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**The reality of a Business Operation,
The National Freight Corporation 1947-1982 -
A Prosopographical View**

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Abstract

Little work has been done within the subgenus (or subfusc) levels of nationalised industries, including at the micro-levels of subsidiary operational nationalised businesses in the nationalised road haulage sector. Additional research is required that would contribute to the re-siting of business history firmly within “current business issues and theoretical concerns” (Harvey 2004), and using a case by case analysis (Jenkins 2004), conceptualising and evaluating operational performance. Pendleton (1997a; 1997b; 1997c) and Peat (2004) have initiated post-privatisation studies from an industrial relations viewpoint, and Jeremy (1998) situated an earlier examination of business and the state within a broader business history of Britain. Armstrong (2003) identified a range of companies involved in nationalised road transport operations, whilst Barker’s (1974a) transport histories of London Transport and economic history of UK transport (1974b), with a further history of road transport (1995) have established indirect connections within the genre.

I indicate where further new data is being collated, with a report of the detailed prosopographical analysis that involved the pensioner cohort of the National Freight Corporation’s Foundation. The methodologies used are described, and interconnections are made to the logistics operations of the operational companies involved. Major gaps in the literature and preceding empirical work are highlighted, and an innovative contribution to the minimal business history historiography of public sector business and organisational management processes in the UK is made. Conclusions are drawn from testing of this part of the case study against the initial hypothesis and further research requirements are highlighted.

Key words

Transport and freight, efficiency, inefficiency, ownership, culture, privatisation, nationalisation, management employee buy-out, prosopography.

Acronyms and abbreviations

BR – British Rail

BRS – British Road Services

HRM – Human Resource Management

MD – Managing Director

MEBO – Management Employee Buy-Out

NAO- National Archives Office Kew

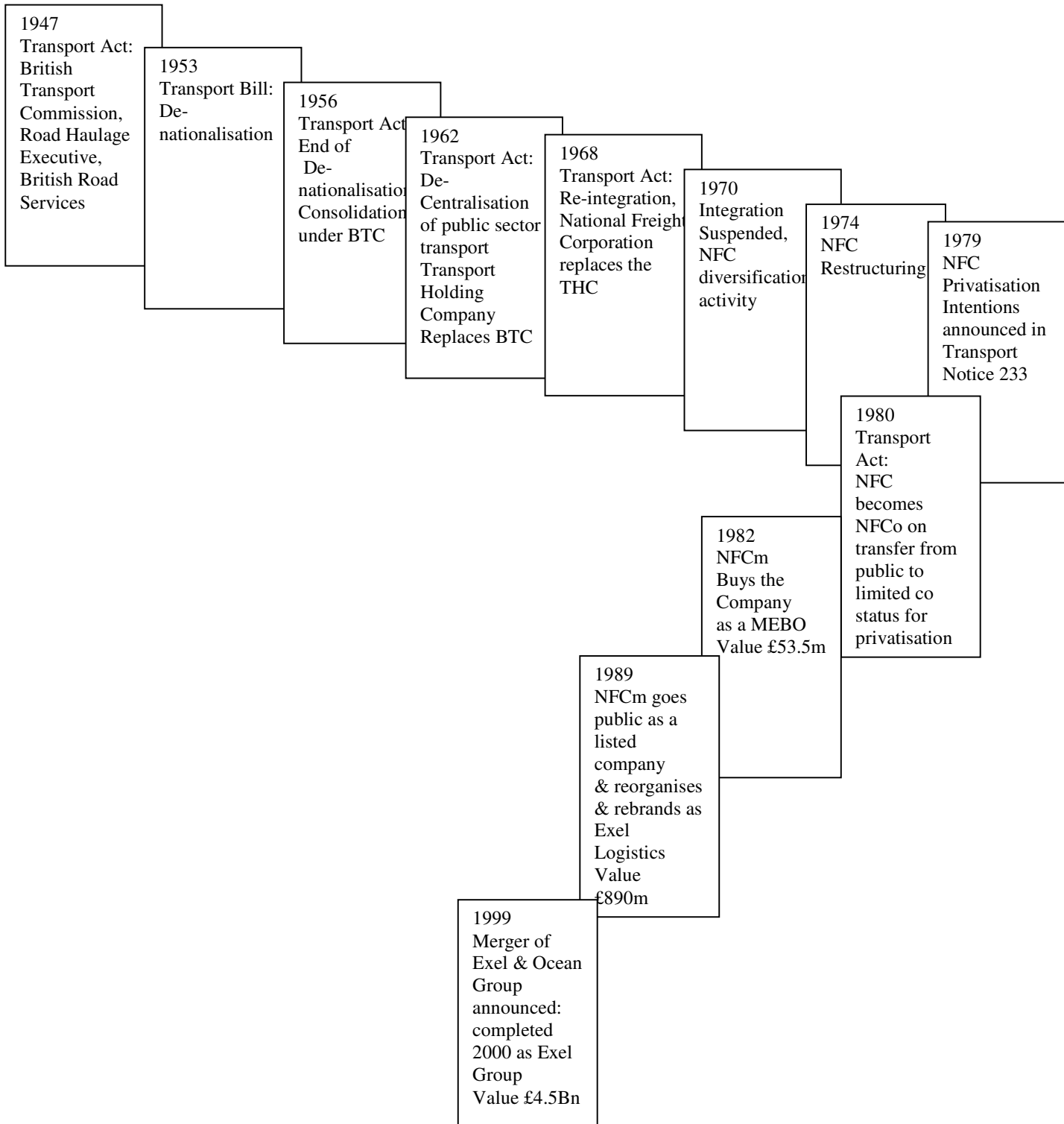
NCL – National carriers Limited

NFC - National Freight Corporation (including predecessor companies Transport Holding Company, Road Haulage Executive)

TU – Trades Union

WW2– World War II 1939-1945

Chronology: The National Freight Corporation 1947 – 1982 (Source: research fieldwork for this paper)



Introduction

The prosopographical data analysis attempted to contribute to determining which view of the NFC was historically correct, and to fill the divergence between perceptions of the company in company records and testimony, and the Government records, and between subsequent justificatory recordings of contemporary perceptions of the NFC. The existing literature and the historical record defined the NFC as generally inefficient and as epitomising the definitive failure of the state corporatist enterprise. The NFC as a corporation considered itself to be a fully commercial operation, its efficiency limited only by a highly politically contingent restriction from the prices and incomes policies of the 1960s and 1970s which effectively restricted its ability to fully meeting its costs by charging the market price. The aim of this paper is a contributory element to the test of the research problem, that the NFC had “lock-in” to post-MEBO success because of the historical composition, structure and management of the company and its longitudinal development over time¹.

NFC People-The prosopographical data

Much business research treats the business operation as a mechanistic “black box” that conforms to inputs, transformations and output criteria, arising from classical rationales centred upon econometric dynamics. The whole schema is considered automata, which respond to the influences of market supply and demand, realizable with the application of management concepts and techniques.

The prosopographical or collective biography approach is a familiar historical research tool to historians and as a multiple career-line analysis method, to social scientists. Stone (1971) considered the methodology to be of particular effectiveness as a tool for the root examination of political action and social structures as an interconnected phenomenon, and the form was operationalised for business history research applications by Jeremy (1990).

¹ The prosopographical approach not only furnished an internal picture of the operational lives of the NFC respondents, but also the external context of their work, the NFC, and a means to triangulate against the company records and contemporary archival data, in addition to the secondary data.

The prosopographical data, which is the subject of this paper, was gathered as a part of the whole picture being built up upon the initial findings from archival primary data at the NAO and in the company, and began to demonstrate some intertemporal connections between the roles of people, culture, politics and economic influences in the efficiency/inefficiency deliberations recorded around the National Freight Corporation (NFC) and its organisational form pre-Management Employee Buy-Out (MEBO).

This work in progress gives an indicative overview of the continuing analysis of the NFC prosopographical survey by examination of the data source, the qualitative anthropological characteristics of the group of NFC respondents.

Theory and Hypothesis

The prosopographical data from the NFC pensioner cohort indicated that there appeared to be elements of apparently significant culture and values influences at a local operational level that had been a distinct and significant factor in the operational activities and efficiency of the NFC companies. The pervasiveness of these elements was identified in a common perception of the respondents of a commitment to efficiency in operational performance of “professionalism”.

There was a richness and variety of philosophies, backgrounds, motivational and related differences of individuals apparent in the data. The diversity, or motley, of the data group graduated toward a pivotal centre in what might be termed a “collective” of organisation, community and individual behaviour focused upon the NFC company institution. A complex structure, almost a taxonomy, involving culture, class, values, leadership and positive organisational management emerged from the data that indicated that something had been “going on” within the NFC as an organisation, something that might be interesting historically and relevant organisationally.

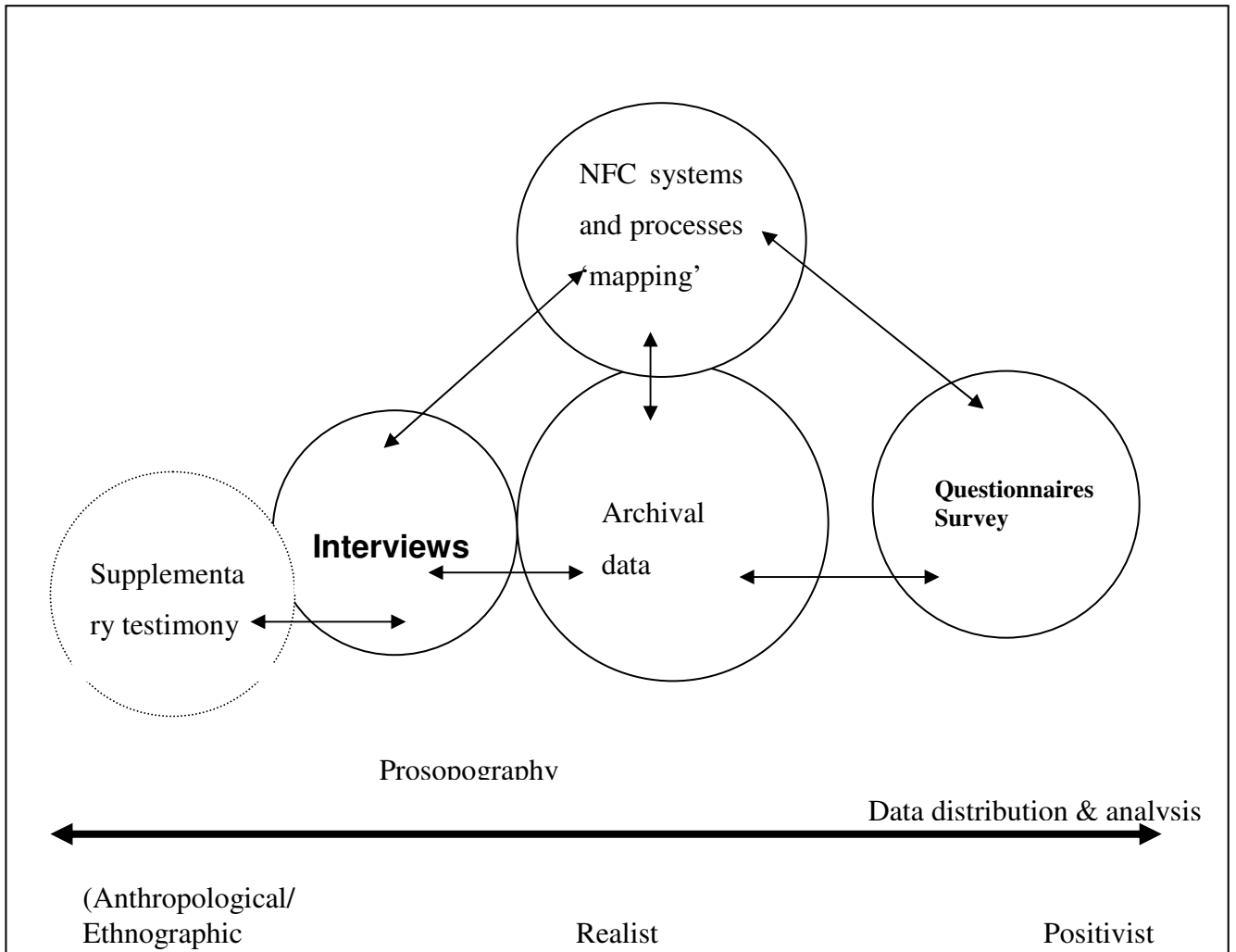
The prosopographical questionnaire data framework had been sorted into three distinctive sets or trends that attempted to identify workable primary groupings around which analysis could be achieved, and to uncover the tacit valuations

incorporated in the attitude of “professionalism” deduced by initial observations². Identifying the framework and foundation of the commonality of the cross-cohort phenomenon of “professionalism” was a key element within and from the questionnaire and interview surveys (figure 1) as part of the overall methodological and analytical framework.

Defining the concept of a methodological and analytical framework for evaluation of the NFC cohort I suggest that it is relevant to distinguish between four basic constructs for the framework. The prosopographical method combined interviews and supplementary testimony with questionnaire data, combining later in the research with comparator archival and systems process data. The constructs were deliberate, in that they were intended to explore the concept of “professionalism” and its multidimensional meanings within the case study, and to provide a model that would synthesize other relevant themes and issues for further research.

² Argument made for the prosopographical approach used with the NFC employees as incorporating both rationalism and empiricism in the practical, active and methodical analysis that was required to evaluate the mass of data.

Figure 1. The methodological and analytical framework design for the NFC.



Data Analysis

The first of the groupings contained the anthropological aspects of the NFC respondents that would identify any characteristics in the data that would be helpful in ascertaining any institutional and social and relational dynamics in the NFC companies. Second was the operational activities context within which people worked over the research time frame and their perceptions of and reactions to, the company operational and strategic management as it impacted upon them. Third was

the Company's strategic management prior to the MEBO and the material and attitudinal influences upon responses of the people to the impending privatisation.

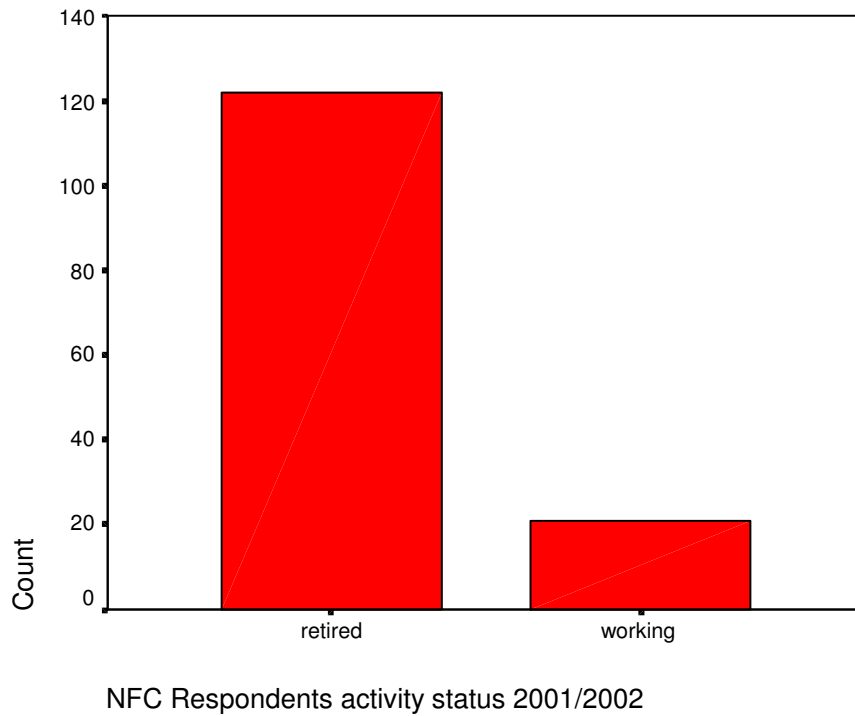
The intention was to determine if there had been developmental effects on the NFC, which could be linked to the NFC companies' internal contexts of values and attitudes, their culture, emanating from the staff environment represented by the survey respondents. The picture would be built up and developed from the questionnaire and subsequent interview responses based upon the three distinctive sets or trends. The reason for this was to fix the respondents' views as firmly as is possible in any survey by looking for significant social, political, religious or relationship change that may have influenced responses and that might have been grounded in their experiences with the NFC. A majority of the respondents' spoke of a "family firm" ambience wherever they worked within the NFC, and this may partly have resulted from the workforce culture and company culture combining in a positive manner.

The first general grouping from application of the model (figure 1) is defined as prosopographical, a construct which itself combines the anthropological and ethnographic constructs from the study of human actors in their social totality, itself within their reality of operational lives in the NFC and retaining the requirement for a positivist analysis in the positivist sense of observation and investigation and comparison of the resulting data.

The grouping that is the subject of this short paper, came from use of the frequency distribution of the data using SPSS: 10.1 to identify the grounding of the respondents by profiling of their social characteristics of age, religious beliefs, ethnicity, length of time with the company, their self-perceptions of their class position and their political allegiances including membership of Trades Unions or the company staff association. The general characteristics of the respondents group are examined initially in the following section³.

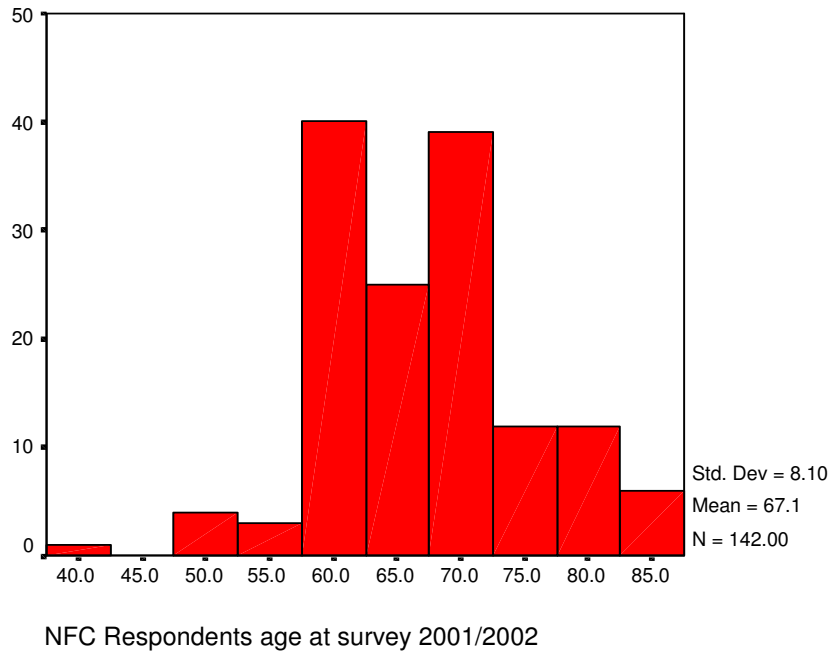
³ This was to identify a general setting that might be applicable to the value-context of the respondent cohort

Figure 2. (n=143).



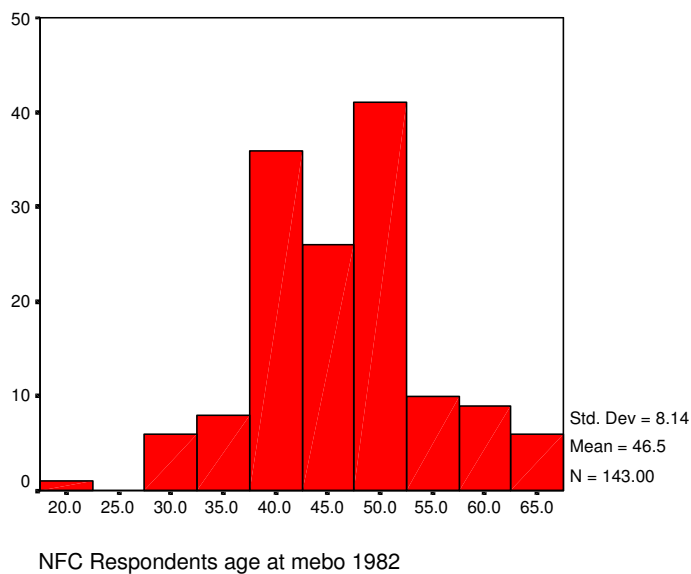
The respondents group (figure 2) were generally retired at the time of survey with a small but active minority who had continued to work in either voluntary or consultancy/advisory activities. They were all pensioners of the NFC under the administration of the Exel Foundation in Bedford, UK, which administers the group's 18,000 pensioners worldwide, and were contacted by the author over the period 1999-2002 via the company magazine for retirees.

Figure 3. (n=142)



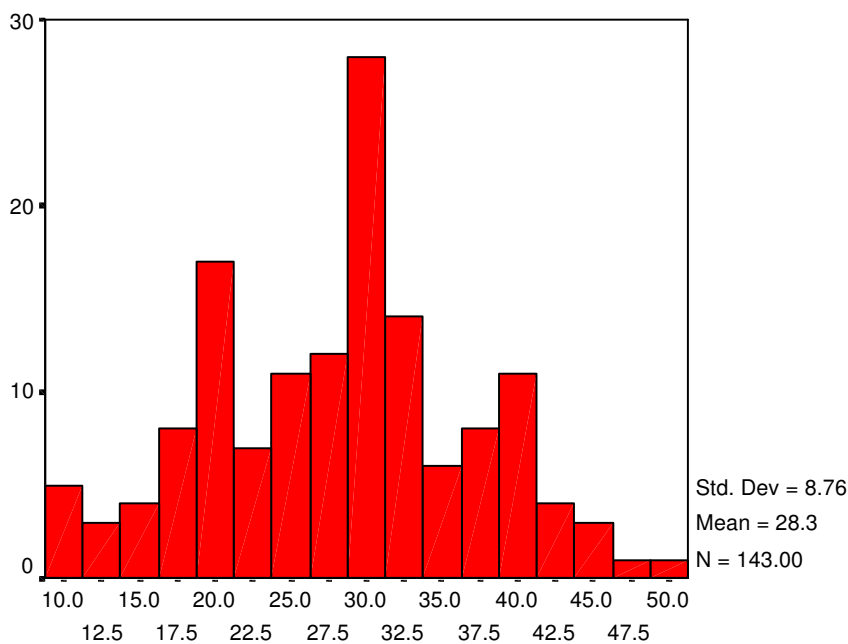
The average age of the respondents at the survey date was 67 (figure 3), with a significant proportion over 70, which gave added urgency to the data collection as the final opportunity to gather primary data from this representative group before ill health and death intervened.

Fig 4. (n=143)



The average age of the NFC respondents who were active in the NFC in 1982 was 46.5, the graph demonstrating a clustering around the 40 –50 year age group (figure 4). The data was indicative of a long-serving work force, with a noticeable contrast in the limited range of the lower age groups, the under 40s, which tended to confirm the conclusion from the analysis of a mature, long-serving work force. Confirmation of the trend came from the supporting interview and questionnaire data.

Figure 5 (n=143)

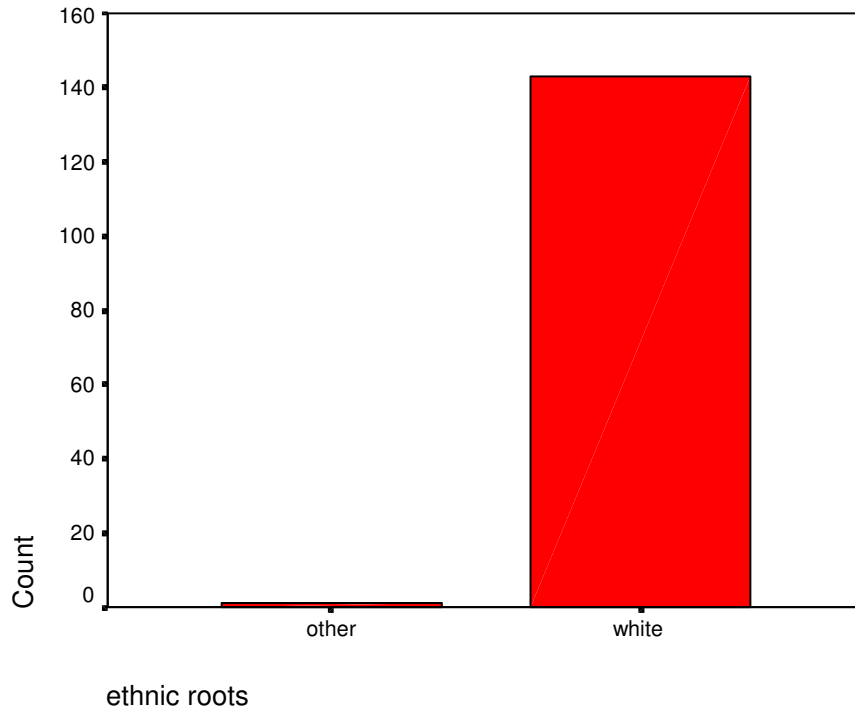


length of time nfc

The analysis of a long-serving workforce is confirmed at figure 5. The mean length of time served with the NFC by the respondents was 28 years, with a frequency range over 25-40 years. The average length of service indicates that a majority of the respondents served in both the private sector, then the public sector as their companies were taken up and disposed of under the various UK Transport Acts ⁴.

⁴ The Transport Acts of 1947,1952,1956,1962,1968 and ultimately 1981.

Figure 6 (n=143)



Without exception the representative group was white, (figure 6), the “other” data indicator in the figure is a dummy variable inserted to deploy the data. Given the wide geographic and company locational spread of the survey, this was an interesting variable in implications for “skewing” of the response data, primary comparative data from archival research had confirmed that there were a significant community of black Commonwealth immigrants from Nigeria and the West Indies working for the NFC from the 1950s (BRS magazine 1950: (1) 4; BRS magazine 1956: (7) 2).

The anomaly of a single ethnic group representation was considered to be a response issue within the self-selective nature of the pensioner respondents.

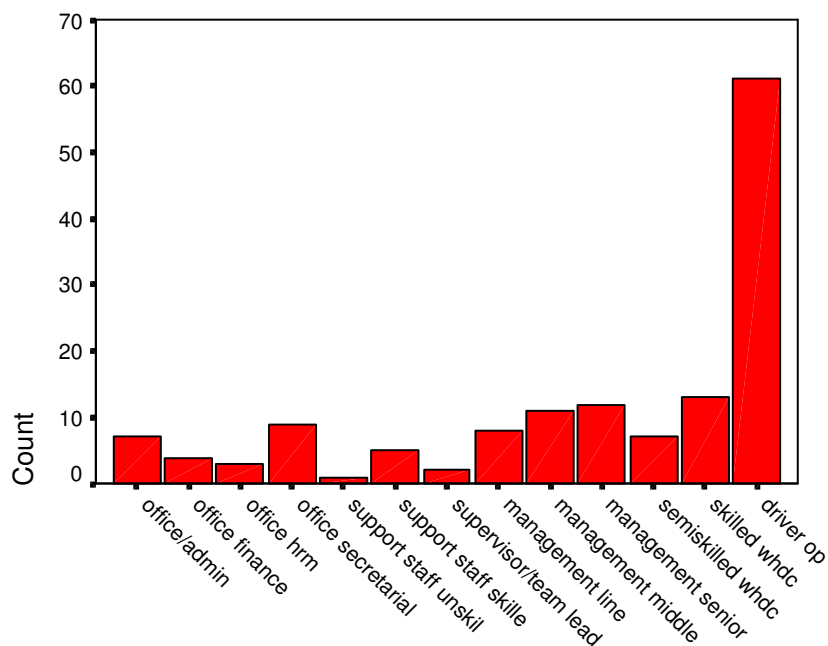
Table 1 (n=143)

gender of subject

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid female	20	14.0	14.0	14.0
male	123	86.0	86.0	100.0
Total	143	100.0	100.0	

The gender figures (table 1) are indicative of the distribution to be found in a transport and distributive activity of the period where the operation of predominantly heavy vehicles and equipment would be male-oriented and female element would be employed in administrative/clerical functions. This was confirmed by further examination of data (figure 7) where females predominantly staffed the HRM, finance and office/admin and office/secretarial activities.

Figure 7 (n=143)



NFC respondents job descriptions

A valuable element within this data segment (figure 7 table 2) was the participation of the retired operators who comprised 42% of the sample, a significant value that introduced a balancing influence to the management participation of 21%+. (See table 2). Their participation added to the quality of the whole of the prosopographical data and the comparative intentions for the data against the archival primary data.

Table 2 (n=143)**which describes your co position**

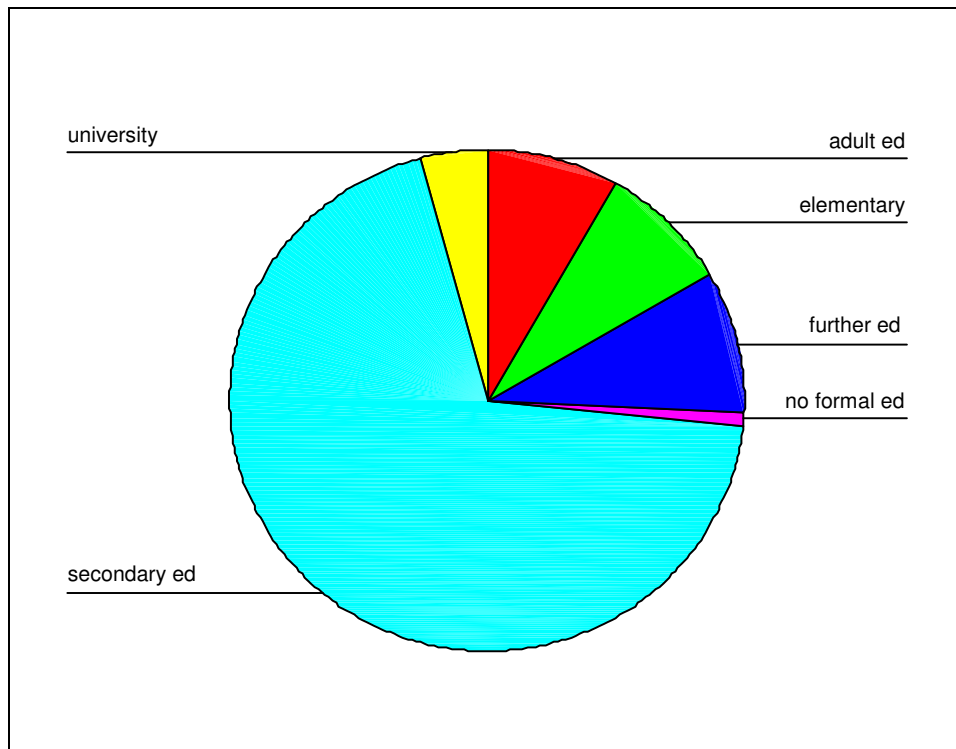
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	full time	1	.7	.7	.7
	office/admin	7	4.9	4.9	5.6
	office finance	4	2.8	2.8	8.4
	office hrm	3	2.1	2.1	10.5
	office secretarial	9	6.3	6.3	16.8
	support staff unskilled	1	.7	.7	17.5
	support staff skilled	5	3.5	3.5	21.0
	supervisor/team leader	2	1.4	1.4	22.4
	management line	8	5.6	5.6	28.0
	management middle	11	7.7	7.7	35.7
	management senior	12	8.4	8.4	44.1
	semiskilled whdc	7	4.9	4.9	49.0
	skilled whdc	13	9.1	9.1	58.0
	driver op	60	42.0	42.0	100.0
	Total	143	100.0	100.0	

The job-spread frequencies (figure 7, table 2) indicated a credible dispersion across the sample that reflected the activities, skills and trades right across the NFC operations. All the main strategic and operational functions were represented, from senior management down to unskilled warehouse operatives, which added to the rich cross-section of this company's commercial structure over time, a prime objective of the methodology. A particular interest of the researcher was in the skill-sets of the workforce via educational background and achievement, which might connect to the earlier terms of reference of the research aims. Those were centred on the contribution of the NFC people to the central efficiency/inefficiency debates that enveloped the NFC operations.

Table 3 (n=143)**education achieved**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	adult ed	12	8.4	8.4	8.4
	elementary	12	8.4	8.4	16.8
	further ed	13	9.1	9.1	25.9
	no formal ed	1	.7	.7	26.6
	secondary ed	99	69.2	69.2	95.8
	university	6	4.2	4.2	100.0
	Total	143	100.0	100.0	

Figure 9. (n=143): Education achieved



Examination of the education skills foundations of the NFC workforce (table 3, figure 9) reveal that only six of the middle and senior management had a university background, although another 12 and 13 respectively had further and adult education qualifications of a professional nature. The majority of the sample had not gone beyond secondary education (69% of the work force), with a significant element, 8%, having only elementary education to 14 years, although given the age range of the work force this is indicative of the pre-WW2 context of education in the UK prior to the Education Acts of the 1940s and 1950s which stopped early school-leaving to take up work (figure 9). Taken as a representative sample, this would indicate that less than a tenth of the NFC work force had had exposure to any further or higher education during their formative years, and yet other primary data later indicated that this did not appear to have affected the company's operational performance. The supporting data would confirm that comprehensive training programmes that had been made available from the company's foundation and appeared to have compensated for any deficiencies from educational skills.

Figure 10 (n=143)

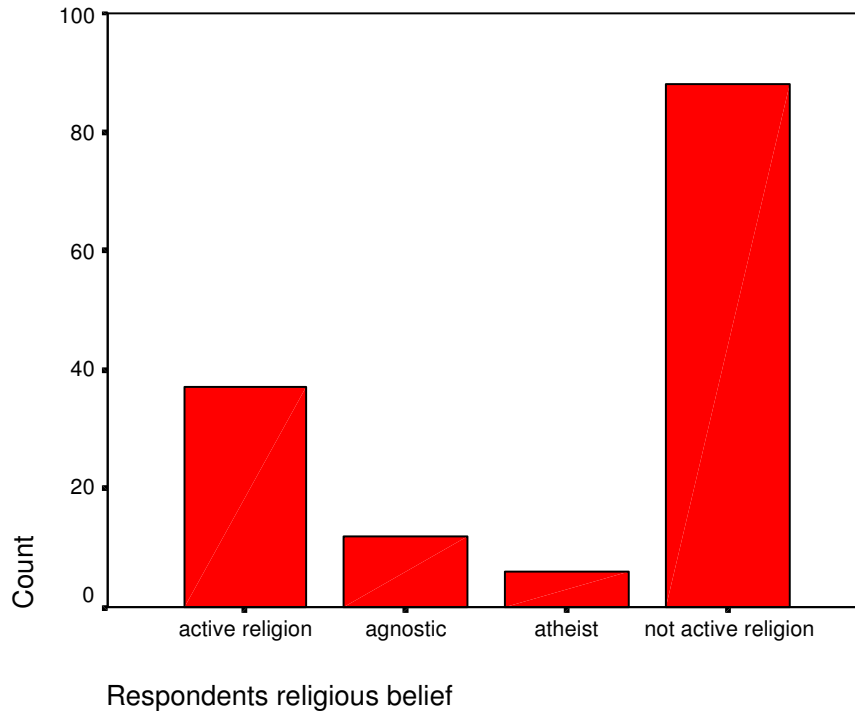


Table 4 (n=143)

		religious belief			
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	active religion	37	25.9	25.9	25.9
	agnostic	12	8.4	8.4	34.3
	atheist	6	4.2	4.2	38.5
	not active religion	88	61.5	61.5	100.0
	Total	143	100.0	100.0	

Religious affiliation declared in the NFC sample (figure 10, table 4), gave a significant variable. A distribution frequency in the pensioner cohort gave a 26% frequency of religious activity by church attendance and church group activities. A voluminous literature from Weber's theoretical base (cf Weber 1910/1947; 1910/1978; 2002) posits the connection of cultural values with a work ethic grounded in religious affiliation. Counter arguments (cf Anthony 1977; Bernstein 1988; Jeremy 1988) propose a pragmatic response to industrialisation. Recent revision (Mudrack 1999) argues for diligence in motivation and performance

variables with retention of a connection to religion as a causal value factor. Alternative revision (Eliaeson 2000) promotes total indifference, considering Weber's seminal material as an epistemological targeting of scientific notions of pure mechanistic behaviour.⁵ The significance of the presence of a distinctive religious ethos in this research was considered as a formative or influential part of the development of a culturally based set of values, which played a part in the NFC performance.

Final indicators of a strong cultural and social class nature were considered to be those that might be connected to class self- perceptions and the political affiliations that may be linked to that. These were brought out in questions that examined political affiliations of the respondents' childhood family context, then their political attitudes whilst at NFC during the research period, and finally at the time of the survey.

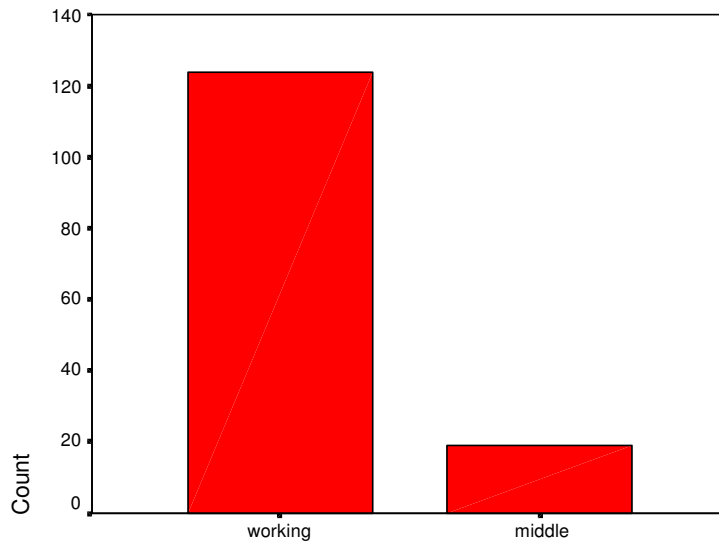
Table 5 (n=143)

family social class as child

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid working	124	86.7	86.7	86.7
middle	19	13.3	13.3	100.0
Total	143	100.0	100.0	

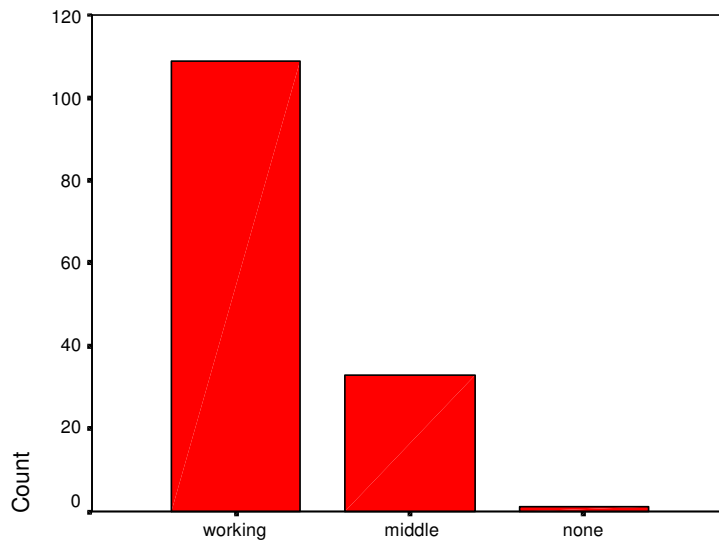
⁵ Similar arguments may be considered for the whole range of major world faiths where connections have been made to work ethic and devotional status as part of cultural values. Weber offers a theoretical base from which to address the significance (or not) of the connections between social and religious values.

Figure 11 (n=143)



NFC Respondents family social class as child

Figure 12 (n=143)



NFC Respondents social class with nfc?

Table 6 (n=143)

social class with nfc?

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid working	109	76.2	76.2	76.2
middle	33	23.1	23.1	99.3
none	1	.7	.7	100.0
Total	143	100.0	100.0	

Figure 13 (n=143)

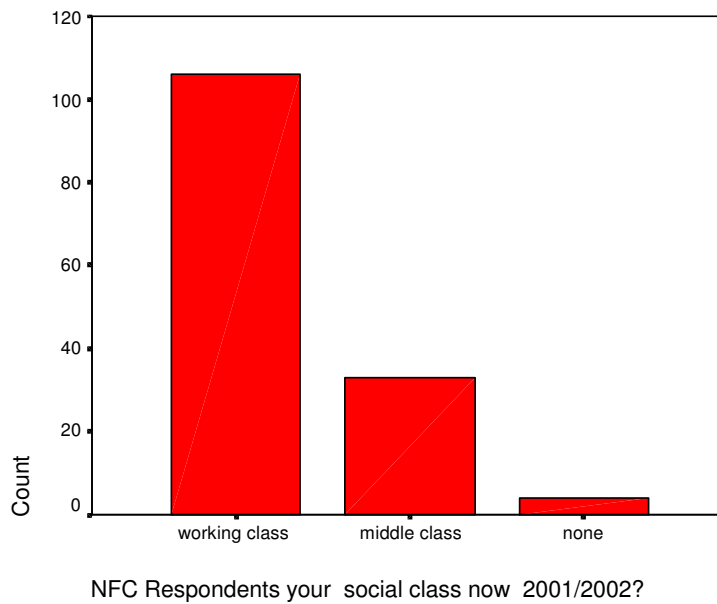


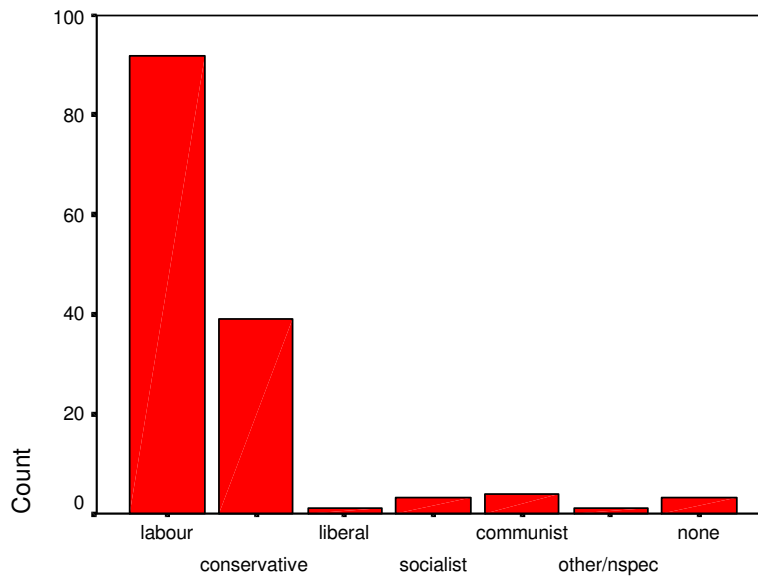
Table 7 (n=143)

your social class now?

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid working class	106	74.1	74.1	74.1
middle class	33	23.1	23.1	97.2
none	4	2.8	2.8	100.0
Total	143	100.0	100.0	

Social class perceptions of family context were quite definite (figure 11,table 5) with 86%+ seeing themselves brought up in working class environments and 13%+ in middle class environments. This begins to change during their careers at NFC (figure 12, table 6). By 1982 a decrease in working class perceptions to 76% and an increase in middle class perception of 23% are evident (figure 13,table 7) together with the appearance of a small element of .7% who had no perception of themselves as in any class. Follow-up contacts with respondents revealed that perceptions of the cohort as working class was not confined to what might be traditionally nominated as “the working class” elements, traditionally at operative level. Supervisory, line and middle managers, plus one senior manager saw themselves as working class, with some warehouse, clerical and administrative staff defining themselves as middle class.

Figure 14 (n=143)



NFC Respondents Family political affiliation

Table 8 (n=143)

Family political affiliation

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid labour	92	64.3	64.3	64.3
conservative	39	27.3	27.3	91.6
liberal	1	.7	.7	92.3
socialist	3	2.1	2.1	94.4
communist	4	2.8	2.8	97.2
other/nspec	1	.7	.7	97.9
none	3	2.1	2.1	100.0
Total	143	100.0	100.0	

The political affiliation of the respondents’ families during their childhoods was a straight division divided between a predominant Labour and a strong Conservative presence (figure 14, table 8)). Examination of the respondents’ age distributions gave the chronological roots of these affiliations to be in the late 19th to the early part of the 20th century.

Figure 15 (n=143)

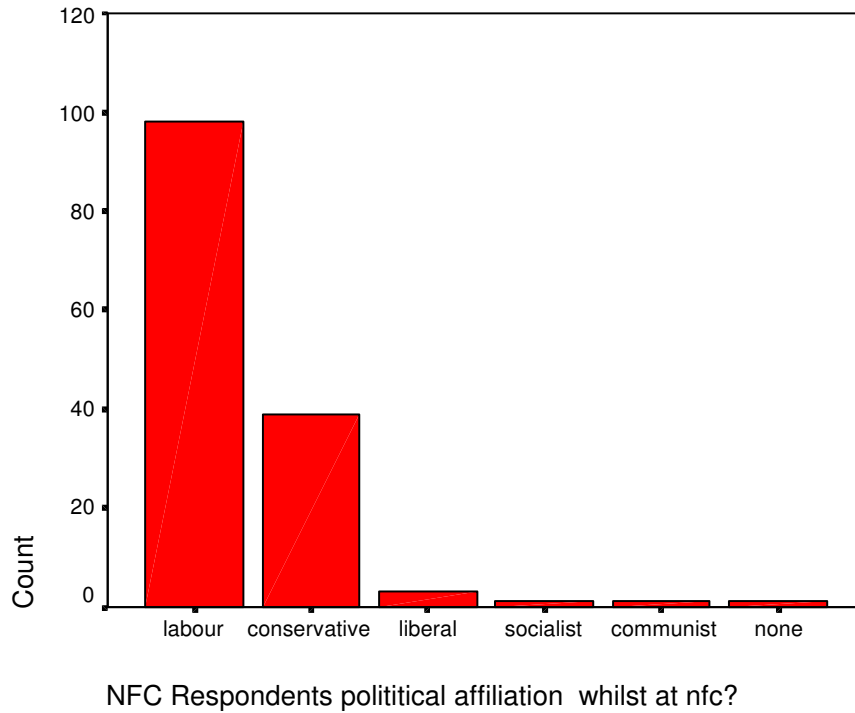


Table 9 (n=143)

political affiliation nfc?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	labour	98	68.5	68.5	68.5
	conservative	39	27.3	27.3	95.8
	liberal	3	2.1	2.1	97.9
	socialist	1	.7	.7	98.6
	communist	1	.7	.7	99.3
	none	1	.7	.7	100.0
	Total	143	100.0	100.0	

The respondents’ political affiliations (figure 15, table 9) as mature employees reflect those of their formative years with their families. There was little significant change in major loyalties, although Liberal support had grown and support for radical i.e. Socialist & Communist minorities had decreased and migrated into the Liberal and Labour affiliation

Figure 16 (n=143)

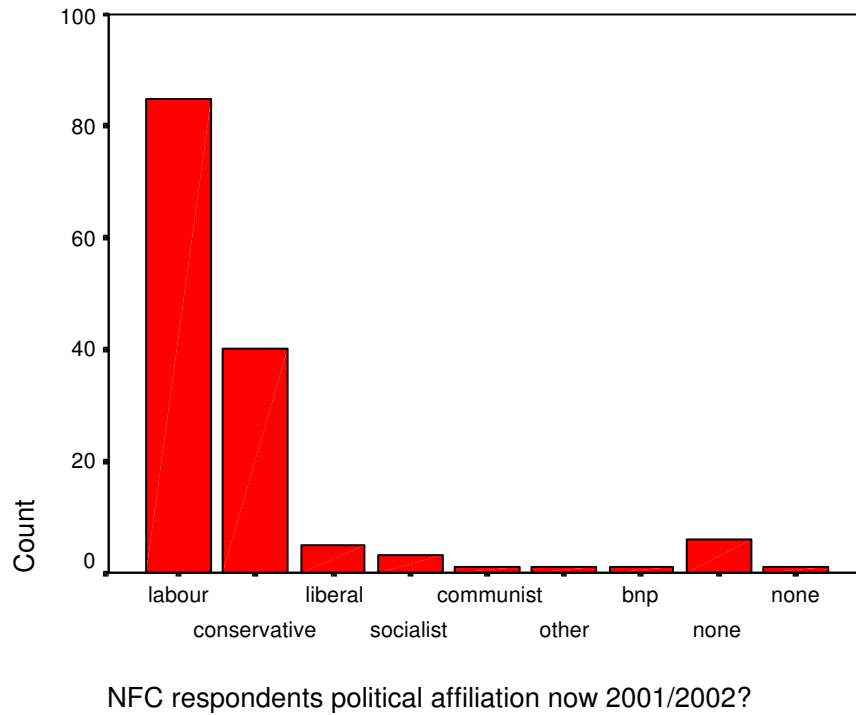


Table 10 (n=143)

political affiliation now?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	labour	85	59.4	59.4	59.4
	conservative	40	28.0	28.0	87.4
	liberal	5	3.5	3.5	90.9
	socialist	3	2.1	2.1	93.0
	communist	1	.7	.7	93.7
	other	1	.7	.7	94.4
	bnp	1	.7	.7	95.1
	none	6	4.2	4.2	99.3
	none	1	.7	.7	100.0
Total	143	100.0	100.0		

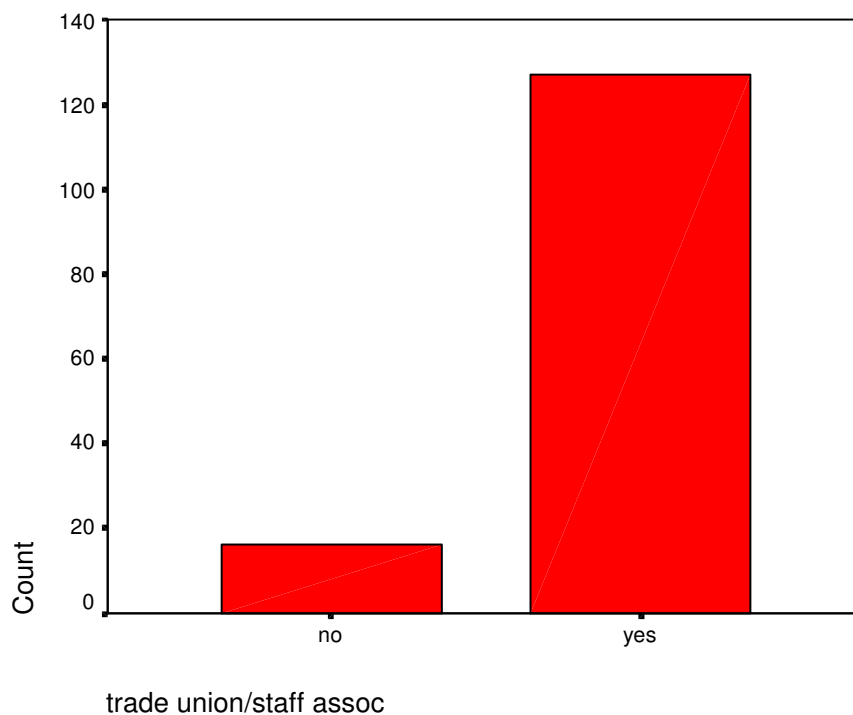
Political affiliations at the time of survey had shifted, although not dramatically, with a decrease in Labour support, the Conservative affiliation remaining fairly constant, and the Liberal affiliation showing an increase (figure 16, table 10). There was a slight increase in support for radical political parties, and a noticeable increase in those responding with a definite none-affiliation at 4.2%, the 7% none-affiliation were none responses.

The affiliations are reasonably constant over time and are characteristic of the respondents' social and class backgrounds in the 20th century UK population that has historically been recorded as grounded in a general divide of political affiliations along class and social status lines, i.e. working class were Labour and middle class Conservative. There are indications of conservatism in this stability of loyalties that would transmit into other values.

Table 11 (n=143)

		trade union/staff assoc			
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	no	16	11.2	11.2	11.2
	yes	127	88.8	88.8	100.0
Total		143	100.0	100.0	

Figure 17 (n=143)



The trades' union and staff association membership data (figure 17, table 11) indicated that the NFC was a strongly organised company in industrial relations terms, and this was confirmed in comparative examination of primary archival data in NAO files. The NFC staff association was the company organisation for the administrative staff of a supervisory or above level, and the level of none-

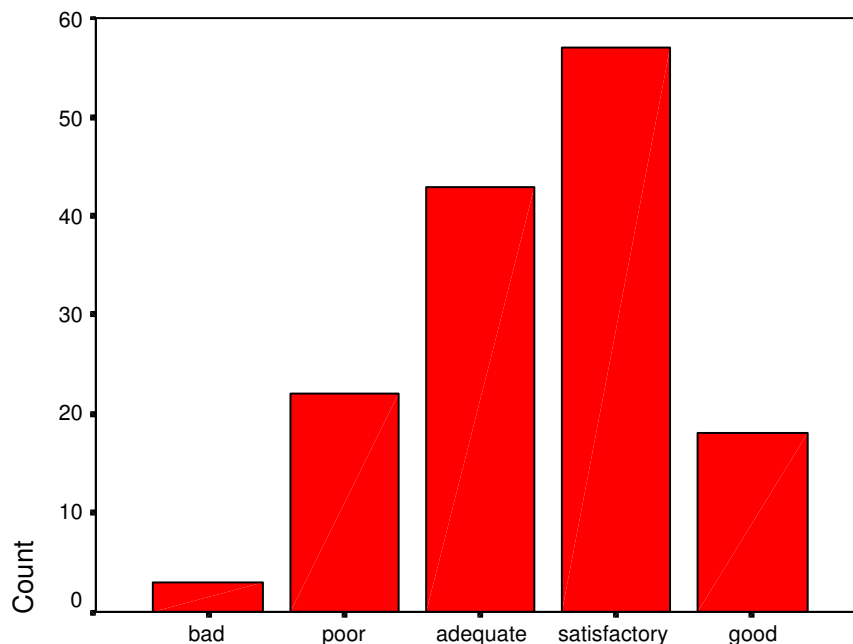
membership is primarily composed of line, middle and senior managers who declined to join the staff association, the company not making any specification for membership, although additional data showed that the operational side was virtually a TU “closed shop” at many depot sites.

Table 12 (n=143)

nfc pensioner?

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid yes	143	100.0	100.0	100.0

Figure 18 (n=143)



NFC Respondents 202/2002 satisfaction with NFC pension

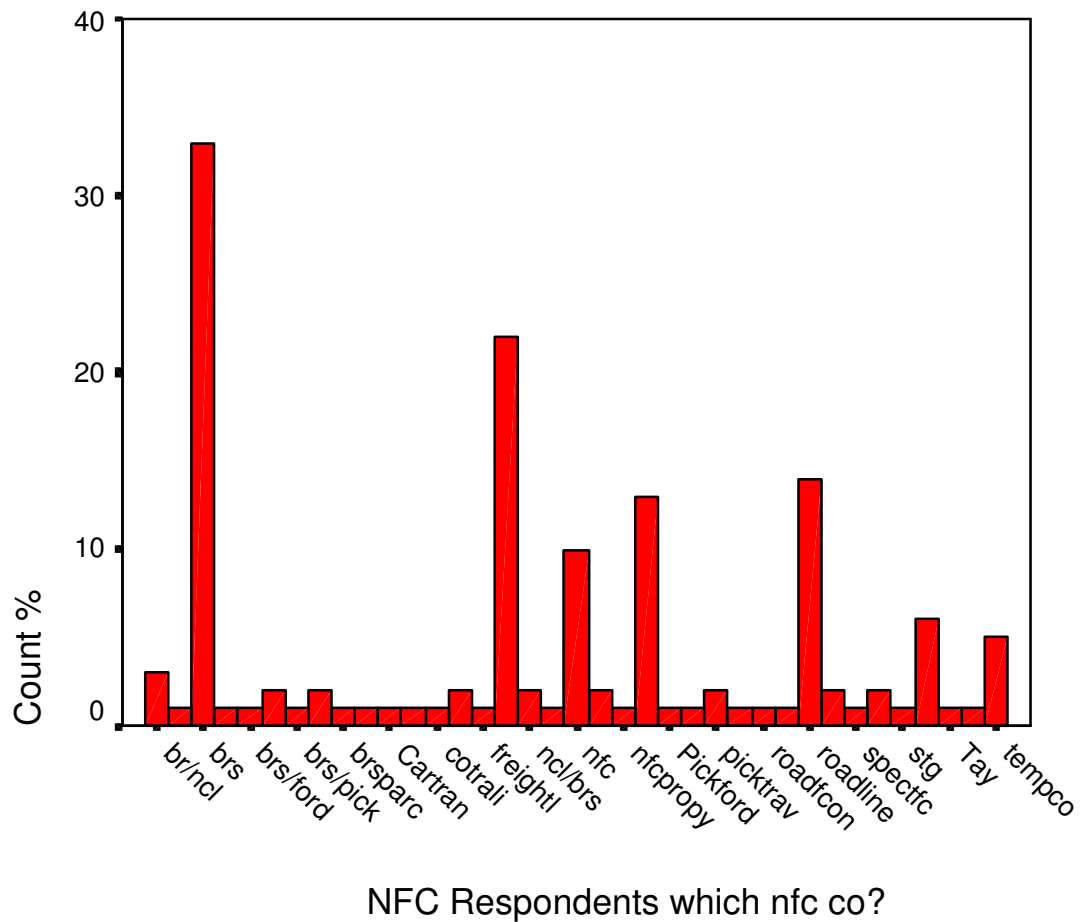
Table 13 (n=143)

how do you consider pension?

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid bad	3	2.1	2.1	2.1
poor	22	15.4	15.4	17.5
adequate	43	30.1	30.1	47.6
satisfactory	57	39.9	39.9	87.4
good	18	12.6	12.6	100.0
Total	143	100.0	100.0	

The pensioner cohort comprised 100% of the sample and expressed satisfaction with their company pensions and pension scheme payments in excess of 80% of responses (table 12,figure 18,table 13). This variable had been introduced to indicate a contemporary factor at time of survey that may have introduced a positive rather than negative bias into the data. The pensioners expressing dissatisfaction included those who had only limited service with the company, had taken only a limited part in the MEBO or no part at all and had missed augmentation of their retirement finances, or were simply dissatisfied.

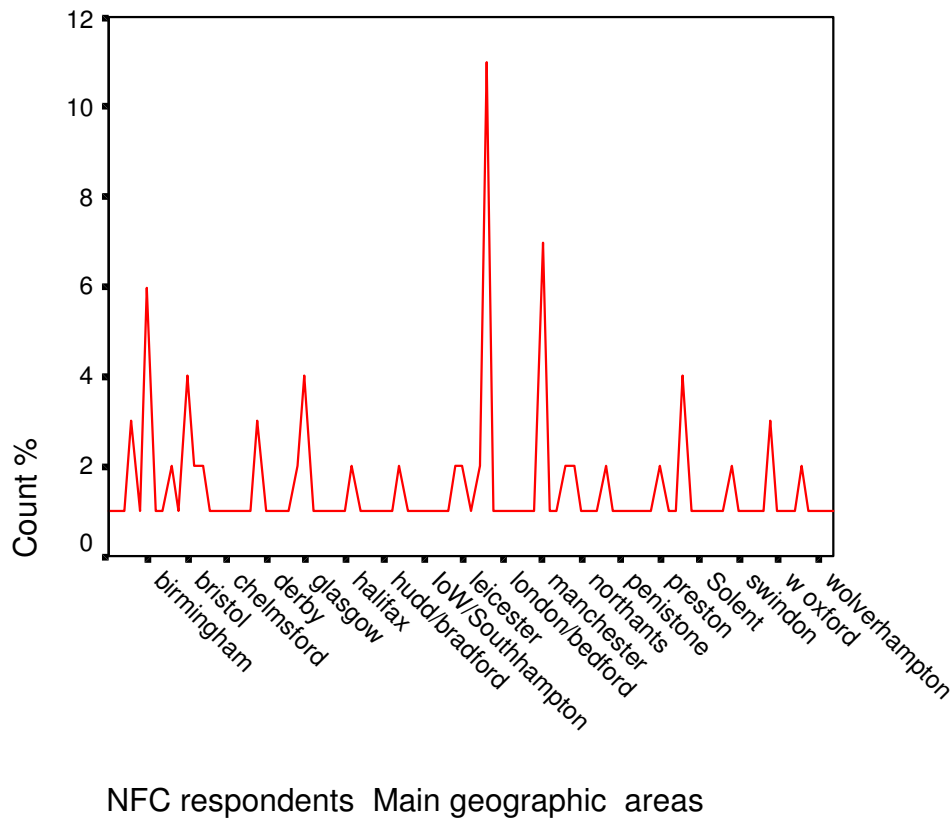
Figure 19. (n=143)



The respondents came from a wide NFC company spread across the road haulage activities, and from all of the primary company operations across a wide geographic area (figures 19 & 20). This element of the data was intended to add to the richness of the survey, firstly by the addition of new representative data in more depth than had been attempted on other previous specific and limited research, and secondly and

more importantly, to gauge the extent of the diffusion of the cultural factors that had been tentatively identified within the whole data set, throughout the whole NFC organisation.

Figure 20 (n=143)



The graph at figure 20 is an indicative geographical dispersion based upon the main geographic areas where the respondents operated with the NFC in their company careers. The dispersion is quite detailed, and covers the whole of the UK mainland from operations centred upon the principal centres shown. Again the intention was to obtain as wide a diffusion of respondents as possible and to test, within the sample limitations, for the breadth and depth of the tentative company culture indicated in the pilot survey (figure 21) and subsequent data analysis.

Table 14

ethos pre mebo

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid positive	11	22.0	22.0	22.0
shared values	29	58.0	58.0	80.0
us & them	10	20.0	20.0	100.0
Total	50	100.0	100.0	

(n=50)

The pilot survey of 50 NFC pensioners (table 14), had indicated that there was a disposition to shared values, i.e. a pro-company commitment and attitudinal set within the employees of the NFC, and this was followed up in the wider survey of 143 responses that identified a sharing of cultural values which were focused upon the employees' local operation rather than the NFC as an entity (tables 15,16), although a significant proportion did acknowledge the existence of a distinct NFC corporate ethos of affiliation to the company as an entity that signified what the respondents saw in the professional distinction of the NFC as a major road haulage player.

The indications from the data were indicative of

- A strong culture, ethos and values context identified with professionalism
- Identification with specific company/depot groups.
- Efficiency and best commercial practice as objectives within NFC confirmed as a longitudinal development from at least the 1960s.
- Concepts of privatisation as a business improvement strategy were in need of qualification.

Justification of the terms of reference for the whole research project, which promulgated that the limitations of the data resulting from previous research on the NFC, and the even more limited examination of the role of participating actors in the transformation of the NFC, required a critical addition.

“The NFC endeavoured with some success to encourage staff to recognise that the new organisation (refers to the post 1968 Transport Act reorganisation) required a fresh approach to produce success, and as time went by staff became more and more associated with NFC”

(Respondent JD 2001: manager finance NCL Birmingham)⁶

⁶ This affiliation was not displayed generally, and particularly not in the post -1968 Transport Act absorption of the ex-BR railway sundries companies would bring a different culture (and trade union) into the NFC, and the integration of the ex-BR parcels operations and their distinct cultures into the

Table 15 (n=143)

NFC company culture?

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid no	90	62.9	62.9	62.9
yes	53	37.1	37.1	100.0
Total	143	100.0	100.0	

A quarter of the respondents saw the NFC having a corporate culture with which they identified (figure 22). This culture was grounded in a spirit of professionalism and customer service in road haulage operations and strongest at supervisory and management levels:

“There was an over riding NFC culture, exposure to which depended to what extent your company role brought you into contact with managers who were NFC head office staff or functional managers based at NFC...NFC subsidiary companies had very distinctive individual cultures within them...”

(Respondent AG 2001: manager Tankfreight Harrogate)

Table 16 (n=143)

depot or dept culture?

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid no	6	4.2	4.2	4.2
yes	137	95.8	95.8	100.0
Total	143	100.0	100.0	

Subsidiary operations tended to identify with the immediate depot then the company (table 16), and local operations evolved distinct cultural environments:

“The people that worked in the NFC only associated with the NFC Company that they worked for. Roadline had a culture of road haulage and at Burnley branch we had flexible working and good working atmosphere. At the Burnley branch we had pride in the service that we gave, our focus was customer first.”

(Respondent TN 2001: driver operator/supervisor Roadline Burnley).

NFC’s existing BRS and Roadline parcels operations as National Carriers Ltd became a major challenge for the NFC in the 1970s.

Table 17 (n=143)

Seperate company culture?

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid no	17	11.9	11.9	11.9
yes	126	88.1	88.1	100.0
Total	143	100.0	100.0	

Within the overall ethos of the NFC the company and depot were the dominant forms to which cultural affinity was acknowledged. The depot gave the immediate focus upon and to which the respondents' acknowledged their closest affiliation but the Company also attracted and fostered a culture and attendant attitudes that directly affected operational activities (table 17). In many cases this culture had pre-NFC antecedents:

“BRS (ex-Bridges Transport) still had a private company feel about it, everybody had a nickname-it was a company club, I was brm-brm because I came in on a motor cycle.”

(Respondent DB 2001: warehouse/DC operative/driver BRS Leyland & Preston)

Many subsidiaries had retained their pre-nationalisation cultures, particularly where there had been a strong family firm ethos:

“There was a more positive attitude in the past than in later (post-MEBO) years, large depots were run on strict lines, with the Trade Union more in evidence, smaller depots were much more friendly, although Trade Unions never got much change from Pickfords...”

(Respondent FG 2001: warehouse operative/driver operator/foreman Pickfords Swindon)

The cultural aspects of identification with company, depot or operation had been recognised by the NFC senior management who saw in it a cohesive feature (cf Thompson 1990:p45), which could be harnessed to the organisation's strategy, and it had become management policy:

“Most managers understood the need to adopt or introduce a good working climate/culture/atmosphere (call it what you will), and on the whole relationships between the managers and the managed were good. The relationship between companies and unions was also good, we worked hard at this.”

(Respondent JFG 2001: senior manager NFC Bedford)

The key element was pride in the company, either directly as an NFC employee or indirectly through their parent company. Many respondents saw this “cultural thing” as more pronounced in the more successful operations such as BRS and Roadline, Pickfords and Tankfreight, whilst significantly there were problems in promoting an NFC identification in the ex-British Rail operations (National Carriers), where the staff looked with nostalgia to the old BR days when there was less pressure to succeed. Many respondents remarked upon the ‘family’ atmosphere that predominated across the NFC companies generally which was seen as a major contributory factor to good working relationships between companies and trades union and management and staff.

“There was a good family atmosphere. The MD at my time of joining Fashionflow new all employees names” and “I think there was a pride in the operation”

(Respondent PS 2001: admin/secretarial Fashionflow Ilkeston)

The prosopographical data continued in indicating that a strong set of shared beliefs, values and knowledge formed a culture within the NFC and its subsidiary companies generally which manifested in a proactive and professional approach to the operational activities of the company, but which was considered to have inherent potential weaknesses by the senior management brought in in the 1970s:

“... it had a management structure which was weird and it had managers who were in their ways able people, but they basically were in love with running road haulage businesses, they weren’t in fact aggressive business managers, they weren’t in fact very particularly finance oriented. It was the great joy of running road haulage businesses that was their major appeal...”

(Respondent VP 2001: director NFC London)

The culture that emerged from the data is considered to be the result of a complex ‘community of endeavor’, grounded in a mutuality of concerns between the NFC employees and the business, and affecting their operational companies’ activities over an extended period of time⁷. The ‘professional’ culture⁸ that became apparent in

⁷ CF Wenger 1999; Weick 1999; Weick & Sutcliffe 2001 where organisational behaviour research from a quantitative view confirmed ‘continuity of practice’ as a formative element to organisational success.

⁸ The difficulties of defining culture have been summarised by Schein (1997) who gives a usable definition based upon “a pattern of shared basic assumptions” developed historically as a group response to their internal and external operating environments.

the data was found to be observable from the organisations foundation in 1947 to the successful transition to privatisation in 1982. It had been transmitted over time exactly in accordance with the original conceptualisation by the founding management of the NFC's predecessor company the RHE, in 1947.

Conclusion

This part of the prosopographical research gave a representational outline of the employees of the NFC during the 1947-1982 period that was substantially definitive, and also attempted to highlight any influential subjective factors in the respondents backgrounds that might have influenced responses from a denigratory viewpoint of the respondents. The respondents come from a wide representative range of company employments and locations and activities. The majority were retired and all were company pensioners. The representative profile that emerges from this initial data is of a totally white, predominantly male and long-service employee, born in the first half of the twentieth century, working class and with an average secondary education. There were a significant amount of woman employees but mainly placed in the then traditional jobs for women, administration, personnel, and finance and secretarial and clerical. The middle management were not universally educated above Further or Higher level or claimed specific middle class status.

There was a strong religious ethos across the all grades in the sample and virtually 100% membership of Trades unions and very strong membership of the staff association with a political affiliation favouring the Labour and Conservative parties. There is distinct class awareness in a none-conflict sense, but not the class-consciousness and potential conflict historically associated with industrial confrontation in the UK of the second half of the twentieth century⁹. There is a stability implicit in this representative image that comes from the conservatism of mental sets and world views seated in attitudes of continuity of practice directly related to security of employment with the NFC and a combining of individual, class and company cultural values to promote the "family firm" ambience within the NFC that was remarked upon in the field data gathering. In short there is evidence in this data of a direct influence of what have been generally described as "Victorian"

⁹ Cf relationships in the nationalised electricity industry in Hannah, L (1982: 130 et seq & 170 et seq). (They did not improve in the next fifteen years).

values, a world view and mind set transmitted culturally and generationally that privileged hard work and good service conscientiously given, evidenced in the religious, class and stable context of the NFC and its employees and active in the daily operations and management.

The values may be generically termed “Victorian” but they may be indicative of the collectivity of interests, whatever way that that may manifest itself, that Putnam & Hall (2002) propose as a determinant in the success of local and national politico-economic institutions, and where the UK is considered to retain a strong element into the 21st century that has a long-term stability and genesis (ibid: pp21-22). By definition that includes the micro elements of the institutional collective, whether it be the depot, the company the team, or a cohesiveness arising from attitudes of professionalism in the NFC experience. Griffiths described a similar phenomena based in rituals of belonging encouraged from “enlightened management” that practised beneficial paternalism at Lever Brothers in the UK before 1939(Griffiths 1995), Marchand describes the lack of commonality of culture as hampering General Motors in the US from achieving efficiency and cohesion in the 1920s (Marchand: 1991;pp825-875). Putnam (2002) sees it as “social capital”, it might well be described as the external manifestation of the positive culture and values of any group.

The data tends to support of Beck’s notion (2000) of ‘civic labour’ from a collective incorporating essential social elements of work and labour. The prosopographical data clearly demonstrates that in the NFC there was a historic collective formed around “social capital” arising from a positive attitude to the company and the employees roles, and that that “capital” contributed to the overall efficiency and productivity of the NFC operations. There are implications for the application of organisational management theory to companies, which emerges from the detailed picture of the “actors” or “players” (the term may be determined from implied perceptions in Schumpeter: 1934; Hayek: 1980;North: 1990) and their roles in the long-term development of the NFC. The detailed delineation contradicts the paradigm of inefficiency currently contained in the current historical record of the company, and will be examined in depth in the final analysis of the complete set of the prosopographical data.

The dynamics behind the long-term efficiency of the NFC may be understood more clearly if the data is accepted as confirmation of a complex interplay arising from the cultural mores of the NFC employees which was based upon professionalism. The term *professionalism* as a precept for driving that efficiency may also be analogous to the element of action arising from personal interventions (Hayek: 1980), and from the entrepreneurial result of such dynamics, at the operational level, (Schumpeter: 1934).

The examination of the research issues and the existing literature clearly identified the economic based focus, and succeeding inconsistencies and anomalies arising from that meaningful but essentially limited focus, of the NFC privatisation as a specific causal event at a specific moment in time. This focus privileged the NFC privatisation and its success as a response resulting in efficiency that was predictable and “rule based” and immediate, reacting to mechanistic economic conceptions of cause and effect.

Examination of the prosopographical and archival data showed patently that a strict economocentric interpretation of both the NFC MEBO and of the NFC as a state enterprise, had shortcomings in the depth of analysis that resulted from such a specific dimension. The data demonstrated that to give full justice to the historical examination of a business operation, in this case the NFC, a fuller and deeper methodology was required that gave a richer quality of data. In this case the prosopographical methodology gave that additional dimension to the historical examination of the NFC and its development to privatisation and subsequent massive growth, and the effects of cultural traits from the NFC employees underpin that dimension. Patterns of behaviour historically persist long after the original motivations from cultural and value-based orientations, and the prosopographical data clearly shows the existence over the time of the study of specific values influencing NFC employee attitudes to their operational roles, an influence which did not appear as the result of privatisation and the MEBO.

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