

History

Life in the 1960s - Lesson 3 of 6

Poverty and Prosperity

What kind of stories can be told about the Sixties?

Mr Wallace



Inside the Home

During the Sixties many more people had well paid jobs and there was low **unemployment**. Weekly wages rose. This had a big impact on many people's homes. Improvements in home life had already been happening in the 1950s, and continued into the Sixties. The biggest impact was in two rooms: the kitchen and the bathroom. New technology meant kitchen **appliances** became widely used for the first time. This included inventions like the washing machine and refrigerator. These appliances gave women more free time as it was usually housewives who were seen as responsible for the housework.



Inside the Home

In the bathroom, millions of British people had the luxury of hot water and indoor toilets for the first time. Many had grown up with a tin bath that was filled by a kettle, and brothers and sisters had to share the water. New homes came with hot water and indoor plumbing as standard. Other parts of the home also changed in the Sixties. Owning colour televisions and vacuum cleaners became increasingly normal. The wealthier people could also afford to buy furniture influenced by Sixties art: bold colours and simple shapes were preferred to flowery old patterns. However, many people still stuck to what was familiar and traditional.



Outside the home

Elsewhere, there were other signs of **affluence**. More people than ever had cars, such as the cheap and cheerful Mini. This small car became one of the most famous designs of the Sixties. Car usage went up from 2.3 million to over 11 million. Another example of improvements in people's lives is seen in the holidays that they took. The traditional seaside holiday continued to be popular, but as people became more **affluent**, new ways of taking a holiday developed. For better off people, the creation of 'package holidays' to sunny Spain changed everything. Only a small percentage of people took them, but for many British people, the idea of a foreign holiday to Benidorm was a dream come true.



Ongoing poverty

However, it would be wrong to assume that everyone benefited in the same way. The better off you were, the more luxuries or foreign holidays you could get. For many people, improvements simply came from having a washing machine, or an indoor bath, or a house with a garden. By the end of the decade, there were still over 5 million people living in **poverty**, over 100,000 were homeless and there were still over 1 million homes without an indoor toilet. The Sixties might have improved the comfort and living standards of many, but there were some who were left out.



Image A

Mr and Mrs M and their four children lived in a council-owned house with no bathroom, no hot water, outside lavatory, inside walls running with damp. The children slept on sodden seat cushions covered by a couple of old 'macs', there was no heating in the room, the snow lay thick outside and the windows were broken.



Image B

Mrs T and her family of five lived in a decaying terraced house owned by a steelworks. She had no gas, no electricity, no hot water, no bathroom. Her cooking was done on the fire in the living room.



Image C

Birmingham
women in 1966
marching to
demand
decent homes
for their
children and
asking to be
taken out of
the 'pigties'
they were living
in.



Image D

Mr and Mrs Gallagher lived with their four children in a ground floor tenement flat. Their bedroom was covered in pools of rainwater. At night they sleep with the light on to keep the rats away. One night they counted 16 rats in the room.



Glossary

Unemployment: The number of people who have no job

Affluent: Being well-off and able to spend money on luxury items

Appliances: electrical machines which help with household jobs like washing machines and vacuum cleaners.

Poverty: Being extremely poor



Questions

1. What appliances became more widely used in British kitchens?
2. What changes were made in people's bathrooms?
3. How did car use and holiday destinations change in the Sixties?
4. How many people still lived in poverty at the end of the decade?
5. What can we learn from the picture sources about the housing that some people lived in during the Sixties?

Challenge: Why was the impact of poverty different for many women compared to men?

