

Research Paper 29

**Neighbourhood Change in the North Laine,
Brighton: a case of the marginal gentrifier?**

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Introduction

The study of neighbourhood change has been dominated in recent years by the gentrification debate. In large part this debate has focused on identifying the cause (or causes) of the gentrification process, and neighbourhood studies have thus been analysed in terms of the insights they give to this ongoing debate. This study of the North Laine area of Brighton aims to assess the extent to which the area could be called 'gentrified', primarily through uncovering the experiences of the residents over the last twenty years. The experience of these residents (both long-term residents and the 'gentrifiers' themselves) suggests that in many ways, gentrification needs to be thought of more as a chaotic concept, in which the role of 'marginal gentrifiers' is especially important.

Gentrification in theoretical context

The process called 'gentrification' is often thought of (rather simplistically) as a movement of the middle classes back to the city centre, when in fact it is not so much a return, but more of a reworking of the nature of central city neighbourhoods in response to new class dynamics and new investment opportunities. Warde (1991: 225) constructs a more comprehensive "definition of the criteria for *identifying* gentrification". The four criteria contained within this definition are; i) the displacement of those of a lower social status by those of a higher social status moving back to city centres, ii) an enhancement of the physical built environment, exhibiting common distinguishing features based on 'good taste' and historicism, iii) commonalities in the lifestyles and consumer preferences of the incoming residents, and iv) a change in property values, representing opportunities for profit for developers, builders and other speculators. The gentrification literature often tends to stress the conflicting nature of the views of pre-existing residents and those who gentrify. Many studies have identified a clear dichotomy in these groups' respective articulation of neighbourhood images. In addition, gentrifiers are characterised as a homogeneous and collective group. It is hoped that the study of such issues will contribute to the understanding of the process of gentrification, particularly the relevancy of the notion of the marginal gentrifier. In light of this, this study aims to investigate neighbourhood change by: i) tracing the changes that have occurred in the North Laine neighbourhood over the last two decades and assessing the extent to which these changes signify a gentrification of the area, ii) unravelling the different ways that a range of residents have experienced this change, and how they 'imagine' the area as it is today, and iii) examining the assumption that gentrifiers form a distinct and homogeneous group.

Complexity and the marginal gentrifier

Discussion on the causes of gentrification has become a dualistic debate between those advocating production or economic arguments on one side (e.g. Smith 1979, 1992), and those suggesting consumption or cultural explanations on the other (e.g. Hamnett 1991, 1992). In contrast to both of these approaches, other writers (Beauregard 1986, Rose 1984, Clark 1992) have argued for an understanding of gentrification that rejects the either/or approach characterising this dichotomous debate, focusing instead on its chaotic nature. Those that view gentrification as a chaotic concept draw upon the notion of the marginal gentrifier as an important element in the chaos. For example, Rose (1984: 62,63) argued that "a multiplicity of processes, rather than a single causal process, produce changes in the occupation of inner-city neighbourhoods from lower to higher income residents", and that gentrifiers gentrify "substantially because of the

difficulties... of carrying on their particular living arrangements in conventional suburbs". Groups not conforming to the norms of suburban household structure are excluded both by design and attitudes, from the suburbs (whether they be gay, single parents, or unrelated people living together). These people can be considered as marginal gentrifiers - gentrifying not so much through 'lifestyle choice' but because of need - for example, for women, many gentrified neighbourhoods "facilitate access to community services, enable shared use of facilities, provide an efficient and non-isolating environment for reproductive work, and enhance opportunities... to develop locally based friendship networks and a supportive environment" (Rose 1984: 64). Rose's research (like most gentrification studies) is based in a major metropolitan area, Montreal. How compatible then, is this study of the North Laine in Brighton, with the existing literature?

'Provincial' gentrification

Brighton is not considered a major part of the British urban system, with a population of 143,582 (1991 Census) or around 250,000 if the adjoining conurbations of Hove, Portslade, and Shoreham are included. Even so, Brighton clearly represents a provincial town. Although studies of gentrification are pre-dominantly based in major metropolitan areas, there is a growing body of work looking at the phenomena in provincial regions. For example, Williams (1984) notes that the gentrification process has been observed in Oxford, Reading, Bath, Canterbury, and Norwich, whilst Giggs' and Whynes' (1988) study of homelessness in Nottingham, suggests that gentrification has been a feature. More recently, Cameron (1992) has traced the gentrification of the waterfront in Newcastle¹. In addition, those studies that are located in large cities usually focus on (sometimes quite small) neighbourhoods (Ley 1986), and the gentrification process has been shown to create very distinct neighbourhood identities². Hence, this study of a neighbourhood in a provincial town builds upon an existing literature. However, large metropolitan areas have remained the focus of the gentrification debate, largely because the process of gentrification is often understood in the context of a growth in high level service sector jobs, concentrated in these urban areas. The growth of jobs in legal, financial and professional sectors has, it has been argued, created a pool of potential gentrifiers, from which a minority (although this is a significant minority) choose to locate in central areas, often close to their place of work (for example Ley 1986, Sassen 1991). Brighton itself is comparatively poor, given its position within the largely affluent South East. Barrow and Hall (1995) note that not only is the unemployment rate above the average for the South East, but it also above that for the country as a whole.

They also record the 'post-industrial' structure of the labour market in Brighton, where service sector employment dominates, and very little employment is provided by manufacturing. The role of the (distinct) Brighton economy will therefore be considered as an explanatory factor in the extent to which the North Laine can be considered gentrified.

Methods and structure of the research

A number of different methods and a number of sources of information are used within this study in order to achieve a narrative (or narratives) of neighbourhood change in the North Laine. The major source of information derives from informal interviews with a number of North Laine residents³. Whilst it is important to realise that the views expressed in these intensive interviews may not be representative, it is also important to remember that no individuals are 'representative' (Sayer 1992), and that "we must avoid the absurd dogma that no study of

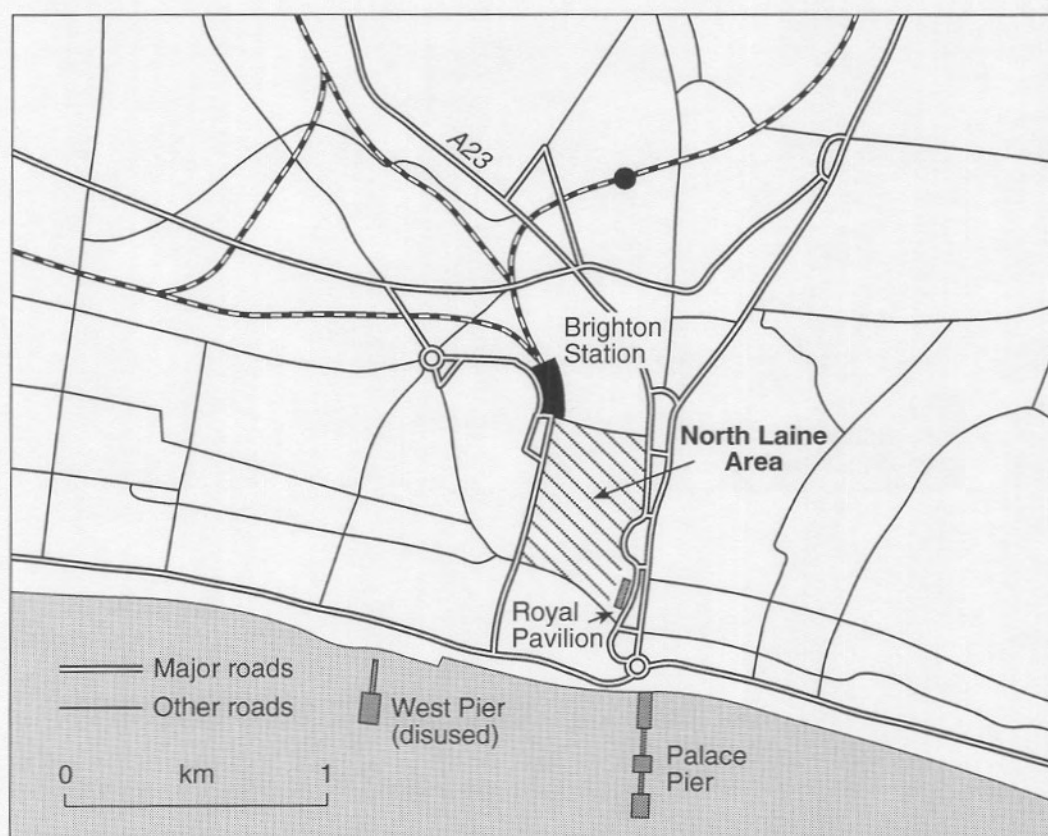


Figure 1. Location of the North Laine, Brighton

individuals... is of interest except as a representation of some larger entity" (Sayer, 1992: 249). For others, "it is this very subjectivity that gives ethnography its reliability... [ethnographers] are involved in the struggle to produce inter-subjective truths, to understand why so many versions of events are produced and recited" (Cook & Crang, 1994: 10). Therefore it is not possible to draw absolute, totalising conclusions from the interviews, but rather they can be seen as a way of understanding how different individuals understand change in their neighbourhood, and the different ways in which they react to this. A number of themes are traced in the interviews, in an attempt to uncover the human accounts and stories of change, and also to ascertain if the North Laine is perceived, or 'imagined' in different ways by different people, and how these different views are drawn along age, class, gender and length of residency lines.

The paper is organised as follows. The next section provides a short introduction to the study area, the North Laine. I then move on to describe the general process of renewal in the North Laine, complemented by the recollections of some of the residents. The next section analyses some statistical indicators of renewal, taken from census data, which is followed by a look in greater detail at one of the main activities in the North Laine - shopping. This not only involves looking quantitatively at the change in shopping facilities, but also at the residents impression and use of these shops. Building on this, the following section develops the theme of identity - both of the area, and of its varied residents. The contested nature of the neighbourhood's identity is discussed, and I focus particularly on how recent gentrifiers 'imagine' the area. Finally, the conclusion attempts to draw these themes together, linking analysis both to the broader

economic situation of Brighton, and the existing gentrification literature, particularly that literature concerning marginal gentrifiers.

The North Laine, Brighton

The North Laine is situated in the centre of Brighton, occupying a block of land to the south and east of the main station, and to the east of the main shopping street, Western Road (Figure 1). The North Laine comprises around 1,800 people in just over 1,000 households (1991 Census). Four of the streets (Bond Street, Gardner Street, Kensington Gardens, and Sydney Street) are predominantly shopping streets. The eastern end of the area has a number of warehouses, and small workshops and industrial units are dotted around the whole area (Figure 2).

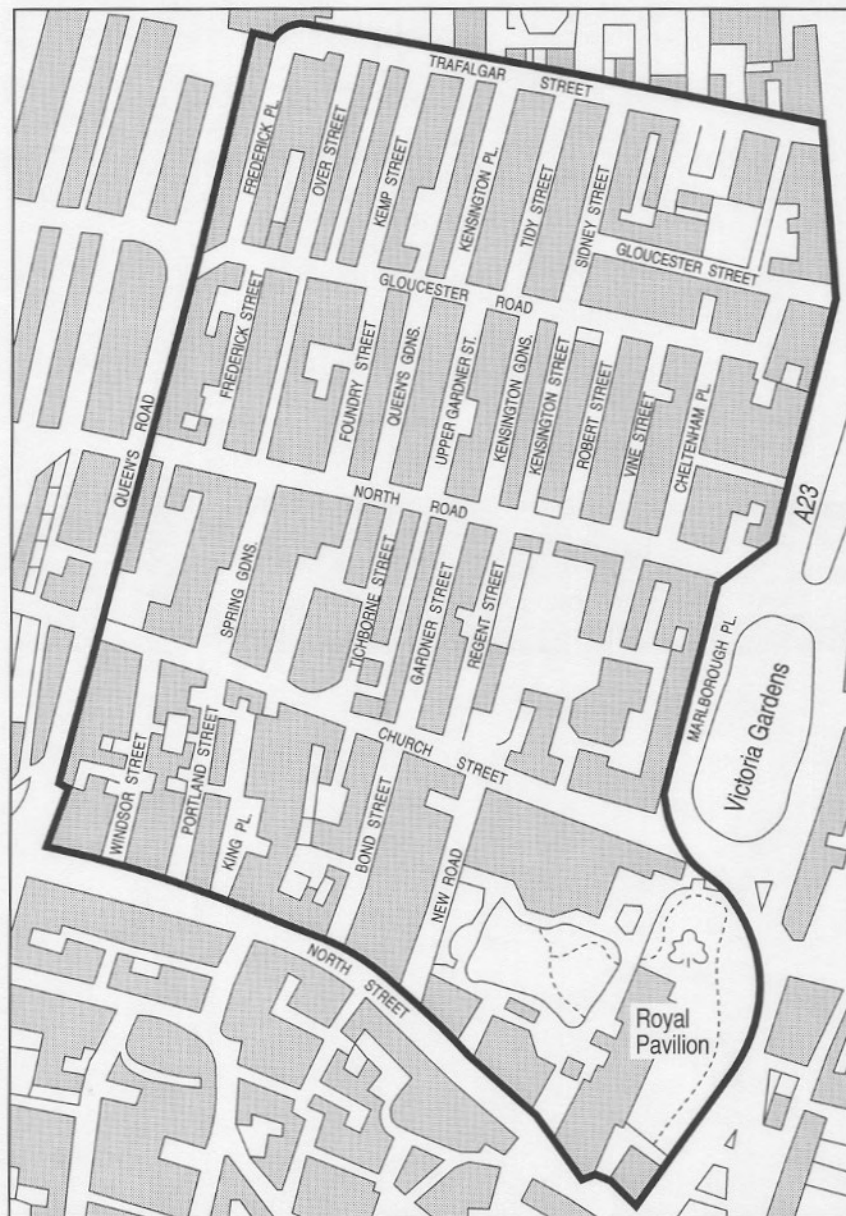


Figure 2. The North Laine area (outlined in black)

The term 'Laine' is an eighteenth century word, referring to a large field. The North Laine was one of five open arable fields in Brighton. In the late 1780s, the area was subdivided into paul-pieces, strips of land running North to South. The land was used for agricultural purposes, and notably there were a number of market gardens (hence Kensington Gardens, Spring Gardens and Queen's Gardens). As land pressure grew in Brighton, the North Laine began to be built on, from the 1780s, although much of the construction did not occur until the 1840s, coinciding with the construction of the railway (Carder 1990). Street construction happened gradually, and plots were sold off one at a time to be built upon. Therefore the grid-like street pattern that exists today reflects the paul-pieces of the 1700s. Brighton Borough Council's 1994 study of the area suggested "the growth of North Laine was not a product of fashion, but of utility. Its purpose was to serve the rest of fashionable Brighton with its small industries - foundries, blacksmiths, and other crafts, and also provide homes for the workforce of the growing town" (p.8). The roots of the area are therefore predominantly working class, and the type of housing reflects this. The streets of the North Laine are characterised by rows of small terraced houses, with no front gardens and only small 'yards' at the back. Today the housing stock remains very much the same - little new housing has been built. There is still also a mix of small industries, workshops and warehouses, and there are also a number of large offices.

However, the image of the area has changed dramatically. As previously suggested, the area was originally built to serve the fashionable areas of Brighton, whereas now - "The Laines (sic) are Brighton incarnate: cool, corny and chic" (from an article in *Impact*, April 1996, a local listings magazine). This change in image is even more dramatic when it is considered that only twenty years ago the whole area was awaiting demolition under the 1930 Slum Clearance Act, and large parts of the neighbourhood were considered derelict. In the space of a few years in the 1970s the area went from awaiting demolition to being designated as a Conservation Area.

'From Slum to Victoriana'

The purpose of the 1930 Slum Clearance Act (as reinforced by the 1949 Urban Renewal Programme) was to clear small, compact, old housing in central areas, and in its place construct new, modern living spaces, typified by the high-rise block. The North Laine was one such area earmarked for demolition. To this end, in post-war Brighton, houses just to the north of Trafalgar Street were demolished, and Theobald House (a high rise of some twenty storeys) was built on the site. Likewise, to the east of the North Laine, just beyond Grand Parade, houses were demolished and replaced by seven tower blocks, each more than ten storeys high. The North Laine itself was spared from demolition only because the Council had neither the time nor the resources to do so, until, by the 1970s, a new approach was taken towards the area. The Council, quite literally 'never got round to it'. However, in the intervening period the policy of the Council was to gradually empty the area. It was able to do this partly by not renting out its own property in the area (around 12.5% of the housing in St. Nicholas ward⁴, 1971 census). In addition, closure orders were placed on other properties that the Council considered unfit for living in. Families displaced by these policies were rehoused in the newly built suburb of Whitehawk, now one of the most deprived areas of Brighton.

In 1971 however, Brighton was the site of a housing crisis, evidenced by the re-emergence of the squatting movement in the town. As a result, existing but unused housing resources came under scrutiny (Wright 1994). This eventually led to a relaxing of the Council's policy towards the North Laine, as closing orders were lifted, and gradually people began to move into the area.

However, this was a slow process, as one other threat still hung over the area - a proposed elevated spine road from Preston Circus to Church Street would cut through the heart of the North Laine. This proposal, known as the Wilson Report, was finally rejected in March 1973 by the Council. It appears that from this time on people began to re-populate the area, and new businesses started, typified by the opening of the first Body Shop retail outlet in Kensington Gardens in 1976 (now an internationally successful chain of cosmetic shops).

Four of the residents interviewed lived in the area whilst the majority of these changes were taking place. The accounts given by these residents of the last twenty years, generally support the picture painted above. All spoke of houses next door to them, or down the street that had undergone renovation as new people had purchased them and moved in. The improvement in the physical appearance of the neighbourhood is generally ascribed to greater levels of owner-occupancy. Three of these participants moved in in the late 1970s, when it is probable the area had started to recover from its attempted emptying. They all recall that the area was as vibrant then as it is today, and that the late 1970s was a period of much optimism and activity in the area. Bill⁵, a retired builder, who moved into the North Laine from a London suburb in 1977, recalls:

it was a very exciting time... there were lots of young people who... had some sort of entrepreneurial skills, and they were doing all sorts of things, it was wonderful... it was this group of young people, they saw the potential for turning some of these bug hutches... into something decent. Some of the things they did in the houses was amazing, and not all of them structural either.

The impression given here is of the local community acting on their own impulses, and through their own 'sweat-equity' to provide themselves with cheap affordable housing. This optimistic view was not shared by all residents of Brighton, however. Diane (an office worker, married with two children) moved into the area in 1978. At the time she knew very little about the area, only what her family (from Portslade) had told her. They disapproved of her moving into the area, as Diana explains:

rumour had it that the police never came round here singularly, they always came in pairs, and my aunt remembered the area from buying fish and chips... in Gloucester Road... they would eat their chips on the corner, and it was quite a thrill to poke their head round the corner into the so-called red light district of the North Laine, but they'd never actually venture into it, because it had that kind of reputation.

Therefore, although in the eyes of some the area was the subject of revitalisation, enthusiasm and vibrancy, older, more negative views of the area's identity persisted. For others, the process of change is less clear, and not so defined. Arthur and Margaret are both in their 70s. Arthur, now retired, ran a greengrocers in Kensington Gardens for 44 years, and his wife Margaret has lived in their present house for 66 years - since she was 9. When I asked them about the period leading up to the 1970s, they didn't recall the area feeling dead or depressed, but they do remember friends who were forced to move to Whitehawk and Moulscroomb. It was difficult for them to separate their experience of change over the last twenty years, from their experience of the area throughout the whole of their lives. This is a pertinent reminder that although studies are often framed within a defined period of time, this is not how peoples lives, experiences and perceptions are shaped and formed.

'The North Laine 'Conversation' Area'

In 1977, parts of the North Laine were designated a Conservation Area. It is difficult to assess where the impetus for this came from. For instance, Department of Environment guidelines

state "Every local planning authority shall from time to time determine which parts of their areas are areas of special architectural or historic interest, the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance, and shall designate such areas as conservation areas" (Article 277 (1), Town and Country Planning Act 1971). The predominant view amongst Council officials is that the then Chief Planning Officer of Brighton, Kenneth Fines, was the impetus behind the proposal to designate the North Laine as a Conservation Area, simply as a matter of carrying out his duty, under article 277 (1). Indeed, in the mid-seventies he stated "the Council should be concerned with preserving the best of Brighton's Victorian heritage... The North Laine area... has a distinctive intimate character..." (in North Laine Runner, December 1992). On the other hand, some residents argue that it was as a result of their pressure, that the Council began to consider giving North Laine conservation status. Whatever the impetus, the areas designation as a Conservation Area underlines its transformation, and indeed may have played a part in its continued 'improvement'. Jager (1986) has traced a similar pattern in Melbourne, where "slums become Victoriana" (p. 79).

Figure 3. 'Welcome to the North Laines conversation area'

Figure 4. Converted industrial units, Foundry Street

The (in)famous sign welcoming people to the North Laine 'conversation' area (Figure 3) may well be an irreverent comment on the North Laine as a socialising, gossiping, word of mouth area, as opposed to a neighbourhood of worthy architectural importance, but for some residents the Conservation Area status granted to the North Laine is an important part of the area's attraction (evidenced by a recent suggestion from some members of the Community Association to campaign for the removal of this sign). Other studies have suggested that conservation designation is seen as an endorsement or encouragement of the gentrification process (i.e. Ley 1986), and is often actively sought by gentrifiers as a seal of approval of 'their' neighbourhood. Both Jager (1986) and Zukin (1982) also note the importance of the aesthetics of old, preserved neighbourhoods as an attraction for gentrifiers. Around half of those interviewed in this study moved into the area before conservation status was granted. Of these, only one (Bill) mentioned the Conservation Area when quizzed on what he found attractive in the area. Of the most recent in-movers, there was a general agreement that the neighbourhood as a whole was worthy of architectural preservation. Of all the participants only Jenny (a single, middle-aged woman employed in administration) articulated that the Conservation status was particularly important to her residency. For the other residents, the area's designation was viewed only in practical terms, as a means of enabling normal residents to protect themselves (and their houses) from the whims and fancies of whoever happened to control the local Council. They felt it gave them greater power. One notable exception was Arthur. For him, Conservation area status amounts to interference:

a house is a man's castle, he should be able to do what he wants with it... I don't want someone telling me what colour I can have my house, or what type of windows I should have. Maybe young people like everything to be the same, but I don't.

This anecdotal evidence suggests that many residents have perceived a significant change (indeed mostly an improvement) in their neighbourhood. In order to gain a broader idea of the changes that have occurred, it is necessary to consider some statistical indicators for the whole neighbourhood, and it is to this that our attention is now turned.

Indicators of change⁶

Tables 1 and 2 compare indicators that are available for all three census years (1971, 1981 and 1991). In terms of age structure (Table 1), the ward of St. Nicholas in 1971 displayed a very similar pattern to Brighton generally. However, over the twenty year period to 1991, a number of significant changes appear to take place.

Firstly there is a marked decline in the percentage of 0 - 15 year olds. Secondly, there is a considerable increase in the 25 - 34 age group, and finally, there is a slight increase in the over 65 age group (although judging by the 1981 figure this may be more to do with the change in census area). The results of these changes are that by 1991, the North Laine is significantly underrepresented by 0 - 15 year olds, but has a significantly higher proportion both of 25 - 34 year olds⁷ and those over 55, compared to the rest of Brighton. The importance of the 25 - 34 age group in the process of gentrification has been noted in numerous case studies. A concentration of this age group is often used to define gentrified areas (for example, both Borgegård & Murdie (1993) and Ley (1986) found that gentrified areas had seen a increase in the concentration of this age group). However, the increase in the over 55's runs against the prevailing evidence of gentrification, which usually suggests the elderly are displaced (Borgegård & Murdie 1993). Similarly, a decline in the number of children is also common to many gentrified areas. It has

Table 1. Age structure (by percent): St Nicholas ward, North Laine, and Brighton Borough, 1971, 1981 and 1991

	1971 ward	(B'ton)	1981 ward	(B'ton)	1991 N.L.	(B'ton)
0 - 15*	13.6	(19.3)	9.2	(17.5)	6.3	(16.6)
16 - 24	16.6	(14.9)	17.1	(13.5)	12.4	(13.1)
25 - 34	11.0	(10.5)	17.6	(14.0)	22.7	(17.3)
35 - 44	8.2	(10.1)	10.6	(10.8)	11.8	(13.6)
45 - 54	13.4	(12.0)	10.5	(10.8)	8.7	(10.5)
55 - 64	16.5	(13.8)	13.4	(12.4)	12.4	(9.9)
65+	20.4	(19.0)	21.2	(21.0)	25.7	(19.0)

*For 1971 the youngest age group is 0-14, followed by 15-24

Table 2. Tenure (by percent): St Nicholas ward, North Laine, and Brighton Borough, 1971, 1981 and 1991

	1971 ward	(B'ton)	1981 ward	(B'ton)	1991 N.L.	(B'ton)
Owner-occupier	26.9	(46.1)	42.0	(56.6)	46.4	(64.6)
Council	12.5	(19.7)	13.9	(20.6)	19.8	(15.9)
Rented	59.9	(33.6)	42.7	(22.9)	28.4	(17.0)
Housing assn.			1.0		5.4	(2.5)

Table 3. Employment status (by percent): St Nicholas ward, North Laine, and Brighton Borough, 1971 & 1981

	1971 ward	(B'ton)	1981 ward	(B'ton)
Total popn. economically active	52.9		56.3	
Males economically active	60.5		67.1	
Females economically active	39.5		45.7	
Of those economically active:				
Working	91.0	(94.3)	84.8	(89.5)
(percent of economically active males)	(90.4)	(94.1)	(80.5)	(87.4)
(percent of economically active females)	(92.1)	(94.6)	(91.0)	(92.7)
Seeking work	6.5	(4.3)	14.1	(9.4)
Sick	2.5		1.0	

been noted that many of those choosing to live in central areas do so because the 'unconventional' household structure within which they live, can find no suitable housing elsewhere (Rose 1984). These non-traditional household structures are typified by fewer and later marriages, fewer children, smaller families and a greater number of single households (particularly women).

Change in household tenure in the North Laine (Table 2) over the last two decades is characterised by a significant shift from private rented accommodation to owner-occupied accommodation. However, the present situation shows that in comparison to the rest of Brighton, the private rented sector is still important in the North Laine, as is (quasi-)public housing (both

Local Authority and Housing Association), and that owner-occupancy rates are still well below average. The importance of owner-occupiers compared to private renters in the gentrification process is the source of much debate. For example (Munt 1987) expressed the significance of increased owner-occupancy rates in the gentrification of Battersea, whereas Ley (1986: 529) argued "there is no support for the postulated relationship between revitalisation and owner-occupancy... in agreement with Logan's study of Melbourne that identified the role of renters in gentrifying areas".

Changes in employment status between 1971 and 1981 are shown in Table 3 (for the ward of St. Nicholas and Brighton Borough). Unfortunately, similar information is not available for 1991 for the North Laine. The increase in the proportion of those economically active is primarily a result of the decline in the non-working population (i.e. 0 - 15 age group) as suggested in Table 1. The employment figures show that the study area had more people out of work in 1971 than was the average for Brighton, and that in the decline in employment that followed, the area's unemployment position became even worse in comparison. In 1981, 14.1% of the economically active were seeking work, a very high figure to the town as a whole. Interestingly, over this time the level of female employment held up, both for the study area and the town, and in fact female employment rates remained higher for the town generally, compared to the study area. In a gentrified area, it would be expected that female participation in the workforce would be relatively high. This does not appear to be the case in the North Laine, although without any figures for female employment in 1991, it is hard to draw any substantive conclusions.

Finally, Tables 4 and 5 present information on the North Laine only, from the 1991 census. Figures on household size (Table 4) reflect the fact that houses in the North Laine are generally smaller than those found in the rest of Brighton. Significantly, however, there has been a 41%

Table 4. Household size (by percent): St Nicholas ward, North Laine, and Brighton Borough, 1991

No. of rooms	1	2	3	4	5	6	7+
North Laine	7.3	13.8	26.1	25.4	16.3	8.2	2.9
Brighton	4.8	8.1	15.9	23.9	22.5	15.5	9.3

Table 5. 10% sample, socio-economic group (by percent), North Laine and Brighton Borough, 1991

	N. Laine	Brighton
Managers and administrators	20.1	16.8
Professional occupations	18.6	10.6
Assistant Professional technical occupation	13.3	11.7
Clerical related occupation	9.3	16.3
Craft related occupations	10.7	11.9
Personal and professional service occupations	5.3	10.1
Sales occupations	9.3	7.7
Plant and machine operators	4.1	5.4
Other	9.3	9.5

increase in the number of households in the North Laine, since the 1981 census. As little new housing has been built, and as there is little scope for existing buildings to be sub-divided, this suggests that a large number of formerly vacant housing is now inhabited. Another possibility is the transformation of previously industrial units into residential units, as has happened in Foundry Street (Figure 4). This process has of course been central to the gentrification process in a number of cases, most notably the transformation of warehouses in London, and the loft conversion process in New York (see Zukin 1982).

The 10% sample by socio-economic group (Table 5) also provides one of the most convincing statistical pieces of information supporting the argument that gentrification has occurred in the North Laine. Although the percentage involved in white collar work is only slightly higher for the North Laine than for Brighton generally, 38.7% of workers in the North Laine are employed in management / administration or professional roles, compared to only 27.4% for Brighton. Managers and administrators, professional occupations, and assistant professional technical occupations, are all overly represented in the North Laine. A concentration of professional and managerial workers is perhaps the most common identifier for gentrification in the literature (i.e. Munt 1993, Rose 1987, Ley 1986⁸).

Despite the difficulties of using census information in this particular case, and despite the fact that there are other indicators it would be useful to compare, many indicators suggest that gentrification has occurred, whilst other indicators suggest that there are contradictions and complications within the changing nature of the study area. Other indicators reveal little about the area. However, information regarding the nature of employment, the changing age structure and the increase in the number of households provides fairly convincing evidence that some degree of gentrification has occurred.

'Welcome to Brighton's fabulous Bohemian quarter'

North Laine is probably the most interesting shopping area in the county with its Dickensian bustle and myriad small, specialist shops. We like to think of it as Brighton's *bohemian quarter*".

(excerpt from 'A brief guide to some of the more interesting shops in Brighton's North Laine', produced by the North Laine Traders Association).

Shops have always been a major part of life in the North Laine. The four major east - west roads all contain a number of shops, but four of the north - south roads (Bond Street, Gardner Street, Kensington Gardens, and Sydney Street) are dominated by shops. The gentrification literature stresses the importance of urban amenity as a attraction for middle class gentrifiers, and moreover, stresses that as gentrifiers move in, the range and type of amenities (such as shops) begins to reflect their needs, desires and tastes. With this in mind an extensive survey of the shops in existence over the last twenty years or so was carried out. Data was collected for three years, spanning a period of twenty-two years (1974, 1985, and 1996). Once collected, the shops were categorised into types of shop. This process involves some fairly arbitrary decisions. For example, an antique furniture dealer could be categorised as either an antique shop, or as a furniture (or homeware) shop. Problems of categorisation aside, the results of this survey (shown in table 6) does provide some very clear trends in the type of shop available to residents of the North Laine.

The most significant declines concern food shops, newsagents and hardware stores. Food shops (i.e. bakers, butchers, grocers) display the most dramatic decline, falling from 57 outlets

Table 6. Number of retail outlets (by type) in the North Laine, 1974, 1985 and 1996¹⁰

	1974	1985	1996
Clothes and Footwear	41	43	64
Hairdressers & Beauticians	10	12	21
Bookshops	8	11	10
Record and Music shops	3	8	16
Antiques (incl. second-hand)	28	41	35
Florists	5	3	5
Food and Drink (ie grocers)	57	26	15
Restaurants and Cafés	19	18	26
Take-aways	3	6	9
Gifts, Crafts, Textiles etc.	19	25	37
Jewellers	4	7	5
Electricals	17	14	13
Pubs	20	18	20
Charity shops	0	5	2
Newsagents, Post Office, Stationers	21	14	10
Hardware	19	15	6
Homeware (ie furnishings)	28	28	20
Sports	3	2	4
Games, Toys	2	0	4
Launderettes	1	1	0
Vacant	N/A ¹¹	35	67

in 1974 (making them the most common type of shop), to only 15 today. Undoubtedly this is due in part to the supermarket phenomenon that has affected all town centres. However, a number of food shops do remain, but rather than the traditional butchers or grocers, the area is dotted with delicatessens and specialist food shops (the cheese shop, and Yum-Yums oriental market for example). Significant increases are recorded for clothes shops, hairdressers, record (and music) shops, and gift/craft shops. Clothes shops have been consistently important in the make-up of North Laine shopping, but this has become increasingly so over the last ten years or so. The clothes shops tend to fall into one of two categories - either 'designer' shops selling the latest fashions from Armani, Gucci and Paul Smith, for example, or second hand stores selling designer, or 'retro' clothes at cheaper, but still 'fashionably high', prices. Similarly, many of the hairdressers to be found in the area are 'designer', rather than the traditional barbers. The number of record shops has grown phenomenally, partly due to the rise of cultural commodities in consumption patterns generally. However, once again, those record shops serve specialist markets.

A number deal in 'underground dance' music, and as well as selling records also sell their own lines in designer bags, jackets and T-shirts. Others specialise in vinyl, a format now largely ignored by mainstream music stores. From the wide (and increasing) range of craft and gift shops, shoppers can buy 'exquisite handmade glassware', contemporary Polish and Russian art, or Navajo jewellery. However, perhaps surprisingly, the most significant increase in the North Laine in recent years appears to be in vacant units. These accounted for the single highest 'use' in the 1996 survey. Many residents suggested that the number of vacant units was due largely to an increase in rent and taxes.

The number of antique shops, furniture and furnishings shops, and cafés and restaurants have remained at relatively consistent levels, and all these businesses represent an important element of North Laine trade. The antique businesses in the North Laine tend to differ from those found in 'The Lanes', in that they more often than not deal in furniture, rather than jewellery and ornaments. Many of the area's cafés provide outside seating (particularly in Gardner Street

which is closed to traffic on Saturdays), providing that al fresco experience (Figure 5). The North Laine then, provides a unique shopping experience in Brighton. The area is dominated by specialist shops, and displays many features that are to be expected in a gentrified area. However, the evidence is ambiguous. For instance, the number of vacant properties appears to be increasing. Additionally, the area suffers from an 'image' problem. A customer awareness survey carried out for the North Laine Traders Association in 1993 found that 75% of shoppers in Western Road had never heard of the North Laine. When told where it was, 90% said that they never shopped there, mostly because 'it's full of junk shops' (Figure 6). A concentrated effort by the NLTA and the Council followed, in an attempt to raise the profile of the area. A year later only 35% had not heard of the area, and the number actually shopping there rose from less than 10% to around 20%. The profile was raised through advertising (particularly in tourist information offices) but most visually through a number of finger posts "to demark the boundaries of the area" (NLTA: What can it do for you?). The clarifying of boundaries (see cover photo), and the creation of a collective image for the area (the North Laine nameplate, bearing a gold compass) appears to have increased both the knowledge and profitability of the area. However, a comparison of the pedestrian flow and Zone A¹¹ rates for the North Laine with Western Road and North Street indicate that the area has some way to go before matching their popularity (Table 7). However, this evidence does not necessarily deny the presence of gentrification. By its very nature gentrification is not a mass process - it involves a minority of the 'new middle class'. The partial marginalisation of the North Laine as a shopping area fits quite comfortably with the gentrifiers desire for alternative amenities, that do not reflect 'popular' taste.

Table 7. Pedestrian Flow rates and Zone A Rates, North Laine and the town centre compared

	Pedestrian Flow (people/week)	Zone A Rate (£ per sq. foot)
<i>North Laine</i>		
Bond Street	15,000-31,000	25-28
Gardner Street	13,000-28,000	20-24
Kensington Gardens	11,000-23,000	24
Sydney Street	10,000-20,000	14
Church Street	not available	10-14
North Road	not available	11-15
Gloucester Road	not available	13-15
Trafalgar Street	not available	10-15
<i>Town Centre</i>		
Western Road	57,000-115,000	100-140
North Street	29,000- 57,000	50-100

(Source: Zone A rates, Pedestrian flows and Vacancy rates, produced by North Laine Traders Association)

This survey clearly shows that the North Laine is important as a shopping area, and over the last twenty years the neighbourhood has seen a radical change in the shops available. The corner stores and butchers remembered with fondness by Arthur and Margaret have gone. The main shopping streets provide a dazzling array of goods, from vegetarian shoes to bonsai trees, but as Anna (a young, single, professional) remarked:

it's far easier to go out and buy a nice piece of art or an antique than it is to buy a pint of milk, or a cabbage.

Figure 5. The Dorset Arms, Gardner Street

Figure 6. Saturday street market, Upper Gardner Street

Attitudes towards the shopping facilities on offer varied greatly amongst the respondents. For Arthur and Margaret, the changes represent a loss in community spirit and have bred feelings of exclusion. This exclusion is not physical or even financial, but is best described as cultural. They remarked how the area was not for them anymore, how they hated the way it was now, how Margaret would not walk down Kensington Gardens anymore, the street where her husband ran a business for 44 years. Other working class residents expressed similar, but less forceful views. Diane, for example, argued:

they just don't seem to be very useful anymore, they're more novelty shops and gimmicky things now.

Most of the more middle class residents also thought that the area wasn't very good for day to day needs, but, nonetheless, they liked the shops for browsing in, for taking friends round, and when looking for gifts. The North Laine is a good place to wander, to absorb the atmosphere, to see people and be seen. However, for Derek, a recently retired businessman and also a fairly new resident, the area's shops provide more than somewhere to spend a bit of time:

if I want French bread I can buy it over the road, if I want nuts..., everything I want is here... I find shopping in North Laines convenient, it's realistic shopping, it's things you want, things you need for everyday living.

Identity and the North Laine

Alternative Brighton?

The evidence discussed above points to the conclusion that the North Laine is a unique part of Brighton, that has undergone massive change in the last twenty years. Much of this evidence suggests some level of gentrification has occurred in the area. Discussions with local estate agents have revealed that the North Laine is one of the most popular places to live in Brighton, and many commuters to London are choosing to do so. House prices in the area are generally higher than for neighbouring areas (such as West Hill, Queens Park and Hanover), although there is variation within the North Laine. In general terms, the eastern end of the neighbourhood is cheaper, although prices do vary from street to street, and even considerably within streets. This in part reflects the variation in condition of houses. Many properties are rented out (particularly to students) and a number of properties in the area are squats. This reflects another side of the North Laine, as the site for a number of 'alternative sub-cultures'. As mentioned, squatting remains a part of life in the North Laine and, additionally, a fair number of the town's homeless population sleep rough in the area. There is also a proliferation of graffiti, much of it in the distinct stencil style which frequently portrays a political message (Figure 7). More recently, two particular events have underlined the contested nature of the North Laine's identity. On the 14th of February 1996, an anti-car demonstration (Reclaim the streets) ended up in North Road. Around 300 protesters were involved in the demonstration which evolved into a party, involving fire eaters, a bouncy castle and a sound system. The event was forcibly halted by the police, and a number of injuries occurred on both sides. At the beginning of March, the protesting group Justice? set up a squatting estate agency on the corner of Bond Street and Church Street, achieving national press coverage. The agency closed after ten days, after surviving one unsuccessful eviction attempt, with the organisers claiming they had achieved what they set out to do - to raise the profile of homelessness and squatting issues. These events serve as reminders that whatever the dominant culture of the North Laine is, this domination is not complete, and remains contested.

Figure 7. Stencil graffiti in the North Laine

Figure 8. Derelict property, North Laine

One of the most common replies given when the participants were asked what they liked about the area was the vibrancy of the neighbourhood, provided by the mix of uses and the mix of people living in the area. At the same time, common dislikes were drunks, beggars, the homeless, graffiti, squatters and the general presence of "traveller, crusty types". There is a potential paradox here in that much of the feeling of vibrancy, life, excitement, and uniqueness of the area is provided by these disliked sub-cultures, and they are undoubtedly part of the 'social mix' that the residents profess to enjoy. Most residents retained some sympathy with the homeless and beggars, but find the sheer numbers asking for money draining. For one of the working class residents, Diane, such things are all part of living in the North Laine:

There are lots of homeless people, they're usually drunk, but they don't do you any harm, but you've got to turn a blind eye to it... A couple of them, being absolutely basic about it, were making love on the doorstep a few doors up, they were actually doing it on the doorstep, and as I say, you've got to turn a blind eye to it.

Derek articulates a different attitude towards the sub-cultures that are part of the attraction of the area for him. The fact that he finds the social mix entertaining is not in question:

In North Laines you have a mix of cultures, a mix of classes, you can walk down North Laine, brush against someone in a fur coat..., and then a dropout, now that's good, because it blends together.... I'm living in a £100,000 apartment, opposite side of the road is full of squats. I don't know where else you can find that. But that's why I like North Laines, because its life, its reality.

However, for Derek, this appreciation of 'otherness', of difference, only goes so far:

we walked down the road and we bumped into about three dropouts with their dogs, and we thought 'oh shit, if its meths drinkers and their dogs all night we're in trouble'... now I believe in live and let live, but don't you ever tread in my patch! You live in your world, and I'll live in mine, if you tread in my world, then you'll have me to answer to!

Fortunately for Derek, this is unlikely to happen. His apartment is protected with the latest security equipment, such as CCTV, an electronic gate, and two entryphones, complete with video. Derek realises the contradiction of his position. He likes the social mix, he doesn't want it to disappear, yet he also wants it to be non-threatening, to behave on his terms. As he says himself:

I think there should be some control, but I don't want to see it puritised. If you puritise it you eliminate what we've got, and there's a great atmosphere. But there's a line somewhere...

The reality of the urban life enjoyed by Derek is, in the words of Robins (1991: 15) "a cosy and cleaned-up version of city life, one which avoids the real conflicts and stresses of urban life". Davis (1990: 224) argues that the security provided by developments such as Trafalgar Place is "less to do with personal safety than with the degree of personal insulation from 'unsavoury' groups", and on another level this security also acts as a status symbol.

Feelings of safety are inextricably linked with feelings towards 'unsavoury' groups. The North Laine's reputation as a site of alternative sub-cultures influences the view of those living outside the neighbourhood. Diane noted:

It did have a reputation, and still has, I would add,... my children's friends, their parents are very loathed to let their children come round here on their own.

In contrast, for most of the North Laine residents that were interviewed the area itself was felt to be safer than the rest of Brighton, which was partly attributed to the life and vibrancy of the area, which means that there are always other people around. Jenny, in complete contrast to the view of the friend's parents of Diane's children claimed:

its much safer than walking down a leafy suburban lane where someone could be lurking behind the bushes.

The feelings of safety created within the boundaries of the North Laine seem particularly strong for women. Anna, for example, recalled:

I went up to... Queen's Road, it was only about 9 o'clock, but suddenly I felt much more exposed there... it didn't feel quite the same somehow as walking back through North Laine... it certainly seems safer wandering round here late at night than even on the boundaries.

For the older residents in particular, however, there is no feeling of safety to be found on the streets after dark. Arthur and Margaret never venture out in the evenings, and the middle-aged Colin, who formerly lived in "genteel" Hove, will not go out after 10 o'clock unless he has to. The one issue that united the participants was the introduction of CCTV to the North Laine, which was widely supported as a means to make the streets safer.

'Bohemian. I love that word'

The gentrification literature suggests that gentrifiers often possess a much more marked sense of identity for the area they now inhabit, than do the existing residents. They 'imagine' the area differently. For longer-term, more working class residents, it is argued, neighbourhoods are places to live, and places where friendships and social networks are forged with those living around you. For gentrifiers, the identity of a neighbourhood is found in its atmosphere, its ambience, the 'spectacles' it produces. For Arthur and Margaret, the area has lost its sense of community. Nobody knows anyone anymore, people don't speak to you, and the shops change hands all the time. The only form of community that they could identify was 'organised community', such as the Community Association. Of the three households which moved to the area in the late 1970s, the area provides both a sense of community in that they know a lot of people in the area, whilst it also provides spectacles to be viewed and enjoyed. Jenny recalls how she used to go and watch the butchers auctions on Saturday afternoons, where the remaining stock was sold off at cheap prices:

people on low incomes used to go along and that's how they managed to feed their families... it was quite an event, one used to go along just for the spectacle of it.

For Bill, the area provided opportunities to socialise, and to enjoy new experiences:

when I first moved, it was Shangri-La to me... you see a lot of actors (from the theatre) round about... I remember Dame Flora Robson... she used to go shopping in Gardner Street, and I used to love playing the old gentleman. I used to wear my hat and say 'good morning Dame Flora', 'good morning' she'd say, right out of the Victorian age... it was all these tiny little things, I'd never have seen them in Edgware in a million years.

Amongst the more recent residents, views were more polarised. Colin sensed that there might be a North Laine identity, and Anna thought that other people in the North Laine identified themselves strongly with the neighbourhood, to the extent that they would never move out, but

didn't feel this herself. For Derek, however, the area possesses a very distinct identity, one which has been shaped by the neighbourhood 'boosters' (Beauregard 1986):

I liked the atmosphere of North Laines, there was activity, there was life, there was a mixture, what is the word they used? Bohemian. I love that word... the North Laines are very much a village community, and I see North Laines as being a totally distinct area within Brighton.

Interestingly however, Derek was the only participant to consistently use the malapropism *North Laines*, rather than North Laine, part of the history of the area that the Community Association is eager to cling to.

Conclusions

The study has aimed to trace the nature of neighbourhood change in the North Laine since the mid 1970s, and to assess to what extent the neighbourhood can be described as gentrified. Undoubtedly the neighbourhood has changed dramatically, and part of this change has been the upgrading of the housing stock, the influx of new people, the concentration of professional and managerial workers, and the development of a shopping area which serves specialist tastes. However, it appears that whilst the area can be considered to have 'gentrified' to some degree, the process seems to have occurred only partially - there are many vacant shop premises, many properties remain in a state of disrepair (Figure 8), large parts of the population are made up of students, squatters and the homeless, and the area has become well known as the site of alternative sub-cultures. People have moved into the area that could be described as gentrifiers, but it also appears that many of these people left the area after only a short while. Diane, one of the interviewees, knew "a lot of yuppie people that thought they were moving into a really nice, up and coming area, but found out differently... there's still an awful lot of lowlife around here and a lot of wheeling and dealing and things going on behind the scenes, you either have to turn a blind eye to it, or move out". Of course, this 'partiality' may just be a temporary state - it is possible that the area is experiencing an ongoing process, which at this point in time is unfinished (although there is unlikely to be an identifiable 'end-point' in any case).

The distinctive nature of the local economy is probably part of the reason for the chaotic/uneven nature of gentrification. The brief overview of the Brighton economy given by Barrow & Hall (1995) highlights the relative poverty of Brighton within the generally prosperous South East. For 1990, the unemployment rate within Brighton was 8.4%, considerably higher than the South East average of 5.1%, and higher also than the national average of 6.8%. Additionally, as one would expect in a sea-side 'resort', the labour market is highly seasonal, and therefore active (i.e. there are relatively fewer long-term unemployed). Finally, the sectoral structure of employment in Brighton is classically 'post-industrial'. 20.4% of the jobs in Brighton are in the retail distribution / hotel sector, 18.1% in the Finance, Insurance and Banking (FIB) sector, and only 8.6% in manufacturing (1987 figures, in Barrow & Hall, 1995: 640). In terms of Sassen's (1991) analysis, this would suggest a polarisation in incomes. However, without more detailed information regarding income levels, rather than occupation, this is not possible to assess (unless income is conflated for occupation, as Sassen tends to do, see Hamnett 1994). What is clear, however, is that the Brighton economy is depressed when compared to London, where most of the UK gentrification studies have been based. Despite the high proportion of people employed in the FIB sector, many of these are employed in large companies, such as American Express, and therefore perform administrative, rather than the better paid 'professional' roles. The partiality

of the gentrification process in the North Laine is partly explained then, by the depressed nature of the local economy, limiting the resources available for large-scale renovation. There are probably a range of other locally contingent factors that account for the partiality of gentrification within Brighton, but analysis of such factors does not fall within the scope of this study. This is perhaps an area for further research.

Centrepieces and Marginal Gentrifiers

Much gentrification literature has sought to expose the primary cause of the gentrification process, and attention has thus focused on either production-side arguments or consumption-side arguments. This dichotomy (characterised by Smith (1979, 1992) on the production side, and Hamnett (1991, 1992) on the consumption side) has entrenched theorists into accepting one or the other as a valid explanation for the 'central' cause of gentrification, which has blinded many to the possibility that a multiplicity of processes are occurring (Clark 1992). Clark draws on Bohr's theory of complementarity as a fruitful alternative to the search for a centrepiece - "even if competing theories are mutually exclusive due to incommensurable abstractions, they may both be true and necessary for a thorough description of that which the theories are about" (Clark 1992: 361). I believe that the interviews with North Laine residents have allowed us to go beyond the stereotypes that 'centrepiece' theories rely on, enabling us to see the messiness, contradiction and chaos that actually occurs. It is worth at this point considering the reasons given by the residents I interviewed, as to why they live in the North Laine.

'We just fell in love with... the idea of being in the middle of it all'

Many of the reasons given for choosing to live or remain in the North Laine appear to be the same. The centrality of the area features heavily in all responses, and in particular the accessibility of shops and leisure facilities. This is true for the range of participants, regardless of age, class and gender. The reasons for wanting to be central do vary, however. For the elderly Arthur and Margaret, getting to the shops would be difficult if they lived further away, and Bill, also in his seventies, expressed a similar view. For Diane, living so centrally has enabled her to work even though the family didn't have a car, echoing the analysis of Rose (1984: 58) who argued "among (the gentrifiers are) people whose combined employment and family responsibilities necessitate an inner-city location". For some of the more middle class gentrifiers, living centrally is more a matter of choice than need. For example, Jenny responded:

the things that interest me tend to be on the cultural side, theatres, cinemas, those kinds of things... so its very easy to indulge one's interest without all the hassle of having to park the car.

Derek, the retired businessman and a more recent gentrifier (having only moved in in January of 1996), lives in one of the new apartments in Trafalgar Place. When asked why he chose to live there, he responded:

I liked the atmosphere, there was more life, more activity, more feeling... I liked the apartment idea, particularly if you think about the retirement image.

For Derek, the North Laine fulfils the image that he desires of a satisfactory retirement. However, not all reasons given by new middle class residents simply reflect their chosen consumption lifestyle. For Anna, a single professional in the significant 25 - 34 age group, the area provided not so much the right 'image', but rather housing at an affordable price for a

single person (see table 4, which confirms that housing in the North Laine tends to be smaller than average for Brighton). For Colin, a married, middle class, middle-aged mature student, the house that he rents in the North Laine was simply one of the few properties in the town that suited his families' requirements for space, cost, and the use of a garage. No strong feelings of attraction to the North Laine were expressed.

I would argue that the comments of these residents refutes the claim that there is a 'centrepiece' of the gentrification process, and that we need to think of the process as complicated, complex, contradictory and chaotic. Certainly there are hints of 'lifestyle choice' amongst some of these comments, perhaps most notably with Derek and Jenny. However, in the case of Jenny, a single middle-aged women, we have already seen how she values the safety to be found in a lively town centre neighbourhood, and much has been written on the 'exclusion' of such people from suburban areas, both by design and attitude (Rose, 1984). Similarly, Anna commented that the neighbourhood provided housing of a suitable size for a single person, and safety was once again mentioned. Rose (1984) amongst others has focused on the importance of single people (particularly female) in the gentrification process. Indeed, on an anecdotal level, Diane told me that quite a few women that she knew in the area moved in following a divorce - both because the houses were affordable to women in such a position, and because the neighbourhood offered support and the chance to 'start again' with their lives. However, it is not only single women that are important in the process, but also the changing roles of married women. For Diane, a central location allows her to combine the roles of mother and wage-earner, without the necessity for a car. These are precisely the kind of people that Rose refers to as 'marginal gentrifiers'.

Previous studies on gentrified areas have identified a clear class-based dichotomy in the way people feel about the neighbourhood they live in, and the way it has changed. One of the stated aims of this study was to uncover the specificity's of residents views and perception of the North Laine. In this particular example, class-based antagonism has not been clearly articulated. This is due in part to the movement of large numbers of the previous working class population to Whitehawk, before the process of gentrification began in the 1970s. It is also often assumed in the gentrification literature that gentrifiers form a distinct, homogeneous group. I have found that the recent residents neither articulate significantly similar views on the area, or that their views necessarily contrast with the existing residents. What has been uncovered is that opinions break down along a number of different lines, depending on the issue at hand. Views on some issues are polarised by gender, on others by class, or age, and in some cases do not differ at all. This reinforces Rose's (1984: 67) assertion that "we ought not to assume in advance that all gentrifiers have the same class positions as each other and that they are 'structurally' polarised from the displaced". However, whilst working class displacement is not a relevant feature of the North Laine gentrification process, glimpses of discontent are evident in some of the more long-standing residents. This is particularly exemplified by Arthur and Margaret in their very strong feelings of exclusion from Kensington Gardens, for example. The fact that they have spent most of their long lives in the area (all of her life in the case of Margaret), makes this 'exclusion' all the more stark. Arthur also has very little time for the idea of 'conserving the area', so often longed for by middle-class gentrifiers (Jager 1986), as a seal of approval of the neighbourhood. Others, such as Diane, bemoan the passing of 'useful' shops, as does Jenny, but for very different reasons - she recalls the 'spectacle' of meat auctions with some fondness.

It becomes clear then, that very few of the residents interviewed can be categorised either as dominating incoming middle-class gentrifiers, or as increasingly marginalised working class

long-term residents. It is not easy to classify the dominator and the marginalised. This does not mean there are not differing levels of power and influence (over the image, the imagining, or the politics of the area) but that this domination / sub-ordination is never entirely clear, and certainly not total. Therefore, some of the 'gentrifiers' can be seen as 'marginal', but not as 'marginal' as those they replace (or displace) (Rose 1984). Perhaps the polar extremes are provided by Arthur & Margaret at one end and Derek at the other. Derek appears the 'classic gentrifier', and Arthur and Margaret the 'classic dominated working class residents', but this should not blind us to the fact that the experience of these people appears by no means to be the general experience.

I think it would be fair to say then, that the type of class antagonism that has often been noted in gentrified areas is not significantly present in the North Laine. Perhaps the greatest degree of antagonism expressed in the area is between the residents (in general) and the homeless. Most commonly viewed as a nuisance or an eyesore, and occasionally a threat, the 'Reclaim the Streets' protest in February 1996 represents the only real flashpoint between 'the North Laine' and 'the homeless'. Whilst not a strictly homeless protest, nor a protest aimed at the North Laine in anyway, the protest brought large numbers of homeless people into (non-violent) confrontation with North Laine residents and businesses, whose lives were disrupted in some way. It is possible to draw parallels with Neil Smith's (1993) account of the Tompkins Square Park riot, where "homelessness and gentrification defined both text and subtext of the riot" (p91), although there are important differences to be noted. In terms of the scale of 'trouble', there is no comparison. 'Reclaim the Streets' (though part of a wider protest movement) was a one-off event, lasting a few hours. The dispute over Tompkins Square Park (where some of New York's growing homeless population had taken to sleeping) lasted years, and there were a number of very large disturbances, or "police riots" (Smith, 1993). Secondly, gentrification and homelessness were not issues in the disturbance in the North Laine. However, both confrontations were between protesters and the police, who defended the residents 'way of life' or 'image of the area', on behalf of the residents. As Smith (1993:91) records, the police in Tompkins Square tried to forcibly remove the homeless from the park "to reimpose (the) mainstream culture". Likewise, the police in Brighton felt it necessary to re-impose 'order' on the situation¹². This reflected the mood of residents and businesses in the North Laine, some of whom clearly support the aims of 'Reclaim the Streets' but not the methods. The residents I spoke to did not think that this type of protest 'had a part' in the life of the North Laine. What both struggles highlight is not just differences between 'residents' and 'the homeless' over specific issues (gentrification, car culture etc.) but relative power relations in a neighbourhood. The dominant, 'civilised, decent' residents are able to impose their will through the law, a will 'imposed' on the less powerful. Smith (1993: 93) argues "Tompkins Square [and perhaps the North Laine disturbance to a lesser extent] expresses not just the spatialization of struggle in the abstract, but the social and political inscription of the geography of the city, through which urban space comes to represent and define the meanings of these struggles".

Overall then, the story of the North Laine in the last twenty years is one of complexity, contradiction, and chaotic development. Certainly the area has been gentrified, but this process itself has been chaotic and only partial. Likewise, the residents cannot be easily categorised. There are differences amongst 'gentrifiers' as well as similarities between long-term and more recent residents. Clark's (1992) appropriation of Bohr's theory of complementarity offers a useful way of analysing these contradictions through the seemingly incompatible 'centrepiece' theories on offer. However, in particular, it is Rose's (1984) notion of the marginal gentrifier that provides the most useful concept for understanding change in the North Laine. In the words of Rose

(1984: 62) "the concepts 'gentrification' and 'gentrifiers' need to be disaggregated so that we may reconceptualise the processes that produce the changes we observe, and so that we may change, where necessary, our 'ways of seeing' some forms of 'gentrification' and some forms of 'gentrifiers'". It is hoped, through this study, and particularly through the use of in-depth interviews, that this process of disaggregating and reconceptualising has been set in motion in the case of the North Laine.

Notes

¹ In the American context, see Lowe's (1992) study of Newburyport, Massachusetts.

² For example, the case of 'loft living', in New York (Zukin 1982, Jackson 1985).

³ A total of seven interviews were conducted with residents of the North Laine. Initial names were provided by a contact active in the community association. Further names were provided by these initial contacts. One interviewee was contacted as a result of a letter that he had written in the North Laine Runner, and two other interviewees were contacted by a selective letter drop (into 'gentrified-looking' houses). All interviews took place between 26 March and 11 April 1996. The use of detailed, semi-structured informal interviews with residents of the North Laine provides the capacity both to give a human account of the changes that are suggested by the other methods, and also to uncover what these other methods hide. These interviews provide accounts of the experience and perception of change from the people most involved - the residents. The semi-structured interviews were conducted with a range of residents, working and middle class, long-term and short-term residents. The participants were invited to talk about their experience and perception of the neighbourhood and its changes, via informal questioning lasting between half an hour and an hour. This intensive, informal interviewing method creates results which "are more vivid, because they describe individuals and their activities concretely rather than in the bloodless categories of statistical indicators" (Sayer, 1992: 242). This method also allows for the participants to raise issues that the researcher has not considered, as they are "not forced into an artificial one-way mode of communication in which they can only answer in terms of the conceptual grid given to them by the researcher" (Sayer, 1992: 245).

This emphasis on qualitative methods arises from the problematization of positivist research, with its belief in a detached researcher, observing an objective world, in order to be able to create an accurate, unbiased, objective representation of that world in the final written document. This belief has come under increasing criticism, resulting in what has been called the 'crisis of representation' (Duncan & Ley, 1993). Notions of 'the detached researcher', 'the pure subject', and 'the pure culture' have been dismissed (Cook & Crang, 1994) as the social construction of knowledge has been revealed. Changes in research practice have mirrored developments in the theoretical and philosophical debates (Jacobs 1993). The more widespread use of qualitative methods in the last decade is evidence of the ongoing debate concerning the construction of knowledge. Jacobs (1993) suggests that three developments in particular have influenced the way that 'the urban' is studied. Firstly, it has been acknowledged that "ethnography is not above the power relations of society, it enacts them" (Jacobs, 1993: 829). Secondly, developments have taken place in the long-running structure/agency debate, particularly as a result of Giddens' structuration theory (1984). For Jacobs (1993: 830) this approach "advocates combined intensive/extensive methodology to highlight the link between broader structures and processes in local settings". Finally, the debate on 'the Postmodern city' has led to the re-assessment of the significance and role of culture, for which qualitative research methods have been needed.

⁴ The North Laine is often confused with 'The Lanes', another distinct area of Brighton situated between the North Laine and the sea, known for its antique and jewellery shops. Even amongst those who are aware of the difference, the term 'The North Laines' is still used, in opposition to 'The 'South' Lanes'. In the 'North Laine Runner' (No. 116, July-August 1995) local writer Sarah Wright argued "the ancient and arguably more interesting meaning of the word has been buried for no better reason than to bring North Laine into line with 'The Lanes', already a familiar part of local tourism, and the populist 'idea' of history".

⁵ St. Nicholas is the ward that most closely resembles the North Laine. In addition to containing the North Laine, St. Nicholas ward also covers the area known as 'The Lanes', to the south, and a number of streets to the west of Queens road. Given the nature of these additional areas, it is probable that council-owned housing in the North Laine was actually higher than 12.5% average for the ward.

⁶ All names have been changed.

⁷ Providing statistical indicators of social change, urban renewal, or gentrification in the North Laine is fraught with difficulty. The obvious source of such information is the small area statistics of the census. The first problem with this is the 'areas' of these small area statistics. Figures are broken down to electoral ward level, which for the North Laine in 1971 was St. Nicholas ward. However, the ward boundaries do not correlate to the commonly understood boundaries of the North Laine. 'The Lanes', to the south of the North Laine also fall within this ward, as do a number of streets to the west of Queens Road. The situation is further complicated because between the 1981 and 1991 census, there were wholesale changes in Brighton ward boundaries, making any comparison between 1981 and 1991 ward statistics impossible. Fortunately, for 1991, the Council produced neighbourhood information pamphlets, providing details of a number of basic indicators for the North Laine only (by aggregating a number of enumeration districts). It is possible therefore, to use information based on St. Nicholas ward for 1971 and 1981, and information based on the North Laine neighbourhood for 1991, to enable some level of comparison to take place. These comparisons however, need to be read in the context of the problematic nature of the census information.

⁸ The decline of the 0-15 year old age group, and the increase of the 25-34 year old age group could merely reflect an ageing of the existing population coupled with non-replacement. However, given the highly transitory nature of the population in the North Laine (the 1981 census recorded 19.1% of the population had a different address within the previous year) the figures still suggest a real increase in this age group.

⁹ Ley (1986) found that an increase in office space per capita had the single greatest correlation with gentrification. Trafalgar Place is a mixed use development, comprising 250,000 square foot of office space, 12 residential units, and 4 retail units, and was completed in late 1994. Although the retail units remain empty, 72% of the office space has been filled, and approaching 1,000 people are employed by a number of companies occupying the building, including Eagle Star, the Legal Aid board and Mott Ewbank Preece. Most of these companies have relocated from elsewhere in Brighton.

¹⁰ This information was gained from a number of sources. For 1974, reference was made to 'Kelly's Brighton Directory 1974', which was unfortunately the last year it was produced. For 1985, GOAD plans were used. These maps detail the shops and businesses of central areas. Information for 1996 is based on personal observation, conducted in March 1996.

¹¹ Kelly's Directory does not list vacant property.

¹² Zone A is the most valuable space in a shop premises. It is the area comprising the width of the shop multiplied by the first 20 feet back from the shop window.

¹³ Police activities were later justified in an issue of the 'North Laine Runner'.

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