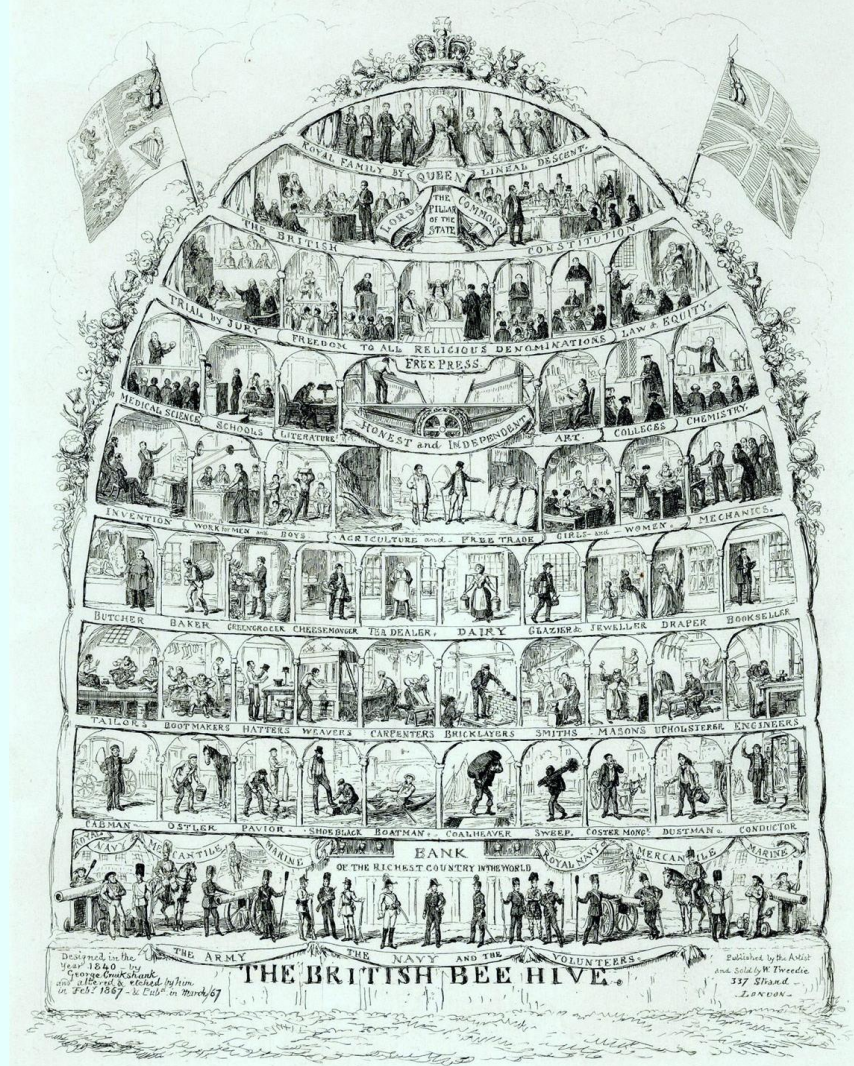


Class

LA14 – Lecture 7



‘The Most Class-ridden Society under the Sun’

(According to George Orwell)

1

Historical Overview

- Feudalism and Merchant Class
- The Industrial Revolution
- An Internalised System
- Class and Politics

2

An Obsession

- Class Indicators
- The Three Classes
- Common or Posh
- The Establishment

3

An Irrelevant Relic?

- A New Class System?
- Shift in Indicators and Perceptions
- Social Mobility
- 21st-Century Representations

1

Historical Overview

Feudalism and Merchant Class
The Industrial Revolution
An Internalised System
Class and Politics



Charles Dickens, the most important
social commentator of the Victorian era

Norman Feudalism



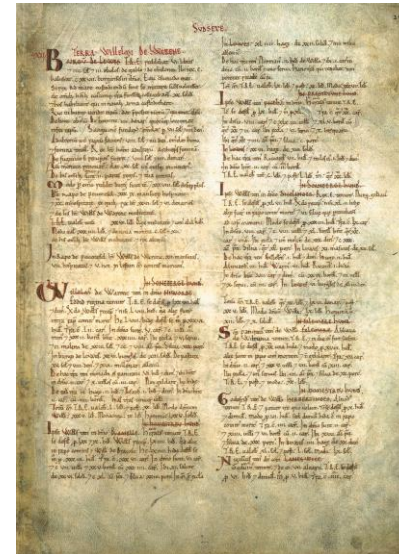
William I – King of England

- Kept direct control of 1/5th of the land
 - Distributed the rest to Norman lords
 - Only 5% still in English hands by 1086
- Normans = new English aristocracy



Introduced the Norman feudal system

- Birthright and primogeniture
- Rigid definition of social hierarchy



Domesday Book (1086)

Record of who held land, what resources were available from it, and its taxable value

Rise of the Merchant Class



After the Black Death (mid-14th century)

- Rapid increase of the population → Rural flight
- Economic revolution: development of urban economy based on barter
→ Emergence of the merchants as a new class



Gradual access to high society

- Education
- Enjoying and financing the arts
- Building churches, guildhalls, etc.

→ Political power in towns and cities



Boosted by international trade and later the colonies

Equality, Inequality... and Religion

Catholic Tradition

All men can be saved provided they lead good lives (and work for their salvation)

Principle of equality before God
(Egalitarian principle)

The rich are stigmatised:

'It's easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of God.' (Matthew)

Protestant (Calvinist) Doctrine

Westminster Confession 1646

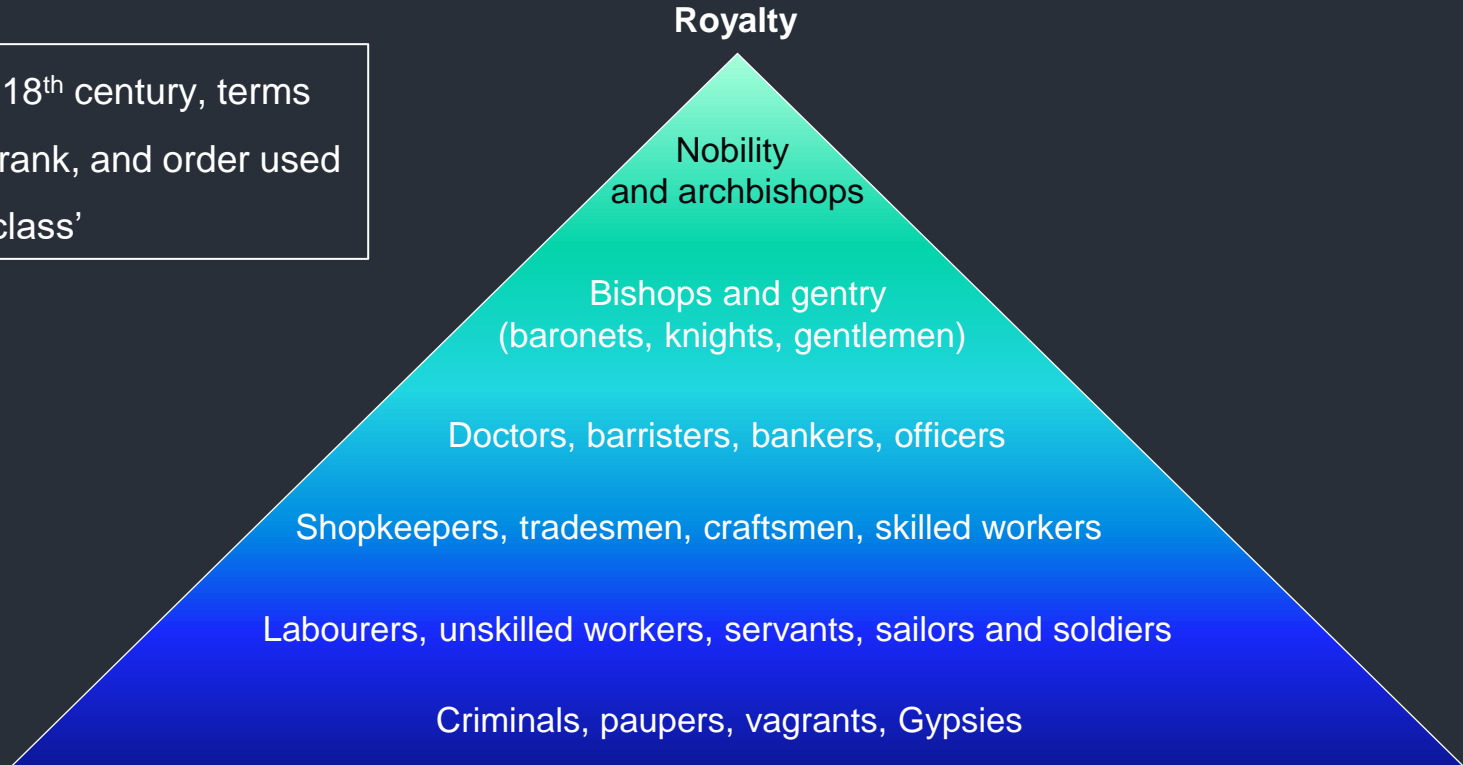
'By the decree of God, ... some men and angels are predestined unto everlasting life, and others foreordained to everlasting death. These angels and men, thus predestined and foreordained, are particularly and unchangeably designed; and their number is so certain and definite, that it cannot be either increased or diminished.'

(based on the teachings of Saint Paul)

Resignation about inequality
(The rich are glorified)

Social Structure before the Industrial Revolution

Prior to the 18th century, terms like estate, rank, and order used instead of 'class'



The Industrial Revolution

Emergence and expansion of the middle class

- Divided between
 - Financiers (London)
 - Industrialists (north)
- Fusion at the end of the 19th century

Diversification of the working class

- Limited opportunities → Rural flight
- Complex cultural subdivisions
 - Labourers, factory workers, etc.
 - British, Irish, and migrants



North and South by Elizabeth Gaskell (1855 – BBC, 2004)

(A story about the north/south divide
and the complexity of labour relations)

Expansion of the Middle Class



The Forsyte Saga by John Galsworthy (1906-21)
(BBC, 2002)

(A story about a 'new money' family, a few generations removed from their farmer ancestors)

Repeal of the Corn Laws (1846)

- Boom in international trade
- Aristocracy lost economic leadership (1880s)
 - Loss of political leadership

Emulating the aristocracy (end of 19th century)

- Buying peerages
- Buying lands off broke aristocrats
 - 'Old Money' vs 'New Money'

The Working Class



Emergence of urban industrial workers

- Navvies
- Factory workers
- Miners



Harrowing working conditions

- Dangerous, relentless, defined by a clock
- Child labour
- Gradual labour legislation
 - E.g.: Factory Act 1874 (10h / day)



Navvies digging a railway tunnel (1861)

Cotton mills and factory workers' houses



An Internalised Class System



A system based on privilege, with no legal barriers → Accepted class consciousness



Perceptions

- Upper class Innate moral superiority, 'good breeding' but disconnected
- Middle class Enterprising, self-reliant but cutthroat
- Working class Honest, hard-working but coarse



Deference and status → Pride + form of snobbery in each class

- Upper and working classes
 - Mutual (grudging) respect, but also fear
 - Looked down on the middle class
- Middle class
 - Enviied the upper class + looked down on the working class

One-Nation Conservatism



Benjamin Disraeli

Prime Minister (Feb-Dec 1868, 1874-1880)

Sybil, Or The Two Nations (1845)

Rich and poor are 'two nations who are as ignorant of each other's habits, thoughts, and feelings, as if they were dwellers in different zones, or inhabitants of different planets.'

One-Nation concept

- Societies exist and develop organically
- Members have obligations towards each other
 - Paternalistic obligation of the privileged and wealthy to the poorer parts of society

Suffrage: A Matter of Land Ownership



Reform Act 1832

- Broader property qualifications → Electorate \approx 5% of the population
- Excluded women (voter = 'male person')



Reform Act 1867

- All male householders → Included part of the urban working class
- Electorate \approx 9% of the population



Reform Act 1884

- Broader property qualifications → Applied to 60% of men
- Electorate \approx 18% of the population



Representation of the People Act 1918

→ All men over 21 + \approx 40% of women



Equal Franchise Act 1928

→ All men and women over 21

The Three Classes at the Turn of the Century



Upper class

Middle class

Working class

As portrayed in *Sherlock Holmes* (Granada, 1984-1994)

2

An Obsession

Class Indicators

The Three Classes

Common or Posh

The Establishment



A black comedy about a man murdering the eight people ahead of him in the line of succession because his mother was disowned by her aristocratic family for marrying out of her social class.

The Class Sketch (1966)



Social Classes in the 20th Century



Upper Class

→ Aristocracy

- Inherited wealth, titles, and privilege
- Might in fact have little money!



Middle Class

- Upper Middle Class
- Middle Middle Class
- Lower Middle Class









Working Class

→ Blue-collar jobs

Class Indicators – A Cultural Notion

Not so much about income, more about:

- | | |
|--|---|
|  Occupation <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Manual (blue-collar)• Non-manual (white-collar) + your father's occupation |  Education <ul style="list-style-type: none">• State school• Private school (including public school) |
|  Type of housing and location |  Accent, elocution, and vocabulary |
|  Shopping and eating habits, hobbies... |  Manners and 'good breeding' |

Accents and Elocution

🎩 Regional accents traditionally associated with lack of education

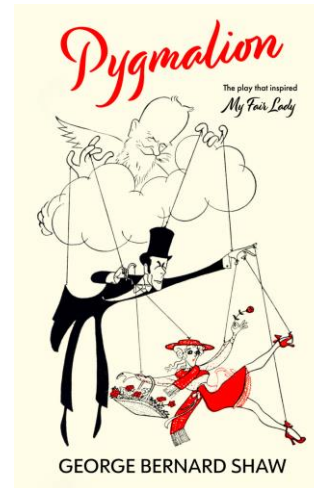
→ Working-class marker

🎩 Obsession with elocution and vocabulary

→ Received Pronunciation (RP)

= Upward social mobility

🎩 Class consciousness remains today



Pygmalion (1913)

A critique of class, entitlement, and social prejudice in Britain

The Upper Class

- 🎩 Still own more than 50% of rural land
- 🎩 Privately educated + RP accent
- 🎩 Understated lifestyle
 - Low-comfort and unfashionable
 - Traditional clothing, artwork, etc.
 - Flaunting money/privilege is vulgar
- 🎩 A closed circle : 'money does not buy class'



Lyme Park, a 'great house' in Cheshire



The Queen in the countryside

The Middle Class



An upper-middle-class house in Holland Park (London)

An middle-middle-class house



Upper middle class

- Professions (surgeon, judge, executive...)
- May have upper-class connections
- Private education + RP
 - As 'far' as any 'ordinary' person can go

Middle middle class

- Private or state education + acquired RP
- Teachers, engineers, civil servants...

Lower middle class

- Office workers
- State education + mild regional accents

The Working Class

Traditional occupations

- Miners
- Factory workers

Other occupations

- Tradespeople: electricians, plumbers...
- Call centres

State education + regional accents



Stereotype of the 'white van man'
(Independent tradesperson)

Being 'Common' or 'Posh'



Common (used to show disapproval)

'He's a bit common but we'll invite him anyway.'

→ Someone showing a lack of taste, education, and good manners



Posh (informal)

'They live in a posh part of town.'

'She has a posh accent.'

'They're posh.'

→ Someone who belongs to or behaves as if they belong to the upper classes

The Establishment



A members' club in London

A 1968 book teaching you
how to identify ties



🎩 'The whole matrix of official and social relations within which power is exercised' (Henry Fairlie)

- Not based on formal or legal arrangements
- People who mix in the same circles
 - Socially exercised influence

🎩 Common background

- Upper class or upper middle class
- Public schools + Oxbridge
- RP
 - 'Old boy' network / School-tie culture

🎩 In favour of the *status quo*

3

An Irrelevant Relic?

A New Class System?
Shift in Indicators and Perceptions
Social Mobility
21st-Century Representations



The Upper-class Twit of the Year

One of Monty Python's most
famous sketches (1971)

NRS Social Grades

- 📄 Developed in the late 1950s
→ Easier to analyse demography
- 📄 Based on occupation
(Rather than wealth or property ownership)
- 📄 Traditionally used by statisticians,
sociologists, and pollsters
- 📄 Widely known by the population
... But not meant to analyse class!

A	Upper Middle Class	Senior professional Senior managerial
B	Middle Class	Professional Administrative
C1	Lower Middle Class	Clerks Shop-workers
C2	Skilled Working Class	Tradespeople (Electrician, Plumber...)
D	Working Class	Semi-skilled workers Unskilled workers
E	Non-waged	Unemployed

Classification developed by
the National Readership Survey

The End of the Traditional Class Divide?



Post-war mobility


- Gradual evolution of work
- Meritocracy supported by the Welfare State
 - Blurred the line between some classes





Victorian classification vs modern British society

- The UK 'should become a classless society' – John Major, 1990
- 'We are all middle class now' – John Prescott (Labour's deputy leader), 1997
- 'The class war is over' – Tony Blair, 1999

National Statistics Socio-economic Classification

 Official socio-economic classification as set by the Office for National Statistics (ONS)

 First used in the 2001 census

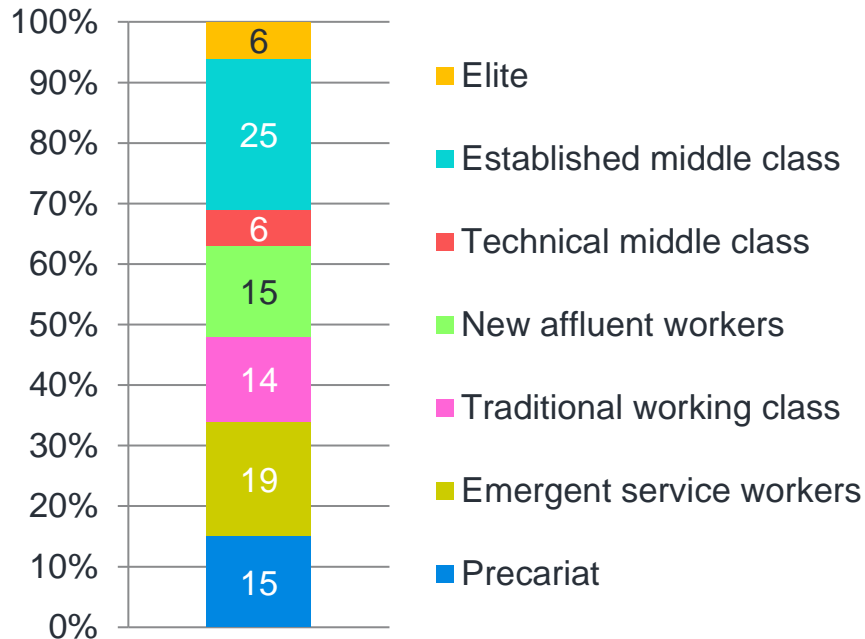
 Regularly updated to match social evolution

 Not used by the population

NS-SEC	OUR 2022 REPORT	THIS YEAR'S REPORT	EXAMPLE OCCUPATIONS
1	Professional and managerial	Higher professional including higher managerial, administrative and professional	Chief executive officer of large firm, doctor, clergy, engineer, senior army officer
2		Lower professional including lower managerial, administrative and professional	Teacher, nurse, office manager, journalist, web designer
3	Intermediate¹³	Intermediate including intermediate occupations, small employers and freelance workers	Clerical worker, driving instructor, graphic designer, IT engineer, shopkeeper, hotel manager, taxi driver, roofer
4			
5	Working class	Higher working class including lower supervisory, technical and semi-routine workers	Foreman, mechanic, electrician, train driver, printer, shop assistant, traffic warden, housekeeper, farmworker
6			
7		Lower working class and workless families	Cleaner, porter, waiter, labourer, refuse collector, bricklayer
8			

The NS-SEC in 2023

Great British Class Survey (2013)



Take the test and see which British class you belong to!

https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/special/2013/newsspec_5093/index.stm


🧠 Not 3 but 7 classes


🧠 Measured according to 3 capitals reported

- Economic
- Cultural
- Social

🧠 Takes more complex factors into account than the traditional system


Social Classes Today...

 Upper Class (1%) → Aristocracy

 Middle Class (60%)

- Upper Middle Class
- Middle Middle Class
- Lower Middle Class

 Working Class (30%) → Blue-collar jobs + low-paid jobs in the service sector

 'Underclass' (9%)

- Since the 1980s
- People facing persistent poverty, unemployment, and social exclusion
- The homeless, etc.

The Great British Class Test

The 'Where Do You Shop' Test



The Great British Class Test

The 'Where Do You Holiday' Test



Blackpool (UK)



Mykonos (Greece)

➡ Common

The Great British Class Test

The 'Where Do You Holiday' Test



Brancaster (UK)



Posh



Tuscany (Italy)

Do You Understand the British Class System?



David Beckham
Footballer



Adele
Singer-songwriter



Rishi Sunak
Former Prime Minister

A Shift in Traditional Indicators



Unreliable indicators

- Economic situation and material possessions
- Culture: more widely-shared forms spanning different social groups



Evolution of accents (especially among younger generations)

- | | | |
|-----------|---|--|
| • RP | → | Standard southern British English (SSBE) |
| • Cockney | → | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Estuary English• Multicultural London English |

The Queen's Accent



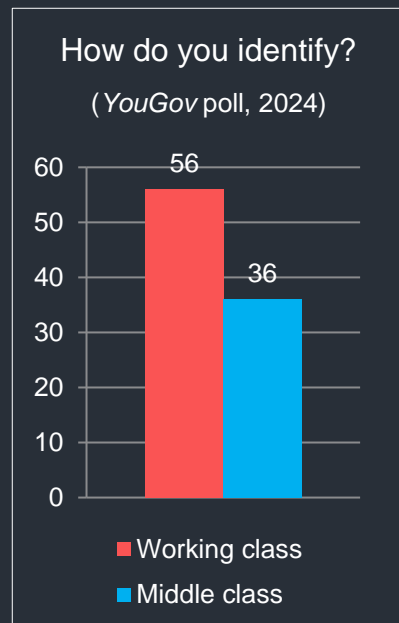
The Queen's Christmas broadcast
1957



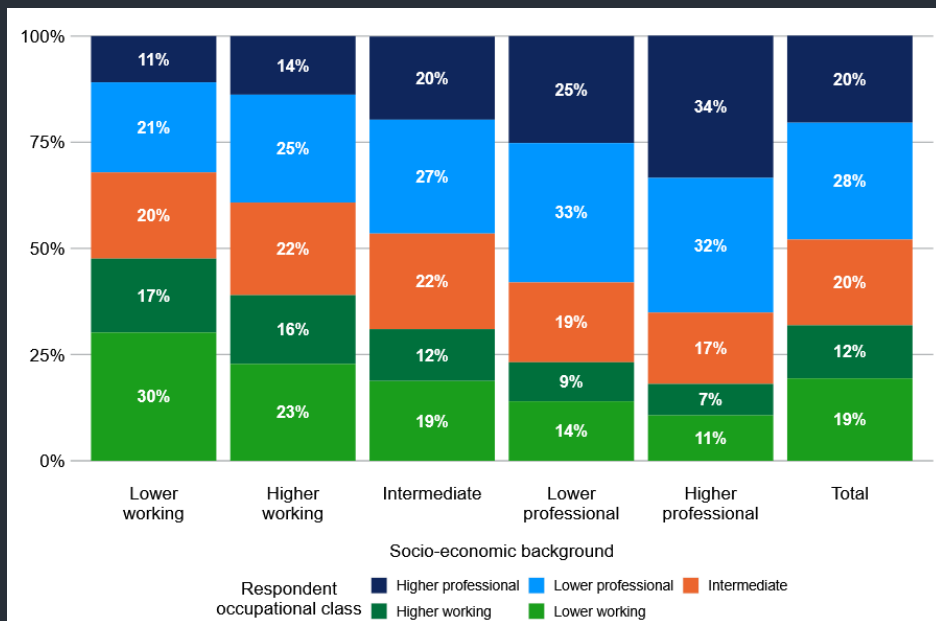
The Queen's Christmas broadcast
2015

A Shift in Perceptions

- 🕒 Constant points
 - Aristocracy
 - Establishment (although its composition varies)
- 🕒 End of traditional class politics
 - Labour = working-class interests
 - Tories = middle-class interests
- 🕒 Class consciousness and economic position
 - Older generations hold on to the cultural definition of class
 - Younger generations tend to associate class with income

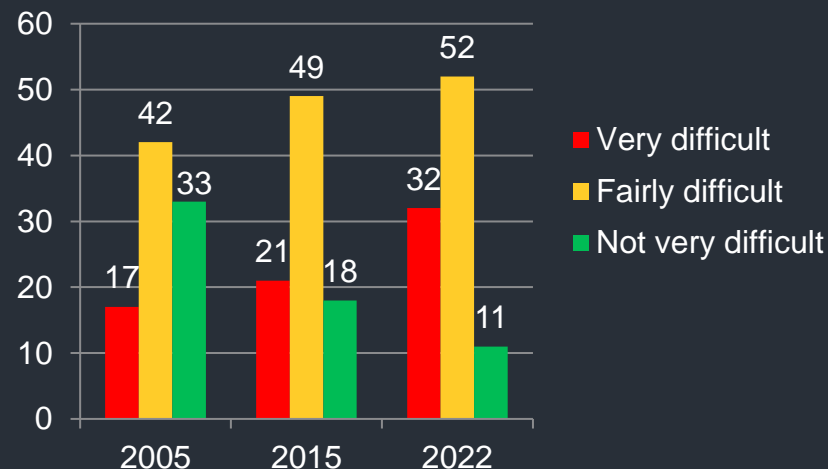


Social Mobility



Occupational class position of people aged 25-64
by highest level of parental occupational class

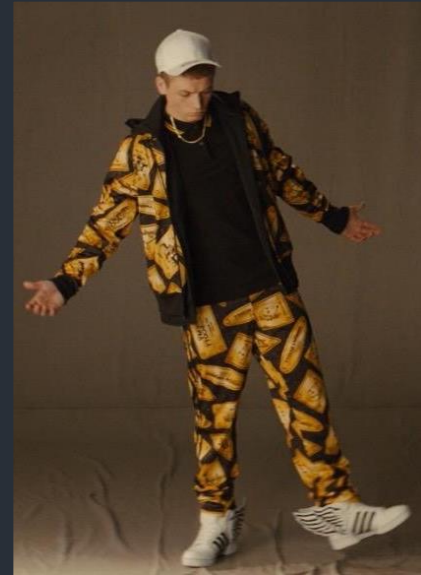
(Social Mobility Commission report, 2022)



‘How difficult would you say it is for people
to move from one class to another?’

(British Social Attitudes survey, 2023)

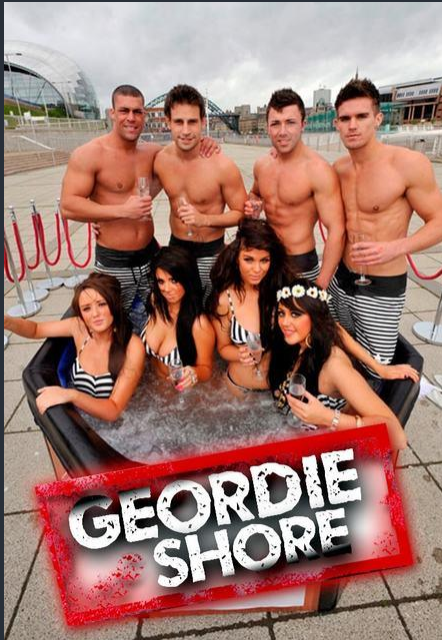
21st-Century Stereotypes



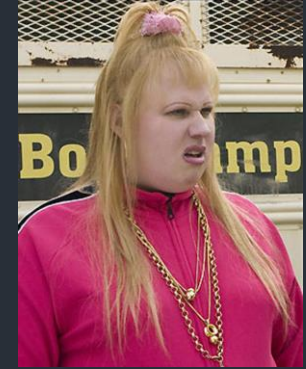
 The gentleman and the 'chav' in *Kingsman* (2014)

 'Manners maketh man'

Representing the Working Class in the 21st Century



- Reality TV
- The 'Essex Girl'



Little Britain
(2003-2007)



Socially accepted marginalisation and stereotyping of the working class?

Representing the Middle Class in the 21st Century



The Dursleys in *Harry Potter*

Representing the Upper Class in the 21st Century

Downton Abbey (2010-2015)

A problematic (re)vision of the past?



Thanks!

Any questions?



An Inspector Calls

(JB Priestley, 1944 – BBC adaptation, 2015)

Harsh criticism of the hypocrisies of a hermetic class system...