

The New Leisure, Voluntarism and Social Reconstruction in Inter-War Britain

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Abstract

In post - World War One social reconstruction leisure acquired new social meanings. In contrast to nineteenth century rational recreation and its emphasis on individual morality, leisure was discussed as a social good with the capacity to contribute to the building of a new post-war society. Thinking on leisure was influenced by social idealism through which the classical Athenian model of leisure was re-imagined for a new and modern Britain. Leisure was promoted as a field of voluntary association, a means of encouraging a shared democratic culture and social citizenship. Voluntary social work, co-ordinated by the National Council of Social Services, was to be the field through which idealist thinking on leisure was to be put into practice. Although idealist visions rarely materialised they were nevertheless important to twentieth century understandings of leisure and helped shape government policy after the Second World War.

Introduction

In November 2010 Prime Minister David Cameron commissioned measurements of national well-being as a counter-balance to economic indicators of the standard of living. Leisure was identified as an agent of social well-being at an early stage of this project but public expenditure on provision for leisure was reduced and the voluntary sector was exhorted to compensate by facilitating leisure opportunities through a "Big Society".¹ The association of leisure with well-being and voluntary action echoed an inter-war debate on the function of leisure in the good society.² While the rationale for voluntary intervention in leisure is historically well-documented in terms of nineteenth century rational recreation it has been less frequently discussed in terms of post-World War One social reconstruction. In inter-war Britain leisure was an extensive field of voluntary associational culture in which hobby, sports and arts groups provided mutual support networks for their members.³ However, leisure was also instrumental to organizations with social aims; examples include the university and social settlements, religious bodies, the outdoor movement and young peoples' organisations, whose objectives included the provision of leisure in slum areas, the organisation of countryside holidays on principles of co-operation and the promotion of social

citizenship.⁴ Through the co-ordination of voluntary social work by the National Council of Social Service, leisure and voluntarism became integrated in social work and social policy. The importance of leisure to social service in inter-war Britain has been under-estimated; an historical review published in 1947 omitted to note the adoption of leisure within social service as a means to social ends, and this has not since been explored in any depth.⁵ However there is ample evidence to suggest that leisure was of central importance to social reconstruction and voluntary social work in the inter-war period.

The historiography of leisure in inter-war Britain over the past two decades has been characterised by two very broad strands. Histories of specific forms of leisure, for example sport, dance, music, holidays and the mass cultural provision of the cinema, have explored the cultural impacts of leisure and its consumption.⁶ A second strand has adopted a thematic approach by using leisure as a prism through which to explore issues of gender, social class, youth and identity.⁷ A third and less well-developed strand has been concerned not so much with specific activities or participation but with the social function of leisure and its potential to serve as a public sphere in civil society. John Stevenson, for example, has suggested that the growth of leisure in the inter-war period was “part of the development of a more uniform and homogeneous society, partaking of an increasingly common culture”, while Ross McKibbin’s view of sport as a civil culture might equally be applied to a wider abstract view of leisure.⁸ A consistent thread of this third strand has been concerned with the association of active leisure with citizenship. This associational link was formed before the First World War but remained vital in the inter-war years as the possible effects of the cinema on citizenship through the undermining of British values and standards became apparent.⁹ Brad Beaven and John Griffiths have further developed the links between leisure and citizenship in showing how wider anxieties about engagement in passive leisure and the existence of an undesirable balance between work and leisure affected the social and communal ties and associations that were believed essential to the maintenance of citizenship.¹⁰

In the late nineteenth century leisure became of interest to social reformers as a means of connecting with the poor and by 1914 was established as a field of voluntary social work throughout Great Britain; the question remained, as Helen Meller has noted, to what degree it could be used

constructively in a social context.¹¹ After the war this question acquired greater urgency, partly because of increased time for leisure and partly because, as the *New Survey of London Life and Labour* observed, the centre of interest of a worker's life was shifting from his daily work to his daily leisure.¹² In the debate on post-war social reconstruction, new understandings of leisure as an agent of social well-being emerged. Leisure was discussed not simply as time or activity but as a modern institution, formed by its social and economic environment and moulded by changes in working patterns, new forms of entertainment and changed social attitudes.¹³ It has been argued that interest in leisure for the promotion of social citizenship derived from fears of fascism which made it necessary to bond citizens with the democratic state and ensure a physically fit nation.¹⁴ However, as Pearl Jephcott recalled, this influence gained prominence only in the nineteen-thirties, and it is therefore necessary to look elsewhere for the forces that shaped voluntary interventions in leisure immediately after the war.¹⁵ Amongst these were the sense of social obligation created by the First World War, which elevated voluntarism to an ideal, and the desire to build a new socially democratic post-war society.¹⁶

What was meant by leisure and its function in the building of a new post-war society became important questions after 1918. Leisure was simultaneously emancipatory and problematic, a field in which social well-being could be nurtured through active citizenship, experimentation and personal development, but also a source of moral degeneration and alienation; it was, in Henry Durant's phrase, one of the crucial points at which the strains of society converged.¹⁷ This paper explores these strains as they were mediated through voluntary social work in post-World War One social reconstruction. In 1919 there was a sense that abstract social ideals should be made concrete to produce a new and better post-war civilization.¹⁸ This raises questions of how leisure was theorised as a public sphere in idealist social philosophy and of the extent to which this informed voluntary social work. Early twentieth century English idealism was complex in nature and has been described as a 'house of many mansions'.¹⁹ For the purpose of the present discussion, Josie Harris' interpretation of social idealism as a vision of the reconstruction of the whole of British society and the creation of the ideal state is adopted because it reflects the broad aim of social reconstruction and assumes a connection between theory and practice.²⁰ Idealist thought extended into everyday political life and many voluntary organisations, though realist in

outlook, were inspired by idealist visions and cannot be properly understood outside of this connection.²¹ Strands of idealist thinking relevant to the discussion of leisure in reconstruction included the relationship between the individual and society and the integration of leisure in the pursuit of the common good. Rejecting the paternalism of a leisure class, social service heralded a new phase of voluntarism based on civic ideals and social welfare, treating leisure not as an aspect of individual morality but as a field of social policy.²²

Leisure and reconstruction: the New Leisure in inter-war Britain.

Leisure was, as the educationalist Lawrence Pearsall Jacks observed, a difficult subject to discuss because it was widely misunderstood.²³ Leisure is a socially structured concept and at the close of the war a sense of a 'new' leisure formed through the growth of mass culture and advances in the mechanisation of industrial work.²⁴ Leisure was not seen as an unqualified good; the reduction of the working week to eight hours in 1919, a change enshrined in Labour Party policy on reconstruction, brought more time for leisure but raised concerns about people's ability to use this 'new' leisure in a socially constructive way.²⁵ The new leisure forms of the wireless and cinema resonated with contemporary critiques of the machine and heightened fears of uniform mass consumption and an erosion of high culture.²⁶ Henry Durant, for example, likened the new leisure to a "machinery of amusement" with "visualized daydreams of a fully leisured, unproductive life", a harbinger of a corrosive American culture and an alienating passive mass entertainment, while cultural conservatives believed the radio and the cinema were standardising forces inimical to traditional culture.²⁷ The trope of the machine was also applied to the dehumanisation of labour under industrial production and its assumed disabling of workers from a proper use of leisure. In a pamphlet for C.H. Douglas' social credit movement Storm Jameson imagined an 'Age of Leisure' as a classless society made possible by the use of machines to create leisure rather than consumer goods; less idealistically William Lever envisaged a six hour day giving more leisure to workers if machine production could be made more profitable to employers.²⁸ In a further sense the new leisure was the 'enforced leisure' of unemployment and occupation of time to prevent social unrest.²⁹ These perceptions of a new leisure represented a culmination of the social and

cultural changes since the Edwardian period, shaped by new entertainments, more time, changed social attitudes, more opportunities, especially for women, and a tendency towards democratic participation; it was not, as Cecil Delisle Burns observed, simply a new form of old leisure but an “entirely different *kind* of leisure.”³⁰

The public discussion of leisure as a social function was predominantly located in the discourse of post-war social reconstruction. The parameters of this were drawn by progressive social idealists, notably Leonard T. Hobhouse, John A. Hobson, and Richard Tawney.³¹ The discussion of social reconstruction displayed a strong idealist tendency insofar as what was imagined was radically different to what had gone before, with social justice, equality and a democratic culture being core elements of the imagined new society. It reflected, as Harold Laski commented, a shift in English Liberalism from the idea of government and a mass of discrete individuals to the idea of an holistic community and a shared citizenship.³² There was to be “an ideal of what we aim at, of what we wish the nation to become and to do”, with co-operation replacing competition, summarised by Bertrand Russell as a unifying integration of individual and community life with a sense of wholeness.³³ The idea of wholeness as the essence of well-being formed a common thread in social reconstruction, expressed in terms of the harmonisation of class differences, of labour and capital, and of work and leisure. The function of leisure in the new post-war society was consequently articulated in terms of social well-being, social democracy and a shared culture. Social meanings of leisure were informed by Christian and Fabian socialism, the writings of Ruskin and Morris on industrial production and leisure, the social liberalism of T.H. Green and particularly the Athenian ideal of leisure and the good society.³⁴ The contribution of leisure to reconstruction lay not primarily in terms of more buildings or playing fields – though these remained important – but in idealist understandings of the meaning of leisure in the good society and in realist terms of the mediation of these understandings through voluntary social service.³⁵

Leisure was important to several fields of social reconstruction. The Conference on Christian Politics, Economics and Citizenship (COPEC) in 1924 declared leisure to be necessary to a human life, while leisure was discussed in terms of medical sociology by the British Medical Association.³⁶ Increased leisure, especially for women, enhanced opportunities for adult education, while factory welfare schemes

increasingly included leisure provisions for workers.³⁷ The principal importance of leisure, however, centred on its capacity to create a democratic culture through voluntary association and social citizenship. This relationship was reciprocal; public service was itself, as Harold Laski noted, a rich and creative use of leisure.³⁸ The citizenship of the new post-war society, Sybella Branford advised the Civic Association of Richmond in 1921, was to be understood in terms of community and the realisation of the good life, with a new leisure initiating a renaissance of community building, adult education and cultural activity.³⁹ It invoked the active and public citizenship of Greek republicanism rather than the passive and private citizenship of classic liberal society.⁴⁰ The good citizen had social obligations; everyone, as H.A.L. Fisher argued, had a duty to contribute to the community.⁴¹ The re-imagining of the classical Greek ideal of leisure as the basis of a new social citizenship was argued most prominently by Ernest Barker and Cecil Delisle Burns. Burns' writings on leisure have been little discussed by historians of leisure.⁴² Described as an influential figure in the constructive side of the Labour movement⁴³, he lectured at Birkbeck College and the London School of Economics and was appointed to the Stevenson Lectureship in Citizenship at Glasgow University in 1927. Prior to his academic career he worked in the Ministry of Reconstruction, the International Labour Office and the Ministry of Labour. He was a member of the Romney Street group, founded to formulate ideas on post-war reconstruction, along with Richard Tawney, Arthur Greenwood, G.D.H. Cole, J.J. Mallon (warden of Toynbee Hall) and the labour historian J.L. Hammond.⁴⁴ He was also a member of the Rainbow Circle, a progressive political discussion group of Labour and Liberal thinkers committed to the abandonment of laissez-faire social policy which included Noel Buxton, Labour MP, Alfred Gardiner, editor of the *Daily News* and Charles Trevelyan, Labour MP.

Burns believed that social change was driven by change in habits and customs and not through legislation. A new leisure, shaped by more time, new forms and experimentation, could thus become the basis of radical social change. The social model of leisure proposed by Burns represented a re-working of Athenian concepts of leisure for a modern and democratic post-war Britain.⁴⁵ Classical Greek philosophy occupied an important place in social idealist thinking through its exposition of the good society and its articulation of the relationship of leisure to the good life.⁴⁶ Both Plato and Aristotle argued that leisure existed for its own sake rather than for relaxation or passive amusement. For Aristotle, leisure was not activity but the end of occupation; used properly, leisure gave pleasure, happiness and enjoyment of life.

Amusements were necessary but leisure was of a higher order, enabling intellectual enjoyment and participation in civic life for the public good. As a sphere of public life, leisure in Ancient Greece had represented a form of voluntary democratic association which underpinned political democracy; Morris later argued that in a society not structured to serve capitalist production, increased leisure would be of direct good to the community.⁴⁷ These arguments were influential at a time of radical thinking on social reconstruction. Like Bertrand Russell, Burns argued that a shared social understanding of an idealist concept of leisure would create a better society, proposing the adoption of Athenian ideals for a new leisure.⁴⁸ In England, however, as John Ruskin had pointed out, leisure was not generally understood in terms of personal development and it would be necessary, as Ernest Barker observed, to develop England as an educational society, guaranteeing leisure and training in its use to all its citizens.⁴⁹ For Burns, England could be compared to Athens; just as Athenian leisure had been restricted to a privileged male elite and enabled by a slave class, the English leisure class denied working people the enjoyment of a true leisure.⁵⁰ However, if the functions of a leisure class became those of the whole community, the leisure of ordinary people could, through voluntary association and the discovery of undeveloped capacities, become the source of a new civilization.⁵¹ As in Athens, the English city could become a Club and the gymnasia and wrestling grounds forums of intimacy and common discussion.⁵² This, Barker maintained, would provide a more effective training in citizenship than adult education classes in civics and political science; even the village public house might be a forum of debate in the manner of the agora of ancient Athens.⁵³

Leisure thus became conceptualized as a sphere in which active voluntary participation could promote social well-being through a new form of civilized life, but only if the “ideal man in the ideal society” could be realized through engagement in new opportunities for self-development.⁵⁴ The capacity of people to engage in socially productive leisure became a gauge of fitness for citizenship. At the end of the war there were doubts about the extent of this capacity; a survey undertaken by the St. Philip’s Settlement in Sheffield argued that those well-equipped for citizenship were family orientated, attended concerts and showed interest in creativity and self-improvement while the mal-equipped had no interests beyond the public house and the passive enjoyment of the cinema and music hall.⁵⁵ It was consequently

argued throughout the inter-war period that social emancipation through leisure required education in its use, notably by Lawrence Pearsall Jacks.⁵⁶ Ernest Barker and Havelock Ellis also emphasised the need to train people in the use of leisure and in 1935 the New Education Fellowship, founded in 1921 by Beatrice Ensor to promote social reform through education, adopted education for leisure as the theme of its first British conference.⁵⁷ Burns, however, believed education in the use of leisure would, if left to the state and church, weaken its capacity to effect social change. Leisure should instead be a field of creative expression and experimentation; a new leisure would make new men. Henry Durant similarly argued that philanthropic and patronized forms of leisure would have to be replaced by free voluntary expression if leisure were to generate social change.⁵⁸ Contrary to Clive Bell and cultural conservatives who insisted on the necessity of a leisure class to maintain civilization, Burns believed that social equality could be established only if the leisure of working people became a site for experimentation and radical social change.⁵⁹ As evidence of this, new youth movements, particularly in hiking and rambling, were characterised by democratic values of comradeship and access to private land, demonstrating the capacity of leisure to nurture a new way of life and a new kind of community.⁶⁰ Similarly women, who had demonstrated their capacity to use their leisure to change their position in public affairs through voluntary social work, would gain an equitable share in a redistribution of leisure.⁶¹ As in Canon Barnett's *Ideal City*, coal miners, grocers and doctors would give expression to the creativity of the ordinary man and woman that was lacking in the cultural production of aristocratic society.⁶² Leisure thus came to be seen as a cultural field for social change. Even the car, cinema and radio - the *bêtes noires* of conservative critics - could, if used differently, serve a similar function to the Greek games by enabling the inner life of civilization through shared experience; there was no such thing as a mass of indistinguishable men and individuality was a function of wise consumption.⁶³ Burns thus saw the cinema and radio not as agencies of control but as tending to social equality by enabling similarity of outlook and attitude through their appeal to all social classes.⁶⁴ Crucially, the arguments for a new leisure were predicated not upon the recommendation of specific forms of activity but on the purpose of leisure and its social meanings.

Leisure, Social Service and Reconstruction

Insight to the extent to which idealist constructs of leisure informed voluntary intervention can be gained through its treatment in the social service movement. Social Service had no fixed meaning. It was, as Henry Mess, Director of the Tyneside Council of Social Service noted, a modern term which combined elements of charity, philanthropy and social reform with a new emphasis on the enrichment of normal life.⁶⁵ For Clement Attlee, then a social worker, social service was an expression of a desire for social justice.⁶⁶ Idealist thinking gave a social dimension to individual action; individual activity in leisure could thus be understood in terms of its social significance.⁶⁷ The function of leisure in social service accordingly became, as described by Harold King, Warden of the Liverpool University Settlement, the creation of community well-being:

“Everywhere efforts to attract this new leisure are springing up. It is essential for the future well-being of the community that the problem should be solved, that the gift of time should be used for the development of a fuller life and greater powers of expression in the individual and of a finer sense of the community in the social whole.”⁶⁸

Social Service represented the adaptation of idealist thinking to practical reform advocated by Patrick Geddes while retaining what Weight and Beach describe as a middle class culture of activism for citizenship.⁶⁹ The scope of voluntary work was influenced by the extent of state provision for social life.⁷⁰ Unlike Weimar Germany where leisure clubs were supported by the state for the diffusion of political culture, the British government adopted the more tangential approach of enabling access to public facilities through partnerships with voluntary associations.⁷¹ In 1919 the structure of state provision for leisure remained minimal and the promotion of socially constructive leisure was not within the interests of the commercial sector. Consequently, the voluntary sector became the principal locus for the realisation of social objectives through leisure, changing the emphasis of voluntarism from nineteenth century paternalism to twentieth century social work, increased bureaucracy and the professionalization of voluntary effort.⁷² The establishment of the National Council of Social Service (NCSS) in 1919 introduced a national co-ordination of social work. While the rhetoric of conference speakers and contributors to its

bulletins often exhibited radical and idealist notions, the NCSS was inherently conservative, led by establishment figures including W.G.S. Adams, government adviser and Chairman from 1920 to 1949; the Eton educated Viscount Bledisloe as President and the Prince of Wales as Patron. This, together with its partnerships with the state – for example the government established Juvenile Organisation Committees, - constrained the extent to which radical elements of idealist thinking on leisure could be adopted. Member organisations of the NCSS included the Charity Organisation Society (COS), Councils of Social Welfare, Guilds of Help, Civic Societies and University and Social Settlements and consequently it inherited the tensions between those organisations which, like the Councils of Social Welfare, sought social solutions and those which, like the COS, adhered to personal case work. Nevertheless the NCSS constituted the official voice of voluntary activity and illustrates the opportunities and obstacles in implementing social idealist thinking on leisure.

The importance of leisure to the NCSS – although it was not considered a discrete field of social service – was affirmed in its first conference in November 1919 on the Leisure of the People.⁷³ Convened to address the increased leisure of the shorter working week, this discussed policies to promote a better use of leisure and the role of leisure in social reconstruction, heralding a new model of social work which embraced educational and cultural objectives.⁷⁴ The spread of leisure across social service was reflected in the diversity of the NCSS' member organizations which included the Boys' Brigade, Church of England's Men's Society, English Folk Dance Society, the Board of Education's Juvenile Organisation's Committee, Library Association, National Federation of Working Girls' Clubs and the Settlements Association.⁷⁵ To gain sociological insight to leisure the conference commissioned surveys from fifty local councils of voluntary service. The resultant reports outlined a shortage of opportunities for constructive leisure resulting from a decline in philanthropy, the tendency of monotonous machine work to encourage passive consumption, and apathy. The Liverpool Council of Voluntary Aid accordingly concluded that the task of social service was to replace passive by active leisure through, for example, holiday camps, concerts, debates, sports and games.⁷⁶ Further social data on leisure became available in academic surveys, notably those of Merseyside and London.⁷⁷ Although undertaken to establish objective social facts of leisure these surveys were motivated by a commitment to social change.⁷⁸ The Merseyside

survey, for example, aimed to improve “the lot of those whose standard of living is below average levels” though recognising that the problems of one class were in reality those of the whole community.⁷⁹ The right use of leisure by all classes, but particularly the working classes, was consequently reported in terms of social well-being rather than morality; the New Survey of London Life and Labour, for example, saw in the use of leisure an indicator of social progress and a choice between building a “fuller, healthier and more civilized life” and frittering it away in transient pursuits.⁸⁰ In 1920 a special edition of the NCSS *Monthly Bulletin* devoted to leisure argued that both personal and community life was affected by ways in which leisure was used and posed the rhetorical question of what use people would make of the new leisure.⁸¹

The NCSS commenced, as its historian noted, from a basis of idealism.⁸² Its focus was not limited to the slums or the destitute but embraced a common effort to promote social well-being, and the facilitation of a good use of leisure was recognised as a means to this end.⁸³ At the 1919 Conference C.G. Ammon, Secretary of the Union of Post Office Workers argued that the best use of leisure was to make good citizens; the point was repeated at the NCSS National Conference on Reconstruction in 1920 where Arthur Collins of the Birmingham Citizens’ Committee claimed that leisure was more important to social welfare than the relief of distress.⁸⁴ The Liverpool Council of Voluntary Aid saw leisure as a social problem that had not previously been accorded sufficient importance but which could “tend to make people self-controlled, responsible and happy”.⁸⁵ Through social centres and Citizens’ Institutes it had facilitated a wide variety of leisure to “meet the newly discovered needs of ordinary citizens”; the Kirkdale Citizen’s Institute, for example, provided football, concerts, darts and billiards each day, while 153 boys’ organisations and 135 girls’ organisations offered recreational opportunities to young people. The trend in voluntary social work throughout the inter-war period marked a shift from the consideration of leisure as a moral issue to a social fact. In her survey of girls’ organisations Madeline Roof reported that while the pioneers of social work had been primarily concerned for the moral welfare of girls, the modern club leader took a more constructive view, promoting activities to develop the skills and aptitudes for citizenship.⁸⁶ It was, for example, common practice in clubs to form committees composed of members to give them experience in leadership and debate.⁸⁷

However the convergence in leisure of the social strains noted by Durant prevented the experimentation in leisure that had been invoked by its idealist protagonists. Although Pearl Jephcott claimed that the number of organisations for girls and their members was greater in 1939 than in 1919, social service reached only a small proportion of the population it sought to attract.⁸⁸ While the Girl Guides in England numbered 240,077 Guides and 155,602 Brownies; other groups had considerably smaller memberships, such as the Federation of Working Girls (14,000) and the Girls' Life Brigade (40,000). Organisations for boys also experienced difficulties in recruitment; in 1920 in Manchester and Salford only ten per cent of the boy population between the ages of twelve and eighteen years had joined a boys' club while in Liverpool one boy in six and one girl in eight between the ages of ten and eighteen had joined a voluntary organisation.⁸⁹ The New Survey of London similarly estimated only one in six adolescent boys belonged to the Boys Club, the Scouts or the Boys Brigade.⁹⁰ York House, a branch of the Liverpool University Settlement, attracted boys who wished to play sport but not those for whom sport held no appeal; it was also the case that the rough behaviour of some members dissuaded other boys from joining.⁹¹ Furthermore, the environment to which young people returned was not conducive to behavioural change. At the Liverpool University Settlement, for example, a gang of slum boys, given autonomy, enforced on its members higher standards in clean speech, sportsmanship and conduct at a job than when under an adult leader; however, this was a temporary behavioural change and not sustainable on return to the streets.⁹²

The recruitment of adults was also challenging, those most in need of service being the hardest to connect with. As Henry Durant noted, the dead weight of the circumstances of working-class life provided little stimulus to seek challenging activities and working men naturally sought relaxation and informality in spare time.⁹³ The local survey of leisure in Bethnal Green found a passive and apathetic population with "little desire for real culture and education, and an almost entire absence of desire for religion".⁹⁴ Such populations, as the survey of the St. Philips Settlement in Sheffield had found, lacked the aptitude to engage in active leisure and social citizenship. In 1920 the Educational Settlements Association was established with the idealist aim of using education to "produce" civilization through a "decent use of leisure"; by 1938 29 settlements had been established, many of their students becoming leaders of settlements and community centres.⁹⁵ These, however, had limited appeal; the York

Educational Settlement's five hundred members were drawn mainly from the respectable social groups of office and factory workers, school teachers, shop assistants and housewives seeking education and included practically no unskilled manual workers.⁹⁶ At Oxford House in Bethnal Green two men's clubs with 450 and 200 members struggled to compete with the cinema and wireless while in Sheffield working-class men preferred, as we have seen, passive above active leisure.⁹⁷

The perception of social service as philanthropy was a further obstacle to progress. It seemed impossible, Henry Mess noted, to divest social service of the idea of help given by the privileged to the unprivileged and the shadow of the leisure class consequently could not be escaped.⁹⁸ At the Liverpool University Settlement the Old Lerpoolians, a club founded in 1894 as the Liverpool College Old Boys Union, provided leisure activities and educational classes for over one thousand men, women, boys and girls. At the same settlement past and present boys of Liverpool College planned and operated a slum lads' club as practical training in service under the English Public Schools Mission.⁹⁹ "Enterprises of the so-called 'leisured' people are always suspect", reported an investigator in Burnley to Rooff's survey, and this was emphatically the case in the north east, where much effort was invested in the provision for the long term unemployed in their "enforced leisure". In Jarrow the word "recreation" acquired a stigma as young university graduates organised leisure activities for men "old enough to be their father" who displayed a "hatred of everything connected with social service".¹⁰⁰ In London the Mary Ward Settlement expressed concern that its failure to attract young adults to leisure classes in Greek dancing, millinery, gymnastics, woodwork, boxing was due to its appearance of being too middle-class.¹⁰¹ There were, too, difficulties in recruiting voluntary workers as potential volunteers, aware of the suspicion of philanthropic voluntarism, opted to join the Labour Party.¹⁰²

The new post-war housing estates built under Addison's Housing and Town Planning Act 1919 and Wheatley Act of 1924, however, offered a blank canvas for experimentation in the application of leisure to community building. The linking of leisure to social well-being concurred with new ideas of a community as a network of relationships and mutual support.¹⁰³ Within the NCSS attention was directed towards community-building and the facilitation of voluntary association.¹⁰⁴ The new estates involved the

movement of people from inner-urban neighbourhood communities to removed locations where community structure and provision for leisure were lacking.¹⁰⁵ The creation of associational culture on estates was adopted as policy by the NCSS in 1925, inspired by the self-governing communities of garden cities such as Letchworth and Welwyn.¹⁰⁶ In 1928 the NCSS established a New Estates Community Committee under the chairmanship of Ernest Barker to work with embryonic community associations and local authorities to establish the estate as a 'unit of social life'.¹⁰⁷ Leisure was to be the sphere in which a sense of a community could be developed and maintained through voluntary leisure association.

The idea of a community centre as a democratic public forum originated in the university settlement movement and was adopted by the National Conference on the Leisure of the People in its recommendation that municipalities should co-operate with voluntary agencies to provide social centres for recreation and 'neighbourly intercourse'.¹⁰⁸ Community centres had also been advocated by the Ministry of Reconstruction as communal spaces for adult education in citizenship as a leisure interest.¹⁰⁹ The experimental provision of Municipal Cafes and Recreational Centres in Carlisle and Annan under the Liquor Control Board and the recreation rooms and social institutes provided by the YMCA and YWCA during the War offered a template for the estates.¹¹⁰ Local authorities were empowered under the Education Act of 1921 and the Housing Act of 1925 to build centres for social or physical training with the responsibility for the organisation of activities in them lying with residents.¹¹¹ In the absence of commercial provision for leisure on estates the NCSS had a "clear field" to develop social citizenship through forming a Tenants' Association and community councils to promote a constructive use of leisure and create new social traditions.¹¹² The Community Centre thus became intimately connected with leisure as a place where people could meet, acting as a catalyst for the formation of associational culture and imagined by Ernest Barker as a "House of Leisure" in the Greek sense of activity for the mind and by L.P. Jacks as a playground for the soul.¹¹³ The new housing estate could become, in the view of one critic, the modern counterpart of the Greek city state with a corporate life of its own. Community Centres, in Ernest Barker's view, made cities 'something like Athens', accommodating men who were working together to govern themselves and to cultivate together the fruits of beauty and knowledge.¹¹⁴

It was recognised within social service that a community spirit was unlikely to evolve spontaneously and Burns' ideal of an organic democratic leisure arising through experimentation did not automatically materialise.¹¹⁵ While providing associational leisure for women who remained on the estate during the day, Community Centres held less appeal to the men who left for work and the lack of leadership required for social organization had to be provided externally by social workers. Where it did exist, as Ruth Durant found on the Watling Estate, it came exclusively from people who had previously contributed to public life.¹¹⁶ At Becontree and Dagenham voluntary associations struggled to come into existence – it was not, as Terence Young perceptively noted, a fully planned garden city but a housing estate – and confusion around neighbourhood identity on what was a large estate of approximately sixteen thousand people militated against the formation of community groups.¹¹⁷ Help was provided through Petit Farm, a non-political and non-sectarian residential settlement founded in 1929 by the NCSS, the Educational Settlements Association and the British Association of Residential Settlements. This housed people who did not live on the estate but helped form organisations for those who did not and retained the missionary and philanthropic character of its nineteenth century antecedents, supported by the Carnegie Trustees and Essex County Council. It provided evening education classes until 1933. Much leisure on the estate, however, was provided by the Anglican and Non-Conformist churches, notably the Wesleyan Methodists, whose Dagenham Central Hall was designed for a social and cultural functions.¹¹⁸ Similarly the estate's Boys 'and Girls' Club, opened only in 1933, was enabled by the support of the NCSS, the Federation of Boys' Clubs, the Federation of Girls. Clubs and the appointment of a girls' club leader by the Young Women's Christian Association and a boy's leader by the Oxford House Settlement.¹¹⁹

Beyond organized social service, working-class people were, as Henry Durant claimed, capable of organizing their own forms of leisure, as was evident in the Welsh mining industry and the textiles industry of the north of England.¹²⁰ In Jarrow, Wilkinson found unemployed men abandoning social service clubs to organize their own recreation; less socially constructive were the "so-called billiards clubs" run by "undesirable" types in the East End of London to evade legal restrictions on gambling'.¹²¹ In

Liverpool too, rough and non-respectable independent social clubs were formed with rarely “anyone of education or standing” in control of them.¹²² While some leisure organisations were strongly informed by idealist values, they lacked the political capacity to transcend the apolitical nature of the NCSS. For example, the Co-operative Holidays Association and the Holiday Fellowship, both members of the NCSS, provided a non-politicised utopian socialist form of leisure, rejecting material and class distinctions and embracing co-operation and collectivism.¹²³ In contrast the politically radical British Workers’ Sports Federation promoted communism through sport and remained outside the mainstream voluntarism of social service.¹²⁴ The politically-driven elements of the outdoor movement, which organised mass trespass as a protest against the leisured class and experimented in dress and attitude have already been mentioned, but other youth movements adopted leisure as a field of experimentation in new standards and values. Amongst these were Rolf Gardiner’s involvement in the Kibbo Kift Kindred and his establishment of the Travelling Morrice folk dance troupe as vehicles for the promotion of internationalism through leisure.¹²⁵

Conclusion

Idealist social thinking on leisure did not produce the hoped for changes of its theorists and this was consistent with the overall failure of idealism to lead to comprehensive social reconstruction.¹²⁶ However, Stefan Collini’s assessment of the importance of British idealism as its capacity to alter society’s concepts and to change the range of possible actions enables a more positive appraisal of the significance of the social construction of leisure in inter-war Britain.¹²⁷ Perhaps the outstanding outcome was its legacy of a new way of thinking about leisure in social policy, and indeed social history, as a social entity rather than an activity. When linked to Athenian philosophies of the good society and the democratic tendencies of social reconstruction, leisure came to be seen as a building block of the civic and neighbourhood community, considered not primarily as an activity but as a function of society. The impact of idealist thinking on the provision of leisure in inter-war Britain was, however, uneven. Writing in 1935 Harold Stovin argued that social service was essentially totemic, a continuation of nineteenth century paternalism disguised in the myth of mutual aid and community.¹²⁸ Exaggerated though this view

may have been, it remains true that voluntarism exhibited elements of non-idealist and paternalist values, exemplified in the missionary approaches of the Charitable Organisations Society and the Liverpool University Settlement. However it is also true that individual voices within and outside the NCSS articulated idealist visions of leisure. While some voluntary social work in leisure retained the character of a “social ambulance”, there was also experimentation in the use of leisure as a sphere of communal democracy and shared culture.

Social reconstruction was important to the change in the social understanding of leisure and to the inclusion of leisure in progressive social policy. While such understandings found their origins in the social work of the final quarter of the nineteenth century, the urgency of post-war renewal and the determination to jettison the paternalism of the late Victorian – Edwardian leisure class were crucial to the forging of a more structural and socially constructive understanding of leisure in the nineteen-twenties. Indeed, the citizenship imagined through leisure, while in some cases revealing fears of the slum, was more akin to the civic spirit and civic engagement seen by some critics as characteristic of the late nineteenth century.¹²⁹ A more complete understanding of the relationships between idealist thinking and voluntary leisure intervention might be gained through extensive analysis of voluntary organisations along an idealist – non-idealist axis.¹³⁰ Neither can the capacity of inter-war leisure to embody the radical cultural challenge to access to the land by young people be considered irrelevant to the revolutionary ideals of nineteen-sixties youth culture. As it has been argued that the experimental uses of leisure in the inter-war period developed organically within youth movements, this suggests a further need for the study of specific organisations to examine the extent to which idealism was an influential force.¹³¹

Although the theoretical development of leisure as a social function was not fully implemented in practice between the wars, it prepared the ground for the expansion of leisure provision by the State after the Second World War in the establishment of the Arts Council in 1946, the 1949 National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act and eventually in the comprehensive leisure departments formed through the local government reorganisation of 1974. In particular the 1975 White Paper on Sport and Recreation, which proposed leisure as a recognised community need and a social service, affirms Hobson’s view that while idealist thinking may not be of great influence in contemporaneous society, it nevertheless opens roads

for possible advance.¹³² It retains the capacity to do so; as Jeffery Hill has suggested, histories of leisure carry the potential to inform current concerns, and the new social strains of early twenty first century Britain suggest that the inter-war exploration of the social value of leisure is a debate worth re-visiting.¹³³

Notes

¹ Office for National Statistics, *Measuring What Matters*

² See for example Haworth and Veal, *Work and Leisure*; Skidelsky and Skidelsky, *How Much?*

³ McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures*; Lewis, *Voluntary Sector*; Snape and Pussard, *Theorisations of Leisure*.

⁴ See for example Taylor, *Claim on the Countryside*; Jones, *Sport, Politics*; Springhall, *History of Boys' Brigade*; Hill, *Leisure and Culture*; Borsay, *History of Leisure*.

⁵ Milnes, "Position of Voluntary Social Services."

⁶ See for example Huggins *Sport and the English*; Richards, *Cinema and Radio in Britain and America*; Nott, *Music for the People*; Zimring, *Social Dance*; Cross and Walton, *The Playful Crowd*

⁷ See for example Langhamer, *Women's leisure*; Skillen, *Women, Sport and Modernity*; Tebbutt, *Being Boys*; Todd, *Young Women*; Borsay, *History of Leisure*; Fowler, *Youth Culture*; *The First Teenagers*.

⁸ Stevenson, *British Society*; McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures*, 332

⁹ Beaven 'Mass commercial leisure'

¹⁰ Beaven and Griffiths 'Creating the exemplary citizen'

¹¹ Meller, *Leisure and the Changing City*, 16.

¹² Llewellyn Smith, *New Survey Vol. 9, 1*.

¹³ Durant, *Problem of Leisure*, 4; See also Darling, *Re-forming Britain*; Delanty, *Social Theory*, 36; Giddens, *Consequences of Modernity*, 6-12; Burns, *Democracy*, 215.

¹⁴ See Beaven, *Leisure, Citizenship*; Beaven and Griffiths, "Creating the Exemplary Citizen," Beaven and Griffiths, "Urban Elites."

¹⁵ Jephcott, "Work among Boys."

¹⁶ Heighton, *Place of the Voluntary Worker*, 9; Jennings, "Voluntary Social Services,"; Milnes, "Position of Voluntary Social Services."

¹⁷ Durant, *Problem of Leisure*.

¹⁸ Branford and Geddes, *Our Social Inheritance*, vii.

¹⁹ Collini, "Hobhouse, Bosanquet."

²⁰ Harris, "Political Thought."

²¹ Offer, *Intellectual History*, 150; "Idealism Versus Non-Idealism."

²² See Lewis, *Voluntary Sector*; Grant, "Voluntarism."

²³ Jacks, *Education Through Recreation*, 91. Jacks was Principal of Manchester College, Oxford. The inter-war literature on leisure was extensive; in addition to the three prominent critics Cecil Delisle Burns, Ernest Barker and Henry Durant, writers included Dark, *After working hours*; Joad, *Diogenes*; Missen, *Employment of Leisure*.

²⁴ See Tinkler, "Cause for Concern,"; Langhamer, *Women's Leisure in England*.

²⁵ Labour Party, *Labour*, 6. See also *Times* "The Leisure Problem." 19th March (1919): 13, col. F; NCSS, "The Use of Leisure'.

²⁶ See Leavis F.R., *Mass Civilization*; Clutton Brock, "Socialism."

²⁷ Durant, *Problem of Leisure*, 30-31; Leavis, Q.D. *Fiction*, 193; see also Joad, *Diogenes*; Frankl, *Machine-made Leisure*; Cunningham, *British Writers*.

²⁸ Jameson, *Soul of Man 14*; Lever, *Six Hour Day*.

²⁹ Olechnowicz, "Unemployed Workers."

³⁰ Rees, *The New Wales*; Parry and King *New Leisure*; Burns, *Leisure in the Modern World*, 161; Olechnowicz, "Unemployed Workers."

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- ³¹ Hobhouse, *Liberalism*; Hobson, *Evolution of Modern Capitalism; Problems; Work and Wealth*; Tawney, *Acquisitive Society*.
- ³² Laski, *Liberty*, 210.
- ³³ Brabrook quoted in Carter, *Industrial Reconstruction*, 233-238; Russell, *Principles of Social Reconstruction*; Hopkinson, *Rebuilding Britain*.
- ³⁴ Morris was widely quoted in this debate, in particular his socialist utopia *News from Nowhere* and his essay 'How we Live' in which he described a communal socialist society with a new mode of work and abundant leisure.
- ³⁵ Lavell, *Reconstruction* 168. Writing from America, Lavell saw post-war reconstruction as a new phase of pre-war social reform. For further discussion of the relationship between idealism and social work; see also Harrison, "Oxford and the Labour Movement."
- ³⁶ COPEC Report, 109; *British Medical Journal* "Proceedings."
- ³⁷ Ministry of Reconstruction, *Interim Report*, passim.; Paterson, "Industry and Leisure"; Long, "Industrial Homes."
- ³⁸ Laski, *Authority in Modern State*, 107.
- ³⁹ Branford, "Citizenship."
- ⁴⁰ Branford and Geddes, *Our Social Inheritance*, 126-7; Low, "Concept of citizenship."
- ⁴¹ Fisher, *Common Weal*, 22.
- ⁴² Michael Freeden in *Liberalism Divided* makes extensive use of Burns work on social philosophy in inter-war Britain but excludes reference to *Leisure in the Modern World* and Burns' explication of the function of leisure as the basis of a reformed civil society. Overy, in *The Morbid Age*, similarly refers to Burns' concern for the decline of civilization without reference to his work in leisure.
- ⁴³ "Dr. C. Delisle Burns, Labour Thinker and Lecturer." *Times* 23rd January 1942, 7 col. E
- ⁴⁴ Lee, in "The Romney Street Group", notes the tone of the Group's discussions reflected the social conscience of the settlement movement.
- ⁴⁵ See Burns, *Leisure in the Modern World; Democracy: its Defects; Industry and Civilization; Modern Civilization*.
- ⁴⁶ Boyd, in "Education for Leisure" surmised that except for the Greeks there had never been any consciousness of leisure as a problem.
- ⁴⁷ Morris, "How we Live."
- ⁴⁸ Russell, *Praise of Idleness*.
- ⁴⁹ Ruskin, *Muna Pulveris*, 15; Barker, *Uses of Leisure*, 11.
- ⁵⁰ Burns, *Civilization the Next Step*, 113.
- ⁵¹ Burns, *Leisure in the Modern World*, 153. See also Burns, "Productivity and Reconstruction."
- ⁵² Barker, *Greek Political Theory*.
- ⁵³ Barker, *Education for Citizenship*, 12.
- ⁵⁴ Burns, *Industry and Civilization*, 249.
- ⁵⁵ St. Philip's Settlement, *Equipment of the workers*.
- ⁵⁶; Laski, *Authority of the State*, 107; Jacks, *Constructive Citizenship; Education of the Whole Man; Education Through Recreation*; see also Ammon, C.G. in NCSS, *Leisure of the People*, 14 .
- ⁵⁷ Jacks, *Education of the Whole Man*; Barker *Uses of Leisure*, 7-8; Ellis, "Gospel of Leisure."; Boyd and Ogilvie, *Challenge of Leisure*.
- ⁵⁸ Durant, *Problem of Leisure*, 252.
- ⁵⁹ Burns, *Civilization: the Next Step*, 213.
- ⁶⁰ Burns, *Leisure in the Modern World*, 160. For further discussion of the outdoor movement to which Burns referred see Taylor, *Claim on the Countryside*.
- ⁶¹ Burns, *Leisure in the Modern World*, 103-4.
- ⁶² Barnett, *Ideal City*, 60-63; Burns, *Leisure in the Modern World*, 170.
- ⁶³ Burns, *Modern Civilization*, 287-8; *Leisure in the Modern World*, 28.
- ⁶⁴ Burns, *Leisure in the Modern World*, 63.
- ⁶⁵ Mess, 'What is Voluntary Social Service?'
- ⁶⁶ Attlee, *Social Worker*, 2.
- ⁶⁷ Collini, "Hobhouse, Bosanquet."
- ⁶⁸ Liverpool University Settlement, *Annual Report*, 1934.

- ⁶⁹ Geddes, "Civics as applied sociology"; see Meller, *The Ideal City* for a comparison of the idealist and the sociological approaches of Canon Barnett and Patrick Geddes; Weight and Beach, *Right to Belong*, 5.
- ⁷⁰ Milnes, "Position of Voluntary Social."
- ⁷¹ See Nathaus, "Leisure Clubs."
- ⁷² Perkin, *Rise of Professional Society*, 348.
- ⁷³ NCSS, *National Conference Leisure*. The first conference was to have been on reconstruction but was postponed because of a railway strike. The conference was held in Manchester.
- ⁷⁴ Brasnett, *Voluntary Social Action*, 27.
- ⁷⁵ NCSS, *Leisure of the People*, 95.
- ⁷⁶ Liverpool Council of Voluntary Aid, *Report on the Uses*.
- ⁷⁷ Caradog Jones, *Social Survey of Merseyside*; Llewellyn Smith *New Survey of London*, Vol. 9.
- ⁷⁸ See Alexander, "A New Civilization."
- ⁷⁹ Caradog Jones, *Social Surveys*, 9.
- ⁸⁰ Llewellyn Smith, *New Survey of London Vol. One*, 56.
- ⁸¹ NCSS, *Monthly Bulletin*, October 1920, 65.
- ⁸² Brasnett, *Voluntary Social Action*, 28.
- ⁸³ NCSS, *Monthly Bulletin*, July 1920; NCSS *Annual Report*, 1923, 5.
- ⁸⁴ Ammon, C.G. in NCSS *Leisure of the People*, 14; Collins "Organisation of Voluntary Social."
- ⁸⁵ Liverpool Council of Voluntary Aid, *Uses of leisure in Liverpool*.
- ⁸⁶ Roof, *Youth and Leisure*, 2.
- ⁸⁷ Jephcott, "Work among Boys."
- ⁸⁸ Jephcott, "Work among Boys."
- ⁸⁹ Clift, "Leisure Occupation."
- ⁹⁰ Llewellyn Smith, *New London Survey Vol. 9*, 25-26.
- ⁹¹ York House, (Liverpool University Settlement) *Annual Report 1931-32*.
- ⁹² Griffith, "Social Experiments."
- ⁹³ Durant, *Problem of Leisure*, 26, 240.
- ⁹⁴ Harris, *Use of Leisure*, 54.
- ⁹⁵ Educational Settlements Association, *Community Education*.
- ⁹⁶ Seebohm Rowntree, *Poverty and Progress*, 373.
- ⁹⁷ Llewellyn Smith, *New London Survey Vol. 9*, 133-37; St. Philip's Settlement *Equipment of the workers*, 62.
- ⁹⁸ Mess, "What is Voluntary."
- ⁹⁹ Liverpool University Settlement, *Settlement and Liverpool College*.
- ¹⁰⁰ Roof, *Youth and Leisure*, 81; Wilkinson, *Town that was murdered*, 233-4.
- ¹⁰¹ *Tavistock Tatler* October 1931. No. 1; Mary Ward Settlement, *Annual Report 1923*, 4.
- ¹⁰² Harris, *Bethnal Green*, 83.
- ¹⁰³ Jennings, "Voluntary Social Service."
- ¹⁰⁴ NCSS, *Annual Reports 1923, 1924*.
- ¹⁰⁵ Burnett, *Social history of housing*, 231.
- ¹⁰⁶ Brasnett, *Voluntary Social Action*, 62-63; NCSS *Monthly Bulletin* Vol. 5 No. 3 March 1925, 25.
- ¹⁰⁷ NCSS, *New housing estates*. See also Olechnowicz *Working Class Housing*, 137-142; Scott and Bromley, *Envisioning Sociology*, 45-6.
- ¹⁰⁸ NCSS, *Leisure of the People*, 31.
- ¹⁰⁹ Ministry of Reconstruction, *Report on Adult Education*.
- ¹¹⁰ NCSS, *Leisure of the People*, 30.
- ¹¹¹ Woodhead, "Community Centres."
- ¹¹² NCSS, *Annual Report 1929-30*.
- ¹¹³ Jennings, "Voluntary Social Service." Barker, "Reflections on Leisure."; Jacks, *Education Through Recreation*, 69 and 147.
- ¹¹⁴ Bingham, "The Greeks."; NCSS, *New Housing Estates*, 6.
- ¹¹⁵ *Social Service Review* "Community Work."
- ¹¹⁶ Durant, H., *Problem of Leisure*, 240; Durant, R. *Watling*, 28.

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- 117 Young, *Becontree and Dagenham*, 26.
 118 History of the County of Essex, Volume 5.
 119 Young, *Becontree and Dagenham*, 189.
 120 Durant, *Problem of Leisure*, 252.
 121 Wilkinson, *Town that was Murdered*, 233-4; *New London Survey Vol. 9*, 137.
 122 Liverpool Council of Voluntary Aid, *Uses of Leisure in Liverpool*, 8.
- 123 Taylor, *Claim on the Countryside*; Snape "Co-operative Holidays Association."
 124 Jones, "Sport, Politics."
 125 Fowler, *Youth Culture*, 46-58; Tyldesley and Jefferies, *Rolf Gardiner* .
 126 Scott and Bromley, *Envisioning Sociology*, 117.
 127 Collini, "Hobhouse, Bosanquet."
 128 Stovin, *Totem*, 148-9.
 129 Beaven and Griffiths "Creating the Exemplary Citizen."
 130 See for example Offer, *Intellectual History*, 162-3
 131 Fowler, *Youth Culture*, 198.
 132 Hobson, *Problems of a New World*, 11.
 133 Hill 'What shall we do?'

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