



# NINETEEN FIFTIES HEAVEN

Researchers pinpoint 1957 as happiest postwar year

writes PHILIP HALCROW

**HAS Britain ever again had it so happy as in the year when Harold Macmillan said, 'Most of our people have never had it so good'?**

In their report *Understanding Happiness*, researchers from Warwick University's Centre for Competitive Advantage in the Global Economy explain how they measured happiness – in the UK and elsewhere – since 1776, when the US Declaration of Independence trumpeted 'the pursuit of happiness'.

As part of their research, they scoured digitised books for the appearance of words with positive associations, such as 'happiness' and 'joy', and those with negative connotations, such as 'die' and 'stress'.

And 1957 emerges as Britain's happiest postwar year. 'It does not mean I would rather live in 1957 than now,' researcher Daniel Sgroi tells *The War Cry*. 'Once exposed to modern life – with the internet and technology – it would be hard to go back. It is rather that people in 1957 did not envisage

**There was a lot of positive rhetoric about the future**

such things and instead most likely were thankful that the Second World War and austerity were behind them, and there was a lot of positive rhetoric about the future.'

As well as insisting that happiness is about more than economic growth, the report argues that words highlight the presence or absence of social happiness.

Words have also long helped individuals work out what happiness is and where to find it. The report notes: 'Over the ages, tracts of the ancient moral philosophers – Plato, Aristotle, Confucius – have probed the question of happiness'.

Augustine of Hippo could be added to a list of ancient explorers of happiness for words such as: 'Happiness consists in the attainment of our desires, and in our having only right desires.'

And so could the texts that make up the Bible, a book which, while acknowledging the ugly sides of life with words such as 'sadness' and 'hate', repeatedly assures its readers that 'happiness' and 'joy' can ultimately be found in the love God has for humankind.

Measures of positive or negative words may not tell the whole story – but over the centuries unnumbered people have found that the Bible's words about happiness add up.

*A woman poses with audio-visual equipment at the National Radio and Television Exhibition in 1957 – technology has progressed but has happiness?*

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