

Nottingham Evening Post 30<sup>th</sup> April 2008

In the 1960s a report turned the spotlight on poverty in Nottingham's inner-city neighbourhood St Ann's. Four decades on, its two authors believe the evidence suggests too little progress has been made in creating a more equal society ...

By **KEN COATES** and **RICHARD SILBURN**

LAST year brought the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of our report on Poverty, Deprivation and Morale in the Nottingham community of St Ann's. At first sight the *Evening Post's* story 'Child Poverty Hits Six in Ten' would suggest that things have been getting worse in the recent past.

In the old area, of 10,000 houses scheduled for comprehensive redevelopment by Nottingham City Council, more than half lacked any hot water system, and 85% of them had no bathroom. Outdoor toilets were the general rule, although most of these had been modified to include water closets, so that the night soil in to had been banished. But the houses were frequently substandard, and sometimes verging on derelict.

But our report was not primarily concerned with the state of the housing in St Ann's, even though this demanded a lot of attention. We were trying to find out how widespread was the incidence of poverty.

One of Ken Coates' adult classes had studied Peter Townsend and Brian Abel-Smith's survey "The Poor and the Poorest" basing itself on the investigation of income and expenditure surveys routinely conducted by the Ministry of Labour, which calculated that not less than 7.5m people in Britain could be living on incomes at or around the prevailing National Assistance rates.

This implied that numerous people in full-time work could be worse off than they might have been if they were on public relief. It was a shocking finding, and one which challenged the members of the adult class to discover whether it might apply in the prosperous town of Nottingham

It was decided to recruit a second tutor, Richard Silburn, from the Department of Applied Social Science in Nottingham University, and to undertake a detailed survey of conditions in the area of St Ann's, which was conveniently near to the Adult Education Centre in which we normally met. We prepared a detailed questionnaire which examined the housing conditions in St Ann's, and a variety of social questions including the incidence of poverty

Using the same criteria as those adopted by Abel-Smith and Townsend, we found that the St Ann's area endured a considerably greater incidence of

poverty than the national average, as determined by Abel-Smith and Townsend.

They found that 14.2% of the entire national population were living in what they described as poverty, which entailed an income below National Assistance entitlements. The figure in St Ann's by contrast was a shocking 36%, and this entailed a consequent finding that half the child population of St Ann's were living in poverty.

We published our detailed findings together with a brilliant series of photographs taken by Cordley Coit and Donald Cooper. These do indeed record a departed world, and the redevelopment of St Ann's has manifestly transformed the landscape as well as the living conditions of those that have been rehoused there.

But modern England has given rise to a whole series of different social problems, much advertised in the popular press, which includes various forms of delinquent behaviour.

We are in no position to throw light on these questions which require serious study far beyond our present means— But we have been frequently asked about the incidence of poverty. Had things improved since the days of the old St Ann's? The evidence appears to be somewhat disappointing.

In his Annual Article on Society the National Statistician states: "On average in the UK we are richer, but there is evidence that inequality in income distribution has increased over the last two decades ... "

Children most at risk of living in poverty live with a lone parent, the adults in the household are unemployed, and the adult members of the household suffer disability. Ethnicity is also a factor.

In spite of regular propaganda utterances about the abolition of child poverty, we are far from having achieved the kind of progress for which reformers were hoping in the 1960s. Certainly the figures published by One Nottingham show that in some areas of the city, including St Ann's, to say the least of it, there has been no improvement in the prevalence of poverty among our people.