Company at Howdon and the Tyne Iron Shipyard at Willington Quay (both next to North Shields) which were both sold to the NSSL. Another yard in the same area, Eltringham's, was put up for sale as a going concern. These closures and sales were disastrous for the local workers. On Tyneside, in 1931, 60% and more of shipbuilding workers were unemployed, and these figures were to worsen. In 1933 the Tyne only managed to produce 11,000 tons of shipping, its worst year of the depression, and in 1934, 70% of shipbuilding workers in the North East were on the dole.

In that period, concentration of ownership in the shipbuilding industry was already well advanced. For example, the Furness family – originators of Furness-Withy Co. (see section on shipping) built an empire which included shipyards. Christopher Furness (born West Hartlepool 1852) developed first an import/export firm, then bought ships which traded between the US and the North East. In 1884, he acquired an interest in Withy & Co., shipbuilders, of Hartlepool, and Furness Withy & Co. was born. The Company grew to a huge size and took in collieries, iron works, ships and shipbuilders. In 1917, the Furness son became Chairman and Director of Furness Withy's *own* shipbuilding Company at Haverton Hill; he was also a Director of the Northumberland Shipbuilding Company of Howdon. This yard was at the heart of the Sperline Combine, a group of London financiers who were attempting to monopolise the shipbuilding industry (particularly in the North East) by acquiring shares and gaining control of Companies. By 1921 the Combine owned all the share Capital of Doxford's, 85% of Fairfield's, and all of the Monmouth and Workman Clark & Co. (Belfast) iron and steel companies. The slump of the 1920s caused the Combine to close the Northumberland Shipbuilding Yard in 1924; the Company went into liquidation in 1927 and sold its assets to the Shipbuilders Investment Co. Ltd. for £320,000 cash, and the yard reopened. It was finally closed, however, in 1932. In 1956, the Furness Shipbuilding Company was bought by the Charles Clore Syndicate (Sears Holdings), eventually becoming part of the Swan Hunter Group in the 'sixties.

The state intervened in the mid-thirties with a voluntary 'scrap and build' scheme, offering sums of money to British shipowners if they scrapped two tons of shipping for every new ton built. The scheme was unsuccessful.

Recovery for the Tyneside yards was slow. An upturn did come towards the end of the decade, but the Tyneside shipbuilding industry was never to recover fully from the depression, and would never regain its pre-First World War size. Whereas it had once supplied a third of all world tonnage, it was left by the end of the thirties with only some 12%. Foreign yards, especially in Germany and Sweden, were now building vessels for countries which UK yards had once supplied, and were also producing vessels for UK shipowners. Traditional markets had already been lost to foreign competitors.

2. British Shipbuilding since the Second World War

The post-war years saw a further erosion of the formerly dominant UK firms. Japanese production increased by more than thirty times during the period 1955 to 1973; their share of the world market went from 10% to 50%, while British firms struggled to produce just about the

same output over the period and saw their market share dwindle from 26% to 3.6%. The reasons why the British industry lost so much of its share of the world market are many and complex, and cannot be dealt with in detail here; there are, however, a number of reports which have been issued in recent years which do go into this, and the reader is referred to them for the arguments.[2] Reasons include the massive state involvement in and protection of the shipbuilding industries in countries such as Japan, contrasted with a lack of investment in the British industry. The latter has meant that productivity has been low in relation to foreign competitors, and profitability insufficient to generate the necessary funds from within the industry for further re-investment. Over the period 1967-72, European companies invested an average of £3,000 per employee while UK firms could only manage £1,300 (and the discrepancy would be even greater in a comparison with Japanese firms).

The British industry has made efforts to cut capacity and increase productivity. The reorganisation that has gone on in the industry over the past ten years has meant thousands of jobs lost through redundancy and natural wastage. In 1966, the Geddes Report[3] called, amongst other things, for greater centralisation and rationalisation, for the setting up of specialised yards, and new standards of efficiency and performance. The urgency of their findings was lost as, after 1966, a temporary boom filled order books; but after 1968, heavy losses were incurred, especially on fixed price contracts.

That the problems persisted was confirmed by the findings of the Booz-Allan and Hamilton consultants report[4] of 1972, commissioned by the Department of Trade and Industry in the early 1970s when the Conservatives were in office. The basic problems, said Booz-Allan, had not been solved, and apart from various options involving massive new investment, the consultants recommended a cut of up to 50% in the UK industry's labour force, estimated at 69,000 in 1973. But the big job losses in the industry in the 1920s and 1930s, however, had been followed by further job losses in the post-Second World War period. Despite the long-post-war boom, and fairly regular employment in British shipyards, 18,000 jobs in shipbuilding were lost between 1957-1963 in the Northern Region.[5] The process continued: between 1961-74, 13,600 shipbuilding jobs were lost in Tyne and Wear County.[6]

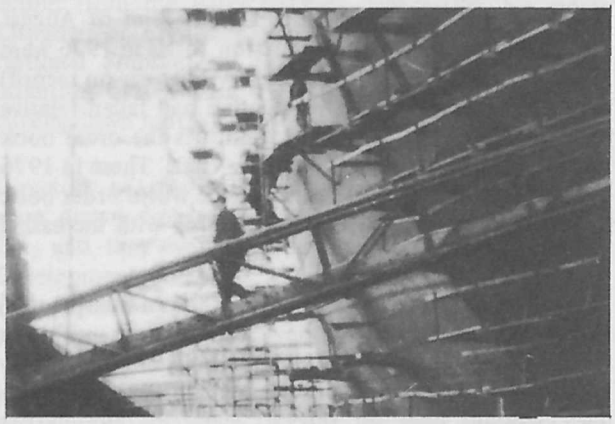
3. The Crisis in the 1970s

Since then, a major crisis has hit world shipbuilding and world shipping. Even before the 'energy' crisis had developed, a joint EEC/OECD report[7] on the future of shipbuilding forecast a glut of ships by 1978 and a continuing excess of building capacity. The sudden 'energy' crisis, with escalating running costs for ships, lower demand for oil, and the subsequent major recession in world trade, exacerbated this already critical problem. The oil tanker trade, and in particular the countries building huge tankers, suffered most; the tanker market collapsed between 1974-75, and estimates in 1975 forecast that by 1979/80, 50% of the world's tanker fleet would be surplus to requirements without large-scale cancellations and scrapping.[8] Cancellations, and the scrapping of increasingly younger vessels, have since occurred. But the crisis is still present, and is continuing to affect shipbuilding nations. Forecasts in 1977 were that world shipyards were only likely to book some 10 million gross tons of new ships in 1977, even lower than the extremely low level of 13 million gross tons for 1976.[9] Stable conditions for shipbuilders are not envisaged until at least 1980. The world shipping surplus has, in fact, recently worsened; 331 tankers and 262 dry cargo ships, totalling 43.2 million tons of merchant shipping were laid up at the end of August 1977.[10] Although world production totals in 1976 were high (in fact, it was the second best world year on record) it was the first year that production had fallen relative to a previous year since 1961; and it is the order book totals which spotlight the long-term crisis. These in 1976 were the lowest for eight years and the world order book has been dropping steadily since 1975, with increasing numbers of cancellations.

The UK industry has not escaped these developments, and they have added to the already serious problems facing British shipyards. The full force of this is only becoming visible at present, although the forecasts have been gloomy now for several years. Production has tended to obscure this until recently; for British yards, because they had not heavily invested in new facilities for larger ships, initially escaped the tanker crisis, and were able to continue building more traditional ships. Output, then from British yards, did not immediately suffer: although in 1975 it was the second lowest since 1969, it was still 1.2 million gross tons[12] and this grew to 1.5 million gross tons (the highest figure for nine years) in 1976. In both years, Britain was fifth in the league table for world output, behind Japan, Sweden, West Germany and France. But whereas Britain was fifth in the league table for world *orders* in 1974, it slumped to seventh in 1976,[13] when the total world order book was the lowest for 8 years. Britain's order books for 1976 stood at 2.95 million gross tons, compared with 7.26 million gross tons in 1973; this was the lowest level since 1967.[14] Total new Western European orders received in 1976 amounted to 3 million tons – described as 'derisory' by Mr R. Huskisson, Chairman of Lloyd's Register in March, 1977.[15]

That the problem was growing ever more serious was highlighted by a series of forecasts. In 1975, the President of the Shipbuilders and Repairers National Association announced that for the first eight months of 1975,

British yards had only received 33,000 tons of new orders.[16] Mr Gerald Kaufman, Minister for Industry, said in April 1976 that British yard overcapacity was running at some 40%.[17] This was compounded by the low level of orders placed by British shipowners and the fact that only 11% of those orders were placed with British yards.[18] In June, 1976, Mr Eric Varley, Secretary of State for Industry, told the conference of the Confederation of Shipbuilding and Engineering Unions that prospects were "pretty bleak";[19] from the start of 1975, British yards had taken orders equivalent to only 20% of normal annual output.[20] At the end of 1976, a report prepared by Graham Day (then Chief Executive designate of British Shipbuilders, the corporation designed to run British shipbuilding after nationalisation), on behalf of a tripartite working group comprising the Department of Industry, the Organising Committee for British Shipbuilders, and the relevant



Construction at Wallsend Yard, Swan Hunter Ltd, 1976.

trade unions, stated that British yards would only get approximately 250,000 tons a year in orders for the following few years, compared to a capacity of around 1.3 million tons.[21]

4. Responses

The crisis is exacerbated by the Japanese powers of recovery. Despite the tanker crisis, Japan is still building around 50% of world output, at prices of 30%-40% lower than those in Britain.[22] This fact has prompted both individual national governments, and blocs of countries, to take protectionist steps to safeguard their domestic industries. Some builders express a fear that Japan is attempting to monopolise world trade, and will capitalise on the crisis by increasingly protecting its own industry, and undercutting others, so that it will soon produce 70%-80% of world output.[23] (There are apparently, good reasons for why the Japanese should want to do this).[24] The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) which includes Japan, has been unable to get Japan's agreement to curb its share of world orders, despite all member countries signing an agreement in principle to cutback world capacity[25] and to consider ways of doing it.[26] The implications of non-agreement are that individual nations will seek their own solution to world overcapacity, either through protectionism, or an orderly run-down in their own capacities.

Pressures to cut capacity come from a variety of international interest groups, some of them recently formed. These are mainly private interests, and are reminiscent in many respects of the kinds of organisations which existed in the depression of the 1920s/1930s, at least as far as their arguments go. For instance, 'Intertanko' – (International Association of Independent Tanker Owners), a consortium of bankers, shipowners, shipbuilders and oil companies, has been pressurising governments to reduce the enormous overcapacity in tankers.[27]

In early 1976, the International Maritime Industry Forum (IMIF) was formed by similar interests, and has argued for scrapping and building schemes,[28] reducing available capacity,[29] and for government restraint on builders and owners – *i.e.* a commercial demand-related ship construction policy, with the inevitable closures and redundancies consequent upon the withdrawal of state aid.[30] Some of these measures have been endorsed by shipowners – e.g. the General Council of British Shipping.[31]

Some of these pressures are reflected in the views of the EEC. In mid-1976, an EEC working party on the Shipbuilding industry stated that 20,000 of the 69,000 jobs in British shipbuilding woud need to be axed;[32] and more recently, with regard to the European industry, the EEC has stated that a drastic reduction in capacity is inevitable between now and the mid-1980s, with up to 20,000 workers jobs being lost through early retirement and 'natural wastage' and a further 60,000-70,000 enforced redundancies.[33]

But the counter-pressure to maintain capacity, and maintain jobs, has come from trades unions[34] and from governments sensitive to the already high levels of unemployment in most shipbuilding areas. The balance between the two demands leaves any individual government walking a tight-rope. To date, the British government has attempted to protect its industry, by pursuring orders, and offering aid to shipyards. It is now able to do this in a more co-ordinated manner than previously, since the industry is now nationalised and under the control of British Shipbuilders. But state intervention in shipbuilding did not begin with nationalisation.

5. State Involvement in Shipbuilding

The state has been heavily involved in shipbuilding for many years. Apart from being a direct customer for ships through naval orders, there has been a steady input of grants into merchant shipbuilding; e.g. between 1964 and 1974, some £156 million was invested in British

shipbuilding.[35] The state also gives grants to shipowners for ship construction, and when orders are placed with British yards this is also an indirect subsidy to shipbuilders. However, this aid did not produce the degree of modernisation the state required. The Booz-Allan report of 1972 stated that British shipbuilding would require further massive government aid to make it competitive.[36] The incoming Labour Government of 1974 decided that only industry wide planning could enable the British industry to survive and compete, and that the appropriate form for this would be nationalisation.[37] Originally, this was resisted by the private shipbuilders, including Swan Hunter's; a particular objection was the compensation terms. The battle to achieve nationalisation took an enormous amount of parliamentary time; eventually shiprepair was excluded from the Nationalisation Bill, after successful stonewalling by the House of Lords. However, by the time nationalisation was imminent, many shipbuilding firms had begun to concede the scale of the problems they faced, and, as one commentator put it, *"The Tory peers can have few friends in shipbuilding, most of whom had reconciled themselves to and even begun to see the benefits of nationalisation"*.[38] The yards were eventually taken into public ownership on July 1, 1977. Prior to that, however, further state aid to the industry had had to be made, in particular to secure orders for the yards to keep them in business. This was because of the delay in nationalising the industry. In April 1976, Mr Varley (Secretary of State for Industry) announced further guarantees for shipowners and an extension of the cost-escalation insurance scheme to ships made for British owners, thereby enabling yards to continue to quote fixed-price terms without fears of losses.[39] British owners were particular targets for orders, too.[40] In early 1977, however, the government was forced to set up a holding company – National Shipbuilders and Repairers – which incorporated all existing state-owned yards and which acted to get more orders for all yards.[41]

The new company was comprised of the Organising Comitteee for British Shipbuilders, and went about pursuing large Polish and Nigerian orders. Late in February 1977, Mr Kaufman (Junior Minister for Industry) announced a £65 million fund for shipbuilders, with the message that without swift government action, much of the merchant shipbuilding industry in the UK could close within two years, and without new orders, two-thirds of the merchant industry (i.e. 27,000 out of 40,000 workers) could be on the dole by the end of 1978.[42] The £65 million was designed to enable builders to bridge the gap between quoted prices in British and other (especially Japanese) yards, (which amounted to some 30-40%), and was available under Part 2 of the 1972 Industry Act. This £65 million lifeline was seen as of particular significance to the negotiations over the Polish and Nigerian orders. Although Ministers were arguing against reducing over-capacity (since Britain had not expanded at all to *cause* the over-capacity in the world), the fact that redundancies on a wide-scale were seen as inevitable was more or less confirmed by the simultaneous establishment of a £14 million fund for the building of advance factories in areas where many shipyard workers lived.[43] (This scheme, too, was to be administered by British Shipbuilders; areas like Tynemouth and Wallsend are recipients of a major part of this grant, and large-scale advance factories are being built). An additional source of state aid prior to nationalisation was also given in the form of naval orders; since early 1976, orders have been placed for two high-value through-deck cruisers (worth £100 million-£150 million each) to be built on Tyneside. At that time, Swan Hunter were already building three destroyers and fitting out a fourth, and the cruiser orders meant that the Tyne had a good chance to become a much more important naval builder centre than previously. Since nationalisation, British Nuclear Fuels have placed a £5 million order for a nuclear waste ship; it is likely that all ship orders by such state-owned corporations will in future be placed in British yards – for there has recently been a controversial reaction to the placing of an order by Cable and Wireless Limited (state-owned) in a foreign yard.

Since nationalisation ('vesting' day was July 1, 1977), merchant orders have been just as vigorously pursued. However, the projected Nigerian order was lost to other shipbuilding nations, including Yugoslavia. The Polish order was secured, with the assistance of some £28 million from the £65 million intervention fund. Sunderland Shipbuilders have also recently secured a large foreign order. One facet of the Polish order in particular is the involvement of the state at the highest level to achieve block orders; they are then distributed to individual yards. The desperation to achieve orders has recently been highlighted by the Polish order saga, when a dispute at Swan Hunter on Tyneside led to the re-allocation of that yard's share of the Polish orders to other yards. (This will not be dealt with in detail here; for readers interested in the story, the national and local (Tyneside) press have covered it in detail between October-December 1977 and there have been several debates in parliament – especially on Monday December 12, 1977). The massive state involvement both at the highest political level and in financial terms is surely designed to rescue the short-term situation so as to maintain a viable industry for when world-trade will take an upturn again, presumably around 1980. British domestic policies, then at present are protectionist and designed to safeguard employment. But the reality of the world situation must raise doubts about safeguarding all jobs in the industry; without the Polish order, massive redundancies would have occurred in shipbuilding areas of the UK. (They would probably have already occurred if shipyards had not known of the possibility of the order and kept on labour which would otherwise have been shed). Once the Polish order is complete, without

further large orders, the mass redundancy problem will be imminent again. Despite trade union statements that job losses will be resisted – that nationalisation would not be traded for jobs[44] – it is difficult to envisage what strategy the Labour Movement will adopt to safeguard workers jobs in the industry once the crunch comes. Short of a totally domestic-protectionist policy involving the nationalisation of shipping companies as well, and the direction of orders to British yards, the crisis in British shipbuilding may well be with us for some years to come; and areas such as Tyneside, and workers living in places like Wallsend and North Shields, will be in the front line of those affected.

6. The Tyneside Industry: Swan Hunter Ltd.

Since the mid-sixties, the shipbuilding industry on Tyneside has been represented in the main by one major company – Swan Hunter Ltd. Following the Geddes Report, its recommendations were pursued with the formation in 1968 of the Swan Hunter Group, merging the major shipbuilders on the Tyne (Vickers Ltd (Shipbuilding Group), Swan Hunter and Wigham Richardson Ltd, Hawthorn Leslie (Shipbuilders Ltd), and John Readhead & Sons Ltd). (Also brought into the group in 1969 was the Furness Shipbuilding Co. Ltd. (Teeside); the Smiths Dock Co. Ltd. (Teeside, with repair yards on Tyneside) had already been taken over by Swan Hunter and Wigham Richardson in 1966). Government money was made available to back this restructuring through the Shipbuilding Industry Board; so, although it was a 'voluntary' grouping, it was very much promoted and supported by the state. Prior to this Swan Hunter were probably one of the very few British shipbuilders to carry out major investment and re-equipment of their yards between 1956 and 1965, when the British shipbuilding industry was seriously falling behind in the world market. In this period, the Wallsend yard, Neptune Yard, and the Wallsend Dry Docks were all re-equipped. Among other things, the original equipment laid down in 1903 for the construction of the *Mauretania* was finally taken out of use. But perhaps it was 'too little, too late': despite the programme of investment, the company still failed to capture a substantial share of the new markets.

After 1968, the new Swan Hunter Group did implement some of the Geddes recommendations, with a specialist joiner's shop for the whole Tyne, the specialisation of particular yards, a new steel working facility at Wallsend, and the mechanisation of certain processes. It was, apparently, insufficient. The government subsidies failed to achieve enough of the kind of re-investment that Geddes envisaged. In spite of a £10m investment programme to modernise the repair yards and an order book in May 1974 worth £400m, Swan Hunter was unable on its own to undertake investment on the scale required to make it internationally competitive. Swan Hunter was one of the more advanced and better equipped shipbuilding companies in Britain; its inability to survive and compete, in spite of its success relative to the rest of the British industry, highlights the long-term problems of the British shipbuilding industry as a whole.

As we have seen, the British shipbuilding industry has been dependent on Government aid for survival and reorganisation for many years. Up to 1972, Swan Hunter Shipbuilders Ltd., with major yards at Willington Quay and Wallsend, had received nearly £6 millions from the Shipbuilding Industry Board following the 1966 Geddes Report. In recent years they received a further £12 millions in the form of shipbuilding construction grants under the provisions of the 1972 Industry Act.[45] Swan Hunter, now the only shipbuilding company on the Tyne, and a major UK shipbuilder (accounting for about a quarter of UK shipbuilding revenue) is now, of course, part of British Shipbuilders Ltd., the nationalised shipbuilding corporation.

Initially, Swan Hunter resisted nationalisation; admitting that some kind of 'state partnership' was necessary with shipbuilders, Sir John Hunter said that nationalisation was no solution to the problem of shipbuilding (nor shiprepair), and that between 1967-1974 the Swan Hunter Group had expanded and modernised, and was engaged in capital spending of some £12 million from its own resources.[46] This was, however, before the full impact of the world crisis – dramatically highlighted on Tyneside by the collapse of the Swan Maritime/ Maritime Fruit Carriers deal in late 1975/early 1976, when nine options on ships worth £120 million were cancelled by MFC.

This was a major catastrophe for Swan Hunter. By forming 25% of a joint company – Swan Maritime, engaged in shipping – Swan's hoped to establish the basis of a continued programme of orders for bulk carriers. However, it appears that MFC were more interested in ships as "floating real estate" – speculating on their building and sale, assisted by massive grants from the state. In the early 1970s (anticipating a continued healthy situation in shipping), MFC placed orders with British ship builders amounting to about one-third of the industry's capacity in 1973. Ordering was financed by borrowing and state aid. Often ships were sold prior to completion. In 1974/5 the shipping market collapsed, and MFC ran into financial difficulties. Ships could not be sold, debts remained unpaid. The collapse left ships being built in yards with the prospect of no buyer; indeed, several of the ships, on completion, were laid up. Others were sold (cheaply) or leased to other shipowners. In 1976, Swan Hunter terminated the association with MFC by disposing of the 25% holding in Swan Maritime.

In large measure, directly or indirectly, (through MFC), Swan Hunter were bailed out by the State, eventually

The 'floating real estate' market collapses: the 'Tyne Pride', one of the 'Swan Maritime' tankers, laid up in the Tyne without a buyer in sight. Wallsend, 1976.

ending up with a loss of only £¼ million. However its order books were severely depleted, and the probable effect of this deal (plus the prospect of the Polish deal which surfaced at the end of 1976) was to silence any further anti-nationalisation programme the Group might have wished to pursue.[47]

The crisis was in part reflected in the Swan Hunter Shipbuilders Ltd. annual accounts 1971-1977.

Table 6. Swan Hunter: Shipbuilding Division: Source: Extel. Nov. 1977

	Turnover £000	Profit £000
1971	69,852	546
1972	77,225	3,188
1973	85,657	5,779
1974	100,727	8,310
1975	96,456	1,281
1977*	—	531

*18 months to June 1977

The good years of the early 1970s show a build up in turnover and profits, followed in 1975 by a downturn and a subsequent major decline. Also, employment figures (for the whole group, not just the shipbuilding side) show a build up from 20,500 (1968) to 25,100 (1973), then a subsequent decline to 21,900 (1977); it seems fair to suggest that the major part of the employment decline was in the shipbuilding and shiprepair sectors of the company. Some yards on the Tyne have been badly hit in recent years; e.g. Readheads (South Shields) is now virtually closed, whilst there have been redundancies at Wallsend Slipway and Engineering Ltd.

How does nationalisation leave Swan Hunter Ltd? Compensation has yet to be finally determined, but there is still a nucleus of a viable private company in what is left of Swan Hunter. On nationalisation, the state acquired Swan Hunter's shipbuilding companies, plus Wallsend Slipway and Engineering Ltd., and the Wallsend Dry Dock Ltd. (the Wallsend Repair yard), and the Swan Hunter Training and Safety Co. (and other companies not on the Tyne). This left the private company of Swan Hunter Ltd. with shiprepairing interests (mainly the North Shields yard), and Brims Ltd. (a civil engineering company), M.W. Swinburne (brassfounders), and several foreign based and other associated companies and trade investments. A new company will probably be formed when the final details of compensation terms are known, and the group reconstructed to take advantage of its remaining trade assets both in the UK and overseas, which, in the opinion of the Directors, form a viable core for an expanding company.[48]

Once again, then, the state (and the taxpayer) are landed with the major problems of the shipbuilding industry; the privately-owned remnants are free to regroup and seek more profitable ventures which is the by-now traditional story of all nationalisations to date in capitalist Britain.* Nationalisation was inevitable; it was a proper demand on the part of the Labour Movement To date, British Shipbuilders and the government appear to be genuinely attempting to safeguard employment levels. But the fact that, after 2-3 years of discussion, no real systems of even workers 'participation' (let alone 'control') has been inaugurated; that the management structure in, for instance, Swan Hunter, has remained virtually unchanged; that the long-term policy of British Shipbuilders Ltd. is one of commercial viability; all seems to indicate that, given the world context, given the overcapacity in Western Europe and the world in general, shipbuilding workers jobs on Tyneside are still very much in jeopardy. Shipyard workers on the Tyne are not oblivious to this, either; as their welder-poet, 'Ripyard Cuddling' put it on vesting day:-

". . . everything is changing
And time is running out,
The hanging sword of Damocles
Will fall I have no doubt.
For berths are lying empty;
The orders running down,
And the time is fast approaching
When Swan Hunter "Go to town".

***To add irony to this, Mr Tom McIver, Managing Director of Swan Hunter Ltd., both before and after nationalisation, was recently appointed a part-time member of the nationalised board for the industry. (Previously, he had wanted nothing to do with it).**

Street by the yard, 1976. The houses have now disappeared forever; will the ships follow them?

When the drag chains have been fitted
And they launch the final boat,
There'll be scores of jobless welders
And one redundant poet."[49]

One thing about shipbuilding and repair is that it is a strongly organised industry, in Trade Union terms. The average earnings, too, are comparatively high, as this table suggests.

Table 7. Average weekly earnings, inc. overtime premium, in Shipbuilding and Repair
Source: Labour Research/Dept. of Employment Gazette

	Jan. 1976 £	Jan. 1977 £	Increase
Timeworkers			
Skilled	67.80	76.72	+ 8.92
Semi-skilled	61.14	69.44	+ 8.30
Labourers	53.80	62.10	+ 8.30
PBR workers			
Skilled	70.17	75.52	+ 5.35
Semi-skilled	61.89	67.27	+ 5.38
Labourers	58.92	66.97	+ 8.05

The initial results of the Department of Employment's New Earnings Survey (1977) revealed that by June 1977, average earnings of male manual workers in shipbuilding and shiprepair were £74.38 per week; compared to the average wage for male manual workers in general of £71.50.[50]

Not only could many jobs be lost, but they are (comparatively, in the Tyneside context) highly paid jobs. Alternative employment – if redundant workers can find any (and many will not because they will be over 45 years of age) – is unlikely to provide such wage packets.

B. SHIPREPAIR

1. North Shields: The Development of "Smiths Dock"[51]

Smiths Dock came to be the principal employer in North Shields in the twentieth century. It is worth looking at its development in some detail. The original Smiths company (the firm became a part of the Swan Hunter Group through a merger in 1966) was a long established Tyneside concern. In 1756, Thomas Smith operated his shipbuilding and repair company from St. Peter's, in Newcastle (where Hawthorn-Leslie is now); he was also associated with a ropeworks. The two sons of Thomas Smith became apprentices (one a ropemaker (Thomas jnr.), the other a shipbuilder (William),) and in 1804 the three together founded William Smith & Co., Shipbuilders (buying out a firm called Rowe, at which William had served his apprenticeship). In 1814, they acquiring Laing's Dock in North Shields to use as a

repair dock. The expanding firm was at this time breaking into the "East India-man" market, up till then dominated by Thames shipbuilders; they even built for London firms (e.g. the *Duke of Northumberland* for the Blackwall firm of Green & Wigram). The partners were also *shipowners*, operating ships they'd built themselves for trade between London, the Cape and the East Indian routes.

In 1836, T. Smith (Snr.) died; his share in the company went to son Thomas (the ropemaker)* – and the firm became known as T. & W. Smith, Shipbuilders, shiprepairers, shipowners and ropemakers.

The East India trade developed in the 1830s and 1840s (as the Victorian empire began its expansion) and large ships (e.g. the *Blenheim*, 1848) of 1600 tons or more were launched; but the firm also built fleets of colliers for the growing North Eastern coal trade. These sailed between the Tyne and the Thames; the firm acquired coal-hulks at Gravesend, a sail-makers at Blackwall, and a warehouse in the East India docks to facilitate this important part of their business.

In 1849, a new shipbuilding yard and graving dock was developed on the Limekiln Shore (a local beauty spot) at North Shields. The development of more capacity was made necessary by the continuous growth of the firms shipbuilding business. The yard was opened in 1851, and in the same year an East Indiaman (the *Termagant* 464 tons) was launched; the following year, the first of Smiths steamships was launched. This was the 300 tons *SS Tyne*, a mailing and passenger boat operating between Britain and Georgetown in the West Indies. (Its engines were built by Hawthorn). In 1852, the graving dock opened; this was (at the time) the largest on the Tyne.

The St. Peter's yard was still building (in fact they were covered in from the elements by rough plate glass); e.g. the *Carlo Alberta* was launched in 1853 and left the Tyne for Woolwich (on the Thames) to be equipped with guns from the Arsenal before becoming a Sardinian warship.

***Thomas Smith (the ropemaking son) made a fortune from the company. He bought High Gosforth House, plus 2,100 acres in 1852 (when the Brandling estates were sold off). He had no sons, and his brother, William Smith, inherited Thomas's estate on his death in 1856. William died in 1860, and his only son THOMAS EUSTACE Smith – inherited. However, he was more interested in politics, and represented TYNEMOUTH in parliament for 17 years. More notoriously, he was one of the MPs accused by Samuel Plimsoll (of Plimsoll Line fame), in the House of Commons debates about safety at sea, of being a "coffin ship" defender – *i.e.* defending employers who sent out overloaded and dangerous ships to eke out every last ounce of profit from each voyage. His own second son, Eustace, eventually bought the business from his father in 1882. In 1883, a George Scorer was appointed manager. He was later a councillor and JP in Tynemouth.** [52]

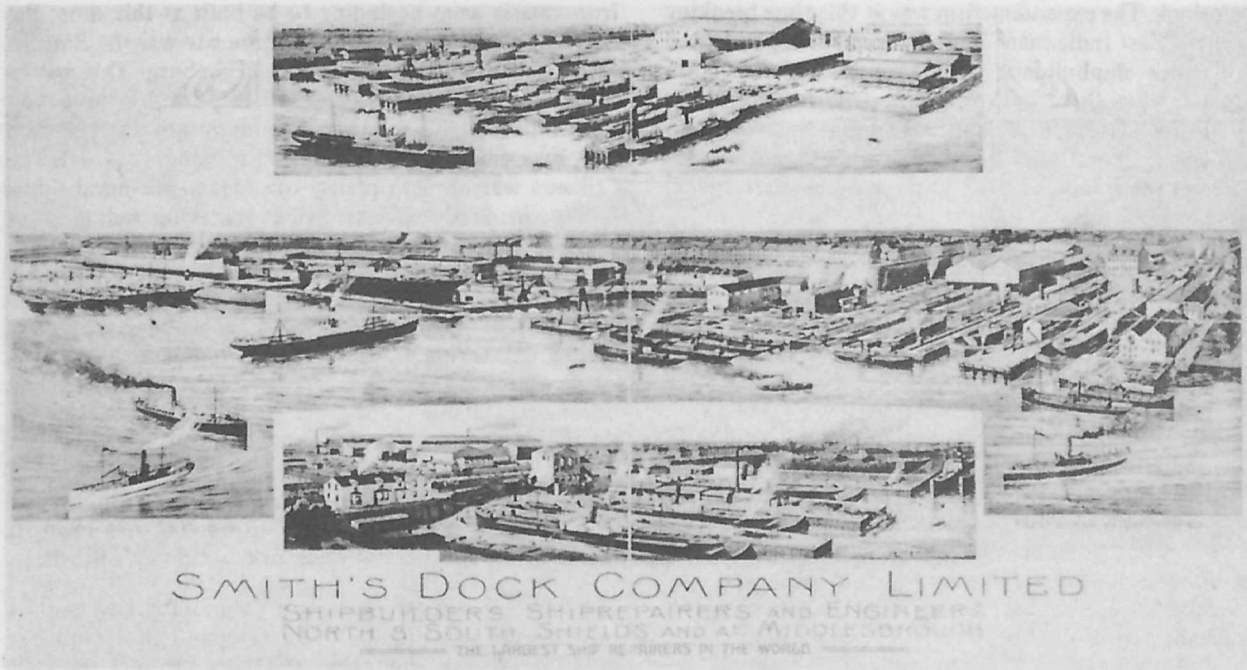
Iron vessels were beginning to be built at this time; the first one built at the Limekiln shore site was the *Zingari*, which sailed between Britain and Hamburg. This was in the 1850s. After the success of this, Smith's built only iron ships, and embarked on a modernisation of the yard (e.g. new workshops and covered in building areas). The Crimean war brought plenty of demand for naval ships; finally, in 1869, Smiths stopped making sailing ships altogether, and went in exclusively for steam-powered iron vessels.

In less than 25 years, however, the company (after a period of varying fortune and problems of succession, when various descendants opted out of the business) rationalised its activites and concentrated exclusively on *shiprepair*. In 1891, a limited company – the Smiths Dock Co. Ltd., – was formed. In 1892, a new pontoon dock was built; another was added in 1897; and around this time, electric power was introduced. In 1899, it merged with another Tyneside firm – Edwards Brothers.

The Edwards' business was also an old established one. Its origins were in a shipbuilding and repair firm established in 1768 at the High Docks, South Shields; this was acquired by George Straker* in 1812. In less than 20 years he made a fortune and dropped out of the business; this was carried on by his son-in-law, James Edwards, but the company (without Straker) did not fare well between 1830 and 1850. Business revived after James Edwards' death in 1856, when Harry Smith Edwards took over the firm. In 1862, all shipbuilding ceased, and shiprepair and shipowning became the major activites. In 1869, the dock was extended so that steamships could come in to be repaired; and the firm started operating its own steamer fleet (although they still had sailing ships), mainly for the Eastern trade. In 1873, a second dry dock was added (at South Shields). In 1875, Harry Smith Edwards took his two eldest sons – James Harry and George Straker Edwards – into partnership. A third dock was added in 1881. In 1883, land at Howdon was acquired from the Duke of Northumberland and the Northumberland shipbuilding yard established (as part of the Edwards firm). (This was eventually to become a part of the Northumberland Shipbuilding Co. Ltd. of which George Straker Edwards was founder and Chairman).

There was no further room at South Shields, so the Edwards firm also expanded into North Shields in the 1880s. Laing's Dock (which had been leased by the

***Geo Straker was an interesting character. He lived at Blyth; rode by horse to Whitehill Point every day, and crossed by ferry to High Docks, South Shields. He then rode to Newcastle to see his merchants and shipbrokers business, then rode home to Blyth. Having made a fortune, he dropped out of business in 1830, and entered public life, having a career with Newcastle Corporation; and becoming a 'River Reformer', (devoting his energies to improving the river).** [53]



Promotional poster for Smiths Dock in its heyday in the early years of this century.

Smiths) was purchased in 1883, followed by the Bull Ring and Dotwick Hall. Two docks were built between 1886 and 1890. These docks specialised in the repair of oil tankers. Between the Bull Ring Dock and Smiths Dock lay Hepple's shipbuilding yard. In 1893, James and George Edwards acquired this yard, and built steam trawlers under the name of Edwards Brothers.

In 1899, the Smiths & Edwards firms merged, to form the largest dry dock company in the world – known as the Smiths Dock Co. (The Edwards name lapsed). E. Smith approached the surviving partners of H.S. Edwards and Sons, and the partners of Edwards Bros., and proposed an amalgamation "for advantage of organisation, finance, efficiency and competition".

Following the amalgamation, the Smith's Dock Co. acquired immense importance in the world of shiprepair, and also as the single most important industrial concern in Tynemouth borough. It became the largest dry dock owning and shiprepair company in the world. Eustace Smith – who had done much to save the Smith firm in the 1880s, buying it up from his MP father – was Chairman and Managing Director. However, he died in 1902, aged 41, and was succeeded by J.H. Edwards as Chairman, and Lancelot E. Smith (his brother) as Managing Director. The latter became Chairman, too, in 1914, when Edwards retired. In 1920, T. Dalrymple Straker-Smith (a nephew of L.E.) became a director.

Although Smith's Dock escaped the 1930s (in the sense that it survived) the years from 1925-1932 were especially difficult, and many workers were laid off. In April, 1925, it was announced that Smith's had run out of work, and *"as a result, 98% of the North Shields Boilermakers' and Iron and Steel Shipbuilders' Society are walking the streets. There is no immediate prospect of work . . ."*[54] The pattern continued into the 1930s, as we can see from the following tables. Many of the unemployed residents of Tynemouth would have worked in Smiths Dock.

Table 8. Tynemouth CBC Residents, 1931. Source: Census. Industry Group – Shipbuilding, Shiprepair and Marine Engineering

	Male	Female	Total
Employed	2213	64	2277
Unemployed	2011	12	2023

On its inception in 1899, the authorised capital of the company was £½ million; this was increased in 1902 to £1 million, and again in 1919 to £1½ million. After the lean years of the 1920s and 1930s, the company was profitable during the Second World War and afterwards. Throughout the war years, 6%-8% dividends were paid (1941-46) and these rose to 10%-12½% from the end of the war to the mid-fifties. Only in 1953 was the authorised capital again increased – this time to £2½ million.[55]

By 1955, the family links were still strong; directors included:

Sir G. Tristram Edwards (Chairman)
Lt. Col. T.E. Smith., TD, JP
Sir Thos. D. Straker-Smith

and 4 others (Jas Potter, Major R.W. Rogerson, Sir John G. Wrightson, D.H. Sword).[56]

In the 1960s, however, the company was acquired by Swan Hunter Ltd., and became the headquarters of Swan Hunter Shiprepairers (Tyne) Ltd., a subsidiary of the Swan Hunter Group.

2. The UK and Tyneside Shiprepair Industry

Like shipbuilding, the British shiprepair industry has been facing difficulties for many years, and this has been exacerbated by the recent shipping crisis. A report by the consultants, P.A. Management Ltd., to the Department of Industry in 1974 spelt out the long term problems.[57] The report (which complemented the Booz-Allan report on shipbuilding) pointed to the fact that the British shiprepair industry had lost half its men and half its trade over the previous decade; this decline would continue unless there was investment in modern, efficient facilities. However, it was *"unlikely that the industry will be able to attract or provide funds for investment on the scale required"*. Further rationalisation was needed, and unless there was substantial investment allied to this, a further 2,000 jobs at least would be lost by the late 1970s. Cramped conditions and a lack of modern facilities characterised the UK yards when compared to continental ones. The report came at a time when the Tyne yards were apparently booming; they had expanded output by 8% between 1968 and 1972, in spite of the general UK decline, and had derived more trade in the then recent past from servicing vessels engaged in North Sea oil work. The Tyneside employers gave the report short shrift, dismissimg it as "outdated before it was published".[58]

But booms and slumps in shiprepair follow each other swiftly, and soon after 1974, the Tyneside shiprepair industry was feeling the full effects of the slump in shipping. The local employers soon followed up their earlier optimism with gloomy forecasts. Their self-same spokesman, eighteen months later, said that the industry as a whole was experiencing its worst spell since the depression forty years before.[59] Late 1975 had brought a crisis point with 400 men laid off by Swan Hunter Shiprepairers alone, and several hundred more on 'idle-time'. There were large scale redundancies in other UK shiprepair yards in late 1975 and 1976. Greenwell's dry dock at Sunderland (state-owned through the North East Coast Shiprepairs) was closed with the loss of 400 jobs; at the South Shields yards of the same company, three hundred jobs were lost between September and December 1975, and a further 125 in January 1976.

This loss of jobs at Greenwell's was permanent, though that is not *necessarily* the case with the other redundancies. Shiprepair is notorious for rapid fluctuations in its labour levels, mainly because of the short-term service nature of the work. Nevertheless the general trend is certainly one of long-term decline in jobs.

3. Cutting back in North Shields

Employment in shiprepair traditionally fluctuates as orders come and go, but the general trend in the North Shields yard over the past few years has been down. At

Ships awaiting repair: busier times at Smiths Docks in the 1950s.

present, approximately 1,300 men are employed, compared with almost 1,800 in 1971, when this represented between 8-9% of the local workforce. Some men not in the 'permanent' labour force are engaged on fixed term contracts (e.g. for three weeks) to avoid restrictions on casual employment and the regulations imposed by the 1975 Employment Protection Act. Apprenticeships have been cut back in the last two years, as they have throughout the whole of the Swan Hunter Group.

Some measure of the decline in shiprepair jobs in North Shields is provided by the census figures in the following tables. These figures are *workplace* derived, i.e. they do not refer to residents living in Tynemouth but workers working in Tynemouth. For this reason, in the main, they refer to workers working in Smiths Dock repair yard in North Shields. The second table roughly confirms the census figures, although derived from a different source. These figures, too, are *workplace* based, and in the main refer to workers working at Smith's Dock.

Table 9. Workplace (Tynemouth CBC) x Industry Group: (Source: Census)

	MALE	FEMALE	TOTAL
1921	3167	56	3223
1951	2119	48	2167
1966	2610	80	2690
1971	1540	120	1660

Table 10. Workplace (North Shields Employment Exchange Area) x Industry Group (Source: Department of Employment)

	MALE	FEMALE	TOTAL
1961	2698	90	2788
1966	2194	140	2234
1971	1650	115	1765
1975	1736	150	1886

Apart from the decline in employment, the difficulties facing shiprepair in recent years are shown in the following accounts of Swan Hunter Shiprepairers (Tyne) Ltd., 1971-1977.

Table 11. Accounts of Swan-Hunter Shiprepairers (Tyne) Ltd, 1971-1977. (Source: Extel, Nov. 1977)

	Turnover £000	Profit £000
1971	29,843	1,042
1972	30,089	1,012
1973	32,158	1,250
1974	25,007	3,029
1975	28,926	2,749
1977	28,214	1,845

From a peak in 1974 (the boom we have earlier referred to) turnover increased only slightly (and allowing for inflation, probably fell in real terms), whilst profits fell steeply.

Clocking on at Smiths Dock, North Shields, 1976. Fewer workers, and fewer boats these days.

4. The Change in Ownership and Control: Implications for North Shields

Until nationalisation, Swan Hunter owned and controlled a significant proportion (at least 50% in terms of employment) of the Tyneside shiprepair industry, with yards at Wallsend and North and South Shields. Up to about 1974, as we have seen, the yards maintained their levels of turnover and profitability, in contrast to the performance of the UK industry as a whole; after that, however, came the slumps already referred to. Up till nationalisation, Swan Hunter Shiprepairers (Tyne) Ltd., accounted for about 20% of the UK industry's capacity, and employed about 2,400 workers (1,300 of them at North Shields). Now, of course, Swan Hunter only control the North Shields repair yard, with its 5 berths; the Wallsend yards were sold to British Shipbuilders (the state-owned corporation) in mid-1977, mainly because they were surrounded by shipbuilding yards about to be nationalised. In fact a great deal of the UK repair industry is now controlled by British Shipbuilders, despite the battles fought in Parliament by the Conservatives and the House of Lords to get shiprepair excluded from nationalisation. It is estimated that as much as 75% of the industry is now state-controlled.[60] On the Tyne (which has always been the largest UK shiprepair centre, employing about 30% of all shiprepair employees in 1974), the major unit now is the state-owned one, comprising the repair yards of Brigham and Cowan, Middle Docks, Mercantile and Readheads (on the south bank), Wallsend Slipway and Wallsend Dry Dock on the north bank – 18 docks in all, with more than 4,000 employees.[61]

How, then does that leave the North Shields repair yard, still under private ownership? Much of the plant and equipment in the yard is outdated and inefficient. The PA Management Report referred to earlier said that new investment could stem the job decline; but in the current slump, new plant would be under-used and uneconomic. It must remain in doubt, too, whether the new private Swan Hunter Group has the finance necessary to engage in large-scale investment – unless the Compensation

terms for shipbuilding are particularly generous. But Swan Hunter have other areas in which to invest so as to reconstruct their group – e.g. civil engineering, brass-founding, insurance broking etc. – and these may prove preferable and more profitable. At present, as Sir John Hunter himself said *"the North Shields repair yard was trading under adverse conditions which would seem likely to continue until there was a revival in shipping"*.[62] Certainly, the Group has no intention of embarking upon a major investment programme; Mr Adrian Hunter, Managing Director of the Shiprepair company, has recently ruled this out, saying that *"Ship repairing is labour intensive; you can give people better tools but you can't replace the man"*.[63] At the same time, however, Swan Hunter fear competition from the nationalised yards, with their possibilities of subsidised rates, and newer equipment from investment programmes; but this could be counter-balanced by anti-nationalisation shipping companies placing their orders with their private 'friends' in shiprepair,[64] and by a lack of investment by the state in shiprepair yards because of public expenditure limits.*

Whatever decisions remain to be taken, however, the 1300 workers at the North Shields yard cannot feel that their jobs are safe. Again, like shipbuilding, a high proportion of jobs in shiprepair are *comparatively* highly paid; so the loss of any of them restricts further still the future opportunities for higher-paid employment in the North Shields area.

*Recently, the private Swan-Hunter Group has changed the name of the North Shields repair yard – to Smiths Shiprepairers Ltd. – to distinguish it from the yards now nationalised which are still using the name "Swan-Hunter".

Chapter V Fishing and Associated Industries

A. THE FISHING INDUSTRY; NATIONALLY AND IN NORTH SHIELDS

1. Introduction

Fishing is an exploitative industry; and in the past the industry has been run on a laissez faire basis – take the fish when it's there, leave some to renew stocks for next year and hope for the best. The industry has two sectors – inshore fishing and the deep sea industry.

i. Inshore Fishing

The national inshore industry is concentrated in the North Sea and the west coast of Scotland, fishing for pelagic species in the main (herring, sprats) and some cod by under 80 foot seine netters and small trawlers. There is a great mixture of ownership of inshore vessels – individual skipper/owners, common ownership, part owned by the managing firm, sometimes hired. Rarely are crews on these small boats unionised, payment being shared out from the proceeds of a trip.

North Shields has considerable advantages as a North Sea fishing port. The fishing grounds in a radius of 40 miles from the north of the Tyne are the richest in the North Sea; the Tyne is more favourably located in relation to the North Sea grounds than either Hull to the South or Aberdeen to the North; the quay is near the mouth of the river so that time and fuel can be kept to a minimum, and the port itself is the safest harbour of refuge between the Firth of Forth and the Humber.

Since the Second World War, the industry at North Shields has always concentrated on North Sea fishing; only for a brief period (1965-73) when Purdy's managed eight freezer trawlers for the Ranger Fishing Company (owned by P & O) was there any substantial deep sea industry fishing from the port. Currently, North Shields is number one port in the country for pelagic species, largely because of its proximity to North Sea grounds; but its local fleet, comprising about 50 home based and 30 permanent visitors, is still relatively small because of the inadequate berthing facilities at the dock. The dock is used for landings by up to 300 other boats who provide over 60% by weight of all fish landed. North Shields is allocated 30 herring licences each year, all of which are taken up by Scottish boats. At present there are only four trawlers over 80 feet operating from the port, owned by R. Irvin and Son. One of these, which arrived in April 1975, is a multi-purpose vessel, which can be adapted for either deep sea or North Sea fishing. Similarly Newington Trawlers which expanded from Hull in 1975, are developing a fleet of eight multi-purpose under 80 foot boats with the aid of a 25% FEOGA* grant.

Recent world-wide trends towards national protectionism and the declaration of exclusive 200 mile fishing limits have meant that British fleets, excluded from traditional waters, have been concentrating their efforts in the North Sea. This has been reflected in the increased landings of pelagic species and nephrops (shell fish) at Shields in recent years. (Table 34, Appendix I, summarises these trends). This emphasis has meant that North Shields, unlike the deep sea ports such as Hull, Grimsby, and Aberdeen has increased its landings overall, even in white fish. (See Appendix I, Table 35). Whereas in 1965 landings at North Shields accounted for 1.6% of the total UK catch, by 1975 they accounted for 5.2%. Over the same period, Hull's catch had fallen from 21.2% to 14.8%, Grimsby's from 18.9% to 13.3% and Aberdeen's from 12.2% to 8.6% (See Appendix I, Table 36).

Our latest figures are for 1976, and whilst this year was one of crisis for the British fishing industry as a whole, it was the best year on record for North Shields, with record landings in pelagic and shell fish. The total catch by weight landed in 1976 was almost 20% higher than the previous best year of 1973. More new vessels arrived in 1977, so the landings were probably even higher.

Unlike deep sea ports, North Shields is in a fortunate, albeit fortuitous position. But, as we shall spell out later, a successful future depends to a large extent on the development of the fish quay. Whilst Shields, like every other port in this country suffers from problems associated with over fishing, unplanned fishing and an

*FEOGA: European Agricultural Guidance and Guarantee Fund. A grant aiding fund to the EEC's common agricultural policy. The Guarantee Section finances the expenditure connected with supporting agricultural markets; the Guidance Sector covers expenditure connected with the improvement of agricultural structures. It applies solely to agriculture, horticulture, fisheries and related industries.

Fresh landings at North Shields; ready for the daily auction, 1976.

unstable market, it has a considerable disadvantage in its quay and ancilliary facilities. These have lacked investment and modernisation, by both private interests in the early days, and more recently by the state agencies involved – the Port of Tyne Authority, the local authority (who own and manage the processing facilities, including the ice factory), and central government (and the EEC) who monitor the handouts and subsidies and who should be responsible for the policies necessary to keep a primary industry, such as fishing, flourishing. Unless conditions are improved North Shields will not be able to make best use of its national advantages.

ii. Deep Sea Fishing

The deep sea industry is highly rationalised and mechanised, fishing primarily from Hull, Aberdeen and Grimsby, and in the past, before the imposition of 200 mile limits and the cod war, fishing off Norway, Iceland and as far away as Greenland for white fish, particularly haddock and cod (the British housewife's favourite fish). It is these 'displaced' trawlers which are providing competition for the country's inshore fishermen such as those who fish out of Shields.

Most of the deep sea trawlers are owned by shore based firms which are responsible for processing and distributing the fish caught by these boats. They are large and powerful organisations such as British United Trawlers, jointly owned by the Imperial Group and Associated Fisheries – the latter responsible for 20% of the British white fish catch in 1975.

iii. The Recession

In recent years both the inshore sector, and more particularly the deep sea industry have been in a state of crisis brought on by a number of complex and interrelated forces.

That the recession has been so severe is a function of the anarchy and lack of planning in the industry, where the attempt to maximise profits has meant over-exploitation of an expendable and unprotected source of food.

The huge increase in fuel costs in 1973-4 coinciding with a slump in market prices sparked the crisis off. The prices fishermen were getting for their landings did not cover fuel costs; fishermen were forced out of business and the demand for fish was made up by foreign imports from countries (such as Norway) with heavily subsidised fishing industries.

The operation of the local market was also unpredictable, with sporadic gluts of fish in the rush of the high season forcing prices down, followed by a dearth of fish which suited neither the merchant who was having to pay too much for his fish, nor the fishermen who wasn't catching enough to make up profitability from the period of over fishing and market saturation. This process was also

exacerbated by the effects of long term over-fishing (in the North Sea for herring and sprats in particular) which necessitated emergency short-term measures such as the imposition of herring quotas in the North Sea.

In addition countries were taking steps to preserve their own fish stocks by establishing trawler-free zones (Norway 1974), 200 mile exclusive economic zones (Iceland 1975, Norway 1975) and vessel-licensing arrangements; which effectively limited the catch from "traditional" waters, and eventually in the case of Iceland banned the entry of British vessels into formerly "traditional" waters. The long distance fleet was further set back, but the British Government was reluctant to taken any decisive measures to save the fleet (apart from a temporary fuel subsidy and a minimum entry price for foreign fresh or chilled cod) pending negotiations with the EEC on the common fisheries policy. Neither was the government prepared to unilaterally declare a 200 mile or even a 50 mile exclusive economic zone, preferring instead to negotiate Britain's rights within a 200 mile zone common to the EEC after these limits had been ratified. These negotiations are still going on, over 2 years later: the inshore and deep sea fleets have formed a temporary alliance to lobby the government in its representations to the EEC for a 50 mile exclusive zone. Meanwhile the deep sea industry is subsisting on about half its potential; the inshore fleet is severely restricted with quotas and bans which are difficult to enforce, and is facing increased competition from displaced deep sea vessels; and common market nations are proving intractable over Britain's demands which imply control over some of the richest fishing grounds in the North Sea.

The next section of the report outlines these developments and local and national responses in more detail.

2. Crisis Develops: 1974 onwards

i. Fuel Increases

In October 1973, OPEC increased the price of oil, so that by October 1974, fuel which had been £19 a ton in May 1973, was £50 a ton. By the end of 1974 a typical North Shields' trawler's fuel costs were anything up to £250 a day. At the same time the cost of equipment rose dramatically – the cost of seine net equipment for one vessel was in the region of £80,000 whereas in 1967 the same equipment would have cost £13,000. In September Gordon Dobie, chairman of the NE local Fishing Vessel Owners Association was pleading for government aid.

"The situation is now critical. It has been a bad year for the actual fishing itself, but there is still a real need for bolstering up from the Government. The real body blow was the trebling of fuel prices and the rise in prices for trawling gear. The cost of running a trawler has doubled in the same period. But the government (has done) virtually nothing."[1]

ii. Inadequate Prices

The industry was caught in a squeeze between increased operating costs and reduced auction prices. Gordon Dobie said:-

"(The Crisis) will have no effect on prices because all our fish are sold by auction and it wouldn't matter if our costs had gone up by 1000 per cent.

We are stuck the way we are and there's no way we can balance it out by putting up charges, which is something a lot of people fail to understand.

I don't remember such a serious situation."[2]

Fishermen also maintained that prices were being kept low because merchants were stocking large quantities of fish in deep freezers in anticipation of scarcity and high prices. However, the biggest problem was the imported frozen fish, from Norway and Denmark in particular, which had produced a glut on the market in 1974, continuing into 1975, forcing the price of fish down. Overall the price of fish dropped 26% and cod went down 40% between 1974 and 1975.

iii. Government Responses

The government stepped in with short term financial assistance, preferring to prevaricate on the question of long term policies. It introduced a temporary fuel subsidy (amounting to £6.25 millions) which was administered on a flat rate daily basis to all boats over 40 feet fishing a qualifying minimum number of days between January 1 and June 30 1975. The amount varied according to the size of the boat, from £5 per day for boats between 40 and 80 feet, to £90 per day for those over 135 feet. These subsidies compared badly with those to the Norwegian fleet, for example. It was estimated that the subsidy on each ton of fish caught by the Norwegian fleet was worth five times the daily temporary fuel subsidy, or in the order of £45 millions per year. Mr Bishop, Minister of State for Agriculture, made clear on introducing the subsidy that it was merely a stop gap measure; the more profound issues of long term government aid, restructuring and protection, being pushed to one side pending negotiations with the EEC over a common 200 mile limit and British rights within it. He said:-

"Some restructuring of the fishing fleet is inevitable and right, but we must avoid radical contraction leading to permanent structural damage."[3]

and

"(This subsidy is) aimed at avoiding the development of a serious structural situation. These considerations do not apply to vessels under 40 feet."[4]

That these measure were inadequate and superficial is evidenced by the fact that the industry both nationally and locally was undergoing a crisis of profitability – in both sectors.

3. Crisis at Shields

In 1973 the Ranger Freezer Trawler fleet left North Shields. It had previously been owned by P & O and managed by Purdy's who commenced trawler fishing from the Tyne in 1877. In order to manage the 8-boat fleet Purdy's sold off all their own trawlers and when the fleet was sold to British United Trawlers in 1973 and transferred to Hull, Purdys were left with their fish processing concern which went bankrupt in 1974, throwing over 40 people, mainly women, out of work.

In 1974 four more trawlers left the port – Irvin's *Ben Loyal* and *Ben Tarbet* to Aberdeen, and Boston's *Arctic Attacker* and *Comet* to Hull. The latter was refitted as an oil supply ship in 1975.

In 1974, Irvin, North Shields main fishing firm, owning 6 trawlers and managing approximately 70 seine net boats, made a loss of £200,000.

The inshore fleet suffered as well – there were reports of at least 10 of the smaller boats (40′ to 60′) being put up for sale at North Shields as skippers and crews left the industry. To make matters worse the grant for maintenance and replacement of under 80′ boats had been cut from 30% to 25% at the end of 1974, in line with the subsidy to the rest of the fleet. Approximately 40 boats at Shields were affected by the cut. As Doug Clark, a seine net-boat skipper said:-

"Big boat owners get a 25% Common Market grant on top of the Government one, but small boat owners are being squeezed out."[5]

In January 1975 the North Shields Fishermen's Mutual Association, a co-operative of 16 inshore vessels and 10 owners, went into voluntary liquidation. Imports were still making up a significant proportion of the landings of white fish at Shields. As stated, the local fleet has always provided approximately 60% of the needs of the market: in March 1975 almost half of the remaining 40% was made up of Scandinavian imported cod and haddock.

In the absence of adequate subsidies fishermen were taking the matter into their own hands. In March the Anglo-Scottish Fish Producers Organisation Ltd. was formed – under an EEC scheme designed *"to give fishermen the opportunity to regulate and develop their own industry"*.[6] One of the purposes of the organisation is to stop prices falling by buying small and poor quality fish in order to save profits on the more popular types and sizes.* Money to finance the scheme comes from the EEC, government and a levy imposed on landings. George Crawford of North Shields, then Chairman of the ASFPO, said:

"A glut of damaged or undersized catches can depress the market as buyers try to get the cheapest possible prices. A flood of small whiting or haddock lowers the prices offered for better quality fish which goes to the housewhife. But we can often guarantee amounts so salesmen can withdraw the rogue boxes."[7]

In the first 6 weeks more than £4,000 was paid out in compensation.

"It shows how badly the men need this kind of action when you realise that sprats have dropped from £38 a ton last year to £13 now and prawns from £15 a box to £10. And of course prices for other fish have slumped at the same time."[8]

4. The EEC, and the Question of Fishing Limits

Meanwhile at the International Conference of the Law of the Sea in March 1975 an agreement was reached whereby coastal nations were given the right to declare 200 mile exclusive economic zones around their coasts. Britain did not however declare its own 200 mile limit being bound by the Treaty of Accession to the Common Market (ratified before Britain joined). Under the treaty, all waters within a common 200 mile limit (but outside national 6-12 mile limits) are open to any common market country. The implications for the British industry, both deep sea and inshore, were clear:

"The EEC has a common fisheries policy based on the pure non-discriminatory principles of the Treaty of Rome, but in effect scrambled together just before Britain joined, which obliges all common market fishermen to share their fish stocks. What this really means is that our Continental neighbours, having generally fished out their own grounds, must be invited to shoot their nets on ours just when we could do with the fish ourselves to replace the arctic cod or haddock we are no longer allowed to catch."[9]

The response of both sectors of the industry was immediate – we need conservation of stocks and adequate methods of policing that conservation – but disunited on how best to protect the industry. The issue of national control over an economically viable area was crucial, but how much control was necessary to enable the industry to be reconstructed and survive was a point of contention.

As early as November 1974, Austin Laing, the Director of the British Trawler Federation (BTF) was concerned to limit common market fishermen's rights within what

*Of course this scheme (which is still in operation, 1978) whilst benefitting the fishermen does not in any way help to hold down prices in the shops.

would have been Britain's 200 mile zone; giving Britain exclusive rights over a coastal zone, possibly wider than 12 miles, and preferential catch quotas within 200 miles. In February 1975, in an unprecedented statement demanding government aid to save his company cutting its fleet, Paul Tapscott, Director of Associated Fisheries called for the unilateral declaration of a 200 mile zone, although by April (after the Law of the Sea Conference) the call from the BTF was for an exclusive 100 mile zone within the common 200 mile limit. Anti-Common market feeling was growing.

The inshore fishermen took a more militant stand. In March and April 1975 they called a national blockade demanding:

1. A 50 mile exclusive limit around Britain's coasts, and protesting
2. Against all frozen fish imports, especially from Iceland, Norway and Poland, and against the landing of non-EEC fresh fish for six months of a year.
3. For a re-negotiation of EEC fisheries policies, for a redistribution of the government subsidies (in favour of the smaller boats) and against the National Dock Labour scheme.

In North Shields local fishermen turned out en masse to block the Tyne, one of 40 ports in the country affected by blockade. The issue of frozen imports was foremost in their minds. George Crawford said:

"The fishermen are really determined to see this thing through to the bitter end and they felt they had to make this stand to protect their living.

We are not an organised body of militant people, but things have got to such a stage with small boat and inshore fishermen really suffering hardship with the impact of this fish, that they have been forced to make their protest."[10]

According to George Crawford local fishermen's earnings had been cut by as much as 40% in the preceding 2 years.

"We are now the lowest paid workers in the country. Others are turning down pay rises of 20% because they are too low while our earnings have nearly halved. It is a situation we can no longer afford. This is the most positive way we have of showing how we feel."[11]

The blockade was unsuccessful; although the Ministry of Agriculture made promises to "look into the state of the industry", the Foreign Office was adamant. David Ennals, then Minister of State at the Foreign Office, said:

"A 200 mile economic zone would provide better protection for the interests of British fishermen than the 50 mile limit. Moreover, it is in the British interests to secure this by international agreements rather than by unilateral action which could provoke retaliation and severely damage the livelihood of British Fishermen."*[12]

*Common EEC 200 mile zone.

Meanwhile non-EEC nations were taking strong measures to protect their industries and the livelihoods of their fishermen. The measures were also a response to over fishing of the seas in recent years brought about with the development of sophisticated techniques for tracking and harvesting fish; and by the increase of industrial fishing, that is catching fish for pet food, fish meal fertilisers and animal feeds.**

As early as 1974 Norway had announced the imposition of trawler free zones off its coasts, and by Autumn 1975 it had announced its intention to press for an exclusive 200 mile zone following agreement reached at the International Conference of the Law of the Sea. In July of the same year Iceland announced a 200 mile limit with a licensing system for foreign vessels. 139 British trawlers were issued with licences under an agreement operating until November 1975. Both these measures restricted Britain's access to traditional waters – and by June 1975 76 deep sea trawlers had been laid up or sold, representing 75,000 tons catching capacity or 12% of the annual production of cod and haddock – which had to be made up with foreign imports.

In March 1975 the British Trawlers Federation (the lobby of the Deep Sea Industry) had been calling for import controls; in May the Government stepped in to prop up the industry by introducing a minimum entry price on imported fresh and chilled cod – not frozen processed fish – in an attempt to improve the market and prevent heavy losses.

But this wasn't enough. By June, the British Trawlers Federation was demanding more subsidies to protect their profits and the employment of their crews.

"The present subsidy has slowed the decline, but there has been no improvement in the market to provide added help, nor is there likely to be in the foreseeable future. Quayside prices remain depressed, worldwide frozen fish stocks are still high and imports continue to flood into the UK at hopelessly uneconomic prices."[13]

Austin Laing, Director of the BTF, added:

"If imports continue to undermine quayside prices, the main object of the subsidy, a slowing of the decline of the fishing fleet may be defeated."[14]

Whilst Gordon Dobie, Managing Director of R. Irvin & Son in North Shields, said:

"There is too much fish seeking too few markets. While this goes on imported fish is an embarrassment. It is not competing with us on a fair basis because of the subsidies."[15]

** Industrial fishing is commercially very attractive because the catch is simple to process and requires less crew, and because young, undersized fish (mainly sprats, herring and pout) are just as suitable as large mature fish caught for human food. The Danish industry is based on industrial fishing – in 1973 80% of the Danish catch was processed into fish meal, in Britain only 12%.

Nevertheless the government was still reluctant to take responsibility. In June 1975, Mr Bishop responded:

"The money to save the industry must come out of the pockets of housewives, and not from the government. The fact is that fishermen want to avoid subsidies when they can increase their returns from the market. And this must come from the housewife."[16]

The situation continued to deteriorate throughout 1975. In the second half of 1975 the distant water fleet diminished from 466 to 350 trawlers; BTF was predicting a £1½ million loss for 1975-6; Associated Fisheries had cut back its fleet from 150 to 100 vessels with 1,000 jobs lost and British United Trawlers which had laid up half its fleet since January 1975, was down to 15 vessels at Grimsby and 15 at Hull.

5. The Local Situation 1975

By July 1975, it was clear that North Shields' bid for a new fish dock would be unsuccessful (see below). In the same month, Gordon Dobie, Managing Director of Irvin's, estimated that his firm would make a loss of £120,000 on their six trawlers alone. As he put it:

"If someone offered a good sum for a vessel to be an oil support tender against what they were doing now, I'd snatch at it."[17]

The firm was considering leaving the port, to concentrate in Aberdeen, now the headquarters of the business; but instead they decided to rely on the fuel subsidy and not replace two of their trawlers. Although the inshore fleet supplied the Shields market with most of its fish, Irvin's six trawlers did catch about 30% of all white fish landed at Shields in 1975 and so their withdrawal would have been a severe blow to local merchants, and to the consumers, both of whom would face an increase in the price of fish. As Harry Foskett, a local fish merchant, put it:

"We get about half of our supplies of fresh fish from Irvins. If they went and we could not find a suitable replacement then we would be in real trouble. In winter, when the inshore boats are forced to stay in port because of bad weather, we depend on the trawlers for supplies. We could not do without them."[18]

On the local market the prices of fish were falling further; by June cod was fetching between £10 and £12 for a 40 kilo box, 20% down on the beginning of the year.

In November a glut of sprats landed off Norwegian boats brought a renewed call from Shields inshore fishermen for a 50 mile limit: Leonard Myers, Sales Manager at Associated Fisheries, said:

"If a 50 mile limit were imposed, the fish the Norwegian boats are catching would be ours, but the way these big boats are catching sprats there won't be any left for us. Sprat fishing will die here in North Shields if the limit is not extended. Already a number of skippers have had to stop sprat fishing because they cannot compete with the bigger boats and in two years the price of sprats has dropped from £40 per ton to £20."[19]

The herring industry was also in crisis with restrictive quotas and bad prices: the following is a brief case study of the herring industry, 1974-1977, which illustrates many of the themes under discussion.

6. 'Kippered': Herring Fishing, 1974-1977

Over-fishing and depletion of stocks meant that in 1974 the first herring quota was imposed on British fishermen. For the period July 1 1974 to June 30 1975 the British allocation was 18,000 tons out of a total allowable North Sea catch of 494,000 tons.* It was a bonanza harvest for North Shields, 4808 tons being caught in the season, but prices were rock bottom. August was a chaotic month with prices falling from £130 a ton in July to £23 a ton in August. In one week 300 tons of fish were pulped for fish meal. The herring industry board commented *"this is an instance of the general unpredictability of the herring industry"*[20] (sic) and advised housewives to take advantage of low prices. Herring curers and fish merchants were working overtime to process the harvest. In June 1975, the British quota was reduced to 16,000 tons for the period July 1975 to December 1976 (practically 2 seasons) out of a total of 254,000 tons. Local fishermen and merchants were divided over the implementation of the ban – especially the impact on prices. Harry Horn, local herring curer, said:

"Naturally I am against the ban beacuse it is going to put me out of business. The shortage is going to put the price of herring sky high and what happens to us when there is no herring to sell? The people at the Herring Industry Board are a load of idiots. We asked for this ban years ago when much of the herring caught was being used for fish meal. Now it has come too late."[21]

High prices were meaning redundancies in the processing factories: Fenwick Ballard, another herring curer, put it like this:

"Fewer herring means less work and a cutback in staff. It's economic stupidity not to make reductions in some way or another. The present situation is putting everyone from the fishermen to the retailer in danger of bankruptcy."[22]

Robin Paterson, Managing Director of Tyne Fisheries Retail, added:

"When you consider these businesses have been established for well over 100 years and carry considerable

*The allocation is based on past catches: a criteria which militated against British fishermen and conservation of stocks, because those nations such as the Danes who had been scooping up huge quantities of fish for industrial purposes had a larger allocation than the British who fish in the main for human food.