Blackpool postcard, 1928. A boarding house between the Central and South Piers. Note the elaborate curtains and the emphasis on rough seas as an attraction. The creative extension of the attic is also characteristic.

THE BLACKPOOL LANDLADY REVISITED

John K. Walton

Since I first wrote about them in 1978, seaside landladies in general, and the brightly-plumaged Blackpool sub-species in particular, seem to have lost none of their power to attract media attention.[1] This suggests a continuing fascination with the landlady among a public whose direct encounters with her current incarnations have become rarer and more transient over the past generation. Increasingly, no doubt, this sustained interest is part of a broader package of nostalgia for older ways of making holiday, which also celebrates (for example) piers and pierrots, saucy postcards and little bits of Blackpool rock.[2] In turn, this is part of the attachment to 'heritage' of all kinds, especially the industrial variety, which looked back to the seemingly secure and rooted ways of life of past generations and generated a profusion of museums and theme-parks during the 1980s.[3] Whatever the detailed mix of causes, with each new holiday season reporters are despatched to the coast in search of surviving examples of an endangered species, to observe them in their habitats, chronicle their survival strategies and adaptive behaviour, and rehash popular historical accounts of what Andrew Martin last year in the *Sunday Telegraph* described as a 'great British comic institution'. Almost inevitably, Martin went to Blackpool for his copy, offering a balanced and unpatronising account of the daily routine of a relatively up-market private hotel on the North Shore which will itself become a valuable source for future historians.[4] The continuing interest in seaside landladies suggest that it would be appropriate to reconsider my presentation of the Blackpool variety sixteen years ago in the light of new historiographical preoccupations and new pieces of evidence which I have accumulated in the course of a recent return to seaside history, this time comparing Blackpool with the Spanish resort of San Sebastián, an exercise which has itself stimulated new questions.[5]

The Blackpool landlady is worth revisiting for several reasons, despite the enduring refusal of certain kinds of historian to accept the legitimacy of research involving the lower middle class and popular culture.[6] In the first place, the landlady's role in catering for the world's first working-class holiday market needs to be emphasised. The availability of cheap, unpretentious accommodation which offered a welcome to working-class people on their own terms, and which was indeed increasingly provided by people whose culture was firmly grounded in the working class of the industrial towns, eased the path for new holiday makers and encouraged the return of established ones. The importance of providing appropriate accommodation is often underplayed in social histories of the seaside, but it was a central element in Blackpool's ability to pioneer mass holidaymaking.[7]

Secondly, the place of landladies in the social structure is itself interesting and anomalous in various ways. As (generally) small independent business people they are sandwiched between the more glamorous and better-documented worlds of landed society and big business on the one hand, and the more controversial and again better-

documented world of the industrial working class on the other. There was little government or philanthropic interest in the petty bourgeoisie to supply central documentation or an obvious research agenda. Recent work on small shopkeepers has advanced our understanding of people who kept a foot in working-class culture and neighbourhood life while being necessarily distanced from the shop floor and its trade unions, and we have been reminded of the refusal of many family economies to conform to the single-occupation model which the census tended to assume and indeed to impose; but much remains to be done. The landlady is emphatically part of this story.[8]

Thirdly, the landlady deserves to have her place in women's history highlighted. This was a predominantly female occupation, so labelled in common usage (which I have followed in this paper), which saw women active as business people and often playing a visibly dominant role in the family economy. Unease at the role reversal undoubtedly fuelled the jokes in a variety of media which celebrated the fierceness, volubility, cunning and intimidating bulk of the landlady, often contrasted with the puny insignificance of her downtrodden spouse. The landlady was a heroine of the world of Donald McGill and the comic postcard. I have written about this elsewhere, but it should be emphasised that the unease reflected and responded to anomalies of class as well as gender: landladies were from the working class but not of it, and they combined the roles of servant and independent businesswoman, to the confusion of superior observers. This was not solely a Blackpool problem, of course: it is well illustrated by an extract from the best-selling novel of suburban life, *The Smiths of Surbiton*, first published in 1906, and somewhat condescendingly intended as a portrayal of a comfortable existence in London suburbia. The Smiths are on holiday at Deal, where they are joined by a relative:

> *Mrs Clutterbuck, consulted about a third bedroom, placed her arms akimbo and pursed her lips.*
>
> *'It's true enough,' she admitted, 'that I 'ave another room, but I'm afraid the young lady wouldn't care about it . . .*
>
> *'Oh, no, sir! . . . it ain't 'aunted. I wouldn't live in a 'ouse as 'ad a 'aunted room in it . . .'*[9]

The body language and cascade of aitches tell their own story: Mrs Clutterbuck is consigned to the status of comic servant, which is endemic and generic in this sort of popular literature, even though she is a householder and capable of catering for the respectable on pleasure bent.[10]

To return to the gender issue as such, the landlady's situation also gives rise to the interesting anomaly that she achieves her measure of economic autonomy and domestic power through the performance and (if in a big enough way of business) the supervision of housework on the grand scale. Is this an achievement to be celebrated, or mere self-exploitation? And where does the necessary exploitation of the labour of children and domestic servants fit into the scheme of things?[11] Most feminists, with the notable exception of Leonore Davidoff, have skirted round these issues, which arise particularly arrestingly at the seaside.[12]

But most writers on resorts still neglect the accommodation industry and the issues it raises. The sheer number of landladies concentrated into a limited and well-defined space at Blackpool, and the unique extent to which they dominated the town's economy for many years, combine to justify further comment on this theme in this place. Revisiting the Blackpool landlady is all the more appropriate because the town's unique and pioneering success in the popular holiday market was founded on the visitors' practice of doing exactly that, returning year after year to the same accommodation and the same landlady in a comforting assertion of the routine and predictability of play as well as work. This preferred practice was much remarked upon by observers, and Andrew Martin picked up on it again in 1993. The only barrier to its near-universality, it seems, was the volatility and vulnerability of many of the businesses themselves.[13]

Despite the sheer swelling volume of its visitor numbers – perhaps three million in 1900 (a figure which itself had perhaps doubled over the last quarter of the nineteenth century), seven million by most accounts during the 1930s, eight million and more by the 1970s, sixteen million *visits* rather optimistically calculated by a visitor survey in 1972 – Blackpool never became *entirely* a working-class resort.[14] It began life in the later eighteenth century by catering for the gentry and especially the rising middle ranks of (mainly) Lancashire, with an August admixture of the more plebeian and impecunious. In the early railway age its mainstream clientele was drawn from the provincial middle class, despite influxes of excursionists on week-end cheap trips and it was not until the 1870s that a more sustained flow of working-class demand was backed up by increasing spending power and longer stays, enabling the idea of catering specifically for the working class and even seeking to attract more of the same to become a visibly paying proposition, despite the objections of those whose preferences and investments were otherwise directed. By this time, anyway, Blackpool had grown enough to find room for its more 'select' visitors and residents at a safe distance from the burgeoning popular entertainment district on the sea-front in the town centre. The North Shore, in particular, was safeguarded by the up-market policies of a development company as the terraces and crescent around the Imperial Hotel grew up from the 1860s onwards. South Shore, too, remained relatively quiet and up-market, although parts of it were compromised in this regard by the rise of the Pleasure Beach from the turn of the century. its proximity did not deter speculators from building impressive new boarding-houses along the newly-extended south promenade in the inter-war years, in an area which also developed residential pretensions; and similar things were happening along the promenade extensions to the north of the town. There was plenty of 'high-class' residential development inland, too, a theme which continued after the Second World War. So Blackpool was never socially homogeneous, despite its overwhelmingly working-class image; and the landlady of stereotype and legend was actually concentrated into the central area, especially in the streets behind the sea-front and a little way inland, around North and Central Stations, responding to formative years of resort development in which practically all the visitors came by train. Elsewhere the visiting public might be more up-market, and those who catered for them might have more pretensions to gentility, giving rise to an alternative set of generic stories involving spinsters struggling to keep up appearances on limited income from inherited investments, or widows trying to make ends meet in the manner to which they were accustomed. Such images were more firmly associated with Southport, or with more pretentious South Coast resorts; but it should be emphasised that a misleading tendency developed to cast all Blackpool landladies in a mould of cheerful, businesslike vulgarity, whether or not this was accompanied by a warm heart. A

wide range of other social backgrounds and modes of self-presentation sheltered, often uneasily, behind the dominant stereotype.[15]

It is also clear that Blackpool's social tone, to use a Victorian phrase, fluctuated over time. It did not simply begin at a relatively high level and then go progressively down-market with growing size and environmental degradation, as a recent tourism studies model proposes for beach resorts established since the Second World War.[16] This might seem to have been happening in the 1840s and early 1850s with the growing volume and regularity of a railborne working-class excursionist presence, in a resort with no dominant landowner to control development and with rudimentary local government and public order systems. But Blackpool then put its house in order and raised its market profile in the 1860s, helped by the way in which first the Cotton Famine, then a trade depression at the end of the decade, dampened down demand from the Lancashire cotton towns. Its social tone and dominant image then moved sharply down-market with the working-class influx of the last quarter of the nineteenth century, only to stabilise and reach out for comfortably-off residents and visitors from the turn of the century. A puff from the *City Leader* in 1903 illustrates the revived aspirations:

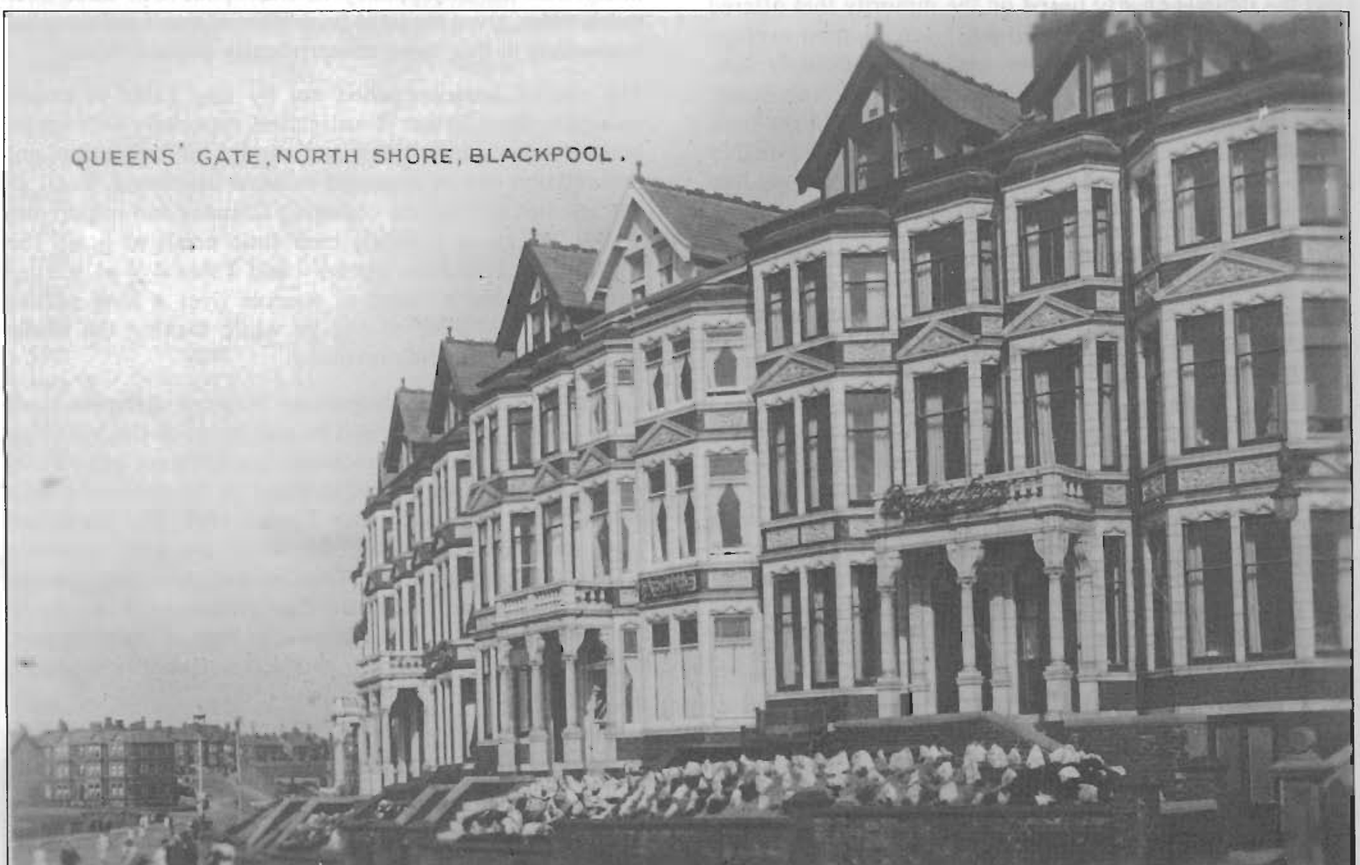
> *Blackpool itself is yearly becoming more fashionable as well as more popular, for the impression that Blackpool is a somewhat rough-and-ready, if not actually rowdy place, is entirely erroneous.*[17]

Sources like this are always likely to be gilding the lily, whether or not owing to occult arrangements with municipal or other interests within resorts; but they still have useful messages. Similarly, the Town Clerk's summary of the results of Blackpool's continuing pursuit of respectability and social diversity in the inter-war years is part of a public relations exercise, but it exaggerated genuine changes rather than inventing them wholesale. Speaking to fellow-professionals in 1939, he emphasised that Blackpool no longer specialised in working-class visitors, but:

> *This has now changed, and visitors of all classes from all parts of Britain and abroad now find their requirements met.*[18]

The post-World War II generation saw Blackpool becoming more resolutely proletarian, as the impact of holidays with pay and the 'affluent society' of the 1950s and 1960s made their mark; and the first professionally-conducted (though far from infallible) visitor survey in 1972 found not only that just over half the visitors were drawn from the skilled manual working class, but also that one-third were from Classes D and E, 'unskilled' workers and state pensioners.[19] The findings of this survey worried the local authorities, and subsequent efforts to propel the resort up-market again seem to have borne fruit. A further visitor survey in 1987 purported to show that the proportion of professional, managerial and white-collar strata among the visiting public had risen from one in six to one in three.[20] So the trajectory of Blackpool's social identity was more like a switchback than a water-chute; and the resort's capacity for recurrent self-renewal enabled it to break out of the predicted spiral of decline and degradation. This is a general feature of enduringly successful resorts, and its causes clearly have to do with the role of local government in relation to private enterprise, and their combined capacity to promote appropriate change and sustain appropriate continuities as needed. But the landladies themselves played an interesting part in the process.

The 1987 survey pointed out that 'the British took more holidays in Blackpool in 1987 than they did in Greece, Italy, Yugosalvia and Turkey combined'. And they did so



Edwardian affluence at the select end of Blackpool: up-market boarding-house and later private hotel territory.

Table 1: Accommodation used by Blackpool Visitors, 1972 and 1987 visitor surveys.

Type of Accommodation	Percentages 1972	1987
Hotels and guest-houses	75	78
— licensed	(27)	(58)
— unlicensed	(48)	(20)
Self-catering flat or room	16	11
Caravan	2	3
Holiday centre	1	1
Other	6	7
	100	100

overwhelmingly in hotels and guest-houses, as Table 1 shows: indeed, they actually increased their share of what was, astonishingly, apparently a growing visiting public in Blackpool between 1972 and 1987, when the overwhelming majority of British seaside resorts were in serious trouble, although it should be emphasized that the increase was within the range of likely statistical error.

Within this overall pattern, the average length of stay was becoming shorter, and the season was shifting further from what had been the traditional July and August peak towards the Illuminations season of September (especially) and October, as Table 2 shows.

The later peak in Blackpool is clearly apparent, although more evident in the hotels than the guest-houses. On the other hand, the guest-houses rather than the hotels were reaping the benefits of Blackpool's distinctive Christmas season, a long-established phenomenon which inflated room occupancy in December significantly above the national average. A high proportion of the guest-houses in Blackpool would not have been open outside the main holiday months, and the table is clearly based on the minority that offered accommodation all the year round. Even so, their average occupancy rates might be regarded as disturbingly low, especially at the height of the season, when 'vacancies' signs were all too common a sight, especially in the back streets; and the Table offers a reminder of the highly competitive and precarious nature of the accommodation industry, which had been an enduring theme.

Despite these reservations, what stands out above all is the resilience of the Blackpool landlady in the face of new forms of competition. The switch to caravans and self-catering, which over much of the English and Welsh coastline had exacerbated the decline of the seaside landlady in her traditional form, was not in evidence in Blackpool itself, while the season here had stood up well to competition from the guaranteed sun of the Mediterranean and other forms of holidaymaking, which had really started to make inroads into the markets of most British seaside resorts during the 1970s and especially the 1980s.[22] Moreover, in contrast with most of the British coastline the number of smaller businesses held up strongly, even according to the official sources, which always underestimated at the lower end of the scale. As late at 1961 nearly one-third of the hotels and boarding-houses listed in the census for Blackpool had fewer than 10 rooms; and a further 39 per cent had between 10 and 14 rooms.[23] On Chloe Stallybrass's figures Blackpool lost 38 per cent of its 'hotels' over the next decade, although the reliability of the census on this score was becoming increasingly suspect, as her own figures show. There seems to have been a moving frontier between those accommodation businesses which were and were not listed as such in the various listings which were compiled for different purposes, and the problem of what constituted a hotel was particularly problematic when large numbers of establishments were trying to trade up, inflating their self-descriptions and acquiring licensed bars for their visitors. The town's ostensible figure of over 32,000 hotel rooms in 1971, more than 10,000 ahead of its nearest rivals (Bournemouth and Torquay), looks impressive enough in the abstract after a decade of such apparent contraction.[24] But it comes at the same time as a standard text on the hotel and catering industry, published in 1972, could state as a truism that Blackpool could 'nowadays accommodate half a million people at one time'. [25] The figures are very problematic indeed, and have been so since the resort's earliest days. The only clear message to emerge from the recent material is that Blackpool had held on to its position as the most capacious and popular seaside resort in Britain, while many of its northern rivals were in steep decline.[26] It also retained a very high proportion of small businesses among its boarding-houses.

The contradictions exposed in the previous paragraph are given vivid illustration by the results of Chloe Stallybrass's attempt to provide an on-the-spot enumeration of Scarborough's holiday accommodation in the 1970s. As Table 3 shows, the most inclusive 'official' counts of holiday accommodation provided figures well over twice as high as those collected at an off-season census. It is likely that the discrepancy in Blackpool will have been much wider, given the large proportion of small and marginal businesses in this more unequivocally popular resort.

The can of worms opened out by this Table is almost enough to deter further investigation, especially over longer periods when definitions and modes of collection and presentation can be expected to have fluctuated. Even so, any attempt to chart the changing fortunes and importance of the Blackpool landlady over time needs to grasp this nettle – or catch these worms – and Table 4 is an attempt to pull together a range of sources over a long period, providing an outline of change while making the reader aware of the problems involved.

Table 4 shows that discrepancies between different kinds of source are nothing new. The gulf between the Victorian census figures and the directories is enormous, but official returns of a similar status to those in Stallybrass's table consistently produce higher figures still. The variations between individual trade directories are also arresting, although the problem is a familiar one. Not only can we compare the much wider coverage offered by Porter in the late 1850s with that of Gillbanks, or that of Porter (again) in 1871 with Mannex in 1868 (itself a generally reputable

Table 2: Room occupancy (as a percentage) in hotels and guest-houses, 1987–8.[21]

Establishment	May	June	July	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr
English seaside hotels	50	59	69	71	70	58	37	32	28	32	33	45
Blackpool hotels	50	58	62	64	75	71	32	33	23	25	21	39
Blackpool guest-houses	23	35	57	61	69	57	24	42	16	19	20	30

Table 3: Holiday accommodation in Scarborough, on the definitions employed by six different sources, 1971–6.[27]

Source	Hotels, guest-houses	Holiday flats	Total
Census, 1971	365	Not collected	
Scarborough Hotels Association members, 1976	358	95	453
Scarborough Accommodation Guide, 1975	355	241	*
Fire Officer, 1975	690	Not available	*
District Valuer, 1976	584	282	866
Rating Officer, 1976	866	175	1041

**Problems of duplication mean that no simple total can be offered.*

directory); there is also the question of whether the difference between the Barrett figures for 1889 and 1895 reflects genuine explosive growth in the number of landladies, or a change of policy or improved coverage on the firm's part. Between 1901 and 1951 the census figures in the table are for *individuals* rather than *households*, with the result that there will be some double-counting of businesses, while by the inter-war years the directories' coverage was probably becoming less full, which helps to account for the reduced discrepancy between the two sets of data. Post-war developments are particularly difficult to chart, especially if we take the Fire Brigade estimate seriously. It was for hotels and guest-houses, *not* the holiday flats which were becoming important, and it was accompanied by an estimate that up to 250,000 visitors might occupy these premises at the season's height (which invites comparisons with Medlik's figure, cited above).[28] After the particularly wide gap between the census and Fire Brigade figures in 1971, the 1981 census does not provide data which can be used to count hotels and boarding-houses or those who kept them. There were said to be 9,305 people resident in Blackpool's hotels and boarding-houses, 2,205 of whom were not usually resident; but the only other categories on offer were 'resident staff' and 'other residents'. Meanwhile, there were said to be 28,075 rooms in hotels and boarding-houses in Blackpool.[29] Six years later, however, the Corporation supplied figures to the visitor survey report of 1987 which counted 2,410 'serviced accommodation' establishments and 1,100 self-catering premises, with bedspaces for 66,405 and 22,737 respectively.[30] It is quite possible that landladies were beginning to hide their businesses from the census in 1971 and 1981 as they feared that it might be used to check up on fire precautions and then VAT. In a way, the most recent figures are actually the most problematic of all; but more generally, the difficulty of establishing something as seemingly straightforward as how many landladies there were at any given time should now be only too apparent.[31]

Table 4: Number of landladies in Blackpool from different sources, 1841–1987.

Year	Census	Directories	Other	Census population	Number of houses
1841	18			1378*	263
1848		84 (Slater)			
1851	85			2564	491
1857		231 (Gillbanks)			
1859		423 (Porter)			
1861	173			3907	761
1868		377 (Mannex)			
1871	322	704 (Porter)		7092	1302
1880		795 (Barrett)			
1881				12989	3267
1883			1722 (MOH)		
1885			2026 (MOH)		
1889		1252 (Barrett)			
1891				21970	5265
1895		2209 (Barrett)			
1901	2642	2311 (Barrett)		47348	10172
1904		2373 (Barrett)			
1911	4174			58371	13492
1921	5208			73800*	17455
1929		2938 (Barrett)			
1931	3967			101553	25201
1934		2874 + 134 (Barrett)			
1938		2912 + 313 (Barrett)			
1951	4094			147184	44912
1961	3297			153185	49960
1963		1897 + 606 (Barrett)			
1971	2055		5000 (Fire Brigade)	151860	55385
1981	No reliable listing				
1987			2410 (Corporation)		

**Census taken in June: visitors deducted from total enumerated population. In 1921, at least, the date of the census will also have meant that more people described themselves as being in the holiday accommodation business. This was clearly less of a problem in 1841.*

For 1934, 1938 and 1963 the second figure is for private hotels. The Fire Brigade listing for 1971 is of course an estimate, but one based on detailed local knowledge. The figures are also affected by boundary changes and changes of definition between censuses, which have less of an impact on the presentation of long-run trends.

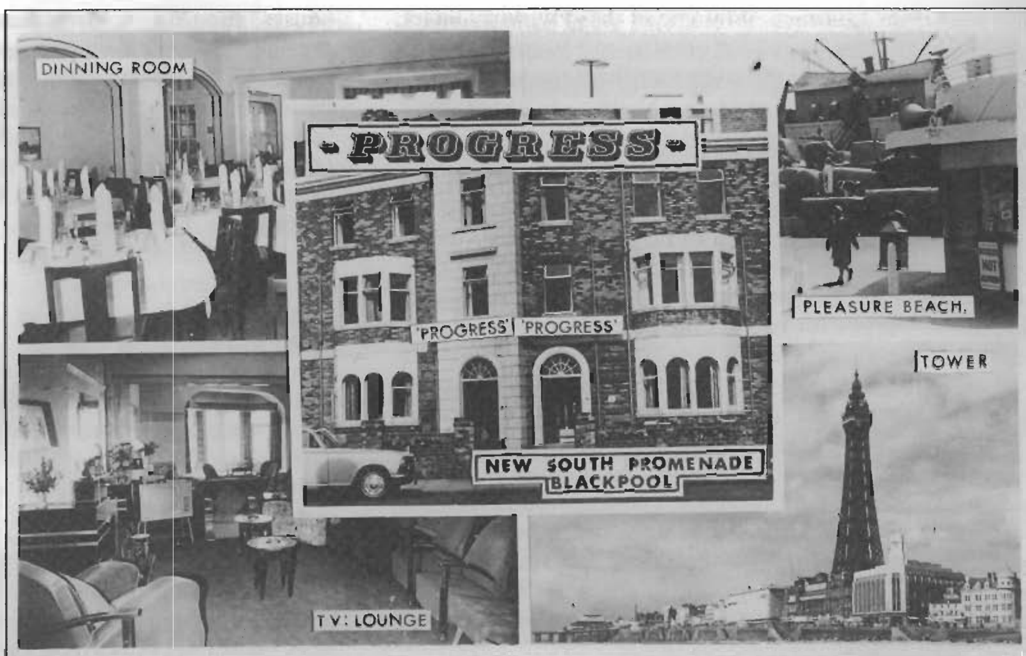
The best way of making some sort of sense of this material is probably to take the highest figures available at each point, on the assumption that even these will miss some people out, but that they provide the best approximation to a very slippery 'reality'. If we divide the period covered by Table 4 according to this criterion, we get an interesting result which fits well with informed contemporary perceptions of the fortunes of Blackpool's holiday industry, at least until recent times. Between 1848 and 1859 the number of landladies grew by 403.6 per cent, a fivefold increase which reflected the resort's impressive post-railway expansion and projected it into the front rank of resorts in terms of sheer quantity of places to stay. The more difficult period between 1859 and 1871 is associated with slower growth at 66.4 per cent, but the expansive years between 1871 and 1883 saw renewed rapid expansion at 144.6 per cent over an identical time-span. By this time Blackpool was far outpacing its competitors, but the 1880s were another period of slower growth, with a hiatus in investment in the popular entertainment industry, which was to be broken by the opening of the Victoria Pier in 1893 and the Tower in 1894. Fittingly, landladies were also slower to expand their numbers, growing by only 16.7 per cent between 1883 and 1895. At this point, however, Blackpool's second great boom began, and in step with it the number of landladies nearly doubled between 1895 and 1911 from what was already a uniquely high base figure, from which an increase of 89 per cent was an astonishing performance. It was impossible to sustain it in the longer term, and the 24.8 per cent growth between 1911 and 1921, in spite of the war, was achieved in part by courtesy of the June census of 1921, which must have counted more seasonal businesses and indeed seasonal migrants than would have been the case in April.[32] This remarkable high-water mark, with 5,208 recorded lodging- and boarding-house keepers, may help to explain the decline of 23.8 per cent which followed over the next decade. But between 1931 and 1951 there was a very small increase, of 3.2 per cent, and the directories had been suggesting an upward trend in the later 1930s, when new building was going on at either end of the promenade. It was only after 1951 that the decline in numbers as recorded in official statistics began in earnest; and even then the decade 1961–71 shows either an increase of 51.7 per cent or a continuing decline of 34.6 per cent, according to whether you take the Fire Brigade or the census figure for 1971. The same problem would apply, of course, to any attempt to establish subsequent trends, and it is worth noting that the 1971 Fire Brigade figure was the second highest I have found in the whole history of the resort, beaten only by the 1921 census total.

The same approach can be used to calculate the relative importance of landladies in the town's social structure at different times. If we calculate landladies as a proportion of householders, we find that in the mid-Victorian years, from the later 1850s to the mid-1880s, Blackpool was a town of landladies to a quite remarkable extent, with over 50 per cent of the households listed as providing accommodation for visitors. As the town grew, this level of specialisation was not sustained, as the percentage fell to around 30 per cent in 1911 and 1921, and declined further to below one in six in 1931. By 1951 landladies in the census returns accounted for less than 10 per cent of the households. They had been swamped by the swelling influx of retired people, commuters, building and general service workers. Even at their peak of relative numerical importance, the landladies had not been able to challenge the stranglehold exerted over local government by the entertainment companies and their allies; but it is interesting to note that even in 1973 their collective rage seems to have been sufficient to deter the Corporation from pursuing a well-matured scheme to develop a Pontins self-catering holiday village on municipal land. The reasons for the retreat are obscure, but the context of fierce opposition was crystal clear. We should not necessarily equate numbers with other kinds of strength in any automatic way.[33]

The difficulty of establishing how many landladies there were at any given time, and charting trends over time, arises primarily from aspects of the nature of the occupation itself. In the first place, its visibility in the sources varies according to its role in the domestic economy of the households concerned. Relatively few families can ever have depended on it exclusively, given the seasonal and highly competitive nature of the industry and the perennial low prices across most of the local market. Male household heads were more likely to be listed as running the businesses in Blackpool than in other resorts, but most of them had other occupations, and a recent student of Blackpool's Co-operative Society notes that husbands appeared in the trade directories as lodging-house keepers in some years but not in others, suggesting that the availability of other work affected their perception of their occupational identity.[34] Female heads of household, meanwhile, will have had a variety of other sources of income, from annuities to dressmaking and fortune-telling (apparently a fairly common sideline in the 1930s),[35] some of which are more visible to the historian than others, and they too might have proffered different

The back streets near North Station: one of the smaller Victorian houses with obligatory large bay windows and sociable garden seat.

occupational labels at different times. But Blackpool was unusual in the high proportion of married couples engaged in its accommodation industry, although only a minority seem to have made a satisfactory income from this highly seasonal trade on its own.



The most recent purpose-built boarding-houses on the New South Promenade. 'Progress' takes its name from the town's motto, and the TV lounge expresses a 1960s version of the concept.

Hardly any single men ran Blackpool guest-houses, however, and this was clearly seen as being a woman's business: where married couples ran the establishments the wife's name was often above the door and the husband was relegated to a subordinate and behind-the-scenes role in the day-to-day running of the business. This identification as essentially a female trade made the accommodation business even more likely than most seasonal trades to be intermittently visible, and it was often hidden behind the husband's trade or waged work in household listings, such as the rate-books which also listed occupational labels in Edwardian Blackpool.[36] To an unusual and remarkable extent, indeed, Blackpool illustrates the point that towns might present a very different social structure if occupations were classified according to women's work rather than men's: landladies' husbands did a variety of jobs which ran through the spectrum from professional to unskilled labour, whereas their wives might all be defined as small to middling businesspeople.

The differences between the sources which are highlighted in Table 4 arise from the contrasting purposes for which they were intended. People were less likely to be conscious of a seasonal role as landlady when responding to census questionnaires in the spring than when contributing entries to trade directories which constituted a form of basic advertisement for that aspect of their family economy which most needed it. But, significantly, the fullest listings we have come from the investigations of local officials charged with health and safety responsibilities, who needed to know the potentially hazardous uses to which premises were put. Even so, as Table 3 shows, the counts made by different officials in the same place could vary widely even in the 1970s.

Whatever the sources used, there will always be a 'dark figure' of hidden and occasional landladies, including people who do not see themselves solely or most of the time as providers of holiday accommodation. This is partly an expression of generic aspects of how women's work is perceived, with more acknowledged fragmentation of activity and less identification with particular kinds of waged or other market-orientated work. Interestingly, however, this fluidity of personal definition also applies very clearly to men in this case. Above all, perhaps, looking at landladies and trying to count them reminds us how artificial it is, and how misleading, to analyse society on the assumption that most households have one income which comes from one regular job. This assumption has been challenged from various quarters, of course, especially with regard to the question of the 'family wage' and in the context of the cotton industry; but it is worth restating given the resistance of (for example) economic historians of living standards to recognising it.[37]

Other problems remain, such as the difficulty of establishing the size-structure of businesses (except in the broadest possible terms, making heroic assumptions from house size) and the probability that the relative importance of catering for visitors in a notional 'average' Blackpool landlady's family economy may have changed over time. This is almost certainly the case, given the changes that have taken place in what is provided for visitors.

In the early days of the industry, in the late eighteenth century, the dominant mode seems to have been full board. The surviving accounts for Bonny's-in-the-fields, a farm which provided lodgings for bathers, suggest that this was the practice in the 1790s. This was a mixed farm whose economy was given a very substantial boost during the bathing season, when ladies, gentlemen, children, their servants and horses were put up at prices which increased from two shillings a day (one shilling and sixpence for children and servants) in 1785 to 2s-6d and 1s-8d in 1792. This included board and table beer, but not wine, which was extra and much in demand. In May 1791 the proprietor bought in 655 bottles of port and 50 of sherry in anticipation of the arrival of his thirsty customers. Recorded receipts up to the end of September, excluding wine, increased from £111-6s.-0d in 1785 to £384-0s.-1d 1792, suggesting a thriving business whose income must have come to outweigh or at least to challenge that from the farm.[38]

From an early stage, opulent visitors might opt to hire a furnished cottage, which was a cheaper alternative to hotels or places like Bonny's. The barrister and Staffordshire county magistrate John Bill did this in 1846, staying expensively at the Lane Ends Hotel until he agreed with Mrs Todd to take a cottage at South Shore for an all-in rent including 'linen, and all other appliances, and means to boot, except plate'. She also found a cook for her lodgers. This pattern of renting self-contained accommodation by

the week was common throughout the Victorian years, especially in more up-market resorts, and as with the later rise of the self-catering flat its ramifications are difficult for the historian to pursue.[39]

At Blackpool, however, these ways of renting accommodation soon gave way, in the early railway age if not before, to the apartments system, which remained the dominant pattern until the 1930s. This entailed visitors paying for room (or share of bed) and service, buying their own food for the landlady to cook, and sometimes paying additional charges for use of cruet, cleaning of shoes, and the like. It was, at a basic level, the cheapest possible option, as befitted a resort which came to specialise in working-class visitors; and it was also very hard work for the landlady and her family (especially the daughters, who were often kept off school during the holiday season to play a full part in the business). The imposed discipline, limited amenities and corner-cutting which were necessary aspects of the lower levels of the apartments system played a large part in the development of the stereotype of the comic landlady, as perpetuated by (for example) the dialect writer Sam Fitton:

> *We'n every convenience; hot an' cowd wayter – well we'n nobbut cowd really, but yo' con soon get it warm wi' swearin;' at it an' knockin' it abeawt wi' bein' vexed . . . Well, wi' had two baths really; they wer' two bakin' mugs, so I towd her hoo must put one foot in each mug, an 'wesh a bit at once. Hoo didn't expect a swimmin' bath at two-bob a neet, an' extra for blackin' boots . . .*[40]

There are also enjoyable passages about the extra charge levied for sitting next to a broken window which provided a pleasant draught, and about the parlous state of the piano, an obligatory piece of lodging-house furniture at Blackpool by the early twentieth century, but not necessarily either stable or in tune. The resourcefulness of the landlady under the apartments system is typified by the story of the family who took a cauliflower to be cooked, only to be served with the leaves after the landlady, feigning ignorance, claimed to have thrown away the centre.[41]

The boarding-house system was slow to supersede this cheap if sometimes makeshift set of arrangements. Full board was more convenient for the landlady, but it reduced visitors' choice as well as saving shopping time (no doubt it was more popular with women than men, as a survey of women's holiday aspirations in the late 1930s showed an overwhelming desire to be relieved of household chores).[42] Moreover, full board enabled larger profits to be made from the service of food, and pushed prices up. Before the First World War it was unusual in Blackpool (though not in Douglas, Isle of Man), and confined to a few up-market places at either end of the promenade, such as the Empire Boarding House in Claremont Park, at the North Shore. This was well ahead of its time with (in 1903) small separate tables, a drawing-room and a smoking-room with 'the leading English and foreign illustrated and comic journals'. Another attraction was the view across to Barrow, where 'the distant furnace fires . . . flare up to the sky' at night.[43] It was hereabouts that in 1926 the Claremont Private Hotel advertised itself to a Spanish clientele through Thomas Cook's Traveller's Guides, stressing (in Spanish) its billiards, small tables and proximity to the golf course.[44]

Such pretensions and ambitions remained most unusual, and when full board made headway during the inter-war years it was almost entirely a new system within the old apartment houses, appealing to skilled workers and their families in regular employment who gained from falling prices. By the late 1930s Mass-Observation identified 'four main types of place for holiday-makers' in its Blackpool survey: the licensed hotel, the unlicensed private hotel, the boarding- or company-house, and at the bottom of the scale (but attractive to freedom-seeking motorists) 'the family house (or Kippax), an ordinary home that takes in one or more guests by recommendation, has no visitors' book or legal status, and . . . undercuts fixed rates with rooms at 6/- or less'. The latter two groups were 'by far the most numerous', and full board was offered at all levels. The 'Kippaxes' are the layer most likely to be invisible to orthodox quantitative sources, and they offered a familial informality which the larger places were unable to emulate, although they tried to claim such virtues as their own. At this level, too, catering for visitors was more obviously an occasional adjunct rather than a basic staple of the family economy.[45]

It was only during the newly-affluent 1950s, and afterwards, that Blackpool's landladies at mainstream level began to offer less spartan accommodation. An advertisement for new boarding-houses just behind the prestigious South Promenade in 1939 still offered only one bathroom and two inside water-closets for all the visitors in a nine-bedroomed house, although it did promise hot and cold water in all bedrooms.[46] The inherited stock of guest-house accommodation proved difficult to modernise, and even the minimum standards schemes which the Corporation introduced in 1967 did not demand very much: 90 square feet for a double bedroom, which was to contain a dressing table, mirror, chair, wardrobe or cupboard, wash-basin, and hot and cold running water. There was to be one bathroom per 25 guests and one water-closet per 15.[47] This reflects a classic Blackpool problem: the difficulty of offering extra space and amenities to meet rising expectations without either raising prices too far or losing too much capacity. Important post-war changes were made, involving television lounges and better furnishings, and the widespread switch to bed and breakfast from full board from the late 1960s reduced work-loads in some ways, although the introduction of licensed bars increased them in others. But space remained at a premium where the working-class market remained the staple trade.[48]

Nevertheless, it looks as if the improvements worked, as far as they went. According to the survey of 1987, visitors were satisfied with their accommodation, apart from a few who still hankered after a private bathroom; and new blood among the visitors had been attracted and kept. Not only were there more middle-class visitors: there were also newcomers from distant parts of Britain, including the London area, who came for the Illuminations and were captivated. One-third of the visitors were still drawn from the 'unskilled' working class and state pensioners, and public transport was still unusually important in bringing Blackpool's visitors; but the surviving, very cheap boarding-houses in the back streets still catered for this market.[49]

In the late 1970s I was pessimistic about the future of the Blackpool landlady. She has proved remarkably resilient in adjusting to new demands and new trends since the 1972 visitor survey warned of the dangers of complacency. The panic over the cost of meeting new fire regulations (which was memorably described by a local fireman in 1971), the problems of VAT and capital gains tax, and the competition from new forms of holidaymaking at home and abroad, were all fought off.[50] How far recruitment to the accommodation industry has been sustained by redundancy

payments and early retirement, changing the balance of the domestic economies of landladies yet again, is a moot question; and the future is clouded by fears of pollution and poverty. The shape of the industry is harder to discern than ever, as some larger establishments have joined the rush to become old people's homes while the penumbra of unofficial guest-houses in the back streets is probably as numerous as ever. Political discontents have driven the Conservatives out of municipal office for only the second time in the resort's history. The future looks every bit as complicated as the past, but it would be dangerous to underestimate the Blackpool landlady's capacity for regeneration and revival.

NOTES

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7 Walton, *Landlady* and 'Blackpool revisited'.

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14 Walton, 'Blackpool revisited'.

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20 Blackpool Central Library LM 89, *Blackpool Visitor Survey 1987*, p. 10.

21 Ibid., p. 26.

22 J. Demetriadi, 'English seaside resorts 1950–74', in H.E.S. Fisher (ed.), *Recreation and maritime history* (Exeter, forthcoming 1994).

23 Stallybrass, 'Holiday accommodation industry', pp. 389–94.

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25 S. Medlik, *Profile of the hotel and catering industry* (London, 1972), p. 37.

26 Stallybrass, 'Holiday accommodation industry'.

27 Ibid., p. 179, Table 5.1.

28 Lancashire Record Office CBBl/(32/8)

29 Census, County Report for Lancashire, 1981, Part 1, p. 20 Table 9, and p. 79 Table 18.

30 1987 Visitor Survey, p. 34.

31 For analysis of similar problems, J.K. Walton, *The English seaside resort* (Leicester, 1983), Chapter 3, and J.K. Walton and P.R. McGloin, 'The tourist trade in Victorian Lakeland', *Northern History* 17 (1981), pp. 153–82.

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34 D. Claber, 'The Blackpool Industrial Co-operative Society, 1885–1910', M.A. dissertation, Lancaster University, 1991, pp. 27–8.

35 Gary Cross (ed.), *Worktowners at Blackpool* (London, 1990), p. 120.

36 Walton, *Landlady*, pp. 215–16; Cross, *Worktowners*, p. 63.

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41 I owe this story to Keith Marshall.

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43 *City Leader* (see above), n. 17), pp. 310–11.

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49 1987 Visitor Survey, p. 14.

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