

Towards Inclusivity at the University of Warwick: An oral history study

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Abstract

As part of the Then & Now project, oral histories were collected from staff and alumni about their experiences at the University of Warwick. During these interviews, participants often spoke about their own experiences of inclusion and exclusion at university, often in comparison to the perceived experience of students at university of today. Looking back to earlier decades of the 1960s, 70s, 80s and 90s, those interviewed described the institution as primarily white, male, and middle-class. But, in their oral history testimonies participants reported feeling that that inclusivity at Warwick has undergone a transformation over the last 50 years. This article reviews these interviews and considers what the interviewees' experiences can add to discussions about inclusivity and accessibility within universities. By focusing on three themes that were identified from these interviews - gender, race and ethnicity, and class - the article explores changing attitudes and experiences of inclusion and exclusion at the University of Warwick 1965-present. The interviews indicate that significant changes have taken place with regards to gender equality, but that less sustained changes have been perceived to have occurred in relation to class and race. By reviewing a small sample of interviews that were collated as part of Then & Now, this article demonstrates the potential that further oral histories could offer to our understanding of inclusivity at the University of Warwick and the history of Higher Education.

Keywords: Inclusivity; oral history; University of Warwick; higher education; gender; race; ethnicity; class

Introduction

As part of the Then & Now: Arts at Warwick project, we interviewed alumni and long-standing members of Warwick's academic staff about the transformations they had witnessed since the university's founding or joining the university. We also examined oral histories that were collected to celebrate the universities 50-year anniversary and stored within the Modern Records Centre Archive. A key transformation that several interviewees identified was social inclusion. When Warwick was founded in 1965, many interviewees remarked that the profile of students and academic staff was primarily middle class, male, and white. Describing his fellow academics in the early Politics and International Studies (PAIS) department, Professor Wyn Grant explains that:

It certainly wasn't very diverse in terms of its [PAIS department in 1971] composition. Everyone in the department was a white male and quite a few of those were Scottish. The head of the department in the 1970's would not appoint a woman under any circumstance (Grant, 2020).

This article reviews these oral history interviews and considers what the interviewees experiences can add to our understanding of the history of inclusion within universities. By focusing on three themes that were identified from these interviews - gender, race and class – the article explores changing attitudes and experiences of inclusion and exclusion at the University of Warwick 1965 to present. This article builds the case that many of those who were interviewed believe that despite visible transformations in inclusivity at Warwick, there is still progress to be made. In particular, although many note that the university has experienced visible transformations in respect to gender, including the movement of women into top positions within departments such as History, all interviewees discussed the structures, cultures and hierarchies that they believe continue to exclude some individuals and groups from feeling included at the University of Warwick, and university culture more broadly.

The structure of this article centres the voices of interviewees within its analysis. This article is structured by key themes that interviewees themselves identified: gender, race and ethnicity, and class. The article explores what we can learn about experiences and perceptions of inclusivity by listening to oral history testimonies. It also demonstrates the potential of oral history interviews as evidence for understanding transformations in inclusivity in universities, and provides the basis for further research into these important topics.

Methodology

As part of the Then & Now project, oral histories about student experience were collected from Warwick alumni and staff. Ethical approval was sought from Warwick's research ethics committee to conduct this research. Interviewees were identified with the support of the alumni office or volunteered in response to emails inviting participants to take part. Six interviews were conducted with alumni and three with current academic staff. The interviews took place over Microsoft Teams and varied in length from 45 to 90 mins. The interviews were recorded and subsequently transcribed. A qualitative analysis of the transcripts was then conducted to select the material included within this article.

This article also makes use to two earlier recorded oral history interviews with Professor Sarah Richardson and Professor Bernard Capp, both from Warwick's history department. These were conducted as part of the Voices of Warwick project in 2015. They were selected for analysis for the purposes of this article due to their focus on themes of inclusivity and because they enabled contextualisation of the Then & Now interviews with other current history department staff members.

This article uses these oral histories to reflect on transformations in inclusivity at the University of Warwick since it was founded in 1965. The subjectivity of oral histories is well suited to the challenges of this question. It enables the space for new perspectives and, considering the issues discussed, captures the strong emotions attached to experiences of inclusion and exclusion. The nature of oral histories does mean that many of the issues discussed are framed in our modern understanding - for example, in relation to 'inclusion' and 'diversity' - which are not necessarily how such issues were understood or conceptualised at the time. This situation extends both to how I have examined the interviews, as well as how as interviewees themselves discussed their past experiences.

Through the interviews, three characteristics were identified around inclusivity that became the key themes in this article: gender, class and race and ethnicity. The three sections within this article explore interviewee responses to these themes and compare interviewee experiences and perceptions of change. That is, how things were 'then' in compared to 'now', and the nature of change from 1965 to present.

The first section explores the growing inclusion of women in academic positions at Warwick. The interviewees, including the first women to join the history department, discuss transformations that have taken place in higher education in relation to gender. It highlights that inclusivity, as these women experienced it, required more than just appointment and representation. The second section considers internationalisation and the

inclusion of black and minority ethnic students at Warwick, as well as the inequalities and discrimination experienced by these student groups. It shows that these issues remain, despite efforts to broaden the curriculum and transformations towards inclusivity headed by black and minority ethnic students, staff and allies in recent years. The final section considers how class and widening participation, focusing on how transformations in student fees and grants have, in some interviewee's opinion, perpetuated education's elitist structure and caused class divisions to become more prominent in university admissions.

Warwick's position as a 'plateglass' university means that it offers an interesting case study for considering changes since 1965 to the present in the broader context of UK Higher Education. Since most of the people interviewed for this research were from the history department, this department provides a focal point for the analysis in this article.

Gender

Certainly, in my case, I wasn't taught by any women, all my lecturers were male, so that's been quite a shift when we think of history departments now (Roberts, 2020).

Gender equality at Warwick has taken substantial steps since the university's founding. In this section, the focus is interviews conducted with several female Professors in the history department describing their experiences of being the first women to work within this previously male-dominated space. Through their testimonies we get a glimpse at the increased presence of women in the university, particularly as part of the academic staff. Their reflections demonstrate that university culture was often resistant to change and that we still cannot claim gender equality at Warwick, and in universities more broadly.

Turbulent social and political times meant that not long after the history department was formed in 1965, hiring was frozen, with virtually no new appointments until the late 1980s. Professor Bernard Capp was part of the history department during this period and describes the severe impact economic uncertainty and depression had:

[The 1960's] was the phase when the whole group of new universities had been founded... they were all new universities, new departments, new jobs... So although it was tough, there was actually some jobs to go for. Whereas 10 or so years later, when the hard times hit there was an almost total freeze... In this department, we went for something like 11 years where literally nobody came and nobody left, no vacancies and no departures (Price, interview with Bernard Capp, 2015).

Professor Sarah Richardson was the first woman to be appointed to the department. Her recruitment in 1988 finally broke the stalemate that had seen no female appointments before this point. However, she was only hired on a temporary contract:

I decided that I would take the teaching job at Warwick. Warwick also was a bit of a gamble because I was the first woman to be appointed and...this was 1988, the last permanent appointment they had made was in 1976. So, there was a big age difference between me and my fellow colleagues, um and as I say all of them were men. So I did feel it was a bit of a gamble (Price, interview with Bernard Capp, 2015).

It was not simply a freeze on recruitment that delayed women's appointment into university posts. Speaking about the Politics Department, Professor Wyn Grant highlights the sexist attitudes of senior members of the department:

In one case, a perfectly good and indeed quite strong woman candidate was simply not shortlisted. She got the job at Manchester University. She was clearly very capable, and the head of department wasn't going to have any women because he thought they were trouble (Price, interview with Bernard Capp, 2015).

Such attitudes acted alongside budgetary restraints to prevent the hiring of women to department posts earlier in Warwick's history. However, the decision to hire Sarah set a precedent that eventually led to greater female representation in the department. As Sarah noted, when interviewed for the *Voices of the University* project in 2015, it was not always easy for newly appointed female members of staff within the primarily male environment of the history department at that time. Recounting her first experience of double-blind marking a special subject she noted:

So I marked it and at that stage it was all blind double marking and the other academic said to me, 'Okay read out all your marks'. So, I went through the candidates and said you know x, 60 whatever, and he didn't respond at all... and normally what happens in this situation they would go, 'Oh well, actually I thought much better of it, I gave it a 75' or 'I thought it was awful I gave it a 50' and then you discuss it. I just had to read all of mine out, I had no reaction, so I had no idea whether my marking was inline, it was very very intimidating. And in fact at the end he said 'Actually you know we are really close' and so I did tell him that I thought that was appalling behaviour... so there were things like that where I felt like I was being tested quite a lot (Schluze, interview with Sarah Richardson, 2015).

Despite such experiences, Sarah felt able to express herself within the department and challenge practices that she felt were discriminatory. She explains that the department's experience of being male dominated for so long seemed to allow sexist practices to have continued unchallenged before her arrival:

I got on well with a lot of my colleagues... [but] it was odd being the only women, it was very odd. At that stage we interviewed everyone, and you interviewed on your own and I remember we used to write little cards... [One of my] colleagues put 'this student is a raven-haired beauty' and I said 'you can't put that, so what would you say if I put that a guy was really fit, he's got a great body, or something' and it was that sort of era where there was a lot of, semi-conscious I would say, sexism that was just seen as acceptable in a department that had just been all men (Schluze, interview with Sarah Richardson, 2015).

Professor Rebecca Earle noted that although some male colleagues supported their new female colleagues, interactions with others was more problematic. She recalls her experience joining Warwick in the late 1980's:

I had good colleagues, who didn't make my being a woman problematic. I mean, there were some peculiar people who, you know, never really wanted to look me in the eye when I walked down the corridor, particularly when I was a postgraduate student. There were people, just, you know, they were old style men who just, they just wouldn't look at me. I think some of them never learned my name even after I've been in the Department for, I don't know, six or seven years (Earle, 2020).

Professor Penny Roberts had a similar experience, with some colleagues unsure how to address her when she was appointed in 1992:

So that was quite an interesting situation, to the point that some colleagues didn't know how to refer to me. I had a very well-known colleague who used to refer to everybody as 'old boy' and ended up calling me 'my girl'. He was the only one of my colleagues I would have ever let get away with that! (Roberts, 2020).

What these testimonies make clear is that male academics were sometimes hostile or even unsure of how to respond to the increased presence of women within the department. Maternity leave seemed a particular source of confusion, in terms of how it required new management and organisational approaches, as Rebecca explains:

I remember when I went and told my head of Department, who was a wonderful person in many ways... I said that I was pregnant, and I was going to be going on maternity leave and he said, 'When are you going

to do that?’ And I said, well, I think because of, you know, the due date, probably I would want to go on leave something like week eight of the first term or something like that. And he said, ‘Well, you can’t do that. That’s the middle of term. You can’t, just, you know...’ [I said] ‘I think I can ‘cause it’s like one month before my baby is due’ and he said, ‘I don’t think so’. I mean, you know, then he looked into it and found that indeed it was true, that’s how maternity leave worked... [But] he was kind of treating it as if it were a request to just take study leave. It was very funny. He was completely flabbergasted by the notion that somebody would just have to leave in the middle of the term (Earle, 2020).

When interviewed, Sarah described her experience as a working mother, and the difficulty of reconciling childcare and the structure of a university day. The existing culture of evening teaching and late research seminars was a particular challenge for Sarah who, as a single parent, had to ensure childcare cover for her daughter:

One of the things that the women in the department, the young women did do was try to stop the culture of late seminar, late research seminars. Because we all found it incredibly difficult because we couldn’t go home, I sometimes had to go home and get a babysitter and then come back. You know it isn’t the case that you can just leave a child for hours, there was one day I was teaching an evening class and it started to snow at about 3 o’clock and I made the decision to cancel class and go home because [my daughter] was being looked after by a babysitter who was 16 or 17 and I didn’t know if I would be able to get home because of the snow and the students, the part-time students made a complaint (Schulze, interview with Sarah Richardson, 2015).

When interviewed, Penny also described the odd comments that she encountered in discussions about mixing academic work and motherhood:

There were some really odd comments... this wasn’t all male colleagues by any means, but you always had the minority who would say things like, ‘Well, I think, you know, that really mothers should be full time at home’. So the idea of combining work with motherhood was something that to some colleagues was not acceptable, suggesting that ‘You’ll have to come back and do all your marking even though you’ll be on maternity leave’, which is actually illegal! (Roberts, 2020).

The increased presence of women within the department highlighted issues of maintaining a balance between work and childcare provision. This is not to say these issues did not affect male academics in the department, but as more women joined the department these topics became notable points of contention, especially in the case of parental leave for childbirth.

Penny's interview revealed the impact of power and gender dynamics of the time which made young women, in particular, susceptible to unwanted approaches. Penny noted:

I can think of things that happened to me, particularly early in my career, and I think this is probably true of young women in most situations, you're much more vulnerable to unwanted approaches... Not so much at Warwick, it was really before I came to Warwick... I was exposed to that sort of situation... by colleagues and you just kind of put up with it. Unfortunately, I think that we were all really used to that kind of stuff and I put up with it in a way that I just wouldn't have done later in my career. That says something, when you're young, when you're vulnerable, you don't want to rock the boat and you become much more susceptible as a consequence (Roberts, 2020).

All of the female members of the history department whose oral history transcripts were investigated remarked on how much things had changed since when they first joined. As Rebecca explained, since the 1970s, the gender balance and culture of the department has significantly changed:

Certainly, the gender balance of the Department really is totally transformed. The male world that I entered is absolutely no more... I mean there's been good career progression now for women [within my department], which wasn't the case for a long time. Like for a long time, so if there were women, we were gathered towards the bottom. But that's changed significantly, and so we also were much closer to the undergraduate intake. Which, if anything, is slightly, you know, is skewed towards women (Earle, 2020).

As demonstrated by the esteem of the female academics interviewed, it is clear women have succeeded in accessing the top positions within the Department of History and Faculty of Arts. However, we cannot assume that issues of gender are no longer a concern. Penny for instance, holds reservations about claiming unequivocal success:

But as we started to recruit as the economic climate improved, it was clear that for every 1 woman they were appointing, they were appointing 3 men and from a base of zero, so there were some difficult conversations in the department. The department felt like it was doing really well, because the women that it did appoint, me, Penny and Rebecca were quite articulate and we would speak in meetings and challenge things so they felt like they had made loads of progress, when actually they hadn't. They were also fortunate that due to some changes in things like education, they were given Carolyn Steedman and Maria Luddy, and Maxine Berg came from economics. We had suddenly got these senior women coming in, again which none of them

had been appointed by the department... It is a similar situation now with the professoriate in the history department, there are 4 female professors, I think and 13 or 14 male professors, although our gender profile looks good, there are a lot of women at Associate Professor level and not a lot of women at Professor level (Schulze, interview with Sarah Richardson, 2015).

The findings of Warwick's Equality Monitoring Annual Report 2018/2019 reflect Penny's observations about the continued need to improve gender equality, particularly within the academic staff. The report found that across the university, in teaching and research roles, only a third of posts were filled by women (**University of Warwick, 2019: 11**). In the Faculty of Arts, there is a more equal split, with women accounting for 43.2% of the teaching and research staff. However, there is still a gendered work division, with 71.4% of Teaching Focused academic roles occupied by women (**University of Warwick, 2019**). Compared to the entirely male academic staff that Sarah described before her arrival to the department, this is a radical change but the continued impact of gender related issues in the faculty is clear.

Penny argues that we need to ask fundamental questions about why we are not attracting a more diverse range of applicants. In this case, she feels that the types of history that the department teaches is crucial in pushing this change:

Since often it will be said 'Oh well, we aren't interviewing any women because nobody who was particularly qualified for this, or who was as strong as the other candidates, applied', whereas the position should be, 'Is there something wrong with the way we are advertising it, if we're not attracting those people to apply? The question isn't just what kinds of colleagues [should we be recruiting] but also what sorts of topics do we want to be teaching... [there has been a] change over the last 40 years or so that moved women's history from being a marginal activity, to gender being a key feature of all historical analysis, [which] has significantly changed the sorts of things people think [of as] history and what topics we teach. I think that is not disconnected with the larger number of women in the historical profession. So that is a steering mechanism that one can think about (Roberts, 2020).

Female representation in the department of history has certainly improved and is undeniably different to the Warwick that Wyn and Bernard initially described. Yet, simply increasing the number of female appointments does not offer all the solutions. As highlighted by the experiences above, there is a view that it necessary for a review of the types of history that are taught as well as working practices and cultures to enable more women to feel that they can succeed in academia.

Ultimately, Penny offers a pessimistic evaluation of gender inclusivity as it stands and the implications it has for inclusivity more broadly: '[But] back to the gender issue if I may, because it is striking that if we can't get that sorted then I don't think we have much hope with anything else' (Roberts, 2020).

Internationalisation, Race and Ethnicity

You also have to have everybody in the Department thinking about what kind of Department do we want (Earle, 2020).

Warwick has seen a significant rise in international students since the 1980s, and especially within the last couple of decades. Although international students were nothing new to British institutions, the 1990s saw a more concentrated effort to recruit and provide for students from overseas. Silver and Silver place Oxford Brookes as the first university to establish an Advisory Service for International Students, which was then followed by other institutions (Silver & Silver, 1997: 74). By 1995 around 150,000 international students were studying within the UK, 10% of all students. A drastic rise from the 25,000 recorded in 1965 (Silver & Silver: 73). On Warwick's current website a page applauds its 'International Profile' where it states that at Warwick there are currently 10,453 'non-UK domiciled students (from approx. 150 countries)'. The rise in international students has increased the diversity of nationalities amongst the student population. It is also worth noting that today '42.9% of all Academic/ Research/ Teaching staff have non-UK nationality' (University of Warwick, 2018). This reflects rising international student numbers nationally, and places Warwick just outside the top universities with the highest number of overseas students (Great Britain, 2021).

Within the Arts Faculty, the founding of the Global History and Culture Centre (GHCC) in 2007 was similarly a crucial step in orientating the curriculum and research in the department away from national focused histories to a global outlook, recognising the interconnectedness of histories from around the world. When interviewed, Professor Maxine Berg spoke about her experience forming this centre, in the context of the broader rise of global history:

But then in 2000, I think things had been going on before that time, but certainly in 2000, Ken Pomeranz's book, The Great Divergence was published...Ken Pomeranz was travelling the world and he came to Warwick. Masses of people turned out to see him. It was like one of those big lecture theatres was completely full ...So, we got a new Vice-Chancellor, and that is the time to seize the moment, so I went to our new Vice-Chancellor... It was Nigel Thrift, and I went to see him and said, 'Warwick needs a Global History Centre, there is not one

anywhere, there has been this amazing intellectual moment in history, and we can create a Global History Centre here'. So that started in the Autumn of 2006... And it was just incredible success, and it was partly because I had such wonderful colleagues, Anne Gerritsen and Giorgio Riello... and then more modern historians became involved and so it just went from there. And various people, we managed to keep it going... So, we became quite well known across the world (Berg, 2020).

Maxine goes on to explain that this intellectual turn was influential in raising new questions and methods within historical study as a whole:

One of the early things we did with the GHCC, we held a conference at the British Academy, called 'Writing the History of the Global' and the British Academy they took, they were very keen on this conference idea and they funded it and we had a big conference, a lot of people came and all the major speakers in the area, but also a whole number of people who weren't necessarily doing global history. I mean people like Linda Colley, and we interviewed them... asking them about how this global turn was affecting the way they saw history, that they saw their history writing. So, I think that was quite a change, and it didn't necessarily mean everyone had to become a global historian, but that they were interested in just this methodology, the approach, the sort of subjects that were being brought into history that really weren't being looked at very much. I mean many of the history departments at that time were just full of British Historians... but they did not have many historians of the wider world (Berg, 2020).

These changes map an evolution in the department's academic and teaching focus towards more global perspectives.

However, oral history interviews and other evidence demonstrates that a trend towards more global research and teaching have not always produced greater inclusion or equality for the staff or student body. Penny reflects on the limited improvements she has seen since her time joining Warwick:

We've gone quite a long way with gender, but we've made very little headway with ethnic minority or BAME appointments or other sorts of protected characteristics. Indeed, somebody who joined the University recently expressed to me quite how surprised he was by how white Warwick is in terms of staff. There has definitely been more of a shift towards a more diverse student base, and people say, 'Oh it's a pipeline you have to wait, this will eventually feed through', but again I don't believe that's necessarily the case. Unconscious bias and existing prejudice remain, and many studies show that without appropriate training people appoint those who look and sound like them, who

appear to have the same views as them, so it becomes self-reinforcing (Roberts, 2020).

This is supported by evidence, such as the Monitoring Equality Report's finding that only 3.4% of staff with an academic contract at Warwick identified as Black Asian or Minority Ethnic (**University of Warwick, 2019: 26**).

In respect to creating greater access and equality for Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic staff and students, another current member of Warwick's History Department, Meliesa-Ono George, has argued in a recent article that changing the curriculum, alone, is not enough and that anti-Racist pedagogy practices also need to be utilised. She describes mechanisms that can be employed to disrupt exclusionary education practices, through challenging objectivity in education and the hierarchical structure in academic teaching (**Ono-George, 2019: 503-4**). When she spoke to current minority ethnic students at Warwick about their experiences, they reported feelings of isolation, daily experiences of overt racism and microaggressions, and lacking staff to whom they can relate. Overall, she concluded, this creates a 'lack of confidence in institutional process and response' (**Ibid: 501**). This demonstrates the shortcomings of Warwick as an inclusive institution, but also criticises teaching practices in Higher Education more widely. Ono-George turns the spotlight towards pedagogy, arguing that simply improving diversity will not be enough to break down the institution's exclusionary practices (**Ibid, 2019: 502**).

It seems that things are changing, especially following movements like RhodesMustFall and BlackLivesMatter. The need to improve inclusivity of minority ethnic students and staff has finally been given the focus that it deserves. Penny explains how such issues are now discussed in meetings, when previously they were not:

Equality and inclusivity as issues are much more on the agenda than before, for instance, above the line and openly discussed in meetings, including around promotions and appointments. There is still a long way to go, but there has definitely been a big change in a positive direction. In particular, people are being made more aware and, therefore, prepared to speak out. So we have come a long way but there is still work to do, but I suspect that there is always going to be work to do (Roberts, 2020).

Maxine also spoke about the impact of BlackLivesMatter and how it informed her own need to re-evaluate her research:

So, you see the subject has come up, there is another good reason for doing this, the reason I took it up in the summer was a response to Black Lives Matter... there has been all this recent work on the history of

capitalism and the role of Slavery in American modernization, but it has all been about America, and all been about the cotton industry. But that impact of that slavery was also very important in Britain and it was much earlier and it was about sugar... It is sugar plantations which were the crucial connection... I just really wanted to write an article that undergraduates could read and have an informed view, that took the subject seriously, and didn't just say it was not important cause it didn't contribute more than 2% to GDP and that's what the position of economic historians largely is (Berg, 2020).

However, such changes are only because of extensive campaigning by minority ethnic students and staff who have challenged exclusionary practices within institutions like Warwick. The work by individuals such as Ono-George has been crucial in drawing academic attention to the inequalities experienced by minority ethnic students within Higher Education today. The improvements we see have been hard fought for and compared with improvements in female inclusivity certainly have a long way to go. The recent attention paid has not overcome years of exclusionary practices that have meant students from a diverse range of backgrounds felt unwelcome within, and unable to access, university spaces.

Class

You could still say that universities are good in the sense that everybody is just chucked in together regardless of their educational background, but once they leave that can still come back into play ... who your parents are, where you went to school, especially if you want to go and work in the city (Roberts, 2020).

When considering the improvements in diversity that we have discussed so far, although success has varied and – certainly in the case of race and ethnicity – there is a long way to go, what is notable is the seemingly linear nature of this progress. When comparing to the white, male dominated academia that existed in the 1960s, Warwick today has experienced diversification, women now accounting for 43.2 % of teaching and research academic staff, and Black Asian and Minority Ethnic staff accounting for 3.4% of the academic staff within the Faculty of Arts (**University of Warwick, 2019: 11, 26**). This model of linear progress does not seem to apply when considering discussions of socio-economic background. Historically, universities were dominated by middle class students. However, grants and significantly lower fees meant that students were not forced to accumulate the levels of debt experienced by students of today.

In the 1960s, issues of elitism and class dominated British universities. As a student coming from a grammar school, Bernard describes the overt elitism he witnessed as a student at Oxford:

Pembroke was kind of a middle of the road place, there were public school people there but there was also quite a few people from state schools, so I sort of fitted in reasonably well. Whereas the big college just across the road, Christchurch was almost entirely top public schools and the culture of the place was that. In fact one lad from my secondary school a year or two later did actually get into Christchurch, and I remember meeting him and we were discussing how things were, and he said 'People on my staircase won't talk to me because I came from a state school' (Price, interview with Bernard Capp, 2015).

At the same time, numbers of students attending university were relatively low. Roughly four in every hundred young people entered full-time courses at university. Of those entering higher education, the percentage of working-class students was low, with only three per cent of working-class boys and one per cent of working-class girls going on to full-time degree-level courses (Barr & Glennerster, 2014: xvii).

The Robbins Report, published in 1963, was a significant turning point in Higher Education provision. The report argued for an expansion of Higher Education, drastically increasing spaces available. The government recognised that too many young people who could have benefited from a university education had been missing out on the opportunity (Ibid). The founding of a wave of new universities, including Warwick, resulted from this changing thought.

After completing his PhD at Oxford, Bernard began his first teaching post at Warwick in 1968. Reflecting on the difference between Warwick students then and now, he explains that during Warwick's early years there was a greater diversity of students across different socio-economic backgrounds:

There was a much bigger... range in terms of social economic background then than Warwick's students today. There's an increasing proportion of our students now from Independent schools, probably because the entrance requirements are so, so high. That many comprehensives for example struggle to match those. But in the early days overwhelmingly students were from the grammar schools or comprehensive state schools anyways. There were always some really high flying students who had made a conscious decision not to even apply to Oxbridge because they thought York or Warwick or Sussex or one of these new places were going to be more exciting and adventurous and they wanted to do that... I did a stint as an admissions

tutor in the 70s I think it was and our standard offer in those days was BCC... It's mindboggling, now the average is sort of 3 A's plus and Warwick was already a respectable place by then (Price, interview with Bernard Capp, 2015).

Bernard believes that the lower grade requirements in Warwick's early years was one factor that allowed students from state schools more opportunity to apply. The 1967/68 prospectus for the university describes the requirements for History as 'passes in two approved subjects at the Advanced Level are required' (**University of Warwick, 1967: 113**). Another significant difference identified by interviewees was the scale of funding available to students to attend university in this period. Rebecca Earle describes the transformative effect this financial support had:

And I think I mean going along with the introduction of fees--one should also say even before that the elimination of the bursary--once upon a time there were no fees and students got a bursary. A much smaller number of people went to University, but it also provided a route for people who came from backgrounds that couldn't afford the fees and couldn't afford the living expenses to be able to do it. And I think there is huge amounts of research on how transformative it was for the generation of people who benefitted from that in the 60's and 70's (Earle, 2020).

However, Penny explains that we need to be careful to assume that this era was a golden time for social mobility:

But, of course, as the university sector expanded, obviously a different kind of financial model was required... Actually, when I went to university, it was still pretty middle class, I'm not sure how much you can look back to a golden era, therefore. Selective schooling and other advantages mean that because it's always been a selective system, you still need the grades to get here (Roberts, 2020).

The creation of new universities like Warwick did not fix the culture of elitism tied to universities. Katherine, an education graduate who attended Warwick from 1990-94, describes her experience coming from a lower socio-economic background and how, despite a wider availability of funding options, class divisions were still obvious:

One bad memory from an education seminar, where about 20 of us were in a circle and uh, the guy, the professor said 'oh let's go round the circle and say your name and where you are from' cause it must have been early days and I said 'I'm Katherine and I'm from Nuneaton' and he went [in an exaggerated accent] 'ah Nuneaton, we've got a local girl' and he just, I was so embarrassed that he had made fun of my accent and I realised at that moment that even amongst the mature students

who were quite local, I was the only one with a local accent. And I just... half of me was embarrassed and half of me was outraged, how dare he do me in for having a local accent. Um, I did find somebody on the course from Tamworth who had an accent as strong as mine, so we chummed up, we were friends for a bit. But yeah there was that side of things. I don't imagine it's as bad now but back then you still had to be of a certain class really to get into university, umm a lot of my friends from my local school... I was in the top class at school, with really intelligent people the vast majority of whom did not go to university because it just wasn't in their culture to go. Most people back then, you didn't go to university unless you were from a fairly middle-class background to be honest, and um... I do remember one girl who I loved, she was so nice, Sue, couldn't cope... our first teaching experience they took us into Chelmsley Wood in Birmingham and oh there was all these ruffian kids running around and we came back and we had to do kind of feedback from it and this poor Sue said, 'Oh My Goodness,' she said, 'I don't know if I am on the right course, I went to a Covent school, I've never seen anything like it'. She was lovely and it was fairly clear from the lectures we went to she was going to be a really great teacher actually, she's probably in a private school somewhere. Somewhere nice. But I loved her to bits, she was so honest about you know... about it being way beyond her scope of experience. That is kind of the sort of people that went to university (Katherine, 2020).

This experience of feeling out of place does not appear uncommon. Considering her own experience travelling South to study her degree, Penny explains a clear bias in Warwick's student population that does still exist:

I am from the North West, and what struck me most when I went to university was being a state-educated northerner among many privately-educated southerners. It was remarkable and really striking... [Warwick] too draws most of its students from the South East. It's difficult to shift this bias because, once you have established that sort of link with where people typically come from, so more people come who look and sound the same (Roberts, 2020).

These stories all demonstrate how class divisions have remained a consistent feature of university life over the last fifty years at Warwick. Compared to other Russell Group universities, Warwick does not have the worst ratio of state school to private school students. Overall, the independent school sector educates around 6.5% of the total number of school children in the UK (ISC, Research, 2021). However, figures published by the Higher Education Statistics Agency, comparing the school background of all undergraduates in the 2017/2018 year, found that 41.8%

of Oxford's cohort had attended private school. Warwick did significantly better when compared to Oxford, with only 23.9% of its students having previously attended a private school (HESA, 2019). This, though, still shows a disparity, whereby private school students are disproportionately represented at the university. In an article published by The Boar in 2019 it was reported that Warwick's proportion of state educated pupils had fallen compared to the previous year's data (Kinder, 2021).

When comparing the Warwick of 1968 that Bernard described to the university community that we see today, it is unclear whether the institution has become more or less inclusive to students from lower socio-economic backgrounds. What is clear is the impact of changes to funding arrangements. The initial decision to abolish student grants to be replaced by income-contingent student loans in 1998 started a process whereby gradually tuition fees rose and maintenance grants transformed into maintenance loans (BBC News, 2009). The decision that from 2012 universities could charge tuition fees of up to £9,000 per year was undeniably controversial (Coughlan, 2010). Debates around the impact of fee rises have been unclear, however it has left one interviewee, Katherine, concerned that any improvements in accessibility to universities would be reversed. She is worried that were she making this decision today, she might not have undertaken her degree:

[I] feel very lucky that financially I didn't have to take on any kind of burden to go there and I loved it, I really enjoyed the course... But just the whole experience was really good and I just feel privileged I did it at a time when I didn't have to pay and I think that is how it should still be... if I had had to take on a loan to do it. I wouldn't have done it, and if I was 18 now I would not be going to university...I think a lot of people from my sort of background won't take up that option (Katherine, 2020).

The interviews examined certainly paint a complex picture of class in the context of Warwick and higher education more broadly. Compared to improvements in gender or progress being made in efforts to address racial equality, we cannot see a clear narrative of progress. Class has been a dividing factor and complex issue for students across Warwick's history, and as we progress forward with higher fees and ever more competitive entry requirements, the experience of the interviewees demonstrate that elitism remains. Certainly, as I consider my own accumulation of over £70,000 of debt, it is not difficult to see why for those of a lower socio-economic background this could be a substantial deterrent.

Conclusion

Considering the interviews conducted as part of the *Then & Now* Project, it is evident that Warwick has certainly changed since its founding in 1965. Warwick, and Higher Education more broadly, has become more inclusive because of active changes pushed for by both students and staff. In terms of gender there has been linear progress (although issues remain), and in the case of race, a clear commitment to address outstanding issues, such as the under-representation of both minority ethnic students and staff. Within the history department it has been shown how efforts to promote gender and racial inclusion have been extended across staff hiring and management arrangements to the research, the curriculum and pedagogic practice in the period 1965 to now. At the current moment, we can hope for further improvements on the horizon, pushed on by recent campaigns to widen the curriculum and transform teaching practices. Through the efforts of certain individuals and groups, we can begin to see progress towards greater inclusivity for both staff and students.

Class contrastingly paints a more complicated picture. We cannot see a clear narrative of progress, unlike with gender and ethnicity. Differences in class have historically divided and excluded students, and interviewees have outlined fears about how this could worsen if we progress forward with higher fees and ever more competitive entry requirements. The experience of the interviewees demonstrates the elitism that still exists in many British universities, including Warwick.

Overall, Warwick has undergone transformations towards inclusivity. However, this transformation has not been enough to address the exclusionary nature of Higher Education in Britain. There is continuing pressure on the institution to act and help in making Warwick a place welcoming to students whatever their background. But COVID has halted progress, as Rebecca explains:

Which is why it's so important that we be able to increase the diversity of the academic staff, not just in terms of gender. In terms of ethnicity, that's incredibly important, and it's distressing that the current financial exigencies that the Department is facing because of the pandemic is really making it hard for us to do anything about that because [hiring is] frozen. We can't hire anybody for the foreseeable future. (Earle, 2020).

We can only hope that current financial issues do not freeze the university's progress as it did in the 1970's and 80s, but that we can continue to push for a more inclusive Warwick.

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Originally from Bristol, Lauren completed her undergraduate at the University of Warwick in History and Politics. Currently she is undertaking a Masters in Global and Comparative History at Warwick, with the goal of working in the heritage industry after her studies.



Interviews

Andrew, April 2020.

Charles, April 2020.

Katherine, April 2020.

Pierre, March 2020.

Professor Penny Roberts, July 2020.

Professor Maxine Berg, December 2020.

Professor Rebecca Earle, September 2020.

Professor Wyn Grant, April 2020.

Archived Materials

Price, C., *Interview with Bernard Capp*, Voices of the University Project: Memories of Warwick, 1965-2015, *Institute of Advanced Study*, University of Warwick Library, 1040/24/1/1-2 (3 February 2015). Available at: <https://cdm21047.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/warwick/id/405/rec/31> [Accessed: 15 July 2021].

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