Chapter 4. UK Manufacturing & Industry Review

'Since 1939 no industry in this country had suffered so many frustrations, or been shackled by so many Government controls, as the furniture industry' (James, 1949).

This chapter starts by looking generally at the state of the British manufacturing industry with its dominance in the early part of the twentieth century, to its steady decline during this century. It addresses the issues of whether High Wycombe was alone in its primary industry decline, comparing it to a similar town that relied on a single manufacturing industry, Stoke-on-Trent. Stoke-on-Trent is an industrial town steeped in the history of the pottery industry. It also saw a dramatic decline of this industry, but similar to High Wycombe, there are still pockets of manufacturing in Stoke-on-Trent that are producing British goods amidst the ruins of many pottery factories. This chapter also evaluates the statistical data held on the UK furniture industry and High Wycombe in particular. The statistical data used for this research was taken from the Furniture Industry Reviews and Digests. These were un-catalogued Industry Reviews and are housed at the High Wycombe Furniture Archive. The relevant information was retrieved manually, and the figures used throughout this chapter are collated from the report at large and therefore do not refer to a particular page. This chapter also includes statistical information from the Office for National Statistics[1] (NOMIS), which provides additional data adding to the new knowledge emerging in this chapter.

The findings are collated from the following Furniture Industry Reviews and Digests:

- *An Economic Review for the Furniture Industry:* FDC[2] Statistical Publications, published by the Furniture Development Council
- *Statistical Digest for the Furniture Industry*: FIRA Statistical Publications, published by the Furniture Industry Research Association
- *An Economic Review for the Furniture Industry*: FIRA Statistical Publications, published by the Furniture Industry Research Association

[1] ONS Crown Copyright Reserved [from Nomis on 21 May 2009] census of employment - employee analysis - SIC68.

[2] The Furniture Development Council (FDC) became the Furniture Industry Research Association (FIRA) in 1961.

- NOMIS (2009) *Census of Employment*. London: National Office of Statistics

This chapter will address the following main aims of the research:

- To provide a better understanding of the High Wycombe furniture industry during this time (1952-2002), putting it in context with the British industry and comparing it to the pottery industry in Stoke-on-Trent.
- To identify any comparable reasons behind the decline of both the furniture and the pottery industry. It will provide some comparable information that will help to understand High Wycombe's position and decline.
- To quantify the decline of the High Wycombe furniture industry, researching statistical data on the number of people working in the furniture industry during the time of the study and comparing with the rest of the UK.
- To ascertain whether the decline was mirrored across the rest of the UK furniture industry, and to identify reasons for the decline.

4.1 British Industry Decline

There was a time when world and British technological history was much the same thing. Early nineteenth century Britain was the seat of the Industrial Revolution; it was the workshop of the world, and it had appropriately heroic entrepreneurs, inventors and engineers. Negative pictures of Britain's technology and industry have been painted many times over the past one hundred years (Edgerton, 1996, p.1).

'Have we really forgotten how to make things?', Labour's Business Secretary Peter Mandelson lamented in 2010 (Comfort, 2013, p.2) having declared some years earlier that Silicon Valley was his 'inspiration' (Chakrabortty, 2011). Comfort, in *'The Slow Death of British Industry: A Sixty-Year Suicide 1952-2012'* explains that in 1952 one half of the UK working population was employed in manufacturing. Indeed the FT index of 1952 included 26 manufacturers out of the 30 companies. Looking at the FT index today just two companies from 1952 still exist: GKN[3] and Tate & Lyle[4] (Comfort, 2013, pp.1-7). Throughout the 1950s, Britain's factories were kept fully stretched as the country re-equipped after six years of war. Indeed the furniture industry performed strongly on the back of the government's wartime

[3] Guest Keen & Nettlefolds (automotive and aerospace).
[4] Tate & Lyle (Cane Sugar Industry).

Utility scheme, which embraced most of its output. But according to Comfort, Britain's competitiveness was weakening at the beginning of the 1960s. 'By 1961 its share of global trade in manufacturing had already fallen back to 16.2 percent, a decline of one-third in just eleven years' (Comfort, 2013, p.9). Comfort describes the furniture industry as taking a hiding from the late 1970s from flat pack furniture, much of it imported from abroad (Comfort, 2013, p.68). Employment in manufacturing by 1979 was down to 6.16 million, half what it had been in 1952 and - as worrying in terms of the future skills base – a near-halving in the number of apprenticeships' (Comfort, 2013, p.57).

By 1997, just 4,238,000 Britons were employed in manufacturing, less than two-thirds the number in 1979 (Comfort, 2013, p.109). The end of the 1990s and the 2000s saw British manufacturing continue to be second to the financial and service sectors, which now dominated the services seen as the way forward. Manufacturing was recognised as globally competitive only in aerospace and pharmaceuticals, a far cry from the 1950s (Comfort, 2013, p.173). The UK's manufacturing sector has shrunk by two-thirds in the past thirty years, the greatest de-industrialisation of any major nation (Chakrabortty, 2011).

Owen (1999) in *'From Empire to Europe'* shows the dominance of British industry export in the early 1900s in Figure 135 and 136 below, British industry struggled to cope with increasing competition in the 1960s and 1970s' (Owen, 1999, pp.31-32).

	Britain	Germany*	Italy	France	US	Japan
1929	23.8	15.5	3.9	11.6	21.7	4.1
1937	22.3	16.5	3.7	6.2	20.5	7.4
1950	24.6	7.0	3.6	9.6	26.6	3.4
1964	14.0	19.5	6.2	8.5	20.1	8.3
1973	9.1	22.3	6.7	9.3	15.1	13.1

Figure 135 Shares of world export

*The German figures for 1929 and 1937 are 71 percent of contemporary Germany; the figures for 1950-73 are for the Federal Republic.

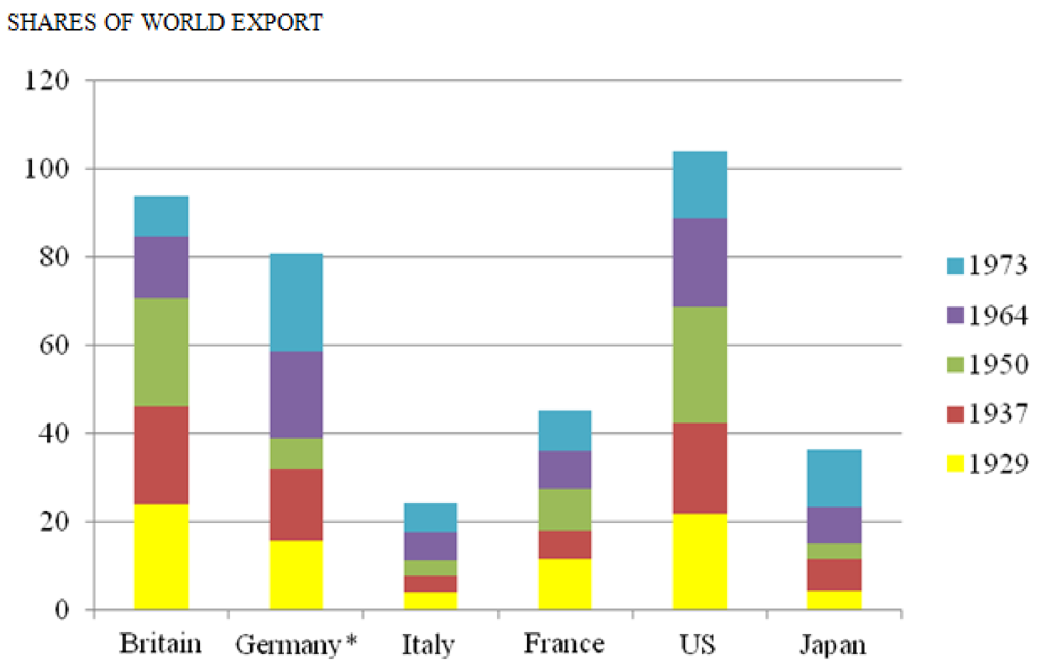

Figure 136 Graph to show shares of World Export

These figures highlight that manufacturing in the UK had been in decline from the 1950s to the 1970s and there have been many reasons for this. Owen (1999, p.453) suggests that these changes occurred during the 1970s for a number of reasons:

> Britain's entry into the Common Market, the rise of Japan and other newly industrialised countries, the slow-down of the World economy after the oil crisis - exposed weaknesses in British industry which had been partially obscured and more easily tolerated in the earlier post-war years...These external pressures coincided with a change in the political climate within Britain. The election of a Conservative government under Margaret Thatcher in May 1979 heralded a break with the past in the management of the economy. A fierce determination to defeat inflation through strict monetary and fiscal policies was combined with a greater emphasis on competition and deregulation...A third ingredient was the phenomenon which became known as globalisation.

Owen also highlights that the lack of long term financial support, training that is too detached from industry and bad labour relations have all been factors that affected the British economy's under performance in the later part of the 1950s compared to West Germany and other Continental countries.

An example of this decline was witnessed in the automotive industry. The UK automotive industry was in a strong position after the Second World War: Britain provided 50 percent of the world's exported vehicles by 1950 (Owen, 1999, p.222), and was the world's second largest car producer after the United States, (Comfort, 2013, p.29). However this dominance was overtaken by the American industry and other European countries increasing their production, and exceeding that of Britain's. By the late 1960s Britain had been relegated to being the world's fourth largest motor vehicle producer, and still creeping further away from the supremacy it once had, to being the sixth largest in 2009 (Holweg, 2009). The changes to the automotive industry have been very dramatic from 2000 to 2010. Up to the year 2000 there were essentially only three car producing regions in the world: Western Europe, Japan and the US/Canada. By 2006 this had changed drastically, with the largest growth in the newly industrialised countries including China and India (increasing their car production from 5.1 percent of world car production in 1971 to 35.7 percent in 2007) (Holweg, 2009). Today the automotive industry has transformed itself once again, from the last decade of poor labour relations, quality and productivity to one that is proactively seeking to be highly competitive and financially viable.

4.2 A Comparison with Stoke-on-Trent

An industrial town that is comparable to High Wycombe, in that it relied heavily on a single industry (pottery) is Stoke-on-Trent. Both furniture and pottery industries are traditional in the materials that they use and the production techniques they utilise. The pottery industry enabled a 'home from home' community spirit to be developed, and like the furniture industry the companies even had their own brass bands and sports teams. The comparison of both the pottery and furniture industry aids the understanding of Wycombe's position and its decline. The closure in recent years of Royal Doulton, which closed in 2005, Spode which closed in 2008, and Wedgwood which went into administration in 2009 to be bought out eventually, highlights the decline of such a prominent industrial town. Nevertheless despite ever-increasing competition from the Far East, the industry refused to collapse. Burleigh Pottery (in Stoke-on-Trent), its workforce cut from 500 to 50, arranged for its factory to be bought by the Princes Trust, renting back the space it needed to continue producing its most sophisticated pieces. With an upsurge of interest in ceramics, a number of new designer-inspired companies[5] were also setting up in the Potteries (Comfort, 2013, p.222).

By the mid-nineteenth century, the region had established a world-leading position as a centre for ceramics, particularly in the design and production of quality fine bone china and earthenware tableware and kitchenware. It maintained this position for over a hundred years. However, in recent years the UK ceramic tableware sector's position has declined significantly, with many firms struggling to adapt to changing market demands or compete, in both domestic and export markets, with low-price competition from Eastern Europe and the Far East. This has led to a number of closures in Stoke-on-Trent and the outsourcing of production to low-cost developing economies, which have contributed to high-levels of unemployment in the city (Lambert, 2009, pp.1-2). This pattern of globalisation is this similar to the furniture industry in High Wycombe.

The ceramics industry, like furniture, was established around its main raw material; clay, and under the clay, a seam of coal. The workforce however was unlike the furniture industry in High Wycombe as it was composed of predominantly women workers as Buckley (1990, p.13) describes:

> Women workers and young girls made up a substantial sector of the Potteries workforce: in 1861 they comprised 31 percent, a figure which had grown to 61 percent by 1959...they tended to concentrate in the lowest paid, least skilled work.

However the women workers in the pottery industry were in the majority not paid equally to the men. The pay structure was much the same as the furniture industry; Buckley goes on to confirm that women would normally earn two-thirds the rate of the men for the same work. The roles of the women workers were also similar to that of the furniture industry, the division of 'male' and 'female' roles was apparent across the pottery industry:

[5] For example Emma Bridgewater and Churchill China (which includes the brands of Jamie Oliver and Cath Kidston).

> [Women] were considered to possess gender-specific skills, to be dextrous, decorative, delicate and meticulous. Between 1870-1955 these perceptions underwent some modification, although it was still firmly believed that women were inheritantly suited to certain areas of design (Buckley, 1990, p.3).

As well as the division of labour in the pottery industry there was a 'hierarchical industrial structure with skilled men at the top and unskilled women at the bottom' (Buckley, 1990, p.4). The pottery industry was also governed by the Utility scheme during the Second World War, and as with furniture, design and production were set by government regulations.

This workforce manufactured affordable tea-ware to the growing export market and the ever-expanding tea loving UK population. Among the greatest achievements of the pottery industry is export performance. In the league table of the world's major exporters of pottery, the UK moved from third position behind Japan and Germany in 1988 to number two after China in 1996 (Padley and Pugh, 2001, p.18). However, the pottery industry mirrored the rest of the UK manufacturing sector in its decline, becoming fragmented and frequently outsourced abroad. Padley and Pugh indicate that over the last 25 years import penetration has steadily increased from around 10 percent to more than forty percent of the UK market (Padley and Pugh, 2001, p.21).

In *'Ceramics, a Fragile History'*, there is a reflection that 'perhaps if left to its own devices Stoke would have been left to flourish but it was to be brought down by forces beyond its control' (*Ceramics: A Fragile History - 2. The Age of Wedgwood*, 2011). Since the late 1980s hundreds of pottery factories have closed. However, a core of pottery factories have survived in Stoke-on-Trent and those with niche markets are flourishing, as discussed, such as Churchill China, Moorcroft and Emma Bridgewater, (Hart, 2008). Emma Bridgewater opened in 1985 against all the odds. Whilst embracing the city's industrial past, the firm saw a vision for the future in high end table ware, which has proved highly successful (*Ceramics: A Fragile History - 2. The Age of Wedgwood*, 2011).

Elizabeth Hart of Nottingham University has carried out extensive research on the history of the pottery industry in Stoke-on-Trent. Research she carried out in 2008 looked at the reasons the workers thought the industry had declined and why so many pottery factories had closed. Her findings were that:

> At senior management level there was a failure to anticipate lifestyle changes with the emergence of new markets for cheap, disposable and yet stylish tableware (such as those made in China and sold at big supermarkets). Established manufacturers were complacent and believed that 'Made in Britain' would always be a byword internationally for 'high quality' ware, and failed to change the way that UK ware was marketed at home and abroad. Because (mainly in the 1960s) so many of the small and medium potbanks had been 'gobbled up' by the few larger ones, when these larger companies went down they took all the others down with them, 'like dominos'. By the late 1980s global forces had become too powerful to resist and with rising manufacturing costs and unfavourable economic conditions, the UK could not compete with 'rice bowl' wages in China and Indonesia. The UK industry lacked government protection (unlike China) and the (Blairite) Labour government appeared disinterested in post-industrial cities such as Stoke-on-Trent (Hart, 2008).

Many of the workers whom Hart interviewed believed that history would come full circle and that the poorly paid and poorly treated workers in China would be similar to the poor Stoke workers of a hundred years ago and that the Chinese and Indonesian workforce would become relatively better off. They also believed that inevitable increasing labour and material costs would have a detrimental effect on productivity and that work would eventually return to the UK.

Matthew Rice, husband of Emma Bridgewater, has written a concise book on the history of Stoke-on-Trent and the Potteries, titled *'The Lost City of Stoke-on Trent.'* He details the history of the industry, its healthy and prosperous position in the 1950s, and its decline as the British Empire decreased in size and many doors closed. The ready market for these ordinary ceramic goods, the 'bread and butter' of Stoke's output was lost and so the decline in this industry and indeed many other industries speeded up (Rice, 2010). Employment figures for the pottery industry in Stoke can be seen in Figures 137 and 138 and for High Wycombe in Figure 139 and 140, and a comparison of both can be seen in Figures 141.

Year	People employed (000's)
1925	100
1948	80
1958	70*
1968	62
1991	22.5
2001	20
2009	6

Figure 137 Employment in the pottery industry in Stoke

** 94 percent of pottery workers in the UK were concentrated in this small area of North Staffordshire.*

Figure 138 Graph to show Employment in the pottery industry in Stoke

Year	People employed (000's)	Reference
1939	10	(Mayes, 1960 c)
1950	7.45	(Lowe, 1983)
1958	8.99	(Lowe, 1983)
1968	8	(Lowe, 1983)
1991	3.34	(NOMIS, 2009)
2001	2.05	(NOMIS, 2009)
2007	1.13	(NOMIS, 2009)

Figure 139 Employment in the furniture industry in High Wycombe

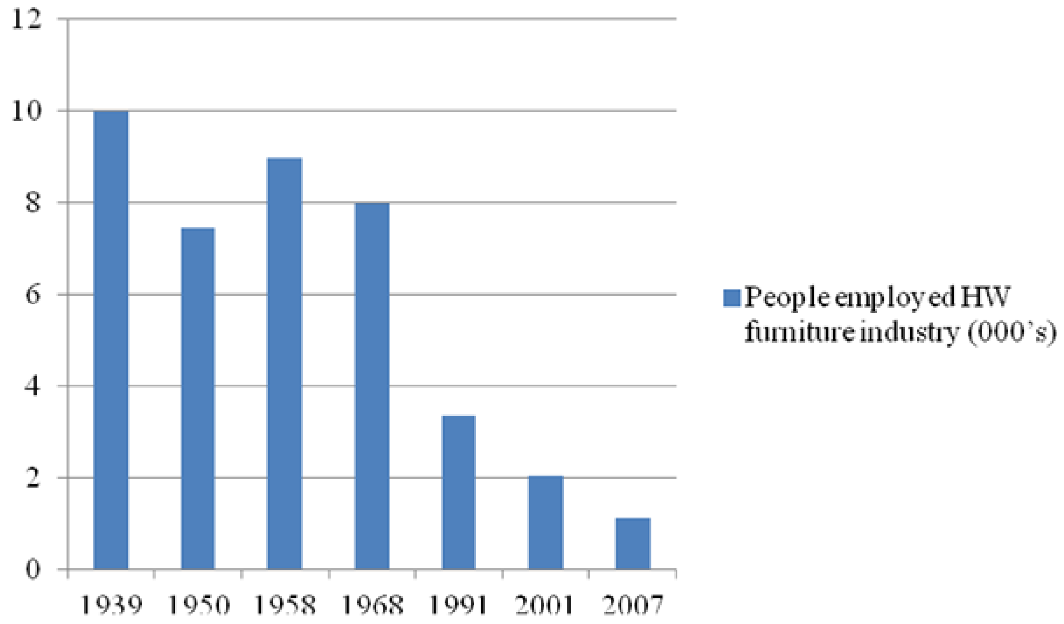

Figure 140 Graph to show the number of people working in the High Wycombe furniture industry 1950-2007

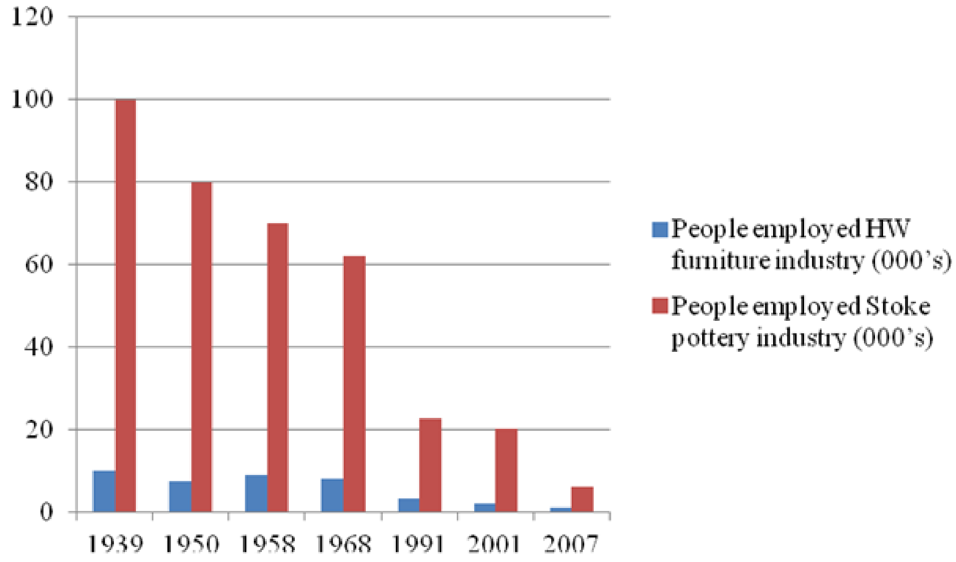

Figure 141 Graph to show a comparison between employment in the Stoke-on-Trent pottery industry and the employment in the High Wycombe furniture industry

Figure 141 shows a comparison between employment figures in the Stoke-on-Trent pottery industry and the employment figures in the High Wycombe furniture industry (taken from the numbers given in Figures 139 and 140). Because the figures for the two different industries do not correlate for every year, for ease of comparison the Stoke figures for 1925 and the High Wycombe figures for 1939 have been placed together, The 1950 figures for the furniture industry have been merged with the 1948 figures for Stoke and the 2007 and 2009 figures have also been put together. The graph shows that the employment figures for the pottery industry far exceed those of the furniture industry. The figures for both industries prior to the First World War were at their peak, with Stoke employing ten times the number in the pottery industry than High Wycombe employed in the furniture industry. From the peak of 100,000 employees in 1925 to the latest figures of 6,000 for 2009 for the Stoke-on-Trent pottery industry, a huge number left the industry, a decline of 94 percent. The furniture industry also lost 8,870 employees, a reduction in the workforce of 89 percent.

Rice (2010, p.57-59) explains that as well as no longer being able to equip the tables of the Empire, the industry was hit with companies beginning to 'outsource'. In 1980 Rice tells us that English industry wages were £2.35 per hour, and Portuguese wages were £1.03. This gap widened for that of China: in 1990 English wages were £3.50, but China's were £0.30. However, like the furniture industry, it was not just the labour costs that were putting the potteries out of business, mechanisation also played a part. Robots and machinery were able to make far more plates and cups than were ever required. Pottery production in Stoke has declined by four-fifths in the last 20 years, but it does survive. Stoke, like many British cities, is now the consumer. China and India are sending their cheap export ware to the UK, but amazingly Stoke, according to Rice (2010, p.61) ‘still has the greatest concentration of ceramics manufactures in the World’. But this is not the same as furniture in High Wycombe.

The similarities with High Wycombe are also reflected in the push for good design to counteract this surge of foreign imports. Pugh and Padley (2001, p.25) reiterate that the UK industry needs to maintain the innovation and design flair, which its forefathers had both in product development and production techniques, as the market looks for greater variety, quality and reliability. The implication here is that the UK pottery industry needs to conquer new export markets at least as rapidly as its competitors are expanding into its home market. Padley and Pugh (2001, pp.25-28) further suggest that the industry’s entrepreneurs and managers need a global perspective, an ever-greater attention to design, marketing and business strategy. The future of the pottery industry, according to Padley and Pugh also depends on its continued ability to increase exports, further research, and to invest in skills. Innovation is the key to long-term survival, as ably demonstrated by our forefathers (Anon., 2009).

Interestingly Lambert (2009, p.3) explored how institutional factors had influenced the success and decline of the ceramic tableware cluster in North Staffordshire. For example, that ceramic tableware manufacturers based in the city today are faced with issues in relation to the availability of committed, motivated and skilled labour, and limited technology and knowledge transfer.

Neil Brownsword, Lecturer and practising potter claims that ‘Stoke-on-Trent is now the only town in this country that is quintessentially connected with a particular industry. Textiles from Manchester, cutlery from Sheffield and cars from Coventry have all had their day, but Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire are known for high quality ceramics the world over' (Brownsword, 2006). According to Brownsword 'output due to technology is still very high but human labour has been dramatically reduced over the last fifteen years'.[6] He also states that what is important is the concept of origin sensitivity: the Japanese and United States markets still want to buy into the notion of provenance and Englishness. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, Stoke-on-Trent is similar to High Wycombe, with its empty factories littering the landscape, an industrial wasteland. 'In the 1970s there were 200 ceramic factories here, now there are less than 30' (*Ceramics: A Fragile History - 2. The Age of Wedgwood*, 2011). The policy of outsourcing has left behind many factory ruins, but the industry still survives.

4.3 Furniture Industry Review

Relevant figures and information were taken from the Furniture Development Council (FDC) and the Furniture Industry Research Association (FIRA) publications dating from 1950 to the most recently published in 2012. The following information is broken up into subheadings, which proved throughout the research to be the common themes. As far as is possible the commonalities and differences found in these reports are compared with findings from NOMIS data. The NOMIS information gives the latest figures for people working in the UK Furniture Industry and in High Wycombe from the 1970s until 2007, from the Office for National Statistics. As mentioned in the introduction the NOMIS data is not completely reliable as there are discrepancies in the High Wycombe town boundaries for the statistics, which can be seen in Appendix E. It is though, the only available resource for this type of information. The figures for each time line, or groups of years have been calculated slightly differently. For example the figures for 1971-81 were collated using the boundaries for High Wycombe and subsequent years used a differing boundary map. There were also different names given to the furniture industry figures for each period of collection, 'Furniture upholstery, wooden/upholstered furniture, timber/wooden furniture and manufacture of furniture. The figures therefore are a best collation from the NOMIS reports and an average has been taken where necessary.

[6] Author interview with Neil Brownsword 7 August 2012.

Before investigating the statistical data in detail, the section begins by covering issues raised in the Industry Reviews and/or NOMIS on advertising, labour issues, import and export details as well as the location of the industry.

4.3.1 Advertising

The Industry Reports dating from the 1960s covered the issue of amounts spent on advertising and some interesting points emerged. The first reference to this was a report written in 1964 by the Furniture Development Council expressing concern that the furniture industry is behind others in prioritising its advertising:

> 1963 was on average a bad year, yet far from an increase in advertising expenditure, manufacturers' press advertising fell by over £100,000 to £704,600 for the year, the lowest figure since 1955 and a fall of 14% over the previous year….Most other consumer durable industries allot a far larger proportion of their turnover to advertising expenditure than the furniture industry, which in 1963 allocated just over half of a percent (FDC, 1964).

According to the Furniture Development Council in 1968, four years after this issue was raised, the furniture industry's advertising individual campaigns totalled £871,790 (FDC, 1968a).

E. Gomme, Parker Knoll and Ercol were the three most enterprising UK furniture companies using national advertising. This would correspond with the finding in Chapter 3 that the coverage of High Wycombe in the press showed these three companies extensively reported on. The Furniture Development Council reported that, 'during 1966 seven companies accounted for half the industry's advertising expenditure' (FDC, 1968a). Figure 142 shows these companies topping the total spend and the amount spent on advertising, compared with the following year in 1969.

Company	**Total advertising spend £ 1968** (FDC, 1968)	**Total advertising spend £ 1969** (FIRA, 1969)
E. Gomme	98,000	76,000
Ercol	88,000	80,000
Parker Knoll	68,000	67,000
Stag	54,000	71,000
Lebus	46,000	69,000
Austin	40,000	Unknown
Sheffield Cabinet	36,000	Unknown

Figure 142 Table to show the amount spent on advertising by the top UK companies in 1968 & 1969

The High Wycombe companies all reduced the amount spent on advertising from 1968-1969, but were still in the top five along with Stag and Lebus. This section shows that E. Gomme, Ercol and Parker Knoll were topping the list of company spend on advertising in the late 1960s. It demonstrates the pioneering attitude these companies had to advertising the new designs of the time. It would seem that the public poll from the 1990s referred to in Chapter 3, that people recognised these three companies above all other UK furniture companies, was an indication of the advertising initiated in previous years.

4.3.2 Employment in the Furniture Industry

Employment figures were first published in 1970, giving an indication of the division of labour in the furniture industry. The FIRA reports suggested a consistent level of 21 percent of the workforce being female (FIRA, 1970a). This is a slightly higher representation than reported in NOMIS (2007), where in 1971 18 percent of the workforce was said to be female.

In 1971 82 percent of the High Wycombe workforce was men, of which 2 percent worked part-time. This compared with women part-time workers making up 37 percent of the female workforce (NOMIS, 2009). The figures remain similar for 1981, with men accounting for 82 percent of the workforce of which 2 percent were part-time, and 42 percent of women workers were now working part-time. In 1991 male workers accounted for 80 percent of the workforce and 1.7 percent were part-time and 43 percent of the female workers were part-time (NOMIS, 2009). The

FIRA reports portrayed the balance of the workforce as being generally largely men, making up 80 percent of the workforce and the vast majority of these men were full-time workers This compared with the smaller proportion still made up of female workers of which a much larger proportion being part-time.

FIRA also reported on the issue of skilled labour shortages in 2002:

> Shortage of upholsterers is most significant (difficulty of finding employees) There are huge skills shortages, especially of skilled craftsmen and production engineers/management (FIRA & DTI, 2002).

The reasons set out in the FIRA report for this were that the workforce was ageing with only 14 percent being under 25, that manufacturing failed to attract young talent, that good designers went abroad and that there was still a heavy reliance on skilled craftsmen. The issue of the lack of skilled labour in the furniture industry was raised as a problem as far back as the 1950s which was discussed in Chapter 3 and so this issue was therefore by no means new, although it had never been given as a reason in the secondary literature for the decline of the industry in High Wycombe. As seen earlier in this Chapter, Owen (1999) also highlighted the lack of training as a factor that affected the British economy's under-performance, although companies such as Ercol have been seen to invest in training, also discussed in Chapter 3.

There is much to be said for the viewpoint that High Wycombe was a 'victim of its own success'.[7] According to Peter Bachelor, because the town became so successful and companies got bigger, they were encouraging workers to specialise in one area of expertise and the overall furniture machining ability of workers declined.[8] It became more difficult for companies to change to suit the changing climate; there simply were not the skills in the workplace. NUFTO changed too, and a policy was adopted of inter-changeability of skills (Reid, 1986, p.167). Maybe because of this inter-changeability it could be argued that the quality of the workers on a specific job was diluted and the skill level reduced. Leslie Dandy believed the demise of the industry came about when the third and fourth generation of the furniture making families, who were educated outside of High Wycombe, lost furniture-making skills

[7] Author interview with Gordon Gray, 8 December 2010.
[8] Author interview with Peter Batchelor, 30 September 2009.

and knowledge.[9] Gordon Gray agreed that the furniture industry caused its own problems because it was not educating young people adequately. He observed that most apprentices became operatives and the trade names of ‘polisher, upholsterer and carver’ had started to decline, reducing the skills in the town. It therefore became more and more difficult to employ people who had the right skill to do the job, especially in the highly skilled work.

4.3.3 Imports and Exports

Initial findings in Chapter 3 showed that foreign furniture imports were from countries such as East Germany and other ‘Iron Curtain’ countries. The Furniture Development Council also clarified this and reported in the 1960s; ‘Taken together Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Poland and East Germany now account for one third of our total furniture imports and half our wooden furniture imports’ (FDC, 1968a). The furniture industry throughout the 1960s and 1970s followed a pattern seen across the UK manufacturing sector. Productivity was lower than in France or Germany, so the gap in competitiveness was widening and Britain was losing ground in export markets; ‘between 1962 and 1966 the country’s share of world manufactured exports fell again from 16.2 percent to 12.1 percent’ (Comfort, 2013, p.56). The loss of two million manufacturing jobs every decade had only been partly offset by higher productivity, and Britain’s share of world export markets had slumped; it was four decades since anyone seriously expected UK imports of goods to match UK exports. Britain does retain a reputation for quality niche and branded products, but in all too many cases only the label is British, with the production manufactured abroad (Comfort, 2013, p.336).

Figure 143 shows the total UK imports and exports of furniture from 1953-2010. The figures have been collated from a wide source of FDC and FIRA reviews, which are also shown. The figures back up the reporting from *The Cabinet Maker* in Chapter 3, that there was little exporting of furniture in the 1970s, although there was some fluctuation in the 1970s, as discussed below.

[9] HWeFA interview with Leslie Dandy, 9 January 2007.

Year	**Imports £'000s**	**Export £'000s**	**Reference**
1953	838	7427	(FDC, 1960)
1954	1185	7522	Ibid
1955	1692	8824	Ibid
1956	2155	10204	Ibid
1957	2625	9870	Ibid
1958	2985	9675	Ibid
1959	3890	9300	Ibid
1960	4774	10560	(FDC, 1965), (FDC 1967) & (FDC, 1968b)
1961	5284	11174	Ibid
1962	5436	10920	Ibid
1963	5929	10905	Ibid
1964	8327	12567	Ibid
1965	8400	14378	Ibid
1966	8121	14809	Ibid
1967	11246	14700	Ibid
1968	14033	17789	(FIRA, 1969) & (FIRA, 1970b)
1969	13488	23213	Ibid
1970	15614	25327	Ibid
1971	21381	30197	(FIRA, 1973), (FIRA, 1975), (FIRA 1977) & (FIRA, 1979)
1972	35097	35025	Ibid
1973	62940	44181	Ibid
1974	70157	69512	Ibid
1975	92259	98471	Ibid
1976	122525	142309	Ibid
1977	139450	211039	Ibid
1978	194745	235497	Ibid
1979	255070	231107	(FIRA, 1986)
1980	282242	239197	Ibid
1981	348829	221027	Ibid
1982	400064	240898	Ibid
1983	490472	257787	Ibid
1984	591791	282112	Ibid
1985	660148	366111	Ibid
1986	767963	348759	Ibid
1987	870030	382476	(FIRA, 1988)
1988	993311	384847	Ibid
1989	1121223	473940	(FIRA, 1989)
1990	1122881	554449	(FIRA, 1998)
1994	729232	631186	Ibid
1995	779913	577680	Ibid
1996	1193638	762828	Ibid
1997	1264729	749473	(FIRA, 2000)
1998	1462617	759634	bid
1999	1630314	742254	Ibid
2000	2073130	761670	(FIRA & DTI, 2002)
2001	2170790	735080	(FIRA, 2005)
2002	2462670	643280	Ibid
2004	3365000	684000	(FIRA, 2008)
2005	3382000	709000	Ibid
2006	3573000	756000	Ibid
2007	3987000	815000	Ibid
2010	4482360	849150	(FIRA, 2011)
2011	4130757	821316	(FIRA, 2012)

Figure 143 Table showing UK imports and exports of furniture 1953-2010

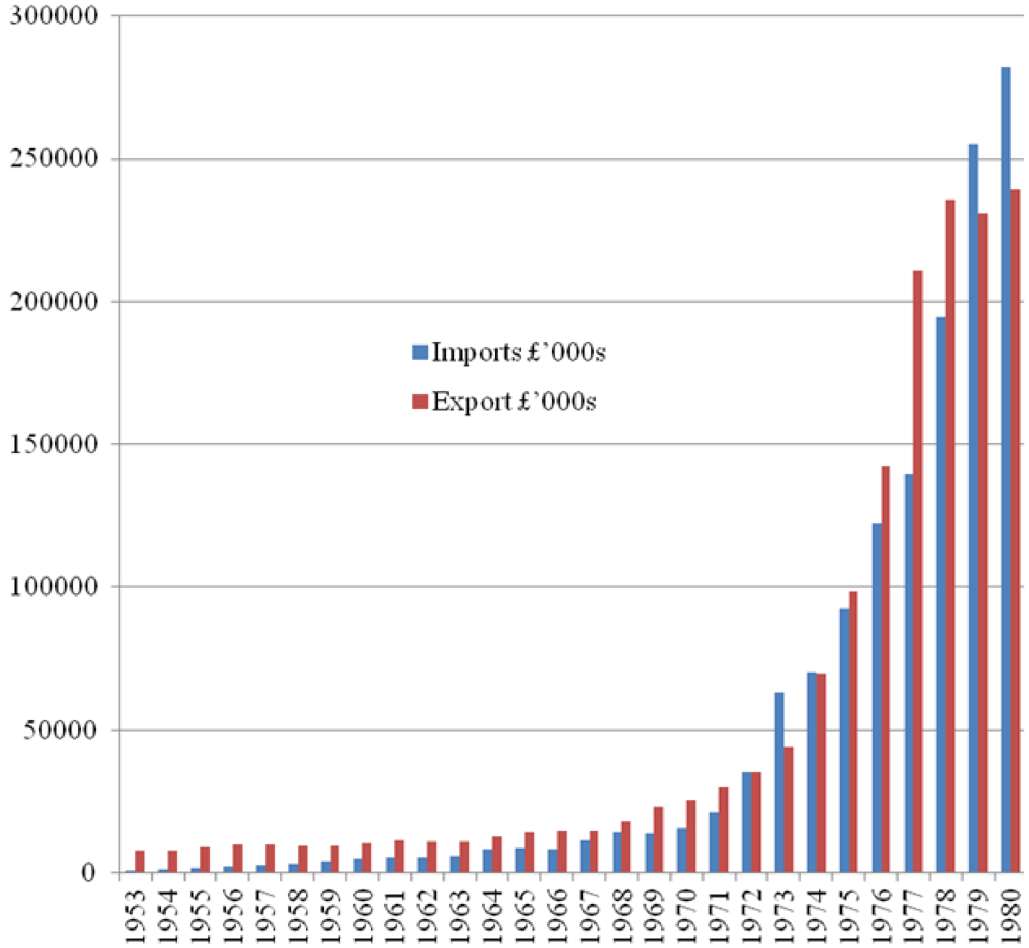

Figure 144 Graph showing UK furniture imports and exports 1953-1979

Figure 144 shows that throughout the 1950s and 1960s exports were considerably more than imports, with some fluctuations throughout the 1970s. It also shows that 1979 would appear to be the turning point, with imports overtaking exports, although 1972-1974 saw a start of the trend towards imports overtaking the export of furniture in the UK. It may also show the change in demand, which seems to grow dramatically, which may be related to population growth. It could also relate to a more 'throw away culture', with products no longer expected to last a lifetime, and higher disposable incomes.

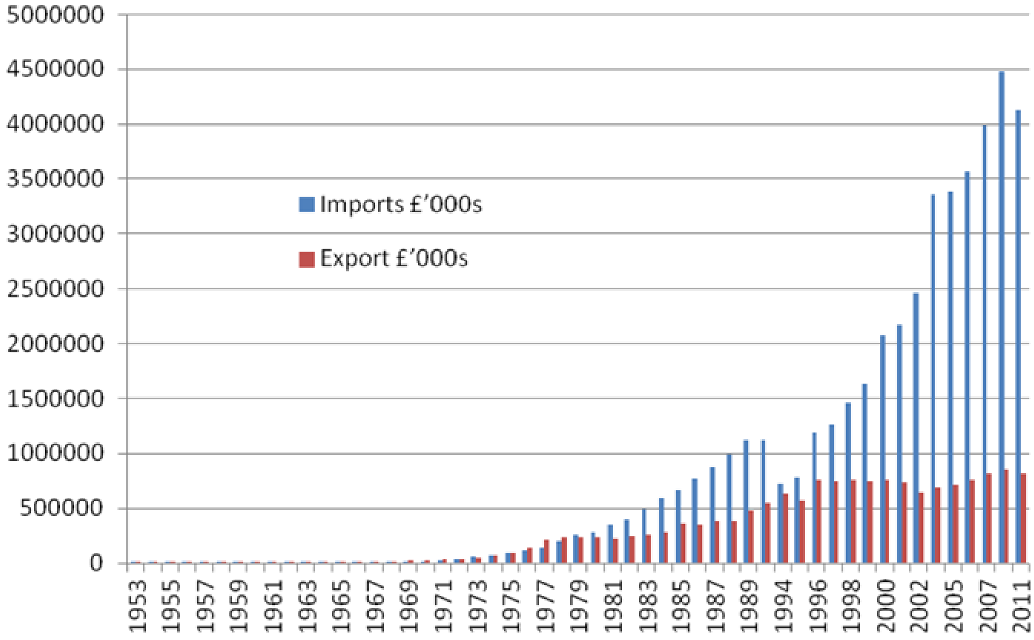

Figure 145 Graph showing UK furniture imports and exports 1953-2011

Figure 145 shows the extent to which imports have grown in the last thirty years. From the 1980s onwards imports have increased dramatically with exports staying at a more constant figure.

The industry report from 1988 showed that Yugoslavia no longer dominated furniture imports into the UK, Italy imported the largest amount of wooden and upholstery furniture in 1987, Belgium and the Netherlands also account for a large proportion of imports, as did Germany and Czechoslovakia (FIRA, 1988). There is no mention specifically about Chinese imports or an impending threat of Chinese furniture production in the 1980s and 1990s reports. It was not until the FIRA and DTI Competitiveness study in 2002 where it was reported that the seven major industrial economies (USA, Italy, Japan, Germany, Canada, France and the UK) together produced 64 percent in value of the world total of furniture production. The report went on to reveal that there were three countries (China, Mexico and Poland) where production was increasing rapidly due to investments in new plant intended to boost furniture exports (FIRA & DTI, 2002). This same report stated that during the five-year period from 1996 to 2000, output from across all UK furniture manufacturing grew from around £8.2bn (manufacturer selling price) to £9.4bn. However, the market itself witnessed an even greater growth from around £8.6bn to just under £10.7bn, with the resulting gap being filled by imports. It also reported that in the same time frame imports increased by 63 percent while exports grew by only 7 percent (FIRA & DTI, 2002). FIRA (2005) reported that imports were rising year on year and that Italy still imported most domestic furniture into the UK.

Earlier reporting in Chapter 3 from *The Cabinet Maker* in 1988 stated the non-threatening imports from China, suggesting only that they would penetrate the lower end of the market. It was not until 2011 that FIRA started reporting imports of furniture from China. The FIRA (2011) report stated that all previous Economic Digests had summarised trade figures by international region (including Asia), but this report comprised the top importing and exporting countries to and from the UK. 'There is little surprise that the majority of imports originated from China (33 percent) nor that Italy remained a major supplier to the UK (11 percent)'. By 2011 furniture imports totalled £4.5 billion, with the number of UK furniture manufacturers declining by 3 percent from the previous year to 6,205. The imports into the UK from China dominated the imports of furniture in 2011, although it is somewhat surprising that the importing figures from China had not been reported earlier. The most recent figures from FIRA (2012) show that imports of furniture into the UK were lower in 2011 than 2010 (£4.3 billion from £4.5 billion). The majority of imports again unsurprisingly originated from China at 32 percent.

Initial references to the emergence of China were not forthcoming in the Furniture Reports or *The Cabinet Maker*. The Union reports in their initial reporting on China and the Far East in the 1950s explained that Britain was keen to help this emerging area in the early 1950s:

> From the beginning the Asia nations agreed to help each other in working out and fitting together the development plans for each country; Britain, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and the United States pledged support mainly in the form of money and technical assistance (ASWM, 1954).

This 'break-down' of help is portrayed in Figure 146. The 'Asia Colombo Plan'[10] spent monies on development in South and South-East Asia, in which Britain was a member. A huge £166 million was spent on industry, power and research.

Further reporting of China in the Union records was not until four years later when The Parliamentary Secretary to the Board of Trade gave an account of his visit to China in 1958. He said that its purpose had been to follow up the recent relaxation of trade restrictions and to persuade the Chinese to turn to Britain for some of their supplies. Chinese economic development was following the Soviet pattern towards industrial self-sufficiency. Despite attempts to achieve industrial self-sufficiency, there were bound to be gaps in Chinese production and these provided opportunities to UK exporters. He said that he looked for a steady, but not spectacular growth in exports to China (ASWM, 1958a). It was, however, to be export from China to Britain which was to grow rapidly over the following forty years. It was also in the 1950s that the Furniture Union (NUFTO) reported one of its branches wanting to join the 'Britain-China Friendship Association':

> Essex Branch No. 197 seek authority to affiliate to the Britain-China Friendship Association...the Branch be informed that they are not entitled to use union funds for the purpose proposed, but that they are free to decide to affiliate if the necessary payment is made from local or voluntary auxiliary fund (NUFTO, 1956).

The links with China were clearly starting as early as the 1950s, but this relationship was seen as beneficial to the UK. In an interview with Raymond Peach, a manager at Thomas Glenisters from 1960s to the 1980s, one of the largest furniture factories in High Wycombe, he recalled not being surprised by the closures of the factories in High Wycombe in the 1990s 'because of competition from the Far East where there was cheap labour', but also the fact that he recalls helping and introducing Far Eastern manufacturers to modern machinery.[11] This section changes the initial perceptions of why the decline of the furniture industry was so drastic in High Wycombe. An interview with Peter Batchelor[12] suggested that the cheaper imports

[10] The Asia Colombo Plan was an organisation made up of seven Commonwealth countries, including Britain, that strengthened economic and social development in the Asia-Pacific region. Initially this was with capital and technology.

[11] Author interview with Raymond Peach, 1 February 2007. Raymond Peach moved from Banbury to live in High Wycombe because of the importance of the town to furniture making.

[12]Author interview with Peter Batchelor, 30 September 2009.

from China was the main reason for the decline, but as these figures suggest the decline was starting well before countries such as China were on the scene.

4.3.4 UK Furniture Company Figures

Figures published in 1964 by the Furniture Development Council show that the number of furniture firms in the UK declined 'at an average rate of 4 percent per annum. Over the same time, average turnover per firm had increased from £33,000 to £90,000, an average increase of 15 percent per annum' (FDC, 1964). This can be seen in Figure 147.

Year	No. of firms	Total turnover £m	Average t/o per firm £'000s
1950	2825	93.5	33.1
1954	2325	115.4	49.6
1958	1725	113.9	66.0
1959	1675	131.2	78.3
1960	1650	130.6	79.2
1961	1625	133.8	82.3
1962	1525	137.7	90.3

Figure 147 Structure and Value of Domestic Furniture Market

The report went on to evaluate the effect the numbers of employees a company had on the feasibility of a company. It found that there appeared to be more than one optimum size, which was identified in the Literature Review Figure 13:

> In bad years it was the very small firms, employing between 11-24 operatives that would appeared to be the most viable. This size of firm should be able to fill its books year in and year out…local market, few overheads, simple management structure. …the real optimum occurs at the larger end, i.e. 100 operatives and over' (FDC, 1964).

Only 0.8 percent of the industry's firms had turnovers in excess of £500,000 in 1950. By 1962 the figure had risen to 3 percent and these firms had increased their share of the total turnover from 22 percent to 44 percent. Compared with most other manufacturing industries the concentration ratio was low (FDC, 1964).

The Furniture Industry Research Association produced a section in its Economic Review called *Review of Domestic Furniture Industry 1960-69* by Goodman. This report also captured the figures for the industry. There were some differences with the figures produced by Goodman and those by the FDC in 1964 (Figure 148). Goodman compared the furniture industry with other similar industries and found that the furniture industry was losing ground. ‘Although most other consumer durable goods industries have enjoyed considerable growth over the last ten years the domestic furniture industry has consistently lost ground and its share of consumer spending has fallen from 2.4 percent in 1960 to 2.2 percent in 1968’ (Goodman, 1970).

Year	Number of firms	Turnover (£m)
1960	1583	108.6
1962	1582	108.4
1964	1480	120.5
1966	1548	123.5
1967	1530	119.4
1968	1519	153.3
1969	1505	128.0

Figure 148 Structure and value of domestic furniture industry

Goodman also discusses production methods in his report:

> The usual process of the replacement of craft by machine methods has been slow but in the last ten to fifteen years the speed of transformation has accelerated, until the clear advantage of intense capitalisation, favouring larger firms has become apparent. Even now most firms are not enjoying the benefits of mass production. British firms, though awake to modern design, are essentially using methods of the past. Across the Atlantic furniture manufacturers are applying methods of the present to the making of furniture of the past. Here in the UK batch production is predominant and to a large extent this exerts a strong influence on the size of the most economic unit (Goodman, 1970).

Turnover group (£)	1960	1962	1964	1966	1967	1968
	% of firms					
Under 10,000	41.3	38.8	44.2	48.8	46.5	44.0
10,000 to 100,000	40.8	42.2	35.7	32.9	33.6	33.7
Over 100,000	17.9	19.0	20.1	18.3	19.9	22.3
Turnover group (£) % of t/0						
	% of Turnover of the industrv					
Under 10,000	1.5	1.3	1.3	1.1	1.0	1.3
10,000 to 100,000	17.8	17.7	14.2	13.8	13.7	10.7
Over 100,000	80.7	81.0	84.5	85.1	85.3	88.0

Figure 149 Distribution of firms and turnover

In view of what had been said about the optimum size of firms it was surprising that the small firms had increased their share from 41.3 percent in 1960, to 46.5 percent in 1967, as seen in Figure 149. It does seem strange that the smaller firms were reasserting themselves, as in the previous decade their proportional share fell from 54.2 percent in 1950 to 41.3 percent in 1960.[13] However, what is significant is that whereas in 1960 this group accounted for 1.5 percent of the total turnover of the industry, in 1967 this had shrunk to 1.3 percent. The medium/small group accounted for 17.8 percent and only 13.7 percent in 1967. Far from fading away, the smaller firms appeared to come into their own again but it was felt that this was only a temporary occurrence which was the antithesis to the overall trend, though of course there will always be a place for the small firm (Goodman, 1970).

Of the third group, only 2.8 percent of the industry's firms had turnovers in excess of £500,000 in 1960. By 1967 the figure had risen to 3.8 percent and these firms had increased their share of the total turnover from 41.7 percent to 49.7 percent in market where total turnover had risen by £30.7m to £152.4m (Goodman, 1970).

67 percent of the industry comprised of small manufacturers operating with less than 9 people, however only 4.7 percent of companies reported turnovers in excess of

[13] This could have been due to the fact that many small companies were set up for Utility furniture.

£5m and 300 companies accounted for 45 percent of the total workforce (FIRA & DTI, 2002).

Within the 1965 Report, Chalkidis wrote an article describing the future of the furniture industry with pessimism. There was a need in the industry for greater efficiencies and improved productivity:

> In the furniture industry direct materials make up almost 46 percent of the cost of the final product. This is a very high proportion compared with any other industry. Direct wages make up 15-16 percent of the cost of the final product...It seems clear therefore that all the signs foreshadow a dismal future, unless there is a reversal of the vicious circle of stagnant demand resulting in higher manufacturing cost, which in turn leads to higher prices and further fall in demand, and so on. Promotion has an important part to play but sustained growth can only be based on offering the consumer greater value for money than he is now receiving. This can only be achieved by higher efficiency (Chalkidis, 1965).

Turnover per employee in British companies appeared suboptimal and uncompetitive, as provisional figures suggested that many German organisations were obtaining output two, three or four times that of even their largest British counterparts. In 1971 there were still over 1,500 manufacturers who had a turnover of less than £100,000 (FIRA, 1972). In 1971 German furniture production reached a value of £1102 million, over four times the British total. The population of Germany was only about 10 percent larger (FIRA, 1972).

This section demonstrates that the furniture industry was decreasing in size with regards to the number of companies, but the average turnover per company was increasing throughout the 1950s and 1960s.

4.3.5 Location of the Furniture Industry

Two principal places of domestic furniture firms were reported in the FDC reports in the 1960s, which again reiterated the prominence of the furniture industry in High Wycombe. As Figure 150, shows, London had the highest concentration of furniture companies with 39.2 percent in 1962, and High Wycombe, where 7.3 percent of furniture firms were situated, having risen from 5.3 percent in 1950.

	Distribution of firms %			
Region	**1950**	**1954**	**1958**	**1962**
London	38.3	35.1	36.7	39.2
High Wycombe	5.3	6.9	7.1	7.3

Figure 150 Location of the domestic furniture industry 1950-1962

At the beginning of the 1970s FIRA reported that London and the South East were still the most important centres of the industry, but the share of firms they had, dropped to 36.8 percent in 1968 for London, and High Wycombe area had dropped to 6 percent (Goodman, 1970). Interestingly FIRA continued to separate High Wycombe as the only furniture making town in its statistics in 1981 (Figure 151).

	Distribution of firms %		
Region	**1970**	**1975**	**1980**
London & SE	34.3%	33.5%	27.8%
South	11.3%	10.3%	9.8%
High Wycombe	4.7%	6.0%	4.5%

Figure 151 Distribution of net number of firms and turnover by region

By 2011 the furniture manufacturing industry was being reported as generally evenly spread around the UK with no single significant geographical hub, although the South East and London accounted for a quarter of all UK furniture manufacturing (FIRA, 2011). This point is shown in the next section, where NOMIS figures for the number of people working in the furniture industry show that Leeds overtakes High Wycombe in 1980. However Leeds is a much larger city than High Wycombe.

This section reiterates High Wycombe as being a major centre for the furniture industry from the 1950s to the 1980s, with London being the only area that exceeded High Wycombe. It also maps the decline of these areas, at the peak in 1962 39.2 percent of all UK firms were based in London, reducing to 27.8 percent in 1980, and 7.3 percent were based in High Wycombe in 1962, reducing to 4.5 percent in 1980.

NOMIS captured the location of the furniture industry post 1980, as the next section describes.

4.4 UK Employment Figures for the Furniture Industry

As the Literature Review and this chapter have shown, it has been difficult to find records of employment figures for the UK Furniture Industry from the 1950s. The Furniture Development Council in 1964 produced a list of figures. These figures show a decline in UK furniture industry employment in the early 1960s (see Figure 152). This figure correlates with the records from Lowe (1983) from High Wycombe where the peak of workers in the furniture industry after the Second World War in High Wycombe was in 1955 at 9,940.

The employment figures were also published in 1970 (Figure 152), but the figures were from the 'Domestic furniture industry', whereas the 1964 figures were from 'Furniture and upholstery industry', and so direct comparison is difficult to make. The figures do though suggest an increase in UK employment in 1964 followed by a steady decline, with the peak employment being in 1959. The 1980s and 1990s show an increase again of employment, which NOMIS re-iterated, peaking in 1999. The employment figures from 1988-1991 were based on 'wooden and upholstered furniture industry including shop & office fittings and the bedding industry', therefore the increase in employment must reflect this change of scope. A comparison is made (Figure 153) with the figures obtained from NOMIS, which give the more up-to-date figures from 1971-2007.

Year	Total employed 000s	Reference FDC/FIRA	Total employed (NOMIS) [14]
1958	103.5	(FDC, 1964)	n/a
1959	107.9	Ibid	n/a
1960	101.8	Ibid	n/a
1961	101.8	Ibid	n/a
1962	99.9	Ibid	n/a
1963	98.6	Ibid	n/a
1964	102.7	(FIRA, 1970 a)	n/a
1965	102.5	Ibid	n/a
1966	95.7	Ibid	n/a
1967	98.1	Ibid	n/a
1968	97.6	Ibid	n/a
1971	n/a		83,677
1972	88	(FIRA, 1981)	87,899
1973	n/a		95,652
1974	n/a		89,753
1975	88.7	Ibid	87,303
1976	n/a		87,529
1977	n/a		86,703
1978	n/a		88,686
1980	78.6	Ibid	n/a
1981	n/a		78,692
1985	80.3	Ibid	n/a
1987	83	Ibid	n/a
1988	119.4	(FIRA, 1992)	n/a
1989	123.3	Ibid	n/a
1990	119.6	Ibid	n/a
1991	111.9	Ibid	105,364
1993	n/a		97,465
1995	n/a		110,310
1996	n/a		115,717

[14] The criteria for 1971-1981 was ‘furniture and upholstery’ and 1991-2006 was ‘manufacture of furniture’.

Year	Total employed 000s	Reference FDC/FIRA	Total employed (NOMIS) [15]
1997	n/a		124,079
1998	n/a		128,389
1999	n/a		128,807
2000	n/a		127,125
2001	n/a		125,908
2002	n/a		123,004
2003	n/a		120,764
2004	n/a		109,115
2005	n/a		101,379
2006	n/a		99,643

Figure 152 Employment in the UK furniture industry, 1958-2006

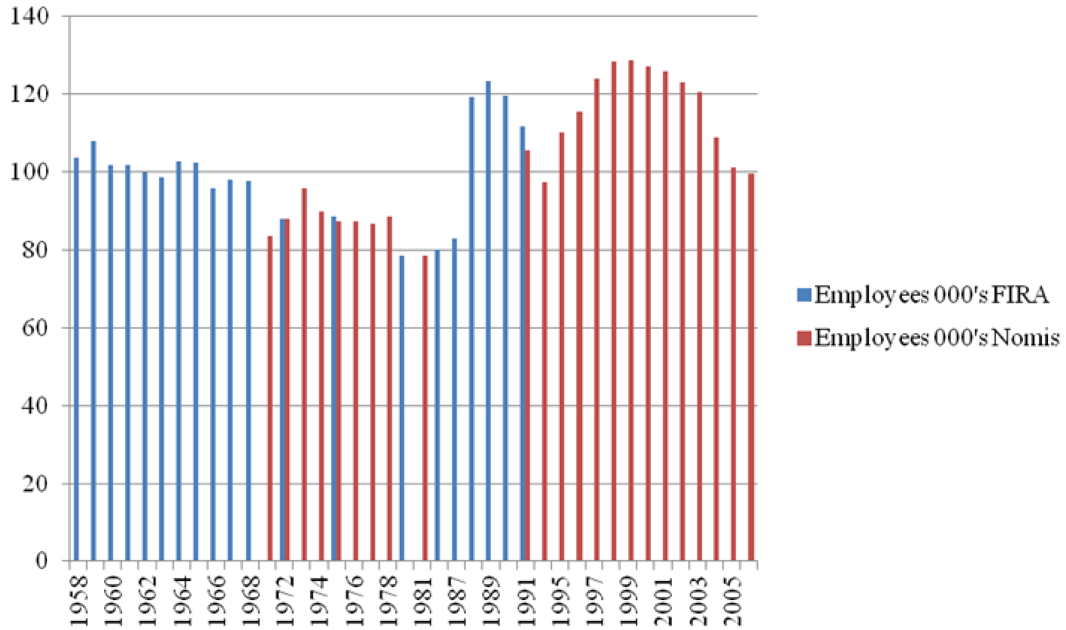

Figure 153 Graph to show the number of employees working in the UK furniture industry 1958-2006

As these figures suggest, it is difficult to compare the figures in the above table because different criteria was used, the NOMIS figures also use differing boundaries for the 1971-1981 years and then 1991-2007, it is therefore difficult to make a direct

[15] The criteria for 1971-1981 was 'furniture and upholstery' and 1991-2006 was 'manufacture of furniture'.

comparison. The gaps in the FDC and FIRA data have been filled by NOMIS and vice versa. It is possible to determine that both FIRA and NOMIS sets of figures are very similar for the years they both cover, 1972 and 1975, although 1991 shows NOMIS at a slightly lower value. The graph (Figure 153) shows that the number of employees in the UK furniture industry increased in the late 1980s and then again in the late 1990s, peaking in 1999 with just over 128,000 employees, but had been steadily declining since 2000 to 99,643 employees in 2006, a loss of 29,164 employees in seven years.

The late 1960s showed no real improvement in the economy with manufacturing suffering. ‘At the beginning of 1967, output was stagnant, unemployment rising and wages and prices effectively frozen’ (FDC, 1968). Gloom and despondency were everywhere early in 1971. Inflation was rampant and unchecked, unemployment was higher than at any time since the 1930s (1 million at year end). (FIRA, 1972)

Putting High Wycombe in context, this thesis aims to give an overview of numbers of people working in the UK to ascertain whether High Wycombe was unusual in its declining industry. High Wycombe will be compared to the other large furniture making areas. NOMIS proves that High Wycombe is the leading furniture making area in the UK at times during the last 30 years, with regards to numbers of people working in the industry. A comparison with cities such as Leeds, Bradford, Manchester, Nottingham and Birmingham will be made, because these areas are the other major furniture making areas. Other areas such as parts of London had strong furniture making areas in the early 1970s but the figures show that they decline significantly in the 1980s.

Figure 154 shows the number of people working in the furniture industry in the prominent furniture areas:

Town	1971		1972		1973		1974		1975		1976		1977		1978		1981	
	number	%	number	%	number	%	number	%	number	%	number	%	number	%	number	%	number	%
High Wycombe	6,631	12.8	6,671	12.2	6,852	12.1	7,154	12.4	7,003	12.0	6,872	11.7	6,897	11.5	6,329	10.2	4,664	7.8
Tottenham	4,220	5.8	4,737	6.4	5,374	7.2	4,866	6.6	4,818	8.0	4,414	7.7	4,310	8.1	4,425	8.0	3,116	7.2
Long Eaton	1,251	4.9	1,356	5.3	1,534	5.6	1,514	5.6	1,482	5.4	1,515	5.5	1,419	5.3	1,462	4.9	1,344	5.0
Nottingham	2,296	1.5	1,906	1.2	1,714	1.1	1,679	1.0	1,344	0.9	1,469	0.9	1,494	0.9	950	0.6	1,575	1.0
Leeds	2,858	1.3	2,995	1.3	3,433	1.6	3,270	1.4	3,297	1.5	3,007	1.4	3,065	1.4	3,156	1.5	2,345	1.3
Manchester	1,491	0.6	1,421	0.6	2,225	1.0	1,550	0.7	996	0.4	843	0.4	1,013	0.4	1,057	0.5	829	0.4
Salford	1,020	1.8	1,061	1.9	1,273	2.2	1,242	2.2	1,037	1.8	1,064	1.9	1,072	2.0	996	1.9	759	1.6

Figure 154 Number of people working in the furniture industry 1971-1981 and percentage of workforce

Figure 154 shows that High Wycombe had the largest percentage of its workforce in the furniture industry, compared to the other furniture making areas, with 12.8 percent in 1971, reducing to 7.8 percent in 1981. It was reported in *The Cabinet Maker* (in Chapter 3) that 'engineering' took over 'furniture production' as the dominating industry in 1967.

Figure 155 and graphs (Figures 156-159) compare the High Wycombe figures to the other centres of furniture making in the UK. The figures were taken from a number of NOMIS statistical charts. Unfortunately it is difficult to make a direct comparison, as NOMIS changed the groupings in the furniture category from 'furniture industries – Timber, furniture etc.' For the years 1971 – 1981, 'Timber/Wooden furniture industries' for the years 1984-1991, and 'Manufacture of furniture' for 1991-2007. It is still possible though to compare each of the areas, as the same parameters have been applied to all areas.

Date	Number of people							
	High Wycombe	Tottenham	Nottingham	Leeds	Manchester	Salford	Bradford	Dudley
1971	6,631	4,220	2,296	2,858	1,491	1,020	925	N/A
1972	6,671	4,737	1,906	2,995	1,421	1,061	2,000	N/A
1973	6,852	5,374	1,714	3,433	2,225	1,273	1,900	N/A
1974	7,154	4,866	1,679	3,270	1,550	1,242	1,805	N/A
1975	7,003	4,818	1,344	3,297	996	1,037	1,715	N/A
1976	6,872	4,414	1,469	3,007	843	1,064	1,721	N/A
1977	6,897	4,310	1,494	3,065	1,013	1,072	1,711	N/A
1978	6,329	4,425	950	3,156	1,057	996	1,972	N/A
1981	4,664	3,116	1,575	2,345	829	759	1,165	N/A
1984	4,560	N/A	1,262	4523	1302	1224	2560	N/A
1987	4,002	N/A	1,530	5026	1513	979	3255	N/A
1989	4,034	N/A	1,840	6047	1391	1013	3206	N/A
1991	3,339	N/A	1,627	5586	1508	748	2806	2466
1993	2,458	N/A	704	3820	806	433	2049	2545
1995	2,432	N/A	1,176	2272	946	411	2041	3151
1996	2,303	N/A	722	3889	696	532	2188	2674
1997	2,388	N/A	1,023	3572	579	444	2511	3061
1998	2,200	N/A	1,064	3862	508	493	2782	3420
1999	1,958	N/A	1,262	3535	407	469	2707	3024
2000	2,059	N/A	1343	3683	320	458	2515	2997
2001	2,053	N/A	1533	3490	417	462	2228	2762
2002	1,515	N/A	1451	3584	342	425	2228	3301
2003	1,514	N/A	1412	3698	429	417	1864	2287
2004	1,515	N/A	1264	3555	538	377	1581	2296
2005	1,317	N/A	882	3326	482	444	1547	2268
2006	1,272	N/A	843	3490	597	342	1481	2294
2007	1,131	N/A	700	2993	574	361	1509	2011

Figure 155 Table showing the number of people working in the key areas of the Furniture Industry

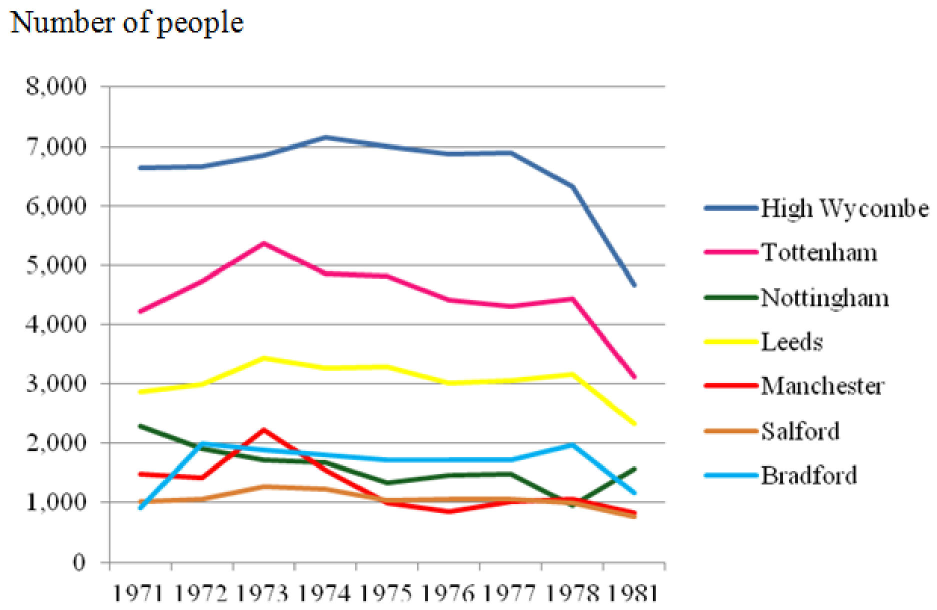

Figure 156 Graph to show those employed in the furniture industry in seven key areas 1971-1981

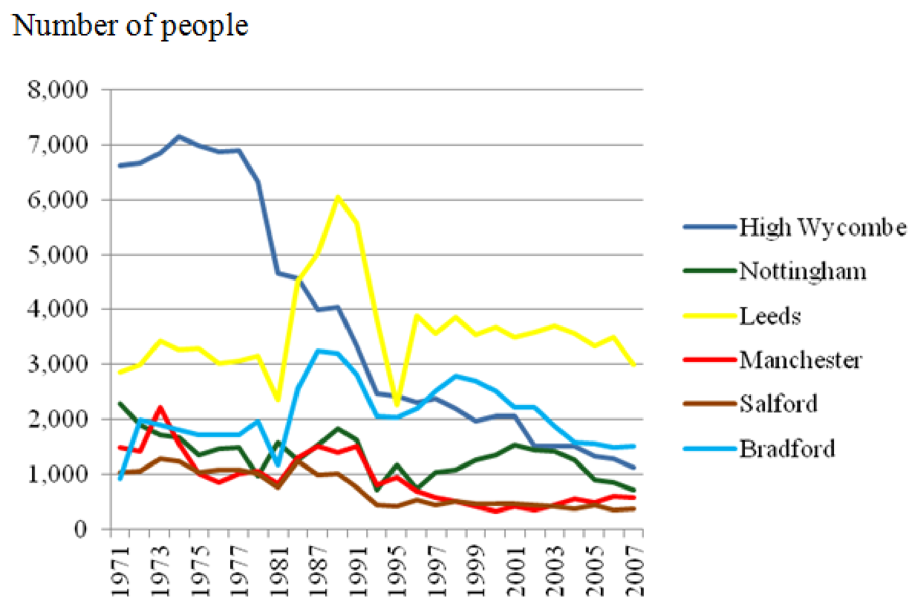

Figure 157 Graph to show those employed in the furniture industry in six key areas 1971-2007

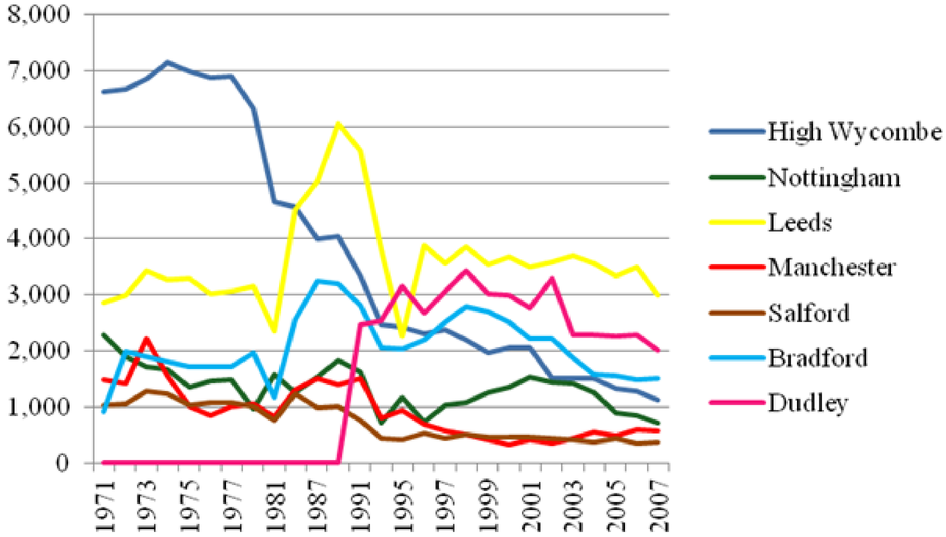

Figure 158 Graph to show those employed in the furniture industry, including Dudley 1971-2007

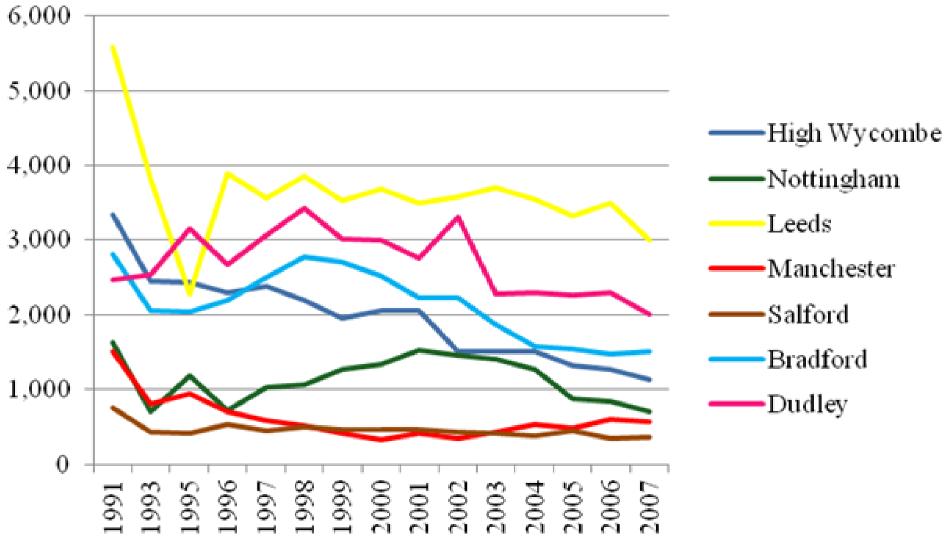

Figure 159 Graph to show those employed in the furniture industry 1991-2007

The 1970s saw High Wycombe and Tottenham leading the way in the numbers of people working in the furniture industry, as can be seen in Figure 156. All areas apart from Nottingham show a marked decline from 1978-1981.

In 1987 High Wycombe no longer dominated the furniture industry; it was taken over by Leeds (a much larger city). By 2007 High Wycombe was only the fourth largest furniture area, with Leeds, Dudley and Bradford all employing more people in the furniture industry.

This section uses both FDC and FIRA industry reports and NOMIS statistics to record the employment in the UK furniture industry, which had not been collated prior to this research. The figures indicate that the years for peak employment in the UK furniture industry were 1989 and then again in 1999. According to NOMIS, High Wycombe was still dominating UK furniture production throughout the 1970s and early 1980s, but 1987 saw Leeds overtake High Wycombe as the area employing the most number of people in the furniture industry.

4.5 High Wycombe Employment Figures for the Furniture Industry

It was necessary to determine the number of those employed in the furniture industry in High Wycombe and compare this with the UK as a whole. The relevant information for this was found in NOMIS, and this section will correlate the statistical data from NOMIS (Figure 160, and represented graphically in Figures 161 and 162) with the data from earlier chapters and compare it with the rest of the UK.

Date	Number of people	Percentage of workforce
1971	6,631	12.8
1972	6,671	12.2
1973	6,852	12.1
1974	7,154	12.4
1975	7,003	12.0
1976	6,872	11.7
1977	6,897	11.5
1978	6,329	10.2
1981	4,664	7.8
1984	4,560	7
1987	4,002	5.9
1989	4,034	6.1
1991	3,339	5.0
1993	2,458	3.7
1995	2,432	3.3
1996	2,303	3.1
1997	2,388	3.0
1998	2,200	2.7
1999	1,958	2.3
2000	2,059	2.3
2001	2,053	2.3
2002	1,515	1.8
2003	1,514	1.8
2004	1,515	1.7
2005	1,317	1.6
2006	1,272	1.7
2007	1,131	1.5

Figure 160 Number of people working in the High Wycombe furniture industry

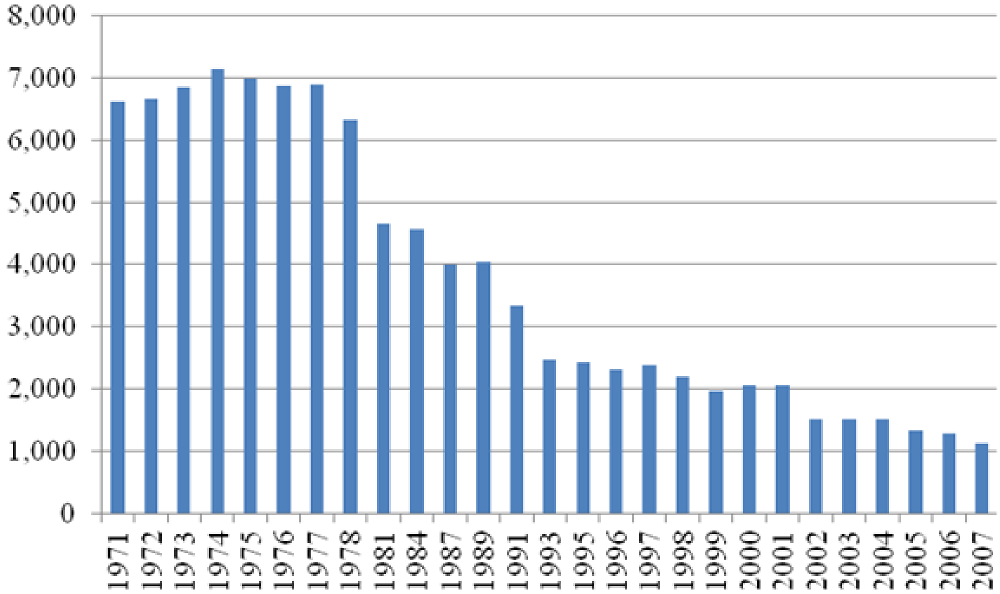

Figure 161 Graph to show the number of people working in the High Wycombe furniture industry 1971-2007

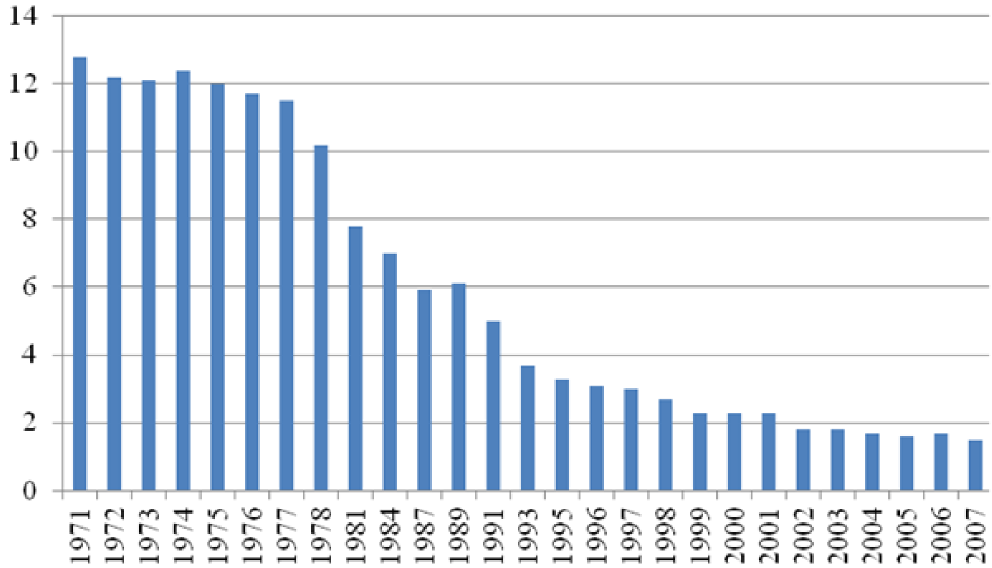

Figure 162 Graph to show the Percentage of the High Wycombe workforce working in the furniture industry 1971-2007

There are some discrepancies between the figures above and those from later years in the literature survey. (Lowe, 1983) published that in 1975 6,100 people worked in the High Wycombe furniture industry and in 1982 there were 6,000. These compare with NOMIS as follows, in 1975 there were 7,003 furniture workers in High Wycombe and 4,664 in 1981 (the nearest comparable year).

These figures were then added to the known published figures that were reported in the Literature Review and graphically represented in Figure 163:

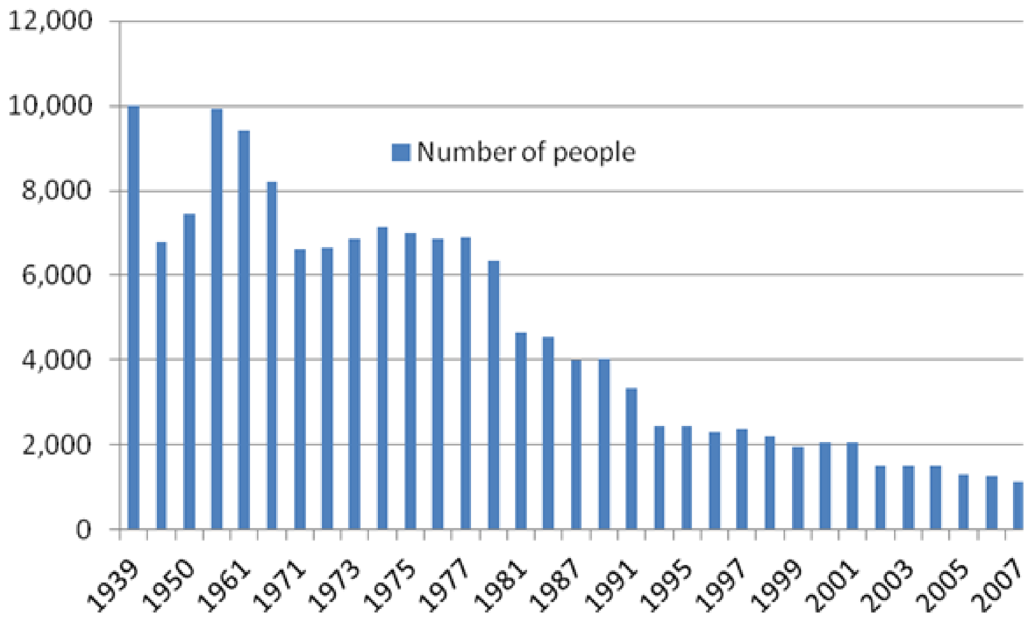

Figure 163 Graph to show the number of people working in the High Wycombe furniture industry 1939-2007

The figures show that the number of people working in the High Wycombe furniture industry post Second World War hit its peak in 1955 with 9,940 (Lowe, 1983). The decline at the end of the 1960s and at the end of the 1970s is evident and the decline continues showing the latest figure of 1,317 working in the industry in 2007 (NOMIS, 2009) to be the lowest recorded. There has been a reduction of 8,809 workers in just over fifty years, a decline of 87 percent.

The following graph Figure 164 compares the UK and High Wycombe furniture employment figures.

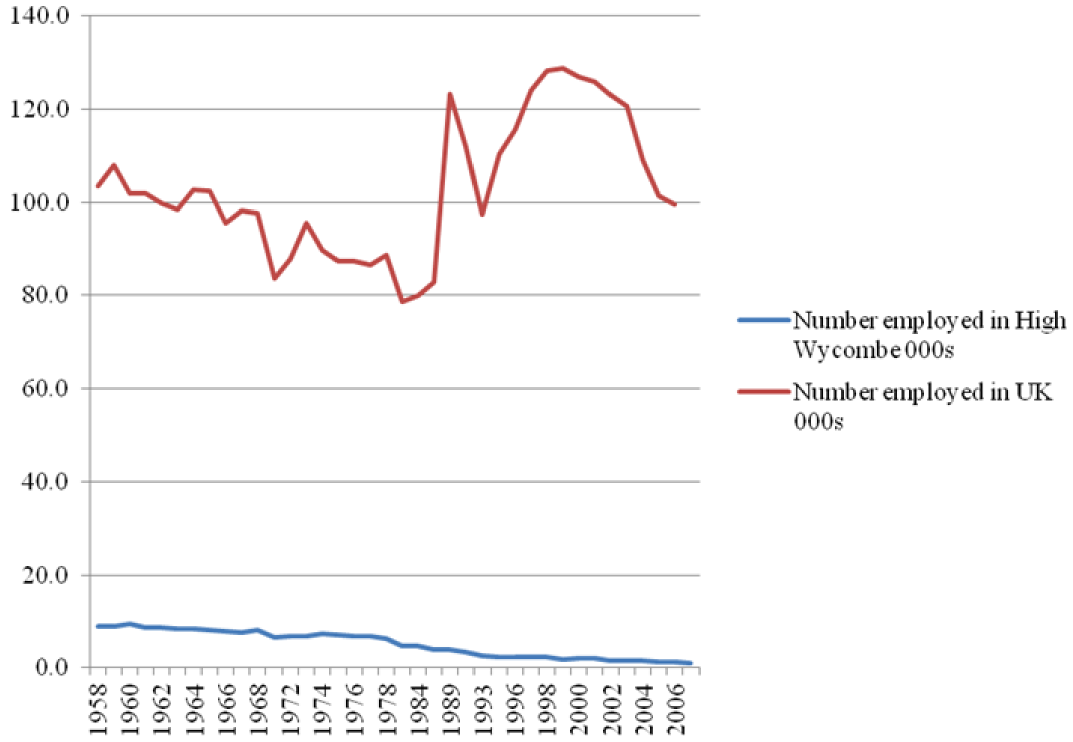

Figure 164 Graph to show a comparison of UK and High Wycombe furniture employment figures.

There has been a constant decline in the number employed in the furniture industry in High Wycombe, which has not been mirrored across the rest of the UK (Figure 164). Unlike High Wycombe which peaked in employment in 1955, the UK as a whole reached its peak in 1999. Both the UK and High Wycombe have been declining rapidly from 1999 to 2007. It is difficult to clearly state when the turning point was for High Wycombe because of the lack of clarity and consistency in the records. The figures from NOMIS show that the most rapid decline in employment was from 1978-1981 when 1,665 people left the industry. This decline was felt across the rest of the UK, with just over 10,000 people being made unemployed from 1979-1980. But in the UK as a whole, the peak of the unemployment came in the early 1990s, from 1991-1993 when over 14,000 people were made unemployed from the furniture industry. This section includes valuable figures adding to the information available on the employment figures of furniture workers in High Wycombe, completing the gaps in this area of research. The figures show that post the Second World War, the peak employment in the High Wycombe furniture industry was in 1961; declining to its lowest figures in 2007 (the most recent figures available). This pattern of decline is not seen for the rest of the UK.

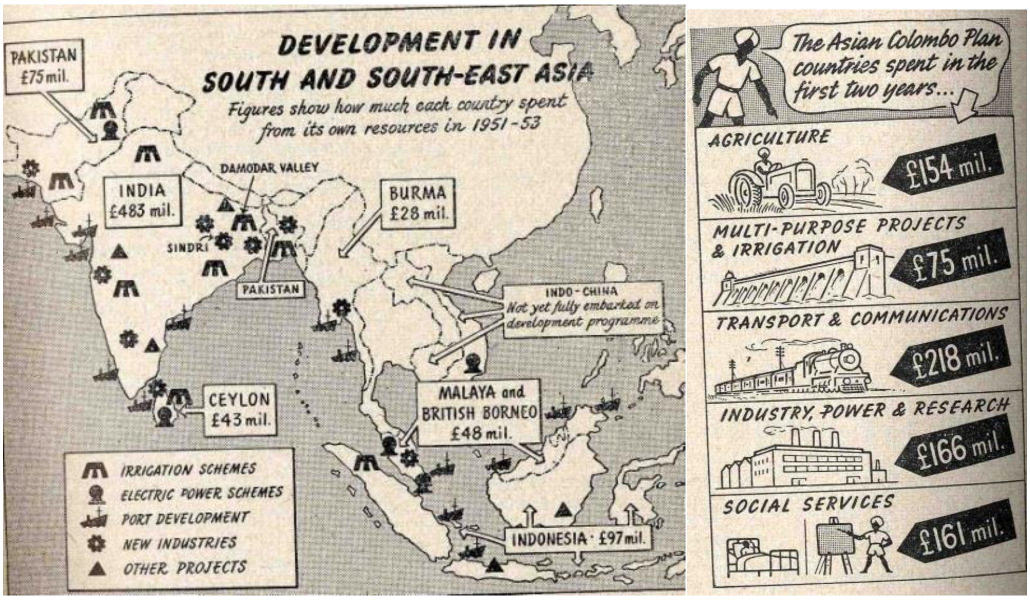

Figure 146 Left: Image prepared by the Central Office of Information showing the development in South and South East Asia Right: Image prepared by the Central Office of Information showing the monies spent on the Asian Colombo Plan