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## Commercial leisure in Halifax 1750-1950. The development of commercialized leisure provision in a northern industrial town.

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# **Commercial leisure in Halifax 1750-1950**

## **Chapter One**

### **Introduction**

This work is a chronological examination of the commercialization of leisure in a northern community between 1750 and 1950. The chosen community, Halifax, is located on the eastern side of the south Pennines in what is now West Yorkshire and was previously a part of the old administrative area of the West Riding of Yorkshire. Halifax was once the second largest parish in England, only Whalley, on the western side of the Pennines in Lancashire, was larger. During the period under consideration Halifax was transformed from a township with a population of 6,360 in 1764, to a county borough of 104,936 in 1901, before declining to 98,404 in 1951.<sup>1</sup> Although Halifax is the focus of the study, it also includes the Parish of Halifax, which roughly covers the upper Calder Valley, an area much larger than either the township or the county borough, and which consequently had a larger population. Many of the townships in the parish became a part of the Halifax municipal, and the later county, borough, whilst those remaining outside it relied on Halifax for many services, such as water, gas and electricity. The people of these outlying districts were also attracted by the leisure facilities offered by the larger town. On local government reorganization in 1974 the area covered by the parish became, along with some adjoining areas, a part of the present Metropolitan Borough of Calderdale, with Halifax as its administrative centre. Calderdale takes its name from the river Calder and the major communities along the Calder Valley include, from the west: Todmorden, Hebden Bridge, Mytholmroyd, Sowerby Bridge, Elland and Brighouse. Halifax itself is situated to the north of the valley alongside the Hebble, a tributary of the Calder.

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<sup>1</sup> Hargreaves, J., (2003) II Ed., *Halifax*, Carnegie Publishing Ltd., Lancaster. pp.74, 127 and 228.

The work defines commercial leisure as leisure provision where an economic transaction takes place between a seeker and a provider of leisure facilities and which involves an audience, crowd of spectators or a simple coming together such as in that perennial place of commercial leisure, the public house. The specific periods of time, dealt with by the various chapters, reveal changes in leisure and how it was pursued, but they are to some extent arbitrary in the sense that no exact dates can be applied to leisure, its provision and how it developed, with only rare exceptions, such as the development of moving pictures.

In this introduction I intend to survey the history of the parish from the medieval period to the middle of the twentieth century. This will provide an assessment of how the town developed both prior to and during the period chosen for study, which takes into account the social diversity of the area and how it changed. There then follows a brief examination of the case study approach and a critical evaluation of the sources and methods used. Key general themes in the historiography of leisure are then outlined, followed by an examination specifically of the development of commercial leisure.

### **Halifax and its hinterland**

There are signs of people being present in the area from prehistoric times, but the date of permanent settlement is difficult to pinpoint with any accuracy. There is no record of Halifax in the Domesday Book but this is generally agreed to be a simple mistake on the part of the compilers.<sup>2</sup> The parish of Halifax was a part of the manor of Wakefield, which had belonged to Edward the Confessor in Saxon times. It was so remote that no vicar chose to live in the town until 1272.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> See both Bretton, R., 'Halifax Parish Church', in *Transactions of the Halifax Antiquarian Society*, 1967, pp.73-91, and for a more detailed explanation of Halifax and its relationship to Domesday, Hargreaves, *Halifax*, pp.10-13. The Halifax antiquarian papers were published separately from 1901 until 1991 and later bound into annual volumes. From 1993 they were published as annual volumes hence the slight difference in referencing. Halifax Central Library has copies of all editions.

<sup>3</sup> Hargreaves, *Halifax*, p.19.

There is evidence of local involvement in the textile industry in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, but some of the earliest references to the cloth industry in the area are to be found in the thirteenth century court rolls of the manor of Wakefield, which mention many people employed in the textile trade.<sup>4</sup> Jennings refers to the fact that the amount of cloth produced locally during this early period in the town's history was modest across the parish and low ranking within the county of Yorkshire as a whole.<sup>5</sup> By the middle of the fifteenth century the principal cloth making areas were the West Country, East Anglia and Yorkshire. Within Yorkshire a fundamental change was taking place, which saw the decline of York and the east of Yorkshire as wool and cloth producers and the increasing importance of Halifax and other towns in the west of the county. George Sheeran has examined the rise of Halifax in comparison to other medieval towns in Yorkshire and how it came to such prominence in the west of the county, alongside both Leeds and Wakefield, noting that "... Halifax, a place which had only grown into a town by perhaps the fifteenth century, developed far more sophisticated markets and buildings for the sale of cloth than any other town in the county including York."<sup>6</sup> From the late fifteenth century Halifax produced more cloth than any other parish in the West Riding, a position it would retain for over three centuries.<sup>7</sup> The area had managed to gain a major concession in the Halifax Act of 1555, which allowed the trading of wool by middlemen, something proscribed by a statute of 1552,<sup>8</sup> a privilege which it held, much to the annoyance of other textile producing areas, for thirty years. By the end of the sixteenth century Halifax was a busy market town, with cloth halls that served as commercial centres for the selling of the cloth, not just for

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<sup>4</sup> Heaton, H., (1920) *The Yorkshire Woollen and Worsted Industries*, Oxford University Press, Oxford. p.5.

<sup>5</sup> Jennings, B., (1992) *Pennine Valley*, Smith Settle, Otley. p.41.

<sup>6</sup> Sheeran, G., (1998) *Medieval Yorkshire Towns*, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh. p.114.

<sup>7</sup> Hanson, T.W., (1993) *The Story of Old Halifax*, M.T.D. Rigg, Leeds. p.80. Edition originally published in 1920.

<sup>8</sup> James, J., (1968) *History of the Worsted Manufacture in England*, F.Cass and Co. Ltd. London. pp.613-14.

the town but for the wider district and with a street of wool shops linking the old and new markets.<sup>9</sup>

During the period before the Reformation the church was central to the economic life of the nation, being a provider of education and welfare, arbiter in certain legal matters and a promoter of art and architecture. Alongside these functions the Parish Church of St. John the Baptist in Halifax was also the centre of much of the cultural life of the area, including the town's fair, held on the feast of St. John the Baptist, the 21 June.<sup>10</sup> In the late medieval period it was by far the largest building in the town and probably the only one constructed entirely out of stone. Later many of the town's early timber buildings were clad in stone. The parish church was an important indicator of the town's increasing wealth and importance and for many years served as a centre of both spiritual sustenance and the more worldly pursuit of leisure.<sup>11</sup> As Clunes has noted, the first players in the early theatre were priests before they were superseded by guild players. Priests acting in miracle plays were paid for performing, usually in church, both to entertain and also to attract people to attend church; these actor priests were still in evidence in the early part of the sixteenth century.<sup>12</sup> Leacroft has commented at length on how important the church was right up to the Reformation as a theatrical and cultural venue used for staging various mysteries, plays and entertainments.<sup>13</sup>

The Reformation and the Puritanism of the period that followed were to play an important part in the process of divorcing the church from significant elements of the cultural life of the people. With the establishment of the Church of England elements associated with the pre-Reformation church were removed. As Pounds has stated: "Fantasy, allegory and symbolism gave way to fierce dogma; henceforward justification

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<sup>9</sup> Betteridge, A., 'Halifax before the Industrial Revolution: Part One', in *Transactions of the Halifax Antiquarian Society*, 1978, pp.17-41.

<sup>10</sup> The church was designated Halifax Minster in late 2009.

<sup>11</sup> Sheeran, *Medieval Yorkshire Towns*, pp.65-77.

<sup>12</sup> Clunes, A., (1964) *The British Theatre*, Cassell and Co. Ltd. London. pp.17-23.

<sup>13</sup> Leacroft, R., (1988) II Ed., *The Development of the English Playhouse*, Methuen, London.

was to be by faith alone.” With this went a reduction in the place the church played in the leisure lives of the people.<sup>14</sup> By the eighteenth century newspaper advertisements confirm that concerts of what are invariably described as sacred music were performed in the church and an entrance fee charged. The fair that celebrated the church’s patron saint’s feast day, as we shall see, gradually became distanced from the church grounds, until in the nineteenth century it was removed from the town centre. In this early period the other central establishments in the leisure life of the town were the inns and alehouses, a survey of 1735 listed no fewer than twenty.<sup>15</sup>

Up to the end of the seventeenth century the parish had acquired some fine houses, which reflected the wealth of the clothiers, merchants and manufacturers who had prospered through the cloth trade. These were complemented by substantial homes built in the eighteenth century, designed by architects of local and national repute such as John Carr. But then, as indeed earlier, there was no local aristocracy permanently resident in the area. By the middle of the eighteenth century Halifax, the established centre both economically and culturally of the parish, had become an area of considerable prosperity.<sup>16</sup> It was thus increasingly a part of the expanding consumer society, with a corresponding increase in leisure provision.

### **The development of transport links**

Transport links began to be improved from the eighteenth century. In 1734 a trust was established to build a road across the Pennines from Rochdale to Elland and Halifax. By the end of the 1740s there was a growing network of turnpike roads, although the road along the Calder Valley to Littleborough to the south of Todmorden

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<sup>14</sup> Pounds, N.J.G., (1994) *The Culture of the English People: Iron Age to the Industrial Revolution*, Cambridge University Press. Cambridge.

<sup>15</sup> Robinson, P.W., ‘The Emergence of the Common Brewer in the Halifax District’, in *Transactions of the Halifax Antiquarian Society*, 1981, pp.70-107.

<sup>16</sup> Betteridge, A., ‘Halifax before the Industrial Revolution: Part Two’, in *Transactions of the Halifax Antiquarian Society*, 1979, pp.81-103.

and Burnley to the north was not finished until 1761.<sup>17</sup> The construction of roads continued into the early nineteenth century, such as the Leeds – Whitehall road, opened in 1826.<sup>18</sup>

The Calder had been made navigable up to Sowerby Bridge by 1774 and in 1794 an Act of Parliament was passed to construct a canal from Sowerby Bridge to connect to the Bridgewater canal. It was completed in 1804 and proved to be successful, as its route was less circuitous than the Leeds – Liverpool canal and more efficient than the Huddersfield narrow canal, which opened in 1811. The canal did not just provide transport for goods to be taken out of the area but also allowed goods and cheaper coal to be brought in.<sup>19</sup> It was finally extended to Bailey Hall in Halifax, opening in 1828. Previously goods had to be brought into Halifax from Sowerby Bridge or Salterhebble, a distance from either place of about two miles.<sup>20</sup>

The coming of the railway represented the last major improvement to regional transportation links during the period. The line between Manchester and Leeds opened in 1841 and was the first trans-Pennine link. Travellers to Halifax initially changed at Sowerby Bridge and continued their journey by carriage, until a single track was laid to the town, opening in 1844 and later extended to Bradford.<sup>21</sup> The local rail network was improved in the late nineteenth century with new stations and lines being constructed that served growing local communities in the Ovenden, Pellon and King Cross areas of the town. Improved rail links to the capital were also sought in the 1890s by extending the Midland Railway into the town and building a new station near to the Wards End area, but in spite of intense lobbying this failed.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Jennings, *Pennine Valley*, p.103.

<sup>18</sup> Hargreaves, *Halifax*, p.79.

<sup>19</sup> Jennings, *Pennine Valley*, pp.113-15.

<sup>20</sup> Hargreaves, *Halifax*, p.82.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p.140.

The local transport network was further improved in 1898 with the introduction of trams operated by the local council. They linked nearby communities with the popular retail centre that Halifax had become, drawing people in not just to shop but also to visit the increasing number of theatres and later cinemas. Trams continued to be central to local transport until they were withdrawn in the late 1930s in favour of buses.<sup>23</sup>

### **The development of industry and commerce from the mid-eighteenth century**

The Piece Hall in Halifax opened during 1779 when woollen and worsted manufacturing was still largely carried out by the domestic system. Exceptions were fulling, a method of cleaning the cloth, and the gig mills, where the nap was raised on fabrics. But the opening of the Piece Hall also coincided with the increasing mechanization of the textile industry. The putting out of domestic work from the area extended as far as Ribblesdale and north Yorkshire and local manufacturers and merchants had developed “a very sophisticated and extensive correspondence with houses in London and abroad.”<sup>24</sup> The industry developed so that both manufacturers and merchants were by the mid-eighteenth century working alongside each other and: “The fortunes that these merchants could accumulate were spectacular ... on a par with the money made by Halifax’s manufacturers.”<sup>25</sup> The local industry had changed from one where independent clothiers were central to the success of the trade, to one where large scale manufacturers and merchants were dominant.<sup>26</sup> The area saw water powered mills introduced in the late eighteenth century, around the time the cloth hall in Halifax opened; this was to fundamentally alter the trade, moving it from a home based industry to one that was increasingly factory based. By 1800 there were something like thirty two cotton spinning and five worsted mills in the Calder Valley. The greater number of

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p.141.

<sup>24</sup> Smail, J., (1994) *The Origins of Middle-Class Culture: Halifax, Yorkshire 1660-1780*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca. p.57.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p.69.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., p.80.

cotton mills at this time was due to the woollen and worsted industry being slower to automate its processes, in part due to technological problems.<sup>27</sup>

Steam power was introduced late into the area, probably due to the abundance of fast flowing streams, which allowed water powered technology to be exploited. However there were problems associated with water power: drought or flooding could stop production and the mills were often situated in places which were difficult to access. Nevertheless, the Calder Valley industry was to remain largely water powered in the early nineteenth century; by 1833 the Factories Enquiries Commission noted that of twenty eight mills, eighteen used water power, seven steam power, with the remaining three utilizing both. There followed rapid growth in the area's textile industry in the period 1833-6, succeeded by a depression up to the mid-1840s. The years 1850-61 in contrast were generally seen as prosperous, with many new textile mills constructed.<sup>28</sup>

Working conditions in the local textile mills caused some concern and became the subject of concerted attacks in the 1830s; Richard Oastler denounced Bradford's mills in the *Leeds Mercury*, whilst another correspondent claimed that the Halifax mills were even worse. However, by the 1850s a number of paternalistic employers had emerged, the Akroyds and Crossleys in Halifax and the Fieldens in Todmorden. They were part of a wider movement in the West Riding that ensured that at least some local mills were seen to be offering decent working conditions. Conversely, the lot of the remaining home workers declined as factory conditions improved.<sup>29</sup>

From the middle of the nineteenth century an important change was that Halifax began to develop as a more broadly based industrial town. Textiles remained the dominant industry, with around half the workforce women, and by the 1870s around a third of the town's total workforce were employed in the industry. But by the 1890s

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<sup>27</sup> Jennings, *Pennine Valley*, pp.107-08.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p.119-22.

<sup>29</sup> Hargreaves, *Halifax*, pp.95-9.

textiles were hit by foreign competition and tariffs, and concerns began to be expressed both locally and nationally for the future of the local industry. Whilst the traditional textile industry faced uncertain times new industries such as machine tools grew from being a support service to textile mills into an independent industry manufacturing a wide range of equipment, including lathes, planers and radial drills, which were exported worldwide. Carpet manufacturing, brewing, wire drawing and confectionery were just some of the other local industries.<sup>30</sup> This growth of the industrial base saw a corresponding increase in the population. The latter part of the nineteenth century saw Halifax become something of a boom town, even as textiles began a long decline.

Not just manufacturing expanded in the second half of the nineteenth century, there was a growth in financial services. Banking had developed in the eighteenth century, with many of the private banks in the area founded by textile merchants and manufacturers. For example, the Swaine Brothers had been involved in both worsted manufacturing and banking from around 1779.<sup>31</sup> In the nineteenth century a number of local banks expanded and the Yorkshire Penny Bank was established in 1871. The building society movement within the town also grew until Halifax had both the first and second largest societies in the country, which later merged to become the Halifax Building Society.<sup>32</sup>

In contrast, the inter-war years saw mixed fortunes for local industry, with periods of severe difficulties. Nevertheless, the town, with its wide industrial base, avoided the worst of the depression, unlike some single industry communities in the north of England. Textiles saw a drop in the number of people employed, but along with machine tools still remained one of the biggest employers. The service sector continued

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., pp.129-34.

<sup>31</sup> Rule, J., (1992) *The Vital Century: England's Developing Economy, 1714 – 1815*, Longmans, London. p.25.

<sup>32</sup> Hargreaves, *Halifax*, pp.135-39.

to grow and make up some of the losses from other industries. The coming of the Second World War saw many textile firms going over to war work.<sup>33</sup> The town had thus developed and maintained a diverse economy, although after 1918 the population had not grown, in fact it had started to fall, albeit slightly. The area did not share in the new industries of the 1930s, based on the growth of consumer electrical goods<sup>34</sup> From the 1950s the town continued to decline as a manufacturing centre, with services becoming more important. In 1951, 71% were employed in manufacturing with 25% in service industry; by 1991 this had changed to 38% and 58% respectively.<sup>35</sup>

### **The development of local government**

The growth of the industrial base of the town saw a progressive increase of the population, and to help cope with these changes local government was reorganized. The township structure was replaced in 1848 when the town became a municipal borough covering the area of the parliamentary constituency of 1832. The council consisted of a mayor, ten aldermen and thirty councillors elected in six wards. The first council election was a triumph for nonconformists with only a handful of Churchmen elected. The Tory *Halifax Guardian* had argued for a non-political council, no doubt fearing what was delivered, one dominated by the Liberals; it had urged its readers to put aside party politics and embrace the “abandonment of all party or political feeling in the election of councillors.” It suggested that as this had not happened, the granting of borough status could turn out to be “one of the greatest curses that ever came to Halifax.”<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., pp.192-3.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., pp.135-39.

<sup>35</sup> Noble, S., and Burkitt, B., ‘De-Industrialisation in Calderdale and the changes it made in local employment, 1921-1991’, in *Transactions of the Halifax Antiquarian Society*, 2007, Volume 15 new series, pp.145-57.

<sup>36</sup> *Halifax Guardian*, 3 June 1848.

The town's continued growth saw the council becoming responsible for supplying, amongst other things, water, gas, baths, cemeteries and libraries. It became a county borough in 1889. The borough's boundaries were extended four times up to 1902, but when the council sought to extend them again in the 1930s, to include a further 52,535 people, this was opposed by the West Riding County Council, fearing a substantial loss of revenue, and the expansion failed to be carried through. But the council continued to supply water, electricity and gas to a number of adjoining authorities up to 1939.<sup>37</sup>

### **The case study approach**

In the early part of the eighteenth century Halifax was an area that impressed visitors. Daniel Defoe was moved by the industry of the people and as Rule noted "readers of his celebrated *Tour* feel an extra surge of energy when he comes to the district around Halifax."<sup>38</sup> The continued growth of the textile industry had by 1750 seen Halifax become an important town both regionally and nationally in respect of its increasingly dominant position in the wool and worsted trade. Whilst this dominance did not last, Halifax, as we have noted, continued to grow, becoming a large manufacturing town with a diverse range of industries and commerce. By 1901 its population had grown to make it the sixth largest town in Yorkshire. It was an archetypal nineteenth-century West Riding manufacturing town, bearing a very close physical resemblance to its near neighbours Bradford and Huddersfield.

Halifax offers the opportunity of a case study covering the whole of the time period chosen, something that is not the case in towns which were largely created in the middle of the nineteenth century, such as Middlesbrough, Barrow-in-Furness or Crewe or indeed those whose main period of growth came only with industrialization, like Bradford. We can examine leisure in relation to an increasing population, patronage,

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<sup>37</sup> Hargreaves, *Halifax*, p.161.

<sup>38</sup> Rule, *The Vital Century*, p.104.

class, improving transport links, increasing mechanization of industry and the introduction of the factory system, in what was already a thriving and important community in the mid-eighteenth century. Many social historians have identified the period 1750 to 1950 as the significant era in the development of modern leisure time pursuits. This case study seeks to add to our understanding of the development of commercial leisure, and in particular will examine if Halifax was typical in the way commercial leisure developed or whether particular local conditions influenced that development.

The benefits of a case study approach include “a more in-depth examination of the subject with which to confirm or contest received generalizations”.<sup>39</sup> Such studies can also help illustrate the diversity of local experience and redress the balance from the emphasis on the metropolitan nature of commercial leisure and also examine whether commercial leisure had its centre in London and then radiated out from the capital to the provinces.<sup>40</sup> Many books on the music hall and theatre, for example, are almost entirely focused on London; yet local studies have suggested that the towns and cities of the north of England saw music halls established by the early 1830s and that these were generated from within the locality rather than following a lead given from London.<sup>41</sup> But the case study should also be seen as worthwhile in itself, as Smail noted in his own case study of Halifax, in which he examined the rise of the middle class: “To argue for the importance of local history is to do more than simply offer the history of a particular community as an exemplar of a larger process.”<sup>42</sup> Rather, local history was fundamental to his theme of class formation.

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<sup>39</sup> Jennings, P., (1995) *The Public House in Bradford, 1770-1970*, Keele University Press, Keele. p.14.

<sup>40</sup> Walton, J., and Walvin, J., (1983) *Leisure in Britain 1780 – 1939*, Manchester University Press, Manchester. p.2.

<sup>41</sup> Bailey, P., (1978) *Leisure and Class in Victorian England: Rational recreation and the contest for social control*, Methuen, London. p.32.

<sup>42</sup> Smail, *The Origins of Middle-Class Culture*, p.14.

## Sources and methods

The main primary sources used in this study are newspapers, both regional and local. In the eighteenth century an early local paper was published in Halifax, the *Union Journal and Halifax Advertiser*, copies of which survive for the years 1759 to 1760. It is not clear why it ceased publication, or whether these dates represent the period when it was in print or simply the only copies that remain.<sup>43</sup> By the early part of the nineteenth century another local paper was published: *The Halifax Journal*. Copies for this paper are available between 1801 and 1811, before it too ceased publication, the publishers J. and B.K. Rogers selling out. It was to be replaced by the *Wakefield and Halifax Journal*. This paper, which has not been used, is described as carrying very little local news, being made up largely of stories taken from other regional and national newspapers.<sup>44</sup> The next local paper that is available specifically for the area is the *Halifax Commercial Chronicle* published between 1829 and 1830 followed by the *Halifax Guardian*, which was started in 1832 and continued until 1921, when it was merged with its rival, the *Halifax Courier*, which had begun printing some twenty one years later in 1853. There was also the *Halifax Express* that was published between 1831 and 1841. All the above were weekly papers; and this continued until the *Halifax Courier* became a daily paper in 1892. Due to the lacuna in the eighteenth and early parts of the nineteenth century the *Leeds Mercury* was also consulted. Bradford Central Library has copies for most of the period 1738 to 1852, although some are missing. The *Leeds Intelligencer* in Leeds Reference Library was also consulted for specific events where copies of the *Leeds Mercury* were unavailable. The Halifax Library does not have copies of Leeds newspapers.

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<sup>43</sup> The British Library newspaper catalogue confirms the dates of existing papers. During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries there were other short lived papers published in the town.

<sup>44</sup> Taylor, K., (2008) *The Making of Wakefield 1801 – 1900*, Wharncliffe Books, Barnsley. pp.64-5.

These eighteenth century papers were not local as we understand, concentrating on a town or city and its surrounding area, rather they were more regional in their content, something which was to continue well into the next century. Both the early *Leeds Mercury* and the eighteenth century Halifax paper, the *Union Journal*, sought to appeal to a regional audience. They tended to be advertising sheets, which carried national news and some topics of local and regional interest. They generally did not carry editorials in the period before 1800. However, they do contain information relating to leisure: the *Leeds Mercury* carries advertisements for the Leeds theatre, musical concerts and sporting events across the county of Yorkshire and sometimes beyond. The sporting events covered included horse racing and cock fighting; these were sports for which gambling was central and also involved substantial prize money. Whilst the information on leisure in the eighteenth century newspapers is limited, there is enough to allow a realistic evaluation of local and regional leisure activities.

The early papers tended to make their profits more from advertising revenues than sales of copies and were also subject to taxation, and, as stated, in the eighteenth century they did not carry editorials that sought to either explain events or influence the reader. It is difficult, but not impossible, to find evidence of what people were actually thinking about leisure in these papers, as there are some letters voicing opinions on various subjects associated with leisure. A point to be borne in mind is that newspapers were not likely to be critical of the leisure pursuits they carried adverts for, especially as in the eighteenth century many of the pastimes were funded by the aristocracy and the middling sort.<sup>45</sup>

The town's second paper, the *Halifax Journal*, was similar to the earlier paper, although it did contain reviews of local theatrical and musical performances. It also contained what might be termed embryonic editorials and also printed letters which give

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<sup>45</sup> The extent of aristocratic involvement is the subject of some speculation amongst historians.

an insight into the thinking of some of the people in the town. The paper positions itself on the side of ‘polite society’, as we shall see; it is strong in its opposition to some traditional pursuits, especially those involving blood sports, whilst it generally remains positive in its reporting of the town’s theatre. The latter is not surprising, as the theatre was funded by the local elite, whilst the nonconformist element in local society would generally welcome its stance on the rougher pursuits. A case, perhaps, of the paper treading an expedient path so as not to antagonize its readers?

The regional and local press eventually became advocates for interest groups, political parties and particular causes. It seems that the *Leeds Mercury* led the way in this development, when Edward Baines took control early in the nineteenth century. He was through personal experience anti-Tory and although an Anglican, most of his personal relationships were with nonconformists and under his leadership the paper developed a Whig-Liberal stance and also introduced editorials. Baines was a person who did not smoke, drink or go to the theatre. The *Leeds Mercury* became what might be termed a crusading paper and one that influenced the development of the press nationally, at one time it sold more copies than the *Manchester Guardian*. It was the *Leeds Mercury* that exposed the government spy ‘Oliver’<sup>46</sup> and the paper supported the repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts in 1828 and the Catholic Emancipation Act in 1829.<sup>47</sup>

The *Halifax Guardian*, which started in 1832, was avowedly Tory, whilst the *Halifax Express*, which was printed from 1833, supported the Liberals. The extent of the *Halifax Guardian’s* support of the Conservatives can be seen in its reporting of the marriage of Queen Victoria to Albert and how it was celebrated in the town. It noted that: “In our

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<sup>46</sup> William Oliver: informant on radicals and agent provocateur, he worked as a government spy for Lord Sidmouth (1757-1844) whilst he was Home Secretary 1812-22.

<sup>47</sup> Read, D., (1961) *Press and people 1790-1850: opinion in three English cities*, Arnold, London. pp. 76-8.

Whig ridden borough the rejoicings were on a limited scale ... dinner at the Old Cock ... and with this solitary exception the town, as a town, took no further notice of the Royal nuptials.” It goes on to state that the town had a funereal air and but for the actions of “a few honest, loyal Conservatives the day would have passed off without a single sign of rejoicings”. It lambasted the dinner at the Old Cock, as it had been organized by the local Whig-Liberals and noted that the toast proposed to the Queen Dowager (widow of the late king) and a person “the Whigs had never failed to traduce and malign” was met with complete silence. The fact that a speech made at the dinner sought to promote the new Poor Law was seen as an opportunity to remind the population of the inmates of the workhouse “whose joyless existence” was not improved by an increase in their food allowance to celebrate the day. The article continues in the same vein, the dinners given in Tory public houses were a great success, as was the ball at the Fountain Inn where a local brewer gave his employees what was described as good English cheer. According to the reporting in the *Halifax Guardian*, the only good things about the day had been promoted by the Conservatives.<sup>48</sup> This piece of journalism clearly shows that not everything written in the press can be taken as fact; there is no doubt that the reporting of the event is a highly partial account of the day, more a piece of propaganda aimed at slighting the paper’s political opponents. The report of the marriage in the *Halifax Express* appeared to be of a different event entirely; it reported that: “The day of Her Majesty’s nuptials was observed, in this town, as a partial holiday. Most of the shops were closed; and most, if not all, of the mills gave up working at noon. There was a public dinner ... Whigs and Tories alike merging their differences”. The rest of the report was devoted to the formalities of the dinner, which was reported as being good humoured, with none of the alleged slights to members of royalty that the *Halifax Guardian* had noted. A factor that

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<sup>48</sup> *Halifax Guardian*, 15 February 1840.

could perhaps have put something of a damper on the day was the time of year when the marriage was celebrated, February, and also that there was a trade depression at the time.<sup>49</sup> After the demise of the *Halifax Express*, and no doubt because the *Halifax Guardian* was a Tory paper, the local Liberals were influential in eventually setting up the *Halifax Courier*.

The way the newspapers reported leisure changed over the period. Initially adverts, letters and brief reports of sport and activities such as concerts and plays were found. However, as the nineteenth century progresses the local press becomes a better source for the investigation of leisure provision and its increasing commercialization. By the later part of the period there was analysis of leisure, especially the theatre and cinema, with detailed commentaries on films and plays that were being presented locally. There was also detailed reporting of both local and national sport. In fact the newspapers were quick to respond as the new codified sports of the 1870s developed, devoting much space, not just to reporting on matches, but also commenting on wider aspects of the game.

The local press can also be used to track the development and impact of leisure on the built environment of the town. Many of the buildings that went to make up the townscape in the latter part of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were related to commercial aspects of leisure and their development was closely reported. The theatres of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries are good examples of this and their openings, and that of the late Victorian concert hall, were favourably reported. The development of the cinema in the Edwardian and inter-war years met with similar approval.

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<sup>49</sup> *Halifax Express*, 15 February 1840.

Using newspapers as sounding boards for local concerns regarding the impact of new leisure pursuits such as music hall, theatre and cinema is also possible. When the town had two papers, each had a very different way of recording political events, but they tended to produce similar reports relating to leisure. It is worth remembering though that leisure time pursuits have often met with a hostile reaction from certain sections of society and the press has had to follow a cautious path between the puritanical and more liberal elements of its readership, whilst at the same time not upsetting its advertisers.

The method used was to examine all the early papers, mainly because these early papers were comparatively short, but then to sample those from the period after the establishment of the *Halifax Guardian*. This was carried out over intervals of five years from 1835 to 1950 looking at the whole year, which allows us to examine seasonal variations in leisure, and comes to a total of 24 years. It was felt that a five year sampling period was manageable within the context of the study and would give a satisfactory result. Towards the end of the nineteenth century Todmorden, Brighouse and, for a time, Sowerby Bridge produced local newspapers, and these were also sampled.<sup>50</sup> One of the problems relating to this periodic method is that significant events may be missed; however other works can help to overcome this, as we shall see, for instance in the construction of the town's enclosed racecourse and on the establishment of sports clubs. It is evident that information on women's commercial leisure is limited as indeed are the largely all male pastimes such as snooker and dog racing, although the latter did attract some women. Women's leisure time included non-commercial activities which were not likely to be reported, such as socializing with friends and neighbours.

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<sup>50</sup> At the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries Todmorden had two weekly newspapers the *Todmorden News* and the *Todmorden Herald*; only the former was sampled.

Other primary sources used include those available in the West Yorkshire archives, although within the Calderdale section the material available on commercial leisure is limited. Much of the information in the archives relating to the music and concert halls, theatres, cinemas and other places used for commercial leisure are in fact building plans, generally for improvements made to the buildings. Although the archival sources specifically on commercial leisure are limited, there is material from the Halifax Harmonic Society and the Mechanics' Institute which impinges on aspects of commercial leisure. A number of business directories are also available, from which much information has been drawn, beginning with *Bailey's Northern Directory* for the eighteenth century. Other regional directories and national directories such as the *Kinematograph Year Book* were also sampled, the latter for detailed local information on the cinema.<sup>51</sup>

Initially the secondary sources on leisure both nationally and in Halifax appeared to be more than adequate, however further examination revealed much of the material to be of limited use. For instance on sport, there are many useful texts, both articles and books, although the popular sports books that are crammed with statistics, player and team profiles, are of limited use. The quality of books on local sport is variable, the local rugby league club has a number of well presented books by the same author, Andrew Hardcastle,<sup>52</sup> but the local soccer team has been less well served. Apart from the football codes there is generally little on local sport, and certain games such as knur and spell popular in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, has seen little written on the game either locally or nationally.<sup>53</sup> Works on the public house in Halifax are similarly limited, with the exception of references in Robinson's work on brewing in the

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<sup>51</sup> The Kinematograph Year Books are difficult to find. Birmingham Central Library has a full set.

<sup>52</sup> Hardcastle, A., (1986) *The Thrum Hall Story*, Hardcastle, Halifax. Also: Hardcastle, A., (1999) *Halifax Rugby League Club: The First Hundred Years*, Tempus, Stroud.

<sup>53</sup> A plebeian game peculiar to the north where a bat, similar to a golf club, is used to hit a small wooden ball, the object being to hit the ball further than opponents.

area.<sup>54</sup> One recent book on the public house in the area, not used in this study, is aimed at the nostalgia market and is largely a book of photographs of the area's hostelrys.<sup>55</sup>

Numerous books on the theatre are available, but many are popular histories. They tend to be, particularly those on the music hall and variety theatre, anecdotal, sentimental and largely about London. There is a lot of information available on the cinema nationally, but it is an area that has yet to be explored by local historians in any depth.

### **Main themes in the history of leisure**

The study of leisure has been driven by the growth of social history. This rise of social history was a response to the domination of the subject by constitutional, political and diplomatic history, which was concerned with people as members of a state. Social history, in contrast, would be a history of the people, one which “would reconstruct the lives of all the people” and in so doing reach out to a wider audience.<sup>56</sup> The growth of the subject has been phenomenal. Harold Perkin noted that social history hardly existed in 1962; up to this time the subject had been seen as less important than traditional approaches, having no chairs or university departments.<sup>57</sup> But by 1983 Asa Briggs was able to claim that: “Social history has now become a favourite kind of history ... it has attracted more and more serious study.” He also defined the subject and highlighted some of the problems faced by social historians: “For me social history is the history of society ... It is concerned with structures and with processes of change ... Much evidence has been lost: what has survived is, in part, a matter of accident.”<sup>58</sup> Briggs, in

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<sup>54</sup> Robinson, ‘The Emergence of the Common Brewer’, pp.70-107.

<sup>55</sup> Gee, S., (2008) *Halifax Pubs*, The History Press, Stroud.

<sup>56</sup> Wilson, A., (1993) *Rethinking Social History. English Society 1570-1920 and its Interpretation*, Manchester University Press, Manchester. pp.9-10.

<sup>57</sup> MacRaid, D., and Taylor, A., (2004) *Social Theory and Social History*, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke. p.9.

<sup>58</sup> Briggs, A., (1994) II Ed., *A Social History of England*, BCA / Weidenfeld & Nicolson, London. pp.9-10.

his all embracing social history of Britain, does include a review of leisure through the ages, but by the early 1980s, when his book was published, leisure had developed its own corpus within the wider field of social history, a body of work that has continued to grow.

Within that corpus, commercialization was identified quite early as a key theme by J.H. Plumb.<sup>59</sup> The central points that Plumb makes are that the commercialization of leisure is associated with the increasing economic spending power of the middling sort and the growth of a consumer driven society in the eighteenth century. He concentrates on certain aspects of leisure, and makes no mention, for example, of the inn or alehouse, which in the eighteenth century was the most important centre for leisure in most communities. Rather he focuses on the printed word, the rise of the theatre, and the town as a centre for leisure activity, especially with the development of assembly rooms and of spa towns. The latter developed as places which provided leisure experiences alongside their original *raison d'être* as places of recuperation and recovery. Plumb does not examine the leisure pursuits of the lower ranks of society. He also fails to consider that commercial leisure was not an eighteenth century phenomenon. In his recent overview of the subject, Peter Borsay confirms that there has always been a commercial aspect to leisure, reaching back to the middle ages. For instance, he notes that “the theatre and alehouses before 1660 suggest a recreational culture in which at least sections were already well attuned to providing for the market.”<sup>60</sup> Since Plumb’s early work, as we shall see, studies have broadened to include all sections of society.

Commercialization is the central theme explored in this work but a range of other themes, or variables, in the development of leisure have been identified, some of which

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<sup>59</sup> Plumb, J.H., (1982) “Commercialization and Society”, in McKendrick, N., Brewer, J., and Plumb, J.H., *The Birth of a Consumer Society: The Commercialization of Eighteenth Century England*, Europa Publications Ltd. London.

<sup>60</sup> Borsay, P., (2006) *A History of Leisure*, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke. p.22.

are clearly linked to it. These include the idea of a traditional leisure culture, class, changes to working hours, the increase of holidays, especially with pay, a growing population increasingly concentrated in urban communities, and levels of disposable incomes, all of which impacted upon people's leisure time and how they spent it

Much of the leisure in the eighteenth century revolved around traditional pursuits, including blood sports, games such as cricket and early versions of football, a sport which had little in common with the game played today, which is largely governed by rules formulated in the late nineteenth century. The inn or alehouse was the most important centre in most communities for leisure activities and not just as a place for drinking as "public houses played a central role in the economic and social life of the country."<sup>61</sup>

In the eighteenth century fairs were complemented throughout the year by other traditions such as, for instance, Plough Monday, which fell on the first Monday after the Twelfth Day of Christmas and involved drinking and various high spirited diversions; Shrove Tuesday was the other main winter holiday, whilst May Day celebrated the coming of spring.<sup>62</sup>

Malcolmson, in a key early work on leisure pursuits, notes that the Reformation had seen a change not only in religious but also in secular behaviour, which impacted upon leisure. The Puritanical view was that much leisure activity was rooted in a Popish and pagan past leading to temptation and a desecration of the Sabbath. Leisure pursuits were also seen as a distraction from basic social duties such as hard work, thrift, personal restraint and devotion to the family and God. This view was clearly not shared by all: "Puritanism was always a minority movement and many of its more rigorous ethical

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<sup>61</sup> Jennings, P., (2007) *The Local: A History of the English Pub*, Tempus, Stroud. p.39.

<sup>62</sup> Malcolmson, R.W., (1973) *Popular Recreations in English Society 1700-1850*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge. pp.15-30.

views were uncongenial to the bulk of the population.”<sup>63</sup> Many Saint’s days were lost as holidays, but the principal holidays associated with Christmas, Shrovetide, Easter, May Day and Whitsuntide remained because they were rooted in the agricultural, religious and seasonal cycle.<sup>64</sup> Poole argues that industrialization did not obliterate the wakes holiday<sup>65</sup> traditionally held in the north of England, as the factory owners “incorporated it in the new order”.<sup>66</sup>

Popular pastimes that could be found at the fairs and festivals included various sports such as cricket and football. Alongside these activities physical contests such as cudgelling, backsword and singlesticks were played out, encounters which involved contestants beating each other with sticks, in which blows to the head were common and the winner was considered to be the contestant that drew first blood. It is not clear if these activities were widespread or contested by a minority of the population who specialized in this particular form of brutality. Horse racing and blood sports such as cock fighting were often a part of an annual fair, certainly at the beginning of, and in many places throughout, the century.<sup>67</sup>

Whilst Malcolmsom records the various leisure pursuits undertaken by the common people, he also comments on the gradual undermining of those activities, particularly through work and religion. Manufacturers such as the Midlands potter, Josiah Wedgwood, complained about the effect of absenteeism caused by workers taking traditional holidays. Evangelicalism was concerned that “damnation went to those who neglected their souls and instead concentrated their attention on worldly affairs”.<sup>68</sup> They were referring in this case to popular pastimes in a similar argument to that employed by Puritans a century before. Legislation too was brought in aimed at curbing the

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid., p.13.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., pp.6-13.

<sup>65</sup> Wakes holidays had originally been religious celebrations usually related to the dedication of the local church.

<sup>66</sup> Poole, R., ‘Oldham Wakes’ in Walton, *Leisure in Britain*, p.72.

<sup>67</sup> Malcolmsom, *Popular Recreations*, pp.34-49.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., pp.96-101.

pastimes of the poor, such as blood sports, which were increasingly seen as leading to social disruption. For Malcolmson then the change from an agrarian to an industrial society led to a concerted attack on the pastimes of the poor. This ultimately produced, he argued, a leisure vacuum in the early part of the nineteenth century, with only the pleasures of alcohol remaining to the labouring classes.<sup>69</sup>

Some historians questioned Malcolmson's analysis and approached leisure from perspectives such as time, class, culture and the supply of leisure.<sup>70</sup> Time spent at work had a major impact on leisure. In the eighteenth century much work was home based or focused on small workshops, and the hours of work tended to be self regulatory. The general consensus is that in the eighteenth century the working day lasted from six in the morning until six at night, with two hours off for meal times; although it is difficult to arrive at conclusive hours and "individual areas experienced different patterns of labour and leisure".<sup>71</sup> However this method of working was increasingly replaced by factory based work and in the early part of the nineteenth-century factory workers could work from six until seven or eight at night with just an hour off for a meal. Cunningham tracks legislation as a method of controlling the long hours worked: the 1833 Factory Act saw a 69 hour week established, followed in 1847 by the Ten Hours Act. By the middle of the century many worked a 60 hour week, although miners, agricultural workers and domestic servants could work much longer, which meant correspondingly less time for leisure. Further reductions in working hours were concentrated into three periods: the early 1870s, 1919-20 and 1946-49. The nine hour day was achieved for some workers in the first period, the eight hour day in the second and in the third the normal hours worked during the week fell from 47.1 to 44.6 hours, although some

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> Borsay, *A History of Leisure*.

<sup>71</sup> Voth, H. J., (2000) *Time and work in England 1750-1830*, Oxford University Press, Oxford. pp.10-11.

leisure time was eroded by the working of overtime.<sup>72</sup> The reduction in the hours worked, as we shall see, had a significant impact on the provision of commercial leisure.

Not all working people were treated the same. Hours worked by the professions and the civil service had until the late nineteenth century been a six hour day. Clerks generally worked nine until five. Businessmen in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries tended to work long hours until nine to five too became the norm for them in the latter part of the nineteenth century. Shop workers did not fare so well and often worked long hours, before the 1911 Act gave them a half day off. Bank employees in the late nineteenth century tended to parallel the hours of the better paid working class but were getting six to 18 days holiday a year depending on their length of service.<sup>73</sup>

Holidays, as we have already touched briefly upon, had been in decline in both the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. They had tended to be seen as particular days, rather than blocks of days, apart from the wakes holidays.<sup>74</sup> It was only towards the end of the nineteenth century that holidays began to be granted widely, through the Bank Holiday Acts of 1871 and 1875. In 1899 the Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants negotiated a week's paid holiday after five year's service. By the 1920s an estimated one million workers were covered by some form of holiday agreement. This increased in the 1930s to see three million manual workers and four and a half million non-manual workers benefiting. But it was not until the 1950s that two weeks holiday a year

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<sup>72</sup> Cunningham, H., 'Leisure and Culture', in Thompson, F.M.L., Ed., (1990) *The Cambridge Social History of Britain, 1750-1950: Volume 2 People and Their Environment*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge. pp.279-281.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., pp.287-88.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., pp.283-85.

became widespread, largely due to government legislation passed on the eve of war but not implemented until peace.<sup>75</sup>

Cunningham thus identified leisure time available both in terms of hours worked each week and also in holidays taken during the year. But he also examined leisure cultures, for example of the 'rough' and 'respectable', in which rough members of each rank or class had more in common with each other than with the respectable members of their own group. This is now generally discounted as being too crude a measure. But boundaries of class, gender and age tend to be reproduced in leisure pursuits, and for Cunningham leisure can reflect a way of life and the values and attitudes embodied in that way of life. The leisure classes, for instance, can clearly be defined in the London season, which in the eighteenth century involved something like 300 to 400 families, and which by the end of the next century had increased to over 4,000 families, participating in what was a generally exclusive social calendar, although the nouveaux riches were allowed to buy their way into it. The London season was a clearly demarcated time; the rest of the year was spent at the country house, where leisure pursuits based on shooting, fishing and hunting were de rigueur.<sup>76</sup> These leisure classes included the aristocracy, the gentry and increasingly the plutocracy. In Halifax a member of the Crossley family, who had made their wealth from manufacturing carpets, bought an estate in Suffolk. In the process they removed themselves from the locality where they had made their fortune, abandoning, apart from a seat on the board, their manufacturing background and adopting the lifestyle of the nobility; in fact they were later ennobled taking their title from the estate they had bought, Somerleyton.<sup>77</sup>

Another element of the theme of class centres on those in the middle. There was a rise in the numbers of what had been referred to as the middling sort in the late

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid., pp.285-86.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., pp.290-94.

<sup>77</sup> Hargreaves, *Halifax*, p.144.

eighteenth century, central as we saw to the consumer revolution. The nineteenth century saw the rise of an urban middle class, with a distinctive culture, who were often to take on the patronage, previously the concern of the aristocracy, of provincial theatre and music. In Halifax, as we shall see, the influence of the aristocracy was negligible as there was no resident nobility. As the nineteenth century progressed, the middle classes were to become more centred on the home and tended to view leisure as an opportunity to allow people to restore themselves for work.<sup>78</sup>

Class was an influence in the pursuit of sport. Formerly associated with rough pastimes and gambling, it was transformed when games such as football were codified and played within agreed rules. There is evidence of middle class moves to keep working class competitors out. The Amateur Athletics Association banned the working classes in 1866 from joining and vestiges of this thinking can be seen in the schism in Rugby and the founding of the semi-professional Northern Rugby Football Union, later to become known as the Rugby League, which allowed broken time payments for working class men. This ideology that sought to keep the classes separate, particularly on the sports field, would be generally, but not completely, abandoned in favour of a rhetoric of class harmony. But in reality, as in rugby and soccer, the middle and upper classes tended to withdraw, rather than play alongside the working classes. Middle class leisure was thus seen not only as clearly identifiable, but something which was increasingly played out within the boundaries of the class.<sup>79</sup>

Working class leisure is described in part as something which can be examined in terms of the religious and the secular. Secular reformists tried to avoid what they viewed as the emotional extremism of the religious. Their thinking was underpinned by a belief in education, self help and mutual associations, which became evident in

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<sup>78</sup> Stoddart, B., and Sandiford, K.A.P., (1998) *The Imperial Game: Cricket, Culture and Society*, Manchester University Press, Manchester. p.10.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.294-99.

organizations such as the Co-Op, the Workers Educational Association and the Clarion movement. The religious reformist movements had encouraged the working class to throw off their old cultural associations, not least the public house; temperance was to become central to the religious movement. In fact, both the secular and religious movements sought to remove the pub from its place in working class life.<sup>80</sup>

Cunningham is clear though that most working class people followed their own culture, which accepted much of the above thinking but which rejected the abandonment of the public house. He identified what he describes as an artisan culture “generated within the class, not one imposed from outside”. He suggests this particular culture, which was specific to parts of the working class, had disappeared by the end of the First World War, becoming part of a more general working class culture.<sup>81</sup> However proof of an artisan culture is hard to find in Halifax, a town where you might expect to find some evidence of one, as by the end of the nineteenth century the town had many highly skilled tradesmen working in industries such as machine tools. There is though anecdotal support for tradesmen maintaining pay differentials between themselves, semi-skilled and unskilled workers up to the late twentieth century. Class in various ways has then played an important part in the analysis of leisure, although the idea of an overarching theory of class remains difficult and as Bailey points out Cunningham himself avoids “full frontal theoreticism”.<sup>82</sup>

Linked with class analysis is the idea of social control, the regulation of both individual and group behaviour by the ruling elite.<sup>83</sup> This idea of the submission of certain groups to new standards, as with the idea of the industrial revolution as a force that destroyed the pre-industrial world, is now not given a great deal of support. Other

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid., p.300.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., pp.301-02.

<sup>82</sup> Bailey, P., ‘The Politics and Poetics of Modern British Leisure. A late twentieth century review’, in *Rethinking History*, 1999, Volume 6 / 113, pp.131-175.

<sup>83</sup> Donajgrodzki, A.P., Ed., (1977) *Social Control in Nineteenth Century Britain*, Croom Helm, London.

historians, Briggs for example, noted that people were not coerced into factories.<sup>84</sup> There is also the evidence, as noted, of the resilience of working-class leisure culture to external forces for change. The picture is more one of gradual change, with the middle to late Victorian period as one which saw a rise in real incomes and increased free time as working hours were reduced, which impacted upon leisure and its increasing provision, especially commercial leisure.<sup>85</sup>

The processes of industrialization and urbanization were stressed, for example, by James Walvin, who examined leisure in the period 1830-1950, concentrating mainly on Birmingham and Manchester. Walvin paints a bleak picture of leisure in the 1830s and 1840s, stating that the forces of “urbanisation and industrialisation had produced a society which, by the 1840s, was qualitatively different from any previous human society. England was becoming urban and industrial; few aspects of social life remained unaffected.” As he asserts: “The leisure occupations of the English people were fundamentally transformed in the nineteenth century by the process of urbanisation.”<sup>86</sup> He argues that changes in leisure pursuits and recreation were seen at their most damaging in society in the cities, but that these were just a part of wider and deep rooted changes in the economy.<sup>87</sup> Walvin mentions the lack of open space in the cities as something that denied outdoor leisure opportunities to people, but this would be a debatable point in a town like Halifax and many of the West Yorkshire communities, which have always had easy access to the surrounding countryside, if perhaps not always legally. He does though state that the picture was variable and that in some areas old pursuits and pastimes survived well into the new century. However, he also maintains that given that the new factories worked Monday to Saturday, the

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<sup>84</sup> Briggs, *A Social History of England*, pp.212-15.

<sup>85</sup> Cunningham, ‘Leisure and Culture’, pp.335-9.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, p.161.

<sup>87</sup> Walvin, J., (1978) *Leisure and Society 1830 -1950*, Longmans, London. p.3.

people employed in them had little time for leisure, certainly at the beginning of the period he examined.<sup>88</sup>

A further theme explored by Walvin is that of the impact of new technologies on leisure, especially the railway and its promotion of the seaside excursion and holiday and the horse races. Executions also featured in the railway companies' timetables, until they were ended in public in 1868, as did trips to prize fights. New technologies thus often gave a boost to more traditional pursuits.<sup>89</sup>

The work of historians such as Malcolmson, Cunningham and Walvin thus provides an insight into some of the most important themes in the development of leisure nationally over the period 1750-1950. The most recent synthesis on leisure by Peter Borsay covers a wider period, starting at 1500 and continuing up to the beginning of the twenty-first century. The book is ordered under themes such as state, class and identities, although some aspects of leisure are given brief treatment, cinema for instance. None of these works, however, are concerned purely with the commercial aspects of leisure. There is a body of work, however, that covers particular examples of commercial leisure, which we shall examine. Some such as the public house, theatre and cinema are largely by their nature entirely commercial and have comprehensive works covering them. However, many works on the theatre, as noted, are almost exclusively about London and so their use is limited. This study aims to focus on the theme of the commercialization of leisure and it is this theme that I now turn in more detail.

### **The development of commercial leisure**

In this section we will examine the growth of commercial leisure, both nationally and highlighting the Halifax case over the period and how it changed from something that was largely local and entrepreneurial, to an industry controlled by regional and national

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<sup>88</sup> Ibid., pp.4-5.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., pp.6-14.

organizations. For instance, by the twentieth century pubs were owned, almost wholly, by a diminishing number of breweries operating on an industrial scale. Similarly theatres and cinemas were generally operated by highly capitalized organizations. Sport was also transformed and included amateur as well as professional clubs, although these professional clubs tended to be run for the sake of the sport, rather than simply for profit, an important caveat to the thesis of commercialization, as we shall see. Whilst this study is concerned with the growth of commercial leisure it is worth remembering that the profound changes in how people spent their spare time during this period did not always involve spending money. However those pursuits are not the focus of this work.

As we have seen some historians have suggested that prior to the nineteenth century and the mechanization of industry people generally enjoyed “a self regulated work discipline which enabled them to take days off ... then work late into the night in order to catch up lost time.”<sup>90</sup> Leisure time was largely rooted in traditional seasonal festivals with the public house being the centre for regular socialising. The rise of the factory system required a compliant workforce, prepared to work regular hours and with suitably disciplined leisure pursuits; popular sports and pastimes were thus moved against.<sup>91</sup> However, is this far too simple an explanation of a complex series of changes? As we have already noted Plumb’s thesis is that leisure was being transformed by an emerging middle class who were creating a commercial leisure culture that was accessible to all who had money in a society where “the appearance of a gentleman was ... sufficient to make him one”.<sup>92</sup> It was this emerging leisure culture, based around the consumer, which would be transformed over the nineteenth century to serve the needs of

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<sup>90</sup> Wright, D.G., and Jowitt, J.A., (1981) *Victorian Bradford*, Bradford Metropolitan Council, Bradford. p.200.

<sup>91</sup> Walvin, *Leisure and Society*, pp.9-10.

<sup>92</sup> Langford, P., (1989) *A Polite and Commercial People: England 1727- 1783*, Oxford University Press, Oxford. p.66.

a growing, and largely working class, population that had both increasing leisure time and higher incomes.

Information on eighteenth century sport in Halifax has, apart from cockfighting, proved to be limited. However, this does not mean that a varied range of sports were not a part of the regular social life of the town and parish. Griffin has pointed to widespread blood sports and traditional pastimes throughout the surrounding West Riding in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.<sup>93</sup> However the response from communities toward these customary pursuits during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries was diverse. In her study of Bristol, Helen Meller, noted how bull baiting continued into the 1830s with the support of the local authority.<sup>94</sup> However she does suggest that Bristol was different from the northern industrial towns, being a cosmopolitan port and also a centre where people visited to enjoy its amenities.<sup>95</sup> In Halifax their elimination started before the nineteenth century; as we will see they were already being referred to in the past tense by the 1780s, suggesting that the local elite had abandoned them, and local press reports by the early years of the nineteenth century were entirely negative.

A recurring theme in the provision of commercial leisure is that of the conflicting social responses from within classes regarding the suitability of commercial leisure. Blood sports were no different. Samuel Pepys writing in the seventeenth century noted that cockfighting attracted people of all classes, although he was not a supporter.<sup>96</sup> Daniel Defoe some years later wrote that it was “a remnant of the barbarous customs of this island”.<sup>97</sup> Dr. Johnson was of a similar opinion: “Cocking and bear baiting may raise the spirit of the company just as drinking does, but they will never improve the

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<sup>93</sup> Griffin, E., (2005) *England's Revelry: A History of Popular Sports and Pastimes, 1660-1830*, Oxford University Press, Oxford. p.149.

<sup>94</sup> Meller, H., (1976) *Leisure and the Changing City, 1870-1914*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London. pp.207-8.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, p.43.

<sup>96</sup> Latham, R., Ed., (1996) *Pepys's Diary Volume I: 1660-1663*, Folio Society, London. p.333.

<sup>97</sup> Scott, G.R., (1983) II Ed., *The History of Cockfighting*, Triplegate Ltd., Hindhead. p.140.

conversation of those who take part in them.”<sup>98</sup> However the blood sports supported by the poor, through a combination of factors, fell from favour and were finally legislated against. There may have been local plebeian attempts to pursue blood sports, mainly cockfighting, beyond the eighteenth century, but reports are imprecise.

The evidence of other forms of popular leisure in the eighteenth century being moved against locally, such as fairs and other travelling amusements, suggests that whilst they may have been unpopular with some, due to their relationship with drinking and associated rowdy behaviour which could occur, they were tolerated. There is though evidence of action being taken against fairs in other parts of the country, notably in London.<sup>99</sup>

Halifax by the middle of the eighteenth century was already an area that relied more on the textile industry than agriculture; it was also a district where nonconformist religion was popular, all of which may have caused a lessening of interest in traditional pastimes such as blood sports. Moreover the nonconformist churches offered more than a moral attack on existing leisure but an alternative to the old popular culture: “Methodism offered its adherents an alternative form of recreation, but one which retained the sense of community... that had been part of the old.”<sup>100</sup>

The impact of industrialization as a cause for the decline in traditional pastimes is difficult to identify locally. Factories were built in the Calder Valley and Halifax from the late eighteenth century onwards; however the evidence that these impacted to any great extent on popular pastimes is hard to prove. No doubt people working long fixed hours in these factories would have both less flexibility and leisure time. But it appears that popular leisure pursuits were subject to a number of forces: church, upper-class withdrawal of support, a general waning in interest in blood sports and legislation. It

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<sup>98</sup> Ibid., p.143.

<sup>99</sup> Judd, M., (1983) ‘The oddest combination of town and country’ in Walton, *Leisure in Britain*, pp.12-30.

<sup>100</sup> Cunningham, H., (1980) *Leisure in the Industrial Revolution*, Croom Helm, London. p.40.

may have been that the abandonment of customary sporting practices was largely self-determined, a rejection by large numbers of common people increasingly unhappy with traditional pastimes.<sup>101</sup> Encouraged by the various religious denominations and changing social mores, the poor simply drifted away from these types of pursuits, as they would withdraw from other forms of leisure, such as the music hall, in the early twentieth century. Poorer people were not passive receptors of leisure and culture handed them on a plate, but active contributors and moulders of culture.

Leisure pursuits in the eighteenth century definitely underwent a transformation; whilst some were falling from favour, a new leisure market was being created in Halifax including a theatre, concerts and facilities such as a range of baths in the town centre. It was a largely, but not exclusively, middle class leisure culture, but one certainly underpinned by their funding and support. The town's theatre was built by the local gentry and professionals, as opposed to nonconformist manufacturers. The growth of theatre nationally was fuelled by middle class support and Halifax was no different. It was not just theatre that benefited: musical concerts were organized, developed and funded by this independent and increasingly assertive group, which supports Plumb's view of an increasing middle class involvement in commercial leisure. This was not confined to Halifax; in his study of Salisbury, Patrick Driscoll suggests a similar situation where the middle class become patrons and organizers of concerts.<sup>102</sup> But classical music was to remain, due to high admission prices, the preserve of the wealthier sort, unlike the theatre which, as we shall see, tended to attract a wider audience.

By the 1820s Halifax, with its theatre, baths and new Assembly Rooms was an established centre for middle class leisure. The growth of the factory system, compared

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<sup>101</sup> Tranter, N., (1998) *Sport, economy and society in Britain 1750-1914*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge. p.3.

<sup>102</sup> Driscoll, P., 'The Salisbury Annual Musical Festival 1770-1800', in *Cultural and Social History*, 2008, Volume 5, Issue 1, pp.33-52.

to nearby Bradford, was delayed and consequently, as we shall see, the town was able to maintain the air of something approaching a spa town, certainly into the early 1830s. However any idea of Halifax as an inland northern spa town to rival Buxton or Harrogate was ended as it was transformed into a decidedly grim centre of the new industrial age based on the factory. The growing population was undoubtedly outstripping the everyday local leisure facilities and although a new leisure experience was being developed for the middle class, the emergent working classes were largely confined for their entertainment in the early nineteenth century to the public house and the traditional travelling shows.

The nonconformist churches attempted to provide a non-commercial alternative to the public house. The Sunday schools offered children a chance to learn to read and by the mid-nineteenth century became the major source of literacy for the poor. By the 1850s large numbers of children were attending and they were for many the high spot of the week where “they created a number of leisure activities... children were provided with an indoor meeting place ... and structured use of their free time.”<sup>103</sup> Though there was religious pressure on the public house “it must be remembered that the public house was not merely a source of drink” it was also a centre for diverse leisure pursuits ranging from sports to the arts and sciences.<sup>104</sup> The public house was not simply a place where earnings were frittered away on drink and immoral behaviour; it remained an important part of the lives of the poor. However, for many the church in the early part of the century was one of the few regular alternatives to the public house and the choices in commercial leisure introduced in the mid-century would prove something of a mixed blessing to the churches.

The increasing intervention by the state was to prove important in how leisure was perceived, its acknowledgement of the need for free time helped to underpin the way

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<sup>103</sup> Walvin, *Leisure and Society*, p.50.

<sup>104</sup> Wright, *Victorian Bradford*, p.200.

various leisure time pursuits came to be accepted as a part of a normal life.<sup>105</sup> As noted, legislation reduced working hours for some sections of the working population but the breakthrough came in 1847 with the ten hour day.<sup>106</sup> Further reductions in the working week and the falling cost of living, leading to increased disposable income, provided a fertile ground for leisure entrepreneurs to exploit. Other legislation allowed local councils to open public baths, libraries and museums. The Museums Act was passed in 1845, the Baths and Washhouses Act in 1846, followed by the Libraries Act in 1850. These facilities initially depended upon funding subject to the agreement of local ratepayers to pay an increased rate to provide them. Suffice to say no rush immediately occurred to build them, with the majority of libraries being opened at the end of the century. But the acts helped to move into the public sector facilities which hitherto had been largely private. Parks were also opened, generally in a response by local people and councils to help alleviate the unhealthy environments in the rapidly expanding towns. However the rules of public parks show a large element of social control, including times of admittance, behaviour and exclusions. As Reynolds points out on the subject of Saltaire Park: “The rules and regulations laid down for the park, as in all Victorian parks, were strict - designed to foster ‘the moral and social elevation of the working classes’”.<sup>107</sup> Nevertheless the legislation that promoted these non-commercial leisure services shows a growing acceptance of the idea that society is responsible for the provision of at least some leisure time facilities.

As the nineteenth century advanced there were attempts to reform the leisure time habits of the working class. Some, but not all, of the middle class, continued to see the leisure pursuits of the working class as unsuitable, involving violence, gambling, illicit sexual encounters and drunkenness. The mechanics’ institutes were initially seen as

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<sup>105</sup> Cunningham, ‘Leisure and Culture’, pp.281-1.

<sup>106</sup> Woodward, L., (1962) II Ed., *The Age of Reform 1815-1870*, Oxford University Press, Oxford. pp.150-5.

<sup>107</sup> Reynolds, J., (1983) *The Great Paternalist*, Maurice Temple Smith, London. p.280.

places of intellectual pleasure and refined leisure where the working class would be advanced under middle class supervision part of the wider campaign for so called rational recreation,<sup>108</sup> and although they proved to be popular to a certain extent, it is unlikely that they had much impact in reforming the leisure pursuits of the workers. Concert Halls were built in most towns and cities, with the intention, in part, of bringing elevating music to the masses, although when Bradford's St. George's Hall opened in 1853 the tickets were too expensive for working people.<sup>109</sup> Halifax struggled to fund its own purpose built concert hall until the end of the Victorian era, and when it did open the prices were very high when compared to the alternative entertainments which were by then on offer. The middle class quandary of a co-operative and enlightened working class prepared to follow their lead remained.

That attempts to moderate and manipulate working class behaviour proved difficult was mainly due to the lower classes having their own ideas on how they would spend their leisure time. The rise of the music hall from the public house singing saloon is an example of a cultural experience that comes from below, and whilst initially opposed, subsequently triumphs. The extent of social control over the leisure time of the workers is also less than clear. Whilst the churches generally attempted to deter the working class from anything associated with alcohol, not all of the middle class were certain of their position as moral arbiters. The opening of the horse racing track in Halifax is, as we shall examine, a prime example of the lack of any coherent middle class approach to commercial leisure time pursuits. And whilst commercial leisure could face powerful opposition, it could also draw upon equally strong support; there is no evidence that commercial leisure provoked a united response from the middle class. It was in general the middle class who were funding the expansion of commercial leisure and they were quick to point to the positive benefits and also avoid conflict with the authorities.

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<sup>108</sup> Cunningham, *Leisure in the Industrial Revolution*, p.99.

<sup>109</sup> Wright, *Victorian Bradford*, p.211.

As the nineteenth century progressed fairs, which in medieval times had tended to be held in the grounds of the church, were gradually moved.<sup>110</sup> Halifax was no different in this respect and the fair was progressively moved from the church into the central part of the town, and then to the cattle market about a mile from the town centre. Its removal from the town centre seems to have been due to the increasing congestion it was causing on the streets, as much as for concerns about rowdy and drunken behaviour, although problems relating to congestion could have been no more than an excuse for its exclusion from the town centre.

The development of the theatre, or indeed any other form of commercial leisure, up to the 1870s was gradual, in fact after the first two or three decades of the century theatre in Halifax, as in the rest of the country, struggled. The Theatres Act of 1843 did not have an immediate impact on the provision of theatres either locally or nationally; it was to be the 1880s before new theatres were built in large numbers. The other problem the theatre faced was the competition from the innovative music halls. The price of visiting the theatre remained stable, but not cheap, throughout the early nineteenth century. By the 1870s the theatres were finding a new lease of life based on an increasing middle class interest in drama. The growth of the theatre in Halifax is in line with its development across the country.

The beginning of the music hall is difficult to establish in Halifax, in part due to the limitations of the research criteria. In northern towns, where significant research has been carried out, the evidence suggests that singing saloons or early music halls were in place by the 1830s.<sup>111</sup> By the 1850s variety type shows are advertised in the Halifax press and by the 1860s they are a regular part of the town's leisure culture. There are hints that the early music hall venues in the town were viewed with some concern, but

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<sup>110</sup> Judd, 'The oddest combination of town and country', pp.12-30.

<sup>111</sup> Smith, M., 'Victorian Music Hall Entertainment in the Lancashire Cotton Towns' in *Local Historian*, 1971, Volume 9, pp.379-386.

more research is needed on the early development and growth of the music hall locally. We do know that the music hall faced strong opposition across the country, largely because of its association with alcohol, but also, as Kift notes, because of its nature, connection with the carnivalesque, and slightly mocking stance towards the traditional Victorian values of hard work, thrift and marriage. Initially music halls helped to define and distance the common people from the elite and it is possible to argue that when it lost this position as a vox populi, for instance when it embraced royalty in the early twentieth century, it sowed the seeds of its own downfall.<sup>112</sup> But this, as we shall examine, is far from certain. The local music halls during the mid-century were run by local entrepreneurs but this was to change as national syndicates gained control of the industry.

Commercial leisure continued to develop throughout the century but the pace of change quickens from the 1870s. It is noteworthy that some local studies, Meller of Bristol, as noted, and Croll of Merthyr<sup>113</sup> both take 1870 as their starting points, whilst Metcalfe in his study of leisure in the north-east of England also notes that it was the late nineteenth century that saw the beginning of a change in the provision of leisure, notably from the 1880s.<sup>114</sup> This is in line with national studies and this consistent introduction of commercial leisure across the country continued into the twentieth century, principally with the introduction of moving pictures.

The widespread interest in music carried on through the century in Halifax. There was always a commercial element to the concerts performed in the local public houses and churches, but financial success never appears to have been the prime motivating force behind those held in churches. The concerts were organized by the local middle

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<sup>112</sup> Kift, D., (1996) *The Victorian Music Hall: culture, class and conflict*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge. p.77.

<sup>113</sup> Croll, A., (2000) *Civilizing the Urban: Popular culture and public space in Merthyr, c.1870-1914*, University of Wales Press, Cardiff.

<sup>114</sup> Metcalfe, A., (2006) *Leisure and Recreation in a Victorian Mining Community*, Routledge, Oxford. pp.51-54.

class and it was they that made up most of the audience as the concerts were relocated from churches and inns and taverns into new purpose built venues. In the 1840s a series of concerts were arranged with the central idea being working class improvement. Their success was limited, nonetheless they continued into the 1850s and it provides some evidence of local attempts to provide rational recreation for the working people. The concerts were subsidized, but not cheap, and the rise of music halls controlled by local entrepreneurs was probably more in line with working class traditions and earnings. Throughout the century concerts for the wealthier members of the community continued.

The public house began to see its central position as the provider of commercial leisure decline with the growing and more varied market from the 1860s. The music halls could offer drinks and a variety show, and the visit of travelling shows and circuses, as we shall see, impacted on the public houses. However publicans continued to exploit their powerful position in the leisure market. The extent of free music and acts in the local public houses is hard to confirm, but evidence from Bradford, where there were a number of pubs and beer houses that provided entertainment free of an entrance charge,<sup>115</sup> suggests a similar situation may have been operating in Halifax. This is strengthened by references to places such as the Talbot using its assembly or concert room as a music hall, with possibly others at the Mitre and the Union Cross. As the century progressed groups of sportsmen used public houses for meetings. The men who formed the town's rugby club started off meeting at the Upper George public house. Knur and spell remained associated with public houses up until the early twentieth century. Groups such as friendly and musical societies had used local public houses in the eighteenth century and continued to do so, but these groups were joined in the late nineteenth century by diverse others, for instance horticultural societies often

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<sup>115</sup> Jennings, *The Public House*, pp.122-4.

met and even held exhibitions in public houses. This was alongside traditional games and gambling which remained a feature of public house life. Pubs also remained open for long hours in the period up to the First World War. This was in spite of moves against the drinks industry from church and temperance groups.

Sport was capable of attracting large crowds in the early nineteenth century but the number of spectators expanded in the latter decades of the century when a traditional approach to sport was replaced by an organized and structured sports culture.<sup>116</sup> The late nineteenth century rise in sport was remarkable, especially the rugby and soccer codes of football which, from virtually no established base, became games played nationally. In Halifax the game of rugby was established by a group of people educated at local academies and firmly located within the manufacturing and commercial community. However, as we will see, the number of people actually playing sport remained relatively low. The poor could find the cost of kit and equipment beyond their means, although toward the end of the century church and works teams helped with the costs, allowing a wider group of people access to playing sport. Once again the development of sport in Halifax is in line with national trends with Meller, Croll and Metcalfe reporting similar enthusiasm in Bristol, Merthyr and the north-east of England.

Profit was the motivation for most commercial leisure entrepreneurs but the same cannot be said for organized sport. The town's rugby club attracted people who were prepared to invest in the club for reasons other than monetary gain. It may be that being associated with a club that attracted so much local interest and goodwill acted as a magnet for those who wished to gain some stature in the community, and perhaps bask in some of the reflected glory associated with a winning club. Of course teams

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<sup>116</sup> Storch, D., 'The Problem of Working Class Leisure. Some Roots of Middle-class Moral Reform in the Industrial North: 1825-50' in Donajgrodzki, A.P., (1977) *Social Control in Nineteenth Century Britain*, Croom Helm, London, pp.152-3.

could, and did, lose money and success could not be guaranteed. Nevertheless investment in sport relied on something other than the pursuit of profits as can be further seen in the town's soccer side. The amounts to be made running a club in the lower divisions of the Football League would not attract the attention of anyone whose interest was motivated solely by making a profit. Halifax Town were, from the outset, run on a restricted budget and success on the field was limited, although such was the pull of the game that large crowds could be attracted, but the club was dependent upon producing a successful side to have any guarantee of large gates. The failure to produce a winning team saw the town's soccer club compete in the lower divisions of the professional game throughout the period. Halifax was no different from other areas in the way professional sport developed during the century, apart from the fact that West Yorkshire was a stronghold of rugby and soccer was slow to be introduced.

If the desire to run the town's rugby and soccer clubs was not founded on the strict principle of turning a profit, this was, as noted, not the case with most other forms of commercial leisure. The main transformation in leisure during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was the move from local entrepreneurs to regional and national companies. This was particularly evident in brewing and the theatre. The growth and increasing control exerted by these national and regional companies in the theatrical world had an impact on the ability of the smaller independent music halls and theatres to compete, and the evidence suggests that they began to decline with the arrival of national organizations. This view, as we shall see, is supported in smaller towns such as Brighouse and Todmorden, where new theatres struggled to compete against the attractions of corporate theatres in nearby larger towns; it also suggests that the contraction of the theatre was happening in the period before the First World War. The decline continued after the war and various reasons have been given for its fall from popularity. However the decline of both drama and variety follows on from

syndicates taking over and also parallels the growth of the cinema, with many theatres converting to film shows. There is some indication of a mini-revival in the fortunes of the theatre by the late 1930s, both nationally and locally. In Halifax the Grand Theatre reverted from films back to drama, in the form of repertory theatre, and the new Alexandra Hall presented plays. There was also a vibrant amateur dramatic scene with some amateur companies taking to the stage in the commercial theatres. These events, as we shall see, were part of a national trend, with Halifax being no different from other areas in this respect.

The triumph of the cinema in the inter-war years was almost complete. Its growing popularity was apparent from the 1910s as it became established as an entertainment in its own right. In the period before the First World War three former music hall venues were operating as cinemas and the town's concert hall was a full time cinema, with film presentations giving way to the occasional concert. Cinema had become more widespread than either the traditional dramatic or variety theatre ever was, with picture houses opening in the town's suburban areas that the theatre never reached. For some, part of the attraction of the cinema was that it was not associated with alcohol. It had quickly sought to present itself as a respectable form of entertainment suitable for the family, and introduced self censorship of films. Cinema was also a form of leisure which women could visit either alone or in groups without raising concerns regarding their moral well being. Going to the pictures throughout the inter-war years remained relatively cheap and may have been one of the reasons why, even during times of high unemployment, visiting the cinema continued, even amongst the unemployed.<sup>117</sup> As we shall see information on how poverty impacts on commercial leisure during the inter-

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<sup>117</sup> Davies, A., (1992) *Leisure gender and poverty: Working-class culture in Salford and Manchester*, Open University Press, Buckingham. p.76.

war period is limited and Davies, in his study of Salford and Manchester, pointed to the conflicting findings regarding access to the cinemas for the poor.<sup>118</sup>

The public house remained the principal form of commercial leisure through the whole of the period, although its position had been eroded and it had come under sustained attack as attitudes to drinking alcohol changed in the Victorian era. Many pubs continued to offer music as an attraction into the middle of the twentieth century and pub games continued to be popular. For most of the period they tended to remain a largely male domain with few women entering licensed premises on their own and it was to be the 1960s before women began to use licensed premises on a similar basis to men.<sup>119</sup>

Commercial leisure had by the early decades of the twentieth century managed to survive in the face of concerted attacks from certain sections of society and this remained the case up to the end of the period examined. The churches, temperance organizations and some secular groups, as we shall see, attacked popular commercial leisure. However, their collective failure had been in part due to a general acknowledgement across society that leisure was necessary and that a diverse leisure market helped to keep large numbers of people, especially the young, from roaming the streets and offered an alternative to the public house. Even in areas with a strong nonconformist tradition, such as South Wales, the churches failed in their attempts to keep the congregations away from the theatre, music halls and cinemas. The owners of these venues were successful in promoting them as respectable and persuading the majority that those opposed were simply 'killjoys'. The increasing secularization of society meant that large numbers of people were not prepared to have their lives controlled by those in society who attempted to restrict the availability of commercial

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<sup>118</sup> Ibid., p.45.

<sup>119</sup> Borsay, *A History of Leisure*, p.114.

leisure.<sup>120</sup> A fundamental point about commercial leisure is that generally it has been financed by the wealthy and they have followed a careful line so as not to antagonize the authorities. From eighteenth century theatre, to music hall and cinema, the owners have always tried to avoid controversy.

Generally the access of women to leisure was restricted during the period examined before a more relaxed position became noticeable in the 1960s. However, as Davies has noted in his study of Salford, the access that women had to commercial leisure is more complex than simply what was considered respectable. In certain families the access of daughters to leisure time pursuits was controlled by their parents. Some women were allowed to visit dance halls, whilst others were forbidden, one woman had her dancing shoes confiscated and then destroyed by a disapproving father.<sup>121</sup> Attitudes in Salford to women drinking in the public house tended to be that it was not respectable for single women, but once married, as long as they were accompanied by their husbands, it became acceptable. Not all women agreed with this view of the respectability of the pub and it seems that the lower down the social scale the less the approbation heaped upon the idea of unmarried women visiting public houses. Nevertheless the number of women visiting the pub remained low in inter-war Salford as in Halifax and the rest of the nation.<sup>122</sup> McKibbin notes that women were to be found at dog tracks in the immediate postwar period even though their numbers appear to have been few,<sup>123</sup> whilst dog tracks in Manchester in the inter-war years had areas for women and children.<sup>124</sup> But it does appear that many women avoided those areas of commercial leisure where there was any suggestion of it not being a decent leisure time pursuit. The majority of the customers for commercial leisure throughout the inter-war years tended to be young,

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<sup>120</sup> Croll, *Civilizing the Urban*, pp.189-197.

<sup>121</sup> Davies, *Leisure gender and poverty*, pp.89-90.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.61-73.

<sup>123</sup> McKibbin, R., (1998) *Classes and Cultures: England 1918-1951*, Oxford University Press, Oxford. p.364.

<sup>124</sup> Davies, *Leisure gender and poverty*, pp.161-62.

and females made up a significant proportion of the customer base, and as we shall see they were targeted by advertisers. However marriage had the effect of limiting commercial leisure time opportunities, especially for women.

To conclude this thematic introduction, we might suggest this broad chronology. The eighteenth century was a time of change when many traditional pursuits fell from favour, or were removed, although not to the extent suggested by Malcolmson, and a new middle class consumer culture in leisure emerged. The early part of the nineteenth century saw the working class largely, but certainly not wholly, confined to the public house until the advent of mid-century changes which gradually offered a wider leisure experience to the lower classes. But it was to be the late nineteenth century before a mass leisure market developed, which then continued into the twentieth century.

## **Chapter Two**

### **1750-1799 The beginning of a refashioning of leisure?**

This is a period when Halifax is an established textile centre but one where the seeds of industrialization are already present. For most of this time the public house was the centre of commercial leisure, it offered a wide range of pastimes including sport, music and theatre. However, there were additional venues where leisure was provided by the end of the century: a purpose built theatre and fashionable baths had been built in the town. Regionally significant music festivals, drawing large audiences, were held in the parish church, and churches throughout the area were used for concerts of what was invariably described as sacred music. Blood sports in 1750 were a generally accepted part of the cultural life of the area, but by the end of the century this was no longer the case. The period is one of change, in certain respects fundamental, that appears to gain pace as the century draws to its close and a change that is driven from within by a confident middle class.

### **Halifax and its hinterland**

At the beginning of this period Halifax was an established centre of the woollen and worsted trades, both for the manufacture and marketing of cloth. In the western upland part of Yorkshire, due to the poor quality of the soil and damp climate a dual economy operated; in the parish of Halifax subsistence farming was carried out alongside the production of woollen and worsted cloth. The manufacture was carried out employing the domestic system of putting out work to people in their own homes in the surrounding areas. However, towards the latter part of the century water powered mills were built in the Calder Valley. By the middle of the century the township of Halifax had been mostly enclosed and many of the timber framed houses had been clad in stone.<sup>1</sup> It presented a medieval aspect, far different from the present town centre which

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<sup>1</sup> Hargreaves, *Halifax*, p.72.

was redeveloped in the late nineteenth century, when many of the medieval buildings were demolished.

Vestiges of manorialism existed in Halifax beyond 1750 and the Halifax manorial court was responsible for regulating building, providing a water supply and suppressing street nuisances. The court continued to regulate some aspects of life throughout the century, but it had been weakened by its middle with freeholders increasingly dominating the townships.<sup>2</sup> Hargreaves notes that by 1750 Halifax had become a “secular entity”, increasingly run by resident property owners who were responsible for providing basic services and maintaining law and order. The individual townships also became more active and this had the effect of devolving and decentralizing power from the parish. By the end of the century a wide range of local and county authorities were involved in administering the area, including the county magistrates, the lords of the manor of Wakefield and honor of Pontefract, parochial and township vestries and improvement commissioners.<sup>3</sup>

Politically the area had supported the Parliamentary cause during the Civil War and Halifax was given an MP during the Commonwealth, a privilege that was removed after the Restoration. During the period up to the 1832 Reform Act, Halifax people who were entitled to vote travelled to York, where they could take part in the election for the Yorkshire County candidates. For instance in the 1741 election, 109 voters supported the Tory candidate, George Fox, with 31 voting for the Whig, Cholmley Turner. Dissenters, who were largely manufacturers, tended to support the Whigs, whilst the Anglicans, mainly gentry, supported the Tories.<sup>4</sup> This continued to be the case into the nineteenth century, when Halifax became a Liberal party stronghold.

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<sup>2</sup> Hudson, P., ‘Proto Industrialization. The Case of the West Riding Woollen Industry in the Early Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries’, in *History Workshop*, 1981, Volume 12, pp.34-61.

<sup>3</sup> Hargreaves, *Halifax*, pp.52-7.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p.52.

The textile industry continued to grow in the second half of the eighteenth century with worsted replacing woollen cloths. Worsteds used the long staples of wool and produced a finer cloth than the short staples which had been used to weave the kerseys, a locally produced woollen cloth. By 1758 there were 39 fulling mills in the area but the industry remained largely home based. The textile trade supplied local markets but mainly exported cloth to Europe and further afield.<sup>5</sup> Hudson notes that the cloth from the Halifax area “relied on export markets for about 90 per cent of their cloth sales, whereas other parts of the Riding had a sizeable proportion of their output ... destined for home consumption”. Looney suggests that the Halifax manufacturers used merchants based in Leeds who alone in the West Riding had “acquired the know-how necessary to engage in international trade directly”.<sup>6</sup> It is not clear what his source for this information is, but there are numerous references to Halifax merchants trading abroad from the seventeenth century.

The success of the textile trade attracted people to work in the area’s growing industry and between the years 1664 to 1764 the number of households in the parish increased from 3,844 to 8,263.<sup>7</sup> The population increased substantially in the township of Halifax, from 5,000 in 1743 to 8,866 in 1801; whilst in the same period that of the parish more than doubled from 31,000 to 63,434.<sup>8</sup> Watson, the eighteenth century historian of the town, noted that there was hardly a single instance in the area of a family living entirely by farming and that the land was largely held in small parcels; he claimed that although it was difficult for the poor to get milk and butter there was plenty of work available and “good wages and plenty of most other necessities of life, so that

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p.74.

<sup>6</sup> Looney, J.J., ‘Cultural Life in the Provinces: Leeds and York, 1720-1820’, in Beir, A.L., Cannadine, D., and Rosenheim, J.M., (1989) *The First Modern Society: Essays in English History in Honour of Laurence Stone*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge. pp.488-9.

<sup>7</sup> Smail, *The Origins of Middle-Class Culture*, p.52.

<sup>8</sup> Hargreaves, *Halifax*, p.74.

we know not any country where, upon the whole, they live better”.<sup>9</sup> This is perhaps an idealized view of the town, as Rule suggests the pressure created by an increasing population may have led to food rioting in Halifax in the 1780s, the same decade in which Watson’s history was published.<sup>10</sup> War in the 1790s was to have a negative impact on Halifax, an area which traded more extensively outside of Britain and Berg suggests that trading conditions had depressed wages and the poor locally were in “a wretched condition”.<sup>11</sup>

Jennings notes that the social makeup of the area was “far from egalitarian”. There were those who made a great deal of money from the cloth trade, alongside those who were economically independent, owning their own equipment and material and earning their living from textiles and farming. However there were also skilled workers who owned just a small amount of land and earned money by selling their labour and those who had very little, living a precarious existence on the edge of poverty. It is difficult to comment in any great detail on these poorer people as they have left little evidence, although there are some township records of the overseers of the poor recording hand-outs to the unemployed and infirm. The lack of an aristocratic presence in the area meant that the local gentry, manufacturers and merchants were at the top of the social hierarchy; this was unlike many other areas of the country where there was generally a resident aristocrat or squire. These local merchants, manufacturers and others of the middling sort filled the important township posts and looked up to no one. This is an important point within Halifax and the wider parish as it was they who were setting the agenda and would increasingly become the people who would drive the area forward culturally and economically.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Watson, J., (1789) *The History of the Town and Parish of Halifax*, J. Milner, Halifax. p.7.

<sup>10</sup> Rule, J., (1992) *Albion’s People: English Society, 1714-1815*, Longmans, London. p.199.

<sup>11</sup> Berg, M., (1994) *The Age of Manufacturers, 1700-1820*, Routledge, London. p.144.

<sup>12</sup> Jennings, *Pennine Valley*, pp.92-3.

By the end of the eighteenth century Smail identifies a group of very wealthy individuals who had moved on, both in wealth and status, from the independent clothiers and yeoman farmers. They had become merchants and manufacturers working on a large scale, an increasingly important part of a growing and self confident middle class whose relations with the rest of local society were undergoing a separation, or a redrawing of social boundaries.<sup>13</sup> This group built some substantial properties throughout the area reflecting their status and wealth. Smail's account of the development of a distinct and identifiable middle class may be open to debate. There is some evidence that there were clear social distinctions locally in the period before the eighteenth century. There had also been substantial houses constructed before the start of the eighteenth century and there were earlier houses, such as Barkisland Hall, built through the proceeds of the cloth trade.<sup>14</sup> These people were already separated by their wealth before the eighteenth century. Nevertheless Halifax was an expanding centre of industry that produced surplus wealth which increasingly went on fine houses and material goods. Borsay identifies these manufacturers and merchants as a group that fuelled the growth of consumerism, a fashionable set that required not just fine clothes and accoutrements but also places where they could be seen; hence the growth of assembly rooms, theatres and concert halls. These were places where the poorer members of the community could be excluded, simply because they lacked the finances to follow the lifestyle.<sup>15</sup>

Trade directories give us some indication of the growing range of services and industries. Bailey's directory of 1781 lists various towns in the north: Manchester with 20 pages and Liverpool 17.5 pages, are by far the largest contributors, with Leeds having 4.5 pages and Halifax with 3 pages among the largest contributors in Yorkshire.

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<sup>13</sup> Smail, *The Origins of Middle-Class Culture*, p.80.

<sup>14</sup> Hargreaves, *Halifax*, p.67-9.

<sup>15</sup> Borsay, P., (1990) *The Eighteenth-Century Town: A Reader In English Urban History 1688-1820*, Longmans, London. pp.175-9.

Whilst the number of entries in a directory is something of a crude measure to judge a town's stature, it does give some indication of their relative importance. However there is also the issue of how they were compiled; there is for instance no entry for Bradford in the edition I examined, although this may have simply been an error, as Huddersfield is included, albeit only a single page, amounting to 14 entries, about a third of the entries for Halifax. The trades in the Halifax entry include many that relate to textiles but there are a wide range of other trades, some indicating a growing consumer element within local society. Alongside numerous grocers, druggists and chemists are watchmakers and various types of drapers including silk, linen, wool and one simply described as a mercer, a supplier of various fine cloths. The majority of the other entries are related to industry. There is less evidence of support services such as lawyers, doctors and teachers and in particular only one innkeeper, in a town where there were in fact numerous public houses, so it is far from a comprehensive list.<sup>16</sup> Local people would not only have used the services of local suppliers of consumer goods and luxuries, the wealthier sort would have been able to use other regional and national sources when purchasing items such as furniture. Halifax can thus be seen as an important town offering a wider range of trades than many others and placing it in a group behind Manchester, Liverpool and Leeds.

Hargreaves, however, is extremely cautious in his analysis of Halifax in the latter part of the eighteenth century, suggesting that it was not "a substantial town nationally or even, in truth, regionally."<sup>17</sup> It certainly was not as large as Leeds or a centre of administration like Wakefield. But a contemporary analyst, the economist Adam Smith, suggested in 1776 that Halifax, along with towns like Leeds, Sheffield and Birmingham, was an important centre of industry "the offspring of agriculture" whose success was

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<sup>16</sup> *Bailey's Northern Directory*, (1781) William Ashton, Warrington. pp.200-3.

<sup>17</sup> Hargreaves, *Halifax*, p.73.

having a significant impact on the nation's economy.<sup>18</sup> Plumb similarly puts Halifax into a list of towns which includes Leicester and Nottingham, again a view which suggests a town of some importance, not just regionally, but also nationally.<sup>19</sup>

By the end of the eighteenth century Halifax was the centre of a bustling parish that had a large population. As James, the nineteenth-century Bradford historian noted: "Halifax stood at the head of the worsted manufacturing seats in the north of England."<sup>20</sup> However the industry was beginning to be transformed from a domestic system to one based on factories; this was not immediate and different branches of the textile process were mechanized at different times, but by the end of the century a number of mills had opened in the area. The importance of the textile trade can be seen in the Piece Hall, the substantial cloth hall built between 1775 and 1778, opening in 1779. The building in the decades after its opening was, for both locals and visitors, a source of admiration and approval.<sup>21</sup>

It is difficult to say how much ordinary people in the area were earning during the period but incomes were rising and subsidiary earnings of children, coupled with the deflation in food prices, meant poorer people generally had more disposable income. By 1752 the labouring poor were spending money on items once considered luxuries, such as snuff, tobacco, tea, trinkets, fancy cloth and ribbons, but whilst consumption of non-essentials did increase the evidence for consumerism amongst the poorer sort is lacking.<sup>22</sup> Hatcher argues that when surplus income allowed, leisure pursuits remained high on the agenda for the labouring poor.<sup>23</sup> As we shall see in Halifax, the evidence suggests that it was the middling sort who benefited most from increasing consumerism

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<sup>18</sup> Smith, A., (1976) *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, Oxford University Press, Oxford. p.409.

<sup>19</sup> Plumb, 'Commercialization and Society', p.328.

<sup>20</sup> James, *History of the Worsted Manufacture in England*, p.357.

<sup>21</sup> Hargreaves, *Halifax*, p.75.

<sup>22</sup> Hatcher, J., 'Labour, Leisure and Economic Thought Before the Nineteenth Century', in *Past and Present*, 1998, Volume 160, pp.64-115.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

and the growth of commercial leisure. It is also worth remembering, as we have already noted, that the general increase in prosperity could mask local variations and periods of economic downturn.

The analysis of commercial leisure which follows begins with the theatre and concludes with the public house, the key social centre of this period. It is a period of continuity but by the end of the century significant changes are taking place.

## **Theatre**

Theatres had been officially closed in 1642 and did not reopen during the Interregnum but with the restoration of Charles II on the 29 May 1660 they were once again in favour.<sup>24</sup> The diary of Samuel Pepys is crammed with both casual and more detailed theatrical references including comments on the wide social mix in the audience. Donohue notes: “‘Pit, box and gallery.’ a configuration and a term epitomizing the eighteenth century theatre and the society that comprised its audience.”<sup>25</sup> The early London theatres were quite intimate; Drury Lane, for example, had a capacity of around fourteen hundred. From the relaxation of the restrictions on the theatre, playhouses were commercial venues which attracted people from a variety of ranks.<sup>26</sup>

The very popularity of the theatre was to lead in the early part of the eighteenth century to strict controls. Walpole’s<sup>27</sup> administration was subject to much criticism from playwrights such as Henry Fielding and John Gay; there was also a residual Puritanical dislike of the theatre within an element of the population that extended through the century and beyond. This prompted government action against the theatre with the Licensing Act of 1737, which provided for “strict control of theatre companies,

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<sup>24</sup> Donohue, J., ‘The Theatre from 1660-1800’ in Donohue, J., Ed., (2004) *The Cambridge History of British Theatre Volume II 1660-1895*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge. pp.6-8.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p.15.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., pp.8-9.

<sup>27</sup> Robert Walpole, 1<sup>st</sup> Earl of Orford, 1674-1745. Walpole is generally acknowledged as being the first Prime Minister of Great Britain.

the plays they might be allowed to mount, limited the King's patent granting authority to the city of Westminster, and restricted dramatic performances to the two patent theatres, Drury Lane and Covent Garden." All plays were subject to censorship by the Examiner of Plays in the office of the Lord Chamberlain. Lord Chesterfield noted that the Act was a restraint on licentiousness and also on liberty on the stage.<sup>28</sup> In response Fielding quit writing plays for novels. The system lasted, in part, until the repeal of the law in 1968.

The theatre was then re-established as a commercial venture, but the Act of 1737 was to severely restrict its growth in the capital for the major part of the century. There were a number of imaginative attempts to establish alternative theatrical type experiences in London but their success was limited. Outside of London "the provincial theatre in England developed from a somewhat haphazard enterprise by ad hoc groups of itinerant players, performing mainly at inns and local fairs, to a more firmly based operation run by London summer companies and local circuit companies playing in purpose built theatres."<sup>29</sup> The granting of royal patents had been accompanied by the restoration of the right of touring companies to operate outside London, providing they carried a licence from the Master of the Revels or a royal patent. They also needed a licence from a local magistrate where they intended to perform. The Act made it difficult for companies to continue, but the restrictions imposed were in turn difficult to enforce and local magistrates were generally happy for companies to visit, as long as they conducted themselves respectably.<sup>30</sup> The owners of theatres and touring companies quickly settled down to work within the framework of the legislation, for "theatre was less concerned with philosophy than with profits, and its profits depended on appeasing new

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<sup>28</sup> Holland, P., and Patterson, M., 'Eighteenth Century Theatre', in Brown, J.P., Ed., (2001) *The Oxford Illustrated History of the Theatre*, Oxford University Press, Oxford. p.259.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p.173.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p.175.

social forces of bourgeois morality.”<sup>31</sup>

By the mid-eighteenth century “the concept of theatre as a rational and therefore a more desirable entertainment ... had taken root outside the capital.”<sup>32</sup> The theatre had become well established across the nation, albeit under a difficult regime. The commercial nature of the theatre both in the established London houses and within the travelling companies was also evident. Its existence was founded on audiences that were willing to pay and it was not only the wealthy who were prepared to do so, even if the admission charged was for some of the audience a considerable portion of their income.

The theatre had a significant impact both regionally and in Halifax. It must be said, however, that the amount of information on the eighteenth century provincial theatre is limited. The *Leeds Mercury* contains the occasional review of London plays and advertises for the theatre in Leeds, as did the short lived *Union Journal or Halifax Advertiser*, which also included occasional comments on local theatre. There is also Tate Wilkinson’s description of running a theatre circuit in Yorkshire and the north of England between 1770 and 1795, which gives an important insight into theatre across Yorkshire and the north. Wilkinson was an actor manager, who had enjoyed some success on the London stage as a comic actor, and had patents for the theatres in both York and Hull; he expanded his circuit to include Wakefield in 1774, Doncaster in 1775 and Pontefract in 1779. He also travelled regularly as far as Newcastle, Scotland and Ireland with his company. His book, which he had published in York in 1795, details much of the routine of the travelling company of actors and also gives valuable insights into the theatre as a commercial leisure business which could be at times very risky. The legal classification of actors remained into the eighteenth century one where they were

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid., p.256.

<sup>32</sup> Garlick, G., ‘Theatre outside London 1660-1775’, in Donohue, J., Ed., (2004) *The Cambridge History of British Theatre Volume II 1660-1895*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge. pp.176-82.

viewed as “vagabonds, rogues and sturdy beggars”.<sup>33</sup> Theatre in England in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was rarely supported by funding from state or civic sources; rather it relied on private capital, although the town corporation in Doncaster did fund the building of the town’s playhouse in 1776.<sup>34</sup>

The travelling theatrical groups usually consisted of upward of a dozen actors with sometimes nearly half being women. From Wilkinson’s memoirs they appear to have been fraught with rivalries and petty jealousies. Wilkinson described one of his actors, a Mr. Chiswick, who left the company as

“a simpering. Ogling inoffensive character, a great admirer of himself. We did not long agree, he left me a discarded actor in 1773, and from that period, by dint of industry, without talents, he, to my astonishment, got an existence by his giving stupid lectures to the entertainment of no one but himself ... It is true he did not want a tolerable education, but was a bad speaker ... he had also a very bad memory, and to make that worse, was always frightened out of his small wits.”

Given his shortcomings it is not clear how he managed to stay with the company for six years. The actresses did not fare much better: he described Miss Grainsby in similar, if less acerbic terms “she even declared she never liked ducks until they grew to be geese, or to go in a ferry boat, unless the water was low, for if it were high ... it would certainly over set it.” It is not clear if he explained Archimedes’ principle, but he did grant that she was very useful to his “rural domain.”<sup>35</sup>

Wilkinson already had the patent for the York theatre when in 1768 he opened “a new elegant theatre in Hull”. His move to a permanent theatre in the west of the county came in 1771 when he opened a playhouse in Leeds on the 21 of July with high

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<sup>33</sup> Donohue, ‘The Theatre from 1660’ p.42.

<sup>34</sup> Taylor, K., (2007) *Theatres & Cinemas of the Wakefield District*, Tempus, Stroud. p.38.

<sup>35</sup> Wilkinson, T., (1972) *The Wandering Patentee; or, A History of The Yorkshire Theatres From 1770 to 1795*, The Scolar Press, London & Ilkley. p.49.

expectations for the venture: “The Theatre was built very neat ... and very splendid ... to the mean places, such as barns, warehouses ... to which they [the local population] had been accustomed ... the houses were well attended, and gave hopes that the seeds of promise were sown and would produce a plentiful harvest and a lasting produce.” His initial enthusiasm was modified when they returned, as the takings tumbled: “For Lo! Fifteen pounds was the receipt of Robertson’s play. That direful omen shook not only the prowess of my army, whose benefits were all depending, but made me quake and feel humble.”<sup>36</sup> In the following weeks matters did not improve, as the takings were £10, £11, £12 and £14 respectively, when it was reckoned that £40 was the amount needed to succeed with a company the size of Wilkinson’s.<sup>37</sup> Leeds would continue to disappoint for a number of years, as we shall see.

The earliest reference to the theatre in Halifax that I have come across is in the *Union Journal or Halifax Advertiser*. On 8 January 1760 there was an advert for *The Siege of Damascus* at the Theatre Halifax. The most likely venue for this production would have been the assembly rooms at the Talbot Inn, or another public house, as both the Old Cock and the White Lion were used by itinerant companies. However it is likely that the town would have had visits from companies previous to this date. Much advertising was carried out through the production of handbills, a practice which was to continue into the next century and beyond. Hargreaves notes that a play-bill exists for what is described as the new theatre at the Talbot in 1758 and praise for the performance given was recorded in a letter.<sup>38</sup>

The company of actors that visited Halifax in 1760 was headed by James Whitley, who toured the Midlands and also ventured north into Leeds and Manchester.<sup>39</sup> It is not

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid., p.59.

<sup>37</sup> Garlick, ‘Theatre outside London’, p.179.

<sup>38</sup> Hargreaves, *Halifax*, p.88.

<sup>39</sup> Taylor, K., ‘Theatre in Halifax c1750-1840’, in *Transactions of the Halifax Antiquarian Society*, 2002, Volume 10 new series, pp.58-67.

clear if the visit by this company of actors was a regular or annual event. Tate Wilkinson visited the town in 1776: “Three weeks previous to York races I tried the town of Halifax for three weeks, which paid my expenses, but our theatre was a dreadful place, being over the stables at the White Lion in that town. I expected that whenever a regular theatre was built there, I should have been favoured with the preference,-but I was not so honoured.” The failure to add Halifax to his list of permanent venues perhaps influenced his views on the town. He returned in 1777 and recorded: “At the end of the Leeds season I tried the PLACE called a Theatre, at Halifax, once more, and acted over the old stable, and with good success; actually better receipts in that dreadful place than at that time I experienced at the large and opulent town of Leeds and its extensive and numerous suburbs.” Wilkinson stated that though he came to know some families, he made no friends in the town. He returned again in 1778, apparently for the last time. He added Pontefract to his venues in 1779, which may have impacted on his ability to visit Halifax.<sup>40</sup>

Even though Wilkinson was offended by not being offered the Halifax theatre, he made money on his visits, more indeed than he was earning at the time in Leeds. His failure in Leeds was, according to Garlick, due to a local Methodist preacher warning people to stay away.<sup>41</sup> But financial success was not guaranteed. Wilkinson commented on visiting Doncaster: “a very pretty and elegant Theatre ... and the numerous attendance at the races, made it a fashionable place of resort. But the assembly-rooms keep the ladies entirely away.”<sup>42</sup> It was not just religious elements that impacted on his business; alternative entertainments could reduce the profitability of the theatrical performances, a factor which is evident when examining the commercial fortunes of the theatre during later periods.

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<sup>40</sup> Wilkinson, *The Wandering Patentee*, p.256.

<sup>41</sup> Garlick, ‘Theatre outside London’, pp.179-80.

<sup>42</sup> Wilkinson, *The Wandering Patentee*, p.241.

The building of a permanent theatre came later in Halifax than at either Leeds or Wakefield; this is not surprising as Leeds was more populous and Wakefield the county town of the West Riding. It also followed legislation of 1788 which saw a boom in theatre building, as it empowered local magistrates to grant their own licences for theatres, so long as they did not open for more than 60 days.<sup>43</sup> The building of the new theatre was financed by a group of twelve locals and built on land at Wards End, where the current Theatre Royal stands. The Theatre, as it was initially called, opened on Monday 21 October 1790, the foundation stone having been laid in September the previous year. The opening play was a new comedy, *The Dramatist or Stop Him Who Can*. It was advertised in the *Leeds Intelligencer* in which His Majesty's Servants, the group of actors based at Nottingham, would present the performance; boxes were 3/-; upper boxes 2/6; pit 2/- and gallery 1/-, with performances on Monday, Wednesday and Friday.<sup>44</sup> The night's entertainment during the period contained more than just the play, usually also including a short sketch and various songs; this was the case on the opening night in Halifax, the advert in the newspaper noted that the other entertainments would be set out in the handbills. In most provincial towns theatres opened, due to the terms of their licence under the legislation, for short seasons rather than opening permanently. Depending on the town or city the times when the theatre was open might coincide with a race meeting or the assizes and for periods of the year it would be closed, except for the occasional concert or lecture. Benefit performances were also held at theatres: one was held in Halifax for Mr. Stopford, organist at the parish church, and one of the original investors. Actor's benefits were often held for members of the company of players as a means of putting aside money for their old age; the actor had to meet the advertising costs and occasionally they could find that little money had been made, or

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<sup>43</sup> Trussler, S., (2000) *The Cambridge Illustrated History of British Theatre*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, Cambridge. p.192.

<sup>44</sup> *Leeds Intelligencer*, 5 October 1790.

worse still that the supposed beneficiary had even suffered a financial loss. The prices for Mr. Stopford's concert were 4/- for the boxes, 3/- for the pit and 2/- for the gallery. Taylor gives the prices of admission for theatrical performances as a shilling less for each part respectively and notes that the theatre was like other contemporary ones, a rectangular box lit by candles with a pit, boxes and a gallery.<sup>45</sup>

Over the course of the century theatre grew to such an extent that many communities had their own theatre. Indeed Plumb notes that in 1770 the country was better served than it was in the 1980s, although towns such as Huddersfield and Bradford did not have purpose built theatres until the nineteenth century. Audience capacity within the theatres also grew. The success of the theatre meant that more money was returned to investors, with the capital value of shares increasing and as much as 5% interest being drawn on some investments.<sup>46</sup>

Theatre was not without financial risk and companies, as we have seen, could struggle financially, especially if as in Leeds the local clergy were opposed. The investors in the Halifax theatre were drawn from the local elite, a mixture of bankers, professionals, merchants and manufacturers and appear to have managed to avoid conflict with the nonconformist churches, the main source of opposition to the theatre. It is difficult to say whether these local entrepreneurs and investors were motivated entirely by financial gain or by an element of civic pride in providing the town with a purpose built theatre. It seems likely that the investors were more interested in tapping into increasing prosperity and based their investment on a sound understanding of the possibility of returning a profit rather than from any desire for social esteem, which they would in any case receive incidentally.

Theatre in England developed successfully in the eighteenth century as a commercial venture in part due to the owners of theatres and acting companies avoiding

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<sup>45</sup> Taylor, 'Theatre in Halifax c1750-1840', pp.58-67.

<sup>46</sup> Plumb, 'Commercialization and Society', pp.275-78.

controversy; they worked within the restrictions imposed through government legislation. The theatre was put under undoubted constraints which restricted its growth within the capital. But by the end of the century purpose built theatres and groups of itinerant actors had become widespread throughout the country, a development which Halifax shared, reflecting its continuing growth as a regional cultural centre.

### **Music**

Another important part of local leisure activity was the organized musical concert. These events, certainly until the opening of the town's theatre in the later eighteenth century, were usually presented in either churches or public houses. The concerts that were advertised in the press, for either venue, included an admission charge.

By the middle of the eighteenth century Halifax had a musical community made up largely from the middling sort who provided the core of musicians taking part. Cowgill has identified Henry Bates, the parish clerk and keeper of the Ring O'Bells public house near to the parish church, as a central figure in this burgeoning group. His son Joah, who went on to have a distinguished career as a musician, had been awarded scholarships to both Eton and King's College, Cambridge and was to play an important part in the opening concert for the Halifax parish church organ in 1766.<sup>47</sup>

The purchasing of the organ for the parish church was an important milestone in the musical life of the area. It was also the basis of a dispute between the townships of Halifax and Sowerby. George Stansfield of Fieldhead in Sowerby, a major manufacturer responsible in part for the new Sowerby church, was unhappy that the cost of the organ for the Halifax church would impact on the rates of the other townships in the parish. The legal dispute that followed was protracted but was eventually settled and the organ built by John Snetzler was opened in August 1766 with a presentation of Handel's *Messiah*. Cowgill has provided a detailed description of the opening, which included

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<sup>47</sup> Cowgill, R., "The Business of Music in Late Georgian and Victorian Halifax", in *Transactions of the Halifax Antiquarian Society*, 2002, Volume 10 new series, pp77-95.

local musicians and choristers supported by professional musicians from Oxford and Cambridge, presumably friends and acquaintances of Joah Bates, who played the organ for the opening concert. Bates' brother wrote to his sister describing the concert as being performed in such a manner "as to give infinite satisfaction to the most polite and numerous assembly that ever appeared in Halifax upon any occasion. The best judges declared they had never heard anything in London to equal it. The next day the performance was repeated with, if possible still greater applause..."<sup>48</sup> The *Leeds Intelligencer* reported that: "The whole was conducted with most exact regularity, and performed so much to the delight and satisfaction of a very polite and crowded audience, that enough can hardly be said to the honour of the performance." It added that William Herschel played the organ and also that there were four Cambridge and one Oxford musicians.<sup>49</sup> (It appears that both Bates and Herschel took turns to play the organ during the concerts.) Admission was by tickets which were available locally. The concept of eighteenth-century polite society is expressed in both Bates' letter and the newspaper article. The ranks of privileged locals were evidently keen to associate themselves with enlightened, polite elite society and culture, well informed, at ease with both the high and low, whilst retaining and reinforcing, in this case through leisure, firm social divisions.

The installation of the organ saw the appointment of a professional organist. The first, William Herschel, who had performed in the opening concert, was selected by competition, which was the usual practice in these instances. Herschel was a German, who had trained as a musician and composer, and was also a self-taught mathematician and astronomer who was to become astronomer to George III, better remembered now as the discoverer of Uranus and the base form of our galaxy, the Milky Way. His

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<sup>48</sup> Cowgill, R., "'The most musical spot for its size in the Kingdom': Music in Georgian Halifax", in *Early Music*, 2000, Volume 28, pp.557-75.

<sup>49</sup> *Leeds Intelligencer*, 7 September 1766.

residence in Halifax was short and he left to take up a more prestigious appointment as organist in Bath. He was succeeded by Thomas Stopford, who filled the post for 53 years. Stopford like Herschel was paid a salary, but was also expected to supplement his income by providing music lessons and tuning musical instruments; he was also one of the founders of the town's first theatre.<sup>50</sup> The acquisition of the organ and the concert associated with its inauguration is evidence of a significant local group intent on developing a musical experience based on talented amateur and professional musicians and going beyond local folk traditions; this was to continue into the next century and beyond. The acquisition of the organ was also significant in that Puritans had been opposed to organs and even singing in church and points to the waning of puritan influence.

On the 17 January 1769 an advert placed by the members of a Halifax Musical Club in the *Leeds Mercury* stated they had fitted out a musical theatre in what is described as the square of the town. The decision to fit out the property as a theatre had come about after a meeting in the Old Cock inn where it was decided that the group needed a place to meet, perform, practice and hold their future concerts. The term theatre was, as we have seen, loosely applied, with any large room that sufficed being called a theatre.

The first concert the club held was on Thursday 26 January 1769 and included Handel's *The Sacred Oratorio of Samson*. The doors opened at 1.00 pm with the concert starting at 2.00; the charges were 2/- for the pit and 1/- for the gallery. Tickets were made available from three public houses, the Old Cock, White Swan and Talbot and also from Mr. Baines, who was a bookseller in the town. It may be that the premises were used for further concerts but the group does not seem to have advertised again in the press. It is difficult to know why the group invested in the project, especially as the assembly room at the Talbot Inn, which could accommodate 300, was available for

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<sup>50</sup> Cowgill, "The Business of Music.", p.82.

concerts; it may be that the economics of owning their own premises made sense, but with so little evidence available on the group we can only speculate as to their motives.<sup>51</sup> Later in the same year, August 1769, a concert of Handel's music was held at the parish church, with tickets at 2/- and 1/- available from six town centre public houses.<sup>52</sup> The cost of the tickets corresponds to the charges of the music group responsible for fitting out the theatre.

As noted, many concerts were held in churches throughout the county in the eighteenth century and most involved an admission fee. What is difficult to determine is how commercial these concerts were and if the musicians and organizers were looking for a profit, or simply for funds to cover expenses. By the last decade of the century, in 1792, the Halifax Harmonic Society, dedicated to the "discussion of and appreciation of music and musical performances" was formed. This society was made up from the ranks of the middling sort, textile merchants and manufacturers, and included both non performing members, who paid a guinea, and performing members who paid half a guinea. The majority of the performers were not professional musicians.<sup>53</sup>

The drive for developing music beyond folk traditions in Halifax came from the middling sort. This broadly based group was made up from the growing ranks of merchants, manufacturers and professional men. Driscoll examined the musical tradition in eighteenth century Salisbury, which was initially supported by the aristocracy, but as the century progressed became a commercial enterprise, dominated increasingly by the middling sort, noting that "eighteenth century musical culture can only be fully understood with reference to the society that sustained it."<sup>54</sup> Even in areas with an aristocratic presence, the middling sort was beginning to assert themselves and

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<sup>51</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 17 January 1769.

<sup>52</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 15 August 1769.

<sup>53</sup> Cowgill, "The most musical spot", pp.564-7.

<sup>54</sup> Driscoll, 'The Salisbury Annual Musical Festival', pp.33-52.

take control of performances of classical music. What the plebeian musical culture of Halifax was is hard to say, as local evidence is difficult to find. Hence we get only a partial view of the musical culture, a reflection of the wealthy and what they pursued. However Driscoll questions whether the culture of patronage was replaced by commerce, whether musical culture was becoming professional at the expense of the amateur and if a metropolitan culture was dominating provincial culture.<sup>55</sup> In Halifax we know that there was no resident aristocracy and whilst members of the Savile family were occasional visitors and guests at various dinners, the musical life of the town came largely from within.<sup>56</sup> The musicians who came together to form the Harmonic Society at the end of the eighteenth century were almost all amateurs, a tradition that continued, but there is evidence of professional musicians coming into the area for concerts, something which also continued into the next century. The driving force in Halifax was the middling sort, some of whom were very wealthy. But it is hard to say whether the local people were following a metropolitan lead or simply a part of an increasingly shared middle class culture. For Plumb the growth of music and of different musical forms, such as opera and pantomime, represented an increasingly commercialized form of leisure. He noted too that Manchester had subscription concerts by the 1740s but these came later to Halifax.<sup>57</sup> Commercial music in Halifax during this time was thus in a transitional stage, partly amateur, partly professional.

## **Sport**

Sports were popular throughout the country in the eighteenth century, comprising cricket, early forms of football, horse racing and blood sports. However not all people were in favour of sport, based in part on the fact that: “Fear, dislike and hostility towards the pleasures of the common people were as old as fear of the common people

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Sir George Savile 1726-1784 was a descendant of George Savile, 1<sup>st</sup> Marquess of Halifax 1633-1695.

<sup>57</sup> Plumb, ‘Commercialization and Society’, pp.279-80.

themselves.”<sup>58</sup> The crowds associated with sporting events and the possibility of social unrest fuelled by drinking seem to be at the centre of concerns, although other social occasions such as feasts like Shrove Tuesday and fairs were also viewed as opportunities for youthful mayhem and drunkenness into the nineteenth century.<sup>59</sup> This section will examine the pursuit and enjoyment of sport in Halifax, how it developed over the period and the impact of concerns such as these.

Beginning with blood sports there is evidence of cockfighting in Halifax and also of hunting, but little evidence remains to suggest that other blood sports were part of a regular cultural tradition.<sup>60</sup> It may simply be that the local evidence of these various pursuits has been lost or remains undiscovered. However Watson, writing his history of the parish in the 1780s, notes: “Bull Green, where in former times, was carried on the diversion of bull baiting, an exercise that our forefathers were so fond of, that one may see the remains of this kind in almost every town.”<sup>61</sup> This suggests that bull baiting at least were already a thing of the past in Halifax by the late eighteenth century, although Griffin has noted that it continued into the early nineteenth century in the nearby districts of Huddersfield, Wakefield and Barnsley.<sup>62</sup>

I have found no evidence of cock throwing locally, a blood sport which involved partly tying a cock down to limit its movement, then allowing participants to throw sticks at it with the intention of disabling the creature, although again this is not to say that it did not take place. Cock throwing throughout its history remained a largely plebeian pastime.<sup>63</sup> It was certainly a commercial event, two pence for three throws in late eighteenth century Chichester being the going rate.<sup>64</sup> In the West Riding by the mid-eighteenth century, authorities in Doncaster and Wakefield had taken steps to end

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<sup>58</sup> Walvin, J., (1984) *English Urban Life 1776-1851*, Hutchinson & Co., London. p.141.

<sup>59</sup> Griffin, *England's Revelry*, p.35.

<sup>60</sup> There were many local press reports of hunts both on horseback and on foot.

<sup>61</sup> Watson, *History*, p.202.

<sup>62</sup> Griffin, *England's Revelry*, p.149.

<sup>63</sup> Borsay, *A History of Leisure*, p.53.

<sup>64</sup> Griffin, *England's Revelry*, p.34.

it.<sup>65</sup> Similarly it was banned from 1745 in Worcester and in Liverpool in the late 1770s.<sup>66</sup> Malcolmsen also notes that this was the first blood sport to be actively campaigned against from the middle of the eighteenth century, although he also suggests that even during the Stuart period it was unpopular in certain circles, probably because of its links to the common people.<sup>67</sup>

It may be that during the second half of the eighteenth century cockfighting was the only commercial blood sport to have been a part of the regular social calendar in Halifax. It was a commercial sport which involved, in some instances, large amounts of capital being invested in both the birds and the pits. It was thus a part of the growing commercial leisure economy of the mid-eighteenth century, but one which, unlike theatre, music and the public house, was not to develop locally beyond the end of the century. In the nineteenth century there is little but anecdotal evidence of the pastime in Halifax,<sup>68</sup> although in nearby Bradford they occasionally took place in illegal drinking houses and beerhouses.<sup>69</sup>

Cockfighting, which is still legal in some parts of the world, has a long history with evidence going back to classical times. By the reign of Elizabeth I it had been established for over two hundred years and James I appointed a cock-master to look after the royal birds.<sup>70</sup> The sport had a long history of commercial exploitation before the eighteenth century, by which time it was well established across the county of Yorkshire. It is worth noting that in spite of the popularity of blood sports with some people there were always those who were indifferent and others strongly opposed to them. There is evidence of cockfighting in Halifax before the eighteenth century; in

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid., p.100.

<sup>66</sup> Porter, R., (1998) *England in the Eighteenth Century*, Folio Society, London. pp.272-3. Originally published as *English Society in the Eighteenth Century*.

<sup>67</sup> Malcolmsen, *Popular Recreations*, pp.119-22.

<sup>68</sup> Bailey, I., Cant, D., Petford, A., and Smith, N., (2007) *Pennine Perspectives: Aspects of the History of Midgley*, Midgley Books, Midgley. p.100.

<sup>69</sup> Jennings, *The Public House*, p.58.

<sup>70</sup> Scott, G.R., (1983) II Ed., *The History of Cockfighting*, Triplegate Ltd., Hindhead. p.93.

May 1680 the gentlemen and the lower ranks of the town became involved in a brawl at a purpose built cockpit at the rear of the Cross Inn. Oliver Heywood, a local minister, recorded that the event was accompanied by much gambling and drinking.<sup>71</sup>

Generally cockfighting coincided with other activities in the social calendar, such as holidays, horse racing, fairs and meetings of the assizes, all of which could attract large groups of people; the Halifax event in 1680 was perhaps a part of the May Day festivities. Cockfights in public houses were often arranged to coincide with such events, allowing landlords to capitalize on the influx of people. The fights in Halifax advertised in the newspapers were all associated with public houses, although this does not exclude the possibility of private and ad-hoc events. The benefits to the owner of an inn with a cockpit were clear; the organizers could expect that over the few days of the event they would make money from providing lodgings, food and drink and also entrance fees to the cockpit. I have been unable to discover any information on entrance fees for events held and advertised in the West Riding; none of the adverts I have seen give any indication of admission costs to enter the venues, just the prize money.

Cockfighting was popular with people across all social ranks.<sup>72</sup> The 1680 Halifax example shows this. But in that case a fight, with people taking sides based on their class or social rank, had broken out between the spectators. However as the eighteenth century progressed events became better organized and it was not in the interest of any publican sponsoring a commercial match to see it descend into a brawl which may well impact on both the profits and his licence.

By the middle of the eighteenth century the town had become one of the most popular venues for cockfighting in the west of the county, only Leeds and Wakefield had more

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<sup>71</sup> Hargreaves, *Halifax*, p.66.

<sup>72</sup> For instance *The Cockpit* 1759 by William Hogarth, 1692-1764, portrays a mix, albeit male, of the various ranks within society at a cockfight.

matches.<sup>73</sup> In theory the sport was open to all and fighting cocks could be kept by anyone, but when viewed from a regional or national perspective the wealthier groups were the driving force behind the sport, especially those events that were well organized and widely publicized. The aristocracy, who were also the source for much of the funding for horse racing, supported cockfighting, with some aristocrats keeping fighting birds. The most notable was the twelfth Earl of Derby who raised three thousand birds a year for the cockpit.<sup>74</sup> There were elaborate and expensive methods associated with breeding and keeping the birds and preparing them for fights. The handlers who prepared the birds and dealt with them in the pit could command high fees, as much as six guineas plus expenses for each match.<sup>75</sup> This was a lot of money when considered against the pay of the lower ranks in society and clearly cockfighting was a sport that could involve considerable capital outlay for some.

The events usually took place over a number of days, normally two to six, starting with a weigh-in day where judges would grade and match the birds according to their size and weight, with some wagers being placed at this stage. The contests were subject to rules, and arguments and fights amongst the spectators would see them excluded from the event. The birds were brought into the pit in sacks and gambling would commence. Fights varied from contests between two birds, to matches where a number of birds fought, the winner being the last one standing. The season lasted from the end of December to the end of September, the break coinciding with the time when the birds were in their moult and had little interest in fighting.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Middleton, I. M., 'Cockfighting in Yorkshire in the early Eighteenth Century', in *Northern History*, Volume 40, Issue 1, March 2003, pp.129-146.

<sup>74</sup> Scott, *The History of Cockfighting*, pp.94-120.

<sup>75</sup> Middleton, 'Cockfighting in Yorkshire', pp.129-46.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*

The *Leeds Mercury* advertised cockfights in 1750 at Mr. Mellan's new pit at the Talbot in Halifax. The first was advertised on the 6 February between the gentlemen of Halifax and Wakefield for Monday the 5 March:

“A main of cocks betwixt the Gentlemen of Wakefield and the Gentlemen of Halifax; for four Guineas a Battle, and forty Guineas the Main or odd Battle; to shew 31cocks on each side of the Main, and 15 on each side of the Bye; to weigh on Monday the 5<sup>th</sup> day of March next, and fight the following days. N.B. There will be a very good Ordinary every Day during the Cockings at Mr. Mellan's aforesaid.”<sup>77</sup> (As original)

The feeders for the contest were David Smith of Wakefield and Jonathan Redseam for Halifax. There was a further advert in the same paper for a contest to be held on the 2 April at the same venue. This meeting was slightly more profitable for the winners at 5 guineas<sup>78</sup> a battle and 50 guineas the main.<sup>79</sup> The time of the year the contests were arranged suggests that they may have been held to coincide with the Easter festivities. Cockfights, as can be seen, were often arranged to exploit inter-town or county rivalries.

Although, as we saw, there is evidence of all ranks attending cockfights, as the adverts make clear and Malcomson points out, gentlemen were the main organizers of the sport and thus the most likely winners.<sup>80</sup> It is not possible to say how much was gambled on cockfights in Halifax, or how profitable the events were, but the owner of the Talbot was certainly confident enough of making a profit to invest in the new pit. Of the actual pit and its construction there are no details; it may have been either inside or outdoors but either type would have probably involved a considerable outlay of capital. Ten years later in 1760 Mr. Mellin's pit is advertising in the newspaper for a contest over two days on the 27 and 28 of February. The biggest prize for what is described as

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<sup>77</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 6 February 1750.

<sup>78</sup> The guinea was a gold coin valued at 21 shillings which was taken out of circulation in 1813.

<sup>79</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 27 February 1750

<sup>80</sup> Malcomson, *Popular Recreations*, p.135.

a Welch Main [sic] contest (one where all cocks except the eventual winner were eliminated) was for an ox valued at £40, compared with the prizes on offer ten years earlier, the value of the prize money seems to have remained static. There are further adverts for contests in July, so although the prize money may not have increased the events remained popular.<sup>81</sup>

The *Leeds Mercury* reveals how popular cockfighting continued to be in the middle of the eighteenth century. There are many adverts for venues across the West Riding around the mid-point of the century, although the advertising appears to reduce in the later decades of the century. This is perhaps a reflection of moves against the sport; magistrates were taking action against them at public houses from this time.<sup>82</sup> For the period 1779-1783 there are comparatively few adverts for cockfighting or indeed for leisure pursuits in general, and whilst there are still adverts for the sport in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, they remain few in number. By the beginning of the nineteenth century there is local evidence that the sport had become unfashionable. In the *Halifax Journal*, which was published between 1801 and 1811, the only reference found on the subject was to a cockfight held in Raleigh, North Carolina in the USA, the description concluded “and thus ended this rational, humane and reputable amusement.”<sup>83</sup> The article’s tone suggests, along with the total lack of interest shown in cockfighting in the paper over the years it is in print, that the sport had fallen out of favour with certain sections of the community. By the end of the eighteenth century and early part of the nineteenth century there is no evidence of cockfights in Halifax; this does not mean however that they were no longer taking place and the *Leeds Mercury* still carried adverts for fights elsewhere in Yorkshire. However cockfighting and other blood sports, although not hunting, were experiencing a decline

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<sup>81</sup> *Union Journal or Halifax Advertiser*, 19 February 1760.

<sup>82</sup> Jennings, *The Public House in Bradford*, p.58.

<sup>83</sup> *Halifax Journal*, September 17 1808.

in popularity due in part to pressure from magistrates, a change in manners and in what was perceived to be respectable, although it is hard to say which was most significant. Halifax seems to have been part of a national trend, however as we will see blood sports did not completely fall out of favour until further legislation was introduced to curb the practice in 1835 and 1849.

Cockfighting was then an important part of the commercial leisure life of the local area in the eighteenth century. Malcomson notes that it continued to retain followers up to the end of the 1830s, until the majority of gentlemen abandoned the sport.<sup>84</sup> Huggins similarly notes that it remained an attraction at horse races up to the 1830s<sup>85</sup> and Scott suggests that the sport continued to be popular until the Act of 1849. But the evidence in Halifax, where cockfighting was associated with the public house, does not support this later survival. What we seem to witness are changing attitudes rather than a pastime impacted upon by for instance burgeoning industrialization. Halifax was becoming an increasingly important cultural centre, possibly a reason in itself why the more brutal pastimes were no longer encouraged. The area's strong links to nonconformity may also have played a part.

Other sports are far more difficult to identify as having been a regular part of the social calendar in Halifax. Horse racing was popular across the country and Middleton has noted that the sport was a regular and important part of the sporting calendar from the early eighteenth century in Yorkshire; the races were often arranged to coincide with the Assizes, a fair or another event that drew people to an area.<sup>86</sup> However the races themselves could act as a magnet for spectators in turn also attracting other entertainments. Plumb noted the importance of horse racing in the development of

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<sup>84</sup> Malcomson, *Popular Recreations*, p. 134.

<sup>85</sup> Huggins, M., (2000) *Flat Racing and British Society 1790-1914: A Social and Economic History*, Frank Cass, London. p.118.

<sup>86</sup> Middleton, I., and Vamplew, W., 'Horse Racing and the Yorkshire Leisure Calendar in the Early Eighteenth Century', in *Northern History*, Volume 40, Issue 2, September 2003, pp.259-276.

commercial leisure as “the first sport to become a highly organized, nationwide social activity, run as much for profit as for fun”.<sup>87</sup>

Evidence of local horse races being held regularly in the later eighteenth century is scarce, although meetings elsewhere were reported, including for instance the York meeting of 1759, where horses belonging to the Marquess of Rockingham and the Earl of Northumberland competed in a race for 1,600 guineas. At the established racecourses large amounts of money were being invested in the sport; although no doubt the races held in Halifax were for less significant sums.<sup>88</sup> The last specific report of horse races in Halifax in the eighteenth century that I have come across is an advert that was placed in the local paper on 25 September 1759. It stated that the horse races advertised on the 2, 3 and 4 of October for less than £50 would incur a penalty of £100 and that any person taking part would be penalized £200.<sup>89</sup> This was due to an Act of Parliament of 1740 which forbade races for less than £50 prize money.<sup>90</sup> It is unclear how often races were held in the town during the eighteenth century; Middleton suggests they were held during the fair week up to 1740 and this may have continued into the later eighteenth century.<sup>91</sup> Huggins notes that entrance fees were not charged at local races in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, money was made from the influx of people into the locality.<sup>92</sup> The final eighteenth-century reference that I found on the sport is an advert for stud facilities in Halifax, explaining that people could view a full list of the horse Gamble’s pedigree.<sup>93</sup>

Generally the commercial aspect of sport during the eighteenth century is limited to the cockpit, horse racing and boxing but cricket had become “stabilized in special grounds which charged admission ... drawing large crowds, both for betting and the

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<sup>87</sup> Plumb, ‘Commercialization and Society’, p. 282.

<sup>88</sup> *Union Journal or Halifax Advertiser*, 28 August 1759.

<sup>89</sup> *Union Journal or Halifax Advertiser*, 25 September 1759.

<sup>90</sup> Middleton, ‘Horse racing and the Yorkshire leisure calendar’, p.259-76.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>92</sup> Huggins, *Flat Racing*, p.152.

<sup>93</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 6 April 1784.

sport.”<sup>94</sup> The popular eighteenth century sports have common elements: they are all associated with gambling, draw people from across the social spectrum and face growing concerns about their suitability. The information on sport locally, apart from cockfighting, is scant, but this does not mean that sport was not played; as noted, an early form of the cricket was played in the seventeenth century, so it may be reasonable to assume that other sports were also seen in the district.

### **The Public House**

The public house was undoubtedly the centre of commercial leisure activities in eighteenth century Halifax. Not only did it serve its primary commercial purpose as a place where people could drink and in some cases also eat, it was also a centre for sports, music, theatre, and acted as occasional assembly rooms for balls. Jennings notes that the eighteenth century public house was the centre for a wide range of sports including prize fighting, cricket and horse racing; although evidence of this is scarce relating to Halifax public houses.<sup>95</sup> However a ball to celebrate the birthday of the Prince of Wales was held at the Talbot Inn in May 1759, with tickets at 3/-, a price that meant only the wealthier people would be able to afford to attend or indeed would be permitted. The audience has always been subject to control through pricing mechanisms.<sup>96</sup> The public house also served as “a place where magistrates sat, election committees organized, [and] business deals were done”.<sup>97</sup>

At least two of the public houses in Halifax could trace their origins back to the sixteenth century, with the Cross Inn dating back to 1535, which in 1639 was described by a traveller as one of the finest inns in England. Around 1745, the time of the Jacobite rebellion, the name was changed to the Union Cross, a name it still bears today. By 1782 it had become a meeting place for the Freemasons Lodge. The other public house

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<sup>94</sup> Plumb, ‘Commercialization and Society’, p.282.

<sup>95</sup> Jennings, P., (2007) *The Local: A History of The English Pub*, Tempus, Stroud. p.47.

<sup>96</sup> *Union Journal or Halifax Advertiser*, 29 May 1759.

<sup>97</sup> Jennings, *The Public House*, p.53.

of a similar age is the Old Cock, it too is still open. The Old Cock was, by the late eighteenth century, a popular meeting place for a number of local clubs and societies.<sup>98</sup>

The extent that public houses were used for commercial leisure purposes has already, in part, been examined in this chapter. But people also played traditional pub games such as cards and skittles in local public houses although specific local evidence is scant. One correspondent to the local paper, who titled himself Rebus,<sup>99</sup> wrote that he was mortified to hear of a pack of cards called for at an inn as: “Gaming, finds a man a FOOL at first, but generally leaves him, or, rather marks an accomplished VILLAIN at last ... It would be endless to mention the pernicious affects of it; cheating, lying, swearing, on the one hand, family distress on the other, are evils that always wait in its train.” He continued, unhappy that women devoted time to cards, and asked whether “the fair-sex, who divide their winter evenings between cards and romances, could find entertainments more suitable as well as more beneficial?”<sup>100</sup> Gambling was certainly widespread and not just confined to the games played in the pubs. It appears that people were prepared to wager amounts of money on what appear, in some instances, bizarre events. A wager of £50 was made between Mr. Hoyland of Halifax and Mr. Oldfield of Chester on whether the former’s black Galloway horse would walk around Skircoat Common on its hind legs for ten minutes; however on seeing the horse Oldfield asked that £5 be taken off the wager.<sup>101</sup> Another reported wager was “for a considerable sum, that a mare belonging to Mr. Alexander Hill, near Bury, did not draw three packs of goods from the Hanging-gate below Black-Stone Edge, to Halifax in eight hours, which she performed in six, and two minutes, with great ease”.<sup>102</sup> The outcome of the Galloway bet was not reported but together they seem to show that whilst some

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<sup>98</sup> Hanson, *Old Inns of Halifax*, pp.3-13.

<sup>99</sup> Rebus is a type of puzzle where pictures are used to represent words they were popular devices in letters in the 18th and 19th centuries.

<sup>100</sup> *Union Journal or Halifax Advertiser*, 13 February 1759.

<sup>101</sup> *Union Journal or Halifax Advertiser*, 9 October 1759.

<sup>102</sup> *Union Journal or Halifax Advertiser*, 6 February 1759.

questioned gambling, it was generally accepted and Porter notes that at the time: “England was gripped by gambling fever. Bets were laid on political events, births and deaths ... for a few pounds challengers galloped against the clock, gulped down pints of gin or ate live cats.”<sup>103</sup> As with pub games, there is limited local evidence of gambling but Halifax was evidently no different than the rest of the country.

The assault on the public house had not begun in earnest in the eighteenth century and consumption of alcohol generally remained socially acceptable; people such as the politicians Charles James Fox and Lord Eldon, and popular figures such as Robert Clive, William Hickey and Dr. Johnson accepted heavy drinking as a part of normal everyday life.<sup>104</sup> Whilst heavy drinking was thus generally tolerated, there was concern where large numbers of common people came together drinking, probably related to fear of disorder rather than drunkenness per se. However, just as attitudes to cockfighting changed during the century, so attitudes to drinking and what was socially acceptable behaviour were also changing. In this context the public house would over the next century become something of a battleground and move from being the centre of commercial leisure in the community, to increasingly becoming just one element of a diverse commercial leisure market.

### **Halifax as a centre for leisure in the late eighteenth century**

The notion of Halifax as a Harrogate or Buxton is difficult to imagine given its industrial development in the nineteenth century but at the end of the eighteenth century an elaborate range of baths with a formal leisure garden were built in the town. Illustrations show them to be far more sophisticated than the area’s many plunge baths. Thomas Rawlinson, a plumber, obtained a lease on Coldwell Ings from the Waterhouse Charities on the 3 March 1784 at £2/10/0 a year. The land was near to Stoney Royd and Bailey Hall, two houses belonging to local gentry. The brick built baths contained a

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<sup>103</sup> Porter, *England in the Eighteenth Century*, p.221.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, p.23.

substantial range of rooms including, dining rooms, shower baths, proper baths, slipper baths and an open air pool with semi-circular ends with steps leading down into the water. Outside a formal pleasure garden was laid out to the front of the complex with a range of other buildings. Records also show that Rawlinson held a licence for the Bath Tavern, which it is believed formed part of the estate from 1793. The Bath Tavern was in 1795 the meeting place for the Lodge of Probity, the oldest Masonic lodge in Yorkshire. The baths were run on a subscription basis with membership costs being one guinea per annum.<sup>105</sup>

Halifax then had a growing range of leisure facilities with which to attract the wealthier sort and it was developing, not just as a manufacturing and marketing centre, but also as a centre for cultural and leisure activities. Late eighteenth century prints of the town show a rural setting more akin to a centre for recreation, not the smoke covered urban sprawl that was to develop in the next century, although the developments were not on the scale of more substantial towns and cities, or indeed specialized leisure resorts. Halifax thus shared in the growth of commercial leisure which Plumb first identified.

The expansion of the local commercial leisure market was coming from within. The wealthy group of middling sorts was the force behind the building of the theatre, whilst a local entrepreneur built the baths at Lily Lane. This tends to reinforce the case that during this period the commercialization of leisure and the growth of a consumer society was driven by a growing and increasingly assertive middle class. The period saw a significant number of changes to leisure. Whilst the public house remained the centre of commercial leisure its position was being challenged. Blood sports were becoming less fashionable due to changing mores and an increasingly rigorous approach to their regulation. This was a development which gathered pace into the new century.

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<sup>105</sup> Robinson, P.W., 'Lily Lane Baths and Albion Mill: From Pleasure Garden to Manufacturing', in *Transactions of the Halifax Antiquarian Society*, 1991, pp.61-95.

## **Chapter Three**

### **1800-1869 Commercial leisure in an age of industrial and social upheaval**

This chapter looks at leisure in an age of fundamental change for the area, one of population growth and the mechanization of industry. In the textile industry the domestic system of manufacture is replaced by one based upon the factory. Traditional leisure pursuits, especially blood sports, are marginalized and legislated against. In sport cricket is the main team game, but it is not yet the age of organized team sports. The public house remains the centre of much commercial leisure, but it is subjected to pressure from reformers, increasing hostility from temperance organizations and alternatives such as the music hall. The theatre experiences lean periods and competition from increasingly popular variety shows. Holidays, in the modern sense are almost non-existent, except for the wealthier sections of society. However the coming of the railway allowed many people further down the social scale to take excursions. Whilst there is growth and development of commercial leisure in the period, this is a time of transition, before the pace of change quickens in the latter years of the nineteenth century.

#### **Halifax and its hinterland**

At the beginning of the nineteenth century the population of the township was 8,886 and of the parish 63,434; by 1851 this had grown to 25,159 and 149,257 respectively.<sup>1</sup> The township became a part of the parliamentary constituency of Halifax in 1832, electing two MPs, and its boundaries also formed the municipal borough from 1848. Halifax was to become a Liberal stronghold in both local and national elections.

The area had seen some mechanization of the textile industry in the late eighteenth century but, as we shall see, it was not viewed by contemporaries as an industrial area,

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<sup>1</sup> Hargreaves, *Halifax*, p.74.

in the modern sense, for at least the first three decades of the nineteenth century. With its theatre, range of baths and, by 1825, its impressive new concert room Halifax was regarded as something of a cultural centre. This was not to last. By the 1840s it was a scene of turmoil as rioters attempted to wreck the new mills. At the same time some areas of the town were squalid slums. The lack of town planning had led to inadequate housing with unmade streets and few social amenities. Families were crammed into unhealthy, poorly ventilated back to back dwellings, with no easy access to fresh water.<sup>2</sup>

During the late 1830s there was a downturn in trade and by 1842 the number of those in receipt of poor relief had doubled. Edward Akroyd, the Halifax manufacturer, speaking to a meeting of the Anti Corn Law League in 1842 describing himself as an employer of 2,000 hands paying over £1,000 in wages each week, warned of possible famine and anarchy.<sup>3</sup> The *Halifax Guardian* disagreed with Akroyd, attributing the current distress to: “The annihilation of the ‘domestic manufacturer’ of Yorkshire ... a great, almost a national calamity. There was so much of the home character in their little half farmstead half clothing shop; the master and his men and domestic apprentices ... that the destruction of such a system cannot but be productive of evil followed as it was by the gloomy factory system ... the class whose destruction we ... lament could not co-exist with establishments ‘employing 2,000 hands and paying £1,000 per week in wages.’”<sup>4</sup> The newspaper was primarily opposed to Akroyd’s support for the Anti Corn Law League but it is clear that a way of life enjoyed for a considerable period had been all but swept away in a very short time.

Trouble flared in August 1842 when an estimated 25,000 Plug demonstrators, including people from Bradford and the Calder Valley took to the streets; it was alleged that they were determined to attack Akroyd’s mill, and he called for the militia. The

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<sup>2</sup> Burnett J., (1978) *A Social History of Housing, 1815-1970*, David & Charles, Newton Abbott. pp.58-60.

<sup>3</sup> Bretton, R., ‘Edward Akroyd’, in *Transactions of the Halifax Antiquarian Society*, 1948, pp.73-91.

<sup>4</sup> *Halifax Guardian*, 30 July 1842.

*Halifax Guardian* was now as quick to praise Akroyd for his decisive action in dealing with the rioters as it had previously been to condemn him. They noted that the military had acted impeccably and that no loss of life occurred, although there followed a list of some fifty people injured by sabre, gunshot and other wounds.<sup>5</sup>

The 1840s continued to see political agitation with Chartism remaining important. The 1847 election saw the radical Congregationalist minister Edward Miall and Ernest Jones barrister and Chartist stand in Halifax. The former was described as a “Chartist in both religion and politics.” Jones’ creed was summed up as: “Whatever is wrong.” The local Liberals had disagreed on which candidate, Miall or Jones, they should support, along with Sir Charles Wood who was re-elected; their prevarication saw the Tory Henry Edwards elected as the town’s other MP.<sup>6</sup>

This decade was to prove the high point of political and domestic strife in the area. During the 1840s Akroyd spent £11,000 on his model village at Copley in an attempt to improve the lot of his workers. In the next decade the publication of William Ranger’s General Board of Health report in 1851, which found 1,000 people living in cellars and a town of unimaginable filth, polluted by industry, with unmade streets and open sewers, prompted further action. Both Akroyd and the Crossley family were to embark on further separate projects of model housing in the town. They were notable and creditworthy attempts to address the problem of poor quality housing, although the houses built tended to be lived in by the better off working classes.<sup>7</sup>

The social and political tensions of the 1840s were lessened by the improvement in trade in the following decade, with Chartism a spent force. However, there were positive developments. People did see some improvement to the environment with the

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<sup>5</sup> *Halifax Guardian*, 20 August 1842.

<sup>6</sup> *Halifax Guardian*, 17 July 1847.

<sup>7</sup> Jowitt, A., (1986) *Model Industrial Communities in Mid-Nineteenth Century Yorkshire*, University of Bradford, Bradford. pp.79-84.

opening in 1857, at a cost of £50,000, of People's Park, funded by Francis Crossley and designed by Joseph Paxton.<sup>8</sup> The council started to take on more responsibilities: gas in 1855, parks 1857, public baths 1859 and cemeteries from 1861 and opened a town hall, designed by leading Victorian architect Sir Charles Barry, in 1864.<sup>9</sup>

During this period the local workforce saw some improvement in their conditions. The Factory Act of 1833 excluded children under nine from textile factories whilst also limiting the daily hours of those under thirteen and weekly hours for those under eighteen. The 1842 Mines Act removed women and children under 10 from working underground. However, the major breakthrough was the Factory Acts of 1844 and 1847, culminating in the 1850 Act which clarified the previous acts and saw a 60 hour week with Saturday afternoons free from work for some workers, although it would be the 1870s before many workers were to benefit from a free Saturday afternoon.<sup>10</sup> The period is then one of great change, with the old system of manufacturing and marketing textiles gone but legislation, in many cases bitterly opposed, was introduced that alleviated some of the worst excesses of the new industrial society.

The middle classes for most of this period were made up mainly of "craftsmen, textile manufacturers, and other businessmen and tradesmen". This group represented nearly 75 per cent of those able to vote by the middle of the century, with around 25 per cent of the electorate described as professional and upper class.<sup>11</sup> Towards the end of this period the Vicar of Halifax, Francis Pigou, maintained that "few English parishes could compare with Halifax for its concentration of wealthy manufacturers and merchant princes". The local gentry, important in the early years of the century, had declined by the end of this period, and it would be the end of the century before there was a

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<sup>8</sup> Cunningham, *Leisure in the Industrial Revolution*, pp.151-55.

<sup>9</sup> Hargreaves, *Halifax*, pp.161-64.

<sup>10</sup> Woodward, *The Age of Reform*, pp.148-56.

<sup>11</sup> Hargreaves, *Halifax*, pp.114-15.

significant increase in the professional middle class as the industrial, commercial base and service elements of the town's economy evolved.<sup>12</sup>

### **Theatre**

During this period there was one purpose built theatre in Halifax but a range of other venues were opened which would come into direct competition with it. These included the Northgate Hotel and Casino, the Oddfellows' Hall and the Mechanics' Hall. All three venues began to offer forms of entertainment which provided alternatives to the traditional stage. However, for at least the first two decades of the nineteenth century theatre continued to be a popular form of entertainment, with the provincial circuits of actors such as the one that served Halifax flourishing.<sup>13</sup> At the beginning of the century the season for the Halifax Theatre ran from November to January; by the end of the period it would run almost continuously throughout the year with just a short summer break. The company of actors that performed in Halifax at the start of the century was one based in Nottingham. This company, albeit with changes of management, continued to appear for their season until the demise of the provincial circuits, giving up the lease to the theatre in Halifax in 1839.<sup>14</sup>

The 1801 season opened with a benefit for Mr. Fawcett. Benefits were often given to actors and managers as a way of both supplementing their income and also allowing them, if the benefit proved successful, to put some savings away as a safeguard against ill health, old age and infirmity. The performance on Monday the 16 November consisted of Otway's play *Venice Preserved*, which was advertised as not having been seen in the town for over ten years. Thomas Otway 1652-1685 had been one of the leading playwrights of the Restoration theatre and this play was reckoned to be one of

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., pp.142-44.

<sup>13</sup> Earl, J., (2005) *British Theatres and Music Halls*, Shire Books, Princes Risborough. p.11.

<sup>14</sup> Taylor, 'Theatre in Halifax c1750-1840', pp.58-67.

the finest blank verse tragedies written.<sup>15</sup> Performances followed a set pattern during this early part of the century; the play was presented followed by a mixture of songs and short pieces, quite often farces. For this performance, following on from the main play there was a musical piece, *Il Dondocani*, and a sketch: *The Drunken Swiss*.<sup>16</sup>

It remains difficult to say with any certainty what the social mix of the audience in Halifax was, but a review from 1801 gives an indication: “The tragedy of ‘The Gamester’ was on Monday, the 7<sup>th</sup>, played before a very numerous audience, the house being crowded in every part, which we were glad to witness, not only on account of the moral excellence of the play, but because the Stage is the most popular and useful source of elegant and classical amusement. All ranks draw from it something to inform, to correct, and to refine.”<sup>17</sup> Not only was the performance well attended but the text suggests that the audience was drawn from a wide ranging social group. As we shall see the price of visiting the theatre was relatively expensive in relation to incomes; but as noted in the previous chapter, people from lower income groups appear to have been able to finance visits to the theatre. The writer also states that the theatre was an elevating form of amusement, although this was never, as we have already seen, a universal view.

The performance of *The Gamester* was popular but this was not always the case, with some performances reported as being poorly attended. Some audiences could also be rowdy, if good natured: “‘The Wheel of Fortune’ played on Saturday evening brought a very good house. The Gallery visitors were too full of Christmas cheer, and too vociferous, to permit themselves, or any part of the audience, to hear the play; on which

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<sup>15</sup> Ousby, I., (1993) *The Cambridge Guide to Literature in English*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge. p.709.

<sup>16</sup> *Halifax Journal*, 14 November 1801.

<sup>17</sup> *Halifax Journal*, 19 December 1801.

therefore, we shall not offer any comments.”<sup>18</sup> Rowdy behaviour was, as we shall see, one explanation why audiences started to decline in the following decades. A visit to the theatre in November 1803 cost either 3/- or 2/6 in the boxes, 2/- in the pit and 1/- in the gallery, but over the course of the century prices for the cheaper seats began to fall.<sup>19</sup>

The theatrical season that ran from the end of 1804 into 1805 was described in January in generally positive terms.<sup>20</sup> Shakespeare was popular, with both *Othello* and *As You Like It* being performed during the season. The following month it was noted that the season just ended was the most successful ever held.<sup>21</sup> When adverts were carried in the paper for the Theatre, tickets were advertised as being available at various local outlets. It seems that the Theatre favoured people buying their tickets in advance rather than paying at the door, no doubt for good financial reasons; they were getting their money before the day of the performance and not simply relying on people turning up on the night.

The Theatre in the early decades of the century attracted the occasional review, but they were not yet a regular feature in the papers and they were, at times, something of a mixed blessing. One review scrutinized the acting abilities of a cast member:

“ *The Young Roscius* (Master Batty)<sup>22</sup> stands so DISTINCT from the *Dramatis Personae* of MEN and WOMEN, that renouncing all pretensions of *settling* the respective merits of all performers, this extraordinary youth *exacts* at least so much at our hands as to notice, that he has in the course of the present week exhibited, no doubt, capital characters - but though his *manner* is engaging, his *voice* is grown dissonant and rugged, incapable of those

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<sup>18</sup> *Halifax Journal*, 2 January 1801.

<sup>19</sup> *Halifax Journal*, 12 November 1803.

<sup>20</sup> *Halifax Journal*, 19 January 1805.

<sup>21</sup> *Halifax Journal*, 2 February 1805.

<sup>22</sup> William Henry West Batty 1791-1874. Quintus Roscius Gallus was a celebrated Roman comic actor, died 62BC, his name become an epithet for successful actors. Batty was known as The Young Roscius.

modulations which at first captivate the ear, and then take possession of the heart. In the beginning of the week the house was not so well filled as was expected.”

It seems that the writer of the review was not the only person in town who was not impressed by the acting, even though Batty was a celebrated actor. In this year the season had extended into February, suggesting some flexibility in the periods the theatre was used for traditional drama.<sup>23</sup> Generally these minor theatres, as the non patent houses were referred to, were licensed for 60 days and performances normally held three days a week, as was the case in Halifax.

The Halifax theatre was also used for the occasional theatrical piece outside of the traditional season. In August of 1808 Mr. Bannister from the Theatre Royal Drury Lane performed a show including recitations and songs entitled *An Actors Ways and Means*.<sup>24</sup> The prices were the same as those quoted above for 1803. Other entertainments were also presented, a lecture held on electricity and chemistry in October had admission prices the same as those for drama.<sup>25</sup> However a series of lectures on astronomy, held during August and September of 1810, was run on a subscription basis costing 9/-, which included an epitome.<sup>26</sup> There was also a 21ft diameter ‘Grand Transparent Orrery’ on view. An orrery is a mechanical model of the solar system which can show the relative positions of the planets in relation to the sun, named after Charles Boyle, 4<sup>th</sup> Earl of Orrery 1674-1731.<sup>27</sup>

As noted, the *Halifax Journal* ceased publication in February 1811 and the Halifax theatre did not advertise regularly in the *Leeds Mercury*, which makes it difficult to follow the development of theatre in the town until the publishing of the *Halifax*

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<sup>23</sup> *Halifax Journal*, 21 February 1807.

<sup>24</sup> *Halifax Journal*, 20 August 1808.

<sup>25</sup> *Halifax Journal*, 8 October 1808.

<sup>26</sup> An epitome in this case is a summary of the lectures.

<sup>27</sup> *Halifax Journal*, 18 August 1810.

*Guardian* in 1832. The *Leeds Mercury* recorded theatres opening in Barnsley and Huddersfield in July and October of 1815 respectively, and in Bradford in 1820.<sup>28</sup> In the issue of the *Leeds Mercury* that announced the opening of the Bradford Theatre, the theatre in Halifax advertised Mozart's *Don Giovanni*. This advert appears to have been a limited response to the opening of the new theatre in Bradford. From the late 1820s the theatre nationally was entering a difficult period and by 1832 it was described by a speaker to the Select Committee on Dramatic Literature as no longer "a fashionable amusement".<sup>29</sup>

According to Taylor, it may be that the Nottingham touring company missed the season 1814-15 altogether and also possibly the following year. There continued to be various ad hoc performances and a concert held on the 21 November 1821 saw prices in both the pit and boxes at 7/-. Alternatives to traditional dramatic performances continued: in 1830 William Cobbett<sup>30</sup> lectured to a crowded house during a tour of the West Riding.<sup>31</sup> In 1824 the building was converted from candles to gas lighting, confirming that the owners were prepared to continue to invest money. Gas lighting had been introduced at Drury Lane in September 1817 to the auditorium and the stage. Previous to gas a mixture of oil lamps and candles were used. This caused problems if wax dripped from the candelabras onto the audience and there was also a smoke nuisance. However gas introduced new dangers, the possibility of leaks and gas explosions but on the positive side gas lighting allowed the auditorium lights to be dimmed, creating a better ambience for the audience.<sup>32</sup>

Many of the smaller theatres during the early decades of the nineteenth century relied

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<sup>28</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 26 February 1820.

<sup>29</sup> Booth, M., (1991) *Theatre in the Victorian Age*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge. p.2.

<sup>30</sup> William Cobbett, 1763-1835, a popular journalist and in later life an MP opposed to the changes brought to the country by the mechanization of industry.

<sup>31</sup> Taylor, 'Theatre in Halifax c1750-1840', pp.58-67.

<sup>32</sup> Leacroft, *The Development of the English Playhouse*, p.186.

on painted canvas stretched across wood frames fixed to the walls to decorate the auditorium. The elaborate use of plasterwork came later in the nineteenth century.<sup>33</sup> Seating tended to be basic wooden benches in the cheaper parts, with better seating in the more expensive areas. Provincial theatres tended to follow a similar design, with the building split in half between the auditorium and stage area. Underneath the stage would have been a machine room and dressing rooms.<sup>34</sup> Over the course of the century the Halifax theatre would undergo considerable improvements and reconstruction.

The difficult times that provincial theatre faced in the 1830s would not have been helped by the review for a play with a local theme. Performed on a stormy night, *Gibbet Law in Halifax*<sup>35</sup> was described as being thinly attended, perhaps not surprising given the weather. However the reviewer noted:

“Mr. Henderson as Mister Colbeck gave a good idea of the social importance enjoyed by mercantile individuals ... but we cannot suppress our opinion that he frequently overdoes an impassioned part by unnatural distortion of features and needless difficulty of respiration; the latter seems more like disease than nature. He also uses too much *rouge* indeed all the gentleman and ladies with the exception of Mr. Hamilton, Mr. Nantz and Miss Garrick [use too much rouge] ... so that the least observant spectator must remark that neither maidenly modesty nor manly indignation could assume so very red a face.”

The damage having been done, the review ended on the note that the performance was “an interesting and instructive production”.<sup>36</sup>

Poor reviews coupled with a season that ran through the winter months could at times no doubt lead to a difficult existence. By 1832 Thomas Wilson Manly, the actor-

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., pp.186-7.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., pp.156-60.

<sup>35</sup> The Halifax Gibbet was a device used to behead criminals, possibly one of a number of decapitation devices that inspired the French Guillotine.

<sup>36</sup> *Halifax Guardian*, 28 February 1835.

manager running the company that visited the theatre, was seeking a reduction in rental, noting that the eleven week season cost him two pence over £590 in expenses. These figures probably accurately reflect the overheads of running a touring company, as they were submitted to the clerk who was employed by the owners of the theatre, so to seek to inflate costs would not have been wise.<sup>37</sup> It appears that theatre in Halifax was struggling.

There is, as noted, evidence of poor audiences across the country during the 1830s, reasons put forward at the time included the theatre falling out of fashion because of the poor quality of the plays, the cost of admission, rowdy audience behaviour, and also the size of some theatres, Manchester's Theatre Royal for instance, with its 2,000 capacity, may simply have been too large to fill.<sup>38</sup> However the decline of the theatre was a national phenomenon and not restricted to the north. By the 1840s many early theatres in less populous areas had fallen into disuse and provincial circuits folded.<sup>39</sup> Even York's Theatre Royal suffered, possibly because York itself was losing some of its appeal as a fashionable cultural centre for the wealthy of the county.<sup>40</sup> However Fitzsimmons questions whether there was a "process of decline but simply one of change".<sup>41</sup> The problems faced by the theatre were noted by parliament when it convened the 1832 Select Committee on Dramatic Literature. It noted that the theatre was no longer considered a fashionable amusement; its audience was mainly lower middle class and the quality of dramatic writing was not good. The recommendations of the committee were, however, not acted upon until 1843.<sup>42</sup> Another reason for the

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<sup>37</sup> Taylor, 'Theatre in Halifax c1750-1840', pp.58-67.

<sup>38</sup> Newey, K., 'Early Nineteenth Century Theatre in Manchester', in *Manchester Region History Review*, 2006, Volume 17 part 2, pp.1-19.

<sup>39</sup> Earl, *British Theatres*, pp.12-13.

<sup>40</sup> Anselm, H., 'The Forgotten Century: York's Theatre Royal Between 1803 and 1911', in *Nineteenth Century Theatre and Film*, 2007, Volume 34/1, pp.35-44.

<sup>41</sup> Fitzsimmons, L., 'The Theatre Royal York in the 1840s', in *Nineteenth Century Theatre and Film*, 2004, Volume 31/1, pp.18-25.

<sup>42</sup> Booth, *Theatre in the Victorian Age*, p.2.

continuing decline in the popularity of the theatre in the 1830s and 1840s may have been the increasing popularity of nascent music halls.

Nevertheless, in spite of the national decline in theatre going, theatres in the new industrial centres were not as badly affected as those that relied on the rural population who were quitting the countryside in favour of employment in the manufacturing towns, and investment continued in the Halifax Theatre.<sup>43</sup> In 1838 new stoves were installed and the public were advised that policemen would be in attendance to preserve order. In 1841 the stage area was completely altered with an inner proscenium being constructed and described as being brilliantly lit with fifty additional gas lights; new boxes were also installed to attract select and family parties. The owners claimed it to be one of the best theatres in the country “suited to be the rendezvous of the intelligence and the wealth of this populous and enlightened neighbourhood”.<sup>44</sup> It seems apparent that these measures were, at least in part, an attempt to attract the respectable middle class audience.

The play featuring the town’s gibbet was regularly performed in the local Theatre. The work reappeared on 10 February 1840 under the title, *Denis, or the Gibbet Law in Halifax*, perhaps abridged, as it followed a performance of *King Lear*. On Wednesday of the same week, a railway night was held under the patronage of a number of what were described as influential gentlemen connected with the railway, with prices from 1/- to 3/-. To give an idea of the relative cost of the theatre in relation to local wages, on the 29 February 1840 positions were advertised at the Halifax Union Workhouse, the vacancies were for a porter at £16, a schoolmistress at £10, a nurse at £15 and a cook at £12/12/0 per annum, including lodgings and provisions. A visit to the theatre would

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<sup>43</sup> Earl, *British Theatres*, pp.12-13.

<sup>44</sup> Porritt, A., ‘The Old Halifax Theatre 1789-1904’, in *Transactions of the Halifax Antiquarian Society*, 1956, pp.17-30.

have been a considerable outlay for people on these wages.<sup>45</sup>

However evidence of the poorer sort attending the theatre is not hard to find. In 1840 there was some economic distress suffered in the area and it was noted that in Bradford:

“It is a matter of very great surprise to persons who are conversant with the very great distress that prevails in the town, that two sets of itinerant actors should find such great encouragement as to have their places of amusement filled, night by night, with the poorer class of persons. We mention this circumstance with very great regret, and what adds to it is the fact, that the pieces nightly acted are the very scum of the London stage; the very rascalities [sic] of life, -the exploits of highwaymen and the lives of prostitutes. We understand that every Saturday night the places are so crammed, that the door keepers have actually (hard task!) to turn many away. Surely this does not tell much of the distress that prevails in town.”<sup>46</sup>

It would seem though that even in times of economic hardship commercial leisure manages to attract an audience, even from the poorest in the community, if that indeed is where they came from. Some people, like the writer here, have always been judgemental about the pleasures of the poor.

At the end of 1840 the Halifax Theatre was advertised as being under new management, having also been redecorated for the new season. Shakespeare remained popular, with *Hamlet*, *Othello* and *The Merchant of Venice* all being performed. The adverts also carried the prices for the first house at 3/6 to 1/- and second houses at 2/6 to 6 pence, the second house being traditionally cheaper than the first. It is not clear if the Theatre had always offered this method of pricing for the different houses.<sup>47</sup> In 1845 the management of the theatre was advertised as having changed again, now being run

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<sup>45</sup> *Halifax Guardian*, 29 February 1840.

<sup>46</sup> *Halifax Guardian*, 25 January 1840.

<sup>47</sup> *Halifax Guardian*, 26 December 1840.

by Messrs. Marley and Rice. They announced: “in addition to exquisite decoration which the theatre has just received, improvements to the entrance to the boxes by the erection of suitable partitions [mean] visitors to the lower boxes will be screened from the observance of parties who may be in the public rooms adjoining the theatre.” The advert was addressed to the gentry of Halifax. As already noted the theatre in the provinces had tended to suffer from a withdrawal of support from the middle class due to a mixture of evangelical fervour and the behaviour of some of the audience and the advert may be viewed as an attempt to attract back this section of the populace.<sup>48</sup> Female attendants were also advertised as serving in the lower cloakroom. The alteration to the boxes was no doubt a further attempt to separate people on the basis of their social class, and theatres would eventually be designed to keep the various classes apart from the moment they entered the building through to the auditorium. Prices had remained unchanged for theatrical performances since 1803, ranging from 3/- in dress boxes to 6 pence in the gallery. The theatre remained linked to the Shakespeare Tavern which opened six years after the theatre in 1796. There was direct access from the theatre to the bar and the tavern was sometimes open all night when the theatre was open.<sup>49</sup>

The period from the 1830s to the end of the 1840s thus appears to have been one of mixed fortunes for the theatre in Halifax; there were improvements to the fabric of the building but also regular changes of lessees. I have however found little serious criticism of the theatre as a form of leisure, but there was some concern expressed, particularly regarding the poorest visiting the theatre during times of economic hardship.

There was a significant change to the licensing of theatres with the 1843 Theatres

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<sup>48</sup> Taylor, ‘Theatre in Halifax c1750-1840’, pp.58-67.

<sup>49</sup> Porritt, ‘The Old Halifax Theatre’, p.17-30.

Act. This legislation did away with the monopoly of Covent Garden and Drury Lane in London and the theatres Royal in the provinces, allowing the Lord Chamberlain to grant a theatre licence to any suitable person. The Act did not, however, have any immediate impact either locally, where no substantial new theatres opened until the late Victorian period or in London where no new theatres opened until the 1860s.<sup>50</sup> A more important development was the growth of alternative entertainments and by the mid-1850s the theatre in Halifax had to contend with variety shows using the town's Oddfellows' Hall and also concerts at the St. George's Hall in Bradford, which not only advertised its attractions in the Halifax paper, but also included the times of trains between the two towns before and after the performance. Halifax, which by this period had been replaced by Bradford as the centre of the textile trade in woollens and worsteds, was also now losing out culturally due to the nearby town's better facilities. It would be the end of the Victorian era before Halifax had a concert hall to compare with Bradford. There is also evidence not just of alternative venues to the theatre but also of travelling groups of actors visiting the smaller towns in the area, for instance an itinerant group performed in Todmorden "the travelling theatre of Mr. Birch has been crowded every night, and from what we can learn the performances gave general satisfaction, the company being of a much higher character than most of the similar establishments."<sup>51</sup> No doubt these travelling shows impacted to a degree on the Halifax theatre.

Few adverts appeared for the theatre in 1855. An amateur performance to benefit the infirmary was announced with prices ranging from 5/- to 1/-. There was also an advert for the theatre in the *Halifax Courier* in January of the same year but curiously with no details of what was to be performed. It may have been a commercial decision to rely on posters and handbills rather than press advertisements. The building had been improved

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<sup>50</sup> Booth, *Theatre in the Victorian Age*, pp.6-7.

<sup>51</sup> *Halifax Guardian*, 28 April 1855.

again in 1853 when a balcony had been installed. Continuing investment was taking place in maintaining and upgrading the fabric of the building, suggesting that the owners had a degree of confidence in the continuing commercial viability of the theatre.<sup>52</sup>

The beginning of the music hall in Halifax is difficult to establish, within the confines of the research methods chosen, mainly because the music hall's early period is linked to the singing saloons of the public house and public houses rarely advertised in the press. From the 1850s there is evidence of variety shows being held in the town but I have come across no evidence of any full time music halls operating, although no doubt there were some as research elsewhere has suggested that music halls started to open across the country from the 1830s. The rise of the music hall in the town thus requires more detailed investigation.

Singing saloons attached to public houses have been recorded in the Lancashire cotton towns from the 1830s. They were apparently visited by a mixture of people, the respectable and those less so; admission was usually 2d for which refreshment was also provided.<sup>53</sup> The Star in Bolton may have been the first music hall in the north of England. Opening in 1832 the concert room measured 150 feet by 45 feet and included a bar at one end and a stage at the other. The audience was largely made up of young single factory workers but also included married couples. The Star did not advertise in the press but used four walking billboards.<sup>54</sup> Performers at the Star were presented by the Chairman and if they failed to please the audience the act would be dismissed from the stage with a terse: "You're no good."<sup>55</sup>

The early singing saloons and public houses that put on free and easies attracted a

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<sup>52</sup> Porritt, 'The Old Halifax Theatre', pp.17-30.

<sup>53</sup> Smith, 'Victorian Music Hall', pp.379-386.

<sup>54</sup> Poole, R., 'Popular Leisure and the Music Hall in Nineteenth Century Bolton', Centre for North-West Regional Studies, University of Lancaster 1982; Occasional paper no.12. pp.51-2.

<sup>55</sup> Mellor, G., (1970) *The Northern Music Hall*, Frank Graham, Newcastle. p.23.

mixture of professional musicians, singers and talented amateurs; members of the audience would sing along and occasionally take to the stage.<sup>56</sup> This mix probably continued in the smaller music halls but by the 1850s the larger halls were offering a wide range of professional entertainment. At the Surrey Music Hall in Sheffield their programme included a blend of works from the classical composers and popular song and dance. The Star in Bolton concentrated mainly on popular culture and commercial entertainment. Henry Pullan, the Bradford music hall entrepreneur, continued to use talented amateurs in various entertainments alongside professional entertainers.<sup>57</sup> This evidence suggests that a wide variety of entertainments were on offer in the mid-century music halls, rather than the narrow assortment of risqué entertainment often associated anecdotally with the halls.

From its inception the music hall had opponents, mainly due to its close connection to the licensed trade. In the early decades the main criticism of music halls, alongside that of the sale of alcohol, was the content of the shows, which were perceived as rejecting the conventional Victorian values of hard work, abstention from drink and the sanctity of marriage. Instead they promoted the dandy and the carnivalesque, with scantily clad men and women performers, acrobats and dancers cavorting around, whilst marriage was presented not as a state for which people should strive but “as a disaster.”<sup>58</sup> The idea that visiting the music hall could encourage people to reject work and marriage seems improbable, but one applied over the years in slightly differing contexts to many forms of leisure.

In 1860 a mixture of shows continued to be staged regularly at both the Oddfellows’ and Mechanics’ Hall. In January, Mr. and Mrs. Charles Keen appeared at the theatre

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<sup>56</sup> Poole, ‘Popular Leisure’, p.51.

<sup>57</sup> Kift, *The Victorian Music Hall*, pp.26-9.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, p.77.

and prices were doubled with good houses.<sup>59</sup> Later in the month Mr. Kean Buchanan's *Hamlet* was described as very good but performed to poor houses.<sup>60</sup> In February Campbell's Minstrels appeared at the Mechanics' Hall at prices ranging from 2/- to 6d; minstrel shows appear regularly at the town's various halls from roughly the middle of the nineteenth century. These shows were popular across the nation and there were many troupes touring the provinces from the 1840s.<sup>61</sup>

From the mid-1860s the growth in commercial entertainment continues. The Theatre Royal, as the Halifax theatre is described by 1865, is offering shows provided by London companies with a mixed fare ranging from the traditional stage plays to opera and the popular minstrel shows. The Mechanics' Hall continued to present stage shows. The Brothers Davenport performed what was described as a seance from the celebrated advocates of spiritualism: "The audience was largest in the 1/- and 2/- seats, but of a very meagre character in the front or 5/- seats, which seemed to contain a great many foreigners of Jewish and French extraction."<sup>62</sup> The brothers were escapologists who were tied up and called upon spirits to untie the cords that were holding them fast. The review of their act reports considerable hooting and laughter from sections of the audience.

Another venue putting on variety shows was the Temperance Hall on Northgate. Also advertised variously as the Coliseum and Surrey Music Hall, it claimed good fires were constantly kept with prices at 6d, 3d and 2d, offering entertainment at cheaper prices than the Theatre Royal or the other venues. This is the first venue that I have come across in Halifax that refers to itself occasionally as a music hall. By the end of this period then the Halifax theatre was facing a range of venues offering an alternative to

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<sup>59</sup> *Halifax Guardian*, 14 January 1860.

<sup>60</sup> *Halifax Guardian*, 21 January 1860.

<sup>61</sup> Smith, 'Victorian Music Hall' p.386.

<sup>62</sup> *Halifax Courier*, 25 February 1865.

the standard theatrical performance. The provision of commercial leisure was increasing and the new venues were offering shows at a cheaper price than the conventional theatre and catered primarily for a working class audience indicative of the growth of demand. The final decades of the nineteenth century would see continuing growth in the popularity of the music hall and also its metamorphosis into the 'respectable' variety theatre.

## **Music**

Churches and assembly rooms attached to inns were the popular venues for local musical concerts in the early 1800s. On 6 November 1801 a concert was held in the Parish Church and later in the theatre to celebrate what was later to be known as the peace of Amiens.<sup>63</sup> The concerts included an admission charge, but details were not printed in the newspaper. By the end of this period important concerts had generally moved from the churches and public houses to purpose built concert rooms and halls.

In June 1802 an advert was placed in the *Halifax Journal* calling a general meeting at the Talbot Inn on the 23 to form a Harmonic Society for the purpose of renewing concerts. It seems that it was a move to reform the Halifax Harmonic Society, which had kept records up to 1798. In a letter in the same edition a request to support the society noted that 7 to 8 years previous the society provided concerts that "were a source of innocent and delightful amusement, tending greatly to the promotion of good society."<sup>64</sup> An editorial in the same paper noted that the meeting of the society was "respectably attended".<sup>65</sup> Apparently the society had stopped meeting due to the war with France, members felt that they should be committing their spare time to serving with the militia rather than to musical pursuits.<sup>66</sup> This was not an uncommon reaction at

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<sup>63</sup> The peace treaty would not be concluded until 1802.

<sup>64</sup> *Halifax Journal*, 19 June 1802.

<sup>65</sup> *Halifax Journal*, 26 June 1802.

<sup>66</sup> Cowgill, 'The most musical spot', pp.557-75.

such times, which would recur, notably in 1914.

Sowerby church held a concert of sacred music on the 29 July 1802. In fact wherever held, concerts during the period were generally advertised as sacred music. A review praised the singers and musicians, noting that: “The company was rather select than numerous; though the day proved to be fine, the uncertainty of the weather doubtless kept many away”.<sup>67</sup> A concert very similar in content to the one held at Sowerby and featuring many of the same musicians was held in Todmorden church and repeated later in the day at the town’s White Hart Inn.<sup>68</sup> Admission prices for these concerts were within a range of 1/- to 2/6, prices which seem to represent almost a standard charge for these types of concerts across the region at the time; although a musical festival held at Bradford, both in the church and a concert room, was noticeably more expensive at 1/6 to 7/-.<sup>69</sup> The Todmorden concerts followed a trend where performances were held twice on the same day, usually at the church and later a separate concert room, often one attached to a public house. Evidently there was enough interest to make two concerts economically viable, with one having the added attraction of alcohol. The concerts held outside of the church were slightly more expensive, possibly because the associated costs were higher.

By 1805 regular subscription concerts were held in Halifax. During the summer of 1805 fears of an invasion by Napoleonic France were expressed in the newspaper; from the tone of the reports there was obviously great concern, but these evaporated after the Battle of Trafalgar on the 21 October. The second subscription concert in November 1805 was to be “expressive of, and calculated to Cherish the honourable feeling universally inspired by the Fall of that eminent Patriot and illustrious Hero, Admiral Lord Nelson”. The subscription concerts were held in the assembly room at the Talbot

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<sup>67</sup> *Halifax Journal*, 31 July 1802.

<sup>68</sup> *Halifax Journal*, 17 July 1802.

<sup>69</sup> *Halifax Journal*, 26 June 1802.

and entrance was higher than for the various church concerts at 3/6. The same entrance fee was charged for a less emotional musical event at the Talbot in the same month when a child prodigy, a 6 year old who it was claimed had played before royalty, performed.<sup>70</sup>

During these early decades of the nineteenth century the majority of musicians performing at the concerts were local people, with only the lead parts being taken by professional musicians from outside the area. Whilst the driving force behind these concerts was the local elite, including manufacturers, merchants and local bankers, the musicians were from a “relatively broad socio-economic background”. Some of the musicians were involved in textile trades, albeit usually the more skilled crafts.<sup>71</sup> This is indicative of the widening of participation in commercial pursuits.

The *Halifax Journal* ceased publication in 1811; some local concerts from this period were advertised in the *Leeds Mercury*. In 1815 a subscription concert at the Talbot Inn, with a selection of music from Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven, was advertised with tickets at 5/6.<sup>72</sup> In October of the same year the town’s triennial Grand Musical Festival was held over three days starting on the 11 of the month. Both the parish church and the town’s theatre were used as venues for these concerts. The music festival was a significant event, not just locally but regionally. The triennial festival which had been held since the end of the eighteenth century was supported by a number of local and county dignitaries, including the Lord Lieutenant of the County Earl Fitzwilliam and, amongst others, Lord Milton, Lord Lascelles, Sir George Armytage and J. Stuart Wortley MP. The attendance was numerous and the festival was reported as a “feast of harmony beyond any musical treat before given in this part of the country. The attendance at the church and the Theatre ... was very numerous, and justified that

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<sup>70</sup> *Halifax Journal*, 23 November 1805.

<sup>71</sup> Cowgill, ‘The most musical spot’, pp.557-75.

<sup>72</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 25 March 1815.

reputation for musical taste which the West Riding has so long possessed.” The editorial praised the qualities of the singers and the musicians and stated that no performance could be criticized. Thomas Stopford, the long serving organist at the parish church, and Messrs. Ashleys, managers of the oratorios at the Theatre Royal London, were responsible for staging and conducting the concerts and their efforts were highly praised. The advert for the festival carried in the *Leeds Mercury* was long and detailed. Admission charges were a guinea for 6 tickets, with single tickets at 3/6 and 7/6. Ticket prices suggest that the poorest would be at best hard pressed to find the entrance fee. Again we can see that the concerts were organized by, and largely for, the wealthiest in the community.<sup>73</sup>

The years 1820 and 1825 saw less advertising for local concerts in the press. Annual subscription concerts, the triennial music festival, maintained until 1830, and concerts in local churches continued to be held. For instance a performance of *Judas Maccabaeus* was performed in Sowerby in 1820 with admission between 1/- and 5/-. In 1825 new Assembly Rooms were opened in Halifax in a fine building, which offered a number of spacious rooms. Unfortunately the acoustics of the new building were to prove disappointing. The Halifax Choral Society, which had been founded in 1817 and operated on an amateur basis, continued to perform throughout the period.<sup>74</sup> Choral societies became very popular in the Yorkshire textile areas in the nineteenth century and were to bring the West Riding to national prominence in choral singing. The Halifax Choral Society is generally agreed to have been the first both regionally and nationally of the numerous choirs that were formed in the century.<sup>75</sup>

The opening of the new assembly rooms in the town was recorded in the diary of Dr. John Simpson, a Bradford physician. The ceremony was followed by a ball attended by

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<sup>73</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 21 October 1815.

<sup>74</sup> Cowgill, ‘The most musical spot’, pp.557-75.

<sup>75</sup> Walvin, *Leisure and Society*, p.100.

local dignitaries and people from further afield, including Leeds and Wakefield. Simpson spoke highly of Halifax; he saw it as less of a manufacturing town and more of a cultural centre that was “at least half a century before Bradford”, a town which, however, he cordially disliked. He also noted that the town was failing to maintain its position at the forefront of the textile trade and that Bradford was the rising manufacturing centre.<sup>76</sup> The new Assembly Rooms continued in the next decade to be the preferred venue for the annual subscription concerts, previously they had been held at the Talbot Inn. The concerts continued to be for the benefit of the more affluent section of the community. Admission was 15/- for two concerts or 7/6 for one, children under 16 paid 5/- to attend a single concert.<sup>77</sup>

By 1840 the town’s newly opened Oddfellows’ Hall was used for concerts and quickly became a popular venue. In November 1840 the Choral Society performed Handel’s *Messiah* with Mozart’s accompaniments. Seat prices ranged from 1/- in the gallery to 5/- for the reserved seats. The profits from the concert were to be used to pay the debt caused by purchasing the music and also to present performers with a gratuity. The admission charges for this concert were less than the annual subscription concerts held at the new assembly rooms, where ticket prices ranged from 3/6 to 7/6.<sup>78</sup>

In 1845 there was a series of concerts, described as oratorios for the working classes, held at the Oddfellows’ Hall. The cheapest seats for these concerts were 6d, far less than had been charged for the subscription and other concerts held up to the time, whilst what was described as a patron’s seat was 2/6. A performance of the ever popular *Messiah* was staged, which included a band and chorus of eighty performers. Tickets were made available for mill owners and gentlemen who wanted to purchase tickets for

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<sup>76</sup> ‘*The Journal of Dr. John Simpson of Bradford*’, Bradford Metropolitan Council Libraries Division – Local Studies Department, Bradford, 1981. pp.40-1.

<sup>77</sup> *Halifax Express*, 8 October 1835.

<sup>78</sup> *Halifax Express*, 28 November 1840.

their work people. Backers for the concerts included the Vicar of Halifax, Archdeacon Musgrave, and a number of wealthy locals, including the Rawson, Waterhouse and Wainhouse families, the same families who had been important in organizing the subscription concerts and building the Assembly Rooms. A review of the concert was positive and noted: “Such entertainments as these entertainments founded on the strictest principles of morality were calculated to enlighten and improve the mind, to mend the morals and enlarge the understanding ... [and to cause the working classes to] abandon those practices which have so long been impairing their comforts and inflaming their passions.”<sup>79</sup> The concerts were seen as an alternative to the dubious pleasures of the public house and possibly the singing rooms associated with them. This is one of the earliest comments that I have found that connects working class improvement to the local elite’s provision of this rational entertainment.

In August of the same year, 1845, the Mechanics’ Institute sponsored a concert at the same hall, with a similar theme, that of working class improvement. The seats were fixed at what were described as a low price, 2/- and 1/-, with seats at 6d for members of the Mechanics’ Institute. Prices were slightly higher than those charged for the oratorios. It was reported that: “Directors have fixed a low price in the hope the public generally will avail themselves of the opportunity to afford assistance to an institution whose object is to elevate the moral and intellectual character of the industrious, but less favoured parts of our labouring population.”<sup>80</sup> The proceeds after expenses were to go towards funding the institute. It is hard to tell from reports of the events whether they were well attended by the working classes they were intended to elevate. But it was claimed that the concert would “restore Halifax to its past preeminence as a musical and

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<sup>79</sup> *Halifax Guardian*, 29 March 1845.

<sup>80</sup> *Halifax Guardian*, 30 August 1845.

music loving town.”<sup>81</sup>

Whilst the above concerts had an element of social improvement as their basis, subscription concerts continued. The new Assembly Rooms suffered, as noted, from poor acoustics and a report on a concert held in February 1845 stated that receipts only covered expenses. The Assembly Rooms struggled commercially but this type of concert, as we shall see later in the century, would continue to find it hard to attract an audience large enough to ensure the concerts could be unqualified commercial successes. A decision was made to change the layout of the seating in the Assembly Rooms in an attempt to improve the acoustics, perhaps in the hope that this would increase admissions and receipts.<sup>82</sup> But the use of the Oddfellows’ Hall suggests that local groups were passing over the problematic venue in favour of the hall. The rooms by this period were 20 years old but still referred to as new Assembly Rooms.

The mid-nineteenth century saw concerts continuing at both of the venues, although there are noticeably fewer advertisements for them. In fact the period perhaps represents a low point in the musical life of the town. In the late 1840s the Orchestral Society which had started in the 1830s had foundered. However a new group, the Halifax Philharmonic Society, was formed and this society was to become highly regarded. It paid its member 6d to attend rehearsals, but fined them if they failed to attend.<sup>83</sup>

By 1855 the musical scene appears to have improved. The Oddfellows’ Hall presented ten People’s Concerts with a selection of music from Mendelssohn, Donizetti and Romberg. Seats for these concerts were modestly priced at 3d, 6d and 1/-. In fact although the prices seem competitive, a positive write up on the ninth concert stated that

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<sup>81</sup> *Halifax Guardian*, 13 September 1845.

<sup>82</sup> *Halifax Guardian*, 8 February 1845.

<sup>83</sup> Cowgill, ‘The Business of Music’, pp.77-95.

the audience was sparse.<sup>84</sup> The tenth and final concert of the series was described as well attended, so there was a mixed outcome overall. However the tenth concert was followed by what was called a grand extra night when prices were increased. This additional concert was arranged to liquidate the debt for the previous concerts.<sup>85</sup> There were more concerts advertised in 1855 than in 1850 but by this time the St. George's Hall in Bradford, which had opened in 1853, was advertising more consistently in the Halifax papers than any of the local halls or venues. The St. George's Hall no doubt reflected Bradford's increasing importance as a centre for culture, although its tickets proved to be too expensive for local working people.<sup>86</sup>

Initially I was sceptical that the various people's concerts and oratorios, given the music and composers selected, would appeal to the working class audience they were meant to attract. However Russell has argued that large sections of the working class, far from being excluded, were familiar with music that later would be termed classical and that "it seems likely that a greater popular base for art music existed between 1840 and 1914 than before or since."<sup>87</sup> This idea of the Victorian working class being at ease with classical or art music is found elsewhere.<sup>88</sup>

Throughout 1860 and 1865 concerts remain but the availability of other competing musical entertainments increases and the provision of concerts tends to revolve around the social calendar of the wealthier sections of society. Commercial profit does not seem to be the main purpose in their provision. The concerts remain more expensive than the alternatives on offer which tends to music hall or variety.<sup>89</sup> The subsidized concerts of the 1840s and the 1850s appear to have stopped. The working classes are attending

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<sup>84</sup> *Halifax Guardian*, 27 January 1855.

<sup>85</sup> *Halifax Courier*, 17 February 1855.

<sup>86</sup> Wright, *Victorian Bradford*, p.211.

<sup>87</sup> Russell, D., (1997) II Ed., *Popular Music in England 1840-1914: A social history*, Manchester University Press, Manchester. p.10.

<sup>88</sup> Walvin, *Leisure and Society*, p.106.

<sup>89</sup> *Halifax Guardian*, 21 April 1860.

both the Mechanics' Hall and the Oddfellows' Hall for a more varied fare of popular music. The Theatre Royal offered both opera and ballet during the period with some cheap gallery seats.

The concerts at the beginning of the nineteenth century and up to the 1840s were primarily middle class affairs simply because they were priced beyond the means of the working class. By the middle of the century attempts were made to engage the working class with the provision of subsidized concerts. Thus we see in Halifax the same moves towards rational recreation found in other towns, as the town's middle class sought to wean the lower orders from the public and beer houses to more elevating and improving leisure. From the evidence they were never commercially inspired events and a break even would have been seen as acceptable, although as we have seen losses appear to have been expected. Social hierarchy was maintained within the halls again through the pricing mechanism but of course had all seats been offered at the same price the audience may well have coalesced into audience groupings based on their respective class.

## **Sport**

References to sport in the parish at the beginning of the century are few. Reports in the press, certainly in the early part of the century, tended to be confined to the results of horse races or the occasional prize fight. In fact sport was largely ignored by the *Halifax Journal* and was only thinly reported in the early years of the publication of the *Halifax Guardian*, which again largely confined its sports reports to the results of horse races. The great growth in spectator sports and sports coverage in the newspapers was in fact to be seen in Halifax only from the 1870s.

The following report gives an insight into certain attitudes regarding sports and pastimes during the early part of the nineteenth century:

“We are sorry to observe the little care, which many parents and masters take of children and young people committed to their trust. Very many of these are permitted to spend the Lord’s Day just as they please. Hence they are frequently seen prophaning [sic] this holy season by sports and pastimes. About twenty boys from the neighbourhood of Salterhebble and six from that of King Cross, have lately been summoned before the Rev. Dr. Coulthurst, and fined on this account.. It would be well if this should put a stop to such flagrant indecorum. It would be still better if the parents and masters of those who have heretofore been most notorious in this respect, should become duly sensible of their former neglect, and take proper pains to enforce a proper observance of the Lord’s Day in future.”<sup>90</sup>

It is not clear what sports and pastimes were being played. The view expressed in the piece supports the argument that the pastimes of the common people came under increasing criticism at the time. But Sunday remained, for most of the population, the only day when they were free from work.

Pugilism was another sport that aroused concern and was treated negatively in the press during the first decade of the century.<sup>91</sup> Griffin notes that fist fighting was common then, although not as significant in the West Riding as in the Black Country, with fewer deaths reported in the area than in the Midlands.<sup>92</sup> It continued to receive a bad press locally, given the possibility of death this is perhaps not surprising, and magistrates in the Wirral were congratulated for their “proper and commendable interference” in having two boxers arrested for fighting for £25 prize money.<sup>93</sup> The following year the same paper reported on fighters in Nottingham being bound over for

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<sup>90</sup> *Halifax Journal*, 14 March 1807

<sup>91</sup> *Halifax Journal*, 18 April 1807.

<sup>92</sup> Griffin, *England’s Revelry*, p.155.

<sup>93</sup> *Halifax Commercial Chronicle*, 24 October 1829.

£100, noting the practice was “brutal and demoralizing to society”.<sup>94</sup> Locally a prize fight held in August 1845 on Skircoat Moor was reported between two butchers over 15 rounds in 21 minutes “conducted with all the disgusting formalities of the P.R.”.<sup>95</sup> These sentiments continued to be aired in the press; much later in 1860 a similar view was expressed over a fight at Farnborough between Sayers and Heenan over 40 rounds and taking 2 hours and 5 minutes, which was reported as ending in chaos and confusion with the boxers suffering bad injuries.<sup>96</sup> The coverage of prize fights, if they were covered at all in the local press, thus remained negative. There are reports of prize fights in Hebden Bridge and Todmorden in the 1860s; the last recorded fight in Todmorden was in 1866 described as having been frequented by “unsavory characters”.<sup>97</sup> There is no doubt that prize fighting was reported negatively throughout this period in the local press and there is little evidence locally of any serious commercial organization of the sport with paying spectators, rather they may have simply been ad hoc events.

Reports of blood sports are few, although they remained popular with some sections of the population. A report of a dog fight at Shepley near Huddersfield, which was said to have attracted a thousand people, carried a comment from a spectator: “Where soldiers could be found for defending us, if ... boxing matches, dog-fighting, cock-fighting ... were put down? These are schools for nursing up recruits. You get no young soldiers from your Temperance Societies and Mechanics’ Institutes.”<sup>98</sup> Cockfighting was rarely reported in the press during this period and if they were reported it was in negative terms, as a report of a fight in Sheffield in 1855 noted 5 men had created a disturbance and were fined £2/9/0 and advised to “select a more rational

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<sup>94</sup> *Halifax Commercial Chronicle*, 23 January 1830.

<sup>95</sup> *Halifax Guardian*, 23 August 1845.

<sup>96</sup> *Halifax Guardian*, 21 April 1860.

<sup>97</sup> Heywood, F., Heywood, M., and Heywood, B., (2004) *Cloth caps and cricket crazy: Todmorden and Cricket 1835-1896*, Upper Calder Valley Publications, Todmorden. p.140.

<sup>98</sup> *Halifax Express*, 9 May 1840.

and less cruel pastime”.<sup>99</sup> There were reports of cockfighting in the Calder Valley as late as the 1880s and 1890s.<sup>100</sup> However by the mid-century these pastimes, due both to a decline in popularity and the impact of legislation, had passed from the widely publicized commercial events of the eighteenth century to ad hoc and clandestine meetings, although trying to eliminate blood sports completely could be difficult if they were supported by the local community.<sup>101</sup> As to the precise timing of their demise locally, it is difficult to say. They had certainly fallen out of favour with some sections of society by the beginning of the century, but “historians are sometimes inclined to pronounce the death of decaying traditions long before their actual expiry”.<sup>102</sup>

By the 1830s cricket matches were occasionally given column space in the local newspaper, a game between York and Malton at York was described as being a great affair with admission at 6d and refreshment marquees provided.<sup>103</sup> In 1840 the Clarence Cricket Club in Halifax was reported as playing the Leeds Old Club.<sup>104</sup> Cricket remained popular, although matches were not held on a regular basis until later in the century when working hours were reduced. The Halifax club advertised its AGM in the Upper George in the town in 1855 but reporting of cricket played in Halifax at this time remains limited.<sup>105</sup>

In contrast from the 1860s local cricket scores are printed and there is an increase in the number of teams playing the game in the area. In 1864 the MCC legalized over arm bowling and cricket began to more closely resemble the game as played today. The same year saw a team from Todmorden play a United England XI over three days with prices ranging from 2/- for what was described as the first class enclosure, with the

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<sup>99</sup> *Halifax Guardian*, 27 January 1855.

<sup>100</sup> Heywood, *Cloth caps and cricket crazy*, p.141.

<sup>101</sup> Huggins, M., (2004) *The Victorians and Sport*, Hambledon and London, London. p.4.

<sup>102</sup> Malcomson, *Popular Recreations*, p.159.

<sup>103</sup> *Halifax Express*, 9 November 1833.

<sup>104</sup> *Halifax Express*, 27 June 1840.

<sup>105</sup> *Halifax Guardian*, 20 January 1855.

second class and third class enclosures priced at 1/- and 6d respectively.<sup>106</sup> Cricket was a sport that had a commercial element from the eighteenth century, and there were professionals playing from at least the mid-nineteenth century, but the way it developed commercially in the latter part of the century was different from football, as we shall examine in the next chapter. It is hard from the evidence available to determine the extent the local game was commercially exploited during this period although there is, as we have noted, evidence pointing to cricket being commercialized elsewhere in the country from early in the century.

Football was to develop locally from the 1870s but information on the game prior to that decade is scant. Forms of football had been played in the area as far back as medieval times: “In Halifax, in 1450, men were forbidden to play on pain of a fine of 12d; four years later the fine had increased by 4d.”<sup>107</sup> There are also numerous references to football being played in the wider West Riding before the game was played under the agreed Association and Rugby codes; but what form the game took in these earlier times is hard to say. Harvey suggests that it was organized, played under agreed sets of rules and that the wild caricatures often used to portray the game were exaggerations.<sup>108</sup> In the Calder Valley there is evidence of football being played at Hebden Bridge, where 40 or 50 players a side took part, and a land survey in the valley identified enclosures as football fields.<sup>109</sup> During the period there is then some evidence of football being played but largely on an ad hoc basis; is no evidence of the commercial exploitation of football in the vicinity at this time. In 1864 an advert for people to form a football team placed in the *Leeds Mercury* saw a response from 500

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<sup>106</sup> Heywood, *Cloth caps and cricket crazy*, pp.32-6.

<sup>107</sup> Walvin, J., (1994) II Ed., *The People's Game: A History of Football Revisited*, Mainstream Publishing, Edinburgh and London. p.18.

<sup>108</sup> Harvey, A., (2005) *Football: The First Hundred Years: The untold story*, Routledge, London. pp.229-30.

<sup>109</sup> Heywood, *Cloth caps and cricket crazy*, p.145.

men, and by 1866 representative games were being held between Sheffield and London. But, as stated, it was to be the following decade when football became established in Halifax.<sup>110</sup>

The involvement in sport in roughly the first two thirds of the century is one that suggests change. Blood sports and rough forms of sport such as boxing were being rejected by the people who controlled the agenda within the local press. This did not lead to a rapid abandonment of these traditional pastimes but their reporting in the press stopped, apart from highly critical attacks on these traditional pursuits. There appears to be little promotion of sport as a rational recreation in the area carried in the press during this period. The commercial exploitation of the games that were played locally appear to be negligible, although as already noted, cricket had commercial aspects and as we shall examine later the game developed its commercial elements as the century progressed. The later decades of the nineteenth century were to witness an increase in sport played under codified rules and a greatly enhanced press interest. It may be the case that the newspaper evidence used in this research has underestimated the extent of sporting activity in Halifax. Further research in sport-oriented papers such as *Bell's Life*, *Sporting Life* and *The Yorkshireman* may shed more light on this question.

### **The Public House**

As we have seen the public house was the centre of commercial leisure for most of the eighteenth century but it was never simply a place of relaxation. They were also used as departure points for coaches, as meeting places by various business groups and by local and national government agencies into the first quarter of the nineteenth century and beyond.<sup>111</sup> However over the course of the nineteenth century the public house declined as a centre for administration and business to become more wholly a

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<sup>110</sup> Walvin, *The People's Game*, pp.44-8.

<sup>111</sup> Jennings, *The Local*, pp.44-5.

leisure institution.

There was little recorded within the pages of the *Halifax Journal* regarding the public house in the first decade of the nineteenth century. Information on the public house in the press tends to relate to pub related activities such as music, theatre and sport. Drunkenness and loutish behaviour also feature as does the less prosaic reporting of the transfer or sale of pub leases. For instance in 1820 the *Leeds Mercury* reported that the Upper George in Halifax had been fitted out and offered good stabling, porter and wines. The Union Cross having been taken over was described as an old established inn and posting house, with the Royal Mail coach from Leeds to Liverpool calling on both legs of the journey and the Royal Alexandra leaving for Leeds at 7.00am and returning at 8.00pm.<sup>112</sup>

During 1829 in a letter to the press the problem of unlicensed drinking in Sowerby was reported. John Whiteley, the landlord of the Star Inn blamed the appearance of such illegal places being due in part to: “Bad ale sold at enormous price, is one cause of there being so many husht [sic]<sup>113</sup> shops in existence.” The letter stated that efforts should be made to eliminate them.<sup>114</sup> It may be the Beer Act of 1830, which provided for the sale of beer without a magistrates’ licence, helped to remove some of these houses or at least address the problem of poor beer sold at high prices. However there were continued reports of illegal drinking taking place after the introduction of the 1830 Act; in mid-century Bolton illegal distilling and the sale of alcohol through unlicensed vendors remained a problem.<sup>115</sup> In Bradford unlicensed premises were also recorded selling beer in 1852 and buying beer outside the permitted hours appears to have been

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<sup>112</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 26 February 1820.

<sup>113</sup> Husht shops or whisht houses were premises used for unlicensed drinking.

<sup>114</sup> *Halifax Commercial Chronicle*, 6 March 1829.

<sup>115</sup> Poole, ‘Popular Leisure’, p.40.

widespread.<sup>116</sup>

In May of 1830 the lease of the Talbot Inn came up for sale; it had been advertised the previous August. The Talbot, which in the eighteenth century was a venue for cockfighting, theatre and music and one of the town's leading public houses may have begun to struggle with the opening of the new Assembly Rooms and changing social mores regarding the acceptability of drinking as a social pastime. In the pursuit of profit the inn's attached assembly room was still used for occasional concerts and was also rented out to the Mechanics' Institute and for Roman Catholic services.<sup>117</sup>

The Beer Act of 1830 was intended to free the sale of beer and promote it in favour of spirits, beer being considered more wholesome than spirits. The licence, which as noted came from the Excise rather than local magistrates, cost two guineas and was valid for 12 months. There were restrictions that applied to the hours of opening which were between 4 a.m. and 10 p.m. apart from Good Friday and Christmas Day. The premises licensed under the Act became generally known as beerhouses or beer shops to differentiate them from the public houses which continued to sell a range of alcoholic drinks. The legislation met with criticism from both vested interests within the existing trade unhappy that the monopoly was being challenged, but also the growing temperance and rational recreation movements.<sup>118</sup>

Temperance, which was introduced into Britain in the 1820s, became established in a relatively short period of time throughout the country. The industrial regions of the north of England were to become central to the movement, with Bradford becoming particularly important. It had close links with the various nonconformist religious groups, but the Church of England and the Roman Catholic Church both had strong temperance movements within them, although it was never for them as central as it was

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<sup>116</sup> Jennings, *The Public House*, p.86.

<sup>117</sup> *Halifax Commercial Chronicle*, 1 May 1830.

<sup>118</sup> Jennings, *The Local*, pp.57-61.

for the nonconformists. Temperance started as a crusade which preached what became known as moral suasion, whereby people were encouraged to give up drink on a voluntary basis, but it developed into a movement which was determined to see prohibition introduced.<sup>119</sup> There was something of an unbending and single minded nature to the temperance movement from its beginning, which probably had a negative effect on its ability to reach a wider population, most of whom were quite happy to enjoy a drink whilst avoiding the calamity associated with over imbibing

West Yorkshire was a temperance stronghold; however, trying to establish figures of people who supported temperance is extremely difficult. An article in the *Halifax Guardian* commenting on the Halifax Temperance Society stated that 12,000 people had attended 64 of their meetings the previous year. What is not clear is the veracity of the numbers, was the figure plucked from the air by the society, to lend gravitas and a higher profile than the group actually deserved? If the figure is divided by the number of meetings it averages out at 186 attending each meeting. There were various other anti-drink groups operating in the town such as the Band of Hope, for children, Good Templars and Rechabites. The numbers actively involved in temperance during this period appear to be relatively low, however as we shall see temperance was to remain something of a thorn in the side of the brewers throughout the century.<sup>120</sup>

Opposition to alcohol itself did not go unopposed. The *Halifax Guardian* expressed opposition in 1855 to the closure of pubs on Sundays noting: “Pubs are not just places to get drunk in”. It was also opposed to the Maine Liquor Laws (total prohibition as advocated and put into practice by the state of Maine in the USA) and claimed that the threatened Sunday closure was a direct attack upon the working class who saw it as a “tyrannical abridgement, exclusively of their liberties”. The paper thus tended to

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<sup>119</sup> Ibid., pp.165-6.

<sup>120</sup> *Halifax Guardian*, 28 February 1868.

support the right of the people to relatively free access to drink and criticized the apparent class bias of restrictions, which did not apply to the clubs and homes of the wealthy. The owners of local beerhouses had also formed themselves into the Beersellers' Protection Society, which met at the Printers Arms in St. James' Road.<sup>121</sup>

However the *Halifax Guardian* was certainly critical when beerhouses were seen to be badly run, as two years later it railed: "Proofs are almost daily given that beer shops are becoming more and more an evil; in some of them vice and immorality of the deepest type are constantly encouraged and practiced". This criticism however related to the Diamond beerhouse in Bradford, where William Crabtree was fined £5 for allowing gross immoral conduct on the premises, alongside others fined for permitting gambling.<sup>122</sup> Notwithstanding pressure from those opposed to the Act of 1830, by 1850 Halifax had at least 47 beer sellers alongside 80 traditionally licensed hotels, inns and taverns.<sup>123</sup> This suggests that nearly fifty new drink outlets had opened in just twenty years.

The impact that temperance had locally on the provision of public houses over this period appears negligible and although the reputation of beerhouses varied, people had always been aware that drunkenness was a problem, especially amongst the young. In 1824 gangs of youths from nearby communities were reported as coming into Halifax and drinking heavily and then causing mayhem, which included roughing up local people.<sup>124</sup> The town's press provided weekly reports from the courts which invariably included drunkenness. Generally it appears that a first time offence for drunken behaviour met with a fine, whilst a more persistent offender could be given a custodial sentence. It is not clear whether drunken behaviour was treated more severely than other

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<sup>121</sup> *Halifax Guardian*, 9 June 1855.

<sup>122</sup> *Halifax Guardian*, 24 January 1857.

<sup>123</sup> *Directory of Halifax, Huddersfield, Holmfirth and adjacent villages*, 1850, Printed by Daniel Burton, Bradford.

<sup>124</sup> Jennings, *The Local*, pp.120-1.

misdemeanours but it does not appear so. An assault in an unnamed Halifax beerhouse warranted a fine of 10/- and 12/- costs when Joseph Varley a “Stout athletic fellow”, and referred too as big Joseph, had called William Swallow a “‘black diamond’ and threatened to ‘put him up the chimbley’” [sic] before delivering Swallow a violent blow to the head with a sledge hammer. Varley claimed in mitigation that Swallow, “had raised my monkey, and I could not help it, he ought not to have raised my monkey up”.<sup>125</sup> In spite of the ferocious nature of the assault the fine does not appear to have been Draconian as a few months earlier, Jarvis Holroyd referred to as “A dirty fellow” was brought up for spitting in the face of William Spencer and for this “most filthy assault” Holroyd was fined 10/- with 10/- costs.<sup>126</sup>

The public house and later the beerhouse remained important parts of the commercial leisure activity of the town. At the same time their centrality was being eroded. Alternatives to visiting the public house were being offered from the middle of the century in the form of variety shows presented in permanent venues (albeit alcohol could be sold at some of these places) and travelling entertainments. It was noted in Leeds in the 1860s that whenever there was a circus or spectacular popular entertainment “the beerhouse keepers are loud in their complaints of the serious diminution in their receipts”.<sup>127</sup> This trend would continue into the later part of the century.

### **Fairs and travelling shows**

Although fairs and travelling shows predate the period under review the evidence locally is only available from this time, hence the discussion here. The Halifax fair was originally a Wakes fair held to commemorate the Feast Day of Saint John the Baptist on the 24 June, after whom the parish church was dedicated, rather than a hiring, or as they

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<sup>125</sup> *Halifax Guardian*, 3 July 1847.

<sup>126</sup> *Halifax Guardian*, 3 April 1847.

<sup>127</sup> Woodward, *The Age of Reform*, p.625.

were sometimes called, a mop fair, which acted like an early form of labour exchange where servants and workers could offer themselves for employment.<sup>128</sup> By the nineteenth century the religious aspects of the town's Wakes fair had been abandoned in favour of the commercial side and, as we have noted previously, the parish church grounds were no longer the location of the Halifax fair. The fair came under increasing pressure as the nineteenth century progressed, being associated with drinking, large rowdy crowds and the possibility of social unrest.

Fairs attracted many travelling shows and performers: "Fire eaters, Theatres, Menageries, Bellringers, Punch and Judy ... Jugglers and Comedians" were all to be found in the turn of the century shows.<sup>129</sup> Mrs. Sylvester from The Strand, London attended the Halifax fair in 1801 with her waxworks of 50 full size figures, said to be of the most distinguished characters in Europe. Ladies and Gentlemen were admitted for 1/-, children and servants for 6d, so a visit to the fair could be expensive. The 1801 fair in Bradford was described in more detail than that at Halifax but not in a favourable light "the shew [sic] of horses was thin and bargains few. The beauty of the weather drew much company ... among whom the pick-pockets were busy, while some of their fraternity exercised themselves in shop-lifting."<sup>130</sup> Attitudes expressed in the local newspapers to the annual fairs, in spite of the occasional positive comments, tended towards a reluctant tolerance, ambivalence or negativity throughout the whole of this period.

The town's fair received no mention in 1804 and the following year was described as having an indifferent show of horses, whilst the Bradford fair was described as being "filled with more company than was ever known on a similar occasion."<sup>131</sup> By 1809 the

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<sup>128</sup> Jewell, B., (1976) *Fairs and Revels*, Midas Books, Tunbridge Wells. pp.21-9.

<sup>129</sup> Starsmore, I., (1975) *English Fairs*, Thames and Hudson, London. p.14.

<sup>130</sup> *Halifax Journal*, 20 June 1801.

<sup>131</sup> *Halifax Journal*, 22 June 1805.

circus was once again advertised in town to coincide with the fair week; included were tight rope dancers, performers on horses and grand posturing with the infant phenomenon, entrance was 2/-, 1/- and 6d.<sup>132</sup> Visitors to the fair of course did not have to pay admittance to the various shows, they could just enjoy the atmosphere.

1810 also saw a circus visiting for the annual fair with prices the same as the previous year and with similar acts. The fair was described as having a good show of horses and Kite's circus was praised and the collection of wild animals "as numerous and rare a one as ever witnessed either in the Tower of London or elsewhere". It was also reported: "It is really pleasing for us to state, that we have not heard of any disturbance, secret mischief or accident having occurred, within the precincts of the town, during the whole period of the fair."<sup>133</sup> Little else on the Halifax fair is then recorded in the press until the end of the 1820s.

In 1829 on Saturday 4 July the first copy of the *Halifax Commercial Chronicle* was printed and it recorded that the *Leeds Mercury*, which had been printed on Thursday, had claimed that the Halifax fair was "comparatively deserted". However the attendance had picked up and by Saturday: "The streets were crowded, the public houses filled, the 'show folk' contented, the country people gratified - in a word 'Halifax Fair' had come back again." The paper did note in August the depression of trade during the year.<sup>134</sup> This was followed up in an editorial on 3 October of the distress caused by the lack of trade and again on the 2 December it reported a meeting in Huddersfield on the plight of the working class. Given this situation, perhaps a varied attendance at the fair was not surprising.

References to the fair in the local press remain irregular throughout the period. A circus was advertised in 1850, perhaps to coincide with the June fair, prices ranged from

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<sup>132</sup> *Halifax Journal*, 17 June 1809.

<sup>133</sup> *Halifax Journal*, 30 June 1810.

<sup>134</sup> *Halifax Commercial Chronicle*, 1 August 1829.

6d to 2/-. The advert for the fair notes arrangements had been made to allow space for a variety of rural games and pastimes, although there are no details of what these were. It is the only reference of traditional pursuits continuing into the mid-century, noted at the fair, found in my research.<sup>135</sup> All kinds of games were played at fairs into the nineteenth century, although those involving cruelty to animals were to be phased out. Opportunities to laugh at, mock and deride people were allowed, which appears to have been the basis for the: “Racing Between Old Women for a Pound of Tea” advertised at one fair.<sup>136</sup>

The annual fair of 1855 saw two circuses in town. One at Northgate presented horses, Chinese jugglers, clowns and acrobats and charged admission at 2/-, 1/- and 6d. The alternative circus was at the Piece Hall, where admission was far cheaper at 6d and 4d.<sup>137</sup> There was also a brass band competition at the hall with entrance from 3d to 1/-, the first reference for such a brass band competition that I have found. Evidently the attendance at the fair had been affected by the Crimean War, although it was noted that there were a number of culinary delights on offer, including boiled pea tents, ice creams, nut and gingerbread stalls.<sup>138</sup>

The town’s fair received a largely negative report in 1865. The reporter dismissed the numerous quacks as noisy, self promoting windbags and their potions as being of dubious benefit, whilst forwarding themselves as “great benefactors of mankind”. The effect on the people living nearby was also commented upon: “At two and three o’clock in the morning drunken men and women may be seen wending their way homewards...” Much was made of the impact the crowds at the fair were having on the

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<sup>135</sup> *Halifax Guardian*, 22 June 1850.

<sup>136</sup> Jewell, *Fairs and Revels*, p.70.

<sup>137</sup> *Halifax Guardian*, 23 June 1855.

<sup>138</sup> *Halifax Guardian*, 30 June 1855.

people living nearby and especially on the sleep of those living near to the ground.<sup>139</sup> By this time the fair tended to be for general amusement rather than trade, although livestock was still bought and sold. Changes in manufacturing and the distribution of foodstuffs meant that the fairs were no longer as important to business. They were also increasingly seen by a section of society as a challenge to the status quo with their alternative nomadic lifestyles and satirical treatment of society.<sup>140</sup> This attitude to both fairs and travelling showmen would intensify in the latter part of the nineteenth century.

Travelling shows quite often turned up in the town during fair week, although they also visited during the rest of the year and were popular throughout this period. Once again there is an ambivalent attitude towards these shows; whilst many, especially those with an educational theme, were welcomed, the more sensational were viewed more cautiously. Evidence of the travelling shows is limited but worth considering as they are a significant part of the provision of commercial leisure before the establishment of music hall and the later variety theatres.

In 1801 the Beilby Museum of National Curiosities visited the town in August with a collection of animals from around the world. Ladies and gentlemen were admitted for 1/- whilst children and working people paid 6d.<sup>141</sup> Many visiting shows advertised through handbills and by sending criers in advance of their visit to the town, rather than pay for adverts in the local press, so the details of itinerant shows is limited, as very few handbills have survived.

In 1810 a panorama visited the town, featuring the naval bombardment of Copenhagen with views of the English and Danish fleets. The exhibition was to stay in New Market Street for a week to ten days and entrance was 1/-. A lecturer, Mr. Neville, also returned to the town to give what were described as classical readings at 3/- and he

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<sup>139</sup> *Halifax Courier*, 1 July 1865.

<sup>140</sup> Starsmore, *English Fairs*, p.16.

<sup>141</sup> *Halifax Journal*, 1 August 1801.

asked for the “support of the most prominent individuals of the town and its vicinity and respectfully hopes that he will be more fortunate than on his first attempt”.<sup>142</sup>

Circuses continued to visit and in December 1829 Wombwell’s Grand National Menagerie was in town, with admission at 2/- or a 1/-.<sup>143</sup> In January 1830 another circus was in town but with entrance at 6d. This circus had competition from the waxworks of Madame Girondelli exhibiting at the assembly room in the Union Cross public house. Admission was 1/- for ladies and gentlemen, 6d for trades people and 3d for children and servants. The display “attracted numerous family parties during each day, and crowds of visitors during each evening”. The article noted that the waxworks of various murderers, maniacs and fanatics attracted more attention than did the representation of the late and “beloved Princess Charlotte”.<sup>144</sup>

A panorama at the old Assembly Rooms in the Union Cross it was stated “accords with the strictest morality”. The image of the subjects revolved, accompanied by suitable music and description; the presentation was varied and included scenes of the bombardment of Algiers, Waterloo Bridge in London and the destruction caused by fire in Bristol. The advert claimed it was a most realistic show but that: “The spectator may judge himself on the spot.” Admission was 1/- and 6d, the room it was noted would be well aired, which as the century progressed became a recurring subject in similar adverts for indoor places of entertainment.<sup>145</sup> A further panorama visited in June, presented at the theatre by the Thiodius Mechanical and Picturesque Theatre of Arts. Initially prices were 2/- and 1/- but by July the gallery was also advertised at 6d.<sup>146</sup> At the end of the year Wombwell’s Circus visited with a range of exotic animals including

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<sup>142</sup> *Halifax Journal*, 24 March 1810.

<sup>143</sup> *Halifax Commercial Chronicle*, 12 December 1829.

<sup>144</sup> *Halifax Commercial Chronicle*, 30 January 1830.

<sup>145</sup> *Halifax Guardian*, 2 February 1833.

<sup>146</sup> *Halifax Guardian*, 1 June 1833.

elephants, a lioness with cubs and what was described as an arctic polar monster.<sup>147</sup>

There is little evidence in 1835 of travelling shows but 1840 saw an exhibition in Halifax at the new Assembly Rooms between 10am and 10pm. This was to prove popular as during the course of the week 2,257 single tickets were issued, with Thursday being the most popular day when 609 tickets were issued; season tickets were also available and 6,656 were reported sold. The exhibition was said to be under the patronage of the Queen and included what were described as curiosities and paintings. The sales of tickets may well have been exaggerated in an attempt to increase interest in the show. There was a panorama at the recently opened Oddfellows' Hall with scenes of the coronation, the voyage of Ross to the North Pole and the city of Calcutta. The panorama was said to have been "amazingly attractive, and has been visited by large crowds who have uniformly expressed their surprise and gratification". These shows coincided with the fair and there were reports of pick pockets operating in the town, a butcher was robbed of £35, another individual of six sovereigns, whilst a person was robbed of 5d by a man with a blunderbuss.<sup>148</sup>

1850 saw visits from a few itinerant showmen. A model of Jerusalem was presented at the Assembly Rooms at the Talbot. Ladies and gentlemen were admitted for 1/- whilst the working classes were to pay 6d.<sup>149</sup> In April 1855, when a model of Windsor Castle was exhibited the standard admission was again 1/- with children paying half price. After six o'clock trades people were admitted for 6d, whilst the labouring classes were charged 3d. Panoramas remained popular: Burton's National War Gallery appeared at the Oddfellows' Hall with faithful tableaux of the battles of Alma, Balaklava, Inkerman and the sieges of Silistria, Constantinople and St. Petersburg. An example of travelling shows exploiting current events, in this case the Crimean War

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<sup>147</sup> *Halifax Guardian*, 21 December 1833.

<sup>148</sup> *Halifax Express*, 27 June 1840.

<sup>149</sup> *Halifax Guardian*, 2 March 1850.

1853-1856. Alongside the panorama was a model of Sevastopol, a Cosmorama, probably a display of the cosmos, and the wonders of the stereoscope. The price to enter depended upon the time of day, between 12am and 5pm entrance was 1/-, between 7.30pm and 10pm admission was 6d, children and schools were admitted half-price.<sup>150</sup>

By 1865 the *Halifax Courier* had a separate section for entertainments within the classified advertisements. The main travelling show to visit the town was once again the circus, this time Myers American Circus was housed in a temporary building in Wards End which was described as a “gigantic building ... [of] a most substantial character ... comprising ... a spacious promenade, boxes, pit and gallery, and the largest arena ever formed in the town.”<sup>151</sup> The structure, an octagonal building, was said to accommodate two to three thousand people. This may have been a largely timber structure as there is evidence of temporary buildings being used during this period for entertainments.<sup>152</sup> The circus stayed for a number of weeks and possibly throughout the summer.

The travelling shows during the early part of the nineteenth century were not cheap but as we can see they were a regular part of the leisure calendar. Many panoramas sold themselves as both educational and patriotic, featuring great military victories. They remained popular through this period as they were far more than a presentation of a picture but dramatic events including a lecturer, music and effects. It is difficult to state how well attended these forms of leisure were. Entrance fees tended to be in line with the theatre but more expensive than the variety shows offered in the 1850s and 1860s. There is some evidence of travelling shows charging entrance fees of 3d, which appear

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<sup>150</sup> *Halifax Guardian*, 3 June 1855.

<sup>151</sup> *Halifax Courier*, 18 March 1865.

<sup>152</sup> A largely wooden theatre was constructed in the Salford area of Todmorden which survived for a number of years.

to be aimed at those with the lowest incomes in the community; these shows with cheaper admission may have been more prolific than this research reveals.

### **Holidays and excursions**

This was not yet the great age of the holiday for the mass of the people. For this period a holiday remained the enjoyment of the better off and in the early decades of the century the health benefits of a seaside holiday were extolled in the local press. Later the railways were to offer excursions to seaside resorts alongside those to public executions, prize fights and the ever popular horse races and it was these excursions that were to offer to some among the working class a chance to experience a holiday, albeit a day return trip rather than a period away from home with an overnight stay.

Seaside holidays were advertised in the *Halifax Journal* in 1803. An advert for warm sea water baths at Bridlington noted: “The public are respectfully informed that baths are now open at Bridlington quay ... It is to be observed the sea water is particularly strong ... The rides and walks are delightful, and the roads remarkably level and good ... Visitors all declare, that there is not a more healthy, clean, pleasant, or charming watering place in the Kingdom.” In the same edition Blackpool is advertised as a destination for those wishing to take the “Benefit of the sea”. There were also details of a carriage that left Halifax every Monday arriving in Blackpool two days later.<sup>153</sup>

Adverts for seaside holidays were infrequent but both Blackpool and Redcar were advertised in the 1830s, the former cost 3/9 a day, which the advertisement noted included the cost of a bed.<sup>154</sup> A coach trip to Blackpool was advertised in the summer of 1833.<sup>155</sup> Horse racing at Doncaster was advertised in August; the paper noted that the turn out was expected to be good as trade was stated to be favourable.<sup>156</sup> The number of

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<sup>153</sup> *Halifax Journal*, 18 June 1803.

<sup>154</sup> *Halifax Commercial Chronicle*, 12 June 1830.

<sup>155</sup> *Halifax Guardian*, 13 July 1833.

<sup>156</sup> *Halifax Guardian*, 31 August 1833.

people attending the races or going to the seaside from Halifax would probably be small during this period with only the wealthier able to afford the time and expense.

The railway arrived in the area during 1840. In September an advert appeared for an excursion to the races at Doncaster, travelling from Leeds to Swinton by rail with the rest of the journey by coach.<sup>157</sup> New stations were noted in October at Hebden Bridge, Sowerby Bridge and Brighouse with the opening of the Leeds - Manchester railway.<sup>158</sup> In November a new railway omnibus was advertised as running from the Union Cross Inn in Halifax to Sowerby Bridge to meet all the trains from Leeds and Manchester.<sup>159</sup> This was the beginning of a new age of relatively cheap transportation. By 1845 railway excursions were taking place regularly: 1,300 people left Sowerby Bridge by special trains containing ten first and second class carriages and what were described as thirty wagons, presumably third class carriages, to Manchester and Liverpool, leaving Saturday and returning Monday evening.<sup>160</sup> Railway excursions became increasingly popular; the Lancashire and Yorkshire Railway placed adverts in the Halifax press for excursions to various destinations throughout the rest of the period.

This period is one of change, both industrially and culturally, a way of life that had, to an extent, revolved around shared pastimes was replaced by one increasingly driven by commercialism, albeit a commercialism in its infancy. Local entrepreneurs had begun to exploit the potential of providing a working class audience with variety shows and entertainments in venues more specialized, and more lucrative, than the public house. Halifax is no different from other towns of similar size in this respect. However leisure was still evolving. Commercial sport remained marginal, at least from the little regular reporting in the local press, apart from horse racing; team sports such as football

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<sup>157</sup> *Halifax Express*, 26 September 1840.

<sup>158</sup> *Halifax Guardian*, 26 October 1840.

<sup>159</sup> *Halifax Express*, 7 November 1840.

<sup>160</sup> *Halifax Guardian*, 23 August 1845.

were to develop in the next decades. Theatre had gone through a difficult period but survived and was on the verge of a revival of interest; music hall was becoming increasingly popular. Concerts, which at the beginning of the century were confined to churches and public houses, were performed in a number of multi-purpose halls. The final decades of the nineteenth century were then to see continued growth in commercial leisure.

## Chapter Four

### 1870-1919 Leisure for the masses

This chapter will examine how commercial leisure continued to grow during a period which would see the creation of a leisure base which remains familiar today. Before 1870 local sport tended to be organized on an ad hoc basis; this situation was transformed with the formation of many local sports teams participating in professional and amateur leagues. By the First World War clubs would represent the town at rugby, soccer and cricket, the first two being professional. Theatre would enter its 'golden age' with variety becoming more popular than the traditional drama. Cinema progressed from being a part of a variety show programme, into a fully fledged entertainment that became *the* mass entertainment of the first half of the twentieth century.

The town's annual fair continued throughout the period, but travelling shows and curiosities such as waxworks were not advertised as often and visiting panoramas also appear to be fewer than in previous decades, a decline which may be due to the increase in locally based permanent forms of leisure. Circuses visited throughout the period. Lectures continued, but the number of independent itinerant lecturers appears to decrease with organizations such as the Mechanics' Institute becoming instrumental in organizing lectures covering a wide variety of subjects. Holidays, especially in the form of day excursions, became increasingly popular.

The public house remained the mainstay of commercial leisure but there was also a growth in cafés and refreshment rooms. These were, perhaps surprisingly, not always welcomed. In 1880 a refreshment room at the local railway station met with objections on what were described as "social and moral grounds." These grounds were probably that these rooms were exempt from Sunday drinking laws as they were licensed for

travellers.<sup>1</sup> An Act of 1854 introduced the concept of a bona fide traveller to try and stop those who simply wanted to drink using the rooms and attempts to clarify exactly who were travellers followed.<sup>2</sup> In 1885 the Halifax Cocoa House Company opened a temperance café, taking the total they were running up to four. They offered refreshments and hot dinners and also provided newspapers, games, smoke rooms and separate rooms for ladies.<sup>3</sup> There had been a movement by temperance groups to provide for the working class more wholesome alternatives to the public house since at least the 1870s; although as a replacement for the pub they were not a great success.<sup>4</sup> The coming of the war was to have a profound impact on the sale and drinking of alcohol, particularly due to government legislation.

There is increasing evidence of alternatives to commercial leisure. Hobbies and interests such as gardening were becoming popular with horticultural and other leisure time interest societies being established.<sup>5</sup> These societies were not commercially inspired but they offered an alternative use of leisure time to those which were commercially driven, although there was a commercial aspect in the form, for example, of profit-making magazines that supported many of these pastimes. Overall it was the most important period for the development of leisure, due in part to a growing population which benefited from a reduction in working hours and increasing disposable income.

### **Halifax and its hinterland**

The population of Halifax continued to increase up to 1901, after which it began to decrease, albeit slightly. From 65,510 in 1871 the population of the county borough, created in 1889, peaked in 1901 at 104,936, before falling to 101,594 by 1911. Some of

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<sup>1</sup> *Halifax Guardian*, 13 March 1880.

<sup>2</sup> Jennings, *The Local*, pp.160-1.

<sup>3</sup> *Halifax Guardian*, February 14 1885.

<sup>4</sup> Jennings, *The Local*, p.177.

<sup>5</sup> *Halifax Courier*, 7 August 1875.

the increase was due to borough boundary changes, which occurred up to 1902, but the widening industrial base of the town was also responsible.<sup>6</sup>

The growth of manufacturing was largely due to the establishment of new industries. By the latter decades of the nineteenth century the textile trade was beginning to decline; the *Halifax Guardian* in a trade review in 1895 noted that: “Halifax in common with other centres of industry has suffered in the wave of depression which has passed over the country ... though perhaps owing to the variety of its trade, the severe conditions of affairs has scarcely been felt as much as other places not similarly situated.”<sup>7</sup> The editorial went on to note that textile companies had suffered most, a worrying feature as textiles were still the town’s major employer. The difficulties were in part due to other nations developing their own textile industries and introducing protective measures in the form of tariffs. However, the increasingly diverse industrial base was to help the town avoid the worst effects of trade depressions in the future. The new industries included: machine tools; wire making; brewing and confectionery manufacture. These manufacturing industries were complemented by service sector developments in banking and building societies; by the first decade of the twentieth century the two largest building societies in the country were located in the town.<sup>8</sup>

The increase in population prompted moves to improve national and local transport links. In the 1890s the Midland Railway Company planned a new railway line linking the town to London, to be served by a new station which was to be built centrally on the south side of the town centre. It was thought that if the town was to continue its growth, a better connection to London and the south east was essential. The line, which was never built, was planned to continue north to Bradford and Skipton opening up a more

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<sup>6</sup> Hargreaves, *Halifax*, p.127.

<sup>7</sup> *Halifax Guardian*, 5 January 1895.

<sup>8</sup> Hargreaves, *Halifax*, pp.128-40.

direct route to Scotland.<sup>9</sup> Local transport links were improved when new railway stations opened to serve local communities and an electric tramway system was introduced at the beginning of the twentieth century. This made the services available in Halifax easier to access from the nearby centres of population in the Calder Valley.<sup>10</sup>

During this fifty year period the town politically remained a Liberal stronghold, although the number of Conservative councillors increased over the period and, from 1897, Labour councillors were elected. The major change in local government was when the town was given county borough status. Perhaps surprisingly this development met with little comment in the press throughout the year. The boundaries of the borough were extended a number of times up to 1902, thereby increasing the number of ratepayers; by 1914 the council was collecting more than £500,000 in rates. Council responsibilities were increased to include libraries and public utilities, such as gas, electricity and transport; the utilities yielded over £100,000 annual profit by 1914.<sup>11</sup>

The growth in the town's population during the nineteenth century was exceptional; from a community of around 8,000 it had increased to over a 100,000. Whilst this growth was extraordinary, it was not unique, indeed Bradford's growth had been far greater and that of Huddersfield was not far behind. This rising population was serviced by a growing retail sector which was enhanced when the town centre was improved in the 1880s and 1890s, including the opening of the borough market in 1896.<sup>12</sup> This redevelopment involved the demolition of a large part of the late medieval town.

The growing population benefited both from a reduction in working hours and increasing wages.<sup>13</sup> Not only that but the fall in the price of many basic goods, such as bread, meat, clothing, shoes and household items meant that real incomes rose. A

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<sup>9</sup> *Halifax Guardian*, 26 January 1895.

<sup>10</sup> Hargreaves, *Halifax*, pp.135-40.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p.161.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p.175.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p.172.

crucial exception was alcohol, which thus became relatively more expensive.<sup>14</sup> These factors fuelled an unparalleled growth in the town's commercial leisure sector, the largest increase of any of the periods examined.

## **Theatre**

Nationally the theatre experienced a period of rapid growth towards the end of the nineteenth century and this continued into the Edwardian era, before its decline and eventual eclipse by the cinema in the early twentieth century. In 1870 Halifax had one purpose built theatre together with a number of other substantial halls which were large enough to put on various types of entertainment, including variety shows, concerts and lectures. The national growth in the theatre was then evident locally: two new theatres and a large concert hall opened, and the Theatre Royal was demolished and rebuilt. Theatres were also opened in nearby Brighouse in 1899 and Todmorden in 1908.

Between 1870 and 1912 music hall was transformed in part into variety theatre. Variety theatre managed to promote itself as a more wholesome entertainment, gaining royal approval when the first royal variety performance was held in July 1912.<sup>15</sup> This royal sanction would mark the high point of variety theatre. There were significant structural changes to the industry. In the mid-nineteenth century music halls and theatres were usually run by local entrepreneurs; during this period they would be replaced by national and regional companies that not only built spectacular new theatres, but also sought to control the artists appearing in them. As we shall see, both conventional dramatic theatre and variety theatre became highly commercialized during the period.

The dawn of a new decade Saturday 1 January 1870 saw the Mechanics' Hall

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<sup>14</sup> Dingle, A.E., 'Drink and working class living standards in Britain 1870-1914', in *Economic History Review*, 1972, Second Series, Volume XXV, pp.608-22,

<sup>15</sup> Nields, S., 'Popular Theatre, 1985-1940', in Kershaw, B., Ed., (2004) *The Cambridge History of British Theatre Volume III*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge. pp.86-91.

presenting a variety show, *Merry Moments* with Harry Lister and his New London Company. The show, a blend of singers and acts, included La Petili Taglione, the smallest lady in the world, reported to be just 28 inches high. Seats were priced from 3/- down to 6d.<sup>16</sup> Music halls did at the time present people such as dwarfs and midgets.<sup>17</sup> The Halifax hall had however been built with loftier ideals than presenting such variety concerts, but the economics of running and maintaining the building were probably responsible for this modification of use. Presenting variety shows was not peculiar to the Halifax institute; the Bradford institute, for example, also offered them, as well as their more traditional courses, and this practice became widespread amongst institutes by the end of the century.<sup>18</sup> With their decline in the early twentieth century many mechanics' institutes and temperance halls were turned over to other uses, some becoming early cinemas, as happened in Halifax.

The Oddfellows' Hall provided both variety shows and pantomimes. The New Year saw the pantomime *Aladdin* performed throughout January.<sup>19</sup> This was followed by music hall acts in February. Prices for both attractions were slightly cheaper than at the Mechanics' Hall at 3d, 6d and 1/-. The Oddfellows' Hall was also licensed for the sale of alcohol, suggesting it may have been the town's first large scale music hall experience.<sup>20</sup>

Whilst both of the above venues offered a mixed bill, the long established Theatre Royal concentrated on drama. There was, through the 1843 Theatres Act, a clear demarcation between the variety halls and the legitimate theatre which limited plays to the latter. The cost of admission to the theatre was higher than to variety shows, the cheapest seat at the theatre being in the gallery at 6d, whilst the dress circle was 5/, pit

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<sup>16</sup> *Halifax Guardian*, 1 January 1870.

<sup>17</sup> Kift, *The Victorian music hall*, p.53.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p.58.

<sup>19</sup> *Halifax Guardian*, 1 January 1870.

<sup>20</sup> *Halifax Guardian*, 5 March 1870.

2/- and balcony 1/-. The local newspapers also carried adverts for theatres in Bradford, Manchester and Leeds, noticeably around the New Year period when pantomimes were produced.<sup>21</sup> Theatres in the larger cities spent considerable amounts on pantomimes and it was in their interest to draw people from as wide a geographic area as possible. Improved transport links made it worthwhile for theatre owners in the nearby cities to promote their shows in Halifax, especially as all of the above places had direct railway links. In this way one can see commercial leisure becoming more than a purely local experience.

In October 1870 an article pointed out the poor attendance for drama,<sup>22</sup> noting that the public preferred vaudeville.<sup>23</sup> Throughout the year there were adverts for variety shows and the evidence suggests that drama was indeed losing out to the faster pace of the music halls' entertainment and their more competitive prices.<sup>24</sup> Commercial music hall was seen by some as a cheap amusement which kept the working class away from the worst excesses of the public house, whilst in the process reducing alcohol consumption and avoiding political excitement. Nevertheless there remained religious and temperance groups who saw music halls as corrupting popular taste in the quest for money and "to whom the halls were anathema".<sup>25</sup>

The local press generally remained neutral on the morality of the music hall and theatre, but whilst not censorious, was not uncritical of some presentations. In January 1875 the pantomime *Bluebeard* was presented at the Theatre Royal, an ambitious production, it was advertised as the best pantomime that had been presented locally,

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<sup>21</sup> *Halifax Guardian*, 15 January 1870.

<sup>22</sup> *Halifax Guardian*, 8 October 1870.

<sup>23</sup> Vaudeville is a term which we now equate primarily with the USA but was at the turn of the nineteenth century widely used in England to describe music hall and variety theatre.

<sup>24</sup> *Halifax Guardian*, 8 October 1870.

<sup>25</sup> Bailey, P., (1987) *Leisure and Class in Victorian Britain*, Methuen, London. pp.164-5.

noting that many of the sets used had come from the Theatre Royal Manchester.<sup>26</sup> Unfortunately the show failed to live up to its own hyperbole and the opening was disastrous. The *Halifax Courier* reported:

“The pantomime “Bluebeard” at the Theatre Royal was evidently produced prematurely, for since the opening night, when the performance was far from creditable, the dresses and scenery being in an unfinished state, and the company, with a few exceptions, being completely at sea, many alterations and improvements have been made in the opening, which is now very good, and if not equal to the productions of some former seasons, is worthy of patronage.”<sup>27</sup>

In fact the show was evidently so poor that it was subsequently advertised as being presented anew. The reality that the premier theatre in Halifax was acquiring second hand sets for its pantomimes suggests that, at this time, the town was lagging behind nearby larger cities in the theatrical presentations its management were responsible for. Most of the local shows were presented by travelling companies who were responsible for their own productions.

The theatre advertised a York company of actors in April, although for much of the summer the stage was given over to a diorama. However there were problems at the theatre again in August when it was noted that the performance was not the one advertised. The press report stated that this could lead to poor audiences. No explanation as to why the performance was cancelled was given, but perhaps considering the problems with the pantomime earlier in the year the theatre’s management was struggling.<sup>28</sup> The prices for the Theatre Royal were not always advertised, but where they were, they remained broadly as they had been in 1870.

Bailey sees the late 1870s and 1880s as a time of generally slower growth and

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<sup>26</sup> *Halifax Courier*, 2 January 1875.

<sup>27</sup> *Halifax Courier*, 9 January 1875.

<sup>28</sup> *Halifax Courier*, 7 August 1875.

consolidation in the music hall, before the spectacular growth which was to come.<sup>29</sup> The Oddfellows' Hall did not advertise in the *Halifax Courier* during 1875, but the Mechanics' Hall continued to present a wide range of lectures and variety shows. The prices for variety shows also remained unchanged from 1870. It is hard to say a great deal about the shows presented as there was not a regular critical review of the performances in the press, just the occasional piece. One example was for a Miss Lydia Howard, described as a 'fairy actress' nine years of age, who played to packed houses.<sup>30</sup> During the following month a group of female minstrels from the USA appeared, apparently so successful that they returned in August.<sup>31</sup> As noted previously the minstrel shows were popular and remained so. Variety shows by the 1870s had fallen into a pattern of music, songs, comedy and acrobats, a combination that was to continue throughout the century and beyond.<sup>32</sup>

By 1880 Templeton's Varieties had opened; this was a new venue at the junction of North Bridge and Northgate. It was later to be renamed the Gaiety Theatre and would be demolished when the Grand Theatre and Opera House was built in its place. At the Oddfellows' Hall Stansfield's Varieties were offering a similar fare. The *Halifax Guardian* included brief reports on the shows. In one review Stansfield's concerts were described as providing "a capital evening's entertainment". Templeton's was also given a positive report.<sup>33</sup> There were now three venues offering music hall fare. Criticisms in other places of indecency in their presentations do not appear to have been reflected locally. Perhaps the Halifax press saw them as being preferable to alternative offerings or recognized the improvements to earlier halls and singing saloons that no doubt

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<sup>29</sup> Bailey, P., (1986) 'Making Sense of the Music Hall', in *Music Hall: The Business of Pleasure*, Open University Press, Milton Keynes. p.xi.

<sup>30</sup> *Halifax Courier*, 23 January 1875.

<sup>31</sup> *Halifax Courier*, 6 February 1875.

<sup>32</sup> Kift, *The Victorian music hall*, p.59.

<sup>33</sup> *Halifax Guardian*, 17 January 1880.

existed in the town. Bailey notes that many music halls were improved for sound commercial reasons by the profit orientated entrepreneurs who ran them, rather than by the activities of social reformers and rational recreationists.<sup>34</sup> The Mechanics' Hall continued to provide a mixture of concerts and lectures but it was largely variety entertainment, although quite what Princess Amazulu, an assortment of Zulu warriors and a witch doctor actually did when they appeared is not clear. But music hall proprietors did relate acts to recent events, with a keen eye for commercial potential, in this case the Anglo-Zulu war of 1879. Prices ranged from 6d to 2/-, slightly higher than Templeton's, where entrance ranged from 3d to 1/6.<sup>35</sup>

There is little evidence of the social make up of the local audience for either the theatre or music hall in the press and although the prices for the halls remained less than for traditional drama it was not cheap and some would therefore be limited to the occasional visit. Commercial leisure throughout the whole of the period up to 1950 tended to be aimed at the young and single, and the music hall and theatres were no exception. We have already noted that the early halls were popular with young men and boys but by the 1870s young working women were attending music halls in greater numbers. In nearby Bradford there is evidence of groups of unmarried women attending the local music halls.<sup>36</sup> Many women in Bradford were in paid employment in the textile industries and had money to spend; Halifax with its comparable industrial base would no doubt have seen a similar increase in the female audience. It has been noted that women were more numerous in music halls in towns offering them paid employment.<sup>37</sup> Large groups of single women may have been welcomed by the owners of the halls as an attraction in themselves, whilst possibly having a civilizing effect on

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<sup>34</sup> Bailey, *Leisure and Class*, pp.174-5.

<sup>35</sup> *Halifax Guardian*, 10 April 1880.

<sup>36</sup> Beaven, B., (2005) *Leisure, citizenship and working-class men in Britain, 1850-1945*, Manchester University Press, Manchester. p.51.

<sup>37</sup> Kift, *The Victorian music hall*, p.65.

the males in the audience, although this notion should be treated with caution as most studies of the music hall comment on their use by prostitutes. For the music hall this is still something of a transition period and it would be the turn of the century before it gained widespread respectability.

The various entertainment halls tended to close for a period in the summer when maintenance work was carried out. During May for instance, of the theatrical halls only Templeton's Varieties was advertising and recorded as being well patronized. Just as the theatre had to contend with competition from the music halls there were increasing alternatives to variety; for instance a roller skating rink had opened by 1880 and admission including skates was 6d.<sup>38</sup> In July Stansfield reopened the Oddfellows' Hall, whilst Templeton's closed for a vacation. Stansfield had completely redecorated the hall<sup>39</sup> with a new entrance in Victoria Street, new ventilation equipment had been installed and the bar decorated. It was described as one of the most handsome halls in the provinces.<sup>40</sup> Nevertheless it was reported in the *Halifax Guardian* on 31 July that audiences had not been large. A period of good summer weather may have had an impact on audience numbers. The following month Templeton reopened his hall, which was also described as having being improved. The stage could now be seen from any part of the auditorium and the male impersonator Vesta Tilley appeared before large audiences.<sup>41</sup>

The Theatre Royal continued to present traditional drama, but the theatre was extending its repertoire and opera was performed on a number of occasions. January saw a company from the Strand Theatre London present Offenbach's *Madame Favari* with prices from 6d, 1/-, 2/- and 4/-. Booking was advised as audiences were predicted

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<sup>38</sup> *Halifax Guardian*, 29 May 1880.

<sup>39</sup> Refurbishments throughout the whole period were regularly advertised by proprietors.

<sup>40</sup> *Halifax Guardian*, 10 July 1880.

<sup>41</sup> *Halifax Guardian*, 18 September 1880.

to be large, a common ploy to encourage booking in advance; prices remained higher than the variety halls with perhaps all but the cheapest seats beyond the means of the poorest in the community. The paper carried brief reviews of the shows and noted that if audiences at the Theatre Royal continued to be meagre it would be difficult to attract good companies, suggesting that the opera had not been a great success.<sup>42</sup> In fact the attendance for the rest of the year at the theatre continued to be described as moderate, although during race week the audience was described as good, helped no doubt by the influx of people for the racing.<sup>43</sup>

There is evidence of amateur dramatics being presented locally at the Dean Clough Institute, a building funded by the Crossley family and including a library, lecture rooms and a hall with gallery, where the first performance by the Halifax Amateur Dramatic Society was presented. The production included a comedy drama, *End of the Tether*, followed by a farce. Admission was 1/- and 6d for the second seats and the gallery. After deducting expenses the proceeds were to go to the Halifax Infirmary. There was evidently a full house.<sup>44</sup>

By 1885 Stansfield, who had previously leased the Oddfellows' Hall and presented variety shows, had taken over Templeton's Varieties and renamed it the Gaiety Theatre. A mixed bill was presented throughout the year, including drama, farce and variety and on occasional Sundays religious gatherings aimed at the working classes, which were either free or requested a contribution to cover expenses.<sup>45</sup>

During the year a number of American touring companies appeared in the town. In February Miss Deering, described as the great American actress, appeared at the Gaiety supported by Chester Hilton in a variety of plays including, *Romeo and Juliet*, *The*

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<sup>42</sup> *Halifax Guardian*, 28 February 1880.

<sup>43</sup> *Halifax Guardian*, 3 July 1880.

<sup>44</sup> *Halifax Guardian*, 31 January 1880.

<sup>45</sup> *Halifax Guardian*, 3 January 1885

*School for Scandal* and *East Lynne*. The latter, a favourite of the Victorian theatre, was a dramatization of the popular novel of 1861 by Mrs. Henry Wood. The tale features a wealthy wife, Lady Isobel Vane, who deserts her husband and family only to be abandoned abroad. She is then disfigured in a train crash and returning to England unrecognizable is employed as the governess to her own children. It culminates with her asking forgiveness from her wronged husband on her deathbed.<sup>46</sup> Melodramas like this became increasingly popular in the late nineteenth century. In March the Theatre Royal presented J.B. Mulholland's Anglo-American Company. There appears to have been a vogue for American touring companies in the latter part of the nineteenth century, which continued into the next; this had been sparked when the replacement of sail by steam saw opportunities for international travel increase. There was a two way transfer of acting companies across the Atlantic, with English companies also heading south to Australia and New Zealand.<sup>47</sup> The Gaiety appears by the end of the year to be concentrating on variety shows. The Oddfellows' Hall was either closed or chose not to advertise in the paper until late in the year, when it was announced that it would reopen for the holiday period with variety shows.<sup>48</sup>

By the last decade of the nineteenth century the variety theatre had entered its heyday. It had evolved from the early music hall into a new experience, the original concept having been refined and rationalized, with programmes compressed into two shows a night. The performers, especially those not considered star turns, were often treated badly by the growing syndicates which were coming to control the business, and given tough contracts that saw them banned from playing at competitors' halls. The 1890s were for the theatre a time of prosperity and "variety was a huge money-

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<sup>46</sup> *Halifax Guardian*, 21 February 1885.

<sup>47</sup> Booth, *Theatre in the Victorian Age*, p.20.

<sup>48</sup> *Halifax Guardian*, 24 December 1885.

maker”.<sup>49</sup>

The town’s Grand Theatre and Opera House opened on Bank Holiday Monday 5 August 1889, replacing the demolished Gaiety Theatre. The Grand was the work of the prolific, and highly regarded, theatre architect Frank Matcham. Built on an awkward and cramped site the theatre held around 2,000 people. It was stated that all patrons had an uninterrupted view of the stage inside an elaborate and richly decorated auditorium. The main entrance served the dress circle and boxes, steps lead down to the stalls and up to the upper circle; other entrances served the gallery and pit.<sup>50</sup> The audience was separated on entering on the basis of seat cost.

For theatre historian Victor Glasstone: “Theatre architecture during Victoria’s reign and the first two decades of the twentieth century is one of the summits of achievements reached by this fascinating and highly specialized architectural form”<sup>51</sup> This was not a view widely held; theatre architects, like cinema architects who followed, were generally ignored by contemporary critics. Theatres in Britain, unlike the continent, were at the time purely commercial buildings and not built by the state. The entrepreneurs who financed them considered the costs carefully and some were intrusions on the townscape; Todmorden’s Hippodrome externally is an undistinguished brick box,<sup>52</sup> those built in Halifax were of a higher standard, ashlar fronted in a variety of styles, generally classically inspired. The Grand is acknowledged in Walker’s book on Matcham but the only details are in the gazetteer where a description of the theatre taken from one of the local papers is included.<sup>53</sup> Few photos of the theatre remain; it was demolished in the late 1950s. But of course other work by him survives for us to

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<sup>49</sup> Earl, *British Theatres*, p.26.

<sup>50</sup> *Halifax Guardian*, 27 July 1889.

<sup>51</sup> Glasstone, V., (1975) *Victorian and Edwardian Theatres: An Architectural and Social Survey*, Thames and Hudson, London. p.7.

<sup>52</sup> The theatre is still in use and seen as a valued local resource.

<sup>53</sup> Walker, B.M., Ed., (1982) *Frank Matcham Theatre Architect*, Blackstaff Press, Belfast.

see its glories. On the opening night boxes were a guinea or 10/6, the gallery, which seated 450, was 6d, the 650 pit seats were 1/-, the 111 dress circle seats were 4/-, the 250 upper circle seats 2/-, the 69 orchestra stalls were 3/-. The cheapest seats in the pit and gallery accounted for about half of the capacity. By April of 1890 there were two prices in operation. The gallery was 6d and 4d, pit 1/- and 6d, pit stalls 1/6 and 1/-, prices being reduced to the lower figure after 7.15. However no prices were given for the private boxes, dress circle, side circle, orchestra stalls or upper circle. The admission charges were also described as summer prices.<sup>54</sup> At this time the Grand was not a full time variety theatre but presented a mixture of traditional drama, melodrama and musicals. Both the Grand and Royal received reviews of their future programmes in the press and each theatre closed for a short period in the summer months.

January 1895 saw the St. James' Theatre advertise a pantomime. This was in fact the Oddfellows' Hall renamed and operating as a variety theatre. Only the Grand and Royal advertised regularly in the press but there was also another new venue for variety which advertised occasionally, the Public Hall on Commercial Street.<sup>55</sup> It may have been the opening of this hall that prompted the refurbishment of the St. James' Theatre, reopening as the New Empire Theatre of Varieties on Easter Monday.<sup>56</sup> It was reported to be "one of the most luxurious and comfortable places of entertainment, which will be entirely free from all vulgarity; and nothing in song, singing or gesture that would be offensive to young or old". Prices were to range from 3d to a guinea for boxes, in the following weeks the cost of the boxes was given as two guineas.<sup>57</sup> It was further described as "a praiseworthy and resolute effort [is] being made to raise the place from the parlous state in which it has been latterly ... Slight structural alterations have been

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<sup>54</sup> *Halifax Guardian*, 12 April 1890.

<sup>55</sup> *Halifax Guardian*, 5 January 1895.

<sup>56</sup> There is no connection with the vast Moss Empires chain of theatres.

<sup>57</sup> *Halifax Guardian*, 6 April 1895.

made, and the ceilings, walls and panelling of the gallery front have been effectively painted ... in the pit stalls upholstered and antimacassared chairs<sup>58</sup> have been introduced ... [it is] now one of the prettiest little music halls to be seen in a days walk.” The attendance was said to be large on the opening.<sup>59</sup> However within weeks the audiences were dwindling, good weather being blamed for the poor attendance: “ In consequence of the inadequate support accorded them, the management have decided to close the season this day, the receipts not having been sufficient to defray the cost of the companies ... engaged. This is to be regretted, as neither trouble nor expense has been spared in the renovation”. The report continues and states that the owners Higginson and DeFrece had lost a considerable amount of money. Quality acts had been booked, the proprietors had, for instance, announced that Marie Lloyd had been secured to appear in the coming weeks. The venue had to compete with the two theatres, the Mechanics’ Hall and the new hall on Commercial Street. It was not well served by its position in the Crossfields part of the town, which was seen as a deprived area; indeed one criticism at the time of opening of the hall nearly fifty years earlier had been its poor location.<sup>60</sup>

The failure of the revamped hall suggests that presenting variety shows was no guarantee of financial success. The note of the hall’s previous state perhaps hints at it being a place more for drinking and a resort for undesirable characters, a perception it may have been unable to escape, even with new management, a refurbishment and better acts. In October the Oddfellows’ Hall once again opened, reverting to its previous name the St. James’ Theatre, with music hall acts and admission fixed at 1/- and 6d.<sup>61</sup> But by November it was reported that it was again poorly attended.

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<sup>58</sup> Covers to protect the seats from Macassar oil, hair oil originally imported from the Far East.

<sup>59</sup> *Halifax Guardian*, 20 April 1895.

<sup>60</sup> *Halifax Guardian*, 18 May 1895.

<sup>61</sup> *Halifax Guardian*, 26 October 1895.

In June 1895 the Theatre Royal closed for alterations, already changed considerably in its 105 year history it would finally be demolished at the start of the new century to be replaced by a new theatre.<sup>62</sup> It reopened on the 29 July after being, it was claimed, entirely reconstructed, enlarged, beautifully decorated throughout and having electric lighting installed. The theatre had been taken over by two Huddersfield brothers A & W Robinson, who also ran theatres in Huddersfield and Dewsbury. Admission prices were, circle 2/6, side circle 2/-, pit stalls 1/6, pit 1/- and gallery 6d, prices were reduced by 6d to all parts after 7.15 except the gallery, which was reduced to 4d. The reopening was attended by local councillors and members of the local elite and the theatre was said to have been packed from floor to roof.<sup>63</sup> The Royal closed for further alterations later in the year when electric lights were installed for stage effects and the stage itself was enlarged. The Robinson brothers were to create Northern Theatres and their takeover of the Theatre Royal was a significant development in theatre ownership in the town as it was the first step in the process by which large regional and national companies would eventually run all the town's major theatres. By 1900 the Grand Theatre had also come under the management of Northern Theatres, which eventually controlled theatres throughout Yorkshire and Lancashire.<sup>64</sup>

There is much evidence that the theatre was increasing in popularity throughout the region. Wakefield, for example, opened a new theatre in 1894, the Theatre Royal and Opera House designed by Frank Matcham.<sup>65</sup> In York the Theatre Royal was increasingly successful during the latter decades of the nineteenth century and the interior was completely reconstructed in 1901-2 at a cost of more than £6,680. This may have been in part due to the opening by a syndicate of York's Grand Opera House,

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<sup>62</sup> *Halifax Guardian*, 1 June 1895.

<sup>63</sup> *Halifax Guardian*, 3 August 1895.

<sup>64</sup> *Halifax Guardian*, 15 December 1900.

<sup>65</sup> Taylor, *The Making of Wakefield*, p.155.

despite its name a variety theatre.<sup>66</sup>

By 1900 films were regularly included as part of variety shows; pictures of the Boer War were shown at the Theatre Royal.<sup>67</sup> All of the halls of 1895 were still open, presenting a mixture of variety and drama. The Public Hall was improved and reopened in November presenting variety and film shows in the programme. The Oddfellows' Hall had been further improved and was now known as the People's Palace. It had been redecorated and illuminated by electricity. Prices were from 2d, 4d, 6d and 1/-. It too was presenting variety interspersed with film shows. At this time there were no permanent cinemas in the town. The People's Palace had come under the control of Frank MacNaughten, who operated a number of variety theatres throughout the country.<sup>68</sup>

In November the Mitre Music Hall, which may have been attached to the Bowling Green public house, was advertised as reopening after extensive alterations and decorations.<sup>69</sup> In December it was advertising a Concertphone with all new records and free admission. Within the review section of the commercial entertainments the Mitre received the occasional brief mention; it advertised professional acts and also encouraged amateur performers to contribute to the evening's entertainment in the manner much more of a traditional music hall than a variety theatre.<sup>70</sup>

By 1905 a new purpose built theatre, the Palace and Hippodrome, had opened at Wards End and the Theatre Royal had been demolished with a new theatre being built on the same site. The Palace Theatre, as it was commonly known, opened on Bank Holiday Monday 3 August 1903. It could accommodate 3,000 with 2,500 seated in the pit, stalls, circle and upper circle. The upper circle was claimed to be the largest in

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<sup>66</sup> Anselm, 'The Forgotten Century', pp.35-44.

<sup>67</sup> *Halifax Guardian*, 6 January 1900.

<sup>68</sup> *Halifax Guardian*, 10 November 1900.

<sup>69</sup> *Halifax Guardian*, 17 November 1900.

<sup>70</sup> *Halifax Guardian*, 1 December 1900.

England and could seat 1,000 in plush seats. The grand circle seated 400 on tip up seats; each section had its own licensed bar and means of ingress and egress. The balconies were cantilevered so no supporting poles interfered with the audience's sightlines.<sup>71</sup>

The Grand Theatre was becoming isolated as the town's centre for commercial theatre and later the purpose built cinemas became centred on Wards End. More variety shows were put on at the Grand, which had previously tended to favour melodramas. Vesta Tilley appeared and it was noted that the Grand was an "establishment given over once again to variety entertainment ... Already the bookings are considerable and it may be assumed that the management will have adequate compensation for their capital outlay." It appears that variety theatre was becoming the people's choice and that drama was proving less profitable. The cheapest seats in the Grand were 2d so a visit to the theatre was cheaper than film shows at the Victoria Hall, although of course seats at the low price were limited.<sup>72</sup> Mellor states that the Grand had converted over from melodrama to variety in 1903 and for a time had caused problems for the new Palace theatre.<sup>73</sup>

On the 29 July 1905 an advert for the opening of the new Theatre Royal was carried in the *Halifax Guardian* announcing the theatre would open with *The Mikado*. It was noted, however, that the audience on the opening night was not as large as it might have been.<sup>74</sup> The Royal was the last theatre to open in Halifax. At this point both variety and traditional dramatic theatre were at the height of their popularity. By the beginning of the twentieth century there were nationally in excess of 200 music halls, with approximately 70 controlled by national companies such as Moss Empires and the Stoll

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<sup>71</sup> *Halifax Courier*, 30 July 1903.

<sup>72</sup> *Halifax Guardian*, 18 February 1905.

<sup>73</sup> Mellor, G.J., (1970) *The Northern Music Hall*, Frank Graham, Newcastle. pp.182-3.

<sup>74</sup> *Halifax Guardian*, 19 August 1905.

Circuit. Around 60,000 people were visiting the music halls each night, and the circuits were reputedly paying out over a million pounds to the top stars annually.<sup>75</sup> However, as we have noted, audiences were erratic and there was no guarantee of success.

The first two decades of the twentieth century were to be the high point of both forms of theatre, which would both fall into decline thereafter. In fact the variety theatre started to decline before the 1914 war, when it was noted that the working class audience had begun to abandon it in favour of alternatives such as the cinema. Some claimed that the working class had not left the music halls, rather they had left them, abandoned in galleries perched at the top of theatres. However this loss of the original music hall was not mourned by all: “They exalt its freedom, its carelessness, its honest mirth. What they fail to recall is the fact of its filth. It was a noisome sewer, and one of the best signs of the times is that the sewer has been cleansed.”<sup>76</sup> Although in Halifax there is little evidence of any sustained protests against the music hall in this period, certainly in my newspaper sample, but the new operators were sensitive to such charges. The new Palace Theatre controlled by the MacNaghten Vaudeville Circuit saw the owner declare at its opening that the music hall was in a transition stage and that he would create theatres “where a man may bring his wife. I will cater for the ladies.”<sup>77</sup> Drinking had been removed from the auditorium and relocated in the bars which served the audience on the basis of the cost of their tickets. The new theatres thus had respectability at their core and “the music hall had been assimilated to the cultural apparatus of a capitalist society.” The social improvements in the way the halls were run were implemented in the quest for profits not by social reformers.<sup>78</sup> Profit was linked to respectability.

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<sup>75</sup> Haddon, A., (1935) *The Story of the Music Hall*, Fleetwood Press, London. p.133.

<sup>76</sup> Cheshire, D.F., (1974) *Music Hall in Britain*, David & Charles, Newton Abbott. pp.53-4.

<sup>77</sup> Mellor, *The Northern Music Hall*, p.183.

<sup>78</sup> Bailey, *Leisure and Class*, pp.174-5.

The period had seen major changes to theatre. In 1895 Henry Irving became the first actor to receive a knighthood,<sup>79</sup> and by the 1890s: “The audiences were highly varied, ranging from the bottom of the social scale to the very top ... No earlier period in the history of British theatrical performance provided such diversity of choice or appealed so widely across the social scale.”<sup>80</sup> It was also noted that the audience by the late Victorian and early Edwardian period in the traditional theatre had generally become more quiet and passive.<sup>81</sup>

There were still smaller music halls which survived in the face of these organized capitalist enterprises: “The ‘poor people’s music halls’ ... were frequented not by the usual 1890s music hall audience”, clerks and shop keepers but labourers and other manual workers.<sup>82</sup> We have seen evidence of these in Halifax: the Oddfellows’ Hall, from press reports appeared to draw in a poorer and rougher audience and the Mitre bore the hallmarks of the earlier music halls. The social profile of Halifax audiences thus mirrored the more general pattern.

From the mid-1890s the rise of the cinema was inexorable and by 1910 the Mechanics’ Hall had become a full-time cinema, with a new purpose built projection room constructed to conform to the 1909 Cinematograph Act. All the theatres in Halifax complied with the 1909 Act and the Victoria Hall noted that they made a profit of £500 in spite of the costs of alterations to meet the requirements of the new legislation.<sup>83</sup> By 1915 the three theatres and the concert hall had licences for both drama and films. Twelve venues were now operating as cinemas, including purpose built cinemas

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<sup>79</sup> Booth, *Theatre in the Victorian Age*, p.23.

<sup>80</sup> Kennedy, D., ‘British theatre, 1895-1946: art, entertainment, audiences – an introduction’, in Kershaw, B., Ed., (2004) *The Cambridge History of British Theatre Volume III*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge. p.5.

<sup>81</sup> Booth, *Theatre in the Victorian Age*, p.12.

<sup>82</sup> Poole, ‘Popular Leisure’, pp.71-2.

<sup>83</sup> *Halifax Guardian*, 29 January 1910.

without theatrical facilities, a clear indication of how popular cinema had become.<sup>84</sup>

The First World War saw a reaction against commercial forms of leisure with taxation on tickets to the theatre, cinema and sports. Nevertheless theatre continued for the duration. During Easter of 1915 the Palace presented a variety show which included the Gaumont Graphic newsreel and urged local people to visit the theatre over the Easter holiday. During the war a Zeppelin scare in the town was reported: "The sudden appearance of the manager on the stage in the middle of a scene ... naturally caused alarm and some cases of fainting fits are reported. But on the whole the British sang-froid prevailed and the thousands of pleasure seekers left the theatre in an orderly manner and made for their homes."<sup>85</sup> There were periodic collections for the war effort. For example 10% of the takings collected on the 21 October by Northern Theatres, owners of the Grand and Theatre Royal, was to be donated to the British Red Cross.<sup>86</sup>

### **Music**

The town continued to be without a purpose built concert hall until the turn of the century, although the multi-purpose Oddfellows' and Mechanics' Halls provided an alternative to the district's churches, together with the Assembly Rooms. Concerts in churches and chapels, which had previously been advertised regularly in the local paper, are harder to find by 1870. Fewer may have been held in places of worship simply because of the increasing number of venues available for staging concerts. The season for subscription concerts in Halifax ran roughly from September into the New Year. These concerts were financially less risky for the promoters than one off concerts due to some of the money being received in advance. Towards the end of the century more of a commercial element was introduced, the promoters tending to be local business people often associated with the music trade rather than, as previously, the local elite, as, for

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<sup>84</sup> Up to this period many cinemas had been built with stage facilities in case films proved short lived.

<sup>85</sup> *Halifax Guardian*, 17 April 1915.

<sup>86</sup> *Halifax Guardian*, 16 October 1915.

example, in 1887 when James Sykes, the owner of the Albany Music Rooms, ran a series.<sup>87</sup> Towards the end of the century the Drill Hall was increasingly used for concerts but even when decorated for the occasion it was not entirely suitable. The concerts at the Drill Hall were expensive when compared with the variety halls and theatre. Reserved seats were 5/-, the cheapest seats being the back promenade seats at 1/-.<sup>88</sup>

From the middle, and especially towards the end, of the nineteenth century the brass band was becoming an important part of the musical leisure scene. Brass bands were not fundamentally commercial enterprises and as such they will not be examined in detail, but from at least the mid-nineteenth century they had become increasingly popular and: “The brass band represents one of the most remarkable working-class cultural achievements in European history.”<sup>89</sup> The growing significance of these bands can be seen in 1870 when a “Great Brass Band Contest” was held at the Halifax Piece Hall. The bands were drawn from the west of Yorkshire and the east of Lancashire, Saltaire, Todmorden, Burnley and Bacup being represented. The main prizes were £30 and an alabaster time piece; other prizes were £18, £12, £8 and £4. The best cornet soloist won a silver watch valued at £6. It is not clear whether the public were charged to enter the contest.<sup>90</sup>

Brass bands did feature at commercial venues. The Halifax skating rink, for example, presented both brass and military bands to attract patrons. The rink also had concerts on Sundays, Besses o’ th’ Barn, a successful band, played a selection of sacred music in June 1890, although no details of the concert’s programme were carried in the press advert, which referred people to the handbills. Sacred music generally meant a selection

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<sup>87</sup> Cowgill, ‘The business of music’, pp.77-95.

<sup>88</sup> *Halifax Guardian*, 19 September 1885.

<sup>89</sup> Russell, *Popular Music*, p.205.

<sup>90</sup> *Halifax Guardian*, 18 June 1870.

of music from oratorios and hymns, which would of course have been considered suitable for a Sunday. Entrance to the rink was 6d.<sup>91</sup> During the summer brass and military bands performed in local parks, for example the Norland<sup>92</sup> band appeared at Akroyd Park on a Wednesday night in August at 7.15pm.<sup>93</sup> People attending these concerts, which were subsidized by the council and normally free to the public, included the respectable elements of the working class, but also the middle classes: “The band could, through its function as entertainers, reach out beyond the social class that produced it.”<sup>94</sup> By the end of the century evidence in the local press suggests that there were numerous local brass bands.

In the 1870s concerts were not advertised a great deal in the newspaper. In December 1870 the Glee and Madrigal Society did advertise a concert with admission at 3/-, 2/- and 1/-; this was considerably more than the variety shows, where prices ranged from 3d to 1/-.<sup>95</sup> Adverts for classical concerts were again rarely advertised in the press throughout 1875. January saw the Halifax Glee and Madrigal Society performing at the Drill Hall, although few details were included in the advert.<sup>96</sup> In March an amateur concert was held at the Theatre Royal; entrance to the gallery was 6d, other seats were 1/-, 3/- and 5/- in the dress circle. It is not clear why in the 1870s classical concerts were apparently so few and far between, although commercial venues were providing varied musical entertainments. It may be that, for concert promoters, handbills and other forms of advertising were favoured over the press.

During 1880 the concerts which appeared to be thin in the previous decade were once again advertised in the press. January 1880 saw a concert advertised at the Mechanics’

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<sup>91</sup> *Halifax Guardian*, 21 June 1890.

<sup>92</sup> Norland is a village on the outskirts of Halifax.

<sup>93</sup> *Halifax Guardian*, 26 July 1890.

<sup>94</sup> Russell, *Popular Music*, p.215.

<sup>95</sup> *Halifax Guardian*, 3 December 1870.

<sup>96</sup> *Halifax Courier*, 23 January 1875.

Hall held in the presence of the Marquess of Ripon, the two Halifax MPs, the mayor and various local dignitaries. Admission was 1/- and the concert was held for the benefit of the members of the institute, who paid half price. There were also some seats provided free for the general public. This was followed by a far grander full dress concert in the same hall. Once again various local dignitaries, the town's MPs and the mayor attended, whilst the nobility was represented by Lord Frederick Cavendish, soon to be murdered in Dublin's Phoenix Park in May 1882. Seats ranged from 1/- to 5/-, although as it was a full dress concert prices were immaterial if you didn't have a dress suit, which most working class men would not. The Assembly Rooms were still open and presenting concerts 55 years since their opening, an excellent record for rooms said to have had poor acoustics from the outset.<sup>97</sup> In 1885 again few classical concerts were advertised in the press. A concert of sacred music with a choir of 60 was held at the Gaiety; admission was free to some seats, whilst a collection was made to cover expenses.<sup>98</sup> These types of concert, with reduced prices and free seats, were evident from the mid-century. They were, however, seldom presented explicitly as an opportunity for the poor to experience rational recreation. In fact rational recreation is a concept that is rarely noted in the local press. This is not to say, however, that it was not a consideration in Halifax. The reduced prices and free seats do suggest a desire to make at least some concerts available to the poorer sections of the community. We saw it also in the funding by the Crossley family of a building incorporating a library, hall and lecture rooms. Rational recreation was seen, and has been seen by historians, as a means to bring the classes together. But in the words of one historian: "the exercise ultimately foundered because working-class culture resisted penetration and control from outside, and the middle class was unwilling to fully fund the initiatives involved

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<sup>97</sup> *Halifax Guardian*, 3 January 1880.

<sup>98</sup> *Halifax Guardian*, 28 March 1885.

and sacrifice the exclusivity of its own leisure pursuits.”<sup>99</sup>

The appeal of the ideal of rational recreation, however, is further shown when in May 1890 the quinquennial Sunday Schools Concert was held at the Piece Hall. The *Halifax Guardian* noted in its editorial that the concert was

“an irresistible attraction. Such a fact, moreover, becomes in turn a healthy token of the times, serving to correct the mournful apprehension of the prophets of evil, who now-a-days affect to see and to foresee a fatal decline in public morals. This latter melancholic class esteem public amusement of any kind to be proof of degradation. ... They cannot realise that a bustling manufacturing town, if destitute of recreative enjoyment, would soon find the energies of its population to be exhausted...”<sup>100</sup>

The concert held on Whit Tuesday, and organized by the town’s nonconformist community, was seen by the paper as an unqualified success. The editorial does suggest debate in the town over working-class recreation between those who viewed it wholly negatively and those who saw a value in the more uplifting forms.

In 1890 non-commercial concerts continued. The Northgate End Orchestral Society started their eighth season and fifteenth concert at the Mechanics’ Hall with prices of 2/6, 1/- and 6d. The Halifax Choral Society advertised a performance of Handel’s *Judas Maccabaeus* to take place in March.<sup>101</sup> A series of subscription concerts were advertised to run at the Drill Hall from October to March and included the Marie Roze Opera Company, a violin recital by the world renowned virtuoso Senor Sarasate,<sup>102</sup> and finishing in March with a concert by the band of the 10<sup>th</sup> Royal Hussars. Tickets for the

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<sup>99</sup> Borsay, *A History of Leisure*, p.100.

<sup>100</sup> *Halifax Guardian*, 31 May 1890.

<sup>101</sup> *Halifax Guardian*, 8 March 1890.

<sup>102</sup> Pablo de Sarasate 1844-1908. At the time a world renowned virtuoso violinist and composer he was born in Pamplona in Spain. Painted by Whistler in 1884 he made some recordings in the early twentieth century.

six concerts were priced at 21/- 15/- and 10/-, with unreserved seats in the gallery and orchestra at 6d.<sup>103</sup> These concerts show a continuing vitality to the musical life of the town that is separate from the purely commercial venues and one where the town's elite maintained a control of the agenda. However, during this period the town's commercial theatres were, as we have noted, offering operas and similar concerts to a wider audience. These non-commercial concerts continued in 1895. Full dress subscription concerts were advertised at the Mechanics' Hall with tickets costing 25/- and 16/-. In the summer months both brass and military bands appeared in local parks. The band of the Oldham Rifles appeared performing music from Supre, Rossini, Sullivan and Mendelssohn. On Thursday and Friday the 8 and 9 of August the full bands of Besses o' th' Barn and Black Dyke Band<sup>104</sup> performed with a fireworks and light show; entrance to these performances was charged at 6d. Later in the year the Drill Hall hosted a full dress concert with the Halifax Choral Society and Sir Charles Halle's band (thus described in the press) performing.<sup>105</sup>

The lack of a purpose built concert hall was again addressed when proposals for a hall to be built at Blackwall next to the new police station were reported. It was stated that the building would be "a hall that would do honour to a town famed for its music loving people". In the event the proposed hall was not built.<sup>106</sup> Cowgill sees the musical life of the town in the Victorian era as one that "stood out among other Northern centres of equivalent size, both for the quality and intensity of its musical life".<sup>107</sup>

By 1900 a concert hall was under construction at Wards End. Subscription concerts were held at the Mechanics' Hall, admission was 6/-, 2/6 or 1/-. The Drill Hall was also

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<sup>103</sup> *Halifax Guardian*, 2 August 1890.

<sup>104</sup> Black Dyke Band was often referred to as Black Dike in adverts. I have used the current spelling.

<sup>105</sup> *Halifax Guardian*, 9 November 1895.

<sup>106</sup> *Halifax Guardian*, 7 December 1895.

<sup>107</sup> Cowgill, 'The business of music', pp.77-95.

used for concerts.<sup>108</sup> In March the town's choral society announced a loss of £7/18/1, although they had made a profit on the *Messiah*. The problems were attributed to their poor quality venues and also the subscription concerts in Halifax and Bradford, which were seen as rival attractions. It was hoped that the new Victoria Hall would be available for the next season and improve their position.<sup>109</sup> There was no report of the society mentioning the impact of the commercial halls on their audience.

In August of 1900 there was an extensive note of the forthcoming season of concerts at the new hall, which included concerts to be given by various local music groups including the Halifax Choral Society; Northgate End Orchestral Society; the Argyle Music Society; the Madrigal Society and also subscription concerts. It was also noted that the organ, built by Hill and Company, was ready and the seating had been tendered and awarded.<sup>110</sup> The hall was to open in January 1901 with a concert performed by the Halle Orchestra.<sup>111</sup>

Just four years after its opening the Victoria Hall was in difficulty. The management was criticized for building the hall without a proscenium arch, although conventional construction at the time was to build concert halls without one. However a proscenium would allow a wider usage and so a temporary one was installed with fire proofed curtains.<sup>112</sup> The Northgate End Orchestra continued to use the Mechanics' Hall; the Victoria Hall must have been too expensive for them. In fact the hall had become home to New Century Pictures, presenting seasons of films with admission at 3d, 6d and 1/.<sup>113</sup> These prices can be compared to a choral society concert, in the same venue, which included Dvorak's, *The Specter's Bride* and Stanford's, *Te Deum*, where the grand

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<sup>108</sup> *Halifax Guardian*, 6 January 1900.

<sup>109</sup> *Halifax Guardian*, 31 March 1900.

<sup>110</sup> *Halifax Guardian*, 25 August 1900.

<sup>111</sup> *Halifax Guardian*, 29 December 1900.

<sup>112</sup> *Halifax Guardian*, 4 March 1905.

<sup>113</sup> *Halifax Guardian*, 18 February 1905.

circle was 6/-, stalls 4/-, area 2/6, centre balcony 2/- and side balcony 1/-.<sup>114</sup> The rest of the year was a mixture of concerts and further seasons of film shows.

By 1910 the Victoria Hall was staging a pantomime, suggesting that limited stage facilities had been introduced and possibly confirming that the building was not viable operating simply as a concert hall. It would soon virtually abandon concerts in favour of full-time film shows. By 1915 wartime conditions saw the concert season diminished, with many of the amateur societies suspending their activities for the duration. Many would not be revived, the war thus marking the end of the flourishing musical life of the town during the late Victorian and Edwardian period.

## **Sport**

The largest growth in commercial sport in the period between 1750 and 1950 was to take place during these years. Cricket attracted a paying audience but developed in a different way to either code of football. Rugby football became well established whilst professional soccer struggled to gain a foothold until the twentieth century. Local games such as knur and spell were popular, as were athletics, gymnastics, golf and shooting. Horse racing was held at a purpose built race course, albeit for a relatively short period. Billiards, another game of skill but one which had a national following, was also becoming increasingly popular. Coursing for rabbits, pigeon shooting, and hockey were also reported by 1900.

## **Cricket**

Throughout these years cricket remained the most popular team game played in the summer months in the Halifax area. The Victorians played the game for “their spiritual and mental regeneration”. Cricket not only provided entertainment, but also served as a

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<sup>114</sup> *Halifax Guardian*, 25 February 1905.

release from the rigours of hard work.<sup>115</sup> It became an increasingly important part of Victorian sporting tradition although the extent to which the game penetrated through the general population in the industrial community of Halifax is debateable; the proportion of working class people taking part in sport remained small even in the early twentieth century.<sup>116</sup> As we shall see, local cricket was not to attract the mass crowds associated with rugby or soccer.

Unlike the game of rugby, cricket was not wholly averse to professionalism; the public schools had appointed professional coaches from the middle of the nineteenth century. Whilst theoretically embracing all, the game, controlled by the MCC, ensured that the classes remained separate.<sup>117</sup> Professional players during this period were usually from the north, but used different facilities than the gentlemen amateurs. Some clubs remained socially exclusive by imposing high membership fees.<sup>118</sup> As noted previously, the make up of local clubs tended to exclude working class men, unless they were encouraged by their employers, as the games were often played during the week. But towards the end of the nineteenth century local teams playing on Saturday allowed a wider pool of both players and spectators to develop.<sup>119</sup>

At the beginning of the 1870s cricket was the most popular local team sport. From the beginning of summer there were reports on selected local cricket matches accompanied by a list of forthcoming fixtures.<sup>120</sup> There is evidence of at least nine cricket teams playing in the area with the results of the games being printed.<sup>121</sup> The Halifax club played against sides from both Hull and Preston during the course of the

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<sup>115</sup> Stoddart, B., and Sandiford, K., (1998) *The Imperial Game: Cricket, Culture and Society*, Manchester University Press, Manchester. p.10.

<sup>116</sup> Vamplew, W., (1988) *Pay up and play the game: professional sport in Britain, 1875-1914*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge. p.52.

<sup>117</sup> Stoddart, *The Imperial Game*, p.15.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.23-6.

<sup>119</sup> Vamplew, *Pay up and play*, p.59.

<sup>120</sup> *Halifax Guardian*, 14 May 1875.

<sup>121</sup> *Halifax Guardian*, 18 June 1875.

summer of 1875. As well as playing local teams other games were arranged. A game between a Halifax sixteen and a north of England eleven was organized; these exhibition matches often saw a larger local team take on an eleven made up of top quality players. The numbers of spectators attending local cricket matches were rarely recorded.<sup>122</sup> Similarly entrance charges to cricket matches are not generally given during the period; where they are, the standard admission is 6d. During the annual fair week entrance to a cricket match was from 6d to 1/-.<sup>123</sup> There was also a charity match, with proceeds to the Crossley Orphanage, played at Manor Heath.<sup>124</sup>

In 1876 the Halifax Cricket Club secured the rental of a ground in Hanson Lane, about a mile from the town centre.<sup>125</sup> They agreed to share the stadium with the town's rugby club, and in 1886 the clubs moved across the road to a new site with separate cricket and rugby pitches. The cricket pitch was level and both pitches were served by the same large pavilion. By this time the club was known as the Halifax Cricket and Football Club.<sup>126</sup>

Cricket was not confined to men. In August 1885 the Original English Lady Cricketers played a two day game at Thrum Hall. Admission was 3d and 6d but no report of the game was printed and this is the only indication of women playing cricket that I have seen from this period in the locality.<sup>127</sup>

Towards the end of the century the Halifax ground was allocated one Yorkshire county match a season. The last county match played at the ground was against Kent in 1897.<sup>128</sup> Prior to the game, which Yorkshire won in just two days by an innings, the Halifax ground was considered to be "one of the best run getting wickets in Yorkshire".

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<sup>122</sup> *Halifax Guardian*, 3 April 1875.

<sup>123</sup> *Halifax Courier*, 19 June 1875.

<sup>124</sup> *Halifax Courier*, 12 June 1875.

<sup>125</sup> Hardcastle, *The Thrum Hall Story*, p.12.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.23-6.

<sup>127</sup> *Halifax Guardian*, 16 August 1890.

<sup>128</sup> Hardcastle, *The Thrum Hall Story*, p.42.

The club was reported to be sound financially and to be considering the possibility of building another stand, even though the ground was rarely favoured with a county match: “Perhaps when Halifax has trams, motor cars and flying machines, we shall be given an opportunity of seeing more than one County match in a season.”<sup>129</sup> Poor transport links were still seen as a problem, even at this late period when the population of the county borough alone was around 100,000. It is not clear why Yorkshire stopped using the ground. Cricket in the area continued to develop on the basis of local leagues, whilst nationally the county championship attracted large crowds. Cricket teams based on inter-town rivalries and attracting partisan local crowds of the type typified by rugby and soccer were rare, although the Todmorden club saw crowds in excess of 1,000 for some of its league games.<sup>130</sup>

By 1900 the Halifax club competed mainly against local sides; just one game in the season was against a side from outside of West Yorkshire, Notts. Forest Amateurs. However the cricket and rugby club announced that they had a £600 deficit and a £4,000 mortgage, so perhaps the club had not been as sound financially as the report in 1897 suggested. The rugby ground’s wooden stand also needed maintenance work. In an attempt to clear the debts they announced they would hold a Worlds Fair on their grounds at Thrum Hall.<sup>131</sup> As we shall see this was not a financial success. Cricket played locally shows little evidence of the commercialization of the town’s professional rugby and soccer clubs. Although the cricket and rugby club published joint accounts it is difficult to unravel exactly how popular cricket was or whether it was subsidized to any degree by the rugby club.

By the turn of the century local cricket sides were flourishing with practically every area of the town and surrounding villages having a team. There were 43 sides in the

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<sup>129</sup> *Halifax Evening Courier*, 10 June 1897.

<sup>130</sup> Heywood, *Cloth caps and cricket crazy*, p.174.

<sup>131</sup> *Halifax Guardian*, 7 July 1900.

Halifax area by 1900 rising to 100 by 1914. Of these a large number, 14 in 1900 and 43 in 1914, were sponsored by churches or were works teams.<sup>132</sup> As we shall see in the next chapter the game continued to develop commercially, but based primarily on the county teams, with some local league teams having an element of professionalism, whilst others eschewed the commercial and professional elements.

### **Horse Racing**

Horse racing, a popular commercial leisure pursuit from the eighteenth century, benefited from the coming of the railways. Initially the Jockey Club had not welcomed the railways but soon realized the associated economic advantages of, for instance, transporting horses. The railway companies were quick to see the commercial possibilities in carrying people to meetings and spectators were able to travel in greater numbers than had previously been possible.<sup>133</sup> After 1875 a number of enclosed race courses had opened, no doubt hoping to benefit from the increasing mobility of the population. Adherents to the sport were found across the social spectrum, but so were its opponents who saw it as encouraging large volatile crowds, heavy drinking and giving the lower class an excuse to avoid work. Nevertheless its early commercialization, exploitation of betting, and the involvement of the aristocracy and middle class, had ensured its continuing popularity.<sup>134</sup> From 1868 the development of the telegraph by the Post Office allowed racing results to be carried across the country, adding to the national interest in the sport.<sup>135</sup>

Horse races had been held on an ad hoc basis in Halifax on the town's Skircoat Moor, often linked with fairs and the associated holidays. A purpose built fenced-in race course of one mile and sixty yards in circumference and costing £12,000 opened at

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<sup>132</sup> Hill, J., 'Churches, sport and identity in the North, 1900-1939', in Hill, J., and Williams, J., (1996) *Sport & Identity in the North of England*, Keele University Press, Keele. pp.123-4.

<sup>133</sup> Walvin, *Leisure and Society*, pp.24-5.

<sup>134</sup> Huggins, *Flat Racing*, pp.14-20.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*, p.27.

Highroad Well in 1878. The architects were G. Buckley & Sons. There was a grandstand capable of holding 1,000 spectators, a further stand and rooms for refreshments.<sup>136</sup> Three meetings were held during the summer months. Admission to the first meeting was 6d, the paddock 2/6 and the grandstand 7/6; spaces for carriages for a single horse were 5/- and 10/- for a pair. The course was equidistant from railway stations at Halifax and Sowerby Bridge, although the walk from both was uphill, with the journey from the latter being particularly steep and taxing, although some public transport to the ground in carriages was available.<sup>137</sup>

On its opening in August 1878, the course was described as enjoying a high and commanding view over the surrounding countryside. In fact the site was quite exposed and almost on the edge of moorland. There were estimates of twenty thousand attending on the first day. The stewards included Prince Soltykoff, the Duke of Montrose, the Marquess of Hartington, Viscount Lascelles and Viscount Helmsley. The railways recorded that twenty to twenty five thousand passengers had travelled to the town from as far away as Birmingham, Coventry and Oxford. The opening meeting was seen to be a success bringing “a few hours of healthy amusement ... and a boon to Halifax and district”. There were no reports of any bad behaviour and it was predicted that the race course would have a very bright future.<sup>138</sup> There appeared to be no local opposition to the races at this point, with both the local newspapers reporting favourably on the two day meeting. Yet within less than ten years the racetrack closed.

In 1879 it became clear that the racecourse was not universally popular when members of the local clergy and some local people made their opposition to the races public.<sup>139</sup> Initially the town’s papers printed a sermon given just prior to the year’s first

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<sup>136</sup> *Halifax Courier*, 10 August 1878.

<sup>137</sup> *Halifax Courier*, 3 August 1878.

<sup>138</sup> *Halifax Courier* 10 August 1878.

<sup>139</sup> Huggins, *Flat Racing*, p.218.

race meeting in May by Dr. Mellor, Congregationalist minister of Square church. He preached that the races “belong to the category of things which the apostle denominates the ‘unfruitful works of darkness’”.<sup>140</sup> He questioned whether the promoters believed the races would “lift up the people in intelligence, in industry, in sobriety, in self control, or any of the virtues ...?” He also railed at length against the evils of gambling, but noted that he was not against leisure per se, advocating “wise and healthy pastimes, pastimes which elevate the moral and physical condition of the people”. The racegoers, or at least a section of them, came in for particularly vitriolic treatment: “I remember the last races. I saw a long train discharge its freight of sporting characters of both sexes, and a more disreputable crew of the species called humans I never beheld before ... vice was written on their faces. Many of them were even half blind with drink, and the very air quivered with their curses and their obscenities.” He also noted that a friend who lived in an area with a history of racing believed that “there is not a sport above the depths of hell which exhibits such a concentration of all that is sensual and devilish as the race course.” He advocated that people keep away from the races and dissuade others from visiting.<sup>141</sup>

The *Halifax Courier* did not comment on the sermon but the Tory *Halifax Guardian* noted that it had been the subject of much discussion in the town but dismissed it: “The sweeping condemnations of race meetings ... are common to the Dissenting pulpit, yet, despite them all, the fact remains that race meetings are a national sport in England.”<sup>142</sup> The paper thus faithfully reflected its general social and political orientation, whilst the conflicting points of view expressed locally serve to illustrate how leisure was a potential source of conflict, a point illustrated in the further history of the race course.

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<sup>140</sup> “And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness; but rather reprove them.” St. Paul’s epistle to the Ephesians 5:11. Holy Bible, Douay Version.

<sup>141</sup> *Halifax Courier*, 7 May 1879.

<sup>142</sup> *Halifax Guardian*, 3 May 1879.

Large numbers attended the May race meeting in 1879. The *Halifax Guardian* noted “attendance both of the general public and the patrons of the turf was very large, and the sport witnessed of very good quality.” There were six races with prize money ranging from sixty to a hundred sovereigns.<sup>143</sup> Both local newspapers observed that the races were once again well attended and the crowds well behaved, although gambling was evident.<sup>144</sup> Following on from the meeting, fifteen people were brought before the magistrates charged with gambling, and thirteen were imprisoned. The gambling, however, was not associated with the races themselves, but on games of chance being played within the racecourse. On course betting was legal and indeed gambling was a vital part of racing’s success. Mr. Storey, who appeared for several of the defendants, claimed “those who bet their thousands were overlooked and even applauded, while the poorer set were locked up.” Those charged were a mixed group: a local 16 year old, described as a wiredrawer, was supported in court by two people who offered sureties of a £1,000. He was fined 10/-. A young woman from Leeds was also fined. Her case was reported in such a way that suggested she had no idea that she was doing anything illegal and was just enjoying the day out. Of those imprisoned one was a local man described as a crippled father of six children, who was a known associate of thieves and bad characters. A second local person was described as a convicted highway robber. The rest were people from outside the locality and although it was not stated, the suggestion was that they were people who attended the races on a regular basis to gamble.<sup>145</sup> Given the number of people reported to have attended the meeting, the number involved in illegal betting appears to have been small. The reports also suggest that the meeting was again a trouble free event and neither paper used the court case as an occasion to condemn the races or the crowds.

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<sup>143</sup> A sovereign is bullion; a gold coin valued at one pound.

<sup>144</sup> *Halifax Guardian*, 17 May 1879.

<sup>145</sup> *Halifax Courier*, 17 May 1879.

Following on from the court case, the Vicar of Luddenden, Reverend J. Nelson, brought an action against Matthew Naylor, the secretary of the Halifax Racing Company, for aiding and abetting “divers persons to play ... certain games ... dice, cards, billy-fair play and spinning”. The case revolved around whether the secretary had rented the sites knowing that they were to be used for games of chance. The case was found against the secretary and he was fined £2 with 10/- costs.<sup>146</sup> Huggins suggests the level of the fine was evidence that the magistrates were not prepared to be punitive.<sup>147</sup> The local papers both reported the proceedings but again neither offered any comment.

Opposition to the races continued, when prior to the year’s summer meeting a public meeting was held at the Mechanics’ Hall, although as the reporter for the *Halifax Courier* pointed out, the eve of the races was an odd time to convene a public meeting called to discuss the detrimental effects of holding races in the town. The meeting was scheduled for 7.30 p.m. but the hall was full half an hour before the start. The mayor, town clerk, seven clergymen and some members of the public, including Edward Crossley, a member of the carpet manufacturing family who paid for the meeting, took to the stage met by a mixture of cheers and hooting which lasted for several minutes before order was restored. This set the tone for the meeting. The mayor took the chair and advised he had no part in calling the meeting or promoting the requisition and would be perfectly neutral. The meeting was, he advised, organized as a number of people, reported as between six and seven hundred, had presented a petition stating that the races were “injurious to the moral and commercial interests of the community”. The resolution was met with a mixture of cheers and groans and from the reports it remained difficult for the audience to hear what the speakers were saying due to shouting from

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<sup>146</sup> *Halifax Courier*, 14 June 1879

<sup>147</sup> Huggins, *Flat Racing*, p.218.

both sides. Neither the mayor, nor the vicar of Halifax, appeared to have put their names to the petition. It transpired that no one seemed to have any idea of who had actually signed the petition, which apparently contained names but no addresses.

When the Vicar of Halifax, Dr. Francis Pigou, rose to speak he thanked the mayor for his opening remarks at which point a voice cried out: “Thy will be done.” another “Two to one bar one”. When he announced that he had been the vicar of Doncaster and that he was not in favour of racing he was further barracked with shouts of: “Go to Doncaster” and “Who pays the rates at Doncaster?” Doncaster council in fact made a significant amount of money from its race meetings; by the 1860s it derived a fifth of its income from the races and by 1887 income from the races produced a reduction in the local rates.<sup>148</sup> A further speaker on behalf of the motion referred to those attending racing as the refuse of society. Dr. Mellor on speaking was cheered and hissed with few able to hear what he said. John Haigh Smith, speaking from the floor against the petition, said the meeting was not a town meeting as it had been paid for by Edward Crossley. He also questioned whether the champion of the Liberal party, Lord Hartington, would put his name to such disreputable proceedings as opponents of the races made them out to be. He described those promoting the resolutions against the races as Pharisees, suggested that none of those objecting to the races had even been and declared that people should vote against the motion as the town had been “...Priest ridden long enough.”<sup>149</sup>

The meeting at various points descended into fighting. Amidst chaotic scenes the mayor had put the first motion to the meeting and declared it carried, even though most people had not heard him. A second motion was put under similar circumstances and that too was carried, albeit Edward Crossley, the person putting it, had presented it by

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<sup>148</sup> Ibid., p.144.

<sup>149</sup> *Halifax Guardian*, 19 July 1879.

“dumb show” and then announced it carried. The meeting broke up amidst general confusion. Damage had been done to the hall with benches being broken in the mayhem. Crowds gathered outside the hall but there was no further trouble. The organizers paid for the damage.<sup>150</sup>

It is clear that the reporter from the *Halifax Courier* considered the calling of the meeting as particularly ill-judged. There was plainly no consensus regarding the races, even amongst those appearing on the platform. Dr. Pigou was in a particularly difficult situation as the land for the racecourse had been leased by the Church Commissioners to the racecourse company. A number of people had questioned why the churches had not objected to the racecourse before it was built at considerable expense. Neither of the papers came down in favour of those protesting. They reported the July 1879 race meeting as well attended with a number of distinguished guests, including Sir Henry Edwards the town’s former Tory MP. The *Halifax Guardian* suggested that the races were a success from the outset, whilst confirming that they were not on the scale of the major meetings such as Newmarket.<sup>151</sup> The following year a report on the second race meeting held in June 1880 noted that the course grandstand and paddock had been improved and that “there was a good attendance of visitors both in ring and stand, and a considerable sprinkling of the aristocrats of the turf.” The meeting took place on Thursday and Friday in June with six races each day and prize money of 50 sovereigns and 100 guineas.<sup>152</sup>

But by May 1884 reporting became less positive. The meeting was described as being blighted with very cold winds. There was an increase in ring attendance, but the fields were small for the five races which were described as not first class.<sup>153</sup> In July the

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<sup>150</sup> Ibid.

<sup>151</sup> *Halifax Guardian*, 26 July 1879.

<sup>152</sup> *Halifax Guardian*, 26 June 1880.

<sup>153</sup> *Halifax Guardian*, 10 May 1884.

attendance was reported as reasonable but the fields again were small with five races, but only two starters in one race.<sup>154</sup> The question remains why did the course fail in a relatively short period of time? The opposition of the nonconformist churches would have had some impact. Liberal leaning areas tended to be less supportive of race meetings, although in Halifax the MPs appear, perhaps due to political expediency, to have kept silent on the racecourse.<sup>155</sup> The race meetings were also held on weekdays in an area which had no strong tradition of holding them, which meant that working class people would find it difficult to take time off work to attend. The course was also in an exposed area where even in the summer months it could be cold, so poor location may have contributed to its demise. It was also difficult to access being a distance from the railway stations. Prize money was also low leading to small numbers of horses competing. It was probably in the end a combination of factors that led to its failure, but it was not the only new course to fail: a course opened by the Prince of Wales in Bristol in 1873 had closed by the 1880s<sup>156</sup> and other new enclosed courses in Birmingham and Portsmouth also failed.<sup>157</sup> What is evident is that there was a complex middle class position when it came to the expanding commercial leisure markets with a number, such as the nonconformists, strongly opposed, with others remaining silent on the issue, and some enjoying the races.

The racecourse was put up for sale in 1885. The sale included a

“very substantially built grand stand, capable of seating 1000 spectators, underneath which are stewards’, directors’, jockeys’, weighing in, cloak, cooking (and) refreshment rooms ... there is also a paddock, stand and jockeys stand, telegraph offices, refreshment booth, farmhouse and farm buildings.

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<sup>154</sup> Ibid.

<sup>155</sup> Huggins, *Flat Racing*, p.148.

<sup>156</sup> Mellor, *Leisure and the Changing City*, p.211.

<sup>157</sup> Huggins, *Flat Racing*, p.154.

There is in addition a saddling paddock and stabling facilities for 40 horses and a mangers house.”

This was clearly a substantial commercial enterprise. The advert went on to note that the racecourse had been running for around seven years and that three or four meetings had been held annually. Two meetings in April and July had been secured for 1885 under the Jockey Club to be raced under the Newmarket rules.<sup>158</sup> The course was bought by Mr. G. Robinson of the Pineapple Inn, Halifax for £1,030. It had opened at a cost of £12,000. In fact no meetings were held in 1885 and an auction of the fittings took place the following year.

There is clearly scope for further investigation of the Halifax races. But this limited examination shows that success in commercial leisure ventures was far from certain, even where substantial sums had been invested. Sports that were successfully established commercially tended to be those that could exploit the Saturday afternoons when the industrial workers were free from work.

### **Rugby Football**

By 1875 rugby had become the main winter sport attraction. The Halifax Rugby Club had been formed in 1873 when an advert was placed in the *Halifax Guardian* requesting people interested in forming a football and athletics club to attend a meeting at the Upper George public house on Thursday 6 November. Only eight people turned up but the club was nevertheless established.<sup>159</sup> The founder members of the club were not, unlike many early rugby clubs, ex-pupils of the public schools. They were, however, firmly located within the ranks of the manufacturing and commercial middle classes. Sam Duckitt was a member of the firm of William Duckitt & Co., brassfounders and Major Brown was a wool and waste dealer, whilst another founder,

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<sup>158</sup> *Halifax Guardian*, 7 February 1885.

<sup>159</sup> Hardcastle, *Halifax Rugby League Club*, pp.8-10.

James Pearson, was a boot and shoe manufacturer. All had been educated at local academies.<sup>160</sup> By the time rugby split on the issue of broken time payments, the large northern clubs tended to be run by men who came from business and manufacturing backgrounds rather than the public schools.<sup>161</sup>

The Halifax club's first match was arranged with the Leeds Athletic Club on the 21 November 1874. A number of the Halifax players had no proper kit. The team at this point did not have their own ground; initially playing on Savile Park, a large tract of land owned by the council, the club was consequently unable to charge spectators to watch the game. However it was reported that between two and three thousand people turned up, no doubt helping to increase interest and popularize the game.<sup>162</sup>

Within a couple of years the team was well established. For instance, on 2 January 1875 Halifax played and beat Wakefield Trinity. The write up of the match was short and under local news rather than a separate sports section.<sup>163</sup> A return game two weeks later was reported as being played under better conditions at Wakefield.<sup>164</sup> During 1875 not all games played by the Halifax team carried a match report and although official attendance figures were not given, estimates sometimes were. It was not until the twentieth century that attendance figures for games were supplied by the Rugby League. The Halifax team's success continued when they won the inaugural Yorkshire Cup. It was played for during the 1877-78 season with Halifax beating York in the final at Holbeck, the success giving the game a further boost in the town.<sup>165</sup> The Yorkshire Cup was the premier competition in the game and by the end of the century was seen as the

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<sup>160</sup> Hardcastle, *The Thrum Hall Story*, p.6.

<sup>161</sup> Huggins, *The Victorians and Sport*, p.69.

<sup>162</sup> *Ibid.*, p.10.

<sup>163</sup> *Halifax Courier*, 2 January 1875.

<sup>164</sup> *Halifax Courier*, 16 January 1875.

<sup>165</sup> Hardcastle, *Halifax Rugby League Club*, p.11.

reason “to which the county owed its present prominence in Rugby football.”<sup>166</sup> The Rugby Football Union (RFU) was, as we shall see, uncertain about the benefits of both cup competitions and the popularity of the game with the northern working class. But victories by teams in cup competitions undoubtedly led to increased local interest especially in games such as rugby and soccer.

The beginning of the 1880s saw rugby football well established with numerous local clubs playing the game. Thousands were reported to be attending matches.<sup>167</sup> Reporting in the local press was by 1880 much more thorough, detailed and analytical. Shorter reports of other local teams and how they had played were also carried by the papers and they included lists of local teams playing rugby, with their forthcoming fixtures. A match played between Halifax and Bradford saw over a column and a half describing a Halifax victory over their local rivals. The style of play was increasingly commented upon. When Halifax had beaten Leeds convincingly the *Halifax Guardian* noted that the *Leeds Mercury* had questioned Halifax’s style of playing the game, the suggestion being that the Halifax club put too much emphasis on winning, something they would be accused of a number of times over the coming years.<sup>168</sup> The criticism of the Halifax team’s desire to win was a concern within the RFU; northern clubs were increasingly seen as putting winning before all else.<sup>169</sup> Local newspaper reports were also becoming increasingly partisan. It also became clear from match reports that games were sometimes ill-tempered affairs, as that of the game between Halifax and Cheetham proved. Cheetham’s approach to the game was questioned and they were alleged to have used violent methods.<sup>170</sup>

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<sup>166</sup> *Halifax Guardian*, 27 April 1895.

<sup>167</sup> *Halifax Guardian*, 3 January 1880.

<sup>168</sup> *Halifax Guardian*, 10 January 1880.

<sup>169</sup> Collins, T., (1998) *Rugby’s Great Split: Class, Culture and the Origins of Rugby League Football*, Frank Cass, London. pp.27-9.

<sup>170</sup> *Halifax Guardian*, 21 February 1880.

The popularity of the game in Halifax saw a North versus South match played in the town. Its purpose was to help decide which players were to be chosen to represent England against Scotland. A very large crowd attended with gate receipts recorded at £250 and expenses £60/16/2, although it is not clear how the expenses were broken down.<sup>171</sup> Admission to games at the time was generally 6d for adults and 3d for children, but charges of 1/- for this game had been criticized for excluding working class supporters. However, this particular game excited so much interest that special trains had been put on to carry followers.<sup>172</sup>

The Halifax club usually played against teams in the Yorkshire and Lancashire area but occasionally it attracted visiting clubs from other parts of the country. In January, Llanelly, the holders of the South Wales Challenge Cup, visited and were beaten. The attendance was not recorded, but a game against Salford was said to have attracted over 5,000 spectators. The game against Llanelly was played on a hard surface and special arrangements had to be agreed in an attempt to alleviate serious injuries.<sup>173</sup> The Halifax club also travelled beyond Yorkshire and Lancashire. Visiting London they played against, and beat, Old Leysians and received post-match hospitality which, according to the press report, was much appreciated. However the club had travelled to the capital primarily to play Blackheath, described as a renowned club, but Blackheath had failed to raise a team. The local paper took a dim view: “The conduct of the Blackheath club was certainly very reprehensible if it was not cowardly...”<sup>174</sup> The tensions within the game between the northern clubs and the rest of the union were becoming apparent. A game between England and Ireland saw just one Yorkshire player, from Bradford, in an

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<sup>171</sup> Hardcastle, *The Thrum Hall Story*, p.17.

<sup>172</sup> Collins, *Rugby's Great Split*, pp.32-5.

<sup>173</sup> *Halifax Guardian*, 2 January 1885.

<sup>174</sup> *Halifax Guardian*, 10 January 1885.

England side reported to be packed with southern players and university men.<sup>175</sup>

The Yorkshire cup competition of 1885 was not to prove successful for Halifax as they were beaten by Batley, who went on to defeat Manningham in the final. The crowd at the final was between fifteen to twenty thousand spectators.<sup>176</sup> The popularity of rugby in Yorkshire can be appreciated when compared to soccer's cup competition of the same year, which attracted a crowd of twelve thousand. The association game had been played between Blackburn and Queens Park (Glasgow). Blackburn won the game two goals to nil, but the soccer cup competition was national, rather than regional, something which would contribute to soccer superseding rugby as a popular national sport.<sup>177</sup> The 1884-85 season terminated with an article congratulating the Halifax team on their efforts. Of 32 matches played, 23 were won, 6 lost with one being rather oddly described as being slightly against them. During this period there was no league structure and clubs played by mutual agreement.<sup>178</sup>

The club developed into an increasingly profitable enterprise. This had not been the aim of the people who came together to form the club, although the revenue helped it to expand and improve its facilities. But the success attracted what were seen as unwanted elements, most notably gamblers. There were allegations of large sums of money changing hands at the grounds as the results of games became the subject of speculation. It was also alleged that bookmakers were not averse to trying to influence the outcome of games. The Yorkshire Cup of 1882 saw Halifax pull out of the competition stating that their players had been subjected to intimidation by betting men, who wanted to see them maimed. There were also allegations, which periodically surface in professional sport, that players had been offered bribes to influence the

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<sup>175</sup> *Halifax Guardian*, 31 January 1885.

<sup>176</sup> *Halifax Guardian*, 4 April 1885.

<sup>177</sup> *Halifax Guardian*, 11 April 1885.

<sup>178</sup> *Halifax Guardian*, 23 April 1885.

outcome of games.<sup>179</sup> Betting was, as we have already seen, something that aroused the hostility of certain sections of the middle classes and the nonconformist churches.

The other major concern that surfaced in 1885 was the allegation that some working class players were being paid and the payment of players was of concern to elements within the RFU. Whilst the object of founding the football club had not been commercial, its success did generate large amounts of revenue. Initially this was through gate receipts, but later through the exploitation of the crowds once in the grounds through the sale of food and drinks. Halifax raised £80 in the late 1880s by selling franchises to allow the sale of food. Fans were also targeted to purchase various football ephemera by the clubs and others. This commercialization was widespread: Bradford spent large sums on the Park Avenue ground, as did the Huddersfield club on their ground at Fartown. But there is little evidence that the clubs were interested solely in profits, they were though increasingly becoming a focus for civic pride.<sup>180</sup>

The numbers of spectators attending the grounds prior to the installation of turnstiles in the 1890s were estimated, and even after their installation claims that clubs were understating crowds persisted. This could allegedly lead to various ways of manipulating the club's finances, with the unrecorded revenue used to pay working class players. During this period middle class players could claim expenses, but payment of working class players was not accepted. In 1886 a Halifax player was fined £15 and received a ban for receiving money through his involvement in playing rugby, although it was later lifted. But there were, as noted, divisions in the game and rugby would fail to accommodate an understanding on payment for working class players in the way that cricket and soccer did.<sup>181</sup>

Rugby remained the popular local winter spectator sport of choice through the 1890s

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<sup>179</sup> Collins, *Rugby's Great Split*, p.38.

<sup>180</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.80-3.

<sup>181</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.57-80.

and into the Edwardian era. The two codes of football were examined in an editorial in the *Halifax Guardian* on the 8 February 1890. It was stated that the rugby game was better than soccer as it was manlier and better physically, thereby hinting at prevailing notions of the proper attributes of masculinity. The editorial also referred to the West Riding as a stronghold of the game. For comparison, the rugby international between England and Scotland played on 8 March 1890 drew a crowd of 8,000 spectators, whilst a Yorkshire Cup game between Halifax and Hunslet, reported on 29 March, attracted a crowd of between 20,000 and 25,000, said to be the highest gate in the game at the time. Halifax in fact lost the game but objected. They claimed that the crowd had encroached onto the pitch and interfered with the game and also that two balls were used, although what was meant by this was not made clear. The club had recently objected to the outcome of another contest, which had been upheld, but on this occasion the objection was dismissed and the local paper agreed that on the day the better team won.<sup>182</sup> Once again there was a hint from the report that Halifax was seen as a team too keen on winning at all costs.<sup>183</sup>

Towards the end of the 1894-95 season Yorkshire, the county champions, played a rest of England team beating them comprehensively 21-3, whilst also having seven tries disallowed. The season was the last the Halifax side would play before breaking away from the RFU. During its period as an RFU club Halifax had seen much success, having won the Yorkshire Cup a record five times.<sup>184</sup> The Northern Rugby Football Union (NRFU) was formed in 1895 on the basis of allowing bona-fide payments to working class players for time taken off work to play the game, although it did not condone full professionalism.

The formation of a northern union saw an experimental match where a round ball was

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<sup>182</sup> *Halifax Guardian*, 29 March 1890.

<sup>183</sup> *Halifax Guardian*, 12 April 1890.

<sup>184</sup> *Halifax Guardian*, 16 February 1895.

used and the teams reduced by two players. The game was played at Halifax and their opponents were Manningham. Rugby football was perhaps beginning to feel the pressure from soccer and it was hoped that changes would speed up its flow and increase its popularity. It was reported that: “The use of the round ball does not find much favour, and is objectionable, because it will remove one of the greatest characteristics of the Rugby game ... The reduction of players by two has some recommendations, but it is by no means certain that players would be able to live with the pace if line outs and scrummages were to a large extent abolished.” The report suggested that it would be a mistake to make the game too much like soccer. In fact the round ball had burst during the match and been replaced with a rugby ball. The reduction of players by two would eventually be implemented, as would the abolition of the line out and changes to the scrum, but the round ball, which it had thought would help players dribbling skills, proved to be unsuitable for rugby.<sup>185</sup> The changes, including reducing players to thirteen a side, were put forward in December 1895 but the motion was lost and it was to be 1906 before substantial rule changes were implemented.<sup>186</sup> The 1895-6 season saw Halifax make a profit of £280. The team had finished second to Manningham and entered a period of success at the turn of the century winning the Northern Union Challenge Cup a number of times.<sup>187</sup>

The split in rugby was not surprising, and it may be that it was not due solely to concerns about payment of working class players, but also to the way the game was played and watched in the north. As early as 1882 it was noted that the game in the north was played in a different spirit “and at times the desire to win leads to much unpleasantness.”<sup>188</sup> As we shall see there is evidence that southern clubs were not keen

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<sup>185</sup> *Halifax Guardian*, 5 October 1895.

<sup>186</sup> Collins, *Rugby's Great Split*, p.163.

<sup>187</sup> Hardcastle, *Halifax Rugby League Club*, p.23.

<sup>188</sup> Huggins, *The Victorians and Sport*, p.210.

to play in front of partisan northern crowds and against, in many instances, working class men. However the main opposition of the RFU remained to any form of payment to working class players. Collins has noted working class men were paradoxically “supporting the operation of market forces in rugby”, whilst the middle class administrators of the game were in effect opposing those same forces.<sup>189</sup> Cricket and soccer both came to an understanding regarding professionalism, albeit in the latter middle class players tended to give up rather than play alongside working class men, whereas rugby did not.

The reaction of the crowd during games was rarely commented upon in local reports. However in a game between Halifax and Oldham, just after the split, it was noted that: “The behaviour of a section of the spectators to the referee (Mr. Harrop of Huddersfield) was anything but satisfactory. He probably committed errors of judgement, but there was no excuse for such expressions as ‘Put an Oldham jersey on’ and ‘Well played Huddersfield’”.<sup>190</sup> Working class crowd behaviour had in fact long been a source of anxiety within the RFU. Large and vociferous northern crowds were seen as intimidating as early as the 1880s; the Goole club had distanced themselves from other northern clubs stating they were nearly free from working class players and that the game would be free from rough play and noisy crowds.<sup>191</sup>

By 1900 the reporting of sport in the local press was more comprehensive. The NRFU was developing and at the time operated two leagues in Yorkshire, the senior and second, with two similar leagues in Lancashire. Soccer was beginning to make an impact locally with at least ten amateur clubs having formed themselves into a league and was by this time drawing large crowds nationally. Nevertheless it remained less

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<sup>189</sup> Collins, *Rugby's Great Split*, p.28.

<sup>190</sup> *Halifax Guardian*, 5 October 1895.

<sup>191</sup> Collins, *Rugby's Great Split*, p.27-9.

popular locally than the rugby game, which had numerous local clubs.<sup>192</sup> Rugby's continuing regional popularity can be judged by the attendance at the Northern Union Challenge Cup competition. The semi-final played between Leeds Parish Church and Swinton attracted a crowd of 20,000.<sup>193</sup>

Notwithstanding success on the field the Halifax club announced that they had a £600 deficit and a £4,000 mortgage. The rugby ground's wooden stand also needed maintenance work. They decided to hold a Worlds Fair on their grounds in an attempt to clear the debts,<sup>194</sup> but as noted elsewhere this was not a success, the summer was a poor one and the club made a loss on the venture.

By 1905 the team was printed in the newspaper under their respective playing positions: fullback, threequarters, half-backs and forwards, along with details of the opponents for the next home game. A crowd of 5,000 saw Halifax take on Wakefield Trinity on what was described as a poor day, so attendance could be reasonable even in inclement weather. The 1905 season was however a nondescript one for the team.<sup>195</sup> The rugby club opened its gates to spectators for the second team at 3d for adults and 1d for boys. Admission to the first team games was 6d, 3d and 2d, in line with entertainments such as film shows and the cheaper variety halls.<sup>196</sup> By 1910 the advance of soccer to a national game is evident, even in a strong rugby town, with weekly results and reports on major soccer games in the local press.<sup>197</sup>

The rugby club was charging 6d for adults and 2d for boys for the first team games in the 1914-15 season.<sup>198</sup> The war caused it considerable problems. A decision had been taken to revert to full amateur status and this was reported positively in the press: "Each

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<sup>192</sup> *Halifax Courier*, 5 January 1900.

<sup>193</sup> *Halifax Courier*, 14 April 1900.

<sup>194</sup> *Halifax Guardian*, 7 July 1900.

<sup>195</sup> *Halifax Courier*, 7 January 1905.

<sup>196</sup> *Halifax Guardian*, 5 February 1910.

<sup>197</sup> *Halifax Guardian*, 7 March 1910.

<sup>198</sup> *Halifax Guardian*, 16 January 1915.

man is keeping himself fully fit and has come forward to play the game for the love of sport, and as an amateur, thereby proving it is the game he plays for and not the financial side of it.”<sup>199</sup> The decision was not successful; for the first part of the season crowds were drastically reduced and press reports suggested that the team were not playing well. The first game of the new season against Brighouse Rangers was poorly attended by a crowd of around 400, a massive drop on the crowds reported before the war.<sup>200</sup> The games were played as friendlies but the initial reports suggested the standards of the play were below what was expected. Although it was said that no points were to be awarded, a league table was in place showing Halifax near the bottom. The club did have a good gate on Christmas Day 1915 when around nine to ten thousand spectators brought in gate money of over £131.<sup>201</sup> Admission charges to the ground had been kept as they had been the previous year, with soldiers being charged 3d. It was feared that a wartime financial crisis might see the complex lost to building development. It included separate rugby, cricket and bowling pitches and was no doubt costly to maintain.

Whilst the club was capable of generating large crowds and substantial income it was never seen as a purely commercial venture in the way that the music hall and cinema were. The intrinsic satisfactions of the club and the game would seem to have been paramount. Clubs had also become a source of civic pride for the towns they represented and Halifax was no exception. The commercial potential of the rugby clubs was rarely exploited and developed to the full. Halifax had thus taken strongly to the rugby game, but the association code was not to prove as popular.

## **Soccer**

At the end of 1875 there was a brief report of an association game of football played

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<sup>199</sup> *Halifax Courier*, 1 September 1915.

<sup>200</sup> *Halifax Courier*, 3 September 1915.

<sup>201</sup> *Halifax Guardian*, 28 December 1915.

between Hipperholme Grammar School and Heath Grammar School, the latter winning by three goals to nil. One can speculate that the masters of these two local schools had played football at public school and introduced the sport. The report of a soccer match at the time was exceptional, but the coverage of either code in the local press was still in its infancy.<sup>202</sup> Why soccer, as it came increasingly to be called in the north to distinguish it from rugby, became popular in certain areas of the north and not others is hard to explain. Simple geographic proximity may have been a factor. Heywood notes that in Todmorden the association game became popular in the Cornholme area, probably due to its popularity in nearby Burnley, whilst rugby remained the game in the other parts of Todmorden which adjoined rugby areas.<sup>203</sup> Arnold touches on the geographic barrier of the Pennines in stopping the spread of soccer from the north east Lancashire towns but this does not account for rugby's popularity in certain other areas of Lancashire and Cheshire.<sup>204</sup>

There were attempts to introduce soccer into Halifax, for instance an exhibition game was played at the ground of the Halifax Free Wanderers, who were a rugby club made up of players from various local teams. The match, confirming the game's popularity in Lancashire, was between the Lancashire Scottish and the Lancashire Natives, the score was recorded as being rather one sided at 10 goals to 2 in favour of the former. The crowd was estimated to be around 2,000, a reasonable attendance.<sup>205</sup>

In 1895 a soccer team began playing in Halifax sharing the Thrum Hall site. It was said that "the Associationists will shortly take relatively as good a position amongst the

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<sup>202</sup> *Halifax Guardian*, 27 November 1875.

<sup>203</sup> Heywood, *Cloth caps and cricket crazy*, p.153.

<sup>204</sup> Arnold, A.J., 'The Belated Entry of Soccer into the West Riding Textile District of Northern England: Commercial Imperatives and Problems', in *International Journal of the History of Sport*, 1989, Volume 6, pp.319-334.

<sup>205</sup> *Halifax Guardian*, 30 May 1885.

clubs of the County as that so long held by the exponents of the Rugby code.”<sup>206</sup> In fact the side did not prosper; its difficulties alluded to when rugby followers were recorded as stating that soccer was “too much like a game of draughts with the players waiting for each other to move.”<sup>207</sup>

Nevertheless the rise in the popularity of soccer continued with more local teams playing the game and by 1905 there was a local league. By 1910 the advance of soccer to the premier national game is evident in the local press with weekly results and reports on major cup games.<sup>208</sup> At this time Halifax did not have a soccer team in any of the national or regional leagues, the team started by the cricket and rugby club having closed. However a club was established in the town in 1911 and the 1914-15 season saw them playing in the Midland League alongside Bradford and the reserve sides from Sheffield Wednesday and United.<sup>209</sup> They had made a loss on the season of £51/12/3. The gate receipts had been down by £200 so clearly the war had impacted on the club’s profitability. They also reported that ten players were now serving with the colours. The club continued to play during the 1915-16 season.<sup>210</sup>

Association football had failed in Halifax to make the same impact as rugby in the nineteenth century and whilst rugby had lost ground nationally the town remained a rugby town. It is difficult to say why soccer failed to make the same impact professionally as rugby. However by the time the town had established a soccer club, the newly formed NRFU, which had struggled initially, with some rugby clubs abandoning the game in favour of soccer, implemented rule changes that improved the game as a fast moving spectacle. As we shall see the soccer club had some success and it periodically attracted decent crowds, but it was never to match the town’s rugby club

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<sup>206</sup> *Halifax Guardian*, 16 February 1895.

<sup>207</sup> *Halifax Guardian*, 14 September 1895.

<sup>208</sup> *Halifax Guardian*, 7 March 1910.

<sup>209</sup> *Halifax Guardian*, 17 October 1914.

<sup>210</sup> *Halifax Daily Guardian*, 1 September 1915.

in popularity and was never far from financial difficulties.

### **The Public House**

The public house remained the main source of leisure time entertainment for working people. It offered a range of amusements to its customers, and provided a meeting place for groups such as amateur sporting teams, trade unions and horticultural societies. But as we have seen, its central position as the provider of commercial leisure was coming under pressure from the increasing range of alternative pastimes. The public house was relatively cheap, depending of course on how much people chose to spend, when compared to the theatre or going to a concert. There was no entrance fee, little limit on the time you could spend there and relative freedom to behave as you wished. But as we saw too, drink itself was becoming relatively more expensive. The temperance movement remained opposed to the drinking of alcohol and campaigned for its prohibition, albeit with no success. The public house was subject to continuing legislation, although severe restrictions on opening hours were only introduced during the First World War.

The local newspapers continued to report cases of drunkenness and drink related crime, but the more positive aspects of public houses are rarely commented upon. Adverts for pubs appear in the press, but not regularly; the Queens Hotel advertised an ordinary (a set meal) every Thursday and Saturday at a quarter past one but details of the cost were not included.<sup>211</sup> It therefore remains difficult to build up a picture of the customers. However in Bradford the customers have been noted as largely male, especially in the beerhouses, but with significant numbers of women and the young. It was only in 1886 that sale of drinks to children under 13 was prohibited for consumption on the premises, later raised to 14 and it remained legal for children over

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<sup>211</sup> *Halifax Guardian*, 14 May 1870.

14 to use the pub until legislation in 1908 banning them.<sup>212</sup>

During this period a significant change came about in that most of the pubs and beerhouses had come under the control of breweries. This did not come about overnight, but by the turn of the century around five local breweries had come to dominate the local licensed trade in Halifax. Three of these: Websters, Ramsdens and Whitakers, would become significant regional brewers. In 1890 Websters became a limited liability company with a share capital of £175,000. Whilst public houses did not advertise regularly, the local brewers did; they established popular local brands and the press carried regular adverts extolling the virtues of the breweries' respective beers. Local brewers were quick to assure drinkers of the high quality of their beer and of its inspection by the borough analyst when arsenic was allegedly found in beer in 1900.<sup>213</sup> In short the nature of the public house had changed over the century as large breweries came to control the local trade.

During this period there were more beerhouses in Halifax than premises with full licences.<sup>214</sup> However the beerhouses were limited to selling beer and one response of the public houses was to develop the dram shop for the sale of spirits. By the middle of the 1860s there were reported to be more than 50 in Bradford where the growth of population had been considerably greater than in Halifax.<sup>215</sup> But local public houses also had been keen to exploit their advantage of the spirit licence by developing the dram shop from the early part of the century.

Halifax, being an ancient town, had a large number of established public houses and a number of these added dram shops to boost their revenue. The dram shops tended to provoke widespread negative reactions on the grounds of their clientele, and their nature

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<sup>212</sup> Jennings, *The Public House*, pp.198-200.

<sup>213</sup> *Halifax Guardian*, 1 December 1900.

<sup>214</sup> Robinson. P., 'Wither the Vault?', in *Caldercask*, Issue 12, August-December 2007, pp.13-17.

<sup>215</sup> Jennings, *The Public House*, p.116.

as ‘vertical drinking saloons’ with little internal furnishings and the fact that they were selling spirits to largely working class customers. For this reason by the mid-to-late nineteenth century applicants for new licensed premises in the town were keen to keep the dram shops but tended to refer to them in plans as vaults or spirit vaults. They also tended to be separate from the rest of the premises, having their own entrance, usually directly onto the street. Whilst the later Victorian vaults were more elaborate than earlier dram shops they remained marked by their lack of seating.<sup>216</sup>

Whilst the dram shop or vaults were limited to premises with full licences they proved influential in the internal design of many new premises, even those without full licences. Their bars proved to be popular in that they allowed customers to be served quickly and were copied with a number of new beerhouses, for instance, the Clarence and Cherry Tree, both late nineteenth century properties in Halifax, including vault type bars.<sup>217</sup>

By the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries the grip of large breweries on the public houses and beerhouses was becoming almost complete. Aware of the opposition to the vaults they were eager not to provoke the licensing authorities and so incorporated the concept of the vault within the plans for proposed new public houses under the guise of a refreshment bar. The White Horse, a town centre pub, was rebuilt in 1899 and included separate tap, commercial and smoke rooms alongside a refreshment room with its own bar and a vault like lack of seating.<sup>218</sup> A number of new public houses were erected in late Victorian and Edwardian Halifax which were typical of the time, brightly lit large premises with etched plate glass windows and a range of separate rooms. The Plummet Line and the Shakespeare Hotel were good examples of this style. By the end of the nineteenth century there were 543 drink outlets in the

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<sup>216</sup> Robinson, ‘Wither the Vault?’, pp.13-17.

<sup>217</sup> Ibid.

<sup>218</sup> Robinson. P., ‘Wither the Vault?’, in *Caldercask*, Issue 13, December-March 2008, pp. 6-9.

Halifax Poor Law union with 179 in Halifax itself.<sup>219</sup>

The Licensing Act of 1904 saw 11 local beerhouses reported in 1905 to the Compensation Authority for extinction on the grounds of non-necessity. The ancient Talbot Inn was refused a licence for music and dancing when the Chief Constable objected to the sanitary arrangements and bad access to the assembly room which was declared to be unsafe.<sup>220</sup> The Licensing Act sought to reduce the numbers of licensed premises creating a mechanism for financial compensation to the owners and licensees. The houses lost tended to be the least profitable. The number of beerhouses would continue to decrease through the early twentieth century.<sup>221</sup>

The First World War saw stringent new licensing hours introduced, which only allowed pubs to open between 12-2:30pm and 6:30-9:30pm. It also banned the practice of treating, buying drinks for other people either singly or in groups, and also the long pull, providing more than the quantity paid for.<sup>222</sup> The hours would be adjusted but they were to remain in place after the war and indeed until the latter part of the twentieth century.

Clearly this period was, in certain respects, a difficult one for the public house; it was subject to attacks from temperance groups, reformers and alternative forms of leisure whilst the end of the period saw severe changes in the hours that pubs were allowed to open. Whilst the public house declined in some respects, for example as a centre for the transport network, political meetings and various local government functions, it had grown as a centre for various sports clubs, societies and trade unions. The public house had continued to develop, with the town having a number of new and refurbished premises, not just in the town centre but also in the suburbs and it remained an

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<sup>219</sup> Hargreaves, *Halifax*, p.172.

<sup>220</sup> *Halifax Guardian*, 11 March 1905.

<sup>221</sup> Jennings, *The Local*, pp.172-3.

<sup>222</sup> Jennings, *The Public House*, p.232.

important part of commercial leisure.

### **Fairs and travelling shows**

By this period the fair and travelling shows had become a less important part of the town's leisure calendar with the growth of alternative forms of recreation. The main part of the annual midsummer fair had, by 1870, been removed to the cattle market, a site on Gibbet Street about a mile from the town centre and it continued to be held here until the twentieth century. However there were still some stalls set up in the town centre in 1870.<sup>223</sup> The removal of the fair from the centre of Halifax was staged over a number of years, probably to avoid opposition from the various interested parties.

During 1875 the *Halifax Courier* reported little of the annual fair. Travelling shows advertised in the press during the year are few although a Diorama was resident for a part of the summer at the Theatre Royal.<sup>224</sup> In 1880 few travelling shows are to be found advertised in the press although it may be that they are simply using alternative forms of advertising, rather than the local newspapers.

By 1885 all trace of the annual fair was removed from the town centre by refusing to allow stalls to set up in the town and threatening anyone selling animals in the street with a fine of up to £5. It was also reported that the fair had been curtailed to four days and that "the horse and cattle fair was only poor. The pleasure fair is of the ordinary character."<sup>225</sup>

1890 saw the visit of Professor Buer and his miniature circus. His act included performing ponies, comical mules and an Indian sacred bull. Admission was 3d, 6d and 1/-.<sup>226</sup> The roller skating rink was used by a number of visiting acts during the year and sponsored promotions. In January the owners offered a massive £200 to any person who

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<sup>223</sup> *Halifax Guardian*, 11 June 1870.

<sup>224</sup> *Halifax Guardian*, 17 July 1875

<sup>225</sup> *Halifax Guardian*, 27 June 1885

<sup>226</sup> *Halifax Guardian*, 11 October 1890.

could lift more than a professional strongman.<sup>227</sup> There was a contest to climb a greasy pole, the winner receiving a leg of mutton.<sup>228</sup> The owner of the rink was clearly exploiting its commercial potential to the full.

The town's annual fair week in 1895 passed without much comment. The press continued to remain ambivalent about the fair; whilst not condemning it outright the support, certainly during the later part of the nineteenth century, was at best lukewarm. However the Yorkshire Agricultural Show held on Skircoat Moor during August was positively recorded. The agricultural show was different in tone to the more plebeian fair with less emphasis on the carnival aspect.<sup>229</sup>

In 1900 a fair was held at Thrum Hall sports ground. The reasons for the fair are noted elsewhere. It contained a mixture of trade exhibits, sideshows, performers and a theatre which included cinematograph shows. The latter proved popular, as the films included local scenes of workers leaving the Dean Clough carpet works of John Crossley and footage taken of a Halifax versus Oldham rugby match. The fair was widely advertised and sought to attract visitors within a 60 mile radius, but, as noted, it was a commercial failure.<sup>230</sup>

The withdrawal of support for the town's annual fair was protracted and reflected a national change in the nature of the fair, as it transformed itself from the eighteenth century fair, based on hiring people and the marketing of goods, to one which revolved around showmen providing amusement: freak shows, acrobats, peepshows and the increasingly popular mechanical rides.<sup>231</sup> It was not just the nature of the fair that came in for increasing scrutiny but the nomadic lifestyle of the fair's travelling showmen. Travellers such as actors and showmen have historically been treated with suspicion,

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<sup>227</sup> *Halifax Guardian*, 18 January 1890.

<sup>228</sup> *Halifax Guardian*, 3 May 1890.

<sup>229</sup> *Halifax Guardian*, 27 July 1895.

<sup>230</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>231</sup> Jewell, *Fairs and Revels*, p.91.

their migratory lifestyles a source of concern. In the 1880s they came under parliamentary scrutiny at the hands of George Smith, an MP who was an active opponent of showmen, his attempt at legislation was however unsuccessful and travelling fairs continued, popular with certain sections of society, into the next century.<sup>232</sup>

### **Holidays and excursions**

Railway excursions became an increasingly popular part of the leisure calendar aided by the introduction of the Bank Holiday Acts in 1871. However even before these Whitsuntide Tuesday 1870, for example, saw trips offered to the seaside. Scarborough was 3/- for adults and 1/6 for children. Excursions to the Lake District, Manchester and even a Bradford gala were offered through the railway companies.<sup>233</sup> The *Halifax Guardian* discussed the availability of these day excursions and noted that large numbers of local people visited the seaside. They remarked how they had progressively increased over the previous twenty years, with each year seeing a new place of interest opened up, so that most places within 100 miles of the town could be visited by rail. The article then discussed some of the seaside destinations, including Whitby and Morecambe, as well as inland places of interest such as Bolton Abbey.<sup>234</sup>

In 1875 railway companies continued to advertise excursions to the seaside, places of interest and race meetings.<sup>235</sup> By 1885 excursions to local race meetings were regularly advertised; trains from local stations ran to both York and Pontefract races.<sup>236</sup> In the summer months both the Lancashire and Yorkshire and Great Northern companies were offering excursions to the seaside.<sup>237</sup> In October of the same year local banks declared

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<sup>232</sup> Starsmore, *English Fairs*, pp.16-7.

<sup>233</sup> *Halifax Guardian*, 14 June 1870.

<sup>234</sup> *Halifax Guardian*, 18 June 1870.

<sup>235</sup> *Halifax Courier*, 3 July 1875.

<sup>236</sup> *Halifax Guardian*, 18 April 1885.

<sup>237</sup> *Halifax Guardian*, 27 June 1885.

Saturday to be a half holiday, by now described as being a half holiday in nearly all the towns in the area.<sup>238</sup> Railway excursions remained popular in 1890. In fact, by this time excursions to the races were commonplace. It remains difficult to say who was taking these excursions in Halifax but evidence elsewhere suggests that large numbers of working class people were taking advantage of the breaks as the local towns became deserted during Bank Holidays.<sup>239</sup> During 1895 unemployment and trade problems were evident but railway excursions continued unabated, including the opportunity of visiting nearby towns. For instance a gala in Foxholes Park in Rochdale was advertised with a rail ticket costing 2/-.<sup>240</sup>

A Zoo at Exley, a village about two miles from Halifax town centre, opened at Whitsuntide in 1909 when it attracted 41,000 visitors.<sup>241</sup> In March 1910 the owners reported that they had suffered no loss of animals over the severe winter, even though the cages were not heated. There was also an announcement that a new feature was open, the Arctic region featured sea lions, seals, and arctic birds. A miniature railway was also under construction. The Electric Theatre had been altered to comply with the 1909 Cinematograph Act and both silent and an early form of talking pictures were to be presented. Alongside the animals and other attractions there was to be a Cingallee [sic] village where natives would be on view, at work and play. It was hoped that the coming season would see better weather than the previous one, although 250,000 were reported to have visited in the previous year. Entrance to the zoo was 6d in 1909.<sup>242</sup> The zoo closed towards the end of the First World War due to wartime difficulties in providing sufficient feed for the animals.

Another attraction associated with the zoo, as so often reflecting the immediate

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<sup>238</sup> *Halifax Guardian*, 31 October 1885.

<sup>239</sup> Walvin, *Leisure and Society*. p.67.

<sup>240</sup> *Halifax Guardian*, 27 July 1895.

<sup>241</sup> Hargreaves, *Halifax*, p.174.

<sup>242</sup> *Halifax Guardian*, 5 March 1910.

attraction of new technology, was a flight between it and the racecourse. The flights were to take place in January between 2.00pm and 4.00pm. The cost of the flights were to be 1/- and 6d, although they were cancelled due to bad weather.<sup>243</sup> A flight did take place in June; however it was also cut short due to bad weather and only lasted three minutes.<sup>244</sup>

Sunny Vale Pleasure Gardens opened in the Hipperholme area in 1883 and were to remain popular into the early twentieth century.<sup>245</sup> In September of 1915 the Sunny Vale grounds were advertising swimming, dancing, an open air cinema and a fireworks display. Admission was 6d all day and 3d for the evening. No doubt this attraction proved popular due to wartime travelling restrictions.<sup>246</sup> During the period the evidence suggests that many working class people were taking day excursions but there is limited evidence to support annual holidays of a week or more away from home.

### **Lectures.**

Visits by lecturers had become almost monopolized by organized societies, with few independent itinerant lecturers. The number of lectures increased when the Dean Clough Institute promoted them as part of their annual programme in 1890.<sup>247</sup> By the 1890s the Mechanics' Institute was being used increasingly for variety shows, nevertheless lectures continued. In October Edison's phonograph was presented as the "Greatest Wonder on Earth!" Admission to the demonstration was not cheap with reserved seats 3/-, other seats at 2/- or 1/- with back seats 6d.<sup>248</sup> Mr. Barret Browning gave a lecture on the English poets at the Stansfeld Rooms on Northgate. Admission to the hall was 2/-. John Lister of Shibden Hall, a noted local antiquarian, gave a series of

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<sup>243</sup> *Halifax Guardian*, 8 January 1910.

<sup>244</sup> *Halifax Guardian*, 11 June 1910.

<sup>245</sup> Hargreaves, *Halifax*, p.215.

<sup>246</sup> *Halifax Guardian*, 7 August 1915.

<sup>247</sup> *Halifax Guardian*, 18 January 1890.

<sup>248</sup> *Halifax Guardian*, 11 October 1890.

lectures on the 'Making of Halifax' for The Halifax Literary and Philosophical Society. Admission was 1/- to each of the lectures. A lecture on the 'Dwellings of the People' given at the King Cross Liberal Club was free. The advert for the lecture stated that ladies were particularly invited. There were other free lectures, for example those of the Halifax Temperance Society.<sup>249</sup>

The Grand Theatre was used for a lecture on the Boer War in 1900. The speaker Mr. Rene Bull, a war artist, spoke of his time with General Buller. There were reported to be over 700 photographs of fighting including the battle of Ladysmith and Spion Kop, with revelations of the serious blunders made at the latter. The cheapest admission was 3d, the dress circle 3/6.<sup>250</sup> The relative expense of lectures suggests a largely middle class audience, although free offerings may have attracted a wider clientele.

## **Cinema**

The illusion of movement caused by the brain's inability to distinguish between a series of rapidly presented images had been recognized, if not entirely understood, for many years, with various mechanical devices exploiting the phenomenon, such as the zoetrope.<sup>251</sup> The possibility of producing moving pictures was being investigated by various people during the latter part of the nineteenth century and there is some debate as to who first perfected moving pictures. Augustin Le Prince, a Frenchman working in Yorkshire, is credited as having taken motion pictures in 1888, the year he applied for a patent for his apparatus and Mellor states that he presented a film show to a number of friends at his studio on Woodhouse Lane, Leeds in the autumn of 1888,<sup>252</sup> although it

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<sup>249</sup> *Halifax Guardian*, 8 March 1890.

<sup>250</sup> *Halifax Guardian*, 26 May 1900.

<sup>251</sup> The explanation of the persistence of vision is subject to debate amongst scientists.

<sup>252</sup> Mellor, G.J., (1971) *Picture Pioneers: The Story of the Northern Cinemas 1896-1971*, Frank Graham, Newcastle. pp.12-13. Earnshaw agrees with Mellor on this see: Earnshaw, T., and Moran, J., (2008) *Made In Yorkshire*, Guerilla Book. No place of publication.

has also been suggested that he was unable to project his pictures acceptably.<sup>253</sup> Subsequently the works of a number of other early pioneers have eclipsed Le Prince. In England William Friese-Green and Robert Paul were both working on cinematography but it was to be the Lumiere brothers who gave the first public display of moving films in England at the Regent Street Polytechnic in February 1896.

Moving pictures were quick to make an impact across the country and were shown, for example, at the Peoples Palace, Bradford in April 1896<sup>254</sup> and in Liverpool in May of the same year.<sup>255</sup> The first films in Halifax seem to have been presented at the Theatre Royal on Monday 2 November 1896, when as part of a variety show “animated photographs or living pictures scientifically known as the Cinematoscope” were to be presented by Professor F. Harvard.<sup>256</sup> The paper subsequently reported that “an optical illusion is produced as novel as it is pleasing. Horses, vehicles, persons and numerous other objects are represented moving in various directions with all the naturalness of life ... while a representation of the arrival of a train at a railway station calls for special praise. This item (the Cinematoscope) is quite a feature of the programme and is well worth seeing alone.”<sup>257</sup> Sowerby Bridge saw Professor Wood introduce moving pictures in December of 1896. Admission was 1/-, 6d and 3d. The professor also offered phrenological examinations and advice on health and on Sunday a concert of sacred music, admission to which was by collection with silver admitting to the best seats.<sup>258</sup>

Initially moving pictures were presented by travelling showmen, often the self-styled professors noted above. But films in Halifax were quickly incorporated as an integral part of the programme of the town’s variety halls. The Theatre Royal included film of

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<sup>253</sup> Hanson, S., (2007) *From silent screen to multi-screen: A history of cinema exhibition in Britain since 1896*, Manchester University Press, Manchester. p.29.

<sup>254</sup> Jennings, *The Public House*, p.226.

<sup>255</sup> Ackroyd, H., (2002) *Picture Palaces of Liverpool*, The Bluecoat Press, Liverpool. p.5.

<sup>256</sup> *Halifax Guardian*, 31 October 1896.

<sup>257</sup> *Halifax Guardian*, 9 November 1896.

<sup>258</sup> *Sowerby Bridge Chronicle*, 4 December 1896.

the Boer War in March of 1900.<sup>259</sup> Later in the year the town's Public Hall announced a grand reopening with a variety show and bioscope.<sup>260</sup>

Whilst there is little evidence in Halifax of cinematograph shows associated with travelling fairs, the fairground bioscope shows were becoming widespread, especially in country areas. It has been argued that these fairground bioscope sideshows were important in establishing the cinema with the masses and having an influence on the design of cinemas. The shows "evolved into grandiose travelling spectacles capable of housing a thousand customers, complete with electric lights comfortable seats and inside heating. The original permanent cinemas ... were copied from the bioscope show."<sup>261</sup> Claims for seating capacities for these travelling shows should, however, be treated with caution, as they were often exaggerated. For instance, when visiting Todmorden, a town of around 20,000 people at the turn of the century, Lord George Sanger's circus claimed a marquee which could accommodate 15,000.<sup>262</sup> It is also arguable to what extent travelling shows were in fact the architectural stimuli for early cinemas. Travelling shows were influential in promoting the cinema as a commercial enterprise with the working class, in part due to the fairground showman's flair for presentation.<sup>263</sup> But the architectural stimulus for the permanent cinemas may have owed more to the theatre. The potential of the picture show was quickly recognized by the variety theatre; new theatres were being built with facilities for showing films within a few years. Frank Matcham's Hackney Empire of 1901 had a projection room. Similarly the immense London Coliseum of 1904, the most ambitious variety theatre

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<sup>259</sup> *Halifax Guardian*, 10 March 1900.

<sup>260</sup> *Halifax Guardian*, 3 November 1900.

<sup>261</sup> Toulmin, V., 'Travelling Shows and the First Static Cinemas', in *Picture House*, 1996, Number 21, Cinema Theatre Association, pp.5-12.

<sup>262</sup> *Todmorden News*, 26 April 1900.

<sup>263</sup> Toulmin, 'Travelling Shows,' pp.5-12.

ever built, had purpose built projection rooms.<sup>264</sup>

Full time seasons of films were quickly introduced in Halifax. The Victoria Hall, which opened as a concert hall in 1901, was not initially a great financial success and films were probably introduced to supplement its income, along with occasional minstrel and variety shows. New Century Pictures, a company launched in 1902 by two Bradford men Carter and Sunderland, and Waller Jeffs, a Birmingham showman and early cinema entrepreneur, introduced seasons of films at the Victoria Hall in 1903.<sup>265</sup> Admission was 1/-, 6d and 3d, children were admitted half price for all seats except the 3d ones.<sup>266</sup> Film shows did give way to concerts during the course of the season but the film shows were much cheaper, prices for a concert at the hall in February of 1905 ranged from 1/- to 6/-.<sup>267</sup> Films continued to be offered as part of the programme in the local variety venues.

As films grew in sophistication they moved from being seen generally as a harmless diversion to become the objects of increasing concern by the press, the churches and both local and national government. There were also fears expressed about the safety of film presentations. The film stock was highly flammable and was liable to catch fire if the film jammed in the projector gate and was subjected to the heat from the arc lamp. It could also become unstable and spontaneously combust. There were implications for audience safety if a projector was placed close to the audience within the body of a hall, as they often were.<sup>268</sup>

In 1908 a disaster at the Public Hall, Barnsley contributed to the growing concerns about the safety of cinema. It included a pit, stall, balcony and gallery, access to which was by a separate entrance with a pay box at the top of the staircase. On 11 January

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<sup>264</sup> Earl, *British Theatres*, p.40.

<sup>265</sup> Mellor, *Picture Pioneers*, pp.22-23

<sup>266</sup> *Halifax Guardian*, 18 February 1905.

<sup>267</sup> *Halifax Guardian*, 25 February 1905.

<sup>268</sup> Hanson, *From silent screen to multi-screen*, pp.16-18.

unaccompanied children were turned back from the pay box as the gallery became full and told they would be admitted to the pit for the same price of 1d. Children running down the stairs collided with children ascending and sixteen children aged between four and nine were killed in the ensuing crush.<sup>269</sup> Many towns had similar experiences with early film shows. In Darlington a temporary wooden projection room in the Central Hall caught fire and although there were no fatalities, widespread panic had ensued.<sup>270</sup> In Newmarket Town Hall a person was killed when the audience leaving after the show upset the cinematograph causing a fire and panic amongst the audience.<sup>271</sup>

In response to public unease there followed the 1909 Cinematograph Act, which became law on the 1 January 1910. It was largely promoted as a measure to improve public safety and ensure cinemas were properly constructed with adequate exits and projection rooms that were isolated from the main body of the auditorium with fire proof shutters on the portholes. It also applied to travelling shows and to the construction of new cinemas. The new law brought the end of a number of early picture houses, usually shop conversions in the larger cities, which were in most cases totally unsuitable.<sup>272</sup> It does not appear that the 1909 legislation caused any closures in Halifax, although the existing halls in the town did of course have to meet the new requirements. There also appears to be some doubt as to how many venues were closed by the 1909 Act. The West Riding County Council continued to issue cinematograph licences to public houses, so clearly it believed that they met the requirements of the legislation. However after 1912 no further licences were issued.<sup>273</sup> I have not come across the use of public houses for film shows in Halifax.

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<sup>269</sup> Taylor, K., (2008) *Barnsley Cinemas*, Mercia Cinema Society, Wakefield. p.8.

<sup>270</sup> Williams, D. R., (2004) *Cinema in a Cathedral City: Durham 1896-2003*, Mercia Cinema Society, Wakefield. pp.37-38.

<sup>271</sup> Hanson, *From silent screen to multi-screen*, p.18.

<sup>272</sup> Gray, R., (1996) *Cinemas in Britain*, Lund Humphries, London. pp.22-23.

<sup>273</sup> Taylor, *Barnsley Cinemas*, p.10.

Although the Cinematograph Act was intended to protect public safety, exhibitors claimed it was being applied ultra vires. Local authorities were quick to use the provisions of the 1909 Act to impose conditions upon proprietors, such as six day opening or a ban on children after specified times. Some councils demanded that films were submitted to the Chief Constable or local watch committees for scrutiny, a measure that remained in place until the mid-century in many areas. The exhibitors did have some success in objecting to the way the 1909 Act was being enforced but the local authorities were vindicated by the high courts and continued to apply the legislation as described.<sup>274</sup> In Durham for instance: “Most cinematograph licences were granted for six days of the week, and where Sunday opening was permitted the films were to be of a sacred nature and the profits were to be donated to good causes.”<sup>275</sup>

As stated, the passing of the 1909 Act stimulated the building of new cinemas. In 1910 the first building entirely dedicated to showing films opened in Halifax. The Electric, a converted riding school, was operated by National Electric Theatres, a London based company that was building a nationwide circuit of cinemas. A local firm of architects, Richard Horsfall & Sons, responsible for the Theatre Royal, had been engaged to renovate the building. The new cinema opened on the 30 July 1910 at a cost of £5,200. It was described as being “beautiful to look upon ... delightful cosy and comfortable ... the circuit system means all films shown will always be new.” The manager, formerly of the American Skating Rink Co., stated that the films were to be “good healthy amusements at as cheap a rate as possible.”<sup>276</sup> Initially admittance prices for adults were 1/-, 6d and 3d with children at 6d, 3d and 2d, but by September these

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<sup>274</sup> Hunnings, N. M., (1967) *Film Censors and the Law*, George Allen & Unwin, London. p.49.

<sup>275</sup> Williams, *Cinema in a Cathedral City*, pp.45-46.

<sup>276</sup> *Halifax Guardian*, 23 July 1910.

had been reduced, with the highest price for both adults and children being removed.<sup>277</sup>

The Electric was followed by another conversion by the same architects. The Northgate Hall was transformed after a period of neglect into the Theatre de Luxe by a group of local businessmen, opening in March 1912. The refurbishment of the stalls and gallery appears to have been carried out to a high standard with marble and mahogany used in the entrance halls. There were two entrances, one in Northgate, a busy thoroughfare, the other on Portland Street. It was hoped that the passing shoppers in Northgate would be attracted and the cinema, which seated just over 500, was open continuously from 2.00 p.m. until 10.30 p.m.<sup>278</sup>

The first purpose built cinema in Halifax, The Picture House, was opened in 1913 by another national circuit, Provincial Cinematograph Theatres. This cinema was significant in that it was built with no facilities for stage shows. Many early cinemas had been built so that they could be used as variety theatres, presumably as a safety measure to save the investor's money if cinemas turned out, like roller skating, to be a short lived craze. The Picture House was a substantial building, having nothing in common with the rudimentary early halls, and seated over a thousand people who were also provided with smoking lounges and a restaurant. The aim was to appeal to the middle class, whilst not wishing to alienate the working class audience. On opening, the manager stated that the company "did not intend to put on the screen ... any picture which was in any way suggestive or unclean. (Applause) So far as they were concerned no pictures would be shown which would in any way degenerate the morals of the boys and girls of Halifax. (Applause)."<sup>279</sup> The company was clearly eager to stress that the cinema was a respectable leisure time pursuit.

The fact that the manager had to express an opinion on the matter suggests that not all

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<sup>277</sup> *Halifax Guardian*, 24 September 1910.

<sup>278</sup> *Halifax Guardian*, 9 March 1912.

<sup>279</sup> *Halifax Guardian*, 25 October 1913.

thought the cinema a suitable pastime, although I have not come across any negative reporting of early films in Halifax, the above suggests there might have been. Some related the new picture houses to the penny gaffs, early cinemas which had become associated with lurid and unsavoury topics.<sup>280</sup> It was not just the contents of the films that disturbed certain people but the darkened auditorium was also seen as a place for possible illicit relations. However unlike music halls and theatres, cinemas were not licensed for the sale of alcoholic drink, for some a positive point in favour of the cinema as a respectable leisure activity.

The early travelling entrepreneurs were replaced, as we have seen, by companies who invested considerable sums in the new cinemas. Their primary concern was to attract an audience from as wide a social background as possible and the associated takings. They certainly did not want to attract interference from the press, government or the churches. As a way of attempting to placate, amongst others, local authorities, the idea of a form of self-censorship was mooted by the film exhibitors. The Home Office liked the idea but declined to promote it, fearing problems with various local councils. The industry came up with British Board of Film Censors, which came into being in 1912; its early success was chequered with some authorities accepting its 'U' and 'A' certificates, but it was not until 1923 that the system was backed by the national government.<sup>281</sup>

Locally cinemas continued to open: the Palladium and the Cosy were purpose built cinemas, whilst the Kingston Liberal Club was converted into a picture house. All were in an area of densely populated working class housing about a mile from the centre of town and within half a mile of each other. The Mechanics' Hall in the town centre also became a full time cinema. By the outbreak of war fourteen halls had cinematograph

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<sup>280</sup> Shail, A., 'Penny Gaffs and Picture Theatres Popular Perceptions of Britain's First Cinemas', in Lyons, J., and Plunkett, J., (2007) *Multimedia Histories: From Magic Lantern to the Internet*, Exeter University Press, Exeter. pp.132-147.

<sup>281</sup> Kuhn, A., (1988) *Cinema Sexuality & Censorship 1909-25*, Routledge, London. pp.12-27.

licences in Halifax, including the town's three theatres and the concert hall, although the latter were not full time cinemas. Nearby districts also saw new cinemas. Richard Horsfall & Sons, the firm of Halifax architects, were again appointed by National Electric Theatres, this time to build an entirely new picture house, and placed an advert in a Halifax paper on the 15 August 1914 requesting tenders for the Electric Theatre, Sowerby Bridge.<sup>282</sup> The cinema opened without ceremony on the 25 November 1915, a low key event probably influenced by the war.

Civic concerns about wartime leisure pursuits surfaced early in the war in Todmorden. The Lancashire Fusiliers needed 100 volunteers from the town so the town's mayor, an officer from the regiment and other officials visited the town's three cinemas seeking men. The mayor stated in one of the venues that "this was a turn not advertised, otherwise the place ... would have been more crowded than it was." In fact the local population was aware of the recruitment drive as the previous week on the 23 April the paper noted that a handsome present of 6/- was to be presented to those signing up. He also suggested that there were single men in the borough who were "hanging back [and that] Judging from the number of eligible young men who may still be seen walking about our streets or frequenting the picture houses and the football and cricket grounds, there ought to be no difficulty in securing the number of men ... unless those left are of a different metal." When the party of officials arrived at the cinemas the offer of 6/- was received with little enthusiasm. The group received a polite reception at the Olympia but not at the Hippodrome where "a small hostile element created a most regrettable and discreditable scene, the speakers being frequently interrupted and subjected to insulting interjections. No blame of course could be attached to the management for this unpatriotic conduct, but all the same it was greatly

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<sup>282</sup> *Halifax Guardian*, 15 August 1914.

to be deplored.”<sup>283</sup>

The growth of cinema within a short period of time had been dramatic and this growth was to continue after the war. The films changed from mere snippets of life to long feature films played out in purpose built cinemas with orchestras supporting the picture. What is also clear is that after the initial phase, cinema became a business that required substantial investment in buildings and equipment. Well capitalized national companies opened picture houses in Halifax from an early period, although local businessmen also funded both new and converted buildings.

As we have noted the cinemas built outside the town centre were in or near to working class housing, although they were also accessible to the more affluent districts associated with the middle class. The concern about the suitability of the cinema expressed nationally was also addressed locally by the managers and owners of the new picture houses. As we have seen the cinema was relatively inexpensive when compared to concerts and priced to closely compete with the local theatres. Cinemas from the start were built so that there was less, but not total, social separation of the audience.

Audience attendance during this period is not well documented. Hanson notes that figures for the period prior to 1914 are unreliable but states that total weekly attendance had risen to between 7 and 8 million.<sup>284</sup> By the outbreak of war there were about 3,500 cinemas nationally.<sup>285</sup> I have not been able to find any figures for numbers attending cinemas in Halifax but in nearby Leeds by 1913 it was reported there was a weekly attendance of 350,000 out of a population of about 450,000, with 150,000 being children attending on Saturday afternoon.<sup>286</sup> At the end of the First World War attendance fell with the imposition of a tax on admission. As we shall see this decline is

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<sup>283</sup> *Todmorden News*, 30 April 1915.

<sup>284</sup> Hanson, *From silent screen to multi-screen*, p.28.

<sup>285</sup> Gray, *Cinemas in Britain*, p.23.

<sup>286</sup> Jennings, *The Public House*, p.226.

reversed during the next period and the cinema continues to grow, becoming the most popular form of commercial leisure in the first half of the twentieth century.

The shorter working week, increased wages, greater disposable income and limited statutory holidays all contributed toward the increased enjoyment of leisure time. The provision of commercial leisure matched the growing population and the leisure facilities available at the end of the nineteenth century bore no relation to those that had existed at the beginning. The provision of leisure continued to move from local entrepreneurs to regional and national companies. Providers of leisure could have different motives, some being purely commercial others fuelled more by local pride, as is the case with the two codes of football. Halifax during the period becomes an archetypal West Riding sporting town, with rugby the dominant team game and soccer making a belated entry.<sup>287</sup> Both codes of football and cricket had been transformed by increasing commercialism and the exploitation of the Saturday half day holiday. Technological innovation also played an important part in the development of leisure, for example the transformation of the fair and the introduction of completely new leisure industries but above all moving pictures.

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<sup>287</sup> The Sheffield area was an exception with soccer being more popular.

## Chapter Five

### 1920-1950 The triumph of popular leisure

The context for the development of commercial leisure in this period includes the borough's slightly declining population, difficult economic times, war and its aftermath of austerity coupled with a natural desire for release, which saw sports crowds and cinema attendance peak in the immediate postwar period. The theatre, after a period of late Victorian and Edwardian growth, contracted remarkably quickly across the nation in the 1920s and Halifax proved to be no exception, although there may have been a revival of interest towards the end of the period. The cinema became the nation's favourite entertainment and Halifax shared in this too. The public house went through a phase of regeneration in which a lot of older properties closed, new pubs opened, and many others were updated in an attempt to attract new customers. Sport continued to play a major part in the social life of the town. The rugby club made commercial decisions which had helped create a winning side by the end of the 1930s. A soccer side was also firmly established in the town with a new permanent ground, although its fortunes, in contrast to the rugby club, would be mixed. Other sports such as cricket remained popular but their commercial element was limited. Whilst there were many hobbies and pastimes which continued to interest people in their leisure hours there was also a growth in home entertainment, with the radio and the gramophone becoming popular and increasingly within the reach of people on modest incomes. It was predicted in 1935 that television, which started to broadcast in 1936, would replace radio in many homes within four years.<sup>1</sup> This of course did not happen but the radio no doubt contributed to the growth of home based leisure. The period concludes in 1950 on the threshold of major changes to the world of commercial leisure.

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<sup>1</sup> *Halifax Weekly Courier and Guardian*, 7 September 1935.

## **Halifax and its hinterland**

The population of the borough peaked at over a 100,000 at the beginning of the century but had fallen to just over 98,000 by 1950.<sup>2</sup> There were moves to extend the borough boundaries in the 1930s to include parts of the Calder Valley, which would have increased the size of the borough's population to over 150,000 but this was successfully opposed by the West Riding County Council.

The industry of the town experienced mixed fortunes during the inter-war years, although Halifax was not as badly hit as some single industry towns. Textiles remained the largest single employer, with 37% of the workforce in 1921, dropping to 29% in 1931 but rising again to 35% in 1951; the steep drop coinciding with the depression. This was true also of employment in the engineering trades, the town's second largest employer; it fell from 12% of the manufacturing workforce in 1921, to 9% in 1931, before again rising to 18% in 1951.<sup>3</sup> Hargreaves notes that the successful machine tool sector helped stave off the worst of the downturn in the late 1920s and 1930s.<sup>4</sup> The town's two building societies had amalgamated in 1927 becoming the Halifax Building Society, which, with the growth in the housing market, expanded in the 1930s. In the Second World War the confectionery industry was hit by wartime rationing but other industries maintained high levels of production which continued into the immediate postwar period.<sup>5</sup> Halifax's relative immunity from the worst effects of the depression meant that spending power held up, with obvious implications for the enjoyment of commercial leisure. In addition falling prices tended to make money go further, although drink, significantly, increased in price. However, as we shall see, there were some during the 1920s and 1930s for whom commercial leisure remained a luxury.

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<sup>2</sup> Hargreaves, *Halifax*, p.182.

<sup>3</sup> Noble, 'De-industrialisation in Calderdale', pp.145-157.

<sup>4</sup> Hargreaves, *Halifax*, p.188.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.186-91.

Developments in transport had important effects on leisure. The basis of the mass local transport system at the beginning of the twentieth century had been the local railway network and trams. Both now went into decline, with many local stations closing and the last tram running in February 1939.<sup>6</sup> The more flexible motor buses had been introduced into the town and there was also an increase in the number of cars on the area's roads throughout the 1930s. One further significant development in the inter-war years was to the townscape. Whilst the central area remained largely unchanged, some slum dwellings had been demolished at Crossfields where the new Odeon cinema was built. Around 2,500 new council houses were built and about three times that number of private dwellings.<sup>7</sup> The postwar years then saw an increase in council housing and the continued development of out of town housing estates.

### **Theatre**

The first part of the twentieth century saw the cinema eclipse traditional dramatic and variety theatre. From a high point in the period leading up to World War One, traditional drama theatre virtually disappeared in many areas across the country. During the period before the war Halifax had three theatres and numerous other halls providing variety type entertainment, including public houses that had music halls attached. By the middle of the 1930s only a variety theatre, the Palace, had survived.

There was understandably a generally sombre mood in the local press during 1920. Nevertheless there was an article devoted to the town's changing entertainment scene in the *Halifax Guardian*. It noted how both the Mechanics' Hall and the Oddfellows' Hall were operating as full time cinemas, the Gem and Alhambra respectively, after years presenting concerts, lectures and variety shows. It also noted that the Theatre-de-Luxe, now a cinema but part of the Northgate Hotel complex, had also operated as a music

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<sup>6</sup> *Halifax Weekly Courier and Guardian*, 6 January 1940.

<sup>7</sup> Evans, M., 'Halifax houses between the wars, 1919-1939', in *Transactions of the Halifax Antiquarian Society*, 2006, Volume 14 new series, pp.120-139.

hall, the Coliseum, for a number of years. The Mitre music hall had closed in 1903 when its licence was surrendered to the new Palace Theatre. The Canterbury music hall had operated out of a room adjoining the Talbot Inn; it was furnished with benches and a small stage and allowed people to drink. The decline of the music halls was almost complete. Significantly in the same edition a new column was introduced called Cinema Chat.<sup>8</sup> There was a venue called the Arcadian, sited somewhere near the Shay football ground, which appears to have put on variety type shows in the 1920s, but I have been unable to find out any significant information on this place.

The conversion of the Grand Theatre in 1925 will be covered in the section on cinema. There was little discussion of its demise in the local newspaper at the time. Its owner, Northern Theatres, obviously felt it could operate more profitably if converted to films. However it may be that theatre generally was struggling, even before the war, as theatres in nearby Brighouse and Todmorden failed to operate profitably enough to ensure their survival, both becoming cinemas.

The decline of variety theatre seems generally to have been blamed on the popularity of the cinema, particularly talking pictures, followed by radio, with television's arrival in the 1930s seen as the most "alarming innovation of all".<sup>9</sup> The acts were also blamed "postwar humour of the filthiest description became acceptable to nearly all classes of society, and every form of censorship seemed to have gone to sleep."<sup>10</sup> The radio was seen as dealing the ultimate blow to the music hall when in the 1930s it presented its nostalgic *Saturday Night Music Hall*. The music halls' disappearance from London's West End was said to be more pronounced than elsewhere,<sup>11</sup> although in Halifax its demise was almost complete. Mellor is less clear on the downfall of variety theatre,

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<sup>8</sup> *Halifax Guardian*, 6 March 1920.

<sup>9</sup> Haddon, *The Story of the Music Hall*, p.142.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p.111.

<sup>11</sup> Manders, R., and Mitchenson, J., (1965) *British Music Hall*, Studio Vista, London. p.39.

although he notes, perhaps surprisingly, dog racing as another reason. However he comments that the Halifax Palace remained a popular variety theatre throughout the 1930s and 1940s, being the last of the MacNaghten Circuit theatres to close in 1959.<sup>12</sup>

There was perhaps a mini revival in the fortunes of the music hall when a number of former variety theatres reverted from showing films during the Second World War, something which continued in the immediate postwar boom years for entertainment. This proved to be short lived.<sup>13</sup> Haddon, writing in the mid 1930s, thought that cine-variety held the key for variety acts to prosper, but circuits such as Odeon rarely invested money in variety acts and the number of cine-variety theatres built declined as the decade progressed.<sup>14</sup>

As we have seen, music hall can be traced back to the 1840s but: “It was not until the 1890s that music halls began to appeal to society as a whole.”<sup>15</sup> The high point of variety theatre was, as we noted, short lived. There is some evidence that by the time of the first Royal Command Performance in 1912 it was beginning to lose, if it hadn’t already lost, its lustre, with its original largely working class audience. Halifax appears to be in line with other areas of the country regarding the decline in popularity of variety.

Dramatic presentations remained the province of the Royal and the Grand theatres. Traditional drama was in certain respects to fare worse, and certainly no better, than variety venues during this thirty year period. A major problem for traditional theatre, apart from the rise of the cinema, was the imposition of Entertainment Tax on tickets, which resulted in the closure of some provincial theatres.<sup>16</sup> Northern Theatres, owners

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<sup>12</sup> Mellor, *The Northern Music Hall*, pp.188-9.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.190-202.

<sup>14</sup> Haddon, *The Story of the Music Hall*, p.195.

<sup>15</sup> Kift, *The Victorian music hall*, p.175.

<sup>16</sup> Gardiner, V., ‘Provincial Stages, 1900-1934’, in Kershaw, B., Ed. (2004) *The Cambridge History of British Theatre Vol. III*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge. p.77.

of the Theatre Royal, claimed that they had a tempting offer to turn the theatre over to talking pictures in 1930, when it was reported that: “Although the loss of our only theatre would occasion keen regret among play goers, no one could blame the theatre directors if they succumbed to the bait, for the patronage extended to really fine plays ... often leaves much to be desired.” The popularity of talking pictures was again remarked upon.<sup>17</sup> On the 22 February the same newspaper announced that the directors had agreed to continue with drama until Christmas, although short plays were to be performed twice nightly, but this was not to prevent the theatre converting to films.

There was interest in live theatre locally and in the mid 1930s there were numerous amateur drama groups operating in the town. There was also a new venue from 1931: the Alexandra Hall built by the Halifax Building Society, which was used by local thespians and professional actors, as well as for dances. During the late 1920s and 1930s the touring companies that served the provincial stage declined, forcing local theatres to return to stock acting companies based on the repertory principle, presenting a mix of plays by a non-star company at accessible prices.<sup>18</sup> It was these repertory companies which brought professional theatre back to the town.

In 1940 it was decided that the Grand Theatre, operating as a cinema for fifteen years, would revert back to dramatic theatre. It may have been that the opening of two new cinemas in the town in the late 1930s had made it difficult for the Grand to get the latest cinema releases. In March the cinema apparatus was removed and the Charles Denville Players opened the following month in *The Story of the Rosary*. It was also reported that modern plays were to be presented at the Alexandra Hall.<sup>19</sup> The London Players presented a season of plays at what they referred to as the Alexandra Repertory Theatre, performing once nightly with two performances on Saturday with admission at 1/-, 1/6

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<sup>17</sup> *Halifax Weekly Courier and Guardian*, 8 February 1930.

<sup>18</sup> Gardiner, ‘Provincial Stages’, p.83.

<sup>19</sup> *Halifax Weekly Courier and Guardian*, 16 March 1940.

and 2/-.<sup>20</sup> Later in the year Patrick Hamilton's *Rope* and Terence Rattigan's *French without Tears* were presented at the Alexandra Hall; whilst the Grand presented J.B. Priestley's *When we are Married*, its prices ranging from 1/-6 to 3d in the gallery. Plays continued at the Grand in 1945 but at the end of the year a circus was presented.<sup>21</sup>

Live theatre continued into the 1950s before the Grand finally closed and was demolished at the end of the decade. It appears that there was some local revival of interest in live theatre during the wartime period, although widespread evidence of this occurring nationally is hard to find. But the revival of live theatre coincides with the growth in commercial leisure in the 1940s. Further research might shed more light on this point.

### **Music**

Concerts, which had been a mainstay of the town's leisure calendar, now entered a more subdued period. Commercial profit had never been the driving force behind the concerts, as we have noted, with a small profit or breaking even apparently the chief aim of the promoters. The town's concert hall since opening experienced mixed fortunes and previous venues used for concerts were now operating as full time cinemas. In fact the Victoria Hall was also operating as a full time cinema during most of the period.

The *Halifax Guardian* reported on the 12 June 1920 that the Halifax Orchestral Society recorded a bank balance of £11/4/1 at their AGM. The Halifax Amateur Operatic Society, moribund since 1916, was revived. Its last production of 1915 had raised £55 for local charities.<sup>22</sup> The year's subscription concerts were to feature amongst others, the Royal Albert Hall Orchestra under Sir Henry Wood and Dame Clara Butt in two of the five concerts. Tickets for all five ranged from £2/2/0 down to

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<sup>20</sup> *Halifax Weekly Courier and Guardian*, 6 April 1940.

<sup>21</sup> *Halifax Weekly Courier and Guardian*, 1 December 1945.

<sup>22</sup> *Halifax Guardian*, 3 July 1920.

11/- for the side balcony; tickets for single concerts were 10/6 for the circle down to 3/- for the side balcony. The concerts were expensive and beyond many people's budgets and even the cheap seats were far in excess of what the theatres and cinemas were charging.<sup>23</sup>

By 1925 the musical life of the town seems to be livelier, although there is a clear divide between the commercial theatres with their professional entertainers and local amateur societies presenting the occasional concert. The flexibility that was apparent in the late nineteenth century music hall, for instance, where amateurs performed on the same stage as professionals had gone, apart from the occasional talent show, which has of course remained popular beyond theatre into the television age. The Palace continued to have a strong musical element to its variety shows and also presented a number of amateur concerts and musicals during the 1930s and beyond. However, as Russell states: "The final years of pre-war England saw the beginning of a process ... whereby the popular musical society, once the pride of a whole community or at least a sizeable section of it, became a specialist organization catering for a diminishing minority."<sup>24</sup> People also had access to music in the numerous cinemas, which since the advent of talking pictures were presenting a range of musicals. The increasing popularity of the radio and the sale of gramophone records probably also affected attendance at local concerts by the 1930s.

The decline of local music appears to continue during the war, as concerts presented by local amateur groups seem to have been discontinued for the duration. Local musicians did appear, alongside professional musicians, in concerts arranged by the Halifax Entertainments Committee, such as the Sunday charitable concert held at the

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<sup>23</sup> *Halifax Guardian*, 11 September 1920.

<sup>24</sup> Russell, *Popular Music*, p.292.

Odeon in January 1940 to help people in the services.<sup>25</sup> The difficulty continued into the late 1940s, when the problem of recruiting male members for the Halifax Choral Society was highlighted, something which would apparently continue for the rest of the century.<sup>26</sup>

## **Sport**

### **Cricket**

Cricket continued to remain the popular summer sport, but locally it did not match either code of football in attracting large crowds. It was played by a mixture of works, church and village teams, which included professionals and amateurs, league clubs and clubs which played friendly games. In cricket, unlike soccer and rugby, the inter-town rivalries based on strong professional clubs failed to materialize, due both to the nature of the game and the regulatory authority. The sport had developed regionally to encompass county cricket, with test match cricket played at international level. During the period the best professional cricketers played for the counties, which was due to the concerns that the MCC held regarding the growing power of the top league clubs. A number of these league clubs had appointed professionals, so the MCC decreed that professionals had to commit to county sides over club sides. The league clubs were particularly strong in the north and Midlands where some grounds could accommodate over 1,000 spectators.<sup>27</sup>

The county game was the prime focus of spectator and media attention; in the inter-war years Yorkshire dominated the sport, it was the best supported side in the country and won the county championship seven times in ten seasons in the 1930s.<sup>28</sup> The

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<sup>25</sup> *Halifax Weekly Courier and Guardian*, 27 January 1940.

<sup>26</sup> Hargreaves, *Halifax*, p.273.

<sup>27</sup> Williams, J., (1999) *Cricket and England: A Cultural and Social History of the Inter-war Years*, Frank Cass, London. p.28.

<sup>28</sup> Russell, D., 'Sport and Identity: The Case of Yorkshire County Cricket Club 1890-1939', in *Twentieth Century British History*, 1996, Volume 7 (2), pp.293-322.

Yorkshire side could attract large crowds of working-class supporters at weekends and Bank Holidays but this group of supporters did not work the leisurely hours that allowed them to attend mid-week, which had the effect of reducing the average attendance. Membership of the club was relatively expensive at about a guinea a year, so it drew more heavily on middle class people, although not exclusively so. The county side stopped playing in Halifax during the 1890s but access to county games for local people remained reasonably easy, as Yorkshire played around four matches a year at the Park Avenue ground in Bradford, about six miles from Halifax town centre.<sup>29</sup>

Local cricket clubs flourish through the period, many villages throughout the parish had a cricket pitch, and although numbers fluctuated there remained near to a hundred, with works teams making up about a quarter of that number in the 1930s.<sup>30</sup> Playing cricket could involve a substantial outlay for kit and equipment, but Williams suggests that these costs were often offset by the works and church teams.<sup>31</sup> Cricket locally never generated the crowds that either code of football attracted and its commercialization remained limited.

## **Rugby**

The Halifax club was generally successful during the inter-war years, attracting large crowds, and by 1939 had gathered a team of great potential, only for it to be dismantled with the coming of the war. In the period following the Second World War success was not immediate, but during the 1950s and early 1960s the club remained one of the sport's major sides. The team then went into decline and it was never able to maintain the consistent success of previous years, a deterioration coinciding with the contraction of Halifax as a major manufacturing centre.

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Stone, D., 'Cricket and Regional Identity: The Development of Cricket Identity in Yorkshire and Surrey', in *Sport in Society*, 2008, Volume 11(5), pp.501-16.

<sup>31</sup> Williams, *Cricket and England*, p.53.

The First World War had put a stop to any significant improvements to the ground, which remained with one covered area, the rest of the terracing being open to the elements. The years immediately following the war were a time of achievement, with the club reporting profits of £560 for the 1919-20 season.<sup>32</sup> Success continued during the following season, when the club were Yorkshire champions and met Leigh in the Challenge Cup final; although expected to win the game, Halifax were surprisingly beaten.<sup>33</sup> Later in the decade attainments were more modest; crowds however remained high, as contemporary photographs of the terraces tightly packed with spectators illustrate. Actual attendance figures were not regularly recorded in the press, but 23,000 attended a Halifax versus Huddersfield cup game in 1928.<sup>34</sup>

The club bought the Thrum Hall ground in 1921 for £8,000, perhaps spurred on by the early postwar success.<sup>35</sup> Payments to players in the 1919-20 season were £2/10/- for a win, with losing pay a pound less; by the following year the pay had increased substantially, almost doubling to £4 for a win and £2/10/- losing pay.<sup>36</sup> From its foundation and through its formative years the team was made up largely of local men, but by the inter-war years players were recruited from across the country, including contingents from both Wales and Scotland. The Halifax players were also appearing on cigarette cards, but how lucrative these deals were is not recorded.<sup>37</sup>

Whilst the club was successful on the pitch membership had dropped during the late 1920s and by 1930 the *Halifax Courier* was warning that “competition in sport is very keen.” There was a suggestion that the recently formed Halifax Rugby Union Club had impacted on membership of the league club, because the union club had seen more

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<sup>32</sup> *Halifax Guardian*, 5 June 1920.

<sup>33</sup> Hardcastle, *Halifax Rugby League*, p.44.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p.48.

<sup>35</sup> Collins, T., (2006) *Rugby League in Twentieth Century Britain*, Routledge, Abingdon. p.23.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p.43.

<sup>37</sup> Hardcastle, *Halifax Rugby League*, p.52.

consistent performances.<sup>38</sup> It is hard to substantiate this claim; anecdotally it can be claimed that supporters of league tend to stay away from union games and vice versa. It may be that some middle class members transferred their support to the union side, although it is possible that hard economic times saw membership decrease. There was increased interest in the union game in England in the 1920s, based in part on an improved national side, which had started in the years preceding the First World War.<sup>39</sup>

Whilst the club saw success in the inter-war years, there were seasons when it failed to make a profit. In 1925-26 a substantial loss of £1,000 was reported and the following season a club appeal raised £137 from the town's brewers.<sup>40</sup> A loss of £440 was recorded in 1935 but the year after the club made a profit of £1,009.<sup>41</sup> The loss was attributed to an early exit from the cup competition and poor weather. The uncertain nature of making money from professional sport is clear. The club remained aware that success involved attracting good players and paying them well; by 1934 pay for a home win was £4/10/- and an away win £5.<sup>42</sup> Whilst the club paid wages at the higher end of the scale, the players had little say in its running. But playing sport professionally in general allowed working class players to escape the humdrum rigours of factories and mines. The management of the club remained, as in rugby union days, firmly in the hands of the middle class. The largely working class supporters had little, if any, input on how the club was run.<sup>43</sup>

In 1936 a major change occurred when the members club became a limited company. The directors had to hold at least £50 worth of shares, the sale of which raised £2,032. Some of the money was invested in players and a good cup run saw

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<sup>38</sup> *Halifax Weekly Courier and Guardian*, 15 March 1930.

<sup>39</sup> Collins, T., (2009) *1895 & all that...Inside Rugby League's Hidden History*, Scratching Shed Publishing Ltd., Leeds. pp.115-6.

<sup>40</sup> Hardcastle, *Halifax Rugby League*, p.58.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p.69.

<sup>42</sup> Collins, *Rugby League*, p.43.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, p.198.

gate receipts reach a substantial £11,671.<sup>44</sup> The rewards for the club were apparent when in 1938-39 the club progressed to the challenge cup final. The semi-final against Leeds at Odsal Stadium, Bradford attracted a crowd of 64,000, with Halifax going on to beat Salford in the final by 20 points to 3. There were scenes of great jubilation on the team's return to the town.<sup>45</sup> Unfortunately the war intervened and caused this winning side to split up, but the commercial decision to convert the club into a limited company saw some success.

Achievements on the field did have its costs in the form of higher wages for top quality players and providing additional staff to service larger crowds. But the directors of football clubs had considerations other than the cash nexus. Business people sought to associate themselves with clubs, particularly during successful periods; in 1931 the Halifax players received gifts from a range of local businesses, including a tin of Mackintosh's toffee, a national brand but made in the town, a pipe from a local tobacconist and a photograph album from the *Halifax Courier*.<sup>46</sup> People were prepared to both invest and to lose money supporting football clubs, something which was unthinkable in other areas of business; it was seen almost as self evident that people would make very little, if any, money from their sporting directorships of football clubs of either code except for some successful First Division soccer clubs.

World War Two saw two top clubs, Widnes and Barrow, stop playing for the duration but unlike in the previous war there was little opposition to sport and commercial entertainment, which were encouraged as morale boosters and the rugby game continued to be played professionally. Many players from the Widnes club turned out for Halifax during the hostilities and the team also benefited from the occasional

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<sup>44</sup> Hardcastle, *Halifax Rugby League*, pp.81-3.

<sup>45</sup> Hargreaves, *Halifax*, p.216.

<sup>46</sup> Collins, *Rugby League*, p.63.

professional player garrisoned at the town's barracks. The final season of the wartime league structure saw the team do well, but the impact of entertainment tax had meant that the club was not making any profit.<sup>47</sup> Wartime had seen a relaxation of rules which allowed league players in the services to play in union sides and they acquitted themselves well when playing union in service sides, a game many had not played before but this did not cause any reconciliation between the two codes or extend much after hostilities ceased.<sup>48</sup>

The years following the war up to 1950 were not distinguished by any great achievement by the Halifax side, but crowds grew from an average of 7,472 in the 1947-8 season to 11,460 in the 1949-50 season.<sup>49</sup> Some games drew crowds of over 25,000, peaking when Halifax played Wigan in front of 28,150 spectators, contributing record gate receipts of £3,355.<sup>50</sup> The following decade and a half saw a consistently successful team but by the 1960s the game generally saw falling spectator numbers and by the end of the decade the Halifax club went into a period of limited success until the mid-1980s, but was never again to attain high levels of consistent achievement. However, this fall in attendance was not something which was peculiar to the Halifax club. Between 1950 and 1960 the average league match attendance fell from 9,600 to 4,829.<sup>51</sup>

## **Soccer**

The establishment of a professional soccer club had been delayed in Halifax. Although the rugby club had established a soccer team, this had been discontinued, possibly by rules introduced by the NRFU in an attempt to stem the surge of interest in soccer, which: "Wherever it was played ... attracted huge crowds, which dwarfed those

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<sup>47</sup> *Halifax Evening Courier and Guardian*, 26 May 1945.

<sup>48</sup> Collins, *Rugby League*, pp.80-4.

<sup>49</sup> Hardcastle, *Halifax Rugby League*, p.92.

<sup>50</sup> *Halifax Evening Courier and Guardian*, 6 May 1950.

<sup>51</sup> Collins, *Rugby League*, p.89.

of rugby.” Soccer was also easier for spectators to understand due to its relative simplicity.<sup>52</sup>

Halifax Town AFC was, as already noted, established in 1911. It initially played in the Midland Counties League and reached the first round of the FA cup in 1913. The club closed for a period during the First World War, starting up again in 1919. After the war soccer was almost exclusively played by the working class, crowds were vociferous, it was commercially lucrative and included a strong professional element,<sup>53</sup> although, as we shall see, not all clubs were profitable.

After playing at two grounds, the club found a permanent home when it moved to the Shay in 1921. The Shay belonged to the local council and was the site of a demolished Georgian mansion, which had been used as a tip. The development of the new stadium was carried out by fans, players and directors, suggesting that the club started under tight monetary constraints and a small capital outlay, but none of the published histories of the club shed light on this. The club, probably on the strength of the new ground, was elected to the Third Division North and the first game played at the Shay was against Darlington and saw a 5-1 home victory in front of a reported 10,143 spectators, although a photograph of the first game suggests this number may have been an exaggeration.<sup>54</sup> This first game must have held out some promise, but by 1925 an appeal was made to the people of Halifax requesting financial assistance to help keep the club going.<sup>55</sup> The auspicious start had not been maintained and the club was to struggle up to 1950 and beyond.

Official Football League figures for match day attendance are available from the 1925-6 season, when the club’s average attendance was 5,983. The highest gate was

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid., p.6.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., p.120.

<sup>54</sup> Meynell, J., (2005) *The Definitive Halifax Town AFC*, Tony Brown, Nottingham. p.9.

<sup>55</sup> *Halifax Weekly Courier and Guardian*, 3 March 1925.

against neighbours Bradford Park Avenue and attracted 11,229. However, it is worth noting that the away fixture at Park Avenue attracted almost double the figure at 22,023. The Derby matches with the Bradford clubs pulled in large crowds, in 1928 for example, 14,609 spectators saw Bradford City play at the Shay. These profitable games were to end when Bradford Park Avenue gained promotion in 1928 and Bradford City the following year. The highest attendance in the 1920s was for an FA cup game when 22,023 attended a match against Manchester City. During the 1920s the club tended to finish in mid-table positions, resulting in attendance at games declining towards the end of the season when little was to be played for either avoiding relegation or seeking promotion.<sup>56</sup> The 1920s ended with members of the board resigning with creditors said to be at the door.<sup>57</sup>

The 1920s saw increased commercial exploitation of the game. Football pools were based on gambling on the outcome of games and were hugely popular. Publishers of periodicals and boys comics featured stories about the game, with pictures of both individual footballers and teams; comics also provided gifts related to the game. Perhaps the biggest craze associated with the game was cigarette cards, which boys collected “with religious zeal from their smoking elders”.<sup>58</sup>

By 1930 the attendance at local games had fallen, largely due to the loss of the Derby games against the Bradford clubs. The average gate for the season was 5,963 but the last home game saw a miserly 1,958 watch Lincoln City; the highest attendance was 8,189 against Gateshead.<sup>59</sup> Of course the depression may have caused attendance to drop at this point. The high point of the decade was in 1934-5 when the team finished in second place, just missing out on promotion. The club reported a profit of £1,152/3/8;

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<sup>56</sup> Meynell, *The Definitive*, p.26.

<sup>57</sup> Thwaites, T., (1989) *From Sandhall to the Shay: An Illustrated History of Halifax Town AFC. 1911-1988*, No publishing details noted. p.8.

<sup>58</sup> Walvin, *The People's Game*, p.125.

<sup>59</sup> Meynell, *The Definitive*, p.26.

however the profits, which were not broken down, included transfer fees from the sale of players.<sup>60</sup> In August it was reported that: “There was a great wave of enthusiasm for soccer football.”<sup>61</sup> The season which followed was to prove disappointing, with the club finishing seventeenth in a league of twenty-two. Second in the league was to be the highest position they achieved in the Third Division North until it was abandoned in favour of a national third division in the 1950s.

The outbreak of war saw the Football League cancel fixtures after 2 September 1939. The game continued to be played, but on the basis of regional teams competing against each other rather than the whole of the north of England. After the war the club was at best mediocre, having to apply for re-election to the league in 1947, 1948 and 1950. Nevertheless, the crowds by the 1950-1 season averaged 7,199, with the highest gate against Bradford Park Avenue of 10,533.<sup>62</sup> Attendance was higher than in the previous decade, even though the team was awful, the club benefiting from the postwar surge in crowds, although these crowds were less than those for the rugby team. Football crowds nationally peaked in the 1948-49 season at 41,271,424.<sup>63</sup> In fact the Halifax club’s highest gate would be in 1953 against Tottenham Hotspur, when 36,885 attended a cup game. The club’s inability to progress saw crowds averaging around 6,000 in each decade, apart from the 1940s, but numbers over twenty thousand could be drawn to watch top quality sides, suggesting that soccer in the town could attract significant numbers of spectators, notwithstanding the town’s successful rugby league side. This was not without precedent; Huddersfield Town were a very successful inter-war soccer team in the heartland of rugby league. The soccer side is another example of directors putting money into sport without any real expectation of financial return. In fact large

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<sup>60</sup> *Halifax Weekly Courier and Guardian*, 13 June 1935.

<sup>61</sup> *Halifax Weekly Courier and Guardian*, 31 August 1935.

<sup>62</sup> Meynell, *The Definitive*, p.52.

<sup>63</sup> Walvin, *The People’s Game*, p.154.

losses could be incurred. As we have seen the Halifax club came close to folding on a number of occasions and even the successful Huddersfield side lost £12,103 in 1935.<sup>64</sup>

### **The Public House**

The public house was the foundation of commercial leisure throughout the 200 years from 1750 to 1950. However the public house was no longer, as it once had been, virtually the only permanent source of commercial leisure available, but was one of a number of competing commercially inspired leisure interests. The First World War had also seen major effects on the public house, with its hours of opening severely restricted, and these had not been relaxed with the coming of peace.

The alterations to opening times were not popular with all and there were reported cases of out of hours drinking. In 1920 the licensee of the New Inn, Mount Tabor, a village about three miles from the centre of Halifax, was brought before the court for unlawfully selling alcohol. The case was reported in some detail, the police were outside the inn after closing time and noted down the goings on in the snug. A man inside the pub was heard to ask: "Do you have any bobbies (policemen) this way?" the reply was that there was just one. Another person then stated: "We will have just another and then we will go, bring me a whisky!" A woman then joined in: "You have been drinking all night I think I will start." A man was then heard to ask: "Where's my drink?" to be advised: "You only ordered three." Ruth Nowell, the licensee, claimed that she thought she hadn't done anything wrong as the people were all guests staying after a birthday party. Nevertheless she was fined £3/3/- for selling beer, whisky and gin outside the permitted hours.<sup>65</sup> It was probable that secluded inns were able to evade the strict licensing laws easier than those in town centres, but how widespread the practice was remains hard to say beyond anecdotal evidence.

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<sup>64</sup> *Halifax Weekly Courier and Guardian*, 13 June 1935.

<sup>65</sup> *Halifax Guardian*, 4 September 1920.

Drunkenness was considered to be a declining problem in the inter-war years. In 1930 the Brewster Sessions heard that cases of drunkenness in the town had decreased to an average of 90 in 1929, prompting the comment that Halifax was “a distinctly sober town”.<sup>66</sup> This was not peculiar to Halifax; the Royal Commission on Licensing of 1929-31 concluded that “by almost universal consent, excessive drinking in this country has been greatly, even spectacularly, diminished.”<sup>67</sup>

By the mid-1920s there were at least 195 premises in Halifax operating with licences to sell alcohol on the premises including taverns, inns and beerhouses; there were also 45 hotels.<sup>68</sup> Most of the town’s licensed premises were now owned by local breweries, three of which were substantial concerns operating locally and regionally: Websters, Ramsdens and Whitakers. However, there were also new public houses built by breweries from outside the area. The Golden Pheasant was opened about a mile from the town centre in the Pellon area by Truman, Hanbury and Buxton, adjacent both to existing working class housing and to new houses that were both private and council built. A number of new public houses were built to serve new council housing, including the Ovenden Way and Exley Park Hotel in the late 1930s by local brewer Richard Whitaker.<sup>69</sup>

Architecturally the new premises were a mixture of styles: the Royal Oak, opened by Ramsdens, was mock Tudor, a popular pub style in these years, whilst the Three Pigeons, a Websters house, took its inspiration from 1930s cinema architecture. The Talbot Inn, which had been a centre of leisure pursuits in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, was eventually demolished in 1925 and replaced by a smart new pub, one of the handful of new town centre public houses built in the inter-war years. However an

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<sup>66</sup> *Halifax Weekly Courier and Guardian*, 1 January 1930.

<sup>67</sup> Jennings, *The Public House*, pp.235-6.

<sup>68</sup> *Halifax, Huddersfield and District Trades’ Directory 1924-25*, Town and County Directories Ltd., Edinburgh and Manchester.

<sup>69</sup> Robinson, P., ‘Whither the Vault?’, in *Caldercask*, Issue 13, December 2007-March 2008. pp.6-9.

editorial in July 1940 noted that numerous inns had closed in the town these included the Bacchus, the Cat i' th' Window and the Turks Head. Most of their licences according to the article were removed to the outskirts of town. The new pubs tended to be granted licences on a quid pro quo basis if a number of licences for older premises, often beerhouses, were surrendered by the brewery.<sup>70</sup>

The interiors of many pubs were refurbished during the 1920s and 1930s, updating the facilities and providing accommodation that was seen as more suitable for couples to visit, and of more appeal to the middle classes. Usually the internal rooms were re-designated 'lounge' or 'bar lounge' and had direct access to the bar, unlike the tap rooms which often had no bar counter. In effect there was a split between lounges which were mixed sex and tap rooms that tended to remain male preserves. Some pubs remained all male preserves and did not allow women, Lewins in the town centre for instance. This internal remodelling of public houses was taking place across the country. In neighbouring Bradford during the inter-war period, 435 applications were made to the licensing justices for alterations to licensed premises. The refurbished public houses, part of a general move to 'improve' the pub, did away with the Victorian gin palace and replaced them with places that offered "open, moderate, respectable, family refreshment".<sup>71</sup>

This refurbishment of public houses in Halifax gathered pace during the 1930s. During and after the war, however, brewer's plans to continue upgrading and building new pubs were affected by restrictions on building associated with leisure taking second place to housing. In 1945 the police objected to the renewal of a number of licences of

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<sup>70</sup> *Halifax Weekly Courier and Guardian*, 20 July 1940.

<sup>71</sup> Jennings, *The Public House*, pp.240-2.

what appear to have been beerhouses, two because they were in slum clearance areas and two because they were described as being structurally unsound.<sup>72</sup>

Conscious of declining consumption, the brewers also advertised their products in the local press during the 1930s in glowing terms. Stocks, a local brewer, advertised their Mountain Ale as: “Giving strength to the digestive organs – a healthy beverage of tonic value.” Wallers, a Bradford brewer, claimed its products were: “The beers that soothe.” Websters of Halifax claimed its beer remained sparkling to the last drop and warmed on cold days and cheered on wet days.<sup>73</sup>

Whether this re-creation of the pub had an impact on custom is hard to say. We have already noted that women used pubs, but that respectable women tended not to enter by themselves right up until the 1960s. I have found no evidence locally that women’s habits changed in the 1930s, although it was noted that by 1945 more women and young people were drinking in public houses.<sup>74</sup> It may be that during the inter-war years women had begun to feel more comfortable entering public houses, but they tended to remain places frequented regularly by older males.<sup>75</sup> The pub remained central to people’s leisure time, more important than church, cinema, dance hall and political organization put together, as the Mass Observation survey of Bolton at the close of the 1930s put it. However, as the survey also concluded, the public house had declined from its pre-eminent position as a commercial leisure venue. Despite a wartime swan song of popularity, that decline was to continue in succeeding years.<sup>76</sup>

### **Fairs and travelling shows**

Fairs and travelling shows tended to remain a form of leisure experience that was viewed with some ambivalence. However the removal of the fair in the late nineteenth

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<sup>72</sup> *Halifax Weekly Courier and Guardian*, 10 March 1945.

<sup>73</sup> *Halifax Weekly Courier and Guardian*, 24 May 1930.

<sup>74</sup> *Halifax Weekly Courier and Guardian*, 10 February 1945.

<sup>75</sup> Jennings, *The Public House*, p.249.

<sup>76</sup> Jennings, *The Local*, p.211.

century from the centre of Halifax was perhaps one reason why little comment was made in the local press about its effects, positive or negative. In fact most years pass without any notable comments in the press regarding the fair. In 1930 it was remarked how no upheaval was caused in the town since the fair had been moved to the cattle market site. The showmen were described in positive terms; they needed to be “courageous individuals ... to pit his abilities against the modern entertainment industry.”<sup>77</sup>

In 1935 a fair announced its star attraction as Tiny Tim, the smallest man ever to have lived at “half the size of any midget shown in England”. Weighing in at 24 lbs and 23 inches the 47 year old was presented alongside Samson the world’s strongest flea.<sup>78</sup> Later in the year a very different fair was reported: “Steam swings are things of the past; paraffin flares are obsolete and fat ladies, midgets and fire eating bushmen are supplanted by ingenious games.” The reporter highlights the bright electric lighting and amplified records of ‘hot jazz’ replacing the steam organ, and noted that the existing traditional sideshows and boxing booths seemed overshadowed by the vigour and power of the new rides.<sup>79</sup> It appears though that the carnivalesque still had a place alongside modern rides aimed at speed and thrills.

However the fairgrounds were still under watchful eyes. The modern rides were subject to public safety checks from local fire, council and police departments before they were allowed to open. The exhibitions of freaks and animals were also brought under control.<sup>80</sup> Jewell suggests that the coming of war in 1939 brought an abrupt end to fairs, although it may be that some black out fairs continued until the fairground

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<sup>77</sup> *Halifax Weekly Courier and Guardian*, 21 June 1930.

<sup>78</sup> *Halifax Weekly Courier and Guardian*, 6 April 1935.

<sup>79</sup> *Halifax Weekly Courier and Guardian*, 6 July 1935.

<sup>80</sup> Jewell, *Fairs and Revels*, pp.111-2.

business returned to something like normal in 1946.<sup>81</sup> Generally it appears that the days of the travelling showmen, apart from those attending the annual fairs, were over.

### **Holidays and excursions**

Holidays with pay were introduced during this period to increasing numbers of workers. In the 1920s 1.5 million people were entitled to paid holidays, which increased to 3 million towards the end of the 1930s; the 1938 Holidays with Pay Act saw a further 11 million become entitled, although its full implementation was delayed by the war.<sup>82</sup>

The railway excursion remained the most popular form of holiday transport in the 1920s, but the latest method to get away for the masses was the motor coach, or as it was referred to at the time, the charabanc. The popular expression ‘chara’ was used locally until at least the 1960s, but is now rarely, if ever, heard. From 1920 there were advertisements for coach outings to the races, day trips and short breaks such as two days in Rhyll, all inclusive, cost £1/15/-.<sup>83</sup> The pub had an important role to play in this, for example a trip organized in October 1920 from the Robin Hood Inn at Pecket Well, near Hebden Bridge, to a knur and spell match in Colne. Sadly it ended in disaster when the brakes of the coach failed. Five were left dead and four seriously injured from a party of 18 men and four women.<sup>84</sup>

Coach trips increased in popularity throughout the period, although initially they were more expensive than rail excursions. Not only coaches, but increasingly private cars, transported people away for trips to the country and seaside. One result was that the roads quickly became congested in the summer months, with the road from Preston

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<sup>81</sup> Starsmore, *English Fairs*, p.121.

<sup>82</sup> Briggs, *A Social History of England*, p.300.

<sup>83</sup> *Halifax Guardian*, 1 May 1920.

<sup>84</sup> *Halifax Guardian* 23 October 1920.

to Blackpool becoming the busiest in the country.<sup>85</sup> In the 1930s the LNER railway company was offering holidays on the ‘drier east coast’, whilst rivals LMS offered trips to the major resorts on the Lancashire coast.<sup>86</sup>

The end of the war in Europe saw 8,000 rail bookings for the wakes holidays in July 1945. Of these 4,500 were to Blackpool, which is nearer to Halifax than the east coast resorts; 400 were booked on the first through train to London in four years, and the east coast was also reported to be popular. The Halifax Industrial Society Holiday Club paid out £97,000.<sup>87</sup> LMS carried record crowds from the nation to Blackpool in 1945, so Halifax was no different than other towns in the desire of the people to go down to the sea after the privations of the war years.<sup>88</sup>

The commercially operated Sunny Vale pleasure gardens at nearby Hipperholme were a popular weekend and holiday venue for outings in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This twenty acre attraction featured landscaped grounds, boating lakes, sports facilities, dancing and fairground attractions. The gardens offered a local alternative to the coach and rail trips to the coast but fell into decline and closed in the 1950s.<sup>89</sup>

## **Lectures**

The commercial lectures of the nineteenth century presented by itinerant lecturers were another casualty of changing leisure provision, although the Halifax Sunday Lecture Society continued in the 1930s and throughout the war. Seasons of 16 lectures illustrated with slides or film shows were presented in the Victoria Hall with tickets for the series from 4/- to 12/-.<sup>90</sup> But the popularity of radio and the opening of cinemas on

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<sup>85</sup> Walvin, *Leisure and Society*, pp.140-1.

<sup>86</sup> *Halifax Weekly Courier and Guardian*, 2 August 1935.

<sup>87</sup> *Halifax Weekly Courier and Guardian*, 14 July 1945.

<sup>88</sup> Walvin, *Leisure and Society*, p.149.

<sup>89</sup> Helme, C., (2007) *Sunny Vale Pleasure Gardens*, Tempus, Stroud.

<sup>90</sup> *Halifax Weekly Courier and Guardian*, 12 October 1935.

Sundays saw the lectures end. A spokesman for the society noted: "People in these degenerate days prefer Sunday pictures to Sunday lectures, more evidence of the marked intellectual and moral decline of the country. I think the people of Halifax as a whole ought to be thoroughly ashamed of themselves for allowing a fine institution like this to finish in this way."<sup>91</sup>

## **Cinema**

Cinema attendance declined nationally after the introduction of Entertainment Duty during the First World War. In Halifax the Ideal cinema closed at some point during the course of the war but the reason or date of closure is not clear. No new cinemas were constructed and the building of cinemas would not resume until wartime building restrictions were lifted in 1921.<sup>92</sup> Whilst 1918 saw a sharp drop in admissions to 15 million, from just over 20 million a week, by 1921 they had fallen to nine million.<sup>93</sup> They would rise from the mid-1920s and figures during the 1930s were around 18 million, peaking in 1946 at just over 31 million a week; admissions would then remain high but decrease each year until 1950.<sup>94</sup>

The number of cinemas operating nationally had fallen from 5,000 in 1914 to 3,584 in 1925 and, as noted, audiences began to decrease from the imposition of Entertainment Duty.<sup>95</sup> The Entertainment Duty, which was also applied to other forms of commercial entertainment, had fallen heaviest on the cheapest admission charges, those up to 6d. One consequence of the tax was that the impact was felt disproportionately by those cinemas that relied on a largely working class audience,

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<sup>91</sup> *Halifax Weekly Courier and Guardian*, 8 July 1950.

<sup>92</sup> Hanson, *From silent screen to multi-screen*, pp.40-1. The building restrictions were not as strict as those applied during and after World War Two. Note also the later reference to Hebden Bridge. The *Kinematograph Year Book 1920* p.10 states there are concerns that restrictions may be placed on building new cinemas suggesting there are none in place?

<sup>93</sup> Hiley, N., 'Let's go to the Pictures', in *Journal of Popular British Cinema*, 1999, Volume 2, pp.39-53.

<sup>94</sup> Hanson, *From silent screen to multi-screen*, p.60.

<sup>95</sup> Hiley, 'Let's go to the pictures', p.40.

usually cinemas that were independently operated.<sup>96</sup>

Expenditure to cinema operators also increased due to the growth of film rental charges and wages. The cost of renting films had risen from £30 to £60 per show to between £150 and £400. The length of the shows had also increased, from around 1.5 hours, to between 2.5 to 3 hours. The lengthening of shows cut down on audience turnover, this had a greater impact on the smaller halls of up to 500 seats, which consequently became less profitable.<sup>97</sup> In an attempt to address this, the industry sought to build cinemas with a larger capacity, although the replacement of smaller cinemas with larger ones in the immediate postwar period is not evident in Halifax.

During the early 1920s film production in Britain had dropped dramatically, and by 1925 only 5% of films exhibited commercially in cinemas had been made here. The government acted by introducing the Cinematograph Films Act 1927. This established that a proportion of films to be shown in British cinemas were to be filmed here; this quota was to increase over a period of time from 5% in 1927 to 20% in 1936. The Act also outlawed blind booking, the practice of production companies requiring exhibitors to take films before they had been made. In future all films had to be registered with the Board of Trade before they could be offered to distributors or exhibitors.<sup>98</sup> The industry in Britain during the inter-war years was not then a story of unparalleled success.

At the same time, cinema buildings became a characteristic feature of inter-war towns and cities. Perhaps the first notable postwar cinema was Robert Atkinson's 1921 Regent cinema in Brighton built by Provincial Cinematograph Theatres (PCT), with internal decorations by Walter Boyes. Atkinson was a highly respected architect and the building was generally well received by architectural commentators. The auditorium seated 2,200 and cost £400,000, making it a very expensive cinema when compared to

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<sup>96</sup> Hanson, *From silent screen to multi-screen*, p.40.

<sup>97</sup> Hiley, 'Let's go to the pictures', p.40.

<sup>98</sup> Hanson, *From silent screen to multi-screen*, pp.45-7.

some of the so called super cinemas built during the 1930s.<sup>99</sup> However the Regent also contained a ballroom and café. The 1923 Pavilion, Shepherds Bush, was the first cinema to be awarded an architectural prize, winning the best frontage for a new building in London for architect Frank Verity.<sup>100</sup> The Pavilion was larger than the Regent with 2,776 seats.<sup>101</sup> Another impressive cinema was the Majestic in Leeds. Opened in 1922 the architects were Pascal J. Steinlet and J.C.Mawell. The Majestic had initially not been a great success, perhaps due to the audience downturn, but became so from 1925 when taken over by the growing PCT circuit.<sup>102</sup> Steinlet had studied at the Beaux Arts School in Paris and the exterior is French inspired, whilst the interior was “...Neo-Greek in vogue at the time but perhaps more suited to ... municipal offices than entertainment venues.”<sup>103</sup>

But in the early 1920s, as the industry in Britain struggled with relatively low audiences the number of these exceptionally large new cinemas was limited, in contrast to the USA. But when the building of cinemas increased in Britain in the late 1920s, the work of American architects Thomas Lamb, C. Howard Crane and John Eberson was a source of inspiration.<sup>104</sup> Some were to follow Lamb with refined, classically inspired auditoria, whilst others created atmospheric interiors after Eberson. The most notable of these atmospheric cinemas were the London Astorias, created by E.A. Stone and T.R. Somerfield.<sup>105</sup> In the case of the atmospheric cinemas, which created the illusion of being in the open air, the influence of the Americans is clear. However as many British architects appeared to continue a previous classically inspired theatrical tradition, the influence of Lamb and Crane is harder to substantiate. Crane was in fact involved in the

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<sup>99</sup> Sharp, D., (1969) *The Picture Palace and Other Buildings for the Movies*, Hugh Evelyn, London. p.86.

<sup>100</sup> Atwell, D., (1980) *Cathedrals of the Movies*, The Architectural Press, London. p.54.

<sup>101</sup> Sharp, *The Picture Palace*, p.147.

<sup>102</sup> Eyles, A., (1996) *Gaumont British Cinemas*, Cinema Theatre Association, Burgess Hill. p.210.

<sup>103</sup> Gray, R., (1996) *Cinemas in Britain*, Lund Humphries, London. p.39.

<sup>104</sup> Sharp, *The Picture Palace*, pp.73-4.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, p.100.

design of two British cinemas, both in London, the Granada Greenwich and Gaumont Holloway.<sup>106</sup>

Perhaps the most notable cinema built in Yorkshire in the 1920s was the Regent, Sheffield.<sup>107</sup> This building, seating 2,300 inside an elaborate auditorium, set the style for a number of PCT cinemas. The neoclassical interior included a spacious entrance foyer with marble stairs leading to the balcony. Eyles notes that the cinema, one of five new PCT houses being constructed at the time, was “one of the few cinemas in Britain to that date to bear comparison with the best work done in America by Thomas Lamb ... and others.”<sup>108</sup>

This increase in building new cinemas was not reflected in Halifax, where no new cinemas were built during the decade. But there were other developments. Early in the 1920s the Pioneer cinema was opened in a converted hall in the Lee Mount area by local businessmen. Seating 700 it was in a largely working class area which would later see council estates built nearby. It was to remain until it burnt down in the early 1960s.<sup>109</sup> Of more significance was the conversion in 1925 of the Grand Theatre. The decision to convert the theatre into a picture house may have been due to the removal in 1924 of the Entertainment Duty on tickets priced 6d or under. The tax also applied to theatre seats so it would have, in any case, benefited from the reduction. It may have been that cinemas could operate on a higher number of lower priced seats. But more importantly, by 1925 cinema admissions had increased to 20 million a week from a low point earlier in the decade of 9 million.<sup>110</sup> The local paper suggested the Grand’s position on the edge of the town centre next to North Bridge had proved to be a problem as the focus

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<sup>106</sup> Gray, *Cinemas in Britain*, p.44.

<sup>107</sup> Opened in 1927.

<sup>108</sup> Eyles, *Gaumont British Cinemas*, p.26.

<sup>109</sup> *Halifax Courier*, 11 December 2008.

<sup>110</sup> Hiley, ‘Let’s go to the pictures’, pp.40-1.

for entertainment had become centred on Wards End at the opposite end of town.<sup>111</sup>

The Grand was reported as having had part of the stage removed, with a large screen described as dark green colour. This may have been due to rear projection being employed, which required a different type of screen to the more usual projection from the front. New seats and carpeting had been installed, with the nearest seats to the screen reported as being fifteen feet away. The theatre had been redecorated and improved and a three manual organ with 1,500 pipes installed. An orchestra was also employed to support the films and entertain patrons. The capacity had been around 2,000 when opened as a theatre, whereas it was reported as being 1,500 when it reopened as a picture house making it, at the time, the town's biggest cinema.<sup>112</sup> By 1940 the capacity was stated to be 974, a considerable reduction.<sup>113</sup>

By July 1925 the Grand was advertising pre-payment coupons with six 9d tickets being offered for 3/-, a reduction of 1/6. This was presumably a device to avoid paying tax on the dearer seats by effectively reducing the cost of each ticket sold to 6d. It is not clear whether the scheme was a success, as part of the attraction of going to the cinema was that people liked to turn up without booking seats. The cost of the pre-paid tickets at 3/- would also have been more than some could afford to pay.<sup>114</sup>

There was a further development when in 1928 the Electric at Wards End, the town's first cinema, closed for reconstruction. The purpose of the reconstruction was described in the press publicity as to make the Electric the equal of any big London cinema. The building was enlarged and modernized, being completely remodelled at the screen end where the building had been extended. A new stage with a modern proscenium opening was built, incorporating organ grilles for the new instrument that was to complement the

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<sup>111</sup> *Halifax Weekly Courier and Guardian*, 2 May 1925.

<sup>112</sup> *Halifax Weekly Courier and Guardian*, 30 May 1925.

<sup>113</sup> *Kinematograph Year Book*, 1940, p.501.

<sup>114</sup> *Halifax Weekly Courier and Guardian*, 30 May 1925.

orchestra, although in the event it appears never to have been installed. The cinema reopened on Saturday, 1 September 1928. Signor Marsicano and his orchestra continued to accompany films after the revamp.<sup>115</sup>

During the 1920s in Halifax one new cinema constructed from an earlier hall with a modest capacity of 700 seats had opened, the Grand had been converted into a cinema and the Electric substantially rebuilt. Elsewhere in the locality, Hebden Bridge saw a new cinema open in July 1921, the Picture House replaced the grandly named Royal Electric Theatre, but which from press reports seems to have been a corrugated iron shed. The building of the Picture House again suggests that the wartime restrictions on building cinemas were limited. It seated 940 in stalls and circle.<sup>116</sup> A converted chapel in Sowerby Bridge that operated as the Cosy cinema closed at some point during the 1920s. Sowerby Bridge did have the Electric cinema owned by the National Electric Circuit, that opened in 1915 and the Palace, operating in the town hall, so the closure of an early converted premise is perhaps not remarkable and is in keeping with what happened nationally.<sup>117</sup>

The conversion of one of the Halifax theatres into a cinema symbolizes the decline of live theatre in favour of the cinema. The national evidence from the early nineteen twenties of declining audiences and of some cinemas opened prior to the First World War closing, does have some support in the local area, although it does not suggest an industry in irreversible decline, but more of one going through a period of restructuring.

During the next decade up to the outbreak of war in 1939 two new cinemas were built in the town and the remaining traditional theatre also became a cinema. The Theatre Royal closed in February 1933; the owners, Northern Theatres, had considered going

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<sup>115</sup> *Halifax Weekly Courier and Guardian*, 1 September 1928.

<sup>116</sup> *Hebden Bridge Times*, 16 July 1921.

<sup>117</sup> Smith, S., and Hornsey, B., (1999) *The Cinemas of Halifax & Surrounding Area (Calderdale)*, Mercia Cinema Society, Wakefield. p.46.

over to films in 1930 but continued with stage plays after an appeal to the public.<sup>118</sup> The Royal was damaged by fire in 1937 and at this point it was decided to remove the theatre's original Edwardian interior and replace it with a modern cinema auditorium. The frontage remained unchanged with the new auditorium inserted into the shell of the building. A new circle replaced the former dress circle, family circle and gallery. The stage was reduced in size from 42 to 21 feet in depth but the stage equipment was retained to allow further stage shows to be presented. Concealed lighting was used to illuminate the auditorium, a new Compton organ was installed and a café opened. The paper reported that the first night audience appeared uncertain when confronted with the modern interior as it was said to be less cosy than the old theatre.<sup>119</sup>

The Royal had been stripped of the highly decorative plaster work popular in turn of the century theatres and modernized in line with the latest architectural trends. Cinema design changed considerably during the course of the 1930s, the commentator P. Morton Shand had been in part responsible. He had been an unashamed promoter of modernism in architecture and felt cinema design had not "succeeded in expressing the modern spirit".<sup>120</sup> He also accused exhibitors of attempting to disguise their cinemas as showmen's booths. Whether British cinemas built in the 1930s can be said to be representative of modernist architecture remains a moot point, but elements were utilized in the design of some cinemas. Nevertheless a wide range of styles continued to be employed by cinema architects.<sup>121</sup>

The decision of the owner of the Royal to upgrade the theatre was perhaps in part due to the imminent building of two new cinemas in the town by Odeon and Associated British Cinemas (ABC). ABC built a new cinema in the town's entertainment district,

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<sup>118</sup> *Halifax Weekly Courier and Guardian*, 8 February 1930.

<sup>119</sup> *Halifax Courier and Guardian*, 31 November 1937.

<sup>120</sup> Sharp, *The Picture Palace*, p.94.

<sup>121</sup> Atwell, *Cathedrals of the Movies*, p.60.

Wards End, whilst the new Odeon opened at Crossfields, at the opposite end of the town, where slum property had been demolished. The Crossfields site had originally been acquired by Cohen and Rafler, a company that operated a number of cinemas in Kent and the south east. They planned a 2,500 seat cine-variety theatre with full stage facilities, however within weeks of announcing their plans ABC were reported as applying for planning permission for a new cinema at Wards End. Apparently Cohen and Rafler decided the scheme was too uncertain, as they might struggle to acquire decent films, especially if two of the major circuits were to have cinemas in the town, so they sold out to Odeon.<sup>122</sup>

Whilst each of the major circuits had developed something of a house style, with Gaumont-British perhaps the most eclectic, it was to be Odeon that became almost a synonym for cinema. The company had been started by Oscar Deutsch, a Birmingham businessman who had made money from the scrap metal trade. He opened his first Odeon in Perry Bar in 1930. He built his cinemas by setting up a company in each location with the ordinary shares being held by a central holding company, whilst debenture or preference shares were sold to local interests.<sup>123</sup> The growth of the company was rapid; their cinemas were stripped of the flamboyance of the Granadas, Astorias and Paramounts. Deutsch argued that as the auditoriums were in darkness for most of the time money spent on elaborate decoration was wasted. Nevertheless they managed to capture people's imagination, becoming a thirties architectural icon. In the London suburbs, the south and Midlands, Odeons were generally built to seat around 1,500. The auditoriums had relatively low ceilings to conserve heat and expensive cinema organs were dispensed with, records being played to entertain whilst the house lights were up. The company was also keen to attract more of the middle classes to the

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<sup>122</sup> Eyles, A., (2002) *Odeon Cinemas 1: Oscar Deutsch Entertains Our Nation*, Cinema Theatre Association, London. pp.173-4.

<sup>123</sup> Clegg, R., (1985) *Odeon*, Mercia Cinema Society, Birmingham. pp.16-8.

cinema. In the north of England, Odeons built by the company tended to be larger, especially in Yorkshire and Lancashire, perhaps reflecting the greater popularity of the cinema in the north. For instance, seating capacities were in Blackpool 3,086, Bolton 2,534, Burnley 2,136, Bradford 2,713 and Halifax 2,058. All of these cinemas, apart from Halifax, were designed in the classic Odeon style, but it is worth noting that many cinemas carrying the Odeon name had not been built by the company but bought from other companies.<sup>124</sup>

The projected Halifax cinema, when taken over by Odeon from Cohen and Rafler, had the seating capacity reduced, the fly tower was never built and the stage reduced in size, with just a couple of dressing rooms provided. The exterior was described as a “‘hotch-potch’ by Coles’ [sic] standards but the foyer and the 2,000 seat auditorium were magnificent.”<sup>125</sup> It was thought to be one of his, “finest Odeon interiors”.<sup>126</sup> George Coles was one of the leading cinema architects of the time. The Odeon at £59,727.00 was one of the costliest built by the circuit and opened on Monday 27 June 1938. A number of local dignitaries, directors of Odeon and the architect attended, piped in by the band of the Queen’s Own Cameron Highlanders.<sup>127</sup>

The Regal cinema was opened by ABC in September of 1938 but its opening was a more sober affair than that of the Odeon. It was the work of the circuit architect W.R.Glen and highly regarded.<sup>128</sup> The press noted that the building, seating 1,918, was not only exceptional inside, it was also pleasing from the outside.<sup>129</sup> The circuit’s access to films distributed by both MGM and Warner Brothers helped to make the Regal a popular cinema.

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<sup>124</sup> Eyles, *Odeon Cinemas 1*, pp.247-251.

<sup>125</sup> Moss, T., ‘George Coles’, in *Picture House*, 1992, Number 17, Cinema Theatre Association, pp.3-29.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>127</sup> *Halifax Courier and Guardian*, 28 June 1938.

<sup>128</sup> Eyles, A., (1999) *ABC. The First Name in Entertainment*, Cinema Theatre Association, London. p.43.

<sup>129</sup> *Halifax Courier and Guardian*, 20 September 1938.

By this point the town had cinemas belonging to each of the three major cinema circuits and two run by a significant regional company. No doubt the arrival of two new cinemas and the reconstruction of the Royal prompted the rebuilding of the Electric cinema under the supervision of the Gaumont-British architect W.E. Trent. The frontage was rebuilt in blue and yellow Vitriolite with a new entrance and single story waiting area running the length of the building. The interior had been completely refurbished with new seating, lighting, curtains, sound and ventilation system, the staff areas and projection room had been improved and the whole cinema redecorated. The Electric had been completely overhauled, the seating reduced from 1,700 to 1,500 and the building given a completely new look in accordance “with the most modern trends in cinema design”.<sup>130</sup> Gaumont-British were a vertically integrated company manufacturing cinema screens, seating, sound and projection equipment, and also producing and distributing their own films.

The town in 1939 then had two new cinemas and two that were completely refurbished. With the outbreak of war no further cinemas were built or modernized, as building restrictions were brought in and not revoked until the 1950s. Two town centre cinemas closed in the 1930s, the Gem in the former Mechanic’s Hall and the Theatre de Luxe, which closed during 1937. The Grand was also to revert to theatre use in 1940. The seats lost at the closed picture houses were more than made up for by the new ones, but clearly there were limits to the number of cinemas a town could support. Nevertheless in 1939 Halifax had eight town centre picture houses, plus four suburban cinemas. In addition, there were cinemas in nearby Todmorden which had three, Hebden Bridge one, Sowerby Bridge two, Elland two and Brighouse three.

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<sup>130</sup> *Halifax Courier and Guardian*, 23 May 1939.

Looking now at technical developments the arrival of talking pictures at the end of the 1920s was a significant advance and gave the industry a commercial boost. The Picture House was the first cinema in the town to have sound equipment installed and the local paper noted the occasion, Monday 23 September 1929:

“The Picture House is the first cinema house in the district to have real talkie apparatus installed, and work has been in progress for over two months, building in the theatre, the most modern type of machine for the purpose. ... The installation, which is practically complete, is by the Western Electric Company and ... can produce synchronised sound either by the film or disc method. It has cost nearly £5,000, ... engineers from the Western Electric Company and Provincial Cinematograph Theatres have been hard at work, ... by the weekend, a new type of screen, an invention which is stated to have increased the efficiency of the "talkies" tremendously, will be in position. ... The orchestra will not be dispensed with. This is a happy feature. The musicians will be available to give interludes and so forth, or play before the opening of the programmes. The new venture will commence with the performance of ‘The Singing Fool’ a production which has won fame wherever shown ...”<sup>131</sup>

The article shows the initial interest in the new talking pictures, but also that investing in the new technology was expensive. The Electric installed sound on the 4 November 1929, the newspaper rather briefly recorded the fact: “The method of reproduction is the "Power’s Cinephone" and as this is different from the installation at the Picture House it will be interesting to make a comparison of the two methods.” The comparison was, it seems, never made in the local paper, nor was any article included on how sound films were received by the Halifax public. The American Powers

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<sup>131</sup> *Halifax Courier and Guardian*, 24 September 1929.

Cinephone system was described elsewhere as a respectable, if less successful system, than Western Electric. Initially the Electric cinema played a mixture of one sound and one silent film each week, but it became increasingly clear during 1930 that silent films were coming to an end. Complaints from the local Cinematograph Exhibitors in Leeds suggested that it would be increasingly difficult to find new silent product and that some cinemas would close as the cost of converting to sound would be uneconomic.<sup>132</sup>

Talking pictures did bring some adverse comment. A series of letters to the local press in 1930 complained of the effect that the sound films were having on musicians and that the orchestras at the Electric and Picture House, described as the best orchestras in the district, were already suffering through members leaving. Other correspondence complained of the increased prices for talking pictures and the lack of bookable seats. Only one person suggested that talking pictures were no more than a novelty the “latest American contraption and has not come to stay”.<sup>133</sup>

Sound newsreels were shown from the second week of talking pictures at The Picture House, which initially played Movietone News, but by the latter part of 1930 had gone over to Gaumont Sound News. These two cinemas, the Picture House and Electric, were advertised in the local press from the 3 November 1930 as being Gaumont-British cinemas, both having been taken over from their respective owners PCT and National Electric. Gaumont-British had come to control 278 cinemas nationally by the end of the 1920s.<sup>134</sup>

During the licensing sessions at the beginning of 1930 concerns were expressed at the size of the queues for cinemas in Halifax “some queues have been enormous, undoubtedly due in some measure to the novelty of the ‘Talkies’. Even crush rooms do

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<sup>132</sup> Murphy, R., ‘Coming of Sound to the Cinema in Britain’, in *Historical Journal of Film, Radio & Television*, 1984, Volume 4, pp.143-60.

<sup>133</sup> *Halifax Courier and Guardian*, 1930.

<sup>134</sup> Eyles, *Gaumont British Cinemas*, pp.19-20.

not seem to have diminished the crowds.” It was noted that booking seats would help but that the nature of the cinema was that people liked to just turn up to see a film. The committee noted that they had done their best to ensure the safety of children at the cinema. This was no doubt a reference to the recent tragedy at the Glen cinema in Paisley, Scotland where sixty-nine children had died.<sup>135</sup>

In July an editorial noted that six of the town’s cinemas had converted to sound and that: “Despite the crudeness of some of the ‘speaking’ films it is evident that they have come to stay, for the silent films are not as satisfying when one has become accustomed to the ‘talking’ variety. It may not be long, therefore, ere all local cinemas will be compelled to change over.”<sup>136</sup> In fact there was a hint of desperation in the advert for the Theatre de Luxe in the week when the Grand Picture House announced its conversion to talking pictures: “We ask those patrons who like silent films to support this excellent silent programme.”<sup>137</sup> By August the Theatre de Luxe announced that it too was converting to sound, announcing that England’s greatest electrical experts were installing “... their perfect talking machines which guaranteed perfect results.” The theatre was redecorated and reopened with sound films on the 11 August.<sup>138</sup> By the following year all the town centre cinemas were presenting sound films.<sup>139</sup> Talking pictures were the main innovation during the period, although colour films, mainly using the Technicolor process which did not require any changes to the projection equipment, were increasingly evident in the later 1930s.

The coming of talking pictures eventually saw the installation of sound equipment in all the Halifax picture houses. In nearby Sowerby Bridge the Palace, situated in the town hall, did not convert to sound and eventually closed, presumably when the supply

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<sup>135</sup> *Halifax Courier and Guardian*, 1 February 1930.

<sup>136</sup> *Halifax Courier and Guardian*, 21 July 1930.

<sup>137</sup> *Halifax Courier and Guardian*, 26 July 1930.

<sup>138</sup> *Halifax Courier and Guardian*, 9 August 1930.

<sup>139</sup> *Halifax Courier and Guardian*, 1 May 1931.

of silent films dried up. Initially some cinemas seemed reluctant to convert to sound. Perhaps this decision was not surprising, as the costs were substantial and earlier attempts to synchronize sound and pictures had failed; previously the sound could not be heard in any but the smallest of cinemas. The development of thermionic valve technology meant that music and speech could be satisfactorily amplified, with the latter being the harder to achieve. Whilst the films had been silent, cinemas never were, but some experienced acoustic problems with talking pictures that required additional work within the auditorium to deal with echo and reverberation.<sup>140</sup>

Installing the equipment for talking pictures clearly had an impact on costs but this does not seem to have been reflected in admission prices. These for Halifax cinemas, reviewed each five years between 1920 and 1940, remain relatively steady.<sup>141</sup> The smaller cinemas charged admission in a range from 3d to 9d, with the town centre cinemas slightly dearer at between 6d and 1/6 for most of the period. Prices in nearby Bradford again seem to have been stable between 1920 and 1940. The smaller cinemas charged between 3d to 1/- during the period, whilst the newer city centre cinemas charged more, prices ranged from 7d and 2/6, increasing to between 1/- and 3/6 by 1940. It is not clear how many seats were offered at the lower price, perhaps just a few rows at the front of the stalls. The coming of sound films does not appear then to have impacted on prices, notwithstanding the claim in the local press to the contrary. If the figures taken from the *Kinematograph Year Books* are correct, either attendance increased to allow prices to remain the same, or the costs were somehow absorbed. The local suburban cinemas remained considerably cheaper throughout the period, but the town centre venues generally offered the latest box office hits in more luxurious

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<sup>140</sup> Crick, R. H., (1943) III Ed., *The Complete Projectionist*, Kinematograph Publications Ltd., London.

<sup>141</sup> *Kinematograph Year Books*, admission prices taken from the following volumes, 1920:1925:1930:1935:1940:1945:1950.

surroundings.<sup>142</sup> For instance the upholstered seats in Odeons were the same throughout the cinema, albeit the leg room in the cheaper seats was restricted. The prices in the West End of London were far higher than the provinces, the Odeon Leicester Square for instance, charging between 2/6 and 8/6 for premieres.<sup>143</sup> Prices by 1945 had increased markedly in the Halifax town centre cinemas due to wartime tax increases, the Odeon, Picture House and Electric, by this time all Rank Organisation cinemas, were charging between 1/- and 2/9, whilst the out of town cinemas increased their prices within a range from 6d to 1/6.

The national audience increased during the 1930s, after a slight decrease when Entertainment Duty was reintroduced in 1931. By 1934 weekly admissions stood at 17.37 millions, increasing to 19.75 millions by 1940.<sup>144</sup> The annual figures over the same six year period 1934-40 grew from 903 to 1,027 millions, a significant increase of 124 millions.<sup>145</sup> Audience numbers boomed during the war and by 1946 the annual figure had risen to 1,635 millions before dropping back by 1950 to 1,395.8 millions, although still ahead of the numbers visiting the cinema in the 1930s, making the 1940s the peak time for attendance at the pictures. The yearly admission total would not fall below the figures recorded in the 1930s until the late 1950s.<sup>146</sup> However Entertainment Tax was to remain high long after the war, impacting on profits and a continuing source of grievance for cinema owners.

The people who visited the cinema the most were predominantly young and working class, however by 1949 the figures show that 24% of both middle and working class people attended the cinema once a week. In an industrial and largely working class town such as Halifax the main part of the audience supporting the local cinemas would come

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<sup>142</sup> Hornsey, B., (2003) *Ninety Years of Cinema in Bradford*, Fuschiaprint, Stamford.

<sup>143</sup> Eyles, *Odeon Cinemas 1*, pp.211-212.

<sup>144</sup> Hiley, 'Let's go to the pictures.' p.42.

<sup>145</sup> Hanson, *From silent screen to multi-screen*, p.60.

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*, p.93.

from the working class. However, almost 20% of the working class never went to the cinema at all, the largest percentage of any social group.<sup>147</sup> The view that the middle class started to attend cinemas in greater numbers due to swish new suburban cinemas is not the case in Halifax, as there were none. Evidence for the type of audience that individual cinemas attracted remains anecdotal. Clearly the more expensive seats in town centre cinemas and visiting their associated smart cafes may have been beyond the resources of many of the working class audience. The attraction of the middle class to the new cinemas built in the suburbs appears to have been more prevalent in the south, although large centres of population across the country did see cinemas open in middle class suburbs.<sup>148</sup> The only local information I have come across noting people's attendance at local picture houses is by local historian Eric Webster, who remarked that he attended three local cinemas in the Queens Road area of town. He comments that the local cinemas changed their programme twice a week and included a children's Saturday afternoon matinee. He also remembered an elderly couple who went to the pictures six times a week.<sup>149</sup>

The cinema's audience was, as stated, largely made up of young people and of these more women than men attended. Cinema was considered the most acceptable form of commercial leisure for women, something that the cinema owners were happy to exploit. Langhamer notes that women enjoyed the experience of visiting the modern cinemas more than the older ones and that "the cinema provided a relatively safe and respectable public leisure space for women, which could - in distinct contrast to the dance hall or public house - be enjoyed alone."<sup>150</sup> The cinema's generally perceived

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<sup>147</sup> Ibid., p.88.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid., pp.68-69.

<sup>149</sup> Webster, E., 'The Twentieth Century Remembered: a 1920s and 1930s Boyhood', in *Transactions of the Halifax Antiquarian Society*, 2006, Volume 14 new series, pp.156-164.

<sup>150</sup> Langhamer, C., (2000) *Women's Leisure in England 1920-80*, Manchester University Press, Manchester. p.62.

respectability was a great advantage to the industry, especially as women made up a large part of the population and therefore the potential audience. However, Kuhn's research on audiences in the 1930s suggests that women preferred to go to the pictures with friends rather than alone. Her survey, based on respondents to a questionnaire, was carried out in the 1990s, so those responding were elderly. When they were questioned as to their favourite actors, Gary Cooper was the top attraction for men and Clark Gable for women, both Americans.<sup>151</sup> No respondents chose the top British box office stars from the 1930s: George Formby, Gracie Fields or Jessie Matthews.<sup>152</sup> These British entertainers with their roots in the music hall had fallen out of favour after the war and the questionnaire perhaps reflected the general preference for American films. The working class who made up the bulk of the audience perhaps did not like the way they were presented: "In most English films all the nice people conform to the most correct West End theatre standards in character, accent, mannerisms and culture ... but the taximan or charwoman is made to talk and act like a mental defective."<sup>153</sup> Of course this does not answer why Formby and Fields were so popular in the 1930s but not remembered as popular stars fifty years on. Richards suggests that both Formby and Fields were well-liked throughout the country and was evidence that "cinema was in fact nationalizing taste and outlook and attitude".<sup>154</sup> Part of the dislike of British films may be due to the poor quality of many of the quota films, although there were many excellent British productions, the works of Korda and Hitchcock for instance.

The cinema was subject to attacks based on the adverse effects it was allegedly having on society, particularly young people. Locally the Reverend J. Hoyle,

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<sup>151</sup> Kuhn, A., 'Cinema going in Britain in the 1930s', in *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, 1999, Volume 19, pp.143-60.

<sup>152</sup> Richards, J., (1984) *The Age of the Dream Palace; Cinema and Society in Britain 1930-1939*, Routledge, London. p.198.

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*, p.33.

<sup>154</sup> Richards, J., 'Cinemagoing in Worktown: regional film audiences in 1930s Britain', in *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, 1994, Volume 14 No. 2, pp.147-66.

superintendent of the Todmorden Wesleyan Circuit, commenting on what was described as the death of Sunday schools noted: “The cinema has certainly an influence which is not always good and very often distinctly bad. I have often postulated against the dirty, suggestive stuff which is poisoning the minds of children.”<sup>155</sup> How often the Reverend Hoyle attended the cinema to arrive at this conclusion is not made clear, nor is what he meant by dirty, suggestive stuff. It is also unclear why the cinema was brought into an argument about the decline of Sunday schools in Todmorden, especially as the town did not allow its cinemas to open on Sunday until the 1960s.

The Birmingham Cinema Enquiry of the 1930s took a stance against Sunday opening in the city, largely due to those who wanted Sunday to remain a day of worship, although they were ultimately unsuccessful. In fact when cinemas were allowed to open in Birmingham it was noted that there was no impact upon the numbers attending church services. The 1935 Sunday Entertainment Act had included a local option which allowed localities to vote and decide whether they wanted Sunday film shows.<sup>156</sup> The Sunday opening of cinemas in Halifax was addressed in 1940 when the military authorities, Halifax being a garrison town, requested that the cinemas be opened. The concern was that there was little for troops to do in a strange town on a Sunday, except presumably go to the public house during opening hours. The council discussed the question and many of the arguments against Sunday opening, such as staff days off surfaced. Councillor Mrs. Latham bafflingly related allowing cinemas to open on a Sunday to living in a dictatorship and suggested that: “The greatest need was for an increase in moral and spiritual powers.” Councillor Regan, who supported the opening of cinemas, noted that he had passed a placard for a cinema which stated, *Only Angels*

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<sup>155</sup> *Halifax Weekly Courier and Guardian*, 18 January 1930.

<sup>156</sup> Richards, R., (1983) ‘The Cinema & Cinema-going in Birmingham’, in Walton, J., and Walvin, J., *Leisure in Britain 1780-1939*, Manchester University Press, Manchester. pp. 41-3.

*Have Wings*<sup>157</sup> (causing much laughter in the council chamber) and that: “It was better for young folk to go to the pictures than to certain other places ... There was surely no moral danger in going to the cinema on Sunday. If so, there was a moral danger to the great masses of the people who went there every night of the week.” It was agreed by the council that the cinemas could open under certain conditions.<sup>158</sup>

The Birmingham Cinema Enquiry was organized primarily to persuade the Home Office to investigate the content of films. As part of the enquiry the committee sent out a questionnaire to a number of schools in Birmingham. It revealed that one child, fond of what were described as burglar films, believed that the films were not scary: “Only potty children are frightened.” Another boy described how: “The pictures taught me how to shoot.” A girl claimed she had learnt how to strangle people by watching films. It was also claimed that phrases like “Oh yeah” and “OK kid” were harmful. The *Birmingham Mail* however noted that attempts to show the malign influence of films on children had failed to provide any evidence of negative effects and that the concerns were merely a rehashing of previous attempts to influence the content of children’s literature.<sup>159</sup> Similar concerns were to be expressed in later years regarding television and computer games.

Perhaps the main reason the committee failed in their attempts was that the film industry was a powerful grouping of film makers, distributors and exhibitors. Birmingham based Oscar Deutsch believed the committee was “composed of the blindest class known to mankind - the class determined not to see unless it suits their own purpose”. The group did receive some support from the Birmingham justices, although even this was lukewarm, with one member suggesting that the committee was

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<sup>157</sup> The 1939 film starring Cary Grant.

<sup>158</sup> *Halifax Weekly Courier and Guardian*, 9 March 1940.

<sup>159</sup> Richards, ‘The Cinema & Cinema-going,’ pp.44-5.

“an interfering lot of old women of both sexes”.<sup>160</sup> The committee had very little success, due in part to the powerful industry opposition, the fact that films were already censored, and that the Home Office was not convinced, feeling that the negative aspects were negligible and that their own commentators felt the cinema had led to a reduction of crime.<sup>161</sup>

I have found little evidence in Halifax to suggest widespread concern regarding the negative impact of the cinema. In fact in 1933 Gaumont-British arranged a treat for poor children of the borough and the mayor attended the Christmas film show at the Electric cinema, where the children were presented with a toy, apple, orange, bag of toffee and a new penny. They were also given mayoral advice when he urged the children to listen to the King’s Christmas radio broadcast and repeat after him three of the maxims that had moulded the King’s life. “Teach me to be obedient to the rules of the game. Teach me to win if I may; if I may not, teach me to be a good loser. Teach me to neither cry for the moon or over spilt milk.”<sup>162</sup>

Whilst the audience for films tended to be young working people with money to spare, separate children’s matinees became popular in the 1930s. The evidence is that they could be noisy before the films commenced and a poor choice of film would see the children lose interest. Granada, a largely southern based circuit, failed in the late 1920s when it attempted to introduce ‘clean, healthy’ matinees, as the children chose not to attend in numbers. However Odeon introduced Mickey Mouse Clubs, an American idea, and they became popular with a format that included: “Disney cartoons, a serial episode and a carefully selected feature film.” By the end of the 1930s the other major circuits and many independent cinemas presented children’s matinees. The shows offered by the major circuits tended to emphasize the importance of good

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<sup>160</sup> Ibid., p.46.

<sup>161</sup> Ibid., pp.47-8.

<sup>162</sup> *Halifax Courier and Guardian*, 24 December 1933.

citizenship and the companies were quick to point out the suitability of the shows for their audience. Children's interests in films were not just targeted by the cinemas, various periodicals and comics included stories about favourite film stars and the ubiquitous cigarette cards featured film actors as well as sportsmen. The periodicals became popular amongst young women as well as girls and were often packed with beauty tips and adverts for cosmetics.<sup>163</sup>

Films shown in British cinemas were subject throughout the period to rigorous control, albeit, as we have noted, a self-imposed industry rather than state based control. Much of the censorship was moral; a President of the British Board of Film Censors (BBFC) advised: "My job is to prevent our morals being made worse than they already are." There was during 1938 concern that there was censorship of anything seen as overtly political, leading to a debate in the house, as it was felt that the BBFC should deal with morals only. In fact the board had banned or cut a number of films, with *Battleship Potemkin* perhaps the best known casualty and the BBFC remained stringent in what they allowed the public to view.<sup>164</sup>

The coming of war in 1939 saw cinemas close for a short period, mainly due to fears of mass casualties caused by enemy bombing. Suburban cinemas reopened on the 11 September and city centre cinemas on the 15 except in the West End of London where restrictions remained in place until the 4 November. As we have already seen audiences increased and the box office take was trebled. Tax was raised three times throughout the war in the form of Entertainment Tax and Excess Profits Tax, finally amounting to 36% of gross receipts.<sup>165</sup>

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<sup>163</sup> Smith, S.J., 'A Riot at the Palace: Children's Cinema-going in 1930s Britain', in *Journal of British Cinema and Television*, 2005, Volume 2, Part 2, pp.275-89.

<sup>164</sup> Richards, J., 'The British Board of Film Censors and Content Control in the 1930s; images of Britain', in *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, 1981, Volume 1, No.2, pp.95-116.

<sup>165</sup> Aldgate, A., and Richards, J., (1994) II Ed., *Britain Can Take It. The British Cinema in the Second World War*, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh. pp.1-17.

A number of cinemas were requisitioned for war use and a number under construction were to remain unfinished, an example was the new Odeon being built in Doncaster where the steel structure remained in place until the 1950s when it was dismantled.<sup>166</sup> Many cinemas were hit by enemy action, with a few being completely destroyed; in Halifax there was no such damage to the cinemas, unlike in Bradford where the Odeon was damaged in an air raid.<sup>167</sup>

As noted, audience numbers increased during wartime, although at the height of the blitz in London audiences shrank and cinemas lost money. During the war British films tended to portray the working class more realistically, although this would not last into the 1950s, when films, certainly war films, reverted to social stereotyping.<sup>168</sup> After the war cinema owners experienced building restrictions, which meant that refurbishment and major updating could not be carried out without work permits. This may have had long term implications, as lack of maintenance would inevitably give even the cinemas built in the 1930s an increasingly shabby appearance. For instance in 1948 the Picture House in Halifax caught fire, the projection room was destroyed and the auditorium damaged; no one in the audience was harmed, but a projectionist died after being overcome by fumes. Restoration of the cinema was hampered by the restrictions.<sup>169</sup>

Overall then the growth of cinema in the town appears to have followed a similar path to that of other towns both in West Yorkshire and nationally. New cinemas were built but older picture houses closed, so its overall expansion was limited. Initially local cinemas were owned by a mix of both local and national companies, but by the 1940s the industry was becoming dominated by highly capitalized national and regional companies. Two companies Rank, which had taken over the Gaumont-British and

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<sup>166</sup> Eyles, A., (2007) *Odeon Cinemas 2, From J. Arthur Rank to the Multiplex*, Cinema Theatre Association, London. p.51.

<sup>167</sup> Eyles, *Odeon Cinemas 1*, p.225.

<sup>168</sup> Eyles, *Gaumont British Cinemas*, pp.121-2.

<sup>169</sup> *Halifax Courier and Guardian*, April 1948.

Odeon chains, and ABC, came to dominate the industry; the local press reveals that their cinemas had immediate access to the best films. The out of town picture houses also came under the control of large companies such as Star Cinemas.

As the 1940s gave way to a new decade few would have predicted the catastrophic decline in the fortunes of the cinema. However its demise was not immediate; more people were attending the cinema up to the mid-point of the 1950s than in any year during the 1930s and Halifax only saw one cinema close during the decade. But by the end of the 1950s the situation was bleak: a combination of years of neglect to cinemas due to wartime restrictions on maintenance and constructing new buildings which extended into the 1950s, high entertainment tax, changing social mores and the impact of television saw a collapse in the audience and mass closures in the 1960s.

This final period examined was one of a relatively stable, but not growing, population and industrial base. During the thirty years the cinema became the town's favourite mass entertainment, with the theatre generally in decline. Halifax was no different from the rest of the country in this respect. Whilst there was some local ownership of cinemas in the inter-war period, by 1950 cinemas, both in the town and in the suburbs had come under the control of regional and national companies. Dramatic and variety theatre had declined from the late Victorian boom years down to variety at the Palace and drama re-emerging at the Grand in the 1940s, with the latter operating on a much diminished seating capacity. Classical or art music concerts became less of a feature of the leisure calendar. The public house retained its popularity and went through a period of inter-war regeneration but was less central to popular leisure than before the First World War. Rugby and soccer were both attracting large crowds, although the latter's popularity was restricted by the club's inability to achieve sustained success on the field. The rugby club had built a strong team by the end of the 1930s and appeared to be on the brink of a

successful phase only to see the team dismantled by the coming of war in 1939. Cricket had remained a popular local summertime sport, with numerous clubs but without the commercialism or crowds that was seen in county cricket.

Certain areas of commercial leisure have not been investigated, such as the dance hall, billiards and snooker. There was a dog racing track established at some period in the twentieth century, but not enough information has become available through my research to make any meaningful comment on these leisure pursuits.

The growth of home based entertainments relying on new technologies was in its infancy at the beginning of the inter-war years. But by the 1930s the radio was present in many homes, as early as 1930 there were 10,000 homes with wireless sets in the Halifax district.<sup>170</sup> The impact of these forms on traditional leisure venues is difficult to assess, but there must have been some, and they were a taste of things to come. The 1940s had seen attendances reach new heights at cinemas and sports grounds, peaking in the years just after the end of the Second World War. But the following decade was to see a decline, as both cinema and commercial sports such as rugby and soccer saw their attendance begin to significantly reduce.

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<sup>170</sup> *Halifax Weekly Courier and Guardian*, 1 January 1930.

## Chapter Six

### Conclusion

This thesis has argued both in general terms for the importance of the case study approach and specifically for the particular case in the development of commercial leisure in the West Riding town of Halifax. In the eighteenth century Halifax was not a county town with a large number of resident gentry and professional men, nor was it a spa town that attracted the well-to-do; but it was a town that created wealth.<sup>1</sup> Halifax was recognized as a key and prosperous centre of the textile trade both before and during the eighteenth century, when it rose to a position of national pre-eminence. The force behind the town's success was initially the middling sort and, from the later eighteenth century, an emerging and increasingly assertive middle class; the class seen by historians such as Plumb as essential to our understanding of how leisure became progressively more commercialized and a central part of the growing consumer society. It was this increasingly affluent middle class that developed a leisure infrastructure which would see the town become an important centre for commercial leisure within the West Riding in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Halifax continued to develop beyond the eighteenth century, and although it lost its position at the head of the nation's textile industry, and its importance as a regional centre for middle class leisure, its sustained growth allows an ongoing examination of how commercial leisure grew in a place of increasing urbanization, the mechanization of industry and attendant population growth.

In mid-eighteenth century Halifax commercial leisure revolved around the inns, alehouses, fairs, travelling shows and traditional pursuits such as cockfighting. By the later decades of the century and into the early nineteenth century there is evidence of an

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<sup>1</sup> Borsay, *The Eighteenth-Century Town*, p.173.

emerging leisure culture created primarily for and by the middle class, initially in the form of occasional concerts but later the establishment of the purpose built theatre, baths and assembly rooms. At the same time, traditional blood sports were in decline as middle class support was withdrawn, whilst areas near to Halifax continued to pursue them. The district in this way reflects the nationally mixed pattern of decline and continuity in their pursuit; in Bristol for example, blood sports were sanctioned by the local authority into the early nineteenth century.<sup>2</sup> As we have noted, historians such as Griffin have pointed to significant local differences in traditional pursuits across the nation in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.<sup>3</sup> These differences are also reflected in the local economy of an area, for instance, pastoral parts of the country tended not to celebrate festivals like Plough Monday.<sup>4</sup> In Halifax the importance of textile production to the economy probably reduced the significance of some agricultural festivals. Local variations in traditional pursuits and the uneven progress of commercial leisure in this early period was normal but, as we have noted, different from how leisure was to develop from the mid-to-late nineteenth century. Halifax does then confirm the pattern of growth of middle class leisure and changing attitudes as to what was acceptable. There is however little to suggest an active campaign locally against traditional pursuits, although there is, as noted, evidence of more subtle moves against blood sports in the locality.

The leisure time habits of the poorer sort in eighteenth century Halifax are more difficult to identify. The labouring poor certainly benefited from the rise in wages across the northern counties which occurred from the 1760s onward. The north took over from the southeast as the highest paying region, with eight of the top eleven counties paying high

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<sup>2</sup> Meller, *Leisure and the changing city*, pp. 207-8.

<sup>3</sup> Griffin, *England's Revelry*.

<sup>4</sup> Borsay, *A History of Leisure*, pp.145-6.

wages in the north of England.<sup>5</sup> This suggests that there would be a corresponding growth in disposable incomes in the area. However there is no substantial data on local rates of pay. A growing income does not necessarily mean that the extra would be spent, but during the eighteenth century the labouring poor were inclined to spend any money left over, after paying for necessities, on luxuries including leisure time pursuits.<sup>6</sup> But the growth in commercial leisure in eighteenth century Halifax has more to do with middle class investment and spending, rather than the exploitation of any surplus wealth of the poorer sort.

The area in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries was an important centre of wealth creation, which was, as we have seen, recognized both by influential contemporaries and later historians. It was not a county or leisure town, nor was it the most important town in the region, but its development during this period reflects the importance of the middle class in creating a commercial leisure culture that transcends the inn, alehouse and traditional pursuits. Halifax is then an example of a town that creates wealth that is then used, in part, to generate a new and largely, but not exclusively, middle class leisure market and in the process became as we have seen, at least for a time, something of a regional centre for polite society.

In the early decades of the nineteenth century there appears to be little growth in plebeian commercial leisure; serving a growing population the inn and the alehouse remained their main source of relaxation, along with travelling shows and fairs. From the 1830s there were changes, notably the introduction of the beerhouse and, although local evidence has proved scarce, the introduction of the music hall. Nevertheless the pace of

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<sup>5</sup> Belchen, J., (1996) *Industrialization and the Working Class: The English Experience, 1750-1900*, Scolar Press, Aldershot. p.13.

<sup>6</sup> Rule, J., (1986) *The Labouring Classes in Early Industrial England, 1750-1850*, Longmans, London. p.212.

change was to remain generally slow until the 1870s. This gradual change has been identified by Bailey and other historians as a nationwide occurrence.

Action by the government in the mid-nineteenth century was to have an impact on attitudes to leisure time; it legislated to provide some facilities through taxation and to reduce working hours. These moves were essential, along with growing disposable incomes, to generate the growth of commercial leisure later in the century. This mid-century period also witnessed the relative decline in the position of Halifax as a regional centre for commercial leisure. Bradford's rise as the core of the textile industry saw it become an increasingly important place for commercial leisure, particularly with the official opening of St. George's Hall in 1853, albeit initially a venue used mainly for middle class leisure. But whilst Halifax did lose some of its status, the town was not in decline; rather it developed at a different pace from Bradford, the growth of which was, in any case, exceptional.

Whilst the pace of change remained gradual the public house retained its place as the main source of leisure, especially for the working class, in the early nineteenth century. It represented continuity in the community and their social importance was seen not just in established towns like Halifax, but also in developing areas such as the mining communities in the north-east of England, where they were "the most important social institutions in the villages".<sup>7</sup> But as the century progressed the public house faced increasing opposition from temperance groups and competition from the developing commercial leisure market. These too were national developments and in which Halifax shared. Bristol similarly saw much of the city's leisure for the poor revolve around the inns, taverns and beerhouses right into the mid-century and also witnessed how the public

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<sup>7</sup> Metcalfe, *Leisure and Recreation*, pp.24-9.

house developed, offering a diverse range of attractions as they met the changing leisure market and attacks from reformers.<sup>8</sup>

Whilst the public houses in the later nineteenth century remained largely male preserves, evidence from Bradford suggest that many women also used them, from the respectable to those considered by some to be less so.<sup>9</sup> There were changes to the licensing laws in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries but it was not until the First World War that strict licensing controls were introduced. They had also become places purely for adults as children and young people were discouraged from entering licensed premises. During the inter-war period the public house underwent changes as brewers and licensees sought to create an image of respectability and this is evident too in Halifax. By the end of the period the public house was much changed but remained the centre of commercial leisure. Halifax is little different to other communities in how the pub developed during the whole of the period examined and the public house remained when much other popular commercial leisure, like the cinema and variety theatre, had declined or disappeared in the latter part of the twentieth century.

Commercial leisure in the nineteenth century did develop and grow in the years up to 1870 but the mass leisure market was largely created in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and Halifax was no different from the rest of the country in this respect. In the mid-century period the development of the commercial leisure market was based on local entrepreneurs providing attractions for the increasing urban working class population especially from the 1840s onward. As we have noted, an almost separate middle class leisure culture, priced beyond the means of the labouring classes, continued; but the town

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<sup>8</sup> Meller, *Leisure and the changing city*, p.209.

<sup>9</sup> Jennings, *The Public House*, pp.197-8.

had become less important as a regional centre for middle class culture as other towns developed their own facilities. Again, the growth of commercial leisure in Halifax reflects national trends during this period.

During the late nineteenth century, especially from the 1870s onward, there was significant and sustained growth in commercial leisure: the theatre, music hall, organized sport and day excursions all expanded to service the growing local population. However social attitudes toward the commercial leisure market varied and not all were positive. There were various attempts to restrict working class access to commercially provided leisure but no consensus on how to achieve this. There was a vocal constituency in Halifax, notably from the pulpit, predicting dire consequences for society if gambling, drinking and commercial leisure generally went unchecked. However not all elements of society supported the attacks on commercial leisure, as we saw when the Halifax racetrack opened, the town's two MPs had remained detached and the majority accepted the races as they did the public house, theatre, music hall, and later the cinema. Similar concerns, expressed throughout the period 1750-1950, were widespread, Meller noted them in Bristol, as did Croll in Merthyr and Metcalfe in the north-east of England, and they continue into the present day: television, computer games and the internet have all been subject to the negative analysis once reserved for popular amusements such as the theatre, public house, music hall and cinema. But there was no great success in curbing commercial leisure. A fundamental point about it is that generally, both locally and nationally, and Halifax is a good example of this, it was financed by the wealthy, and they have followed a careful line so as not to antagonize the authorities and in the process damage their business interests. From eighteenth century theatre, to music hall and cinema, the owners have always tried to avoid controversy and conflict. Halifax, as we have seen, saw some

criticism of popular leisure, which is in line with trends in other areas, but which, similarly, had little tangible effect.

The vast expansion of commercial leisure in the late nineteenth century that led to the mass leisure market of the twentieth century was a result in particular of the growth and increasing prosperity of the working class. However, commercial leisure entrepreneurs were keen to draw an audience from across the social spectrum and whilst the music hall initially appealed to the urban working class, by the turn of the century it was also attracting the middle class, albeit mainly to the new variety theatres. There is some evidence that the working class rejected the music hall as it became increasingly sanitized, an interesting issue that would merit more investigation. The decline in the number of music hall venues may have had more to do with the restructuring of the industry as it became controlled by syndicates, with the leading performers contracted to these organizations forcing the smaller independent venues to turn to alternatives such as moving pictures for which, it has to be said, there was a ready audience. Admission prices were used as a method of separating the classes in the theatre and in the cinema, the race course and even the football ground. Whilst all classes could theoretically access commercial leisure, pricing tended to separate people on the basis of their social class, although some people may well have chosen to remain with members of their own class rather than sit in more expensive seats they may have been able to afford. Nevertheless commercial leisure venues sought to attract as wide a range of social classes as possible, as they sought to maximize their profits Halifax provides a good example of this.

It is worth stressing again that although commercial leisure expanded across the country in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, there were local variations. Redfern in his study of Crewe, for example, recorded that “outside leisure interests only had a limited

impact on recreational developments in the town”.<sup>10</sup> Crewe had a population of 498 in 1844, which had increased to 42,000 by the turn of the century when it had become a one industry community that owed its growth to the railways and it was the railway company that had sponsored much of the leisure time facilities used by the populace.<sup>11</sup> The scarcity of employment in Crewe for local females perhaps also caused a cautious approach by investors in local commercial leisure, as we have seen how women in paid employment were an increasingly important part of the market.<sup>12</sup> By 1910 the town’s theatre was rebuilt after a fire, but smaller than it had been, and four cinemas were present, so the town was not without commercial leisure facilities, but it appears that many local people travelled, perhaps on subsidized company rail tickets, to Manchester, Liverpool and Chester for their entertainment.<sup>13</sup> Whilst Crewe did have commercial leisure venues, it demonstrates local variation and thus the importance of the local case study.

That commercial leisure operators increasingly sought to draw as large an audience as possible is evident. But the concept that commercial leisure was developing, especially the cinema in the twentieth century, as a reactionary conservative force framed to encourage consensus in its audience remains problematic, as Davies has pointed out: “Tracing the formation of social consciousness is one of the most difficult and sensitive of the tasks undertaken by the social historian.”<sup>14</sup> It is difficult to find local evidence to support the thesis, although it remains the case that some historians have seen leisure as diverting the working class away from the political sphere and was the cause of an “absence of a strong

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<sup>10</sup> Redfern, A., ‘Crewe: Leisure in a railway town’, in Walton, *“Leisure in Britain”*, p.118.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p.125.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p.132.

<sup>14</sup> Davies, *Leisure Gender and Poverty*, pp.95-6.

revolutionary position”.<sup>15</sup> However, as we have noted both locally and nationally, politicians tended to avoid becoming embroiled in arguments about the positive or negative effects of leisure and in the case of cinema film censorship the government allowed the industry to regulate itself. Given the nature of commercial leisure, film exhibitors, for instance, would not be keen to present films that posed awkward questions about the capitalist system of which they were an integral part. But the extent to which the commercial cinema explicitly sought to influence audiences into accepting the status quo remains debateable. Nevertheless we have noted how local cinemas were keen to stress its suitability, especially for women and the working classes, and in this it followed both dramatic and variety theatre.

The growth of commercial leisure in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in Halifax reflected national trends and these, as we noted, represented an important shift from its earlier history. Whilst theatre and sport continued to grow, other traditional pursuits such as travelling shows and fairs were increasingly marginalized. The fair had lost its place as a central part of the leisure calendar as it was relocated to the outskirts of town and travelling shows decreased, although both continued to attract support from the people, if not from the press.

Women, especially single women, were an important part of commercial leisure’s audience and as we have seen, were, from the twentieth century, increasingly targeted as a discrete part of the commercial leisure market. In Halifax commercial leisure operators, notably the theatre and the cinema were eager to present their entertainments as suitable for women. This is not surprising, as women made up an important part of the total audience, 75% of the cheap seats in theatres in working class areas of Manchester for example were

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p.169.

taken up by women.<sup>16</sup> The impact of commercial leisure on the lives of women in the Halifax area has been far harder to elucidate as little is evident, certainly in the nineteenth century press, on its impact on their lives. But from the twentieth century the local evidence is that operators of the variety theatres were keen to publicize that women were a welcome part of the audience. Managers of local cinemas promoted the fact that they offered a respectable venue where women could visit alone without the need of a chaperone or the protection of a group, actions which added to the “ideology of respectability” that the industry cultivated, not just locally but nationally.<sup>17</sup>

The impact of unemployment in Halifax during the inter-war was not as bad as in some communities; in 1936 the town clerk, perhaps not a disinterested party, claimed that unemployment and its effects in Halifax had been less “than any other industrial town in the country”.<sup>18</sup> This tends to set the town apart from many northern communities, although the impact of unemployment on commercial leisure locally is difficult to quantify. There appears to be no noticeable decline in local commercial leisure pursuits, apart from the music hall, the decline of which in any case started before the inter-war years. Sport remained popular. The growth of cinema was mixed, particularly during the slump years of 1930 to 1933, and it was the late 1930s before any new cinemas were built or existing ones refurbished to modern standards. As McKibbin has pointed out: “The unemployed ... drank less, smoked less, bet less, went to football matches and the cinema less.”<sup>19</sup> But given, as noted, that Halifax experienced lower levels of unemployment, this was less significant in the town.

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p.73.

<sup>17</sup> Hanson, *From silent screen to multi-screen*, pp.28-9.

<sup>18</sup> Hargreaves, *Halifax*, pp.186-7.

<sup>19</sup> McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures*, p.155.

During the inter-war and postwar period Halifax again reflected national trends in the way that commercial leisure developed. The town's breweries continued, with three expanding and becoming regional as they extended into other areas of Yorkshire and Lancashire, before they were taken over in the 1960s by larger national breweries. The cinema, initially introduced by travelling showmen had quickly become a part of the variety show before permanent cinemas were established. These permanent cinemas had originally been operated by local businessmen and early national cinema chains but by 1950 all of the town's cinemas were controlled by national companies, again confirming national trends.

This thesis was based on a sample of newspapers covering the whole period under investigation. As was acknowledged, this, perhaps inevitably, led to gaps in coverage. The general area of women's leisure is an important example. More specifically, for example, in the twentieth century two snooker halls opened in the centre of Halifax but information on them and their clientele is scarce. Anecdotally snooker and billiard halls were viewed with some concern as they tended to be open all day and it was felt they attracted the 'loafing' element of society, which may have caused newspapers to limit reporting upon them. This idea of their perceived unsuitability, at least by some, is given some credence by the NRFU who refused to pay the broken time payments to players who worked in billiard halls.<sup>20</sup> Commercial dance halls were present in the area but evidence found in my research remains limited. However Davies, as noted, pointed out that dancing was popular, predominantly with women, in Salford during the inter-war years, and McKibbin confirmed its national popularity and the growth of dance hall operator Mecca who opened venues,

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<sup>20</sup> Hardcastle, *Halifax Rugby League*, p.37.

usually in the larger cities, nationwide in the inter-war years.<sup>21</sup> There was also a dog track that opened in Halifax, possibly in the 1930s, situated in the Thrum Hall sports complex but this also remains an area for more investigation. There is scope for further research to be undertaken in sources not utilized for this study. One example is the range of sport-oriented newspapers, such as *Bell's Life*, *The Yorkshireman* or *Sporting Life*. Another example is through oral history, which can provide a fruitful approach, as Davies demonstrated for Salford, or Langhamer in her study of women's leisure. The thesis too focused on commercial leisure in Halifax, although necessarily it touched upon a range of other issues in the history of leisure. But further research could explore those many other themes in more detail: class, the role of the state or gender among others.

This Halifax case study then confirmed in many ways the wider findings of a range of historical studies of leisure in general and commercial leisure in particular. These included the growth of a consumer culture in the eighteenth century, through a relative diminution, or at best stagnation, of leisure for the labouring classes in the early nineteenth century, to the later century development of mass commercialized leisure. This is important in itself. But it has illustrated too the importance of the local, in, for example, the particular nature of Halifax as an established town of wealth in the eighteenth century that went on to industrialize unlike its near neighbour, Bradford with its very rapid growth from relatively small beginnings. Or again, as an industrial town in the twentieth century with a more diverse economic base, which enabled it to avoid that inter-war contraction of leisure opportunities experienced by many in some single industry towns. Yet again in the more specific cases such as the particular fortunes of its racecourse. As a case study of the history

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., pp.397-407.

of commercial leisure, Halifax confirms more general findings, but also illustrates the importance of purely local developments.

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