

Upper Class in England

Klára Pospíšilová

Upper Class in England
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Mgr. Helena Janasová

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prof. PhDr. Vlastimil Švec, CSc.
děkan



doc. Ing. Anežka Lengálová, Ph.D.
ředitelka ústavu

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ABSTRAKT

Předmětem bakalářské práce „Vyšší třída v Anglii“ je popsat vývoj třídního systému v Anglii, zmapovat typické ukazatele třídní příslušnosti a dále seznámit čtenáře s tím, jak jednotlivé třídy v Anglii vnímají vyšší třídu. Cílem této práce je zjistit, zda vyšší třída v Anglii přetrvává samostatně, nebo jestli splyne s neustále se rozšiřující střední třídou. Práce dochází k závěru, že v tradiční Anglické společnosti má třídní systém své nezastupitelné místo a je stále velmi důležitý. Vyšší třída se během času vyvíjela, adaptovala se na 21. století, ale je jisté, že se střední třídou nesplyne. Anglie bude vždy národem ovládaným třídním dělením a sociální mobilitou.

Klíčová slova: Třídní systém v Anglii, Vyšší třída, ukazatele třídní příslušnosti, sociální mobilita, společenské postavení

ABSTRACT

The goal of my Bachelor Thesis “Upper Class in England” is to describe the development of the class system in England. It also examines the typical indicators of social status and informs readers about the perception of the Upper Class. The main aim of this thesis is to find out if the Upper Class will survive separately or merge with the constantly enlarging Middle Class. The thesis states that in the traditional English society the class system is irreplaceable and still important. The Upper Class was evolved over time and has adapted to the ways of the 21st century but will never really melt into the Middle Class. England will surely always be a part of a nation dominated by social class stratification and social mobility.

Keywords: Class system in England, Upper Class, status indicators, social mobility, social status

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INTRODUCTION

Genealogy, gain, grammar, gardening, grocery, and garbage. What do these miscellaneous words have in common?

There are many things which define social status. These things can strengthen or on the other hand, if one made a mistake, they could weaken their position in the society within the class system. A person could lose a lot of affairs which had been built up over a long period and laboriously too.

All over the world there are many societies which can be divided according to different criteria. These criteria include matters such as the government of the country, geographical divisions, the nationalities living there and the social hierarchy. The last phrase brings us to important question. Where and why is the social status so important that it can influence the mentality of the whole nation? The answer is obvious-it is England. The class system pervades all aspects of English life and culture and this will be discussed in all the chapters of this thesis.

In this part of my Bachelor Thesis, it is necessary to define the essential questions: “Will the class still matter in the future? Will the Upper Class survive separately or merge with the constantly enlarging Middle Class? Does the traditional class system have its place in the modern society?” These are the questions this Bachelor thesis is planning to deal with.

It is important to reveal the thesis statement: “In the traditional class society, which the English society undoubtedly is, will the class system always be irreplaceable and still be of importance? The Upper Class can be changed, evolved in time, adapt to the ways of the 21st century but never really melt into the permanently enlarging Middle Class. England will surely always be a part of the nation dominated by social class stratification and social mobility.”

In the Bachelor Thesis I will try to prove that my thesis statement is valid and generally acceptable. Every statement, research or conclusion will be backed-up by obvious evidence so that everyone can be satisfied that my written thoughts are trustworthy and valid.

The class system nowadays is quite a changeable system and not as rigid as it was one hundred years ago. A person’s status may change from one day to the next, or this status change may take several generations. English people are proud of their status and from time to time do weird things to achieve a better position in the class ranking. Interestingly

Upper Class people are able to do the strangest things. As was said by one Upper Class echelon in a television interview: “Only the really Upper Class people can afford eccentricity.”

1 DEVELOPMENT OF THE CLASS SYSTEM IN ENGLAND

England is a stratified society in which different classes are brought up to follow different rules about how to think, talk and behave. Sociologists define social class as the dividing of people according to their occupation. Practitioners, lawyers and teachers are given higher status than unskilled workers. The different positions within the class system represent various levels of influence, power and money. In past decades class influenced a person's chance of getting a good education, a job etc. and it also affected the people someone would socialise with and start a family with. Today this type of pattern has nearly gone but with one exception, The Royal Family which will be discussed further.¹

English society has always been divided into three broad groups of classes:

- The Upper Class
Traditionally people with inherited money, the wealthiest minority in the country. Includes some of the respected and oldest families, many of them are titled aristocrats.
- The Middle Class
The vast majority of the population of England. This class includes managers, politicians, industrialists, professionals and shop owners.
- The Working Class
People who are agricultural, mine and factory unskilled workers.²

This three-tier system is the simplest one. Another sociological model of the class system is based entirely on the occupation of people; this model's main disadvantage is that it is rather abstract. "While individual occupations have been reallocated to different classes, the overall shape of the model has changed very little during the past sixty years. The classes are now described as follows"³: for a description of the classes it uses letters in alphabetical order *A–Professional occupations*, *B–Managerial and Technical occupations*, *C–Skilled occupations*, *D–Partly-skilled occupations*, and *E–Non-skilled occupations*,

¹ Dennis Kavanagh, David Richards, Andrew Geddes and Martin Smith, *British Politics*, 5 ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, USA, 2006), 82-84.

² Mandy Barrow, "British Life," Woodlands Junior School, Hunt Road Tonbridge Kent, <http://www.woodlands-junior.kent.sch.uk/customs/questions/class.htm> (accessed March 29, 2011).

³ David Rose, "Official Social Classifications in the UK," Social Research Update, <http://sru.soc.surrey.ac.uk/SRU9.html> (accessed March 29, 2011).

which refers to groups of people, and indexes C₁–*skilled non-manual occupations* and C₂–*skilled manual occupations*, because there was a need for a distinction of this the most numerous group.⁴ Allocation to these classes was based on the sociologists' estimates of the prestige of a person's occupation.

“It should already be apparent that social class is a derived classification achieved by mapping occupation and employment status to class categories. But where does the raw data come from? The main source of reliable national data comes from the decennial Population Census which is held in England. Census data on occupation, employer and employment status are collected for the whole working population and 10 per cent of this data is then coded and used in analyses. Between Censuses, government social surveys also collect data required for social classifications, as do many academic studies. In addition valuable data for health and medical researchers are derived from death registration records which include the occupations of departed persons.”⁵

Classes are no longer simply about wealth or where someone lives; the English people are able to find out someone's class through a series of complex variables including behaviour, language and manners. For a better understanding of the background and development of classes, in the following chapter, there will be a brief description of the history and historical situation in England.

1.1 Class system and changes in the past

The essential and most relevant reason why I chose only the Upper Class in England as a topic for my thesis is the historical development which is completely different from the rest of Great Britain. In terms of size and the proportion of England on the whole economy, England is considered to be the most important part of the countries under the Union flag.⁶

England is the largest country in the UK and occupies most of the southern two thirds of Great Britain. The total area of England is 130,410 square kilometres. England contains about 84 per cent of the UK population. The capital, seat of the government, and the

⁴ David Rose, “Official Social Classifications in the UK,” Social Research Update, <http://sru.soc.surrey.ac.uk/SRU9.html> (accessed March 29, 2011).

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ “Welcome to Britain,” Visit Britain, <http://www.visitbritain.com/en/About-Britain/> (accessed April 10, 2011).

largest city in the United Kingdom, London, is in England. The whole of Great Britain has been ruled by the UK government in London since 1707.⁷

From an historical point of view England ruled by the Romans and then the Anglo-Saxons had a huge influence on the development of the country. The Romans were at a cultural peak at that time and so brought lots of new information for English people. During their occupation of Britain the Romans built an extensive network of roads which continued to be used in later centuries and many routes are still followed today. The Romans also built a water supply, sanitation and sewage systems and also built the well-known Hadrian's Wall as protection against their enemies. Many of England's major cities, such as London, Manchester and York, were founded by the Romans. Trade flourished and Christianity was brought to England during that period.⁸

It is likely that the Romanisation of England principally affected the rich people. The aristocracy could increase their status by adopting Roman manners, etiquette and practices such as regular bathing and a noble style of clothing. On the other hand the vast majority of the English population would remain relatively untouched by Roman civilisation.⁹

After the withdrawal of the Roman legions in 410 AD waves of Jutes, the Angles and the Saxons arrived from German lands. Furthermore, the last successful invasion and very important date for England was 1066 when the Duke William of Normandy (called the Conqueror) invaded Britain and defeated King Harold of England. The coronation of William the Conqueror marked the beginning of the reformative period which produced changes of lasting importance. Norman power was based upon a new feudal nobility. The results of the Norman Conquest in England might be expected to be in the first instance aristocratic and ecclesiastical.¹⁰ William changed the class system and also changed the official language to French. A direct consequence of the invasion was the near-total elimination of the old English aristocracy and the loss of English control over the well-established Catholic Church in England. William formed a strong central government and systematically dispossessed English landowners and conferred their property on his

⁷ Mandy Barrow, "British Life," Woodlands Junior School, Hunt Road Tonbridge Kent, <http://www.woodlands-junior.kent.sch.uk/customs/questions/class.htm> (accessed March 29, 2011).

⁸ Historic UK., "Roman England: 43 Ad - 410 Ad," Historic UK., <http://www.historic-uk.com/HistoryUK/England-History/RomanEngland.htm> (accessed March 26, 2011).

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ David C. Douglas, *William the Conqueror: The Norman Impact Upon England (English Monarchs)* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977), 265.

followers. This significant change in the social structure distinguished England from all the other powers in feudal Europe at that time.¹¹

“For Normandy it meant that the newly formed aristocratic group of Norman noblemen was to be vastly enriched, and at the same time brought into more closely defined relations with the duke who had become a king. For England the same process involved nothing less than the destruction of ancient nobility, and substitution in its place of a new aristocracy imported from overseas. This was perhaps the greatest change which occurred in England during the reign of William the Conqueror, and it was effected to a large extent under his management.”¹² In those times the Norman and Anglo-Saxon languages and customs were merged. The changes which were introduced during the reign of William the Conqueror are still relevant today. In addition to cutting out the old nobility, during the Norman reign, more changes in society followed.

After the Norman period England was divided for the first time and become as we know it today-the King had the supreme position and then his followers who formed the nobility. The next stage in social rank was held by free citizens who owned land-landowners and in the lowest position were slaves. Of course in today’s contemporary society there are no slaves but the division is similar, with only small changes. At the top of English society stands Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II and her immediate family. The Parliament consists of a hereditary (until the Reform in 1999, see chapter 1.3 Class system nowadays) Upper Class–Aristocracy in the House of Lords and elected members in the House of Commons representing ordinary people–commoners, the most numerous Middle Class and Working Class groups.

During the history, in England there were periods when the society was formed a less but it cannot be said about the 19th century. It is one of the most important periods in the English history where England had envisaged to striking changes in its structure.

1.2 Changes in the 19th century

The 19th century was an extremely important epoch in English history. The facts that prove the truth of this statement are the changes made then which are still present now.

¹¹David C. Douglas, *William the Conqueror: The Norman Impact Upon England (English Monarchs)* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977), 265.

¹² Ibid.

The 19th century had faced up to the impact of the Industrial Revolution and is worth further discussion. England was the cradle of the Industrial Revolution which influenced almost every aspect of social and economic life. “The labels ‘upper’, ‘middle’ and ‘working’ first appeared in the 19th century as a way of classifying the sharp social differences that arose in Britain as it led the world in the Industrial Revolution.”¹³

At the beginning of the 19th century Britain was an oligarchy, this meant that only a small number of men only were allowed to vote; women at that time had no voting rights. Things began to change in 1832 when the vote was given to more men. Electoral districts had been redrawn and many industrial towns were represented for the first time. There were two further vote franchise extensions, in 1867 and later in 1883. In 1872 the secret ballot which was a new voting system where voter’s choices in an election were confidential was introduced. This kind of voting system still exists today. By end of the 19th century the House of Commons was responsible for determining the Government’s resources and, as the industrial revolution began, the authority of the Commons was enhanced as land lost its dominant position as a source of wealth. The widening differences between the agendas of the political parties and the extension of the electoral franchise reinforced the growing dominance of the Commons, as did the Reform Acts of the 19th century. A main change was that the powers of the House of Commons were enlarged which meant that the House of Lords lost the ability to block or veto most of the bills passed in the House of Commons.¹⁴

In the 19th century at least 80 per cent of the population were members of the Working Class. In order to be considered Middle Class you had to have at least one servant. The majority of servants at that time were women because the salaries of male servants were higher ex lege. Throughout the 19th century services in the working class sector was the major employer of women.

Families in the 19th century were much larger than today, this was partly because infant mortality was high. Parents had many children and accepted that not all of them would survive. During this period society was strictly patriarchal—father was the real head of the family. His wife and children respected him and obeyed him. Until 1882, a woman’s

¹³ British Broadcasting Corporation, “About the Great British Class Survey,” British Broadcasting Corporation, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/labuk/articles/class/> (accessed March 25, 2011).

¹⁴ Tim Lambert, “Everyday Life in the 20th Century,” *Everyday Life in the 20th century*, <http://www.localhistories.org/20thcent.html> (accessed March 27, 2011).

property (including money, jewellery, clothes etc.) belonged to her husband. Divorce was made legal in 1857 but it was very rare. During the 19th century, the factory system gradually replaced the system of people working in their own homes or in small workshops. These changes caused a great deal of suffering for poor people because they had no money which could help them obtain food. In the 19th century towns were dirty, unsanitary and overcrowded. One of the worst things about poverty in the 19th century was the insensitive attitude of many Victorians. They were substantive believers in so called “self-help”. Self-help meant that they thought that everyone should be self-sufficient and so do not need other people to help. Well-to-do Upper Class Victorians also believed that anyone could become successful through true hard work and that anybody had the same conditions for being successful. Logically that meant that if you were poor it was purely your fault.¹⁵

Well off Victorians lived in very comfortable houses. For the first time furniture was mass-produced. That made it cheaper but unfortunately standards of quality and design dropped. Middle class 19th century homes seemed overcrowded with furniture and had lots of needless stuff. However, only a small minority of people could afford this comfortable and luxurious lifestyle.¹⁶

Girls from Upper Class families were taught by a governess who was paid for tutoring children in private households of the people who could afford this luxury for their children. Apart from nurses, the governess took care of school age children. Upper Class boys in Victorian times were often sent to public schools like Eton, Harrow or Rugby. Middle class boys went to grammar schools. Middle class girls went to private schools where they were taught “accomplishments” such as music and sewing. This can be clearly seen in Jane Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice*, where the main character Elizabeth Bennet deals with issues of manners, upbringing, morality, education and marriage in the society of the landed gentry of early 19th century England.¹⁷

To briefly summarize this chapter, the 19th century was one of the fundamental epochs which formed the further development of English history. Changes in society that occurred at that time strongly influenced contemporary social situations in England.

¹⁵ Tim Lambert, “Everyday Life in the 20th Century,” *Everyday Life in the 20th century*, <http://www.localhistories.org/20thcent.html> (accessed March 27, 2011).

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

Working and social conditions improved but the classification of society remained almost untouched. These unchanged matters are the subject of the next chapter which deals with the current class situation in England.

1.3 Class system nowadays

People have to obey unwritten class rules to be fully accepted by contemporary society. The whole English nation is clearly as acutely class-conscious as it has ever been, but in these “politically correct times”, many people are embarrassed about English class-consciousness, and do their best to deny or disguise it. The majority of people do not like to talk about money and the class they belong to because, as was said above, they feel embarrassed and stressed about it.¹⁸

Many sociologists argue that the social structure of Britain has changed rapidly in the last 25 years. The size of the manual Working Class has declined, class is less important in politics, and Britain, it is said, has become a multicultural society. In terms of politics, there has been a shift in the class nature in England. Traditionally within the Conservative political Party in particular, there was a significant aristocratic presence with a large proportion of the Cabinet being dominated by the Upper Class.¹⁹

However, in the last half of the 20th century, politicians were talking about Britain being a classless society and in 1959, after Labour lost three elections in a row; the question was raised of whether Labour could win again because of the decline in the size of the Working Class. On the contrary the Middle Class was enlarged, and the Upper Class remains almost the same. The Conservative Party is less aristocratic and the Labour Party is less Working Class. The British Election Survey concluded that class was no longer a significant determinant of the vote.²⁰

Since 1911 there have been various attempts to reform the House of Lords, but nothing was as radical as the House of Lords Act 1999 which firstly restricted the membership of the House of Lords by virtue of a hereditary peerage. The Act prevented hereditary peers from automatically sitting in the House of Lords.²¹

¹⁸ Kate Fox, *Watching the English: The Hidden Rules of English Behaviour* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2005), 80.

¹⁹ Dennis Kavanagh, David Richards, Andrew Geddes and Martin Smith, *British Politics*, 5 ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, USA, 2006), 82-84.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ “House of Lords Reform,” politics.co.uk, [http://www.politics.co.uk/briefings-guides/issue-briefs/legal-and-constitutional/house-of-lords-reform-\\$366545.htm](http://www.politics.co.uk/briefings-guides/issue-briefs/legal-and-constitutional/house-of-lords-reform-$366545.htm) (accessed April 1, 2011).

There have always been passionate political discussions between Labour and Conservatives about the relevance of the mutual relationship between politics and class. Former Labour leader, Tony Blair has always been a supporter of a model of society where everybody has equal status and opportunities in life. In 1999 in his speech he claimed: “A New Britain where the extraordinary talent of the British people is liberated from the forces of conservatism that so long have held them back, to create a model 21st century nation, based not on privilege, class or background, but on the equal worth of all.”²²

Despite all Blair’s efforts to equalise the whole English nation, the society remains almost the same. It means that the Upper Class hasn’t change their way of life, manners or attitude. In terms of the social situation society has to face the rise in the number of Middle Class members to the detriment of the Working Class.

The sociologist Peter Saunders argues, that contemporary England is an open society where it is possible for people from Lower Class backgrounds to move up into better Middle Class occupations relatively easily. It is clear that at the beginning of 21st century the majority of people worked in white-collar, or what could be described by a majority of people as middle class occupations. In modern Britain more than 50 per cent of the population are now in non-manual jobs compared with only 20 per cent in the early 20th century and 25 per cent in the 1950’s. The mines have been replaced by call centres and steel factories have turned into leisure facilities. People have shifted from manual to non-manual occupations. With these changes in occupations it seems that some of the other markers of class have declined. The significant differences in dressing, accent, and education that existed between the Middle and the Working Class in the mid 20th century seemed to have softened or disappeared nowadays.

However, the shift from manual to non-manual jobs does not mean that the Working Class has become Middle Class. Whilst people may now be working in offices rather than factories, it does not mean that they have changed class. The work in the office is routinised, the workplace highly structured with limited autonomy for employees; pay rates and opportunities for career development are low. The non-manual category conceals the class distinctions based on occupation, autonomy at work, work conditions also pay and

²² UK Politics, *BBC News*, September 28, 1999. http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/politics/460009.stm (accessed March 28, 2011).

life opportunities. While some of the indicators of class may have minimised others are resolutely still important.²³

Health and life expectancy are closely linked to social status and class in England.²⁴ Those on lower incomes are more likely to be overweight and unhealthy because of eating cheap junk food from fast food chains. Indeed the inequalities between the poor and the rich have become greater in terms of health.

It used to be thought in the past that social class was defined by one's occupation. Teachers, lawyers or doctors have different income levels, job security, and social experiences than drivers, office workers or gardeners. Another way of putting this is to say that people in professional occupations have different lifestyles to people who earn money by physical labour. But English economy and peoples' lifestyles have changed profoundly since 19th century when these categories were invented, so this may no longer hold true. Indeed, sociologists consider classification by occupation as too simplistic, and argue that social class actually has three dimensions now: economic, social, and cultural. To measure an individual's 'resources' in each of these dimensions, sociologists look at many factors which can collectively be referred to as 'capital'.²⁵

In the United Kingdom, entry to the Upper Class is still considered to be very difficult, if someone is not born into it. Marriage into this class rarely results in complete integration. The Upper Class holds the cachet of exclusivity. On the other hand, a part of the Working Class seems to have evolved into an underclass. That is a group of unemployed people existing within the Working Class who are welfare recipients. They have no vision or perspective for the future. Among sociologists there are several explanations of why the phenomenon of the Underclass occurs in modern England. Its roots can be traced back to 19th century when poverty was wide-spread in England.²⁶

This chapter focused on the development of class structure in England throughout history. The present situation along with more detailed insight will be presented in the following chapter.

²³ Dennis Kavanagh, David Richards, Andrew Geddes and Martin Smith, *British Politics*, 5 ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, USA, 2006), 82-84.

²⁴ British Broadcasting Corporation, "About the Great British Class Survey," British Broadcasting Corporation, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/labuk/articles/class/> (accessed March 25, 2011).

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Dennis Kavanagh, David Richards, Andrew Geddes and Martin Smith, *British Politics*, 5 ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, USA, 2006), 82-84.

2 INDICATORS OF SOCIAL STATUS

Before the invention of the printing press, having a large collection of books was considered to be a reliable status symbol. Afterwards when the printing press was invented, the possession of books was less of a status symbol. In the past, having pearls was a major social symbol. Another common status symbol of the past which is still somewhat present today is heraldry, or a family name. Nowadays, it is not so easy to define social status and class.²⁷

Several sociological surveys have been carried out in England, in which people were asked a question, which criteria they could use to tell what class people are in. One of the leading sociologist, Peter Townsend, who studied social situation, found the following order of criteria, in answer to the question “What decides what class you are in, it’s mainly job, education, the family you are born into, your way of life, money or anything else?”²⁸

Here are the peoples’ first choices and percentage:

1. Way of life (31%)
2. Family (18%)
3. Job (17%)
4. Money (17%)
5. Education (10%)²⁹

Another survey offered a large choice, in answer to the question “Which two of these would you say are the most important in being able to tell which class a person is?” What were the most common answers can be seen from the table on the next page.³⁰

From the table below it is clearly visible that material and financial wealth is for contemporary English people, whether they are male or female, not as important as origin, language, education and the way in which the Upper Class people spend their money. These are the best indicators of social status and class and they will be discussed further in the next chapter.

²⁷ Michael Argyle, *The Psychology of Social Class* (London: Routledge, 1993), 4-5.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

Table 1: Rank order of social class criteria

	(a) Men and women	Percentage		(b) Women only	Percentage
1	The way they speak	33%	1	Appearance and behaviour	53%
2	Where they live	28%	2	Family background	50%
3	The friends they have	27%	3	Attitudes, beliefs, political views	45%
4	Their job	22%	4	Style of life	42%
5	The sort of school they went to	21%	5	Education	38%
6	The way they spend their money	12%	6	Occupation	31%
7	The way they dress	18%	7	House/area in which they live	13%
8	The car they own	5%	8	Income	13%
			9	Prestige in the community	11%

2.1 The most prominent factors of being a member of the Upper Class

England is a really class-ridden society; everything people do is influenced by social status information because people in England are renowned for their obsession with the detail of accent, schooling or dress and behaviour. Simultaneously England is a country where class status is completely independent on material or financial wealth. A person can be very wealthy but may be “only” a member of the Middle or Upper-Middle Class. On the other hand one may be poor but according to their manners be really Upper Class.³¹

As stated above, it is a very important fact that class is not judged at all on wealth, only a little on occupation. The really fundamental factors are the non-economic indicators such as family background, living in “the right” house, formal education and the way of speaking including lexicon, grammar and pronunciation. The last issue will be a major part of this comprehensive chapter.³²

Some of the content of the following paragraphs are based on the research and observation of an English social anthropologist and bestselling author of popular social science books, Kate Fox, so I would like to briefly introduce her. Kate Fox is frequently

³¹ Michael Argyle, *The Psychology of Social Class* (London: Routledge, 1993), 185.

³² Julian Glover, “Riven by Class and No Social Mobility - Britain in 2007,” *Guardian*, October 20, 2007. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2007/oct/20/britishidentity.socialexclusion> (accessed April 10, 2011).

quoted in the Press and interviewed on radio and television on all types of programmes. Kate has also been a regular columnist for psychology magazines.³³

What and how different factors define class will be discussed in the following four subchapters.

2.1.1 Origins and family

From time immemorial the family for an Englishmen, as well as for other nations is an essential ingredient of life. Children can be for the Upper Classes more important than for others because they are “badges of the class continuance”. The children have to wear smart, brand clothes and have an au-pair (in Upper Class circles called Nanny) who takes care of them for the whole day and night while their parents have to make business and have their own hobbies. Having an au-pair as an assistant is posh and Upper Class people want to be seen as well-to-do by their neighbours and society around them.

For the Upper Class the choice of a name for their newly born child is really important. The name can reveal a lot about one’s pedigree. Upper Class people are usually proud of their ancestors’ lives and what they achieved. It’s typical that parents give their child a name after a favourite or an historically important ancestor. In later years the child will be able to refer to the name of the famous ancestor and will be seen by their peers as somebody honourable. The most frequent Upper Class names for boys are Pierce, Christian, Sebastian, Hugo and Tarquin. The most frequent names for girls are Arabella, Suzanna and Fiona.³⁴

Their official names are closely linked with nicknames like “Mindy, Panty, Nemo etc.” and with their nicknames funny stories from childhood. On the BBC there was an interview with an Upper Class woman, English actress Jenny Eclair, she said: “When I was very little we had a nanny and she didn’t know how to pronounce my name, so I was “Wo”, how funny!”³⁵

Another reliable class indicator is the choice of newspapers which are bought by the family. Tabloid newspapers such as the Sun or the Mirror are typically Working Class, as opposed to the Times or the Guardian which are targeted for Middle Class readers.

³³ Social Issues Research Centre, “Kate Fox,” Social Issues Research Centre, http://www.sirc.org/about/kate_fox.html (accessed March 29, 2011).

³⁴ “The Grumpy Guide to Class - Part Two,” YouTube, FLV file, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mLUY5xtqRoM> (accessed March 23, 2011).

³⁵ Ibid.

When children grow up it's time to leave the family nest and become a respectable adult and a part of society, with that it helps them to have a good education which is more detailed discussed in the next subchapter.

2.1.2 Education

A respected education has been an indicator of class from since ancient times, only those with money could afford to hire instructors. Nowadays, the majority of people who complete high school are considered to be Middle Class; those who receive a university degree move into a higher class. A degree from a well-known university with a long history and difficult entrance requirements, like Oxford or Cambridge, boasts of a greater status than one with minimal entrance requirements, like the local community college. Education is considered to be one of the routes to upward mobility.³⁶

From the paragraph above it follows that where one was educated is in contemporary English society often considered to be more important than the level of education attained. Traditionally, Upper Class children are brought up at home by a Nanny for the first few years of life and then the children are schooled at home, by private tutors. When children are old enough, they may attend a well-established primary school. From the 19th century, it became increasingly popular for Upper Class families to imitate the Middle Classes, in sending their children to public schools, which had been primarily founded to serve the educational needs of the Upper-Middle or Middle Class.³⁷

Moving into secondary education, it is still commonplace for Upper Class children to attend one of Britain's prestigious public schools.³⁸ Probably everybody has seen in its life on TV the scene of a happy, wealthy English family discussing the educational future of their nearly mature offspring in relation to where their ancestors attended for their studies. Family discussions on this topic can be inexhaustible and children usually obey advice from their parents and do their studies where deemed desirable.

There is no need to sketch an outline of the English educational system. Upper Class echelons send their children only to the most famous English public schools and prestigious universities. Why? Simply because they are considered to be the best ones and

³⁶ Michael Argyle, *The Psychology of Social Class* (London: Routledge, 1993), 178.

³⁷ Kate Fox, *Watching the English: The Hidden Rules of English Behaviour* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2005), 365.

³⁸ Ibid.

Upper Class parents want only the best for their children. As was quoted above, ‘it is important where one is educated nowadays’.

Eton, Harrow, Rugby, Winchester, these four names are probably the best-known public schools in England. It’s generally considered in England that boarding schools make Gentlemen. These people need to be well prepared for a life of luxury. The public schools carry the cachet of exclusivity; students have to pay high fees and contributions to study there. Eton is a prestigious and internationally well-known public school, often described as the most famous public school in the world. It is located in Eton, situated about a mile north of Windsor Castle. It has a very long list of well-known graduates, including 19 former British Prime Ministers.

“Finishing of secondary school is followed by the so called Gap Year, a passage between school and university, when young English people spend some time travelling abroad, often incorporating some kind of charity work (helping Peruvian villagers to build a school, saving a rainforest, etc.) and generally seeing the real world. Young people have to prove that they are worthy of official incorporation into adult society. A Gap Year initiates all classes who are expected to return from their experience transformed into mature, socially aware, reliable adults, ready to take on the enormous challenge and responsibility of living in a university hall of residence, doing their own laundry, etc.“ Echelons of the Upper Class must now compete with the university-educated Working Class members for the best jobs.³⁹ This is the main difference between the past and the current education of all classes.

In terms of university education, Oxford and Cambridge jointly referred to by the portmanteau term Oxbridge or Durham and St. Andrews Universities are regarded as bastions of the Upper Class establishment. Going to these schools provides a good education, but in addition, these schools also provide a certain set of behaviour rules, values and a set of social contacts which may be useful in the future.

The University of Oxford, located in the city of Oxford, is the oldest university in the Anglophone world. The university traces its roots back to the end of the 11th century. Second in age to Oxford is Cambridge University. This university includes the renowned Cavendish Laboratory, King's College Chapel, and the Cambridge University Library. In

³⁹ Kate Fox, *Watching the English: The Hidden Rules of English Behaviour* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2005), 365.

addition to cultural and practical associations as a historic part of British society, these two universities also have a long history of rivalry with each other; it means emulation in sport and intellectual events.

Sport was and is closely linked with the university rivalry and education. The Upper Class displayed a passion for sports especially those created by the English-football, cricket and rugby. Their expansion over the empire served to bind together English communities within the empire.⁴⁰ Here we can perceive a segregation of sports; typically the Upper Class whoever seen to play horse polo which is a favourite among the Upper Classes and the Royal family. On the basis of the information mentioned above in this chapter it is clear, that after graduation not everyone has the same starting position, even if they have the same level of education. In fact, there is no equality of opportunity; intelligence and good school grades predict success in life but so does the social class in England.⁴¹

2.1.3 Living

‘My house is my castle’. For English people this proverb is valid at least twice. They attentively keep their privacy behind the green fence and the curtains. They know very well that houses are a reliable status indicator, a part of a person’s identity and one of the main hobbies in England.

The English are a nation of “Do-It-Yourself people”. People can express their unique personal taste and enjoy an artistic spree. But it has nothing to do with money. This applies to the Upper Class echelons. Their homes tend to look shabby, frayed and unkempt in a way no Middle Class would tolerate. On the other hand homes of the wealthiest Working Class nouveaux-riches are full of extremely expensive items that Upper Class members regard as the height of vulgarity.⁴²

It is definitely not easy to be an Upper Class member and have to furnish and decorate a new house. When English people are talking about moving house or arranging for a new

⁴⁰ Mandy Barrow, “British Life,” Woodlands Junior School, Hunt Road Tonbridge Kent, <http://www.woodlands-junior.kent.sch.uk/customs/questions/class.htm> (accessed March 29, 2011).

⁴¹ Michael Argyle, *The Psychology of Social Class* (London: Routledge, 1993), 185.

⁴² Kate Fox, *Watching the English: The Hidden Rules of English Behaviour* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2005), 115.

home, they must always describe the process as something really horrible and traumatic, even if everything runs smoothly and also in record time.⁴³

According to Fox it is an applicable modesty-rule. “The more grand or desirable your new residence, the more you must emphasize the troubles, inconveniences and “nightmares” involved in its acquisition and improvement.” Among the Upper circles it is absolutely forbidden to ask someone directly what sum was paid for the house, flat or anything that could be expensive. Only the most vulgar nouveaux-riches break the unwritten society rule and tell precisely the sum to boast about how rich they are.⁴⁴

Among the higher echelons of English society is assumed a lack of interest because the opposite could be viewed very negatively as the above mentioned vulgar boasting. In England it is generally advisable to be vague rather than specific in compliments when showing off a home. When furnishing, the higher castes prefer bare floorboards, often part-covered with old (usually inherited) rugs or Persian carpets. Sitting rooms are commonly divided into two main rooms; the terms “sitting” or “drawing room” are used as places where guests are invited to have a coffee or a cup of tea. The adjoining part is called a “back room” or a “family room” where the Upper Class echelons have stereos, televisions and sofas. Everything is precisely ranked to look minimalistic and modern (even if the sofa was inherited from a Great grand-father and is a more than three hundred years old family treasure).⁴⁵

At the highest and lowest ends of the social scale you will find old, threadbare and mismatched furniture, while the classes between favour brand-new “suites” of matching “settees” and armchairs, sets of matching designer dining tables and chairs, etc. In fact, an English person’s social class can be gauged immediately from his or her attitude to expensive brand-new furniture: if someone sees it as “posh”, that is no higher than Middle-middle at best; if people think it is “naff”, they are Upper-middle or above.⁴⁶

Interesting and applicable is also another rule which Fox defined in her last book. This rule is another helpful class indicator which is called the “Brag-wall Rule”. The definition depends on which room the family display prestigious awards which their members won or

⁴³ Kate Fox, *Watching the English: The Hidden Rules of English Behaviour* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2005), 117-120.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

important photographs where the family are, for example with some famous actor or actress.

“If the family is Middle or below, these items are proudly shown in the sitting room, foyer or in a place considered to be important and prominent. For the Upper classes the only acceptable place to exhibit such things is the downstairs loo. This trick is smart in both senses of the word (posh and clever): visitors are highly likely to use the downstairs loo at some point, and to be impressed by your achievements, but by displaying them in the loo you are making a joke out of them and thus cannot be accused of either boasting or taking yourself too seriously.”⁴⁷

The organisation of the garden is also an important Upper Class trait. Upper Class gardens look more natural with a wide range of plants.

English people are highly sensitive to almost all class indicators, especially people from the Middle Classes who tend to have better position within the class system. They pretend to be “more” than they really are, buy expensive but completely needless things, have pets which are considered to be Upper Class (however, it is interesting that Upper Class people do not consider those pets to be an Upper Class indicator-e.g. A poodle- looks snobbish but it’s a typical example of the illogical Upper Class behaviour. The poodles look quite snobbish so “we” do not like them at all).

Hunting and shooting are also favourite leisure time activities, Upper Class families often own country estates suitable for these sports. Upper Class echelons love equestrian activities. They are popular with both sexes. There is a long-standing tradition of the Upper Class having close links to horses, as was said in the foregoing pages.

They despise typical Middle Class dog and cat shows and exhibitions, but horses and ponies these are something completely different.

Nowadays, money, income and material possessions are thought of as less important factors for England’s Upper Class families which are likely to have had wealth in their history. Income differences between classes are less striking nowadays. There are a lot of well-paid skilled manual jobs, and also less well-paid professional jobs in business or finance sectors which require a lot of skills and education. As was mentioned above,

⁴⁷ Kate Fox, *Watching the English: The Hidden Rules of English Behaviour* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2005), 117.

income is not so important status index, as opposed to language, which is probably the most important and relevant indicator of class status.⁴⁸

2.1.4 Language, accent, pronunciation and grammar

It was once said by one wise man that nothing can distinguish two similar nations (as are America and the UK) like language. This clever man was George Bernard Shaw, who dedicated almost his whole life to studying all aspects of language matters. G. B. Shaw is the father of the masterpiece *Pygmalion* which has been made into a film, a well-known theatre play and a TV adaptation known as *My Fair Lady*. *Pygmalion* is about the Cockney dialect—a way of speaking by slightly uneducated Working Class people from the East End of London.

The dialect which is the opposite to Cockney is called ‘Received Pronunciation’. In England it is the language of the media or Upper circles of society. Popular terms for this accent, such as “The Queen’s English“, “Oxford English“ or “BBC English“ are all a little misleading. Her Majesty, the Queen, for instance speaks an almost unique form of English, while the English variation which can be heard at Oxford University or on the BBC is no longer restricted to one type of regionally unmarked accent.⁴⁹

RP with its posh manner, strange words and (some man say) quite funny pronunciation is really the language of the Upper Classes. Traditionally, Received Pronunciation was the “everyday speech in the families of Southern English people who had been educated at public boarding-schools” and which conveyed no information about the speaker's region of origin preceding attendance at the school.⁵⁰

The term ‘received’ here is to be understood in its nineteenth-century sense of “accepted in the most polite circles of society”. British society has undergone a lot of changes since then, but RP has still remained in use among the upper social classes, when described by education or title, income and profession. Traditionally, those who graduated from public schools talked in this way. The accent has perpetuated mostly because of these schools and state schools trying to be like them. In many countries the prestige accents are of specific location. RP only originated in London and the surrounding area, but today,

⁴⁸ Michael Argyle, *The Psychology of Social Class* (London: Routledge, 1993), 185.

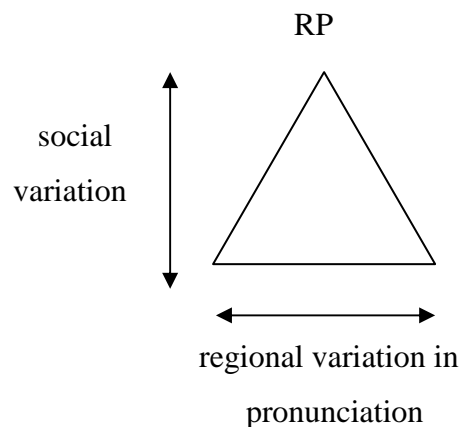
⁴⁹ Peter Trudgill, Arthur Hughes and Dominic Watt, *English Accents and dialects: An Introduction to Social and Regional Varieties of English in the British Isles*. (London: Hodder Education, 2005), 2-11.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

upper-class members speak it throughout the entire country.⁵¹ “As suggested above, RP has the greatest currency and enjoys the highest prestige in England; a majority of English people tend to associate the accent with the high social status, wealth and power of its speaker, RP is usually considered the best, the clearest, and even the most “beautiful” accent.”⁵²

The speakers of RP tend to be found at the top of the social rank, their speech is not regionally marked and gives no clue of their regional origin. People at the lower end of the social scale speak with the most obvious, the “broadest”, regional accents. “Between these two extremes, in general (and there are always individual exceptions) the higher a person is on the social scale, the less regionally marked will be his or her accent, and the less it is likely to differ from RP.” This relationship between class and accent can be represented diagrammatically in the form of a triangle, as in Figure 1.⁵³

Figure 2: *The triangle model of the relationship between status and accent*



It is really only in the highest echelons of British society, in the English public schools, and in the officer classes of the military, that earlier attitudes towards RP are maintained. Among the general public, RP is still highly valued in the sense that it is equated with being “well-spoken” or “articulate”, and is perceived widely as a signal of general intelligence and competence, but is no longer considered essential for certain occupations.⁵⁴

⁵¹ Michael Argyle, *The Psychology of Social Class* (London: Routledge, 1993), 185.

⁵² Peter Trudgill, Arthur Hughes and Dominic Watt, *English Accents and dialects: An Introduction to Social and Regional Varieties of English in the British Isles*. (London: Hodder Education, 2005), 2-11.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

What speakers of RP should bear in mind is that this form of pronunciation, however conservative, may sound strange to many British people, particularly in areas where the variations between RP and regional accents are most noticeable.

A good example of the importance of accent in upward mobility is Mandi Norwood, a British editor of one of the most-famous magazines for women. When she started her journalistic career, she had a strong Geordie accent spoken in the Tyneside area. It was suggested to her by her London friends that she should avoid speaking Geordie and rather speak RP if she wanted to get on. From that time her career went only upwards.⁵⁵

In ancient times Upper Class people developed a type of “secret language”, a tongue by which members of the higher society could talk to each other without servants or other people understanding. Here we can see that Uppers always had a need to be different. They called it Upper Class Rhyming Slang. It’s obvious why “Rhyming Slang-words” have to rhyme with each other it is a kind of language play. It shows us that Upper Class members are playful, it will be sketched further.

Upper Class rhyming slang was first introduced by Christopher Marlow, a contemporary wordsmith of William Shakespeare, as his major contribution to Walsingham’s Secret Service during the reign of Queen Elizabeth I. Upper Class rhyming slang uses a phrase which rhymes with the actual word one wants to say, the disguise being originally a code to transmit secret information to those who understand it. Upper Class rhyming slang works in the same way as Cockney rhyming slang except that the words of the wealthy and powerful are used as rhyming euphemisms for the more mundane.⁵⁶

Let me sketch out how the Upper Class Rhyming Slang works in a few examples in the next table. The meaning of words is concealed in rhymes which usually sound in quite a different way, compare:

⁵⁵Mike Storry and Peter Childs, eds., *British Cultural Identities*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2002), 179, http://books.google.cz/books?id=WozRiHGS8MEC&printsec=frontcover&dq=British+Cultural+Identities&hl=cs&ei=8iibTcO2D9CQswa_yYjEBg&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=1&ved=0CCoQ6AEwAA#v=onepage&q&f=false (accessed April 5, 2011).

⁵⁶Paul Wheeler and Anne Broadhead, *Upper Class Rhyming Slang* (London: Sidgwick & Jackson Limited, 1985), 6-7.

Table 2 Comparison between Rhyming Slang words and their real meaning

Rhyming Slang Word		Real meaning	Example
<i>String of pearls</i>	=	<i>Girls</i>	<i>Finish off your brandy, We'll go and rejoin the string of pearls.</i>
<i>Avant Garde</i>	=	<i>Hard</i>	<i>Getting into Oxford is not as avant garde as you may think.</i>
<i>Old School Tie</i>	=	<i>Sly</i>	<i>I know he was at Eton, but I still think he's terribly old school.</i>
<i>Gucci Shoes</i>		<i>News</i>	<i>Antonia must have lots of Gucci shoes. She just got back from Rome.</i>
<i>Life Peer</i>	=	<i>Deer</i>	<i>The life peer is a protected species, of course: there was always a danger of it dying out.</i>

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Language is a game and negotiating a meaning is a guessing game. From the last example we can see that being an Upper Class member requires also a good sense of humour and also a sense for irony and modest understatement. According to Kate Fox the rules of English humour are classless, but it must be admitted that a majority of English humour is preoccupied with class.

On the other hand with some people you cannot speak in an informal way. Everybody should have a sense of intuition as to where it can be used. This is pretty difficult especially for foreigners. When communicating with people, Upper Class members see others as equal to themselves in social rank or class; the British Upper Class echelons are direct and modest. If communicating with someone they know well, their style may be more informal, although they will still be reserved. Being reserved is a trend for the Upper Class people.

In the English Upper Class language there are seven words which are considered to be something like the 7 Deadly Sins. For really Upper Class people saying these words is

⁵⁷ Paul Wheeler and Anne Broadhead, *Upper Class Rhyming Slang* (London: Sidgwick & Jackson Limited, 1985), 6-7.

prohibited and must be punished, at least with a baleful gaze. They regard these words as infallible shibboleths.⁵⁸

French is generally seen as the sophisticated and high-culture language, in Upper Class circles however it is completely different. Somebody who speaks with a French accent or uses French expressions is considered to be quite eccentric and is pretending to be somebody else because really Upper Class members never ever use this kind of wording.

First of the “Deadly Sins” is the word “*pardon*”. The use of this unmistakably lower-class term is for Uppers frequently worse than swearing. According to Kate Fox in England a good class-test is to deliberately say something to a person which they cannot hear. A lower-middle class person would say: “Pardon?”; upper-middle would say: “Sorry?” or “Sorry-What?”. Upper and also the Working Class people would say only “What?”. Some upper-working class with Middle Class aspirations may say “Pardon?” in a misguided attempt to sound posh and clever.⁵⁹

The next word which is banned in Upper Class circles is also a word of French origin “*serviette*”. Use of this word is an attempt to enhance one’s status, a tendency to look posh while using a modern and fancy French word rather than a plain English one. Today *serviette* is regarded as a term which really belongs to lower class slang and Upper Class mothers get very upset when their children learn to say *serviette* from their lower-class nannies.⁶⁰

How to say the name of the room which is most commonly visited during the day? There are a lot of terms which are appropriate, but only one or two are acceptable in the Upper Class family. These two acceptable terms are lavatory or its abbreviation “loo” and one which is completely inappropriate is “*toilet*”. A native English speaker who uses this prohibited word could be called pejoratively a social climber.⁶¹

A room in the house where people spend a lot of time by amusing guests and relaxing is a sitting room; and its lower-class synonym is “*lounge*”. This term is commonly used by lower-class groups of people. Some Middle Classes with aspirations to have higher

⁵⁸ Kate Fox, *Watching the English: The Hidden Rules of English Behaviour* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2005), 76-78.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid.

positions on the class rank might learn not to use the words *toilet* and *serviette*, but lounge is a stumbling block for them.⁶²

An essential part of a sitting room undoubtedly is a comfortable piece of furniture used for sitting-sofa. This term is used by the Upper Class echelons and is considered by them to be the only correct one, whereas a term “*settee*” is considered to be another inconvenient expression which ranks people among the lower groups of classes.⁶³

The next banned word is “*dinner*”. There is nothing wrong with the word itself but it comes with a bad usage of this term. Working Class members simply use the word *dinner* for the meal which is eaten at midday, but the correct word for this meal should be “lunch”. There might be also problems with another meal during the day called, by higher echelons, “supper” or “dinner”, Working class people refer to this meal as “*tea*”. For the higher classes “tea” means a small refreshment consisting of tea and biscuits, which is taken around four or five o’clock. This is a useful class indicator when you are a stranger in an English family and when invited to have a meal with a family, you should guardedly ask what daily meal you are proposing to have. Answers will help with the classification of hosts on the social scale.⁶⁴

“*Sweet*” is also inappropriate with the Upper Class echelons. Here the same rule applies as with *dinner*, this word itself is not bad, but the inappropriate usage is considered to be a reliable class indicator. The sweet meal after the main course is called-by the upper classes “pudding”. It does not matter from what is made of: a cake or a fruit or ice cream. Another unacceptable term which could be confusingly used is “*dessert*”. For the Upper Classes dessert is traditionally fresh fruit which is served at the end of all preceding dishes.⁶⁵

This chapter could be summarized by an absolutely accurate quote: “An Englishman’s way of speaking absolutely classifies him,” sang Henry Higgins in “My Fair Lady.” “The moment he talks he makes some other Englishman despise him.”⁶⁶

⁶² Kate Fox, *Watching the English: The Hidden Rules of English Behaviour* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2005), 76-78.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

2.2 Royalty at the top of the class system

In England there is only one exception which stands outside the class system, or we can say at the Top of the imaginary ranks of the classes. It is the Royal family-one of the symbols of England. The United Kingdom became the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland in 1922. Over the centuries, Great Britain has evolved politically from several independent countries. The present British Royal family is descended from the Scottish Royal family who trace their origins back to 500 AD when the Scottish Kingdom was founded. This makes the English Royal family one of the oldest in the world.

In ancient times and for a long time afterwards, the monarchy meant privilege and the rights of heredity and rank. They had the prerogatives of wealth and the concept of monarchs as special, even divine, beings.

Today's Aristocracy in Britain is composed of approximately 7,000 hereditary peerages. The Royal Family heads the Top of this system and is followed by 783 titles in a fixed order—25 dukes, 37 Marquesses, 173 Earls, 110 Viscounts and 438 Barons. All these titles are represented in the House of Lords. A common mistake is that a majority of these dukes, Marquesses, Earls, Viscounts and Barons take pride in what was accomplished by their ancestors rather than by themselves. Such a system of titles and social roles is not so widespread nowadays. However in England the monarchy has a very long tradition.⁶⁷

England is a constitutional monarchy. In real terms that means that the constitution is not contained in any single document and the Queen is a head of the state. However, although the Queen is the Head of State, her role is mainly to represent the state, and legislative and executive competency belongs to the elected Parliament. The Queen plays an important role in the life of the nation. The Sovereign is deemed to be a national symbol, she acts as a “focus for national identity, unity and pride; gives a sense of stability and continuity; officially recognises success and excellence; and supports the ideal of

⁶⁷ Victoria Krummel, *The Old Upper Class - Britain's Aristocracy* (Munich: Grin Verlag, n.d.), 4, http://books.google.com/books?id=Jwc9JJPMJmAC&pg=PA4&dq=The+old+upper+class+-+Britain%C2%B4s+aristocracy&hl=cs&ei=XkG4TeqTAYX-vQPvN9SiAw&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=1&ved=0CCkQ6AEwAA#v=onepage&q&f=false (accessed April 15, 2011).

voluntary service.”⁶⁸ In all these roles Her Majesty is supported by all members of her family. Even in hard times people believe in their Queen.

For its entire existence England has not been occupied by any other nations, therefore, they maintain their traditional division of classes, which has been known since the days of William the Conqueror; on the contrary they have enforced their own class system on the people who have been colonized.

Today’s higher classes include people from a broader social spectrum of the population. This was caused by the rise of meritocratic elements and values that came to dominate Britain’s society after the Second World War.⁶⁹

2.3 Historical importance of the Upper Class for the whole of English society

I would like to follow up on the last sentence of the preceding chapter, Royalty at the top of the class system, which dealt with Britain’s society after the period of the Second World War. This new chapter deals with the benefits and the importance of the Upper Class echelons for the entire English society. According to historians and also my own research, especially war and post-war periods are worth describing and considering because nothing can change the established order of things like a war.

In the famous Battle of Britain there was one squadron which played an important role in defence of the homeland against the German enemy. It was the 601 Squadron of the Royal Auxiliary Air Force, also known by the nickname as the ‘Millionaires’ Squadron’.⁷⁰

This squadron was formed in 1925 when a group of young, brave and wealthy English aristocrats decided to form themselves into a Reserve Squadron of the Royal Air Force. The squadron had a passion for flying, the unfulfilled dreams of their fathers and a need for take risks and for adrenalin. When the war came, they felt the desire to defend their country against a strong and perilous enemy. They were wealthy enough to buy Spitfires

⁶⁸ The Royal Household, “What Is Constitutional Monarchy?” The Official Website of the British Monarchy, <http://www.royal.gov.uk/MonarchUK/HowtheMonarchyworks/Whatisconstitutionalmonarchy.aspx> (accessed March 29, 2011).

⁶⁹ Victoria Krummel, *The Old Upper Class - Britain’s Aristocracy* (Munich: Grin Verlag, n.d.), 4, http://books.google.com/books?id=Jwc9JJPMJmAC&pg=PA4&dq=The+old+upper+class+-+Britain%C2%B4s+aristocracy&hl=cs&ei=XkG4TeqTAYX-vQPvN9SiAw&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=1&ved=0CCkQ6AEwAA#v=onepage&q&f=false (accessed April 15, 2011).

⁷⁰ Huw Jones, “601 Squadron: Millionaire Flying Aces of World War II,” *BBC News*, December 14, 2010. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-11951642> (accessed March 31, 2011).

for battles and also cameras; so they could film their brave escapades. Most of the squadron pilots owned their own private aircraft.

At the beginning of the World War II, this squadron and its members were seen by their war comrades as a bunch of undisciplined wealthy young men, but they soon proved that it was not true and they deserved to be taken seriously and they made a huge contribution to the British Royal Air Force. Even in these hard times there could be seen the renowned English sense of humour. If someone wanted to become a member it was necessary to prove that as a potential recruit he could still behave like a gentleman when drunk.

Later, this aristocratic squadron had a reputation for their exploits and their tampering of the rules, says Peter Devitt from the RAF Museum. “But they could not have got away with it without being an efficient and effective fighting unit. They were very serious about their flying and their fighting.” The real benefit of the Upper Class echelons was that even when the whole of England was financially exhausted by military spending and war, they had money to buy aircraft and the courage to sit in their own bought planes and they went fight for their country, in their proud Albion. Many Upper Class young men died due to volunteering to go and to fight on the front of line. One of the reasons for this volunteering was “Noblesse Oblige”, simply, they knew they must fight more bravely than the lower classes. There were other auxiliary squadrons, but none was as exclusive or elitist as 601.⁷¹

⁷¹ Huw Jones, “601 Squadron: Millionaire Flying Aces of World War II,” *BBC News*, December 14, 2010. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-11951642> (accessed March 31, 2011).

3 PREDICTIONS FOR THE FUTURE OF THE UPPER CLASS

“I look down on them because I am Upper Class. I look up to him because he is Upper Class but I look down on him because he is Lower Class. I am Middle Class. I know my place.”⁷²

In the third and also in the last chapter of this thesis will be described potential perspectives in the future development of class diversification and possible situations which might occur in English society.

This section starts with a well-known quotation; see above, because in the 20th century there were rigid boundaries in the English class system. These boundaries were clearly “defined” in 1966 in a famous comedy sketch for The Frost Report starring three English actors who represented members of the three main classes. It spoke to a society obsessed with class structure, and one’s place within it. While modern Britain is different in many ways from its 1960’s forebears, only some things have changed more than others. Nowadays, the class boundaries are less well-defined, and some would argue that English people are less obsessed with status now than they were then.⁷³

The class system remained relatively unchanged from the Norman times to the Victorian times. The class system in England remains unchanged because this country has not previously been occupied by any other nation, so brought its own way of state organization and transformation in the class system. Even in the past, when England colonized states which it conquered, the elements of the traditional English culture were transmitted to these colonies. England has a traditional class system that divides human beings into several groups. People were divided into classes and breaking the well-established class barriers was a very uneasy task in the past. Contemporary England is a less rigid society than it was hundreds of years ago but there are still barriers which defend the social mobility.⁷⁴ The Upper Class is perceived by all the British as an elitist society into which it is hard to get.⁷⁵

⁷² UK News, *Telegraph*, May 20, 2007. <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/1552095/Theres-no-way-up.html> (accessed March 27, 2011).

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Mike Storry and Peter Childs, eds., *British Cultural Identities*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2002), 179, http://books.google.cz/books?id=WozRiHGS8MEC&printsec=frontcover&dq=British+Cultural+Identities&hl=cs&ei=8iibTcO2D9CQswa_yYjEBg&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=1&ved=0CCoQ6AEwAA#v=onepage&q&f=false (accessed April 5, 2011).

⁷⁵ Kate Fox, *Watching the English: The Hidden Rules of English Behaviour* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2005), 233.

This chapter has a title where the word “prediction” is used in the plural. This may be a little misleading. Indeed, according to the facts mentioned and examined in this Bachelor Thesis, there is only one possible option for the development of modern English society and the future of the Upper Class.

A recent study held by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development found that contemporary England is still a highly stratified society, where background determines a person’s success to a far higher degree than in almost any other European country. Many experts say that the findings show that Britain has always been a stratified society, in which different classes are brought up to follow different rules about how to think, talk and behave.⁷⁶ England is a constitutional monarchy with a well-established social system. The main feature typical of this society is the gradualism—in other words it means that in this society there is no occurrence of any sudden and rapid changes but the gradual alteration of the customs. It is universally valid and clear that people in Britain are proud of the monarchy and their class system. The vast majority of them agree with it despite its pros and cons and they all know to which class they belong.⁷⁷

What has to be true is that Upper Class has changed and undergone a time evolution. The Upper Class has assimilated to the ways of the 21st century. Nowadays, it is rare that you meet someone on the street in England who is the traditional aristocratic gentleman or typical Middle Class man wearing a suit and a bowler hat. They have been replaced by well-dressed managers of large companies. It is not surprising that contemporary Upper Class echelons act normally and ordinarily because society requires it. They wear jeans, eat junk food, sometimes travel by mass transportation and get drunk just like anyone else in England. This is also an indicator of the less well-defined boundaries of the class system. It cannot be determined to which class one belongs only according to the clothes, but an individual’s status should be seen as a set of all the indicators. People in England are proud of their conventional class society—this is probably also a perception of the rest of the world about England. Even in today’s society, the traditional class division is simply linked with English society and has an inherent and irreplaceable position in the United Kingdom.

⁷⁶Randeep Ramesh, “Britain’s Class System – and Salaries – Inherited from Fathers,” *Guardian*, February 11, 2010. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/society/2010/feb/11/britain-earnings-mobility-oecd> (accessed April 11, 2011).

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

3.1 Upper Class from different perspectives

Which class do I belong to? Today it is a flammable question in England. Class structures the life of everyone in England. Where someone lives, where they go shopping, the jobs that people get, this can all be related to class. Indeed, it has a significant impact on the majority of things people do. About 95 per cent of people in England are able to place themselves in a certain social class. On the other hand, people's self-perception does not fully correspond with the sociologist perception of class and status. This phenomenon occurs because the sociologists define social class and status by occupation while people perceive social class by a set of other variables, such as language, education, relationships with the others and a style of life.⁷⁸

The first part of this chapter dealt with how the Upper Class perceive themselves and also with the social phenomenon called "Noblesse Oblige". The term noblesse oblige stands for a set of social norms, the really Upper Class echelon should behave in accordance with. This term comes from the French language, and translated to English means the 'nobility have obligations'. Generally it is used in a sense that with money or prestige comes hand in hand also the responsibilities for others less wealthy or less privileged. This social concept suggests that everyone who possesses something special or is in some way gifted then they should do their best to help others.⁷⁹

The importance is not the definition of the noblesse oblige itself, but with an understanding of the strength and power of this concept of behaviour which many of the world's most successful businessmen and politicians obey, as well as gifted individuals. If this concept is taken generally, however everyone can be seen as gifted and having a unique skill or talent that can be used for the best. For the Upper Class echelons acting according to the noblesse oblige it is one of the reasons for being involved in philanthropic activities.⁸⁰

The members of the English Royal family also have many charity projects; they act as a good example for others. The noblesse oblige doesn't affect only the English Upper Class; it has also influenced the rich American people. In the USA there is also a widespread class which has fortune and power. As well as wealthy Englishmen, the rich

⁷⁸ Michael Argyle, *The Psychology of Social Class* (London: Routledge, 1993), 202.

⁷⁹ David Murray, "Noblesse Oblige," Learning to give, <http://learningtogive.org/papers/paper38.html> (accessed April 5, 2011).

⁸⁰ Ibid.

American people feel some responsibility to do charity or volunteer aid; otherwise they would get strong social critics.

“It can be seen that Upper Class individuals are generally rich and they see themselves as people who are educated, from good families and holding certain attitudes and beliefs.”⁸¹ The Upper Class people perceive themselves as privileged but they can behave in both senses of this word. Those who see themselves predestined can act in a positive way, they help others, do charity work and philanthropy, etc. Those people are the old fashioned “Gentlemen and Ladies” who act according to the noblesse oblige—“We have wealth and power, so we have also ethical duties to the whole of society which has allowed us to be privileged.” On the other hand, in England nowadays there are a lot of the Upper Class people who are not committed to the idea of the noblesse oblige. These people could be described as the nouveaux-riches Upper Class. They usually attained their wealth quickly by doing business, and with it do not attain the correct Upper Class manners and behaviour, they have a lack of experience or finesse to use their wealth in the same manner as older aristocratic people from the families who have been wealthy for multiple generations. There are also important status distinctions between the two parts of the Upper Class; between those who possess the “old money”, and the nouveaux-riches Upper Class. The highest status tends to be conferred on the old upper classes, the true aristocracy, which is represented by individuals such as the Duke of Westminster. The “old money” Upper Class echelons often operate exclusionary strategies against the “vulgar” nouveaux-riches, for example, by restricting them from being members of very exclusive English aristocratic clubs. The “new money” confers among the English people a lower status. From time to time, the nouveaux-riches people of the Upper Class may cast bad reflections on the perception of the rest of the highest class. However, it could be a current viewpoint about the Upper Class in the whole England. The Upper Class is viewed by the English as an elitist society into which it is hard to get.⁸²

On one hand the Middle Class may be anxious to get into the Upper Class and on the other hand their members despise the Upper Class snobbish behaviour and posh Received Pronunciation. The Middle Class can be divided into several groups of people who have different views about the Upper Class. In contemporary Middle Class English society there can be distinguished two groups of people. The first is considered to be the so called

⁸¹ Michael Argyle, *The Psychology of Social Class* (London: Routledge, 1993), 204.

⁸² Ibid.

“social climbers”—Middle Class people who are sensitive to social status indicators and tend to have a higher position on the intelligible class rank. They are not fully committed and satisfied with the Middle Class life and do their best to increase their status; they have relationships with the Upper Class echelons, try to speak regionally unmarked Received Pronunciation, avoid misguided use of the “Middle Class speech shibboleths”, do their shopping in the shops which are considered to be the exclusive ones, etc. Views on this class differ from one person to another. One person may consider doing the shopping in Marks & Spencer as Upper Class, while another can consider going to the Marks & Spencer as an indicator of Middle Class status.⁸³ In addition, these people who adopted the “superior” lifestyle (in terms of houses, cars, luxury goods, etc.) have an elevated perception of their social status. They see the Upper Class as something extraordinary which is worth getting into.⁸⁴ On the contrary, the other group of Middle Class people has a totally opposite viewpoint of the Upper Class. A high degree of subjectivity is implicated here. This part of the Middle Class refuses the Upper Class snobbery, their typical activities, and they also despise the posh lifestyle.⁸⁵

According to sociologist David Lockwood Working Class people see the English class hierarchy as a set of established norms based on lifestyle and social acceptance. However there is a historical discrepancy with the class system, when the higher classes were perceived by the manual workers as “them” from the phraseograph “us and them”. In the past, Uppers were predestined to live better lives, while Working Class members saw themselves primarily as people who work mainly for their living.⁸⁶ Some Working Class people see the middle classes as superior. Other Working Class people perceive the class system as fluid and flexible, so that they are able to move up into the Middle Class.⁸⁷

Class attitudes are developed with growing up in age. In England sociologists carried out several studies and it was found that children at the age of 5 are able to distinguish the difference between poor and rich people, from observations of their grand houses and luxurious cars, etc. At 10 years children are able to recognize that between richness and poverty lies an intermediate stage. At the same age children are also able to differentiate

⁸³ Kate Fox, *Watching the English: The Hidden Rules of English Behaviour* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2005), 233.

⁸⁴ Kate Fox, *Watching the English: The Hidden Rules of English Behaviour* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2005), 176.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Michael Argyle, *The Psychology of Social Class* (London: Routledge, 1993), 207.

class on the basis of different occupations. Adolescents have a more profound knowledge of the class system and status indicators. They also realize that differences between certain classes are partly due to ability and effort as well as to individual social background.⁸⁸

3.2 Return to the traditions or a “New era for the Upper Class”?

The traditional Upper Class has been tightly linked with aristocracy in the past. Members of the aristocracy lived in majestic houses and were the hereditary elite who had wealth and a stable position in society.⁸⁹ It used to be that Upper Class meant wealth, power and aristocratic landowner. It also used to be that the Middle Class had detached or semi-detached houses, suits, monocles and bowler hats, while the Working Class people ate fish and chips, had common, regionally marked accents with the less educated lexicon and council flats.⁹⁰ However, those times are almost gone. It is definitely not true that upper circles of society are nowadays more open for new members, but at a certain level society is not as rigid as it was. For example the boundaries between the Working and Middle classes are less well-defined, and in contemporary England it is easier to achieve and hold a Middle Class position in spite of Working Class roots and origins.⁹¹ Although, that is not to be implied for conversion from the Middle to the Upper Class, which is still considered to be elitist and sealed. As was mentioned in the previous subchapter, the matters concerning the evolution of the classes in time has been slightly changed. It is very likely that the traditional old aristocracy will continue in the upbringing of the new posh generations; because, as was examined in the subchapter dealing with the origins and family of the Upper Class-snobbery is learnt from parents and gained from the circles and conditions in which children live during their childhood.

Indeed the phenomenon of upward and also downward mobility in the field of social levels is not very common and even diffused in English society. It is still virtually impossible to move from the large ranks of the middle classes to anything above that.

⁸⁸ Michael Argyle, *The Psychology of Social Class* (London: Routledge, 1993), 207.

⁸⁹ Mike Storry and Peter Childs, eds., *British Cultural Identities*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2002), 179, http://books.google.cz/books?id=WozRiHGS8MEC&printsec=frontcover&dq=British+Cultural+Identities&hl=cs&ei=8iibTcO2D9CQswa_yYjEBg&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=1&ved=0CCoQ6AEwAA#v=onepage&q&f=false (accessed April 5, 2011).

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Michael Argyle, *The Psychology of Social Class* (London: Routledge, 1993), 4-5.

There still exist barriers to social mobility that may matter more than class however such as gender and racial factors.⁹²

In the past, there were a few large steps towards a society where class and where someone was born did not matter. It was for example the Industrial Revolution which allowed a flood of the nouveaux-riches to gain power and influence through their quickly attained wealth rather than through their origins. This began to strengthen the lines between the working and middle classes, and the middle and upper classes.⁹³ Another important historical period was the time of the two successive wars. They had decimated the whole of society and especially the upper classes. Then the class system was under attack from Attlee's and Blair's Labour government, they tried to close social gaps and destroy established boundaries with contributions to the National Health Service, etc. Thanks to these attempts modern Britain is a generally much freer society with a much more informal social hierarchy. Nevertheless, as far as I know, there has never been a totally classless society. Even primitive societies, where there is a great deal of co-operation and sharing, still have their hierarchies and classes. England has always gone its own way and does not submit to the views of others. Things that may sound strange all over the world are quite normal in England, such as driving on the left side of the road, different metric system or currency. These are also the things according to which I assume that the developed system of social hierarchy and classes in England have their right place and will not undergo any more profound changes. To finish this paragraph it is worth to writing down, that old habits die hard and many people still stick to the traditions of the good old England.⁹⁴

The second part of the headline a "New era for the Upper Class" here testifies to the fact that in the 21st century the Upper Class has had to undergo several changes to remain at the highest position on the social class rank. There is plenty of evidence to suggest that the class system in England is alive and well. Indeed, most people believe that nothing has changed in England in terms of class. In the few past decades several sociological surveys have been carried out targeted on the relationships between the three broadest classes. In 1996 one of them, led by a sociologist, Hill found, that 81 per cent of people believed there

⁹²Michael Argyle, *The Psychology of Social Class* (London: Routledge, 1993), 4-5.

⁹³Thorn Murphy, "Does Wealth Matter More Than Class in Modern Britain?" Associated content from Yahoo, http://www.associatedcontent.com/article/1379067/does_wealth_matter_more_than_class.html?cat=9 (accessed April 11, 2011).

⁹⁴Ibid.

was a “class struggle” in the whole of Britain fifteen years ago. After two years ago another similar survey was carried out which showed that more than two thirds of people thought that the United Kingdom was a class divided country, while only about 20 per cent considered England as a classless society. Of course class is still a huge issue, regardless of how much it has dropped in importance.⁹⁵

The Upper Class is proportionally the smallest class, it probably consists of 5 per cent of the adult English population. Nowadays, many members of this class effectively control large companies, either directly via their positions within these organizations, or more subtly through their occupation of key positions in the financial sector. Some of these individuals also have leading positions in politics and other spheres of public and cultural life. The Upper Class echelons are distinguished from the other social groups for example by their consumption of money. They do not spend money by the impulse buying of posh items; financial wealth is invested by them. “The Upper Class uses its wealth to confer social advantages and to retain the privileged position for its future generations. Thus, the Upper Class can be seen to be relatively closed, coherent and a self-recruiting elite. It may have become an invisible elite in cultural terms but its underlying power and influence have never been stronger.”⁹⁶

Finally, I would like to conclude this chapter with the statement that there will be no return to the traditions or a new era for the Upper Class. The contemporary Upper Class is a well-balanced mixture of the traditional elements with modern social features, for example wealthy businessmen with the old-fashioned “gentlemanly characteristics”.

⁹⁵Mike Storry and Peter Childs, eds., *British Cultural Identities*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2002), 179, http://books.google.cz/books?id=WozRiHGS8MEC&printsec=frontcover&dq=British+Cultural+Identities&hl=cs&ei=8iibTcO2D9CQswa_yYjEBg&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=1&ved=0CCoQ6AEwAA#v=onepage&q&f=false (accessed April 5, 2011).

⁹⁶ Ibid.

CONCLUSION

There are several status indicators which define upper class permanence. It is worth repeating that the most important of these are the family background, the family home, its furnishings and the location plus the style of living. The most reliable indicator is an accent. Whoever speaks with a regionally unmarked Received Pronunciation is automatically perceived as a member of the social elite. One indicator never stands alone but must go hand in hand with others. Being perceived as an Upper Class person is a set of complex variables according to which people judge an individual. The Upper Class echelons are distinguished from the lower classes by these indicators and also by their wealth, class integrity and power. We can see the contemporary Upper Class as a layer of society composed of wealthy families rather than individuals. In the 21st century the core of this class is made up mainly of managers of large companies and of the old English aristocracy. For the English elite it is typical to have a wide range of social and business contacts, which are gained mainly during their university education. The Upper Class has its representatives not only in politics but also in business, administration and the armed forces.

Each class has its own unique characteristics but the differences in lifestyle, especially between the Middle and the Working classes have gradually become less easily defined. Nowadays socially upward mobility is easier for Working Class people. It comes through hard work, extra hours and education. Upward mobility from the Middle Class to the Upper Class is more difficult because the Upper Classes put up barriers preventing people from the lower social classes entering their society. It is because of the family background, attitudes, language and other status indicators.

Great Britain has been and still is a land destined to be a class society. All over the British Isles there is not a sufficiently strong enough will which would be able to radically change the existing system. England is a traditional society in which the changes are not dramatic but The Upper Class has had to face many attempts of England becoming a classless and egalitarian society. The Upper Class has undergone an historical evolution but its social status has remained almost unchanged.

Everyone in England is born into a certain class and although social mobility is possible especially through a good education, it is highly likely that a person will remain a member of the class into which they were born throughout their lives, or at least remain in

the same class in their minds. England is a country where the class affiliation significantly affects every single individual.

To summarize the whole of this Bachelor Thesis it is necessary to admit that the thesis made it very clear, the class system is still an integral part of English society; it has not changed significantly in any way and it will certainly prevail into the future.

The conclusion is also that there is a significant number of indicators of class status in England and practically every English citizen is aware of their class, no matter whether they are proud of it or not. As for the Upper Class, it is settled and it will remain the uppermost part of the class system in the future. It is also certain that the Upper Class will never merge with another class because of the various barriers in existence, such as the people a person associates with, the house they live in etc. These things make it impossible for an outsider to join the Upper Class and become a respected member of this the highest social circle.

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