Doing Belonging: a sociological study of belonging in place as the outcome of social practices

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Abstract

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Place is disguised, hidden or simply ignored in much sociological research. Belonging, however, has become a focus of sociological concern. This thesis proposes that one way of belonging is through belonging-in-place leading to a sociological positioning of place as an active participant in social life. In much sociological research places have been seen as fixed and essentialised. To avoid this problem, this study turned to geography and anthropology for suitable frameworks incorporating an open, fluid and relational understanding of place. In particular, Ingold’s (2000) concept of the ‘taskscape’ has been used to understand the connections between place, people, activity and time.

The thesis argues that ‘imagined’ and narrativised places create only an ‘outer layer’ of belonging and that it is through embodied connections to other people in the place (what I call a ‘peoplescape’) and through inalienable connections to material places over time that a three dimensional ‘ontological belonging’, as a way of being (and doing) in the world, can develop. Belonging, often spoken of as a sense or feeling, is here shown to be the outcome of social practices, by embodied beings, in a material place.

The research took a phenomenological approach in order to see the life-world of the participants from within. A multi-dimensional belonging was uncovered through various user driven qualitative methods: biographical interviews and photo and written diaries with families who have lived in one place, Wigan, for at least three generations. The diaries detailed social encounters which revealed that knowing other people and being known are crucial to an embodied belonging-in-place. Taking photos alongside the diaries enabled specific places of importance to the respondents to be discussed and these revealed that places can be passed on, as inalienable gifts, from one generation, or one life phase, to the next. Inalienable traces of previous generations of Wiganers are present in the material place. The phenomenological methodology and the mix of qualitative methods enabled an inductive analysis which disclosed the everyday life-world of these people in this place. Diaries, both written and photographic, together with other respondent directed methods could be used more widely to explore seemingly mundane aspects of social life from the perspective of the participants.

The research found that place is not merely a backdrop to social life but is an integral part of the social practices carried out by embodied and emplaced people. A greater emphasis on both place and materiality as they impact social life could enhance much sociological research.
DECLARATION

No portion of the work referred to in the thesis has been submitted in support of an application for another degree or qualification of this or any other university or other institute of learning.

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For Jack, Billy and Sarah
Figure 1 Wigan, situated between Manchester and Liverpool
Figure 2 Wigan in detail

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1 Introduction

Sociology often treats place as a passive context for social life (Gieryn, 2000, p. 466). This research stems from my undergraduate dissertation investigating farming families in Cheshire (Bennett, 2007). I interviewed four couples out of whom three of the men were living in the houses they grew up in having taken over their father’s farm (this included one tenant farmer as tenancies can also be passed on). As Steve (a third generation dairy farmer) expressed it: ‘[W]e’re all from farming backgrounds going back numerous generations...I’ve always got what I wanted right here’ (Bennett, 2007, p. 43). This attitude made me question what part place plays in people’s lives and identities. The inherent difficulty in uncovering meaning and motive in people’s lives, is that it is in the ordinary, everyday, unthought-about tasks of daily life that this attitude becomes apparent (Jackson, 1993, p. 332). Therefore I have approached this research into our relationship to place through the theme of belonging, a way of situating ourselves in the everyday (May, 2011, p. 367). However, in contrast to May (2011, p. 367) who looks at belonging from the starting point of a person, I am approaching this research from the position of place as the social and material location where particular people live out their lives. Taking inspiration from Miller (2002) I have broken aspects of belonging into social, historical and geographical connections, purely for analytic purposes: place is all of these things.

1.1 Objectives of this study

My starting point is place and people’s relationship to place. Although there is a considerable amount of sociological research around people who share a location, or place communities, little of this takes into account the effect of the place itself on the people who live there. Many classic community studies tend to treat place as an inert background where the relations between people are acted out. I suggest that place can instead be understood as imagined and embodied, an active site for social practices through history, memory, other embodied and emplaced people and material things. In order to investigate this relationship to place I have chosen to focus on ‘doing belonging’, which can be seen as way of situating ourselves in the everyday. Following Miller (2002) I have broken aspects of belonging into social,
historical and geographical connections allowing a multi-dimensional belonging in place, an ‘ontological belonging’, to emerge. Places, in all their different guises are included here: imagined historic places, sites of social relationships, material, lively places. The temporal and the material are connected in each dimension. Imagined, historic places are inseparable from the material places experienced by embodied people; sites of social relationships, what I call a ‘peoplescape’, is embodied and connects across time to the ‘world of restorable reach’; geographic or material places are used by embodied people who leave inalienable traces in the place. This multi-dimensionality incorporates different layers of attachment to place, some of which have been addressed by previous research but this study benefits from the combined effect of studying all these different dimensions together. To have ‘a sense of belonging’ is passive, intangible, unseen; I address belonging as ‘doing belonging’, an everyday, yet active, way of being-in-relation-to a place, thus bringing an active place into the sociological domain.

The thesis therefore addresses two main issues: i) how can place be brought into sociological research; ii) how can belonging in place be understood sociologically. The central argument of this thesis is that place plays an integral role in who we are and consequently how everyday life is lived. Place should therefore be considered more thoroughly in much sociological research. Through addressing belonging-in-place the importance of place in social life - an open, fluid and relational place - will come to the fore.

Current sociological literature on belonging is often around ‘not belonging’ (Ahmed, 2007; Valentine, et al., 2009). This literature serves to highlight the importance of belonging in people’s lives, but does not address belonging-in-place. Belonging is in fact a nebulous term without a clear definition. For the purposes of this research I have used the term ‘ontological belonging’ - belonging as a way of being in the world - taken from Miller (2002) to denote the active nature of the belonging-in-place that is researched here. Other sociological literature does address belonging and place but lacks the three dimensions of historical, social and embodied and geographical, or material, connections to places that I explore here. I am using embodied here to refer to embodied people in place and material to refer to materiality of place, although they are often interconnected concepts. In
Globalization and Belonging (2005) Savage et al have elucidated a particular form of belonging practised largely by middle-class professionals based on weak ties; more recently May (2011) has described a multifaceted belonging which she proposes can help to evaluate social change. Although these accounts of belonging include relationships to places, neither examines belonging-in-place from the bottom up, starting from place, which is what this thesis does.

There is a large literature of community studies that does seem to address place, as each study is based in one, or sometimes multiple, particular places. However, these places are, especially in the older studies, inert rather than active; the places can be seen as useful classificatory aspects of the research, defining who should be included in the study, rather than as a participatory force in the social life of the place. I have, in fact, also used place in order to determine who should participate (see 1.3 Why Wigan below) but this is only one way in which place has been used in this research. Another way of addressing place in research on belonging is through ‘imagined’ places. Imagined communities (Anderson, 2006) have a marked influence on how people negotiate place identities and a sense of belonging, as is shown in Chapter 4 Imagining Us below, but, I argue, this is only one aspect of belonging-in-place. In the three dimensional analysis of belonging here I also evaluate social connections to known others in the place and connections to the material place through personal, family and communal history.

As sociological literature is currently lacking in studies which have an understanding of place as an actant in social life, I turned to geographical and anthropological literature to develop an understanding of an open, relational place (Massey, 2006) and the way in which people act together in and with place (Ingold, 2000). From this literature I was able to develop an original framework from which to explore how people interact with places through historical, social and material (geographic) connections which have provided a structure for the empirical chapters. Imagining Us examines how the participants use their own and others’ imaginaries and histories of Wigan to position themselves vis-à-vis their place. These stories are not unified across the respondents but tailored to individual lives and positions within the place. Social connections are explored in Worlds within Reach which looks, not at family and friends, although these are certainly present
in the data, but focuses on the less obvious connections to others who are a ‘part of
the place’, those who form what I call a ‘peoplescape’ by which I mean a place of
face-to-face relationships to known others. These people are the shopkeepers,
neighbours and others who form a web of connections within a locality. The extent
of this web across and through time is perhaps indicative of an embeddedness
within the place. How people connect to the past and future through the material
place is examined in Material Places. Here place is likened to Mauss’ ‘gift’
(Godelier, 1999) with inalienable connections to past and future generations. The
unfolding of these three data chapters can be seen as an unpeeling of layers of
belonging, from the outermost layer of a cognitive, visually imagined place,
through intersubjective connections to other emplaced and embodied people to
finally reach the materiality of the place, the core element of an ontological
belonging, where past, present and future collide in buildings, worn paving stones
and the swings in the park. Together these dimensions of belonging make a
significant contribution to knowledge through this framework of imagined places,
‘peoplescape’ and place as inalienable gift.

In order to investigate the way belonging in place is ‘done’ I needed to gain a good
understanding of the life-worlds of the participants. To do this I undertook a variety
of qualitative methods of data collection, to give a three dimensional view
of these people’s lives, encompassing Miller’s (2002) three dimensions of ontological
belonging (historic, social and geographic connections).

1.2 Research Methods

As belonging can be a nebulous concept, slippery and difficult to define, the choice
of research methods is central in order to come to grips with it. Belonging as
attachment to place, or ‘doing place identity’, is not something that is necessarily
able to be discerned by those on the ‘inside’, as it is part of the taken-for-granted
aspect of everyday life (May, 2011, p. 370). People who have stayed in an
area/place all their lives are likely to have this kind of belonging as it is partly
concerned with history. Where the links with the place are longer than one lifetime
this may be all the stronger, embedded in the material place and passed on from
one generation to the next, as I saw in the farmers I spoke to in my previous
research (Bennett, 2007). Ideally then I would speak to multiple generations of families who have remained in the same place for three or more generations. In addition to biographical interviews I chose to ask respondents to complete photo and written diaries in order to gain a more detailed insight into their everyday lives. Much of this in-depth data has shaped the empirical chapters and findings of this research. In order to highlight some of the benefits I achieved through basing the research around families and through the use of diaries there is a case study at the end of this introductory chapter (1.5 Case Study on the benefits of family research) which demonstrates the particularity of this form of data collection.

The taken-for-granted nature of belonging can make it difficult to talk about in a rational way, one needs to take a different viewpoint, what I call a ‘sideways’ look. A phenomenological approach, using the ideas of Schutz, Merleau-Ponty and Heidegger, allows everything to be questioned, rather than simply accepting a standard rationalised life-story narrative. With such an ill-defined concept as belonging I did not want to presuppose any particular understandings and therefore did not include the term in any questions. User driven research approaches, such as the narrative style interviews and written and photo diaries used here, allow a bottom up approach and take the perspective of the respondents’ life-worlds. The combination of visual, verbal and written data embraces different forms of perception and understanding to give a comprehensive idea of the respondents’ lives. These research methods give a distinctive flavour complementing my atypical approach to understanding how belonging-in-place is done.

I undertook the data analysis with care. The biographical interviews were looked at both thematically and as narratives; some of the diaries were mapped out pictorially to illustrate the density of the web of connections they represented; places were also looked at thematically: churches, schools and local shops were all well represented. I feel a huge responsibility to represent the participants and their views fairly and in good faith. However, in taking care to understand the data within the context of these people’s lives it is possible that I have overlooked information that would appear significant to someone else. This does not detract from my findings which are based on my reading of the data, but other interpretations could also be valid. I chose to research this particular group of people who seemed likely to share
a strong place identity but other groups without such long term attachment to place may also ‘do belonging-in-place’ in a similar way.

1.3 Why Wigan?

This research was conducted in Wigan Metropolitan Borough, a large borough positioned on the western edge of Greater Manchester and to the north and east of Merseyside (Liverpool). I wanted to find people in urban areas who have an attachment to place. I knew from personal experience, having grown up in the north\(^1\), that there are people like this in many northern towns. The choice of Wigan was based on a number of factors: it has a very low in and out migration rate (meaning that people don’t move very much, the population tends to be static) (Office for National Statistics, 2012) so there are families who have remained there for multiple generations; it has a distinctive identity based on Orwell’s ([1937] 1986) *The Road to Wigan Pier* and more currently on sport, particularly Rugby League, allowing an examination of the place in the national, as well as local, imaginary; and finally as I know the area having grown up there, there was less need for a period of familiarisation with the place before beginning the research.

‘With a population of about 300,000 across an area of 77 square miles, Wigan is one of the largest metropolitan districts in England. The borough is based around the two main towns of Wigan and Leigh, and several smaller towns and villages of the former Lancashire coalfield.’ (Wigan Council, 2012). The area covered by the research expands beyond what was historically ‘Wigan’ as the Metropolitan Borough of Wigan created by the local authority reorganisation in 1974 encompasses what were independent towns. This has little direct significance for this research as the neighbouring areas have a similar history and demography. Wigan does not have a large Asian community as does nearby Bolton, for example, and remains very much white ‘working’ and (nowadays) ‘lower middle’ class.

Reputed to have been a Roman settlement, Wigan was granted its first royal charter in 1246, making it one of the four oldest boroughs in Lancashire along with

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\(^1\) I lived in Wigan from the ages of 6 to 20 but no longer have any family or close friends living there. As my parents are not from Wigan, I do not consider myself to be a Wiganer.
Liverpool, Preston and Lancaster (Mayor's Handbook, 2011). Coal was first found here as early as the fourteenth century. When Celia Fiennes (1702) visited in the late seventeenth century she found carvings made from a very high quality marble-like coal – cannel coal. By this time there were numerous mines all over the town; the last mine in the area of the current borough closed in 1992. Cotton mills were relatively late in developing in Wigan with two of the first large scale operations being built as late as 1822 but during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries these were also major employers in the town. Some mill buildings still exist and are in use today divided into small workshops or offices. Celia Fiennes described Wigan as a ‘pretty little market town’ (1702) prior to its huge expansion during the Industrial Revolution but by the depression of the 1930s George Orwell portrayed a place of slums and terrible poverty ([1937] 1986). Orwell has been accused of being selective in his depiction of the grimy, industrial north (Vallely, 2003) but, high rates of unemployment particularly amongst the young notwithstanding (Richardson, 2011), many people see Wigan as a convenient and pleasant place to live: ‘75 per cent of Wigan borough is rural. It's only 20 minutes from the coast, Manchester airport, Haydock and the Trafford Centre, and 30 minutes from the theatres, concert halls and clubs of Liverpool and Manchester. The Lake District is 40 minutes away. It's a great place to live.’ (Vallely, 2003); sentiments which are reflected in several of my interviews.

1.4 Structure of thesis

Following this introduction, the next two chapters describe the process I followed in coming to my research questions and choosing the methods to use.

Chapter 2, Doing Belonging begins by looking at sociological literature around belonging in communities of place starting with both classic and more recent community studies, through to imagined communities and finally on to more recent studies of different ways of belonging, in particular Savage et al’s (2005) Globalization and Belonging, with its concept of ‘elective belonging’. The second half of the chapter then goes on to explore literature from other social science disciplines, notably geography and anthropology which give a place-focused starting point for this research. A relational place, such as that elucidated by
Massey (2006, p. 34), brings together its history, geography and people, which might be seen as the core dimensions of belonging (Miller, 2002, p. 217). I find the work of anthropologist Tim Ingold and his idea of a ‘taskscape’ to be a helpful framework with which to pull together these various aspects of belonging, that is, place, people and actions through time.

Chapter 3 Practical Matters: Theory and Method examines the methodological approach taken and the practical aspects of carrying out the research. I have chosen to take a phenomenological approach using the ideas of Heidegger, Schutz and Merleau-Ponty which enable me to access the taken-for-granted worlds of the respondents and question them. In order to do this I interviewed multiple members and generations of the same family making it possible for me to identify what is passed on through time. I use a mixture of user-driven research methods to open up the scope of the research and capture the life-world of the participants.

The three data chapters can be seen as unpeeling different layers of belonging, finding an ontological belonging at the core.

Chapter 4, Imagining Us, introduces the idea of being (and belonging) in a place, or more specifically a milieu, a social place which has a life story (history) just as the social actors inhabiting it do. This gives rise to four different themes, which will reappear in the subsequent chapters. Firstly place is examined in terms of a social construction or imaginary based around particular views of history. The history of the place is seen in the present both in the imaginary and in the continuing material presence of the industrial past. This introduces the second theme of a materiality which helps to (re-)create the imagined place in the present. The third theme of narrative and the part it plays in creating belonging is seen through individuals and families linking their biographies to the stories of the place. The final theme is that of temporality as underpinning both imagined places and material ones: narratives take place within time.

Chapter 5, Worlds within Reach, then addresses the social aspects of belonging. Rather than exploring ‘social networks’ of friends and family connections (Pahl & Spencer, 2005) I focus on the embodied and emplaced people who Schutz
identifies as ‘types’ in the ‘world of common reach’ (Schutz & Luckmann, 1974, p. 84). These people provide face-to-face relationships and create what I am calling a ‘peoplescape’, a social environment of embodied and emplaced people. The shared stock of knowledge, passed on from one generation to the next, incorporates ‘ways of doing things around here’ through typifications and recipes for action (Schutz & Luckmann, 1974, p. 15) which can also be understood through the lens of the taskscape, a combination of landscape, people, tasks and time, where everyday activities, such as neighbouring, are undertaken by ‘attending to one another’ (Ingold, 2000, p. 196). The chapter also explores an embodied belonging through accent; how definitions of ‘others’ are crucial to a sense of ‘us’; and how family histories, embedded in place, can pull the world of restorable reach, both in an imagined and material sense, into the world of actual reach.

In the final data chapter, Chapter 6, Material Places, the core of what I am calling an ontological belonging is uncovered. Using the idea of the ‘gift’ from anthropological theory (Godelier, 1999; Jones, 2010) I examine how inalienable connections to places through the generations help to create an ontological belonging. This brings together the themes of temporality and materiality with a focus on the family and broader future generations to whom places are passed on. The chapter analyses the way in which places and memories can be perceived as ‘inalienable gifts’ passed from generation to generation.

Chapter 7, Conclusion, reviews the body of the thesis and its core arguments before looking at the particular contributions this work makes. As well as uncovering the essence of what I have called an ‘ontological belonging’, developing Miller’s (2002) use of the term, this research demonstrates the central part place plays in social life, opening up sociological research to the influence of material places on social life. I explain how this is a fundamentally different understanding of belonging-in-place from other recent sociological work. Finally the distinctive combination of qualitative methods used here demonstrates the efficacy of participant driven research methods which, I suggest, could be used more widely in the social sciences.
Before beginning the substantive part of this thesis I have included here a case study of one day in the life of one family, who all, four people across three generations, filled out diaries for the same week. On the Wednesday there was considerable overlap between their activities which highlights the different ‘life-worlds’ of the different participants. These particularistic windows into a Wednesday in March show the value of taking multiple perspectives into account and, perhaps, of not taking anything for granted. The benefits of allowing the respondents the freedom to offer up data in their own way, rather than extracting it through specific questions, is also shown – what would have been the point of asking Lauren what she did on her parents’ wedding anniversary?

1.5 Case Study on the benefits of family research

It is on the whole difficult to quantify the benefits I found in speaking to more than one member of the same family. Occasionally it confirmed or provided a slightly different slant on events, such as the pre-existing family relationships to the in-laws of Claire and Joanne discussed in Chapter 5 Worlds within Reach, or as when interviewing the three generations of Linda’s family together – herself, her mother and her daughter – any discrepancies were quickly ‘corrected’, usually by Linda. Janet’s family (who I’ve called ‘the Aspinalls’) were the only ones where I interviewed siblings from the older generation. Beryl (76) and Ian (62) are brother and sister; Ian told me before I met Beryl that she would have a different view of her upbringing to him, partly because they are fourteen years apart. Beryl did give extra insights into Ian’s story which gave a fuller understanding of his life history; she also denied, or did not remember, that she ‘found’ the house he moved into back in Wigan after living in Manchester. This is part of Ian’s story of being attached to Wigan through his family, whether he or she misremembers it I don’t know. It is clear that regardless of its ‘truth’ it is important to Ian’s account of himself in Wigan (see 5.8 Family History section). These aspects of multiple family interviews can serve to highlight what is important to people, rather than simply what is ‘true’.

The Aspinalls were also the only family who filled in more than one diary and they did this over the course of the same week. There were several ‘overlaps’ between
Janet (52) and each of her children, Tom (18) and Lauren (16) and between Janet and Beryl (76), her mother, but it was only on the Wednesday that all the diaries cohered around the ‘event’ of Janet’s wedding anniversary. This makes an interesting case study in itself because it shows the different ways of seeing a particular family occasion by different members and generations, of a family. These four diaries do cohere around what took place on the Wednesday afternoon and evening testifying to a network of relationships or an ‘ensemble of tasks, performed in series or in parallel, and usually by many people working together’ (Ingold, 2000, p. 195), that is, a ‘taskscape’; so that, whilst each person appears to be isolated, or to only come into contact with others glancingly, when examined together we can see how the occasion of the wedding anniversary shaped everyone’s day.

1.5.1 Janet’s Wedding Anniversary

Janet’s family completed diaries across the three generations: her mother Beryl, herself, and her two children Tom and Lauren. On the Wednesday of the week Janet’s family wrote their diaries it was Janet’s wedding anniversary and all the diaries were affected in some way by this event. To Beryl her daughter’s wedding anniversary is an important occasion which deserves the right gift, the children completely ignore the occasion, it is not mentioned by either of them despite it impacting on their lives. Nor does Janet herself mark the day as particularly significant; the topics of conversation when Beryl visited being particularly mundane – the dog, the weather. From what is written Beryl, rather than Janet, would appear to be at the centre of the occasion. In effect ‘the anniversary’ stands at the centre and Beryl, Janet, Lauren and later Tom ‘dance’ around it.

Beryl wrote:

Today is my eldest daughter’s wedding anniversary and I couldn’t find a nice card in the shop last week, I will have to go out this morning and try a different shop... At this late stage I have no choice but to get a bottle of wine for the happy couple. I usually buy flowers but wine will make a nice change.

(Beryl’s diary)
Beryl added later:

Just got back from our daughter’s house after delivering her card and wine seems that I bought the correct type of wine.

(Beryl’s diary)

Janet wrote:

4pm Mother and father called with anniversary card and gift. Discussed dog’s habits, weather, shopping expeditions.

(Janet’s diary)

Lauren wrote:

I talked to my Gran and Grandad at about 4 o’clock. I was mainly not listening very hard and missed their conversations.

(Lauren’s diary)

Tom gets a takeaway pizza for tea, presumably just for him and Lauren although this is not mentioned, he then takes his parents to a restaurant before going out to meet friends and picking his parents up on his way home. Lauren says that ‘everyone bar me went out whilst I stayed home to revise for more exams’ (Lauren’s diary); although Lauren is keen to point out her personal reasons for staying at home even without revision to do, she would not have gone out with her parents. Janet had visits from a sister and an aunt bringing cards and gifts as well as her parents, but she too makes little of the occasion. Of course, this reticence may be a reluctance to write in much detail in the diaries, although at the post-diary interview Janet did not immediately recognise her (admittedly somewhat unclear) photo of the restaurant, perhaps indicating this was not a particularly memorable occasion for her.

Beryl is concerned to buy the right card and present, this occupies her day and is written about twice in her diary demonstrating the importance of her relationship with her eldest daughter and the significance of the event to her: the gift must ‘embody’ their relationship (Fowler, 2004, p. 33). Janet has visits from her sister and aunt as well as her parents; she goes out for a meal with her husband. These activities mark out this day as different from others. Lauren sees her grandparents and spends the evening at home alone. Tom calls in where he works to buy a takeaway pizza for tea; he drops his parents at a restaurant and takes them home later. Together Janet’s family, her parents, sister, aunt, children and husband mark
this occasion: whilst they appear to be working independently they are in fact ‘attending to one another’, in the same way as individual musicians need to listen to each other in order to play together (Ingold, 2000, p. 196). The family, situated across more than one household, is acting in harmony, apparently without the need for conscious thought or discussion. This is a particular day during the week of the diaries when they were synchronized, to some extent, over this anniversary celebration; on other days links were made between Janet and her children or Janet and her parents, but not across all three generations simultaneously.

An anniversary of any kind marks the passage of time: for Beryl this event, the marriage of her eldest child, would have been a defining moment in her life and not one that she will forget; for Janet marriage would also have meant leaving home for the first time; whereas for the two children it is ancient history – something that happened before they were born and of little consequence, although it would have been an important pre-condition of their very existence. Different moments in time are circulating: Beryl still lives in the house that Janet moved out of on her wedding day; the pub where Janet and her husband first met is now the restaurant where Tom works. This coincidence is mentioned only in passing in Janet’s interview but adds another element of the past, alongside the house she grew up in where her parents still live, to the on-going present tense of Janet’s life. These places are, for Janet, ‘inalienable’ containing all the relationships to her past with which they have been connected (Jones, 2010, p. 190). Lauren, revising for her GCSEs is symbolic of the future, a future where she wants to leave the parochialism of life in this part of Wigan and head for a city (Lauren’s interview). Whilst the encircling nature of these events/relationships can be seen as ‘hugging’ (Fry, 2011) they can also be enclosing (Bertaux-Wiame, 2005, p. 49). This is a very small, personal event but nevertheless brings strands of past, present and future to bear on it. The participants can be seen as circling around the event itself which is only mentioned directly by Beryl, but there is also the wider circle of bringing the past into the present and projecting towards the future. There is a flow of family life both around this particular anniversary in 2010 and around all the anniversaries, past and future, which it stands for (Ingold, 2008, p. 1805).
This recording of a shared family event from four different perspectives gives a privileged glimpse into the life of this family. Without the diaries this phenomenological view would not be available to an outsider, a researcher. It is only through including the whole family in the research that a four-fold view of this day is possible. The benefits of talking to families, related individuals, are shown here in the wealth of detail available through the diaries. This was the only instance as cohesive as this in my research data but it shows why it is worth the extra effort of finding families willing to contribute to research. Other less intense data from family groups is scattered throughout the empirical chapters that follow such as Ron’s family’s interest in rugby (see Chapter 6 Material Places). The connection of Ron’s family to rugby in Wigan was hinted at in the initial interview with Ron, but only through speaking directly to his son Steve and daughter-in-law Anne did it become clear how much Steve’s life has been shaped by rugby and that this influence stemmed originally from his father. This is also something he is hoping to pass on in turn to his children. The element here of ‘passing on’ would not have been clear if only Steve or only Ron had been interviewed.

This short case study has shown the importance of familial connections over time to particular places which become apparent through the different perspectives of different family member made visible through the use of particular research methods (the diaries) and research participants (families). It is through this multiplicity of viewpoints that it was possible to gain an insight into the multi-dimensional belonging which is the focus of the body of this thesis.
2 Doing Belonging

2.1 Introduction

Many sociological studies of belonging have a limited and limiting conception of place. This may be due to an understanding of a local place as a passive context for social life (Gieryn, 2000, p. 466). If, as Massey suggests, we take a view of places as ‘constantly shifting articulations of social relations through time’ (1995, p. 188), within which Massey includes relations to other places, then identities, and borders, can change, whilst still remaining ‘the same’ place. If we include within ‘social relations’ places themselves, as ‘actants’ (Cloke & Jones, 2001, p. 650) then we have a definition of place, a local place, which is not essentialist or internalist, can change over time, and encompasses relationships to other places. It is through acting with and reacting to place that one becomes ‘of that place’. I therefore focus here on the interactions between body, place and action as they constitute belonging to a locality, or local community.

I want to find out how and why some people ‘fit’ apparently seamlessly into their environment, as Steve (a third generation farmer from Cheshire) expressed it: ‘[W]e’re all from farming backgrounds going back numerous generations… I’ve always got what I wanted right here’ (Bennett, 2007, p. 43). This close integration with place does not have to be limited to those living in what is considered to be the pleasant open countryside of Cheshire, but could also be experienced by urban dwellers, hence my focus on the town of Wigan. The inherent difficulty in uncovering meaning and motive in these people’s lives, is that it is in the ordinary, everyday, unthought-about tasks of daily life that this attitude becomes apparent (Jackson, 1993, p. 332). Therefore I have approached this research into our relationship to place through the theme of belonging, a way of situating ourselves in the everyday. Taking inspiration from Miller (2002) I have broken aspects of belonging into social, historical and geographical connections.

What began as a pared down study of a particular type of close knit community mutated into looking ‘sideways’ at belonging as this seems more able to encompass the multiple communities people create within a locality. By a ‘sideways’ look I
mean to emphasise the importance of being in the world, gaining a viewpoint similar to that of the subject of the enquiry. The phenomenological approach discussed in Chapter 3 *Practical Matters: theory and method*, goes some way towards achieving this ‘sideways’ look. The view taken here of belonging is also ‘sideways’ because the starting point for the thesis is the sociological position of place, rather than belonging itself. Communities of place bring together these two themes. There are strong links between the two concepts of community and belonging: ‘community studies’ within the sociological canon encompass belonging or not belonging to the community in different ways although the concept itself is not always discussed. I did not address belonging with the participants in this research partly because it is an emotionally loaded term and therefore people may be inclined to claim to ‘belong’ in order to demonstrate their ‘moral worth’ within the community (Miller, 2002, p. 218). I also chose not to ask directly about ‘belonging’ because my emphasis here is on ‘doing belonging’ and I felt this was best addressed through the ‘observation’ of behaviour (here largely through diaries). Belonging as a term does not yet have the historical sociological baggage that community has but this does not mean that it has a clear definition – it doesn’t. ‘To belong’ is sometimes described as a basic human need, but it can be interpreted in different ways. Therefore specific types of belonging ought to be investigated. The ‘type’ of belonging demonstrated in the empirical chapters is one that I see as having been particularly neglected, at least sociologically: that is an embodied, active belonging-in-place through history, memory, family, the liminal moments of ritual and the discursive work of boundary making. Place gathers these strands of communal belonging which are visible in the actions people undertake, their tasks, as part of their everyday lives. These actions, in material places, showing how ‘belonging’ is ‘done’, are the focus of this research.

I will argue that it is necessary to open up the concept of belonging to prevent it becoming as multifarious as ‘community’ within sociology. There are different kinds of belonging, not all of which are available to everyone. Here I examine belonging-in-place as an integral part of identity, arguing that how it develops and what effect it may have on social lives should be investigated sociologically. Much of the sociological literature on belonging-in-place is based on community as intersubjective, that is, largely divorced from materiality or embodiment. There is a
dearth of sociological research which focuses on a more material belonging, as this research does. The three key themes of this research: historical, social and geographical connections in place encompass imagined and historic places, embodied intersubjective aspects of communities and the material aspects of places through time enabling a three dimensional view of belonging. In contrast to the literature discussed below, the starting point of this thesis is place, a material place, and how it shapes the lives of people living there. I begin by arguing that place, qua place, is not widely covered in sociological literature and I therefore need to engage with geographical and anthropological research, in the second part of this chapter, to explain how place is integrated into the social world. This enables me to challenge the dominance of globalization discourses and the demise of the local, alongside Savage et al (2005) and, more particularly, Massey (1994; 2005). I shall show how these other subject areas can support an understanding of belonging as active, something that is done rather than felt, which is currently lacking in sociological literature.

In popular culture ‘belonging’ is, perhaps, taken for granted; it is understood as a sense and therefore difficult to describe. I argue, along with Miller (2002, p. 217), that ‘belonging’ is more than a feeling; indeed one may ‘do belonging’ without necessarily feeling that one belongs. Many classic community studies treat place as an inert background where the relations between people are acted out, rather than as part of a ‘spatial imaginary’ (O’Neill & Whatmore, 2000, p. 125). O’Neill and Whatmore use this term to unite a space of both action and narrative encompassing people and buildings/wider aspects of places; elements which are all addressed in this study. Community studies do not address belonging directly although it is implicit and probably taken for granted; there is no definition of belonging to be found here (Bell & Newby, 1971; Crow & Allan, 1994). More recent studies of communities do sometimes address belonging in place more explicitly (Edwards, 1998; Rogaly & Taylor, 2009) but do not define it or explain its sociological significance. Belonging is often addressed in opposition to ‘not belonging’ (Southerton, 2002) rather than by looking at different types of belonging. Communities, in these studies, are the intersubjective social relations between people who live within close proximity; ‘the community’ does not address the effect of the material place on these relations as part of a ‘spatial imaginary’
(O’Neill & Whatmore, 2000, p. 125). The belonging symbolised through the nation-state that Anderson (2006) wrote of in *Imagined Communities* or ‘communities in the mind’ (Pahl, 2005) can be used to unite otherwise disparate groups and to portray a sense of ‘us’ to the world. These communities use a strong sense of the history of the place (nation) and memory to unite members. Elements of media-led images feed into many perceptions of places and people from those places. The way in which a community is imagined is likely to influence how it is experienced by its members. A discursive understanding of place is an important part of developing a place identity; it is partly through language that meaning is ascribed to material objects (Leach, 2002, p. 126), but meaning is also assigned through action (Ingold, 2000, p. 204), which is missing from Anderson’s (2006) account. ‘Elective belonging’ is a specific and clearly defined type of belonging, or attachment to place, which is accessible to those who have the economic and social capital necessary to make residential choices (Savage, et al., 2005). Place, in this reading, does not constitute a fundamental part of one’s identity but rather is both an instrumental and symbolic relationship (p. 79); places are seen as (chosen) sites for performing (chosen) identities. Whilst this type of belonging has engaged the sociological imagination because it moves away from the apparent stasis of traditional community studies it is nevertheless restricted in its scope and lacks the historical dimension of many other recent analyses of belonging in place (Blokland, 2001; Degnen, 2005; Fortier, 1999; Gray, 1999; Stewart, 1996). Whilst I dispute the primacy of choice in belonging to place, the challenges Savage et al (2005) make to the fixity of the local in the older community studies and to the omnipresence of a globalisation discourse in more recent research are shared with my research. A comprehensive view of belonging such as May’s (2011) describes it as multi-dimensional but does not differentiate clearly between types of belonging or have any real concept of what one belongs to; here, I examine belonging to a place community as a particular way of ‘doing belonging’.

Communities are not things, material objects, but have to be constructed, built or cultivated relationally through the materiality of the place and the actions (including remembering) of the people. Thus communities are open to a variety of meanings and interpretations over time (Cohen, 1985, p. 20), or at the same time. Some of these ideas are incorporated into a more concrete, active belonging in this study. Here I argue that, contra Savage et al, belonging (or not) to/in place *is*
fundamental to who we are. Place is therefore an important aspect of identity, alongside gender, race and class (Gieryn, 2000), although it is important to note that, as with gender, race and class, places do not give rise to unified collective experiences, as the empirical chapters demonstrate.

Before beginning an in depth investigation of a particular type of belonging in place, which I (after Miller, 2002) call an ‘ontological belonging’ it is worth looking in more detail at these other ways of conceptualising belonging. My approach includes history and imaginaries, intersubjectivity and embodied sociality and the materiality of places: a three dimensional way of belonging in place. I argue here that none of the current research into belonging and place encompasses all of these dimensions which are necessary to the ‘ontological belonging’ described by Miller as ‘a sense of ease or accord with who we are in ourselves’ and ‘a sense of accord with the various physical and social contexts in which our lives are lived out’ (2002, p. 220). I develop this conception of belonging through clarifying and expanding upon these dimensions empirically: uncovering different histories in play; an embodied and emplaced ‘peoplescape’, as I call it; and the inalienable connections passed on through material places. In the remainder of this chapter I will show, through an examination of some exemplary sociological analyses of the conceptions of ‘community’ and ‘belonging’, where these approaches are lacking in: i) uncovering the aspects of daily life in which belonging is embodied; ii) defining, or allowing for, different types of belonging to different types of ‘communities’; iii) an understanding of place as a constituent and active part of social life. I begin by looking at lay understandings of ‘community’ and ‘belonging’, then move on to classic and more recent community studies before looking at how imagined or symbolic communities have helped to shape understandings of belonging and identity. Elective belonging is then examined to show why this view is, in its application to very specific groups, not open to all. This is followed by broadening out the concept of belonging through a multifaceted view, which has the opposing problem of being too diffuse, trying to encompass everyone. The next section then situates the active, embodied belonging illustrated in the empirical chapters, in contrast to these established viewpoints. Using geographical and anthropological literature I show where the gaps in a sociological understanding of belonging to place lie and how this research begins to
fill that gap through an active understanding of how belonging is done in place, an ontological belonging.

2.2 Lay approaches to Community and Belonging

This section addresses common sense understandings of ‘belonging’ and its relation to ‘communities of place’. Belonging, often described as a ‘sense of belonging’, is something intangible in contrast to the active ‘doing belonging’ examined in this research.

A strong feeling of attachment to the place where one is from may be unfashionable amongst the middle class generally but Stephen Fry is prepared to buck this trend with the following comment on a television programme on identity:

You love your football team, you love your region, you love your city, you love your country but it doesn’t mean you hate everybody else’s and I think it’s the best of belonging, that embracing who you are and it’s just like an extra dimension in your life, it’s an extra feeling of, it’s a sort of hugging feeling of belonging. I find it very important in my life and without it I think my life would be poorer.

(Fry, 2011)

Fry is clearly speaking of belonging to place (region, city, country) and in a way that it is ‘who we are’ – a component of identity. It is also neutral in the sense that there is no ‘other’ he is positioning himself against. As is made clear here belonging is not easy to describe; but a sense of belonging, the comfort and security that it provides (‘hugging feeling’), is generally understood even if a detailed description is ephemeral and easily derided. A ‘sense of belonging’ is often seen as a universal human need (May, 2011, p. 368; Miller, 2002, p. 217). We need to feel accepted by others, as part of a group, in order to be fully human.

There are lay concepts of ‘community’ which are overlaid with nostalgia for places where ‘everyone knew everyone else’ (Bennett, 2008). Whether these ever existed in any substantial form is a moot point but it seems that belonging to a community is tied up with knowing and being known by other people giving rise to this sense
of belonging as part of a group. On the other hand, to be told that one does not belong can be a form of ostracism. In this sense belonging has strong moral overtones. If one does not belong, is out of place, then there is sense of immorality, opposition to the established order, akin to Mary Douglas’s ‘matter out of place’. Belonging has been described as a feeling of a bodily/embodied fitting in (Ahmed, 2007, p. 158).

In lay terms belonging and community are seen as closely related, both about being comfortable, safe and cosy: this is perhaps what is generally perceived to be a ‘real’ community, how communities, neighbourhoods, used to be. These kinds of communities are also seen as ‘stifling’ and there have been numerous novels and memoirs written about how people have escaped from such places to a big, anonymous city. The positive or negative connotations of these notions of community are often opposed to the positive or negative connotations of globalisation, choice of identities, lifestyles and so on. Lay concepts have a tendency to emphasise the dichotomous nature of terms rather than understand models as continuums, where communities can be more or less all-embracing, allow for more or less choice, and so on. Thus the growth of virtual and global relationships are seen as eclipsing local communities, rather than seeing that they can exist both in parallel and as overlapping and interlinked concepts (Savage, et al., 2005, pp. 6 - 7).

These lay ideas of belonging and community can be seen as values around belonging, they are not, on the whole, about doing belonging but about how people understand and talk about belonging, as a noun, rather than how people belong, as a verb. To have ‘a sense of belonging’ is passive, intangible, unseen. To belong, on the other hand, is to ‘be a part of something, be accepted by others’: this is active, tangible and, importantly, acknowledged by others. It is cultural and embodied, about both what we do and how we do it, round here (Jackson, 1993, p. 340). This is what I am addressing in this thesis, how one belongs, through what one does, in a particular environment.
2.3 Community Studies

Belonging in place, whilst rarely addressed in sociological literature, can be found in some community studies, even if as a subtext. This genre of sociological literature has been criticised for its lack of theoretical rigour although some of the more recent studies do address the embodied or active forms of belonging investigated in this research in a theoretically sound manner (Fortier, 1999; Jenkins, 1999; Southerton, 2002).

‘Community studies’ covers a diverse range of sociological and anthropological studies mostly written between the 1930s and the 1960s. A distinctiveness of this genre is that the studies are based in specific places, but the focus on the community usually pushes the place itself and its affect upon the people there into the background. The place was usually disguised in order to protect the identities of those studied but this also meant losing much of its specificity (Becker, 1998, p. 51). The anthropological nature of these studies often foregrounds a focus on the family (Williams, 1963; Young & Willmott, 1962). Specific mention of ‘belonging’ is also usually missing here but is implicit or perhaps taken for granted, particularly as it is assumed one will almost always automatically belong to a family. The strength of these studies is that through the grounding of the study in a particular locality at a particular time they can reveal how wider social forces impact on everyday lives (Crow, 2002, 1.3).

Unfortunately there is a lack of both theoretical underpinnings to the studies, including stated hypotheses, and development of a thesis as an outcome of the research. These shortcomings lead to a dependence on critiques such as those of Bell and Newby (1971) and Crow and Allan (1994) in placing these studies within a theoretical background. The first problem in trying to group studies in order to analyse them is the multiple definitions or conceptions of ‘community’. This has not been overcome, despite the word continuing to be used frequently in both policy and sociology. The most common way of theorising these studies is along what Pahl (1966) terms the ‘rural-urban continuum’. Rural communities are generally seen as being close-knit face-to-face communities where there is a strong
‘sense of belonging’ and urban communities as at the Gesellschaft end of the continuum where there is little ‘sense of belonging’. The demise of the close-knit community has been a continuing theme from the beginnings of sociology, discussed by Marx and Durkheim amongst others, but as these studies show, ethnographic studies of face-to-face communities are an enduring sociological method, that is they are used as ‘samples of cultures’ rather than ‘objects in their own right’ (Bell & Newby, 1971, p. 54, original emphasis).

The research methods of the original studies tend to be ethnographic, with the researcher living in the community during the course of the research, combined with interviews (Frankenberg, 1966; Williams, 1956; Williams, 1963; Young & Willmott, 1962). It is this ethnographic method which perhaps shows most clearly a lack of engagement with the concept of ‘belonging’. Taking part in the activities of the community under scrutiny allows only a partial ‘inside’ view of the way they do things which was not always made clear by the researcher. As Bell and Newby put it ‘to a great extent [the fieldworker] remains a stranger, no matter how friendly he is with individuals he meets in the field.’ (1971, p. 64). The researcher is never going to be ‘one of us’, s/he does not belong. Not belonging is not, in itself, detrimental to research, in fact it is necessary to some extent (Bell & Newby, 1971, p. 70) but, if ‘belonging’ is seen as an important concept it ought to be discussed. An explicit understanding of, and engagement with, belonging is missing from these older community studies.

We can group the studies considered here into two groups: the ‘old’ or ‘original’ studies (with a sub-group of re-studies) and ‘new’ studies, conducted since 1990 as ‘community’ has again become an important sociological concept. Perhaps due to taking a functionalist perspective in the original community studies place is treated as a relatively fixed structure without its own history and temporality. These studies are stereotyped as focussing on ‘long-established working class neighbourhoods’ which created ‘dense, locality-specific social networks.’ (Clark, 2009, p. 1562). They present an image of place as simply a bounded geographical area; a space where relationships between people (sociologically important relations) take place.
Functionalism gave little credit for human agency in the progress of modernisation (Crow, 2002, 1.3). Social change has since come to be understood as a more complicated and open process leading more recent community studies to look at the interactions between people and, in some instances, place, such as Rogaly and Taylor’s (2009) oral history study of housing estates in Norwich. These studies of communities tend to focus more narrowly on specific changes in a community which are usually unwelcome to the people participating (Blokländ, 2001; Stewart, 1996), nuanced divisions between people in one place (not based solely on ‘class’) (Jenkins, 1999; Southerton, 2002) or the importance of the history of a place to the character of the people there (Degnen, 2005; Edwards, 1998; Gray, 1999). These studies do engage with the concept of belonging in various ways including through family, ethnicity, class and tradition and through history and shared, communal memories. Setting aside Southerton’s (2002) study which, as it is centred around a New Town does not have a strong element of local tradition or local memories, memory, and being able to position oneself and others through local memories, is the strongest element of belonging in all these studies. Fortier’s (1999) work in particular brings together the shared community memories in the church magazine, creating belonging through ‘genealogy and geography’ (p. 45) and a strong element of embodied memory in the performance of the church service, the familiarity of which goes back to her own childhood as part of another community in another country. The way in which Fortier’s study combines elements of communal and family memory and memories embodied and embedded in places is also a key element of my research.

The older community studies have been criticised for theoretical deficiencies, a lack of rigorous methods and an inability to add to wider theoretical debate. Newer studies tend to be more narrowly focussed not on ‘a community’ per se, but on particular aspects of the functioning of the community, leading to a sounder theoretical basis. However, a clear definition of belonging is usually still lacking, exceptions being Fortier (1999) and Jenkins (1999). Other studies demonstrate some of the ways in which memories are symptomatic of belonging but these two go further in investigating how ‘belonging’ in this way can then produce local lives and characteristics; in other words, how it becomes embodied through or in the material place itself. I build on and extend their work by reversing the focus: rather
than examining how people ‘create’ a place performatively, as Fortier (1999) does, or using a Bourdieusian ‘habitus’ as Jenkins (1999) does, this study begins with the place and looks at how a place can ‘create’ its people. This approach enables a sociological view of place as an ‘actant’ (Cloke & Jones, 2001, p. 655) in the story of the community or locality.

2.4 Imagined Communities

Imagined communities are also communities of place: discursive, socially constructed places. Imagined communities are an important way in which people relate to both known and unknown places. Different forms of imaginaries will almost always be at play in discussions of place and that is true in this research also. However I found that imaginaries exist alongside and within material places (see Chapter 4 Imagining Us).

Imagined communities have been written about in an historic and broad sense by Anderson (2006) and in a more specific sense relating to community studies, by Pahl (2005). Both make the important point that, perhaps surprisingly, ‘imagined’ communities have a resilience that may be lacking in some more ‘real’ communities (Pahl, 2005, p. 634). Anderson’s Imagined Communities was written to support the critical Marxist position of Tom Nairn, who, counter to the main debates on nationalism during the 1970s, felt that nationalism had a historical-political importance overlooked by classical Marxism (Anderson, 2006, p. 208). The aim was to show nationalism’s raison d’être as a source of both political and affective strength of feeling. Imagined communities bind people together without a face-to-face connection. Pahl (2005), on a more local level, is examining contrasting ‘experience-near’ and ‘experience-distant’ views of community, arguing that ultimately the ‘imagined’ ‘experience-distant’ community is at least as real and useful a conception as the ‘experience-near’ view (p. 637).

An imagined community is constituted through various symbols such as language, memories, monuments, media and communication. Communal memories of the past help to create a sense of community in the present and the future (Bhabha,
A shared language, along with a shared history, is also a key component of an imagined community. Together with the more general availability of books through the printing process, the writing of books in English and other spoken languages, rather than Latin, is acknowledged by Anderson as key to the development of nationalism. Anderson (2006, p. 39) explains how through mass media – originally the development of print – people come to share ideas and understandings with others without a face-to-face relationship. History, and the ‘manipulation’ of history by those with power, serves to create images of people and places that serve a purpose, for example to ‘forget’ former rulers or a conflict-filled past. Through various forms of media these stories can become accepted as ‘fact’. Media generally have a strong symbolic role in defining imaginary identities. England is divided between different imagined identities, between, for example, the North and the South (Shields, 1991, pp. 207-245), which are, as Shields shows, strongly endorsed by mass media. These discourses create popular images of places, and the kind of people who live there. As much as defining a community, they help to draw its boundaries, to define what it is not (Cohen, 1985, p. 58) so that ‘community exists ultimately in the symbolic order rather than in an empirical reality’ (Delanty, 2003, p. 46); symbolic boundaries are flexible and will move with the times. However, the manner in which a community is imagined is likely to influence how it is experienced on the ground. Imagined communities give an ‘outside’ view of the place, on the whole, creating it as a type such as ‘English village’. On the Isle of Sheppey Pahl (2005) found the ‘communities-in-the-mind’ to be twofold: an imagined community of the past and the ‘perceived community of deprivation in the present.’ (p. 633). Such ‘imagined’ communities exist as they are experienced by their members and are, therefore, ‘real in their consequences’ (Pahl, 2005, p. 637), perhaps occasionally overflowing in liminal moments of rites and ritual (Delanty, 2003, p. 47). This position is useful in understanding how communities are constructed through their memories of the past and how people enact, or do, their belonging to this ‘imaginary’, an ‘open system of cultural codification’ requiring interpretation (Delanty, 2003, p. 47). Communities are not things, material objects, but have to be constructed, built or ‘cultivated’ relationally through the materiality of the place and the actions of the people. Thus communities are not closed systems of stifling conformity but open to
a variety of meanings and interpretations by different people over time (Cohen, 1985, p. 20), or at the same time.

An historical approach is a valuable way of looking at ‘rootedness’; imagined communities demonstrate the pliability of such history and the possible ephemerality of roots (Bhabha, 1994, p. 2) leading to caution in any interpretation. These approaches are important in understanding how places are seen both by those who live there and those on the outside. An imagined community can create the community in the mind almost before it exists on the ground and is therefore a top down or deductive approach. An embodied belonging brings into play ways of acting as well as memories, which may also be embodied. This could be seen as a ‘bottom up’ or inductive approach. Both are often at play in people’s constructions of their localities, using memories of the past together with a continued presence to reconstitute the past in the present and continue to participate in an on-going community (Blokland, 2001; Pahl, 2005). An imagined community can be seen as one layer of belonging, a visual and discursive layer, rather than the actively embodied belonging that ‘doing belonging’ implies. This is one dimension of belonging – the historical (or mythological) connection. Practice and representation form a ‘complex multiplicity’ which can together inform an understanding of people in place which is both historical and open to change (Cloke & Jones, 2001, p. 662). This is the basis of a three dimensional belonging: imagined or historical; geographic or material; and social or task oriented. Whilst an imagined community cannot by itself construct an embodied belonging it can contribute both inside and outside views to an open, reflexive, three dimensional way of belonging to a community, which is how it is used in this research.

2.5 Elective Belonging

Moving from a focus on community to looking at belonging specifically, an elective belonging can be seen as relying on an outside (one dimensional) imaginary. That is, choices are always based on the unknown, perceived risks and outcomes or potential benefits (Mol, 2008, p. 6), so choosing where to ‘belong’ has to be, at least partially, dependent on a fantasy or imagined future.
Globalization and Belonging (Savage, et al., 2005) is perhaps the most widely read recent sociological text on belonging. In the book the authors put forward the idea of an ‘elective belonging’, based on choosing a place to live and ‘put[ting] down roots’ (p. 207), which has since been taken up by others (Christensen, 2009). The study examines the effect that globalisation has had on people’s perceptions of the place where they live through a focus on four locations around Manchester with largely mobile, middle class populations: Cheadle, Chorlton, Ramsbottom and Wilmslow. The mobility of these populations and the emphasis on links outside the localities was a reaction against traditional community studies. Positioning themselves between the older, static view of local places and the more recent discursive formulations of imagined communities, Savage et al were formulating a new way of looking at local communities within a globalised world. Overall they find that a ‘sense of belonging’ to a locality is still important to people (2005, p. 203). They conclude that this disrupts dominant discourses around globalisation and ‘epochal’ social change.

‘The local’ can sometimes be seen as an anti-progressive or reactionary site, particularly when contrasted with the post-modern world where global connections and mobilities are prioritised (Urry, 2000), often through the use of new technologies, with interest in virtual global communities replacing local, face-to-face ones (Brah, 2002; Urry, 2000, pp. 70 - 76). Savage et al argue against this position beginning with a useful unpacking of the term ‘local’: as context; as particular; as historical residue; as network hub; and as bounded construction. The argument of globalisation theorists is that in setting its own terms, through ‘choice’, the ‘imagined community of global citizenship’ has no boundaries, ‘the global’ is context, leaving no room for a ‘local’ (p. 4). If, on the other hand, the local is defined as ‘particular’ in contrast to the global ‘universal’ then the local becomes merely the concretization of instances of what remains universal. The local is irrelevant to the conception of ‘globalisation as an overarching, social process’ (p. 4). Looking at Castells’ view of local communities as a reaction to forces of globalisation, Savage et al see the local ‘defined as a historical residue’ rather than ‘motors of change’ (p. 5). In contrast to these negative views of the local

Globalization and Belonging positions the local as a hub amongst other local hubs,
linked together through networks. They use Massey’s (1994) arguments to show how mobility is possible without a theory of globalisation (p. 6) and Appadurai’s (1996) and Cohen’s (1985, p. 58) arguments around boundaries as socially constructed, focusing on a networked, fluid conception of the local. This is used to ‘champion the idea of the local as an “irritant” to the epochal and speculative character of much contemporary social theory’ (Savage, et al., 2005, p. 6).

Using Bourdieusian theories Savage et al propose that people choose to live where they feel comfortable according to their habitus; that is, they seek out a fit between field and habitus, and within fields move to places of comfort. Habitus is taken to be relatively fixed but daily life takes people through various different fields such as work, home and leisure activities which promote different feelings of ease. The differences between fields prompts more reflection, for example over where one chooses to live. Rather than habitus and field allowing for distinction, these fields promote a quest for ‘ordinariness’, an ‘opting in’ to various social practices (pp. 9 - 10). The link between residential location and different cultural fields, along with the spatial organisation of these fields is the subject of Globalization and Belonging.

In conclusion the book makes five key points around these particular people and their attachment to their localities (Savage, et al., 2005, pp. 207 - 8). They found that in terms of everyday lives the concept of globalisation seems to have had little impact (p. 204 – 5). The key arguments focus on the choice of place to live with which one can identify through congruence of habitus and field and then ‘commit[ting] to a place’ by ‘putting down roots’ (p. 207). This is realised through incorporation into a personal biography. The attachment they describe is based on places which lack historical identities of their own (in the eyes of the incomers) or any substantial materiality. There is little sense here of a shared belonging through shared memories or a common past: there may be a sense of attachment to place in a fairly abstract sense, but perhaps not to milieu, a social place, or to a community. This sense of belonging is not embedded in interaction with the place, but is contingent on life phase and self-presentation; it has an aura of ephemerality about it, indeed places are seen as offering ‘visions of living’ (p. 207) independent of relationships to others or to the character of the place.
What this account seems to overlook is that belonging is not one-sided – in order to belong to anything one has to be accepted, become part of the ‘we’ group. Where newer residents elect to belong there are almost always long term residents but as this ‘original’ population diminishes these people increasingly feel they are the ‘outsiders’ (Savage, et al., 2001, p. 48). Rose’s (1988) research into the diminishing population of Anglophones in Quebec shows that if there are fewer opportunities to maintain the shared stock of knowledge which is the basis of any cultural group, then the sense of belonging to a community will fade. In their examples from two of the four areas, Cheadle and Chorlton, people who do live close to where they grew up see it as ‘a mark of failure’ (Savage, et al., 2001, p. 51). Savage et al attribute this to a discourse of modernity which requires the individual to develop and thus to choose a new place to live in order to ‘confirm a sense of who they are’. This analysis, however, is not applied to Ramsbottom residents whose pride in belonging to the local community is attributed to their residential separation from the newcomers to the town and their working class identity (p.52). The stock of knowledge of the long term residents is not being watered down by the arrival of the ‘middle classes’ in a separate area of the town. The influx of any new, culturally homogeneous group will reduce any sense of belonging or community amongst the older, but now minority, group. In contrast to the sense of loss that Rose (1988) invokes at the probable demise of a distinctive community, Savage et al celebrate the influx of the middle classes into these formerly working class areas.

*Globalization and Belonging* presents an anti-globalisation thesis and stresses that ‘the local’ is still an important part of people’s lives. Re-introducing ‘the local’ to sociology without attracting the unhelpful label of ‘community study’ enables my research to begin to plug some of the gaps opened up around different conceptions of belonging. Choosing where to belong is clearly not a choice available to everyone (Ahmed, 2007; Skeggs, 2009) so an elective belonging should not be seen as the only satisfactory way of re-introducing local belonging in contrast to theories of globalisation. Savage et al focussed on a specific set of people and chose their locations accordingly – they investigated mobile, middle class people and their attachment to the places where they currently live. This thesis also contests the dominance of globalisation arguments and argues that ‘the local’ is still paramount.
to many people. My research, however, reaches beyond the single dimension of an ‘outside’ or ‘elective’ belonging to a particular place at a particular time in one’s life and introduces the further dimensions of history and an historical and material landscape and a ‘peoplescape’, that is, a place populated by known others. Belonging can never be solely about choice as one must also be accepted in order to belong. Looking at belonging from different dimensions gives it a more solid basis for a sociological understanding.

2.6 Multi-dimensional approaches to belonging

A more recent contribution to the debate on belonging is Vanessa May’s article Self, Belonging and Social Change (2011). Here, various aspects of belonging are bound together in order to create a ‘sense of belonging’ as a method for evaluating social change. Crow (2002,1.3) has already put forward the case for community studies as a means of grounding the evaluation of social change, which, as he found, is not something imposed on a community from outside but is a process of negotiation between the community and wider social processes. May relates belonging to an everyday ‘ordinariness’ that is unconscious (p. 370), in fact belonging is sometimes only considered when it is disrupted, which is perhaps why there is more academic literature relating to not belonging than to belonging (Ahmed, 2007; Brah, 2002; Bhabha, 1996; Said, 2000; Valentine, et al., 2009). Considered as part of everyday life belonging is simply there, at hand, as part of our habit, or embodied, memories (Connerton, 1989).

May (2011, p. 366) uses the arguments of Simmel and Elias to stress the interdependence of individuals and society. Belonging, as May says, ‘links the person with the social’ (May, 2011) which can also be described in terms of ‘intersubjectivity’ (Duranti, 2010; Rose, 1988; Schutz & Luckmann, 1974). A self is only achievable through society, other people. Society, is not a mere collection of individuals, rather, like belonging, society is seen as what people do (May, 2011, p. 366). This is very much a people-centred approach to belonging.
May’s elucidation of belonging is multi-faceted, it includes place, incorporates change, is ‘inside’ and active. However, it has little historical or biographical content and omits to emphasise that a key element of belonging is inculcated from childhood. In fact there is little on how one comes to belong, or not. Political belonging is acknowledged to be more than a one-sided feeling and part of a ‘hierarchy’ of belongings, but there is no expansion on the idea or place of other ‘types’ of belonging within this ‘hierarchy’ (May, 2011). Rather than the image of a ‘hierarchy’ which implies that some ways of belonging are more important than others, (which may, of course, be the case), I would argue that the belonging-in-place investigated here is done in many different, overlapping ways simultaneously, more like a Venn diagram. Such a description is in harmony with May’s description of belonging as a ‘multidimensional experience’ (p. 370).

Although each of us experiences belonging in different ways at the same time I feel it is useful to break these down into different ‘types’ of belonging which may or may not be experienced by different individuals depending upon their life experiences.

As May points out one aspect of belonging is, in fact, not belonging (p. 369). I include this as a type of belonging as it is one that is written about extensively within the sociological literature (Ahmed, 2007; Bhabha, 1996; Brah, 2002; Valentine, et al., 2009; Walkerdine, 2010). As May makes clear (p. 369) not belonging can be caused by rejection by others as belonging is contingent upon acceptance which may not be forthcoming. Belonging, in these terms, is a site of political contestation which can be refused by those on the inside or the outside. This is always a risk, particularly of an elective belonging, but also of any belonging which is able to be consciously chosen or rejected. The belonging I investigate here is not chosen or elected in a conscious sense. I agree that self and society are ‘mutually constitutive’ (May, 2011, p. 364); however I would go further and, following Buber (Crossley, 1996, pp. 11-13), claim that the subject emerges from its relationships with others (I include places and material objects amongst ‘others’). If the self is its relationships to other people/things then these relationships are a priori and belonging must therefore be composed of them, rather than determined by them. Where these relationships exist they are part of identity. This does not mean, however, that belonging is ‘fixed’, rather that the self
is a process which will change as its constitutive relationships change. The self is its life events and life history, in the concrete world, experienced together with others. Such relationships help to comprise an ‘ontological belonging’ as a ‘condition of the self’ (Miller, 2002, p. 219). It is this ‘type’ of belonging from which the various elements of an ontological belonging can develop: belonging through intersubjective relationships to other people (which could be either face-to-face or virtual); belonging as everyday practices; belonging through inalienable material connections to places. These belongings overlap and intersect in multiple ways. Marco Antonsich (2010), in his analytical framework for the study of belonging, in which he positions ‘place-belongingness’ as one of two major analytical dimensions (the other being belonging as a discursive resource which is equated to a politics of belonging), observes that ‘[a]lthough in fact the interrelation between the ‘here’ and ‘there’ of belonging has been largely investigated, no studies are available which explore the ‘here’ in all its multiple scales and in their connections’ (p. 653): this study goes some way towards filling that gap.

Although belonging could be used as a measure of social change it still needs to be grounded in empirical work, indeed this harks back to the original community studies as a way of understanding the impact of social forces on everyday lives (Crow, 2002, 1.3). May’s discussion of belonging is not based around a community, or any group smaller than ‘society’: one has to belong to something. Whilst my study does not specifically evaluate social change it does, I suggest, provide an understanding of belonging in a similar way to May, but rooted in how it plays out on the ground. This empirical understanding of belonging as activity is a necessary pre-requisite to using belonging as the basis for further theorizing. I, along with Miller (2002, p. 217), see belonging in place as having three key parts: geographical, historical and social connections. All these aspects are important. Although the empirical chapters describe layers of belonging these three aspects cut across all the layers and are not hierarchical. Each aspect of belonging adds to a full definition of an ontological belonging whilst also being a particular way of belonging-in-place. Taking different ‘strands’ of belonging and analysing them separately enables an overall picture to be drawn of how belonging unfolds. ‘Belonging’ can thus be seen to have multiple definitions, a theoretically more
useful description than attempting to incorporate all aspects of belonging into a single definition.

In May’s paper belonging (described as a sense, not an action) is used as a means to the end of evaluating social change and is therefore subsidiary to its main argument. Without a clear definition of different types of belonging and where they fit within a ‘hierarchy’ or, as I see it, a matrix or Venn diagram it will not be possible to use ‘belonging’ as a concept, any more than it is currently possible to use ‘community’ within sociological discourse without a clearly stated definition of what the author actually means by it. May has opened up a broad definition of belonging here including many of the aspects I find in an ontological belonging. However, rather than a purely ‘people-centred’ approach, I engage with a multi-dimensional view of belonging-in-place, focussed on imagined, social and material aspects of places.

2.7 Approaches to Community and Belonging: Conclusion

Popular culture, classic sociological studies, imagined communities, elective belonging and a broad-brush multi-dimensional approach all, to varying degrees, feed into the idea of an ‘ontological belonging’ (Miller, 2002). Of course, belonging is not always referenced directly in these studies and some authors focus on less material aspects of belonging than I do (Anderson, 2006), or how belonging affects particular sections of the population (Savage, et al., 2001). They all link belonging to place in some sense, but generally a passive, taken-for-granted place. My research also looks at belonging to place but here the place is an active constituent in the process of belonging. The vagaries of the place(s) shape the belongings that the inhabitants develop, as the empirical chapters demonstrate.

In popular culture it may be that belonging - as what one does - is usually unnoticed because it is so ingrained. To have ‘a sense of belonging’ is passive, intangible, unseen and this is how people tend to understand and talk about belonging, rather than as something that is done, actively. The older community studies have been criticised for a lack of rigour and being too place-specific. More
recent studies of communities tend to focus more narrowly on specific aspects of a community enabling them to contribute to wider sociological debates. Community studies are a source of inspiration for this study also, but this study has the resources to engage with the lives of a relatively small number of people, albeit in some depth. Imagined communities, particularly communities of memory, feed into perceptions of a place and its people. As a way of constructing a place-community this is one of the most recognisable ways that people engage with places incorporating, as it does, history and memory. For this reason Savage et al (2005, p. 207) identify ‘visions of living’ as key to choice of residence for their respondents. 

*Globalization and Belonging* has begun a sociological conversation on belonging with a concept of a post-modern sense of belonging to (an open, relational) place through choice. The challenges to the fixity of the local and the omnipresence of globalisation within sociological discourse are shared with my research. May (2011) proposes a multi-dimensional view of belonging as do I but she does not specifically address the *doing* of belonging or its location within a landscape, themes which are tackled here.

The literature discussed here has shown that a sociological understanding of belonging-in-place is premised on the largely intersubjective ideas of community, whether imaginary or ‘real’. There is a dearth of sociological research which focuses on a material basis for belonging. In order to begin to fill that gap the focus here is the effect of the material and historic place on the lives of the people who live there. The three key themes of this research: social, historical and geographical connections in place serve to reveal how place is an active participant in social life. It is also, however, necessary to develop a three dimensional picture of belonging. The material aspect of place is the third dimension largely missing from current research. But other ways of expressing belonging, through the imagined, storied and peopled landscapes of local lives, cannot be and are not ignored. However here, in contrast to other studies of local belonging, the starting point is place and people’s relationship to place. The next section addresses what is meant by a three dimensional view of belonging, an ‘ontological belonging’ (Miller, 2002), and how this can enhance our understanding of the different ways in which we enact, or do belonging. The section introduces the ‘missing’ literature which helps to uncover a sociological place and shows why my change of emphasis from the community
studies focus of ‘people who happen to live in a place’, to that of ‘a place where particular people live out their lives’ will add to sociological research.

2.8 Ontological Belonging: Introduction

The first half of this chapter looked at sociological literature around communities, place and belonging. This showed that materiality, particularly in the form of place, is largely missing from current research. In researching belonging-in-place starting from the material place itself, as this research does, it is necessary to develop a theoretical understanding of place, a social place. This section addresses this gap in the sociological literature by looking at literature from geography and anthropology where material places are seen as an integral part of social life. I begin by outlining what is meant by an ‘ontological belonging’, explaining why the literature examined in the previous section does not provide a firm basis for a discussion of this ‘type’ of belonging. Some literature from geography and anthropology, particularly that of Massey (1994; 1995; 2005) and Ingold (2000; 2008; 2010), is then discussed to demonstrate other ways of conceiving place and people’s relationships with it. I demonstrate how this literature can provide a solid basis for examining an active belonging in place, how we ‘do belonging’. The section concludes by detailing how the concept of an ontological belonging adds to sociological research.

In examining some of the problems with both older and newer ways of studying belonging and local communities the lack of a comprehensive sociological definition of what ‘belonging’ is, or what it means ‘to belong’, in place, has become apparent. Savage et al (2005) have elucidated a particular form of belonging practised largely by middle class professionals based on weak ties; May (2011) has described a more multifaceted belonging; but neither of these accounts explains the kind of attachment to place of origin that is present in some lay understandings of the term (Fry, 2011). Miller (2002, p. 218) argues that belonging, what she terms an ‘ontological belonging’, is a state of being in correct relation to community, history and locality; this includes both belonging as ‘a sense of ease or
accord with who we are in ourselves’ and ‘a sense of accord with the various physical and social contexts in which our lives are lived out’ (p. 220). This definition of belonging is in accordance with what has been discussed above in so far as it encompasses the ‘types’ of belonging uncovered through community studies, imagined communities and elective belonging, but in encompassing both who ‘we’ are and the social and material places where we live it goes beyond these concepts. In combining social (intersubjective), historical (imagined, narrative) and geographical (material) connections to places an ontological belonging is multidimensional. This thesis therefore analyses ‘imagined’ understandings of place, the people beyond the reach of social networks and material attachments to places to capture all these dimensions. My research is concerned with i) discovering a belonging-in-place as ‘a sense of ease or accord with who we are in ourselves’ and ‘with the various physical and social contexts in which our lives are lived out’ (Miller, 2002, p. 220); and ii) uncovering both how this belonging develops and what effect it may have on both the people and the places it encompasses. An ontological belonging addresses how through embodied aspects of being such as accent, through communal memories and shared activities in the material place, people do belonging. This is not to preclude other types of belonging co-existing with an ontological belonging. A ‘sense of belonging’ may, indeed is likely to be, present as well.

Miller’s definitions of ontological belonging as ‘a sense of ease or accord with who we are in ourselves’ and ‘a sense of accord with the various physical and social contexts in which our lives are lived out’ (p. 220) chimes with Fry’s (2011) definition of belonging as ‘embracing who you are’. But a lay appreciation of belonging and community are generally ill-defined and perhaps seen as ‘narrow-minded’ or parochial. Community studies may seem to give a better platform from which to launch an investigation into belonging in a place. However, lack of theoretical rigour (for the older studies) and a focus on very specific kinds of or aspects of communities for most newer studies, mean that these studies tend to give a fairly limited perspective from which to investigate belonging-in-place. Imagined communities and socially constructed images of place are fundamental to sociological conceptions of place and they give an excellent starting point for investigating the stories of places. An elective belonging plays into the trope of
middle class residential mobility as the standard of late-modernity, what Fortier refers to as ‘the reification of uprootedness as the paradigmatic figure of the postmodern experience of identity’ (1999, p. 42). Physical proximity to family and friends is deemed relatively unimportant in the quest for a residence that reflects one’s identity. ‘Locals’ are often seen as stuck in the past (Savage, et al., 2005, p. 58). Whilst on the one hand government policies such as the ‘Big Society’ are premised on ‘communities’ working together, on the other hand mobility and a lack of any historical connection to place (and therefore perhaps other people in the place) is, seemingly, encouraged. And yet there is a concern to understand history and connections to others in the past through, for example, family history research (Kramer, 2011) and to ‘save’ historic buildings (O’Neill & Whatmore, 2000, p. 128), both aspects of this research. The existence of a type of long-term belonging to place that is not mired in stasis or bounded places and is not reliant on the ability to choose one’s place of residence (a choice not open to all) can be seen as a central aspect of forging a modern identity whilst belonging-in-place. This is what I am calling an ‘ontological belonging’.

Whilst I agree with Stevens (2012, p. 588) that sociology has neglected a primary role for place there has been some other recent sociological work which engages with place in different ways. Kidder (2012), Duff (2010) and Howe and Morris (2009), for example, examine how places both shape and are shaped by particular actions and groups of people undertaking specific ‘tasks’ (parkour, dancing, running). Degen et al (2010) examine shopping practices in different places, which, in its evocation of the ‘everyday’ nature of shopping and its interdisciplinary focus is closer to this work. Strangleman (2012) and Degen (2010) focus on the historical trajectory of places and the various social relations these throw up, again bearing similarities with this work. All of these recent works depict place as fluid, dynamic and social but do not, in themselves, provide a sufficient body of work to be a theoretical basis for this research.

I aim to position place sociologically as a key aspect of belonging. In order to do this place must not be seen as bounded and thus a constraint but as open, active and a participant in everyday life. I turn to geographic literature to find this view of place, in particular the work of Doreen Massey. What people do, together, in place
is the essence of ‘doing belonging’ and for a fluid notion of a peopled place I use anthropological literature especially the work of Tim Ingold. In focussing closely on what people do as well as how they create narratives around their identities I aim to avoid becoming mired in the post-rationalising trajectories of most life stories and instead examine how belonging is done in everyday life.

2.9 People, Place and Practice/practise

An ontological belonging based on a strong place identity needs an open, fluid and relational understanding of place in order to avoid the accusations of fixity and stasis often levelled at local places in traditional community studies. This can be found in the work of geographer Doreen Massey. As a geographer, Massey does not specifically write on belonging or community, although communities certainly feature in her work on places (1995; 1994; 2000). The trouble with ‘local’ places and belonging is that of defining ‘where’. Geography and administrations have tended to divide up space putting fixed borders around parishes, housing estates and so on. Lines on maps are not how people live their lives, however (Robertson, et al., 2008, pp. 64 - 5). There is a dynamism in places that this artificial fixing of borders overlooks. What Massey does is to open up a ‘progressive sense of place’ recognising movement (in terms of both people and ‘things’) in and between places and contributing to the identity of the place. Local places (a cotton plantation, a mill) are linked together through these movements rather than ‘the local’ being counter positioned to ‘the global’. This conceptualisation of place is fluid, dynamic and temporal.

For Massey (1994; 2005) place is an instance of space – a recognisable site of particular local practices. For many geographers, and others, ‘[s]pace is the abstract and asocial aspects of the material environment—direction, distance, shape, size, and volume’ (Kidder, 2012, p. 230); places then become the social representations of space. For Massey, however, space is not a flat, empty concept devoid of humanity but is an inherently social concept (1994, p. 2) which is also constituted through social interactions and is a sight of power, particularly race, class and gender relations. Space, for Massey and others, is always in a relation with time.
(Massey, 1994, p. 3), that is time as a flow within which life takes place (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, pp. 411 - 2). Whilst space is interrelated, multiple and always becoming these attributes also apply to place. As an articulation of social relations within space, places have relationships which stretch beyond a particular locale (Massey, 1994, p. 5). Here I show how Wigan as a place is part of a broader regional and national identity, that its histories are not simple, straight-line trajectories but always changing in the telling and the place itself is constantly developing through diverse social, spatial and temporal relations. Rather than engaging specifically with the notion of space (although as a site of power space is clearly a sociological concern), here I engage with places as specific material environments, within and connected to these wider social spaces. These positions allow us to see place as ‘part of who we are, both as individuals and as societies, an agency that shapes us as we shape it’ (Stevens, 2012, p. 588).

Whilst Savage et al (2005, p. 204) also expound the virtues of this notion of place (although they refer to ‘networked’ approaches, a term which I, along with Latour (2005) and Ingold (2000), wish to avoid due to its static image of connections between fixed points), they do not access the historical aspect of Massey’s work (1995; 2000; 2005). Geography and history are not in opposition but are brought together in place, as are ‘nature’ and ‘culture’, the human and the non-human (Massey, 2006, p. 34). Massey’s relational, historical, expansive view of places is essential to my concept of an ontological belonging that is not ‘fixed’ or ‘primordial’. A relational ontology ‘avoids the pitfalls of both classical individualism and of communitarian organicism’ (Massey, 2005, p. 189): places are neither self-constituting nor closed structures but are elements of an assemblage of people, place and practices, Ingold’s taskscape (Cloke & Jones, 2001, p. 652; Ingold, 2000, p. 197). Examining ‘a place’ (the definition of which will vary in the present as well as over time) through its history, and the history of the people who help to constitute the place opens up an opportunity to tease out a particular historical trajectory and ask why did it happen like this and what kind of place and people have resulted (Gray, 1999, pp. 454 - 6)?

Ingold (2000; 2008; 2010) also expounds a relational and open view of place that is drenched in history, which ‘lives on’ through the numinous presences in the
materiality of place and has an effect in the present. What Ingold’s anthropological stance adds to Massey’s geographical one for this research is the action based notion of the taskscape. In looking at belonging as something that one does, together with others, the taskscape is what brings together this active belonging in the place, over time.

I am using ‘taskscape’ to describe the interactions between the landscape, people and what they do and time. Landscape, although often used to describe a static view of place, is here used in the broader sense that Tilley (2006, p. 8) defines as ‘outcomes of social practice’, something constantly being reworked. Landscape then, in this definition (with which Ingold (1993) concurs) is already about people interacting with their environment, and vice versa, a continuous process. Through this processual engagement, building and other forms of cultivation cause changes to the environment. People alter their practices according to the vagaries of the place, as part of their ongoing process of inhabitation. Taskscape is temporal, moving along with those ‘inside’ it. It describes the mutual, generally routine and often unnoticed, practices of interaction between people and environment, over time, often multiple human life times. People ‘attend to one another’ (Ingold, 2000, p. 196), whilst performing everyday tasks.

These open, relational, historical, ‘spacious’ views of place can, I believe, be the foundation of an open, relational, dynamic, historical theory of belonging in a local place which is not essentialist or primordial but is developed from the inside, worked at, acted upon and passed on through time. A belonging that is therefore ontological, a way of being in the world. I want to hammer some sociology into the cracks in conventional views of local places that have been opened up by these non-sociologists to emphasise the dynamic sociality of local belonging in place. Looking at local places from these perspectives will shed new light on how people do belonging in everyday life. This could lead to new understandings of how place communities work, on the ground.
2.10 Ontological Belonging

The central argument of this thesis is that place is more than just a background to our lives – it plays an integral part in both who we are, in Fry’s (2011) more individualistic sense, and who ‘we’ as a group, sharing a stock of knowledge (as opposed to ‘they’) are, and how we live – it is a part of culture continuing over time and generations. In taking a phenomenological and intersubjective approach I hope to overcome any understanding of ‘place’ as either the result of social forces or an a priori setting within which social processes occur. That is, place is not seen here as a social structure but as relational, linking ‘the social’ and ‘the environment’ (Strangleman, 2012, 3.1). I argue that the geography of the place, is constitutive of social relations; coal is found in areas where once upon a time there were ancient forests but it is the discovery of coal, by people, which draws people in to an interaction with the place in extracting it. Consequently, there are strong links between the geographical features of the place and the people who reside there (Casey, 1996, p. 19; Stevens, 2012, p. 588), making the study of these connections a suitable topic for sociological investigation. Like gender, race and class, place is the outcome of social processes – it is not fixed but is changeable and defined relationally. Rather than study an area defined through physical or administrative boundaries as the original wave of community studies tended to do, or community as an ‘imagined’ and possibly ‘magical’ place, this research looks at the entangled connections between people, place, histories and practices and how these constitute a taskscape (Ingold, 2000, p. 195) where people belong ontologically through what they do.

There are various themes from this discussion of the literature which are carried through the empirical chapters. These are time and temporality, history and narrative and materiality. History and narrative, related to the past, are the focus of Chapter 4 Imagining Us representing the outer layer of an ontological belonging; materiality is at the centre of Chapter 6 Material Places, where the core of this belonging is revealed as the passing on of places to future generations; the intersubjectivity of Chapter 5 Worlds with Reach is situated within the present
whilst drawing on the past and future. These interwoven strands are drawn out next.

The traditional mode of temporality is a linear progression of past, present, and future. Past, present and future here are not linear but co-exist. Time is a system of measuring a series of events and therefore an ‘external’ view; temporality is a part of being in the world, to be carried along with life and therefore an ‘internal view’. For Merleau-Ponty (1962, pp. 410 - 433) time is posited as a relation between things or things and subjectivities (people) and as such presupposes an observer (p. 411), making it an ‘external’ viewpoint. Merleau-Ponty sees dimensions of temporality, past, present, future, as inseparable (p. 422), as indeed the corresponding aspects of belonging are. All of these ‘abide’ in us (p. 421) and, I argue, in other things including places and buildings and in the processual nature of the taskscape (Ingold also takes his understanding of time from Merleau-Ponty (2000, p. 196)). The taskscape, like the landscape, is temporal: this is the ‘everydayness’ of everyday life, not repetitive but rhythmic (Ingold, 2000, p. 197). If belonging is seen as a way of being in the world, it is also temporal.

History in this conception of time (‘constituted time’ Merleau-Ponty (1962, p. 415)) is not time itself but the recording of time. So we can tell a story that takes place over time, a biography perhaps. One event succeeds another in the narrative but all the events accumulate in the life, the subjectivity, going to make up the person or thing. An understanding of the historical trajectories of places is important in order to position the place, and its people, in the present (Gray, 1999, p. 455). The told history of a place, its biography, is, as with all histories, necessarily teleological: its purpose is to explain how the place came to be as it is now, today, in the present moment (Anderson, 2006). Past and future abide together with the present, rather than as the ‘no longer’ and the ‘not yet’ (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p. 412). Creating history, a story, is a relational act, a co-creation with other bodily or material beings-in-the-world; whilst history is a story of the past it is told in the present (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p. 421).

The past is thus brought to bear on the present and remains affective through an inalienable presence in material things whose temporality exceeds human life times
(Jones, 2010). The inalienable traces are not themselves past but always in the present (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p. 413). As Ingold puts it ‘the landscape is constituted as an enduring record of - and testimony to - the lives and works of past generations who have dwelt within it, and in so doing, have left there something of themselves’ (1993, p. 152). The ‘works of past generations’ can be seen as a gift to the future containing the inalienable presences of the givers in buildings and other cultivated places (Fowler, 2004, p. 73; Godelier, 1999, p. 94). The performance of everyday life is shaped by these previous inhabitants and their practices. That is, current practices embody past ones. This ‘embodied conduct in intermundane spaces’ (Crossley, 1995, p. 61), or ‘attend[ing] to one another’ (Ingold, 2000, p. 196), is cultural knowledge passed on through practices. As an empirical example, Cloke and Jones (2001) in their study of an orchard in Somerset take what they call a ‘dwelling’ approach but also see the place as a ‘hybrid’ taskscape of nature and culture. They find ‘a series of practices which have evolved over time, and changes which are constantly informed by shifting economic, technical, and cultural formations’ (2001, p. 657). The place is part of a hybrid place/taskscape, an ‘actant’ in its own story, not merely a backdrop to the performance of social, economic or cultural life (Cloke & Jones, 2001, p. 649). The material place connects people to past and future through inalienable traces and continuing cultural practices; place, people and activities form a taskscape which is temporal, a way of being in the world. This combination of themes is drawn together in the elements of an ontological belonging – social, historical and material (geographical) relationships.

I argue that belonging (or not) to/in place is a part of ‘who we are’, identity, in a similar way to gender, race and class. I know who ‘I’ am, my identity, the group with whom I identify, through having myself reflected back at me when I look around me; where this does not happen I am ‘out of place’. This ‘reflection’ takes place through the three key foundations of an ontological belonging: social, historical and material/geographical relationships to the world. When I look around I see people who are like me, I see myself reflected back in behaviour, demeanour, voice and so on. When I look at my environment I see my history, my life story and the life story of my community/society/’we’ group, reflected back through the inalienable presences in buildings and places where these lives took place (Leach,
The place also reflects me: I can see where I am, I ‘know my way around’. Each reflection is a confirmation of acceptance within the group.

If new people come into a place then the reflections the original inhabitants see will change. The new people are likely to be identified as ‘other’ but over time some ‘ways of doing things’ will merge together. This is not a conscious exclusion of the ‘other’ but rather a way of securing my/our identity. There is nothing here to preclude two, or more, groups of people living in the ‘same’ place, each with their different historical connections to the place, each seeing different reflections and reinforcing their own sense of identity/belonging, although this may lead to conflict (Massey, 1995; Wright, 1985). For example, Miller (2002) argues that only indigenous Australians can belong ontologically through the dreamtime history of Australia, but where there is a different, but acknowledged and understood, history of connection to the place and a caring for the land and people for the future, there is no reason why white Australian farmers cannot also belong ontologically, albeit through a different historical trajectory (Gullifer & Thompson, 2006). Exposing this active form of belonging with its strong relationality to other people and to place over time not only adds to our sociological understanding of belonging(s) but also opens up a concept of the communities to which one belongs as taskscapes where people act alongside one another and alongside past selves or others.

Much current research into why people live where they do focuses on mobility and choice (Savage, et al., 2005; Savage, 2008; Urry, 2000). Choice is also a feature of staying put but the decision may then be at least partly based on an already existing feeling of belonging or attachment to the place. Choice however is a nebulous notion as it is always constrained in varying ways and will often be based on too many intercontingent events to have reliably predictable outcomes (Becker, 1998, p. 35), but it is nevertheless a neo-liberal imperative (Mol, 2008, p. 3). The idea that some people may effectively evade the issue of choosing where to live by staying put could thus be seen as a subversive one. It can also be seen as un-modern and therefore lacking in some way, potentially making people defensive about their choice (Savage, et al., 2005, p. 51). The community studies concept of a geographical area enclosing a group of like-minded people or a microcosm of society is redundant where place is a temporal meshwork of relations to people and
other places through time. This popular idea of a community tends towards the structural, something that can be joined rather than shared ways of behaving or doing things together (this is not necessarily a consciously chosen togetherness). Imagined communities allow for a more fluid conception of place but the negative side of nationalism can be deterministic or become culturally embedded. Belonging to a group is always going to contain elements of the imagined though: a shared past, the liminal moments when through performance a community is created, the discursive and creative elements of boundary drawing (Fortier, 1999, p. 42) which may help to create ‘our’ narrative – the story that can become ‘us’. These are key elements missing from an elective belonging, the reason why elective belonging will never be described as a ‘hugging feeling of belonging’ (Fry, 2011). I suggest that an ontological belonging may contain all these aspects, together with the connections to a social place through the taskscape and the inalienable traces of our ancestors, creating a multi-dimensional belonging-in-place.

2.11 Conclusion

Belonging is a term that is used vaguely in sociology and often with assumed values underlying it, as is community. I am not going to ‘solve’ this problem but I am exploring an under-researched type of belonging which begins from place and its relations to people. I am investigating a particular form of belonging that is not a sense or feeling, it is not intangible although it may be ineffable, but it can be discerned through people’s actions. I am not asking people if they feel they belong, rather I am looking at their everyday lives, how they speak of the place they live in and what they do, and from these diverse forms of information uncovering a ‘way of being, in this place’ which denotes an active belonging.

Sociological literature is not sufficiently concerned with place to be a satisfactory starting point for research into place. This research therefore engages with geographical and anthropological research, as well as some architectural (Leach, 2002), philosophical (Miller, 2002) and archaeological (Jones, 2010) work. I want to follow Savage et al (2005) and Massey in challenging dominant discourses
around globalisation and the demise of the local, but I want to do this through examining the position of place in people’s lives. I see this not in terms of a chosen, ‘outside’ belonging to a place based largely upon imaginary views of the place, but through layers of belonging starting from an imagined history (personal, family and communal) and then zooming in to a focus on ‘community’ – the people who live in the place, now and in the past (neighbours, friends, family), doing things together – the taskscape. The innermost layer, or core, is displayed through the material geography (an open, relational view of place) and the ‘passing on’ of place through the generations. This will aid an understanding of what an active belonging is and how it is achieved, which is currently missing from social science literature. I want to show how people/families who ‘stay put’ are not necessarily socially immobile, or ‘lacking’ in any way (as Savage et al infer (2005, p. 53), in their somewhat essentialising view of ‘locals’). If it can be acknowledged that local places are important, why ‘up roots’ in order to choose where to ‘put down roots’ in the future. Is the attempt to ‘bring back the local’ with different locals (i.e. not where one was born) not a somewhat half hearted swipe at globalisation reducing it perhaps to regionalisation? Of course some people move, and always have, but why should this be privileged as the only way to belong in a modern society? I want to open up the concept of belonging, before it suffers the fate of community and becomes whatever the writer wants it to be. There are many different kinds of belonging, not all are available to all people at all times. Here I examine a belonging-in-place that is an integral part of identity in a similar way to gender or ethnicity (Gieryn, 2000, p. 481).

First and foremost an ontological belonging is ‘who one is’, and by this I mean, in a kind of behaviourist way, who one is seen to be by others, whether one is accepted as ‘one of us’ but also who one sees oneself to be through one’s past. It is allied with identity but articulated through the relations with what we belong to. ‘To belong’ is a verb and needs an associated object. Identity is a noun, it can be possessed.

Put simply:

- ‘Belonging’ is seen as an important human need
there is no real sociological understanding of what it means ‘to belong’

an active belonging to/in a place is a fundamental part of identity where it exists

Place itself has largely been ignored by sociology; it is generally seen as fixed and passive, rather than an active part of social life.

Therefore:

Belonging, in particular an active belonging to place, what I am calling an ontological belonging, how it is developed and what any consequences might be, needs to be investigated sociologically.

Trying to move away from an unhelpful general concept of what is meant by ‘belonging’, I particularize an ‘ontological belonging’ which will not be applicable to everyone. Through the empirical data I show how this type of belonging works ‘on the ground’. Places are part of the meaningful social context of our social lives and therefore ought to be a sociological staple alongside gender, ethnicity and class. As such this research also helps to develop a sociological view of place as an active social context or milieu. Place here is not a symbol but an active constituent of identity and therefore needs to be opened up to more sociological investigation. I am beginning that process here.
3 Practical Matters: theory and method

3.1 How I approached this research

3.1.1 Summary

This chapter describes the methodological foundations and the data collection methods I used in this research. This long chapter is divided into two distinct sections, the first covering the epistemological approach taken to the research and the second the practical considerations regarding data for the research which follow on from this. This section covers the strategic approach to the research, the second section the tactical methods used to implement this strategy. The key question I wanted to answer through my research is ‘how do people develop a “deep-seated attachment” (ontological belonging) to “their” place and what might the consequences be for a sociological understanding of place?’ The first practical problem was to work out how to investigate this kind of attachment. What I am calling ‘ontological belonging’ is a way of being in the world, belonging as ‘fit’ perhaps (Ahmed, 2007, p. 158). This is not the kind of belonging that is obvious even to those who possess it: it is about behaviour, usually implicit, and how everyday life is conducted in a particular locality, not something that is necessarily able to be discerned by those on the ‘inside’. There are several dimensions I needed to understand: histories, intersubjective relations within the place and attachment to the material place, all of which contribute to a multi-dimensional belonging in place. People who have stayed in an area all their lives are likely to ‘do’ this kind of belonging as it is tied up with memories and history. Where the links with the place are longer than one lifetime this may be all the stronger, carried through familial memories and family history embedded in the material place and passed on from one generation to the next. In order to see whether an ontological belonging is still present in the ‘current’ generation of young adults as well as among older people (where it would be more commonly expected, perhaps) it is necessary to seek out a variety of ages of people, to map changes. Putting these last two points together – links to place lasting more than one lifetime and a variety of ages – leads to the conclusion that multiple generations of each family should be included. I felt
the everyday, taken-for-granted nature of what I was trying to examine would be hard for people to reflect on and articulate. Therefore I chose to use a combination of visual, verbal and written data collected through interviews and diaries that embrace the different forms of perception and understanding people have in order to generate a fairly comprehensive overall picture of the respondents’ lives. My approach to belonging-in-place is from how people engage with the place in everyday life. The diaries give me a window into these life-worlds. Having been influenced in my original research proposal by Heidegger’s phenomenology which is based in the everyday life-world, and, essentially for this research, includes place (Cloke & Jones, 2001, p. 652), it became clear that I should adopt this methodology which has its origins in the everyday world I am investigating. Taking a phenomenological approach allows me to overturn what is deemed ‘natural’ or taken-for-granted and question everything. It gives me the ‘sideways’ view I need to refrain from objectifying my respondents and their lives, whilst not becoming a part of their life-world and therefore being unable to question its norms and values. I’ve tried to combine the ideas of Schutz, Merleau-Ponty and Heidegger, together with Ingold, to create a view of an embodied social, temporal and material world. These elements encompass the social, historical and geographical aspects that go to make up the three dimensional approach to belonging being researched here. The multi-dimensional framework of Ingold’s ‘taskscape’ (landscape, people and activities over time) provides a way of dissecting the data into digestible ‘chunks’ for analysis whilst still holding on to its holistic nature. This will become clear in the empirical chapters, which address each of these themes. These aspects of my methodology and data collection methods give this research a distinctive flavour which, hopefully, complements my atypical approach to understanding belonging-in-place.

My research strategy was based on trying to gain a sense of people’s, or families’, daily practices in their localities. I chose to focus on multiple generations of families across the age range because I felt that I would be able to identify common traits and what is passed on through the generations in a more concrete sense than I would from focusing on unrelated individuals (see 1.5 Case Study on the benefits of family research). Families are the building blocks of communities, making them the ideal starting point for a focus on a place community. Using the family as a
starting point also meant that intergenerational relations over time were built in to the study from the outset. Asking people about family history, mobility and so on is more specific than asking for an elucidation of a local history, for example. Speaking to several members of the same family gave a more substantial picture of the whole family, its ethos and position, than I got from the individual respondents whose families did not take part. A family narrative focuses on relations between family members enabling social-structural relations within the community to come to the fore (Bertaux & Delcroix, 2000, p. 75).

The next problem I had to overcome was how, and crucially where, to find suitable participants. As my research is about belonging to place I thought I would find more coherent data by keeping the data collection to one place. This was not, however, to restrict the focus of the research and although Wigan was chosen as the ‘one place’ it is, in fact, made up of multiple smaller locales with their own identities. I see people who have this active, embodied belonging as being ordinary, as indeed one participant claimed to be, so they would not stand out on surveys or necessarily have any other special affiliations, for example to a religious or cultural/ethnic group. The obvious place to look for people like this would be in rural areas and due to previous research I’d done I knew that they would be well represented amongst farmers, for example. However I specifically wanted to avoid this stereotype and to find people in urban areas who still had this level of attachment. Big cities do have areas where such families are likely to be found but perhaps not easily. I knew, however, from personal experience having grown up in the north, that there are people like this in many northern towns. The choice of Wigan was based on a number of factors: it has a very low in and out migration rate (UK as well as international migration) (Office for National Statistics, 2012); it has a distinctive identity based on Orwell’s The Road to Wigan Pier and more currently on sport, particularly rugby league; and finally I know the area having grown up there and had access to some ‘gatekeepers’ (although these were not used).

The strategies of data collection grew from my initial focus on multi-generational families. I wanted to access detailed data on daily life in order to reveal the practices of belonging as it is done on a daily basis and over time. It was not
practical for me to go and live in Wigan, as many previous community studies researchers have done although that type of ethnographic approach is still very much the perspective of an observer, an outsider. In order to try to vary this ‘observational’ perspective I chose to take a phenomenological approach. I was keen to understand what people do, rather than what they say they do or even what they think they do, in order to examine processes of belonging. Using a weekly diary of photos and daily activities went some way towards getting an ‘inside’ view of participants’ lives. These gave me detailed knowledge of what people did over the course of a typical week. In addition biographical interviews at the initial meeting and post-diary interviews added to my understanding of these people’s lives. Overall twenty-two individuals took part, made up of five families and five individuals. As background information and part of my search for participants I visited Wigan on numerous occasions including during festivals, I went on walks led by local people, visited different areas of the town and had informal conversations with many people. These have all added to my understanding of how people relate to the place.

These strategic methodological decisions reflect my choice of a phenomenological approach to my research. A phenomenological approach, whilst by no means unique, is perhaps a less common approach taken in sociological research around communities and belonging. The combination of detailed daily records together with broader life and family histories gives a distinctive breadth and depth to my data, particularly in view of the multiple views on the life of each family from different family members (see 1.5 Case Study on the benefits of family research), contributing to the multi-dimensionality of this study.

In the remainder of this chapter I expand upon the practical ways in which I solved the challenges posed by my research questions. The chapter is divided into two halves. The first half addresses phenomenological theory and how it applies to the questions posed here and then sociological theories around the use of families and of stories in research illustrating why they are used here. The second half of the chapter describes the gathering of research data, the rationale behind the data collection methods used and their outcomes.
3.1.2 Taking a phenomenological approach

The initial problem was to determine how an idea as implicit and intangible as ‘belonging’ could be investigated. In sociological research belonging is usually looked at by asking people how they feel; whether they feel comfortable, at home, in place (Savage, et al., 2005; Christensen, 2009). This particular research could not be conducted by simply asking people about their feelings as it is concerned with a level of engagement with the world which is not usually thought about. The kind of belonging examined here is not obvious even to those who have it: it is about behaviour, usually implicit, and how everyday life is conducted in a particular locality, not something that is necessarily discernible by those on the ‘inside’. This is not easily rationalised (Jenkins, 1999, p. 77). In the same way that family practices (Morgan, 1985) are about ‘doing’ family, place practices are about what I call ‘doing place identity’. Place is not merely a context for daily life but is a cultivated environment that is an active part of everyday life, helping to shape its inhabitants and their interactions. Performing everyday tasks in place, creates a belonging in, and an identification with, place (Bell, 1999, p. 3; Leach, 2002, p. 130). Over time, places become ‘inalienable’, that is inseparable from the lives of those who have lived there (Jones, 2010). However this is often unnoticed and taken-for-granted. Phenomenology gives us a way of understanding the contingency of this taken-for-granted attitude by allowing for a pre-reflective engagement with things in the world. Rather than merely observing what people do, in analysing the fit between how people talk about their lives and what they do (via the diaries) I hoped to access the impact of place and people upon each other, not only its taken-for-granted or practical (unconsidered) involvement in people’s lives. This way of looking ‘sideways’ at the everyday practices of this group of people approaches the study of belonging from a different angle from the more obvious ethnographic methods often used (Blokland, 2001; Degnen, 2005; Fortier, 1999). The framework of the ‘taskscape’ (Ingold, 2000, p. 195) can be used phenomenologically to examine the relationships between people, place and actions over time as a combination of a temporal landscape and cultural activities. The concept of the taskscape joins together the landscape, its people and what they do there over time as an assemblage pulling together the social, material and temporal

But first I examine what is meant by phenomenology and how phenomenology, particularly the ideas of Schutz, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty and Ingold can be used as a theoretical basis for the argument I put forward in this thesis. That is, that belonging is an important human need, and an active belonging in place is a fundamental part of an identity, where it exists.

3.1.3 What is phenomenology?

Phenomenology is, essentially, the description or explanation of directly perceived phenomena (Vaitkus, 2000, p. 273). This can either be the material object, the subject of a picture or a memory or feeling: it is the consciousness of something (Ferguson, 2006, p. 24). The method of phenomenology is a particular way of seeing the world as contingent, as ‘just one of a series of possibilities’ (Ferguson, 2006, pp. 48 - 9 ). Investigation of this level of understanding is difficult: there is no ‘where’ from which to observe objectively as we are always already immersed in and surrounded by the phenomenal world. Philosophy has long been concerned either with ideal objects such as Plato’s forms or with the existence, or not, of material objects, such as tables and chairs (Russell, [1912] 2001). Phenomenology developed in opposition to this radical dualism where consciousness and ‘reality’ are located in separate spheres. Heidegger reversed the philosophical primacy of the theoretical over the practical by proposing a phenomenology of the everyday. He realised that philosophy’s engagement with the occurrence of objects (Frede, 2006, p. 58), their presence at hand, is predicated on a prior, practical level of engagement with the world which is not reflective and is organised by activity rather than conscious interaction with objects. This is what he termed the ready-at-hand (zuhanden) practical engagement with things in the world and being-with (mitsein) other people. For example, when using my pen to write I am unaware of the pen in my hand until it runs out of ink. It is the act of writing (communicating with others) that engages me, not the tool through which I accomplish the act, any more than I am aware of my larynx when speaking, or, specifically, of the grammar
of language. Everyday life, for Heidegger, is concerned with these practical and personal concerns (Frede, 2006, p. 59), that is, ‘a human being is never an isolated, worldless subject, but is an entity that in its very essence is constituted by its world’ (Frede, 2006, p. 63, original emphasis).

Schutz used Husserl’s phenomenological ideas of the life-world to pursue a particularly social phenomenology which defined intersubjectivity as a ‘primordial phenomenon’ (Vaitkus, 2000, p. 280) taking place in the ‘world of daily life’ or the life-world (Schutz, 1970, p. 72), part of the pre-reflective layer of interaction with the world where Heidegger’s phenomenology of everyday life took shape. Self and society are necessarily mutually constitutive (May, 2011, p. 366): society itself creates already encultured individuals who then belong, ontologically, partly through the incorporation of the stock of knowledge, which is not only cognitively based but is performed in the ongoing activities of everyday life (Ingold, 2000, p. 196). For Husserl, ‘intersubjectivity includes the human relation with the natural world, the role of tools and other artefacts in evoking other minds and other lives, the sense of belonging to a community or to a particular relationship even when others are not co-present, the participation in particular types of social encounters, the access to and use of human languages and other semiotic resources’ (Duranti, 2010, p. 29). Using these concepts allows me to examine relations to places intersubjectively.

A phenomenological understanding of the world always incorporates the past and future giving a sense of continuity over time. There is, in a phenomenological sense, no outside, objective view of the passage of time but we travel through time as we effect the daily tasks of living (Ingold, 2000, p. 196). The boundaries of birth and death are overcome through the connections to building and cultivation: the continuation of everyday life from one generation to the next (Heidegger, 1971). The three temporal strata exist simultaneously: Schutz’s worlds of potential, restorable and actual reach. These are connected through an on-going stock of knowledge passed between the generations, allowing for shared understandings over time. The framework of Ingold’s taskscape (2000, pp. 194 - 5) is also a way of seeing the intercontingency of people and place through activity over time.
Schutz set down two questions as central to many sociological problems: ‘(1) What does this social world mean for me the observer? And (2) What does this social world mean for the observed actor within this world and what did he mean by his acting within it?’ (Wagner, 1970, p. 44). These questions are central to my research. In order to answer the question what is (whether there is) a local place identity, and to discover whether there is a specific type of belonging-in-place, I have to develop an understanding of the observed actors’ underlying meanings and motives – their everyday ways of being in the world (Schutz, 1970, pp. 270 - 1). I do this through taking a phenomenological approach.

3.1.4 Using a phenomenological approach

This section addresses how the ideas of Schutz, Heidegger, Ingold, Merleau-Ponty can help to answer the questions ‘how is a belonging to a local place achieved’ and ‘how can we deconstruct a belonging that exists through activity in the (material and imagined) world?’

I established in the previous chapter that there is no clear sociological definition of belonging, in particular belonging to place. Indeed place itself has largely been ignored by sociology; it is generally seen as fixed and passive, rather than an active part of social life. I argue, however, that an active belonging-in-place is a fundamental part of identity, where it exists. It is through acting with and reacting to place that one becomes ‘of that place’. In this section I explore how phenomenology can be used to understand just such an active belonging in place by separating activities into their vorhanden parts: engagement with one’s own body, with others, with the place. Looking ‘sideways’ between the layers of phenomenal and material (embodied) perception, prising them apart, shows how they all work together to create cohesive actions in the world.

3.1.4.1 The embodied self and intersubjectivity

Understanding the self as developing from within a culture allows an appreciation of the pre-reflective nature of that culture within our everyday lives. A sense of identity (being the same) is incorporated from those around us (family, friends,
neighbours) and from stories about ‘us’ and the place we inhabit. In being-in-the-world (or just being) a ‘body-subject’ already belongs in the world, through ways of behaving and doing (acting) (Crossley, 1995, p. 56), for example through having the ‘right’ language or accent. Through practice, bodies become attuned to places, walking around them becomes automatic (Vergunst, 2010, p. 380). Daily life develops into routines, perhaps based on an underlying rationale (Jackson, 1993, p. 340). These actions help to create an identity as part of a group, a ‘we-relation’ (Schutz & Luckmann, 1974, p. 67) based on the norms and rules that govern this particular society, in this place.

Relations with others, ‘we relations’, are essential to understanding the practices of ‘community’ or society, as particular ways of behaving, acting, that take place ‘here’. Schutz’s ‘worlds of reach’ connect to generations past and future, both in terms of other people and the material world of places, imposing an order on the myriad relationships that go to make up a life story. Schutz proposed that there are actual, restorable, attainable and common worlds within reach which all extend across time and space (Rose, 1988). What is within ‘actual reach’ is physically accessible now, so could be taken to mean what is within a certain space in relation to an individual. However, ‘actual reach’ could also be understood as including what is immediately accessible, for example by a phone call, so that close family and friends will always be within ‘actual reach’ (provided phones are available). ‘Restorable reach’ refers to the past that is still accessible through memory, largely communal memory. This is used to verify what is happening in the present, understanding ‘us’ as the same over time. This is part of a common, or shared, identity. ‘Attainable reach’ is what could be accessed by moving through space and time: it could mean the world of a new career that can be accessed through a successful interview, or a new locality when moving house. ‘Common reach’ is what is shared within the larger life-world, so that celebrities, for example, are within common reach: this can correspond in some ways to an ‘imagined community’ (Anderson, 2006).

Schutz compares the degrees of knowledge of the social world with contour lines on a map, marking out different levels of familiarity, many of which are investigated in detail in this research. The more these overlap, or are shared, the
more similar the life-worlds that people inhabit. The most in-depth area of social knowledge for most people will be the family with its shared habits, customs and memories; this would be the equivalent of the highest point of a mountain, with the self standing on the mountain top. For different people within the same family this ‘contour line’ is likely to be similar. The wider the social group (street, neighbourhood, township) the more the contour lines are only likely to converge at a broader, but lower level – at the base of the mountain; these constitute the worlds within actual and attainable reach. Some groups are more tightly bound than others: the more there is in common, the more entanglements there are. Where place of birth and residence are shared, together with family histories, ways of speaking, eating and spending leisure time, groups have multiple connections which are likely to bind them closer together. Different ‘we’ groups will exist based on, perhaps, neighbourhood, shared social activities or family and friends. As there is an ‘us’ so there will be an ‘other’ developed through similar, but opposing processes. Gaining an understanding of these relationships within and between different groups of people in a place gives an insight into the processes of belonging. However, belonging-in-place is not just a question of relations between people, it is also concerned with relations to the material aspects of places.

3.1.4.2 Connections between self and practical/material/phenomenal world

We live in a social world, but it is populated by more than people – buildings, nature, everything is a part of the world within reach and essential to our understanding of who we are, through reflecting back, and retaining traces of, history and our own life stories (Leach, 2002). This is the realm of Ingold’s taskscape: a cultivated landscape, people and the actions they perform together through time, possibly multiple human lifetimes (Jones, 2010, p. 194). Others are to us ‘ready to hand’, enabling us to ‘attend to one another’ in the performance of everyday tasks (Ingold, 2000, p. 196). It is between the phenomenological experience of the material world and reflective engagement with it that a pre-reflective, active belonging might be found.
An ontological belonging needs connections through time, to place and to other people (Miller, 2002, p. 217). We are always ‘in’ time as we are always in a cultural environment; history is always part of our present (Merleau-Ponty, 1962). History is often depicted as a series of events strung out through time, where our perception of it is as disembodied observer. Alternatively, time can be seen as moving imperceptibly onwards, where we are positioned within it (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p. 421) and can only ‘see’ it from this (embodied) perspective. A phenomenological approach insists that we remain within time and see ourselves and our actions as part of an on-going story: what happened in the past is not finished but effects continue to ripple forwards through time. People remain connected to buildings, places and other people through their histories and through the inalienable traces they leave there (Jones, 2010). Stories of places from the perspective of different ‘we groups’, perhaps at different times, show how local stories weave the tellers and participants into the fabric of a local place. The pattern of what is created through these histories will vary from one telling, or person, to another, creating a variety of places and place identities within the same space.

A phenomenological theory of place understands place as something generally unnoticed, part of the pre-reflective space (Crossley, 1995, p. 48). But drawing attention to aspects of place (for example through new building, or removing buildings) will make it *vorhanden*, present-at-hand, an object of study positioned over against us. In the activities of daily life in a familiar place, place is unnoticed, unreflected upon and would appear to be merely a context for daily life, although different people can both perceive and use the same place in different ways. But, as with all the tools people use to conduct their daily lives (including, for example, language), place is, in fact, a part of the constitution of that ordinariness of daily activity (Heidegger, 1971). Without the place being as it is, life would be different. Elements such as the weather demonstrate the contingency of a place when they disrupt, or enable, normal activities.
3.1.5 Phenomenology Conclusion

I have suggested that a phenomenological approach can promote an integrated understanding of the various characteristics of a multi-dimensional belonging: by focusing on embodiment, intersubjectivity and connections to places and the contingency of place. Phenomenology teaches us to engage with what we actually see, rather than perceiving the world through a myriad of cultural filters (whilst also understanding that the researcher herself is always already immersed in a cultural world) and therefore is a useful tool to understand the everyday, that is, how people conduct their lives ‘doing being ordinary’ (Sandywell, 2010, p. 169). A phenomenological approach sees the world from side on, as an array of contingent possibilities which allows the particularity of local ‘ways of doing things’ to come to the fore. Understanding that ‘it doesn’t have to be like this’ allows embedded (and embodied) assumptions and ways of being/doing to be questioned. This gives a basis from which to unpick the connections linking the various aspects of an ontological belonging: places, life-histories, memories, and family history. Pulling these threads from the social fabric of the milieu as my research does, will give an explanation as to how it may have evolved.

The researcher attempts to grasp the world in its ‘presence-at-hand’ (vorhanden-ness), that is, at a theoretical level of understanding, rather than what is taken-for-granted. In order to communicate the researcher must accept the taken-for-granted nature of the world for those who live in it, whilst at the same time deconstructing it into its vorhänden parts. Asking participants why they act in certain ways will assimilate their stock of knowledge and taken-for-granted assumptions. It will not explain why these people in this place undertake particular ways of doing things (Becker, 1998, p. 125). This is a danger in any research which relies solely on participants’ own account of themselves without recourse to examining what they actually do either through daily accounts or observation (Miller, 2012). The resulting analysis becomes circular as the ‘why’ of an action is predicated on a specific cultural understanding and adds nothing to the explanation of that culture. Local ways of doing things, ‘local particularity’ (Jenkins, 1999, p. 77), can easily be overlooked, as often the same actions are undertaken elsewhere, but here have a specific, local purpose. The second half of this chapter addresses the tactical
elements entailed in the carrying out of the research and will elaborate upon the methods used in order to attempt to avoid some of these risks. Before that, however, I conclude these sections on the theoretical aspects of the research by examining the sociological reasons for using family units as the basis of this research and critically assessing issues around the telling of ‘stories’ – biographies and family histories.

3.1.6 What is the significance of the family for Community and Belonging? Why base the research around families?

This research uses the family (a three generational unit, not a household unit), or more precisely families in a particular place, as the locus of the empirical work. For the vast majority of people it is through their family that they are first introduced to the community and the world. One is born into a family, community and society; family is the microcosm which may yield up some ‘sociological pearl’ (Bertaux & Delcroix, 2000, p. 83). Therefore families seem likely to be a site where intimations of belonging, perhaps through family or wider community practices, are more likely to be discovered. Successive generations will leave inalienable marks on places round them, connecting people through time. Rather than selecting people across various age ranges it is important here to link the generations through social relationships as well as generational ones to enable us to trace family practices. Such family practices help to inculcate cultural norms into children which are often then confirmed and strengthened by the local community to cement belonging. Individual life stories gathered from people within a particular community can tell us about individual lives within that community, but as an extension to a biographical approach multiple stories from the same family, or kinship group, within a community begin to tell us more about how the reproduction of social life in that community takes place (Bertaux & Delcroix, 2000, p. 75). This is because, as Bertaux and Delcroix explain, a family narrative focuses on relations between different family members over the generations rather than on an individual biography. Talking to families brings the relationships between family members (including ancestors) to the centre of the picture. These are both the intersubjective relationships discussed above through Schutz’s ‘worlds
of reach’ and socio-structural relations. It is necessary to look at both ‘ends’ of the relationship in order to get the full story. Family in this sense extends beyond the nuclear family and even beyond the known, current family into ancestry and possible future descendents. Family histories can therefore throw light on both generic aspects of family life such as gender roles or bringing up children and on more abstract social concepts such as social change over time. A family-oriented historical dimension can be captured by asking multiple generations about family history.

Of course, families are not idyllic and not always safe havens, any more than communities are. There is a vast literature on the family in all its various guises but my concern here is with the embeddedness of the family within the locality, rather than familial relations per se. A family spread across three or more households within a small area is likely to be a part of the fabric of that place community: each household unit will have neighbours and friends in the area meaning that the family as a whole are well known. This knowledge of family ‘places’ a person through their kin relations (Finch, 1989, p. 234); children in particular are known, and have their status determined, through their parents or grandparents. Being known and knowing who one is can provide support and comfort. Family influences are transmitted across the generations both within the family structure and within the wider community structure (Bertaux & Thompson, 2005, p. 15; Cohen, 1982). The common practice of grandparents looking after grandchildren whilst both parents work enhances the influence of family through the generations. Childminding is work but it is also, in the instances I have come across, generally undertaken with great pleasure: Bertaux and Delcroix (2000, p. 75) talk of life being a gift given across the generations and the birth of grandchildren being a reciprocal gift back to the parents; it is certainly often seen in that way by the families I spoke to who undertake regular childminding duties. Grandparents can pass on attachments to places to their grandchildren.

Support networks within the family and the community as a whole create ‘both potential opportunities and potential constraints for its members’ (Bertaux-Wiame, 2005, p. 49). Opportunities are generated through possibly being privy to job and house purchase opportunities before these are opened up to the public; constraints
on the other hand may involve the perceived obligation to forego a potential career move in order to remain close by to look after elderly parents or grandchildren (Jenkins, 1999, p. 114). Lives can, from the outside, sometimes seem to follow an ordained pattern, continuing from generation to generation but there are always rejections, conflicts, varying degrees of external pressure giving rise to changes in the family form; whilst one child stays another may leave, giving the family as a whole stronger links into other places. Researching families encompasses wider sociological notions than ‘merely’ those of the family relationships and processes themselves: families are connected to places through houses (these are often lived in by multiple generations sequentially); through businesses – either a family run business or a place where many family members work/have worked, which was common until recently; through repeated generations attending the same schools; and even through graves. People are connected to places through these familial connections over the generations.

Looking at a community through the life stories and everyday lived experiences of families allows for a closer examination of practices of belonging in place. However, the telling of and interpretations of stories has its own implications which are discussed next.

3.1.7 The Ways in Which People Tell Their Stories and Researchers Interpret them

The telling of a life story is not as straightforward a process as it might seem. ‘Tell me your life story’ could elicit anything from a five minute overview to a two hour or more in-depth discussion. Most of the people interviewed for this research began with the overview, or required further prompting on where to begin. People do not generally seem to see their lives as particularly interesting or worthy of research and so require encouragement to elaborate. Stories were rarely told in strict chronological order, digressions occur, there are interruptions to the interview from telephones or other members of the household, threads are lost. But eventually a narrative is constructed and the story of a life emerges.
A life history has to be told from the perspective of now, the time of the telling, and it must make sense now, within this context. Within the boundaries of ‘making sense’ the same set of events can be organised around different plots (Czarniawska, 2004, p. 7). Although many of the facts of such a story would be verifiable – which school, what jobs, when married and so on – reasons behind the actions are not, and it is these reasons that comprise the plot: *I left school at sixteen because I had to go out to work and contribute to the family budget* – part of setting the scene of *I came from a poor family*. The way the plot is formulated ‘informs us about how the subject thematises and constructs his own biography ... and identity’ (Kohli, 1981, p. 70). Part of this thematising will be done through publicly available discourses in order to conform to cultural mores (Summerfield, 2004). In this way individual lives can be connected to the wider social context and then be abstracted as in some ways ‘typical’ of that context (Rustin, 2000, p. 42). This identification with others lends authenticity to the account. Rather than taking a sociological frame of reference and categorising individuals within that, biographical sociology identifies a life, or events within a life, as being representative of a wider social context (Rustin, 2000, p. 45). Using several biographies from the same family which produce overlapping accounts generates a richer ‘social historical’ account than individual life histories (Bertaux & Delcroix, 2000, p. 74) (See 1.5 *Case Study on the benefits of family research*).

Finally, the relationship between the interviewee and the researcher must be recognised. This is an integral part of the production of any interview or story. The interviewee may be eager to please the researcher and having been given an idea of the topic of the research in advance endeavour to address that topic directly (Plummer, 1983, p. 102); this is one reason why I did not use the term ‘belonging’ when addressing the topic of my research with potential interviewees. However many people rehearse their life stories; family stories, in particular, tend to be repeated and mythologised. In telling a personal story the aim is often to present a happy and successful self (Hollway & Jefferson, 2000, p. 175; Jones & Rupp, 2000, p. 285), which might necessitate ignoring or skimming over less successful or unhappy parts of a life, as my interviewees did around the subject of divorce. In analysing the ‘told story’, alongside the relevant contextual history, the reasons for missing or incoherent actions in the ‘lived life’ become clear. The multiple genres
available to people telling their own stories (the happy life, the successful life, overcoming tragedy, working class hero) make analysis of the context of the whole lived life, not just the text itself, important in producing abductive theoretical sociological studies, which is the aim here.

3.1.8 How I approached this research: Conclusion

In this section I have outlined why I chose to conduct the research in this particular way and how this has helped to address the questions raised in the previous chapter. Beginning with the epistemological approach I have shown the benefits, and some drawbacks, of this methodology. I believe that embracing a phenomenological approach gives my research a unique edge: I am approaching belonging to place not from what people say or think, but from how they engage with the place on a daily basis understood through a window into their life-worlds opened up in the diaries. The multi-dimensional framework of the taskscape (landscape, people and activities over time) provides a way of dissecting the data into digestible chunks for analysis whilst still holding on to its holistic nature. This will become clear in the empirical chapters, which address each of these themes.

The family is central to my research strategy. This has sound sociological precedents in the work of Bertaux, Thompson and Delcroix for example (Bertaux & Delcroix, 2000; Bertaux & Thompson, 2005), but is also a staple of anthropological work which I am drawing on extensively (Ingold, 2000). Family narratives have the potential to cover multiple generations enabling me to follow lines of connection to places, or inalienable traces, over multiple lifetimes. Narratives, both individual and family ones, are interpretive methods: they can thus be both told and understood in different ways by different people at different times. They do, however give the person centric view, required by an embodied phenomenological approach (Merleau-Ponty, 1962): how this person sees the world at this point in time is what I aim to capture and decipher in order to explore their relations to their life-world, in particular to their place.
The second part of the chapter looks at how my research put these ideas into practice.

3.2 How the research was conducted

This research was conducted using a phenomenological approach in order to gain an understanding of place sociologically, beyond the imaginary or ‘visions of living’ (Savage, et al., 2005). I focus on the interactions between body, material place and action through time that may contribute to an ontological belonging. In taking this approach I needed to investigate how people in a place live their everyday lives; how they present the stories of their lives; and how they fit within their life-world.

The following sections expand on why I chose Wigan as the setting for this research, who participated in the research and why I chose this group of people, and how I collected a rich variety of data through ethnography, biographical interviews and written and photo diaries. There is also a discussion of the ethical considerations necessary to this research and finally a brief note on the types of analysis undertaken completes the explanation of the practical aspects of my research.

3.2.1 Why Wigan?

I have used an administratively defined place in order to determine who should participate in this research, that is, Wigan Metropolitan Borough. Wigan was chosen as the locale for this research because the population tends not to be mobile having one of the lowest rates of in and out migration in England per 1000 population, being the sixth lowest by local authority area for England and Wales (Office for National Statistics, 2012), so that there are a considerable number of families of several generations who grew up in the same area. Wigan also has quite a strong place identity in terms of being known nationally for its coal mining past.

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2 Wigan Borough had internal migration of 36,600 in and 34,400 out giving a figure of 51 per 1000 population (total population 301,415) between mid 2001 and mid 2006 compared to Wandsworth with internal migration of 123,400 in and 142,300 out giving a volume of 243 per 1000 population (total population 260,380) between mid 2001 and mid 2006.
as well as rugby league and more recently football teams. To be a ‘Wiganer’ means something, not just within the environs of the town or the north west but more widely thanks to the old music hall joke about Wigan pier, giving Wiganers an identity from the outside, which has a strong link to specific features of the place – coal mining and its location on the Leeds and Liverpool canal.

Wigan does not have a large Asian community as does Bolton, for example, and remains very much white ‘working’ and (nowadays) ‘lower middle’ class. Wigan Borough is a large area but is divided into ten townships by the local council. Initially research concentrated on the Wigan north and Wigan south townships as these comprise the areas closest to Wigan town centre and thus likely to be the strongest ‘Wigan’ identity, although families with members living in other parts of Wigan Borough were not excluded. In practice the area covered by the research expands beyond what was historically ‘Wigan’ as the Metropolitan Borough of Wigan created by the local authority reorganisation in 1974 encompasses what were independent towns including Leigh and Ashton-in-Makerfield. This has little direct significance for this research as the neighbouring areas have a similar history.

3.2.2 Who to research?

Having decided on an approach to follow in terms of gaining an insight into the kind of belonging I was interested in, the next step was to find people who might be willing to participate: people who might have this rooted attachment to place, or ontological belonging. I was not looking at people who consciously develop an attachment to a specific place later in life (although this would be an interesting subject), so needed to find people who had stayed put all their lives. Such people are more likely to have a long-term relationship with the place, and possibly through previous generations of the family too. I felt that looking at multiple generations of family could show the development of an attachment or a reason for it through things that had happened to the family or the way the place and family had developed together over time. Following Bertaux and Delcroix (2000, p. 73) I hoped to discover sociologically interesting relations between family members over
time that would help to illuminate why and how they do or don’t belong to the place. Whilst there are plenty of the kinds of family I was looking for living in Wigan – people would frequently tell me how many people they knew who would fit my bill – it was not easy to persuade them to take part in the study. Perhaps the idea of talking about place and family connections was too vague, or people simply couldn’t see the point. However I did manage to find sufficient willing participants.

Ideally I wanted to interview three generations of each family, as this would be the maximum that could be hoped for (there would be little chance of accessing several four generational families). I wanted a minimum of five families to provide sufficiently varied data to capture different ways of living local lives. In order to show that an ontological belonging exists, only one family who displays this kind of belonging to place is needed (Denzin, 2012, p. 23). However, as belonging is a process, there will be differing ways of achieving it. I did not, however, try to find participants unlikely to have some form of attachment to the place, or only limited attachment. The possible effects of this are discussed later in this chapter in 3.2.6

Did I get the data I needed?

As five families with three generations willing to take part could not be found then families with two generations willing to take part in the research and a third generation too young to take part were included. Five individuals also took part without other members of their families, although they were all able to give me a considerable amount of information on the generations preceding and following them. Altogether twenty-two people were interviewed.

In order to examine the concept of ‘local belonging’ to a particular locality, all the generations needed to have spent most of their lives in the Wigan area. It is, I think, important that all respondents, or at least one of each couple of each generation, identified themselves as a ‘Wiganer’ so that the concept of locality and what it means to be a local ‘from round here’ can be fairly specific and some commonalities identified, for example in defining outsiders, supporting local teams, knowing the local history.
3.2.3 Recruitment

It was anticipated that recruitment would be difficult and time-consuming due to the level of commitment required from more than one family member. I asked initially for interviews with multiple generations of the family; at the first interview I then asked people if they would be willing to complete a diary over the course of a week, including photos.

Interviewees were recruited through various means; I encountered most difficulty with the generation of parents of young(ish) children, as they tended to be working full time and too busy to take part. Initially I wrote to people on the published electoral register in certain postcode areas which I knew to be areas where people were likely to have lived for a long time. This produced some positive responses but the difficulty of recruiting more than one generation quickly became apparent. I also encountered a certain amount of suspicion despite using University of Manchester headed paper with appropriate telephone numbers and email addresses for people to check my identity.

As a way of overcoming this suspicion and legitimising my status as a researcher I approached the Business Intelligence team at the local council, who run surveys regularly using a self-selecting ‘Citizens’ panel’ which consists of individuals who volunteer to be available to take part in research in the form of questionnaires and focus groups run by the local council. This panel embraced the whole of Wigan Metropolitan Borough which widened my area of inquiry beyond the township of Wigan itself. Whilst areas such as Leigh, Atherton and Tyldesley are part of Wigan in this broader sense they tend to identify more closely with Manchester or Bolton. However, the underlying culture is still of former mining communities, no noticeable Asian immigration during the sixties or seventies and a largely working class culture. Through the citizens’ panel I recruited two families with two generations available for interview – the youngest generation in each case being too young to take part. Other attempts through the council from notices at local township meetings to advertising in staff newsletters did not draw any response.
In looking for recruits but also as part of my field work I visited a dominoes club, the Trefoil Guild, a mother and toddler group and sheltered accommodation and went on walks run by the local Leisure and Culture Trust. This provided interesting and detailed observational data but few interviewees. A local history group and a letter to the local paper did elicit positive responses, however. Some of those I interviewed managed to persuade other members of their family and friends and neighbours to take part, which overall was the most successful recruitment method. After about eight months I had spoken to five families of two or more generations, and five other individuals comprising twenty-two biographical interviews with an age range from fifteen to eighty-five. I received ten diaries and conducted six post-diary interviews. In all, there were approximately one hundred photos to accompany the written diaries.

### 3.2.4 The Participants

As described above, two three-generation families and three two-generation families, plus five individuals participated in the research. I include here a brief overview of the different family groups and some interesting points about the interviewees. Further information on each participant is included in Appendix I for ease of reference.

Names in **bold** in the following table indicate those interviewed.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grandparents</th>
<th>Parents</th>
<th>Children</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Val</strong>, 65, retired bank clerk lived in or close to Leigh all her life</td>
<td><strong>Paul</strong>, 35, married to Claire, spent 5 years out of Leigh in the army, works as a technician</td>
<td>2 daughters, 10 and 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Keith</strong>, 66, retired senior manager for international company, moved to Wigan on first marriage, lived in Leigh 20 years</td>
<td><strong>Rob</strong>, 37, lives in London with partner, works in media, brief email ‘conversation’</td>
<td>1 son, 1 year old</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Keith’s son, 36, married</td>
<td>2 sons, approx 10 and 8</td>
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</tbody>
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‘The Leythers’ are a middle class blended family living in Leigh. Val was the main respondent as she completed a photo diary. The two generations, Val and husband Keith and daughter Claire with husband Paul, were interviewed separately but in couples. The grandchildren were too young to participate. I exchanged a couple of emails with Val’s son who lives in London in order to gain the perspective of someone who has moved away, but still visits regularly and has very strong family ties. Paul’s mother and Val, both being life-long ‘Leythers’ knew each other before Paul and Claire met and embarked on their relationship.

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<tr>
<th>Grandparents</th>
<th>Parents</th>
<th>Children</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>John, 61, retired BT engineer, always lived in Wigan</strong></td>
<td>Joanne’s husband, BT engineer from Wigan</td>
<td>2 children, 5 and 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wife, works at local school, always lived in Wigan</td>
<td>Joanne’s sister, 33, Occupational Therapist, lives in Wigan, single</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

John and Joanne perhaps demonstrate how it is possible to be ‘socially mobile’ whilst remaining in place. John left education at sixteen and completed an apprenticeship in bricklaying whilst both his daughters have degrees. John spent most of his working life as a BT engineer, both his daughters have professions: Joanne is an assistant headteacher and her sister (not interviewed) manages a team in Occupational Health. As with the Leythers, the family all live close by, the grandchildren are regularly looked after by the grandparents and family meals are shared on a weekly basis. Joanne married a local boy whose family were neighbours to John when he was a child.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Grandparents</th>
<th>Parents</th>
<th>Children</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Barbara, 75, retired coach tour guide, widowed and remarried, always lived in Wigan</strong></td>
<td>Daughter, married, works part-time, lives near Bolton</td>
<td>3 children 10 and under</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Barbara has strong roots in the local area and still lives near to where she and her father were born. She has done some family history research and has written and published some of her family stories. She only agreed to marry her second husband on the proviso that he moved to Wigan from his home in the midlands. Barbara’s only daughter lives about half an hour away but outside Wigan Borough and did not take part in the research. She has three children who see their grandmother regularly.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grandparents</th>
<th>Parents (divorced)</th>
<th>Youngest generation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Paternal grandfather worked as engineer in the Mill, died of emphysema as a result</td>
<td>Father, long term sick Mother, unemployed, formerly a receptionist</td>
<td>Antony, 25, single, formerly a teaching assistant, always lived in Wigan, 3 younger siblings</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Antony, single and in his mid-twenties, was unable to persuade either of his parents or an aunt to take part in the research. He has also done a lot of family history research and found that his family roots in Wigan go back to the eighteenth century. Along with Ian (see below), his family research has spilled over to an interest in local history, particularly in local buildings.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grandparents</th>
<th>Parents</th>
<th>Children</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Beryl</strong>, 76, married, retired administrator, always lived in Wigan</td>
<td><strong>Janet</strong>, 52, does not work due to a disability, formerly civil servant, 2 younger sisters, lives close to Mum Beryl, husband, not interviewed, insurance assessor, also from Wigan</td>
<td><strong>Tom</strong>, 18, taking A levels, hoping to study Computing at university  <strong>Lauren</strong>, 16, taking GCSEs, wants to be a solicitor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ian</strong>, 62, Beryl’s brother, married, retired teacher, lived in Manchester and Salford when younger</td>
<td>2 children, daughter lives in Thames Valley, son about 35 miles from Wigan</td>
<td>1 baby grandson</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Aspinalls comprise three generations – Ian and his sister Beryl from the ‘grandparent’ generation, Janet as the ‘parent’ and her two teenage children, Tom and Lauren. Beryl, Janet, Tom and Lauren all completed diaries for the same week.
enabling a comparison of how the different generations depicted shared events, such as Janet’s wedding anniversary which fell in that week (see 1.5 Case Study on the benefits of family research). Ian was interviewed in Manchester, the others at Janet’s home in one afternoon. Tom and Lauren together, Janet and Beryl separately.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grandparents</th>
<th>Parents</th>
<th>Children</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ethel, 85, widowed, always lived in Wigan, 5 children, 1 great, great grandchild</td>
<td>Linda, 61, retired secretary, always lived in Wigan, husband an engineer from Glasgow</td>
<td>Kate, 34, works at Leisure Centre, divorced, 2 primary-aged children, lives close to Linda</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Kate’s brother, not interviewed, joiner, married, two children, lives in Wigan</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Linda’s family are the other three generational family to take part, although there are five living generations here. Linda’s mother Ethel is in her mid eighties, Linda in her early sixties and Kate, Linda’s daughter, in her thirties. Kate’s children were too young to take part. Linda’s sister had just become a great-grandmother making for five living generations. Linda and Kate were interviewed together before Ethel arrived and were then present during Ethel’s interview. Linda completed a diary and a post-diary interview; entries in the diary confirmed the closeness of the mother-daughter relationship between Linda and Kate. Linda also sees Ethel at least once a week, but Kate sees Ethel less often.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grandparents</th>
<th>Parents</th>
<th>Children</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Maureen, 75, retired sewing machinist, widow of a miner, always lived in same area of Wigan</td>
<td>One son, married, manager recently made redundant, lives locally</td>
<td>2 daughters, both at local universities</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Maureen was unable to persuade her son or granddaughters to take part. She is the only participant to have been directly involved with mining – her husband was a miner up until his retirement in the 1980s and it was only during the strikes of the 1970s that Maureen returned to work in order to support the family.
Grandparents | Parents | Children
--- | --- | ---
Steve, 38, financial advisor, lived in Wigan other than time at university | 3 children, 6, 4 and a baby
Ron, 62, retired solicitor, widowed, always lived in Wigan (apart from years at university) | Anne, 38, American, Steve’s wife, works for local council | 1 child
Steve’s sister, not interviewed, teacher, married, lives outside Wigan (near Warrington)

Ron’s family also have traceable roots in Wigan back for at least a hundred years as his father’s family owned a grocery business over that time. Ron went away to university but returned to Wigan as did Steve, his son. His daughter also lives a short drive away, but not in Wigan Borough. Anne moved to Wigan from America in order to marry Steve. As with the other grandparents interviewed, Ron regularly looks after his grandchildren whilst both parents work. Unfortunately none of this family completed a diary.

Grandparents | Parents | Children
--- | --- | ---
Father, deceased, ran own business
Mother, widowed, lives close by | Sean, 42, lives with partner, always lived in the same house (from 1 year old), sheet metal worker, 1 brother in Preston | 2 sons, 6 and 2

Sean again could not persuade his mother to be interviewed. He lives with his partner, also a Wiganer, and two small children. Their house, a Victorian terrace, is the one that Sean was brought up in which he bought from his parents about twenty years ago. Sean was keen to extol the virtues of Wigan as a place to live, and he has visited many other places in both Britain and abroad. He is, however, concerned that there won’t be suitable jobs available locally for his children in the future.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grandparents</th>
<th>Parents</th>
<th>Children</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Joan</strong>, 66, divorced, retired receptionist, always lived in/near Wigan, lives in house she grew up in</td>
<td>Son, 43, married, lives close by</td>
<td>4 children 17 - 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Daughter, 47, married, lives in Wigan, works for NHS</td>
<td>2 children, 18 and 16, eldest at university</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Joan could not persuade either of her children or her eldest grandchildren to take part in the research. She did, however, complete a diary and also took me around the local Victorian park, through which she can map out a large part of her life story. She also lives in the terraced house she grew up in, having inherited it from her father. Although neither of her children (now in their forties) went to university her eldest grandchild had just started university in Scotland with the next one planning to go the following year, but to somewhere more local.

### 3.2.5 Data collection methods

The data collection methods I used were designed to provide information on different dimensions of local lives in order to understand a three dimensional belonging-in-place. I used multiple methods of qualitative data collection in order to get the necessary rich, in-depth data to enable me to understand histories, intersubjective relations within the place and attachment to the material place. The historical element of the research led me to undertake biographical interviews and to ask about family history. I felt it would be difficult for people to provide enough detail in an interview of the everyday tasks they undertake in their locales in order to give me an understanding of their ‘taskscapes’, therefore I chose to use a combination of visual and written diaries. These detailed the social and material life-worlds of the participants giving a fairly comprehensive overall picture of their lives. All participants were interviewed once, interviews taking from one to two hours, and some were interviewed again after the completion of a photo diary. The first interview was biographical, the chronology largely led by the interviewee; the post-diary interviews used photo elicitation techniques from the photo diaries to find out more about the places people visit. I also spent time in and around Wigan where I gathered observational and informal data from those I met.
As far as possible, I was led by the interviewees in terms of the structure of the interviews and (within some pre-imposed limits) the content of the diaries, allowing the research to be ‘user-driven’. I was deliberately somewhat vague about the aims of my research in order not to narrow the focus of the interviews. I felt that ‘not belonging’ is often seen as a slightly shameful category and therefore, if asked directly, everyone would claim belonging. Indeed those who feel that they don’t belong in the sense that their partners do (Keith, for example) did talk about it self-deprecatingly. My unstructured approach could be seen as trawling for data – I cast the net wide and deep, not in terms of numbers of participants, but in trying to find out as much about their lives as possible, within the constraints of the research process, mainly time – both theirs and mine. This approach successfully produced data that was ‘rich and deep’ (Bryman, 1988, p. 103). The interviews went backwards and forwards in time including ancestors and descendants as well as the respondent’s own life story. Through the diaries I got a distinct flavour of the daily life of these people, and from the post-diary interviews and photos how they feel about the place where they live.

3.2.5.1 Observation

Observation was used to provide an introduction and contextual background to the site of the research. It has also been complementary to other methods throughout the research.

Before beginning to recruit research participants I spent some time in Wigan familiarising myself with the place – local parks, the new shopping centres, the new market hall. As well as the standard chains there are still local cafes where the customers often seem to bump into friends. In one coffee shop in the town centre (a local one, not a national chain) almost everyone, including the staff, seemed to know or have some connection with others in the café. This chimed with Joan’s accounts of bumping into ‘about seventy’ people she knew whenever she went shopping. These examples show how despite being a relatively large town there is a face-to-face community element here (Kellehear, 1993, p. 118). The time I spent observing in communal and public areas of the locality contributed a small amount
I took the local weekly paper (The Wigan Observer) for a year during the period of fieldwork and some of the information from there has made its way into the empirical chapters. I also regularly visited the websites of the daily evening paper and of ‘Wigan World’, which includes online message boards. These serve to highlight what is important to local people, giving an insight into the cultural history of the community as a whole. Local politics and the local business world are portrayed through the local papers, giving additional information on what is or is not considered acceptable, respectable behaviour.

Much of the observational data were gathered when spending time in Wigan before or between interviews, and when attempting to recruit participants. This was not always systematic and has been used largely as anecdotal evidence although based on field notes made at the time.

Overall this data gave me a good insight into the ethos of Wigan: what is important to local people; what facilities are available and what history of the community as a whole. Local politics and the local business world are portrayed through the local papers, giving additional information on what is or is not considered acceptable, respectable behaviour.

Neither is the local paper unbiased; it follows a particular agenda, which tends towards the nostalgic, as evidenced by the page each week devoted to ‘old’ pictures and stories of past (and implicitly better) times. The other people I met, for example on ‘Health Walks’, were largely middle or lower-middle class and middle aged or older and are probably not particularly representative of the population as a whole. The users of the message boards on the Wigan World website are often ex-Wiganers keen to reminisce nostalgically with old friends.

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As with all the other data I have used in this research it needs to be taken within context and understood as part of a broader picture of the place and the people who live there.

**3.2.5.2 Interviews**

I felt it necessary to try to understand something of the biography and the family history of the participants in order to follow through some of the processes of belonging, ontologically, to a place. How did they come to be here? Had they ever moved away? What about school, jobs, friends? To get answers to these questions I conducted narrative style biographical interviews.

The interviews themselves mostly took place within the homes of the respondents, or the home of a member of the family. One interview was in a pub and another at university, all except two were recorded and transcribed. With one couple the recorder failed and I took copious notes. When I visited sheltered accommodation the opportunity for an interview was unexpected, so again I took notes which I wrote up immediately afterwards. I took a flexible approach to interviewing and allowed interviewees to decide whether they wanted to be interviewed together or separately. Some interviews were conducted in family groups or couples, others singly either at the same time or separately. In one family all three generations were interviewed together which developed into a general discussion of how things have changed over their lifetimes. The granddaughter was obviously very interested to hear what her grandmother was saying about her past. With another family the two generations were interviewed as couples. These different interview scenarios produced different kinds of accounts. Where the three generations were interviewed together the mother (middle generation) frequently corrected the accounts of her daughter and particularly the elderly grandmother, whereas when I interviewed separately I would sometimes be told two different versions of the same event. It would perhaps have been interesting to interview more people from the same generation as on the one occasion where I did interview siblings from the older generation they had quite different accounts of their childhood, although in this case there was an age difference of fourteen years. Most seemed to enjoy the experience and the opportunity to reminisce, particularly where it meant that three
generations of the family got together – an event that wouldn’t happen particularly frequently, although each would visit their immediate kin (parents – children) weekly.

The interviews focussed on major life events – rites of passage – such as starting school, leaving school or college and getting a job, marriage, children, deaths. Gathering information on decisions made at these times and considerations of alternatives helped to show how these decisions have affected the subsequent life course. Although such information will necessarily be affected by post-rationalisation it still gives an informative insight into the perspective of the informant and their discursive practices (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995, p. 156). Of course this is subjective and ephemeral: it is likely to change from one telling to the next, but just as identities are fluid and multi-faceted, so are the stories, or social relations, that lie behind them. Divorce was a particularly difficult topic for people to discuss. More information was forthcoming at the second (post-diary) interviews, when we were more familiar with each other. The influence of other family members, particularly parents, came through quite strongly in career decisions, especially with the older generation, illustrating perhaps the lack of choices available in the immediate post-war years.

The informants set their own agenda as far as possible. This may in some ways exacerbate the differences in social knowledge between the interviewer and the interviewee, but it puts a measure of power back in the hands of the informant. This leaves me to take on a more passive observation role, responding, prompting and guiding the interview where necessary, making for ‘a good life story’ (Bertaux, 1981, p. 39), and getting an idea of the associations that go to make up each person’s or family’s social arena or ‘reach’. Overall the interviews seemed to elicit stories of the ‘ordinary’ lives of ‘ordinary’ people (cf. Sandywell, 2010). The different perspectives from different family members show how each individual is at the centre of his/her own narrative, but each of us is also a part of others’ narratives which exert constraints and tells each life from a different point of view (Macintyre, 2007, pp. 213 - 4); life-worlds overlap in their reach (see 1.5 Case Study on the benefits of family research).
The life stories provided information on roles within the family and community and the social practices underlying them. Conducting multiple interviews within the same ‘system of relevance’ or ‘world within attainable reach’ (Schutz, 1962) shared by family members, friends or neighbours flagged up common local discourses on what it is to be a good (or bad) local citizen and who is ‘us’ and who ‘other’. People, as Bourdieu (1977, p. 19) points out, are not necessarily the best placed to describe their own practices. I did not ask directly if interviewees feel that they belong. However, without being prompted some people expressed feelings of belonging to the place, whether place means home, street or wider community (Hopf, 2004, p. 207). Asking directly may have directed respondents towards a desire to claim belonging when this would not happen otherwise (cf. Savage et al, 2005). In this research belonging is uncovered through a phenomenological approach to the available data.

3.2.5.3 Diaries

Looking at what people do and where they go on a daily basis seemed like a good starting point to access the level of everyday actions I wanted to investigate. These would allow me to understand what people do, and who they meet, in their locality on a daily basis: in essence, to uncover their ‘taskscapes’ – activities, in place, over time. Asking questions on this in an interview might only get at a partial truth – things would be omitted because forgotten or possibly deemed to be too menial. A good way to find out about the necessary details of daily life is through a daily record - a diary. I asked people to write down or record where they went and who they met, over the course of a week; people also took photos of the places they visited. These then formed the basis of a photo-elicitation type interview. In this way the talk revolved around places that are meaningful to the participants rather than generically ‘important’ places in Wigan.

Altogether about half of the interviewees completed a diary. In all ten diaries were completed, six post-diary interviews and one walking tour. As filling out the diary required more commitment than the initial interview about half were completed by the older, retired generation, although I do have two from the ‘parent’ generation, two teenagers and one mid-twenties. I only asked one of a couple to keep a diary in
order to avoid repetition. The take up of diaries was quite high with the majority being returned and most were very detailed. The photos were of varying quality, often the fault of the disposable cameras used, by far the best photos were taken with the respondents’ own digital cameras. What constitutes a picture of a place also varied; after receiving the first set of photos with pictures of people – friends, postman and so on, I was more explicit in my instructions not to include people, particularly children, to avoid issues of confidentiality (see Appendix II). Everyone I requested a second interview with to discuss the diary and photos agreed. This was also an opportunity for me to address any issues from the first interview that I felt required further clarification. In the more relaxed setting of the second interview where we both felt that we knew each other I was able to draw out information from two older divorced women about their divorces which had not been forthcoming at the first interview. At this stage I was taken for a walk around the local park which had played a big part in the life of the interviewee.

Diaries tend to answer the kinds of questions that would otherwise need continuous observation to answer: ‘What do these people do all day? What varieties of activities do they engage in? How many people do they interact with every day? What kinds of relationships obtain between people? What is the typical temporal sequence of events? And so on.’ (Zimmerman & Wieder, 1977, p. 483). Diaries were used to access the minutiae of everyday life which could otherwise be overlooked; the tacit knowledge that is available to members of the community (shared life-world). This was drawn out by asking diarists to record seemingly unimportant details of their lives which can be difficult to access through interviews due to their grounding ‘in taken-for-granted assumptions about the nature of the world’ (Alaszewski, 2006, p. 42). For some respondents a diary may offer more scope to record their daily life than they would feel able to express in an interview (Meth, 2003, p. 200); the diaries collected here included references to meals, doctor’s appointments and other intimate details. The diaries reflect individual experiences or observations, without ‘interference’ by an interviewer who has an intentional or unintentional influence on what is remembered and the way in which it is remembered (Hareven, 1978, p. 142). The build up of entries over time shows the processes through which certain social situations came about for these participants (Zimmerman & Wieder, 1977, pp. 487 - 488).
Instructions on how to complete the diary were written into the front of the notebook which was provided for the purpose (see Appendix II). These were explained at the initial interview. Participants were asked to complete the diary for a week – writing it on a daily basis. Once completed a follow-up ‘de-briefing’ interview needed to take place as soon as possible to ensure it was still fresh in the memory of the participant. Reading and subsequently discussing the diaries provided details of the everyday life of the informants which helped to uncover ‘the structure of relevancies that inform, render sensible and give value to such activities’ (Zimmerman & Wieder, 1977, p. 490). The diaries also gave respondents a chance to air their own views as to ‘the state of the world’ with some containing comments on the demise of local stores, examples of bigotry, and revealing comments on visits to places outside of the local area such as the cars seen in Wilmslow indicating to the diarist the relative wealth of the local people there. Diary keeping can also be insightful for the diarist giving a new perspective on their experiences (Meth, 2003, p. 203), in some cases making them more aware of their friends and acquaintances.

3.2.5.4 Photography

Photographs have been used in several ways here. Photos around the home were used spontaneously by respondents to illustrate their friendships and other aspects of family and local life; pictures of ancestors were often on display as well as children and grandchildren. In some homes more informal collections of snapshots were either gathered together into a large frame, or pinned up informally in the kitchen, which gave another glimpse into the particularities of family life.

The most productive use of pictures here was in asking people to add photographs to their diaries. Questions asked around photographs need to be kept simple and broad such as ‘what does this photo mean to you?’ (Wagner, 1979, p. 91), which allows respondents to formulate their own feelings about a place. Whilst even a broad ranging narrative style interview with few direct questions is dependent upon the researcher to set the initial agenda, self-directed photography places the subject of the subsequent discussion firmly in the hands of the researched (Moore, et al.,
It gives the respondent control, reversing the usual power relations between researcher and researched, and therefore allows the researcher a unique insight into the respondents’ life-worlds. Photos are taken from a point of view in the same way that a biography is narrated from a point of view; ‘objective’ data is not possible within this type of research. Young and Barratt (2001, p. 147) point out the subsequent discussion can often elicit more information than the photograph itself, a benefit which Moore et al also found: ‘[i]t was evident that the photographs enabled participants to clearly articulate their feelings about their local area whilst assigning meanings to specific places, issues, buildings and streets; a powerful tool for a research method.’ (2008, p. 56). I found that family and local stories emerged, peeling back the layers of history behind the building in the picture: Tesco’s reverted to its former incarnation as Central Park and St Wilfred’s Anglican church became ‘our’ (Roman Catholic) church stolen from ‘us’ during the dissolution of the monasteries five hundred years ago. Beginning with the respondents’ pictures allowed for the privileging of local knowledge (Dodman, 2003, p. 293) so that using these as part of a diary of social and spatial interaction helped to elicit what is ‘local’ for these people. I took care not to impose my meanings on the pictures. McDonald’s for example is a specific restaurant when it is part of a photo diary, not a generic one. Whilst in an interview situation the respondent is making a conscious effort to communicate with the interviewer this will not necessarily be the case when taking photographs. A photograph of a familiar place is a snapshot, a reminder of the place, but a photograph of somewhere unfamiliar to the viewer is the whole picture and thus the content of the picture becomes part of a different context. A photograph of the elevation of a building is a two dimensional view to an unfamiliar observer, but to someone who knows the building it is not just three dimensional architecture but it also has an inside, which is probably more important if this is where most time is spent, for example a work place. To the person who spends time inside the building a picture of the outside is merely a generally unobserved portal to their familiar world. In fact one respondent did not recognise her photograph of the church she has been going to for over forty years because she took the photo of the tower to show off the carvings, not something she would normally look at. The participants were asked to rank their photos in order of the places that mean the most to them. Some of the photos, of course, were of places visited only rarely and therefore held little
meaning for the respondent. But the most mundane places such as a local garage had strong levels of attachment for people. This serves to emphasise that the places that people are particularly attached to are not necessarily the ones I would have selected to talk about had I decided on a photo elicitation interview where I provided the pictures.

Used as part of a diary (see above) a disposable camera was offered to each participant, although if they preferred to use their own camera or phone to take pictures this was acceptable, indeed preferable due to the enhanced quality, provided that the photos were emailed to the researcher prior to the follow up interview. A log of the pictures including time and date taken, place, why the picture was taken and any other comments was used to link in to a written form of diary, the format of which is described above. In general this format worked well, although the quality of the photos from the disposable cameras was sometimes poor. This did not pose any issues for the follow up interview, but has caused some photos rather than others to be selected for publication.

3.2.6 Ethical Considerations

There were several ethical issues to take into account in conducting this research. The University of Manchester School of Social Sciences guidelines were followed and approval was given (see Appendix III), based on the methods discussed above. Each participant gave their informed consent to being interviewed and the interview being recorded and transcribed, through signing a consent form. The participants were offered the opportunity to read their transcriptions which two participants (Val and Barbara) chose to do. Where the participants had taken photos they all gave copyright of the photos to me, in writing. In addition, where the anonymity of the participants could be compromised due to the detail of the data used explicit consent was acquired to use some aspects of the data, such as the professions of participants (British Sociological Association, 2002, 35 & 36). In addition to these considerations, due to the nature of the research explicit ethical decisions were made around the participation of multiple members of the same
family, the use of visual data and the sensitive nature of some of the data collected. These issues are discussed in more detail below.

3.2.6.1 Family Participation

As discussed in 3.1.6 What is the significance of the family for Community and Belonging? Why base the research around families? above, families were chosen as the basis for this research because they are, usually, where cultural norms and practices of belonging are first instilled in the next generation. However, researching families can bring its own set of ethical dilemmas (Gabb, 2010). Some of these may be related to research involving children. Concern for the welfare of their children, in particular, was given as a reason why the adult children of one of the participants would not take part in the research. However, partly for these reasons, partly because I felt their testimony would be less informative, I did not intend to interview any children under sixteen.

Family research also presents ethical issues around preserving the anonymity of the participants (Gabb, 2010, p. 14). In many of my interviews more than one family member was present. It is possible that this then restricted what each person was prepared to say but it also meant that what was said was not intended to be entirely between the respondent and the researcher. In telling a personal story the aim is often to present a happy and successful self (Hollway & Jefferson, 2000, p. 175) and where the research is family based this includes presenting a happy and successful family story. This was particularly evident where the subject of divorce was skirted around in each of the cases where a participant had been divorced. However, as many of the participants were interviewed twice, the second time following the completion of the photo diary, it was possible to ask further questions on this topic and the respondents were more forthcoming on this occasion. This was probably largely to do with greater familiarity between researcher and researched, but in Val’s case her husband, who had been present at the initial interview, was not a part of the post-diary interview, perhaps making it easier for her to talk about her first husband. However none of this more sensitive data has been used as it is not pertinent to the discussions in the data chapters. By focussing on the relationships between family, wider community and place, rather than intra-familial relationships, the research generally avoided issues that can affect family research.
3.2.6.2 Photographs

The photographs used here were taken by the participants as part of their photo diaries with copyright explicitly given to me prior to their publication (Pink, 2001, p. 136). Using photographs in social research presents its own set of ethical issues (Tinkler, f/c Feb 2013, pp. 195 - 208). Issues involving privacy have been avoided by asking participants to restrict their photographs to places, rather than people (see Appendix II). The rider ‘Please avoid taking photos of family or friends for confidentiality reasons’ was added after the first set of photos contained pictures of family and friends which have not been published. Where the photos taken by the participants are of specific places with which the family has some relationship such as their own homes, homes of friends, schools and churches, I have largely avoided publishing these pictures in order not to reveal the identity of participants.

In addition to the possibility of photographs being used to identify participants there is also a risk that the way in which the photo is presented in published work is in some way misleading or misinforms (Pink, 2001, p. 135; Tinkler, f/c Feb 2013, p. 205). I have tried to treat the photos as simple representations of places which the participant then either wrote about in their accompanying diary or, more often, spoke about at the post-diary interview. I have not interpreted the photograph from a personal viewpoint in order to keep the data ‘clean’. I have also avoided commenting on the photos or analysing them as they are intended to act simply as representations of places in lieu of visiting the places themselves during the course of the interview process.

3.2.6.3 Sensitive Data

As mentioned above, it was not anticipated that the research would cover sensitive topics. However in discussing family history it was possible that ‘family secrets’ (Smart, 2007, pp. 108 - 132) might be revealed. Although I was told of illegitimate births and extra-marital affairs these were not presented as family secrets where they happened to unknown ancestors. However I was privy to information about more recent forebears which may not be common knowledge amongst the wider family. As with data regarding divorce, this was not relevant to the discussions here and therefore the decision not to include it was straightforward. However I did feel a ‘vested interest’ (Gabb, 2010, p. 2) in the participants’ lives and would not have
wanted to interpret any data I was privileged to hear in a less favourable light than it was given.

3.2.7 Did I get the data I wanted/needed?

Together the methods of data collection gave an in-depth and comprehensive view of these families’ daily lives. In general the biographical interviews took one to two hours each and where there was a diary and a follow-up interview the contact with the respondent was extensive. Reading the diaries gave a fascinating insight into daily lives involving not just the respondent but also their family and friends. This particular combination of methods seemed to provide an excellent and relatively unobtrusive way of ‘observing’ people’s everyday activities, in order to engage with the interstitial space where actions and the phenomenal world collide and where, I believe, an active belonging-in-place can be found.

Whilst a relatively small number of people were involved the level of detail goes much deeper than would be achieved in a single, semi-structured interview. All of those individuals whose families did not take part gave me a substantial amount of information about other family members both in the past and in the present. In three cases people shared with me a considerable part of their family history research. Where the family was interviewed biographical data was enhanced giving a more holistic view of the family’s ethos. This melding of different types of information – family history, biographical details, daily life, feelings for local places – gives this study a distinctive focus with a considerable breadth as well as depth of data for each of the families. In contrast to, for example Savage et al (2005) who used semi-structured interviews to investigate belonging, my data, often driven by the participants themselves, examines everyday practices and understandings of the place without pre-formed ideas of what is important to these people. The variety of methods I used, in contrast to the more limited methods used by other recent studies (for example Rogaly & Taylor, 2009), gave a three dimensional view of respondents’ lives. The data collection aimed to dig deep into everyday lives and habits, which, combined with an historical perspective, enabled me to begin to unravel some of the ways in which people come to belong in a place.
In retrospect, I think including more individuals who were prepared to talk about their families, and families who don’t fit the bill of three generations resident in Wigan, could have given a more rounded picture of different kinds of local people. Including perspectives of those who may not feel fully a part of the place could have given a useful ‘outsider’s’ viewpoint. Where I received multiple diaries from one family some of the overlapping data was very interesting, and it would have been useful to have more of these two, or more, sided family diaries. Unfortunately these were not forthcoming. The most useful diaries included far more information than I had actually asked for. I only asked for a minimum of information on where people went, who they met and some idea of what they talked about. This gave a firm basis for the subsequent discussion in the post-diary interview, but where diarists treated the diary like a personal diary, or a report or letter to me (the researcher) far more useful and interesting information was included such as food that was eaten, the weather, and so on.

In trying to access the life-worlds of the participants I feel a huge responsibility to represent them and their views fairly and in good faith. Certain voices came through more strongly than others, some voices seem dominant simply through the amount of data they provided. Joan for example, gave about three hours of recorded conversation at her house over the course of two interviews, plus a walking tour of the park, which was not recorded, and a diary. Inevitably the younger people had shorter life story narratives. Analysing the data, it would have been easy to slip into an objective treatment of the information and therefore of the informants which might have led me to draw different conclusions but would almost certainly have led me to misrepresent some of the participants’ views. However, in taking care to understand the data contextually, it is also possible that I have overlooked information that would strike an outside view as important.

In researching families, rather than individuals, I am assuming that families influence ontological belonging. If, for example, I had interviewed individuals, without a lifelong or family attachment to place, I would not have uncovered the processes which now form the basis of the empirical chapters. My data would have been different. I may not have found any traces of an ontological belonging. A
certain amount of analysis of what might lead to this type of belonging had to take place before the fieldwork described here. Some of this was through previous research I had undertaken for undergraduate and Masters dissertations. These led me to see the family as central to a deep-seated attachment to place. My undergraduate dissertation looked at farming families and it was clear that a rootedness in place was at least partly the result of the passing on of the family farm between generations (Bennett, 2007). This study led to a focus on intergenerational relations and relations to place. The research and the methods used here stem from that earlier research which has strongly influenced this research strategy.

3.2.8 How I conducted the Data Analysis

To begin with (after transcribing the interviews) I wrote one page life stories for each interviewee, to enable me to more easily see their lives in chronological order. I then looked at these in terms of places, people and critical moments to try to unpick how different lives are structured by these things through space and over time. After putting this data into Nvivo, which enabled me to highlight certain themes, these were put into ‘trees’ according to their relationship to the various theoretical aspects around belonging that were previously identified and to the research questions. I could then ensure that I had sufficient data available to answer my research questions. The diaries were looked at in terms of the types of places visited and the many social encounters each respondent had over the course of the week. Some of these were mapped out pictorially to illustrate the density of the web of connections. Diary data and themes were also put into Nvivo, along with the relevant photos, where applicable.

I then revisited the transcripts to undertake a narrative analysis – how people tell their stories and present themselves. This brought out further themes and also some similarities and differences between respondents, for example where their family history has been thoroughly researched this is often strongly related to their own life themes. It was also interesting to notice those participants who had obviously thought through what I was looking for before meeting me, they had some interesting perspectives on their own lives and those of others similar to them.
Keith, who is not a Wiganer but is married to one, gave a very clear ‘outsider’s’ view of the community he lives in. This outside view, the ‘imagined community’ and how ‘insiders’ incorporate it into their stories forms the basis of the first empirical chapter. The daily contacts with friends, family and known others saturates the diaries, it is overwhelming, whilst also being a key theme of the initial interviews. These worlds of reach, intersubjectivity conducted through common taskscapes, forms the basis of the second empirical chapter together with embodied marks of belonging such as accent and family history. My analysis then looked at what kinds of places recurrent across the different families and generations – schools (repeated over generations), churches (a surprising number of respondents are church-goers), workplaces, shops and cafes. Some of these places are there for their evocation of other things/people/times and memorable for that either as an individual or family memory or a regional one such as the converted mill buildings. Mundane places (a garage, for example) are at least as important as the grander ones. Material connections to place don’t come through particularly strongly in the biographical interviews or even directly in the written diaries but they were the main subject of the post-diary interviews. Using the photos taken by participants of places they had visited I asked what particular places meant to them knowing that the places in the photos are a part of their lives. Particular places and how people negotiate ways of belonging through them forms the basis of the final data chapter.

Some themes that stood out were the different ways that people conceptualise and describe the places they live – their ‘imaginary’ views of the place; how people such as family past and present, neighbours and ‘others’ help to define ‘us’ and, often implicitly, ‘them’ and relationships to each other and places; how people connect to particular places in a material sense and connect to their own past and other pasts and futures through the inalienable traces left in the materiality of place.

3.3 Conclusion

In the first part of this chapter I outlined why I chose to conduct the research in this particular way and how this has helped to address the questions raised in the previous chapter. The second part of this chapter looked at how my research
methods operationalised these strategic objectives. I am approaching belonging to place not from what people say, or think, but from how they engage with the place on a daily basis. Embracing a phenomenological approach enables my research to take a ‘sideways’ look at belonging-in-place through what people do in their everyday lives. Through ‘entering into’ the life-worlds of the participants (via the diaries) I can take their perspective whilst remaining detached enough to make observations. Phenomenology is an embodied and material approach to understanding the world. Merleau-Ponty and Heidegger both take this stance towards the world: accepting that human interaction with places, buildings, ‘things’ is taken-for-granted, *zuhanden*, but that *zuhanden*-ness is cultural, learnt behaviour. A phenomenological approach takes nothing for granted: the life-world is taken apart so that we can understand how it fits together. Schutz takes a less obviously material approach focusing on the intersubjective nature of social life but his concept of ‘worlds of reach’ is based upon a model of distance which only makes sense from the starting point of the embodied subject herself (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p. 247). This necessarily embodied and emplaced material life-world is the starting point for developing an identity, including a relationship with place.

My focus on a three dimensional belonging comprising embodied attachments through historical, material/geographical and social connections requires data on all these aspects. Narrative and historical data can be accessed through interviews but the kinds of social connections to other people of the place and feelings of attachment to the place itself are possibly more difficult to express in an interview. Using a variety of methods is, in any case, likely to provide a more rounded picture of people’s lives. Photo and written diaries provide a more direct window into different life-worlds than an interview. Diaries written on a daily basis can provide a level of detail of social encounters that would be likely to be overlooked in an interview situation; the photos (themselves material) are a starting point for an understanding of how places are used and incorporated into daily lives. Using pictures of places enables both researcher and researched to share a vision of the place being discussed, although this is a particular viewpoint it allows for a common starting point for discussion.
The family is central to my research strategy. As well as being used in other sociological work it is also a staple of anthropological work which I am drawing on extensively (Ingold, 2000). Family narratives have the potential to cover multiple generations enabling me to follow lines of connection to places, or inalienable traces, over multiple lifetimes giving a depth to the historical connections of a three dimensional belonging. Narratives, both individual and family ones, are told by someone and therefore give the embodied viewpoint required by a phenomenological approach. Each of the research participants and families has a story to tell which can provide more information on how these people who have chosen to remain in their place of birth make those choices and the impact it has on their lives.

The multi-dimensional framework of the taskscape (landscape, people and activities over time) provides a way of dissecting the different types of data into digestible chunks for analysis whilst still retaining its holistic nature. This will become clear in the empirical chapters, which address each of these themes in turn. The brief description here of Wigan and pen portraits of the participants have set the stage. The spoken and written data, together with the pictures present a rounded portrait of these people’s lives in Wigan showing how living local lives demonstrates an active belonging in place. Place, as an integral element of social life, gathers these people/families/life-worlds through time.

All research is, to some extent, confined through the methods used. In choosing to focus on in-depth information on a small number of people I have, necessarily, restricted the scope of the research in some ways. This is qualitative data, the results cannot be taken to apply more widely than these particular people, living in this particular place at this time. This qualification does not, however, detract from the findings which are detailed over the following three chapters.

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4 Imagining ‘Us’: the role of the outside, inside

4.1 Introduction

Miller (2002, p. 217) refers to three ways in which the idea of belonging is commonly understood: to refer to social connections, to historical connections and to geographical connections. In this chapter the focus is on the way in which belonging refers to historical connections. Although it is neither possible nor desirable to completely separate out these different aspects of belonging, or of place itself, it is necessary to alter the focus across the empirical chapters in order to analyse the different dimensions. The next chapter, Worlds within Reach, explores the social connections between people in a place and the final data chapter, Material Places, focuses on the geography of the place, whilst also drawing together all three elements. The focus of each chapter can be seen as giving an understanding of belonging at a deeper level, the cumulative effect being one of unpeeling the layers of belonging-in-place to reach the core.

This chapter introduces the idea of being (and belonging) in a place, or more specifically a milieu, a social place which has a life story (history) just as the social actors inhabiting it do. This gives rise to four different themes, which will reappear in the subsequent chapters. Firstly, in a way similar to Anderson’s (2006) ‘imagined communities’, place is examined in terms of a social construction or imaginary based around particular views of history. The history of the place is seen in the present both in the imaginary and also through the continuing material presence of, for example, old mill buildings and the canal. These ‘reminders’ of the industrial past introduce the second theme of a materiality which helps to (re)create the imagined place in the present. Both of these themes arise in the data through the telling of stories. Through linking their biographies, their own stories, to the stories of the place, the chapter explores how belonging is performed by individuals and families, giving rise to the third theme of narrative and the part it plays in creating belonging. The fourth and final theme is that of time or temporality, which acts as
substratum to each of the preceding themes: time is the underpinning aspect of imagined places and material ones; narratives take place over time.

According to Anderson (2006, p. 6) all non-face-to-face communities are imagined. An imagined community is constituted through symbols such as monuments and memories, language, media and other forms of communication. This description of the local ‘life-world’ derives from a shared stock of knowledge creating ‘us’ as a ‘we’ group (Schutz, 1962, p. 32). A local (or national) ‘community’ creates an identity to present to those beyond the borders, the ‘outside’ world. This identity is based on mediated understandings of how they ought to appear, largely premised on a particular understanding of history. There is an internal understanding of the history of the place which is likely to be subsumed as ‘social memory’ connecting past to present (Fentress & Wickham, 1992, p. 25); combined with an external view deduced from regional and national media (Shields, 1991, pp. 231 - 45) (which may possibly be considered to carry more weight) which together construct the place (here, Wigan) in the imaginary of those who live there.

A group identity is created through the imaginary, other intangible qualities of a place which reflect back onto its people (‘attractive’, ‘ugly’) and embodied understandings (as part of the stock of knowledge). There may be, however, discrepancies between the imagined place and what is seen/experienced in the phenomenological world (Pahl, 2005, p. 625). This bifurcation between the cognitive or discursive understanding of Wigan and the felt, material presence of the place is indicative of some of the problems inherent in understanding ‘place’ in a holistic, non-reductionist, manner (Gieryn, 2000, p. 466). A multi-dimensional understanding, such as is being put forward in this thesis, is necessary to a comprehensive investigation of place as a mediator of social life and thus a foundation of belonging. Place is often seen as passive, a backdrop to social life (Gieryn, 2000, p. 466) and it is depicted this way in the standard histories of this place, as described below. However, the empirical data also shows how the material features of the place, are additional actants helping to make its history (Cloke & Jones, 2001, p. 652). The two themes of imagined and material place are impossible to untangle fully when, as in this research, people are discussing the imaginary from the phenomenological position of being in the place.
It was through the narratives of individual and family biographies that the dual themes of imagined and material places arose, positioning narrative as the third theme of this chapter. Biographies, of both individual lives and family histories, are bound up with stories of the place and the shaping of identities, of the place and the people, a theme looked at in more detail in Chapter 5 *Worlds Within Reach*. Wider global histories impact through the industrial revolution, the connections of the cotton trade from America to India via Lancashire; and the depression years of the 1930s. The research data indicates that there are at least two (hi)stories of Wigan. One that has been found in ‘official’ documents, and spills over into some negative views of the place, which could be called the ‘Orwellian’ view, based on George Orwell’s ([1937] 1986) writing during the depressed years of the 1930s; and a more positive one based on a successful late Victorian period. The first, which could be called the ‘official’ history as it is found in some depictions in the local and national media (Shields, 1991, pp. 231 - 43), takes the line that Wigan bears the scars of heavy industry which has left the place ugly, run down and out of touch with modern society. Now that industry has largely gone there are no suitable jobs for the kinds of people who live here, leading to either a ‘get out while you can’ mentality (depicted by Ian, 62) or a covering up or deliberate forgetting of the (recent) past in order to move on and become ‘modern’ (late or ‘post-modern’) which is evident in some documents. The alternative history, which could be called the Victorian ‘boom town’ view, incorporated into the narratives of Antony (25), Val (65), Joan (66) and others is that Wigan (‘we’) has an industrial past to be proud of; the remnants of this in terms of Victorian red brick buildings and other physical features are a part of the local landscape, familiar and often beautiful. There are plenty of ‘nice’ places to go in and around Wigan (the park, Pennington Flash, Haigh Hall) and living here is (at least) satisfactory so there is no need to go anywhere else. These different views of the place, different imaginaries based on different historical perspectives and different symbolism suggest taking a cultural approach to the narratives (Summerfield, 2004).

Throughout this chapter the temporal nature of belonging becomes clear. The understanding of temporality employed in this analysis is derived from that of Merleau-Ponty (1962, pp. 410 - 433). Time is posited as a relation between things
or between subjectivities and things (p. 411). History is then not time itself but
recorded time (p. 415). Time itself abides within things; past present and future
being inseparable. A ‘taskscape’ of belonging, as Ingold (2000, pp. 198 - 201)
shows, is a process, not an object, and therefore continues through/within time. It
gathers the inseparable dimensions of time within it: past, present and future
possibilities are contained within the ongoing ‘Wigan-ness’ of Wigan (Cloke &
Jones, 2001, p. 658). Over time (a different scale of time from a human lifetime)
buildings decay and change use but remain, ultimately, ‘the same’ building,
containing past, present and future within itself. The ‘natural world’ (one not fully
controlled by human endeavour) is always present showing how places act and
react as a part of society allowing the independent life of the place and the temporal
nature of changes to become apparent (Cloke & Jones, 2001, p. 658). In a narrative,
dimensions of time are separated out in order for a coherent story to be told.
National history and ascribed identities of the dirty, scarred industrial north create
the imagined/media led constructions of Wigan but there is an underlying cohesion
in the changing place. The imagined Wigan creates an historic place in the present;
but the materiality of the place brings a dynamism to the place, in an abiding
‘present’ which contains the past and potential future. History, therefore, is not past
as in ‘over’ but past as in ‘passed’ or gone by, life has superseded it but, just as
moving through a landscape doesn’t mean that what we can’t see has disappeared,
the past is still there and a part of the world as it is ‘now’. The passing on of
identities and places from previous and to subsequent generations which is the
focus of Chapter 6 Material Places begins to be felt in the changes to mill
buildings, the canalside and the centre of Leigh.

The argument put forward in this chapter is that firstly, the history as well as the
geography of a place affects and helps to create its identity (Massey, 1995), and
following on from that the identity of a place affects and helps to create the
identities of the people in (and from) that place. Places, in all their parts, buildings,
roads and so on, are not objects set over against the human habitus but are ‘things’
(Heidegger, 1975; Ingold, 2010). A ‘thing’, as opposed to an object, is an integral
part of human life, a part of the habitus, available for use with rules which are
implicitly understood, a part of the shared, intersubjective, local ‘stock of
knowledge’ (Schutz, 1962, pp. 38 - 9). The ‘taskscape’ is Ingold’s (2000, p. 195)
concept of an integrated landscape, temporality and everyday life. ‘Things’ are tools which people make use of in their performance of daily life (Ingold, 2000, pp. 194 - 5) and therefore are a part of the taskscape. In this way, places are a part of the ‘world in common’, the shared life-world (Schutz & Luckmann, 1974, p. 5). The life histories of places resemble, and walk alongside, those of the people who inhabit them (Ingold, 2010), a theme explored from the point of view of the present in the next chapter. Places can be seen as having their own ‘memories’ or telling their own history or biography (Massey, 1995) through both natural and human remnants in the landscape (Stewart, 1996, p. 148). These landscapes in the present are entangled with the stories of the people who live /have lived there through time (Blokland, 2001; Degnen, 2005; Massey, 2000).

The data used in this chapter were derived from the different methods employed. From visiting different sites during my fieldwork and through the use of photos in particular, visual understandings of the place are brought to the fore. An imagined place is primarily visual – shared understandings of iconic places such as London or New York can be introduced simply through outlines of their skylines, creating the ‘external’ imaginary discussed below by Rob (37). Accessing visual and temporal data is difficult in social science research, particularly where longitudinal research is not practical. Here the use of photos taken by the respondents of the places that feature in their lives allows access to a perceptual understanding of the surroundings. The photos were used in post-diary interviews to explore understandings of the places visited and in some instances these reflected differing imaginaries. Pictures of old buildings helped to engage respondents with a sense of the temporality of the places concerned. This is enhanced here through the connections of multiple generations of a family within the same locality connecting present identities to those in the past, Antony’s (25) narrative account providing the best example. The stories that people tell are also embedded within their own biographies, the subject of the initial interview. Through allowing the respondents to narrate their stories freely, without set interview questions creating a pre-formed view of how ‘Wigan’ might be socially constructed in their intersubjective world, different imagined pictures of Wigan were drawn. These were followed through in the post-diary interviews and through a careful reading of the diaries, showing, in particular, how Val (65) engages with the historical materiality of her place. A
photo, of course, captures a fixed moment in time. Contemplating change from this perspective – before and after images – can be disconcerting. In daily life, for example, Linda (61) walks by the canal as part of her everyday life but standing outside and reflecting on it makes change, and the taskscape itself, visible (Ingold, 2000, p. 204).

In this chapter I start to unpeel the layers of what constitutes ‘belonging’ for many people. I have earlier (see Chapter 2 Doing Belonging) described an ontological belonging as arising from ‘who one is’, understood as who one is seen to be by others and who one sees oneself to be through one’s past. These are the outer layers of an ontological belonging; the following two chapters delve deeper into the ‘peoplescape’ linking people and place and then the material place imbued with the history examined here. A temporal thread moving from past to present to future also passes through the three chapters. This chapter begins with the outermost layer by looking at how these people understand themselves to be perceived from the outside: what is the imagined community of Wigan? This discursive understanding brings a wider, national, stock of knowledge into play and begins to open a space for an intersubjective belonging explored more fully in the following chapter. Having discussed how Wigan is imagined by those with some power (both national and local media) I then move deeper into the phenomenological world of these people to look at how the group of people taking part in this research create their view of themselves through incorporating into their own stories either the somewhat negative ‘Orwellian’ history of the place or secondly the Victorian ‘boom town’ view. Belonging is done here through having an understanding of an identity of the place, and aligning one’s own identity with that. These different interpretations of the history of the place allow us to see the way in which this kind of identity creation is variable rather than fixed. Those who belong to the place do so on their own terms although where stories are event driven, rather than a part of a movement within time, this can be problematic. Although there are examples used from people based in both Wigan itself and Leigh, which falls within the Metropolitan Borough of Wigan whilst retaining its own identity, they share many features including old mill buildings, mine works and flashes (lakes formed by mining subsidence) reformed into places of leisure/countryside. Wigan, I was told, can be seen as a ‘collection of villages’, each with its own sense of identity (and
distinctive accents – see 5.2 Embodied Belonging) as well as sharing in the overall ‘Wigan’ identity. Leigh, according to Rob (37), does not associate itself closely enough with Wigan to feel tainted by Orwell’s depiction in The Road to Wigan Pier, but is clearly a part of the shared place myth of the North of England (Shields, 1991, pp. 207-8).

The chapter moves from the outermost layer of Wigan as perceived from the outside to the next layer of Wigan as seen from within. I start by looking at Wigan as a community imagined from the outside, moving on to explore the two historical versions of Wigan apparent in the data: firstly the ‘Orwellian’ view based on the depression of the 1930s and then the ‘Victorian’ view of Wigan as a successful centre of the Industrial Revolution. Imagined and material themes are entangled in each of these historical views. The first section looks at how Wigan can be seen as an imagined community through stories told by outsiders and insiders. This shows how outside views of the identity of the place, particularly those promulgated by the media in its various forms, impacts on the identities of people in place.

4.2 Wigan as Imagined Community

Anderson’s Imagined Communities, first published in 1983, describes the development of nation states (the ‘communities’ of the title) as based on the development of media, initially through the printing press. Prior to the development of the printing press there was little sense of a national identity. Others have since taken on board this idea with Pahl (2005) writing of ‘communities in the mind’ and Savage et al (2005) seeing belonging as ‘socially constructed’ (p. 12) and places as ‘visions of living’ (p. 207). The concept of an ‘imagined community’ is based on the use of symbols to replace, to some extent, face-to-face relations (Anderson, 2006, p. 26). In this way, the understanding that other, unknown people are acting in similar ways to oneself, at a similar time, creates a ‘nation’: we read the same newspapers and books, access the same websites and watch the same television programmes. But of course within every nation there are differences in different places, and this also becomes a part of the national story: in England northerners are seen as stereotypically working class, flat cap wearing, manual workers
Shields, 1991, p. 212). As part of the nation, northerners themselves appropriate this image as they have the ability to see themselves as others see them, but they also invert it making the North the creator of the nation’s wealth and the South the place ‘where it was squandered’ (Shields, 1991, p. 212).

Where these imagined, outside views are at odds with what can be seen from inside the place confusion may creep in. This can be construed as the difference between the landscape as it may be understood in common parlance through ‘landscape paintings’ as something static, fixed and framed, and landscape as defined by Tilley:

> landscapes are contested, worked and re-worked by people according to particular individual, social and political circumstances. As such they are always in process, rather than static, being and becoming... landscapes are structures of feeling, palimpsests of past and present, outcomes of social practice...

(Tilley, 2006, pp. 7 - 8)

The external view of a place may be fixed within a frame but internally the ‘landscape’ is an ‘inherently unstable’ ‘spatialisation’ (Shields, 1991, p. 65), ‘always in process’, through time. The imaginary geographic spaces, everyday actions and local identities are brought together but are also continually in flux, making any external view permanently out of date. However, through the imagined community of the nation state ‘internal’ and ‘external’ positions can overlap. The media creates narratives which allow people to understand, or think they understand, how others see ‘their’ place, based on the same, common narratives (Hareven, 1978; Summerfield, 2004).

Rob (37), Val’s son who now lives in London, spoke of Leigh, and Wigan, in terms characteristic of the north/south mythology describing Wigan as ‘a byword for the grim North West’ going on to say ‘I blame George Orwell or rather I should be grateful Leigh was on a branch line’ (Rob’s email). In Rob’s experience the mythology of the grim working class-ness of northern towns leads him to believe that ‘if I chose to live in Leigh my colleagues would think it was odd’ (Rob’s email). This comment, from someone who works in the media, reinforces the kinds of justifications that Savage et al’s (2005, pp. 90 - 1) respondents went through in
choosing places to live. The place becomes an extension of one’s own identity and therefore how one presents oneself to the outside world. Although Rob is happy that Leigh is ‘an important part of who I am’ and has happy memories of the place, its image beyond the town itself means that it does not present a ‘vision of living’ (Savage, et al., 2005, p. 207) that would be acceptable amongst his colleagues. Those who, like Rob, do move into the middle class through attaining a degree may therefore be inclined to stay away, a problem that Ian (62) had also observed:

Well I mentioned a few minutes ago that all these children [of neighbours] had all been to university – how many still live in the Wigan area? One, or two, two, one’s a teacher and one’s an accountant here in Manchester ... All the rest are long gone.

(Ian’s interview)

Ian is speaking of what Fortier refers to as ‘the reification of uprootedness as the paradigmatic figure of the postmodern experience of identity’ (1999, p. 42). These outside images are used by many people with the resources to choose where to live to make that decision and they therefore contribute towards reducing the mix of people in different occupations and income groups within one place (Savage, et al., 2005, p. 12), a point that Rob (37) also noted: ‘[i]t seems to be a feature of the North West that towns that would once have had a mix of people in different occupations and income groups now tend not to’ (Rob’s email). Ian’s approval is implicit; those who are university educated have no place in Wigan – neither of his children still lives in the borough. Ian’s identity is based on a family history of social mobility, through education and enterprise (see 5.8 Family History). This is what he has passed on to his children – he already lives in what he describes as ‘the best part’ of Wigan so his children have had to move elsewhere to do better. In Ian’s view Wigan has nothing to offer these people. Joanne (35) and her sister, however, both have degrees and have remained in Wigan. Their parents, John (61) and his wife, would not have considered moving away from Wigan and this sense of it being an acceptable place to live seems to have been passed on to their daughters. Whilst ‘mobility’ is a key word in much twenty-first century sociology (Brah, 2002; Urry, 2000) it is not necessarily a priority for everyone.
The place myth of the north as being a world stuck in the past (Shields, 1991, p. 232) is attested to by John (61) and by Keith (66) (who do not themselves share these views). John attested to some local people’s antagonism towards those from other cultures in his post-diary interview when he explained that his local post office was taken over by people from Bolton and ... they're Pakistani, I’m not sure, and it was strange er there was one or two people weren’t happy about it and I was a bit upset about that um ‘cos I didn’t realise people were a bit bigoted in that way (John’s post-diary interview)

John was surprised and upset that some of his acquaintances were ‘unhappy’ about the new post office owners. This is the only explicit story of apparent racism in any of the interviews, although it may also be the case that the antagonism is directed towards people ‘from Bolton’ (see 5.7 External Attachments). The very low levels of Asian immigration in Wigan compared to other Lancashire cotton towns, due to the industrial decline already in evidence in Wigan by the 1960s, may have stopped Wigan from opening up to the world at a time when other, broadly similar places, were becoming more culturally diverse (Field notes, 19/1/10), leading to an homogeneous population and associated cultural norms in Wigan. The movement of time varies across the different elements of the taskscape (Ingold, 2000, p. 201). Here change in the people and activities they undertake (Schutz’s ‘stock of knowledge’) seems to be slower than that of the nation as a whole, a parochialism that can be associated with a particularly homogeneous community (Bowles & Gintis, 2002, p. 433).

Keith (66) has lived in Wigan and Leigh for most of his life but despite twenty years of residence in Leigh does not feel qualified to call himself a ‘Leyther’ (person from Leigh) (Keith, Val and Keith’s interview). He still sees himself as an outsider to some extent and was keen to incorporate that viewpoint in his interview. As someone middle class (he is a retired Senior Manager of a large international firm) but living in a deprived area he is involved in various local charities and

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3 Parts of the area are in the most deprived ten percent areas of the country (Wigan and Leigh Community Safety Partnership, 2012)
feels well placed to comment on the ethos of the area. Keith suggests there is a generally old-fashioned misogynistic attitude:

I think a lot of the ills of the Wigan area are to do with gender inequality. I think that, well I mean I sit in meetings with middle class [men] where they can be quite disparaging about women generally and I do think that has been an issue for the levels of violence against women is not a bad indicator for my mind of that problem. (Keith, Val and Keith’s interview)

Women are seen as the moral core of the working class, constantly being read and judged by others and ‘put in their place’ (Skeggs, 2009, p. 37). This, according to Keith, is the attitude taken by some local middle class men perhaps suggesting that working class values are the dominant, pervasive ones in Wigan. It seems that, in effect, class differences are suppressed in favour of a local community identity which here seems to value the putatively working class, and distinctly northern, attitudes of a dominant ‘tough’ masculinity alongside an also strong but overall subservient femininity (Dawson, 1998, pp. 216 - 7). This attitude also came across through the local paper when the Labour Party imposed all women shortlists on both the Wigan and the Ashton-in-Makerfield constituencies. Only fifteen women applied for the Makerfield seat which is one of the safest in the country, and only one of them was a local woman. A spokesperson for the local Labour party ‘explained’ this: ‘[t]here just aren’t that many women ... with the necessary skills...’ (Bean, 2010). These stories show some Wiganers as ‘stuck in the past’; the landscape has not been ‘worked and reworked’ (Tilley, 2006, p. 7) and there is a sense of stasis, seeming to impact on the identity of some of the people as well as the place. At times, the sense of the place myth of Wigan as dirty, northern industrial town seems to overwhelm and subdue attempts to redefine Wigan as ‘quite a nice place’ (Joanne’s interview) rather than ‘a bit rubbish’ (Antony’s interview).

This section has looked at Wigan from the outermost layer. The outside view of Wigan succumbs to the north/south divide Shields (1991, pp. 231 - 43) writes of which has also been incorporated into some insiders’ views of the place, notably Ian’s. For others though, able to see past this mythology, Wigan is ‘just where I
was born and you get used to that’ (Joanne’s interview). How people attach themselves and their families to different understandings of the history of Wigan and how much they are influenced by this outside view is explored in the next section which starts to peel off the skin of the place myth and look at how Wiganers see their world(s), from within.

4.3 How Wiganers see their world: through the eyes of Orwell

A large part of the built environment of Wigan was created during the Industrial Revolution and much of the previous history in terms of buildings, has gone. Many of today’s landscapes are dominated by this industrial past, although this is not always apparent to, or particularly considered by, the people who inhabit them. The Leeds and Liverpool canal was built as a means of transporting goods to and from the port of Liverpool, mills to house looms, winding wheels to lower cages, or lifts, into the mines, even slag heaps had a purpose as the waste from the mines had to go somewhere and flashes, or lakes, came into being as a direct result of mining subsidence. Those who take the ‘Orwellian’ view of history see these as representing the ugliness of industrialisation, which ‘ended’ in poverty in the 1930s and unemployment as mines and mills closed, part of the myth of the ‘grim north’. There is therefore a discrepancy between what Wigan ought to be like (that is, ugly) and how it seems to be from the inside (often quite a pleasant place) which creates conflicts within images of the place.

The way in which we see or relate to a place is always from our position within it as a phenomenal body in a phenomenal place (Casey, 1996, p. 18; Shields, 1991, p. 17). ‘Seeing’ (within which term I would include other methods of understanding our physical environment such as touch and hearing) is not something we do alone, but is part of our intersubjective world, part of the general stock of knowledge, our common sense understanding of the world and will consequently vary according to our worlds of reach (Rose, 1988, p. 161; Schutz & Luckmann, 1974, p. 105). It is also, therefore, cultural, based on the social milieu to which we belong. What we see in a place is partially shaped by our association with that place over time (Blokland, 2001; Gray, 1999; Stewart, 1996). Not only do we see cultural objects
‘things’) in a culturally habitual way (as part of the social milieu), but this is also how we understand nature. Nature and culture merge in ‘the countryside’ which is managed and controlled by people just as much as any overtly built environment (Bender, 2002, p. S106). This natural/cultural environment is changing constantly, either through natural forces such as the weather or seismic shifts in tectonic plates (Massey, 2006, p. 34), or through mankind’s cultural intervention in building and later abandoning dwellings (Tilley, 2006, p. 26). The different temporalities of people, buildings and the geographic environment mean that some aspects of the natural or built environment can come to be seen as permanent features that have always existed. Ingold’s framework of the taskscape takes into account the variations in changes over time (2000, pp. 198 - 201). The taskscape incorporates time as part and parcel of activity, social life. History is understood not as a series of isolated happenings, still frames from a film, rather the film keeps going, carrying life along with it, carrying the past into the future (Ingold, 2000, p. 194). This past then becomes a part of the present life for the current community (Jones, 2010, p. 194).

As part of my fieldwork I visited the Flashes at Poolstock on a Wigan Leisure and Culture Trust walk. My engagement with local people and places was designed to both secure further interviewees and to gain an understanding of the place and its people. A ranger from the Lancashire Wildlife Trust showed the group around. The Flashes are described as a ‘haven for wildlife’ (Lancashire Wildlife Trust, n.d.) and due to specific features of the formerly industrial site have developed unusual habitats which can attract rare creatures including the bittern, a wading bird. A visitor information leaflet produced by the Lancashire Wildlife Trust tells the story of a place that has ‘overcome’ its industrial heritage in order to become a pleasant place for leisure:

The Flashes (or lakes) are a legacy of the town's industrial past and were formed as a result of mining subsidence. Some of the flashes were partially filled with colliery waste and ash from the nearby Westwood Power Station... Ince Moss Colliery closed in 1962 and Westwood Power Station was demolished as recently as 1989. Natural colonisation and large-scale reclamation works have
helped *heal the industrial scars*, turning the area into the amenity it is today.

*(Lancashire Wildlife Trust), my emphasis*

Mining caused the flashes to develop and also brought people to the area, the power station being built as a result of this. This taskscape has undergone a radical shift from people working together in an industrial landscape to people sharing leisure time in another landscape which was created through the activities undertaken in the earlier form of this taskscape – the mining. This site, and several others around Wigan, have not been returned to a previous natural state but have become ‘naturalised’ after having been industrial sites; they are, as are all places, palimpsests. There are not only layers of history but a building of one layer upon another, the new stratum growing out of the previous one and therefore being a natural environment without the need to make claims further back to any previous untouched state. Through the palimpsestual nature of buildings altered over time, and changing features of the landscape (Massey, 2000; 2006) the history of a place, and its people, is told. Here inalienable traces of the collieries and power station in the composition of the soil give rise to particular wildlife habitats; the place has a life of its own which helps to shape the changes in this taskscape (Cloke & Jones, 2001, p. 660; O'Neill & Whatmore, 2000, p. 131). The temporal nature of the taskscape is paramount in this sketch of the flashes. In contrast to Ingold’s use of a painting to illustrate a somewhat static picture of the nature of a taskscape (Ingold, 2000, pp. 201 - 7) here the radical changes wrought by time and activity are materially present – changes in sights, sounds, smells. In walking through the place it is possible to engage a different understanding from one based on readings. The mediated imagined place of the Trust’s literature is trumped in my understanding by the materiality of the place in the flesh.

Positioning the industrial past as having created scars seems to have created a perception of Wigan as ‘a bit rubbish’ (Antony, 25), ‘just where I was born, and you get used to that’ (Joanne, 35) which pervaded many of the interviews. Whilst there were many positive views of the place in the present, there was an implicit understanding that Wigan could not be beautiful or attractive in an overarching way. For some of the interviewees there were disjunctures in their positive perception of Wigan as a place to live for themselves and the apologetic way in
which they thought it ought to be presented to an outsider (Antony (25), Linda (61), Ian (62)). This inevitably gives rise to a dis-ease with the place, a feeling of slight discomfort when facing outwards. Most people, of course, do not generally reflect upon the place where they live, particularly if this is a long term relationship to the place (Savage, 2008, p. 156). Where the interviewer is an outsider, the residents’ awareness of the image others have of ‘their’ place, in the North of England probably shapes the conversation (Shields, 1991, p. 212).

These powerful images of Wigan having suffered from the industrial revolution meant that Linda (61) had difficulty in equating her idea of the canal, which is a part of industrial Wigan and therefore, as a ‘natural’ setting, could not be beautiful in her understanding of these terms, with the reality of it:

There’s quite a lot of wild life down there, we saw herons and different birds and things, it was lovely. It’s a lovely walk, I love walking along there, it just makes you feel as though you’re out in the countryside, doesn’t it? ... and in fact where Wigan Pier is, it was quite attractive round there and we were talking to, there was this man on the barge and he came from Edinburgh ... but he was going to, he was going to stay at the top of Wigan for two nights [laughs as if with incredulity at the idea], I don’t know why but he actually said how beautiful it was coming
through Appley Bridge and Parbold and it is, it’s stunning countryside as you walk along the canal there, it’s absolutely beautiful.

(Linda’s post-diary interview)

Linda’s contradictory speech (‘I don’t know why’ and then ‘it is, it’s stunning’) indicates her confusion as to the validity of the ‘natural’ environment, growing out of the industrial one. It seems to be difficult for her to reconcile the attractiveness of the countryside and the canal (Figure 1) with the idea of it being a key part of the industrialisation of Wigan. There is a general perception that Wigan’s industrial past has permanently spoilt the environment, rather than seeing the story as a whole whereby the past has made Wigan the place it is today, that is, taking a teleological view of history (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p. 413). There is, as Massey puts it ‘a felt dislocation between the past and the present of a place.’ (1995, p. 182), rather than an understanding of the inherently palimpsestual nature of all lived environments. Wigan’s industrial past is carried into the present through the continuing presence of the canal but this waterway also has its own temporal rhythms and life-cycles, separate from those of human development (Ingold, 2000, p. 204). Linda is unable to incorporate the materiality of what she sees with her cultural knowledge, incorporated from childhood, that Wigan should be ugly, dirty and surrounded by slagheaps; she struggles to make these conflicting stories fit together (Summerfield, 2004, p. 67). This confusion leads to the bifurcation between her local phenomenological material world and the intersubjective cognitive, abstract one of imagined places (Smith, 1987, pp. 84 - 5). It is from accessing Linda’s story through both the verbal, cognitive method of the interview and the visual perception of the place in the photo which brings into focus memories of her walk, that this division between the different ‘worlds’ – concrete and abstract – becomes apparent. In ‘talking about’ Wigan, Linda understands that, culturally, she should see it as post-industrial and ugly; but the photo re-engages her bodily perceptions which remind her that, in fact, ‘it’s stunning’.

The still dominant context of the narrative of northern industrial ugliness overwhelms what Linda actually sees. As Summerfield (2004, pp. 92 - 3) explains, many people meld their own personal narratives into more widely known stories in order to make them understandable. Here the standard narrative of the grimy,
industrial north is the background for personal stories (Shields, 1991, p. 212). As Massey says, ‘[t]he identity of places is very much bound up with the histories which are told of them, how those histories are told, and which history turns out to be dominant.’ (1995, p. 186) (original emphasis). To fixate on one era as ‘the true identity’ of a place is not unusual, as Massey (1995) found in the Wye Valley and London’s Docklands, and Patrick Wright (1985, pp. 217 - 20) found in Stoke Newington. It is, however, a result of seeing history as a series of events at points in the past, rather than as a continual unfolding of an ongoing life which carries the past into the future (Ingold, 2000, p. 194). Identity creation is an on-going process therefore identities based on a moment in history are inevitably incomplete as there is no continuation into the future.

Not all the respondents see the industrial heritage in a negative light. Some respondents focussed on an image of a successful Wigan during the Industrial Revolution. The next section examines two of these views – those of Antony (25) and Val (65). Antony’s history of Wigan is enmeshed with his family history and the places where his forebears lived and worked. Val, in contrast, takes a more presentist approach being ultimately concerned with the continuation of the past, in terms of buildings, into the present. Val in particular has a more positive, forward-looking view of the place.

4.4 How Wiganers see their world: through the eyes of Victorian Britain

Antony (25) generally fights to preserve Wigan’s industrial heritage. He accepts that mills are no longer going to be used for their original purpose but wants to preserve the appearance of a familiar landscape with a mill chimney at a particular point in the past with which he feels a personal connection through his grandfather and great-grandfather:
I’m bothered because every time I wake up I look out of my window and look at that, I’m fond of it, it’s a very nice viewpoint.

(Antony’s interview)

Antony tends towards an essentialist notion of the place based only upon a specific time in its history (Massey, 1995, p. 185; Anderson, 2006). Within a taskscape the elements of people, activity and landscape all incorporate different temporalities. The building of the mill (Figure 2) has a life which has extended beyond that of its original use and the activities of the original mill workers (the mill now houses small business units). Antony appears to want to arrest the temporal nature of this taskscape at a point in the past. The Victorian buildings which he wishes to preserve, and which are frequently the subject of preservation orders (Paul Butler Associates, 2007), often replaced the older Tudor buildings of which only three remain in Wigan (Heritage Works, n.d.).

Antony tells the story of Eckersley’s Mill where his grandfather and great-grandfather worked, as much from the position of Mr Eckersley as from that of his ancestors (see 5.8 Family History). Whilst he has researched his own family history he has also researched the Eckersley family finding that ‘he was mayor of Wigan
on six different occasions, absolutely incredible person, he orchestrated the mills that you see today and he built all that up, basically an empire, he’s widely regarded as the greatest Wiganer of all time’ (Antony’s interview). Antony’s world of restorable reach stretches back to a particular point allowing Antony to look back to Mr Eckersley as the archetypal ‘Wiganer’ bringing prosperity to the town (Schutz, 1962, pp. 224 - 5). Unlike his views of the current councillors and planners, Antony sees Mr Eckersley as a wholly positive influence on Wigan. Although Antony is very much a local, this way of selecting a particular view of the past concurs with those found by Massey (1995) in incomers to the Wye Valley who opposed any increased tourism and by Wright (1985, pp. 217 - 20) in Stoke Newington where incomers wanted to keep places at a particular point in history. This need not be seen as a nostalgic clinging to the past but as an attachment of an identity in the present to a suitable identity from the past. Antony’s identity as respectable working class is based on his grandfather and great-grandfather, skipping his father’s generation (see 5.8 Family History). Evoking nostalgic narratives of the past enables Antony to create a fixed identity in the present, in a similar way to Massey’s (1995) and Wright’s (1985, p. 218) ‘elective belongers’ (Savage, 2008, p. 161). This version of the narrative of Wigan’s industrial past has been disrupted, broken off, somewhere in the late nineteenth century, what went before, the town’s previous dominance as one of four towns in Lancashire with royal charters, and what came after, the depression and poverty of the inter-war years and the nationalisation of the mines, conveniently forgotten by those telling the story; thus ‘our’ history, the story of where ‘we’ came from, is incomplete (Misztal, 2003, p. 4; Warnock, 1987, p. 55), leading to an ambivalent relationship to place. There are similarities between Antony’s more positive view of the industrial past and Linda’s one of Wigan as necessarily ugly: both are fixed at particular, although different, points in the past.

Nostalgic stories of a better past can be seen as a particular genre of oral history narrative. In using this particular genre for their narratives respondents are, at least partly, responding to what their understanding of my research question is (Chamberlain & Thompson, 1998, p. 10). Another example of a nostalgic view of a better past cropped up in Linda’s family interview. Kate (34) began to ask her grandmother questions about the past talking about the ‘pot fair’ that used to come
to town annually, where you could buy ‘black peas’. Ethel (85) declared ‘No it’s not half as nice in Wigan now as in olden days’ (Ethel, Linda’s family interview). Nostalgia can serve a purpose in defining ‘us’ as, in effect, descended from a moral and respectable past (Bagnall, 2003, p. 93); looking back together gives a shared history (Blokland, 2001, p. 280) and can therefore create a ‘community’ (in the sense of a Schutzian ‘we’ relation) in the present (Rose, 1988, p. 167). Kate was using the occasion of the interview to connect with her grandmother in sharing memories and creating a ‘we’ relation through this restorable past. This could be seen as a kind of boundary work creating the family as real Wiganers as opposed to me, the interviewer, an ignorant (I didn’t know what ‘black peas’ were) outsider. This example also illustrates the dynamic of the family interview. The topic was introduced by Kate who used the occasion as an opportunity to get to know more about her grandmother’s past and took over the role of interviewer, to some extent. The effect of this was to push my presence into the background and thus allow the family to create themselves as those with the more knowledgeable status, subverting the traditional interviewer/interviewee dynamic and allowing me access to more personal data.

Val (65) also has a positive view of the industrial past but this is brought into the present rather than being fixed in the past. Valerie speaks in different ways about the industrial environment she inhabits, whilst overall being much more open to its

Figure 5: Bradshawgate, Leigh
possibilities than in the previous examples. Val freely admits that the centre of Leigh ‘isn’t beautiful’ when seen in a photograph, much of it having been rebuilt during her lifetime, particularly in the 1960s and 1970s, but she also attests to the difficulties of properly observing a familiar space when she says ‘but you don’t see it really’ (Val’s post-diary interview). It’s ‘the people’ - who are discussed fully in Chapter 5 Worlds within Reach - who make Leigh an acceptable place to live in its current twentieth century incarnation. There are, however, traces of a wealthier Victorian past in the redbrick Victorian building, the former Co-operative department store, on the left of the picture (Figure 3). This attests to Leigh’s successful industrial past, of which Val seems to be only vaguely aware despite her parents having worked for the Co-operative movement (Bennett, 2011, pp. 9 - 10).

Many of the old mills, mostly with chimneys removed as they require a lot of upkeep, are reused as spaces for leisure and consumption.

‘Oh and this is a wonderful building as well ... They really have done a superb job, ‘cos it’s a huge space being a mill ... there’s this big wide corridor and then it’s all divided off into these big areas, I think they sell kitchens somewhere, there’s a big furniture shop in there
somewhere, so you know, they are trying to utilise these buildings, ‘cos I mean they’re quite part of our skyline, as you’re coming along the Lancs from Manchester there’s always been a row I find really beautiful, there’s a lot less than there used to be.’

(Valerie’s post-diary interview)

Reusing these buildings is another organic layer of their ongoing history. As an actant in the story of the place the building’s presence continues to attest to other lives and times (Jackson, 1993, p. 340; Latour, 2005). Whilst there will be, for many of the users of the ‘huge space’, no real concept of its former incarnation, for some there is. Val may tell her granddaughters what this building was originally, providing a link between its past and future. Val is able to find beauty in these physical remnants of an industrial past without the weight of cultural contamination that Linda (61) displays (Summerfield, 2004, p. 93). Here again, the use of photographs both privileges a visual perspective and gave us something material to pore over together, as this extract from the post-diary interview shows:

Val: It’s lovely, yeah. Right this is the door where you go in here

Me: Where it says ‘EXIT’

Val: Well, that’s for cars you see, the exit for cars and there’s a lift which is an industrial lift, so it requires a great deal of welly to open it...And last week I went on the Tuesday and it wasn’t working so I had to get up all these stairs.

(Val’s post-diary interview)

The sense of the physical space comes through in Val’s description, based on the photo (Figure 4). I can also see the exterior of the building, the car park and the orange door. Val’s description of the industrial lift needing ‘a great deal of welly’ gives a sense of the formerly industrial nature of the building but also brings me into the building with her. The photo allows us to take this phenomenological-type view of the building, and for Val to simply describe it as she experiences it when she visits.

Val’s acceptance of her environment described in different places as both ‘not beautiful’ and ‘beautiful’ illustrates her unspoken approval of the place she has
lived almost all her life. One may quibble over her subjective positioning of what is and isn’t beautiful but the story Val tells is of a place where she feels completely at home which came through in her talk of ‘the people’ of Leigh giving it a ‘sense of community’ – a theme expanded upon in Chapter 5 Worlds within Reach. Her implicit understanding of the continuation of the mill’s history as well as that of the centre of Leigh, shows how she brings the past into her present, in a continuous flow of time which enables her to belong unequivocally in the present, without recourse to a nostalgic past.

Val (61) and Antony (25) both use the ‘Victorian’ success story, rather than the Depression era poverty, on which to base their stories. This story invokes a sense of pride in the place and therefore a wish to care for it. Antony is keen to retain the buildings in some form of ‘original’ state whereas Val is happy to see them updated, but both are keen on their preservation, as symbols of a successful past that can be carried into the future. These are both common narrative tropes of either progress or decline (both of which are seen later in talk of the town centre in Chapter 6 Material Places). Both tropes bring the past into the present. To belong ontologically is defined by Miller (2002, p. 219) as having integrity, a moral purpose. In caring for the place Val and Antony are demonstrating integrity and moral purpose: there is a sense in both accounts not only of preservation for themselves but in order to pass on to the next generation (see Chapter 6 Material Places).

Taking an ahistorical view Sean (42) was the one person to express a liking for Wigan without reference to the past in a completely unapologetic way:

Yeah like when I have been to all these places in England and that, I used to say there’s nowhere better than Wigan I really used to think that, you know. I do like Wigan, you know the transport and everything, but the problem’s the work for the future, that’s it.

(Sean’s interview)

For Sean, Wigan is not a post-industrial town just yet as he works locally in heavy industry, so there cannot be a conflict between the external image of the grimy industrial place and the reality; or it may just be that Sean sees no reason to
apologise to me, as an outsider for the state of the town. At the beginning of our interview, Sean questioned me closely on my interest in Wigan so knew that I grew up there. Sean sees the taskscape of Wigan as changing through activity – work is uncertain; he had recently had his hours cut. This in turn is likely to affect the place his children will inherit – they may have to move to find work.

This chapter has looked at Wigan as an ‘imagined community’ – a collection of social constructions of the place appropriating different points in history. The way Wigan is seen by those who live there varies, as does their understanding of the ‘Wigan’ seen from the outside. The empirical work has shown how the history of the place is seen by the respondents in the present both in the imaginary but also through the continuing presence of, for example, old mill buildings and the canal, which are reminders of the industrial past and help to create the imagined place in the present. The chapter has begun to show how belonging is performed by individuals and families through, in some cases, linking their biographies to that of the place: Val (65) describes Leigh, in terms of great familiarity, as an outcome of its largely unspecified history; Antony (25) uses family history to position himself in the present environment; Ian (61) shows how his own story has taken him /his family beyond this particular place. There is not a unified imaginary of ‘Wigan’ shared by these inhabitants. Linda, Val, Antony and Ian all connect their life/family histories to the story of Wigan in different ways. Place identity is not fixed or given.

Some confusion and conflict over what is the acceptable image of Wigan (and therefore, implicitly, of the people who live there) came through in talking about places. Whilst at least two of the families I spoke to (Ian’s and Antony’s) have roots in Wigan going back to the early eighteenth century, the history of the place that lives on as the ‘imagined’ past seems to be stuck either in the second half of the nineteenth century, or in the twentieth century stories of strikes, poverty and later industrial decline and unemployment. These are the two tropes into which the majority of the respondents fitted their stories (Summerfield, 2004). Neither history tells the full story and, importantly, doesn’t explain how the ‘Wigan’ presented in these stories developed. A belonging based solely on a social construction is fragile.
and may have little connection to the place as it is experienced phenomenologically.

4.5 Conclusion

This chapter has focused on the way in which historical connections confer belonging and has begun to unpeel the layers of an ontological belonging. It has shown how history and myth, the story of the place, is understood and used in a variety of ways. The chapter moves from the outermost layer of Wigan as perceived externally to the next layer of Wigan as seen from within. I began by looking at Wigan as a community imagined from the outside, through the views of Rob (37), who has moved out of Wigan, Ian (62), whose children have moved out of Wigan and John (61) and Keith (66) who reflect on the parochialism of the actions of their acquaintances. The external views presented by Rob and Ian confirm the ‘place myth’ of the ‘grim north’ (Shields, 1991, pp. 207 - 8) as an undesirable place to live. John and Keith show how Wigan can be seen in a negative light as parochial, possibly as a result of an overly homogeneous community. I then moved on to explore the two historical versions of Wigan apparent in the data: firstly the ‘Orwellian’ view based on the depression of the 1930s and then the ‘Victorian’ view of Wigan as a successful centre of the Industrial Revolution. The ‘Orwellian’ view is depicted in tourist information as well as Linda’s (61) understanding of her environment. Antony (25) and Val (65) represent the ‘Victorian’ view. Each of these views combines a spatial imaginary with a phenomenological view of the material place. Each narrative works to connect the person to the place, through social constructions, other people and the physical place. Linda’s narrative is the tale of a walk by the canal, Antony’s of his uncovering of his family’s place in Wigan and Val’s of the on-going presence and use of buildings. Each of these stories delineates actions, undertaken through time, within the place: that is, a ‘taskscape’ (Ingold, 2000, pp. 198 - 9).

In looking at how ‘Wigan’ is understood as an imagined community through stories told by outsiders and insiders. I showed how the wider community of the media, Anderson’s (2006) imagined community, impacts on the identities of people in
place. Rob (37), John (61), Ian (62) and Keith (66) illustrate how one aspect of their identity as ‘Wiganers’ is based on a mediated view of an industrial north leading to a cultural understanding of themselves or others around them as ‘behind the times’, parochial, in some respects. This understanding of the outside view of Wigan feeds into the historical narratives employed by Linda (61), Antony (25) and Val (65) to help create their belonging in this place. I have demonstrated how an imagined history has created a Wigan as struggling to overcome its industrial past. This has also been seen to impact on the way Linda is able to discuss her relationship to the place and the way Antony has brought a particular familial identity into the present. Rob has shown the possible effect of this somewhat negative media image on his life choices. The narratives employed here by John, Ian and Keith help to create and bolster this mediated image of Wigan. Whilst these historic episodes, the Industrial Revolution, the Depression, make good stories with (relatively) clear beginnings and endings they do not always connect with the present. At times this leads to an identity perhaps mired in an (imagined) past (Antony) although elsewhere the past is brought alive in the present through its continuing presence in people’s lives (Val). Val’s palimpsestual understanding of the continued presence of the mill buildings brings the past with it into the present. It is through this continuing story that places can be passed on to the future – a theme explored more fully in Chapter 6 Material Places. The material presence of the place, over time, comes into play and acts to disrupt the mediated images. Places do not stand still in time although the media images often fail to keep pace. This discrepancy came through particularly in Linda’s account of the beautiful ‘natural’ environment of the canal. Different elements of a taskscape operate in different temporalities (Ingold, 2000, p. 201), material changes to place often being slower than human ones and thus overlooked in a purely social view of the world (Massey, 2006, p. 34). Bringing history and geography to bear on a social place allows for the inclusion of a broader time-perspective.

The focus of this chapter has been on a social construction, or discursive, view of place based on an understanding of place as a passive recipient of human cultivation. This has been informed through the biographical interview data and through the photos and post-diary interviews where the photos were discussed. These brought in aspects of the place as a whole, of which the photo is only a
snapshot providing a window on to the material place. ‘Talking about’ the place has privileged the visual and the cognitive. However, the materiality of the place has also shown itself where the built environment has been overpowered by the non-human interventions of time and landscape or nature. Places here are material, alive and develop in sometimes uncontrollable ways. The geographical spatial imaginary of Shields (1991, pp. 63 - 4) has been developed to give an understanding of a ‘place myth’ in action: the inseparability of the imaginary and material place has come to the fore through the use of autophotography and photo elicitation. Starting with Ingold’s (2000) anthropological work I have illustrated how the place has revealed itself as part of a taskscape comprising the landscape, the people and tasks they undertake through time (p. 195). This empirical presentation of a taskscape begins to bring Ingold’s illustration using Bruegel’s *The Harvesters* into the twenty-first century (pp. 201 - 7).

This first empirical chapter has begun to peel away the outer layer of what is commonly understood as a ‘sense of belonging’. I have questioned the validity of belonging through an ‘imagined’, external view of the place (symptomatic of an elective belonging) and begun to look at the next stratum of belonging through history. For some this has been shown to be problematic in that their stories are event driven, rather than being embedded within time. History as a series of isolated events does not explain ‘who we are’ in the sense of being a product of time as well as place (Miller, 2002, p. 219). Although a belonging based on a narrativised version of an imagined place is too narrowly focussed to be described as ‘ontological’, the inclusion of the internal and external imaginaries of a place in people’s identities will impact on how they do their belonging, as Rob seems to indicate, when he refers to ‘the grim north’ (cf. Cloke and Jones, 2001, p. 662). There have also been hints of the subsequent layers – the connections between people through worlds of reach explored in the following chapter and the inherent materiality of places that is the subject of the final empirical chapter.

Social life is bound up with these lively places, place and people being actants in a common assemblage (Latour, 2005) or milieu. The next chapter looks at the next layer of belonging: the social world of actual reach; and how people belong in Wigan through their socially acquired stock of knowledge. This builds on the
imagined history presented here and introduces people into the picture, social connections being another of the key aspects of belonging (Miller, 2002, p. 217). The particular people discussed in *Worlds within Reach* are those who belong with the place, who make up the people of the local taskscape, attending to one another in the performance of their tasks (Ingold, 2000, p. 196).
5 Worlds within Reach

5.1 Introduction

The previous chapter examined the social construction or imaginary of Wigan as a place, steeped in history, where people belong through linking their biographies and identities to that of the place. This could be seen as the outer layer of belonging being concerned with the imaginary and having a cognitive and visual focus. The second part of the chapter started to move through the layers and ‘get under the skin’ of the process of belonging by looking at historical connections to places, in both the imaginary and a more material way (Leach, 2002, p. 129). Miller (2002, p. 217) suggests the three key aspects of belonging are social connections, historical connections and geographical connections. This chapter addresses the social aspect of belonging. Here I look in more detail at the ‘people’ part of the ‘social-place’ assemblage, what could be called a ‘peoplescape’. The relationships to people explored here, however, are not those that would be found in analyses of people’s ‘social networks’ (Pahl & Spencer, 2005) but are the people Schutz identified as ‘types’ in the world of common reach, here moving into the world of actual reach as known individuals (Schutz & Luckmann, 1974, p. 87). I see this as a deeper layer of belonging because it is moving into the embodied aspects of belonging, a belonging as more connected to what people do rather than what they think. Although I use theories of intersubjectivity to explore these ideas the chapter is also grounded in the more physical aspects of the place using the idea of the ‘taskscape’, people working together in a place over time (Ingold, 2000, p. 196), to investigate concepts of ‘neighbouring’ and place identity. I examine how people belong firstly in an embodied manner through shared speech (language is a crucial aspect of Anderson’s imagined community too) and secondly intersubjectively through the worlds of actual and common reach and their shared ‘stock of knowledge’ (Schutz, 1962, pp. 306 - 8). This is then placed in opposition to ‘others’ – again a crucial component of an imagined or symbolic community (Cohen, 1985, p. 69). The chapter ends with a look at how family identities, over time, can link people into ‘their’ place.
In a Schutzian analysis, the world of actual reach is the private world, the starting point for all activity, the peak of the mountain in the map of worlds of reach. The world of common reach is a world of actions undertaken alongside others. The stock of knowledge, passed on from one generation to the next, incorporates ‘ways of doing things around here’ through typifications and recipes for action (Schutz, 1962, p. 306). ‘Knowledge’ here can mean cognitive understanding (how to queue, for example) but can also mean embodied knowledge or habit (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, pp. 142 – 3). Another way of looking at these ‘worlds’ is through the lens of the taskscape, a combination of landscape, people, tasks and time, where everyday activities are undertaken by ‘attending to one another’ (Ingold, 2000, p. 196) through a mutual understanding or stock of knowledge, thereby fostering an active belonging together within this landscape at this time. The taskscape thus includes the place itself over time, which, I argue, is crucial to these particular intersubjective relationships, taking place within a phenomenological world of actual reach. What could be called the ‘neighbourhood’ is the locus of particular, place-based activities: the taskscape of neighbouring.

Many community studies focus on the people over and above the features of the place, seeing the community being studied as a group of people who happen to share a location: these studies tend to either treat the community as an object or as a microcosm of wider society (Bell & Newby, 1971, p. 41). ‘Community’ in these studies refers primarily to a group of people (Bell & Newby, 1971, p. 29). In contrast, my research is focussed on bringing to the fore a sociological understanding of the role that place plays in belonging as a process. Inevitably this encompasses the people who live in the place and their relationships with each other but these are not the kinship groups which are often the subject of older community studies (Bell & Newby, 1971, p. 138). A sense of belonging is often linked to close relationships with family and friends, what Pahl and Spencer (2005) called ‘personal communities’. These connections are clearly very important to the respondents here with accounts of meetings with members of these personal communities saturating the diaries. However, we can probably take the importance of family and friends as given. Where families have remained in place over generations family networks will be extensive in the local area, and where it is not unusual to remain in the same place long term friendships are also likely to survive.
Such relationships are typically the subject of research into social networks (Pahl & Spencer, 2005). What is possibly less well understood are the many and varied connections to others within the locale through a world of common reach, what I referred to above as a ‘peoplescape’. This encompasses known others, but others who are, in effect, part of the place: people who one sees and talks to only because of a shared milieu, for instance neighbours or shopkeepers. Contra Savage et al (2005, p. 103) and their theme of ‘elective belonging’ which denies or dismisses such relationships, I argue that these are the foundation of a belonging-in-place. Identifiable and more or less significant (Morgan, 2005, p. 643), such people avoid being identified as ‘types’ (Schutz, 1962, p. 60), which, in turn, creates stronger mutual obligations becoming manifest in the things people do together, through, for example, the taskscape of neighbouring. It is through their interaction with the place and with each other that people of the place, here specifically Wiganers and Leythers, are formed. These are not people who have in some sense chosen this place, but people who have developed within this place and see themselves reflected in it and in each other (Leach, 2002, p. 131) thus forming a ‘we’ group. This is an ongoing process which takes place over time. It is through being a part of this assemblage embedded in time, firmly located inside this place-community, that an ontological belonging can develop – an understanding of the rules of what to do when and where within this micro-society.

One of these reflections is through speech – accent and dialect. The embodied and cognitive notion of speech brings the imaginary aspect of the previous layers of belonging discussed in Imagining Us into the embodiment addressed here. Speech and thus accent is embodied – it is a function of the voice box. Language however, encompassed here through dialect, is a function of the imaginary. This section brings together the embodied way in which people in this place (these places, more accurately, as accents can be extremely localised) create themselves as ‘we groups’ distinguished through subtle differences in speech and the broader imagined ‘us’ kept alive through the officially sanctioned valorisation of the Wigan dialect.

The relationships which develop between people in a milieu which would not necessarily be considered important enough to be included in a ‘personal community’ are the ones examined next, those relationships which would be lost if
one moved away. Although this does not preclude some of these relations to be
with people also counted amongst friends – for example John (61) is friends with
the school’s lollipop lady. I argue that these ‘background’ relationships hold
together the assemblage of people and place: the place is the medium in which the
relations take and hold shape whilst being variable and fluid particularly over time,
bringing to mind Bell’s (1999, p. 9) analogy of a rhizome as conveying both
movement and rest. As Fortier (1999, p. 44) shows, social networks continue over
generations with past, present and future creating relationships across different
layers of practices and representations – conceived here as taskscapes. Through an
understanding of shared activities in place and time as a taskscape, I investigate the
activities of neighbours ‘doing’ neighbouring (which can range from taking an
elderly neighbour to hospital to saying ‘hello’ in the street) and the extensive social
worlds that many of these people are part of. Knowing neighbours is largely a
function of many people tending to stay in one place giving time to develop
relationships. Extensive social worlds are built up from childhood, so that the detail
of others’ life stories is often well known (Degnen, 2005). These people are a part
of the place, embodying its character and identity in the same way that particular
buildings and open spaces do. They are familiar parts of the everyday environment
who share a stock of knowledge, ways of doing things, who we could typify as, for
example, the local shopkeeper, but who is also an individual, known by name, with
whom other activities such as church going may be shared.

Alongside those known others, there are important others, in terms of people and
places, against whom we position ourselves. Those geographically and socially the
closest are those ‘others’ from whom we will distinguish ourselves most clearly
(Southerton, 2002). For Wiganers, Leigh, St Helens and Liverpool are the places
and people where ‘we’ are set apart from ‘them’. Other places are drawn into
Wiganers’ lives through, for example, family members and holidays. These are
often imagined places which may be unpeopled in any intersubjective way,
illustrated by Joan’s visit to Wilmslow below. These external attachments create
Wigan as part of a set of relationships within the world, rather than as a bounded
space (Cloke & Jones, 2001, pp. 661 - 2; O’Neill & Whatmore, 2000). Such
relationships can help to change the perspective Wigan has of itself, the view from
outside which was examined in the previous chapter. Finally the chapter focuses on
family histories and how people link family and place over generations in their own personal stories. Here the ‘peoplescape’ is populated by those from the world of restorable reach: known and unknown others from the past, recreated in the present through these narratives. In this setting place identity is created through family links but also, crucially, through the material places which often outlast the lives of an individual family member, but can be passed down to subsequent generations, the subject of the next chapter, Material Places.

The diaries, where respondents were requested to note down details of social encounters – who was met during the day – provide much of the data for this chapter, particularly the section on neighbouring and knowing people. Some of the diaries, where the writers gave plenty of detail, give a real flavour of the quality of the relationships with the people they meet during the course of their daily life. Without this information, written in the respondents’ own time, at leisure and without pressure from an interviewer, it is likely that the importance and details of some of these relationships would have been lost. What was written about in the diaries was then the focus of the post-diary interview which added extra detail.

The chapter begins by looking at embodied knowledge shared by people in place, the example that stood out in the interview data was a concern with accent. Having the ‘right’ accent is a key marker of belonging (or not) in Wigan, as in many other places. Embodied ways of perceiving and being in the world are part of the phenomenological method being pursued here (Crossley, 1993, p. 411). I then move on to look at ‘the people of the place’, those who make up the ‘peoplescape’: who are known because ‘we’, and they, live or work here, and form what might be called a ‘neighbouring taskscape’. The picture of a ‘we’ group is completed by looking at the ‘others’ - people and places who ‘we’ define ourselves against in either a positive or a negative light. The final section of the chapter examines family history encompassing the family and the place over multiple generations, examining how the respondents’ taskscapes are also peopled by those from the world of restorable reach: people from the past brought into the present partly through memories but more specifically through material places (and things) featuring in the present lives of the respondents.
5.2 Embodied Belonging: accent

As well as ways of belonging, or being at home in a place, being displayed through personal and social memories, habit memories, those incorporated into the body, can also symbolise belonging to both insiders and outsiders (Fortier, 1999, p. 47). The strongest way that this emerged during my field work was through accents. These were noticeable in the interviews, which were mostly recorded. When I transcribed the interviews I wrote down what I heard, although I did not transcribe to recreate the local accent, where ‘me’ was used instead of ‘my’ I typed ‘me’. Some respondents asked to read the transcripts and it was here that the different attitudes became clear as Val (65) and Barbara (75) both read their transcripts and whilst Barbara found the use of ‘me’ possibly slightly insulting, Val did not comment on it.

Accent is a form of habit memory which attaches one to a culture in a physical sense, enabling one to belong (Bottero, 2009; McCrone & Bechhofer, 2008; McIntosh, et al., 2004; Rogaly & Taylor, 2009). Embodied memories, such as accents become a part of who we are in a substantially different way from episodic memories, or memories about a place (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p. 142). This kind of habit memory, developed through copying others inscribes cultural norms in our bodies so that we become a person of a culture in an embodied way (Connerton, 1989, p. 83; Fortier, 1999; Martin, 1997; Merleau-Ponty, 1962) and enables one to belong in a sense that a stranger would not (Schutz, 1976 [1964]). Habit memories are not conscious, reflective memories but are a part of who we are and often unnoticed (Bender, 2002). Accents are learnt before we can recall episodic memories and are not generally referred to as memories (Jackson, 1993, p. 328). Not having the ‘right’ accent can prevent belonging (McIntosh, et al., 2004), a point Keith (66) (originally from the South) was well aware of. Whilst some respondents had more pronounced Wigan accents than others, who sounded more generically northern almost all used ‘me’ instead of ‘my’ at times; Joanne (35) didn’t, perhaps because she is a teacher. Linda (61), Barbara (75) and Joan (66) were all aware of their accents and how it presented them to the outside world.
The ‘strongest’ accents were those of Antony (25) and Sean (42), two of the most working class respondents, but generally the older people have more pronounced accents than the younger ones. A Wigan accent is distinctive in terms of Lancashire accents and within the borough itself the different accents associated with different areas are detectable by those with experience, for example a Pemberton accent (personal conversation). Recognition of these micro-differences seems to be a form of distinction, a measure of hyper-belonging, almost (see 5.7 External Attachments below). The boundaries created through speech become increasingly important to those linked together through geographical location and thus local community (Cohen, 1985, p. 13).

**Sitheyitsezere**

[See, thee, it says here]

The two ‘incomers’ – Keith and Anne – both commented on accents, although in different contexts; for Keith it was all about fitting in but for Anne simply about basic communication. Keith was ‘taught how to talk proper’ by a fellow apprentice when he moved north, to St Helens (Val and Keith’s interview), so this was a general south/north divide issue rather than being specific to Wigan. Keith does not speak with a particularly northern accent, even now, fifty years later. Anne, being American, couldn’t understand Steve when she first spoke to him on the phone unless he ‘spoke like Hugh Grant’ (Steve and Anne’s interview). She also had trouble both understanding many people and being understood herself when she first moved to Wigan which seemed to exacerbate her feelings of dislocation.

Others also spoke of accents simply in terms of understanding: Joan wrote in her diary of how the woman in the post office who was new to Wigan, from Yorkshire, couldn’t understand anybody, although she could Joan because ‘me being a trained telephonist she complimented me on having no accent’ (Joan’s diary); Linda’s son has developed a broader accent since working as a joiner with older men and ‘he went to me mum’s and she couldn’t understand him’ (Linda’s interview).

Whilst a standard Wigan accent is largely understandable to most other English speakers (if not Americans), there is also local dialect or ‘mining talk’ which Steve said he couldn’t understand when he had a temporary job with an ex-miner as a
boss. Barbara, who read through the transcript of her interview, was surprised and possibly slightly upset that I had written ‘me’ where I heard it, as she was not aware of saying it (Barbara’s email), although Valerie also read through her transcript and made no comment on the use of ‘me’. While a Wigan accent is a strong marker of identity and belonging (McCrone & Bechhofer, 2008; Taylor, 2005, p. 102), it can also be a marker, perhaps, of being ‘common’ which would appear insulting to Barbara who is obviously proud of her grammar school education and Master Craftsman heritage, (see 5.8 Family History section) whereas Valerie, who also went to grammar school, displays no ambivalence about being a Leyther on any level (Bender, 2002, p. S111).

Accents can symbolise both inclusion and exclusion: having the right accent allows one to fit in, to be ‘one of us’ as with Linda’s son trying to fit in with his workmates; not having the right accent can be exclusionary, as in Keith’s case; but more crucially not understanding others, whilst ostensibly speaking the same language can cause ‘trouble’ around one’s sense of identity (Taylor, 2005, p. 102) and caused Anne to feel ‘out of place’. Conversely, of course, familiar accents can make one feel at home: a woman originally from Liverpool, whom I met on a local health walk, commented that when she moved to Wigan on marriage in the early seventies so many people from Liverpool were moving into the cheaper housing available that the whole street was full of ‘scouse’ (Liverpudlian) accents making her feel very much at home (Field notes, walk around Poolstock flashes, 8/12/09).

As markers of identity, accents can also categorise and classify. The ambivalence towards a Wigan identity discussed in Chapter 4 above is also present in talk on accents: Barbara (75) was unhappy that she sounded ‘Wigan’ to me (Barbara’s email); Joan (66) appears proud to be considered to have ‘no accent’ (Joan’s diary); and Linda (61) knows ‘I don’t talk posh, but I don’t believe I’ve got a broad Wigan accent’ (Linda’s family interview). All are trying to suppress what is generally acknowledged as an important part of a local identity (McCrone & Bechhofer, 2008) and yet none would want to be considered ‘posh’ which is used as a gentle rebuke in Wigan (Beryl’s interview). Accent is a strong marker of classed identity.
(Bottero, 2009, p. 10; Rogaly & Taylor, 2009, p. 56) with a broad Wigan accent denoting a more ‘working class’ background – as was found here with Antony (25), who left school with few qualifications and started ‘working’ life as unemployed for a year, and Sean (42), a sheet metal worker, having the most pronounced accents. The distancing by some from being a ‘working class’ Wiganer again demonstrates an ambivalence of belonging to the imaginary of Wigan (see *Imagining Us*), an uncertainty as to their place in the world.

Although not used by any of my respondents there is a local dialect known as ‘mining talk’ (Steve (38), Steve and Anne’s interview). There was a sense of pride that it exists and generally the Wigan dialect is celebrated in mugs and t-shirts sold by the council, and on the Wigan World web site. ‘Mining talk’ or dialect, that is the use of different words or forms of speech (thee and thou for example), is a part of the heritage of Wigan, in the same way that old mill buildings and pit winding wheels are, and therefore part of the community narrative, as defined by those in authority, with the power to create this history, perhaps (Dawson, 1998, p. 212). The promotion of the dialect is a part of the creation of the imagined community of Wigan. Although in the past this was learned and embodied in the way an accent is, for most people its use today is a conscious creation of a particular identity.

Language can be seen as a tool defined by its use. That is, it is part of ‘being-in-the-world’ and can exhibit a point of view on that world (Crossley, 1995, p. 48). Through the way it is talked about the world may be perceived and thus interacted with in a particular, locally specific way (Crossley, 1995, p. 48). Joan (66), for example, speaks differently with unknown others (the woman in the post office, me on the telephone) from the way she would speak to friends and neighbours. Through this different embodied action she is positioning the other as part of a different ‘world’ – either one of common reach, or for known others, one of actual reach.

The different worlds of reach and how those from the less well-known world of common reach are incorporated into the world of actual reach is the subject of the next section. Neighbours and the people one knows through a multitude of long term social connections comprise the peoplescape of the locality – people who are,
essentially a part of the place. These do not have to be ‘local’ people as such: the woman from Yorkshire who Joan spoke to in the post office is a part of this peoplescape. However, she is ‘a woman who works in the post office’ – a Schutzian ‘type’ rather than a familiar, known other whose family history is known. The movement of these people across the worlds of common and actual reach is discussed below.

5.3 Neighbouring as Taskscape

Neighbours are people who ‘belong with the place’, a part of the taskscape of the locality made up of the material place (shared driveways or fences, perhaps) and doing things together (chatting over the fence, putting out the bins), over time. Neighbours who are known are a part of the ‘we group’ (Schutz & Luckmann, 1974, p. 67) of ‘we who live in this street/hood’. Knowing other people is a part of belonging, feeling at home in a place (Morgan, 2009). But whilst faces are known names may not be and other than proximity there may be few points of commonality. Neighbours encroach upon the border between the private space of the house and the public space of the street occupying a sort of no man’s land where British cultural norms relating to kin or strangers do not necessarily apply leading to the possibility of ambiguous encounters (Painter, 2012, p. 530). Whilst friendships may develop, or may have pre-existed becoming neighbours, these are qualitatively different kinds of relationships (Laurier, et al., 2002, p. 357). The respondents here clearly distinguish between neighbours, other long term acquaintances, work colleagues and friends, each type of encounter requiring a different set of practices. Overlapping to some extent with the idea of an imagined community (Anderson, 2006) or ‘we’ group brought together through common understandings of neighbouring, this is, nevertheless, towards the rural, or Gemeinschaft end of Frankenberg’s ‘morphological continuum’ (Morgan, 2005, p. 643). Long term residence is likely to be indicative of closer relationships with neighbours because familiarity increases over time (Savage, et al., 2005, p. 81; Southerton, 2002, p. 185).

Neighbouring can be seen as a taskscape (Ingold, 2000, p. 196): it entails people doing things together, in a place (the neighbourhood) over time. ‘Doing things’
may be as little as saying ‘hello’ when passing in the street, but even such small actions are an integral part of daily life for many. For John (61) though, some of his neighbouring activities have taken place over nearly forty years between his house and the one next door. John’s next door neighbours on one side are elderly, their children were growing up when John’s were born. During the week of John’s diary it snowed (January 2010), so John checked on his neighbours and offered to do their shopping for them for three days in a row. On one occasion their neighbour from the other side was also visiting, seeing if they needed anything:

...we go next door to see [neighbours] who are our original neighbours since we moved here in 1974. They are now both in their late 70s. We ask them if they require anything ... we are concerned that they will venture out [in the snow] ...spent a good part of the afternoon cleaning snow from our drive and footpath as the forecast is for freezing temp to last at least a week, made a path through to [neighbour’s] back door and in his back garden to his bin and bird table

(John’s diary)

John’s house and his neighbours’ are semi-detached without a fence delineating the front gardens. The footpath in front of both houses is seen as a part of John’s landscape. The neighbours’ back garden is also a part of the territory John is comfortable with, knowing his neighbour’s habits. Neighbouring is a reciprocal activity. A couple of days later John wrote:

[neighbour] comes round with some soup for me!! (a regular occurrence since I retired!!)

(John’s diary)

Long term neighbourly relations involve the whole family over time: John’s neighbours have seen his children, Joanne (35) and her sister, growing up and the grandchildren coming to visit; John is now seeing the later stages of their lives. By the time of the post-diary interview the husband was in hospital, and his wife needed lifts to visit him which John was prepared to provide, but the neighbours on the other side and others who have lived in the street a long time also help, easing the burden. John’s relationship to his neighbours is close: ‘We’ve all been very
good neighbours and it’s you know, difficult to see them growing old’ (John’s post-diary interview).

This part of John’s neighbouring taskscape encompasses his and his neighbours’ status as long term residents of the street; there is a shared environment of a particular group of houses, not necessarily contiguous, where people look after each other, in an almost familial way. Being a neighbour is not just an individual relationship but involves spatial and performative networks. At the time of the snow John also spent his Sunday morning clearing the snow from outside the school which is close by, and a part of his everyday life as it is where his wife works and his grandson is a pupil. As a neighbour John is active in his attention to everyday tasks; he performs his belonging in this community through attending to others in their shared world of reach (Ingold, 2000, p. 196; Schutz, 1962, p. 328). This can be seen as a process of ‘territorialization’ (Leach, 2002, p. 130): John performs his belonging through these activities and at the same time creates a sense of identity of ‘us’ living in this place as a ‘community’ (Morgan, 2005, p. 647). John’s neighbourly relations seem to generate obligations towards each other which are heightened through knowing each other for a long time. Linda (61) also has neighbours on one side who have been there almost as long as she has (nearly forty years) and they get on very well - she called in there, for no particular reason, during the week of the diary and once took her neighbour to hospital when she was ill and on her own; but on the other side people tend to come and go very quickly and are thus mere ‘people who live next door’, not named and cared for (Linda’s post-diary interview). ‘Doing neighbouring’, over time involves caring for other people and the place and thus could be seen as a form of gift exchange (Fowler, 2004, p. 33).

Rather than a general sense that John gets on with his neighbours the diary method shows the extent of this relationship, which could have been missed in an interview simply asking about neighbourly relations. The encounters that John had with his neighbours during the week in which he wrote his diary led to the talk of other neighbours at his post-diary interview, again giving a more rounded picture of what he does in terms of neighbouring, rather than simply asking whether or not he gets on with his neighbours, which would elicit a different kind of response.
John’s local community of the street is subtly different to that of his next door neighbours, or their other neighbours. There is no fixed locality which comprises a particular bounded community of ‘John’s street’. Each person or household is at the centre of a flexible world of actual reach which forms their local community: a taskscape moves along with the person (Ingold, 2000, p. 196). These multiple, complex, overlapping social relations are symptomatic of a ‘local social system’ (Stacey, 1969, p. 144) and were in evidence across many of the interviews and diaries. For example when Janet (52) moved into her current house she had quite complex connections to several people in the street:

a couple across the road, he’d lived in the same street where I grew up, the ones next door, his uncle was the local plumber and oh you know his nephew, son-in-law, next door, her mother had been [husband’s] mother’s bridesmaid when she got married in 1947

(Janet’s interview)

Through sometimes tenuous connections Janet was able to identify her neighbours and therefore accord them a greater sense of trust than if they were strangers giving rise to a greater feeling of ontological security. It is important to be able to identify the people around us in some way. The traceability of Janet’s relationships to her neighbours is possible only because people stay put: where many people stay in the same place over generations worlds within actual and restorable reach will intersect at many levels (contrast Rose, 1988). Even without directly knowing someone it is possible to ‘place’ them and understand that there is a shared world of reach (Blokland, 2001; Degnen, 2005; Fortier, 1999).

5.4 Knowing People: Networks of Spatial Reach

As well as those specifically defined as neighbours, those who live in the same street or within close proximity, there is a more general sense of ‘knowing people’ or ‘being known’. Social worlds are understood in terms of their relevance for everyday life (Schutz, 1976 [1964], p. 92). The closest world, the world of actual reach, is the best known – that of family, friends and physically proximate neighbours. But there are also slightly more distant relations to those who share a
world of common reach, and to varying extents a world of restorable reach. Some of these people are still known by name, through their families or positions within society; others through their ‘type’ – as a shopkeeper, for example. These people are part of the stories one tells about the place allowing ‘the physical geography of the village [to] come alive with both the social relations of the people who lived there and the local histories of events that had transpired there’ (Degnen, 2005, p. 733). Being a part of this social geography of the place is to be accepted as ‘one of us’, part of the ‘we’ group. Doing activities in the local taskscapes involves doing things alongside others; where these others are known and there is a common understanding or ‘stock of knowledge’ there may be a greater ‘ease’ in the performance of everyday life (Schutz, 1976 [1964]).

John (61) describes the process of ‘being known’ through another neighbourly relationship. This is subtly different from the one with his next door neighbours as John’s wife grew up with the neighbours across the road, so she’s ‘known her all her life so it’s more than being a neighbour really, but we’re not too close but we go across on Christmas Day and have a drink’ (John’s interview). John’s wife and the neighbour both belong to another ‘we’ group of those who grew up together in another area of Wigan, as well as ‘we who live in this street’. John’s wife knows many people locally from both her childhood in the (then) close knit community of [*] and through her work at a school now. It would be a very rare occasion that she would go shopping in Wigan and not bump into someone she knew. She will also meet people from Wigan, whom she knows, when they are away on holiday – as happened when they were in Scotland recently. Val (65) has had similar experiences, usually of meeting customers in Devon, France or Malta, and she will always bump into someone when in Leigh. Joan (66) pointed out how ‘knowing’ someone encompasses multiple relationships: ‘when I go up Wigan I bet I meet about seventy people, hello, hello and you know all the family history don’t you, you know, through the generations’. Joan, Val and John and his wife are embedded in complex sets of relationships built up over a lifetime (Degnen, 2005, p. 733). In speaking of knowing ‘all the family history ... through the generations’ Joan indicates how important family background and the ability to ‘place’ others is for acceptance into ‘the community’ (Finch, 1989, p. 234), in this case Joan’s world of actual reach. Identity and belonging are not only achieved but are also ascribed
through the family background: hence the importance to Antony (25) of being able to place his ancestors within the respectable class of mill workers (see 5.8 Family History section). This is also why it takes time to belong in a new place and is not simply a case of choosing to ‘put[ting] down roots’ (Savage, et al., 2005, p. 207) but requires an acceptance by the others in the place. ‘Reality maintenance’ (Rose, 1988, p. 167), casual conversations with known others, takes place with others who share the same world of restorable reach and stock of knowledge, ‘the people’ who, for Val, provide a ‘sense of community’ in Leigh (Val’s post-diary interview). These shared worlds of reach are not available to newcomers to the place.

Several respondents commented on their relationships with local shopkeepers and businesses. John (61) knows the woman who works in the local post office well. She is happy to deal with the change John brings in from charity collection. Linda knows the people who run her local post office through their son, who now works in the post office, who was in [scouts] when she and her husband were running it. Janet has a closer relationship to the woman who works in her local petrol station and describes her as a friend:

    That’s the garage, that’s there because I go a lot and one of the assistants I’ve known for, how long have I known [her]? I’ve probably known her thirty years! ... then her children and my children and you know. I’ve been going to that garage since I passed my driving test.

(Janet’s post-diary interview)

All of these relationships to known others stops them being treated as ‘types’ and creates certain mutual obligations: John is careful to count and bag the coins; Linda’s husband loyally buys his paper at the shop everyday; Janet ‘always’ buys her petrol here. Tom (18) demonstrates this kind of relationship from the point of view of the potential ‘type’ – he works in the local pizza restaurant:

    where I work that’s a very, very busy restaurant ... so it’s very popular but I have actually made friends through there like customers who come in regularly, I’m on first name terms with some of them... And with the computing as well, I’ve been helping people who’ve come in and just like, so I have stemmed work from work... Not that my boss likes it, making money out of their business.

(Tom, Tom and Lauren’s interview)
Tom demonstrates a financial benefit to him of knowing people and being known, but these are also relationships based on trust: Tom is not just a name in an advertisement for computer services, he is known as a friendly, honest, responsible young man. Tom also shows how extended networks are not simply a corollary of age but partially extend through generations of the family (some of these people being known to his parents) and are also built up through regular contact – here for Tom in a busy restaurant. All of these people take on roles in particular places and then develop wider, more intimate relations based on a world of actual reach rather than a world of common reach; they become part of the local communities through face-to-face relations.

It is largely from the diaries that these accounts are drawn, as they give the kind of detail within these encounters that might be missed from a more general interview discussion. Janet chose her picture of the garage as the place, out of those she photographed, which means the most to her because she associates it with her friend – the place and the person being inextricably linked for her. Without the photo to hand it is unlikely that an interview would have hit on a garage as a place of significance for her.

This section has shown how connections with familiar others are built up over time. Becoming familiar with shop keepers, restaurant customers and others is either a corollary simply of time spent in a place, illustrated by John’s relationship to the woman in his local post office, or of other interconnecting relationships, such as Linda’s to the people who run her local newsagents. Further relationships to others in the ‘peoplescape’ can be through other family members, often through the generations, as Joan remarked, ‘you know all the family history, don’t you’ (Joan’s post-diary interview).

5.5 Intergenerational Reach

Family is the centre of the world of actual reach. Although not the focus of the peoplescape being explored here, families also position individual members within particular worlds of reach and can lead to sometimes convoluted relationships to
‘known’ (or ‘known of’) others. Two of the interviewees married people from families known to their families although the couples in question didn’t actually know each other. Joanne (35) explained:

Well, I kind of always knew the family and knew who his mum was just through, you do in [this area] because people know one another

(Joanne’s interview)

Joanne’s father, John (61), and her father-in-law were neighbours as children and have both moved to the same area. But whilst this knowledge is likely to make the partner accepted into the family more easily, it is not necessarily a comfortable situation to be in as Claire (35) and Paul (35) found: ‘so everyone kind of knew each other, which in a way is nice, it’s nice now it’s worked out between us, it was a bit, ooh, it’s a bit much really this, had to be really careful’ (Claire and Paul’s interview). Claire is expressing discomfort over their parents ‘knowing each other’, possibly seeing it as a kind of surveillance, the ‘downside’ of ‘everyone knowing everyone else’ (Bennett, 2008). If the relationship had not worked out there was a danger that the friendship between their parents would also be damaged. It is, perhaps, not surprising that partners are selected from the large pool of ‘known’ others, simply because these social webs of relationships stretch so far (Young & Willmott, 1962).

Claire had grown up with the situation of being unable to ‘put a foot wrong’ as everyone knew her mum and even during her interview, at her parents’ house, she whispered when she told me that occasionally she used to hang around the streets as a teenager! She has already warned her ten year old daughter of the consequences for her: ‘the trouble when I was a little girl is everybody knows your Grandma so I couldn’t do anything wrong and it will still happen to you!’ (Claire and Paul’s interview). This story was told by both Claire and her mum, Val (65), in their separate interviews but Claire was able to add the point of view of the one being ‘watched’: ‘when I was about the age 18, 19 when I was going for a drink, everywhere I went I’d see people me mum knew’ (Claire and Paul’s interview) and this made her feel like going somewhere else at times. The different perspectives from Claire and Val demonstrate one benefit of interviewing two generations. Tom
(18) expressed similar sentiments about having to ‘behave’ himself when in the pub with people his parents know. This kind of community surveillance is something that perhaps used to be common, particularly at the level of the street where all the neighbours were known. How others, known others, perceived the family was important as a marker of morality and status, especially for women who were more likely to spend most of their time in the neighbourhood (Bloklad, 2001, p. 274; Roberts, 1971). The worlds of actual reach extend across generations extending also the identity of the ‘we group’ (Rose, 1988, p. 167). Older members of the group protect the group’s status by policing the younger ones; this is often seen as the negative aspect of well-populated worlds of reach.

Known others also know the family (as Joan pointed out) so when Janet (52) had her first son ‘all day long people were coming to have a look at the baby. When I went to the registrar’s office to register the birth, we knew the registrar’ (Janet’s interview) because Beryl (76) (her mother) worked at the hospital. One’s identity is, to some extent, ‘typified’ either through being a member of a particular family (hence the importance of the status of the family) or through being a ‘type’: a young person or a church goer, perhaps. Identities are largely ascribed. Claire (35) refers to this pressure to conform both as a child and when she met her husband: belonging is dependent upon this acquiescence with the status quo, with being who one is expected to be and performing accordingly (Fortier, 1999). This is perhaps one of the pressures leading Lauren (16) to want to ‘escape’ to a university in a city (Bertaux-Wiame, 2005, p. 49).

As with neighbours, ‘knowing people’ is not friendship but more to do with the place community, with being accepted as ‘one of us’. We talk of ‘placing’ people and by knowing people, individually or through their families, we can ‘place’ them, and others in relationship to them, as Joanne did with her husband-to-be and Joan does through ‘knowing all the family history’. Having placed somebody we are clear as to where, within this place, we stand in relation to them, and them in relation to us, giving rise to a shared world of reach, a mutual understanding of the phenomenological world through a shared ‘stock of knowledge’ (Crossley, 1996, p. 94).
‘Knowing people’ has shown how the concept of ‘reach’ helps to populate the peoplescape. The local lifeworld is made up of a myriad of different connections to familiar, to a greater or lesser extent, others. It is partly through intersubjective connections, common membership of different ‘we’ groups, that belonging, ontologically, is done. As Bell (1999, p. 3) points out, one does not simply belong, rather it is something that has to be achieved on different levels. This section has shown how belonging to particular ‘we groups’ can be achieved. Here, these groups are of people in place, the place being the uniting element of the group: the neighbourhood, or street, for John; the area where she grew up for John’s wife. Place can have a bigger role in uniting people as shown in the next section where identities of people and place merge through performativity - common actions undertaken together (Leach, 2002, p. 132), that is, through the taskscape (Ingold, 2000, p. 196).

5.6 Identifying with the Place

Neighbours are people who we are thrown into close proximity with, but with whom we often share values and ‘ways of doing things’ (Shields, 1991, p. 63). For Ian (62), it seems to be taken as a matter of course that where he lives (‘it is very nice, it’s where all the big houses are in Wigan’, Ian’s interview) all the children would go on to university. Ian boasts about the ‘social mobility’ of the adult children of his neighbours as well as his own children, implying that this is a characteristic of the neighbourhood which he therefore also embodies. Neighbours and how well they are known give more of a ‘flavour’ of the place than of themselves as people, perhaps; as Leach (2002, p. 132) put it: ‘[a]s individuals identify with an environment so their identity comes to be constituted through that environment’.

Joan (66) also exhibits a sense of a street identity. She told me how

when I was sixty, because I’d always lived in this street, it took me nine months to find all the kids, where they’d gone, most of them were around here, but some of them lived a way away and what I did I had a street reunion (Joan’s interview)
Joan is the only one still living in her street since childhood. Although the people Joan grew up with have now dispersed she managed to track down many of them for her reunion. This is not because she had kept in touch with them, as friends, but because of the complex and multifarious connections in Joan’s web of relationships. The fact that Joan wanted to do this demonstrates the importance she attributes to the people of the place she calls home. These relationships to neighbours are through a shared world of spatial reach, they are not intimate personal relations. Knowing people, integrates one into the locality and gives one a sense of being a part of a group (Savage, et al., 2005; Southerton, 2002). These people embody the character of their place, the habitus (Degnen, 2005; Stewart, 1996). ‘We’ share a world of actual reach and therefore our stocks of knowledge overlap (Schutz, 1962, p. 312): no-one spoke of knowing people who are fundamentally different from them – Val (65) and Keith (66) describe their Muslim neighbours as ‘lovely people’, that is, essentially ‘like us’. There is a certain drive towards homogeneity amongst people living in the same place (Southerton, 2002, p. 185). People come to be identified by the place and the place, in turn, by the types of people who live there.

For Janet (52), when she gets petrol for her car, she is visiting her friend who works in the garage (Janet’s post-diary interview); for Linda (61), when she visits the local post office she is also seeing a friend (Linda’s post-diary interview); Joanne (35) sees not just fellow parents at her son’s school but also her own school friend, whose son is in the same class (Joanne’s interview). For these people relationships are not just to ‘types’ of people, but also to known others. This is what gives rise to belonging through what ‘we’ do, everyday lives. ‘Knowing people’ could probably, as Janet suggests, be a euphemism for ‘having a sense of community’, although ‘community’ here is small, at the level of the street; and it seems that this has, generally, diminished over the latter part of the twentieth century. This is partly because people move house more than they used to do (Janet and Beryl’s post-diary interview). Janet linked this to feelings of security: ‘and that’s what people fear I think, you don’t know who’s living next to you’, the idea of ‘community’ invoking feelings of safety and security. Keith (66) also said ‘I feel really comfortable here, I don’t feel threatened here’ about Leigh. The idea of ‘home’ is usually associated with a feeling of safety and security (Mallett, 2004, p. 71), with
Janet and Keith perhaps extending their view of ‘home’ to the intermediary space of the neighbourhood (Painter, 2012, p. 531). Valerie (65) and Keith (66) spoke very positively of Leigh ‘having a sense of community’, this being its main virtue (Val and Keith’s interview), not being related particularly to neighbours, but to ‘knowing people’ in a more general sense. Bumping into people when out shopping and knowing and being known by shopkeepers and local tradesmen shows a level of integration into the locality (Latham, 2004, p. 1996) which can be seen as a degree of belonging. This sense of community though is about people who are ‘tied to their setting’ (Laurier, et al., 2002, p. 364): they are a part of the place and individual people could change without affecting ‘the community’, as when neighbours move. A synthesis of belonging-in-place and belonging-with-other-people is the start of an ontological belonging. This is demonstrated here through the multifarious social connections these people have within their local place.

Another important way of defining ‘us’ as a ‘we group’ is to be specific about who does not belong, who is ‘the other’. I have already shown in the previous chapter, *Imagining Us*, that ‘the other’ can be defined at different levels. There, part of the ‘place myth’ revolved around the division between the north and south of England, a fairly gross distinction. But closer ‘others’ were also seen to encroach on the territory of Wigan through the new owners of John’s local post office ‘from Bolton’ (about ten miles away). Other studies, looking more specifically at these distinctions, have shown that the closest ‘others’ are often the most derided (Southerton, 2002, p. 182), in order to support ‘our’ specific identity as ‘us’. This aspect of identity creation will be portrayed in the next section.

### 5.7 External Attachments

The positioning of ‘ourselves’ in relation to ‘the other’ or ‘outsiders’ is an important part of creating an identity as part of a ‘we’ group (Schutz & Luckmann, 1974, p. 67); ‘[a] sense of community is cultivated by contrast with the social worlds beyond its boundaries’ (Dawson, 1998, p. 210). Most nations or smaller identity groups select a common ‘other’ to compare themselves against and Wiganers are no different; the construction of certain ‘others’ with particular group identities stands out in these narratives (Crossley, 1996, p. 93). Many of these are
place-based identities. Defining a boundary around who counts as ‘us’ varies depending on context and is impossible to elucidate fully, but some of these designations will be examined here. All of the respondents have close family or friends living away from Wigan extending their ‘reach’, the threads of their lives, into a wider world of attainable reach (Schutz & Luckmann, 1974, p. 39), broadening their global perspective, but also enabling them to reflect on their position as Wiganers. Many of the respondents also have close relationships to people who have moved into Wigan from elsewhere giving another link to the wider world and another point of reflection. However, for many, Wigan itself is not a unified place but a composite of smaller places each with its own characteristics.

I think that’s what Wigan is, a collection of villages that come under this big umbrella but [place] is entirely separate, given that it’s two miles away

(Janet’s interview)

This concept of Wigan being an almost disparate group of places came through frequently. Where within Wigan one is from is key: Scholes for example, the area that all Ian’s (62) mining forebears came from is still down at heel, slum clearances having been replaced with council high rises in the sixties; Ian grew up in Beech Hill, then a new council estate for the ‘aristocracy’ of the working classes, that is ‘policemen, firemen, local authority employees’ (Ian’s interview), but now ‘it’s a bit of a rough area’ (Antony’s interview); Ian now lives in another area: ‘it is very nice, it’s where all the big houses are in Wigan’ (Ian’s interview). These three places form the backdrop to Ian’s account of his social mobility, each place being set in a particular time of his life and having its own distinctive character. The fact that all these places are grouped under Wigan Metropolitan Borough Council is almost irrelevant, until Ian talks about Bolton: ‘I wouldn’t have moved to Bolton. It’s not very nice. Wigan’s not a nice town, but Bolton’s worse.’, although earlier in the interview he said that he and his wife had looked at houses in Bolton (Ian’s interview). These micro-affiliations are used to distinguish subtle levels of belonging, which probably wouldn’t be available to an incomer (Southerton, 2002, p. 185).
Antony (25) distinguishes where he is from, from where he lives now, a five minute walk away:

I mean it’s my area, you know, well the area where I’m from, I live [close to the town centre], Beech Hill, the hill’s at the top , ... There’s no trouble at all in [here], it’d be a bit noisy if I go up Beech Hill.

(Antony’s interview)

And, crucially, there is a difference in the character and local reputation of these places: ‘Beech Hill Terrors Named and Shamed’ being a headline from *Wigan Today* (2008), downplayed by Antony as ‘a bit noisy’. These distinctions seem to imply that boundaries are seen as absolute. The ‘village’ theme can be used to deny belonging, as with the lunch club members I spoke to in Platt Bridge who used being from Platt Bridge (about two miles from the town centre) to deny being ‘Wiganers’ and therefore eligible to take part in my research. I even asked where the boundary is and there was a reasonable consensus on where ‘Wigan’ became ‘Platt Bridge’ (Field notes, 5/11/09). Drawing boundaries around their ‘villages’ enables people to distinguish themselves from others and perhaps maintain an attachment to a local community which might otherwise be lost (Cohen, 1985, p. 69). Leigh is a separate place altogether – the towns were only joined under one council in the 1974 local government reorganisation. Leythers, people from Leigh such as Valerie (65), are not Wiganers and she ‘never’ visits Wigan, although her son-in-law is a Wigan Athletic supporter (Leigh does not have a national league football team). Even Keith (66), Val’s husband, who has no particular axe to grind having lived in different areas around Wigan, would not describe himself as living in Wigan (Keith, Val and Keith’s interview). Traditionally there is some hostility between Wigan and Leigh, as there is between Wigan and St Helens, particularly in sporting fixtures (cf. Fortier, 1999). These geographical or place based identities are fairly clear-cut and the characters of places quite well known – perhaps stemming from the clearly defined area of Scholes where miners lived and the weaving area of Pemberton, a hundred years ago (Ian’s interview).
The more subtle creation of ‘others’, however, is ‘Scousers’ as people ‘who don’t live like us’ (Poolstock Flashes walk, field notes 8/12/09). This is shown in the following exchange between mother and daughter, Linda (61) and Kate (34):

K. They used to come from Liverpool on the train because we’re right on the train line

L. The filled in quarry? Oh yes, they still do that

K. They’d come in summer for a nice day, there’s just hoards of them, even little children with armbands on, in the quarry.

Me. Isn’t it really dangerous?

K. Oh yes

L. Very dangerous.

K. So there’s been a lot of crime from that because they come and they drink and whatever

L. They drink and then go in the quarry

K. And then pinching cars to get back home [laughter]

(Linda’s family interview)

The laughter at the end of this exchange seems to indicate that at some level Kate and Linda realise they are creating a stereotype of an ‘other’. The extract exemplifies the depiction of the lower classes as ‘masses’ (‘there’s just hoards of them’) (Lawler, 2005, p. 432) with Linda and Kate positioning themselves on the moral high ground of those who understand the dangers of drinking and swimming and who know how to look after their children properly (Skeggs, 2009). The data here is the kind of conversational chat that would not emerge during a straightforward interviewer/interviewee encounter and yet it gives a clear insight into how these two women view particular ‘others’ who visit ‘their’ place. Family interviews are likely to encourage this more elusive everyday speech because the people being interviewed are at ease with each other. Whilst the friction with Liverpudlians is possibly more hidden than that between Wigan and St Helens, which is constantly rehearsed through rugby matches, it may also be older. St Helens is a relatively new place only really coming into its own as a town in the
late nineteenth century whereas Wigan and Liverpool, along with Preston and Lancaster, are the oldest Lancashire towns, making Wigan Liverpool’s geographically closest rival before the industrialisation of Manchester. More recently there was an influx of Liverpudlians into new housing estates on the south side of Wigan in the late 1960s and early 1970s (Poolstock flashes walk, field notes, 8/12/09). A comment on the Wigan World website talks derogatively of ‘second generation Scouse families’ living in Pemberton (Wigan World Forum, 2011) the implication being that these are Wigan’s immigrant population, and also that it takes more than a generation to become a Wiganer. The lack of a significant influx of outsiders from further afield allows these micro-distinctions with familiar/similar ‘others’ to be made. Described by one woman as ‘people who don’t live like us’ (Poolstock flashes walk, field notes, 8/12/09), the implication is that these people perhaps undertake slightly different activities in their taskscape or, in Schutzian terms, that the local stock of knowledge (understanding how ‘we’ do things round here) is not fully available to these ‘others’ (Crossley, 1996, p. 94). A more relational approach than Schutz’s, however, incorporates ‘others’ as a part of the ongoing life of the place with ‘us’ and ‘them’ adapting to each other, over time, the place itself acting as the common ground or shared imaginary around which the performative network of the daily life of Wigan continues (cf. Cloke & Jones, 2001; O'Neill & Whatmore, 2000). It is through this acceptance of ‘others’ that the respondents Anne (38), Keith (66) and Linda’s husband, originally from other places, come to feel ‘at home’ in Wigan and Rob (37, Val’s son) sees London as his home (Rob’s email).

In contrast to the ‘othering’ of people from Liverpool some other places have specific imaginaries attached to them which sets them apart from Wigan. Most diaries contained information about familiar places outside of Wigan such as Southport, Ormskirk and Bolton, which have all been incorporated into the regular daily life of the participants; Valerie (65) goes to Bolton to shop, Linda (61) to Southport, Joanne (35) works in Ormskirk. These places are often seen as ‘better’ than Wigan, in terms of their facilities, the materiality of the place. Linda, for example, compared her picture of Lord Street in Southport to Paris (Linda’s post-diary interview). Joan (66) visited Wilmslow during the week of her diary, a place she had never visited before:
I've never seen so many expensive cars on the road in all my travels. Ferraris, Jags, 4x4, Lotus Elans, this must be footballers wives’ land

(Joan’s diary)

Joan describes Wilmslow as a far wealthier and more attractive place than Wigan – she also wrote of ‘the autumnal colours of the trees’ and took a picture of a fancy cake shop. These material descriptions of the place give it its identity for Joan. There are no people involved in Joan’s imaginary of Wilmslow who can be ‘looked down’ on, as Kate and Linda ‘look down’ on the quarry swimmers. Joan does not position herself as inferior to them, rather coming from a very different world – they are from an imaginary ‘footballers’ wives land’, and whilst footballers are known to live in that area, this name also comes from a fictional television programme. At just over thirty miles away Wilmslow is far enough away in both geographical and social reach not to impinge on or threaten Joan’s own sense of identity. As in Southerton’s (2002) study it is the closer ‘others’ (in terms of spatial location and cultural and economic capital) who are the most disparaged. In this case the boundaries are relational, moving with the world of common reach, rather than absolute geographic ones.

Who is ‘us’ and who ‘other’ moves across times and places. Some of these constructions are about the people – what ‘they’ do and how ‘they’ behave, some are closer to imaginary images built around aspects of the material place. As with most people living in Britain, this group of Wiganers have many contacts outside of their home region and most travel abroad at least occasionally; their lives are not introverted but are at least partially articulated towards the outside world. The processes of these connections and reconnections should allow ‘a sense of place which is extra-verted, which includes a consciousness of its links with the wider world’ (Massey, 1993, p. 66). There are, however, always comparisons, setting one place, one group of people, off against another, so that Wigan is not particularly nice, until compared with Bolton (in Ian’s view) and Southport is like Paris and hence preferable to Wigan for Linda. Just as class distinctions can be about relative positioning, so too can place identities (Southerton, 2002).
Thus far, this chapter has been concerned with a ‘peoplescape’ in the present. Belonging has been shown to be done through the way ‘we’ talk, the taskscape of neighbouring, through dense and extensive social networks within the place and through identities of and in place merging to create a sense of a very localised cultural identity, or world of actual reach, as ‘we who live here do this’. In order to set off these aspects of belonging-in-place other people and other places also enter into people’s narratives positioning ‘us’ relationally rather than absolutely. The people of the place examined so far have been known or familiar others but not (unless coincidentally) kin or close friends. There are, however, other people in this landscape through the world of restorable reach. These are ancestors, both known and unknown, brought into the present by those who are either personally familiar with their family history, as in Barbara’s case, or who have uncovered their family history, as Antony has done. As well as being part of the intersubjective world of restorable reach, family history can also contribute to a belonging in place through the connections to particular places and buildings over the generations. Material places hold inalienable traces of ancestors tying people in to particular places. Both intersubjective and material connections to people from the past are explored in the following section.

5.8 Family History

This section looks at how ancestors and other kin, can help to forge familial or individual identities in the present, both through an intersubjective world of restorable reach and through connections to material places, passed on through the generations. Past, present and future abide within the family across the generations (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p. 421) creating a family taskscape where ‘we’ ‘attend to one another’ (Ingold, 2000, p. 196). The stories here attend to those in the past, whilst also presenting them to the future. Whilst Imagining Us examined history of place and Worlds within Reach has looked at how the concept of who ‘we’ are, as a group of people from this place, family history is the more personal, intimate side of connections to places. Imagining Us showed how there are particular narratives around the identity/ies of Wigan; here Ian (62), Barbara (75) and Antony (25) demonstrate how their own identities are constituted through an understanding of their ancestors’ lives within this place. These individuals were the respondents with
the most information about their family histories; Joan (66) was beginning her family history research at the time of the interviews. Each of these respondents also takes an interest in local history: Ian with particular reference to the Catholic history in the area; Barbara is secretary to a local history society; Antony is involved with a group trying to preserve Wigan’s buildings. The merging of local and family history knowledge in their stories brings the material place(s) to the fore in their accounts emphasising their families’ continued embeddedness in this locality.

The biographical narratives around which initial interviews were structured did not necessarily begin with the individual. Most people started to tell their story from their own birth but did not continue chronologically. The narratives of self-identity begin with forebears (Lawler, 2008, p. 42) and it is through the family that ‘... social values and aspirations ... taken-for-granted ways of belonging’ are passed on (Bertaux & Thompson, 2005, p. 1). But whilst a narrative understanding of these family histories is interesting and, as the ‘raw material of social history’ (Bertaux & Thompson, 2005, p. 14) helps to position the histories of Wigan outlined in Imagining Us, a more distinctive take on these particular stories is how they engage with the place itself. Because all these ancestors also lived in Wigan (none traced their families outside of Wigan) there is a significant reliance on places and particular buildings in the stories. These material aspects of the stories are a part of the respondents’ current lives and thus add an additional dimension not usually present in ‘who do you think you are’ type narratives (Bottero, 2012, p. 69; Kramer, 2011, pp. 389 - 90).

Some of the interviewees had conducted a considerable amount of family history research, others knew nothing further back than their grandparents, and for Ethel (85) and Maureen (75) anything beyond their parents’ occupations was unclear. For those who have delved into their family background in detail it seems to be a source of pride and an important part of their identity. History, as we have seen with the histories of the place in the previous chapter, Imagining Us, is not only about the past but is also carried forward into our understanding of the present and potential futures. Ways of using family history to provide a link forward to the present are shown in the accounts of Antony’s and Barbara’s family stories. Ian, as
a local historian as well as a family historian, seems to take a more detached view in many ways, but some of his central concerns with the future of his family, that is the social mobility of his children, is also evident in how he describes his family in the past.

5.8.1 Ian’s use of Family History

Ian (62) positions himself first and foremost as an historian, with his family history being almost incidental to that: the fact that he could discover so much of his family history is down to the Catholic records available – of which he has knowledge because he has studied local Catholic history.

Although his family have lived in Wigan since at least 1720 he does not use this to embed himself as a Wiganer and takes a rather detached view of this length of attachment – looking from a historian’s (or scientific) perspective, rather than a personal one. Unlike many who research their family history, he does not seem to view ancestors as people in whom he has anything more than an academic interest, although he speaks more fondly of people such as his grandfather and mother with whom he had a personal connection. However Ian does highlight ancestors who have risen above the everyday and either made money or improved themselves in some other way: ‘he was hewing the coal, I think that was the top job in the mines’. He is obviously impressed by wealth and enterprise: ‘Henry took over the pub. And they must have made a lot of money’, both in the past but also with people he knew such as aunts who ran boarding houses in Blackpool during the sixties. He has also moved beyond the rest of his family in terms of social mobility in that he has a PhD and he is clearly pleased that his daughter has a degree from a top university, and that she has not returned to live in Wigan. Up until his father’s generation his family had lived ‘within three hundred square yards’ for two hundred years: his father moved out to about three miles away, to a council house, and then he moved further away and now his children have moved out of Wigan altogether. At the same time, in Ian’s estimation, Wigan and its people have gone downhill.

Differing temporalities and notions of place are at play in Ian’s family story. For two hundred years they pretty much stayed put in the mining area of Wigan; some
branched out into mill work and moved areas accordingly, but as far as Ian’s direct ancestors go they remained living ‘within three hundred square yards’. Then within three generations they, Ian’s children, have left Wigan. Whilst in Ian’s version of the story this seems to be largely down to the family’s own attributes and achievements (although he does acknowledge the improvements in educational opportunities) in fact much of this could be ascribed to changes in social practices. Improved housing, in the form of council housing, became available and Ian’s parents positioned themselves to be allocated a house by moving to a slum area with their young daughter, Ian’s eldest sister Beryl (76); this part of the story was told by Beryl, Ian did not mention it. Ian himself, whilst prepared to leave Wigan, and he did live elsewhere in the north west for some years, was drawn back when his sister found him a house in ‘the best area’, according to his version of events, although Beryl did not remember this. His children, however, have both moved away and Ian does not seem likely to try to draw them back.

Ian is familiar with the particular places in his family’s story. He is familiar with the kinds of terraced houses his forebears lived in in Scholes and would be aware of the lowering of the social status of the area where he grew up – he emphasised that when his parents moved into the area it was:

> what you might now expect you’d get on a normal sort of semi-detached estate populated by the aristocracy of the working class, policemen, firemen, local authority employees, people who worked for the revenue.

(Ian’s interview)

Ian does not, as Barbara and Antony do below, connect his life story to a particular site or building but the materiality of the place came through in his use of maps to tell his family history. He brought a map of Wigan showing Scholes in the nineteenth century and the size of the houses there to demonstrate how the plot his current house stands on is about four times the size of his ancestors’ homes. This material distinction is one way Ian positions himself as having moved up in terms of the social position of his family (Bertaux-Wiame & Thompson, 1997, p. 124).
Ian’s story of his relationship with Wigan is more nuanced than the one he tells of his parents or previous generations but all can be seen as being constrained by the place and time in which they functioned (Smart, 2007, p. 116). Through a grammar school and university education, made more widely available after the Second World War, Ian was able to exercise some choice over the outcomes of his life including where he lived, although he did not consider the possibility of moving outside the North West as his daughter has done. Ian positions his life as the culmination of a family history of social mobility, but another version of the story could be made around changes in social practices: the increased education available to his generation, the construction of council housing, the wider availability of mortgages and wider choice of careers. Account must be taken also of the way the story was told. Ian brought his family tree to the interview. It covered most of the large table in the room. He then talked me through who he saw as key characters in his family story. Although drawn up by himself, the family tree is also a material aspect of his family, a picture of them, and was used, in the same way as the interviewees used the photos in Imagining Us, as an aide-memoire in his narration of particular events. It may be that Ian chose, consciously or unconsciously, a particular version of the story in order to address my sociological theme. Nevertheless, Ian’s family story clearly lends itself to a cultural interpretation of social mobility and this theme of improvement comes through in both Barbara’s and Antony’s stories as well.

5.8.2 Barbara’s Family History

Although Barbara (75) has looked into her family’s past she made limited use of it in telling her own life story. In terms of how she sees herself her most important antecedents are her father and his father, her grandfather, who died tragically before she was born. She comes across as their natural heir, despite being a girl. She was an only child and therefore allowed to take on the role of son as well as daughter: ‘I used to go in the workshop with him’. And even when it came to starting work, despite taking up the female role of secretarial work Barbara joined the company where her father worked: ‘and I went there straight from school, so there was three generations of us who had gone to the same firm’.
Barbara’s grandfather was well-known in the local area and his early death is used to demonstrate how that has gone down in family folklore:

So it was very tragic because he had one of the biggest funerals ever at [...] Parish Church with brass bands and contingents of scouts, guides, ambulance workers and everything, it was one of the biggest funerals, so he was very, very highly respected

(Barbara’s interview)

And Barbara is a direct continuation of that line. This is embodied in the house that they all lived in:

But as I said I was born down the road in a house that was built in 1911 with my, my grandfather built that with the gentleman next door so my dad, I lived in that house, my dad lived in that house and my grandfather lived in that house, so that was three generations of us living, lived in the same house

(Barbara’s interview)

The temporality of the house is different from that of the people who inhabit it as it covers three generations of the family before needing ‘a lot of money ... to be spent on it’. This difference in life courses allows Barbara to share aspects of her life with her grandfather despite not knowing him personally, but having grown up with the inalienable traces of him in the house he built (Jones, 2010, p. 189). The house takes on its own personality in Barbara’s story with its position by the canal and near the glue factory shaping her childhood stories.

Barbara’s family history is largely composed of a set of stories, which are well rehearsed through writing them for the writing groups she belongs to and are thus fixed in time and memory. Some of these have been related to her by other family members, such as her grandfather’s death and funeral, others, such as her grandmother’s story, she has put together herself:

my Grandma on my mother’s side, lived til 92, 94 and she was absolutely super and couldn’t read or write and um knew everything that was going on... me Grandma never had any meat or fish when we used to go and as a child
you don’t understand and me mum used to say well your Grandma’s no money

(Barbara’s interview)

Her grandmother is the only well drawn female figure, her mother paling into insignificance beside her father’s technical abilities and the adventurousness of her uncle-by-marriage:

I said to my uncle well can I come down the mine and he said well I don’t know whether you can come down the mine. Well anyway, I went down the mine... About 12 or 13 ... and I got my overalls on and went down the cage with my hat ... and then crawled along to the coal face and there were all these sweaty miners with their pickaxes and me uncle said would you like to fire a shot? And he said but when you press the plunger you have to run, so I said ok so I pressed the plunger there were all these wires and cables and things and of course all dust comes down so we had to run

(Barbara’s interview)

These anecdotes tend to be separate tales, not particularly linked directly to who she is which is defined more clearly through the mere fact of being born in the house her grandfather built and working for the same firm as her father and grandfather. All the stories position Barbara, alongside other members of her family, as enmeshed in webs of social relations (Lawler, 2008, p. 19). The emphasis in Barbara’s stories is on continued respectability and on poverty as an unlucky aberration. As with Ian’s focus on social mobility, Barbara’s grandmother’s poverty is an aspect of the past that she has moved on from.

Despite having a daughter and three grandchildren there is little sense in her account of Barbara’s family continuing into the future, as there is with Ian’s. It may be that because Barbara has committed much of her family story to paper, and to print in the case of her grandmother’s story, it is settled, in the past, history. These narratives have already been interpreted by Barbara and they are thus fixed but together form a more-or-less whole autobiography (Bruner, 1991, p. 18) and the books themselves will be passed on to her grandchildren (Barbara’s interview). Whereas Ian, although he has drawn up a large family tree, had to talk me through it, making the connections anew each time. A story that is read is the same each
time, whereas one that is told is told afresh, just as any practices, no matter how mundane or routine, are always a copy rather than an exact repetition of a previous one (Ingold, 2000, p. 197). The life of the teller, and the listener, move on, things change, the story is always a part of the present and directed towards the future.

Barbara’s story is centred around the house her grandfather built. This physical reminder of her unknown grandfather was central to Barbara’s childhood. However, buildings also have life spans; although Barbara indicated it is still there, not far from where she lives now, it was sold by her mother as being too expensive to maintain. The other material aspects of Barbara’s story are the photos of her grandfather and others and her writing – her grandmother’s story is published in a collection. These are what Barbara showed me at her interview and what she will pass on to her grandchildren, in lieu of the house itself.

Joan (66) was less advanced in her family history research than Ian or Barbara but also had a different aim – to find out more about her father’s family whom she never knew as a child due to a rift over her Catholic father marrying her Methodist mother. She spoke of the first time she met her cousin: ‘he’s so like me dad, his eyes are the most beautiful shade of blue, I just wanted to look at him because he’s a proper [surname]’ (Joan’s interview). Here there is a direct link back to her father who died in 1973, but has almost been brought back into actual reach through her cousin’s physical likeness to him (Mason, 2008, p. 34). This shock of physical likeness is often described by adoptees finding their birth families (Mason, 2011). The reflection back of us from those around us confirms our own identities (Leach, 2002, p. 131), here giving Joan the confirmation she needs that she is a part of her, previously unknown, father’s family.

We use the ‘world within restorable reach’ in order to compare and confirm the current world that surrounds us, to give meaning to new developments in our world. This is probably seen most clearly in Antony’s account of his family history. He reaches back to the world of his grandfather and great-grandfather in order to give himself status as a member of the respectable working class, rather than the closer (in terms of reach) world of his father, which defines him as descended from a ‘black sheep’ in his terms.
5.8.3 Antony’s Family History

Antony (25) has done a considerable amount of family history research and uses what he has found to reconstruct his own identity from the bottom up, so to speak.

Antony’s surname has been traced back to the Normans in England, arriving in Lancashire in the eleventh century:

so it’s very much a Bury name, it’s a Lancastrian name, it’s very rare to find one elsewhere unless they’ve emigrated from Lancashire, they’re not based anywhere else you know, they were made in Lancashire

(Antony’s interview)

The knowledge of the long association with Wigan and with Lancashire have caused ‘the proudness thing that I’ve started to feel’. Knowing of his family’s long connection with the place has made him feel more attached himself, which he puts down to a hereditary connection, giving him a link to these unknown ancestors, whom he refers to as ‘we,’ embodying the ‘we-relation’ across generations, bringing the world of restorable reach into the world of actual reach. But his very existence as a member of this family with the Norman name has, at the same time, become precarious as he discovered that his great-grandfather was the only surviving boy of his generation.

Antony’s grandfather and great-grandfather were mill engineers, working the steam engines that kept the mills working. He sees these as hardworking men and himself as their direct descendant, although when he left school he ‘did nothing for twelve months’ which follows more from his own father who has been ‘sick’ for as long as Antony can remember. He describes his father as a ‘black sheep’ but then brings social history into play alongside his own family history in sideling his father’s generation as ‘lost’ and ‘absolutely scattered’ due to the closure of the coal mines and other industry during the eighties: ‘you’ve got to look at the social changes especially like the Thatcher times and all that stuff, it all sort of ties in’.
Overwhelmingly, though, Antony’s attachment is material, to the place. He has searched out graves and monuments and become active in trying to preserve the character of Wigan through its buildings. Antony seems to understand the inalienable nature of these material places and connects to his ancestors through them making their preservation tantamount to preserving the people themselves, or at least their memory (Jones, 2010). Antony did not have interpersonal relationships to his grandfather or great-grandfather but through uncovering their stories and visiting places which are inalienable from them he has recreated these people as a part of his present, as part of his own life story (Kramer, 2011, p. 389). In one sense Antony belongs in Wigan through having spent his whole life there. But, due to his father’s long term unemployment, the family lacks status locally which leads Antony to feel he does not have a place in the ‘moral order of the community’ (Morgan, 2009, p. 76).

He has researched not only his own family history but the history of others whose lives have overlapped, such as the mill owning family. However, Antony does not glamorise Wigan and says it is ‘a bit rubbish’ as a town, although this is probably not meant in a completely derisory way but merely to show that he can see Wigan with an outsider’s gaze.

History is never solely about the past but concerns how we define ourselves in the present (Anderson, 2006) and going towards the future. Through engaging with their family history and family stories these three people, Ian (61), Barbara (75) and Antony (25), bring ‘the world within restorable reach’ into their personal ‘world within actual reach’ establishing ‘we-relations’ with their, often unknown, ancestors (Kramer, 2011, p. 385). This creates relationships to place not just through these people themselves but also through their ancestors and the overlapping worlds of actual, common and restorable reach. These relationships are physical, embodied, not just to names on a certificate. Her grandfather is a real presence for Barbara through having lived in the house that he built; Antony has visited the graves of his ancestors – going to some lengths to find the actual, unmarked burial sites and then trying to mark them; Ian is able to compare his house to the ones his ancestors lived in. Through these shared interactions ancestors move into reach. This is not about disembodied memories but a material
connection to others via the place (Casey, 1996, p. 23). Kramer’s (2011, pp. 389 - 90) correspondents attested to the importance of place in family history research and the intangible connections it can represent. For my respondents, more unusually, the places in the research are places that are well known and a part of their own lives, sometimes prior to knowing of the family connection. Because these people’s families are rooted in Wigan what Mason (2008, cited in Kramer 2011, p. 389) describes as ‘intangible or ethereal affinities’ surround them. Belonging in the place can then be claimed on multiple levels. In effect, and as Antony seems to understand, this place and the inalienable presence in it of ‘our’ ancestors (those of the ‘we’ group) needs to be preserved in some way and passed on to the future in order to continue a level of engagement with the place and the people in it that constitutes an ‘authentic’ attachment (Jones, 2010, p. 199) or what I am calling an ‘ontological belonging’. This close connection to the past reconfirms connections in the present – ‘we’ are Wiganers, ‘we’ belong here (Rose, 1988, p. 166).

5.9 Conclusion

This chapter has examined the second layer of belonging-in-place – that of social connections to people in the place. I have looked at how ‘we’ come to identify with others in the same place. This takes various forms including embodied actions – here looked at through accent; a taskscape of neighbouring giving rise to caring relations between people who are physically close to each other; broader connections to others in the place over a lifetime or more; depictions of other people and places which confirm our idea of ‘us’; and finally the connections between families and place over multiple lifetimes. Ways of talking can help to define us and distinguish between ‘us’ on a more subtle level and become part of us in a physical, embodied way but are also part of the overall imaginary of the place and how ‘we’ behave or talk. I have shown how the intersubjective worlds of reach which are shared by people who inhabit the same milieu, are based around activities – the tasks that people do together. Neighbouring is an activity undertaken by many as part of everyday tasks – helping out elderly neighbours, looking after children, clearing snow or sharing a conversation. In order to define ‘us’ as a group we need to share some part of a stock of knowledge, to have a
common understanding of how to do things, round here. This is offset against a
group of ‘them’ and ‘other’ places which are used to create boundaries through the
same activities – ways of talking, ways of doing things, creating an imagined place
– that are used to define the ‘we group’. I also looked at how the peoplescape
encapsulates time by bringing together the narrated family history in the present,
the person telling the story and material remains and inalienable traces. The
‘imagined’ community of the past is inherently embodied and emplaced within the
material environment.

Belonging is not only about sharing a world with family and close friends – people
with whom we would have a relationship regardless of proximity – but also of
knowing and being known, more generally. Here my analysis departs significantly
from that of Savage et al (2005) or Pahl and Spencer (2005) who focus on friends
(although within a broad definition of friendship) and family as comprising the
important intersubjective relationships between people rather than those based on
‘daily, situational, contact’ (Savage, et al., 2005, p. 151). Whilst the participants
here had numerous ties to extended families and friendships which, due to their
length (eighty years in Ethel’s case), were ‘family like’, my argument is that
belonging, in the way it is examined here, as a practice, is predicated upon the day-
to-day embodied and emplaced relationships with familiar others: neighbours,
shop-keepers and so on. The relationships analysed here are with people who are,
essentially, a part of the character of the place, based on spatial propinquity. These
relationships, dismissed by Savage et al (2005, p. 103) as not required for
belonging, are, I argue, fundamental social practices that go to make up a
132), although it helps to have friendly relations with them. This does not detract
from the importance of these relationships to a feeling of well being and of
belonging but rather highlights the importance of both knowing others and being
known, that is, of face-to-face relations (Morgan, 2009) and the mutual obligations
they can create. It is this group of acquaintances in a place who engender a ‘sense
of community’ in the shared social landscape and thus a belonging-in-place (Miller,
2002, p. 217). Knowing the people around us, both in the present and through the
world of restorable reach, in this place (defined through a contrast with other
places), confirms us in our own identity as ‘we’ are reflected back to ourselves (Leach, 2002, p. 130).

In focussing on these background, but, crucially, embodied and emplaced, relationships, which are a part of the everyday taskscape for most people, I have shifted the focus of belonging from the abstract and imaginary spatially dispersed networks of friendships (Savage, et al., 2005, p. 151), ‘social networks’ or ‘personal communities’ (Pahl & Spencer, 2005) to shared practices, in place, with recognizable others. Contra Savage et al (2005, p. 103) and an ‘elective belonging’, this is about belonging as what ‘we’ do together in this place, an active, embodied peoplescape. Where we share a world of common reach it is clear that ‘we’ belong as a group. Where a world of restorable reach (‘knowing all the family history’) is also shared then the level of belonging and identity is stronger (Rose, 1988, p. 165). Because these people and their families have stayed in the same place over time the world of restorable reach stretches back further into the past, bringing that past to life in the present, which also gives a sense of rootedness that can provide a stable base for the future. A community, like the landscape, is a process, not a thing (Tilley, 2006, p. 7) and therefore changes through time. Through understanding everyday practices in place using the concept of Ingold’s (2000, p. 196) ‘taskscape’ we can see how the outcome of social practice is a constant becoming, built on the past but directed towards the future. Belonging-in-place is the outcome of practices, undertaken together by people, in place.

Miller (2002, p. 218) argues that belonging is a state of being in correct relation to community, history or locality; this includes both belonging as ‘a sense of ease or accord with who we are in ourselves’ and ‘a sense of accord with the various physical and social contexts in which our lives are lived out’ (p. 220). In other words, we come to understand who we are through interaction with others (Crossley, 1996, p. 17). The more we can see ourselves reflected in those around us the more likely we are to have that sense of ease with ourselves. Part of the social context of our lives is ‘who we are’ in the sense of who we are understood to be, by others; one physical context of our lives is the place(s) where we live out our life. In order to belong we need to ‘fit’ within these different contexts. This is not a purely subjective position, not a choice of the individual, but is enacted through
relationships outside the self to other people, history and place, it is a performative belonging. The embodied and performative, or ‘doing’, elements of belonging found here demonstrate a deeper layer in an ontological belonging, from that of an imagined place found in the previous chapter. This chapter has shifted focus from a visual, cognitive one to one based on performance (Fortier, 1999; Leach, 2002), the ‘doing’ of belonging with other embodied people, in place. The carrying of the past into the future to continue the attachment to the place and people is examined in the next chapter, *Material Places*. This examines the materiality that connects place and people in order to understand the importance of places, buildings and other specific sites, to belonging. The moral obligations of neighbouring are extended over generations as I show how people care for the place in order to pass it on into the future. Here the core layer of an ontological belonging is revealed as an embodied being in a material place, the focal point of past, present and future. Being situated in time and place enables a sense of accord with community (people), history and locality.
6  Material Places

6.1  Introduction

So far I have unpeeled the two outermost layers of an ontological belonging. I have discussed the different imaginaries of Wigan and the way people connect to them and belong through them (in *Imagining Us*) and in *Worlds within Reach* have considered the different kinds of relationships to people who help to confirm a sense of belonging-in-place. The focus of the research shifted from a visual, cognitive approach in investigating imagined places to an intersubjective and embodied understanding of people in place. Many studies of belonging end at this point (cf. May, 2011; Savage, et al., 2005; Southerton, 2002). In order to explore the full picture of a three-dimensional belonging as a way of being in the world, here I extend the discussion of belonging-in-place to the materiality of the places themselves. Using the idea of the ‘gift’ from anthropological theory I examine the importance of places to belonging through the generations, bringing together the themes of temporality and materiality through a focus on the family and broader future generations to whom belonging is passed on.

Miller (2002, p. 217) describes the three cornerstones of belonging as history, people and place. These are all displayed here. Places are not only social constructions or imaginaries, not only a ‘peoplescape,’ but are also material and engage with all the senses and with physical bodies. Places are not static or reactionary but fluid, interactive and a fundamental part of social life (Massey, 1995, p. 183). The life of the material place and the people of that place exist in different temporalities, not synchronized but still harmonized (Ingold, 2000, p. 197). When imbued with significant social encounters and absorbed into the rhythm of life, places become part of a dense web of relationships, as the neighbouring relations demonstrated in *Worlds within Reach*; these in turn become inalienable from the place itself, passed on through the generations, usage changing, buildings themselves changing but ultimately remaining the same place, its identity merging with the identity of the people inhabiting it (Gray, 1999, p. 455). It is the material features of the place and their integration into the performative spaces of social life that will be examined here.
It is through the metaphor of the gift that memories, rather than conjuring a nostalgic sense of the past or something lost, can bring the past into the present. The ‘past’ or the memory of it is a part of the present life story of the person/people/place. One instance of this re-creation in the present can be illustrated through family history research. The uncovering of the life stories of ancestors is less of a looking back to an unknowable past than it is of a bringing of the story of the ancestor into being in the present, inextricably entangled with the life of the researcher (Kramer, 2011, p. 385) (see 5.8 Family History). Here, however, I shall discuss these entanglements as mediated through places, younger selves and unknown others, rather than specific people.

6.2 Place as Gift

*Imagining Us* looked at how people think about the varying social constructions of their communities and the places they inhabit. The chapter explored the ways in which people try to reconcile imaginary constructions of their social and material environment with what they see and experience in everyday life. In contrast to this constructivist approach this chapter takes a materialist approach focussing on the places, buildings and their networks of ‘relationships with past and present people and places’ (Jones, 2010, p. 189). It is, I argue, through the development of such relationships that people come to belong ontologically. This focus lends itself to an anthropological approach.

Gifts are inextricable from a relationship between donor and recipient: they are the fulcrums around which personal attachments pivot ... Inalienable goods carry with them an intimate connection with each relationship they were part of: they retain a part of each person who has authored their history ... They may not be possessed: no gift object is inalienable from a single person. Inalienability is not ownership.

(Fowler, 2004, p. 33)

The aim of this chapter is to analyse how memories and places can be seen as ‘inalienable gifts’ passed from one generation to the next. Inalienability endows the ‘gift’ with a part of each person who has previously held it (Godelier, 1999, p. 172).
Using this anthropological concept metaphorically this chapter explores how places through time come to figure as inalienable gifts passed from generation to generation, symbolising intersubjective (that is, sociological) relations between them (Godelier, 1999, p. 105). Identities in the present comprise multiple social relationships stretching between past, present and future showing an ontological belonging as a web of connections between generations and places over time. It is the material aspect of place that is crucial here because ‘the materiality of objects embodies the past experiences and relationships that they have been part of, and facilitates some kind of ineffable contact with those experiences and relationships’ (Jones, 2010, p. 189).

Gifts are not one-way traffic. Gifts in the sense used here are often reciprocal vehicles of exchange, although this does not have to mean that the reciprocity is towards the original giver of the gift, but rather that receiving a gift does not confer outright ownership and the gift must eventually be passed on (Fowler, 2004, p. 32). This is the case with some property inheritance in the West and sometimes with family heirlooms and family stories, although it may perhaps be dying out as a practice (Hurdley, 2007, p. 129). I show how this concept also shapes the relationships of people with more public places such as the park and the town centre. Differing from contractual economic transactions, a moral obligation is implicated in gift exchange (Fowler, 2004, p. 33). One of the tasks that neighbouring involves is to care for the place, and its people. This particular theme is continued here. Being a person of this place (Wigan) could be seen as a ‘type’ identity (Schutz, 1962, pp. 350 - 1): that is, a ‘moral person’ who holds a status within the group and acts as an incumbent of this position. Maussian gifts are exchanged by groups or ‘moral persons’, rather than modern individuals, and thus the exchange is made on behalf of, as an agent of, the group, not as a self-interested act (Parry, 1986, p. 456). Relationships between people in place were the subject of Worlds within Reach which showed how the people of the place are part of the ‘taskscape’ (Ingold, 2000, p. 196) of the place, incorporating the people, place and what they do there together, over time. ‘Gifts’ in terms of knowledge, history and tradition are passed between these people through generations, over time, each ‘holding’ the knowledge or history until the next generation is ready to receive the gift. As these are inalienable gifts they contain the essence of previous generations
of, here, Wiganers. ‘Doing neighbouring’ could be seen as a form of gift exchange (see Chapter 5 Worlds Within Reach). Where the gift is an inalienable one, destined to be passed on rather than back to the donor, then there is a moral obligation on the holder to nurture the gift. Where the gift is a place passed between generations it should, then, be looked after by the current holders. We will see, below, how Joan takes on this role with relation to the park and how Ron develops his particular network of places that comprise a ‘Wigan’ he is happy to pass on. However, as we saw in Imagining Us, how a place should be looked after is open to interpretation and dispute. Places are always palimpsests containing layers of history. If ‘restoration’ requires removing some of those layers, and the relationships contained within the layers are then lost, then ‘restoration’ will destroy part of the web of social relations within which the place, as it is now, is located (Jones, 2010, p. 189). In the same way, moving an object, such as the pit winding wheels placed outside the college in Wigan and Sainsbury’s in Leigh, will tear it from the historical relationships which gave it meaning (Jones, 2010, p. 192). How some of the people of Wigan understand their responsibilities towards these gifts from the past are discussed below.

The temporal aspect of the place assemblage or network is brought to the fore when looking at the changes that have happened. But change over time, does not have to preclude continuity: history is not then ‘past’ but is pulled into the present by these ongoing inalienable relationships through the material aspects of the place. This is not nostalgia, a longing for home or something lost, but can act to reconfirm identities in the present. These relationships to the past are ‘held’ in the places, but brought to life through intersubjective relationships made possible through the medium of the place (Duranti, 2010, p. 29).

This material conception of belonging is significantly different from Savage et al’s (2005, p. 207) ‘visions of living’ which are largely independent of relationships to others, past or present, or to the material aspects of the place. The places the elective belongers elect to live are ahistorical (to these people) and therefore do not have any connections to past or future within the elective belongers’ lives, these places (for these people) are part of the economic sphere. Commodities and gifts are fundamentally different, although the distinction is not rigid: a commodity can
become a gift in some circumstances (Hurdley, 2007, p. 138). But a commodity does not usually contain a part of the person who made it or who sold it (Fowler, 2004, p. 34). Place as gift can also be seen as an extension of Massey’s relational view of place which here stretches through time as well as to other places. There are overlaps with Ingold’s ‘taskscape’ of people acting together through time, but here I focus on the indelible presence of previous owners or holders that remain in material objects which are given as gifts (Godelier, 1999, pp. 53 - 4).

Whilst places and their histories can be seen as gift-like by a section of the population who can connect through these inalienable relationships to known or imagined forebears, this does not in any way restrict their usage by other people (including ‘elective’ belongers). Indeed, the building up of the ‘cultural biographies’ (Jones, 2010, p. 199) of places and their position in a social web of relationships and obligations is an ongoing process. The next generation to whom the gift of place and memories is passed on is not fixed and not restricted to those with connections to the current gift holders; new social relationships are constantly being formed (O’Neill & Whatmore, 2000, p. 131). The gift of rugby is an example as many of the rugby league team’s most cherished members are not born and bred Wiganers. In this way ontological belonging is passed on not solely through familial connections but is also created through connections to the places (or other material objects) themselves (Miller, 2002, p. 223).

The idea of place and history as inalienable gift can be used to unravel complex entanglements between people and places now, in the past and in the future: what Jones (2010, p. 189) refers to as ‘magical’ relationships. Connections through time are a necessary pre-condition of an ontological belonging and these are present in family relationships as well as wider, community ones (Miller, 2002, p. 223). Links between grandparents and grandchildren are the clearest articulation of this and an example is outlined below through Val’s (65) diary. Whilst this is one particular example similar links to places through the generations can be found in other diaries and biographies such as John’s (61) family connections to the church or Barbara’s (75) to the family home. This familial example is followed by an illustration of place as inalienable gift both from one generation of Wiganers to the next and as gifts that accompany people throughout their lives, bringing pasts (and
sometimes futures) into the present through Joan’s (66) lifelong connection with the park. These individual examples of the passing on of places between and through lives are then followed by examples which connect with wider groups of people. Where buildings are demolished then the inalienable connections inevitably go with it; how this affects people in the present, and the taskscape that the place was a part of, is looked at through the former rugby league ground of Central Park. Wigan town centre is also at the heart of many changes to buildings and narratives from Ron (62), John (61) and Linda (61) show the way that gifts for passing on can be cobbled together from selective mixes of new and old places.

Through the use of photos and diaries it was possible to engage directly with the respondents and the material places which have specific meaning for them. At the post-diary interviews the photos were used as prompts to talk about the different places pictured and this engaged interviewees in other stories of the place as Val (65), John (61) and Linda (61) demonstrate below. Biographical interviews also brought up places which sometimes became thematic, such as Central Park in Steve (38) and Anne’s (38) interview. It was in Joan’s (66) initial interview that the important place the park plays in her life became clear, and as a result of this I asked her to take me to the park during her post-diary interview. The week of her diary did not include a visit to the park. These different methods, particularly the walk, enabled a phenomenological understanding of the places talked about: being in the park gives a different understanding from being told about it.

It is worth emphasising that the places talked about in the following sections can be viewed in terms of ‘the common’ as a way of organising mutual interest. Common land allows different people to use it in different ways (Wright & Davies, 2010). The specific views and uses of the following places depicted here are those of these particular people and may not apply to others, whether those who consider themselves to belong to Wigan or not.

6.3 Val: circularity and the gift of grandchildren

Many of the places visited by the respondents during the week they kept a diary are places they have visited throughout the course of their life which also extend
through their families: parents and children attending the same schools for example. Val (65) picks up her granddaughter from school, a building which was where Sunday school was held when she was a child. Being very close to where she lives now and where she grew up, this building is an integral part of Val’s life story that is now also incorporated into her granddaughter’s life. Through the material aspects of the building and a photo, Val recreates her childhood self in the present.

Val is closely involved in her granddaughter’s school. Here is an extract from her diary:

3pm Pick up granddaughter (along with husband) from ... school. Know a lot of people outside school. Some that I have known a very long time, others I have met through school.
4pm Back at school with husband and granddaughter to help set up the Tombola stall that we run at the school Christmas Fair. See lots of people we know.

(Val’s diary)

Val also knows many of the other parents and grandparents at the school. Helping out at the school fair – run by the PTA, or Friends of the School – is something that Val does as a member of this school community. Volunteering in this way can be used as a way of engaging with and belonging to the school community (Savage, et al., 2005, pp. 72 - 76) which is often undertaken by people new to the place to develop connections to others. Val, though, uses her skills from banking to act as a treasurer for several local groups where she already knew the other people involved.

The school building (Figure 5) was where Val attended Sunday School as a child. It is part of the fabric of her life. The inalienable relationships present in the building, for Val, are a part of her life story, she and the building share a part of their biography (Jones, 2010, p. 189). The entanglement Val has with the building is with her own past, which is reflected back to her through the building and entangled with her present (Leach, 2002, p. 132).
At her post-diary interview she explained:

This is [granddaughter’s] school which is a three minute walk away. I was Rose Queen there when I was six because it’s the church school, so it belongs to the church along the way however I didn’t go to that school, I went to the one over the bridge, at the time it was a better school. But [my children] both went and it closed down halfway through Claire being there... as I say I was Rose Queen there when I was six and then I went to Youth Club so it’s always been a big part of my life as a building ... But I know a lot of people who go there and a lot of people are Grandmas picking up their children who I’ve known since I was little so that’s nice.

[Val went upstairs and came back with a picture of herself as Rose Queen at six years old, with a friend she still knows also in the picture, I commented on how amazing that was, sixty years later]

Well it’s like that Leigh you see, ‘cos on the whole people stay here, which is nice, well it’s changing now, you know, a lot of our friends, their children live in London ‘cos I mean careers are different.

(Val’s post-diary interview)
The longevity of these relationships is due to Val living around the corner from where she grew up, but the fact that she still sees the people at the school is because her daughter also still lives very close by and her granddaughter goes to this school. On her first marriage Val moved to a different part of Leigh but the house she lives in now happened to be available when she and Keith were looking for a house together. Claire’s husband Paul had his own house close by when they met and Claire moved in with him. They have since moved but still live very close. These coincidences could be seen as ‘intercontingencies’ (Becker, 1998, p. 35), the dependencies we all have on the decisions of others in affecting our life course. Val and Claire are mutually dependent as Claire staying in Leigh allows Val to look after her grandchildren and Val being there (she and Keith considered moving to another part of Wigan) gives Claire the help she needs.

Val’s life has a circularity to it – she has lived in other nearby areas but is now back where she grew up; thus the school building and a lot of the other Grandmas are still present in her life. Val’s past life is therefore brought with her into the present in the materiality of the place, the intersubjective relations with the other grandmothers, who are ‘people of the place’ (see Worlds within Reach) and the (also material) photo of herself as Rose Queen with her friends. These memories are located outside the body, in the things and other people with which Val has shared her life (Brewer, 2005). But looking back at the photo of herself as Rose Queen is not, for Val, an act of nostalgia, a longing for a past home, because the photo does not depict something that is gone but what is still present in Val’s life: the building where she attended Sunday School and her friend who is also in the picture. This presence of her past life in the present can be seen as an ‘inalienable gift’ (Fowler, 2004, p. 33). It is inalienable because it cannot be separated from the giver – Val’s childhood self, in this case. This presence of the past reflected back through places and things is, I shall argue throughout this chapter, the gift of belonging, an ontological belonging (Leach, 2002, p. 132; Miller, 2002, p. 223).

Another form of gift visible in Val’s diary extract is the gift of grandchildren. Bertaux and Delcroix (2000, p. 75) see grandchildren as being a reciprocal gift back to the parents. The inalienable gift of life is given to children who then reciprocate by providing their parents with grandchildren. Val’s son Rob (37) also
has a son but, despite Val and Keith making a real effort to have a similar relationship with him they acknowledge that their relationships with their grandchildren who they see in the flesh, rather than on Skype, every week will inevitably be different. The grandchildren here in Leigh share in the place, the school, the local park, play areas and McDonald’s. The circularity of life is universal and ongoing: circles being without beginning or end. The fruits of the original gift will be returned to the giver: exchange becomes cumulative rather than directly reciprocal (Fowler, 2004, p. 33).

Other places, more accessible to a wider section of my sample, can also show how the gift relation can bring together different people and places over time (Fowler, 2004, p. 33). Some of these places, Mesnes Park, Tesco’s and Wigan town centre, are discussed below.

### 6.4 Mesnes Park: Joan’s Life Story

The park is where Joan (66) can trace out her life history. Joan has been visiting the park for as long as she can remember, first with her parents, then her children and now her grandchildren. She has seen changes over the last fifty years but essentially the park has remained very much the same place. Many of the places in the park hold particular memories for Joan and much of her life story can be traced out here. In walking around the park with Joan she was able to show me the places she had talked about in her initial interview. Although Val shows how a place can repeat its presence in someone’s life Joan has had a continuous relationship with the park and at times her childhood and adult selves overlap in different places, bringing her past childhood self into the present. Joan has already passed on the park to her grandchildren but she also understands the park as belonging to ‘the people of Wigan’ in a wider sense, as it was originally intended.

The park was built for the people of Wigan by Mr Eckersley, the mill owner, in 1878 on land bought from the Rector of Wigan. This was the highest point around the town centre, which is in a dip, to try to create a ‘green lung’ out of the smog (Antony’s interview, Joan’s interview). In common with many Victorian parks
there is a bandstand and a café and it was a popular place for a Sunday afternoon outing. Joan recalled regular Sunday visits with her parents in the fifties:

Every Sunday, me Mum and Dad’ld get dressed up and we had outfits that we only kept for Sunday, Sunday best, we’d go to church, we’d have a lovely Sunday dinner, roast beef, Yorkshire pudding, the whole thing, then we’d all get dressed up and go in the park and there would be hundreds of mums and dads doing the same thing. And inside the cafe there was like what they called a ‘mezzanay’ and you could sit up on the balcony and look down below, and we used to have milk shakes and ice cream and we used to chat, ‘cos there was no televisions in them days and it was a place where everybody went.

(Joan’s interview)

In her first interview the park stood out as a place that has been an ongoing part of Joan’s life. I asked her to take me around the park during her post-diary interview.

Although the park is little more than five minutes walk from Joan’s house it was inevitable, for someone who bumps into ‘seventy’ acquaintances (Joan’s interview) whenever she goes into Wigan, that we would meet people she knew on the way. And sure enough she stopped to speak briefly to two people connected to the church. In the park, we started at the playground. The swings are dilapidated but for Joan this is where she brought her grandchildren and the five of them fought over the two swings. Near the pond she showed me a shelter where as a young mother she would sit with other mothers feeding their babies: renovated but already vandalised again and covered in graffiti. Past the duck pond which she helped to clear out with the Friends of the park; the rose garden restored by the Friends and then opened by Sir Ian McKellan who lived in a house opposite as a child. We stopped at the cafe which is still open and displaying the plans for renovations, including the restoration of the mezzanine level. Then we looked at the statue of the Wigan MP who brought clean water to the town and whose foot is shiny and worn through being rubbed for good luck. Around the pedestal of the statue are pictures of taps and pipes showing the introduction of running water in the town. Finally we looked at the lodge, covered in scaffolding and hidden behind layers of plastic.
Whilst Joan still visits the park regularly her park landscape is heavily coloured by her 1950s childhood:

But there’s a little lodge there and when I was a little girl it belonged to the park keeper and when I was a little girl he used to always wear a hat and uniform and he used to say keep off the grass, the grass was sacred, his wife used to rubbing stone that step and the front door had brasses on that you could see your face in.

And she elides her experience with the original (civilized) Victorian park-goers:

And in the Victorian times it was sort of a place where everybody met. And when I was a little girl, ... there used to be a bandstand and there used to be a brass band there every Sunday afternoon, so people used to sit on chairs and listen to the brass band, it was very civilized. I mean nowadays we have to have an alcohol ban in there because of all the teenagers.

(Joan’s post-diary interview)

These activities that ‘everybody’ undertook, in the same way that today ‘everybody’ watches television, connect Joan to a time in the past although the place itself is a part of her present. In talking about or visiting the park Joan constantly ‘bumps into’ her childhood self, the Victorian Wiganers she could be descended from, her young grandchildren and her potential future great-grandchildren (Leach, 2002, p. 132).

the children walk through the park to go to the college so every three or four months all the Friends of Mesnes Park go in and do a litter pick, they don’t care and it’s so sad because it’s their park and one day they’ll be parents and they’ll want it nice for their children.

(Joan’s interview)

The passing on of the park as a gift to the next generation that Joan alludes to here (‘it’s their park’) adds to the park’s temporal continuity. Kate (32) also remembers trips to the park as a child and rubbing the foot of the statue, something that people still do. This statue embodies the form of what Becker (1998, p. 50) might call a ‘congealed social agreement’: something undertaken by the people here, in this
place, which is effectively closed off to outsiders through the inaccessibility of the local ‘stock of knowledge’ (Schutz, 1976 [1964]). Steve (38) and Anne’s (38) six year old daughter loves going to the park. This is not a place stagnated in a particular era but is a part of generations of children’s lives. History is not written on to a (pre-objective) landscape rather the landscape is created through interactions (Ingold, 2000, p. 192): here, between Joan and the other ‘Friends’, ‘the children’ and the various elements of the park itself including the paths they walk on and the grass they sit on. Rather than being fixed in one imagined version of the past (see Chapter 4 Imagining Us), the park circulates around and through Joan’s life from childhood to grandmotherhood and back again:

and in the middle of the lake there’s a great big island and as a child I always wanted to go on there, a lot of children have, not drowned, but they’ve had accidents in the pond and then about five years ago they decided that all the middle of the island needed replanting, they put a pontoon down and we were actually allowed to walk on the pontoon, I said all my youth as a child, I wanted to come on here and plant and now all ducks are nesting there and it’s really a lovely island now...

(Joan’s interview)

This is not a linear narrative. The telling of the story, through our walk, veers from grandchildren to Joan’s own childhood, to Victorian Wigan, to more recent events; the future, in the shape of restoration plans and growing grandchildren, is evident as well as the past. Rather than creating a nostalgic dichotomy between the past and the present as these types of reminiscences are often seen to do (Robertson, et al., 2008, p. 61), these vignettes of Joan’s association with the park throughout her life pull the past into the present as well as evoking the future. Time seems to melt away leaving Joan and the park in a vortex of tangible remembering. The park itself is a part of the web of Joan’s life, which together with the house she has lived in for most of her life embeds Joan, both socially and materially, into the past, present and future of this place (Cloke & Jones, 2001, p. 664; Godelier, 1999, pp. 103-4; Massey, 2006, p. 34).

Joan is a part of the life of the park as well as it being a significant part of her life. This is not an individual ‘choice’ (Savage, et al., 2005); there is no rationale behind
her childhood visits other than that this is what ‘everybody’ did. Visiting the park became an embodied habit, part of what Joan does (Connerton, 1989, p. 5; Leach, 2002, p. 132). Recently, freed from the ties of children and grandchildren, she has been able to reciprocate through being a Friend of the park, leaving a material impact on the pond and the rose garden as well as the more ephemeral lingering of her past selves in the cafe and at the swings (Ingold, 1993, p. 152). The inalienable gift of the park from Mr Eckersley to the people of Wigan continues to be passed from generation to generation, constantly spinning new webs of relations.

6.5 Central Park: the destruction of a gift

As well as personal memories and those repeated through families there are events that pertain to a wider audience which will be remembered and retold by the community. The demise of Central Park, home to Wigan rugby league for nearly a century is one of those events. Rugby league is ‘like a family’ (Joan’s interview) in Wigan and therefore demolishing its home is akin to demolishing the family home. Although there is a new stadium, this does not have the atmosphere, the history of both successes and failures over time, of Central Park. The lack of a material place to ‘pass on’ may have contributed to the fact that amongst some of the younger generation the national sport of football has become more important.

John (61) kept a diary and Figure 6 is one of his photos.

He said:

There’s the Tescos we use every week and sometimes more than once a week. And of course that’s where, that’s on the ground of the old Central Park, which not a lot of people are happy about.

Did you used to go and watch rugby there?

Yes, yes, yeah. Um it was quite traumatic that, but we’re not too enamoured with it to be honest with you. Because we don’t like Asda we go to Tesco.

(John’s post-diary interview)
Central Park, the former rugby league ground, was sold to pay off debts in 1999.

Although the Tesco store has been there for about ten years, and Central Park for less than one hundred years before that, the change was sudden and therefore ‘traumatic’ (Walkerdine, 2010, p. 109). From being a particular place where local people could perform their identity as Wiganers through supporting a successful sports team, it has transformed into a place without a specific Wigan identity. The loss of Central Park was, in effect, the destruction of an ‘inalienable gift’ and hence destroyed or damaged the relationships through time which it embodied. Rugby itself is an inalienable gift passed on through the generations in Wigan, but one that is still present, now played in the new out-of-town stadium shared with Wigan Athletic, the football team.

As with Mesnes Park, Central Park was, effectively, a gift to the people of Wigan from the then owners, in 1902. However the legal ownership of Central Park remained with the rugby club. The owners in the late 1990s were in significant debt and had no choice but to sell the ground. The ground was the site of many victories for Wigan which, as a team, was very successful in the 1950s and 1960s and again in the 1980s. Being close to the town centre the spectators would travel through the
town on a Saturday afternoon and retire to the pubs on Wigan Lane, close to the
ground, after the match (Antony’s interview). These people, both home and away
fans, being a part of the ‘spatial imaginary’ of rugby in Wigan (O’Neill &
Whatmore, 2000, p. 125). Rugby, as Joan (66) pointed out, is more than just a
game in Wigan and the ashes of many people had been scattered on the ground
over the years. There is now a small memorial in the car park at Tesco’s to
commemorate the existence of Central Park.

After almost one hundred years the ‘inalienable gift’ of Central Park had passed
through perhaps four generations. This long standing connection with the people of
Wigan placed the ground at the centre of a thick web of relationships with present,
past and future fans and players (by no means all Wigan born and bred) as well as
with other aspects of the town itself such as the local pubs, many of which have
since had to close due to lack of custom (Antony’s interview). The spectators no
longer cross the town centre from the railway stations to the stadium removing the
relationship between ‘Wigan’ as its town centre and the rugby. This, to some
extent, would ‘tear the heart out of’ Saturday afternoons in Wigan, altering the
‘peoplescape’ of the town centre and Wigan Lane on a Saturday night. The weekly
(re-)creation of Wigan as a rugby-playing town is lost. Sport is a key site of
performing belonging for many people as evidenced by the ‘thousa
Wigan Warriors fans who turned out to salute their Grand Final heroes’ (Wigan Today,
2010). Steve (38) can tell his life story through rugby. When he moved back to
Wigan after university, he moved to a flat close to Central Park, which he found
through his rugby friends. He met his wife Anne (38) through a rugby website and
they now live close to the old Central Park, but also close to where Steve’s father
was brought up. Steve’s father, Ron (62), has a season ticket for Wigan Warriors
and is occasionally invited as a guest of the new owner who he was at school with.
John’s daughter Joanne (35) was also a rugby fan:

Yes as a young girl we used to follow the rugby often, we
used to go every week to Central Park when it was here as
young teenagers really, so I followed that quite a lot, we
went to Wembley numerous times and it was the only
pocket money I ever had was my rugby money.

(Joanne’s interview)
These threads of the sport weaving through people’s lives bring together the site of the matches (Central Park located at the bottom of Wigan Lane where Ron, Steve’s father, grew up), the players (a picture of former player Billy Boston on my research leaflet inspired Joanne’s story), the fans including Steve, Anne, Joanne and Ron. Central Park was an active constituent in the social network of rugby in Wigan (O’Neill & Whatmore, 2000, p. 131). This has now gone and its replacement, the DW Stadium does not, in the view of these respondents, have the ‘numinous or magical quality’ that Jones (2010, p. 200) argues is ‘linked to the networks of inalienable relationships [objects] have been involved in throughout their social lives’. The demolition of Central Park destroyed the inalienable relationships associated with it. It also disrupted the ‘spatial imaginary’ (O’Neill & Whatmore, 2000, p. 126) of rugby in Wigan. Whilst the gift of rugby continues through the reformation of the performative network, the gift of Central Park and the myriad of tangible relationships it embodied, has gone.

What this example highlights though is the essential stability over time of the web of relationships connecting people, places and activities to form the ‘taskscape’ (Ingold, 2000) of rugby league in Wigan. Central Park, whilst being a key part of the ‘spatial imaginary’ (O’Neill & Whatmore, 2000, p. 125) of Wigan rugby for almost one hundred years is not, in fact, essential to the team, the supporters or the success of the club. Other changes have also happened affecting this particular taskscape, notably changing the time of matches from Saturday to Sunday afternoons and moving the season to fit in with the demands of television (personal conversation, Wigan, March 2010). Despite these disruptions the essential ‘assemblage’ of team, a ground and supporters remains intact. The identity of ‘Wigan Warriors’ continues with the new, improved (in terms of facilities) stadium (Cloke & Jones, 2001, p. 658). Communities such as this community of rugby in Wigan are generally resilient: tearing down Central Park may have torn the heart out of rugby at the time, but nevertheless it carries on. Inalienable gifts are not always passed on but sometimes come to the end of their natural life (Fowler, 2004, p. 33). Joanne is unlikely to pass her childhood love of rugby on to her children as her husband prefers football and is a Wigan Athletic supporter. Steve’s daughter (6) though is already showing an interest and he is keen to promote rugby within her school.
This place, as a site of memory is still relevant, it is more than a supermarket for the ‘we’ group who remember it as Central Park. However its palimpsestual qualities are limited as nothing remains of the former site and even the roads have been reconfigured (Brewer, 2005). The place has transferred from gift economy, part of the enduring ‘Wigan-ness’ of Wigan, to a commodity, part of the economic space of Wigan. Connections are still made and remade here, for example John mentioned bumping into a former colleague and a chat with the checkout girl in his diary, but these are not durable relationships for him recorded in the fabric of the building (the checkout girl will probably have a more definitive relationship with the place where she works) (Fowler, 2004, p. 34; Godelier, 1999, pp. 104 - 5).

Disruptions to and reconfiguring of networks of relationships are also features of how John and others experience Wigan town centre.

### 6.6 Wigan town centre: the making of ‘us’

The town centre of Wigan has seen many changes over the last twenty years. These have largely been to improve the shopping facilities, but not everyone is in agreement over this ‘improvement’. Different respondents move around and appropriate the town centre in different ways, each creating their own version of Wigan in the process and aligning this with their own place identity.

Wigan is its town centre. ‘Going up Wigan’ means a visit to the centre of town (Joan’s interview). It is a place separate from the surrounding residential areas (Joan (66) lives less than a mile from the centre), somewhere people visit with family or friends and meet people they know, people of the place, discussed in Chapter 5 *Worlds within Reach*. Linda (61), a couple of weeks before we met, ‘bumped into someone I used to work with at the Nationwide, I hadn’t seen her for about fifteen years so that was quite nice, we had a chat, she was there with her grandchildren’. And Joan said ‘when I go up Wigan I bet I meet about seventy people, hello, hello and you know all the family history don’t you, you know, through the generations’. Wigan town centre is, for these people at this time, a place of leisure, not work. Although there are many unknown faces around, it is
still a site of some face-to-face relations which Joan cited as a reason for not moving away. Wigan town centre is, for many of the participants in this research, a place of memories, through which their life histories can be traced. In contrast with the ‘unchanging’ nature of the park, the town centre has seen many changes in recent years. Built in 1877 the old Market Hall was replaced in 1991, along with the Galleries shopping centre. In 2007 the Grand Arcade was opened on the site of the Empress Ballroom (later Wigan Casino) and the Ritz cinema. The new Market Hall, whilst still retaining traditional market stalls and a small outdoor market has been built over the open market square where Silcocks (of Warrington) used to hold an annual funfair and other itinerant groups would hold regular events, such as the ‘pot fair’ spoken of by Linda’s family, when Kate (34) was encouraging her grandmother Ethel (85) to reminisce (see 4.4 How Wiganers see their world). Some events, such as Christmas markets, are now held at ‘the cross’ at the top of Market Street, but this is a much smaller, although more central, area.

Respondents varied considerably in their views of the new developments. John (61) is a fan of the newest shopping centre (Figure 7):

Figure 9: Grand Arcade, Wigan
Right so that’s the Grand Arcade. We like it. I like it anyway. It’s been a good addition to the shopping facilities ... It’s only like 3 years old that, it is quite recent. (John’s post-diary interview)

Any new development is likely to cause controversy (Massey, 1995, p. 186) and Wigan is no different. It takes time to embed new places into the landscape, to make them familiar through usage over time. The narratives surrounding the Grand Arcade tell us that it was built to help to bring Wigan into the twenty-first century and to divorce it from the (official) dirty and industrial past (see Chapter 4 Imagining Us). Wigan has been trying to throw off its Orwellian image and make itself ‘modern’ since the 1970s. The Grand Arcade is the latest incarnation of this. A reminder of the 1970s, Wigan Casino is commemorated in the Casino Café in the Grand Arcade.

John met his children and grandchildren in Wigan during the week of his diary:

Shopping day!! We arranged to meet [second daughter] and her friend and also Joanne and the children in town. First stop Barclays Bank and on to Marks and Spencer’s. Meet the girls in the coffee shop. Our friend is playing the keyboard to raise money for our charity. He has known [my wife] since their childhood days. (John’s diary)

Many of the places in John’s life in Wigan have gone (the Ritz, the Empress Ballroom, Central Park) so the axis of his personal attachments is now the café in Marks and Spencer’s where his family gathers. The Ritz and the dance halls would, for John, be ‘inalienable gifts’ from his mother who worked at the Ritz and got him good tickets to see the top bands there – the Beatles, the Rolling Stones – and who persuaded him to learn to dance. Although these are now gone, there is a symmetry in the physical space of the Grand Arcade, and Marks and Spencer’s location within it. John does not refer to these connections, but that is perhaps because they tend to be, as Jones (2010, p. 189) points out, ‘ineffable’.

John’s daughter, Joanne (35), shares his favourable view of the new shopping facilities, whilst at the same time bemoaning the lack of non-chain shops:
But I do tend to do general shopping in Wigan because there’s a lot more choice now with the new shopping centre so if I need a new outfit, or something for the children, there’s not an awful lot of choice for them really, there’re no nice baby shops anymore, they’ve all closed

( Joanne’s interview)

This favourable view of Wigan town centre seems to have been passed on from her father. Joanne on the whole was defensive of Wigan’s reputation.

The gifts that John has to pass on to his children and grandchildren are the café in Marks and Spencers and the Grand Arcade, places that can be seen as carrying Wigan into the future, rather than embedding it in its past. History flows from the past of the Ritz and the ‘Emp’, and through John’s wife’s childhood friend performing in the café, into the future of his grandchildren who are creating their own versions of Wigan, their own lines of connection of the flow of their lives to people and place (Ingold, 2008, p. 1806).

Ron (62), along with Linda (61) prefers the older parts of the town centre, with the Makinson Arcade being a particular favourite of Linda’s. When asked to order her photos ‘starting with the ones that mean the most to you and finishing with the ones that mean the least, it could be either to do with the place, or what you do in that

Figure 10: Makinson Arcade, Wigan
This was her first choice (Figure 8), that is the place that holds the most meaning for her, out of those visited during the week of her diary.

I’ve spent a lot of time in Wigan you know, and a lot of me youth in Wigan and going through there ... There’s three arcades in Wigan, that’s the main one. I think they’ve spoiled it because they’ve pulled the old arcade down, Legs of Man arcade there used to be a pub call the Legs of Man in it and I can remember going. I used to get me nylons, at the top, there used to be a massive stocking and nylons store at the top. It was brilliant, when you were, you know, fifteen and there used to be a man at the bottom, or half way down with the old scales that you used to go and weigh yourself on, you know, the ones that you sat on, I can just see him now.

(Linda’s post-diary interview)

As with Joan’s relationship to the park, the affection Linda feels for this place is based on a connection over a long period of time and on walking through it, a way of appropriating a place (de Certeau, 1984, pp. 97 - 102; Leach, 2002, p. 132). This arcade is also a link back to the one that has now gone and to the memories held in that place (Brewer, 2005; Jones, 2010, p. 199). This particular arcade gathers within it the memories of the other arcades, recreating them in Linda’s memory and bringing them into the present. Although the connection to the hosiery shop is via a different arcade it is through the inalienable nature of Linda’s relationship with the arcade that her past self is still present (Jones, 2010, p. 197). Linda was in Wigan with her daughter when she took the photo and she makes clear to Kate (34) the sense of loss she feels through the changes that have taken place in the town centre over her lifetime:

I said oh I think they’ve ruined the shops they’ve made it the same as, you could be anywhere, every town’s the same isn’t it, where Wigan used to have quite a character when I was growing up anyway.

(Linda’s family interview)

Rather than appropriating the new shopping spaces, as John has done, Linda mourns the loss of older places that she will be unable to ‘pass on’ to her daughter and grandchildren. The ‘gift’ of Wigan as a distinctive place is no longer available to her, which perhaps makes Linda seem disappointed, even a little angry (‘they’ve ruined the shops’). As a ‘moral custodian’ of the ‘gift’ of Wigan to the next
generation (Fowler, 2004, p. 33) Linda is unable to pass on much more than memories. This type of sentiment was also expressed by her mother Ethel (85) who complained that ‘it’s not half as nice in Wigan now as in olden days’, so this may be their family outlook, in the same sense as Joanne and John are both positive about the changes to Wigan. Ian also sees Wigan as being ‘unworthy’ of being passed on as it is ‘tatty’. His children have moved away and Ian does not position himself as responsible for the state of the town centre, as its ‘moral custodian’. The theme of Wigan being the same as everywhere else, so ‘you could be anywhere’ ran through Ron’s (62) interview as well.

I always go into Wigan to buy clothes or other items other than food. If I go to Wigan I always use the market, I buy some fish and meat and vegetables at the market... I’m a bit of a traditionalist ... I’m not keen on the big massive shopping mall whatever it’s called in fact I used to use Debenhams a bit but I can’t be bothered going down there now. It’s not my cup or tea, you could be anywhere in the country.

(Ron’s interview)

In insisting that he shops in Wigan, Ron is emphasising his commitment to Wigan as a town and thus his own identity as a Wiganer. He has chosen to remain in Wigan and ‘never thought of” moving anywhere else. Ron’s family had a grocery business in Wigan and the surrounding area for about a hundred years. His focus on local shops may be a continuation of a family loyalty, part of what ‘we’ do, bringing his own history to bear on the way in which he constructs what he considers to be an authentic Wigan (Jones, 2010). Ron’s Wigan incorporates market traders, the hairdresser and the dentist. Although unnamed, these people (Schutzian ‘types’) are incorporated into Ron’s taskscape of Wigan, his world of actual reach (Schutz & Luckmann, 1974, p. 87). Through the practice of not going in there Ron creates the Grand Arcade as a place apart. It is, in effect, not a part of the ‘Wigan’ Ron inhabits. The particular network of inalienable places that Ron considers to be Wigan (the market, the Galleries arcade) are what he, as current custodian, as a ‘Wiganer’, would pass on to future generations, both his own grandchildren and others.
The centre of Wigan is dominated by the Parish Church tower which looms over the area known as ‘the cross’ (Figure 9).

So the Parish Church, I don’t know it the same as, well I don’t use it at all, I think I’ve only been in there once but I’ve not got very much knowledge of [it] really, um but I’ve walked there hundreds and hundreds of times though because you can walk, you can park at the back there and walk through from that direction into Wigan.

(John’s post-diary interview)

The Parish Church is a place on the margins of John’s (61) life but a central landmark within the town he has lived in all his life. It is an object that helps to constitute Wigan, a centrepiece for the town, gathering the place around and is therefore a ‘part of the community’ (Jones, 2010, p. 194). Despite John’s unfamiliarity with the interior of the Parish Church through his bodily engagement, through walking past it, this place, the church and its grounds, is a vital component in John’s implicit, phenomenal, knowledge of Wigan (Casey, 2001, p. 718; Leach, 2002, p. 132). Walking allows for a proprioceptive, that is a bodily understanding of place, rather than a purely visual one (de Certeau, 1984, pp. 97 - 102; Gray, 1999, p. 447; Vergunst, 2010, p. 380). Whilst to someone unfamiliar with the town it would appear to be hidden behind an outer layer of buildings, Wiganers, over many generations, are used to cutting through the path between the buildings on the
far left of the picture (Figure 9), around the war memorial and past the church. Previous generations and John’s younger selves are present through the worn paving stones that John, his children and grandchildren still walk on. The inability to articulate what is, in one sense obvious – that John has a lifelong connection with these slabs of stone – is a theme of these narratives, overcome to some extent through the use of photographs which give the conversation a focus on place. These connections to his past are hidden within John’s narrative, their ‘zuhanden’ nature as part of a practical level of engagement with the world means that a material, embodied and task-oriented understanding of belonging-in-place is needed to uncover them.

An architectural feature of many of the older buildings in Wigan is the ‘mock tudor’, which John points out as being a favourite feature of his giving the town character and highlighting the ‘Wigan-ness’ of the place. This is not done by referring to some other place as a point of reference (Savage, et al., 2005, p. 94) or by engaging a wider cultural imaginary, rather in these unchanged aspects Wigan stands as a ‘magical’ place (Savage, et al., 2005, p. 94) without the need of further cultural referents. In contrast to Savage et al’s respondents these Wiganers do not attempt to justify their relationship to the place in any way, they simply describe it in relation to their own life course; the fact that they have a mutually constituted connection to the place is taken as given. This unconscious acceptance of the place as embodying their life stories is a part of the expression of an ontological belonging through ‘a sense of accord with the various physical and social contexts in which our lives are lived out’ (Miller, 2002, p. 220).

In Imagining Us I showed how different points in history create different understandings of place and identity in the present, and in Worlds within Reach how connections to others within the place contribute to an understanding of the people/place assemblage that goes to create a place identity. Here we have unravelled some of the material connections these respondents have to the locale that represents ‘Wigan’ for them. The Parish Church is unambiguously representative of the ‘authentic’ Wigan but its benign presence is largely ignored. Makinson’s Arcade is also an established part of Victorian Wigan. The current Market Hall, whilst a relatively new building, still houses stalls from the original
hall. The Grand Arcade is a part of twenty-first century Wigan. These different buildings hold different memories, histories and relationships with each respondent having their own unique location within those histories. Makinson’s Arcade is an inalienable part of Linda’s (61) childhood, a gift which keeps her past forever present. Ron (62) rather more explicitly creates his own version of Wigan, avoiding the aspects which don’t fit with his idea of the ‘real’ Wigan. He is then able to create himself as a moral purveyor of the gift of ‘Wigan’ to the next generation. John (61) makes a similar move but without particularly creating an idea of Wigan as somewhere distinctive. For him this incarnation of the chain store found on most high streets in Britain is enough: Marks and Spencer is his wife’s ‘second home’ and as such a suitable gift for his daughters and grandchildren. These largely personal stories also, inevitably, include other people, the world of common reach, the shopkeepers, waitresses and market stall holders who are a part of the background material presence of these ‘Wigans’.

But not everyone sees the gift of ‘Wigan’ as valuable enough to pass on. Ian (61) feels that ‘[t]he rest of the town’s a dump [other than the new shopping centre]. All Market Place and Standishgate, tatty shops with tatty things …’ (Ian’s interview). Ian’s attitude to Wigan overall is somewhat ambivalent (it’s far better than Bolton, for example) but he is pleased that his children have moved away; he does not seem to see Wigan or an identity as a Wiganer as a gift he wants to pass on to his grandchildren. All such curatorial relationships involve a choice; in this case Ian does not want to pass on ‘Wigan’ to his descendents, but his children could also have independently chosen not to accept the gift (Hurdley, 2007, p. 137).

These buildings, material places, focus attempts to identify with Wigan, as Wiganers. But the places do not stand alone: they are implicated in networks of relationships between people, places, activities through time. The temporal aspect of the place assemblage or network is brought to the fore when looking at the changes that have happened: Theseus’ paradox questioning whether a ship which has had most or all of its wood replaced is ‘the same’ ship, comes to mind. But change over time, does not have to preclude ‘sameness’ where relationships are inalienable: history is not then ‘past’ but is pulled into the present by these ongoing relationships. ‘Looking back’ does not have to be nostalgic, a longing for home or
something lost, but can confirm identities in the present, as Linda does when she sees her childhood self in the picture of the arcade. These relationships to the past are ‘held’ in the places, but brought to life through intersubjective relationships made possible through the medium of the place (Duranti, 2010, p. 29).

History made present through inalienable objects and places bestows knowledge of ‘who one is’ for these people, who can connect with past selves recognised in familiar places. This is always a negotiable and possibly exclusionary process (Blokland, 2001, p. 276; Jones, 2010, p. 199); what counts as an inalienable relationship may not be straightforward. Inalienable relationships can only be formed over time, a long term relationship with place or building, or other object, through repetitive activity (Gray, 1999, pp. 450 - 1; Leach, 2002, p. 130). Joanne (35), for example, saw her connection with rugby league as firmly rooted in her childhood self and not an important part of her current identity; John (61) did not recognise (or perhaps could not articulate) the importance of the Parish Church in his assemblage of ‘Wigan’. Gifts may fall by the wayside, as in Ian’s (61) case. The presence of the past in daily life is often overlooked, sometimes made visible only through the photographs taken as part of this research process. Whilst highlighting the benefit of this method of researching and the added dimensions it can bring to people’s narratives, this effect also indicates the difficulties inherent in calling on the intangible (albeit embodied within the material) to support theories of identity and belonging.

### 6.7 Conclusion

The three cornerstones of belonging Miller (2002) describes – history, people and place – are displayed here. Peeling away the layers of belonging shows that places are not only visualised as social constructions or ‘imaginaries’, nor are they simply a background for social activities but they are material and engage with physical bodies, incorporating all the senses as in Joan’s descriptions of the park. Material places are at the centre of an ontological belonging. Places move and change, currents rippling across the surface so that one building is replaced by another, shops change hands, or, stones are worn away by footsteps passing by ‘hundreds and hundreds of times’. The life of the place and the people of that place exist in
different temporalities, not synchronized but still in harmony (Ingold, 2000, p. 197). Places are not static or reactionary but fluid, interactive and a fundamental part of social life (Massey, 1994). When imbued with significant social encounters and absorbed into the rhythm of life places become part of a dense web of relationships. These in turn become inalienable from the place itself, passed on through the generations, usage changing, buildings themselves changing but ultimately remaining ‘the same’ place, its identity merging with the identity of the people inhabiting it (Gray, 1999, p. 441).

The examples above have taken individual family gifts, such as the school building for Val, more widely accessible places like the park and Central Park and the hub of Wigan itself, the town centre, to show how places feature in people’s belonging. Each of the places here has been passed down: Joan’s parents bequeathed her the park; Ron passed on his love of rugby to Steve; Linda’s childhood self has left her the arcades. Each of the respondents talks of the future of these places as well as the past. The gift of the place has placed an obligation on these people to nurture it and pass it on into the future (Fowler, 2004, p. 33). In nurturing, inalienable traces of the carer are sedimented into places. Nurturing, in this sense, is not explicit but a part of everyday life, in the same way that neighbouring, whilst a caring task, is still an everyday activity. Belonging is inherent in the daily actions undertaken by people who have inalienable connections to the places they inhabit. Rather than a dislocation between past and present, even where changes have been made, webs of connections remain, tying the people and the place together (Jones, 2010, p. 194). Where belonging is chosen, and people seek out places to live which are conducive to their chosen lifestyle, place itself becomes a commodity. Commodities are divorced from relations to the past or the future (Fowler, 2004, p. 34). Where place is seen as a commodity it cannot be part of a web of relations stretching from past to future with the sense of continuity that is necessary for an ontological belonging. The elective belongers in Savage et al’s (2005) research tend to treat place as a commodity to be consumed rather than as a debt to be repaid through careful nurturing (Fowler, 2004, p. 33). Without looking towards the future, through passing the gift of place to the next generation, there can be no ongoing sense of community and therefore no ontological belonging.
As stated earlier the different places discussed here can be viewed in terms of ‘the common’ as a way of organising mutual interest (Wright & Davies, 2010), not all those who use these places will have the same understanding of them. Where there is an historical connection, where the place has been received as an inalienable gift, embedded in cultural or ancestral ties, there is likely to be a stronger sense of ownership (Jones, 2010, p. 199). The narratives associated with and encountered in the place will be accessible to those who have a personal investment in the place. For these reasons this is ‘ultimately an exclusionary process associated with the production of power and identity’ (Jones, 2010, p. 199). Only some of the people using the place will have these connections. Whilst this does not preclude others from using the space, enjoying the swings in the park or shopping in the market or the arcades, only those with some of these deeper historical connections will be ascribed an identity as a ‘Wiganer’.

History moves through the lives of people and places, it is not ‘stuck’ in the past but constantly being brought into the present. History is inherent in the ‘flow’ of life (Ingold, 2008) of people, material objects, and places. There is no particular moment in time when ‘the real’ (authentic) Wigan existed; the life of the place, as of the people living there, is in constant flux. The ‘gift’ of the place to be passed on is not like a single object which may age but changes slowly, it is more like the gift of the plant which is nurtured and grows and from which the fruits are the reciprocal gift (Fowler, 2004, p. 33). An ontological belonging is an (probably unconscious) understanding of this process, which can also be seen as being in ‘correct relation’ to the place (Miller, 2002, p. 218); having a ‘sense of accord with the various physical and social contexts in which our lives are lived out’ (Miller, 2002, p. 220) whilst also being part of a web of mutual obligations, as these people, in this place, are.
7 Conclusion

Many previous sociological studies of belonging have had a limited conception of place. This thesis has sought to address that. By positioning place at the centre of the research it has been shown to be an active participant in social life, which can shape lives and identities and act as a repository for the history of both the place and its people. This research has examined the lives of a group of people in place who are outside the ideal of ‘uprootedness as the paradigmatic figure of the postmodern experience of identity’ (Fortier, 1999, p. 42) and shown them to experience ‘their’ place as both imagined and material, populated with embodied, emplaced, people and as a gift, which they may see as giving them a moral duty, as custodians, to nurture and pass on. They can be said to have ‘a sense of accord with the various physical and social contexts in which [their] lives are lived out’ (Miller, 2002, p. 220), that is, a belonging-in-place or an ontological belonging. Belonging-in-place, whether conceived through imagined communities, social relations or historic connections, has been shown to be always embodied and emplaced. This chapter will review these findings and suggest how they could be useful to future research.

This thesis has made a significant contribution to sociological knowledge through: i) taking a phenomenological approach and developing what I call a ‘sideways’ look at belonging-in-place using a distinctive combination of methods; ii) empirically developing Miller’s (2002) concept of an ontological belonging comprising historical connections, embodied and emplaced social connections (a ‘peoplescape’) and material connections; iii) demonstrating empirically how this can work ‘on the ground’ allowing place to emerge as an integral component in social life. These points are reviewed below.

The three data chapters have peeled away layers of a multi-dimensional belonging, from an outer layer of belonging based on imaginaries and visual/cognitive understandings of the place in Imagining Us, to a more embodied social level of belonging-in-place in Worlds within Reach, where, through shared worlds of reach with known others in a locality, strong mutual obligations are created. Finally, in
Material Places, the ‘core’ of a belonging in place was shown to be premised on material connections to places, over time, which are passed on, gift like, from one generation to the next. The distinctive theoretical and methodological approach used which facilitated the disclosure of these findings was discussed in Practical Matters: Theory and Method. These were developed after examining the current literature in Doing Belonging which revealed the lack of a space for place in sociological research. The substantive arguments from these chapters are reviewed here before I draw out the benefits of the research and the implications for further research.

7.1 Theoretical and Methodological Underpinnings

I came to this research wanting to find out how and why some people have an unambiguous attachment or belonging to ‘their’ place. The central argument of this thesis is that place, a material place, plays an integral role in who ‘we’ are and consequently how everyday life is lived. There is an inherent difficulty in uncovering meaning and motive in the ordinary, everyday, unthought-about tasks of daily life (Jackson, 1993, p. 332), which is where a sense of ease or accord with place, that is an ontological belonging, might be found. Therefore, following Miller (2002), I have broken aspects of belonging down into social, historical and geographical connections in order to take in a three dimensional belonging and to examine the various different dimensions and the relations between them.

The first three chapters of this thesis set the scene. They describe the process I followed in coming to my research questions and choosing the research methods. Following the Introduction the first part of Doing Belonging looks at sociological literature around belonging in place communities from classic and more recent community studies, through imagined communities and on to more recent studies of belonging, in particular Savage et al.’s (2005) Globalization and Belonging, with its concept of ‘elective belonging’. What this review showed was that place qua place is missing in much sociological research (Gieryn, 2000; Kidder, 2012; Stevens, 2012) and where it is present it is generally portrayed as an inert background where the relations between people are acted out rather than as an
active and integral part of social life. Many community studies contained an implicit idea of belonging as being part of a largely intersubjective local community. There is a dearth of accounts of a more material basis for belonging. In contrast, the starting point for this research was an embodied social and material place and people’s relationship to place. Rather than the focus being on ‘people who happen to live in a place’, as with the literature discussed in Community and Belonging, the focus of this thesis is on ‘a place where particular people live out their lives’.

The second part of Doing Belonging then went on to explore literature from other social science disciplines from which I formed a sound theoretical basis for this research. In order to position place sociologically as a key aspect of belonging it must not be seen as a constraint but as an open and active participant in everyday life. The geographic work of Doreen Massey provided a starting point for this. A relational place, such as that elucidated by Massey (2006, p. 34), brings together its history, geography and people, the core aspects of an ontological belonging alongside what people do, in place. I found the work of anthropologist Tim Ingold and his idea of a ‘taskscape’ to be a helpful framework with which to pull together some of the aspects of a multi-dimensional belonging, that is, place, people and actions through time. Belonging as a way of being in the world, an ‘ontological belonging’ (Miller, 2002) includes an attachment to place because place is a part of the assemblage of a social world, not a backdrop to the social world. The thesis has therefore addressed two key issues: i) how can place be brought into sociological research; ii) how can belonging in place be understood sociologically.

This kind of belonging is one that is not necessarily obvious, even to those who possess it as it concerns behaviour and the conduct of everyday life, things that are difficult to perceive directly. In order to investigate this type of belonging it was necessary to understand the life-worlds of the participants, how they structure their daily lives and why they do so in a particular way. Taking what I call a ‘sideways’ look at their life-world through using a phenomenological approach allowed me access to this taken-for-granted world and to question every aspect of it. I used the phenomenology of Heidegger, Schutz and Merleau-Ponty to access embodied, social and material aspects of the respondents’ everyday lives.
The data collection methods were intended to provide information on different dimensions of local lives in order to give a phenomenological understanding of a three dimensional belonging in place. I used multiple methods of qualitative data collection in order to get the necessary rich, in-depth data. The methods were largely ‘user-driven’ with the subject matter in the control of the respondents allowing their preoccupations and concerns to be seen. The combination of visual, verbal and written data from interviews and diaries enabled the construction of a rounded picture of people’s lives. In addition, I interviewed multiple members and generations of the same family enabling me to identify what is passed on through the generations. Families are also the building blocks of communities, making them an obvious starting point for a focus on a place-community or what I call a ‘peoplescape’. As the focus of the research is place, all the participants came from the same place, that is, they could identify themselves as people of a particular place, Wigan Metropolitan Borough.

This triangulated approach was able to encompass histories (individual, family and local), intersubjective daily life and the materiality of places, capturing the richness and complexity of social life and all the necessary elements to understand a three dimensional belonging. The distinctive variety of qualitative approaches used increased the depth of the data and in small scale research such as this, where numbers of respondents are limited for various reasons, a combination of data sources adds immensely to the quality of the findings. The particular combination of methods which I used are a key strength of this research and are indicative of its particularity in this field of research.

7.2 Layers of belonging

The three data chapters have been presented as unpeeling layers of belonging, moving from a largely imaginary outer layer, through embodied social relations to the materiality of well-used, inalienable places as the inner core. In Imagining Us belonging was based on ‘imaginaries’ and visual/cognitive understandings of the place. The way in which people expressed their feelings about the place was premised to some extent, on an external view of the place. Worlds within Reach
introduced belonging as intersubjective, but prioritised the embodied and emplaced relationships to ‘people of the place’ rather than those family and friends typically found in social networks. Finally, Material Places drew out a belonging to place as material connections to places, over time, passed on, gift like, from one generation to the next.

In Imagining Us place is examined in terms of a social construction or imaginary based around particular histories showing the role of narrative constructions in creating belonging to place. The chapter explored how belonging is performed by individuals and families through linking their biographies to the stories of the place. In this chapter I questioned the idea of belonging solely through an imagined, media-constructed view of the place (indicative of an ‘elective belonging’) and belonging through a shared material history began to surface. The respondents constructed two distinctive histories: an Orwellian, depressed ‘Wigan’ and a Victorian boom-town ‘Wigan’. But alongside these imaginaries the continuing material presence of, for example, old mill buildings and the canal introduced another phenomenological view of the place in the present. Each narrative connected person and place, through the imaginary, other people and the material place. This use of place and history through a world of restorable reach began to demonstrate how a belonging through history, geography and social connections might be achieved.

Worlds within Reach then examined the second layer of belonging in place – that of social connections to people in the place. This took different forms including the embodiment of accent; connections to others in the place over a lifetime or more; depictions of ‘others’ which serve to confirm a sense of ‘us’; and finally the inalienable connections between families in place over multiple lifetimes. I looked at the people part of the social-place assemblage, what I called a ‘peoplescape’. Rather than exploring people’s ‘social networks’ (Pahl & Spencer, 2005) I focussed on the people identified as ‘types’ by Schutz in the world of common reach, but here populating the world of actual reach as known others (Schutz & Luckmann, 1974, p. 87), shopkeepers, neighbours and so on. In contrast to the imaginary networks of an elective belonging (Savage, et al., 2005, p. 151), belonging was shown to be expressed through undertaking shared practices in place, such as
neighbouring. The embodied, performative and emplaced ‘doing’ of belonging found here moved towards a deeper layer of ontological belonging from the cognitive understanding of an imagined place found in the first data chapter.

In the final data chapter, Material Places, I used the idea of the gift from anthropological theory to examine the impact of places through the generations on an ontological belonging. This brought together the themes of temporality and materiality with a focus on the family and broader future generations to whom belonging is passed on. The chapter analysed the way in which both memories and places can be envisaged as ‘inalienable gifts’ passed from generation to generation. I showed how history moves through the lives of people and places, it is not stuck in the past but constantly being brought into the present. This is what I am calling an ‘ontological belonging’: an embodied understanding of this process of obligations to the past and the future, or being in ‘correct relation’ to the place (Miller, 2002, p. 218).

Throughout the data chapters the value of my distinctive use of different qualitative methods became clear. The biographical and family history narratives illustrated how elements of lives are passed through the generations such as attachment to a mill building or a love of rugby. These also formed the basis for understanding Wigan lives, over time, more generally. In ‘talking about’ the place through the ‘window’ of a photograph the materiality of the place showed itself: the inseparability of the imaginary and material place came to the fore through the use of auto-photography and photo elicitation. In Imagining Us it was through looking at her photo of the canal that Linda’s (61) view of Wigan began to change and she could say that yes, it is beautiful. Much of the data for Worlds within Reach was taken from the written diaries, where respondents were requested to note down details of ‘social encounters’. Without this information, written in the respondents own time, at leisure and without pressure from an interviewer, it is likely that the details of some of these less obvious relationships, such as John’s (61) connection to the woman in the post office, would have been lost. This again demonstrates the usefulness of the particular methods of this research and how it gave rise to distinctive data.
7.3 Discussion

The key questions I have answered through my research are: i) how can place be brought into sociological research; ii) how can belonging in place be understood sociologically. I have begun to make a space for place in sociological research through putting place at the heart of my research. This reversal of priorities from other studies, where place is often merely a context, has shown that place has sociological value, that it matters and should be included in other sociological research. I looked at the effect that place has on everyday life and showed how through storied understandings, embodied social worlds and material, historical places people ‘do belonging’ in place. In contrast to other recent studies based around ‘imaginary communities’ this study puts belonging firmly into a material world of embodied social practices where social life, including belonging, is fully emplaced.

The originality of this thesis stems from the theoretical and practical methods used. By looking at belonging from the bottom up, through beginning with the contribution place makes to social life, this thesis has created a distinctive place for place, qua place, in sociology. Taking geographical (Massey, 2005; Massey, 2006) and anthropological (Ingold, 2000) literature as a starting point an open, relational view of place has been used to demonstrate how a material place is a part of social life. Place has been shown to be an active participant in the assemblage, or taskscape, of everyday social practices: through shared histories; as foundation for the ‘we’ of ‘we who live in this place’; as purveyor of tradition and continuity through the idea of the inalienable gift; and as a site of constant change and re-creation. In much sociological literature place is a background figure often overlooked as an important influence on other aspects of social life, or, where it is understood to have an impact it is still seen as playing a passive role (cf. Rogaly & Taylor, 2009). I have shown place to be active in the creation of identities of individuals and groups or communities. Places have been shown to contribute to identities not only through choice, place identities are also ascribed, aligning them with gender, race and class (Gieryn, 2000, p. 481). Imagining Us illustrated that
how we see and talk about place matters: categorising a place affects the people who live there and how they see themselves. Places matter not merely as one aspect of a chosen identity, even if the ‘crucial’ one (Savage, et al., 2005, p. 207), places matter because they gather past, present and future together (Heidegger, 1971; Ingold, 2000, pp. 206 - 7) thus providing a foundation for the temporal continuity of a group of people (community or culture), as Material Places showed. Places belong to the people who live in them, or use them, regardless of legal ownership because they are inalienable from the people who live there (Godelier, 1999, p. 94). Places matter to ‘their’ people and are cared for, as are the other people of the place. Place should therefore be understood as a sociological staple, as another aspect of the complexity of social life. Rather than plugging a gap in the existing sociological cannon, this research has begun to open up a space for place in sociological literature as another aspect of social identity.

Embodied people and material place are united in this study through the concept of ‘belonging’. Belonging is a nebulous term usually regarded as a feeling, making it correspondingly difficult to define. It is therefore often defined by its opposite, not belonging (Ahmed, 2007; Valentine, et al., 2009). There have, of course, been other studies of belonging which focus on some of the same themes that this work does. Fortier (1999), for example, looks at a performative belonging; Degnen (2005) examines how long term relations between people in a place cement belonging; Jones (2010) shows how material attachments in place create a sense of community through time. However, none of these works includes all the aspects covered here: the historic, imagined place; the people in the place; and the material connections over time. From beginning with an ‘external’ view of the imagined place and then moving through different historical versions of the place layers of belonging began to be unpeeled. People are always embodied and in material, local places (Ingold, 2000, p. 216). These inescapable, and inherently inseparable, facts form the basis of an ontological belonging. Intersubjective relations between embodied, emplaced people shed light on the rhythms of everyday life and shared social practices in this place, unpeeling another layer. Finally, in looking at intergenerational material connections to places the core of an ontological belonging was uncovered. Through accessing how people ‘do belonging’ across these different dimensions, reached through multiple research methods, the
centrality of place to each aspect is magnified. This elucidation of how these people, in this place, ‘do belonging’ is thus based on a firm foundation.

Possibly the most widely read current sociological work on belonging is Savage et al’s *Globalization and Belonging* (2005) where the focus is on belonging to place as a choice, an ‘elective belonging’. My research investigated a different group of people – people who stay put rather than those who move – and has come to very different conclusions. Savage et al see belonging as a part of choosing an identity, symbolic of a modern personhood. In my research belonging to place is through shared histories, knowing other people and sharing embodied traits and inalienable attachments to particular sites. An elective belonging is, of course, a choice for many people. However, what my research has shown is that contra Savage et al a modern individual does not have to move (2005, p. 53). I have shown that as well as an elective belonging being a choice for some people, other people (equally ‘modern’ in terms of education and so on) belong ontologically and the outcomes of their lives in a broad sense (for example the possibility of social mobility) are likely to be similar. Again contra an elective belonging (Savage, et al., 2005, p. 207) this research has shown that an ontological belonging arises as the outcome of an attachment to place created through history, face-to-face relationships to others in the place and inalienable relationships to the materiality of the place. I argue this is suggestive of an active attachment to place: an ontological belonging is not a sense but an act, performance or task, place identity, belonging-in-place, is done. This type of belonging has been shown to embody a level of care for the past and future of the place and the people in the place. It is this caring aspect of an ontological belonging that sets it apart from an elective belonging in its effects, choice and care being to some extent incommensurable (Mol, 2008, pp. 1 - 2). In ‘doing belonging’ there has been shown to be an identification with the place that is not a result of ‘choice’ and leads to a sense of moral responsibility for the place (Stevens, 2012, p. 590).

### 7.4 Future Directions

The phenomenological methodology used and distinctive combination of biographical interviews and written and photo diaries as methods of data collection
have enabled this research to produce these results. Taking a phenomenological approach has allowed a ‘sideways’ look at the taken-for-granted aspects of daily life: the interactions people have with their place. The visual methods in particular have allowed an engagement with the materiality of the place through the eyes of the participants. The written diaries allowed respondents to control the subject matter of the data (within prescribed limits) allowing for an inductive approach and reducing the influence of the researcher’s preconceptions. Due to the widespread use of digital cameras and camera phones and with the internet making written communication almost instantaneous, diary methods, including photo-diaries and photo-elicitation, could become a more common method in social research. The most productive use of photographs will often be, as here, alongside other data (Tinkler, t/c Feb 2013). Gieryn, (2000, p. 483) for example, considers the use of photos and other visual methods crucial to further exploration of place in sociological work. User-driven methods such as these can open up the perspective of the research and bring in aspects a researcher would not have considered, not being privy to the life-worlds of the participants. Choosing to focus on families has given a detailed insight into the lives of groups of local people. Interviewing in couples and family groups also introduced an extra dimension through the different, often personal, conversations which took place. Interviewing small friendship groups or couples, as well as family groups, could enhance other research into the more ephemeral aspects of social life. It is to be hoped that this research will act as an exemplar of these useful and perhaps underused research approaches.

The concept of this research originated from researching farmers who seemed to ‘fit’ into their family farms seamlessly. This led to questions such as why do people stay put and what part does place play in people’s lives? I extrapolated this into a belonging in or attachment to place. However rather than looking at ‘people who happen to live in a place’, I have researched ‘a place where particular people live out their lives’. By prioritising place I have been able to focus directly on the relations between the place and those who, in effect, ‘use’ it, that is those who live or work there. The subsequent investigation of people who have remained in place has shown how what I am calling an ‘ontological belonging’ can tie people into their place, through the social practices and relationships that develop over a
lifetime. I have shown that locals do not have to be ‘trapped in the past’ (Savage, et al., 2005, p. 53) and electing to belong is not the only choice for ‘modern’ individuals. A deep seated belonging by multiple generations of socially mobile modern individuals, such as has been uncovered here, reopens belonging as a multi-faceted concept which needs further investigation. ‘Doing belonging’ shows how what is usually spoken of as a sense or feeling is in fact active: the outcome of social practices, by embodied beings, in a material place.

I share with Gieryn (2000, p. 481) the view that place should be considered a ‘wellspring of identity’. However, this raises the question, what of those who don’t have a long term attachment to place? Other studies have researched belonging and place based on storied identities and imagined places (for example Savage, 2008). These seem to show that achieving an identification with place is important to people and can be accomplished through narratives, regardless of length of residence in a place. This way of belonging-in-place equates to what my research has found to be an outer layer of an ontological belonging and lacks the clarity of the belonging in an embodied, peopled, material landscape I have uncovered here. Part of this difference in the presentation of belonging is almost certainly due to the different research methods used. I did not ask people if they belong, whereas the mass observation directive Savage (2008) quotes did. Belonging as what one does on a daily basis is difficult to describe which is why I chose to ‘observe’ daily life, and why talking or writing about belonging-in-place tends to focus on idealisations of the place such as feeling ‘peace of mind and contentment’ or ‘the vitality of the city’ (Savage, 2008, p. 152), rather than knowing other people, or particular embedded and embodied memories. There is also the question, however, of whether it is necessary to have the long term historical attachments to place that the participants in this research have in order to belong ontologically, in place. Miller (2002, p. 223) is clear that it is through embracing one’s place identity and historical connections that one belongs, rather than simply the longevity of the attachment. Further research amongst different groups of people would be required in order to fully answer this question.

This thesis is also a first step in carving out a place for place as a sociological staple: that is, an aspect that should be considered in most sociological research. I
have demonstrated that place is not merely a backdrop to social life but is an integral part of the social practices carried out by embodied and emplaced people. How place is depicted in the wider world, how its history is understood, relationships with other people in the place and the materiality of the place are all an integral part of social relationships that go to make up the richness and complexity of social life. Place, therefore, ought to be given a more prominent place in sociological research. This thesis is a step towards these goals.
## Appendix I The Participants

Names in **bold** in the following table indicate those interviewed. Those who completed diaries are also indicated.

**The Leythers:** a middle class blended family living in Leigh

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grandparents</th>
<th>Parents</th>
<th>Children</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Claire, 35, works in recruitment, currently for a Government agency; lived in Leigh all her life</td>
<td>2 daughters, 10 and 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Val, 65, retired bank clerk lived in or close to Leigh all her life</td>
<td>Paul, 35, married to Claire, spent 5 years out of Leigh in the army, works as a technician</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Completed Diary</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keith, 66, retired senior manager for international company, moved to Wigan on first marriage, lived in Leigh 20 years</td>
<td>Rob, 37, lives in London with partner, works in media, brief email ‘conversation’</td>
<td>1 son, 1 year old</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Keith’s son, 36, married</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2 sons, approx 10 and 8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**John and Joanne**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grandparents</th>
<th>Parents</th>
<th>Children</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Joanne, 35, primary school teacher, always lived in Wigan</td>
<td>2 children, 5 and 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John, 61, retired BT engineer, always lived in Wigan</td>
<td>Joanne’s husband, BT engineer from Wigan</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Completed Diary</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wife, works at local school, always lived in Wigan</td>
<td>Joanne’s sister, 33, Occupational Therapist, lives in Wigan, single</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Barbara

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grandparents</th>
<th>Parents</th>
<th>Children</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Barbara</strong>, 75, retired coach tour guide, widowed and remarried, always lived in Wigan</td>
<td>Daughter, married, works part-time, lives near Bolton</td>
<td>3 children 10 and under</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Completed Diary</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Antony

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grandparents</th>
<th>Parents (divorced)</th>
<th>Youngest generation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Paternal grandfather worked as engineer in the Mill, died of emphysema as a result</td>
<td>Father, long term sick Mother, unemployed, formerly a receptionist</td>
<td><strong>Antony</strong>, 25, single, formerly a teaching assistant, always lived in Wigan, 3 younger siblings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Completed Diary</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Aspinalls

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grandparents</th>
<th>Parents</th>
<th>Children</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Beryl</strong>, 76, married, retired administrator, always lived in Wigan</td>
<td><strong>Janet</strong>, 52, does not work due to a disability, formerly civil servant, 2 younger sisters, lives close to Mum Beryl, husband, not interviewed, insurance assessor, also from Wigan</td>
<td><strong>Tom</strong>, 18, taking A levels, hoping to study Computing at university</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Completed Diary</strong></td>
<td><strong>Completed Diary</strong></td>
<td><strong>Completed Diary</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ian</strong>, 62, Beryl’s brother, married, retired teacher, lived in Manchester and Salford when younger</td>
<td>2 children, daughter lives in Thames Valley, son about 35 miles from Wigan</td>
<td>1 baby grandson</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Linda’s Family

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grandparents</th>
<th>Parents</th>
<th>Children</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ethel</strong>, 85, widowed, always lived in Wigan, 5 children, 1 great, great grandchild</td>
<td><strong>Linda</strong>, 61, retired secretary, always lived in Wigan, husband an engineer from Glasgow</td>
<td><strong>Kate</strong>, 34, worked at Leisure Centre, divorced, 2 primary-aged children, lives close to Linda</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Completed Diary**

Kate’s brother, not interviewed, joiner, married, two children, lives in Wigan

## Maureen

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grandparents</th>
<th>Parents</th>
<th>Children</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Maureen</strong>, 75, retired sewing machinist, widow of a miner, always lived in same area of Wigan (within a two mile radius)</td>
<td>One son, married, manager recently made redundant, lives locally</td>
<td>2 daughters, both at local universities</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Ron’s Family

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grandparents</th>
<th>Parents</th>
<th>Children</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Steve</strong>, 38, financial advisor, lived in Wigan other than time at university</td>
<td></td>
<td>3 children, 6, 4 and a baby</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ron</strong>, 62, retired solicitor, widowed, always lived in Wigan (apart from years at university)</td>
<td><strong>Anne</strong>, 38, American, Steve’s wife, works for local council</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Steve’s sister, not interviewed, teacher, married, lives outside Wigan (near Warrington) | 1 child |
### Sean

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grandparents</th>
<th>Parents</th>
<th>Children</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Father, deceased, ran own business  
Mother, widowed, lives close by | **Sean**, 42, lives with partner, always lived in the same house (from 1 year old), sheet metal worker, 1 brother in Preston | 2 sons, 6 and 2 |

### Joan

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grandparents</th>
<th>Parents</th>
<th>Children</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Joan</strong>, 66, divorced, retired receptionist, always lived in/near Wigan, lives in house she grew up in <strong>Completed Diary</strong></td>
<td>Son, 43, married, lives close by</td>
<td>4 children 17 - 6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<p>| | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Daughter, 47, married, lives in Wigan, works for NHS</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
9 Appendix II Photo Diary Instructions

Photo Diary Instructions

For one week (which can start on any day)

1. Take a photo of each place you go to, only 1 photo needs to be taken of each place (so if you visit the same place more than once a week only take 1 photo). Please avoid taking photos of family or friends for confidentiality reasons.

2. Make a note of the number of the photo, date and time and where it was taken together with any other comments you wish to remember, such as why you went there, who you saw.

3. Note down a brief account each day of what ‘social encounters’ you have had – who you met (actual names are not important e.g. ‘friend from work’, ‘shop assistant’), where you met them and what was talked about. Add the number of the photo which relates to this.

4. Try to fill in the diary at least once each day for 7 days.
10 Appendix III Ethics Forms

The University of Manchester

Graduate Office, School of Social Sciences

Ethical Practice in Conducting Research - Statement

Name: Julia Bennett

Programme: PhD

Department: Sociology

Title (Dissertation/Thesis): Self-Identity, Place and Community

You may find the following headings useful when explaining how you will address any ethical issues arising from your dissertation/research project. They are taken from the Association of Social Anthropologists of the Commonwealth, "Ethical Guidelines for Good Research Practice http://www.theasa.org/ethics.htm which provides more explanation of ethical issues that can arise when dealing with human subjects. The Department of Health: Research Governance Framework document can be found at http://www.dh.gov.uk/dr_consum_dh/groups/dh_digitalassets/@dh/@en/document/s/digitalasset/dh_4108965.pdf

Do not feel constrained by following list of headings.

There is no need to provide a statement under each heading, except heading 2 where you must address the ethical issues that will arise from involving human subjects in your research. Note that any research which involves the interviewing of any NHS staff, for whatever reason, requires ethical approval from the NHS Local Research Ethics Committee (LREC) - see Department of Health: Research Governance Framework.

1. Brief description of project.
This research is investigating aspects of everyday life as specific to a particular locality in order to understand participants’ sense of belonging to the community. In order to gain a good understanding of how local people conduct their lives it is anticipated that at least two visits to their homes will be required over the course of about six months and as well as interview data thick descriptions of the home environment will be made by the researcher.

2. Relations with and responsibilities towards research participants.

There may be some safety issues as the researcher will be visiting participants in their homes. It is anticipated that a telephone conversation will precede this meeting and in some instances, for example if participants are recruited through schools or colleges, they will have met previously. For her own safety the researcher will ensure that address details are left with someone else.

As at least two interviews will be required as well as access to the participants’ homes, the level of commitment that is needed will be made clear to participants before they are asked to consent in writing to taking part in the research. The researcher will also attend public events such as church fêtes, possibly accompanied by the participants, to observe social interaction in the community.

It is intended to interview consenting participants between the ages of 16 and 80, singly, in couples and family groups. Where permission is granted interviews will be tape recorded, otherwise notes will be taken. Interviews will be unstructured but are intended to cover topics related to home life, work or school/college, family life and social relationships. It is not intended to introduce any sensitive topics such as divorce, but if such topics are brought up by the interviewee the interviewer will respond sensitively whilst not dwelling on the topic. Interviewing family groups raises ethical issues about joint disclosure but due to the lack of sensitive topics being covered this is unlikely to be an issue. Tapes will be destroyed after they have been transcribed.

Some participants may be asked to record themselves and/or their family on video cameras or take still photographs, although refusal to do so will not prevent
participation in the research. Whilst, with express permission, photographs may be used in the thesis, video footage will be deleted at the end of the research.

All information recorded in interviews or personal information gathered through observation will be treated as confidential. Tapes will be kept at the researcher’s home in an anonymised form whilst being transcribed. Within the thesis the identities of all the participants will be disguised.

3. Relations with and responsibilities towards sponsors, funders and employers.

4. Relations with and responsibilities towards colleagues and the discipline.

5. Relations with own and host Governments.

6. Responsibilities to the Wider Society
9 June 2009

By email: Julia.m.bennett@postgrad.manchester.ac.uk

Dear Julia,

Re: ETHICAL PRACTICE IN CONDUCTING RESEARCH

Title of research: Self-Identity, Place and Community

Thank you for submitting your Ethical Declaration form in line with the Graduate School’s guidelines. Your declaration has now been considered and approved by the School of Social Sciences’ Ethics Panel.

Yours sincerely,

Ann Cronley
Graduate Office
School of Social Sciences
11 References


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