

## **Walking spaces: changing pedestrian practices in Britain since c1850.**

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## **Abstract**

Walking is one of the most sustainable and healthy forms of everyday travel over short distances, but pedestrianism has declined substantially in almost all countries over the past century. This paper uses a combination of personal testimonies and government reports to examine how the spaces through which people travel have changed over time, to chart the impacts that such changes have had on pedestrian mobility, and to consider the shifts that are necessary to revitalise walking as a common form of everyday travel. In the nineteenth century, most urban spaces were not especially conducive to walking, but many people did walk as they had little alternative and the sheer number of pedestrians meant that they could dominate urban space. In the twentieth century successive planning decisions have reshaped cities making walking appear both harder and riskier. Motorised transport has been normalised and pedestrianism marginalised. Only radical change will reverse this.

**Key words:** Mobility, Planning, Pedestrians, Automobility, Sustainability.

## **Biography**

Colin Pooley is Emeritus Professor of Social and Historical Geography in the Environment Centre, Lancaster University, UK. His research focuses on the social geography of Britain and continental Europe since *circa* 1800, with recent projects focused on residential migration, travel to work and other aspects of everyday mobility. His current research focuses on the ways in which mobility has changed since the nineteenth century and the implications of this for present-day transport policies.

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# Walking spaces: changing pedestrian practices in Britain since c1850.

## Introduction

Walking as a form of everyday transport for short journeys in urban areas is by far the most environmentally friendly and healthy option. This is increasingly being recognized by transport planners and policy makers in Britain and elsewhere in the world.<sup>1</sup> However, media coverage of walking often prioritizes negative sentiments, focusing especially on issues of safety and poor infrastructure.<sup>2</sup> This reflects decades of transport planning and infrastructure development that has prioritized cars in most urban areas and, consequently, has marginalized pedestrians. As using a car for even a short journey has become the norm for many people, so walking has become increasingly viewed as an unusual, inconvenient and sometimes risky means of travel. Although there is increased awareness that this must change, the ways by which everyday travel behaviour can be shifted away from cars and towards more active travel – usually some combination of walking, cycling and public transport – are less clear. This paper argues that close examination of the extent, nature and experience of pedestrianism in the past may help to explain both the decline in walking that has occurred and suggest ways in which this trend can be reversed.

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<sup>1</sup>. See for instance: House of Commons Transport Committee, *Active travel: increasing levels of walking and cycling in England* (London: House of Commons, 2019); Department for Transport (DfT), *Cycling and Walking Investment Strategy* (London: DfT, 2017); Transport for London (TfL), *Walking action plan: Making London the world's most walkable city* (London: TfL, 2018); Welsh Government, *An Active Travel Action Plan for Wales* (Cardiff: Welsh Government, 2016).

<sup>2</sup>. Sustrans, *Active travel in the media: Exploring representations of walking and cycling in UK and Scottish online news* (Bristol: Sustrans, 2019).

Official statistics on walking are limited as it is rarely included as a form of transport in travel surveys, but the British National Travel Survey provides some short-run data. In 1975/6 some 35 per cent of all recorded trips were on foot,<sup>3</sup> but by 2018 this had fallen to 27 per cent of all trips compared to 61 per cent for travel by car.<sup>4</sup> Walking does remain the second most frequent means of travel in Britain, and it has increased slightly over the past few years from a low of 22 per cent in 2014, reflecting increased public awareness of the benefits of active travel.<sup>5</sup> Over a longer time scale research using oral history and archival evidence has estimated that travel to work on foot has fallen consistently over the twentieth century: some 59.4 per cent of all travel to work journeys were on foot 1890-99 but only 7.9 per cent a century later.<sup>6</sup> In seeking to promote more travel on foot for short journeys in urban areas there is sometimes a tendency to focus on complex technological solutions such as the development of apps for journey planning and complex network design,<sup>7</sup> whereas the conditions that make walking easy and accessible are often much more simply provided.<sup>8</sup> Most fundamentally pedestrians need space in a pleasant and accessible environment. In

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<sup>3</sup> . Department of Transport, *National Travel Survey 1975/76* (London: DoT, 1979).

<sup>4</sup> . Department for Transport, *National Travel Survey 2018* (London: DfT, 2019).

<sup>5</sup> . Department for Transport, *National Travel Survey 2014* (London: DfT, 2015).

<sup>6</sup> . C. Pooley, J. Turnbull and M. Adams, *A Mobile Century? Changes in Everyday Mobility in the Twentieth Century* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), Table 6.3.

<sup>7</sup> . See for instance: M. Scott, "Smart cities and the technology of walking", *Government Technology*, 24 March 2014, <https://www.govtech.com/fs/news/Smart-Cities-and-the-Technology-of-Walking-.html> (accessed 24 March 2020).

<sup>8</sup> . This is recognized by some urban designers. See for instance: ARUP, "Encouraging city dwellers to walk more", <https://www.arup.com/perspectives/encouraging-city-dwellers-to-walk-more>. (accessed 24 March 2020). See also J. Speck, *Walkable city rules: 101 steps to making better places* (Washington, DC: Island Press, 2018).

this paper I focus on the ways in which the urban spaces available to and used by pedestrians may have changed over time, on the concurrent changes in planning policies, society and transport technologies, and on the effects of such changes on levels of walking for everyday travel.

## Data and method

Detailed information on walking in the past, and especially on the experience of walking, is hard to find. This paper draws on a research project that has collected information on all aspects of everyday mobility from personal diaries and other individual testimonies that refer to mobility. In total some 60 diaries have been consulted so far together with testimonies from victims and witnesses at London's Central Criminal Court (the Old Bailey) who were walking in London at the time of an offence. Diaries consulted range from the early-nineteenth century to the mid-twentieth century, and the Old Bailey data relate to the period 1801 to 1911.<sup>9</sup> Like other forms of qualitative information, all personal testimonies present problems of use and interpretation; but they also provide insights that cannot be garnered from any other sources.<sup>10</sup> They must be viewed as

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<sup>9</sup> . For more information on the data, and examples of their use, see: C. Pooley, "Cities, spaces and movement: everyday experiences of urban travel in England c1840-1940", *Urban History* 44:1 (2017), 91-109; C. Pooley, "Travelling through the city: using life writing to explore individual experiences of urban travel c1840-1940", *Mobilities*, 12:4 (2017), 598-609; C. Pooley, "On the street in nineteenth-century London", *Urban History*, published on-line 11 November 2019: DOI: <https://doi-org.ezproxy.lancs.ac.uk/10.1017/S096392681900097X>.

<sup>10</sup> . For more discussion of the use and interpretation of diaries see: S. Sherman, "Diary and autobiography", in J. Richetti (ed.), *The Cambridge History of English Literature, 1660-1780* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 623-48; M. Hewitt, "Diary, autobiography and the practice of life history", in D. Amigoni (ed.), *Life Writing and Victorian Culture* (London: Routledge, 2006) 21-39.

individual examples of personal experiences and behaviours, and are not representative of any larger population. Their availability is governed by several factors, including the sub-set of people most likely to provide such testimonies (few exist for the very poorest), and the extent to which they survive and are made available in archives. Diaries are the most revealing source, but they are also the most restricted in terms of coverage. Diaries were most frequently written by young women (men were more likely to write life histories), with diary writing usually ceasing or becoming sporadic after marriage. Many personal diaries have not survived or remain in private hands and are not available to researchers, and there are sometimes ethical considerations about the use of a diary that was clearly meant to be private. All the material used in this paper has either been deposited in an archive with permission to be made public or has been given to the author with permission to use for research purposes. There are also more specific issues to be considered when it comes to studying everyday mobility and travel behaviour. It is likely that a diarist will have under-recorded the most mundane and routine events, including repeated everyday travel, but will have privileged more unusual events that spark interest from the diarist. There is thus a danger that historical interpretation focuses on rare and exceptional events at the expense of more routine activities. All these factors have been borne in mind in the interpretation of material used in this paper.

This is primarily an empirical paper, drawing on the careful reading and interpretation of a large quantity of textual material. For the most part this must be done manually as most of the diaries used are not available in a digital form. They can run to many volumes of close and sometimes barely legible handwriting and cannot be easily scanned. In any case, the information needed to interpret the diaries could not be produced from any text analysis algorithm as it always has to be contextualised within the broader scope of diary entries, sometimes over several years.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> . On computer analysis of textual data see for instance: I. Gregory, C. Donaldson, P. Murrieta-Flores and P. Rayson, "Geoparsing, GIS, and textual analysis: current developments in spatial

From a theoretical perspective the paper draws on a range of writing on mobilities, especially the pioneering work of John Urry and Mimi Sheller.<sup>12</sup> In particular, I emphasise the extent to which everyday mobility was (and is) not only a means of travelling from one place to another to meet routine commitments, but that the travel itself could have meaning for an individual and could contribute directly to their lived experiences. I also argue that analysis of everyday travel from the perspective of the individual, and the accounts that travellers provided, emphasizes the ways in which mobility and transport are inter-related. Too often transport histories focus solely on infrastructure and technologies: it is important that the people who travelled are also given equal consideration.<sup>13</sup>

### **Pedestrian spaces in the nineteenth century**

The streets of nineteenth century cities were full of people at most times of the day and night: men women and children of all ages and from all walks of life. Urban space itself was not necessarily more amenable to pedestrians than it is today: pavements could be narrow and crowded; roads were busy with a wide variety of vehicles and streets were often dirty (horses could leave much

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humanities research", *International Journal of Humanities and Arts Computing* 9:1 (2015), 1-14; I.

Gregory, "Challenges and opportunities for digital history", *Frontiers in Digital Humanities* 1 (2014), 1.

<sup>12</sup> . See for instance: M. Sheller and J. Urry, "The new mobilities paradigm", *Environment and Planning A* 38:2 (2006), 207-226; J. Urry, *Mobilities* (Cambridge: Polity, 2007); M. Sheller and J. Urry, "Mobilizing the new mobilities paradigm", *Applied Mobilities* 1:1 (2016), 10-25.

<sup>13</sup> . For further discussion of this theme see: C. Pooley, "Connecting historical studies of transport, mobility and migration", *Journal of Transport History* 38:2 (2017), 251-259; C. Pooley, *Mobility, Migration and Transport: Historical Perspectives* (London: Palgrave Pivot, 2017).

mess); and cities were bustling noisy places. But for most travellers in the nineteenth century walking was the normal and only means of transport available, and this process of normalization meant that travelling on foot was a taken-for-granted aspect of urban life. Moreover, the vast numbers of pedestrians on the streets meant that, to some extent at least, those who walked could compete with other street users to create their own spaces. Although previous research on the crowd in history has focused mainly on relatively rare events such as mob violence and urban protest, or on the dangers of the street,<sup>14</sup> there is also safety in numbers. The presence of other pedestrians could have provided security and support for those undertaking mundane everyday journeys on foot. Travellers would pass familiar places and people most days as they travelled to school, to work, to shops or to visit friends and this could provide support and reassurance.<sup>15</sup> Some of these themes can be illustrated by using selected extracts from the sources summarized above.

Elizabeth Lee (born 1867) lived with her parents near Birkenhead, Cheshire, in the late nineteenth century. She kept a diary from 1884 to 1892 and seemed to record most of her everyday activities. She walked frequently both alone and with friends or family over short distances but mostly used the tram or train for longer journeys. Walking trips were both for leisure and practical everyday activities such as visiting friends or going to her father's shop. One example from 1884 (age

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<sup>14</sup> . For instance: G. Rudé, *The Crowd in History: A Study of Popular Disturbances in France and England, 1730-1848* (New York: Wiley, 1964); R. Holton, "The crowd in history: some problems of theory and method", *Social History* 3:2 (1978), 219-233; P. Andersson, "'Bustling, crowding, and pushing': pickpockets and the nineteenth-century street crowd", *Urban History* 41:2 (2014), 291-310.

<sup>15</sup> . For a related discussion see: M. Domosh, "Those 'gorgeous incongruities': Polite politics and public space on the streets of nineteenth-century New York City", *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 88:2 (1998), 209-226.



17) describes a walk (alone) of just over 4km from her home to see a friend in a neighbouring village. Such excursions were a routine part of Elizabeth's everyday life: "This afternoon I walked to Landican and saw Patty and Jessie Ragg who is stopping with her. They were so surprised to see me".<sup>16</sup> Similarly, it was normal for Mary Anne Prout (age 21 at the time of keeping her diary in 1882) to walk quite long distances between communities in Cornwall. For instance, she recorded walking alone the 6.5km from her home in St Agnes to 'Perran'<sup>17</sup> and back again. Her return journey would most probably have been in the dark, and for longer journeys visitors and family members regularly walked some 8 km to and from the nearest railway station.: "I walked over to Perran this afternoon to see Father he told me to wait for him. I staid there until nearly 10 o'clock and then walked home by myself".<sup>18</sup>

Evidence from the victim and witness statements of the Old Bailey<sup>19</sup> provide ample evidence of the diversity and quantity of people walking the streets of London in the nineteenth century. Simple quantitative analysis of the data shows that men outnumbered women (though this could also reflect an inherent data biases as men may have been more likely to be called as a witness).

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<sup>16</sup> . Diary of Elizabeth Lee, Sunday 12 October 1884. Published in C. Pooley, S. Pooley and R. Lawton (eds.), *Growing Up on Merseyside in the Late-Nineteenth Century: the Diary of Elizabeth Lee* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2010).

<sup>17</sup> . Perranporth, Cornwall.

<sup>18</sup> . Diary of Mary Anne Prout, Thursday 4 May 1882. (Bishopsgate Institute Archive, London: GDP/58).

<sup>19</sup> .The Proceedings of the Old Bailey – London's Central Criminal Court, 1674-1923, Old Bailey on-line (OB), <https://www.oldbaileyonline.org/>.

### Box 1: Selected quotes from Old Bailey (OB) victim and witness statements

I am a widow, and live in Gloster-terrace, Mile End-road. On the 24th of September, at six o'clock in the evening, I was in Whitechapel - I had been to buy some ribbon, and returning about seven o'clock, the prisoner was standing at the corner of Mr. Mears's, the bell founder (Victim statement by Elizabeth Fox, 24<sup>th</sup> October 1821. OB Ref: t18211024-53).

I live at 46, Gurley Street, New Kent Road—I have a daughter named Annie Gertrude, who was six years old on Monday—she left home to go to school, six minutes' walk off, and at 10.30 I met a policeman with her outside my house—I do not know the prisoner (Victim statement by Patrick Edgely on behalf of his daughter Annie (age 6), 4<sup>th</sup> May 1891. OB Ref: t18910504-441).

I am a labourer, and live at No. 9, Duke-street, Commercial-road. On Saturday night, the 1st of January, I was returning home through Wentworth-street, Spitalfields; I was a little in liquor (Victim statement by Samuel Cooper, 6<sup>th</sup> January 1831. OB Ref: t18310106-146).

I am a Barrister, and have chambers at 3, Brick-court, Temple—on Saturday, 11th May, I had been dining at the Trafalgar, at Greenwich, along with other members of the Durham Sessions, and Between half-past 10 and 11 o'clock I was returning with my friends to the station—when we got near the railings of the College the prisoner and another man came up—I was walking with my friend Mr. Shield (Victim statement by William Lewers, 10<sup>th</sup> June 1861. OB Ref: t18610610-518).

I am single, and live in Giffin-street, Deptford. I get my living by shirt-making—I was walking in High-street, between twelve and one o'clock, on the night in question, and saw Welsh walking just before me—I saw the prisoner come behind her and kick her (Witness statement by Ellen Fairway, 12<sup>th</sup> May 1851. OB Ref: t18510512-1204)

I am single, and live at 18, De Beauvoir terrace, De Beauvoir-town, and am a telegraphic clerk—about 6 o'clock on the evening of the 12th January I was walking in Shoreditch—it was rather dark (Victim statement by Ann Pulham, 28<sup>th</sup> January 1861. OB Ref: t18610128-162).

I am a surgeon, and live in Cannon-street, City. On the 24th of July between eight and nine o'clock at night I was walking down the Commercial-road, holding up my umbrella, as it rained hard (Victim statement by Rees Price, 12<sup>th</sup> September 1821. OB Ref: t18210912-88).

I am a porter, of 3, New Court, Spitalfields—on 25th November, about midnight, I was walking in Wheeler Street, with three persons—I bade them good night, and a man from behind put his hand into my trousers pockets, which were empty (Victim statement of Albert Evans, 14<sup>th</sup> December 1891. OB Ref: t18911214-124).

I live in Furnival's Inn, and am a solicitor. On the 9th of November, about three o'clock in the afternoon, I was in Cheapside : my gold pin, set with pearls was in my stock; there was a very great crowd - I was walking in the middle of the road, to avoid the crowd (Victim statement by James Gadsden, 1<sup>st</sup> December 1831. OB Ref: t18311201-130).

The data also show that most walking took place for leisure in the evenings, but that some pedestrians were on the streets at all times of day and night, and that people of all social classes

regularly walked both for leisure and in the course of their everyday activities.<sup>20</sup> A selection of quotes from statements made at the Old Bailey is provided in Box 1. These and others like them clearly demonstrate that urban space in nineteenth-century London was dominated by pedestrians. Although movement on foot through the city was not without difficulty, there is no evidence that pedestrians felt marginalized. Those who walked dominated the streets, they were places where people from all backgrounds mixed (though did not necessarily interact), and for the most part the crowds that existed created places of safety and security with other pedestrians often identifying or even apprehending those who perpetrated the rare criminal acts that took place.<sup>21</sup>

### **Pedestrian spaces in the twentieth century**

Although many people did continue to travel on foot for everyday activities during the twentieth century, both urban and rural areas became increasingly hostile environments for pedestrians. As motorized traffic increased in both volume and speed the impact of cars and trucks on pedestrian movement also grew rapidly. Urban streets in particular were reconfigured to accommodate motor vehicles with pedestrians pushed to the margins on often narrow pavements, corralled at road crossings, and exposed to heightened levels of pollution from vehicle exhaust fumes.<sup>22</sup> In rural areas

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<sup>20</sup> . For full details see Pooley, "On the street". Only a very brief summary is provided here as the purpose of this paper is to demonstrate change from the nineteenth century to the present.

<sup>21</sup> . Using data from the Old Bailey can give a false impression that criminal activity was common. In fact, it was relatively rare, and most crimes were minor acts of theft, pick-pocketing or minor assault.

<sup>22</sup> . These changes are well documented. See for instance: S. Gunn, "People and the car: the expansion of automobility in urban Britain, c. 1955–70", *Social History* 38: 2 (2013), 220-237; G. Mom, *Atlantic Automobility: Emergence and Persistence of the Car, 1895-1940* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2014). P. Norton, *Fighting Traffic: The Dawn of the Motor Age in the American City*. (Boston: MIT Press, 2011).

the lack of dedicated pedestrian space on narrow roads could create even greater dangers for those who walked.<sup>23</sup> The ways in which this occurred can be documented through an examination of the UK transport ministry's engagement with walking as a form of transport over the course of the twentieth century.<sup>24</sup>

In the early days of motoring car drivers were quite severely restricted, mostly because of concerns about conflicts with horse-drawn vehicles rather than with pedestrians, but this rapidly changed and for a short period between 1930 and 1934 all speed limits for vehicles carrying less than seven people were abolished. However, it was soon realised that in urban areas at least some regulation of traffic was necessary, and when the Ministry of Transport did engage directly with pedestrians in the early twentieth century interventions were largely around issues of road safety and the amelioration of conflict with motorists. While couched as strategies to protect the considerable number of people who regularly travelled on foot in the first half of the twentieth century, most policies were also designed to smooth the flow of traffic and could have the effect of restricting pedestrian movement. The dilemma of how to manage the increased variety and number of road users was summed up by the then Minister of Transport, Oliver Stanley, in 1934 when he introduced a new road safety campaign in response to increased concern about the number of casualties on Britain's roads. He stated that:

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<sup>23</sup> . On rural road safety see: K. Hamilton and J. Kennedy, *Rural road safety-a literature review* (Edinburgh: Scottish Executive Social Research, 2005).

<sup>24</sup> . Some material for this section was developed for the volume charting 100 years of the Department for Transport. See C. Pooley, "The changing role of walking in everyday travel and transport", in W. Pethen (ed.), *DfT 100: Celebrating our Journey. Reflections on a Century of the Department*. (London: DfT, 2019).

Only the co-operation of every user of the road - motorist, cyclist and pedestrian – only their caution, their care and their courtesy could make the roads really safe. It was no good arguing which had the better right to the roads – motorists or pedestrians. They were both on the roads and they were going to stay there. Years ago when motoring was the privilege of the peer or the plutocrat, it might have been possible to resist what was only the luxury of the few. But today the luxury of the few had become the necessity of the many.<sup>25</sup>

In practice, this acceptance of the rights of motorists led increasingly to road designs and traffic managements that privileged drivers and restricted pedestrians.

Although there had been attempts to provide (manually) controlled pedestrian crossings on busy roads in some British cities in the nineteenth century, systematic attempts to manage pedestrian flows at road crossings developed in the 1930s. These measures included the installation of traffic lights and pedestrian crossings (indicated initially by metal studs and from the 1950s by striped 'zebra' markings) with their distinctive flashing Belisha Beacons (named after the Minister of Transport of the time, Leslie Hore-Belisha). While ostensibly introduced to aid pedestrian safety, such measures also had the effect of channelling pedestrians to specific crossing points, and of controlling when they should cross. They were thus also measures that restricted the traditional freedom of pedestrians to walk (and cross roads) where they wished, and at the same time smoothed the flow of motorised traffic. One of the most extreme examples of interventions that restricted pedestrian movement was introduced along part of London's Mile End road in 1936. Hore-Belisha approved a plan, proposed by the Metropolitan Police Commissioner Alker Tripp, to place guard rails along a section of this busy dockland road with the aim of preventing pedestrians crossing the road wherever they wished and thus slowing traffic. A 1.5 mile (2.4 km) stretch of railings was

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<sup>25</sup> . Quoted in *The Times*, 28 March 1934, 9.

built but Tripp's aim was to further restrict pedestrian movements to facilitate the free flow of traffic.<sup>26</sup> The scheme met with strong resistance from local businesses and residents, and from the Pedestrians' Association (now Living Streets) which had been formed in 1929 to protect and advance the rights of pedestrians as road users.<sup>27</sup> These concerns halted further extension of the scheme and the outbreak of war in 1939 effectively ended this particular experiment, but the selected use of guard rails to both protect and channel pedestrians at busy junctions continued in the post-war period. The negative effects that these policies could have on pedestrians was highlighted in 2002 when a Select Committee report stated that: 'pedestrian railings, barriers and staggered crossings are designed to maintain traffic flows and restrict pedestrian movement',<sup>28</sup> with the Government acknowledging in response that guardrailing: 'has been used in this way for many years and has left a legacy that can be inconvenient to pedestrians, and lead to an unattractive and cluttered environment'.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> . D. Rooney "Keeping Pedestrians in their Place. Technologies of Segregation in East London", in P. Mackintosh, R. Dennis and D. Holdsworth (eds.), *Architectures of Hurry – Mobilities, Cities and Modernity* (Abingdon, Routledge, 2018), 120-136.

<sup>27</sup> . B. Schmucki, "Against 'the Eviction of the Pedestrian' The Pedestrians' Association and Walking Practices in Urban Britain after World War II", *Radical History Review* 2012:114 (2012), 113-138; *Living Streets* website (accessed 24 March 2020) <https://www.livingstreets.org.uk/>.

<sup>28</sup> . House of Commons Select Committee, *Road Traffic Speed* (London: TSO, 2002).

<sup>29</sup> . Department for Transport, *The Government's Response to the Transport, Local Government and the Regions Committee's Report on Road Traffic Speed* (London: TSO, 2002). See also: Department for Transport, *Pedestrian Guardrailing. Local Transport Note 2/09* (London: TSO, 2009). Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/pedestrian-guardrailing-ltn-209>.

In the post-war period a rapid increase in motorised transport, and the increased normalisation of driving as the transport mode of choice for all those who could afford a car, meant that most road schemes at both the national and local levels were automatically focused on the needs of the motorist. The shift in priorities from the 1930s, and its potential effect on pedestrian movement, can be seen from one case study. Lancashire County Council had proposed improving the existing N-S route of the A6/A49 with a dual carriageway that included separate cycle tracks and pedestrian footpaths along its length. However, due to increased concern about high accident rates on roads where pedestrians had unfettered access, in 1937 these plans were abandoned and instead a new route was proposed which would be restricted to motor vehicles only. This scheme was approved by the Minister of Transport (Leslie Burgin) and although all work was halted during the war, the scheme formed part of the 1946 national road construction programme and was included in the 1947 Lancashire County Road Plan. It came to fruition as the Preston Bypass opened as the first stretch of motorway in the country in 1958, with the rest of the M6 through Lancashire completed by 1965.<sup>30</sup> Thus, over a short period of time, priorities shifted from building roads that to some extent at least accommodated pedestrians, to a focus on those that excluded those travelling on foot but which facilitated the rapid movement of vehicles.

By the 1960s increasing concern was being expressed about the impact of traffic in towns, and in 1960 Ernest Marples, Transport Minister in Harold Macmillan's government, commissioned Colin Buchanan to provide a report that could show how traffic movement could be improved but congestion in towns reduced as part of the programme of post-war reconstruction. Buchanan's

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<sup>30</sup> . All material on the development of the road system in NW England from *The Motorway Archive*, , <http://www.ukmotorwayarchive.org.uk/> (accessed 24 March 2020). See also C. Pooley, "Landscapes Without the Car: A Counterfactual Historical Geography of Twentieth-Century Britain", *Journal of Historical Geography* 36:3 (2010), 266-275.

report, published in 1963, became one of the most influential transport policy documents of the post-war era and had a profound effect on many British cities and the people who lived in them.<sup>31</sup> One aim of Buchanan was to reduce the impact of traffic in towns and to improve city centres for pedestrian movement. This was to be achieved in part by diverting traffic on to urban dual carriageways around city centres, and through the pedestrianisation of city centre retail areas. Although pedestrian precincts were initially opposed by many businesses because it was thought that they would reduce passing trade, in practice some degree of pedestrian precinct development occurred in most British towns and cities and certainly produced a more congenial environment for shoppers away from constantly moving traffic. However, Buchanan's schemes also had negative effects on pedestrians. The new roads designed to keep traffic out of town centres could cut through the urban fabric: they often formed barriers that separated residential areas from business and retail locations, and made pedestrian access from the suburbs to the centre more difficult. In some cases roads were crossed via footbridges, which were difficult for parents with a child in a buggy and for anyone with reduced mobility, and in other instances through subways that were often seen as unpleasant and potentially risky environments, especially at night. Such impacts are seen in many British cities, Leeds and Newcastle being just two examples. Although developments in Britain were not as extreme as in most US cities,<sup>32</sup> the unintended consequences of the drive to speed cars through towns on new dual carriageways away from city centres were not always helpful for pedestrians.

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<sup>31</sup> . C. Buchanan, *Traffic in towns: a study of the long term problems of traffic in urban areas* (London: HMSO, 1963); S. Gunn, "The Buchanan Report, environment and the problem of traffic in 1960s Britain", *Twentieth Century British History* 22:4 (2011), 521-542.

<sup>32</sup> . P. Norton, *Fighting Traffic*; P. Norton, "Street rivals: Jaywalking and the invention of the motor age street", *Technology and Culture* 48:2 (2007), 331-359.



Arguably, it was in the 1990s that both national and local governments focused most clearly on walking as a means of transport, recognizing the importance of pedestrian movement in city streets and the need to make walking an easier and more attractive option. The Department of Transport established a Steering Group ‘to help reverse the decline and encourage walking as a mode of transport’, and their report produced in 1996 with a foreword by John Bowis a Minister of Transport in John Major’s Conservative administration,<sup>33</sup> is possibly the first document (and still one of very few) to emerge from national government to focus solely on walking, though it is careful to clarify its status as a discussion document rather than the views of the Department of Transport. Reading the report today it is remarkably far-sighted in identifying the reasons why walking had declined and the sometimes radical steps needed to counteract these trends.<sup>34</sup> Proposals ranged from the development of national and local policies to promote walking to the redesign of roads and urban structure, and the better management of traffic in towns to prioritise pedestrians. Much of this thinking found its way into the 1998 White Paper ‘A new deal for transport: better for everyone’ championed by John Prescott as Deputy Prime Minister and Secretary of State for Environment, Transport and the Regions in Tony Blair’s Labour administration.<sup>35</sup> Although arguably still focusing too much on road and rail, the White Paper did highlight the need to promote walking and cycling

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<sup>33</sup> . Responsible for transport in London and road safety under the Secretary of State for Transport Sir George Young in John Major’s Conservative government.

<sup>34</sup> . Department of Environment, Transport and the Regions (DETR), *Developing a strategy for walking* (London: DETR, 1996): Available at:

<https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20000520032213/http://www.local-transport.detr.gov.uk:80/walk/walk.htm>.

<sup>35</sup> . DETR, *A new deal for transport: Better for everyone* (London: DETR, 1998). Available at:

<https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/+http://www.dft.gov.uk/about/strategy/whitepapers/previous/aneudealfortransportbetterfo5695>.

through both national policies and local plans. In practice much more was achieved at the local level, especially in London, with vehicle movement continuing to be prioritised in national policy decisions and spending.

In the new millennium attention has gradually shifted more firmly towards policies to promote sustainable travel options at both the local and national levels, with a substantial number of discussion documents and policy statements emerging from the Department for Transport and other government departments. The DfT document 'Walking and Cycling: an Action Plan' was announced by Minister of Transport Kim Howells in 2004,<sup>36</sup> forming part of a series of statements and policy proposals on walking, cycling and sustainable or active travel that have continued to the present day.<sup>37</sup> The Welsh Assembly was especially proactive with the passing of the Active Travel Bill in 2013 which was in some ways a stimulus for the DfT's first statutory Cycling and Walking

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<sup>36</sup> . DfT, *Walking and cycling action plan* (London: DfT, 2004). Available at:

<http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20100202100434/http://www.dft.gov.uk/pgr/sustainable/walking/actionplan/ingandcyclingdocumentinp5802.pdf>.

<sup>37</sup> . For instance: DfT, *10 year plan for transport*, (London: DfT, 2000). Available at:

<http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/+http://www.dft.gov.uk/about/strategy/whitepapers/previous/transporttenyearplan2000>; DfT, *The future of transport* (London: HMSO, 2004). Available at:

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[http://www.dh.gov.uk/prod\\_consum\\_dh/groups/dh\\_digitalassets/documents/digitalasset/dh\\_113104.pdf](http://www.dh.gov.uk/prod_consum_dh/groups/dh_digitalassets/documents/digitalasset/dh_113104.pdf); DfT, *Creating Growth, Cutting Carbon. Making sustainable local transport happen* (London:

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DfT, *Investing in walking and cycling: the economic case for action* (London: DfT, 2015). Available at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/cycling-and-walking-the-economic-case-for-action>.

Investment Strategy.<sup>38</sup> Most recently reports from Sport England and Sustrans on active travel, and new NICE guidelines that include a quality statement that ‘Local authorities [should] prioritise pedestrians, cyclists and people who use public transport when developing and maintaining connected travel routes’ further emphasise the importance of planning for more sustainable and active travel.<sup>39</sup>

Although these policy statements are well intentioned and have the potential to make a real difference to how people travel in cities, most of these initiatives have also been problematic for the promotion of walking because, in almost every instance, walking and cycling have been linked together as ‘sustainable travel’ with very little attention paid to pedestrian movement alone. In practice walking and cycling are very different activities, making different demands on the traveller and on road space, and thus need to be addressed through distinctly different policies. Moreover, possibly because cycling with its use of a machine on public road space more easily fits a traditional view of transport, a majority of both activity and expenditure has been focused on the promotion of cycling and the provision of separated cycle lanes, with continued relative neglect of the needs of

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<sup>38</sup> . Welsh Assembly, *Active Travel Bill* (Cardiff: Welsh Assembly, 2013). See: <https://gov.wales/walking-cycling>; DfT, *Cycling and walking investment strategy* (London: DfT, 2017).

Available at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/cycling-and-walking-investment-strategy>.

<sup>39</sup> . N. Cavill, A. Davis, A. Cope, and D. Corner, *Active Travel and Physical Activity Evidence Review* (London: Sport England, 2019). Available at:

<https://www.sportengland.org/research/understanding-audiences/active-travel/>; National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE), *Physical activity: encouraging activity in the community*.

*Quality standard QS183* (London: NICE, 2019). Available at:

<https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/qs183>.

pedestrians. However, despite these initiatives, cycling rates remain low at around two per cent of all trips at a national level, with little sign of change apart from in a small number of urban locations, especially London. Far more people walk regularly than cycle, and walking is the easiest and most accessible form of travel for short trips. Although pedestrians do have separate space for movement in most urban areas there are many ways in which the ease of pedestrian travel could be improved. There was (and remains) the potential to substantially increase rates of walking if pedestrian movement had been given more prominence in recent sustainable travel initiatives. Only one recent Government publication has focused solely on walking as a form of transport, and this was generated by the Foresight division of government and states quite clearly that it does not represent government policy.<sup>40</sup> In contrast, the most recent DfT report on the 'Future of Mobility', while highlighting the importance of active travel for short trips in urban areas and its importance for individual health and environmental quality, uncritically links walking and cycling in almost all its statements, effectively treating them as a single entity.<sup>41</sup>

### **Individual experiences of mobility change**

I now focus on the ways in which this all-pervasive culture of automobility, which successive planning policies have in part at least facilitated, affected individual citizens and the ways in which they moved through rural and urban spaces. This is done by using selected extracts from the diaries

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<sup>40</sup> . M. Tight, *Walking in the UK transport system: how and why is it changing?* (London: Foresight, Government Office for Science, 2018). Available at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/future-of-mobility-walking-in-the-uk-transport-system>.

<sup>41</sup> . DfT, *Future of Mobility: Urban Strategy* (London: DfT, 2019). Available at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/future-of-mobility-urban-strategy>.

of one woman (referred to here as B) who lived in north Lancashire during much of the twentieth century. She was born in 1928 on a farm in a relatively remote part of upland Lancashire, she never married, and she died in 2018 in a care home in a small town some 30km from her birthplace. Her diary begins in 1942 when she was 13 and a few months before she left school, but an interview with B shortly before she died provided some additional information about the early years of her life. Initially almost all her travel was on foot, including walking alone several kilometres to and from school in all weathers from the age of five. For rare longer journeys she used a motor bus but her everyday action space was very restricted and mostly on foot. By the start of her diary B's parents had moved to a different farm and her father had bought a car (in 1935). B (age 13) now cycled or walked for most journeys, with occasional lifts in a motor vehicle. She travelled by bus for rare longer trips. Three brief quotes give a flavour of this early mobility.<sup>42</sup>

Went to Pr. Dad took us as far as W and we got out and got on a bus...<sup>43</sup>

Mother went with R to Ch, then we went to Ch on our bikes to catch 11.20 bus.<sup>44</sup>

In the afternoon went for a ride on our bikes with P. P came up for me again at night, I walked to Ch [c4km] with her, took battery down and brought another back. Had some fun with the boys.<sup>45</sup>

This pattern of activity remained much the same for the next 10 years. B worked on her parents' farm and mostly travelled locally on foot, by bike, bus and sometimes in her father's car. Because agriculture was a reserved occupation her father was not directly affected by petrol rationing during

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<sup>42</sup> . All personal and place names have been anonymized.

<sup>43</sup> . Diary of B, Wednesday 6 May 1942 (Author's copy).

<sup>44</sup> . Diary of B, Monday 11 May 1942 (Author's copy).

<sup>45</sup> . Diary of B, Sunday 5 July 1942 (Author's copy).

the war, and although fuel was meant to be used solely for business purposes in practice the family car was often also used for social activities.

In 1952 B's father sold the farm (largely due to old age) and the family moved to a semi-detached house in a small suburban community some 14km from the farm. B now had to find work outside the home, first cleaning in local houses, then at a chicken farm and from 1956 with an agricultural merchant. Travel was mainly by bus, with some local travel on foot or by bike, and with quite frequent lifts with her father or work colleagues. Four brief extracts again illustrate these points:

W [workplace] 8.30 to 5pm. Went on 7.45 bus, at night Mr W brought me back to end of Lane [home].<sup>46</sup>

W 8.30 to 9.30. I walked to NH for 5 to 10 bus. They were wondering where I was at home.<sup>47</sup>

Got the 8.20 bus to Pr, then 9.30 bus to Ch, J and M picked me up at F and we went to W Church for 12 o'clock, to M's wedding to J, back to S Inn for reception [sic], then to W, I came home by bus on 7.20 from Ch. Home 8.45.<sup>48</sup>

B's pattern of mobility changed markedly in July 1958 when she passed her driving test. Due to failing health her father now rarely drove, and B had frequent (though not total) access to the family car. However, she still mostly biked to and from work and sometimes used the bus. In 1964 she bought her own car and from then on became almost completely car dependent. She usually drove the short distance (c3km) to and from work and only occasionally walked anywhere (usually short distances for leisure). She only travelled by bike or bus if the car was not available for some reason.

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<sup>46</sup> . Diary of B, Tuesday 19 January 1954 (Author's copy).

<sup>47</sup> . Diary of B, Thursday 15 April 1954 (Author's copy).

<sup>48</sup> . Diary of B, Wednesday 28 September 1955 (Author's copy).

B almost always drove distances that only 20 years earlier she would have regularly walked or cycled, and consequently it can be suggested that her use of and interaction with local spaces changed significantly. This pattern of mobility continued until late in life when she was forced to give up driving due to ill health, the only change being that, as she got older, she began to go on more organised coach outings with friends from the locality. Three quotes illustrate these points:

DJ 7.15 to 4.30. Dad took the car and I wanted it. How-ever he arrived back with it, and A, V, E & I went to the AC to see "Carry on Teacher".<sup>49</sup>

DJ 7.15 to 3.45. ... The car had a flat tyre this morning so I had to use the bike.<sup>50</sup>

J picked us up in 'Carters' Coach' at 8.25am ... went to Ch then on a trip to the Royal Worcester Porcelain works at Worcester, we met M, ... we left at 4.30pm and got to Co, Cheshire for dinner ... we got out of the coach here at 11pm.<sup>51</sup>

All individual lives are to some extent unique, but it can be suggested that B's transition from what today would be called 'active travel' to almost complete car dependency was typical of many in the second half of the twentieth century. This mobility transition was generated by many different factors, but the restructuring of public space to accommodate motor vehicles was one element that discouraged walking and cycling and encouraged car ownership and use as new technologies and rising real incomes made motor vehicles more readily accessible.

## **Conclusions**

In the twenty-first century there is increased awareness of the need to curb the use of petrol and diesel vehicles and to promote more active travel. Some major cities such as London and Paris have

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<sup>49</sup> . Diary of B, Thursday 3 September 1959 (Author's copy).

<sup>50</sup> . Diary of B, Monday 18 March 1968 (Author's copy).

<sup>51</sup> . Diary of B, Tuesday 29 September 1981 (Author's copy).

begun to restrict motor vehicles through schemes that include congestion charges, low emission zones, car-free days and areas, and pavement widening,<sup>52</sup> but it remains the case that most urban streets are dominated by motor vehicles creating spaces that are harmful for both people and the planet. Much more drastic measures are needed to curtail car use, to provide good alternatives through public transport, and to produce inviting streets for walking and cycling. Considerable attention has been given to the development of electric and autonomous vehicles as a way of reducing the environmental impact of motor traffic, but there is a real danger in such an approach. The carbon footprint of such vehicles remains considerable (though less than petrol and diesel motor vehicles) and, crucially, they are still vehicles that will dominate streets and create an unpleasant and potentially risky environment for pedestrians (and cyclists). Indeed, there is a risk that the volume of cars on urban streets may actually increase if people begin to see electric or autonomous vehicles as an acceptable alternative to conventional cars.<sup>53</sup> Moreover, in most rural areas the space available to pedestrians has barely changed since the nineteenth century with no

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<sup>52</sup> . K Willsher, "Paris mayor unveils '15 minute city' plan in re-election campaign" *The Guardian* 7 February 2020: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/feb/07/paris-mayor-unveils-15-minute-city-plan-in-re-election-campaign> (accessed 23 March 2020). Mayor of London, *Walking action plan: Making London the world's most walkable city* (London: Transport for London, 2018): <http://content.tfl.gov.uk/mts-walking-action-plan.pdf> (accessed 23 March 2020).

<sup>53</sup> . T. Litman, *Autonomous Vehicle Implementation Predictions* (Victoria, Canada: Victoria Transport Policy Institute, 2017), <https://www.vtppi.org/avip.pdf> (accessed 23 March 2020); C. Klöckner, C. Andreas, A. Nayum, and M. Mehmetoglu, "Positive and negative spillover effects from electric car purchase to car use", *Transportation Research Part D: Transport and Environment* 21 (2013), 32-38; D. Metz, "Developing policy for urban autonomous vehicles: Impact on congestion", *Urban Science* 2: 2 (2018), 33.



separate pavement space on narrow roads that carry an increased load of large vehicles. This will remain problematic for pedestrian safety however vehicles are powered.<sup>54</sup> There will need to be substantial shifts in planning and societal attitudes towards everyday travel before street spaces that are conducive to walking, and which do not marginalize pedestrians, become the norm. Only then can those who walk dominate urban space in the ways in which pedestrians did in the nineteenth century.

As I write (in March 2020) global, national and local mobility has almost stopped due to the restrictions imposed by almost all governments in response to the Covid-19 (coronavirus) pandemic. The future is uncertain and at present life feels fragile.<sup>55</sup> Transport infrastructures are shutting down and it is likely that not all transport-related businesses will survive. Assuming that at some point in the future mobility restrictions are lifted, perhaps the collective experiences of living under a state of global and local mobility lockdown may lead to some reappraisal of the ways in which we travel. There is, of course, a risk that the desire to return society to normal, and to boost economic activity, will lead to even greater mobility, and to the abandonment of greener transport initiatives in the desire to stimulate global economies. But there may also be a space in which it is possible to consider if we really do need to travel as much, and in the same ways, as in the past. There is already evidence that the travel restrictions have led to a reduction in urban air pollution and carbon emissions, and this could be a model for the future.<sup>56</sup> Such a window of opportunity needs to be

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<sup>54</sup> . DfT, *The Road Safety Statement 2019. A Lifetime of Road Safety* (London: DfT, 2019).

<sup>55</sup> . World Health Organization (WHO), *Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) Pandemic*: <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019> (accessed 23 March 2020).

<sup>56</sup> . M McGrath “Coronavirus: Air pollution and CO2 fall rapidly as virus spreads” BBC on-line, 19 March 19 2020: <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019> (accessed 23 March 2020); J. Watts and N. Kommenda, “Coronavirus pandemic leading to huge drop in air pollution”, *The Guardian* 23 March 2020 (accessed 24 March 2020).

seized by governments and by wider society if the future challenges of delivering low-impact transport systems that have long-term environmental sustainability are to be met.

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