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POPULAR RECREATIONS IN ENGLISH SOCIETY 1700-1850

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis is concerned with the character of popular recreations in late pre-industrial England, their place in society, and the changes they experienced during the period 1700-1850.

The first chapter presents a descriptive survey of popular recreations in the eighteenth century. It focuses on two main themes: first, the principal events of the holiday calendar - parish feasts, pleasure fairs, hiring fairs, November the 5th, Christmas, Plough Monday, Shrove Tuesday, Easter, May Day, and Whitsuntide; and second, the most significant sports and pastimes of the common people - bull-baiting, cock-fighting, throwing at cocks, football, cricket, boxing, wrestling, cudgelling, and several other diversions.

The second chapter examines the relationship between popular recreation and the larger society. It looks first at the social contexts of recreation and, in particular, draws attention to (a) the independent plebeian basis of some festivities, (b) the support which was often provided by genteel patronage and assistance, and (c) the recreational role of the public house. The second section of this chapter discusses some of the functional attributes of sports and festive occasions for the common people:

the emphasis here is on recreations as outlets for tensions and hostile sentiments.

The last two chapters are concerned with problems of change. Chapter III discusses the various attempts to suppress traditional recreations during the century before 1850. Special attention is paid to the attacks on animal sports, feasts, fairs, and football, and consideration is given to the motives and class biases underlying these attacks. Chapter IV is concerned more generally with the decline of popular recreations between the mid seventeenth and the mid nineteenth centuries. It concentrates in particular on some of the major trends which militated against the traditional practices: Evangelicalism, the increasingly rigorous attitudes concerning labour discipline, the enclosure movement, the decline of customary rights, and the breakdown of paternalistic habits. An effort is made here to relate the decline of recreations to some of the larger processes of social change.

Throughout the thesis, and especially in chapters II to IV, persistent emphasis is placed on the social relations which entered into, and gave shape to, the conduct of recreational affairs, most notably the relations between gentlemen and the common people. Recreations are seen, not in isolation, but in the context of the culture as a whole.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My principal debt in the course of this research has been to my supervisor, Edward Thompson. He suggested some of the early lines of enquiry, frequently provided advice on source materials, on several occasions suggested further (and fruitful) approaches to the subject, and (in particular) read and criticized the various drafts of this thesis with great care and penetration. The excellence of this supervision and advice, available formally and informally, has been a major source of encouragement during the past four years.

A number of people have taken the trouble to provide me with valuable references and put at my disposal some of their expert knowledge. I am especially grateful for the assistance, on various occasions, of Mr. Eric Dunning, Mr. Brian Harrison, Mr. Roy Palmer, Mr. John Rule, Mr. Rex Russell, Mr. Malcolm Thomas, and Mr. Barrie Trinder. Thanks are also due to those who allowed me to consult sources in their custody: the officers of the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals; the Librarian of the Society of Antiquaries of London; the proprietors of the Stamford Mercury; and the management of the Essex Chronicle Series Ltd. The staffs of many public institutions courteously aided the tasks of research, especially those of the British Museum's

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Reading Room, Department of Manuscripts, and the Colindale  
Newspaper Library; the University of London; the Institute of  
Historical Research; the Bodleian Library; the Public Record  
Office; the Northampton Borough Library; and numerous County  
Record Offices.

R. W. M.

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Bod. Lib.	Bodleian Library
B.M.	British Museum
P.R.O.	Public Record Office
R.O.	Record Office
<u>V.C.H.</u>	<u>Victoria County History</u>

INTRODUCTION

In the early eighteenth century a foreigner could easily spend many months in England and still remain substantially ignorant about the recreations of the common people. All of the foreign tourists were gentlemen and they had (at best) only an incidental interest in popular customs and manners; but there would have been more cause for their ignorance than simple social myopia. For there were few fixed, concrete features in the English setting which could be seen to be obviously connected with recreational activities. The modern tourist unavoidably forms some sort of impression about the people's pastimes and diversions - he cannot fail to see the playing fields, stadiums, bingo halls, television sets, cinemas, and amusement centres - but his eighteenth century counterpart was less favorably placed. The popular recreations of the day, when they were institutionalised facts of social life, were normally a part of traditions and customs which left few physical remains after their practice; most of them were cultural phenomena which had not yet developed special, full-time locations for their exercise. The popular playgrounds were usually constructed from the materials of everyday life - the market place, the public thoroughfares, the churchyard, an uncultivated close, the open fields. They would not have been immediately recognized by outsiders as places of recreation. The one fixture which the visitor would have associated

with popular diversions was the public house or the coffee house. But otherwise, though he might have seen a game of quoits by an alehouse or a crowd being entertained by a harlequin or several boys playing pitch and toss, he probably would have learned little about those major seasonal festivities which were of the first importance in the recreational life of the common people. He might have taken the opportunity to see one of the well publicised sporting diversions which tended to cut across class lines - perhaps a boxing match or a cock-fight or a horse race - (and many actually did in order to satisfy their curiosities), but his knowledge of most of the seasonal recreations would have depended very much on accident, whether or not he was in a particular locality at the time when a holiday was customarily observed.

The native gentlemen were, at least potentially, much more favorably positioned. The squires and parsons in the countryside had frequent contact with the labouring people in the course of their routine activities. They too were involved in the seasonal rhythms of agriculture and the celebrations of the ecclesiastical calendar which together provided the fundamental framework for recreational customs. There must have been a widespread awareness of these traditions, especially the more public exercises, for they could not have passed unnoticed; and sometimes the participation of the local gentry was an essential ingredient of

the festivities. But the gentry were not students of popular behaviour. Their learning and their enquiries were pursued in the traditional directions, those which supported the distinctive culture of their own class. Most of their observations on popular habits were incidental, often arising out of practical issues; only a few writers attempted systematic studies.<sup>1</sup> A good deal must have been known about the customs of the people but the efforts to explore and communicate this knowledge were scanty. Contemporaries were not entirely unaware of this lacuna. "The study of popular antiquities," observed a correspondent in the Monthly Magazine in 1798, "though the materials for it lie so widely diffused, and indeed seem to obtrude themselves upon every one's attention, in proportion to the extent of his intercourse with the common people, do not appear to have engaged so much of the notice of enquirers into human life and manners as might have been expected."<sup>2</sup> Writing of Northumberland in 1778, William Hutchinson remarked on the "many ancient Customs [which] prevail in this County, the familiarity or outward insignificance of which occasion them to pass without much

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<sup>1</sup> There are two important eighteenth century studies of popular customs, both of which include substantial discussions of recreations: Henry Bourne, Antiquitates Vulgares; or, the Antiquities of the Common People (Newcastle, 1725), and John Brand, Observations on Popular Antiquities (Newcastle upon Tyne, 1777). The first work to be devoted exclusively to recreations was Joseph Strutt, Glig-Gamena Angel-Deod; or, the Sports and Pastimes of the People of England (London, 1801). On these and several of the other early folklorists, see Richard M. Dorson, The British Folklorists: A History (Chicago, 1968), chap. 1.

<sup>2</sup> Monthly Magazine, V, 1798, p. 273.

attention".<sup>1</sup> Here in fact were probably the two main inhibitions. Common, everyday experiences were not usually considered to be subjects worthy of investigation, especially when the experiences were principally those of the common people. In most cases they passed by every year unrecorded, surviving only in the memories of their participants.

For the historian then such subjects are elusive. But the difficulties for historical understanding are by no means overwhelming. Although there is no substantial core of primary evidence, there is much scattered, fragmentary, often incidental material, and it is this type of documentation which provides the major support for our study. Men of education may have seldom paid special attention to the pastimes of the people (unless it was to disparage them), but for various reasons they did not (or could not) avoid mentioning them altogether. Country diarists often noticed the diversions of the villagers they knew and their own servants. Many of the growing number of publications on parish, county and town antiquities include a few details on the existing state of the locality's amusements. Newspapers sometimes alluded to recreational practices. References can also be found in the papers bearing on local government. Occasionally short accounts on popular customs were contributed to one of the principal periodicals. And when

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<sup>1</sup> William Hutchinson, A View of Northumberland (2 vols; Newcastle, 1778), II, Appendix, p. 3.

genteel and plebian interests clashed, as they increasingly did during this period, when the familiarity of popular diversions no longer guaranteed their ready acceptance, the dissatisfactions and disputes which ensued brought them a greater degree of public, and consequently documented, acknowledgement.

\* \* \* \* \*

The limitations in the scope and subject matter of this study should be specified. Almost all of the evidence presented relates to provincial England. London would require a thesis in itself. Moreover, the social and physical conditions of this huge metropolis moulded a recreational life which was quite different from that of the countryside. The provinces have been examined selectively: some areas were largely neglected (notably the south coast and the West); others were examined in varying degrees of detail (parts of the Midlands, East Anglia, the North); and one county, Northamptonshire, has been investigated fairly systematically. The chronological limits which are suggested are partly arbitrary, but they do stand as rough boundaries of the period during which the traditional pattern of recreations, still flourishing around 1700, almost completely disintegrated. The meaning of the term "recreation", about which sociologists have debated, need not detain us: for a definition we may draw on Samuel Johnson, who spoke of "diversion" (the century's equivalent of "recreation") as "Sport; something that

unbends the mind by turning it off from care."<sup>1</sup>

The first two chapters of this study are descriptive and analytical: they attend exclusively to the static features of recreational life. The first chapter attempts a broad portrait of the fabric of popular diversions; the second chapter examines, first, the specific social contexts and relationships which most significantly conditioned and accommodated these diversions, and secondly, it suggests a number of the functional qualities which can be attributed to recreational customs. The last two chapters deal with problems of change. Chapter three offers an account of the attacks which were directed against popular recreations; and the final chapter examines some of the reasons for this opposition and, more generally, the variety of circumstances behind the decline of these recreations from the seventeenth until the mid nineteenth century.

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<sup>1</sup> Samuel Johnson, A Dictionary of the English Language (2 vols.; London, 1755).



Chapter I

A SURVEY OF POPULAR RECREATIONS

The following pages are intended to offer a descriptive account of popular recreations between the late seventeenth century and the beginning of Victoria's reign. They are concerned for the most part with two basic questions: first, the timing and character of the most important festive occasions - in other words, the holiday calendar; and second, the particular features of the major sports and pastimes of the common people. This account is entirely in static terms; no attention is given to the changes which all of these recreations were experiencing, a theme which is reserved for the last two chapters. The immediate task is to describe what existed, to build up a rounded portrait of the period's recreational life, and as much as possible the evidence has been drawn from eighteenth century sources.

\* \* \* \* \*

(1) The Holiday Calender

One of the most important holidays for the common people was the occasion of the annual parish feast, sometimes known as the "wake" or "revel" or the "rush-bearing". Many of the contemporary local histories and descriptive accounts alluded to the celebration of an annual wake, and country diarists often referred in passing to the local feasts which they or their servants attended. Wakes were clearly major recreational occasions and observers of popular customs were agreed on their prevalence and widespread appeal. "I am now in the Country," wrote a contributor to the Gentleman's Magazine in September 1738, "and at that Season of the Year in which Parish Feasts abound."<sup>1</sup> In 1710 Daniel Hilman, the editor of Tusser Redivivus, noticed that the parish wake "in a great many places continues still to be observ'd with all sorts of rural Merriments; such as Dancing, Wrestling, Cudgel-playing, etc."<sup>2</sup> Writing of Cornwall in 1758,

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<sup>1</sup> Gentleman's Magazine, VIII, 1738, p. 465.

<sup>2</sup> Daniel Hilman, Tusser Redivivus: Being Part of Mr. Thomas Tusser's Five Hundred Points of Husbandry (London, 1710), "June", p. 16.

William Borlase claimed that "every parish has its annual feast",<sup>1</sup> and in 1778 it was said by William Hutchinson that "many are yet celebrated" in County Durham.<sup>2</sup> Several observers remarked on the many wakes which continued to be held in Derbyshire.<sup>3</sup> The people in south-west Leicestershire, in the vicinity of Claybrook, were reported in 1791 to be "much attached to the celebration of wakes".<sup>4</sup>

Although these contemporary opinions are certainly of interest, there is some further and more valuable evidence bearing on the incidence of parish feasts which allows us to speak more precisely of their extent. The most useful source, a history of the county of Northampton, was not published until 1791, but was based entirely on material collected earlier in the century, mostly between 1719 and 1724, by John Bridges, a retired barrister. It seems that Bridges personally visited all parts of the county, and for the majority of the parishes his material included a note on whether or not a wake was held, and if so the time of its celebration. He

<sup>1</sup> William Borlase, The Natural History of Cornwall (Oxford, 1758), p. 301. It is possible that this remark should be qualified: 'In May 1753 John Trehawke wrote to the Reverend William Borlase, "Tho' the Wakes, Feasts or Revels are continued in almost every parish West of Lestithiel yet on this side or in the Eastern Division of the County they are wholly laid aside" ...' (H. L. Douch, Old Cornish Inns, and their Place in the Social History of the County [Truro, 1966] p. 45).

<sup>2</sup> A View of Northumberland, II, 26n.

<sup>3</sup> James Pilkington, A View of the Present State of Derbyshire (2 vols.; London, 1789), II, 55; John Farey, General View of the Agriculture of Derbyshire (3 vols.; London, 1811-17), III, 628; and Stephen Glover, The History and Gazetteer of the County of Derby (2 vols.; Derby, 1831), I, 262.

<sup>4</sup> Aulay Macaulay, The History and Antiquities of Claybrook (London, 1791), p. 128.

dealt altogether with 290 parishes. In only 11 cases was there a specific indication that no wake survived; in 81 others there was no reference to the subject. But for 198 of the parishes explicit mention was made of an existing wake, giving a total of 206 wakes for the county (6 parishes had 2 wakes and one had 3). In other words, at least 68 per cent of the county's parishes had an annual feast.<sup>1</sup> Such a figure gives real substance to the impressions of contemporaries. Roughly similar pictures emerge from the evidence available for other parts of the country. In the northernmost hundred of Buckinghamshire, and despite the fact that a number of its 28 parishes had very small populations, there were still at least 14 wakes around the middle of the eighteenth century; and of 15 Berkshire parishes which were specially investigated in 1759, some of them very incompletely, 8 were found to have wakes (one of which had 3).<sup>3</sup> A later source, dating from the mid

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<sup>1</sup> The History and Antiquities of Northamptonshire. Compiled from the Manuscript Collections of the Late Learned Antiquary John Bridges (2 vols.; Oxford, 1791). The compiler was Peter Whalley. The account of Fawesley Hundred was first published in 1740 under the hand of Samuel Jebb, and the two volumes which finally appeared (which discussed all twenty of the hundreds in the county) followed closely the general format of the 1740 edition. Whalley contributed no new research of his own. A later history of the county, George Baker, The History and Antiquities of the County of Northampton (2 vols.; London, 1822-41), also includes details on parish feasts; however, it only deals with eight hundreds, and it is clear from many of the parish accounts that Baker frequently drew his information on wakes directly from Bridges rather than investigating the circumstances which prevailed during his own lifetime.

<sup>2</sup> Browne Willis, The History and Antiquities of the Town, Hundred, and Deanery of Buckingham (London, 1755).

<sup>3</sup> Collections Towards a Parochial History of Berkshire (London, 1783), printed by John Nichols and included in his Bibliotheca Topographica Britannica (10 vols.; London, 1780-98), IV.

1840's, includes a list of the wakes in the vicinity of Stamford, apparently compiled for the benefit of itinerant tradesmen.

Although the area under view was not precisely delimited - the list was based on an economic and social region rather than an administrative area - our impression of the prevalence of wakes is again reinforced, and this time for a much later period. A total of 118 feasts were included in the list: 44 in Rutland, 37 in Northamptonshire, 23 in Lincolnshire, 8 in Huntingdonshire, 4 in Leicestershire, and 2 in Cambridgeshire.<sup>1</sup>

Wakes were most commonly celebrated around the time of the anniversary of the parish church's dedication, normally on the Sunday after the feast day of the saint to whom the church was dedicated. There was however a large minority of exceptions to this rule: in Northamptonshire, for instance, about 30 percent of the wakes mentioned by Bridges were held at a time which was unrelated to the appropriate saint's day. But the more important feature about the timing of wakes is the manner in which they were distributed throughout the calendar year. Rather than being evenly

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<sup>1</sup> There are actually two lists from the mid 1840's of the wakes in the vicinity of Stamford. One is in Sharp's Agricultural Compendium and General Advertiser for 1846 (Stamford, 1845), p. 44, and gives a total of 137 wakes; the other, in George Burton, Chronology of Stamford (Stamford, 1846), pp. 175-77, includes 117 of the same wakes, omits 20, and makes one addition. Since a number of the 20 additional wakes in Sharp's list were rather distant from Stamford, I have chosen to rely on the list provided by Burton. Sharp's list was obviously compiled for those with commercial interests, and it is possible that Burton excised those references which were of less relevance for a strictly local study.

spread out during the course of the year, they were very much seasonally concentrated (see attached Table). The two most important of these periods were, first, the early summer, and secondly, the late summer and first half of the autumn - the latter especially.<sup>1</sup> In Northamptonshire there were 38 wakes in the fortnight from late June through early July, 22 from the end of August until mid September, and 82 during the 6 weeks from just before Michaelmas until just after All Saints Day. These two and a half months accommodated about 80 per cent of all the county's feasts. The pattern which emerges from the list of the mid 1840's is much the same - 23 feasts at the start of the summer (or 31 if those around July 6th are included) and 43 from the middle of September until early November - except that in this case there was a greater incidence of wakes around Whit and Trinity Sundays.<sup>2</sup>

Useful as these figures may be, their value and preciseness should not be exaggerated. They should not be thought to achieve a high level of quantitative exactness. Bridges, for example,

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See also the several references for August and September in A. R. Wright, British Calendar Customs, ed. T. E. Lones (3 vols.; London, 1936-40), III.

2

It should be noted that the apparent differences between the timing of wakes in the early eighteenth century and the mid 1840s are largely a consequence of the calendar change of 1752. After 1752 the seasonal cycles were on the average eleven days later than those before, and as a result the times of some of the wakes were altered, particularly those which fell in the late summer and early fall. The list of the mid 1840s indicates that many of the traditional Michaelmas feasts were celebrated in October, around the 10th and 11th; consequently they are placed here under the October rather than the Michaelmas heading.

TABLE  
The Distribution of Wakes  
During the Calendar Year.

Period of Time	Wakes from Bridges	Wakes from list of mid 1840s
January - March	0	0
April and early May	1	1
Around Whit and Trinity Sundays	4	15
Late June and beginning of July	38	23
Around July 6th*	=	8
Second half of July	20	6
Early August	1	6
Around August 15th	14	5
Late August and first half of September	22	0
Second half of September	-	16
Around Michaelmas	31	-
October	18	20
Around All Saints Day	33	7
The rest of November plus December	<u>23</u>	<u>11</u>
	205**	118

\* July 6th was the day after Midsummer Old Style

\*\* Of the 206 wakes referred to in Bridges, 1 is undated.



probably neglected to enquire about wakes in certain instances, and this almost certainly accounts for some of the 81 parishes for which no information is offered. Of the 37 Northamptonshire wakes included in the list of the mid 1840s, 12 had not been mentioned by Bridges; and there were another 5 cited for parishes which had not even been included in Bridges's survey.<sup>1</sup> Nor can the list of the mid 1840s be regarded as complete, especially when the area to which it refers is indefinite. Moreover, the figures tell us nothing about the varieties of wakes, how many were vigorous and thriving and how many were tiny or on the verge of collapse. What they do show - and here their incompleteness is of only minor importance - is that parish feasts were undoubtedly very prevalent recreational occasions and that they were heavily concentrated in two seasons of the year.

Wakes usually began on a Sunday and lasted for part, and sometimes all, of the week. Although we cannot be sure of the extent of their religious implications during earlier periods, it is clear that by the eighteenth century they were predominantly

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<sup>1</sup> It is often difficult to establish the exact number of parishes in a county at a given time since what was reckoned a parish in one generation sometimes lost its status in the next, and vice versa. It was said of Northamptonshire that "the whole Number of Parishes, according to general Computation, which is taken from Mr. Camden, is 326: But in the List of the Registry of the Diocese, no more than 284. With the Exempt Churches, the number is 290." (John Morton, The Natural History of Northamptonshire [London, 1712], p. 22.)

secular festivals. The religious element, where it did survive, was probably confined to a special church service on the Sunday of the wake.<sup>1</sup> "The religious tenor is totally forgotten," complained one observer about the wakes in the North, "and the Sabbath", he added (probably with a degree of extravagance), "is made a day of every dissipation and vice which it is possible to conceive could crowd upon a villager's manners and rural life."<sup>2</sup> It was clearly the profane and pleasure-seeking atmosphere which dominated the wake. In a great many parishes the feast must have been one of the main occasions each year for good eating and abundant drinking, for music and dancing, for sports and entertainments, and for hospitality. It was the community's own petty carnival. Sometimes there were stalls with gingerbread, nuts and fruit; often a travelling fiddler attended to play for the dancers; and housewives made special preparations for the entertainments which were expected of them. It was said of the three feasts in Stamford that

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<sup>1</sup> At Bletchley the Rev. William Cole recorded in his diary for 14 September 1766: "Feast Sunday .... At Matins, where Tom's Music Master from Buckingham and his Brother played on a Bassoon and the other sang .... At Vespers, where I preached again; the only Time when there are 2 Sermons. Music also in the Gallery." There was a bassoon again at both services on the feast Sunday in 1767. (F. G. Stokes, ed., The Blecheley Diary of the Rev. William Cole 1765-1767 [London, 1931], pp. 119 and 261.) There were normally two services on the wake Sunday at Shalstone in Buckinghamshire. (MSS. Purefoy Diaries, passim, in the possession of Mr. Geoffrey Purefoy of Shalstone Manor: I am grateful to Mr. Purefoy for allowing me to examine these papers.) On 15 November 1761 the incumbent of Nuneham Courtenay, Oxfordshire noted pointedly that "this being Newnham Feast, Self preached on this Text, All is Vanity." (Bod. Lib., "Diary of Rev. James Newton of Nuneham Courtenay, Oxon, 1761-62", MS. Eng. misc. e. 251, f. 59).

<sup>2</sup> Hutchinson, View of Northumberland, II, 26n.

... they are generally kept up with great spirit and liberality, and all the poor who can entertain their friends on the occasion do so to the utmost of their means. The public-houses in the neighbourhood of the feasts frequently provide prizes to be contended for by athletic exercises or rustic sports.<sup>1</sup>

A wake normally included several of the familiar sports and pastimes of the period: wrestling or boxing or cudgelling; sometimes donkey racing, a wheelbarrow race (while blindfolded), a smock race for the women; contests might be arranged in hot hasty-pudding eating, grinning through a horse collar (the funniest won), chasing a greased pig, running in sacks, or smoking a pipe of tobacco (as quickly or as slowly as possible); at some wakes bull-baiting, cock-fighting or badger-baiting were included.<sup>2</sup> The first Sunday in August 1762 was "the Feast Day at Kennington" in Berkshire and "the Country People ... assembled in the Afternoon for the usual Sports of Wrestling and Backword Playing".<sup>3</sup> In November 1672 the teenage son of the squire in Lamport, Northamptonshire wrote of how, during the week of the

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<sup>1</sup> Burton, Chronology of Stamford, p. 175.

<sup>2</sup> Some of these amusements are described in Strutt, Sports and Pastimes, pp. 275-78. For further details on the diversions at wakes, see John Clare, The Village Minstrel (London, 1821), stanzas 70-84; William Somerville, Hobbinol, or the Rural Games (London, 1740); William Hone, The Every-Day Book (2 vols.; London 1825-27), II, cols. 54-55 and 1399-1403; and the advertisement of a wake at Yattendon, Berkshire in 1785 which is transcribed in C. B. Andrews, ed., The Torrington Diaries, Containing the Tours Through England and Wales of the Hon. John Byng (Later Fifth Viscount Torrington) between the Years 1781 and 1794 (4 vols.; London, 1934-38), I, 208-09.

<sup>3</sup> Jackson's Oxford Journal, 7 August 1762; quoted in James Townshend, News of a Country Town: Being Extracts from 'Jackson's Oxford Journal' Relating to Abingdon 1753-1835 (Oxford, 1914), p. 49.

village's feast, "Bomeford of Houghton had a bull, on which they set dogs belonging to Mr. Baxter, Satchell, Freeman and Haggardy .... After they had finished, the spectators wrestled with one another till five o'clock."<sup>1</sup> At Brassington and Hognaston in Derbyshire the wakes of 1810 included dramatic performances in the evenings, played from a temporary stage.<sup>2</sup> And the bull-baitings which commanded such a following in south Staffordshire were most widely patronised at the times of the wakes.

Wakes were undoubtedly major occasions for a concentration of the traditional forms of revelry and diversion. And in most instances they would have been attended, not only by all the common people of the parish, but also by the considerable numbers of visitors who came as invited guests; for a wake was the traditional time when scattered friends and relations were accustomed to assemble together in order to reaffirm their social ties. "This being our Feast at Kettering", wrote the parish's curate on 6 July 1766, "We had, as usual, large Congregations and many Strangers".<sup>3</sup> It was said that

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<sup>1</sup> Walter Rye, ed., The Journal of Thomas Isham, of Lamport, in the County of Northampton, 1671-1673 (Norwich, 1875), p. 71

<sup>2</sup> Daniel Lysons and Samuel Lysons, Magna Britannica: being a Concise Topographical Account of the Several Counties of Great Britain (6 vols. London, 1806-22), V, ccxli.

<sup>3</sup> B. M., "Diary of the Rev. Abraham Maddock, 1765-1771", Add. MS. 40, 653, ff. 29-30. See also John Cole, The History and Antiquities of Weston Favell (Scarborough, 1827), pp. 32-33; Gentleman's Magazine, CIII, part 1, 1833, p. 116 (on Scopwick, Lincolnshire); and W. Harbutt Dawson, History of Skipton (London, 1882), pp. 384-85.

at the wakes in the vicinity of Claybrook "the cousins assemble from all quarters, fill the church on Sunday, and celebrate the Monday with feasting, with music, and with dancing."<sup>1</sup>

Important occasions for recreation were also provided by the many fairs which were to be found all through the country. Although the majority of these fairs were primarily concerned with commercial functions - there were horse fairs, cattle fairs, sheep or hog fairs, cheese fairs, fairs for hardware or leather or general merchandise - a good many of them were also treated as pleasure fairs, and in a few cases pleasure provided their main rationale. At St. Faith's Fair near Norwich, for instance, which was one of the most important meetings in the kingdom for the sale of cattle, the first day of the fair (October 17th) was devoted entirely to pleasure and generally attracted a great number of visitors. Parson Woodforde, who lived in Weston, a few miles north-west of Norwich, often gave his servants leave to take a holiday at Saint Faith's or one of the other fairs in the neighbourhood.<sup>2</sup> Similarly, on 27 May 1771 at Norwich Syllas Neville recorded in his diary, "My people being gone

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<sup>1</sup> Macaulay, Claybrook, p. 128; cf. William Howitt, The Rural Life of England (London, 2nd edn., 1840), pp. 493-95. See also below, pp. 106-08.

<sup>2</sup> On 30 April 1788, for instance, Woodforde wrote in his diary, "Mattishall Gaunt (alias Fair) to day, my maid Betty, whose Friends live at Mattishall went thither and is to return home to Morrow"; and on 29 June 1796, "This being Ræpham Fair Day, I gave Briton leave to spend the Day with his Friends there." (John Beresford, ed., The Diary of a Country Parson: The Reverend James Woodforde 5 vols.; Oxford, 1924-31, III, 22, and IV, 292. Other similar references may be found in II, 99; III, 221-22, 351, 359, and 378; IV, 27 and 111-12; and V, 118, 279, 321, and 398.

to Ingham Fair, shall be alone till tomorrow evening."<sup>1</sup> As the village minstrel in John Gay's The Shepherd's Week attested, the provincial fair was not only for merchants and farmers:

Now he goes on, and sings of Fairs and Shows,  
 For still new Fairs before his Eyes arose.  
 How Pedlars Stalls with glitt'ring Toys are laid,  
 The various Fairings of the Country Maid.  
 Long silken Laces hang upon the Twine,  
 And Rows of Pins and amber Bracelets shine;  
 How the tight Lass, Knives, Combs and Scissars spys,  
 And looks on Thimbles with desiring Eyes;  
 Of Lott'ries next with tuneful Noteshe told,  
 Where silver Spoons are won and Rings of Gold.  
 The Lads and Lasses trudge the Street along,  
 And all the Fair is crouded in his Song.  
 The Mountebank now treads the Stage, and sells  
 His Pills, his Balsoms, and his Ague spells;  
 Now o'er and o'er the nimble Tumbler springs,  
 And on the Rope the vent'rous Maiden swings;  
Jack-pudding in his parti-coloured Jacket,  
 Tosses the Glove and jokes at ev'ry Packet.  
 Of Raree-Shows he sung, and Punch's Feats,  
 Of Pockets pick'd in Crowds, and various Cheats.<sup>2</sup>

The mingling at fairs of business and pleasure is illustrated by the remarks on Stourbridge Fair (one of the largest in England) which the Marchioness Grey delivered to a friend in a letter of 1748:

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<sup>1</sup> Basil Cozens-Hardy, ed., The Diary of Sylas Neville 1767-1788 (Oxford, 1950), p. 102.

<sup>2</sup> John Gay, The Shepherd's Week. In Six Pastorals (London, 1714), from the sixth pastoral, "Saturday"; cf. Hone, Every-Day Book, II, cols. 1207-12 and 1307-10.

... the Booths or Shops form a Street about a Mile long. The first Part is destin'd for the Cheese-Traffick, and perfumes the Air to a very considerable Distance, the next to Sights and Shews, and you may listen if you please to the Ingenious Conceits of Merry-Andrew, or feast your Eyes with all the Wonders upon Canvass that can be collected from any part of the Globe. A little further the genteeler part of the Fair opens .... The Public Part of the Fair pleased me the best, where everybody has such a Face of Business, ... and where one meets with a Number of clean tight Country-Men and Maidens trick'd out with their Ribbands and Straw-hats to whom this is really a happy jolly Day.<sup>1</sup>

As well as the "Warehouses and Shops of almost every Kind of Commodity", there were also "Coffee-Houses, Taverns, Eating-Houses, Music Shops, Buildings for the Exhibition of Drolls, Puppet Shews, Legerdemain, Mountebanks, Wild Beasts, Monsters, Giants, Dwarfs, Rope Dancers, etc.... Besides the Booths, there are six or seven brick Houses ... and in any of which the Country People are accommodated with hot or cold Goose, roast or boiled Pork, etc."<sup>2</sup> A similar variety of purpose was evident on a smaller scale at other fairs. In 1847 an Oxfordshire clergyman wrote of how

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<sup>1</sup> Bedfordshire R. O., L. 30/9a/2, pp. 13-15.

<sup>2</sup> Charles Caraccioli, An Historical Account of Sturbridge, Bury, and the Most Famous Fairs in Europe and America (Cambridge, 1773), pp. 20-21. See also Daniel Defoe, A Tour through the Whole Island of Great Britain (2 vols.; London, Everyman edn., 1962), I, 85. In 1768-69, when William Cole was living in Waterbeach, Cambridgeshire, his servants were allowed to attend the fair at least once each year. (B.M., "Diary of Rev. William Cole", Add. MS. 5835, pp. 392 and 419).

The principal festival of Bampton is its annual fair, which takes place on the 26th August, and is a sort of carnival to all the neighbouring villages ....

The celebrity of Bampton fair arises from two causes, first, the large number of horses which are sold there, secondly from the large number of children, servants and other persons, who flock thither from the whole neighbourhood ....<sup>1</sup>

The July fair at Chesham, Buckinghamshire in 1761 included, along with its market for cattle, organised wrestling and back-swords matches and a women's smock race.<sup>2</sup> In Derbyshire the afternoons and evenings of many fairs were said to be "more or less devoted to amusement and jollity, among the young folks: if this be the main purpose of the day, it is called a Gig-fair."<sup>3</sup> The fair at Prittlewell in Essex, which a doctor referred to in his diary on 15 July 1826, seems to have been one of those occasions at which pleasure was predominant:

Morning very fine. Arranged the stalls in front of my house. The fair is a very decent one. An exhibition on our right of a Giant, Giantess, an Albiness, a native of Baffins Bay and a Dwarf - very respectable. We had a learned Pig and Punch on our left and in front some Theatrical Exhibition. All in very good order.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> J. A. Giles, History of the Parish and Town of Bampton (Oxford, 1847), p. lxiv.

<sup>2</sup> Northampton Mercury, 20 July 1761

<sup>3</sup> Farey, Agriculture of Derbyshire, III, 630; cf. Howitt, Rural Life, pp. 497-501.

<sup>4</sup> L. F. Matthews, ed., "The Diary of Jonas Asplin, M.D., of Wakering Hall, Rochford, and Prittlewell", Essex Review, No. 258, January 1957, p. 42.



Puppet shows, gingerbread stalls, musicians, mountebanks, buffoons - there was a punchinello at Brixworth fair in 1673<sup>1</sup> -, wax figures, throwing for prizes, painted panoramas of notable historical events, living curiosities - the pig-faced lady, a pair of dwarfs, the thin man: these were familiar features at pleasure fairs. And at some of the larger ones in the nineteenth century there might be Adam's Circus or Wombwell's Menagerie or one of the other big travelling entertainments.

While it is clear that many fairs were at least partly for pleasure, it is difficult to be precise about their incidence; lists of fairs are readily obtained but the problem lies in trying to distinguish the fairs which were principally for business from those which combined business with pleasure and those which were mostly for pleasure.<sup>2</sup> All wakes were fundamentally festive occasions but fairs took on a variety of forms. Consequently it is often hard to establish the actual texture of a particular fair, especially the

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<sup>1</sup> Journal of Thomas Isham, p. 93.

<sup>2</sup> There are two main sources for fairs: William Owen, An Authentic Account ... of all the Fairs in England and Wales (London, 1756; and later edns.); and John Ogilby and William Morgan, The Traveller's Pocket-Book (London, 1759; and later edns.). The British Museum has editions of Owen of 1756, 1780, 1783, 1792, 1795, 1802, 1813, 1834, 1856, and 1859; and editions of Ogilby and Morgan of 1759, 1761, 1765, 1770, 1771, 1775, 1778, 1782, 1788, and 1794. I have examined several editions of both works but have used chiefly the 1756 edition of Owen and the 1770 edition of Ogilby and Morgan. The "Report of the Royal Commission on Market Rights and Tolls", Parliamentary Papers, 1888, LIII-LV, and 1890-91, XXXVII-XLI, provides no additional material of importance for this period.

smaller ones. Moreover, since our main sources were compiled primarily for the use of merchants and traders, they tended to emphasize the commercial functions of fairs (that is, the commodities in which they specialised) and to ignore or deprecate their recreational dimension. Of the hundreds of fairs extant around 1770 in fourteen selected counties - Bedfordshire, Berkshire, Buckinghamshire, Cambridgeshire, Derbyshire, Hertfordshire, Huntingdonshire, Leicestershire, Northamptonshire, Nottinghamshire, Oxfordshire, Rutland, Staffordshire, and Warwickshire - only twenty were explicitly identified as pleasure fairs (or listed as specialising only in "toys") another twelve included toys as one of their major articles of sale.<sup>1</sup>

Probably the majority of fairs did in fact centre on dealings in livestock, cheese, hardware, and other commercial staples; but it is likely that a substantial minority were distinctly mixed gatherings, occasions when recreation complemented trade. At Daventry, for instance, the Easter Tuesday fair was reported in Owen's Book of Fairs to be for horses and horned cattle, the fair of June 6th and 7th for "swine and all sorts of goods", and the fair of October 2nd and 3rd for "cattle, cheese, onions, etc."; but a local

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<sup>1</sup> Ogilby and Morgan, Pocket-Book. Of the 55 fairs in Northamptonshire, only 2 were cited as including "toys" amongst their specialties. The reference to "toys" can usually be regarded as a clear indication of the fair's function as a holiday.

source indicates that all three were "also frequented for pleasure" (the town had nine fairs altogether).<sup>1</sup> Similarly, the fair at Boughton Green, one of the largest and most popular in the southern Midlands, was said to be noted for "timber, poles, ladders, cooper's ware, tunnery, braziers, china, etc." and for "ready made cloaths, hats, and stockings";<sup>2</sup> but it was also renowned as a pleasure fair, in both genteel and plebian society.<sup>3</sup> "This fair is still kept with great solemnity," observed John Bridges, "and is famous for its trade in brooms, and wooden-ware, for variety of shops and booths for entertainment."<sup>4</sup> The recreational side of the fair was usually emphasised in the advertisements: for example, in the Northampton Mercury of 2 June 1740 it was announced that

... on the 24th Instant will be, as usual, a Fair at Boughton-Green for all Manner of Merchandise, Husbandry, Houshold Goods, and Cattle; And on the 25th, which will be the second Fair-Day, there will be Raffling for the Recreation of Gentlemen and Ladies: And on the 26th will be two Laced Hats, one wrestled for, the other play'd at Singlestick for; the Wrestling to begin at Ten o'clock in the Forenoon, and to be wrestled for by twelve Men that never won the Value of a

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<sup>1</sup> Baker, County of Northampton, I, 326-27.

<sup>2</sup> Ogilby and Morgan, Pocket-Book.

<sup>3</sup> John Britten, A Topographical and Historical Description of the County of Northampton (London, 1810), p. 114; Baker, County of Northampton, I, 36-37; and Northamptonshire R.O., I.L. 3808-09, letter of 30 June 1725.

<sup>4</sup> Bridges, Northamptonshire, I, 411.

Guinea at any one Time; the Singlestick after the Wrestling is done the same Day, by twelve Men that never won the Value of a Guinea at any one Time....<sup>1</sup>

On Whit Thursday 1766 William Cole recorded that "Tom went with his Uncle and almost all the young People of the Parish, to Buckingham Fair", and one assumes that they were not principally attracted to the fair because of its cattle market, the only feature which the lists mention.<sup>2</sup> In short, although we cannot be definite about the incidence of those fairs which included a recreational dimension, there were certainly a considerable number which were not solely confined to business activities. And almost any fair must have had some recreational significance for the people who lived in and around the town in which it was held, if only because of the novelties and excitement which normally accompanied a fair.

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<sup>1</sup> A notice in the Northampton Mercury of 1 June 1730 was even more explicit about the recreational arrangements at the fair. "Whereas some People that live at a Distance from Northampton have complained that there has not been publick Notice given Time enough, when the Prizes of Wrastling and Single Stick are to be contended for at Boughton Green Fair: This is to give Notice, that Midsummer Day is the Day on which the Fair is constantly held for People of all Sorts to buy and sell their Goods. The next Day being Thursday the 25th of June, the Ladies and People of the better Rank meet to Raffle, see the Shows, and thence adjourn to a Ball at the Red Lyon in Northampton that Evening. Friday the 26th of June, is the Day for the Trial of Skill at Single Stick for a Gold-laced Hat of a Guinea Value. Saturday, which is the 27th of June, is for the Trial of Skill in Wrastling, where eight Couple wrestle, and those that give the best of three Falls, are rewarded each with a Pair of Buckskin Gloves, at Four Shillings per pair. The Eight Conquerors are to wrestle for the Price of a Gold laced Hat of the same Value and Goodness as that played for at Single Sticks. And if there should be any Horse or Foot Race those are not to be before the 29th of June."

<sup>2</sup> Diary of William Cole, p. 51.

One of the areas in which it is clear that there was a large number of pleasure fairs is East Anglia. Of the 111 fairs in Essex around 1756, 63 were cited as specialising in toys and another 9 included toys as one of their specialties; of the 92 fairs in Suffolk, 42 concentrated in toys and 23 included them. The predominance of pleasure fairs was less marked in Norfolk - of the 101 fairs, 16 were exclusively and 29 partly for toys - although many of the business fairs were said to be noted for "petty chapmen".<sup>1</sup> Perhaps the major reason for this bias towards pleasure fairs in these three counties is the fact that they do not seem to have had parish feasts.<sup>2</sup> Consequently fairs functioned to a greater extent as holiday substitutes, and they provided some of the recreational attractions which in the Midlands and the North were normally associated with wakes. Woodforde's servants always got leave to visit their friends at fairs, never at wakes. The regional difference was implied in a comment by William Marshall, when he was remarking on the sociability at so many of the Norfolk fairs:

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<sup>1</sup> Owen, Fairs. Chapmen were probably most noticeable at the smaller pleasure fairs.

<sup>2</sup> Although there is no positive evidence that wakes did not exist, the absence of any reference to them is probably not simply fortuitous. This suspicion is more or less supported by Miss Nancy Briggs of the Essex Record Office: "Our general feeling is that you are right about the absence of wakes, but all the evidence seems to be negative." (Private communication of 5 February 1969).

"Yorkshire has its feasts; other counties their wakes; and Norfolk its fairs."<sup>1</sup>

There was one kind of fair which always served as an occasion of festivity - the statute sessions for hiring servants, colloquially known as "stattis" or "mops". Hiring fairs were supposed to be held under the supervision of the chief constables, but by the end of the eighteenth century (and in many places earlier) this official involvement had for the most part been abandoned; the fairs themselves, however, normally survived, partly because they continued to be serviceable for both masters and servants, and partly because stall-keepers and publicans were active in giving them encouragement. Moreover, the working people in agricultural regions would have been

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<sup>1</sup> William Marshall, The Rural Economy of Norfolk (2 vols.; London, 1787), II, 261. The distribution of these East Anglian pleasure fairs through the calendar year was somewhat different from the pattern which we noticed with wakes. Although the peaks were at around the same periods, the East Anglian fairs were more prevalent in the later spring and early summer than in the fall, and (unlike wakes) they were not almost entirely absent during the first four months of the year. The following figures, from Owen, Fairs (1756), show the distribution in detail:

Pleasure Fairs in Essex, Suffolk, and Norfolk.

	<u>"Toy" Fairs</u>	<u>Fairs incl. "toys"</u> <u>as a specialty</u>	<u>Total</u>
January-March	7	7	14
Around Easter	10	1	11
April	5	3	8
May	8	5	13
Ascension-Whitsuntide	21	7	28
June	20	3	23
July	16	9	25
August	7	4	11
September	14	8	22
October	6	8	14
November-December	7	6	13
	<u>121</u>	<u>61</u>	<u>182</u>

most reluctant to give up such an important holiday. Economically statute fairs functioned as labour exchanges, but the evidence suggests that they were at least of equal importance as social occasions. "In the evening they turn to a kind of holiday romp," said one writer of the statutes he had seen in Leicestershire.<sup>1</sup>

On 3 October 1791 James Woodforde observed in his diary, "This Day being appointed for the Petty Sessions at Reepham for hiring Servants, we met on our return a great many Lads and Lasses going there";<sup>2</sup> at Axbridge in Somerset the Lady Day hiring fair lasted for two or three days and was "generally attended by an immense concourse of servants of both sexes."<sup>3</sup> Some of the many newspaper notices of statute fairs referred to one or two of the intended diversions: "Ten-Bell Ringing" at the statute in Stonham Aspal, Suffolk in 1757; bell-ringing and a match at singlesticks at Stony-Stratford, Buckinghamshire in 1765; backwords and a variety of races at Berkhamstead, Hertfordshire in 1751; morrice dancing at Great Broughton, near Northampton, in 1747; bell ringing, morrice dancing, and a match at singlesticks at the statute in Towcester, Northamptonshire in 1766.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> William Pitt, A General View of the Agriculture of the County of Leicester (London, 1809), p. 303.

<sup>2</sup> Diary of a Country Parson, III, 303.

<sup>3</sup> Gentleman's Magazine, LXXV, part i, 1805, p. 202.

<sup>4</sup> Respectively: Ipswich Journal, 17 September 1757; Northampton Mercury, 30 September 1765, 26 August 1751, 7 September 1747, and 6 October 1766.

John Clare too is a witness to the holiday mood at Hiring fairs:

He knew the manners too of merry rout  
 Statute and feast his village yearly knew  
 And glorious revels too without a doubt  
 Such pastimes were to Hob and Nell and Sue  
 Milkmaids and clowns that statute joys pursue  
 And rattle off like hogs to London mart  
 Weary of old they seek for places new  
 Where men hail maidens with a frothing quart  
 And Hodge with sweetheart fix'd forgets his plough and cart<sup>1</sup>

Some statutes were very substantial affairs, like the one at Polesworth in Warwickshire noticed by William Marshall in 1784:

Servants came (particularly out of Leicestershire) five and twenty or thirty miles to it, on foot! The number of servants collected together, in the "statute yard," has been estimated at two to three thousand.... Polesworth being the only place, and this the only day [for a statute in the area], farm servants, for several miles round, consider themselves as liberated from servitude on this day; and, whether they be already hired, or really want masters, hie away, without leave, perhaps, to the statute.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Village Minstrel, stanza 61. (The punctuation has been removed from these and other lines by Clare since it was clearly a result of the publisher's intervention.) Stanzas 62 to 69 offer a descriptive account of a hiring fair. Perhaps Clare had especially in mind his own village of Helpstone: John Bridges had observed earlier about the parish that "the statutes are always kept here, with a great concourse of people". (Northamptonshire, II, 514). In Charles Johnson's The Village Opera (London, 1729), the setting for Act I, Scene iii is described as "A Country Mop, or Statute, that is, a Sort of a Fair where Servants are hired; little Sheds with Toys, etc. among the trees upon a Green; Maids and Men ranged on each Side to be Hired."

<sup>2</sup> William Marshall, The Rural Economy of the Midland Counties (2 vols.; London, 1790), II, 19. There is a long description of another large hiring fair, the one at Studley in Warwickshire, in William Hone, The Table Book (2 vols.; London, 1827-28), I, cols. 171-78. See also Howitt, Rural Life, pp. 495-97.



Hiring fairs were most commonly held around Michaelmas, though sometimes Martinmas was more the norm (as in Yorkshire), or perhaps Christmas (in the south-west), and in a few places (Cumberland and parts of Lincolnshire) they usually took place in May.<sup>1</sup>

While we are reasonably clear about the recreational character of hiring fairs, we cannot be as firm about their incidence through the country. Certainly, from the tone of the evidence and some of the passing comments, one gets the strong impression that they were very widely established - William Marshall, for instance, thought that in Leicestershire "most towns and many villages have their statutes"<sup>2</sup> - but we do not have the kind of reliable evidence which can be systematically quantified. What material there is, though, does provide considerable reinforcement for this impression. For example, in September and the beginning of October 1757 the Ipswich Journal carried advertisements for twenty statute fairs in the county of Suffolk. Lists of fairs from the late eighteenth century indicate that there were at least ten places with statutes in Oxfordshire - two at Woodstock, Chipping Norton, Witney, Bicester, and Thame; and one at Burford, Banbury, Deddington, Watlington, and Wheatley

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<sup>1</sup> William Marshall, The Rural Economy of Yorkshire (2 vols.; London, 1788), II, 260; Wright, Calendar Customs, III, 271-72; and advertisements in the provincial press. In Northamptonshire a hiring fair was called a "statute" if it was held just before Michaelmas and a "mop" if it was held immediately after. (Anne E. Baker, Glossary of Northamptonshire Words and Phrases [2 vols.; London, 1854], II, 29 and 292-93; and John Cole, The History and Antiquities of Wellingborough [Wellingborough, 1837], p. 242).

<sup>2</sup> Marshall, Midland Counties, II, 20n; cf. Pitt, Agriculture of the County of Leicester, p. 302.

(all of the fairs fell around Michaelmas).<sup>1</sup> There is positive evidence that fourteen Northamptonshire hiring fairs were held in 1805, and it is probable that there were several more.<sup>2</sup> Our rough guess would be that during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries most counties would probably have had one hiring fair for every one to two hundreds.

It is important to emphasize the extent to which wakes and fairs were intimately involved in the seasonal rhythms of agricultural life. To a considerable degree they were dependent on and given form by these rhythms. In most cases they were fitted into the cycles of agricultural labour at times of convenience, during those intervals between the completion of one set of tasks and the beginning of another. There was a concentration of festive occasions during the late spring and early summer because this was a period of partial relaxation between the spring sowing and the summer harvest (the hay harvest usually began in July). But easily the most important release from labour came with the completion of the corn harvest. In September the agricultural year was brought to an end: the harvest itself was frequently concluded with a festive dinner for the workers

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<sup>1</sup> J. Bridges, A Book of Fairs, or, A Guide to West-Country Travellers (np., nd.), p. 13 (the B.M. catalogue suggests 1800 as the approximate date of publication); and Owen, New Book of Fairs (1792).

<sup>2</sup> Northampton Mercury, September and October 1805. Statutes in other Northamptonshire towns are recorded in earlier and later sources.

who had helped to bring in the crops,<sup>1</sup> and during the next few weeks, as the pressures of work slackened off, many of the common people were able to enjoy a period of relative leisure. The necessity to gather in the crops imposed overriding demands on most of the farming population and the intensification of labour during these weeks ensured that it would be generally regarded as an especially unpropitious time for recreation.<sup>2</sup> In Surrey in 1671 a man was prosecuted for baiting a bull, not because the sport was thought to be cruel, but on the grounds that by practising it during the harvest-time he caused "divers labourers and other poore persons to leave their work."<sup>3</sup> There was a decline in the number of East Anglian pleasure fairs towards the end of the summer and in the area around Stamford during the 1840s it appears that not a single wake was celebrated between the end of August and the middle of September. But in the fall there were fewer pressing demands and as a result it was a convenient and welcome time for feasts and fairs. White Kennet pointed out that many wakes "are now celebrated near the time of Michaelmass, when a vacation from the labours of harvest and the plough, does afford the best opportunity for visits and sports".<sup>4</sup> Most people would have had more money than usual -

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<sup>1</sup> For some details on harvest feasts, see below, pp. 122-25.

<sup>2</sup> See, for instance, John Clare's description of August and September in The Shepherd's Calendar, ed. Eric Robinson and Geoffrey Summerfield (Oxford, 1964).

<sup>3</sup> Quoted without a reference in L. A. Govett, The King's Book of Sports (London, 1890), p. 73.

<sup>4</sup> White Kennet, Parochial Antiquities Attempted in the History of Ambrosden, Burcester, and other Adjacent Parts in the Counties of Oxford and Bucks. (Oxford, 1695), p. 611.

the labourers with their harvest wages, the servants whose terms ended at Michaelmas with their newly settled accounts - and some of the money was spent on pleasure and hospitality or it was used to buy clothing and finery and household effects at one of the autumn fairs. It was an interim season, socially and economically, between the peak period of labour and the discomforts, hardships and dreariness which were often suffered during the winter. And winter was very much the off season for wakes and pleasure fairs. But during the active seasons most of the common people would have been able to attend, and probably did attend in their own neighbourhoods, at least one of these traditional festive assemblies.

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Along with wakes and fairs, there were a number of other important annual occasions for feasting and relaxation. Some of them were fixed dates in the calendar and others were moveable. "It is usual, in Country Places and Villages," wrote Henry Bourne, "where the Politeness of the Age hath made no great Conquest, to observe some particular Times with some Ceremonies, which were customary in the Days of our Fore-fathers: Such are the great Festivals of Christmas, Easter, and several others, which they observe with Rites and Customs appropriated to them."<sup>1</sup> The French

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<sup>1</sup> Antiquitates Vulgares, pp. 115-16.

traveller, Henri Misson, reported that "the great Festival Times" in England "are from Christmass to Twelfth-Day inclusive, at Easter, and at Whitsontide",<sup>1</sup> the same three holidays which had been specially singled out a few years earlier by Guy Miege in The New State of England.<sup>2</sup> And among the other notable festive occasions, some of which Bourne probably had in mind, were Plough Monday, Shrove Tuesday, May Day, and the 5th of November.<sup>3</sup>

The harvesting of the late summer, certainly one of the most crucial events in the yearly cycle, was succeeded (as we have seen) by a period of less intense labour during which there was a considerable abundance of wakes and fairs, and in most places they would have provided the principal holidays of the fall. The only other autumn holiday of major significance was Guy Fawkes Day, the 5th of November, an occasion which was widely celebrated. In 1686, according to one contemporary, there

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<sup>1</sup> John Ozell, ed., M. /Henri/ Misson's Memoirs and Observations in His Travels over England with some Account of Scotland and Ireland (London, 1719), p. 29; Misson's work was first published in French in 1698.

<sup>2</sup> Guy Miege, The New State of England (London, 1691), part ii, p. 40.

<sup>3</sup> During the later eighteenth century a poor house in Tiverton, Devon allowed its inmates the following holidays for "innocent recreations": two days at each of Shrovetide, Easter, Whitsuntide, and Christmas; a day and a half for each fair; and the 29th of May and the 5th of November. (Margaret D. Fuller, West Country Friendly Societies [Reading, 1964], p. 89.) A useful source on the traditional holiday calendar is Wright's Calendar Customs. The first volume covers the moveable feasts, the second and third volumes the fixed festivals; the bulk of the descriptive material is drawn from the period after the early nineteenth century. See also the collections assembled by William Hone: The Every-Day Book, The Table Book, and The Year Book (London, 1832).

... was published an order against bonfires and fireworks upon any account whatever. The vulgar and every one soon perceived what it drove at, viz., the hindering of rejoicings and sports on gunpowder treason night. Therefore, that nevertheless they might not loose [sic] the privilege of haveing some merriment, and of shewing their abhorrence of popery, they invented illuminations; that is every house, when that night came, set all their windows as full of candles as ever they could hold in all the great towns in England, which caused a most delicate spectacle.<sup>1</sup>

Special festivities were commonly observed in the larger towns.

For instance, on November 5th, 1742 at Northampton,

... being the Anniversary of the double happy Deliverance of these Kingdoms from Popery and Slavery, the Morning was usher'd in here by Ringing of Bells at all the Churches: The ... Mayor of this Corporation, attended by the Aldermen, Bailiffs, etc. and preceded by the Town Musick and Flags, went to All-Saints Church, where a Sermon suitable to the Occasion was preach'd by the ... Vicar of that Church; from whence they proceeded to their Guildhall, to drink the Healths of his Majesty and the Royal Family, etc. And the Evening concluded with Bonfires, Fireworks, and other Demonstrations of Joy.<sup>2</sup>

There were similar rituals at Gloucester in 1740 and the day was also brought to a close with diversions which would have been partly

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<sup>1</sup> Charles Jackson, ed., The Diary of Abraham de la Pryme (Publications of the Surtees Society, LIV, 1870), p. 10.

<sup>2</sup> Northampton Mercury, 8 November 1742.

for the benefit of the common people, in particular bonfires and fireworks.<sup>1</sup> The anniversary was celebrated too in rural areas. "The rustic feasts were celebrated according to custom", noted Thomas Isham of Lamport on 5 November 1671,<sup>2</sup> and on the same day in 1766 William Cole wrote in his Bletchley diary of "Bonfires on the Green."<sup>3</sup> A special notice of 1803, which was prompted by the conditions of war, revealed the prevalence of Guy Fawkes festivities in one part of the country: because of the fire beacons which had been set up in different parts of Essex, the Lord Lieutenant requested "that the usual custom of lighting Bonfires on the Fifth of November, may be Discontinued at the ensuing Anniversary of that Day".<sup>4</sup>

Most of the customary amusements of November 5th centred on the varieties of fire power - bonfires, firearms, squibs, firebrands, and fireworks. Around 1800 at Middleton, according to Samuel Bamford,

Most people ceased from working in the afternoon, and children went from house to house begging coal to make a bon-fire.... At night the country would be lighted up by bon-fires...; tharcake and toffy were distributed to the younger members of families, whilst the elder clubbed their pence and at night had 'a joynin' in some convenient dwelling.

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<sup>1</sup> Gloucester Journal, 11 November, 1740.

<sup>2</sup> Journal of Thomas Isham, p. 17.

<sup>3</sup> Diary of William Cole, p. 146. Cole had noted on November 3rd that his manservant Tom "went out with some young Folks at Night to cut down an old Willow Tree, against the Bonfire on Wednesday." (Ibid.)

<sup>4</sup> Chelmsford Chronicle, 4 November 1803.

The lord of the manor made the young men a present of a good two-horse load of coal, with which a huge fire was lighted on The Bank, near the church, and kept burning all night and most of the day following. The young fellows also joined at ale from the public-house, and with drinking, singing, and exploding of fire-arms, they amused themselves pretty well ....<sup>1</sup>

It was said that at Weston Favell, Northamptonshire,

The Fifth of November is annually celebrated in a very jovial manner ...; the revelry of the day being anticipated for several weeks previous; and with collections, made from all the hedges in its vicinage, of scrapings ... and sums collected by the juveniles going round the village, expended in faggots, etc., a bonfire of no small dimensions is formed, which may be viewed throughout a circuit of many miles.<sup>2</sup>

At Lincoln November the 5th was one of the main holidays of the year, and it was distinguished, according to a correspondent in 1818, "by the usual disgraceful proceedings of the populace - bull baitings, throwing of serpents, squibs, etc.: every parish too had its bonfire and 'Old Guy'."<sup>3</sup> Bull-baiting was also practised on November 5th at Axbridge in Somerset.<sup>4</sup> And there were many other

<sup>1</sup> W. H. Chaloner, ed., The Autobiography of Samuel Bamford, vol. I: Early Days (London, 1967; first published in 1849), pp. 159-60.

<sup>2</sup> Cole, Weston Favell, p. 59.

<sup>3</sup> Stamford Mercury, 13 November 1818. There are other references to November 5th at Lincoln in the Stamford Mercury of 10 November 1809, 10 November 1815, 12 November 1819, 10 November 1820, and 9 November 1821.

<sup>4</sup> Gentleman's Magazine, LXXV, part i, 1805, p. 203.



places with Guy Fawkes celebrations: for example, Hull, Manchester, Woburn, and Kingston-upon-Thames.<sup>1</sup>

The principal days of festivity during the Christmas season varied from place to place - they might be around Christmas itself, or New Year's Day, or around the twelfth day after Christmas. Henry Bourne pointed to Twelfth Day as "one of the greatest of the Twelve, and of more jovial Observation than the Others, for the visiting of Friends and Christmas-Gambols", though he added that "the others preceeding [it] are [also] observed with Mirth and Jollity, generally to Excess."<sup>2</sup> "This was Twelfth Day," wrote James Boswell in his journal for 6 January 1763, "on which a great deal of jollity goes on in England."<sup>3</sup> "Feasting and rural amusements take place at several seasons of the year", said one observer of Cumberland, "but the principal are at Christmas, when the greatest hospitality prevails among the villagers; every family is provided with goose pies, minced pies, and ale."<sup>4</sup> In Northumberland "the celebration of New Year's Day is preserved ... as a rural festival.

<sup>1</sup> Respectively: Hull Advertiser, 9 November 1816, and 1 November 1817 (for Manchester); Bedfordshire R.O., Q.S.R. 23,437 (1817); and Kingston Guildhall, "Kingston-upon-Thames Court of Assembly Book 1834-1859", D.I. 4.5 (meeting of 5 August 1840). See also Wright, Calendar Customs, III, 146-47 and 154-56; and Hone, Every-Day Book, I, cols. 1429-33, and II, cols. 1379-80.

<sup>2</sup> Antiquitates Vulgares, pp. 151-52.

<sup>3</sup> Frederick A. Pottle, ed., Boswell's London Journal 1762-1763 (London, 1950), p. 125.

<sup>4</sup> John Housman, A Topographical Description of Cumberland, Westmoreland, Lancashire, and a part of the West Riding of Yorkshire (Carlisle, 1800), pp. 76-77. The descriptions of popular customs in this work are mostly concerned with Cumberland.

Gifts are made to children, servants, and dependants, called New Year's Gifts."<sup>1</sup> Much of the recreation during the Christmas season was taken in small groups - with the family, in intimate gatherings with friends - rather than in large public assemblies. On Christmas Eve 1766 William Cole recorded that "As they were to ring the Midnight Peal, Tom went with his Fellow Ringers to sup at the Ale-House, as usual, till near 12 o'Clock"; and two years later at Waterbeach, Cambridgeshire his servants "Tom and Molly supped and played at Cards at Mr. Hall's" on January 5th and the next evening they were similarly entertained "at Mr. Mason's till 3."<sup>2</sup> At Little Crosby in Lancashire Nicholas Blundell, the squire of the parish, wrote of how on the 1st of January 1708 "Most of my Servants if not all went to Ince to the Merry Night."<sup>3</sup> Hospitality, sociability, good eating and drinking: these were the dominant features of the season. "The mirth of the Twelfth day here consists of feasting and social intercourse between neighbouring families", said Hutchinson of Northumberland.<sup>4</sup> "With the generality,"

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<sup>1</sup> Hutchinson, View of Northumberland, II, Appendix, p. 4.

<sup>2</sup> Diary of William Cole, p. 168; and B. M., "Diary of William Cole", Add. MS. 5835, p. 398.

<sup>3</sup> J. J. Bagley, ed., The Great Diurnal of Nicholas Blundell of Little Crosby, Lancashire, transcribed and annotated by Frank Tyrer (3 vols.; Record Society of Lancashire and Cheshire, 1968- ), I, 158. The first two volumes of Blundell's diary have been published as of 1970: volume I covers the period 1702-11, volume II 1712-19.

<sup>4</sup> Hutchinson, View of Northumberland, II, Appendix, p. 5; cf. George Young, A History of Whitby (2 vols.; Whitby, 1817), II, 879-80.

an essay of 1754 suggested, "Christmas is looked upon as a festival in the most literal sense, and held sacred by good eating and drinking. These, indeed, are the most distinguishing marks of Christmas".<sup>1</sup>

There were, though, one or two notable public recreations of the Christmas season, in particular mumming and ceremonial dancing (which often went together). In 1769 John Wallis wrote of how, around Christmas in parts of Northumberland,

Young men march from village to village, and from house to house, with music before them, dressed in an antic attire, and before the ... entrance of every house entertain the family with ... the antic dance, ... with swords or spears in their hands, erect, and shining. This they call, The sword-dance. For their pains they are presented with a small gratuity in money, more or less, according to every house-holder's ability. Their gratitude is expressed by firing a gun.<sup>2</sup>

Henry Bourne spoke of mumming as "a changing of Clothes between Men and Women; who when dress'd in each others Habits, go from one Neighbour's House to another, and partake of their Christmas-Cheer, and make merry with them in Disguise, by dancing and singing, and such like Merriments".<sup>3</sup> On 2 January 1769 at Castle Cary in

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<sup>1</sup> London Magazine, XXIII, 1754, p. 535; reprinted from the Connoisseur of 26 December 1754.

<sup>2</sup> John Wallis, The Natural History and Antiquities of Northumberland (2 vols.; London, 1769), II, 28.

<sup>3</sup> Antiquitates Vulgares, pp. 147-48. Bourne may have been wrong about women dressing up as men: as a rule men took all the parts in a mumming play.

Somerset James Woodforde recorded in his diary, "We had the fine Mummers this evening at Parsonage";<sup>1</sup> and at Witney, Oxfordshire mummers were still performing at Christmas time around the middle of the nineteenth century.<sup>2</sup> Mumming plays and sword dancing were said to be common during the season in the North of England.<sup>3</sup> There were as well a number of other prevalent Christmas customs, including wassailing, caroling, and the decorating of houses. Woodforde wrote on 24 December 1768 of the caroling which was customary at Castle Cary, and on December 1790 at Weston, Norfolk he gave 1s.6d. to "Willm Mason of Sparham who used to go about at Christmas with 10 Bells, and has this Year got a Bell-Harp".<sup>4</sup> In 1791 the incumbent of Claybrook spoke of how "Old John Payne and his wife, natives of this parish, are well known from having perambulated the hundred of Guthlaxton many years, during the season of Christmas, with a fine gew-gaw which they call a wassail, and which they exhibit from house to house with the accompaniment of a duet."<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Diary of a Country Parson, I, 83.

<sup>2</sup> J. A. Giles, History of Witney, (London, 1852), p. 62.

<sup>3</sup> Brand, Popular Antiquities, pp. 175-76; see also Christopher Clarkson, The History and Antiquities of Richmond in the County of York (Richmond, 2nd edn., 1821), pp. 290-91.

<sup>4</sup> Diary of a Country Parson, I, 82, and III, 239.

<sup>5</sup> Macaulay, Claybrook, p. 131. For further details on the festivities of the Christmas season, see Wright, Calendar Customs, II, 1-90, and III, 209ff.; Hone, Every-Day Book, I, cols. 1604ff.; and the introduction in William Sandys, Christmas Carols, Ancient and Modern (London, 1833).

Plough Monday, which fell on the first Monday after Twelfth day, was by tradition (if no longer in practice) the time when agricultural labour was resumed following the festivities of Christmas. Although it was certainly not as significant a holiday as some of the others during the year - as Christmas and Whitsuntide, for instance - it does appear to have been widespread in many parts of the country, notably in those regions where arable farming predominated. Although its extent was more limited, the limits seem to have included a considerable area. "On Plow Monday", wrote Aulay Macaulay, "I have taken notice of an annual display of Morrice-dancers at Claybrook, who come from the neighbouring villages of Sapcote and Sharnford."<sup>1</sup> During the late 1760s at Waterbeach, Cambridgeshire William Cole was visited by the ploughmen on their holiday,<sup>2</sup> and at Barnack in Northamptonshire during the 1720s the rector's accounts included annual gifts on Plough Monday.<sup>3</sup> Plough Monday celebrations were also recorded from other villages in Northamptonshire and from parts of Derbyshire, Staffordshire, Lincolnshire, and Yorkshire.<sup>4</sup> In general their incidence seems to have been

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<sup>1</sup> Macaulay, Claybrook, p. 128.

<sup>2</sup> W. M. Palmer, William Cole of Milton (Cambridge, 1935), p. 47; and B.M., "Diary of William Cole", Add. MS. 5835, pp. 369 and 398.

<sup>3</sup> A. Tindal Hart, Country Counting House: The Story of Two Eighteenth-Century Clerical Account Books (London, 1962), p. 67.

<sup>4</sup> Baker, Northamptonshire Words, II, 123-24; Thomas James, The History and Antiquities of Northamptonshire (London, 1864), p. 15; Derby Mercury 1 February 1816 and 9 January 1817; J. E. Brogden, Provincial Words and Expressions Current in Lincolnshire (London, 1866), pp. 151-52; Stamford Mercury, 14 January 1848 and 15 January 1864; and Clarkson, Richmond, p. 293.

concentrated in east-central England, in the area encompassing Yorkshire, the East Midlands, and East Anglia.<sup>1</sup>

Plough Monday usually featured a ceremonial dance and procession by the agricultural labourers, and the small donations which were collected during the day were laid out for an evening's feasting and drinking. It was a day of ritual display and a day for occupational solidarity:

... In some places in the North, the young rustics yet enjoy dancing on Plough Monday, each clad in the dress of the opposite sex; Morisco Dancers, with a boy in girls cloaths, as the Maid-marion, still exert their agility in other villages. In some districts Mab and his wife continue to lead the festive throng; and the Fool and Bessy in other places: Dancers, with swords, or wood cut in the form of that weapon, perform various feats of activity around the fool plough in other townships; while the more common mode of passing the holiday, is to drag a plough from door to door, soliciting plough money, wherewith to defray the expences of a feast, and a dance in the evening.<sup>2</sup>

On 11 January 1768 at Waterbeach, William Cole wrote of "Plow Monday. All the Boys in the Parish with Hurdy Gurdy's, black'd Faces, Bells and Plows."<sup>3</sup> In 1762 a contributor to the Gentleman's Magazine noticed how, on Plough Monday, "the young men yoke themselves,

<sup>1</sup> Thomas Davidson, "Plough Rituals in England and Scotland", Agricultural History Review, VII, 1959, p. 30.

<sup>2</sup> John Brady, Clavis Calendaria; or, A Compendious Analysis of the Calendar (2 vols.; London, 1812), I, 153; cf. Hone, Every-Day Book, I, cols. 71-73, and Young, Whitby, II, 880-81.

<sup>3</sup> B.M., "Diary of William Cole", Add. MS. 5835, p. 369.

and draw a plough about with musick, and one or two persons, in antic dresses, like jack-puddings, go from house to house, to gather money to drink; if you refuse them, they plough up your dunghill."<sup>1</sup> John Brand also remarked on how "they plough up the Soil before any House, at which they have exhibited, and received no Reward."<sup>2</sup>

Shrove Tuesday was the only other major winter holiday. It was especially noted as a holiday for apprentices, though many other working people observed it as well. Brand mentioned it as the apprentices' "particular holiday" and noticed how, "At Newcastle upon Tyne, the great Bell of St. Nicholas' Church is tolled at Twelve O'Clock on this Day; Shops are immediately shut up, Offices closed, and all Kind of Business ceases; a Sort of little Carnival ensuing for the remaining Part of the Day."<sup>3</sup> It was said that during the early nineteenth century at Filey in the East Riding "The apprentices and servants are on this day privileged with a

<sup>1</sup> Gentleman's Magazine, XXXII, 1762, p. 568; see also Howitt, Rural Life, pp. 471-72.

<sup>2</sup> Brand, Popular Antiquities, p. 409. In the Isle of Axholme a plough procession was customary on the day after old Twelfth Day. "The plough-bullocks, or boggins, go round the town to receive alms at each house, where they cry 'Largus.' They are habited similar to the morris-dancers, are yoked to, and drag, a small plough; they have their farmer and a fool, called Billy Buck, dressed like a harlequin, with whom the boys make sport. The day is concluded by the bullocks running with the plough round the cross in the market-place, and the man that can throw the others down, and convey their plough into the cellar of a public house, receives one shilling for his agility." (W. Peck, A Topographical Account of the Isle of Axholme /Doncaster, 1815/, p. 278.)

<sup>3</sup> Brand, Popular Antiquities, pp. 331 and 333.

holiday, for recreation."<sup>1</sup> "On Shrove Tuesday" at Messingham, Lincolnshire in the later eighteenth century "cock fights were held at the public house in the morning. In the afternoon football was played, and the day was concluded with dancing and cards."<sup>2</sup> Eating pancakes, as a number of observers pointed out, was one of the most distinctive of the Shrovetide customs. Samuel Bamford recalled that at Middleton in the early nineteenth century

... we had always a holiday on Shrove Tuesday, when we went to each other's houses to turn our pancakes, and 'stang' such as incurred the penalty by not having eaten their cake before the next cake was ready. The person to be stanged was placed on a pole, and being held on each side, was carried by others to the middin and there deposited, amid the laughter and jokes of all present.<sup>3</sup>

On Shrove Tuesday at Claybrook "a bell rings at noon, which is meant as a signal for the people to begin frying their pancakes."<sup>4</sup> But most of our material which relates to this holiday is concerned with two of the principal Shrovetide diversions, football and throwing at cocks, and these will be considered in some detail in the following section.

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<sup>1</sup> John Cole, The History and Antiquities of Filey (Scarborough, 1828), p. 132; cf. Young, Whitby, II, 881. At Skipton in the West Riding, "Formerly Shrove Tuesday was a holiday for the apprentices ..., as it is now for the elementary schools, and early in the present century cock-fighting and football were sports inseparable from the day." (Dawson, Skipton [1882], p. 375.)

<sup>2</sup> Edward Peacock, ed., John MacKinnon's Account of Messingham [1825] (Hertford, 1881), p. 10. MacKinnon's descriptions of the later eighteenth century appear to have been based largely on the oral evidence which he collected from the villagers.

<sup>3</sup> Early Days, p. 136.

<sup>4</sup> Macaulay, Claybrook, p. 128; see also Derby Mercury, 19 February 1823 and Brand, Popular Antiquities, pp. 331 and 333. For a general survey of Shrovetide Customs, see Wright, Calendar Customs, I, 1-31, and Hone, Every-Day Book, I, cols. 242-261.



The Easter season was certainly one of the most widely observed of the yearly holidays: "On the Holy-Days of Easter," wrote Henry Bourne, "it is customary for Work to cease, and Servants to be at Liberty".<sup>1</sup> There were few distinctive features of the season's recreations, for most of them were also practised at other times of the year. There were "revels" and pugilism at Bristol in 1822; handbell-ringing at Oakingham, Berkshire in 1829; a steeplechase race at East Kirby, Lincolnshire in 1841.<sup>2</sup> At Waterbeach, Cambridgeshire on Easter Tuesday 1769 William Cole wrote of "A Dancing at Rose Denson's where Tom and Molly went at 8 and Jem at 10 when I went to Bed."<sup>3</sup> In 1797 it was reported that at Workington the "annual football match, on Easter Tuesday, was won by the seamen. After that was decided, a belt was produced, to be wrestled for, when no less than forty competitors appeared."<sup>4</sup> On Easter Monday at Hallaton, Leicestershire there was one peculiar custom, a "scrambling" for ale and meat pies (it was rather like a licenced free-for-all), and the afternoon was "spent in festivity, ringing of bells, fighting of cocks, quoits, and such like exercises, by Hallaton and the

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<sup>1</sup> Bourne, Antiquitates Vulgares, p. 196

<sup>2</sup> Respectively: John Latimer, The Annals of Bristol in the Nineteenth Century (Bristol, 1887), p. 97; Berkshire Chronicle, 25 April 1829; and Lincolnshire Chronicle, 23 April 1841.

<sup>3</sup> B.M., "Diary of William Cole", Add. MS. 5835, p. 404.

<sup>4</sup> Notes & Queries, 10th series, I, 1904, p. 230; quoting the Cumberland Pacquet, 25 April 1797. This annual contest was between the seamen and the colliers.

neighbouring youth."<sup>1</sup> Easter was a season for general festivity and relaxation. "From time immemorial", remarked the Manchester Chronicle in 1841, "the Easter week has been a season of mirth and festivity amongst the sons and daughters of toil in this neighbourhood",<sup>2</sup> and at Leicester it was spoken of in similar terms.<sup>3</sup> At Richmond in the North Riding at Easter time,

After the morning service, various games and pastimes, derived from ancient customs, still remain among the lower class of people, such as foot-ball, fives, cricket, etc. It is also the custom on this day to put upon the dress something new, even the most trifling, as a ribbon, a pair of gloves, etc., and it is reckoned unlucky to omit doing it.<sup>4</sup>

There was also a considerable concentration of fairs around Easter; some were mostly for pleasure and others mixed amusement with business. Bamford, for instance, noticed that

On Easter Wednesday, what was called 'The White Apron Fair,' was held in Middleton. It was merely an occasion for the young wives and mothers, with their children, and also for the young marriageable damsels, to walk out to display their finery and to get conducted by their husbands or their sweethearts, to the ale-house, where they generally finished by a dance, and their inamoratos by a battle or two....<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> John Nichols, The History and Antiquities of the County of Leicester (4 vols.; London, 1795-1811), II, part ii, 600.

<sup>2</sup> Quoted in the Derby Mercury, 21 April 1841.

<sup>3</sup> Leicester Journal, 27 April 1821 and 31 March 1826.

<sup>4</sup> Clarkson, Richmond, p. 294.

<sup>5</sup> Early Days, pp. 143-44.

Altogether in mid eighteenth century England and Wales there were 113 fairs during the week before and the week after Easter, 63 of them on Easter Monday and Tuesday.<sup>1</sup>

May Day was one of the principal holidays of the spring. On the first of May, wrote Henry Bourne,

... the juvenile Part of both Sexes, are wont to rise a little after Mid-night, and walk to some neighbouring Wood, accompany'd with Musick and the blowing of Horns; where they break down Branches from the Trees, and adorn them with Nose-gays and Crowns of Flowers. When this is done, they return with their Booty home-wards, about the rising of the Sun, and make their Doors and Windows to Triumph in the Flowery Spoil. The after-part of the Day, is chiefly spent in dancing round a Tall-Poll, which is called a May-Poll....<sup>2</sup>

When he was in Manchester on the 30th<sup>of</sup> April, 1667 Oliver Heywood had occasion to complain of the local festivities - "that night they have a foolish custom after twelve a clock to rise and ramble abroad, make garlands, strew flowers etc which they call Bringing in may I could sleep little that night by reason of the tumult, the day after being May the 1st" - and some years later he wrote with greater feeling of the celebrations in his own town of Halifax;

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<sup>1</sup> Owen, Fairs (1756), pp. 172-73.

<sup>2</sup> Bourne, Antiquitates Vulgares, pp. 200-01.

On May-day being Saturday 1680, a great number of persons of the poor and baser sort, begun early in the morning, (even while it was dark) to bring in May, they divided themselves into 3 companys, every company above 60, one about the Crosse, another about Starfold, another about Clark-brig, men women and big youths, they had all white wast-coats or sheets upon them, with huge great garlands, flowers, branches of trees, - they had 2 or 3 drums, pipers, fiddlers, some of them had white banners flying with red crosses, thus they went up and down the town to all houses receiving money, they broke windows at T.R. because there denied them: above 100 went in to Dr. Hooks house but /what/ they got I hear not, thus they kept rambling about most of the day, a lusty fellow got upon the staires by T.C. shop, with a huge great garland, banner, the rest fell a dancing about the place where the May Poll had been, many of them were drunk and mad towards night: there was never such work in Halifax above 50 years past, at which time Dr. Favour was Vicar, Mr. John Barlow lecturer, at that time rude people brought in a may-pole, but they strenuously opposed them in preaching, but hell is broke loose.<sup>1</sup>

In 1672 an apprentice from Woburn who had been charged with a theft was supported by the parishioners in advancing the defence that he,

...(with divers other youths of our said parish) had upon May day in the morninge last past stucke severall May bushes at the doores of divers people in our said Towne, and at the very instant (as is supposed) when the money was lost, were drinkinge and makinge merry at those houses where the May bushes were formerly stuck as aforesaid....<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> J. H. Turner, ed., The Rev. Oliver Heywood, B.A. 1630-1702; His Autobiography, Diaries, Anecdote and Event Books (4 vols.; Brighthouse and Bingley, 1881-85), I, 240, and II, 270-71.

<sup>2</sup> Bedfordshire, R.O., H.S.A. 1672 S50 (24 July 1672).

Similarly, William Hutchinson noticed how in Northumberland "the young people of both sexes go out early in the morning of the 1st of May, to gather the flowering thorns and the dew of the grass, which they bring home with music and acclamations" - dew was regarded as a cosmetic - "and having dressed a poll on the town-green with garlands, dance around it."<sup>1</sup> There was a "May-pole hill" near Horncastle in Lincolnshire, and according to William Stukeley, "the boys annually keep up the festival of the Floralia on May Day, making a procession to this hill with May gads (as they call them) in their hands", and "at night they have a bonfire and other merriment".<sup>2</sup> A cottager in Waterbeach, Cambridgeshire spoke of how in the late eighteenth century May Day "was our grandest holiday":

... preparatory to its celebration, the young women collected materials to form a garland; they consisted of ribbands, flowers, silver spoons, with a silver tankard to suspend in the centre; which, with the spoons, constituted the greater portion of the plate of our parish. Our young men, early in the morning, or rather late at night, went into the fields to collect the emblems of their esteem and disapproval and placed them by the doors of young women in the village/.... The young men then went for the garland,

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<sup>1</sup> Hutchinson, View of Northumberland, II, Appendix, p. 14.

<sup>2</sup> William Stukeley, Itinerarium Curiosum (London, 1724), p. 29. A "May gad" was "a white willow wand, the bark peel'd off, and/ty'd round with cowslips". (Ibid.)

and suspended it by a rope in the centre of the street between two opposite chimneys; this was always done before the rising of the sun; the morning was then ushered in by the ringing of the village bells. We then attended to our domestic concerns till the after part of the day; our sports then began; they consisted of dancing, playing at ball,<sup>1</sup> and every kind of sport we could devise....

While it is our impression that the majority of these May celebrations were held on the first of the month, it is clear that in some places they were customarily observed on the 29th ("Oak-Apple Day"), the anniversary of Charles II's entry into London in 1660. In these cases the May Day festivities had been transferred to the later date after the Restoration, complete with garlands, maypoles and traditional dancing, but it is difficult (if not impossible) to determine the extent of this shift.<sup>2</sup> On 29 May 1761 at Nuneham Courtenay, Oxfordshire James Newton wrote in his diary of "Oaken Boughs set at many Peoples' Doors", a practice which may have been derived from the popular May Day custom of the same character.<sup>3</sup> At Normanton, Derbyshire John Byng came across a maypole in 1789 which was, "as others of this county, richly adorn'd by garlands, composed of silk, gauze, and mock flowers; and around which (a woman told me) they danced in the Morris-way; but not in honor of the goddess Maia on the 1st of her month, but, rather

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<sup>1</sup> John Denson, A Peasant's Voice to Landowners, on the Best Means of Benefiting Agricultural Labourers, and of Reducing the Poor's Rates (Cambridge, 1830), pp. 17-18. The relevant section of this work, the chapter on "The Past and the Present State of the Village, and What It Might be Rendred", was originally published in the Labourer's Friend, May 1821. For further details on May customs, see Hone, Every-Day Book, I, 542ff., and II, 570ff.

<sup>2</sup> For some evidence on this change, see Wright, Calendar Customs, II, 254-70

<sup>3</sup> Bod.Lib., "Diary of Rev. James Newton", MS. Eng. misc. e. 251, f. 10.

in memory of the Restoration, upon the 29th of May."<sup>1</sup>

The Whitsuntide holidays were particularly widely observed. Whit Monday, said one observer, "is a universal festival in the humble ranks of life throughout the kingdom."<sup>2</sup> In previous generations the Whitsun period had been one of the usual times for parish "ales", and though the religious significance of such ales had largely evaporated by the eighteenth century, their secular spirit lived on, sometimes under the traditional name. In a deposition from Oxfordshire in 1763 one informant "saith that on Wednesday in Whitsun week last, there being a Whitsun ale at Haly, ... he went to sell cakes to the company then assembled there"; another deponent referred to the gathering as "a Whitsun Sport".<sup>3</sup> A Whitsun ale was held at Towcester in 1766,<sup>4</sup> and a festivity in the Cotswolds which was known by the same name was said in 1779 to be attended "by great numbers of young people of both sexes".<sup>5</sup> In May 1743 at

<sup>1</sup> Torrington Diaries, II, 29.

<sup>2</sup> Hone, Every-Day Book, II, 666.

<sup>3</sup> Oxfordshire R.O., Quarter Sessions Rolls, Trinity 1763 (Depositions)

<sup>4</sup> Northampton Mercury, 12 May 1766.

<sup>5</sup> Samuel Rudder, A New History of Gloucestershire (Cirencester, 1779), pp. 23-24.

Shalstone, Buckinghamshire the squire of the parish gave 2s.6d. to "the Whitsun-ale folks".<sup>1</sup> The language of "ales", though, was becoming increasingly anachronistic - but the social realities of the Whitsun holiday persisted with vigour. Parson Woodforde's diary includes frequent references to the Whitsun recreations in Weston: "This being Whit Monday", he wrote on 5 June 1786, "there was running for a Shift, plowing etc. etc. this Afternoon at the Heart"; and on 12 May 1788, "Merry doings at the Heart to day being Whit Monday, plowing for a Pair of Breeches, running for a Shift, Raffling for a Gown etc."<sup>2</sup> During the Whitsun week of 1758 at Shepperton, Surrey there was a punting match, cudgelling, wrestling, and a smock race for women;<sup>3</sup> and at Hornsea in the East Riding during the early nineteenth century the week was noted for feasting and dancing.<sup>4</sup> On Whit Monday 1766 at Bletchley William Cole recorded that the "Woburn Abbey Morrice Dancers" visited the parish and that "Tom went to the Alehouse with the young People of the Parish"; the next year Tom and another man "went to a Wrestling

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted in G. Eland, ed., Purefoy Letters 1735-1753 (London, 1931), p. xxv.

<sup>2</sup> Diary of a Country Parson, II, 248, and III, 24. Other references to Whitsun sports may be found in II, 137 and 188; III, 276; and V, 316.

<sup>3</sup> A clipping of May 1758 from an unidentified newspaper in a B.M. copy (shelf mark: 142.e.1,2) of John Brand, Observations on Popular Antiquities, revised by Henry Ellis (2 vols.; London, 1813), II, facing p.226.

<sup>4</sup> E. W. Bedell, An Account of Hornsea, in Holderness, in the East-Riding of Yorkshire (Hull, 1848), p. 89. On Whit Tuesday 1711 at Little Crosby, Lancashire Nicholas Blundell wrote that "the Miller played on his Fiddle to the Young People on the Green." (Diurnal of Nicholas Blundell, I, 290.)



Match at Thornborough" on the Monday and on the Tuesday the Woburn dancers again performed.<sup>1</sup> Whitsuntide in fact was one of the principal times of the year for ceremonial dancing. A group of morris dancers were noticed by Nicholas Blundell at Hatherop, Gloucestershire in 1703 and by John Byng at Wallingford, Berkshire in 1781, on both occasions during Whitsun week.<sup>2</sup> Henry Purefoy of Shalstone made donations to the Whitsun morris dancers in 1735 and 1742,<sup>3</sup> and an anonymous account book from Warwickshire records payments to the holiday dancers in 1775 and 1776.<sup>4</sup> At Kidlington in Oxfordshire morris dancing was involved with both a peculiar local custom and the common kind of merry-making which must have been familiar in many other villages:

... on Monday after Whitson week, there is a fat live Lamb provided, and the Maids of the Town, having their thumbs ty'd behind them run after it, and she that with her mouth takes and holds the Lamb, is declared Lady of the Lamb, which being dress'd with the skin hanging on, is carried on a long Pole before the Lady and her Companions to the Green, attended with Musick and a Morisco Dance of Men, and another of Women, where the rest of the day is spent in dancing, mirth and merry glee. The next day

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<sup>1</sup> Diary of William Cole, pp. 51, 222, and 223.

<sup>2</sup> Great Diurnal of Nicholas Blundell, I, 35, and II, xiv; and Torrington Diaries, I, 5.

<sup>3</sup> Purefoy Letters, p. xxv.

<sup>4</sup> Warwickshire R.O., CR 125B/4 (for 5 June 1775 and 2 June 1776).

the Lamb is part bak'd, boyld and rost, for the Ladies feast, where she sits majestically at the upper end of the Table and her Companions with her, with musick and other attendants, which ends the solemnity.<sup>1</sup>

Around Whitsuntide, as at Easter, there was a large number of fairs. William Owen listed a total of 314 English and Welsh fairs which fell during the fortnight before and the fortnight after Whit Sunday, 79 of them on Ascension Day and 113 on Whit Monday and Tuesday.<sup>2</sup> In Essex alone there were 10 Whitsun pleasure fairs and another 2 just after Trinity Sunday. An unofficial fair was held on Trinity Monday at Naseby, Northamptonshire - it was known as "Rothwell-fair Monday" - "the inhabitants inviting their friends, and making merry; the young people assemble, and spend the afternoon and evening, with ringing of bells, dancing, etc."<sup>3</sup> At Leicester during the 1830s Whitsun week was still regarded as "a general holiday" by the common people, and here as in many other towns it had become the main time of festivity for the large numbers of clubs and friendly societies which had grown up since the later eighteenth century.<sup>4</sup> This, for example, was clearly the case in

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas Blount, Fragmenta Antiquitatis (London, 1679), p. 149. In a survey of the distribution of the ceremonial dance in Britain, published by the English Folk Dance and Song Society, I have counted 60 references to folk dances in England dating from the period 1700-1825, 10 of which were around Whitsun and 4 at unspecified times in May (19 of the 60 references could not be seasonally dated). (E.C. Cawte, et. al., A Geographical Index of the Ceremonial Dance in Great Britain, Journal reprint No. 10; reprinted from the Journal of the English folk Dance and Song Society, December 1960).

<sup>2</sup> Owens, Fairs (1756), pp. 173-76.

<sup>3</sup> John Mastin, The History and Antiquities of Naseby (Cambridge, 1792) pp. 77-78.

<sup>4</sup> Leicester Journal, 27 May 1831; and Howitt, Rural Life, pp. 444-50.

the counties of Derby, Norfolk, and Northampton, as well as in many parts of the West Country.<sup>1</sup> And in James Woodforde's rural parish the "Weston Purse-Club" was making its annual perambulation on Whit Tuesday around the turn of the century.<sup>2</sup>

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The rhythms of the year's calendar, then, provided the fundamental framework for recreational life. One of the stanzas of a ballad known as "The Mayer's Song" spoke of how

Life with us is in its spring,  
We enjoy a blooming May,  
Summer will its labour bring,  
Winter has its pinching day.<sup>3</sup>

Most of the principal ceremonies and festivities flowed from the annual cycle of agricultural pursuits - the flux of intense labour and partial relaxation - and they were further moulded by the customs of ecclesiastical practice. Festive occasions were among the most important of those events which punctuated the year's succession of economic activities, complementing (and sometimes reinforcing) the periodic rhythms of "natural" processes. In so doing they helped to give coherence, as E. R. Leach has suggested, to the temporal structure of the year's passage. It seems, in other words, that

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<sup>1</sup> Derby Mercury, 10 June 1840, 5 June 1844, and 10 June 1846; Hone Every-Day Book, II, cols. 669-70; Baker, Northamptonshire Words, II 435; and Fuller, West Country Friendly Societies, p. 89.

<sup>2</sup> Diary of a Country Parson, V, 119, 316, and 393.

<sup>3</sup> Hone, Every-Day Book, II, 571.

one of the basic functions "which the holding of festivals may fulfil ... is the ordering of time. The interval between two successive festivals of the same type is a 'period', usually a named period, e.g. 'week', 'year'. Without the festivals, such periods would not exist, and all order would go out of social life."<sup>1</sup> Holidays then not only provided psychological counterweights to the burdens of sustained labour - liberties for personal indulgence, excitement and spectacle, temporary distractions from care - they were also critical social suspensions which helped to create a patterned conception of time.

There were further dimensions to the temporal structure of recreational life which should be briefly noticed. The rhythms of the year were paralleled on a more modest level by the rhythms of the week: Sunday was a day of rest and often, despite official taboos, of diversion as well; and the weekly respite from work was commonly extended to "Saint Monday", a popular observance which was much deplored by men of property.<sup>2</sup> Everyday leisure was relatively subdued and tended to be centred on small, intimate gatherings - the family, visits to kin folk, friends assembling in the village pub, young men playing games on the green. On some winter evenings there

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<sup>1</sup> E. R. Leach, Rethinking Anthropology (London, 1961), pp. 135-35.

<sup>2</sup> See below, pp. 300-01.

would have been singing and story-telling in the household; in the spring and summer outdoor diversions - quoits, ball play, perhaps dancing - were practised after the day's work. There might have been occasional visits from some itinerant entertainment - a puppet-show, an exhibit of some living curiosity, a travelling musician (at Weston on 2 June 1794 Parson Woodforde reported a "Mountebank at Ringland this Afternoon, Ben and the Boy had leave to go and see him")<sup>1</sup> - and from time to time in country towns a troupe of strolling players appeared to act some of its repertoire in a makeshift theatre, a barn or an inn or a temporary booth.<sup>2</sup> Sometimes work and recreation were so blended together that they were temporarily indistinct: weavers sung at their looms and women gossiped over their sewing; among some groups of workers one of their members was appointed to read aloud as the others worked;<sup>3</sup> a trip to the market combined business with pleasure; exchanging news and courtesies with a craftsman or dealer introduced sociability into an economic encounter. And finally, it should be noticed that some festivities were associated with the three major events of an

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<sup>1</sup> Diary of a Country Parson, IV, 113.

<sup>2</sup> Sybil Rosenfeld, Strolling Players and Drama in the Provinces 1660-1765 (Cambridge, 1939), chap. 1.

<sup>3</sup> M. J. Quinlan, Victorian Prelude: A History of English Manners 1700-1830 (New York, 1941; repr. 1965), p. 244.

individual's life cycle - birth, marriage, and death. Christenings were sometimes attended with small festive gatherings, and marriage feasts must have been common - it was said of running at the quintaine, a sport which survived in Blackthorn, Oxfordshire, that "there is seldom any public wedding without this diversion on the common green, with much solemnity and mirth"<sup>1</sup> - and at funerals the sense of loss was considerably offset, it seems, by the abundance of drinking and eating which often marked their celebration.

## (2) Sports and Pastimes

It remains now to consider in greater detail the character of some of the specific sports and pastimes of the common people. A catalogue of the distinctive diversions would be lengthy and varied. In 1669 Edward Chamberlayne claimed that "the Citizens and Peasants have Hand-Ball, Foot-Ball, Skittles, or Nine Pins, Shovel-board, Stow Ball, Goffe [i.e., golf], Trol Madam, Cudgels, Bear-baiting, Bull-baiting, Bow and Arrow, Throwing at Cocks, Shuttle-cock, Bowling, Quoits, Leaping, Wrestling, Pitching the Barre, and Ringing of Bells";<sup>2</sup> and in 1720 John Strype wrote of how in London "the more

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<sup>1</sup> Kennet, Parochial Antiquities, pp. 18-19 and 22.

<sup>2</sup> Edward Chamberlayne, Angliae Notitia, or the Present State of England (London, 1669), p. 46.

common sort divert themselves at Foot ball, Wrestling, Cudgels, Ninepins, Shovel-board, Cricket, Stow-ball, Ringing of Bells, Quoits, pitching the Bar, Bull and Bear baiting, throwing at Cocks, and lying at Alehouses."<sup>1</sup> Other pastimes certainly could have been added to the list. Some of these diversions are frequently documented; others were seldom mentioned, perhaps because they were mostly among the low-keyed, loosely structured pleasures of everyday life; others still were confined to particular localities. At any rate, our intention is not to attempt a comprehensive survey of popular recreations, but rather to describe only the most important of those diversions which usually gave rise to sizeable public gatherings and/or were particularly associated with one or more of the principal calendar holidays.

(a) Animal Sports

Bull-baiting was one of the most prominent animal sports during the eighteenth century. It was a common attraction at many wakes,

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<sup>1</sup> John Strype, ed., A Survey of the Cities of London and Westminster: by John Stow (London, 1720), Book I, p. 257. In Cumberland it was said that "the diversions of the young men are of the athletic kind, such as running, leaping, foot-ball, trippet, hunting, and horse-racing. The savage sport of cock-fighting has also taken deep root in this county, and draws together a large collection of rude gamblers once a year, at every village alehouse; and that about the beginning and end of Lent. Girls often play at hand-ball; dancing is a common amusement of both sexes; as well as an occasional game at cards." (Housman, Description of Cumberland, pp. 77-78.)

and in some parts of the country it was closely associated with one of the other principal local holidays - with a Whitsun fair, or the 5th of November, or the festivities at a municipal election. In some places it may even have been a relatively routine recreation. The common people of early eighteenth century Chichester, for example, were said by one resident to have been "much given to mean diversions such as bull-baiting, which was very frequent, and for which many bulldogs were kept in the town to the great torture and misery of those poor animals."<sup>1</sup> The most detailed and probably most accurate description of a bull-bait was provided by the French tourist, Henri Misson, at the end of the seventeenth century:

They tie a Rope to the Root of the Horns of the Ox or Bull, and fasten the other End of the Cord to an Iron Ring fix'd to a Stake driven into the Ground; so that this Cord, being about 15 Foot long, the Bull is confin'd to a Sphere of about 30 Foot Diameter. Several Butchers, or other Gentlemen, that are desirous to exercise their Dogs, stand round about, each holding his own by the Ears; and when the Sport begins, they let loose one of the Dogs: The Dog runs at the Bull; the Bull, immoveable, looks down upon the Dog with an Eye of Scorn, and only turns a Horn to him to hinder him from coming near: The Dog is not daunted at this, he runs round him, and tries to get beneath his Belly, in order to seize him by the Muzzle, or the Dewlap, or the pendant Glands.... The Bull then puts himself into a Posture of Defence; he beats

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<sup>1</sup> Francis W. Steer, ed., The Memoirs of James Spershott (Chichester Papers, No. 30, 1962), p. 14. Spershott, a joiner and Baptist preacher, was born in 1710 and died in 1789; the memoirs appear to have been written towards the end of his life.



the Ground with his Feet, which he joins together as close as possible, and his chief Aim is not to gore the Dog with the Point of his Horn, but to slide one of them under the Dog's Belly, (who creeps close to the Ground to hinder it) and to throw him so high in the Air that he may break his neck in the Fall. This often happens: When the Dog thinks he is sure of fixing his Teeth, a Turn of the Horn, which seems to be done with all the Negligence in the World, gives him a Sprawl thirty Foot high, and puts him in Danger of a damnable Squelch when he comes down. This Danger would be unavoidable, if the Dog's Friends were not ready beneath him, some with their backs to give him a soft Reception, and others with long Poles, which they offer him slant-ways, to the Intent that, sliding down them, it may break the Force of his Fall. Notwithstanding all this Care, a Toss generally makes him sing to a very scurvy Tune, and draw his Phiz into a pitiful Grimace: But unless he is totally stunn'd with the Fall, he is sure to crawl again towards the Bull, with his old Antipathy, come on't what will. Sometimes a second Frisk into the Air disables him for ever from playing his old Tricks: But sometimes too he fastens upon his Enemy, and when once he has seiz'd him with his Eye-teeth, he sticks to him like a Leech, and would sooner die than leave his Hold. Then the Bull bellows, and bounds, and kicks about to shake off the Dog; by his Leaping the Dog seems to be no Manner of Weight to him, tho' in all Appearance he puts him to great Pain. In the End, either the Dog tears out the Piece he has laid Hold on, and falls, or else remains fix'd to him, with an Obstinacy that would never end, if they did not pull him off. To call him away would be in vain; to give him a hundred Blows would be as much so; you might cut him to Pieces Joint by Joint before he would let him loose. What is to be done then? While some hold the Bull, others thrust Staves into the Dog's Mouth,

and open it by main Force. This is the only  
Way to part them.<sup>1</sup>

Some of the more ritualised bull-baits were preceded by a procession through the streets of town, with the bull decked out with ribbons or garlands. They usually took place in a publican's yard or an accessible open field or a market place - in 1794 the chamberlain's accounts at Leominster, Herefordshire, included a payment of 1s.6d. on the day after November 5th "to a labourer for cleansing the Corn Market after Bull-baiting"<sup>2</sup> - and some towns even had an iron ring permanently fixed in the ground to which the bull's rope could be fastened (Harewood, Darlington, and Hornsea are three cases in point).<sup>3</sup> And of course there is the place-name "bull ring", a modern relic of a former bull-baiting site.

The two other animals which were used for baiting, though less commonly than bulls, were bears and badgers. In 1782 Syllas Neville recorded that he "went incognito to a Bear baiting at Islington and

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<sup>1</sup> Misson, Memoirs and Observations, pp. 24-27. Briefer accounts of bull-baiting may be found in Balthasar de Monconys, Journal des Voyages (2 vols.; Lyon, 1665-66), II, 72; W. H. Quarrell and Margaret Mare, eds. and trans., London in 1710, From the Travels of Zacharias Conrad von Uffenbach (London, 1934), p. 59; and Henry Alken, The National Sports of Great Britain (London, 1821), caption for plate II on "Bull-Baiting". On 14 August 1666 Samuel Pepys wrote of going "with my wife and Mercer to the Beare-garden, where I have not been, I think, of many years, and saw some good sport of the bull's tossing of the dogs: one into the very boxes. But it is a very rude and nasty pleasure." (Henry B. Wheatley, ed., The Diary of Samuel Pepys [8 vols.; London, 1904-05], V, 374-75.)

<sup>2</sup> Quoted in George F. Townsend, The Town and Borough of Leominster (Leominster, nd.), p. 196.

<sup>3</sup> John Jones, The History and Antiquities of Harewood, in the County of York (London, 1859), p. 168; W. H. D. Longstaffe, The History and Antiquities of the Parish of Darlington (Darlington and London, 1854), p. 295; and Bedell, Hornsea, p. 88.

had the nonour of mixing with highwaymen, footpads and thieves of all denominations. The poor animal was only a cub and, as Terriers only were permitted to attack him, he was not much hurt."<sup>1</sup> Bear-baiting seems to have differed from bull-baiting only in the fact that different techniques were available to the bear for self-defence. "As soon as the dogs had at him," noted a German tourist, the bear "stood up on his hind legs and gave some terrific buffets; but if one of them got at his skin, he rolled about in such a fashion that the dogs thought themselves lucky if they came out safe from beneath him."<sup>2</sup> The comparative rarity of bear-baiting probably resulted from the scarcity of bears. Badgers, however, were in much more ample supply and were more frequently employed. "The gist of the match," according to one of Regency sportsmen's literati, "and object of the betting are, the number of times the dog will draw the badger from his box, within a given space of time .... It is almost incredible, considering the strength and powers of offence, with the sharp teeth of the Badger, how often he will be drawn within the usual time, by a well-bred and thoroughly-trained dog."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Diary of Syllas Neville, p. 299.

<sup>2</sup> Travels of von Uffenbach, p. 59.

<sup>3</sup> Alken, National Sports, caption for the plate "A Match at the Badger". -

The point of the exercise, it appears, was to test the dog's mettle by enticing him to the small and dark opening which led to the strong-toothed badger.<sup>1</sup>

Bull-running was a highly localised diversion. In fact, as a prominent spectacle it seems to have been exclusive to two towns, Tutbury in Staffordshire and Stamford in Lincolnshire, and the attention paid to it here - or at least to the Stamford case - is explained by the frequent reference which will be made to it below, when the controversies over the traditional blood sports are examined.<sup>2</sup> The bull-running in Stamford, held on the 13th of November (except for Sundays and market days), was a major festive occasion for the town and its surrounding countryside which attracted each year hundreds of spectators and participants. It was essentially a free-for-all bull-fight without weapons - or at best with

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<sup>1</sup> The badger, according to one critic, "is put into a hole or box in which he has scarcely room to turn; a well-bred terrier is then loosened upon him, and the surroundings miscreants begin to bet how often he will draw the badger out in a certain time. The dog rushes into the box, and endeavours to seize the badger, who eludes him with astonishing quickness, or, in his turn, lays hold of his assailant." (William Youatt, The Obligation and Extent of Humanity to Brutes [London, 1839], p. 173.)

<sup>2</sup> The evidence available on the Tutbury bull-running is slight, partly because it was suppressed at a relatively early date, in 1778. It was held annually on the 16th or 23rd of August, and by the eighteenth century it seems to have occasioned a general carnival for the nearby parishes in Staffordshire and Derbyshire. Details are provided in Robert Plot, The Natural History of Staffordshire (Oxford, 1686), pp. 436-40; Stebbing Shaw, The History and Antiquities of Staffordshire (2 vols.; London, 1798-1801), I, part ii, 52-55; and Sir Oswald Mosley, History of the Castle, Priory, and Town of Tutbury, in the County of Stafford (London, 1832), pp. 88-90.

only sticks and heavy staffs - much, it seems, like the bull-runnings recently or still found in parts of France and Spain, and distinguished too by a similar kind of carnival atmosphere. On the morning of the 13th the entrances to the main streets were barricaded and shops were shut up, and at eleven o'clock, with the bells of St. Mary's tolling his arrival, a bull was released from a stable to the swarms of onlookers and participants (called "bullards") who packed the street. The excitement was provided by the ensuing confusion and by displays of spark and mettle in tormenting the bull - for instance, by throwing irritants at him or by baiting him with a red effity and then manoeuvring out of his way. Smacking the bull with a stick or getting tossed without being gored were well regarded parts in the ritual. A talented bullard might pack himself in an open-ended hogshead and roll it at the bull: the objective here was to provoke him to toss the barrel and at the same time to avoid getting dislodged or mauled. "If he be tame," wrote a hostile observer in 1819, "he is soon surrounded by the canaille, and loaded, as the bulliards express it; that is, some have hold of his horns, and others his ears, some are beating his sides with bludgeons, and others are hanging at his tail."<sup>1</sup> A man in trouble would be aided by diversionary antics from his friends. Sometimes

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<sup>1</sup> From an article in the Fireside Magazine; or Monthly Entertainer (Stamford), February 1819, pp. 46-47.

the bull was stormed by groups and often he was simply chased through the streets. Much of the enjoyment appears to have been in the carefree abandon, chaos, and mild danger of the proceedings.

After an intermission for lunch the bull was again let loose, but this time he was driven toward the main bridge spanning the Welland River. The bullards surrounded him on the bridge and united to life him over the parapet and into the water (this was known as "brigging" the bull). He would shortly make his way to the adjacent meadow where a few dogs might be set upon him (though he was not tied down) and where bullards would give chase for a while around the muddy lowland. In late afternoon he was escorted back to town, frustrated and fatigued no doubt, but not usually mutilated. He was immediately slaughtered and sometimes the meat was sold cheaply to the poor or served up in the public houses. The odd bull which had refused to be "brigged" was spared his life.<sup>1</sup>

"Battering with missive Weapons a Cock tied to a Stake," wrote a contributor to the Gentleman's Magazine in 1737, "is an annual Diversion that for Time immemorial has prevailed in this Island", and, he added, continues to be "generally practised amongst us".<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> This account is based largely on material from the local press, especially the Stamford Mercury, during the period 1785-1840.

<sup>2</sup> Gentleman's Magazine, VII, 1737, p. 6.

Throwing at cocks was almost exclusively a Shrovetide recreation, though it is possible that it might have been seen now and again at a wake or fair. On Shrove Tuesday 1708 Nicholas Blundell of Little Crosby, Lancashire recorded in his diary that "My Wife and I saw them throw at the Cock in the Townfield", and the next year at the same time he complained that "My Tenant Thomas Warton should have come here for dinner<sup>7</sup> ... but he was so busy shooting at the Cock he could not come, but after dinner he came and eat some Pancakes etc: with us."<sup>1</sup> At Lamport, Northamptonshire Thomas Isham noted that "this is the usual day for cock killing" and "a great slaughter of cocks at our place" on the Shrove Tuesdays of 1672 and 1673;<sup>2</sup> and at Shrovetide in 1722 a newspaper spoke of how "several People got together in St. George's Field to throw at Cocks according to the ancient and barbarous Custom at this Season of the Year".<sup>3</sup> At York on Shrove Tuesday 1673 "the prentices of the city being at liberty for recreation, plaid in the minister-yard, throwing at a cock".<sup>4</sup>

The method of the amusement, which was a precursor of many modern fairground entertainments, was singularly simple: a cock was tied to a stake by a cord and the competitors, standing some

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<sup>1</sup> Diurnal of Nicholas Blundell, I, 163 and 204. On Shrove Tuesday 1710 Blundell noticed what seems to have been a variation on the usual pastime: "The Boys of this Town flung at a Mallard in a Tub of Water." (I, 246).

<sup>2</sup> Journal of Thomas Isham, pp. 27 and 85.

<sup>3</sup> From an unidentified newspaper clipping in a B.M. copy (142.e.1,2) of Brand, Popular Antiquities (1813), I, following p. 62.

<sup>4</sup> Oliver Heywood, I, 345.

twenty yards away, tried to knock it down by throwing some kind of missile, normally a cudgel or a broom-stick. In most instances the sport was run as a free enterprise with the owner of the cock charging around twopence for three throws. If a thrower could knock the cock down and run and secure the bird before it regained its feet, the cock was his, and sometimes he would then set himself up as the promoter. A well trained cock was a difficult target and could earn good money for its owner.<sup>1</sup> Writing in the early 1780s, James Spershott of Chichester described how, during the second quarter of the century,

... on Shrove Tuesday the most unmanly and cruel exercise of 'cock scailing' was in vogue everywhere, even in the High Church 'lighten' and many other places in the city and in the country. Scarcely a churchyard was to be found but a number of those poor innocent birds were thus barbarously treated. Tying them by the leg with a string about 4 or 5 feet long fastened to the ground, and, when he is made to stand fair, a great ignorant merciless fellow, at a distance agreed upon and at two pence three throws, flings a 'scail' at him till he is quite dead. And thus their legs are broken and their bodies bruised in a shocking manner.... And wonderful it was that men of character and circumstance should come to this fine sight and readily give their children a cock for this purpose.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> There are brief descriptions of cock-throwing in Brand, Popular Antiquities (1813), I, 67 and 68n-69n; J. W. Walker, Wakefield, Its History and People (2 vols.; Wakefield, 2nd edn., 1939), I, 115; Robert Gibbs, A History of Aylesbury (Aylesbury, 1885), p. 554; and Records of the Borough of Nottingham (9 vols.; Nottingham, 1882-1956), IV, 253.

<sup>2</sup> Memoirs of James Spershott, p. 14.



A Swiss visitor, César de Saussure, complained in 1728: "it is even dangerous ... to go near any of those places where this diversion is being held; so many clubs are thrown about that you run a risk of receiving one on your head."<sup>1</sup> A variation on the sport, described by Joseph Strutt, was

... to put the cock into an earthen vessel made for the purpose, and to place him in such a position that his head and tail might be exposed to view; the vessel, with the bird in it, was then suspended across the street, about 12 or 14 feet from the ground, to be thrown at by such as chose to make trial of their skill; twopence was paid for four throws, and he who broke the pot, and delivered the cock from his confinement, had him for a reward.<sup>2</sup>

Cock-fighting is probably the best known of the traditional blood sports. The literature of the eighteenth century includes an abundance of references and descriptions - the newspapers, for instance, are full of advertisements for cock-fights - but most of the sources attend exclusively to matches among the gentry (almost all the notices are of the "Gentlemen of Suffolk versus the Gentlemen of Norfolk" variety). However, while most of the publicised matches were organised for gentlemen by gentlemen - the only

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<sup>1</sup> Madame van Muyden, ed., A Foreign View of England in the Reigns of George I and George II: The Letters of Monsieur César de Saussure to his Family (London, 1902), p. 294. Just such an incident was reported in the Newcastle Courant of 15 March 1783. "Leeds, March 11. Tuesday se'nnight being Shrove-tide, as a person was amusing himself, along with several others, with the barbarous custom of throwing at a Cock, at Howden Clough, near Birstal, the stick pitched upon the head of Jonathan Speight, a youth about thirteen years of age, and killed him on the spot." (Quoted in Brand, Popular Antiquities [1813], I, 68n-69n.)

<sup>2</sup> Strutt, Sports and Pastimes, pp. 212-13.

exception we can point to is a main in 1754 between the colliers of Oldham and the weavers of Manchester<sup>1</sup> - it is clear that the common people were by no means uninvolved in the sport. It was in fact one of the principal diversions which cut sharply across class lines. Hogarth's famous engraving emphasized the mingling of ranks and Oliver Heywood attested to the same phenomenon in an equally hostile depiction of the sport which he confided to his diary:

Upon Monday May 31, 1680, there was to begin a great cocking at Halifax, the place was on the back side of the Crosse, at Halifax, the inne is kept by widow Mitchel where a cocking house is built that cost 32 li, many gentlemen came to it upon the munday, that day was spent in appointing judges to sit and match the cocks which they did with great authority, on the tuesday the poorer sort of Halifax brought their cocks which were to fight first, but Mr. Tho. Thornhil said what had beggars to doe to fight their cocks among gentlemen upon which Tho. Cockrofts son tript up his heels, so they fell to blows, and they took sides and all fought desperately a long while, Ab. Mitchel taking the poor mens part: at last Jo. Mitchel drew his rapier and swore he would run him through that struck another stroke, so they were quieted - then they fell to cocking, and the Halifax cocks generally beat the gentlemen, then on the wednesday, thursday, friday the gentlemen cocks fought, abundance of mney was lost and won, - they drunk all night and were so high in swearing, ranting at the Crosse that they were heard far in the town.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Alfred P. Wadsworth and Julia de Lacy Mann, The Cotton Trade and Industrial Lancashire 1600-1780 (Manchester, 1931), p. 391n, quoting the Manchester Mercury of 19 February 1754.

<sup>2</sup> Oliver Heywood, II, 271-72.

At the very least the common people would have participated in many matches as spectators and betters, and there must as well have been some exclusively popular mains, arranged informally at a public house or in some vacant yard.<sup>1</sup>

Most of the more substantial cock-fights were held in an inn which was specially fitted up for the sport or at an actual cockpit. The cockpit resembled a small amphitheatre: it had a round platform in the centre and was surrounded by tiered benches for the gamesters. Before a battle the cocks were matched by weight and their beaks were filed down and their wings and tails clipped. The German tourist von Uffenbach recorded the manner in which the fight proceeded:

When it is time to start, the persons appointed to do so bring in the cocks hidden in two sacks, and then everyone begins to shout and wager before the birds are on view. The people, gentle and simple (they sit with no distinction of place) act like madmen, and go on raising the odds to twenty guineas and more. As soon as one of the bidders calls 'done' ..., the other is pledged to keep his bargain. Then the cocks are taken out of the sacks and fitted with silver spurs.... As soon as the cocks appear, the shouting grows even louder and the betting is continued. When they

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<sup>1</sup> De Saussure distinguished between an unnamed cockpit where "the spectators are ordinarily composed of common people, and the noise is terrible, and it is impossible to hear yourself speak unless you shout", and the Whitehall Cockpit where "the spectators are mostly persons of a certain rank, and the noise is much less". (Letters of De Saussure, p. 281.) Syllas Neville described the spectators at a cock-fight which he saw on 30 January 1767 as "poulterers, butchers, and other low fellows". (Diary of Syllas Neville, pp. 2-3.) Attention might also be drawn to the various popular ballads on cock-fighting: for example, "The Cock-fight", in A. L. Lloyd, Come all ye Bold Miners: Ballads and Songs of the Coalfields (London, 1952), pp. 36-37; and the "Wednesbury Cocking", one version of which is in the Staffordshire R.O., D 722/2.

are released, some attack, while others run away ... and some are impelled by terror to jump down from the table among the people; they are then, however, driven back on to the table with great yells (in particular by those who have put their money on the lively cocks which chase the others) and are thrust at each other until they get angry. Then it is amazing to see how they peck at each other, and especially how they hack with their spurs. Their combs bleed terribly and they often slip each other's crop and abdomen with the spurs. There is nothing more diverting than when one seems quite exhausted and there are great shouts of triumph and monstrous wagers; and then the cock that appeared to be quite done for suddenly recovers and masters the other. When one of the two is dead, the conqueror invariably begins to crow and to jump on the other.... Sometimes, when both are exhausted and neither will attack the other again, they are removed and others take their place; in this case the wagers are cancelled. But if one of them wins, those who put their money on the losing cock have to pay up immediately, so that an hostler in his apron often wins several guineas from a Lord. If a man has made a bet and is unable to pay, for a punishment he is made to sit in a basket fastened to the ceiling, and is drawn up in it amidst peals of laughter.<sup>1</sup>

Although individual pairings tended to be the norm, the most spectacular (and notorious) type of fight was the Welch main, a match-play arrangement involving a large number of cocks (commonly

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<sup>1</sup> Travels of von Uffenbach, pp. 48-49; cf. Count Frederick Kellmansegg, Diary of a Journey to England in the Years 1761-1762, transl. Countess Kielmansegg (London, 1902), pp. 241-42. The cockpit at Alnwick was owned by the town corporation. (George Tate, The History of the Borough, Castle, and Barony of Alnwick [2 vols.; Alnwick, 1866-69], I, 434.) In 1715 at Woodstock, Oxfordshire a man was given leave to build a cockpit on a piece of the town's land on the condition that "the Common Councilmen of the said Borough shall have the liberty of going into the pit at any cock-matches to be fought there without paying anything for the same". (Quoted in Adolphus Ballard, Chronicles of the Royal Borough of Woodstock [Oxford, 1896], p. 111.)

32), out of which only one was able to survive.

There were a number of other animal sports as well. Dog-fighting was mentioned from time to time; and field sports, though more difficult to assess, were certainly not entirely unknown to the common people. They were of course predominantly a part of a gentleman's culture and by law they were reserved for his enjoyment; but menservants sometimes went coursing with their masters or hunted with their approval - the diaries of Cole, Blundell and Woodforde testify to this - and on the other side of the law, a good many casual poachers must have hunted for pleasure as well as for gain. It was said that in Cheshire and Lancashire hunting the fourmart "is a common diversion amongst the lower sort of people, who have a peculiar breed of dogs for this purpose.... This diversion is always followed in the night-time; and those who are once initiated are said to be extremely fond of the sport."<sup>1</sup> But probably the most significant of the yet unmentioned animal sports was another of the gentry's favorite diversions - horse racing. Although its organisation was largely under the control of the governing class, the followers of the sport were drawn from all social levels. Indeed, the crowds which attended some of the major meetings could hardly have been so substantial without a considerable intrusion of plebeian spectators. Parson Woodforde's servants were in the habit

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<sup>1</sup> Gentleman's Magazine, LIV, 1784, p. 836.

of going to the Lenewade Races, and in 1795 one of the diarist's entries referred to the Bruton Races which "a vast Concourse of People attended, both gentle and simple."<sup>1</sup> Oliver Heywood mentioned on several occasions the large crowds which were present at local races, and in one instance he complained of how "One race begets another, that at Rastrick ... begot one at Halifax, September 25, 1678; it was given out that many races would be run, to gather the countrey to drink their ale, for it was hoped it would be as profitable to the town as a fair, ... and the countrey came in freely".<sup>2</sup> The common spectators at some of the races around London were disapprovingly acknowledged: they were, complained the Craftsman in 1738, "frequented chiefly by Apprentices, Servants, and the lowest sort of Tradesmen".<sup>3</sup> And in August 1749, when "there was no Horse-

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<sup>1</sup> Diary of a Country Parson, V, 208, 267, and 327; and IV, 230.

<sup>2</sup> Oliver Heywood, II, 246. The possible rationale of such promotions, and the tensions which they could generate, were revealed in a notice of 1736. "Whereas it has been reported, that the Alehouse Keepers of Melksham, have an Intention to have a petty Horse-Race in Melksham-Common, contrary to the Approbation of the principal People that have Right of Feeding in the Common of Melksham: And whereas the said Common is a stinted Common, and that the Proprietors are apprehensive that these Diversions will be prejudicial to the Feed and Cattle: This therefore is to give Notice, that whoever brings Horses to run, or erects Booths in the Common of Melksham aforesaid, will be prosecuted as the Law directs." (Gloucester Journal, 1 June 1736.)

<sup>3</sup> Craftsman, 26 August 1738, reprinted in the London Magazine, VII, 1738, p. 447.

Races in Tothill-Fields, Westminster, ... as was expected," the common people became "so enraged..., that they pulled down the Starting-post, Booths, Benches, etc. and made a large Bonfire with them in the Middle of the said Fields."<sup>1</sup> Even if there had have been a concern to keep the populace away from race meetings, in most cases it would have been quite impracticable to attempt to exclude them from the open spaces which served as the courses - the commons, waste lands, pastures and meadows.<sup>2</sup>

(b) Other Diversions, Mostly Athletic

Football play in the twentieth century takes three basic forms: soccer, rugby football, and American football. The rules and organisation of each game are now so elaborately systematised' that the sport has become a strongly institutionalised feature of modern life, nationally and even internationally. In earlier times, however, when poor communications imposed firmer limits on the extent to which popular behaviour could be homogenized, and regional peculiarities exercised a larger influence on the recreational practices of

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<sup>1</sup> Reprinted from a London paper in the Ipswich Journal, 26 August 1749.

<sup>2</sup> One writer pointed out that "the course has from very early times, been the proper theatre of amusement to the most exalted ranks of society, and there need [be] no laws to restrain the middling and lower classes from engagements thereon, since their expensiveness will, in general, confine such to their proper place as spectators." (John Lawrence, A Philosophical and Practical Treatise on Horses, and on the Moral Duties of Man Towards the Brute Creation [2 vols.; London, 1796-98/, II, 23.) It had been found necessary, however, in order to discourage popular involvement in horse racing, to make illegal all races for stakes of less than 50 pounds. (13 George II c.19.)

the common people, the games which we can recognise as some kind of football play were exhibited in a variety of forms and styles, each moulded in important ways by special local circumstances and traditions.<sup>1</sup> In some games kicking was the principal exercise of the sport; in others carrying and throwing were allowed; and in a few cases there was very little kicking at all. Some games were played with an inflated bladder, usually encased with leather, while others, especially those which emphasized throwing and carrying, made use of a smaller hard ball. There were different sets of rules which determined what was and was not considered fair play: in some places the rules were comparatively sophisticated in the restrictions they placed on aggressive behaviour, while in others the players were allowed a good deal of discretion. "When the exercise becomes exceeding violent," said Joseph Strutt, "the players kick each other's shins without the least ceremony, and some of them are overthrown at the hazard of their limbs."<sup>2</sup> A contest might be over an extensive stretch of countryside, with one goal perhaps the village well and the other a gate a mile or two distant in an adjacent parish (the annual match between the students of the

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<sup>1</sup> There are several general histories of football. Francis P. Magoun, Jr., History of Football from the Beginnings to 1871 (Bochum-Langendreer, 1938) is essentially a catalogue, weak on interpretation but very useful for drawing together a good many scattered references to football, most of them from printed sources. Morris Marples, A History of Football (London, 1954) adds a little to Magoun for the period before the formation of the Football Association in 1863. Percy M. Young, A History of British Football (London, 1968) is an uninspired work.

<sup>2</sup> Strutt, Sports and Pastimes, p. 79.



Bromfield free school, for example, was played between the eastern and western parts of the parish, a distance of two or three miles, "every inch of which ground was keenly disputed"<sup>1</sup>); or it could be in a convenient enclosed field, the goals a pair of stakes, or any other handy markers, a few yards apart. Considerable differences can also be seen in the extent to which the sport was formalised and incorporated into an established local tradition. At one extreme was the impromptu, fairly casual play through the streets of a town or village or in an untilled field; at the other were the big matches on festive occasions, matches which were frequently soaked in ritual and organised to the point of being an institutionalised factor in the community's pattern of life. Somewhere in between were many of the games in the countryside of village against village or hundred against hundred, or perhaps between the two ends of a parish at its annual wake. Some matches called for teams of ten to fifteen a side, while others, the less regulated affairs, permitted numbers unlimited.

The East Anglian version of football was known as "camping".

"Camping is Foot-ball playing, at which they are very dextrous in

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<sup>1</sup> William Hutchinson, The History of the County of Cumberland (2 vols Carlisle, 1794), II, 323n.

Norfolk", wrote Daniel Hilman in 1710,<sup>1</sup> and later in the century a local observer noticed that "in some parts [of Suffolk] this active game of our ancestors is still much in fashion."<sup>2</sup> A camping ground had two goals around ten yards in width, 150 to 200 yards apart, and when play was to begin,

An indifferent spectator ... throws up a ball, of the size of a common cricket ball, mid-way between the confronted players [of ten to fifteen a side], and makes his escape. It is the object of the players to seize and convey the ball between their own goals.... He who can catch or seize it speeds therefore home pursued by his opponents (thru' whom he has to make his way) aided by the jostlings and various assistances of his own sidesmen. If caught and held, or in imminent danger of being caught, he throws the ball - but in no case must give it - to a less beleagured friend, who, if it be not arrested in its course or he jostled away by the eager and watchful adversaries, catches it; and he hastens homeward, in like manner pursued, annoyed, and aided - winning the notch (or snotch) if he contrives to carry - not throw - it between his goals. But this in a well matched game, is no easy achievement, and often requires much time, many doublings, detours, and exertions.... if the holder of the ball be caught with the ball in his possession, he loses a snotch, if, therefore, he be hard pressed, he throws it to a convenient friend, more free and in breath than himself. At the loss (or gain) of a snotch, a recommence takes place, arranging which gives the parties time to take breath. Seven or nine notches are the game - and these it will sometimes take two or three hours to win.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Hilman, Tusser Redivivus, "November and December", p. 15.

<sup>2</sup> Sir John Cullum, The History and Antiquities of Hawsted, in the County of Suffolk (London, 1784), p. 113.

<sup>3</sup> Edward Moor, Suffolk Words and Phrases (London, 1823), pp. 63-66.

A football was used for the modified game of "kicking camp" and shoes were worn for what was quaintly known as "savage camp". There seems to have been a further distinction between two basic styles of camping, rough-play and civil-play: the former included boxing as one of its tactics while the latter allowed only wrestling and kicking.<sup>1</sup> Cornish hurling was somewhat similar to camping, though in the western parts of the county the play was normally over open countryside and permitted an indefinite number of participants.<sup>2</sup>

In many places the principal football match of the year was on Shrove Tuesday. During the early nineteenth century there were still scores of surviving Shrovetide games, many of which were played through the streets of town. Among the more notable holiday matches were the ones at Alwick, Chester-le-Street, Sedgefield, Derby, Ashbourne, Nuneaton, and Corfe Castle; Twickenham, Teddington, and Bushey Park (in Middlesex); and at Dorking, Richmond, Kingston-upon-Thames, Hampton Wick, East Moulsey, Hampton, and Thames Ditton

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<sup>1</sup> R. W. Ketton-Cremer, "Camping - a forgotten Norfolk Game", Norfolk Archaeology, XXIV, 1932, pp. 88-92.

<sup>2</sup> Hurling is described in William Borlase, The Natural History of Cornwall (Oxford, 1758), pp. 300-01. It was a particularly popular recreation at parish feasts. I am grateful to Mr. John Rule for advice on this and several other Cornish sources.

(all in Surrey).<sup>1</sup> At Workington and Eakring, Nottinghamshire the main match of the year was on Easter Tuesday and at Kichham, Lancashire it was customarily played on Christmas Day.<sup>2</sup>

Since each holiday match had its own peculiar customs and playing arrangements, no one case can claim to be a completely typical specimen. But at least we can look at one of them, the well documented Derby game, both as an interesting case in its own right and as illustration of the general texture of a Shrovetide match.

Theoretically the Derby competition was between the parishes of St. Peter's and All Saints, but in practice the rest of the borough was allowed to take part, and with time the townsmen were being joined by a large influx of holidayers from the countryside. Business was suspended for the afternoon and play began at two o'clock from the market place. The objective of each team - there were 500 to 1,000 a side in the early nineteenth century, - was to

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<sup>1</sup> See Magoun, History of Football, pp. 101-02, for a list of the references to Shrovetide games which he had collected; and Wright, Calendar Customs, I, 26. See also Charlotte S. Burne, ed., Shropshire Folk-Lore: A Sheaf of Gleanings (London, 1883), p. 319; and Hone, Every-Day Book, I, 245. "From time immemorial", observed a report in The Times of 6 March 1840, "it has been the custom in most of the parishes and places in the western portions of the counties of Middlesex and Surrey, for the inhabitants on Shrove Tuesday in every year to devote the greater part of the day to the manly sport of foot-ball, which has not been confined to the open spaces of the respective towns and villages, but the ball has been pursued by hundreds through the most public thoroughfares, the shops and houses of which were customarily closed, and the windows barricaded with hurdles, to prevent their being broken."

<sup>2</sup> Respectively: Notes & Queries, 10th series, I, 1904, pp. 194 and 230; V. C. H. Nottinghamshire, II, 412; and Henry Fishwick, The History of the Parish of Kirkham, in the County of Lancashire (Publications of the Chetham Society, Old series, XCII, 1874), p. 206.

carry the ball to a goal about a mile outside the town, St. Peter's' the gate of a nursery ground towards London and All Saints' the wheel of a watermill to the west, either of which had to be struck three times with the ball. In most matches the St. Peter's side tried to get the ball into the River Derwent and swim with it, a circuitous approach to their own goal but a tactical removal of the ball in the opposite direction from the All Saints watermill. If the Peter's men could overpower their opponents in the water, the ball was landed at a point near their goal and carried home; if the defence was too strong it would be hidden until dark, sometimes to be relieved of its cork shavings and the covering smuggled in under someone's smock or petticoat. Now and again, when one side had uncommon muscle, the offense was straight overland, but this strategy obliged the Peter's team to cross the brook which led to the enemy's goal, a risky approach which could easily backfire. New ploys for attack or defence were warmly received: on one occasion, for instance, an enterprising fellow was reputed to have escaped with the ball into a sewer and passed under the town, only to be surprised as he confidently surfaced by a party of opponents. Towards the finish of the match, when the drift of the contest was clear, the climax centred on the stratagems around one goal, such as starting up the All Saints water-wheel. The player who ended the game was chaired through the winners' home territory and was given the honour of throwing up the ball at the start of the next year's play. A

similar match for the youth of the town was staged on Ash Wednesday under the supervision of their elders.<sup>1</sup>

Although the Derby game probably attracted an unusually large following, many of the other Shrovetide matches would also have been recreational highlights in their own, usually smaller communities. The entry for Shrove Tuesday 1767 in William Cole's Bletchley diary mentions "Football playing on the Green";<sup>2</sup> and in a case like this a large proportion of the able-bodied men in the parish would have had to turn out just in order to make up the teams. We have evidence as well of other organised games which were also planned or traditionally anticipated for some special occasion. "Seven bouchers should have play'd at foot-ball with seven glovers, being Tuesday, this year above," wrote Jacob Bee of Durham on 18 September 1683, "and my man Christopher went without leave to play."<sup>3</sup> On 2 February 1742 Richard Kay of Baldingstone, Lancashire wrote in his diary, "in the Afternoon took a Walk to Bury

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<sup>1</sup> This account is based particularly on Glover, County of Derby, I 262-3; Llewellyn Jewitt, "On Ancient Customs and Sports of the County of Derby", Journal of the British Archaeological Association, VII 1852, p. 204; an article in the Penny Magazine, 6 April 1839; and a report in the Derby Mercury, 20 February 1827.

<sup>2</sup> Diary of William Cole, p. 191. On Shrove Tuesday 1768, after Cole had moved to Waterbeach, the holiday sport was again acknowledged: "Tom football playing". (B.M., "Diary of William Cole", Add. MS. 5835, p. 372).

<sup>3</sup> "Diary of Jacob Bee of Durham", in Six North Country Diaries (Publications of the Surtees Society, CXVIII, 1910), p. 47.

with great numbers beside to see a Football Match betwixt Town and Country";<sup>1</sup> and during the 1770s there were reports of organised games in parts of Devon, at Rochdale, Lancashire between some of the hamlets in the parish, and at Hitchin in Hertfordshire.<sup>2</sup> One Sunday in the fall of 1722 at a village near Eastlow, "during the usual time of Divine Service, there happened such a violent Hurricane, that a great part of the Steeple of the Church was blown down; which would have done very considerable Damage to the parishioners had they been at Church: But they happened to be luckily at a Foot-Ball Match, by which means their Lives were probably saved."<sup>3</sup> In 1741 notice was given of a forthcoming camping match bear Blofield, Norfolk,<sup>4</sup> and in October 1754 another was announced to take place in Eye, Suffolk.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> W. Brockbank and F. Kenworthy, eds., The Diary of Richard Kay, 1716-1751, of Baldingstone, near Bury: A Lancashire Doctor (Publications of the Chetham Society, 3rd series, XVI, 1968), p. 47. B. T. Barton, History of the Borough of Bury and Neighbourhood (Bury, 1874), p. 41, claims that the main matches of the year were at Christmas, Shrovetide, on Good Friday, and especially during the Easter week, but no documentation is offered.

<sup>2</sup> Respectively: William Chapple, A Review of Part of Risdon's Survey of Devon (Exeter, 1785), pp. 37-38; Henry Fishwick, The History of the Parish of Rochdale (London and Rochdale, 1889), p. 536; and Reginald L. Hine, The History of Hitchin (2 vols.; London, 1927-29), II, 244.

<sup>3</sup> St. James's Journal, 1 December 1722 (this item may be apocryphal, for we have not been able to confirm the existence of a place named Eastlow). The parish accounts of 1713 for Coine, Lancashire included a debit of a shilling as the "charges with ye men taken playing at football in ye tyme of Divine servis to ye Justice". (Quoted in William Andrews, Old Church Lore /Hull, 1891/, p. 96.)

<sup>4</sup> Norwich Gazette, 2 May 1741, quoted in John Glyde, The Norfolk Garland (London, 1872), p. 165.

<sup>5</sup> Ipswich Journal, 19 October 1754, quoted in the East Anglian Daily Times, 21 September 1901, p. 12.

And in 1789 a football game was advertised as an attraction at Bradwell Fair, "Bradwell and Tillingham, against Dengie Hundred, for Eleven Pair of Valuable Gloves".<sup>1</sup>

Along with these more formalised, more structured matches, there must have been a good many relatively informal and spontaneous games, on the lines of the football play in Covent Garden described in John Gay's Trivia.<sup>2</sup> On 12 January 1723, for instance, an impromptu game was reported from Smithfield,<sup>3</sup> and on 23 April 1711 Nicholas Blundell spent some time teaching a few of the villagers "to play at Penny prick with the Foot balle."<sup>4</sup> In Chichester "Footballing in the streets day after day in frosty weather" was said to be a familiar

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<sup>1</sup> Chelmsford Chronicle, 19 June 1789. A match between the same sides had been held on the same occasion in 1787. (Chelmsford Chronicle, 22 June 1787, quoted in A. F. J. Brown, ed., English History from Essex Sources 1750-1900 [Chelmsford, 1952], p. 170.)

<sup>2</sup> John Gay, Trivia: or, the Art of Walking the Streets of London (London, 1716). The relevant lines are from Book ii, "Of walking the Streets by Day":

Here oft' my Course I bend, when lo! from far,  
I spy the Furies of the Foot-ball War:  
The 'Prentice quits his Shop, to join the Crew,  
Encreasing Crouds the flying Game pursue.

Remarking on football, Henri Misson wrote of how, during the winter time, "a Leather Ball about as big as ones Head ... is kick'd about from one to t'other in the Streets, by him that can get at it, and that is all the Art of it." (Memoirs and Observations, pp. 306-07.)

<sup>3</sup> St. James's Journal, 19 January 1723.

<sup>4</sup> Diurnal of Nicholas Blundell, I, 287.



sight in the earlier eighteenth century;<sup>1</sup> on 3 January 1665 Samuel Pepys noticed that a street in London he rode through was "full of footballs, it being a great frost".<sup>2</sup> In 1792 the Moravians in Bedford were complaining of the games which were played just outside their single brethren's house.<sup>3</sup> In these cases the people's recreation would have been taken during a brief respite from work, in the evening perhaps or at some time on the weekend. A cottager in Waterbeach, Cambridgeshire spoke of how, "as the days lengthened, in the evening, after our work was done, we assembled on our village-green to spend our time in some rustic amusements, such as wrestling, football, etc.";<sup>4</sup> and in 1759 a resident of Shifford, Berkshire referred to the main sports of the village as "football, wrestling, and cudgelling".<sup>5</sup> John Clare too provided a fragment of evidence on the use of the routine hours of leisure: "I never had much relish for the pastimes of youth", he confessed; "instead of going out on the green at the town end on Winter sundays to play football I stuck to my corner stool poreing over a book".<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Memoirs of James Spershott, p. 14

<sup>2</sup> Diary of Samuel Pepys, IV, 303.

<sup>3</sup> Bedfordshire R.O., M.O. 34 (meeting of 21 February 1792).

<sup>4</sup> Denson, Peasant's Voice to Landowners, p. 17.

<sup>5</sup> Nichols, Parochial History of Berkshire, p. 55.

<sup>6</sup> Eric Robinson and Geoffrey Summerfield, eds., Clare: Selected Poems and Prose (Oxford, 1966), p. 65; cf. Shepherd's Calendar, ed. Robinson and Summerfield, p. 5.

But whatever form it might have taken, however organised or casual it might have been, it is clear that football was a very common and widespread recreation. On 4 July 1696 Sir William Trumbull wrote from Whitehall to a correspondent with regard to "the numerous meetings of People at Football Matches etc".<sup>1</sup> On some occasions it was even employed as a camouflage for a popular protest. During the 1740 food riots an informant from Northamptonshire reported to the Secretary of State that "a March of Futtball was Cried at Ketring of five Hundred Men of a side but the real Design was to Pull Down Lady Betey Jesmains Mills".<sup>2</sup> A letter of 9 March 1698/99 from the Privy Council to the Lord Lieutenants of Cambridgeshire, Norfolk, Huntingdonshire, and Northamptonshire revealed a similar use of the sport:

After our very hearty Commendation to your Grace, The Governor, Bayliffs and Commonality of the Company of Conservators of the Great Levell of the Fenn called Bedford Levell having by their Petition this day Read at the Board humbly set forth that being very sensible to the Ruine and Destruction lately Committed by divers desperate and malicious Persons that have destroyed in a great Measure the works of Draining in Deeping Levell, adjacent to the Petitioners Levell, under Colour and pretence of Foot Ball Playing; They the Petitioners have lately received notice of the like Design against the works of Bedford Levell, Humbly praying that Such orders and directions may be given as may secure the Petitioners and the Countrys Estates in the said Levell from any Violence or Destruction. And it appearing by Information upon Oath annexed to the said Petition, that Publick notice has been given by a Paper affixed on march

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<sup>1</sup> P.R.O., S.P. 44/99, p. 285.

<sup>2</sup> P.R.O., S.P. 36/50, f. 418. I am indebted to Mr. E. P. Thompson for this reference.

Bridge of a Foot Ball Play and other Sports on or about the Fourteenth of this instant March on Coats Green by Whittlesea, and that Severall Persons had been heard to say that the Captain or Cheif of the Mobb in the late Ryat in Deeping Fenns was to be at the said Foot Ball Play, and that they would pull down the mills and Cutt the Banks as had been already done in Deeping Fenns. Wee have thought fit to acquaint your Grace therewith, and that wee have sent directions to the High Sheriff and Justices of the Peace to hinder and obstruct all Riotous or Tumultuous meetings in or near Bedford Levell upon account of Foot Ball Play or otherwise and to suppress and disperse the Same, Recommending to your Graces particular Care to use all proper means for the preventing and Suppressing any Such Riotous or Tumultuous assembly whereby the Publick Peace may be disturbed or Endangered.<sup>1</sup>

In late July 1765 the Northampton Mercury carried an announcement of a football game to be played at West Haddon - "This is to give NOTICE to all Gentlemen Gamesters and Well-Wishers of the Cause now in Hand, That there will be a Foot-Ball Play in the Fields of Haddon aforesaid, on Thursday the 1st Day of August, for a Prize of considerable Value; and another good Prize to be play'd for on Friday the 2d.- All Gentlemen Players are desired to appear at any of the Publick-Houses in Haddon aforesaid each Day between the Hours of Ten and Twelve in the Forenoon, where they will be joyfully received, and kindly entertained, etc." - but the next number of the newspaper was obliged to report (with some embarrassment) that "We hear from West-Haddon, in this County, that on Thursday and Friday last a great

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<sup>1</sup> P.R.O., P.C. 2/77, p. 309.

Number of People being assembled there, in order to play a Football-Match, soon after meeting formed themselves into a tumultuous Mob, and pulled up and burnt the Fences designed for the Inclosure of that Field, and did other considerable Damage".<sup>1</sup> Football play, it seems, was a convenient and sometimes effective pretence for gathering together a large assemblage of local dissidents. And it could only have functioned in this way, as a convincing shield for rebellious intentions, if it were a familiar, accepted, and relatively routine reason for drawing together a considerable crowd.

It should be mentioned in passing that though football was predominantly a diversion of the common people - almost everyone agreed on this: Guy Miege put it bluntly when he declared that "Football is a rude Diversion for the common sort of People in frosty Weather"<sup>2</sup> - there are a few indications that from time to time gentlemen too became engaged in the sport. We have noticed how the squire in Little Crosby once taught several of his parishioners to kick (or throw) at a mark with a football. The camping match at Eye in October 1754 was announced as being "made by the gentlemen in the county of Suffolk (for ten men on each side)", though it is not clear whether these gentlemen were players or only betters.<sup>3</sup> There

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<sup>1</sup> Northampton Mercury, 29 July and 5 August 1765. See also J. W. Anscumb, "An Eighteenth Century Inclosure and Foot Ball Play at West Haddon", Northamptonshire Past and Present, IV, No. 3, 1968/69, pp. 175-78.

<sup>2</sup> Miege, New State of England, part ii, p. 40.

<sup>3</sup> Ipswich Journal, 19 October 1754.

is a similar ambiguity in a notice of 1802 which announced that a football match was to be played "For Eleven Pair of Gloves, between the Gentlemen of Rochford Hundred, and the Gentlemen of Dengie Hundred".<sup>1</sup> But even if these notices did actually refer to genteel players, it is clear that they would have been relatively exceptional occurrences; football was usually regarded as too rough and uncivil for adults of good breeding. It was however - and this was the focal point of genteel football - a common fixture at the public schools and had been played at some of them since at least the beginning of the eighteenth century.<sup>2</sup> At Cambridge too the sport seems to have enjoyed a certain following. In 1679 Magdalene College issued an order "That no schollers give or receive at any time, any treat or collation upon account of ye football play, on or about Michaelmas Day, further then Colledge beere or ale in ye open hall, to quench their thirsts";<sup>3</sup> and a tutor at the same college in 1702 included a bill of five shillings for "Footballs etc" in the

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<sup>1</sup> Chelmsford Chronicle, 4 June 1802.

<sup>2</sup> E. G. Dunning, "The Evolution of Football", New Society, 30 April 1964. See also Mr. Dunning's "Early Stages in the Development of Football as an Organized Game" (unpublished M.A. thesis, University of Leicester, 1961), which deals principally with football in the public schools. Norbert Elias and E. G. Dunning, The Making of Football: A Sociological Study, is forthcoming.

<sup>3</sup> Fifth Report of the Historical Manuscripts Commission (London, 1876) p. 483, col. 2.

<sup>4</sup> Hart, Country Counting House, p. 18.

account which he presented to one of his students for the Michaelmas term.<sup>1</sup>

It is rather more difficult to determine the significance of cricket in the recreational life of the common people. The sport was not particularly associated with any of the traditional holidays, so we hear of it only occasionally in the descriptions of these events. Moreover, although there are certainly a large number of references to cricket in the literature of the period (especially in the press), most of them are either concerned with the matches of gentlemen or they are imprecise about the social standings of the players and spectators.<sup>2</sup> During the eighteenth century cricket was becoming increasingly popular in the fashionable world and most of the evidence bears on this genteel taste for the sport. Consequently, we are left somewhat uncertain about the nature and extent of the common people's involvement. It is clear, though, that the gentry had no monopoly on the game. An essay of 1743 in the Gentleman's Magazine complained of the mingling of ranks at cricket matches: "can there by any thing more absurd, than making such Matches for the sake of Profit, which is to be shared amongst People so remote in their Quality and

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<sup>1</sup> Hart, Country Counting House, p. 18.

<sup>2</sup> See especially two works by George B. Buckley: Fresh Light on 18th Century Cricket: A Collection of 1,000 New Cricket Notices from 1697 to 1800 (Birmingham, 1935); and Fresh Light on Pre-Victorian Cricket: A Collection of New Cricket Notices from 1709 to 1837 (Birmingham, 1937).

Circumstances?"<sup>1</sup> De Saussure claimed of cricket that "everyone plays it, the common people and also men of rank",<sup>2</sup> and in the 1694 edition of Angliae Notitia Edward Chamberlayne spoke of how "the Natives will endure long and hard labour; insomuch, that after 12 hours hard Work, they will go in the Evening to Foot-ball, Stool-ball, Cricket, Prison-base, Wrestling, Cudgel-playing, or some such like vehement Exercise, for their Recreation."<sup>3</sup>

There are several specific pieces of evidence relating to plebeian cricket. From sources concerning London we hear of the common people playing cricket in Moorfields in 1733 and in the fields near Bedford House during the 1760s.<sup>4</sup> In 1760 "William Searle of Guildford Apprentice and Berkley Gardiner of the same place Chapman" were presented at Quarter Sessions "for Sabbath breaking by playing at Cricket on the Lords Day ... at Worpleston ... and for insulting Wm Wallis Gent High Constable."<sup>5</sup> In 1702 a member of the Bunyan Congregation in Bedford was under admonition for various "light

<sup>1</sup> Gentleman's Magazine, XIII, 1743, p. 486.

<sup>2</sup> Letters of de Saussure, p. 295.

<sup>3</sup> Chamberlayne, Angliae Notitia (1694), p. 52; in the 1708 edition of this work cricket is specifically mentioned as a plebeian recreation (p. 252).

<sup>4</sup> Middlesex County R.O., MSP 1733 Ap/19(Quarter Sessions Records of 7 April 1733); Whitehall Evening Post, 3 August 1764, quoted in Buckley, 18th Century Cricket, p. 42; and Lloyd's Evening Post, 17 August 1767, quoted in Buckley, Pre-Victorian Cricket, p. 4.

<sup>5</sup> Surrey R.O., Michaelmas 1760 Quarter Sessions Papers, document no. 18.

unbecoming actions", one of which was playing stool ball, a primitive form of cricket.<sup>1</sup> On 14 May 1715 Nicholas Blundell reported that "the Young Folks of this Town had a Merry-Night at James Davis, Tatlock played to them; the Young Weomen treated the Men with a Tandsey as they had lost to them at a Game of Stool Balle."<sup>2</sup>

Oliver Heywood complained that on Easter day 1681, "as my hearers went from us through Halifax there was hundreds of people at Clark brig, in the church yard, on the green, and all along the town of young people and others playing at Stool-ball, and other recreations, without any controll".<sup>3</sup>

■ In 1829 it was said that at Beverley "the lower classes of the people have their quoits, their foot-ball, and their cricket".<sup>4</sup> It is likely too that some of the common people attended cricket matches as spectators. In 1755, for example, it was recorded that an Oxfordshire manservant "was absent by his Masters Consent one day in April to go and see a Cricket Match at Whitam in the County of Berkshire";<sup>5</sup> and on 30 October 1766 William

<sup>1</sup> G. B. Harrison, ed., The Church Book of Bunyan Meeting 1650-1821 (London and Toronto, 1928), p. 103.

<sup>2</sup> Diurnal of Nicholas Blundell, II, 134.

<sup>3</sup> Oliver Heywood, II, 279.

<sup>4</sup> George Oliver, The History and Antiquities of the Town and Minster of Beverley (Beverley, 1829), p. 432; see also Joseph Lawson, Letters to the Young on Progress in Pudsey during the Last Sixty Years (Stanninglen, 1887), pp. 62-63.

<sup>4</sup> Oxfordshire R.O., Quarter Sessions Rolls, Epiphany 1764 (examination of John Collyer, 25 October 1763).



Cole's servant "engaged himself to go with Mrs Willis's Servants and others to Dinner at a Cricket Match at Fenny-Stratford".<sup>1</sup> Certainly, it would not usually have been possible to prevent interested members of the populace from watching a game, for most of the playing fields must have been open to public view.. The gentlemen's match which was played at Bradwell Fair in 1789 must inevitably have been watched by a good many of the plebian holidayers.<sup>2</sup> And many of those publicans who organised matches would probably have welcomed a certain degree of popular patronage.<sup>3</sup>

Pugilism was one of the sports which cut very much across class lines. Its patronage extended from labourer to lord, and in some instances both were even together at the same match. Fighting of course was a long-standing social reality, but it only gradually became established as an acknowledged and organized recreation. When two working men "have a disagreement which they cannot end up amicably," wrote de Saussure in 1727, they sometimes

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<sup>1</sup> Diary of William Cole, p. 143.

<sup>2</sup> Chelmsford Chronicle, 19 June 1789.

<sup>3</sup> Some of these matches were advertised as being for "Gentlemen and others" (for instance, Ipswich Journal, 10 September 1743 and 12 August 1749).

... retire into some quiet place and strip from their waists upwards. Everyone who sees them preparing for a fight surrounds them, not in order to separate them, but on the contrary to enjoy the fight, for it is a great sport to the lookers-on, and they judge the blows and also help to enforce certain rules in use for this mode of warfare. The spectators sometimes get so interested that they lay bets on the combatants and form a big circle around them. The two champions shake hands before commencing, and then attack each other courageously with their fists, and sometimes also with their heads, which they use like rams. Should one of the men fall, his opponent may, according to the rules, give him a blow with his fist, but those who have laid their bets on the fallen man generally encourage him to continue till one of the combatants is quite knocked up and says he has had enough.<sup>1</sup>

By the mid eighteenth century the practice of pugilism was becoming increasingly systematised: formal rules of play were developed; the "scientific" principles professed by its best exponents were articulated; and championship matches were organised, often with the support of interested members of the gentry. By the end of the century the press was carrying frequent and sometimes detailed reports of the more significant fights. Some were arranged by professional promoters or publicans, others by gentlemen patrons. Prominent boxers (who were almost always plebeian) were local and perhaps even national celebrities, and several thousand enthusiasts

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<sup>1</sup> Letters of De Saussure, p. 180.

were normally on hand for a notable battle. Syllas Neville, a spectator at a match in Norwich in 1772, remarked on "what a concourse of people of all ranks there were to see this fight and what gambling."<sup>1</sup> Gambling was one of boxing's principal supports, underlying its appeal in the same manner as for horse racing and cock-fighting. Small-scale matches were sometimes arranged at wakes or fairs,<sup>2</sup> and at the larger fairs professionals might exhibit their skills in a sideshow.

There were also a number of other prominent athletic diversions. Wrestling was popular in many regions, particularly in Cornwall, Devon, Bedfordshire, Northamptonshire, Norfolk, Cumberland, and Westmoreland. It was, for example, one of the customary attractions at Boughton Green Fair.<sup>3</sup> At a match at Botley, Berkshire in 1737 it was said that "there was the greatest Concourse of People that has been known on such an Occasion, for tho'

<sup>1</sup> Diary of Syllas Neville, p. 172; see also Christina Hole, English Sports and Pastimes (London, 1949), pp. 33-34.

<sup>2</sup> Joseph Lawson recalled that "it was customary for the pugilists of all the villages to visit each other's feasts, and in many cases with the avowed object of meeting other pugilists there." (Progress in Pudsey, p. 57). It was reported that there were twenty-three "pugilistic encounters" at Wansford feast in June 1830. (Stamford News, 18 June 1830.)

<sup>3</sup> A notice of the fair in the Northampton Mercury of 1 June 1730 drew attention to a problem which had arisen out of previous arrangements for wrestling. "N.B. Whereas it has been observed that several Fellows, under Pretence of coming in their own Shoes, have wrestled with Shoes where there has been Nails artificially fix'd, which has done great Damage, it is hereby declared, That no Man shall be admitted to wrestle in any Shoes that have a single Nail, being the Prizes are given for the Diversion of the Country; and all Occasion of Mischief is to be avoided."

in the middle of Harvest, it's modestly computed there were 10,000 People, some of whom came 40 Miles to see the Diversion."<sup>1</sup> On 29 September 1766 William Cole's manservant "went to a Wrestling at Shenley" and on 25 July 1769 it was reported that "Tom went with the workmen to Ditton Plow where was a great wrestling."<sup>2</sup> Quoits (a game like horseshoes), skittles and nine-pins (varieties of bowling) were mentioned less often, probably because they usually would have been played in smaller gatherings.<sup>3</sup> Foot races and pedestrian contests were very frequently arranged, the latter from the later eighteenth century and the former all through the period, and both served as further outlets for gambling. In 1770, after an Italian had succeeded in walking 50 miles in 12 hours, "he was conducted to Nottingham by a large Concourse of People with Cockades, preceded by a Hand-Organ, and a Band of Music. And the same Evening he walked seven Miles to a Country Wake, and back again to

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<sup>1</sup> From an unidentified newspaper clipping of 1737 in a B.M. copy (142.e.1,2) of Brand, Popular Antiquities (1813), II, facing p. 310.

<sup>2</sup> Diary of William Cole, p. 128; and B.M., "Diary of William Cole", Add. MS. 5835, p. 414.

<sup>3</sup> In 1725 a member of the Bunyan congregation was chastised for "his foolish conduct in going to cock fighting, playing at nine pins and quoits two or three times each, Exercises not suitable to his profession and promised reformation." (Church Book of Bunyan Meeting, p. 135.) On quoits see Jehoshaphat Aspin, Ancient Customs, Sports, and Pastimes of the English (London, 1832), pp. 197-98; on skittles and nine-pins see Strutt, Sports and Pastimes, p. 203.

Nottingham."<sup>1</sup> Oliver Heywood observed painfully that on 7 August 1682 there were "3 races at Halifax, some run stark naked. They say 11 races were run at Halifax on Munday Aug. 21. fearfull uproares";<sup>2</sup> and in early November 1684, according to Jacob Bee of Durham, "A foot race was runn betwixt Fairebearnnes, a butcher, and a countrey-man called John Upton, and runn upon Elvitt-moore, the hardest run that every [sic] any did see. The countrey-man wone upon hard tearmes, being runn soo nerely that scarce any could judge, when they had but one hundred yards to runn, whether should have it."<sup>3</sup> On 2 October 1752 there was a notable foot race in heats at Norwich: "The Spectators were very numerous, and greatly pleas'd with the Sport. It was the best Foot Race that ever was seen in this City."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Northampton Mercury, 18 June 1770. During the early nineteenth century the newspapers were full of reports on pedestrian matches. The matches were presented in a variety of guises and the promotions were ingeniously arranged to keep abreast with the latest state of public fashion: straightforward contests over 1,000 miles in one month gave way to more rigorous requirements, such as London to Oxford in one day and back again the next (for twenty or thirty days), or walking for several weeks during thirty minutes in every hour, or walking backwards. The matches might be between competitors or (as was more usual) against the clock. In all cases a large number of wagers depended on the outcome.

<sup>2</sup> Oliver Heywood, II, 294.

<sup>3</sup> Six North Country Diaries, p. 49. See also the description of a long distance race in Christopher Morris, ed., The Journeys of Celia Fiennes (London, 1947), pp. 359-60.

<sup>4</sup> Norwich Mercury, 7 October 1752.

There were a good many references to cudgelling and playing at single-sticks. For example, on 9 October 1767 William Cole's servantman "went with his Sister Molly and others to Stony-Stratford: a great Cudgel-Playing there";<sup>1</sup> and in Somerset on 22 September 1771 Parson Woodforde "went to the Cudgell-Playing (alias Back-Sword) at Crockers, where was good sport and a vase concourse of people".<sup>2</sup> An adeptness at single-stick was one of Humphry Clinker's many talents (he could wrestle too).<sup>3</sup> According to a contributor to William Hone's Year Book,

Single-stick playing is so called to distinguish it from cudgelling, in which two sticks are used: the single-stick player having the left hand tied down, and using only one stick both to defend himself and strike his antagonist. The object of each gamester in this play, as in cudgelling, is to guard himself, and to fetch blood from the other's head; whether by taking a little skin from his pericranium, or drawing a stream from his nose, or knocking out a few of ... the teeth .... In cudgelling, as the name implies, the weapon is a stout cudgel; and the player defends himself with another having a large hemisphere of wicker-work upon it. This is called the pot ....<sup>4</sup>

A typical kind of announcement for this sort of sport appeared in Sarah Farley's Bristol Journal, 7 May 1774:

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<sup>1</sup> Diary of William Cole, p. 275.

<sup>2</sup> Quoted by the editor in Diary of a Country Parson, I, 110-11.

<sup>3</sup> Tobias George Smollett, The Expedition of Humphrey Clinker, ed. Robert G. Davis (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1950), pp. 94-95.

<sup>4</sup> Hone, Year Book, col. 1525; cf. Misson, Memoirs and Observations, p. 308.

To be played for at Back Sword at Wotton under Edge, on the Tuesday and Wednesday in the Whitsun Week, Twenty guineas, viz. 8 guineas the first day by nine men on a side, and 12 guineas the second day by eleven men on each side. Each couple to play 'till one of their heads is broken. The side which gets the odd head to have the prize. No padding allowed.<sup>1</sup>

Finally, there was the widespread custom of bell-ringing.

"Ringing of Bells is one of their great Delights," claimed Henri Misson, "especially in the Country".<sup>2</sup> "I do not suppose there is a country where bell-ringing is brought to such an art as it is here," said de Saussure, "where bells are always in chime and in harmony .... with six or eight bells of various tones, in an hour's time a good bell-ringer can ring out more than a thousand different peals and chimes; ... and the people are so fond of this amusement that they form societies among themselves for carrying it out."<sup>3</sup> The ringing was either of church or of hand bells. Many places had their own groups of ringers who performed on special occasions. In June 1770 it was reported that "the Sherwood Company of Change-Ringers in Nottingham (who generally go to spend two or three Holidays in the Country at Whitsuntide) went this Year to amuse themselves upon the melodious Peal of eight Bells at Burton-upon-Trent, in Staffordshire, but were greatly disappointed in finding the Bells in very bad Order .... On their Return they performed upon the Sett of ten Bells at

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted in Gloucestershire Notes and Queries, IV, 1890, p. 85; I am indebted to Mr. Malcolm Thomas for this reference. Eighteenth century newspapers frequently carried notices of cudgelling and single-stick matches.

<sup>2</sup> Memoirs and Observations, p. 306.

<sup>3</sup> Letters of de Saussure, p. 295.

All-Saints Church in Derby."<sup>1</sup> On the Monday of the wake at Bletchley in 1766 there was "Ringing all Day" and on Easter Monday 1767 William Cole referred to "the Ringers drinking Ale in the Kitchen" (Christmas was the other main time for bell-ringing in the parish).<sup>2</sup> Competitive ringing between parishes was also popular. In eighteenth century Cornwall, for instance, it "became as common and keen as hurling matches or wrestling bouts."<sup>3</sup> In Norfolk it was announced that on 20 July 1752 at Aylsham "there will be given Gratis at the Sign of the Red Lyon five or Six Pair of Gloves, to be Rung for by any Company of 5 or 6 Bell Ringers, ... no less than Two Companies to Ring".<sup>4</sup> And on Easter Monday 1829 in Berkshire "a ringing match on hand-bells took place at the Pin and Bowl, Oakingham, between the Reading, Oakingham, Winkfield, and Binfield Youths."<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Northampton Mercury, 18 June 1770; cf. Ipswich Journal, 23 July 1743, for a notice of an intended bell-ringing by a society from Norwich.

<sup>2</sup> Diary of William Cole, pp. 121, 168, and 204.

<sup>3</sup> Douch, Old Cornish Inns, p. 136.

<sup>4</sup> Norwich Mercury, 11 July 1752.

<sup>5</sup> Berkshire Chronicle, 25 April 1829.



CHAPTER II

RECREATION AND SOCIETY

(1) The Social Contexts of Popular Recreations

Many recreations arose directly out of the fabric of common interests and common sentiments among the working people themselves. The fundamental social basis for several of the calendar festivities was the relatively small, tightly-knit rural community, and it was in this kind of community that most labouring men spent the great bulk of their time and with which they were intimately associated. It was a world of face to face contacts, deriving its unifying forces from the common experiences of daily (and yearly) routine and a shared oral culture. The people's social relationships stemmed mostly from the ties of family, the ties of neighbourhood (a village, a hamlet, one end of town), and the ties which were formed in the course of their work. The range of their social encounters was normally fairly limited; in most rural areas (aside from the market towns) they would have had only infrequent contact with complete strangers. Some of their recreations reflected the personal character of their day to day experiences. During the Christmas season friends from the parish, and perhaps relatives from nearby, were in the habit of gathering together in each others' cottages. It was said that on Christmas Day "at Danby Wisk in ye North-Riding of Yorkshire, it is the custom for ye Parishioners after receiving ye Sacrament, to goe from Church directly to the Ale Hous and there drink together as a testimony of Charity and friendship."<sup>1</sup> A morris dance in the market

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<sup>1</sup> John Aubrey, Remaines of Gentilisme and Judaisme, ed. James Britten (London, 1881; repr. 1967), p. 5.

place or through the village streets would have attracted an audience from the bulk of the inhabitants, many of whom would have known one another personally. There was a communal basis for the ritual. The community's sense of solidarity might also have been expressed in some athletic competition - the village hero contending in a wrestling match, a football game against a neighbouring parish. A few of the festive occasions depended on a consciousness of mutual interests among people of the same trade. Plough Monday was an occupational holiday for the ploughmen, St. Andrew's Day (November 30th) for the lacemakers;<sup>1</sup> February 3rd was widely observed by the woolcombers with parades and merry-makings, in honour of their patron saint, Bishop Blaze.<sup>2</sup>

The ties of kinship, friendship and neighbourliness among the common people were especially important as supports for the annual wake, probably the principal occasion for individuals to come together in order to renew and reaffirm their relationships. Henry Bourne remarked that at the time of a wake the people "deck themselves in their gaudiest Clothes, and have open Doors and splendid Entertainments, for the Reception and Treating of their Relations and Friends, who visit them on that Occasion, from each neighbouring Town";<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Wright, Calendar Customs, III, 186-87.

<sup>2</sup> There are numerous references to Bishop Blaze festivities: for instance, Norwich Mercury, 25 January 1752; an unidentified newspaper clipping of 1792 in a B.M. copy (142.e.1,2) of Brand, Popular Antiquities (1813), I, facing p. 46; and Northampton Mercury, 4 February 1804. See also Wright, Calendar Customs, II, 130-35; and Hone, Every-Day Book, I, cols. 209-12, and Year Book, cols. 1202-03.

<sup>3</sup> Antiquitates Vulgares, p. 225.

and in September 1738 a contributor to the Gentleman's Magazine declared that he heard of at least one parish feast "every Sunday kept in some Village or other of the Neighbourhood, and see great Numbers of both Sexes in their Holiday Cloathes, constantly flocking thither, to partake of the Entertainment of their Friends and Relations, or to divert themselves with the rural Games and athletick Exercises."<sup>1</sup> John Clare too wrote of the social connections which underlay the wake:

The wood man and the thresher now are found  
 Mixing and making merry with their friends  
 Children and kin from neighbouring towns around  
 Each at the humble banquet pleas'd attends  
 For though no costliness the feast pretends  
 Yet something more than common they provide  
 And the good dame her small plum pudding sends  
 To sons and daughters fast in service tied  
 With many a cordial gift of good advice beside<sup>2</sup>

The feast was pre-eminently a time of hospitality and generous provision. It was said in 1759 that in Fallow, a hamlet of the parish of Sparsholt in Berkshire, "the feast day at the old chapel at Fallow, now demolished, had been on the Sunday following the feast of St. James, which day the neighbourhood of Fallow kept<sup>ep</sup> in the way of having better cheer and open hospitality."<sup>3</sup> At the wakes in Stamford, "An abundance of good cheer, which every individual in the

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<sup>1</sup> Gentleman's Magazine, VIII, 1738, p. 465.

<sup>2</sup> Clare, Village Minstrel, stanza 74 (punctuation omitted). After his move to Waterbeach, William Cole allowed his manservant to visit his friends at the time of the wake: on 9 September 1768 he wrote, "I let Tom go off at noon in order to go to Bletchley Feast to morrow with Harry Mason." (B.M., "Diary of William Cole", Add. MS. 5835, p. 391).

<sup>3</sup> Parochial History of Berkshire, p. 37.

parish provides, whose circumstances will permit him to obtain it, supplies his table nearly the whole of the week, to which a host of ready cousins, friends, and neighbours, are welcome: and on the Saturday night, the round of festivity is commonly concluded with ass races and dancing."<sup>1</sup> Similarly, Samuel Bamford recalled that on the Sunday of the wake "the very best dinner which could be provided was set out ... and the guests were helped with a profusion of whatever the host could command. It was a duty at the wakes to be hospitable, and he who at that time was not liberal according to his means, was set down as a very mean person."<sup>2</sup>

As one might expect, on many of the festive occasions the most active participants were young people, men and women aged between about 15 and 25 years, and sometimes children as well. Some of the athletic diversions - football and wrestling, for instance - were only suitable for men with robust constitutions, and as a result most of the players were relatively young. Guy Fawkes Day seems to have been particularly associated with the revelries of young men. Shrove Tuesday was traditionally the especial holiday of apprentices and May Day was primarily for the benefit of young men and women. Since almost all servants were single, young people were particularly dominant at hiring fairs. And there were one or two secondary

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<sup>1</sup> John Drakard, The History of Stamford (Stamford, 1822), p. 428.

<sup>2</sup> Bamford, Early Days, pp. 154-55.

occasions as well which were exclusively for the young: on Valentine's Day 1767 at Bletchley William Cole referred to "All the Children in the Parish hallooing under my Chamber Window before I was up" and the next year on the same day he "Gave 36 small Loaves to the poor Children, and 6d. besides."<sup>1</sup>

The most important reason for the prominent involvement of young people in recreational events was the fact that they served as occasions for courtship and sexual encounters. This was most noticeably the case at fairs and feasts. On 29 October 1781 Syllas Neville referred in his diary to the "country Beauties and their sweethearts enjoying themselves at the fruit stalls and mountebank's stage" at a fair in Burton-upon-Trent; and at Norwich on 8 April 1784 he wrote of a "fair on Tombland for toys etc., full of Beaux and Belles before dinner".<sup>2</sup> An observer of the hiring fair at Studley, Warwickshire noticed that "towards evening each lad seeks his lass, and they hurry off to spend the night at the public houses".<sup>3</sup> It was said that at the fairs and statutes in Cumberland "it is customary for all the young people in the neighbourhood to assemble and dance at the inns and alehouses"; after a hiring, with "fiddlers

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<sup>1</sup> Diary of William Cole, p. 186; and B.M., "Diary of William Cole", Add. MS. 5835, pp. 372 and 401.

<sup>2</sup> Diary of Syllas Neville, pp. 279 and 316.

<sup>3</sup> Hone, Table Book, I, col. 176.

tuning their fiddles in public houses, the girls begin to file off, and gently pace the streets, with a view of gaining admirers; while the young men ... follow after, and having eyed the lasses, pick up each a sweetheart, whom they conduct to a dancing room, and treat with punch and cake."<sup>1</sup> The feast at Pudsey was reported to be a major occasion for match-making.<sup>2</sup> Dancing was always a standard attraction at wakes and pleasure fairs and it provided a focal point for courting and flirtation. John Clare, for instance, wrote of the dancing at a village feast -

Where the fond swain delighteth in the chance  
To meet the sun tann'd lass he dearly loves  
And as he leads her down the giddy dance  
With many a token his fond passion proves  
Squeezing her hands or catching at her gloves  
And stealing kisses as chance prompts the while<sup>3</sup>

Indeed, it would have been strange if many holiday gatherings had not catered to the peculiar interests of unmarried men and women. Festive assemblies offered them some of the best opportunities for establishing new contacts and for pursuing acquaintances already made; they widened the range of choice, and because of their free and easy and relatively uninhibited textures, they encouraged the kinds of gallantries and personal displays which were not usually possible in everyday life. Eustace Budgell must have had this sort

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<sup>1</sup> Housman, Description of Cumberland, pp. 70-71.

<sup>2</sup> Lawson, Progress in Pudsey, pp. 11-15.

<sup>3</sup> Clare, Village Minstrel, stanza 72 (punctuation omitted).

of setting in mind when, in his portrayal of a football game at a country wake, he noted that one "Tom Short behaved himself so well, that most People seemed to agree it was impossible that he should remain a Batchelour till the next Wake."<sup>1</sup> Sir Thomas Parkyns was assuming a similar set of circumstances when he was publicising the satisfactions which were to be gained from his favorite sport:

For the most Part our Country Rings for Wrestlings, at Wakes and other Festivals, consist of a small Party of young Women, who come not thither to choose a Coward, but the Daring, Healthy, and Robust Persons, fit to raise an Offspring from: I dare say, they sufficiently recommend themselves to their Sweet-hearts, when they demonstrate that they are of hail Constitutions, and enjoy a perfect state of Health, and like the Fatigue of that Day ...<sup>2</sup>

And in the same vein, John Gay's The Shepherd's Week had the maid Marian speak warmly of how

Young Colin Clout, a Lad of peerless Meed,  
Full well could dance, and deftly tune the Reed;  
In ev'ry Wood his Carrols sweet were known,  
In ev'ry Wake his nimble Feats were shown.  
When in the Ring the Rustic Routs he threw,  
The Damsels Pleasures with his Conquests grew;  
Or when aslant the Cudgel threats his Head,  
His Danger smites the Breast of ev'ry Maid....<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Spectator, No. 161, 4 September 1711.

<sup>2</sup> Sir Thomas Parkyns, The Inn-Play; or, Cornish-Hugg Wrestler (London, 3rd edn., 1727), p. 20.

<sup>3</sup> Gay, Shepherd's Week, from the second pastoral, "Tuesday". In The Seasons, James Thomson described the festive aftermath to the harvest:

Her every charm abroad, the village-toast,  
Young, buxom, warm, in native beauty rich,  
Darts not-unmeaning looks; and, where her eye  
Points an approving smile, with double force  
The cudgale rattles, and the wrestler twines.

("Autumn", lines 1226-30; from J.L. Robertson, ed., James Thomson, Poetical Works (London, 1908; repr. 1965)).



However, although the young may have been particularly active on many holidays and even dominant on a few, they seldom monopolized the pleasures of a festive gathering. On most occasions there would have been ample room for the participation, in some form or other, of the middle-aged and the elderly. On 9 July 1715 Nicholas Blundell reported that at Little Crosby "the Little Boyes and Girles of this Town diverted themselves with Rearing a May-pole in the West-Lane, they had Morrys dancing and a great many came to it both old and young".<sup>1</sup> Similarly, John Denson of Waterbeach claimed that "both old and young participated" in the afternoon diversions of May Day - the rites of the morning were exclusively for the young people - "and those whom age and infirmity prevented, appeared to enjoy our sports as they sat at their cottage doors."<sup>2</sup> On those occasions when youth enjoyed the limelight there was nothing to prevent the older people from looking on. At the annual harvest feast in Warton, Lancashire during the early eighteenth century "the Old People after Supper smoak their Pipes, and with great Pleasure and Delight behold the younger spending the Evening in Singing, Dancing, etc."<sup>3</sup> On

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<sup>1</sup> Diurnal of Nicholas Blundell, II, 140.

<sup>2</sup> Denson, Peasant's Voice to Landowners, pp. 17-18.

<sup>3</sup> J. Rawlinson Ford and J. A. Fuller-Maitland, eds., John Lucas's History of Warton Parish (London, 1931), p. 126; Lucas's work was written between about 1710 and 1744.

Midsummer Eve, according to Henry Bourne,

... it is usual in the most of Country Places, and also here and there in Towns and Cities, for both Young and Old to meet together, and be Merry over a large Fire, which is made in the open Street. Over this they frequently leap and play at various Games, such as Running, Wrestling, Dancing, etc. But this is generally the Exercise of the younger Sort; for the old Ones, for the most Part, sit by as Spectators, and enjoy themselves and their Bottle.<sup>1</sup>

Matrons would watch the games and dancing at a wake and older men would be keen observers at a match of football, wrestling or cudgelling. "Aged men also, hardly able to walk, were to be seen moving towards this scene of riot," complained a clergyman of the bull-running at Stamford, "anxious to witness a repetition of such exploits as they, when young, had often performed."<sup>2</sup>

In short, even when the young were the most vigorous participants, it is clear that a good many older people attended as spectators - sometimes to gossip, to pronounce judgments, and to display the wisdom of experience. Moreover, there were a number of recreations and festive events which favored no particular age group. The celebrations of the Christmas season, for instance, were appropriate for all ages. And several of the principal pastimes put no special premium on youth: bull-baiting and cock-fighting could be pursued just as effectively by older men (in fact they might have had an advantage) and bell-ringing could be enjoyed and probably practised

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<sup>1</sup> Antiquitates Vulgares, pp. 210-11. Midsummer Eve was one of the secondary festive occasions during the eighteenth century.

<sup>2</sup> J. F. Winks, The Bull Running at Stamford...; Being the Substance of a Sermon Delivered in the General Baptist Meeting-House, Stamford, on Lord's Day Evening, Nov. 15, 1829 (London, nd.), p. 14.

by people of almost any age. Sex was more likely to have been a determinant of even greater weight; for while most of the major holidays involved women as much as men, many of the sporting events expected women to attend only as spectators, and some of them were exclusively mens' affairs.

While some of the traditional popular recreations were conducted fairly autonomously and had their fundamental roots in the common people's own culture of social interdependence, many others were at least partly dependent on the patronage of interest or acquiescence of persons with greater authority, usually the gentry. In certain recreations the involvement of gentlemen was of the first importance. Most horse races would not have existed without them; and hiring fairs obviously assumed employers. Gentlemen also participated actively in cricket and cock-fighting and pugilism; they served as patrons for the boxers of their choice and commonly were responsible for the purses; they bred most of the best fighting cocks and often arranged the mains; and they not only watched cricket but also played it with enthusiasm. Patronage, of course, was traditionally one of the major social functions of the governing class, and it extended into many areas of social activity. Behind a large number of recreational events was the supporting prestige or largess (sometimes conspicuously displayed) of some prominent figure. To cite a typical instance of such patronage, in June 1721 it was announced that

... the Earl of Strafford has been pleas'd to give a Hat, Value one Guinea, to be play'd for on the Monday at Cudgels; and another of the same Price, as also 6 Pair of Buckskin Gloves, at 5s. a Pair, to be wrestled for on Tuesday; and a Silver Cup of 5 Guineas Price, to be run for on the Wednesday, by Maiden Galloways, not exceeding fourteen Hands, during the time of Boughton Green Fair.<sup>1</sup>

Some of the traditional popular sports the gentry patronized for their own diversion. The gentlemen subscribers to the bowling green at Kingsthorp, Northamptonshire gave notice in September 1751 of the wrestling and single-stick matches which they were organising;<sup>2</sup> and in July 1753 at Bristol, where a grand cudgelling match (of some 70 competitors) was promoted, it was said that the "whole Expence" was "borne by a voluntary Subscription of the Gentlemen frequenting the Hot-Well".<sup>3</sup> These were familiar kinds of occurrences. It is clear too that their principal attraction was the gambling involved. Gentlemen were seldom inclined to support a popular diversion very eagerly unless they could bet on its outcome. At a widely attended wrestling match at Botley, Berkshire in 1737 it was said that "there were many Hundred Pounds won and lost upon the Match."<sup>4</sup> A receipt

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<sup>1</sup> Northampton Mercury, 5 June 1721.

<sup>2</sup> Northampton Mercury, 23 September 1751.

<sup>3</sup> From an unidentified newspaper clipping of 1753 in a B.M. copy (142.e.1,2) of Brand, Popular Antiquities (1813), I, facing p. 283.

<sup>4</sup> From an unidentified newspaper clipping of 1737 in Ibid., II, facing p. 310.

book of William de Grey of Merton, Norfolk includes for 12 January 1684 the entry, "Wonne at Watton upon a Wrastling there betwixt one White of Thetford and one Martin servant to Sir Francis Jernegan, the first of which wonne - 00.10.00."<sup>1</sup> An announcement for a wrestling match at Highworth, Wiltshire in the fall of 1740 also pointed out that "if any Person is inclin'd to lay any Sums of Money against the Berkshire Boys, they may have Bets."<sup>2</sup> Pedestrian contests relied almost entirely on the willingness of gentlemen to lay bets. Similarly, César de Saussure remarked in 1728 that "You often see men or boys running certain distances on foot for a wager of from £15 to £20."<sup>3</sup> The gentry must have been active backers of the large meeting in 1679 which Oliver Heywood complained of: "Upon Wednesday Aug. 20. 79, there was a great race at Outwood moor near Wakefield, a great plate set up that cost 25 li, multitudes of people went from all parts: - there was both an horse race and a footrace, one man won both, a Darbeshire man, much vanity there was, some say a Lincolnshire man, he won both plates but lost the wagers, some say it was a cheat made by the gentry."<sup>4</sup> At times certainly the gentlemen gamesters and the plebian sportsmen had interests in common.

Sometimes the gentry were relied on to make small donations

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<sup>1</sup> Walter Rye, ed., Norfolk Antiquarian Miscellany, III, 1887, p. 91.

<sup>2</sup> Gloucester Journal, 21 October 1740.

<sup>3</sup> Letters of de Saussure, p. 293.

<sup>4</sup> Oliver Heywood, II, 264.

towards the support of a particular holiday or pastime. When aid was solicited on certain traditional occasions, they were expected to contribute a shilling or two for the people's ceremonial fund. Such solicitations were an integral part of the mumming and dancing rituals of Christmas, Plough Monday and Whitsuntide, and it seems that the gentry usually responded to the customary expectations. An account book which was kept during the early eighteenth century for the Throckmorton family of Weston Underwood, Buckinghamshire includes records of payments to morris dancers (2s. 6d. on Trinity Monday and 27 December 1701) and to mummers, wassailers and musicians at Christmas time (on 31 December 1701 a half crown was given for "the musick on the Feast day").<sup>1</sup> On 20 October 1714 Claver Morris, a physician in Wells, gave a shilling to some morris dancers.<sup>2</sup> During the 1760s the Earl of Gower was giving a guinea twice each year, around Whitsuntide and New Year's Day, to the Lichfield morris dancers.<sup>3</sup> Most of these kinds of payments would have been regarded by both the donors and recipients as customary aids. Around 1720 the rector at Landbeach in Cambridgeshire was paying "by custom" 2s. 6d. "on Shrove Tuesday for the Football men."<sup>4</sup> Often the

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<sup>1</sup> Berkshire R.O., D/EWeAl.

<sup>2</sup> Edmund Hobhouse, ed., The Diary of a West Country Physician 1684-1726 (London, 1934), pp. 19-20.

<sup>3</sup> Staffordshire R.O., D.593/F/3/12/2/1. The donation was referred to by the recipient as "his Lordship's usual present to the Morrice".

<sup>4</sup> Quoted in William K. Clay, "A History of the Parish of Landbeach in the County of Cambridge", Publications of the Cambridge Antiquarian Society, VI, 1861, p. 60n.

donations were collected in the course of a procession - the procession of ceremonial dancers or perhaps of football players before a traditional match. On Christmas Day at King's Cliffe, Northamptonshire during the earlier eighteenth century "the parishioners with the clerk assemble at the church, at three o'clock in the morning, and sing a Psalm; then they proceed to the cross, and to every gentleman's house in the town, for which they receive a largess in the holidays."<sup>1</sup>

In some places the traditional parish perambulations of Rogation week survived into the eighteenth century and they too might rely on the participation of propertied householders in support of the customary feasting. The parish register of Ashampstead, Berkshire for the eighteenth century included a "Memorandum of such Tenures, by whose Tenants or Under-Tenants, and of those Places, where by Antient Custom, Refreshments are to be provided on the Day of perambulation in the Rogation Week within the parish of Ashampstead, either of Bread, Cakes, Cheese, Butter or Cheesecake, Some one thing, some another, according to the abilities of the several Persons concerned in this provision."<sup>2</sup> In Shalstone, Buckinghamshire the squire of the parish made a note on 24 May 1731 of the activities on "Rogation Monday - Shalstone ffolks went on Processioning - eight pounds of Cheese and a twelve penny loaf and one dozen and an half

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<sup>1</sup> Bridges, Northamptonshire, II, 432.

<sup>2</sup> Berkshire R.O., D/P8 1/1, p. 1.

of penny loaves serves Them for Eating" - he paid the baker 2s. 6d. "for bread for the processioners" - "And two Bushell of Malt and half a pound of hops serves Them for Drinking." He added significantly, "N.B. This is no Custom but my free gift only", but the practice was continued: in 1746 the donation included two 12d. loaves of bread, six white penny loaves, nine or ten pounds of cheese, and two bushels of malt and half a pound of hops; and on the Rogation Tuesday of 1795 the processioners (26 men and 11 boys) started at 8 a.m. from Shalstone House, were refreshed "with Bread and Cheese and Ale" at 11, and finished "at 3 O'Clock in the Afternoon when they were regaled with a plenty of Bread and Cheese and five Horns of Ale to each Man's Share."<sup>1</sup> A memorandum book kept by Sir Thomas Sclater includes an account of the perambulation at Linton, Cambridgeshire on 18 May 1680, an occasion which included a feast given at Sclater's house for around 100 men of the parish. According to his notes,

... the ancientest were first in ye Hall to drink and eate Cake, about 16 or 20, and after about 5 or 6 of ye clock in ye parlor had with me a Supper, viz 4 or 5 joints of Meats and a cold Gammon of English Bacon stuff. And some 20 persons more were in ye kitchin and had Beer and Cake ... and stayed about 2 Hours ... And the 3rd Company being about 40 or 60 were in ye Court next the kitchin and brick stables and after every one was served with the \_\_\_\_\_

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<sup>1</sup> "Purefoy Memorandum Book", in the possession of Mr. Geoffrey Purefoy of Shalstone Manor.



[one word illegible] Beer and a piece of Cake of half a peck cut into 14 or 16 pieces being given, severally set out into ye outermost Court next ye Barn and meadow and stayed about 1 Hour and a Half or 2 Hours.<sup>1</sup>

The recreations of the domestic and agricultural servants who lived in were particularly dependent on the favor and interest of their employers. At the very least servants had to get leave from their masters and mistresses in order to take time off. If the diaries of Nicholas Blundell, William Cole and James Woodforde are any indication, it would appear that servants were fairly frequently given permission to attend a fair or a feast or some sporting event. In 1708, for instance, Blundell's servants went to at least three plays one of which was held in the hall of his house.<sup>2</sup> On both the 11th and 12th of July 1768 William Cole's servantman was allowed to go dancing in the evenings and on 11 January 1769 he "Gave Tom, Molly and Jem Leave to meet Mr. Mason's Sons and Daughters and Mr. Hall's Sons and Kitty Huckle at John Denson's: they stay'd late."<sup>3</sup> On 7 May 1792 Woodforde wrote about "a frolic given to the Servants etc. at Weston House this Afternoon, Tea and Supper etc. Our Servants were invited, Betty and Briton went about 5 in the Afternoon and stayed till 11 at Night .... Our People said they never were at a better frolic."<sup>4</sup> In mid October 1776 he had allowed some free time

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<sup>1</sup> Cambridgeshire R.O., R.59/5/3/1, p. 120.

<sup>2</sup> Diurnal of Nicholas Blundell, I, 167, 181, and 183.

<sup>3</sup> B.M., "Diary of William Cole", Add. MS. 5835, pp. 386 and 398.

<sup>4</sup> Diary of a Country Parson, III, 350.

to several of his servants: on the 12th Betty went with her boy friend to another town to stay overnight; on the 17th Will Coleman went to St. Faith's Fair; and on the 18th Molly was given leave to stay away overnight.<sup>1</sup> Even a guidebook for the good behaviour of servants (which was at pains to emphasize the need for industriousness and a careful use of time) accepted that a certain amount of free time for recreation was only right and proper. "But those you live with must be very unreasonable indeed", it advised, "that would not permit you sometimes to see your Friends on other Days than those which ought to be devoted to Heaven alone: Few Servants but are allowed one Holiday at each of the great Festivals of the Year, and in the Time of Fairs, and it is then expected that you should go to your Relations, or take what other Recreation you think proper."<sup>2</sup>

Sometimes the gentry's support for their servants' recreations was more active. At Little Crosby the servants were allowed to have dancing from time to time: on 4 September 1706, for example, Blundell reported, "I played at Tables with my Lord Gerard. John my Lords Brewer played on his Pips in the Kitchen and some of the Servants danced"; and on 10 September 1709, "The Miller played here after Supper and some of the Servants etc; danced."<sup>3</sup> Servants would at

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<sup>1</sup> Bod. Lib., "Diary of James Woodforde", MS. Eng. misc. f. 149, leaf 16.

<sup>2</sup> A Present for a Servant-Maid: or, The Sure Means of Gaining Love and Esteem (London, 1743), p. 39.

<sup>3</sup> Diurnal of Nicholas Blundell, I, 118 and 229.

times be provided with pocket money if they were going to a recreational event. Around 1770 the memorandum book of the agent for the Aston estates in Shropshire included allowances given to the farm servants to spend at wakes, "merry nights", bull-baits and cock-fights.<sup>1</sup> On 25 July 1707, when the family went to a fair in Liverpool, Blundell gave 1s. 2d. as "Fairings for the Servants".<sup>2</sup> And on 26 January 1767 William Cole noted that "I gave Tom and Jem leave to go to see the Montabank at Fenny-Stratford, and gave each of them with Sarah something to try their Luck at the Lottery. Jem and Sarah who went Shares got a large Pair of Silver Buckles."<sup>3</sup>

Certain festive events were actively arranged by the gentry (or large farmers) as a result of their role as employers of agricultural labour. At the end of a major agricultural task - the corn harvest was easily the most important - it was standard practice for the employer to provide a feast for his workers. "When the Fruits of the Earth are gather'd in," wrote Henry Bourne, "and laid in their proper Receptacles, it is common, in the most of Country Places, to provide a plentiful Supper for the Harvest-Men, and the Servants of the Family; which is called a Harvest-Supper, and in some Places a Mell-Supper, a Churn-Supper, etc."<sup>4</sup> In Northumberland the harvest

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<sup>1</sup> Burne, ed., Shropshire Folk-Lore, p. 463n.

<sup>2</sup> Diurnal of Nicholas Blundell, I, 145n.

<sup>3</sup> Diary of William Cole, p. 179.

<sup>4</sup> Antiquitates Vulgares, p. 229.

dinner was called "the Mell-Supper, at which there are dancing, masquing, and disguising, and all other kinds of rural mirth";<sup>1</sup> and in parts of Yorkshire, as John Brand was told by a local clergyman, "when all the Corn is got home into the Stack-yard, an entertainment is given called the Inning Goose."<sup>2</sup> The harvest dinner, wrote Daniel Hilman in 1710,

... the poor Labourer thinks crowns all, a good Supper must be provided, and every one that did any thing towards the Inning, must now have some Reward, as Ribbons, Lace, Rows of Pins to Boys and Girls, if never so small for their Encouragement, and to be sure plumb Pudding. The men must now have some better than best Drink, which with a little Tobacco, and their screaming for their Largess, their Business will soon be done ....<sup>3</sup>

(The tone of voice is clearly that of the landlord with mixed feelings.) Stephen Duck spoke with sensitivity, and without sentimentalism, of the feasting which followed the harvest:

Our Master joyful at the welcome Sight,  
Invites us all to feast with him at Night.  
A Table plentifully spread we find,  
And Jugs of humming Beer to cheer the Mind;  
Which he, too generous, pushes on so fast,  
We think no Toils to come, nor mind the past.  
But the next Morning soon reveals the Cheat,  
When the same Toils we must again repeat:  
To the same Barns again must back return,  
To labour there for room for next Year's Corn.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Hutchinson, View of Northumberland, II, Appendix, p. 17.

<sup>2</sup> Brand, Popular Antiquities (1813), I, 444n.

<sup>3</sup> Hilman, Tusser Redivivus, "August", pp. 9-10.

<sup>4</sup> From Stephen Duck, "The Thresher's Labour", in his Poems on Several Subjects (London, 1730), pp. 24-25.

Certainly the harvest dinner must have been one of the most widely observed of all the calendar festivities. At Warton, Lancashire the celebrations were organized on a communal basis: "When Harvest is over they have a Merry Night as they call it, against which each Family of the better sort contributes, some Time before, it's [sic] Quota of Malt, which is brewed into Ale, of which, and of a plentiful Entertainment provided at the joynt Expences of the Masters of Families, the whole Village are Partakers."<sup>1</sup> On September 14, 1776 at Weston, Norfolk James Woodforde wrote of being "Very busy all day with my Barley, did not dine till near 5 in the afternoon, my Harvest Men dined here to-day, gave them some Beef and some plumb Pudding and as much liquor as they would drink."<sup>2</sup> On September 12, 1706, with the harvest completed, Nicholas Blundell "killed a Bull for the Workfolks", and the next day he noted that "Many of the Workfolks and most of the Servants went at night to be Mery at Great Crosby".<sup>3</sup> On 12 September 1761 at Nuneham Courtenay

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<sup>1</sup> Lucas's History of Warton, p. 126. "In this Part of the County", he also noticed, "each Village commonly hires a Fiddler which, during the Time of Harvest, goes from one Field to another, and plays to the Reapers: at which Times I have seen the young People whose Backs had been bowed down with hard Labour, in the hot Sun for several Hours, dance as briskly in the Stubble as if they had been on a Theatre; and then their Strength being renew'd by the Muscles of their Bodies having been put into different Motions, and their Spirits revived by the Harmony of the Musick, fall to their Labour again with redoubled Vigour and Activity." (Ibid., pp. 125-26.)

<sup>2</sup> Diary of a Country Parson, I, 187.

<sup>3</sup> Diurnal of Nicholas Blundell, I, 119.

Oxfordshire the Rev. James Newton "Gave Mr Braine orders about the Harvest Home Supper to Night."<sup>1</sup> When he finished the harvest in 1768, Francis Prior of Ufton, Berkshire "Gave all the people that work'd at Cart that day their supper and plenty of Ale and I intend if please God I live till the next harvest and remain in the same mind I now am to provide on this Ocation a Large Round of Beef."<sup>2</sup> At Bletchley, Waterbeach and Weston the rectors' servants were frequently invited to other men's harvest dinners. On 27 August 1801, for example, Woodforde mentioned that "Our Servant Maid, Sally Gunton, had leave to go to Mr. Salisbury's Harvest Frolic this Evening and to stay out all Night. Our Servant Man, Bretingham Scurl, had also leave to be at Mr. Bridwell's Harvest Frolic this Evening";<sup>3</sup> and on 6 September 1766 Cole noted that "Tom and Jem went to Master Holdom's Harvest Home last Night after they put me to Bed at 10."<sup>4</sup> In the arable parishes of England harvest feasts would have involved a large proportion of the active, adult members of the community.

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<sup>1</sup> Bod. Lib., "Diary of James Newton", MS. Eng. misc. e. 251, f. 40.

<sup>2</sup> Frederic Turner, ed., A Berkshire Bachelor's Diary: Being the diary and letters of Francis Prior, recusant and gentleman farmer of Ufton, Berks., in the latter half of the 18th century (Newbury, 1936), p. 17. In 1769 he gave the intended dinner, for which he killed a bull. (Ibid., p. 24.)

<sup>3</sup> Diary of a Country Parson, V, 334; cf. III, 297, and Bod. Lib., "Diary of James Woodforde", MS. Eng. misc. f. 149, leaf 12, and f. 150, leaf 20.

<sup>4</sup> Diary of William Cole, p. 114; cf. B.M., "Diary of William Cole", Add. MS. 5835, pp. 390 and 416, where four harvest feasts in Waterbeach are mentioned.

Although the finishing of the corn harvest occasioned the most important of the agricultural festivities, there were also several other farming tasks which might be concluded with recreations, usually at the employer's expence. At Baldingstone, Lancashire on 6 September 1737, with the corn not yet gathered in, Richard Kay recorded in his diary: "This Day I've been employ'd in Husbandry, this Evening we ended our Shearing, and according to Custom we gave our Reapers this Evening a Treat".<sup>1</sup> On the final day of the hay harvest in 1766 William Cole noted that the labourers "made a sort of Procession, with a Fiddle and German Flute, Jem dressed out with Ribbands and Tom Hearne dancing before the last Cart, I giving a good Supper to all my Hay makers and Helpers, being above 30 Persons in the Kitchin, who staid 'till one."<sup>2</sup> On 14 September 1714 Nicholas Blundell had "a great Breaking of Flax as grew in the Little More-hey, ... there was 12 Breakers, 12 Scutchers, 11 Slansers, 4 to tend two Gigs and one to take up the Flax, in all 40 Persons; ... I gave a good Supper to my

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<sup>1</sup> Diary of Richard Kay, p. 13.

<sup>2</sup> Diary of William Cole, p. 75. Sometimes the mowing of meadows was associated with a recreational custom which, at the very least, would have assumed the employers' acquiescence. For example, at Ratby, Leicestershire in the eighteenth century it was the custom for the occupiers of a certain meadow in the parish "to mow their several allotments on a certain day, called 'the meadow mowing", as was the custom in several parts of the county, particularly at Nelston, Desford, Stanton under Bardon, etc. When the labour of the day was over, the remaining part was spent in wrestlings, footballs, cudgel-playing, and other athletic exercises; and the evening was spent with music and dancing on a small eminence in one part of the meadow." (John Throsby, Select Views in Leicestershire [2 vols.; London, 1790], II, 83-84.)

own Breakers and Swingers. Tatlock played to them at Night, we had 4 Disgisers and a Garland from Great Crosby, and a deal of Dansing."<sup>1</sup> In some of the pastoral areas of England festivities were associated with the sheep-shearing of early summer. John Aubrey observed that "Sheep-sheerings, on the Downes in Wiltshire, and Hampshire etc: are kept with good Cheer, and strong beer".<sup>2</sup> "The Feast of Sheep-sheering, is generally a Time of Mirth and Joy, and more than ordinary Hospitality", wrote Henry Bourne, "for on the Day they begin to shear their Sheep, they provide a plentiful Dinner for the Sheerers, and for their Friends who come to visit them on that Oacasion; a Table also, if the Weather permit, is spread in the open Village, for the young People and Children."<sup>3</sup>

Perhaps the most interesting instance of an employer making provision for his labourers' recreation is the marling celebration which was arranged in 1712 by Nicholas Blundell. During the spring he had been marling some of his fields and as the work was nearing completion in July he wrote of the festivities with which he was actively concerned. The details are worth quoting at length:

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<sup>1</sup> Diurnal of Nicholas Blundell, II, 110.

<sup>2</sup> Aubrey, Remaines, p. 34.

<sup>3</sup> Antiquitates Vulgares, p. 126. See also Hone, Table Book, II, cols. 559-61, and Year Book, cols. 812-14.



- July 4. ... Some of the Young Foulks of this Town met those of the Morehouses and of Great Crosby to consider about the Flowering of my Marl-pit, some of them met at Weedows and others at my Mill....
7. ... I was very busy most of the after-noon shaping Tinsall etc; for the Garland for my New Marl-pit and after Supper the Women helped to Paste some things for it. I began to teach the 8 Sword Dancers their Dance which they are to Dance at the Flowering of my Marl-pit, Dr Cawood played to them....
8. I was very busy in the after Noone making Kaps etc: for my Marlers and Dansers, severall of Great Crosby Lasses helped me. The Young Women of this Town, Morehouses and Great Crosby dressed the Garlands in my Barne for Flowering of my Marl pit. I taught my 8 Sword Dancers their Dance, they had Musick and Danced it in my Barn.
9. I was extreemly busy all Morning making some things to adorn my Marlers Heads. My Marl-pit which was made in the Great Morehey out of which I Marled the Picke and Little Morehey was flowered very much to the Satisfaction of the Spectators, there was present Ailes Tickle, Mrs Molineux of the Grange, Mr Burton, Mr Shepperd of Ince, etc:, they Suped here, all the 14 Marlers had a Particular Dress upon their Heads and Carried each of them a Musket or Gun, The six Garlands etc: were carried by Young Women in Prosestion, the 8 Sword Dancers etc: went along with them to the Marl-pit where they Danced, the Musick was Gerard Holsold and his Son and Richard Tatlock, at Night they Danced in the Barne, Thomas Lathord of Leverpoole brought me to the Marl-pit ~~in~~ a Dogg Collier against my Bull Bate as is to be in the Pit....
15. ... I Baited a Large Bull in the Bottom of my New Marl-pit in the Great Morehey, he was never baited before as I know off, yet played to admiration, there was I think 8 or 9 Doggs played the first Bait and onely two the 3rd Bait, I think there was not above two Doggs but what were very ill hurt,

some Sticked into the Side or Lamed or very ill Bruised, I gave a Coller to be played for but no Dogg could get it fairly, so I gave it to Richard Spencer of Leverpoole being his Dogge best deserved it, There was present at the Bait old Robert Bootle, John Fooler, John Tarlton, John Knowles of Leverpoole, etc:....

18. ... Mr Aldred began to make some kaps for some of my Sword Dansers against the Finishing day....
22. ... William Kennion, Christopher Parker, and their Wives, Sera Atherton, John Mather etc: dined here, they came some of them to give to my Marlars and others to present my Wife against the Finishing of my Marling, I went with them to the Marl pit....
23. ... I had my Finishing day for my Marling and abundance of my Neighbours and Tenants eat and drunk with me in the after noone, severall of them had made presents to my Wife of Sugar, Chickens, Butter, etc:. All my Marlars, Spreaders, Water-Baylis and Carters din'd here except one or two Carters as I think were absent, I payed off my Marlars, and Spreaders and some of my Carters. We fetched home the May powl from the pit and had Sword Dansing and a Merry Night in the Hall and in the Barne, Richard Tatlock played to them....<sup>1</sup>

There were other times too when the gentry might commemorate some special event by providing food and drink and entertainment for the common people. These kinds of festivities were normally occasioned either by an event of state - a coronation, a royal birthday or wedding, a military victory, the ending of a war - or by a development of importance for a particular family - the birth of a son, the heir to an estate coming of age. Celebrations of this type are reasonably well known: certainly they were often recorded, sometimes in considerable detail, by the newspapers of the period.

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<sup>1</sup> Diurnal of Nicholas Blundell, II, 25-27.

After the recovery of George III from his illness in 1789, for example, the country was full of celebrations which were organised by the gentry. At Bidford in Warwickshire, to take a representative case, it was reported that

By Six o'Clock in the Evening Bonfires were lighted, and the whole Town was illuminated. An excellent Band of Music was previously provided for the Occasion, which, together with the Choir of that Place, paraded the Streets during the greatest Part of the Evening, playing 'God save the King,' and such other select Pieces of Music as are most admired for their loyal Tendency. A liberal Subscription was entered into by the Gentlemen of the Corporation, towards defraying the Expences of the Evening. The Poor were plentifully supplied with Bread, Beef, Beer, Cyder, Coals, Candles, etc. etc. and an elegant Supper was provided at the Apothecary's-Arms Inn, which was genteelly attended.<sup>1</sup>

At Exton in Rutland "the right hon. the Earl of Gainsborough, entertained the whole parish in a most bountiful manner; the town was illuminated, a large bon-fire made, and a pipe of ale given to the people in the streets"; and at Morton, Lincolnshire, "a liberal subscription having been made by the inhabitants of Morton and Hantorp; the two inferior public houses were opened for the reception of every householder who chose to partake of the same, the number of whom amounted to one hundred and sixty, who were regaled with an excellent supper of beef and ale, and who testified their grateful thanks for the well-timed largess."<sup>2</sup> Many of the great national

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<sup>1</sup> Northampton Mercury, 21 March 1789; cf. Chelmsford Chronicle, 1 May 1789.

<sup>2</sup> Stamford Mercury, 13 March and 1 May 1789.

events were acknowledged in the conventional manner: music, illuminations, bonfires and fireworks perhaps, an assembly for the gentility, beer and beef distributed among the common people. To celebrate the coronation of George III at Northampton,

... an Ox was roasted whole on the Market-Hill, and at Noon given to the Populace, with several Hogsheads of Strong Beer, by the Worshipful the Mayor and Corporation - a very handsome Coronation-Pole, upwards of 100 Feet high, was erected in the Centre of the Hill, on the Top of which is fixed an Imperial Crown and Sword, finely gilt and painted.... At Night the Town was illuminated in a grander Manner than ever was before known....<sup>1</sup>

On 9 September 1761 at Nuneham Courtenay, Oxfordshire the Rev. James Newton "Gave the Ringers 2.6 to drink for the safe Arrival of the King's intended Consort."<sup>2</sup>

Family celebrations were sometimes observed with similar gala displays, though naturally they were usually confined to one locality. "Made an entertainment at Esholt to all the neighbouring gentlemen and their ladyes," wrote Sir Walter Calverley on 11 September 1707, "and on Saturday after, being 13th same Sept., had my tenants and neighbours and wives at another entertainment provided on purpose. Both the said entertainments were upon the account of my wife's coming to Esholt."<sup>3</sup> (He had just been married in the previous January.)

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<sup>1</sup> Northampton Mercury, 28 September 1761.

<sup>2</sup> Bod. Lib., "Diary of James Newton", MS. Eng. misc. e. 251, f. 39.

<sup>3</sup> "Memorandum Book of Sir Walter Calverley, Bart.", in Yorkshire Diaries and Autobiographies in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries (Publications of the Surtees Society, LXXVII, 1886), p. 117.

At the coming of age of the Earl of Pomfret later in the century,

On this occasion, all his Lordship's Tenants, and the Trades People of Towcester, were invited to Dinner; after which the Company assembled in the Great Hall at Easton, and the evening was concluded with a Ball and Supper. On the four following Days, several Oxen were divided between the Poor of Towcester and the neighbouring Villages, accompanied with Bread and Beer proportioned to the Number of each Family; on which Days many Hundreds also attended at his Lordship's House at Easton, and were entertained in the most hospitable Manner; making the whole Neighbourhood wear the Face of Chearfulness.<sup>1</sup>

On 11 September 1807 an advertisement in the Chelmsford Chronicle announced that

A Bullock will be Roasted Whole in the Common Mead of Great Baddow, Tomorrow, Saturday, the 12th instant for the Benefit of the Inhabitants of that Parish, and the Public at large, by direction of Mr. John Emberson, of Hutton; he being a native of that parish, gives this treat in commemoration thereof.

In a letter of 14 October 1761 to his daughter, the Earl of Breadalbane described the reception given to his family on their entrance into Staffordshire:

The street of Eccleshall thro which we pass'd was adorned with Boughs and Flowers which cover'd every house to the top. An arch was erected of the same materials, with our arms and those of Lord Niddesdale ... hanging in the middle, under which our Coach pass'd. Several girls dress'd in white strew'd flowers as we went, and morrice dancers preceeded us. The windows and streets were cōwded, and a great deal of ale given, by subscription, to the mob. Our neighbour

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<sup>1</sup> Northampton Mercury, 10 January 1789.

Mr. Bosvile sent a machine drawn by one of his coach horses with a Hogshead of ale on it, and his coachman riding on the Cask like a Bacchus; the horse, machine, Hogshead, and man were all dress'd with flowers. This stood in the street and was soon emptied. Several sheep were roasted whole and many Bonfires and the Bells of different parishes rang all the next day. Besides the subscription made by the principal Inhabitants and the neighbouring Farmers, it cost me £20 but luckily 'tis a Case which happens seldom ... the Evening ended with a Ball in Eccleshall.<sup>1</sup>

And a local development of importance could also be the occasion for a special treat. In November 1736 it was reported from Wiltshire that

The Lower Road leading from Marlborough to Beckhampton, Sandy-Lane, and Bristol, (which is much the warmest, safest, and nearest Way) being finish'd, Thomas Smith, of Kennet, Esq; made a handsome Entertainment for his Neighbours, on a very high, large, and beautiful Hill, called Celbury Hill, which lies in the Lower Road; and in a very loyal and affectionate Manner all the Company drank a Health to his Majesty King George, the Queen, the Prince....

After Dinner a Bull was baited at the Top and Bottom of the said Hill, and between 4 and 5000 People sate at the Bottom of that and another steep Hill opposite to it, which made a very agreeable Appearance, and seemed to be as pleasing to the Company as the other Diversion. There was also Backsword, Wrestling, Bowling, and Dancing. The same Diversions were repeated on the 2nd Day, and also running round the Hill for a Petticoat. The 3rd Day the Bull was divided by Mr. Smith amongst his poor Neighbours on the Top of the Hill, where they diverted themselves with Bonfires, Ale and Roast Beef, for Several Hours, and concluded with drinking the Royal Family's and several other loyal Healths.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Bedfordshire R.O., L 30/9/17/45.

<sup>2</sup> Gloucester Journal, 9 November 1736.

Sometimes men of substance were involved in promoting or patronising certain recreations by virtue of the local offices of authority which they held. In these cases the persons who occupied particular positions in local government, usually in the parish or in the town corporation, were obliged by custom to make disbursements for recreational purposes. Bull-baiting seems to have been the most common of these public provisions. At Alnwick, for example, the corporation records indicate that 1s. 4d. was spent in 1664 "for setting the Bull Stob"; 3 shillings in 1680 for a bull rope; 1 shilling in 1695 "for bringing the stone for the Bull ring" and another 7s. 11d. for iron and lead; and in 1750 a workman was paid 10d. "for going to Alemouth for a rope to bait a Bull".<sup>1</sup> Similar fragments of evidence show that bull-baiting was also provided by the corporations of Bristol (1697 and 1698), Northampton (1692 and 1703), Nottingham (1720), and Truro (at the beginning of the eighteenth century).<sup>2</sup> At Skipton in the West Riding the constables' accounts included a charge every few years for buying a new bull rope (12s. 6d. in 1738, 10s. 6d. in 1742, 10/= in 1750, 13/= in 1758).<sup>3</sup> ~~At Skipton~~

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted in Tate, History of Alnwick, I, 432.

<sup>2</sup> Respectively: John Latimer, The Annals of Bristol in the Eighteenth Century (n.p., 1893), pp. 26-27; Christopher A. Markham and J. Charles Cox, eds., The Records of the Borough of Northampton (2 vols.; Northampton, 1898), II, 222; Records of the Borough of Nottingham (9 vols.; Nottingham, 1882-1956), VI, 83; and Douch, Old Cornish Inns, p. 51.

<sup>3</sup> Dawson, History of Skipton, p. 386.

In all these cases it seems to have been the custom for the local government to contribute towards the exercise of the sport. A similar situation may have existed at Stamford with regard to the bull-running: in 1710 the chamberlain paid the constables 2s. 8d. for stopping up the streets on "ye Bull running day";<sup>1</sup> and around 1740 at least two of the town's parishes (St. George's and St. Mary's) made allowances to their churchwardens for expences at the bull-running.<sup>2</sup> As late as 1821 it was reported that the two bulls which were baited on the 5th November at Lincoln had been provided by the city's chamberlains.<sup>3</sup> Sometimes too a local election was the occasion for a sponsored animal sport. Around 1760 at Liverpool it was usual to provide a bear for baiting on the day of the mayor's election;<sup>4</sup> and at Beverley during the eighteenth century it was

... the custom, from time immemorial, for every Mayor of this town on his election to give a bull to the populace, for the purpose of being baited on the day of his being sworn into office; and which was always done either in the Market-place, or at the door of the donor - several of the Aldermen of those days having rings fixed in the pavement, opposite their houses, for that purpose.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> George H. Burton, ed., Old Lincolnshire, A Pictorial Quarterly Magazine (Stamford, 1883-85), p. 166.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 166; Burton, Chronology of Stamford, p. 51; and Stamford Town Hall, Phillips Collection, No. 183.

<sup>3</sup> Stamford Mercury, 9 November 1821. One of the expenses of the Chelmsford overseers in 1720-21 was £20-2-7 "for Bulls Baiting and Bull Feast". (Essex R.O., D/P 94/12/5, vestry meeting of 27 March 1721.

<sup>4</sup> Thomas Troughton, The History of Liverpool (Liverpool, 1810), pp. 92-94.

<sup>5</sup> Hull Advertiser, 1 November 1817. See also Hull Advertiser, 11 October 1817 and 13 October 1820, and Oliver, History of Beverley, p. 422.



Most of the types of dependence which we have drawn attention to lay stress on the active participation of the gentry (or the prosperous middling people) in the recreational life of the common people. But there were more subtle ways too in which many of these recreations assumed support from above. It was not always active assistance which they especially needed, financial or otherwise, but rather the support which was derived from the passive acquiescence of the gentry in the people's traditions and customs. Customary practices, in order to flourish, not only had to be preserved by the common people themselves: they also had to be approved of, or at the very least tolerated, by people with authority. Unless there was a widespread consensus within the governing class which was more or less in favor of these popular traditions, they could not be easily retained. The customs involved sometimes imposed certain limitations on the gentry's freedom of action, for they were customary privileges, rights which the people claimed for themselves; and unless these privileges were acceded to by the gentry, even though particular sacrifices might be involved, the recreations which they sustained would have been placed in jeopardy. If both the people and the gentry were inclined to accept these customs, whatever reservations there may have been, the recreational practices were relatively secure; if on the other hand the gentry were to become hostile, the hostility was sure to pose a serious threat to their survival.

During the eighteenth century, especially in the earlier decades, the dominant attitude of the gentry towards the recreations

of the people seems to have been one of acquiescence and tolerance. To a certain extent gentlemen shared some of the same recreational interests as the common people; and there was only limited room for conflict when their tastes were often so similar. The common denominator was particularly noticeable in the practice of animal sports. Although there were murmurings of disapproval before the middle of the century,<sup>1</sup> there is no indication that any substantial number of gentlemen had as yet become vigorously opposed to them. In fact they were more likely to be attracted by them. "My Black-Bull was Baited at Mrs Ann Rothwells," wrote Nicholas Blundell on 8 September 1712, "there played but three right Doggs and two of them were ill hurt".<sup>2</sup> On 20 October 1714 the physician Claver Morris gave 1s. 6d. for the bull-baiting at a public house;<sup>3</sup> and on 5 September 1759 James Woodforde wrote that "I went to the Bear-baiting in Ansford"<sup>4</sup> (his father was rector of the parish). During the festivities on the day of the mayor's election in Liverpool it was said that "every house and window in the vicinity of the spot where the bear was baited, was adorned by the appearance of the most elegant

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<sup>1</sup> See below, pp. 186ff.

<sup>2</sup> Diurnal of Nicholas Blundell, II, 33.

<sup>3</sup> Diary of a West Country Physician, pp. 19-20.

<sup>4</sup> Diary of a Country Parson, I, 12.

ladies and gentlemen in the town";<sup>1</sup> and an observer of the Stamford bull-running probably had men of substance in mind when he claimed in 1785 that "I have heard some of the natives, who have lived in the metropolis, aver that they never saw any diversion there comparable to it, and if they were to pay a visit to their friends, have construed to come down a little before this day in order to become actors in it."<sup>2</sup> And the informal field sports, especially fishing and coursing, sometimes drew together in the countryside a diversity of social ranks.

The point to bear in mind is that, during the first half of the eighteenth century in particular, many gentlemen were not entirely disengaged from the culture of the common people. They frequently occupied something of a half-way house between the robust, unpolished culture of provincial England and the cosmopolitan, sophisticated culture which was based in London. (Indeed, even the high culture could sometimes be sympathetic to the more primitive culture. "It is impossible that any thing should be universally tasted and approved by a Multitude," opined Joseph Addison on one occasion (he was thinking especially of popular ballads), "tho' they are only the Rabble of a Nation, which hadh not in it some peculiar Aptness to please and gratify the Mind of Man. Human Nature is the same in all reasonable

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<sup>1</sup> Troughton, History of Liverpool, p. 93. During most of the eighteenth century the annual bull-baiting on December 21st at Wokingham, Berkshire was actively patronised by the town corporation. (Arthur T. Heelas, "The Old Workhouse at Wokingham", Berks, Bucks and Oxon Archaeological Journal, XXXI, 1927, pp. 170-71; and V.C.H. Berkshire, II, 296-97.)

<sup>2</sup> W. Harrod, The Antiquities of Stamford and St. Martin's (Stamford, 1785), pp. 193-94.

Creatures; and whatever falls in with it, will meet with Admirers amongst Readers of all Qualities and Conditions".)<sup>1</sup> Most of the country houses were not yet principally seasonal extensions of a polite and increasingly self-conscious urban culture and many of their occupants remained relatively uncitified. They still retained some of the characteristics of rusticity, traits which they shared with the common people. The fact that the drama of the late seventeenth and earlier eighteenth centuries was full of booby-squires (boobies from London's point of view) is an indication, not that the characterization was accurate, but that there actually were a large number of gentlemen whose modes of thought and behaviour were deeply imbedded in the experiences of rural life.<sup>2</sup> There were points at which genteel and plebeian experiences overlapped, and many a gentleman must have been prepared to accept the traditional customs of that community on which he himself depended for some of his satisfactions - not only economic, but psychic and social as well. He too was often a traditionalist, a cultural as well as a political conservative. Moreover, as one student of the period has justly observed, "to an English landowner popularity was of real importance,"<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Spectator, No. 70, 21 May 1711.

<sup>2</sup> John Loftis, Comedy and Society from Congreve to Fielding (Stanford, 1959), especially pp. 68-76. The rustic squire was a much less prevalent figure in the literature of the second half of the eighteenth century because by that time he had no significant basis in social reality.

<sup>3</sup> G. E. Mingay, English Landed Society in the Eighteenth Century (London & Toronto, 1963), p. 284.

and the less social insulation was possible, the more was popularity valued. Nicholas Blundell cannot be regarded as a typical squire of the early eighteenth century - he was a Catholic and he lived in a relatively remote part of the country - but his diary is certainly an instructive testimony of the extent to which one gentleman was involved in those traditional activities which were also shared by the common people of the community. An intimate involvement in rural culture imposed certain common experiences on lord and labourer alike.

The paternalism and tolerance which did exist was not, of course, entirely disinterested. Sometimes it was very much in a gentleman's own interest to accommodate himself to the customary expectations of the common people. Despite the reservations which he may have held, it would often have been inexpedient to fly in the face of popular tradition. It was just this kind of self-interest which one observer had in mind when he wrote in 1759 of the custom of providing harvest feasts:

These rural entertainments and usages ... are commonly insisted upon by the reapers as customary things, and a part of their due for the toils of harvest, and complied with by their masters perhaps more through regards of interest, than inclination. For should they refuse them the pleasures of this much expected time, this festal night, the youth especially, of both sexes, would decline serving

them for the future, and employ their labours for others, who would promise them the rustic joys of the harvest supper, mirth, and music, dance, and song.<sup>1</sup>

There was, in other words, the need to accept a certain amount of give and take. But it is often difficult to determine how much of the gentry's behaviour was motivated by an awareness of their own self-interest and how much resulted from their uncritical acceptance of traditional practice. At times certainly there must have been a tension between the conflicting pulls of two inclinations, the one traditional and the other "progressive". Sir Joseph Banks seems to have felt this sort of tension when he wrote from Revesby, Lincolnshire on 20 October 1783 that "This is the day of our fair when according to immemorial custom I am to feed and make drunk everyone who chooses to come, which will cost me in beef and ale near 20 pounds".<sup>2</sup> His conformity to the customary obligation was probably prompted largely by the desire to maintain his reputation. Certainly some popular customs must have been ambivalently regarded by the gentry: although they served to keep the people contented and sympathetically attached to their social superiors, they also cost them time and money. The crucial distinction, it seems, was between those who accepted the traditional practices, more or less willingly

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<sup>1</sup> The Genuine Account of the Life and Trial of Eugene Aram, for the Murder of Daniel Clark (London, 1759), p. 71. Aram wrote this short piece on "The Melsupper, and Shouting the Churn" while he was a prisoner in York Castle.

<sup>2</sup> Banks to Sir Charles Blagden, Royal Society Miscellaneous MSS, B.22. I have Mr. David Mackay to thank for this reference.

and without much consideration (the most common disposition), and those who regarded them as impediments to their freedom of action, as unacceptable and anachronistic popular impositions. The latter view, as we shall see, was to become increasingly powerful as the century advanced.

The dominant attitude during at least the first two-thirds of the century reflected a subtle blend of tolerance, self-interest, and the paternalistic habit. The judiciousness of this delicate mixture is especially evident in an article of 1736 entitled "Reflections on Wakes and other Times of Publick Diversion":

'Tis well known that such Diversions are chiefly enjoy'd by the common People; who being fatigued by labouring continually for a sorry Living, find a Relaxation highly necessary for them. For several Months before these Festivals come, they please themselves with the Expectation of approaching Joys. Then, think they, we shall not only rest from our mean Employments, but shall act the Part of Richer and more Creditable People; we shall appear with our best Clothes, and with the Help of our Savings not only live well, but divert ourselves with the merry Humours of Harlequin and Punchanello. These Imaginations brighten their Thoughts, dispel the Clouds of Melancholy, and make them dispatch their Business with Pleasure and Alacrity. When the Festival is over, the Idea of it dwells long in their Imaginations, and is every Day revived by their Memories. But what would be the Consequence, if all such Diversions were entirely banished? The Common People seeing themselves cut off from all Hope of this Enjoyment, would become dull and spiritless, and lose not only the Support of their Labour, but even the Comfort of Life: And not only so, but thro' the absolute Necessity of diverting themselves at Times, they would addict themselves to less warrantable Pleasures. Let it not be objected, that they ought rather to addict themselves to such Relaxations as are edifying and apt to promote Virtue. 'Tis true,

they ought so to do; but every Thing cannot be so as it ought to be, nor indeed much otherwise than it is. From all this it follows, that the Government is not at all to be blamed for suffering publick Diversions, tho' in some Respects not strictly warranted by Religion, with Design to guard against more pernicious Consequences.<sup>1</sup>

The same attitude of moderation was adopted by the author of a guide-book for the good behaviour of servant girls: "Innocent Merriment", he advised, "will make you afterward work with more Alacrity, ought to be sometimes indulg'd, and is never blameable, but when the Heart is set too much upon it".<sup>2</sup> Similarly, in the course of advocating increased genteel patronage of certain traditional recreations, the author of a letter to the London Magazine in 1738 declared that

I would not confine rural Diversions to Trials of Strength and Courage; I would admit other Amusements, from which the inferior Part of the other Sex might not be excluded. Dancing on the Green at Wakes, and merry Tides, should not only be indulg'd but encourag'd; and little Prizes being allotted for the Maids who excel in a Jig or Hornpipe, would make them return to their daily Labour with a light Heart, and grateful Obedience to their Superiors.<sup>3</sup>

Here then was the essence of the paternalism of the period: tolerance and a disposition towards traditionalism were strongly

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<sup>1</sup> This essay first appeared in the Dutch Spectator but it was regarded as sufficiently relevant to justify republication in at least two English journals, the Daily Gazetteer of 2 October 1736, and the London Magazine, V, 1736, pp. 560-61.

<sup>2</sup> Present for a Servant-Maid, p. 39.

<sup>3</sup> London Magazine, VII, 1738, pp. 139-40.



reinforced by an awareness of the methods for maintaining social control. "For a Sort of civil and political Reasons," confessed a contributor to the Gentleman's Magazine in 1738, "as well as out of my natural Candor and Humanity, I am no Enemy to the Recreations of the Populace".<sup>1</sup> Adam Smith was to touch on the relationship between social control and recreations in his discussion of the potentially subversive character of popular religious sects. One of the ways to guard against their dangerous tendencies, he suggested, was to provide "public diversions":

The state, by encouraging, that is by giving entire liberty to all those who for their own interest would attempt, without scandal or indecency, to amuse and divert the people by painting, poetry, music, dancing; by all sorts of dramatic representations and exhibitions, would easily dissipate, in the greater part of them, that melancholy and gloomy humour which is almost always the nurse of popular superstition and enthusiasm. Public diversions have always been the objects of dread and hatred, to all the fanatical promoters of those popular frenzies. The gaiety and good humour which those diversions inspire were altogether inconsistent with that temper of mind, which was fittest for their purpose, or which they could best work upon.<sup>2</sup>

Similarly, in the preface to his pioneering study of popular customs John Brand pointed out that "Shows and Sports have been countenanced by the best and wisest of States.... The Common People, confined

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<sup>1</sup> Gentleman's Magazine, VIII, 1738, p. 523.

<sup>2</sup> Adam Smith, An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations, ed. Edwin Cannon (2 vols.; London, 1950), II, 280-81. Smith's remarks are reminiscent of Machiavelli's advice to the prince that "at proper times of the year he engages the people's attention with festivals and shows." (The Prince, chap. 22; from Machiavelli: The Chief Works and Others, transl. Allan Gilbert [3 vols.; Durham, N.C., 1965], I, 84.)

by daily labour, seem to require their proper Intervals of Relaxation; perhaps it is of the highest political Utility to encourage innocent Sports and Games among them."<sup>1</sup>

The other principal social support for popular recreations was the publican and the public house. Indeed, for the exercise of many recreations the participation of publicans was often very useful and sometimes even essential. Aside from the family household, the public house was the foremost everyday meeting place for off-work social gatherings; it was one of the fundamental social centres of the community (the only others of importance were the market place and the village green, and perhaps the churchyard) and because of this it came to serve as a major focal point around which recreations developed and were cultivated. It was a natural recreational centre, for men were in the habit of visiting the public house during their free time for refreshment and conversation and conviviality. "The beer-house is an attractive thing to him", said a Hampshire magistrate in 1833 of the working man; "it is not altogether the beer, but the fellowship they meet with, and the conversation they get into, and the petty publications which are continually carried round to those houses, and which they get to read".<sup>2</sup> (Even before the advent

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<sup>1</sup> Brand, Popular Antiquities, pp. v-vi. There are some general observations on the character of eighteenth century paternalism in Mingay's English Landed Society, chaps. 9 and 11.

<sup>2</sup> "Report from the Select Committee on the Sale of Beer", Parliamentary Papers, 1833, XV, p. 9 (evidence of Rev. Robert Wright of Itchin-Abbas).

of popular periodicals and newspapers the alehouse would certainly have been an important centre for the exchange and dissemination of news.) When the Swedish visitor, Peter Kalm, was in Little Gaddesden, Hertfordshire in April 1748 he noticed that "the men of this village very often came to the inn, to pass some hours over some Pint beers.... There were seen, sometimes both before and after dinner, a number of labouring men and others killing time in this way. Still, the evenings after six o'clock were especially devoted to this, after the carls had finished their regular labour and day's work."<sup>1</sup> This must have been a familiar kind of scene: certainly it was often (and increasingly) mentioned by the social reformers of the period as being all too common.

Quite naturally, the general mood of leisure which was inherent in public house gatherings was frequently given specific content through the provision of particular amusement facilities. A public house could often offer to its patrons decks of cards and other devices for petty gaming, such as a skittle ground or a shuffle board or a nine pin alley. "Tom and Jem at the Raffle or Lottery at the Alehouse", wrote William Cole on 7 March 1768.<sup>2</sup> It was observed that in Derbyshire "Quoits seemed a very prevalent amusement of the lower and more idle part of the manufacturing People, at the

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<sup>1</sup> Kalm's Account of His Visit to England on His Way to America in 1748, transl. Joseph Lucas (London, 1892), pp. 333-34.

<sup>2</sup> B.M., "Diary of William Cole", Add. MS. 5835, p. 373.

Ale-house Doors, in the north of the County, about Sheffield in particular".<sup>1</sup> If a public house was sufficiently spacious dancing might be allowed on holiday evenings. In Cumberland, for instance, it was said that many of the village alehouses had several dances a year, in addition to the ones during fairs and statutes.<sup>2</sup> Hiring fairs very much centred on public houses: almost all the statutes were held at some inn or public house, including those which were still run by the High Constables, and as a result they inevitably served as the hub for the day's entertainment.

But many publicans did more than just passively preside over the amusements of their clientele: they also actively organised and promoted popular recreations.<sup>3</sup> They knew that a festive or sporting crowd would assure them of a lively trade. (The sponsors of a horse race in Gloucestershire in 1736, "G. Chambers at the Three Crowns, and John Halling at the Bear, in Cold-Harbour, and William Nebes of Horsley", were quite explicit about their motives: "The abovesaid Subscribers have taken the Field, so that all Persons not concern'd are desir'd to bring no Liquors there for Sale.")<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Farey, Agricultural Derbyshire, III, 630.

<sup>2</sup> Housman, Description of Cumberland, pp. 72-73.

<sup>3</sup> For a summary of the relevant evidence on two counties, see A. F. J. Brown, Essex at Work 1700-1815 (Chelmsford, 1969), pp. 72-73; and Douch, Old Cornish Inns, chap. 3.

<sup>4</sup> Gloucester Journal, 20 July 1736. Similarly, another advertisement for races desired "no Person to come into the Fields adjoining, or Meadow, to sell any sort of Liquor, but the Inhabitants of Sutton-Benger." (Gloucester Journal, 2 November 1736.)

Consequently they were to be found making arrangements for matches of football, cricket, wrestling, cudgelling, and even bell-ringing; and they sometimes organised baitings of animals and promoted cock-fights. On 12 August 1749 a cricket match was announced to "be played between Eleven Men from Manningtree, Mistley, and Brightingsea, and Eleven Men of Colchester; to meet at George Johnson's, the Sign of the Fencers in Tenant's Lane, Colchester. Wickets to be pitched at One o'clock, and play for Eleven Guineas, at Colchester aforesaid; where all Gentlemen Cricketers and others, will meet with a hearty welcome, from their humble Servant, George Johnson."<sup>1</sup> Similar notices drew attention to other diversions at public houses: an ass race at the Lion and Castle in Theberton, Suffolk on 1 October 1743;<sup>2</sup> a wrestling match between Berkshire and Gloucestershire at the Swan Inn in Highworth, Wiltshire on 16 October 1740 ("for the Encouragement of the Gamesters," it was added, "the Landlord ... will give Two Guineas to that Side which shall throw Three Falls out of the Five, and Half-a-Crown to every Man that throws a Fall");<sup>3</sup> a singlestick match at the Goat Inn in Northampton on 16 August 1765;<sup>4</sup> bull-baiting

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<sup>1</sup> Ipswich Journal, 12 August 1749.

<sup>2</sup> Ipswich Journal, 17 September 1743.

<sup>3</sup> Gloucester Journal, 7 October 1740.

<sup>4</sup> Northampton Mercury, 12 August 1765.

at the White Hart in Maldon, Essex on 5 January 1785 and at the Bell in Purleigh on 27 June 1786.<sup>1</sup> The provincial newspapers were full of such advertisements. Although the efforts of publicans in small villages were probably less ambitious, it is unlikely that they would have neglected to provide one or two special attractions on a major holiday. At Weston in Norfolk, for example, the Whitsuntide entertainments normally centred on the local public house, where a variety of rural diversions were arranged. In 1765 one

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<sup>1</sup> Chelmsford Chronicle, 31 December 1784 and 23 June 1786. Although publicans were probably the major sponsors of animal baits, there were two other ways in which the sports could be provided. Butchers were sometimes required to have a bull baited before killing it, and fines could be levied on those who neglected to do so. The Darlington parish records for 1723 contain the entry, "We lay a pain of 6s. 8d. upon any Butcher that shall kill any Bull unbated" (quoted in Longstaffe, History of Darlington, p. 295); and in 1739 the court leet at Skipton fined a butcher 6s. 8d. because he "hath killed and sold within the burg aforesaid a bull without baiteing" (quoted in Dawson, History of Skipton, p. 386). A similar presentment for killing a bull unbaited was made at Alnwick in 1709. (Tate, History of Alnwick, I, 432). On 30 September 1674 a bylaw was passed at the Atherstone court leet and baron "that noe butcher shall kill any bull unbaited" on pain of a two shilling fine. (Warwickshire R.O., MR. 9.). Baiting a bull was thought to make its flesh more tender. The least common arrangement was for a bull or bear keeper to hire out his animal for baiting. In November 1658, for example, "John Morgan, one of the Churchwardens of the parish of Cheadle", was presented "for hyring his Bull to be baited from Alehouse to Alehouse on Cheadle Wake day." (J. H. E. Bennett and J. C. Dewhurst, eds., Quarter Sessions Records with other Records of the Justices of the Peace for the County Palatine of Chester 1559-1760 /Record Society of Lancashire and Cheshire, XCIV, 1940/, p. 166.) Bearwards still existed in Derbyshire during the early nineteenth century. (Farey, Agriculture of Derbyshire, III, 628-29.)

observer spoke of how, "on occasions of rendezvous and public meetings of merriment in a village, the landlord of the alehouse will give a tup, (so they call a ram) or a pig, well soaped, with the tail, and the horns, and the ears, respectively cut off. He that catches the tup is to have him; but if he be not taken, he returns to the landlord".<sup>1</sup> Some publicans organised their own petty fairs. The publican in fact was the only commercial promoter of major significance. There were as well a number of other recreational entrepreneurs, especially the itinerant entertainers - mountebanks, gypsies, travelling players and musicians and exhibitors of curiosities<sup>2</sup> - and by the early nineteenth century some of the fairground amusements were substantial commercial propositions; but the most regular and most familiar source of promoted recreations had to be a fixed institution, and this could only be the public house.

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<sup>1</sup> Samuel Pegge, "The Bull-running, at Tutbury, in Staffordshire, considered", Archaeologia, II, 1773, pp. 90-91 (from a paper read at the Society of Antiquaries, 14 February 1765).

<sup>2</sup> For example, in 1791 a constable in Epping complained that on June 28th, "about seven o'clock in the evening Samuel Cunningham, a quack doctor, Isaac Cunningham, a Merry Andrew, Eleanor wife of Isaac Cunningham, tumbler, John Thompson, tumbler, and William Legat, minstrel, appeared in the market place at Epping..., and there performed interludes of daring tumbling and conversation pieces and Whist, amongst the parts of which a lottery was opened, wherein the said Cunningham gave prizes to several of the people, that a large mob was collected, and by there [sic] various arts and subtle craft they did impose upon and deceive many of his majesty's unwary subjects." (Essex R.O. Q/SBb 345/67.) At one time in 1798 at West Ham a crowd assembled near the church to see a man who was playing a hand organ and exhibiting in his caravan (at a penny a view) a "white negro woman". (Essex R.O., Q/SBb 372/61.)

One of the notable features about the recreational life in eighteenth century England is the fact that for the most part the church was only peripherally involved in the traditional festivities of the labouring people. In much of Catholic Europe the church's participation in these festivities remained vigorous and of fundamental importance; holidays were still in some measure holy days, and the church continued to be active in sustaining and sanctifying a holiday calendar which was very much of its own making. But in England, where the established church was largely a senior servant in the machinery of government, much of the religious significance of the periodic festivities had been swept away during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.<sup>1</sup> The parish church still retained some association with recreational customs - the wake Sunday, for instance, was commonly marked by a special service, and in some places it was the traditional occasion for strewing the church with rushes (on the feast Sunday at King's Sutton, Northamptonshire "it is a custom to cover the floor of the church with rushes" and at Little Oakley and Paston special meadows were set aside for this purpose)<sup>2</sup> - but by the

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<sup>1</sup> For a brief discussion of this change, see Christopher Hill, Society and Puritanism in Pre-Revolutionary England (London, 1964), pp. 146-51 and 209.

<sup>2</sup> Bridges, Northamptonshire, I, 180, and II, 330 and 537; cf. Alfred Burton, Rush-Bearing (Manchester, 1891), pp. 21-22, and Wright, Calendar Customs, I, 181.



eighteenth century most of these festivities had become, and were widely regarded as, predominantly secular affairs; and when their existence was defended by some gentleman, the defence was usually on grounds of social and political utility. The religious culture of the past was popish and thus to be deplored; the new religious orthodoxy was rational and unencumbered by an overbearing priestcraft. When religious considerations did enter a discussion of popular recreations, it was either because the superstitions of Catholicism were again being condemned or because a critic of these recreations was drawing attention to the discrepancy between the alleged original religious character of some festive occasion and its contemporary profanity. At those times when the church actually was associated with a major holiday - around Christmas, at Easter, on the wake Sunday (in 1733 the vicar of Dartford, Kent referred to "the great festival days of our church, X'mas, Easter and Whitsunday")<sup>1</sup> - it was really just one of several participants and social supports, and often not the most important. The parson had become much like any other gentleman and his church had given up many of its distinctive functions. For the most part the common people made their own pleasure and when necessary they looked to secular sources for assistance.

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<sup>1</sup> Elizabeth Melling, ed., Kentish Sources, vol. IV: The Poor (Maidstone, 1964), p. 103.

(2) Some Social Functions of Popular Recreations

A sociologist has suggested that a "fundamental characteristic of play, as differentiated from any other sort of behaviour," is "that play is activity which is by and large non-instrumental in character." "On a social level," he argues, "play is relatively 'self-contained' activity, which is not linked to consequences lying outside the performance of the activity itself."<sup>1</sup> The present section advances a contrary view. It seeks to relate popular recreations to the wider social contexts from which they arose and, in particular, to discern some of the social functions of these recreations for the common people themselves. It attempts to explain some of the less obvious, sometimes latent, appeal of popular recreations and to establish their implications for the social structures and networks of social relations in which they were involved. As a guide to this functional approach we may follow Robert Merton: "The central orientation of functionalism", he says, is "expressed in the practice of interpreting data by establishing their consequences for larger structures in which they are implicated!".<sup>2</sup> And it should be noted that the "larger structures" to which our attention is presently directed are primarily those of only one group in society, the common people, not the social system as a whole.

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<sup>1</sup> A. Giddens, "Notes on the Concepts of Play and Leisure", Sociological Review, New series, XII, 1964, p. 74.

<sup>2</sup> Robert Merton, On Theoretical Sociology: Five Essays, Old and New (New York, 1967), pp. 100-01.

Social scientists have often drawn attention to those social activities which, as a sociologist has put it, "provide institutionalized outlets for hostilities and drives ordinarily suppressed by the group."<sup>1</sup> "In most known societies," it is suggested, "one can find more or less institutionalised occasions where ordinary constraints are to some extent relaxed."<sup>2</sup> Traditional recreations have frequently been among the most important of these types of occasions, and from the evidence of our period it is possible to demonstrate some of the principal ways in which they served as outlets for tensions and hostilities.

Certain recreations, it seems, functioned as outlets for those urges which, because of the enforcement of mores governing personal behaviour, were normally repressed. On these occasions some of the ordinary taboos about personal behaviour were set aside and "licentious" behaviour was temporarily sanctioned. Orgiastic feasts are the classic expressions of the characteristic features of "licentiousness" - heavy drinking, wild dancing, spontaneous singing and

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<sup>1</sup> Lewis A. Coser, The Functions of Social Conflict (London, 1956), p. 41. I am indebted to this work for a number of ideas, especially the discussion in chapter 3, "Hostility and Tensions in Conflict Relationships".

<sup>2</sup> Norbert Elias and Eric Dunning, "The Quest for Excitement in Leisure" (typescript), p. 4. Mr. Dunning kindly allowed me to read this unpublished paper.

shouting, the loosening of sexual inhibitions - practices which have been observed on such occasions as the Roman Saturnalia, the continental and Latin American carnivals, and the Scottish or American New Year's Eve. "Here the individual," writes Edmund Leach, "instead of emphasizing his social personality and his official status, seeks to disguise it. The world goes in a mask, the formal rules of orthodox life are forgotten."<sup>1</sup>

These kinds of events were not at all uncommon in English society. Oliver Heywood wrote once of how "On Lords day July 12, 1680, there was a rushbearing at Howarth and their Tyde (as they call it) on which multitudes of people meet, feast, drink, play, and commit many outrages in revellings, in rantings, riding, without any fear or restraint.... The like was at Bramly the same day being Lords day."<sup>2</sup> In Northamptonshire, where the festival of St. Andrew continued to be observed by the lacemakers well into the nineteenth century, it was said that "the day is one of unbridled licence - a kind of miniature carnival.... the lace-schools are deserted, and drinking and feasting prevail to a riotous extent."<sup>3</sup> Sir Frederick

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<sup>1</sup> Leach, Rethinking Anthropology, p. 135.

<sup>2</sup> Oliver Heywood, II, 272.

<sup>3</sup> Thomas Sternberg, The Dialect and Folk-lore of Northamptonshire (London, 1851), p. 183.

Eden spoke of the heavy drinking which marked many of the English holidays: in the North, he said, strong drink "is reserved as an indulgence for extraordinary festivals; for a horse-race; a merry-making; or a market-day; and resorted to, not merely for shallow draughts, but with the avowed purpose of drinking deep."<sup>1</sup> A song on the "Rotherham Statutes" remarked on the free drinking at the fair:

When night came on the game begun,  
They drank hot ale and gin;  
Grace's face was like the rising sun,  
And Sam felt warm within....<sup>2</sup>

William Borlase, in the mid eighteenth century, was complaining that the traditional wrestling and hurling matches in Cornwall were being marred by "frolócking and drinking immoderately".<sup>3</sup>

On such occasions the sobriety which was normally demanded, in order that the everyday business of life could be carried on, was temporarily set aside when the need for discipline was less compelling, and when opportunities became available for relatively harmless insobriety. Since most recreations inherently involved a loosening of ordinary social restraints, and were set in a context which was by nature more permissive, more free and easy<sup>4</sup> - a bathing spot, the

<sup>1</sup> Sir Frederick Eden, The State of the Poor (3 vols.; London, 1797), I, 542.

<sup>2</sup> John Wilson, ed., The Songs of Joseph Mather (Sheffield, 1862), pp. 118-20.

<sup>3</sup> Borlase, Natural History of Cornwall, p. 301.

<sup>4</sup> The relative "looseness" of recreational gatherings is remarked upon in Erving Goffman, Behaviour in Public Places: Notes on the Social Organization of Gatherings (New York, 1963), chap. 13.

fairground, the gatherings around a football pitch - they were particularly suitable settings for the exercise of more radical kinds of licence, for behaviour which was not merely more relaxed but which actually countered the dominant mores of people's working lives. Sexual indulgence was, as it still is, more permissible at a party than in "normal" circumstances because (for one reason) at a party there were fewer overriding demands which sex could disrupt.

Some holidays were thought to be especially associated with sexual licence. The early morning excursion of May Day into a woods or common in order to "gather the May" was sometimes held in this light: "much Wickedness and Debauchery are committed that Night," claimed Henry Bourne, "to the Scandle of whole Families, and the Dishonour of Religion".<sup>1</sup> "If any kind Sweet-heart left her Maiden-head in a Bush," remarked a Restoration writer, "she had good luck if she finde it again next May-day".<sup>2</sup> Wakes too might be similarly regarded: "Wherever this sort of feast is yet kept up", said an early nineteenth century observer of north-east Lincolnshire, "there is no little drunkenness among the men; and often dancing parties are attended with a rude familiarity towards the other sex near approaching to licentiousness."<sup>3</sup> John Brand suspected that in the North wakes

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<sup>1</sup> Bourne, Antiquitates Vulgares, pp. 200-02.

<sup>2</sup> Matthew Stevenson, The Twelve Moneths (London, 1661), p. 22; cf. Hill, Society and Puritanism, p. 187.

<sup>3</sup> Society of Antiquaries, "Edward James Willson Collection" (Lincoln), vol. XIII, MS. p. 62.

"sometimes prove fatal to the Morals of our Swains, and to the Innocence of our rustic Maids."<sup>1</sup> The smock races which were common at wakes and other rural gatherings could carry a sexual connotation, for the female competitors were often encouraged to come lightly clad.<sup>2</sup>

Fairs were probably the recreational events which were most commonly employed for sexual licence. A fine illustration of this feature is the October fair at Charlton in Kent which was roundly condemned, but also perceptively observed, by Daniel Defoe: the village, he said,

<sup>1</sup> Brand, Popular Antiquities, p. 302.

<sup>2</sup> According to Oliver Heywood, on 1 September 1681 "there was a strange unheard of race on Karsy Moor near Manchester in Lancash. it was run by 3 or 4 women stark naked only their privitys covered with a rag, amongst many thousands of people, oh unparaleld impudence! Capt Howorth (Dr Howorths son) made it, proposing a holland shift to the winners.... he hath been to Flanders a courtier...." (Oliver Heywood, II, 284.) In the Penny London Morning Advertiser of 11 June 1744 an announcement for a cricket game on Walworth Common also noted that "the gentlemen who play this match have subscribed for a Holland smock of one guinea value, which will be run for by two jolly wenches, one known by the name of The Little Bit of Blue (the handsome Broom Girl) at the fag end of Kent Street, and the other, Black Bess, of the Mint. They are to run in drawers only, and there is excellent sport expected." (Quoted in Buckley, 18th Century Cricket, p. 18.) The sexual implications of a smock race are suggested in Somerville, Hobbinol, or the Rural Games. See also Dennis Brailsford, Sport and Society: Elizabeth to Anne (London and Toronto, 1969), p. 240.

... is ... infamous for the yearly collected rabble of mad-people, at Horn-Fair.... The mob indeed at that time take all kinds of liberties, and the women are especially impudent for that day; as if it was a day that justify'd the giving themselves a loose to all manner of indecency and immodesty, without any reproach, or without suffering the censure which such behaviour would deserve at another time.<sup>1</sup>

Indeed, the fair at Charlton had a particular reputation for licentiousness, but some degree of permissiveness was a common characteristic of many fairs. At the March 25th hiring fair in Axbridge, Somerset it was said that "many of the fair filles-de-chambres, dairy-maids, and even fat cooks and greasy scullion wenches, are so civilly greeted by their amorous swains, that this fair is productive of much business for the country justices and their clerks, parish-officers, and mid-wives, for many miles round."<sup>2</sup> "Its effects are seen ... before the end of the year;" claimed one writer of the statute fair, "for, when bastardy cases are being adjudicated, many a poor girl declares that her ruin was effected at the last Martinmas Hirings."<sup>3</sup> At Bromley, Kent there was a bulge of bastard births each year in December-January, about nine months after the spring fair.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Defoe, Tour through Great Britain, I, 97. See also Hone, Every-Day Book, I, cols. 1386-88; and William Chappell and J. W. Ebsworth, eds., The Roxburghe Ballads (9 vols.; London, 1871-99), VII, 194-96, and VIII, 661-68.

<sup>2</sup> Gentleman's Magazine, LXXV, part 1, 1805, p. 202.

<sup>3</sup> Greville J. Chester, Statute Fairs: Their Evils and Their Remedy (York and London, 1856), p. 9.

<sup>4</sup> Local Population Studies Magazine and Newsletter, No. 1, Autumn 1968, p. 46.



Many fairs provided for the common people what masquerades afforded to the gentry and nobility. Indeed, the fair as a sexual playground was something of a literary stereotype. After her first affair, Betty the chambermaid in Joseph Andrews was said to have been "long deaf to all the sufferings of her lovers till one day, at a neighbouring fair, the rhetoric of John the hostler, with a new straw hat and a pint of wine, made a second conquest over her."<sup>1</sup> In Charles Johnson's The Country Lasses (1715) the same social assumption emerged from Modely's warning to Heartwell against marrying a peasant girl: "Ay, ten to one but some Sinewy Thresher, who has warm'd her brisk Blood at a Mop or a Wake, steps into your Place, and delivers down a Posterity of young Flail-drivers, known by the name of Heartwell."<sup>2</sup> "'Tis a very foolish piece of business;" complained the tough-minded squire of the hiring fair on the village green in Isaac Bickerstaffe's Love in a Village (1763), "good for nothing but to promote idleness and the getting of bastards".<sup>3</sup> Popular ballads regularly referred to the permissiveness which was observed at fairs. A song on the "Wrekington Hiring", for instance, told of how

<sup>1</sup> Henry Fielding, Joseph Andrews, Book I, chap. 18.

<sup>2</sup> Charles Johnson, The Country Lasses (London, 1715), Act IV, scene i.

<sup>3</sup> Isaac Bickerstaffe, Love in a Village (London, 1763), Act I, scene ~~iii~~ vi.

... they danc't agyen till it was day,  
 An' then went hyem, but by the way,  
 There was some had rare fun they say,<sup>1</sup>  
 An' found it nine months after-O ....

Similarly, according to the ballad "A True Description of a Trip to the Fair", "Some I doubt will repent they took no better care,/ For in less than nine months they'll remember the fair."<sup>2</sup>

The sexual reputation of fairs may be seen as a function of the social circumstances of those persons who were most directly implicated - servants, apprentices, and other young bachelors and spinsters. Since almost all of these people were subordinate to a master or mistress (or perhaps still to their parents), they were ordinarily obliged to submit to a discipline which, for the most part, imposed considerable restrictions on their opportunities for sexual indulgence. Their subordination involved many everyday constraints, and the stronger the constraints, the more would a relief from authority be valued. Large social gatherings, such as fairs, allowed them to escape temporarily from some of these restrictions - as the

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<sup>1</sup> Two versions of this ballad are included in "A Collection of Broad-sides and Ballads Printed in Newcastle on Tyne" (c. 1799-1830), B.M., 1875.d.13. Another version is in Lloyd, Come all-ye Bold Miners, pp. 28-30.

<sup>2</sup> From a copy supplied to me by Mr. Roy Palmer, who has very generously provided me with broadside and ballad material, along with much useful bibliographical advice. For further illustrations from balladry of the sexual reputation of fairs and wakes, see "The Rigs of the Mops" and "The Plough Boy" in Roy Palmer, ed., Songs of the Midlands (forthcoming); and "Haymaking Courtship" in James Reeves, The Idiom of the People: English Traditional Verse (London, 1958), pp. 122-23.

lines from one ballad recommended, "Come, lasses and lads, take leave of your dads / And away to the fair let's hie"<sup>1</sup> - and gave them a chance to follow more freely their own inclinations in the propitious setting of an abundant sexual market. Hiring fairs were especially appropriate occasions for tension-release because they were very much servants' days, holidays which were given shape largely by the servants' own tastes and psychic needs. Their employers, of course, were often much less enthusiastic. Complaining of what he regarded as an increasing licentiousness between the sexes, the rector of Claybrook claimed that "the practice of hiring servants at public statutes, which prevails universally in Leicestershire, is by many people strongly condemned in a moral point of view, and I believe with reason."<sup>2</sup> These and other popular assemblies very much encouraged the infringement of important mores which it was in the interest of the employers to have upheld. Indeed, the uses to which fairs were put illustrates a general feature of many large public gatherings: the fact that they undermined the impact of social control and allowed those who were usually dependent to step outside those regulations which ordinarily inhibited their personal behaviour.

Festive gatherings could also serve as a medium for the expression of hostility against the prevailing structures of authority.

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<sup>1</sup> "The Humours of Hayfield Fair", in Llewellyn Jewitt, ed., The Ballads and Songs of Derbyshire (London, 1867), pp. 62-64.

<sup>2</sup> Macaulay, Claybrook, p. 132.

On these occasions an active defiance was displayed against norms and constraints which were imposed from above. They became opportunities for irreverence, occasions for taking liberties at the expense of gentlemen. One of the arguments against the traditional pastimes which an ejected minister advanced in 1661 was that "these prophane meetings do encourage the rout in their insolency against the antient and the honourable. This makes the servant contemn his Master, the people their Pastor, the subject his Sovereign, the childe his Father, and teacheth young people impudency and rebellion."<sup>1</sup> They sometimes included incidents of aggression specifically intended to embarrass and irritate men of higher rank. The Swiss visitor César de Saussure complained in the 1720s of the populace "throwing dead dogs and cats and mud at passers-by on certain festival days", and during a game of street football, he claimed, "they will break panes of glass and smash the windows of coaches, and also knock you down without the slightest compunction; on the contrary, they will roar with laughter."<sup>2</sup> At times this kind of aggressiveness was exercised in a ritual form. For instance, at Derby's Shrovetide football match there was a custom known as "dusting":

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas Hall, Funebria Florae, The Downfall of May-Games (London,<sup>3rd edn.,</sup> 1661), pp. 14-15.

<sup>2</sup> Letters of de Saussure, pp. 294-95.

... bags of loosely-woven canvas were filled with powder-colours.... The victim was attacked first from the rear, and then, as he turned round to identify his assailant, he was 'dusted' on all sides - blue, white, red, yellow and black - until, half-blinded and wholly angry, he managed to make his escape. The 'dusters' worked entirely among lookers-on upon the outskirts of the play, and any unpopular person was certain to be the object of their attention.<sup>1</sup>

Similarly, the ritual celebrations of November 5th were sometimes employed to castigate some prominent and unpopular individual in the community. The conventional technique was to substitute the person's effigy for that of Guy Fawkes, as at Lincoln in 1818, where (according to the Stamford Mercury's correspondent)

... a leader of the rabble who had a pique against a neighbouring tradesman in St. Peter's at Gowts parish, availed himself of the Guy to hang that person in effigy, to insult him at his own door in the grossest manner, at the head of his mob, charging him falsely with perjury, and then to flog and behead the effigy of the unfortunate object of his persecution. Considerable damage was done by the rabble to the windows and front of his house.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> A. W. Davison, Derby: Its Rise and Progress (n.p., 1906), p. 212n. A letter in the Derby Mercury of 28 February 1844 drew attention to the same phenomenon: "I was passing down Wardwick before two o'clock on Tuesday, and was met by a band of ruffians who appeared to consider themselves outlaws. Each was prepared with a bag filled either with soot or charcoal dust, and on meeting any person who appeared respectable they threw the bag and its contents in his face, or upon that part of his dress that suited their purpose best." One spectator reported that as he was awaiting the start of the match "a filthy clout coated in mud was most dexterously thrown into my face." (Derby Mercury, 9 February 1815).

<sup>2</sup> Stamford Mercury, 13 November 1818. In the Stamford Mercury of 10 November 1820 it was regretted that the Guy Fawkes holiday "has served not unfrequently as a vehicle for lampooning some object of private or public obloquy".

In the wake of a dispute in Castle Cary, Somerset between the parishioners and their squire over the use of the church gallery, the squire was publicly sanctioned on the 5th November 1768:

The effigy of Justice Creed was had through the streets of C.Cary this evening upon the fire Engine, and then had into the Park and burnt in a bonfire immediately before the Justice's House, for his putting the Church Wardens of Cary into Wells Court, for not presenting James Clarke for making a Riot in the Gallery at Cary Church some few Sundays back. The whole Parish are against the Justice, and they intend to assist the Church Wardens in carrying on the cause at Wells. The Justice is now at Lord Pawletts at Hinton.<sup>1</sup>

On 5 November 1831 the effigies of several bishops were paraded and sometimes burnt - at Exeter, Crayford, Canterbury, Sheerness and Sittingbourne - a popular reply to their opposition to the Reform Bill.<sup>2</sup>

Popular assemblies were often potential threats to the gentry's tranquility. And sometimes the disturbance materialised: "I went to drink Tea at Mr Knapp's at Shenley," reported William Cole on Sunday August 30th, 1767, "where was the Feast and great Rioting, fighting and quarrelling: some, of the People affronted Mr. Knapp the rector as he returned from Church."<sup>3</sup> On many holidays the common people were animated by a confidence which stemmed in part from numbers (plebian crowds, they knew, had to be treated more

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<sup>1</sup> Diary of a Country Parson, I, 81.

<sup>2</sup> The Times, 10-12 November 1831.

<sup>3</sup> Diary of William Cole, p. 257.

respectfully than plebeian individuals), and as a result they were able to neglect for the moment the habit of deference; they could more easily insult established authorities and mollify (or even reverse) the perquisites of social rank. The kinds of liberties which might be taken were observed in 1761 by a gentleman who witnessed the return of a crowd from the customary Easter Monday festivities in Greenwich Park:

They set out and continued their journey, preceded by musick of different sorts.... To this they kept time in country dances.... Nothing extraordinary happened till they had capered a little beyond the Half Way house; where meeting a single Gentleman on horseback, (who seemed to me to be a Clergyman) holding hands with each other, they formed a line, the extremities of which reached the opposite ditches. When they had thus effectually retarded his progress, they insisted upon his getting down and saluting one of their Nymphs, that they averred, by repeated asseverations, had the most beauty and softest lips of any Girl in the Park. The young Gentleman, sensible of his embarrassment, and probably fearing the consequences of non compliance, shewed his sense in dismounting without hesitation, which, as soon as they perceived his alacrity in doing, he was dismissed with a general plaudit.

But it fared far otherwise with a fat surly curmudgeon, just behind him in a one horse chair, of whom the same tribute was, in like manner, exacted.... instead of complying he began to expostulate with them. After a prelude of smart altercation, and abusing him for a woman-hater, they handled him so roughly, that he would have been glad to have kissed a more ignoble part of the Lady than her Face, to have avoided such familiarities.

"I have mentioned these instances," he added, "that travellers, whose lot flings them in the way of such mobs, may be warn'd by these examples to treat them with civility, as they are too powerful to be awed by threats, and generally too much intoxicated to be prevailed on by the remonstrances of reason."<sup>1</sup>

Not only, then, might the common people be released from some of the constraints attached to their ordinary subordinate roles: they were able also, by adopting new and more powerful roles, to establish for the moment a rough and ready social equality. For instance, during the early nineteenth century in the area around Bottesford, Lincolnshire, landowners tolerated the privilege which was claimed by the people to shoot game at will, on anyone's land, on the 5th November.<sup>2</sup> It was said that around Whitby December 26th "is a great hunting day, the game laws are considered as of no force for that day."<sup>3</sup> On May Day at Polperro in Cornwall

... all the boys of the village sally forth with bucket, can, or other vessel, and avail themselves of a licence which the season confers, to 'dip,' or well-nigh drown, without regard to person or circumstance, the passenger who has not the protection of a piece of 'may,' conspicuously stuck in his dress....<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Lloyd's Evening Post, 24 March 1761.

<sup>2</sup> Notes and Queries, 7th series, VI, 1888, pp. 404-05.

<sup>3</sup> Young, Whitby, II, 880.

<sup>4</sup> Thomas Q. Couch, ed., The History of Polperro, by the late Jonathon Couch (Truro, 1871), p. 153.



It was a day when a special licence was both claimed and practised.

In Cumberland and Westmorland there was a similar custom:

Early in the morning of the first of January, the Faex Populi assemble together, carrying stangs and baskets. Any inhabitant, stranger, or whoever joins not this ruffian tribe in sacrificing to their favourite Saint day, if unfortunate enough to be met by any of the band, is immediately mounted across the stang (if a woman, she is basketed), and carried, shoulder height, to the nearest public house, where the payment of six pence immediately liberates the prisoner. No respect is paid to any person; the cobbler on that day thinks himself equal to the parson, who generally gets mounted like the rest of his flock.... None, though ever so industriously inclined, are permitted to follow their respective avocations on that day.<sup>1</sup>

The harvest dinner was particularly acknowledged as an occasion for social levelling. John Clare, for instance, wrote of how Lubin

Join'd with the sun-tann'd group the feast to share  
As years roll'd round him with the change agen  
And brought the masters level with their men  
Who push'd the beer about and smok'd and drank  
With freedom's plenty never shewn till then  
Nor labourers dar'd but now so free and frank  
To laugh and joke and play so many a harmless prank<sup>2</sup>

At the harvest feasts, observed Henry Bourne, "the Servant and his Master are alike, and every Thing is done with an equal Freedom. They sit at the same Table, converse freely together, and spend the remaining part of the Night in dancing, singing, etc. without any Difference or Distinction."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Gentleman's Magazine, LXI, part ii, 1791, pp. 1169-70. A similar custom was observed at Helstone, Cornwall on the 8th of May. (Gentleman's Magazine, LX, part i, 1790, p. 520.)

<sup>2</sup> Clare, Village Minstrel, stanza 49 (punctuation omitted).

<sup>3</sup> Bourne, Antiquitates Vulgares, p. 229.

Sometimes festive occasions were employed for insulting authority by means of a traditional "mock mayor" ceremony. At Middleton a ritual of this kind was observed during the Easter holiday:

On Tuesday night, some unlucky fellow who had got so far intoxicated as not to be able to take care of himself, would be selected to fill the post of lord mayor for the year ensuing.... Their mode of election, most certainly, was not of so courteous nor so grave a character as are the proceedings of mayoral elections in some of the recently created neighbouring boroughs, but 'the Middleton Charter' having been in existence 'time out of mind,' ... the electors were not very strictly circumscribed in their operations, and they generally went to work without consulting either the town's books, town-clerk, statute or charter.... The electors who undertook this important duty for 'the good of the town,' would be mostly of that class of 'free burgesses' who, on festive occasions, are always the first at the ale-house, and the last to leave it; the first to leave work, and the last to return to it.... ... The face of the candidate was ... well daubed with soot and grease, his hair would be dusted with both soot and flour, a pig-tail made from a dish-clout would be appended behind, a woman's kirtle, a cap, a hat without crown, an old jacket, an old sack, or any other shred of dress which the imagination of his lordship's robbers could construe, either into an article of adornment or deformity, would be placed upon him so as to have its greatest effect. He would then be taken into the street, placed on a chair, or in an arm-chair if too far gone to sit upright, and proclaimed 'Lord Mayor of Middleton,' with every demonstration of drunken and mischievous glee.... and so, amid shouts, laughter, yells, and oaths, would be conducted through the streets and lanes of his new dominions. It was generally somewhat past midnight ere his lordship commenced this his first survey, and the noise which accompanied his approach was such as permitted but few of his subjects to remain in repose....<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Bamford, Early Days, pp. 138-41.

The ceremony was, at least in part, a burlesque on the character of the social hierarchy as seen from below. The crux of the ritual was the total reversal of roles - as the Bible expressed it, "the last shall be first and the first last". By slighting authority roles, by indicating that these roles should not be taken too seriously, the people were displaying a regulated disdain for the dominant powers and dominant values.<sup>1</sup> The pretentiousness of the upper ranks could be parodied, their claims to superiority deprecated. At Bideford in Devon the annual election was for the mayoralty of "Shamwickshire".<sup>2</sup> During the mock mayor's election at Polperro in Cornwall, which was held on the third day of the feast,

The person who is chosen to this post of mimic dignity is generally some half-witted, or drunken fellow who, tricked out in tinsel finery, elects his staff of constables, and these, armed with staves, accompany his chariot, (some jowter's cart dressed with green boughs), through the town, stopping at each inn, where he makes a speech full of large promises to his listeners of full work, better wages, and a liberal allowance of beer during his year of mayoralty.... Having completed the perambulation of the town, his attendants often make some facetious end of the pageant by wheeling the mayor in his chariot with some impetus into the tide....<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> For some illuminating ideas on this point, see Erving Goffman, Encounters: Two Studies in the Sociology of Interaction (Indianapolis and New York, 1961), especially the essay on "Role Distance".

<sup>2</sup> Transactions of the Devonshire Association, LX, 1928, pp. 129-30.

<sup>3</sup> Couch, ed., History of Polperro, p. 159.

Similar rites were observed at Wooton in Oxfordshire during the wake and the man selected as mayor was usually one of the biggest drinkers.<sup>1</sup> And at Randwick, Gloucestershire, it was reported (in 1779) that

... an annual revel is kept on the Monday after Low Sunday [the Sunday after Easter], ... attended with much irregularity and intemperance, and many ridiculous circumstances in the choice of a Mayor, who is yearly elected on that day, from amongst the meanest of the people. They plead the prescriptive right of antient custom for the licence of the day, and the authority of the magistrate is not able to suppress it.<sup>2</sup>

Sometimes festive occasions served as outlets for those personal antagonisms which had been nurtured within the plebeian community; they were used, and were in the habit of being used, by individuals in settling their grievances against other individuals. At Middleton, for instance,

The night of the first of May was 'Mischief-neet', when, as 'there is a time for all things,' any one having a grudge against a neighbour was at liberty to indulge it, provided he kept his own counsel. On these occasions it was lawful to throw a neighbour's gate off the angles, to pull up his fence, to trample his garden, to upset a cart that might be found at hand, to set cattle astray, or to perform any other freak, ... which might suggest itself or be suggested.... If a young fellow wished to cast a slur on a lass, he would hang a rag containing salt at her parents' door, or he would cast some of the same material on her door step, as indicative

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<sup>1</sup> Ballard, Borough of Woodstock, p. 138; and "Dedication of Churches, With some Notes as to Village Feasts and Old Customs in the Deaneries of Woodstock, Deddington, and Witney", Oxfordshire Archaeological Society, Transactions No. 47, 1904, p. 26.

<sup>2</sup> Rudder, History of Gloucestershire, p. 619; cf. Gentleman's Magazine, LIV, part 1, 1784, pp. 334-35. Mock mayor ceremonies are noticed in Wright, Calendar Customs, III, 158-59.

of gross inclinations.... A gorse bush indicated a woman notoriously immodest; ... a tup's horn intimated that man or woman was faithless to marriage vows.... If a house floor wanted cleaning, a mop would be left for that purpose; and if a dame was notorious for her neglect of needle-work, a ragged garment of some sort would be hung at her door.<sup>1</sup>

Some sporting events functioned as formalized contexts in which personal animosities were traditionally satisfied. Following the game of throwing the hood at Haxey, held annually on Twelfth Day, there was (according to the Stamford Mercury) a good deal of fighting, "for it is an established maxim that all old grudges and back reckonings are to be cleared up: all of which can be done with impunity."<sup>2</sup> At Workington the Easter Tuesday football match was between two occupational groups, the seamen and the colliers, and the

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<sup>1</sup> Bamford, Early Days, pp. 144-45. A similar licence was observed on the 1st of May in Bury. (Barton, History of Bury, p. 12.) Further references to "Mischief-Night Customs" may be found in Wright, Calendar Customs, II, 196-98. In the Huntingdonshire fens during the later nineteenth century Plough Monday was the principal occasion for satisfying grudges. In Sybil Marshall's Fenland Chronicle (Cambridge, 1967) Mrs. Edwards recollected how the young men would "wait until Plough Monday to get their own back on somebody what had done them some injury during the year. Perhaps they'd take a plough in the middle o' the night and plough the other fellow's doorway up, or move the water butt so as it stood resting on a bit of its bottom-rim, a-leaning up outside the door. Then when the man o' the house opened the door afore it were light, next morning, the tub 'ould fall in and the water slosh all over the floor o' the house-place, for the poor woman to clean up on her hand and knees afore the children could come out o' the bedroom. Very often a gang o' young men 'ould go round the fen taking gates off their hinges and throwing 'em in the nearest dyke, so that all the horses and cows got out. This sort o' nasty trick gradually died out during my young days, and a good thing too, I reckon." (p. 199.)

<sup>2</sup> Stamford Mercury, 10 January 1840. The same custom was associated with the annual Stamford bull-running. (Burton, ed., Old Lincolnshire, p. 166.)

day was usually closed "with a fight or two, as all disagreements during the past year are put off until this night to settle."<sup>1</sup> The Shrovetide game at Hampton-on-Thames was also followed by "a general settlement of the year's grievances."<sup>2</sup> Again, it can be seen that a special licence was sometimes pleaded in order to sanction such hostilities. On Easter Tuesday at Workington "the town is almost considered in a state of siege, as the lower class think whatever wrong they do on that day the law cannot lay hold of them."<sup>3</sup> A similar assumption was held about the annual football match at Sancton in the East Riding: "The carnival was supposed to be of such ancient date that the law had no power to stop it, even if a person was killed."<sup>4</sup>

Hostilities between groups of individuals were also channeled into certain recreational events. There was a pronounced clanishness and suspicion of outsiders in many English communities - Joseph Lawson, for instance, emphasized the hostility felt by Pudseyites in the early nineteenth century towards nearby villages (the sentiment

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<sup>1</sup> William Whellan, The History and Topography of the Counties of Cumberland and Westmoreland (Pontefract, 1860), p. 479.

<sup>2</sup> Henry Ripley, The History and Topography of Hampton-on-Thames (London, 1884), p. 108.

<sup>3</sup> Whellan, Cumberland and Westmoreland, p. 479.

<sup>4</sup> William Smith, ed., Old Yorkshire, III, 1883, p. 11. At Exeter it was widely believed "that the statutes ... take no cognizance of any misdemeanours and breaches of the peace, short of downright rioting," during the festivities of May the 29th. (Hone, Year Book, cols. 636-38.)

might be revealed in the inhospitable treatment often accorded to an outside courter of a local girl)<sup>1</sup> - and some of the competitive recreations provided institutionalized settings in which the aggressiveness and pride which arose from social separateness could be actively expressed. Gentlemen sometimes remarked on the hostilities which underlay the vigour of popular sporting events. "At the Seasons of Football and Cock-fighting," many parishes were reported by the Spectator to "reassume their National Hatred to each other. My tenant in the Country is verily perswaded, that the Parish of the Enemy hath not one honest Man in it."<sup>2</sup> When Cornish villages competed in hurling it was said that "each parish looks upon itself as obliged to contend for its own fame, and oppose the pretensions, and superiority of its neighbours."<sup>3</sup> In Keighly in the West Riding football play, it was claimed, "was sometimes carried to a riotous and dangerous extent, township being arrayed against township and village against village. Much excitement and alarm were often created by the great set matches between the Town and Parish of Keighly."<sup>4</sup> In Pudsey around 1830 one could have seen "Down-towners

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<sup>1</sup> Lawson, Progress in Pudsey, pp. 11 and 55-56.

<sup>2</sup> Spectator, No. 432, 16 July 1712.

<sup>3</sup> Borlase, Natural History of Cornwall, p. 300; see also Douch, Old Cornish Inns, pp. 49-50.

<sup>4</sup> Robert Holmes, Keighley, Past and Present (London, 1858), p. 61.

playing up-towners.... It was quite common to see these up and down towners kicking each other's shins when the ball was a hundred yards away."<sup>1</sup> At Sancton the annual football match "often ended in much fighting and bloodshed, each party contending for the honour of taking the ball home."<sup>2</sup> A similar competitive spirit was observed during the Haxey Hood game: "the inhabitants of several villages adjacent ... contend for the mastery [of the hood], each little party striving to get it to the village in which they reside."<sup>3</sup> By the late seventeenth century the bull-running at Tutbury was being used as a trial of strength between the men of Staffordshire and Derbyshire, with each side attempting to drive the bull into its own territory.<sup>4</sup> Wakes could also function as occasions for expressing inter-group animosities. In preparation for the wake at Middleton,

About a month or six weeks before the wakes, the young men of the hamlets, as well as those of the town, would meet at their respective rendezvous, which was some ale-house, where the names of such as wished to join the party during the wakes were given in, and the first instalment of money was paid.... It was the interest of these young fellows to raise as strong a party as they could, not only with a view to a plenteous fund, but also in order to repel - if

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<sup>1</sup> Lawson, Progress in Pudsey, p. 58.

<sup>2</sup> Smith, ed., Old Yorkshire, III, 1883, p. 11.

<sup>3</sup> Stamford Mercury, 9 January 1846.

<sup>4</sup> Robert Plot, The Natural History of Staffordshire (Oxford, 1686), p. 440; and Thomas Blount, Fragmenta Antiquitatis (London, 1679), p. 175. Plot pointed to "the emulation in point of manhood, that has been long cherish't between the Staffordshire and Darbyshire men" as the principal source of the bull-running's popularity.



necessary - aggression from other parties; for as these little communities were seldom without a few old grudges to fall back upon, should an opportunity offer, it was very extraordinary indeed if a quarrel did not take place amongst some of them, and half-a-dozen battles were not foughten before the wakes ended. It was consequently an object with each of them to get as numerous a party, and as heavily bodied an one, as they could....<sup>1</sup>

During the early nineteenth century "Wrekin Wakes" in Shropshire was highlighted by a traditional battle between the colliers and the country people for the possession of the hill on which the feast was held.<sup>2</sup>

As well as functioning as outlets for hostile feelings, popular recreations also served to foster social cohesiveness and group unity. Competitive team sports, for instance, often reinforced the sense of solidarity of the communities from which the opposing players were drawn. One observer said of the traditional sports of the people (no doubt with some exaggeration) that "the victory obtained by their parish or hundred, served them for the next half-year, till another holiday brought another trial of strength."<sup>3</sup> During camping matches in Suffolk, so it was reported, "the eagerness and emulation excited and displayed in by the competitors and townsmen, are surprising.... [The games are played] amid the shouting and roaring of half the population of the contiguous villages."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Bamford, Early Days, pp. 147-48.

<sup>2</sup> Burne, ed., Shropshire Folk-Lore, pp. 362-63.

<sup>3</sup> Robert A. Slaney, Essay on the Beneficial Direction of Rural Expenditure (London, 1824), pp. 199-200.

<sup>4</sup> Moor, Suffolk Words and Phrases, p. 65.

When a community's aggressiveness was externally directed its feeling of unity was likely to be enhanced. Joseph Lawson indicated that "whatever petty prejudices existed intrinsically, when villagers met each other at the various feasts or at other gatherings, the various Pudsey clans would combine against outsiders, and being, as a rule, larger in numbers, would generally be the victors".<sup>1</sup> And when the internal conflicts were well modulated there was often a binding force in the competition itself, if only by virtue of the fact that the attention of many individuals was concentrated on one widely-embracing social event. It was said of the Derby football match that

No public amusement is calculated to call forth so high a degree of public excitement. Horse races and white apron fairs must not be named in comparison with it. The aged and the young are drawn from their homes to witness the strife in which the robust and vigorous population of the town and immediate neighbourhood engage with all the energy of eager but amicable competition.<sup>2</sup>

The rituals and ceremonials which were observed on certain holidays - club day feasts, Plough Monday processions, weavers' parades, Bishop Blaize Festivities - were affirmations of common interests and common sentiments, and themselves helped to consolidate group pride. One of the ballads sung by the farm labourers on Plough Monday boasted

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<sup>1</sup> Lawson, Progress in Pudsey, p. 56.

<sup>2</sup> Derby Mercury, 20 February 1827.

that "My back is made of iron, my boots are made of steel, / And if you don't believe it, put your hands on and feel."<sup>1</sup> Parish feasts, as we have noticed, encouraged social cohesiveness through their emphasis on fellowship, hospitality and good cheer. "Games and amusements", a French social historian has concluded, "extended far beyond the furtive moments we allow them: they form<sup>ed</sup> one of the principal means employed by a society to draw its collective bonds closer, to feel united."<sup>2</sup>

Another function of popular recreations was that they provided realistic opportunities for the common people to acquire prestige and self-respect. Through them the people were able to create, as one writer has aptly put it, "small-scale success systems of their own".<sup>3</sup> Even a critical observer of Derby's Shrovetide football match could suggest some of this rationale for the game's popularity: "I have seen this coarse sport carried to the barbarous height of an election contest; nay, I have known a foot-ball hero chaired through the streets like a successful member, although his utmost elevation of character was no more than that of a butcher's apprentice."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted in V.C.H. Nottinghamshire, II, 412.

<sup>2</sup> Phillipe Ariès, Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family Life (New York: Vintage Books, 1965), p. 73.

<sup>3</sup> The phrase is used in a more general context by John Foster, "Nineteenth-Century Towns - A Class Dimension", in H. J. Dyos, ed., The Study of Urban History (London, 1968), p. 294.

<sup>4</sup> William Hutton, The History of Derby (London, 1791), p. 218.

It was said that during games of camping "the spirit of emulation prevails, not only between the adverse sides, but also among the individuals on the same side, who shall excel his fellows."<sup>1</sup>

John Clare had a similar competitive mood in mind when he wrote of the wrestling at a village wake:

... For ploughmen would not wish for higher fame  
 Than be the champion all the rest to throw  
 And thus to add such honors to his name  
 He kicks and tugs and bleeds to win the glorious game<sup>2</sup>

"It is handed down from father to son", complained a clergyman in 1830 of the Stamford bull-running, "it is fostered by parental authority, and parental example, and he who is the most expert and the most daring, in facing the enraged animal, gains a sort of enviable notoriety among his fellows, which urges him on to fresh feats of adventure".<sup>3</sup>

Indeed, it seems that one of the important implications of many recreations was that the accomplishments on the playground, and the ritual displays at a festival, provided substantial raw material for status evaluations. Persons were accorded criticism or applause, respect or shame, as a consequence of their success or failure in

<sup>1</sup> Robert Forby, The Vocabulary of East Anglia (2 vols.; London, 1830), II, 53.

<sup>2</sup> Clare, Village Minstrel, stanza 83 (punctuation omitted).

<sup>3</sup> Voice of Humanity, I, 1830-31, p. 69.

certain well established recreational roles. They were often regarded, we have noticed, as occasions for sexual display. And they could test as well a person's organizational abilities and canons of taste. At Middleton extensive preparations for the wake were made well in advance (elsewhere too this was the custom: special food was prepared, amusements were planned, and the house was fully cleaned), and much effort was put into

... the arrangements and setting forth of 'the sheet.' This was exclusively the work of the girls and women; and in proportion as it was happily designed and fitly put together or otherwise, was their praise or disparagement meted out by the public: a point on which they would probably be not a little sensitive. The sheet was a piece of very white linen, generally a good bed sheet, and on it were arrayed pretty rosettes, and quaint compartments and borderings of all colours and hues which either paper, tinsel, or ribbons, or natural flowers could supply. In these compartments were arrayed silver watches, trays, spoons, sugar-tongs, tea-pots, snuffers, or other fitting articles of ornament and value; and the more numerous and precious the articles were, the greater was the deference which the party which displayed them expected from the wondering crowd.<sup>1</sup>

Moreover, any public recreation usually left in its wake a reservoir of incidents which could be retrospectively enjoyed and drawn upon during social intercourse, and the memorable details could be incorporated into the community's changing assessments of its own members. The details of the annual football match between the students of the Bromfield free school were said to have been "the general topics

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<sup>1</sup> Bamford, Early Days, pp. 149-50.

of conversation among the villagers";<sup>1</sup> and another observer, writing in the mid nineteenth century about Hornsea, found that although a noted game against Sigglesthorpe, described by an elderly resident, was fifty years past, he "seemed to remember every close and field that the ball went into, and various feats of skill and activity, disasters and hurts that occurred."<sup>2</sup>

Prestige and honour were also acquired during those recreational occasions which assumed a display of fancy dress. "Whoever takes delight in viewing the various scenes of low life," observed Bernard Mandeville, "may on Easter, Whitsun, and other great holidays, meet with scores of people, especially women, of almost the lowest rank, that wear good and fashionable clothes".<sup>3</sup> These were the plebeian occasions for cutting a figure. They catered to basic desires for personal display, for an indulgence in finery, for an escape from the customary drabness. At the parish feast in John Clare's The Village Minstrel (stanza 71) -

... villagers put on their bran-new clothes  
And milk-maids drest like any ladies gay  
Threw cotton drabs and worsted hose away ....

And in the ballad on "Wrekington Hiring" the pleasures of self-display were warmly applauded:

<sup>1</sup> Hutchinson, County of Cumberland, II, 322n-23n.

<sup>2</sup> Bedell, Account of Hornsea, p. 88.

<sup>3</sup> Bernard Mandeville, The Fable of the Bees, ed., Irwin Primer (New York: Capricorn Books, 1962), p. 89.

An' Bess put on that bonny gown,  
 Thy mother bought thou at the town,  
 That straw hat wi' the ribbons brown,  
 They'll a' be buss'd that's comin-O;  
 Put that reed ribbon round thy waist,  
 It myeks thou look se full of grace,  
 Then up the lonnen come in haste,  
 They'll think thou's com'd frae Lunnen-O.<sup>1</sup>

A cottage woman's recollections of the late nineteenth century in the Huntingdonshire fens were explicit about the motives and deeply-rooted norms which underlay these dress-up affairs. On the Sunday School anniversary at the Primitive Methodist chapel, she recalled,

Every mother, however poor she was, had to get her child'en looking smart for the anniversary, and if they couldn't buy new clothes for their families every child had to have one thing new. Among the girls, the secret o' what they were going to wear were kept as if their lives depended on it, and many a mother has dragged out to work for weeks in the field to be able to buy the new things for the anni. This were the part we loved best, because although we were as poor as anybody there, we knowed we could trust our mam to get us the prettiest frocks as well as better quality ones than anybody else's there.<sup>2</sup>

Dressing up and spending generously for a holiday were relatively accessible means of winning approval and consequently were emphasized as social norms; many other channels through which status might theoretically have been established, especially those which the middle class favored, were in practice blocked off by the completely

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<sup>1</sup> "A Collection of Broad-sides and Ballads", B.M., 1875.d.13; cf. another version of the same ballad in Lloyd, Come all ye Bold Miners, pp. 28-30.

<sup>2</sup> Marshall, Fenland Chronicle, pp. 205-06.

unrealistic economic capabilities which they assumed. And on this issue there was a clear clash between popular and middle class norms. What seemed rational from the people's point of view was regarded by middle class observers as criminally extravagant and irresponsible. One writer, for instance, in discussing the hiring fairs in the North during the mid nineteenth century, complained of

... the passion for dress and dancing, which prevails to an extraordinary extent among the canny daughters of the North.... The young ladies themselves carry their savings on their backs; and the result of a year's pinching is seen at the 'statty' ball, when a girl, whose ordinary attire is wooden clogs and a serge petticoat, turns out in white muslin, a wreath of flowers, and white kid boots and gloves.<sup>1</sup>

It can be seen, then, that traditional recreation may only be properly understood when account is taken of the overall complex of social relations and norms in which it was rooted. The hostilities which arose at festive gatherings were closely related to established, everyday antagonisms; revelry and self-indulgence were counterparts to the inhibitions of normal routine - the norms which strictly regulated personal relations, the tedium, fatigue and dependence of the working man's (or woman's) daily labour; certain customs were shaped by the perception of social privilege, pretension and authority; active sports could be opportunities for legitimate aggressiveness; some gatherings were soaked in ritual

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<sup>1</sup> T. E. Kebbel, The Agricultural Labourer (London, 1870), pp. 125-26.



and helped to draw men more closely together, others emphasized group differences and reinforced the dislike of outsiders; dances, processions, ceremonials, festive displays, individual and team sports - all these were occasions when reputation was at stake. Popular diversions were not simply ephemera in a play-world of little consequence; they were recurrent social activities, inseparable from the full range of social reality. Recreation was one major dimension of an established culture - here rooted in exclusively plebeian experiences, there overlapping with the culture of gentility -, woven into the total social fabric from which its basic significances arose.

CHAPTER III

POPULAR RECREATIONS UNDER ATTACK

The following pages examine the opposition to certain traditional diversions which developed during the century after about 1750. Some recreations, most notably the blood sports, became much more controversial than others; they attracted the bulk of the reformers' attention and absorbed a larger share of the growing hostility towards the traditional popular pastimes. The literature of the period is full of such attacks. In this chapter we are especially concerned with the efforts to suppress these recreations. The circumstances conditioning the general decline of popular recreations during this period, and the changing attitudes towards them, are discussed in the final chapter.

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The traditional blood sports, along with most of the common people's diversions, had been sometimes condemned and vigorously attacked during the Tudor and Stuart periods, but it was not until the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries that they were subjected to a systematic and sustained attack. Prior to the mid-eighteenth century they still retained a degree of favor, or at least sufferance, from the governing class, and many gentlemen, as we have seen, actively patronized cockfighting and sometimes even bull-baiting. Blood sports had not yet come to be widely regarded as cruel or disreputable. When Prince Lewis of Baden was being

fêted by William III in January 1694 "there was bear's baiting, bulls' sport, and cock fighting instituted for his diversion and recreation."<sup>1</sup> But during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries there was a growing sentiment of dissatisfaction with such amusements. One of the early statements of disapproval appeared in the Craftsman of 1 July 1738:

I am a profess'd Enemy to Persecution of all Kinds, whether against Man or Beast; though I am not so much a Pythagorean as to extend my Philosophy to those Creatures, which are manifestly design'd for our Food and Nourishment; but we ought to make the Manner of their Deaths as easy to Them as possible, and not destroy or torment Them out of Wantonness. Upon this principle I abhor Cock-fighting, and throwing at Cocks, as well as Bull-baiting, Bear-baiting, Ass-baiting, and all the other butcherly Diversions of Hockley in the Hole.

In later years the criticisms were voiced with greater warmth.

"Among the lower sort of the people", wrote a prominent Evangelical in 1805, "Bull-baiting and Cock-fighting are the disgrace of our country, and indeed are contrary to the humane character of the British nation.... for persons called Christians to derive their pleasure from the misery of suffering animals, is shocking and shameful."<sup>2</sup> The opposition to blood sports expanded and intensified

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<sup>1</sup> Charles Jackson, ed., The Diary of Abraham de la Pryme (Publications of the Surtees Society, LIV, 1870), p. 33.

<sup>2</sup> George Burder, Lawful Amusements; a Sermon (London, 1805), p. 4.

and its supporters became more vehement and their attacks increasingly strident. A tract of 1833 by a Birmingham schoolmaster expressed this concern in language which was only marginally more fervent than the norm:

Staffordshire, for ages, has been notoriously distinguished for Bull-baiting, and the numerous collieries of Tipton and its vicinity, have produced thousands of beings, who being trained in their infancy to the love and practice of Bull-baiting, possess nothing human, (when arrived at man's estate) but the form. Ignorant, vulgar, and wicked to excess, their ferocious rage for this bloody and barbarous amusement, knew no bounds, would brook no controul. Against these, the Rev. John Howells, the clergyman of that parish for twenty years, with unceasing zeal, 'warred a good warfare,' and so successful were his exertions to rescue the poor suffering Bull from these demons in human shape, that the year 1827 was gloriously distinguished by the total extirpation of the bloody sport. Not a Bull was to be found in the whole parish, kept for the purpose of being bated at the wake. Thus he gave most convincing proof what great things may be accomplished by zealously persevering in the cause of God....<sup>1</sup>

The movement against popular blood sports was at its peak during the first forty years of the nineteenth century; by the 1840s most of these sports had been almost entirely eliminated.

Throwing at cocks was the first of the blood sports to be vigorously attacked and the first to be generally suppressed. Periodic attempts had probably been made to curtail the sport during

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<sup>1</sup> Abraham Smith, A Scriptural and Moral Catechism (Birmingham, 1833), p. xx.

the Stuart period, but it was not until the middle of the eighteenth century that a sustained and widespread campaign was directed against the custom. The earliest condemnation of the amusement in the Gentleman's Magazine appeared in 1737,<sup>1</sup> and between 1750 and 1762 there were six pieces in the journal which criticised the pastime, five of them letters to the editor.<sup>2</sup> In 1739 the Rev. Joseph Greene of Stratford-upon-Avon included some severe comments on the sport in a letter to his brother and in 1767 he submitted a letter on the subject to the editor of Jackson's Oxford Journal.<sup>3</sup> Attacks on the custom were also published in Aris's Birmingham Gazette of 5 March 1764 and 10 February 1777.<sup>4</sup> Around the middle of the century the prominent clergyman and writer, Josiah Tucker, produced a short tract against cock-throwing,<sup>5</sup> a public service which was applauded on at least one occasion by a contributor to the Gentleman's

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<sup>1</sup> Gentleman's Magazine, VII, 1737, pp. 6-8.

<sup>2</sup> Gentleman's Magazine, XX, 1750, pp. 18-19; XXI, 1751, p. 8; XXIII, 1753, p. 5; XXVI, 1756, pp. 17-18; XXXI, 1761, pp. 201-02; and XXXII, 1762, pp. 6-7. The last two of these contributions made reference to a recent publication entitled Clemency to Brutes! The Substance of two Sermons preached on a Shrove-Sunday, with a particular View to dissuade from that Species of Cruelty annually practised in England, The Throwing at Cocks (London, 1761), a copy of which is held in the Bodleian Library.

<sup>3</sup> Levi Fox, ed., Correspondence of the Reverend Joseph Greene 1712-1790 (London; Joint Publication of the Historical Manuscripts Commission and the Dugdale Society, 1965), pp. 42-43 and 101-02. Greene's letter to the Oxford Journal was published in the issue of 28 February 1767.

<sup>4</sup> John A. Langford, A Century of Birmingham Life: or, a Chronicle of Local Events, from 1741 to 1841 (2 vols.; Birmingham, 1868), I, 143 and 257.

<sup>5</sup> Josiah Tucker, An Earnest and Affectionate Address to the Common People of England, Concerning their Usual Recreations on Shrove Tuesday (London, n.d.); the essay was reprinted in full in the Ipswich Journal of 28 February 1756.

Magazine.<sup>1</sup> To cite a representative expression of these critical sentiments: one of the letters in the Gentleman's Magazine begged permission,

... on behalf of these guiltless, useful animals, to intreat all in authority, magistrates, peace-officers, parents, and masters of families, to exert themselves with the utmost vigour, in the suppression of the infamous and iniquitous custom, a custom which conduces to promote idleness, gaming, cruelty, and almost every species of wickedness. And it is humbly hoped that the honourable magistrates of these cities will be pleased to give such orders to the peace officers, as may effectually put an end to this horrid enormity, and secure to themselves the honour of abolishing a practice which is as absurd as it is offensive both to God and man, and which perhaps cannot be equal'd by any among the most ignorant and barbarous nations in the universe.<sup>2</sup>

The sentiments of this and other critics did not remain unheeded. As early as 1753 it was suggested that "a progress towards the suppression of this evil, is already made in some places",<sup>3</sup> a view which was not at all unwarranted. In February 1755 it was said by one newspaper that at Aylesbury in Buckinghamshire "there never were fewer cocks thrown at than on last Shrove Tuesday".<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Gentleman's Magazine, LI, 1781, p. 72.

<sup>2</sup> Gentleman's Magazine, XXI, 1751, p. 8.

<sup>3</sup> Gentleman's Magazine, XXIII, 1753, p. 5.

<sup>4</sup> Quoted from an unidentified newspaper in Robert Gibbs, A History of Aylesbury (Aylesbury, 1885), p. 554.

It is clear that widespread efforts were being made to suppress the amusement. In 1752 measures were taken to arrest people participating in Shrovetide sports in London, Reading, Bristol and Northampton, and one of the specifically condemned pastimes was throwing at cocks.<sup>1</sup> At Newbury in 1750 the amusement was presented as a nuisance<sup>2</sup> and at Wakefield the bellman was paid 6d. "for crying down throwing at cocks" in 1755 and 1758.<sup>3</sup> In 1753 at Nottingham the chamberlain was requested to "pay to John Gunthorpe Ten Shillings allowed to the Constables for parading ye Town to prevent throwing at Cocks and all Mobbing and other Disorders on Shrove Tuesday",<sup>4</sup> and at Castor, Northamptonshire the constables' accounts for February 1759 included a charge of one shilling "for returning a warrant to prevent ye Cox being holled at on Shrove Tuesday".<sup>5</sup> At Norwich in 1753 one man was fined 3s. 4d. for engaging in the sport,<sup>6</sup> and on 17 February 1759 the city's Court of Mayoralty,

<sup>1</sup> Gentleman's Magazine, XXII, 1752, p. 89.

<sup>2</sup> V.C.H. Berkshire, II, 297.

<sup>3</sup> Quoted in J. W. Walker, Wakefield, Its History and People (2 vols.; Wakefield, 2nd edn., 1939), II, 115.

<sup>4</sup> Records of the Borough of Nottingham, VI, 253.

<sup>5</sup> W. D. Sweeting, Historical and Architectural Notes on the Parish Churches in and Around Peterborough (London and Peterborough, 1868), p. 12.

<sup>6</sup> Norwich Mercury, 10 March 1753.



"in just abhorrence of the cruel practice of throwing at cocks in this season of the year, and to prevent such disorders as usually arise therefrom," ordered

'... the several constables within this city and county to apprehend every person of what age soever that they shall find throwing at cocks, and immediately carry them before Mr. Mayor or some other magistrate of this city and county. And to suppress this barbarous custom as far as possible every constable within this city and county is hereby commanded to patrole his particular ward and district on the day of Tuesday next. And this count doth hereby declare that whoever shall presume to persist in and continue this inhuman practice, shall be prosecuted to the utmost extremity.'

A similar type of order was issued by the Essex Quarter Sessions every year between 1758 and 1761.<sup>2</sup> And at Sheffield in the 1750s, High Wycombe in 1774, and Manchester in the third quarter of the century, active means were employed to eliminate the traditional diversion.<sup>3</sup>

Understandably, throwing at cocks was not immediately suppressed. Like many of the people's diversions, its long history and deeply-rooted practice armed it with a certain short-run resilience, and in

<sup>1</sup> Quoted in Norfolk and Norwich Notes and Queries, Series 2, 1896-99, p. 396.

<sup>2</sup> Essex R.O., Q/SO 10, pp. 98-99, 150, 208, and 254.

<sup>3</sup> Robert E. Leader, Sheffield in the Eighteenth Century (Sheffield, 1901) p. 45; Gibbs, Aylesbury, p. 544; and J. P. Earwaker, ed., The Constables' Accounts of the Manor of Manchester (3 vols.; Manchester, 1891-92), III, 66, 132, 178, 249, and 342.

many cases it was only gradually put down after repeated exertions. Orders against the sport were sometimes reissued several times by the same local authorities. The Northampton Mercury of 1 March 1762 reported that on Shrove Tuesday "our Mayor and Justices, attended by their proper Officers, perambulated the Precincts of this Town, to prevent the scandalous and inhuman Practice of Throwing at Cocks", adding that "we hope the same will be no more used"; but as late as 1788 a warning against the practice was still felt to be necessary: "We cannot but express our Wishes," the paper observed, "that Persons in Power, as well as Parents and Masters of Families, would exert their authority in suppressing a Practice too common at this Season - throwing at Cocks".<sup>1</sup> In the same breath, however, it was acknowledged that the pastime, "to the Credit of a civilized People, is annually declining."<sup>2</sup> Indeed, towards the end of the century it seemed to be generally agreed that the custom was very much on the wane, if not already completely eliminated. In 1777 John Brand reported that in Newcastle-upon-Tyne the pastime "is now laid aside";<sup>3</sup> by the last

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<sup>1</sup> Northampton Mercury, 2 February 1788.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Brand, Popular Antiquities, p. 234. "To the Credit of our northern Manners", he observed in an appendix, "the barbarous Sport of throwing at Cocks on Shrove Tuesday is worn out in this Country." (p. 377n.)

quarter of the century the custom was generally neglected in East Sussex,<sup>1</sup> and in the early 1780s James Spershott of Chichester claimed that "this cruel practice is almost over in these parts."<sup>2</sup> In 1781 a contributor to the Gentleman's Magazine was of the opinion that throwing at cocks "is in many places abolished"<sup>3</sup> and a letter in the Monthly Magazine of 1797 suggested that "cock-throwing is ... nearly extinct."<sup>4</sup> "The magistrates," wrote Joseph Strutt, "greatly to their credit, have for some years past put a stop to this wicked custom, and at present it is nearly, if not entirely, discontinued in every part of the kingdom."<sup>5</sup> A few residues managed to survive into the nineteenth century. The magistrates in Warwickshire were taking steps to suppress the sport in 1814 and a decade later the mayor of Warwick was obliged to issue a request that "so disgraceful a Practice", a custom which was thought to have been completely abandoned, would not be revived by any of the inhabitants.<sup>6</sup> In 1825

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<sup>1</sup> F. E. Swayer, "Sussex Folk-Lore and Customs Connected with the Seasons", Sussex Archaeological Collections, XXXIII, 1883, p. 239.

<sup>2</sup> Memoirs of James Spershott, p. 14.

<sup>3</sup> Gentleman's Magazine, II, 1781, p. 72.

<sup>4</sup> Monthly Magazine, IV, 1797, p. 198.

<sup>5</sup> Strutt, Sports and Pastimes, p. 212; cf. Gentleman's Magazine, LXXII, part ii, 1802, p. 998.

<sup>6</sup> Warwick and Warwickshire General Advertiser, 19 February 1814 and 6 March 1824.

William Hone said that the diversion "is still conspicuous in several parts of the kingdom",<sup>1</sup> and at Quainton in Buckinghamshire it was said to have continued until as late as 1844.<sup>2</sup> But it would appear that these were only the last remnants of the amusement. For most of the common people in most parts of the country throwing at cocks was a forbidden and neglected recreation by the end of the eighteenth century.<sup>3</sup>

The relatively early demise of throwing at cocks seems to have stemmed from a number of circumstances. For one thing, it was widely regarded as exceptionally unsporting; it was thought to be lacking even the elementary features of fair competition. "What a Noble Entertainment it is", wrote one critic, "for a Rational Soul, to fasten an innocent weak defenceless Animal to ye ground, and then dash his bones to pieces with a Club? I can compare it to nothing but the behaviour of that silly Fellow, who

<sup>1</sup> Hone, Every-Day Book, I, col. 252.

<sup>2</sup> Gibbs, Aylesbury, pp. 554-55.

<sup>3</sup> The principle of the sport was often retained in other forms. John Brady pointed out that "the boys at school now throw at a wooden instead of a living cock; and here the metropolis, even the vulgar have long disused this brutal custom, substituting in its stead oranges, tobacco-boxes, etc. etc. placed on sticks, all of which, out of compliment to the original, are denominated cocks, and as such, thrown at with bludgeons by those who are tempted to strive for their possession." (Clavis Calendaria, I, 207-08.)

boasted of his Activity, because he had tripp'd up a Beggar who had a pair of Wooden Leggs!"<sup>1</sup> Throwing at cocks, argued the Warwick and Warwickshire Advertiser of 6 March 1824, "is far more barbarous than ... cock-fighting; the poor sufferer has no rival bird to inflame his jealousy, and call forth his powers, but, fastened to a stake, he is compelled to endure the battering of sticks and other missiles".<sup>2</sup> This fact of unfairness, the fact that the cock was put in such a weak competitive position, was mentioned by many of the critics, and it probably served to draw the attention of people with doubts about animal sports in general to cock-throwing first and to the other sports, those with one or two extenuating features, not until later. In addition, since cock-throwing was more a game for small groups than a major community activity, it lacked the underlying strength of a broadly-based social cohesiveness (the more a community was united en masse behind a festive event, the more difficult it was to suppress the event); consequently it was relatively vulnerable to any organized

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<sup>1</sup> Correspondence of Joseph Greene, pp. 42-43. A similar point was made by Josiah Tucker: "it is a most UNMANLY Diversion. For what Trial of Manhood, or what Proof of Strength or Activity is there, in overcoming a poor Creature that can make no Resistance, and has not so much the Power of running away? What Glory would it be to beat a Person, and to insult over him, when he is your Prisoner, chained down, and lying at your Mercy?" (An Earnest and Affectionate Address, p. 4.)

<sup>2</sup> See also Thomas Young, An Essay on Humanity to Animals (London, 1798), pp. 68-69.

attacks. Moreover, the suppression of cock-throwing did not imply a really drastic curtailment of the people's recreational life, for its elimination involved not the complete loss of a holiday, but only one of the holiday's diversions. Finally, it was of some importance that throwing at cocks was almost exclusively a plebeian sport, for it was always easier to suppress a recreation when there was little risk of encroaching on the interests of gentlemen. Several critics condemned with equal fervour both of the Shrovetide blood sports, cock-fighting as well as cock-throwing, but in almost all cases it was only the distinctly popular pastime which was actually prohibited.

Bull-baiting, which drew more controversial attention than any of the other blood sports, seems to have been already in decline by around 1800, at least in certain parts of the country. "This custom of baiting the bull," claimed the Sporting Magazine in 1793, "has of late years been almost laid aside in the north of England";<sup>1</sup> and at Lincoln it was said in 1789 to be "in a dwindling state".<sup>2</sup> In 1797 a contributor to the Monthly Magazine referred to the sport as "greatly diminished",<sup>3</sup> and Joseph Strutt was of the same opinion.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Sporting Magazine, III, 1793, p. 77.

<sup>2</sup> Stamford Mercury, 13 November 1789.

<sup>3</sup> Monthly Magazine, IV, 1797, p. 198.

<sup>4</sup> Strutt, Sports and Pastimes, p. 193.

In Nottingham and at Hornsea in the East Riding bull-baiting seems to have died out by the beginning of the nineteenth century.<sup>1</sup> The reasons for this apparent decline are not at all clear. There is little evidence of outright suppressions of bull-baiting during the eighteenth century. Perhaps the growing hostility of genteel opinion discouraged its survival in areas where the authority of such views could not be easily ignored. The sport was particularly dependent on some form of outside assistance - patronage, sponsorship, or promotion - and it is likely that such assistance was increasingly difficult to obtain. By the late eighteenth century butchers were no longer providing bulls for baiting; gentlemen had in almost all cases given up their patronage of the sport; and many publicans must have become increasingly reluctant to act as promoters, especially when such involvement might put their licences in jeopardy.

But whatever the reasons may have been for this eighteenth century decline (and some contemporaries may have overstated their case), it is clear that bull-baiting was still being practised in many places during the first forty years of the nineteenth century. It continued to be a popular 5th of November diversion at Lincoln,<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Roy A. Church, Economic and Social Change in a Midland Town: Victorian Nottingham 1815-1900 (London, 1966), p. 15; and Bedell, Account of Hornsea, p. 88.

<sup>2</sup> Stamford Mercury, 9 November 1821.

Bury St. Edmunds,<sup>1</sup> and at Axbridge, Somerset.<sup>2</sup> At Norwich it survived through at least the first two decades of the century<sup>3</sup> and at Bristol until the 1830s.<sup>4</sup> It persisted in many Derbyshire towns (for instance, Chesterfield, Wirksworth, Chapel en le Frith, Bakewell, Ashbourne)<sup>5</sup> and in parts of Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire (Oakley, Thame, Wheatley).<sup>6</sup> It was a customary practice at Wokingham, Berkshire (on December 21st) until at least 1823<sup>7</sup> and at Beverley (on the annual swearing-in of the mayor) it continued during the first two decades of the century.<sup>8</sup> It remained widespread in

<sup>1</sup> Bury and Norwich Post, 18 November 1801 and 10 November 1802; and Monthly Magazine, XII, 1801, p. 464.

<sup>2</sup> Gentleman's Magazine, LXXV, part i, 1805, pp. 203-04.

<sup>3</sup> Norfolk Chronicle, 14 March 1807, 21 January 1815, and 23 May 1818.

<sup>4</sup> K. Backhouse, Memoir of Samuel Capper (London, 1855), p. 31; John Latimer, The Annals of Bristol in the Nineteenth Century (Bristol, 1887), p. 68; and Animals' Friend, No. 5, 1837, p. 18.

<sup>5</sup> V.C.H. Derbyshire, II, 304; The History and Topography of Ashbourn (Ashbourn, 1839), pp. 94-95; and Derby Mercury, 2 September 1829.

<sup>6</sup> Gibbs, Aylesbury, pp. 559-60; Oxfordshire R.O., Quarter Sessions Rolls, 1827, Epiphany No. 5, and Quarter Sessions Rolls, 1828, Epiphany Nos. 1-4; and W. O. Hassall, ed., Wheatley Records 956-1956 (Oxfordshire Record Society, XXXVII, 1956), pp. 90-91.

<sup>7</sup> H. Edwards, A Collection of Old English Customs (London, 1842), pp. 63-64; and Arthur T. Heelas, "The Old Workhouse at Wokingham", Berks, Bucks and Oxon Archaeological Journal, XXXI, 1927, pp. 170-71.

<sup>8</sup> Hull Advertiser, 11 October 1817 and 13 October 1820.



south Lancashire.<sup>1</sup> And it was particularly prevalent in the West Midlands, mostly in Shropshire, Staffordshire and the Birmingham area: normally it was observed here during the annual wakes.<sup>2</sup>

The persistence of bull-baiting (along with other blood sports) was a cause for considerable concern in respectable society, especially among the increasingly influential Evangelicals, and this concern was frequently voiced during the first third of the century in the political arena. The legal standing of blood sports remained ambiguous: cruelty to animals could be dealt with under the common law (usually as a common nuisance), but the lack of any statute on the subject tended to militate against prosecutions. Reformers were well aware of the limitations of the law and attempted to rectify the situation: between 1800 and 1835 Parliament considered eleven bills on cruelty to animals, most of which were explicitly or indirectly concerned with blood sports. Bills against bull-baiting were introduced in 1800 and 1802; both were lost by narrow margins (43 to 41 and 64 to 51), principally because of the vigorous

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<sup>1</sup> For instance, Parliamentary History, XXXVI, p. 840 ( a remark of William Windham in a debate of 1802); Northampton Mercury, 18 November 1820 (on Rochdale); and Voice of Humanity, I, 1830-31, pp. 50-51.

<sup>2</sup> Burne, ed., Shropshire Folk-Lore, p. 447; B. S. Trinder, "The Memoir of William Smith", Shropshire Archaeological Transactions, LVIII, part ii, 1966, pp. 181-82; Voice of Humanity, I, 1830-31, pp. 49-52; Animals' Friend, No. 3, 1835, p. 6; Christian Advocate, 22 November 1830; and Abraham Smith, Scriptural and Moral Catechism, part ii, pp. 5-6. Bull-baiting, according to Stebbing Shaw, was "practised in many country towns (particularly in the North-west parts of this county) at that season of the year called the Wake." (The History and Antiquities of Staffordshire [2 vols.; London, 1798-1807], I, part ii, p. 55.) It seems to have been just as common in the south of the county.

opposition and eloquence of William Windham.<sup>1</sup> Bills generally dealing with cruelty to animals were debated in 1809 and 1810, and again both efforts failed.<sup>2</sup> An Act of 1822 to "Prevent the Cruel Treatment of Cattle"<sup>3</sup> was interpreted by some magistrates to apply to bull-baiting, though this had probably not been Parliament's intention (in fact, in a decision of 1827 the King's Bench declared that the bull, which was not referred to in the Act, was not included in the genus of "cattle").<sup>4</sup> Efforts to outlaw blood sports were continued after 1822: bills to this purpose were introduced in 1823, 1824, 1825, 1826 and 1829, on each occasion without success.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Parliamentary History, XXXV, pp. 202-14, and XXXVI, pp. 829-54.

<sup>2</sup> Cobbett's Parliamentary Debates, XIV, pp. 851-53, 989-90, 1029-41, and 1071; and XVI, pp. 726 and 845-46.

<sup>3</sup> George IV c. 71.

<sup>4</sup> Parliamentary Debates, New Series, XIX, pp. 1121-22 (6 June 1828); F. A. Carrington and J. Payne, Reports of Cases Argued and Ruled at Nisi Prius (9 vols.; London, 1823-41), III, 225-28; and Voice of Humanity, I, 1830-31, p. 49. The one unequivocal statute on the subject was the 121st section of 3 George IV c. 126, which made illegal bull-baiting on the public highways.

<sup>5</sup> Parliamentary Debates, New series, IX, pp. 433-35; X, pp. 130-34, 368-69, and 486-96; XII, pp. 657-61 and 1002-13; XIV, pp. 647-52; and XXI, pp. 1319-20. In 1832 investigations were commenced by the Select Committee on the Cruel and Improper Treatment of Animals, but it never completed its enquiries and was disbanded at the end of the session. The evidence was drawn entirely from London and concentrated on dog-fighting; it is slight in volume and of limited interest. (Parliamentary Papers, 1831-32, V, pp. 73-116.)

Finally, in 1835, a Cruelty to Animals Act unequivocally established the illegality of all blood sports which involved the baiting of animals.<sup>1</sup>

There were other indications of the growing revulsion against blood sports. We have traced sixteen essays published between the 1780s and the 1840s which dealt in part or entirely with blood sports (all of them critically), and the list could probably be extended.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> 5 & 6 William IV c. 59. An Act of 1849 "for the more effectual Prevention of Cruelty to Animals" (12 & 13 Victoria c. 92) was similar to the Act of 1835, though it was more explicit about the illegality of cock-fighting (the earlier Act had only outlawed the keeping of cockpits).

<sup>2</sup> Soame Jenyns, "On Cruelty to Inferior Animals", in his Disquisitions on Several Subjects (London, 1782); Denys Rolle, a pamphlet on blood sports c. 1789 (not traced; reference from Gentleman's Magazine, LXVII, part ii, 1797, p. 1125); John Oswald, The Cry of Nature; or, An Appeal to Mercy and to Justice, on behalf of the Persecuted Animals (London, 1791); Luke Booker, "On Humanity to the Brute Creation", in his Sermons on Various Subjects (Dudley, 1793); Thomas Young, An Essay on Humanity to Animals (London, 1789); /Sir Richard Hill/, A Letter to the Right Honourable William Windham, on his late opposition to the Bill to prevent Bull-baiting, 1800 (cited in the Anti-Jacobin Review, VI, 1800, pp. 217-18); Percival Stockdale, A Remonstrance Against Inhumanity to Animals; and Particularly Against the Savage Practice of Bull-Baiting (Alnwick, 1802); Edward Barry, Bull Baiting! A Sermon on Barbarity to God's Dumb Creation (Reading, 1802); Thomas Moore, The Sin and Folly of Cruelty to Brute Animals: A Sermon (Birmingham, 1810); Henry Crowe, Animadversions on Cruelty to the Brute Creation, Addressed Chiefly to the Lower Classes (Bath, 1825); J. F. Winks, The Bull Running at Stamford, A Transgression of the Divine Laws, and a Subject of Christian Grief; a Sermon Delivered ... on Nov. 15, 1829 (London, n.d.); Abraham Smith, Scriptural and Moral Catechism (1833); William H. Drummond, The Rights of Animals, and Man's Obligation to Treat them with Humanity (London, 1838); William Youatt, The Obligation and Extent of Humanity to Brutes (London, 1839); James Macaulay, Essay on Cruelty to Animals (Edinburgh, 1839); and Lewis Gompertz, Fragments in Defence of Animals (London, 1852), mostly reprinted essays from 1833-41.

In 1800-02 at least three tracts appeared which were specifically directed against bull-baiting. Sermons on the theme of humanity to animals were often delivered,<sup>1</sup> sometimes as a result of special endowments. Newspapers and journals periodically included condemnations of some blood sport, commonly in the form of a letter to the editor.<sup>2</sup> By the second quarter of the century genteel concern was substantial enough to support the formation of several reform societies, all of which drew some of their strength from the sentiments against blood sports: the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (1824- ), the Association for Promoting Rational Humanity Towards the Animal Creation (1830-33), the Animal's Friend Society (1832-c.1852), the Ladies' Society for the Suppression of Cruelty to Animals (the 1830s) - and in the part of the country where blood sports were especially prevalent, the South Staffordshire Association for the Suppression of Bull-baiting (1824- ? ). They sponsored tracts and periodicals - for instance, the Voice of Humanity and the Animal's Friend - and during the 1830s they were active in investigating and carrying to court many cases of animal sports.<sup>3</sup>

Bull-baiting, then, was widely under attack, and as the nineteenth century advanced it was gradually overpowered. Clergymen were

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<sup>1</sup> For instance, Abraham Smith, Scriptural and Moral Catechism, p.xxii.

<sup>2</sup> There are numerous such instances in the September-December issues of Aris's Birmingham Gazette during the 1830s.

<sup>3</sup> For a brief discussion of these reform societies, see the Appendix.

especially active in preaching and informing against bull-baiting and in organizing practical efforts of resistance.<sup>1</sup> Aside from a small body of Tories, genteel opinion had become almost solidly hostile. At Tutbury the sport was "at length suppressed by the humane interference of the surrounding gentry"<sup>2</sup> and at Stone, also in Staffordshire, it was eliminated in 1838.<sup>3</sup> It was suppressed at Aylesbury in 1821-22,<sup>4</sup> at Beverley in 1822-23,<sup>5</sup> and at Wheatley by 1837.<sup>6</sup> At Lincoln bull-baiting had been put down by the mid 1820s, and it was reported that on the 5th of November 1826 "the bullwards, notwithstanding much threats and boasting, did not venture to revive their barbarous diversion, which has been happily declining in public favor for some years past".<sup>7</sup> In 1837 it was said that "Thame is no longer the scene of that brutality which once cast a

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<sup>1</sup> There are many references to the involvement of clergymen in the campaign against bull-baiting: see for instance Abraham Smith, Scriptural and Moral Catechism, pp. xx-xxiii; RSPCA MS. Minute Book No. 3, pp. 14 and 24-26; Voice of Humanity, II, 1831-32, p. 77; Animal's Friend, No. 8, 1840, p. 30; F. W. Hackwood, Olden Wednesbury: Its Whims and Ways (Wednesbury, 1899), p. 18; and Burne, ed., Shropshire Folk-Lore, pp. 447-49.

<sup>2</sup> Sir Oswald Mosley, History of the Castle, Priory, and Town of Tutbury (London, 1832), p. 90.

<sup>3</sup> RSPCA MS. Minute Book No. 3, pp. 14 and 24-26.

<sup>4</sup> Gibbs, Aylesbury, p. 559.

<sup>5</sup> Oliver, History of Beverley, p. 422.

<sup>6</sup> RSPCA MS. Minute Book No. 2, pp. 93-94 and 202-04, and Twelfth Annual Report of the SPCA, 1838, pp. 81-82.

<sup>7</sup> Stamford Mercury, 10 November 1826.

blemish over its inhabitants; the bull-baiting is now done away with, and in its place we had a really good and efficient band of music parading the town".<sup>1</sup> By 1842 "the inhuman practice of bull bating [sic], which usually drew a large concourse of people to Ashbourn and other places during the wakes week, having been put a stop to, the inhabitants contemplate having steeple chases to be run for in the same week."<sup>2</sup>

Such suppressions were often only effected after years of opposition and numerous failures, for in many places the people were keen in their resistance and capitulated only under persistent and determined pressure. (Bull-baiting was commonly associated with large holiday gatherings and as a result the authorities' attempts at social control could often be ineffectual.) In the Birmingham-Black Country area a vigorous campaign against bull-baiting was continued through the first third of the century - prosecutions, convictions, sermons, journalistic attacks, personal interventions by clergymen and magistrates - and during the 1830s, especially after a strong legal leverage was provided through the Cruelty to Animals Act of 1835, there was a final wave of charges (and normally convictions) against bull-baiters, many of which were actively supported or

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<sup>1</sup> Jackson's Oxford Journal, 21 October 1837.

<sup>2</sup> Derby Mercury, 10 August 1842; see also History and Topography of Ashbourn, pp. 94-95.

initiated by the Animals' Friend Society: for instance, at King's Norton, Wednesbury, Bilston, Sedgley, Asted, West Bromwich, Handsworth, Durlington, Dudley, Dursley, Walsall, Darlaston, Oldbury, Woodgreen, and Rowley.<sup>1</sup> The reformers' determination and zeal were fully satisfied: within a few years bull-baiting was completely eliminated from the area. On 30 September 1839 it was reported by Aris's Birmingham Gazette that "at the annual wake at Brierly Hill and Wordesley on Monday last, the cruel and barbarous practice of bull-baiting was entirely abandoned." The Animals' Friend Society was noticing a definite decline in bull-baiting after 1835,<sup>2</sup> and by 1841 it was able to point,

... with great satisfaction to the chief late bull baiting districts, at the happy results which have followed the exertions of this Society in those districts. From Birmingham a letter to Mr. Chapman, Hon. Sec. to the Birmingham Branch Animals' Friend Society, of the 4th of July 1840, says that bull baiting at Handsworth (where the Society last year distributed its bills) is now at an end, and that a police force was established there, which there is now every reason to hope entirely prohibits it. At Birmingham, Mr. Yewen, on arriving there this year, found the happy effects of his former exertions; bull baiting having, as far as he was able to ascertain, disappeared from there and the vicinities.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Animals' Friend, No. 4, 1836, pp. 4-5; No. 5, 1837, pp. 16-18; No. 6, 1838, pp. 31-32; No. 7, 1839, p. 27; and Aris's Birmingham Gazette, 29 November 1837.

<sup>2</sup> Animals' Friend, No. 5, 1837, p. 16; No. 7, 1839, pp. 25 and 27; and No. 8, 1840, p. 30.

<sup>3</sup> Animals' Friend, No. 9, 1841, pp. 41-42.

The demise of bull-baiting was complete by the early years of Victoria's reign. "Happily", reported a tract of 1838 on bull-baiting and running, "they are now nearly every where abandoned."<sup>1</sup> "After many a hard contest," said William Howitt, bull-baiting "has been eventually put down".<sup>2</sup> "The appeal of good sense and humanity has been listened to in almost every part of the United Kingdom", rejoiced a reformer in 1839; "and this useful animal is no longer tortured amidst the exulting yells of those who are a disgrace to our common form and nature."<sup>3</sup>

There was, then, during the generations from the later eighteenth century until the 1840s, a persistent tension between the growing sentiments for reform and the popular conservatism which underlay the sometimes vigorous resilience of traditional blood sports. Active confrontations often arose when practical efforts were taken to suppress a particular sport, for the people could be determined in the defence of what they regarded as one of their rights; in some cases their resistance was effective enough to prolong the diversion for several decades. In almost all such cases the custom was eventually abolished, though only to the accompaniment of considerable social friction, and not without the application of substantial legal or physical pressure.

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<sup>1</sup> Drummond, Rights of Animals, p. 104.

<sup>2</sup> Howitt, Rural Life, p. 525.

<sup>3</sup> Youatt, Humanity to Brutes, p. 159.



One of the lengthiest and most spirited of these clashes emerged during the last fifty years of the observance of the annual bull-running at Stamford. The bull-running had existed for generations (according to local tradition, for almost 600 years), and for the most part without any serious opposition; and though a few earlier observers had disapproved of the practice, it was not until 1788 that an attempt was actually made to effect its suppression. At the Borough Quarter Sessions in January an order was delivered prohibiting the custom in the future,<sup>1</sup> and from early October a vigorous campaign was directed by the magistrates against the approaching holiday (on November 13th). (The principal instigator of the prohibition seems to have been the Earl of Exeter, the town's aristocratic overseer.) At the Sessions of October 6th the sport was forbidden on the grounds that it had been "productive of Vice, Prophaneness, Immorality, Disorder, Riot, Drunkenness, and Mischief, among<sup>st</sup> many People, Inhabitants of this Borough, and the Neighbourhood thereof; of every Species of Inhumanity, by the lower Order of People, to an unhappy Animal; and of great Annoyance, Danger, and Delay, to all Travellers passing and repassing upon the King's Highway in this Borough."<sup>2</sup> No obstructions were to be placed in any of the streets, and to facilitate the enforcement of the orders 48 special constables were sworn in to assist the 12 regular constables. Publicans were

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<sup>1</sup> Stamford Mercury, 18 January 1788.

<sup>2</sup> Stamford Mercury, 10 October 1788.

ordered not to let persons linger in their houses on the 13th and tradesmen were advised to keep their shops open and follow their usual business. At the end of the month, in response to the many expressions of discontent and the rumours that a subscription was on foot to purchase a bull, a further notice was issued threatening prosecutions under the Riot Act against any resisters.<sup>1</sup> There were disturbances outside the Mayor's residence on November 8th: a request for assistance was sent to the War Office and on the 12th a troop of dragoons arrived from Newark. Excitement was at a high pitch on the 13th, and for a few hours it seemed that the authorities were going to be completely successful. Around noon, however, while the soldiers and constables were watching a suspicious looking bull to the south of town, another was brought in from the west and run freely through several streets.<sup>2</sup> When the authorities caught up with this development a minor scuffle broke out and Lord Exeter and Sir Samuel Fludyer were "roughly treated" by the populace; the bull was confiscated, several arrests were made, and the crowd gradually dispersed.<sup>3</sup> The next day the Stamford Mercury applauded the magistrates' firmness and reported that "Last night and this morning the

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<sup>1</sup> Stamford Mercury, 31 October 1788.

<sup>2</sup> MS. notes by the Rev. John Swann in Harrod's History of Stamford, transcribed in a book of cuttings and miscellaneous notes on the bull-running, No. 183 in the Phillips Collection, Stamford Town Hall. The pages of this volume are not numbered but the items are arranged in a rough chronological order and are readily found.

<sup>3</sup> Excerpts from the MS. diary of Maurice Pollard of St. Martin's parish, Phillips Collection No. 183.

populace were very quiet, and we trust there is now an end to a custom which has too long disgraced the town of Stamford." In January four of the participants in the November 8th disturbance received jail terms of two weeks to three months.<sup>1</sup>

In 1789 the magistrates repeated the prohibitions and precautions of the previous year. But despite the strong warnings and the attendance of dragoons, this year's holiday was said (by the Rev. John Swann) to have "exhibited the same scene with rather more daring spirit in the populace who broke open a lock and let out a Bull from a Croft in Scotgate of Farmer Wright's and ... actually run it for several hours through every part of the Town and with the most consummate audacity bid defiance to the Mayor, Aldermen, and the Recorder Lord Exeter for which several were the next day committed to jail."<sup>2</sup> An obese woman named Ann Blades, dressed in a bright blue frock, had led the bull and his followers into the town; the crowd was met by the Mayor, the constables and the military, but the captain of the dragoons, apparently more impressed by the orderliness of the bullards than the wishes of the Mayor, declined to offer any resistance and dismissed his men, who promptly joined the bull-running.<sup>3</sup>

In January three men were sentenced for riot, one for six months

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<sup>1</sup> Stamford Mercury, 16 January 1789.

<sup>2</sup> Phillips Collection No. 183; and Stamford Mercury, 20 November 1789.

<sup>3</sup> Phillips Collection No. 183 (MS. diary of Pollard); and Burton, Chronology of Stamford, p. 52.

imprisonment and the others to one month.<sup>1</sup>

It seems that the magistrates were now becoming discouraged and less confident of success. In 1790 dragoons were again summoned but left the town without being called into service. On November 13th, according to Swann, "the populace persevered in their designs with the most determined resolution and brought a bull from Ryhall and ran him several times through all parts of the Town without any opposition of the Mayor etc. who wisely left them to their own will thinking it the most likely method of suppressing this savage diversion by taking no notice thereof".<sup>2</sup>

The authorities had been defeated and popular feeling revelled in the victory. Several broadsides and ballads glorified the success and predicted similar results in the event of future encounters. One broadside skit, entitled "Bull Running Reviv'd", presented a Lord Wing (alias the Earl of Exeter) vexed and murmuring to himself when a bull was found to be loose:

Ye Gods! how wretched my exalted State,  
I thought I rul'd, I thought I once was great:  
The other Day I cou'd command the Waves,  
To cease their Course, and bid all Men be Slaves;  
The Beggars' Humble Hut, the Prisoners' Cell,  
Suits their mean Pride, and all within is well:  
These Wretches find more pleasure in their Sport,<sup>3</sup>  
Then I can find in B - r - gh's gilded Court....

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<sup>1</sup> Stamford Mercury, 15 January 1790.

<sup>2</sup> Phillips Collection No. 183; see also Burton, Chronology of Stamford p. 53.

<sup>3</sup> Phillips Collection No. 183.

Similar sentiments persisted well into the next century. John Drakard's Stamford News of 11 November 1825 included an irreverent contribution from an anonymous poet:

Said Martin, of Galway,<sup>1</sup> to Justice Conant,  
 To stop the Bull-running at Stamford I want:  
 So do I, Mr. Martin, the big-wig replied,  
 But the Bullards of Stamford your law have defied;  
 They bid us not meddle, and swear, if we do,  
 That the dogs shall pin me, and the bull shall toss you.  
 Now, this pinning to earth, and this tossing in air,  
 You'll confess, my dear friend, is no laughing affair,  
 So we'd better be quiet, and stay where we are.

A minor culture of popular self-expression grew up around the bull-running. Some of the local mugs were enscribed with the patriotic slogan "Bull For Ever", and enterprising boys made water-colour sketches of particular bull-running incidents and sold them for a few pennies to local enthusiasts.<sup>2</sup> The opposition subsided and seems to have maintained a discreet silence. Periodic sermons and letters to one of the newspapers continued to condemn the custom but during the first thirty years of the nineteenth century the holiday was subjected to no serious challenges.

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<sup>1</sup> Richard Martin of Galway was the MP who persistently introduced legislation against blood sports during the 1820s; he was the principal sponsor of the 1822 Cruel Treatment of Cattle Bill. There seems to have been a tradition in Stamford of opposition to such attempts at reform: in 1802, for instance, a petition was sent from the town to Parliament against the Bill to suppress bull-baiting. (Parliamentary History, XXXVI, p. 839.)

<sup>2</sup> George H. Burton, ed., Old Lincolnshire, A Pictorial Quarterly Magazine (Stamford, 1883-85), p. 165; and Phillips Collection No. 183.

Some observers during the 1820s and early 1830s thought that the bull-running was declining in popularity.<sup>1</sup> Changing tastes and interests and more refined manners were cited as the reasons for this trend. A fortnight before the 1833 holiday the bullards were said to be having difficulty raising enough money to promote the run. But this creeping apathy was soon undermined when it was reported in early November that the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals was intending to intervene in that year's bull-running. This announcement prompted such a generous subscription for the holiday that it was rumoured sufficient funds had been collected to finance the diversion for another two or three years. One Charles Wheeler, supposedly an agent for the SPCA but in fact an imposter (he was, though, a bona fide if deceitful campaigner against blood sports),<sup>2</sup> arrived in Stamford to press the issue with the magistrates, but he was so ill-received by the inhabitants that he found it expedient to remove to Stilton, some fourteen miles away. According to the Lincolnshire Chronicle of 15 November, the 13th saw "a savage kind of esprit du /sic/ corps amongst the 'bullards', and ... the present year's 'sport' ... received a degree of éclat of which no recent anniversary affords an example." Clubs were

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<sup>1</sup> For instance: Stamford Mercury, 19 November 1819; John Drakard, The History of Stamford (Stamford, 1822), p. 414; a letter to the editor of the Stamford Mercury, 7 November 1834; a letter of 16 November 1836 from the Mayor of Stamford to the Home Office (P.R.O., H.O. 52/30, Lincolnshire bundle); and Burton, Chronology of Stamford, p. 53.

<sup>2</sup> For a brief note on Wheeler, see the Appendix.

actually formed expressly to perpetuate the amusement. Recalling the lessons of 1738-90, the local press remarked on the worthy motives but indiscretion of the intervention from London. A proverb was cited from the bullards' own lore in support of moderation, that "the bull may die, but he cannot be killed". In an indignant letter Wheeler talked of "riot, confusion, plunder, and bloodshed", and concluded by complaining that "for my humble endeavours to prevent the bull-bait [sic] I was threatened with personal violence and the most horrid imprecations [were] uttered against me by the ferocious and blood-thirsty bull-baiters of Stamford."<sup>1</sup>

Although the intervention of 1833 was in itself a very inconsiderable threat, there was a real and growing possibility of effective interference from some of the more influential London reformers. In 1830 a reporter from the Christian Advocate and an agent from the SPCA had been sent to Stamford, the one to publicize the bull-running and the other to seek the support of the magistracy.<sup>2</sup> The SPCA maintained its interest in Stamford: replying to a letter in the spring of 1834, its Committee reaffirmed its opposition to the bull-running, "Yet they are fearful that the Laws now in force, are not sufficiently strong to suppress it, ... and they regret to

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<sup>1</sup> This paragraph relies principally on the reports in the Lincolnshire Chronicle, 15 and 22 November 1833, and the Stamford Mercury, 15 November 1833.

<sup>2</sup> Christian Advocate, 15 November 1830; RSPCA MS. Minute Book for 1824-32, pp. 128-30; and Voice of Humanity, I, 1830-31, pp. 14-23 and 67-75.

say also, that the limited Funds at present at their disposal, do not justify them in incurring the expence of ... a proceeding against the sport".<sup>1</sup> During the next two years these disabilities were largely removed: the 1835 Cruelty to Animals Act provided an effective foundation for prosecutions, and the receipt of a legacy of £1000 in October 1836 encouraged the Society to pursue a more ambitious and aggressive policy.<sup>2</sup> (Its Secretary and an inspector had returned from observing the 1835 bull-running with information concerning twenty-eight of the most active participants, but because of financial considerations the idea of legal action had to be dropped.)<sup>3</sup> Thereafter the SPCA was campaigning in earnest. In 1837 charges were laid against eight men for their involvement in the previous bull-running. At the summer Assizes in Lincoln five were acquitted and three were found guilty; the sentences were deferred in order to allow the bullards to reconsider the wisdom of their persistence.<sup>4</sup> By this time the SPCA had laid out on the Stamford case (its first of a considerable scale) at least £350 and in 1837 it accounted for almost a quarter of the

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<sup>1</sup> RSPCA MS. Minute Book No. 1, pp. 131-32.

<sup>2</sup> RSPCA MS. Minute Book No. 2, pp. 92-93.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., pp. 19-26 and 34; and Tenth Annual Report of the SPCA, 1836.

<sup>4</sup> Stamford Bull-Running, Report of a Criminal Prosecution (Rex v. Richardson and Others), Trial at Lincoln Summer Assizes, July 18, 1837 (Stamford, 1837), a copy of which is held in the Stamford Town Hall; Burton, Chronology of Stamford, p. 55; and RSPCA MS. Minute Book No. 2, pp. 124 and 179-80.



Society's total expenditure.<sup>1</sup>

Prior to the 1837 bull-running the Stamford magistrates were being urged to action by the Home Office, which had itself been petitioned by the SPCA.<sup>2</sup> A letter of November 2nd from the Home Office called for firm measures and enquired about the strength of the town's constabulary force. The magistrates' reply was full of doubt about the feasibility of putting down the festival:

Their Worships do not think the 40 special Constables already sworn in would act with effect to suppress or prevent a Bull running assemblage and they wish not to disguise that great difficulty would be found in organizing a force sufficient to prevent it. The Chief Constable has ... offered to make oath that neither the regular Police nor the special Constables can be depended upon for that purpose....<sup>3</sup>

The lukewarm spirit of the magistrates was sharply challenged in the next Home Office letter and their resolve was stiffened to the extent that they published notices promising severe punishments for bull-running and enlisted another 240 special constables, "generally of the most able and many of the most opulent Inhabitants of the Town."<sup>4</sup> At the same time the publisher of the Stamford Mercury, Richard Newcomb was offering an insider's version of the local circumstances in a private letter to the SPCA:

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<sup>1</sup> Annual Reports of the SPCA for 1836-38, passim; and Twelfth Annual Report of the SPCA, 1838, pp. 14ff.

<sup>2</sup> Stamford Mercury, 10 November 1837; and RSPCA MS. Minute Book No. 2, pp. 89-92, 98-101, and 196-99.

<sup>3</sup> P.R.O., H.O. 52/34, Lincolnshire bundle, letter of 4 November 1837.

<sup>4</sup> Phillips Collection No. 183, letter of 21 November 1837.

I am one of the Magistrates of the Borough; and I regret to say the only one not favorable to the continuance of the Bull Running. Through my suggestion in a letter to London a correspondence has arisen and is at present carrying on between the Secretary of State ... and the Magistrates of Stamford.... The correspondence has produced a collision between my brother magistrates and myself; and the exhibition on their part of an odious system of delusion calculated to get over the coming anniversary without a direct interposition on the part of ~~the~~ Government.... Some of them (including the Mayor) will I verily believe do all they can to promote the continuance of this cruel custom, on the expressed persuasion by them that it is sanctioned by Charter and by Law and that Mr. Phillips (the learned Under Secretary of State) is wrong in calling it "illegal". They urge upon Lord John Russell the bringing in of a Bill to make the Sport of Bull Running unlawful!!! and then they hint it might be stopped at Stamford but not otherwise. They also state that Special Constables ... cannot be found amongst those who are to be depended on ... for respecting their oaths: a gross calumny on many respectable townsmen who will willingly be sworn into office on that day, provided the Magistracy show a purpose to protect them from being murdered....<sup>1</sup>

Newcomb's representation of the other magistrates' sentiments was confirmed during an interview which the SPCA's Secretary had with the town's authorities on 12 November 1837. They were found to be unsympathetic to any of his proposals: "It was evident to all", he reported later, "that the majority of the Magistrates did not wish to do anything either to prevent the Bull Running or to apprehend the offenders."<sup>2</sup> At 9 a.m. on the 13th nearly 300 constables assembled

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<sup>1</sup> RSPCA MS. Minute Book No. 2, pp. 200-01. Newcomb wrote similar letters to the Home Office; two of his fellow magistrates resigned in protest against these clandestine activities. (P.R.O., H.O. 52/34, Lincolnshire bundle.)

<sup>2</sup> RSPCA MS. Minute Book No. 2, p. 217.

at the Town Hall, but (according to the magistrates) "the general expression and determination manifested by them in favour of a Bull running (though they declared a readiness to protect property, etc.) was such as to amount at once to a convincing proof that no reliance could be placed on them".<sup>1</sup> The SPCA's officers reported that "the Special Constables were ... called up to the Magistrates, and in a very short space of time they came running and stamping down the Stairs shouting and yelling Bull for Ever! Yahoo Yahoo."<sup>2</sup> By midday bull and bullards were running freely about the town. In the afternoon the bull was paraded through the streets and displayed in front of the Town Hall as the people "shouted, yelled and groaned several times in defiance".<sup>3</sup> On November 25th six men were tried in a very crowded Town Hall under the 1835 Cruelty to Animals Act. Four were acquitted and two were convicted and fined; one of the fines was paid immediately from a collection taken up right in the court.<sup>4</sup>

The attack became more consolidated and better grounded in 1838. As a result of an appeal against the Assize convictions of 1837, the custom was explicitly declared illegal by the Court of the Queen's

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<sup>1</sup> Phillips Collection No. 183, letter of 21 November 1837.

<sup>2</sup> P.R.O., H.O. 44/30, Lincolnshire bundle, p. 7 of a report on the 1837 proceedings; see also RSPCA MS. Minute book No. 2, pp. 214-27, for a detailed account of this year's activities.

<sup>3</sup> RSPCA MS. Minute Book No. 2, p. 221; cf. Stamford Mercury, 17 November 1837.

<sup>4</sup> Stamford Mercury, 1 December 1837.

Bench.<sup>1</sup> In early November the Home Office, under pressure from the SPCA, ordered 12 London police and 35 dragoons to Stamford; the magistrates decided on a firmer stand and commissioned 60 special constables.<sup>2</sup> Letters of the 2nd and 7th<sup>of</sup> November from Richard Newcomb to the SPCA were uncommonly optimistic: "A wonderful change has taken place in the feeling of the Magistrates.... [They] are quite converted and see now the peril of their position if they do not act as they ought to, in aid of the purpose of Government so clearly and energetically evinced".<sup>3</sup> Until one o'clock on the 13th no bull appeared. Then, by coincidence, an apparently innocent farm servant was found to be leading through the town a herd of nine cows and one bull. Some of the people relieved him of the bull and succeeded in running it through much of the town before they were restrained by the police and the military. The bull was confiscated and the law enforcers were pelted with stones by a resentful crowd.<sup>4</sup> Newcomb was satisfied with the day's efforts and thought that the tradition had been effectively broken.<sup>5</sup> At the January

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<sup>1</sup> Stamford Mercury, 9 November 1838; and RSPCA MS Minute Book No. 2, pp. 242ff.

<sup>2</sup> Thirteenth Annual Report of the SPCA, 1839, p. 10; RSPCA MS. Minute Book No. 3, pp. 3, 11-12, and 18-22; Stamford Mercury, 9 November 1838; and P.R.O., H.O. 52/37, Lincolnshire bundle, especially the magistrates report on the 1838 proceedings.

<sup>3</sup> RSPCA MS. Minute Book No. 3, pp. 33-34 and 36-37.

<sup>4</sup> Stamford Mercury, 16 November 1838; Lincolnshire Chronicle, 16 November 1838; and The Times, 16-17 November 1838.

<sup>5</sup> RSPCA MS. Minute Book No. 3, pp. 39-40.

Quarter Sessions four persons were tried for rioting but all were acquitted by a sympathetic jury.<sup>1</sup>

The 1839 preparations took on minor siege proportions: 20 metropolitan police and 43 dragoons arrived in Stamford to assist the 90 local constables. On the 12th notices were distributed which summarized the duties and powers of the special constables and described in some detail the overall plan for maintaining order the next day (it included provisions for messengers, lookouts at all the accesses, and procedures for safely escorting passing cattle.)<sup>2</sup> Once again though the preventive measures failed. In the early afternoon a bull was surreptitiously introduced into town and pursued in the customary manner. The police attempted without success to confiscate the bull, so the dragoons had to be summoned to the scene; they arrived just in time to prevent the release of another bull.<sup>3</sup> At the next meeting of a disillusioned town council there was prolonged and confused debate on the bull-running. The main point of contention was the swelling cost of the attempts to put it down. Almost £150 had been expended in the previous year and this year's failure was expected to cost twice as much; an additional sixpence in the pound had to be levied on the ratepayers.<sup>4</sup> (Disgruntled

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<sup>1</sup> Lincolnshire Chronicle, 11 January 1839.

<sup>2</sup> Phillips Collection No. 183.

<sup>3</sup> Stamford Mercury, 15 November 1839; and P.R.O., H.O. 52/43, bundle "S", file on Stamford for 1839.

<sup>4</sup> Stamford Mercury, 22 November 1839 and 17 January 1840; and Stamford Town Hall, MS. Minute Book vol. VI, Council meeting of 16 November 183

in the popular mind. The "Bull-Running Song", almost a local anthem, was often sung on public occasions in later years and was still remembered and sometimes introduced as late as the 1880s.<sup>1</sup>

Although the resistance to the attacks against Stamford's bull-running ~~were~~<sup>was</sup> exceptional in the extent and vigour of its determination and popular support, it was a representative expression of the sort of ardent conservatism which was evident on a smaller scale in many of the instances when blood sports were directly threatened. In the West Midlands, for instance, the people clung almost as tenaciously to their bull-baiting practices. The particular resilience of the bull-running seems to have stemmed from a number of relatively untypical circumstances. Because of the very large following which the event attracted - it drew support not only from a sizeable market town, but also from much of the surrounding countryside - the difficulties of enforcing a prohibition were unusually formidable. In such conditions popular resistance had a better chance of overpowering official directives.<sup>2</sup> "The annual Bull-running at Stamford", observed the town clerk in 1837, "is

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<sup>1</sup> Burton, Chronology of Stamford, p. 66; and Burton, ed., Old Lincolnshire, p. 133n.

<sup>2</sup> "On the occasion in question," observed the Stamford Mercury of 18 November 1836, "it is not with the populace of Stamford alone that the police would have to contend - the rural population for many miles around have been in the habit of resorting to the town on the 13th of November, and those with whom the constables would have to struggle would not be townsmen and known neighbours, but strangers - the athletae of a large district, excited by the desire of a daring though disgusting sport. It would require, therefore, to make proper head against them, a force much exceeding that which the Magistrates of Stamford can ordinarily command".

attended by a large and powerful assemblage of persons of the lower orders of society, many from the country, strongly impressed with the idea that their practise is a lawful ancient custom, warranted by an exercise of 600 years, ... and which they ought not to be deprived of except by an express legislative enactment".<sup>1</sup> Indeed, the local enthusiasm for the distinctive holiday does appear to have been uncommonly intense. Around 1730 William Stukeley had spoken of the Stamfordians' "lov'd bull-runnings"<sup>2</sup> and in 1809 the Stamford Mercury referred to "the extraordinary devotion of the people of this town to their far-famed bull-running".<sup>3</sup> And it was not only the common people who patronized the holiday. "So strong was the prejudice in favor of this barbarous custom", reported the SPCA in 1836, "that even the Mayor himself, as well as several of the Aldermen, were subscribers to the annual sport as it was termed; and [it is said] that it would be dangerous to any person to appear publicly in any endeavour to prevent or suppress it."<sup>4</sup> Some of the

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<sup>1</sup> P.R.O., H.O. 52/34, Lincolnshire bundle, letter of 4 November 1837.

<sup>2</sup> The Family Memoirs of the Rev. William Stukeley, M.D. (3 vols.; Publications of the Surtees Society, LXXIII, LXXVI, and LXXX, 1882-87), LXXIII, p. 118.

<sup>3</sup> Stamford Mercury, 3 March 1809; cf. Stamford Mercury, 18 November 1830. In a rough hand-bill, apparently dating from the 1790s, it was asked: "Shall it be said in after ages that we have been cowards, and given up what our ancestors have been so often delighted with; and even we have tasted the pleasure [of] so often? No, our children shall not say we are afraid, but we'll set them an example to keep it up, and be true St - f - dians." (Phillips Collection No. 183.)

<sup>4</sup> Tenth Annual Report of the SPCA, 1836, p. 64.

aldermen's sons were active participants in the diversion.<sup>1</sup>

"Persons of respectability follow the bull at Stamford," complained the Stamford Mercury of 20 November 1812, "who would be affronted with the imputation of doing any thing else on a parity with such a proceeding." This was a circumstance which on several occasions the reformers noted with regret - many of the participants in the 1835 bull-running, the SPCA's inspector reported, were "very respectable in their appearance, the rest of the lowest grade"<sup>2</sup> - and in 1830 it was noticed that "the windows which afforded a good view of the sport were filled with well dressed persons."<sup>3</sup> The special constables, though they were drawn from the town's more substantial citizens, were for the most part supporters of the holiday. Indeed, the "respectable" attitude towards the diversion was remarkably sympathetic, and it helped significantly to strengthen the custom's resilience and to provide it with a degree of legitimacy which few of the other sports so effectively retained.

The other blood sports retreated more gradually and their decline was accompanied by considerably less controversy and social conflict. Badger-baiting and dog-fighting, both of which were secondary amusements, were under attack during the same period as was bull-baiting -

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<sup>1</sup> Christian Advocate, 15 November 1830; Voice of Humanity, I, 1830-31, pp. 67, 73, and 74; and RSPCA MS. Minute Book No. 2, p. 25.

<sup>2</sup> RSPCA MS. Minute Book No. 2, p. 23.

<sup>3</sup> Voice of Humanity, I, 1830-31, pp. 72-73; cf. Burton, ed., Old Lincolnshire, p. 165, and Winks, Bull Running at Stamford, p. 16.



indeed, during the later 1830s the Animals' Friend Society was in the habit of investigating dog-fighting (and sometimes badger-baiting) as well as bull-baiting on the occasions of its annual missions into the Birmingham area<sup>1</sup> - but neither sport prompted much public outcry or heated discussion. They were both substantially reduced by the 1840s, probably to negligible proportions in the country as a whole.<sup>2</sup> In a few areas, however, they survived into the later nineteenth century,<sup>3</sup> mostly because of the difficulties of tracking them down: they could be more easily conducted in secrecy, in confined places away from the public gaze (such concealment was not possible with bull-baiting), which also meant that their offensiveness was less immediately disturbing. It is likely that they are not unknown today.<sup>4</sup> Cock-fighting was even more resilient, partly for the same reasons, partly because of its considerable genteel following. Advertisements for gentlemen's cock-fights continued to appear in

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<sup>1</sup> Animals' Friend, No. 5, 1837, p. 17; No. 6, 1838, pp. 31-32; and No. 7, 1839, pp. 27-28; and Aris's Birmingham Gazette, 10 December 1838 and 9 December 1839. See also RSPCA MS. Minute Book No. 2, pp. 155-56, and No. 4, pp. 201-02.

<sup>2</sup> RSPCA MS. Minute Book No. 4, p. 5; Derby Mercury, 6 March 1844; William Howitt, The Rural Life of England (2 vols.; London, 1838), II, 271; and Youatt, Humanity to Brutes, p. 173.

<sup>3</sup> See for instance Hassall, ed., Wheatley Records, pp. 91n and 98.

<sup>4</sup> For evidence concerning the practice of modified forms of badger-baiting, see the Guardian, 25 October 1967, p. 6.

the provincial press during the first quarter of the nineteenth century,<sup>1</sup> and though its support among all classes was certainly falling off in this period,<sup>2</sup> it was not until the beginning of Victoria's reign, when the great majority of gentlemen had abandoned the sport, leaving it for the most part in the hands of lesser men, that an active campaign against the sport was actually mobilized. The RSPCA began its attack in the late 1830s, and between 1838 and 1841 it prosecuted at least thirteen cases against cock-fighting, almost all of which were against men of little social standing. The sport still retains a small following today.

What were the main grounds for the complaints against blood sports? Why had they come to be so poorly regarded? Many of the criticisms clearly arose from moral and religious considerations: such diversions were "savage", "barbarous", "inhuman", "uncivilized", "heathenish", and generally at odds with enlightened morality. They involved "such scenes as degrade mankind beneath the barbarity of a savage, and which are totally inconsistent with the laws of nature, the laws of religion, and the laws of a civilized nation."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> As late as 1826 it was announced that "a new Cock Pit has been recently erected in this town Nottingham, the entrance to which is by the road leading from Clumber Street into Maypole Yard. It will be opened on Shrove Tuesday, when a main of cocks will be fought between the Gentlemen of Nottingham and the Gentlemen of Derbyshire." (Derby Mercury, 8 February 1826.)

<sup>2</sup> For instance, Brady, Clavis Calendaria, I, 200; and Clarkson, History of Richmond, p. 294.

<sup>3</sup> Stamford Mercury, 13 November 1789.

"Such a custom might comport with the barbarism and darkness of past ages," conceded a critic of the Stamford bull-running, "might suit the genius of an uncivilized and warlike race; but surely, must be regarded as an indelible stain upon the history of an enlightened and professedly christian people."<sup>1</sup> This was a familiar line of argument: the "march of intellect" should be overpowering such primitive practices. As the reformers saw it, the general framework of man's moral duties was to be found in the great chain of being. Man had been granted the power to govern the animal world, but just as God benevolently oversaw the lives of humans, so man should not misuse his authority over subordinate creatures. There was a hierarchy of rights and duties and man's obligations towards the dumb creation were not to be lightly neglected. As a clergyman put it in 1830: "man was appointed the terrestrial sovereign of the brute creation. But did God, in entrusting the brute creation to the care of man, and in giving him the power of awing their brute force into submission and obedience, at the same time give him the power to put them to unnecessary torture, and to destroy them in mere wantonness?"<sup>2</sup> "Clemency to Brutes is a Natural Duty," argued another reformer, "and Natural

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<sup>1</sup> Stamford Mercury, 12 November 1814.

<sup>2</sup> Voice of Humanity, I, 1830-31, pp. 68-69. See also ibid., p. 20; Nehemiah Curnock, ed., The Journal of the Rev. John Wesley (8 vols.; 1909-16), IV, 175-76; Stockdale, Remonstrance Against Inhumanity to Animals, p. 4; and Winks, Bull Running at Stamford, p. 4.

Duties are of eternal and universal Obligation."<sup>1</sup> The basic theological and ethical position was most precisely spelled out by Soame Jenyns in an essay of 1782:

Man is that link of the chain of universal existence, by which spiritual and corporeal beings are united: as the numbers and variety of the latter his inferiors are almost infinite, so probably are those of the former his superiors; and as we see that the lives and happiness of those below us are dependent on our wills, we may reasonably conclude, that our lives, and happiness are equally dependent on the wills of those above us; accountable, like ourselves, for the use of this power, to the supreme Creator, and governor of all things. Should this analogy be well founded, how criminal will our account appear, when laid before that just and impartial judge! How will man, that sanguinary tyrant, be able to excuse himself from the charge of those innumerable cruelties inflicted on his unoffending subjects committed to his care, formed for his benefit, and placed under his authority by their common Father? whose mercy is over all his works, and who expects that this authority should be exercised not only with tenderness and mercy, but in conformity to the laws of justice and gratitude.<sup>2</sup>

It followed from these views that the maltreatment of animals should be regarded as a serious breach of divine injunctions.

"Cruelty towards Men is most confessedly an Offence against God,

<sup>1</sup> Clemency to Brutes, p. 6.

<sup>2</sup> Annual Register, 1782, p. 166; from an essay "On Cruelty to Inferior Animals", reprinted in full from Jenyns's Disquisitions on Several Subjects (London, 1782).

and can the same Disposition towards Brutes be otherwise? Did not the same Hand which made Them make Us?"<sup>1</sup> "If we eagerly stimulate brutal fierceness", declared one reformer, "we are guilty of a most barbarous impiety."<sup>2</sup> An individual's position on this question would probably bear on his spiritual prospects. "It does not appear to me extravagant", suggested an observer in 1801, "to suppose that our conduct with respect to the brute creation will be taken into consideration at the day of retribution, and have considerable influence on our future state."<sup>3</sup> Later writers were to advance the same fear with greater warmth. "The cruelty with which they have treated the victims of their sport", claimed one writer of Stamford's bullards, "will embitter their expiring moments, and plant on their dying pillow the thorn of remorse."<sup>4</sup> Another critic of blood sports pointed to "the inseparable connection between cruelty and impiety. In no other situation, under no other circumstances, can a person have an opportunity of witnessing impiety to such an extent.... Who but must acknowledge that the promoters of them rank amongst the worst enemies of God and man, and are the most active agents of the DEVIL

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<sup>1</sup> Clemency to Brutes, p. 7.

<sup>2</sup> Stockdale, Remonstrance Against Inhumanity to Animals, p. 3.

<sup>3</sup> Hull Advertiser, 19 December 1801.

<sup>4</sup> Voice of Humanity, I, 1830-31, p. 21.

has under his controul?"<sup>1</sup>

It was also argued that blood sports served to undermine social morality. "Every act that sanctions cruelty to animals", observed the Manchester Mercury of 15 April 1800, "must tend to destroy the morals of a people, and consequently every social duty." Cruel sports, it was feared, would naturally give rise to cruel men:

... the greatest Unhappiness attending the rude Exercises of Cock-Throwing, Bull-Baiting, Prize-fighting, and the like Bear-garden Diversions, (not to mention the more genteel Entertainment of Cock-fighting), ... the greatest Misfortune arising from these Brutal Sports is, That they inspire the Minds of Children and young People with a savage Disposition and Ferity of Temper highly pleased with Acts of Barbarity and Cruelty. Good-nature, Compassion and Tenderness, will with great Difficulty afterwards gain Possession, if the Mind be first tinctured with Inhumanity and Blood.<sup>2</sup>

It was thought that "all such trainings of the mind of a people to delight in scenes of cruelty, are as dangerous in their tendency to the public peace and order, as they are corruptive of the young and uninstructed, whose most natural principles, (benevolence and compassion) they extinguish, and pervert their hearts to the contrary."<sup>3</sup> The logical consequence of indulgence in such sports could be crime

<sup>1</sup> Abraham Smith, Scriptural and Moral Catechism, part ii, p. 52.

<sup>2</sup> Gentleman's Magazine, VII, 1737, p. 8; cf. Young, Humanity to Animals, pp. 3-6.

<sup>3</sup> Bury and Norwich Post, 18 November 1801.

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<sup>3</sup> Bury and Norwich Post, 18 November 1801.

of the highest order: "Whatever is morally bad cannot be politically right. The monster, who can wilfully persevere to torture ~~a~~ <sup>the</sup> dumb creation, would feel little or no compunction, to serve a purpose, in aiming his bludgeon at the head, or ingulfing the murderous blade within the warm vitals of his fellow creature."<sup>1</sup> One writer felt that "much of the misery and crime of the English rural districts, is to be ascribed to the influence" of cock-fighting, "which has trained many a victim for the gallows, and reduced many a family to want and beggary."<sup>2</sup>

Blood sports, then, involved special dangers, but they also shared with other popular diversions a general tendency to social indiscipline. They tempted men from productive labour; they disrupted the orderly routine of everyday life; they encouraged idleness, improvidence, and gambling; and sometimes they resulted in boisterous and tumultuous assemblies. This is a theme which will be taken up in the next chapter. Here we may simply notice the various concerns which lay behind the introduction of the Bull-baiting bill of 1800. "The practice", declared Sir William Pulteney, "was cruel and inhuman; it drew together idle and disorderly persons; it drew also from their occupations many who ought to be earning subsistence for themselves and families; it created many disorderly and mischievous proceedings,

<sup>1</sup> Barry, Bull Baiting, p. 12.

<sup>2</sup> Macaulay, Essay on Cruelty to Animals, p. 124; cf. Abraham Smith, Scriptural and Moral Catechism, part ii, p. 19.



and furnished examples of profligacy and cruelty."<sup>1</sup> Similarly, Sir Richard Hill pointed out that "men neglected their work and their families, and in great crowds spent whole days in witnessing those barbarous exhibitions. From the baiting-field they retired to the alehouse, and wasted the whole night in debauchery, as they had done the day in idleness."<sup>2</sup> In short, the concern for cruelty and its consequences was strongly reinforced by the solicitude for public order and for labour discipline.<sup>3</sup>

Unlike the movement against blood sports, there was no such powerful and sustained campaign which was intent on undermining the essential fabric of the traditional holiday calendar. The legitimacy of some sort of festivity, or at least relaxation, at Christmas, Easter and Whitsuntide was only infrequently brought seriously into question; for the most part they were accepted as established and justifiable occasions of leisure - they were celebrated in some form by almost everyone and they were implicated in the practices of diverse institutions (the church, fairs, clubs and friendly societies) - though specific features of their observance were sometimes condemned. Most of the dissatisfaction with the customary holidays was directed at wakes and pleasure fairs. They were exposed to criticism on a

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<sup>1</sup> Parliamentary History, XXXV, p. 202.

<sup>2</sup> Annual Register, 1800, p. 148.

<sup>3</sup> For a further discussion of this theme, see below, pp. 289ff.

number of grounds: they involved large - sometimes very large - public assemblies and consequently could be difficult for the authorities to control; they were often boisterous and "licentious"; many of them were exclusively plebeian and only marginally associated with "respectable" institutions, religious, social or economic; they were thought by many observers to be thoroughly committed in the crudest of ways to the pursuit of sensual pleasures. One writer suggested that "few persons are ever to be intrusted to feast. And fewer are to be allowed to meet in numbers together. There is a contagious viciousness in crouds. Though each individual of them, alone and by himself, would act with a religious propriety; yet all together they act with irreligion and folly."<sup>1</sup> William Somerville claimed that at country wakes "We see nothing but broken Heads, Bottles flying about, Tables overturn'd, outrageous Drunkenness, and eternal Squabble."<sup>2</sup> Self-indulgence and a variety of social vices were thought to be inherent to many feasts and pleasure fairs; and their disadvantages were not clearly offset by any positive attributes. To many gentlemen they appeared to involve some of the most objectionable aspects of popular diversion and to perpetrate them with particular force and resolution.

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<sup>1</sup> John Whitaker, The History of Manchester (London, 1775), Book II, pp. 443-44.

<sup>2</sup> Somerville, Hobbinol, or the Rural Games, p. ii.

There are numerous indications from the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries of this genteel dissatisfaction with parish feasts. In Gloucestershire there were several early attempts to eliminate wakes and at the second of these, in 1710, the county's Court of Quarter Sessions set out the type of grievances which was to be repeatedly advanced during later generations. The preamble to the order for a general suppression of wakes spoke of how

... it has been Represented to this Court by the ministers and principall Inhabitants of the several Parishes of Coaley Frocester and Nympsfield, That there are yearly held in those Parishes aforesaid as in other places in this County unlawfull Wakes and Revells and other Disorderly meetings upon several Lords Days and which have been continued on for several days of the week following: vizt the Sunday after St. Bartholomews Day at Coaley Palm Sunday at Cowleys Pick and Nympsfield and the Sunday after St. Peters day at Frocester, and on other particular Sundays in other places in this County, which draw great Concourse/s/ of People together, to the great Prophanation of the Lords Day in Contempt of her Majesties Gracious Proclamation against Immorality and Prophaneness, where Rioting and Drunkenness, Lewdness and Debauchery and other Immoralities are Committed, which according to the Preamble of the Statute of the 4th of King James the 1st against Drunkenness is the Root and foundation of many other enormous sinnes to the Great Dishonour of God and our Nation, the overthrow of many good Arts and manual Trades, the Disabling Diverse workmen, and the General Impoverishment of many good Subjects....<sup>1</sup>

Similar orders were delivered by the Quarter Sessions in 1718 and 1731 (the latter was printed), both of which also referred to "other

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<sup>1</sup> Gloucestershire R.O., Q/SO 3, Easter 1710 (Frocester is spelled "Froster" and Nympsfield "Nymphffield" in the original document). See Q/SO 3, Epiphany 1709/10 for the first of these orders.

disorderly Meetings, for Wrestling and Cudgel-Playing for Hats or other Prizes, which are promoted and encouraged by Alehouse-Keepers."<sup>1</sup> In 1778 the Nottinghamshire Quarter Sessions threatened to refuse licences to any publicans who helped to promote wakes: the order complained that on these occasions "Diverse Riots and Disorderly doings frequently arise by Persons Assembling and Meeting together to be guilty of Excessive Drinking Tippling Gaming or other unlawful Exercises."<sup>2</sup> In 1796-97 the principal inhabitants of three Lincolnshire communities - Sibsey, Withern, and Morton - announced through the columns of the Stamford Mercury that they had determined to discontinue their customary feasts.<sup>3</sup> The notice from Morton argued that country wakes, "tho' originally intended for religious Meetings, are now quite perverted, serving chiefly to encourage Drunkenness, the Inlet of Vice and Prophaneness;" and that since "the present high Price of Provisions must nearly involve every poor Family in unsurmountable Debts and Difficulties", the omission of the feasts would help to "keep our Parishioners from such Embarrassments, as well as to check the rapid Growth of Vice and Immorality".

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<sup>1</sup> Gloucestershire R.O., Q/SO 4, Epiphany 1717/18, and Q/SO 5, Easter 1731.

<sup>2</sup> K. T. Meaby, Nottinghamshire: Extracts from the County Records of the Eighteenth Century (Nottingham, 1947), p. 147.

<sup>3</sup> Stamford Mercury, 8 July 1796 (for Sibsey and Withern) and 23 June 1797 (for Morton). I am grateful to Mr. Rex Russell for drawing to my attention these notices.

It is clear that the concern for public order and morality was a major ingredient in the opposition to wakes. "There was then", said a Bedfordshire magistrate of the feast night at Sharnbrook, "an almost riotous assembly of men and women dancing and walking about on the road, clasping each other in a loving manner, all along the turnpike road. He thought this was not conducive to the morals of the public, which was the chief object he should have in view."<sup>1</sup> This was the sort of grievance which was uttered time and time again about many varieties of popular diversion. But there were as well several other complaints which were more peculiar to wakes. First, it was very often argued that wakes had seriously degenerated from their original institution as religious occasions and that as almost exclusively prophane assemblies their continuance could not be justified.<sup>2</sup> Since they no longer served any significant religious purpose, it would be best (thought some) if their practice were terminated. "When a thing not only fails to answer the end proposed," suggested one writer in 1783, "but operates commonly on the contrary, the sooner it is laid aside or changed the better."<sup>3</sup> A religious

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<sup>1</sup> Bedfordshire Mercury, 7 January 1861 (a report of a discussion at the Epiphany Quarter Sessions).

<sup>2</sup> See for instance John Bowstead, The Village Wake, or the Feast of the Dedication (London, 1846); William J. Kidd, Village Wakes; Their Origin, Design and Abuse (Manchester, 1841), held in Pusey House, Oxford, pamphlet no. 13403 (I am indebted to Mr. Brian Harrison for this reference); and Aulay Macaulay, History of Claybrook, p. 128.

<sup>3</sup> Gentleman's Magazine, LIII, part ii, 1783, p. 1004.

commemoration had become a gathering for licentiousness: "the Feasting and Sporting got the ascendant of Religion, and so this Feast of Dedication, degenerated into Drunkenness and Luxury."<sup>1</sup> Moreover, since wakes normally began on a Sunday they were liable to disapproval as a prophanation of the Sabbath. Public sensuality was bad enough but sensuality on the Lord's Day was completely intolerable. Various efforts were made to restrain these impieties, especially the setting up of booths and the sale of drink.<sup>2</sup> Finally, wakes were thought to involve the common people in financial extravagance, in an improvident "expense of time and money".<sup>3</sup> A sympathetic commentator was of the opinion that "the excitement lasts too long, and the enjoyment, whatever it may be, is purchased at the sacrifice of too great expense. It is a well-known fact, that many of the poor who have exerted every effort to make this profuse, but short-lived display, have scarcely bread to eat for weeks after. But there is no alternative, if they expect to be received with the same spirit

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<sup>1</sup> Bourne, Antiquitates Vulgares, p. 228.

<sup>2</sup> For instance, Leeds Intelligencer, 20 June 1786; Hull Advertiser, 4 June and 23 July 1808; Stamford Mercury, 20 October 1837; Derby Mercury, 1 July 1840; and Bedfordshire Mercury, 7 January 1861. In July 1825 the vicar of Bucklebury, Berkshire recorded that he "Gave instructions to my brother in law to provide that no beer should be sold in private houses nor Booths be erected on the Revel-Sunday, July 31st." (Arthur L. Humphreys, Bucklebury: A Berkshire Parish [Reading, 1932], p. 369.)

<sup>3</sup> Gentleman's Magazine, LIII, part ii, 1783, p. 1005.

of hospitality by their friends."<sup>1</sup> Amusement had to be tailored to suit a family's financial capabilities, and the wake, it was thought, was too frequently an occasion when the working man's expenditure became grossly overextended.

The attacks on other popular holidays were directed mostly against hiring fairs and outright pleasure fairs. In Essex, where pleasure fairs abounded, their suppression was ordered on numerous occasions after the mid eighteenth century. In 1761-62 two ~~long~~ standing orders from Quarter Sessions prohibited a total of twenty-four fairs;<sup>2</sup> during the 1780s and early 1790s several more orders were published against fairs in other parishes.<sup>3</sup> None (or virtually none) of these fairs was a chartered event and consequently they were regarded by the authorities as "pretended fairs ... not warranted by Law"; they were unofficial assemblies, organized only for pleasure and petty business, and they were objected to on the usual grounds - for their "riots and tumults", their drunkenness, their "unlawful games and plays", their

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<sup>1</sup> Hone, Every-Day Book, II, col. 55; cf. James Pilkington, A View of the Present State of Derbyshire (2 vols.; London 1789), II, 55.

<sup>2</sup> Essex R.O., Q/SBb 225/16 and Q/SO 10, pp. 337-38.

<sup>3</sup> Essex R.O., Q/SBb 323/52; Q/SO 14, pp. 292-94; and Q/SBb 343/26. See also the Chelmsford Chronicle, 26 May 1786 and 8 July 1791.

"debauching of Servants Apprentices and other unwary people."<sup>1</sup>

Similar orders were issued by the Surrey Quarter Sessions in the late 1780s.<sup>2</sup> A fair at Ardleigh, Essex was prohibited in 1823 and another at Sprowston, Norfolk in 1826.<sup>3</sup> There seems to have been little active and articulated opposition to hiring fairs prior to the mid nineteenth century.<sup>4</sup> Many of them continued to provide useful service as labour exchanges and they were still supported by a large number of farmers. It was only in the second half of the century that they came under frequent attack - several essays were published against them and attempts were made to regulate them more effectively or to substitute other procedures for hiring labour - and it was mostly during this period that they very much declined

<sup>1</sup> Essex R.O., Q/SBb 225/16.

<sup>2</sup> Surrey R.O., Acc. 450 (1788); William M. Godschall, A General Plan of Parochial and Provincial Police (London, 1787), p. 111; and Leon Radzinowicz, A History of English Criminal Law and Its Administration from 1750 (4 vols.; London, 1948-69), III, 491-93.

<sup>3</sup> Essex R.O., D/P 263/28/6; and Norfolk Chronicle and Norwich Gazette, 22 July 1826.

<sup>4</sup> William Marshall was a precocious critic of statute hirings: see his The Rural Economy of the Southern Counties (2 vols.; London, 1798), II, 233, and Rural Economy of the Midland Counties, II, 19-21. In 1808 the magistrates of Warwickshire encouraged masters not to patronize statute fairs, but their advice appears to have been largely unheeded. (Warwickshire R.O., QS 39/11, pp. 129 and 151.)



in importance.<sup>1</sup> They were condemned for the same reasons as pleasure fairs had been and particular stress was placed on the mingling of young, innocent, inexperienced servants with the older, hardened, and profligate followers of statute meetings - thieves, prostitutes, seducers, philanderers, adventurers of all sorts - in circumstances which greatly encouraged drunkenness, uproar, sexual promiscuity, and the loss of chastity, especially for naive maid-servants.

To what extent had these traditional holidays been undermined by the mid nineteenth century? The reasons for the opposition to wakes and fairs are reasonably clear, but what about the practical impact of the criticisms? Certainly in comparison with the blood sports, these festive gatherings displayed a considerable staying power. If the area around Stamford was in any degree representative, it seems likely that parish feasts were still being widely celebrated as late as the 1840s; some wakes had been suppressed but many persisted.

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<sup>1</sup> See in particular Greville J. Chester, Statute Fairs: Their Evils and Their Remedy (York and London, 1856) and the same author's Statute Fairs. A Sermon Preached at the Parish Churches of Farndish and Puddington, Beds. (London, 1858); Nash Stephenson, "On Statute Fairs: Their Evils and their Remedy," Transactions of the National Association for the Promotion of Social Science, 1858, pp. 624-31; J. Skinner, Facts and Opinions Concerning Statute Hirings, Respectfully Addressed to the Landowners, Clergy, Farmers and Tradesmen of the East Riding of Yorkshire (London, 1861); and an article on "Mops" in the Illustrated London News, 26 October 1878, p. 398. See also Kebbel, Agricultural Labourer (1870), pp. 118-22 and 131-33; and Francis G. Heath, Peasant Life in the West of England (London, 1880), pp. 68-69.

<sup>2</sup> See above, pp.12-13, and the Penny Magazine, 12 August 1837, pp. 311-12.

And there was still an immense number of fairs all through the country during the second half of the nineteenth century. Northamptonshire, for instance, had more fairs in the 1850s than it had had a century before.<sup>1</sup> In the countryside fairs continued to serve important marketing functions and most of them were able to survive as long as they retained some significant economic rationale. This was a point of considerable importance: those fairs which blended pleasure with business were much more resilient than those which were strictly for pleasure; when a fair became economically redundant - and many did during the Victorian period - it was much more liable to attack (this development was acknowledged by an Act of 1871 (34 Victoria c. 12) which provided efficient machinery for the abolition of "unnecessary" fairs). The Society for the Suppression of Vice had suggested in 1803 that it would "be expedient to suppress all Fairs whatever, unless when they are really wanted for the purpose of useful traffic. Such an Act would be extremely beneficial to the morals of the community, without being productive of the smallest inconvenience to the public."<sup>2</sup> This was a distinction which was widely acknowledged. Unofficial, unchartered fairs, such as those which were suppressed in Essex during the later eighteenth century,

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<sup>1</sup> Owen, Fairs (edns. of 1756 and 1859).

<sup>2</sup> An Address to the Public from the Society for the Suppression of Vice (London, 1803), part ii, p. 61n.

could not be justified on any acceptable criteria of economic usefulness. Statute fairs very much fell out of favor after the mid nineteenth century partly because by this time, as their hiring services were in many places of depreciating value (at least for employers), they were functioning almost entirely as pleasure fairs.

Gatherings which were merely plebeian, then, and unabashedly devoted to pleasure, enjoyed considerably less security than those in which substantial economic interests were involved. With time most of them disappeared. But it should be emphasized that their demise was gradual and relatively gentle and that by the mid nineteenth century it was only moderately advanced. Moreover, it is possible that in the long run their decline was much more a consequence of the diminishing weight of the countryside in the overall life of the nation - a function of the rise of a predominantly urban culture - than of the organized attacks of influential opinion. Reform of this kind had to hitch its cart to the general process of social change, sealing up and slightly accelerating movements which were already well-developed. It was only when the society which supported traditional festivities was fundamentally altered - when the numbers of labouring people in the countryside began to decline, when faster communications broke down rural insularity, when the countryside became subordinate to the cities, when the rural proletariat came to assimilate many of the urban manners and pastimes -

that the diversions which were fundamentally rooted in a country parish or a market town's hinterland were finally and irreparably dissolved.<sup>1</sup>

Many traditional football matches, especially the major holiday events, were increasingly condemned during this period and some of them were successfully put down. Football though had never enjoyed full approval from people of influence. From the fourteenth to the sixteenth century it had been frequently prohibited on the grounds that it distracted public attention from the much more useful recreation of archery.<sup>2</sup> Thereafter other arguments began to be directed against the sport, in particular the inconvenience of its exercise in public thoroughfares. "I would now make a safe retreat," said a Parisian in a skit by Sir William Davenant, "but that methinks I am stopt by one of your Heroick Games, call'd Foot-ball; which I conceive ... not very conveniently civil in the streets; especially in such irregular and narrow Roads as Crooked Lane."<sup>3</sup> An order of 1608 from the court leet of Manchester

<sup>1</sup> For a general discussion of the transformation of rural society after the mid nineteenth century, see John Saville, Rural Depopulation in England and Wales 1851-1951 (London, 1957), chap. 1.

<sup>2</sup> Magoun, History of Football, p. vii.

<sup>3</sup> Sir William Davenant, The First Days Entertainment at Rutland-House (London, 1657), p. 62.

addressed itself to a grievance which was to persist for almost another three centuries:

Whereas theire hath bene heretofore greate disorder in our towne of Manchester, and the Inhabitants thereof greately wronged and charged with makinge and amendinge of theire glasse windowes broken yearelye and spoyled by a companye of lewde and disordered persons usinge that unlawfull exercise of playinge with the ffootebale in ye streets of the said towne, breakinge many mens windowes and glasse at theire plesures, and other greate inormyties, Therefore Wee of this Jurye doe order that no maner of persons hereafter shall playe or use the ffootebale in any streete within the said towne of Manchester....<sup>1</sup>

(For a number of years, 1610 to 1618, the court appointed annually three officers whose particular responsibility was to ensure that the order was effectively enforced, and in 1655-57 the constables were specifically desired to present everyone who was found playing football in the streets.)<sup>2</sup> In 1615 a similar order was issued banning street football in the area around the City of London, allegedly a source of "great disorders and tumults".<sup>3</sup> At Maidstone in 1656 a man was indicted on the grounds that he

'... did wilfully and in a violent and boisterous manner run to and fro, and kück up and down in the common highway and street within the said town and county, called the High Street, a certain ball of leather, commonly called a football, unto the great annoyance and incumbrance of the said common

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<sup>1</sup> J. P. Earwaker, ed., The Court Leet Records of the Manor of Manchester (12 vols.; Manchester, 1884-90), II, 239-40.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., II, 256; and IV, 143, 171, and 209.

<sup>3</sup> J. C. Jeaffreson, ed., Middlesex County Records (4 vols.; London 1886-92), II, 107.

highway, and to the great disquiet and disturbance of the good people of this Commonwealth passing and travelling in and through the same, and in contempt of the laws, etc. And to the evil example of others. And against the public peace.<sup>1</sup>

There is evidence from the next century of a number of attempts to prohibit football play. It was cried down at Louth in 1745 and 1754,<sup>2</sup> and at Worcester in 1743 2s. 6d. was paid to "the bellman, for crying down football kicking".<sup>3</sup> At Derby there were several unsuccessful attempts to suppress the Shrovetide match, in 1747 and 1797 and possibly in 1731<sup>4</sup> - the prohibition of 1747 made particular reference to "Tumults and Disorders" and "breaking Windows, and doing other Mischiefs to the Persons and Properties of the Inhabitants of this Borough"; and at Kingston-upon-Thames the several efforts during the 1790s to put down the sport were successfully resisted. On 24 February 1799 three Kingston magistrates wrote to the Home Secretary concerning their difficulties in dealing with the annual custom:

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted in L. O. Pike, A History of Crime in England (2 vols.; London, 1873-76), II, 188-89. I am indebted to Mr. John Beattie for this reference.

<sup>2</sup> R. W. Goulding, Louth Old Corporation Records (Louth, 1891), p. 54.

<sup>3</sup> Quoted in John Noake, Worcester in Olden Times (London, 1849), p. 197.

<sup>4</sup> Derby Mercury, 27 February 1747, 11 and 18 February 1796, and 23 February 1797; and Marples, History of Football, p. 84.

It having been a practice for the populace to kick foot ball in the Market Place and streets of this Town on Shrove Tuesday to the great nuisance of the Inhabitants and of persons travelling through the Town and complaints having been made by several Gentlemen of the County to the Magistrates of the Town they previous to Shrove Tuesday 1797 gave public Notice by the distribution of hand bills of their determination to suppress the Practice which not having the desired effect several of the offenders were Indicted and at the last Assizes<sup>m</sup> convicted but sentence was respited and has not yet been declared the Judge thinking that after having warn'd them of their situation that they would not attempt to kick again but we the present Magistrates of the Town having been previously informed it was their intention with others to kick again as on last Shrove Tuesday some days before issued hand bills giving Notice of our intention to prosecute any persons who should on that day kick foot ball in the said Town and apprehending that we should find great opposition two days previous thereto addressed a Letter to the officer commanding the Cavalry at Hampton Court informing him of the Circumstance and stating that if we found it necessary we should call on him for the assistance of the Military. On the Shrove Tuesday a great number of persons having assembled and begun to kick a ball in the market place we caused three that seemed the most active to be taken into Custody hoping that would induce the others to disperse but not having that effect we then caused the Riot Act to be read and the Mob not then dispersing but increasing in Number and threatening to Use violence in liberating those in Custody we addressed another Letter to the Officer on Command at Hampton Court requiring him to send part of the Cavalry to our assistance but not receiving an answer in a reasonable time one of Us went to Hampton Court in search for the Officer when it was said that Major Hawker was the Officer on Duty there but was gone from home and not to be seen nor could any other be found who could Act and the Men at the same time kicking foot ball on Hampton Court Green. Nor being able to obtain the assistance required the persons in Custody were rescued by the mob as

the Constables were conveying them to Prison and the Keeper was violently assaulted and much hurt. If the Military had attended we should have succeeded in abolishing the nuisance without much difficulty but not having met with such support the Game will be carried on to a greater height than it ever has been the mob conceiving they have got the better of Us and that the Military would not attend. As we apprehend that Major Hawker (having previous Notice of our intention to apply to him in case we stood in need of his assistance) ought not to have been absent from his Post without leaving some other officer capable of acting in his absence.<sup>1</sup>

Public thoroughfares had always been regarded as legitimate playing places by the common people, but as the pace of urbanization accelerated, and as the means of social control became increasingly sophisticated, the clash between this popular point of view and the growing concern for orderliness and property rights was very much accentuated. The sort of conflict which must have been very common is illustrated by an incident of 1818 in Hull: elaborating on a report concerning a man who had recently been fined 40s. for playing football in the streets, a local newspaper pointed out that "the police of Sculcoates have strict orders to prevent any person from playing any games in the streets troublesome to the inhabitants of the said parish, which have of late been so prevalent, to the great annoyance and personal danger of the public."<sup>2</sup> In 1829 and 1836 the vestry of Barnes, Surrey complained of the nuisance of street

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<sup>1</sup> P.R.O., H.O. 42/46, f. 128. I am indebted to Mr. E. P. Thompson for this reference.

<sup>2</sup> Hull Advertiser, 25 April 1818



football and recommended its suppression to the officers of the peace.<sup>1</sup> The Highways Act of 1835 made explicit reference to the sport (5 & 6 William IV c. 50, clause 72): it provided for a fine of up to 40s. for playing "at Football or any other Game on any Part of the said Highways, to the Annoyance of any Passenger", and thereby afforded solid grounds for future prosecutions. In later years football in the streets was forcibly terminated at a number of towns in Surrey - at Richmond (1840),<sup>2</sup> at East Moulsey and Hampton Wick (1857),<sup>3</sup> at Hampton (1864),<sup>4</sup> and at Kingston-upon-Thames (1867).<sup>5</sup>

Shrovetide football in Derby was only put down after considerable controversy. During the early decades of the nineteenth century its practice had been periodically deplored, but no direct action was taken until 1845. In January a petition to end the match was presented to the Mayor; and at the same time a subscription was taken up to promote alternative sports on the customary holiday on the condition that football in the streets was abandoned, a bargain which was alleged to have the support of "a large number of those who have

<sup>1</sup> Surrey R.O., P 6/3/5, vestry meetings of 5 March 1829 and 10 February 1836.

<sup>2</sup> Richmond Borough Library, Richmond Vestry Minute Book for 1829-42, pp. 466 and 468; and Surrey Standard, 6 March 1840.

<sup>3</sup> Surrey Comet, 28 February 1857.

<sup>4</sup> Surrey Comet, 13 February 1864.

<sup>5</sup> Surrey Comet, 9 March 1867.

heretofore been the leading players on both sides".<sup>1</sup> There was a general concern among the men of property to avoid giving the impression that they were callously crushing a favorite amusement without offering some sort of compensation.<sup>2</sup> Surprisingly energetic efforts were made to win the support of the working people for the new arrangements: the Mayor met with many of the footballers and (it was said) found that his proposals were well received; notices were posted to publicise the new sports and the prizes they carried; and on Tuesday "bands of music were engaged to perambulate the streets, preceded by banners" with "suitable mottoes", and several thousand people collected to test the innovations. However, when it was learned a little later that a football was being kicked through the streets by a few dissidents (apparently only a fraction of the usual numbers), the new amusements were called off and the large crowd was left in the lurch, unoccupied and discontented.<sup>3</sup> Later that month the Town Council voted to re-establish the Derby races, and thereafter it would be fashionable to regard the races as a recreational substitute for the Shrovetide sports and a further justification for eliminating the older holiday.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Derby Mercury, 22 January 1845.

<sup>2</sup> Opinions hostile to football but favorable to the principle of popular recreation were registered in the Derby and Chesterfield Reporter, 8 March 1844 and 24 January 1845, and the Derby Mercury, 1 January and 22 January 1845.

<sup>3</sup> Derby Mercury, 5 February 1845, and Derby and Chesterfield Reporter, 7 February 1845.

<sup>4</sup> Derby Mercury, 26 February 1845.

The next year, at a Town Council meeting of February 4th, the football question was again introduced.

The mayor and others agreed that there ought to be no pudding exhibitions, no swarming greased poles, nor grinning through collars, as were proposed last year. (These remarks elicited much laughter.) For his own part he delighted to see the working classes enjoy a rational amusement; and he thought if they were denied one amusement, they ought to have some others provided. This had already been done. (Hear, hear.) The Races having been established, he thought that the irrational and disgraceful pastime to which Mr. Pegg had called attention, ought now to be put down; and he should be happy to use what influence he possessed, in conjunction with his fellow magistrates, to effect its abolition. (Hear, hear.)<sup>1</sup>

An order prohibiting football was issued, several hundred "respectable inhabitants" were sworn in as special constables, and (with the approval of the Home Secretary) two troops of dragoons were summoned from Nottingham. Some of the footballers acquiesced and on the evening before Shrove Tuesday formally surrendered the ball to the Mayor and promised to try to persuade their fellows to obey the ban. Others were less obliging. Precautions were taken to block off the market place and one ball which appeared on Tuesday was quickly captured by the police and cut up, but in mid afternoon another ball

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<sup>1</sup> Derbyshire Advertiser and Journal, 11 February 1846.

... was thrown up and taken down the river as rapidly as possible, and a detachment of police and specials ... proceeded to the Railway Bridge to intercept it, but were overpowered. The Mayor ... and other Magistrates came up. Some ruffian threw a brick bat and bludgeon - one or both of which hit the Mayor upon the shoulder. The ruffian was seized ... and soon rescued by considerable violence being offered to his capturer; other unmistakable manifestations of the temper of the mob were given, and the civil power being found insufficient, the Riot Act was read and the military called out; but before they could reach the Railway Bridge the players had made all speed with the ball down the river out of the bounds of the borough.<sup>1</sup>

Under the direction of a County magistrate, the dragoons, specials and regular police were soon in hot pursuit and a later confrontation occurred around Normanton where the players and police skirmished for the ball. This however was the last time of resistance; during the next three years precautions were taken before each Shrove Tuesday and dragoons were posted nearby, but there was no further attempt to perpetuate a tradition which the magistrates had determined to suppress.<sup>2</sup>

Many of these holiday football matches were particularly resilient, for they were fortified by a festival context, long-standing traditions and large numbers of followers. The Nuneaton game was still extant in 1881 and the Dorking and Workington matches survived into the twentieth century. Several games were able to

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<sup>1</sup> Derby and Chesterfield Reporter, 27 February 1846.

<sup>2</sup> It is possible that alternative Shrovetide sports were being instituted: see for instance the Derby and Chesterfield Reporter, 10 March 1848.

continue by shifting their ground to more open spaces (though in so doing they sometimes lost much of their peculiar appeal). When steps were taken at Alnwick in 1827-28 to bar the Shrovetide game from the streets the Duke of Northumberland provided a convenient meadow for its refuge.<sup>1</sup> At Twickenham in 1840 "the local magistracy prevented" the Shrovetide football from "taking place in the town, but it was most spiritedly carried on in a meadow belonging to Mr. Cole, the brewer of that parish, under the superintendence of a man named Kirby, who has been 'master of the spotts' for the last 50 years"; "formerly ... the sport had been extended throughout every avenue of the place; but of late years, and more particularly since the passing of the new Highway Act, by which it has altogether been prohibited in any public thoroughfare, ... it has been confined to" the meadow of "Mr. Cole, who kindly offered it for the purpose."<sup>2</sup> There was periodic talk of putting down the annual football at Kingston-upon-Thames, but nothing came of it until 1867 when the corporation directed the players off the streets and onto a new playing field, an order which sparked off some angry protests and a little rioting but was generally accepted the following year.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Marples, History of Football, pp. 101-02; and Magoun, History of Football, p. 126.

<sup>2</sup> The Times, 2 and 6 March 1840.

<sup>3</sup> Surrey Comet, 2 and 9 March 1867, and 29 February 1868.

The Ashbourne game, after weathering an attack in 1860-61, removed itself to the outskirts of town<sup>1</sup> and survived into the twentieth century to be condoned and patronized, not only by the common people, but by civic officials, the church, and on one occasion (1927) by the Prince of Wales.

The fundamental objections against popular football stemmed from the concern for public order. "The Game of Football as practised in this Town on Shrove Tuesday<sup>1</sup>, it was claimed in a motion introduced at the Kingston Town Council on 29 February 1840, "is an obstruction to the passengers, a great annoyance to the peaceable Inhabitants, subversive of good order and prejudicial to the morality of the Town."<sup>2</sup> Football in the streets disturbed the normal routine of business and such disruptions were no longer as readily tolerated. "It is not so much with a wish to deprive the lovers of this sport of their enjoyment, that I advocate its abolition," wrote a Derby critic in 1832, "but more particularly to condemn the fitness of the place of its competition for such a purpose; instead of emanating from the centre of the town, let them assemble in the Siddais, or some such place, so as not to interfere with the avocation of the industrious part of the community; it is

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<sup>1</sup> Derby Mercury, 15, 22 and 29 February, and 7 March 1860; 20 February and 6 March 1861; and 12 March 1862; Derbyshire Advertiser, 20 February 1863; see also Magoun, History of Football, pp. 109-10, and Marples, History of Football, pp. 102-04.

<sup>2</sup> Kingston-upon-Thames Guildhall, Kingston Court Assembly Book 1834-1859, D.I. 4.5.

not a trifling consideration that a suspension of business for nearly two days should be created to the inhabitants for the mere gratification of a sport at once so useless and barbarous."<sup>1</sup>

During a discussion of the Kingston game in 1857 one of the Town Councillofs claimed that "He knew what loss he sustained on that day by the diminution of trade, and no doubt his friend Mr. Jones knew too, and so did every grocer and draper".<sup>2</sup> In 1845 Derby's Mayor was suggesting that

In former times, when the town contained but few inhabitants, the game was not attended with its present evils, but it was now a well ascertained fact that many of the inhabitants suffered considerable injury, in person as well as property, from this annual exhibition; and he himself knew of instances where persons having an interest in houses, especially the larger ones, had experienced losses from want of occupiers, at adequate rents; parties who would otherwise have expended many thousands a year on the trade of the town, having left it, or declined to reside in it, because they did not like to bring up their families here, under the idea that Derby was one of the lowest and wickedest places in the kingdom.<sup>3</sup>

During the prosecution of some of the recalcitrant Derby footballers in 1846 it was argued that

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<sup>1</sup> Derby and Chesterfield Reporter, 23 February 1832. A similar view was expressed by the Derby Mercury of 3 February 1847: "It is an amusement as brutal in itself as unsuited to the feelings of the present day; besides, it has had the effect of causing the banking houses and shops to be closed, and all business to be suspended".

<sup>2</sup> Surrey Comet, 7 February 1857.

<sup>3</sup> Derby and Chesterfield Reporter, 7 February 1845.

... in a town consisting of 40,000 inhabitants, one-third of whom were labouring population, persons must not assemble for such low and improper amusements at the present day in the public streets, whatever they might have done when football was originally practised - Derby being at that time a very small place; but at the present time the town had become very large. Persons from a distance occasionally residing in it, whose characters were unknown, availed themselves of this opportunity of injuring persons by destroying property, alarming the timid and well-disposed inhabitants, and putting a stop to all business for the greater part of two days.<sup>1</sup>

Although there was a strong strand of moral opposition to the holiday matches - at Derby the game was variously labelled as "brutalizing", "disgraceful", "inhuman", "filthy and disgusting" - it is clear that moral outrage was a much less prominent theme in the opposition to football than it was in the attacks against blood sports, or perhaps even pleasure fairs. There were fewer objective grounds for passionate denunciations: serious injuries were infrequent, the crowds were for the most part relatively orderly, and

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<sup>1</sup> Derby Mercury, 25 March 1846; cf. Derbyshire Advertiser, 25 March 1846, and Derby and Chesterfield Reporter, 27 February 1846.



the games were pursued in a reasonably sporting manner.<sup>1</sup>

"During these boisterous Saturnalia," remarked one observer of the Kingston game, "the inhabitants are reduced to the necessity of barricading their windows; and the trade of the town is somewhat impeded; yet the general good-humour with which the sport is carried on prevents any serious complaints; and the majority of the corporation are favourable to its continuance."<sup>2</sup> Football was regarded by some gentlemen as a "manly sport", rugged but character-building, and there was some feeling that it helped to sustain the Englishman's "bull-dog courage". Several matches enjoyed a considerable gentry

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<sup>1</sup> There is much evidence in support of these points: see for instance Derby Mercury, 9 February 1815 and 29 January 1845; Penny Magazine, 6 April 1839; Surrey Standard, 20 February 1836 and 13 March 1840; and Surrey Comet, 9 February 1856, 7 February 1857, and 13 February 1858. The reputation of early football play for bloodshed and violence is probably exaggerated: the game could certainly be rugged and strenuous - "The Foot-ball ... tyres the legs of the strongest," said a seventeenth century writer, "and merry matches continue good fellowship; but beware of your shins and a broken leg" (Stevenson, Twelve Months, pp. 12-13) - but it was seldom the cause of death. There is evidence of only one death resulting from the matches at Derby, Ashbourne and Kingston-upon-Thames. On the other hand, Robert Graves reported that at Islip, Oxfordshire in 1921 "the village nonagenarian complained that football was not so manly now as in his boyhood. He pointed across the fields to a couple of aged willow trees: 'Them used to be our home goals,' he said. 'T'other pair stood half a mile upstream. Constable stopped our play in the end. Three men were killed in the last game - one kicked to death; t'other two drowned each other in a scrimmage. Her was a grand game.'" It may be that this was a statement of fact; or it might have been a local embellishment, probably intended to enhance the renown of the traditional game. (Goodbye to All That [Penguin edn., 1960], p. 255; cf. Moor, Suffolk Words and Phrases, pp. 65-66.)

<sup>2</sup> E. W. Brayley, A Topographical History of Surrey (5 vols.; London 1841-48), III, 51-52.

following, a feature which was often remarked on. One writer, for instance, spoke of how at Derby "the crowd is encouraged by respectable persons attached to each party, ... who take a surprising interest in the result of the days' 'sport'; urging on the players with shouts, and even handing to those who are exhausted, oranges and other refreshment."<sup>1</sup> The circumstances at Kingston were much the same: many gentlemen were known to be favorably disposed towards the custom. An attempt to suppress the practice in 1840 was blocked by the Town Council and at the same time a petition from the inhabitants was sent to the Commissioners of the Metropolitan Police requesting that they not interfere with the sport.<sup>2</sup> In 1860-61, when efforts were made to put down the Ashbourne game, its supporters included some of "the most respectable citizens of the town".<sup>3</sup> Indeed, the resilience of some of the holiday matches is partly explained by the fact that they received a reasonable degree of backing from respectable opinion, and when popular and genteel conservatism joined hands the attacks of the reformers were much less likely to succeed.

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<sup>1</sup> Stephen Glover, The History and Gazetteer of the County of Derby (2 vols.; Derby, 1831), I, 262. The newspapers often alluded to the genteel followers of the match.

<sup>2</sup> Kingston-upon-Thames Guildhall, Assembly Book 1834-59, D.I. 4.5, meetings of 29 February and 6 May 1840; and The Times, 6 March 1840

<sup>3</sup> Derby Mercury, 7 March 1860.

The only other athletic sport to be frequently criticized was boxing. From the later eighteenth century magistrates became increasingly prepared to prohibit the staging of prize-fights and to prosecute their principals whenever possible. In 1791, for instance, the Bedfordshire justices, "being convinced of the ill Tendency of Stage fighting or Boxing Matches have resolved that publick notice be given that they are determined not to suffer them to take Place".<sup>1</sup> Prize-fighting could be readily restrained under the law, either as a breach of the peace or an unlawful assembly,<sup>2</sup> and though many matches were winked at - some were partly protected by their influential patrons, and others were accompanied by crowds too large for the resources of local constables - successful interventions against intended prize-fights were often reported in the newspapers of the first half of the nineteenth century. Boxing was not infrequently the cause of accidental deaths and serious maulings, a circumstance which incurred for it much public disfavor. "These dreadful catastrophes", suggested one paper, "bespeak it the duty of every magistrate, as well as every man, to use their utmost endeavours to repress so disgraceful, so dangerous, and so increasing

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<sup>1</sup> Bedfordshire R.O., Q.S.R. 17, 3 (Epiphany Sessions, 1791).

<sup>2</sup> Richard Burn, The Justice of the Peace, and Parish Officer (6 vols.; London, 28th edn., 1837), II, 833.

an evil."<sup>1</sup> More significantly, a prize-fight was attended by considerable problems of public order. A crowd of thousands, some of them persons of dubious employments, seriously threatened the tranquillity of an unprepared locality - "the established order, and good decorum of society," complained one writer, "have been, of late, much disturbed, and nearly set at defiance" by the prevalence of boxing matches;<sup>2</sup> moreover, such gatherings tended to undermine the assurance and reputation of the local guardians of the peace. Cat-and-mouse contests between the promoters and magistrates were common; matches were often staged near county borders in the hope that, should the magistrates appear, jurisdictional divisions could be more readily exploited. The Derby Mercury of 10 August 1842 complained that

The inhabitants never know any thing of the business until they see the crowds of vagabonds upon the grounds, who forcibly take possession of some field suitable for their purpose, and not only bear down all resistance on the part of the owner, but set at defiance the exertions of the magistrates and peace officers, to stop their lawless proceedings. It has therefore been determined to take a more efficacious plan with them for the future, namely, by instructing the peace officers and others to take particular notice, not only of the parties, and their seconds and bottleholders, but also of the principal ringleaders, who generally consider themselves more respectable,

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<sup>1</sup> Northampton Mercury, 11 June 1791.

<sup>2</sup> Edward Barry, A Letter on the Practice of Boxing (London, 1789), p. 7.

and any other persons on the ground who refuse to assist the peace officers, and afterwards to indict them. By this course the contest with a mob of vagabonds (which really adds to their amusement) will be avoided, and the criminal parties taught that the law, although slow in its march, is sure to overtake them, and will signally punish such outrages wherever perpetrated in defiance of it.

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Some of the attacks on traditional recreations betrayed a pronounced class bias. For the most part the reformers' energies were mobilized entirely against popular amusements; few were so indelicate as to storm the citadels of genteel pleasure. The critics were able to discriminate nicely between the fashionable diversions of the rich and the less fashionable of the poor - and to act accordingly.<sup>1</sup> Such discrimination was especially noticeable in the movement against animal sports. The SPCA, despite disclaimers to the contrary, discreetly disregarded the pleasures of the fashionable world and almost always prosecuted only plebeian sportsmen.<sup>2</sup> The Act of 1835 against cruelty to animals conveniently confined its attention to cattle and domestic animals; it was at

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<sup>1</sup> See on this point Sidney and Beatrice Webb, The History of Liquor Licensing, Principally from 1700 to 1830 (London, 1903; repr. 1963), pp. 162-63, and Radzinowicz, English Criminal Law, III, 181-82; and on a similar phenomenon under the later Stuarts, the Webbs, *op. cit.*, pp. 151-52, and Maurice J. Quinlan, Victorian Prelude: A History of English Manners 1700-1830 (New York, 1941; repr. 1965), pp. 16-17.

<sup>2</sup> Brian Harrison, "Religion and Recreation in Nineteenth-Century England", Past & Present, No. 38, December 1967, pp. 116-18.

pains to exclude from its frame of reference such "wildlife" as rabbits, deer and foxes. Henry Alken's The National Sports of Great Britain (1821), which condemned the brutal diversion of baiting bulls, found it expedient to eulogize field sports and, more remarkably, even to defend cock-fighting and badger-baiting, both of which still retained a select genteel following (the defence here was partly on grounds which were rejected as a justification for bull-baiting - i.e. the natural ferocity of the combatants). Fighting cocks, it was ingeniously argued, "die of that which they love, for it is impossible to make a Cock fight against his will; and as they are in no case, or seldom, permitted to die a natural death, it matters little, in reality of rhyme or reason, at what period, early or late, they may be accommodated with an artificial one."<sup>1</sup> Richard Martin, the persistent sponsor of animal legislation during the 1820s, countered the charge of discrimination with the argument that "Hunting and shooting, in his opinion, were amusements of a totally different character. Many gentlemen who indulged in those recreations had been the foremost to support his bill for preventing cruelty to animals." "Those who sported on their own manors, or fished in their own streams," he suggested, "were a very different sort of men. He had known men as humane as men could be

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<sup>1</sup> Alken, National Sports, captions for plate i on cock-fighting, plate ii on bull-baiting, and the plate "Drawing the Badger".

who followed the sports of the field."<sup>1</sup>

The flaws in such arguments did not go unnoticed by contemporaries, especially by those who were unimpressed by the general tenor of the Evangelical movement. Indeed, there was a considerable awareness of the prejudices and partiality which were involved in the programmes for recreational reform. At the beginning of the century this objection was advanced with particular vigour by William Windham, a vocal opponent of the various legislative attempts to restrain cruelty to animals. His case, which was to be frequently repeated both in and out of Parliament during the next several decades, was given public currency through the debate on the Bull-baiting bill of 1800:

The advocates of this bill ... proposed to abolish bull-baiting on the score of cruelty. It is strange enough that such an argument should be employed by a set of persons who have a most vexatious code of laws for the protection of their own amusements.... When gentlemen talk of cruelty, I must remind them, that it belongs as much to shooting, as to the sport of bull-baiting; nay more so, as it frequently happens, that where one bird is shot, a great many others go off much wounded.... And do not gentlemen, for the empty fame of being in at the death, frequently goad and spur their horses to exertions greatly beyond their strength?... The common people may ask with justice, why abolish bull-baiting, and protect hunting and shooting? What appearance must we make, if we, who have every source of amusement open to us, and yet follow these cruel sports, become rigid censors of the sports of the poor, and abolish them on account of their cruelty, when they are not more cruel than our own?<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Parliamentary Debates, New series, X, pp. 133 and 487 (11 and 26 February 1824).

<sup>2</sup> Parliamentary History, XXXV, p. 207 (18 April 1800); see also Cobbett's Parliamentary Debates, XIV, p. 990 (12 June 1809).

Sidney Smith emphasized the same inconsistency a few years later in an unflattering assessment of the Society for the Suppression of Vice:

The real thing which calls forth the sympathies, and harrows up the soul, is to see a number of boisterous artizans baiting a bull, or a bear; not a savage hare, or a carnivorous stag, - but a poor, innocent, timid bear, - not pursued by magistrates, and deputy lieutenants, and men of education, - but by those who must necessarily seek their relaxation in noise and tumultuous merriment, - by men whose feelings are blunted, and whose understanding is wholly devoid of refinement.... A man of ten thousand a year may worry a fox as much as he pleases, - may encourage the breed of a mischievous animal on purpose to worry it; and a poor labourer is carried before a magistrate for paying sixpence to see an exhibition of courage between a dog and a bear! Any cruelty may be practised to gorge the stomachs of the rich, - none to enliven the holidays of the poor. We venerate those feelings which really protect creatures susceptible of pain, and incapable of complaint. But heaven-born pity, nowadays, calls for the income tax and the court guide; and ascertains the rank and fortune of the tormentor before she weeps for the pain of the sufferer.<sup>1</sup>

The one-sidedness of the reformers' concerns was widely recognized, at least by a substantial body of genteel opinion. "The privileged orders can be as cruel as they please," complained a Stamford journal in 1819, "and few are the mortals who dare say wrong they do; while every evil action of the lowly is trumpeted

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<sup>1</sup> Edinburgh Review, XIII, January 1809, p. 340. There are similar observations in Sir Thomas Beevor, Looking Glass for the Great (n.p., c.1787), held in the B.M., 1850.c.6.(83); and A Letter to a Member of the Society for the Suppression of Vice (London, 1804), especially p. 44.



forth: the perpetrator is even named, that he may be shunned and despised."<sup>1</sup> John Drakard's Stamford News was at pains to defend the town's bull-running against the outrage of genteel sensibilities (especially as expressed in the Stamford Mercury): "Away, then with this spurious feeling and bastard humanity! which froths and foams at one yearly indulgence of the lower orders, and sympathizes with the daily and destructive enjoyments of the high and the wealthy, or leaves them sanctified and untouched."<sup>2</sup> Even one of the reform bodies, the Animals' Friend Society (which was much less fashionably supported than the RSPCA), showed some awareness of the partiality of the movement which it helped to sustain:

The lower classes have, as they deserve, been unsparingly censured by every one having the least claim to humanity who has treated on the subject, for bull-baiting, dog-fighting, etc., and even by stag-hunters themselves - while their own equally savage sports are held by them as virtues, and their heartless outrages and treachery to defenceless animals are related by them with all the glee that belongs to brave and generous deeds, with bravado added to their crimes.<sup>3</sup>

Sometimes these objections were simply brushed aside as unworthy of consideration. Another reply was to accept and sanction such discriminations, more or less openly, as an inherent (and perhaps

<sup>1</sup> Fireside Magazine, I, 1819, p. 48.

<sup>2</sup> Stamford News, 19 November 1819.

<sup>3</sup> Animals' Friend, No. 6, 1838, p. 16.

acceptable) aspect of a hierarchical society. Henry Alken's National Sports of Great Britain, for instance, was a candid apologia for the sports of the landed elite. Objections to coursing on the grounds of cruelty were not to be seriously considered: "The arguments for its high gratification to those who possess leisure and wealth, more especially in land, and for its undisputed conduciveness to health and hilarity, will ever prove decisive."<sup>1</sup> There was some distress at the general meeting of the RSPCA in 1840 when a person stood up and asked "the noblemen and gentlemen on the platform, who declaimed upon the subject of cruelty to animals, how many hunters had they in their stables, and how many had been ridden to death for their amusement? (Cries of no, no.)", but the Society's supporters were quick to defend themselves. "I, for one," admitted Lord Dudley C. Stuart, "keep several hunters, and love the pleasures of the chace as sincerely as any man":

At the same time, my notion is, that as all animals were made for the use of man, there can be no possible harm in making them conducive to our rational enjoyments, as well as employing them for our profit and convenience; but at the same time, I trust, that I never in my life ill-used any animal to promote my pleasure or amusement; (Hear,hear,) and I believe, generally speaking, that in pursuing the sport of hunting, little or no cruelty is practised. No doubt the stern advocate for humanity may object both to hunting and steeple-chasing as unnecessary, and shooting and fishing would of course come within the same rule; but I think these objections to our national sports may be carried too far, and, so long as unnecessary

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<sup>1</sup> Alken, National Sports, caption for the plate "Coursing-Death of the Hare".

cruelty is avoided, I see no reason to cry them down on the score of inhumanity; and I believe it is generally admitted, that the sports of the field, if unavoidably attended with a certain degree of suffering on the one hand, produce, on the other hand, many advantages which might fairly be brought forward as a set-off against the alleged cruelty of such practices. (Hear, hear.)<sup>1</sup>

Popular blood sports, however, could not be discovered to offer any such compensating features. Bull-baiting, for instance, was thought to admit of "no one palliation that may be urged in excuse of some recreations, which though on principles of humanity, cannot be altogether justified; yet not being marked with any of the peculiar atrocities of the other, must not be brought into comparison."<sup>2</sup>

But the rationalizations for field sports were not always easily sustained and some writers found it useful to call upon the will of Providence:

... though having no partiality or fondness for the chase in any form, [we are] yet constrained to believe that there is such a provision made for it by an all-wise Providence in the constitution of man, the instinct of hounds, and even in the stratagems and fleetness of the hare herself, who may often have a gratification in eluding or outstripping her pursuers, as to afford some justification of the practice. It has been strongly argued that the great propensity to field sports, which operates on many like an uncontrolled instinct, is a sure indication of the intention of the Deity, not only to permit, but to stimulate to those pursuits. And here, as in all things else, we may discern wisdom and goodness.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Fourteenth Annual Report of the RSPCA, 1840, pp. 40-41 and 45-46 (italics added).

<sup>2</sup> Barry, Bull Baiting, pp. 8-9.

<sup>3</sup> Drummond, Rights of Animals, p. 37 (see also pp. 41 and 44).

"How shall we account for" the fact, queried another advocate of humanity to animals, "that in every country and every age of the world, the love of the chase has been the distinguishing characteristic of a considerable portion, and far from being the worst portion, of the community"? It must, he concluded, be a legitimate pastime, not to be compared with the atrocities of plebeian diversions.<sup>1</sup>

Other reasons were sometimes advanced in support of a careful differentiation between popular and genteel recreations. It was argued that protection should be given to animals whenever politically possible, that reform should be pursued with due regard for the limits of public tolerance, and that it was not to be expected that everything could be accomplished at once.<sup>2</sup> Some writers allowed that the elegance, excitement, and refinement of certain genteel amusements compensated in part for the cruelty involved.<sup>3</sup> Unlike the popular sports, genteel diversions had been incorporated into a code of sensibility and refined manners. Moreover, while fashionable pleasures were typically private, enjoyed within the confines of a personal estate, the amusements of the people were

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<sup>1</sup> Youatt, Humanity to Brutes, pp. 109-11.

<sup>2</sup> Parliamentary Debates, New series, IX, p. 433 (21 May 1823), and X, p. 133 (11 February 1824); and Macaulay, Cruelty to Animals, pp. 55-57.

<sup>3</sup> Howitt, Rural Life (1838 edition), I, 41-42 and 45; and Stockdale, Remonstrance Against Inhumanity to Animals, p. 10n.

normally on public display, open to the view of delicate tastes, and consequently they were much more apt to infringe the increasingly severe standards of public decorum. "Open sin" was the principal concern; private vices were not as socially dangerous.<sup>1</sup> The degree of a diversion's publicness significantly conditioned the extent to which there might be a concern for its regulation. "The Legislature ought to interfere for the protection of animals, wherever public control can be extended," suggested one writer, "although it may be deemed impossible to regulate the conduct of individuals in regard to their own property".<sup>2</sup> Property, as always, was a substantial deterrent to incautious public meddling.

There was as well a pronounced and appreciating general bias against recreations which were public and in favor of domestic pleasures, and such a view was bound to accentuate any established animosities towards popular traditions. The amusements of Christians "should be rather of a private, than a public and gregarious, kind", opined a contributor to the Christian Observer in 1805.<sup>3</sup> "That the human mind requires recreation, experience proves", admitted an essay of 1827; "but where the taste is not

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<sup>1</sup> Ford K. Brown, Fathers of the Victorians: The Age of Wilberforce (Cambridge, 1961), p. 435; and Radzinowicz, English Criminal Law, III, 182.

<sup>2</sup> Macaulay, Cruelty to Animals, p. 42.

<sup>3</sup> Christian Observer, V, 1805, p. 13.

Spent
 vitiated, the necessary recreation is more easily and satisfactorily found in domestic privacy, than in the haunts of dissipation and vice, or even in large assemblies of a better character."<sup>1</sup> Here then was a basis for another direct clash of sentiment: while respectability increasingly favored family relaxation, the traditional pastimes were mostly of a public character and hence out of tune with the newer tastes. The home was a sanctuary and its "fire-side comforts" were the highest rewards. And since these satisfactions were imagined to be accessible to all - "these best pleasures of our nature the Almighty has put within the reach of the poor no less than the rich," thought Wilberforce<sup>2</sup> - there was no reason to encourage the continuance of more primitive recreational habits. The older usages were incapable of providing genuine pleasure. Happiness, argued William Howitt, "does not consist in booths and garlands, drums and horns, or in capering round a May-pole. Happiness is a fireside thing. It is a thing of grave and earnest tone; and the deeper and truer it is, the more it is removed from the riot of mere merriment."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Observations on Some of the Popular Amusements of this Country, Addressed to the Higher Classes of Society (London, 1827), p. 21.

<sup>2</sup> Robert I. Wilberforce and Samuel Wilberforce, The Life of William Wilberforce (5 vols.; London, 1838), II, 449.

<sup>3</sup> Howitt, Rural Life (1840 edn.), p. 420. "~~Great writers~~, claimed Wilberforce, "~~had placed the summit of human happiness, not in picnics, but in the cottage of the peasant, surrounded with his smiling family.~~" (Parliamentary History, XXXVI, p. 847.)

Perhaps the most important basis for the discriminating treatment of recreational practices was the accepted, long-standing distinction between a life of leisure, which was a perquisite of gentility, and a life of onerous and involuntary labour, which was a mark of a plebeian existence. For gentlemen recreation was a natural and legitimate part of their culture; for labouring men it was (or could easily become) a dangerous temptation, a distraction from their primary concerns. "To be born for no other Purpose than to consume the Fruits of the Earth", wrote Henry Fielding, "is the Privilege (if it may be really called a Privilege) of very few. The greater Part of Mankind must sweat hard to produce them, or Society will no longer answer the Purposes for which it was ordained."<sup>1</sup> Diversion - indeed, often diversion in abundance - was an indulgence which the affluent could readily afford, but the common people had to guard themselves, or be protected, from such potentially destructive practices. This was a distinction which was widely acknowledged.<sup>2</sup> For the working people, said Fielding "Time and Money are almost synonymous; and as they have very little of each to spare, it becomes the Legislature, as much as possible, to

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<sup>1</sup> Henry Fielding, An Enquiry into the Causes of the late Increase of Robbers (London, 1751), p. 7.

<sup>2</sup> See for instance the analysis of this difference in Adam Smith, Wealth of Nations, ed. Cannan, II, 279.

suppress all Temptations whereby they may be induced too profusely to squander either the one or the other; since all such Profusion must be repaired at the Cost of the Public."<sup>1</sup> It was entirely proper, then, to treat recreation with due regard for the status of its participants - "In Diversion, as in many other Particulars, the upper Part of Life is distinguished from the Lower" - and to apply the sort of restraints on popular indulgence which would be quite unnecessary for the upper classes.<sup>2</sup> Labour discipline was not to be directed towards men of property; indeed, for them it was socially meaningless. Social regulation dealt only with the lower classes and among these classes recreation was found to be especially in need of control from above: "while these classes ought to be protected and encouraged in the enjoyment of their innocent amusements," reported the Society for the Suppression of Vice, "surely a greater benefit cannot be conferred upon them, than to deprive them of such amusements as tend to impair their health, to injure their circumstances, to distress their families, and to involve them in vice and misery."<sup>3</sup> Just as the Game Laws discriminated in favor of the sport of gentlemen, and did so with the approval (or at least general acquiescence) of "public opinion" - "Rural diversions

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<sup>1</sup> Fielding, Increase of Robbers, pp. 11-12; cf. Life of Wilberforce, II, 448-49.

<sup>2</sup> Fielding, Increase of Robbers, pp. 10-11 and 22-23.

<sup>3</sup> An Address to the Public from the Society for the Suppression of Vice (London, 1803), part ii, p. 61n.



certainly constitute a very pleasing and proper amusement for all ranks above the lowest", remarked one essayist<sup>1</sup> - so the attacks on traditional recreation accommodated themselves to the circumstances of social and political power, concentrated their attention on the culture of the multitude, and fashioned their moral protest in a manner which was consistent with the requirements of social discipline.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Vicesimus Knox, Essays Moral and Literary (2 vols.; London, <sup>12th edn.</sup> 1791), II, 153-54.

<sup>2</sup> For an extended discussion of the attitudes to social discipline, see below, pp. 289ff.

Chapter IV

THE DECLINE OF TRADITIONAL RECREATIONS

There was, it is clear, an increasing willingness to intervene against the customary practices of popular leisure from around the last quarter of the eighteenth century, and though some of the highlights of this trend have been examined, much of the background to the overall decline of traditional recreation remains unexplained. Why, in particular, did most popular diversions so noticeably fall out of favor? Were there any particular sentiments, beliefs, or social circumstances which were of special importance in moulding this opposition? Moreover, although the previous chapter was concerned almost entirely with various direct attacks against popular recreations, it might be suspected that their demise cannot be fully accounted for by reference to such outright suppressions. In what ways, if any, can their decline be related to the broader social changes which were occurring during these years? Were there any developments which particularly militated against the survival of traditional practices? These are some of the questions, questions of a more general character, to which we may now direct our attention.

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One of the most powerful negative influences upon popular recreation was the Evangelical movement. Beginning from a variety of sources in the 1730s, it grew so rapidly that within a century

it was a force of powerful dimensions in English society, both within and without the established Church.<sup>1</sup> Evangelical sentiment was almost always at odds with the traditions of customary diversion. It was forward-looking, morally "reformist", profoundly concerned with sin and salvation and the need for self- and social discipline, interested more in the individual's private life than in the affairs of the community (though the former assumed attention to the latter),<sup>2</sup> suspicious of worldly pleasures (though nicely discriminating in its suspicions), and contemptuous of much of the culture of earlier generations (especially that of its immediate predecessors); on most counts its morality was completely inconsistent with the conservative, gregarious, and ritualistic morality which was represented in the pastimes of the common people. Evangelicalism could not accommodate itself to the traditions of popular leisure without abandoning its basic presuppositions. There was little room for compromise. The standards of morality and propriety which were

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<sup>1</sup> See especially J. D. Walsh, "Origins of the Evangelical Revival", in G. V. Bennett and J. D. Walsh, eds., Essays in Modern English Church History in Memory of Norman Sykes (London, 1966), pp. 132-62; and Ford K. Brown, Fathers of the Victorians.

<sup>2</sup> Wilberforce thought that "the great distinction between our constitution and that of the ancient republics is, that with them the general advantage was the object, without particular regard to individual comfort: whereas in England individual comfort has been the object, and the general advantage has been sought through it." (Life of William Wilberforce, V. 214.)

advanced by Evangelicalism established more rigorous criteria for the evaluation of diverse forms of social behaviour, and as the limits of "tolerance" contracted, as new norms were opposed to old, the "consensus" which underlay traditional practices was whittled away and replaced by an atmosphere of open hostilities. Moral enlightenment became engaged in warfare with the forces of unregeneracy. Customs which had previously been relatively unquestioned came to be seriously challenged and the disposition of public opinion gradually shifted from a qualified leaning towards traditionalism to a sympathy for progressivism and reform.

What, then, were the main areas of tension? Which elements of Evangelicalism were especially opposed to recreational practices?

The starting point for the Evangelicals' antipathy to recreation was their suspicion of "the world" and many of its activities. Evangelicalism posited a fundamental opposition between the life of service to God, a life of holiness, and the life of worldliness, of self-dedication to secular concerns.<sup>1</sup> The ways of the world were essentially wicked and the moral person had to be acutely aware of the temptations which constantly impinged upon his life and threatened to cast him into an abyss of darkness; a state

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<sup>1</sup> In 1819 Wilberforce wrote: "I deſcare my greateſt cauſe of difference with the democrats is their laying, and cauſing people to lay, ſo great a ſtreſs on the concerns of this world, as to occupy their whole minds and hearts, and to leave a few ſcanty and lukewarm thoughts for the heavenly treaſure". (Quoted in Brown, Fathers of the Victorians, p. 113n.)

of grace was extremely difficult to sustain and only continual vigilance could shield him from the forces of evil which surrounded mortal existence. Salvation was won through repentance and a subsequent devotion to spiritual concerns; damnation went to those who neglected their souls and instead concentrated their attention on the affairs of the world. True religion, said Hannah More, involved "a turning of the whole mind to God".<sup>1</sup> The evils which were most clearly opposed to such a state of holiness were those of the flesh. The struggle between divine and demonic forces was always at work - within the individual, in the society where God had placed him. In an admirable representation of the basic Evangelical structure of belief, G. M. Young has emphasized the theological foundations of the faith and suggested some of the ways in which their consequences were discerned in the operation of social reality. "Evangelical theology", he writes,

... rests on a profound apprehension of the contrary states: of Nature and of Grace; one meriting eternal wrath, the other intended for eternal happiness. Naked and helpless, the soul acknowledges its worthlessness before God and the justice of God's infinite displeasure, and then, taking hold of salvation in Christ, passes from darkness into a light which makes more fearful the destiny of those unhappy beings who remain without. This is Vital Religion. But the power of Evangelicalism as a directing force lay less in the hopes and terrors it inspired, than in its rigorous

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted in Asa Briggs, The Age of Improvement 1783-1867 (London, 1959), p. 71.

logic, 'the eternal microscope' with which it pursued its argument into the recesses of the heart, and the details of daily life, giving to every action its individual value in this life, and its infinite consequences in the next.... The world is very evil. An unguarded look, a word, a gesture, a picture, or a novel, might plant a seed of corruption in the most innocent heart, and the same word or gesture might betray a lingering affinity with the class below.<sup>1</sup>

Recreation, being so much a part of the world, had always to be held at arm's length, to be closely scrutinized before being welcomed. And under such scrutiny it was frequently found to be a dangerous fruit - a distraction from things holy, a temptation to immoral indulgence. "That Christian is the most prudent and most honourable," declared one observer, "who keeps at the greatest distance from the ensnaring and polluting vanities of the world":<sup>2</sup> "Real Christians, who diligently discharge the duties of their stations, and conscientiously fill up their places in their families, in their callings, and in the church, will find but little opportunity or occasion for amusement";<sup>3</sup> "when the love of God in Christ Jesus is shed abroad in the heart, the believer will feel no desire

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<sup>1</sup> G. M. Young, Victorian England: Portrait of an Age (London, 2nd edn., 1953), pp. 1-2.

<sup>2</sup> George Burdär, Lawful Amusements; A Sermon (London, 2nd edn., 1805), p. 36.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 34.

for carnal amusements, nor could he relish them."<sup>1</sup> "Can you, who love the Lord Jesus Christ," it was asked, "have any inclination to associate yourselves with idle and vicious pastimes? Impossible! Your heart, your treasure, your home, is not on earth - neither can you be delighted with earthly things; much less with things sensual and polluting."<sup>2</sup> "The Christian's conversation is in heaven, his affections are set upon things above", argued another clergyman in a sermon against the conventional observance of village wakes:

What spirit, then, can draw you thither to these scenes of frivolity and vice? Is it there you can meditate upon the themes in unison with your renewed soul? Is it there you can contemplate the mysteries of redeeming love? Is it there you would think of CHRIST, His incarnation, agony, and bloody sweat, His cross and passion, His precious death and burial, His glorious resurrection and ascension? Is it there you would desire to live? Is it there you would wish to die?<sup>3</sup>

Such advice gave little encouragement to notions about "innocent amusement". Indeed, many Evangelicals were at pains to point out that what others saw as innocent was often a snare for the unwary, a catalyst for the evil passions of human nature, "the inherent

<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 36.

<sup>2</sup> Francis Close, The Evil Consequences of Attending the Race Course Exposed, in a Sermon (Cheltenham, 2nd edn., 1827), p. 15.

<sup>3</sup> William J. Kidd, Village Wakes; Their Origin, Design and Abuse (Manchester, 1814), p. 11. An early Evangelical attack on wakes may be found in John Fletcher, An Appeal to Matter of Fact and Common Sense (Bristol, 1772), p. 117; I am indebted to Mr. Barrie Trinder for drawing my attention to Fletcher's writings.



depravity of man". Permissiveness on this point could not be excused; corruption was too liable to take root if the moral defences were relaxed. "But again and again is the question put to us, 'What harm can there be in once complying with the wishes of our children, and letting them go, at least once, to a place of public amusement? We take them merely to gratify a natural and innocent curiosity.' Brethren, the curiosity is too natural to be innocent."<sup>1</sup> Even when some degree of recreation was theoretically accepted, it was usually so hedged in with restrictions that few of the traditional diversions would be able to qualify. Hannah More laid down that "the amusements of a Christian must have nothing in them to excite the passions which it is his duty to subdue; they must not obstruct spiritual-mindedness, nor inflame 'the lust of the flesh, lust of the eye and pride of life'."<sup>2</sup> "In estimating the propriety or rather the lawfulness of a given amusement," advised one writer, "it may safely be laid down, that none is lawful of which the aggregate consequences are injurious to morals: - nor if its effects upon the immediate agents are, in general, morally bad: - nor if it occasions needless pain and misery to men or to animals: -

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<sup>1</sup> R. C. Dillon, A Sermon on the Evils of Fairs in General and of Bartholomew Fair in Particular (London, 1830), p. 132.

<sup>2</sup> Quoted in Muriel Jaeger, Before Victoria; Changing Standards and Behaviour 1787-1837 (Penguin edn., 1967), p. 28.

nor, lastly, if it occupies much time or is attended with much expense."<sup>1</sup> Amusement, to the extent that it is necessary, should be morally constructive and uplifting, and for the most part it should be sought only in order to refresh the spirits for higher tasks.

Public assemblies for diversion were particularly suspect, for it was in these settings that the temptations were most intense, the chances of contamination most likely, the sensual indulgences most extreme. Morality was always vulnerable in crowds, and since large gatherings were commonly associated with traditional recreation, the grounds for disapproval were seen to be almost overwhelming. "There are occasions", declared one clergyman (he was thinking especially of pleasure fairs), "when this danger's world is even made more dangerous; when the disobedient and rebellious subjects of God countenance and strengthen one another in the ways of sin - draw their destructive forces to one common arena - and transgress in troops and bands. And then it is that the Christian Watchman is to sound the alarm of impending danger".<sup>2</sup> Public gatherings generated vices which otherwise might not be encountered; they corrupted the innocent through exposure, and they encouraged the

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<sup>1</sup> Jonathan Dymond, Essays on the Principles of Morality, and on the Private and Political Rights and Obligations of Mankind (2 vols.; London, 1829), I, 446. See also Brown, Fathers of the Victorians, pp. 442-43.

<sup>2</sup> Dillon, Evils of Fairs, p. 118.

unregenerate to cast off all restraint. "At an age when evil passions are beginning to assert their power, when friendly counsel and brotherly aid are most of all necessary, when the armour for the life-long contest against the devil, the world, and the flesh, ought to be buckled on in earnest, these young persons are thrown into the way of manifold and fiery temptations, to which they only too often yield": this was one of the main objections to hiring servants at statute fairs.<sup>1</sup> The licence which so commonly characterized public diversions was widely acknowledged and much deplored. An observer of the 1829 bull-running at Stamford complained that "Many young women too were among the number, whose conduct was anything but modest. Indeed all classes seemed as if they had, on that day, license to cast off all appearance of decency and order, and plunge into every excess of riot, without shame or restraint."<sup>2</sup>

The only safe course was to avoid such assemblies and to confine one's recreation, so much as it was necessary, to domestic pleasures. The home was a refuge from the world; here amusement could be "rational", regulated, uplifting, and subservient to the laws of religion. "It is happily and kindly provided", wrote one

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<sup>1</sup> Greville J. Chester, Statute Fairs. A Sermon Preached at the Parish Churches of Farndish and Puddington, Beds. (London, 1858), pp. 4-5.

<sup>2</sup> Winks, Bull Running at Stamford, p. 16; cf. p. 13.

moralist, "that the greatest sum of enjoyment is that which is quietly and constantly induced. No men understand the nature of pleasure so well or possess it so much as those who find it within their own doors."<sup>1</sup> This was a view which came to be widely held, and in so doing one of the basic features of many popular practices lost much of its public sanction. As the home was elevated in status, the value of the public realm came to be depreciated; and the Evangelical criticism was significantly responsible for putting it on the defensive.

Evangelicalism also acted as a restraint on recreation as a result of its solicitude for a strict observance of the Sabbath. A sabbatarian tradition was, of course, already established,<sup>2</sup> but it was very much strengthened and revitalized by a whole battery of Evangelical influences - Wilberforce, Hannah More, the

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<sup>1</sup> Dymond, Principles of Morality, I, 455. Answering William Windham's defence of bull-baiting in 1802, Wilberforce pointed out that "Great writers had placed the summit of human happiness, not in picnics, but in the cottage of the peasant, surrounded with his smiling family. This was the happiness, and this the recreation, varied and combined with manly exercises abroad, which belonged naturally to the people of England". (Parliamentary History, XXXVI, p. 847.)

<sup>2</sup> See W. P. Baker, "The Observance of Sunday", in Reginald Lennard, ed., Englishmen at Rest and Play: Some Phases of English Leisure 1558-1714 (Oxford, 1931), pp. 79-144; W. B. Whitaker, Sunday in Tudor and Stuart Times (London, 1933); W. B. Whitaker, The Eighteenth-Century English Sunday: A Study of Sunday Observance from 1677 to 1837 (London, 1940); and especially Christopher Hill's essay on "The Uses of Sabbatarianism" in his Society and Puritanism in Pre-Revolutionary England (London, 1964), chap. 5.

Society for the Suppression of Vice, Methodism, the Evangelical Magazine, the cheap Repository Tracts, the wide range of literature for moral improvement. Sabbath observance was for the Evangelicals a matter of <sup>the</sup> first importance - "As Mrs. More pointed out at the beginning of the campaign, Sunday observance is the Christian Palladium; when it is lost, everything is lost" - and they were repeatedly pointing to it as one of the surest signs of a true believer.<sup>1</sup> Indifference to the Sabbath was a clear indication of profligacy, and this crime, it was thought, often marked the opening of the floodgate for a profusion of vice.<sup>2</sup> A Select Committee of 1832 referred to the Sabbath, in moderate Evangelical spirit, as "this most important institution of the Christian Religion, the more or less decorous observance of which may be considered, at any given time, to afford the safest test of the greater or less degree of Moral and Religious feeling pervading the Community."<sup>3</sup> Evangelicalism was probably the main moving force behind the appreciating regard for a disciplined Sunday which became so deeply rooted in nineteenth century society. Recreation on the Sabbath was thoroughly unacceptable: it was widely regarded as one of the worst types of

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<sup>1</sup> Brown, Fathers of the Victorians, p. 441.

<sup>2</sup> Radzinowicz, English Criminal Law, III, 162-63; see also Henry Zouch Hints Respecting the Public Police (London, 1786), p. 17.

<sup>3</sup> "Report from the Select Committee on the Observance of the Sabbath Day", Parliamentary Papers, 1831-32, VII, p. 261.

deseccration. "Private, and especially public amusements on this day, are clearly wrong", advised one essayist;<sup>1</sup> Wilberforce argued that "the people could only innocently recreate themselves on that day by attending to their religious duties."<sup>2</sup> From the later eighteenth century attitudes were hardening and the kinds of Sunday relaxation which had formerly been tolerated gradually succumbed to the pressures of Respectable disapproval, retiring completely from public view and seeking their consolation in the partial sanctuary of the alehouse. A resident of a hamlet in Buckinghamshire explained how in her locality Sunday proprieties came to be enforced, and active recreation restrained:

For several years after I first settled in East Burnham, cricket was regularly played during the summer on Sunday afternoons, by all the men and lads of the vicinity. The common, indeed, presented a lively and pleasing aspect, dotted with parties of cheerful lookers-on, with many women and children and old persons, among whom we ourselves, and our servants, not unfrequently mingled. But about the year 1842-3, some boys of our hamlet having been taken up and carried before the Beaconsfield Bench, for playing cricket on a Sunday, and fined 'fifteen shillings each, or six weeks of Aylesbury gaol,' the practice of playing cricket was effectually checked in East Burnham. The young men and boys having thenceforth no recreative pastime, spent

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<sup>1</sup> Dymond, Principles of Morality, I, 171-72.

<sup>2</sup> Parliamentary History, XXXIV, p. 1008, debate of 30 May 1799.

their afternoons in the beershops, or played at skittles in public-houses, or prowled about the lanes looking for birds'-nests, game-haunts, hare 'runs,' and the like; while the common was left lonely and empty of loungers.<sup>1</sup>

Evangelicalism had a profound impact on English society.

Its voice is to be heard time and time again in the documents of the several decades after the 1790s - in the press, in Parliamentary debates, in tracts and pamphlets, in serious works of enquiry, in the appeals of social reformers -, a voice which spoke in earnest tones, which was acutely sensitive to issues of morality (as well as propriety), preoccupied with the tension between virtue and vice, bearing its sense of righteousness with directness and intense self-consciousness. Evangelical attitudes became common currency, entering the thinking and di<sup>3</sup>course of many who might not have considered themselves members of the movement; on many issues there was an impressive cross-fertilization between Evangelicalism and the cult of Respectability. Evangelicalism was not the only important voice of the period - there were nostalgic Tories, High Churchmen, gentlemen of pleasure, Utilitarians, Romantics, working class radicals but it was certainly one of the most powerful of the competing beliefs. Men found themselves, as G. M. Young has remarked, "at every turn controlled, and animated, by the imponderable pressure of the Evangelical discipline" - and closely associated with it, "the almost universal faith in progress".<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Some Account of the Hamlet of East Burnham, Co. Bucks., by a Late Resident (London, 1858), p. 45n.

<sup>2</sup> Portrait of an Age, p. 1.

It should be noted as well that some of the Evangelical impetus for reform arose from the working people's own religious associations; not all of it was promoted by parson, gentleman-reformer, or employer. Wesleyan Methodism, a socially mixed (though increasingly respectable) denomination, helped to weaken the plebeian attachment to traditional diversion: Wesley himself had spoken against recreational indulgences,<sup>1</sup> and this hostility was energetically maintained by his successors.<sup>2</sup> One writer, for instance, explained in some detail why Methodists should not conform to the conventional practice of observing parish feasts.<sup>3</sup> "Wherever any of the Methodists give into the custom," he said, "the result is, that they suffer such loss in their souls by it, as they seldom

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<sup>1</sup> The Works of John Wesley (14 vols.; London, 1872), VII, 506, and VIII, 270; see also Fletcher, Appeal to Matter of Fact, pp. 114-21.

<sup>2</sup> See E. P. Stigant, "Methodism and the Working Class, 1760-1821: A Study in Social and Political Conflict" (unpubl. M.A. thesis, University of Keele, 1968), pp. 197-200.

<sup>3</sup> James Wood, An Address to the Members of the Methodist Societies, on Several interesting Subjects (London, 1799), pp. 3-12 (a copy is held in the Methodist Archives and Research Centre). See also E. P. Thompson, The Making of the English Working Class (Penguin edn., 1968), pp. 449-50.



recover for many months".<sup>1</sup> During the generation after the end of the Napoleonic War the Primitive Methodists were particularly active in campaigning against the worldliness of popular culture. "No person shall be continued a member of our society," they declared, "who visits public or worldly amusements; nor those who waste their time at public-houses".<sup>2</sup> They frequently conducted camp meetings at the times of wakes in order to counteract, and hopefully to undermine, the influence of profane festivity;<sup>3</sup> in

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<sup>1</sup> Wood, Address, p. 9. In 1784 the Methodist Conference at Leeds had considered the problem of wakes:

"Q.21. Many of our brethren have been exceedingly hurt by frequenting feasts or wakes on Sundays. What do you advise in this case?

"A. Let none of our brethren make any wake or feast, neither go to any on Sunday, but bear a public testimony against them."

(Quoted in Whitaker, Eighteenth-Century English Sunday, p. 178). William Howitt thought that "in the manufacturing districts, where the Methodists have gained most influence, ... they have helped to expel an immense quantity of dog-fighting, cock-fighting, bull-baiting, badger-baiting, boxing, and such blackguard amusements" (though he added that "Maying, guising, plough-bullocking, morris-dancing, were gone before, or would have gone, had not Methodism appeared"). (Rural Life [1840 edn.], p. 415.)

<sup>2</sup> Primitive Methodist Magazine, I, 1819, p. 218.

<sup>3</sup> Primitive Methodist Magazine, I, 1819, pp. 7-8, 56-57, 132-33, and II, 1821, pp. 12 and 14; John Petty, The History of the Primitive Methodist Connexion (London, 2nd edn., 1864), pp. 18-19; and H. B. Kendall, The Origin and History of the Primitive Methodist Church (2 vols.; London, n.d.), I, 61-62 and 287-90.

August 1820 a camp meeting was held on the Sunday of the annual football contest between Preston and Hedon in the East Riding,<sup>1</sup> and at Ashbourne in 1845 the local congregation organized a tea party as a counter-attraction to the Shrovetide football match.<sup>2</sup> Many working men found themselves converted to Primitive Methodism and their modes of life appropriately reformed.<sup>2</sup> It was said, for instance, that Filey in the East Riding was

A place noted for vice and wickedness of almost every description. Drunkenness, swearing, sabbath-breaking, cock-fighting, card-playing, and dancing, have been the favourite diversions of this place for many years; but which, through the mighty power of God, have received such a shock as will not soon be forgotten; and such as I hope they will never recover.<sup>3</sup>

Underlying much of the growing hostility towards popular recreation was the concern - a concern which was repeatedly expressed - for effective labour discipline. To men who especially valued industriousness, frugality and prudence, many of the traditional

<sup>1</sup> Petty, Primitive Methodist Connexion, pp. 131-33.

<sup>2</sup> Derby and Chesterfield Reporter, 7 February 1845.

<sup>3</sup> See for instance B. S. Trinder, "The Memoir of William Smith", Shropshire Archaeological Society Transactions, LVIII, part ii, 1966, pp. 178-85.

<sup>4</sup> William Howcroft, "On the Work of God at Filey", Primitive Methodist Magazine, IV, 1823, p. 255.

diversions were apt to appear shockingly self-indulgent and dissipated - wasteful of time, energy and money. "All sports are unlawful which take up any part of the Time, which we should spend in greater works", advised Richard Baxter;<sup>1</sup> and though it was admitted that in some circumstances recreation might be justified, he was at pains to emphasize the dangers which were frequently involved - idleness, loss of precious time, worldliness, sensual pleasures.<sup>2</sup> The stress on labour discipline was particularly derived from the puritanism of the century before the Restoration,<sup>3</sup> and though much of its religious and political edifice was destroyed after the Interregnum, many of its attitudes towards work and recreation survived into what was officially a non-Puritan world and were gradually incorporated into the orthodox thinking of educated society. "Much of the social content of puritan doctrine", suggests Christopher Hill, "was ultimately accepted outside the ranks of the nonconformists

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<sup>1</sup> Richard Baxter, A Christian Directory (London, 2nd edn., 1678), Book I, p. 388.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., Book I, pp. 244-45.

<sup>3</sup> See Christopher Hill's essay on "The Industrious Sort of People" in his Society and Puritanism, chap. 4; and Michael Walzer's chapter on "The New World of Discipline and Work" in his The Revolution of the Saints: A Study in the Origins of Radical Politics (Cambridge, Mass., 1965), especially pp. 210-19. "Puritans discovered in work", says Walzer, "the primary and elemental form of social discipline, the key to order, and the foundation of all further morality." (Ibid., p. 211.)

and even by the apparently triumphant Church of England."<sup>1</sup> The puritan emphasis on regularity, restraint, orderliness, sobriety, providence, and dutifulness in one's calling were all part of a general regard for individual and social discipline. Thrift<sup>less</sup>ness, sensuality, pleasure-seeking, levity, and idleness were among the enemies to be overcome, and it was particularly easy to associate such ungodly qualities with the fabric of popular diversion as customarily observed.<sup>2</sup> And although the puritans' religious enthusiasm was dampened down after 1660, many of their social values persisted, at first with diminished strength and diluted by the revived traditionalism of the Restoration, but by the next century in a consolidated, more rigorous, and more widely accepted form: the Charity School Movement, proposals for the reform of poor relief, the campaign for the reformation of manners, many of the influential writings on economic and social matters - these were some of the expressions, now more secular in tone, of the social morality of

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<sup>1</sup> Hill, Society and Puritanism, p. 506.

<sup>2</sup> For a brief discussion of the puritan hostility towards traditional recreation, see below, pp. 333-39.

seventeenth century Puritanism.<sup>1</sup> It was this tradition, in all its various strands, which most powerfully threatened the established customs of popular culture and most significantly accelerated the rupture between high and low society which was to emerge fully developed by the late eighteenth century.

One of the social virtues which was passed on to the eighteenth century, there to enjoy a position of pre-eminence, was industry. Industry was thought to be the linchpin of English progress; it was

<sup>1</sup> For discussions of these topics, see Dudley W. R. Bahlman, The Moral Revolution of 1688 (New Haven, Conn., 1957); M. G. Jones, The Charity School Movement: A Study of Eighteenth Century Puritanism in Action (Cambridge, 1938); Dorothy Marshall, The English Poor in the Eighteenth Century: A Study in Social and Administrative History (London, 1926); and Edgar S. Furniss, The Position of the Laborer in a System of Nationalism: A Study in the Labor Theories of the Later English Mercantilists (New York, 1920; repr. 1965). A charity school tract on the Christian festivals, which was presented in the form of a dialogue between a master and his students, concluded with a statement of the following resolution from one of the students: "I for my part, (and I hope the rest of my Schoolfellows are of the same mind,) am resolv'd, with the Assistance of God's holy Spirit, to observe these holy Festivals, which our most excellent Church has set apart, for the best of ends, and this the greatest of all in particular /i.e. Christmas/; not in Riot and Drunkenness, not in Chambering and Wantonness, not in mispending that precious time which God has given me, in Gaming, and other idle Diversions, but in attending the Service of the Church, with due Seriousness, and in spending the best part of it while I am at home, in reading the holy Scriptures that are appointed by our Church to be read then, and in meditating on 'em, and reading other good useful Books, which shall either be given or lent me for this purpose." (A Discourse Concerning the Lawfulness and Right Manner of keeping Christmas, and other Christian Holy-days /London, 1708/, p. 24.)

the motive power of those astounding advances which had so recently carried the nation to new heights of prosperity and world influence. "It is our Industry that changed the Face of this Country from what it was," thought one observer, "and proved thereby the Source of our Liberty and Property; it is our Industry that is the Basis of domestick and foreign Trade, and consequently the sole Fountain of our Riches; in short, it is our Industry that must maintain us, enable us to do Justice to others, and to live happily ourselves; for tiwithout it we can do neither." It was only natural to conclude that "Industry ought to be as much encouraged as possible, and that every thing capable of lessening it, ought to be the object of Censure."<sup>1</sup> Industry was the spring from which progress flowed, and some contemporaries were prone to rhapsodize on its behalf:

What a variety of blessings follow in thy train,  
O industry! By thee our poor would be made happy,  
 our riches would increase, more employments would  
 be created for our shipping, our naval power would  
 be extended, and our riches and power would either  
 secure to us the quiet possession of our properties,  
 or enable us to repel the united effort of our en-  
 croaching enemies.<sup>2</sup>

Industry was seen as a virtue with religious backing, a quality which was sanctioned as much by God as by the state. "The Rules

<sup>1</sup> London Magazine, XVI, 1747, p. 221.

<sup>2</sup> [William Temple], Considerations on Taxes, as they are supposed to affect the Price of Labour in our Manufacturies (London, 1765), pp. 53-54.

of Religion, and the Rules of social Industry do perfectly harmonize", claimed Josiah Tucker, and "all things hurtful to the latter, are indeed a Violation of the former. In short, the same good Being who formed the religious System, formed also the commercial".<sup>1</sup> Industry was very much a duty, not only to one's society, but also to the God who created it and supervised the public good. It is industry "which makes the artificer and the labourer as useful and valuable as any members in society", suggested one contemporary:

And as God hath allotted to men very different stations and conditions of life, and assigned them different gifts and talents to profit w<sup>ith</sup>al, different occupations and employments for the good of the whole; therefore to be diligent in the several provinces in which he hath placed us, is a duty we owe to him as to our neighbour and ourselves. It is our proper business, and a sort of trust reposed in us by the governor of the world: and therefore it is not only an offence against society, but a breach of our duty to heaven to desert or neglect it. And on the other hand, a diligent discharge of this duty from a principle of conscience towards God, is in its proper time and place an act of religious obedience; and will surely be as well accepted of by God, as any act of piety which may be thought more immediately addressed to his honour.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> "Instructions for Travellers" (1757), in R. L. Schuyler, ed., Josiah Tucker: A Selection from his Economic and Political Writings (New York, 1931), p. 266.

<sup>2</sup> William Adams, The Duties of Industry, Frugality and Sobriety. A Sermon Preached before a Society of Tradesmen and Artificers, in the Parish Church of St. Chad, Salop, on Easter-Monday, 1766 (Shrewsbury, 3rd edn., 1770), pp. 16-17; cf. John Clayton, Friendly Advice to the Poor (Manchester, 1755), pp. 8-9.

If industry was to be established as one of the cardinal virtues, it was only logical that idleness would have to be regarded as a major vice. "Indeed, an idle Person," according to John Clayton, "... who trifles away that Time unaccountably, which ought to be employ'd in honest Trades for necessary Uses, betrays such an inconsiderate Mind, such a Deadness of Heart, as absolutely disqualifies for every Duty; and is as truly inconsistent with the Spirit of the Gospel, as with the Dictates of natural Affection."<sup>1</sup> Idleness was regarded by one observer - and this was a common sentiment - as "the fruitful root of every vice".<sup>2</sup> It involved a neglect of one's social and religious duty, a shameful avoidance of productive labour, and a vulnerability to diverse temptations. Richard Baxter thought that "idleness is unfaithfulness to the God of heaven that setteth you on work: ever in working for men, you must do it ultimately for God."<sup>3</sup> Idleness was a sin which bred, facilitated, and accentuated other sins: for many observers it was the hub of immoral behaviour; and it was a vice which ran rampant among the labouring people. (Although idleness might be

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<sup>1</sup> Clayton, Friendly Advice, pp. 12-13.

<sup>2</sup> Edward Barry, A Letter on the Practice of Boxing (London, 1789), p. 31.

<sup>3</sup> Quoted in Charles H. George, "A Social Interpretation of English Puritanism", Journal of Modern History, XXV, 1953, p. 339.



construed as a personal failing of a gentleman, it was generally agreed that among the populace it was a fault of a different order: "The Time of People of Fashion may be indeed of very little Value," admitted an essayist in 1743, "but, in a trading Country, the Time of the meanest Man ought to be of some Worth to himself, and to the Community.")<sup>1</sup> For the most part the social and economic writers of the period had a low opinion of the moral standards of the common people. William Temple, one of the most zealous advocates of a strict labour discipline, regarded the "manufacturing poor" as "very depraved and wicked".<sup>2</sup> This sort of disapproval varied in intensity, but there was clearly a widespread agreement on the need for improvement. Josiah Tucker was putting the case strongly, but not in an unrepresentative spirit, when he argued in 1746 that

... with regard to the morals of the poor at present, far from exaggerating the matter, it must be acknowledged, times were never worse. For the lower class of people are at this day so far degenerated from what they were in former times, as to become a matter of astonishment, and a proverb of reproach. And if we take the judgment of strangers, and foreigners of every other country, who are certainly the most unexceptional Judges in this respect, we shall find them all agreed, in pronouncing the common people of our populous cities, to be the most abandoned, and licentious wretches on earth. Such brutality and insolence, such debauchery and extravagance, such idleness, irreligion,

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<sup>1</sup> Gentleman's Magazine, XIII, 1743, p. 486.

<sup>2</sup> Considerations on Taxes, p. 17.

cursing and swearing, and contempt of all rule and authority, human and divine, do not reign so triumphantly among the poor in any other country, as in ours: - Nor did they ever in ours, 'till of late, in any degree to what they do at present.

And the reason of this is, alas! but too easily assigned: - Our people are drunk with the cup of liberty.<sup>1</sup>

This school of writers looked upon any signs of popular indulgence with intense misgivings. One observer criticized the "beggary Pride" of those poor men who insisted on keeping a dog;<sup>2</sup> another attacked their weakness for "Trifling Niceties" and their tendency to congregate together in public places "upon every Occasion of public Solemnity", such as at marriages and funerals.<sup>3</sup> The fashionable disapproval of the luxurious living of the poor - tobacco, finery, tea in particular - is amply documented and well known.<sup>4</sup> Recreation too was an indulgence which could easily pass beyond the limits of social acceptability; if industry was to be kept up, it would have to be strictly restrained. "Is it not melancholy", asked one writer, "often to see what has been purchased by painful industry and labour squandered away in unprofitable and foolish recreations"?<sup>5</sup> It was pointed out by one tract, in a very

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<sup>1</sup> Josiah Tucker, Six Sermons on Important Subjects (Bristol, 1772), pp. 70-71, from a sermon of 18 March 1745/46.

<sup>2</sup> Hilman, ed., Tusser Redivivus, "November", p. 4.

<sup>3</sup> Clayton, Friendly Advice, pp. 30 and 13.

<sup>4</sup> For one such statement, see Fielding, Increase of Robbers, p. xi.

<sup>5</sup> Adams, Duties of Industry, pp. 21-22.

moderate spirit, that

... the first Thing commonly thought on by Youth is Recreation and Pleasure: A Degree of which (if the Recreation be lawful) cannot reasonably be objected to; but Care must be taken that the Pursuit of Pleasure may not too much contract, or quite exclude any necessary Duty, and that it indispose not for the Returns of Labour.... A frequent Taste of any kind of Diversions is apt to grow upon the Palate, and give too strong a Relish for them; and when the Inclination is turn'd strongly towards them, and the Mind runs perpetually upon them, the Shop or the Work-room is like the Confinement of a Prison, and labour like a Weight that goes up Hill.<sup>1</sup>

Another observer expressed his concern just as temperately when he suggested that "All Diversions, all Exercises, have certain Bounds as to Expence, and when they exceed this, it is an Evil in itself, and justly liable to Censure."<sup>2</sup>

The nature of these bounds was, of course, very much open to debate; but it seems that the dominant inclination was to interpret them as narrowly as possible. Work and recreation were commonly polarized, and the overriding concern was to give the former the maximum<sup>of</sup> encouragement, the latter continual discouragement. One writer, commenting on the views of John Clayton, declared that

The Way of Wealth, the certain, known, and beaten Track, is thro' Carefulness, Diligence, and Sobriety: This Road, always brings the assiduous Traveller to the wish'd-for End of his Journey; whilst a Desire in Men to spend their Time in Play or Pleasure, is sure, not only to stop them in their Road, but by enervating their Bodies, and their Minds, effectually

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<sup>1</sup> The Servants Calling; With Some Advice to the Apprentice (London, 1725), pp. 80-81.

<sup>2</sup> Gentleman's Magazine, XIII, 1743, p. 485.

to check their Progress, thereby preventing them from advancing their Children....<sup>1</sup>

Recreation was commonly seen as an impediment, a threat of substantial proportions, to steady and productive labour. "How often do we see the inhabitants of a country village drawn from their harvest-work, to see a cudgel-playing, or a cricket-match!" complained an essay of 1764.<sup>2</sup> Richard Baxter advised that "all Recreations are unlawful, which are themselves preferred before our Callings".<sup>3</sup> The characteristic attitude was to view most, if not all, traditional diversions with suspicion and irritation. Dorning Rasbotham of Farnworth, Lancashire, for instance, recalled that in July 1783, when provisions were dear, "one evening I met a very large procession of young men and women, with fiddles, garlands, and every ostentation of rural finery, dancing Morris dances in the highway, merely to celebrate an idle anniversary, or what they had been pleased to call for a year or two a fair, at a paltry thatched alehouse upon the neighbouring common."<sup>4</sup> Recreation, it was suspected, might not be in harmony with the scheme of the national economy; its legitimacy would have to be seriously questioned.

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<sup>1</sup> Joseph Stot, A Sequel to the Friendly Advice to the Poor of Manchester (Manchester, 1756), pp. 19-20.

<sup>2</sup> London Chronicle, 4-6 October 1764.

<sup>3</sup> Baxter, Christian Directory, Book I, p. 388.

<sup>4</sup> Quoted in B. T. Barton, Historical Gleanings of Bolton and District (Bolton, 1881-83), 1st series, pp. 262-63.

The customary holidays received particular criticism, for they were held to be most responsible for the loss of working time. "Common Custom has established so many Holy-days", remarked John Clayton, "that few of our Manufacturing Work-folks are closely and regularly employed above two third Parts of their Time".<sup>1</sup> Such a situation was clearly insupportable: "The Commandment of God is positive six Days shalt thou labour, and do all that thou hast to do; and enjoineth constant Diligence in the Pursuit of that Work which he hath given us to do; such solemn Occasions only being excepted from the Injunction, as are peculiarly dedicated to his immediate Service, by that Authority which he hath imparted to Rulers, whether Spiritual or Civil, for the edifying his Church, and the due Government of his people".<sup>2</sup> It was notorious that artisans and domestic outworkers were in the habit of observing a weekly cycle of only five, and sometimes even four, working days; Saint Monday was a common observance and among some workers the licence was extended to Tuesday.<sup>3</sup> "Everybody knows", observed Bernard Mandeville, "that there is a vast number of journeymen weavers, tailors, cloth-workers, and twenty other handicrafts, who, if by four days labour in a week they can

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<sup>1</sup> Clayton, Friendly Advice, p. 13.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 8.

<sup>3</sup> For a discussion of this popular tradition, see E. P. Thompson, "Time, Work-Discipline, and Industrial Capitalism", Past & Present, No. 38, December 1967, pp. 72-79.

maintain themselves, will hardly be persuaded to work the fifth".<sup>1</sup> Moreover, the annual holidays, it was thought, were unnecessarily numerous and a heavy drain on the economy: in 1697 John Pollexfen reckoned that each holiday cost the nation £50,000;<sup>2</sup> two generations later the loss was being put at £200,000.<sup>3</sup> By the late eighteenth century it was even being suggested that all (or virtually all) occasions of popular diversion might be better dispensed with, in the interests of industry, morality, and public order. "It is ... found by long experience," argued Henry Zouch in 1786,

... that when the common people are drawn together upon any public occasion, a variety of mischiefs are certain to ensue: allured by unlawful pastimes, or even by vulgar amusements only, they wantonly waste their time and money, to their own great loss and that of their employers. Nay a whole neighbourhood becomes thereby unhinged in such a manner, that there is a general stagnation of labour for many days: the young and inexperienced, are here initiated in every species of immorality, and prophaneness: quarrels and disturbances are too often promoted, and of course, a great deal of irksome business is thrown upon Justices of the Peace.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The Fable of the Bees, ed. Irwin Primer (New York, 1962), p. 122. See also John Houghton, A Collection of Letters for the Improvement of Husbandry and Trade (2 vols.; London, 1681-83), II, 176-77; Clayton, Friendly Advice, p. 29; and John Mastin, The History and Antiquities of Naseby, in the County of Northampton (Cambridge, 1792), pp. 51-52.

<sup>2</sup> John Pollexfen, A Discourse of Trade and Coyn (London, 1697), p. 50.

<sup>3</sup> London Chronicle, 4-6 October 1764, citing an unnamed author.

<sup>4</sup> Zouch, Public Police, pp. 6-7.

Given these attitudes to work and recreation and to popular behaviour, it was only to be expected that such writers should be entirely agreed on the need for more severe and effective labour discipline. One writer in 1787 regretted that "the lower order of civil polity in this kingdom is so little attended to" and "so laxly administered".<sup>1</sup> The common people had an inordinate fondness for independence; they waved the flag of liberty, claiming "that as Englishmen they enjoy a birthright privilege of being more free and independent than in any country in Europe", and in so doing they undermined the interests of their employers and the state. Such freedom - or more properly, licence - could only be tolerated at the risk of national ruin. "The labouring people should never think themselves independent of their superiors; for, if a proper subordination is not kept up, riot and confusion will take place of sobriety and order."<sup>2</sup> The working people were seen as a sluggish, recalcitrant, insubordinate multitude, and the overriding problem was to control and regulate them, both for their own best interests and the interest of the public good. "Unless a speedy reformation takes place among our manufacturing poor," exclaimed William Temple, "unless some scheme be form'd to extirpate idleness, restrain excess and debauchery, prevent vagrancy, enforce industry, keep the

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<sup>1</sup> William M. Godschall, A General Plan of Parochial and Provincial Police (London, 1787), p. 1.

<sup>2</sup> [William Temple], An Essay on Trade and Commerce (London, 1770), pp. 56-58.

poor constantly employed, and ease the lands of the heavy burthen of poor rates, real liberty will still be very precarious, for liberty without property is merely chimerical."<sup>1</sup>

What, then, were the means recommended to achieve this greater degree of social discipline? How was efficient and regular industry to be effectively enforced, idleness to be punished? The basis for such labour discipline, it was generally agreed, had to be "necessity": if economic circumstances were such that men had to work continually in order to satisfy their basic needs, maximum productivity could be achieved and personal indulgence would be discouraged under pain of severe penalties. This would be the best way of deterring inclinations to idleness. "When men show such extraordinary proclivity to idleness and pleasure", remarked Bernard Mandeville, "what reason have we to think that they would ever work unless they were obliged to it by immediate necessity?"<sup>2</sup> Wages should be kept low and prices high; scarcity encouraged industriousness, abundance allowed men to be idle, self-indulgent and insubordinate. This was one of the essential messages of the economic writers - Houghton, Mandeville, Tucker, Temple - and has been discussed by E. S. Furniss as "the doctrine of the utility of poverty".<sup>3</sup> Subsistent poverty was the greatest incentive to labour

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., pp. 51-52.

<sup>2</sup> Fable of the Bees, ed. Primer, p. 122.

<sup>3</sup> Furniss, Position of the Laborer, chap. 6.



for it meant that men had to work with regularity in order to survive; if the poor were allowed any surplus they would probably spend it on non-productive activities ("as they ought to be kept from starving," said Mandeville, "so they should receive nothing worth saving").<sup>1</sup> Necessity was one of the fundamental planks of social control. "When provisions are clear, so that virtually wages are less," said William Temple, "industry and sobriety assume their seat among the manufactures.... Great wages and certainty of employment render the inhabitants of cities insolent and debauched. Low wages and uncertainty of employment near at hand, if discharged, make the husbandman temperate and humble."<sup>2</sup> Although this was not the only attitude to labour efficiency, it seems to have been the most highly regarded; only a few commentators were prepared to

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<sup>1</sup> Fable of the Bees, ed. Primer, p. 123. "It is the interest of all rich nations", he added, "that the greatest part of the poor should almost never be idle and yet continually spend what they get." (Ibid.)

<sup>2</sup> William Temple, A Vindication of Commerce and the Arts (London, 1758), pp. 57-58. See also Houghton, Collection of Letters, II, 174-86: the title of this essay is "An Offer to make it appear, that this Kingdom will thrive more, and the Manufacturers live better, and sell their Manufactures Cheaper when Provisions are Dear, than when Cheap: With some Proposals for the keeping up of Dearness, Industry, and Plenty."

consider the case for higher wages.<sup>1</sup> Temple, as usual, was the most candid advocate for the disciplinarians: "The only way to make them temperate and industrious," he said of the labouring people, "is to lay them under a necessity of labouring all the time they can spare from meals and sleep, in order to procure the common necessities of life".<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Malachy Postlethayt, for instance, argued against such severity towards the labouring poor. "I must beg leave to differ in sentiment from those great politicians, who contend for the perpetual slavery of the working people of this kingdom.... Have not all wise nations instituted holidays, sports and pastimes, for the diversion of the mass of the people? To what end? Certainly to give them a fresh relish for their labour. And if they had not unbendings, we may presume they would pine away, and become enervated as well in body as marred in understanding. And what sort of workmanship could we expect from such hard-driven animals?... And why may not the superior ingenuity and dexterity of our artists and manufacturers be owing to that freedom and liberty they enjoy to divert themselves in their own way...?" But he still felt disposed to conclude: "However, some regulations may be requisite, even for the diversions of the industrious poor." (The Universal Dictionary of Trade and Commerce /2 vols.; London, 4th edn., 1774/, II, xiv.) It has been argued that a more sympathetic attitude towards labour can be detected in the economic writings of the third quarter of the eighteenth century, especially with regard to wage levels; the evidence for this case, however, is still inconclusive, and for the most part there are few indications that the general question of labour discipline came to be treated with any greater permissiveness. (See A. W. Coats, "Changing Attitudes to Labour in the Mid-Eighteenth Century", Economic History Review, 2nd series, XI, 1958-59, pp. 35-51.)

<sup>2</sup> Vindication of Commerce, pp. 56-57.

The most direct (and the traditional) means to encourage labour discipline was through the application of state power, and these kinds of regulation continued to be generally applauded. Government was to back up the workings of the free market, to complement the discipline which was inherent, though not always entirely effective, in the market economy. Industry was a social duty, and where economic necessity failed to enforce it fully, the responsibility for assistance fell to the state. The market and the state were mutual help-mates. One commentator, speaking in support of such restraining laws, suggested that "to hold the lower Orders to Industry, and guard the Morals of the Poor, on whom all Nations must rely for Increase and Defence, is the truest Patriotism."<sup>1</sup> William Temple commended the whole problem of popular behaviour to the attention of the nation's leaders. "A good police must be established," he said, "a good set of laws, relative to the employment of the poor, must be framed, and their execution be properly enforced, so that constant labour may grow into habit", and "our manufacturing poor are contented to labour six days for the same sum which they now earn in four days".<sup>2</sup> "What can be more worthy

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<sup>1</sup> Reflections on Various Subjects Relating to Arts and Commerce (London, 1752), pp. 62-63. The bluntness of this remark was partly softened by the author's more permissive stand on the level of wages. He concluded that "the Hope of Ease, however remote and unlikely, is the Inducement to Labour. The Prospect of a better way of Life in the industrious, must excite Emulation in the Idle." (Ibid., p. 64.)

<sup>2</sup> Essay on Trade, p. 69.

the attention of the legislature," he exclaimed, "than the framing of laws which would tend to make several millions of poor labouring people sober, industrious, frugal, temperate, virtuous, and happy, and the state, in consequence of this, the richest and most powerful in the world?"<sup>1</sup> He warned, though, that one had to be discreet in applying such laws if work of good quality was to be expected, for "the lower sort of people in England, from a romantic notion of liberty, generally reject and oppose every thing that is forced upon them". Labour which was provided under conditions of quasi-slavery, he realized, was apt to suffer a decline in efficiency. It was better to regulate labour with greater subtlety: "If possible, the effects of such laws should be produced, almost insensibly, and without the appearance of force: for force will hardly ever answer the end proposed in this land of liberty."<sup>2</sup>

An important prerequisite of such labour discipline was the regulation of all means of diversion, for these were among the most damaging of the many temptations which distracted the populace from work. We have already noticed some of the opinions on this issue. Annual holidays were to be kept to a minimum; unnecessary festivities - wakes, pleasure fairs, archaic rituals - should be reformed or

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 71; see also pp. 244-46.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., pp. 92-93. For a general discussion of attitudes concerning "the enforcement of the duty to labor", see Furniss, Position of the Laborer, chap. 5.

eliminated; boxing matches and other large assemblies should be curtailed; public houses ought to be strictly regulated and prevented from offering recreational attractions.<sup>1</sup> "A Journeyman can no more afford to lose, give or throw away his Time, than the Tradesman can his Commodity", wrote an essayist in the Public Advertiser of 2 September 1757; "and the best way of preventing this useful Body of Men from this Species of Extravagancy is, to remove from their Sight all Temptations to Idleness; and however Diversions may be necessary to fill up those dismal Chasms of burdensome Time among People of Fortune, too frequent Relaxations of this kind among the Populace enervate Industry."<sup>2</sup> Josiah Tucker suggested that taxes be levied on various forms of recreation with the intention of "preventing Idleness, promoting Industry, and checking Extravagance". They ought to be laid, he thought,

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<sup>1</sup> On the regulation of public houses, see Sidney and Beatrice Webb, The History of Liquor Licensing (London, 1903), especially chap. 3 and the Appendix. For a few of the contemporary criticisms of the recreational functions of public houses, see An Enquiry into the Causes of the Encrease and Miseries of the Poor of England (London, 1738), pp. 50-51; Propositions for Improving the Manufactures, Agriculture and Commerce, of Great Britain (London, 1763), p. 61; an essay in the London Chronicle, 4-6 October 1764; John Powell, A View of Real Grievances, with Remedies Proposed for redressing them (London, 1772) pp. 16-17; Zouch, Public Police, pp. 4-5; A Principal Cause of the Miseries of the Poor (London, 1787), pp. 6-7; and Reports of the Society for Bettering the Condition and Increasing the Comforts of the Poor (5 vols.; London, 1798-1808), II, 189n-90n.

<sup>2</sup> The author was probably Sir John Fielding; cf. Henry Fielding, Increase of Robbers, pp. 10-11.

... on all Places of public Resort and Diversion, such as public Rooms, Music-Gardens, Play-Houses, etc. also on Booths and Stands for Country Wakes, Cricket Matches, and Horse Racing, Stages for Mountebanks, Cudgel Playing, etc. moreover on Fives Places, and Ball Courts, Billiard Tables, Shuffle Boards, Skittle Alleys, Bowling Greens, and Cock Pits: -- Also Capitation Taxes should be levied on itinerant Players, Lottery-men, Shewmen, Jugglers, Ballad Singers, and indeed on all others of whatever Class or Denomination, whose very Trades and Professions have a natural Tendency, and whose Personal Interest it is to make other People profuse, extravagant, and idle.<sup>1</sup>

The more popular diversion could be controlled and constrained, the more would the national economy be strengthened and expanded; habits of leisure had to be brought in line with the requirements of efficient and orderly production.

With the rise of the factory system in parts of the Midlands and the North, the curtailment of many traditional customs of popular leisure, and the effective regulation of those pastimes which remained, became basic ingredients in the employers' codes of industrial discipline: the irregularity of the pre-industrial employment of time, and the premium which the people put on leisure, had to be attacked and restrained and hopefully undermined in order that the economic advantages of large manufacturing units could be fully realized. Josiah Wedgwood, for instance, was complaining in 1772 of how his workmen "keep wake after wake in summer when it is

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<sup>1</sup> "Instructions for Travellers", in Schuyler, ed., Josiah Tucker, p. 261.

their own good will and pleasure",<sup>1</sup> and despite his threats and admonishments, absenteeism at the times of local holidays (as well as during the normal week) remained a persistent problem.<sup>2</sup> Sometimes legal deterrents were utilized: in 1836 two Birmingham apprentices "who for some time past had been in the habit of keeping St. Monday at their masters' expense" were given a month of hard labour in a House of Correction.<sup>3</sup> The tension between popular and propertied interests, between independence and dependence, was certainly accentuated from the later eighteenth century, and historians have recently been investigating the various ways in which this process of discipline accompanied industrialization.<sup>4</sup> Such tension, though, was not a novel phenomenon: labour discipline was a long-standing concern, and accelerating social change only heightened conflicts which earlier generations had already tasted. For example, a letter of 8 July 1702 to William Blathwayt focussed on some of the labour difficulties which were hindering progress on the construction of his new home at Dirham, Gloucestershire:

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<sup>1</sup> Katherine E. Farrer, ed., Letters of Josiah Wedgwood 1762-1780 (2 vols.; London, 1903), II, 14.

<sup>2</sup> Sidney Pollard, "Factory Discipline in the Industrial Revolution", Economic History Review, 2nd Series, XVI, 1963-64, p. 256; and Neil McKendrick, "Josiah Wedgwood and Factory Discipline", Historical Journal, IV, 1961, pp. 38-42, 46, and 51.

<sup>3</sup> Philanthropist, 1 September 1836.

<sup>4</sup> As well as the references above to works by Pollard and McKendrick, see also Keith Thomas, "Work and Leisure in Pre-Industrial Society", Past & Present, No. 29, December 1964, pp. 50-62; Thompson, "Time, Work-Discipline, and Industrial Capitalism", op. cit.; and Sidney Pollard, The Genesis of Modern Management (London, 1965), chap. 5.

Honorable Sir,

I begin to despair of getting Things in any good order agt. you come down, such a pack of People you have here that there is no depending upon them. Sunday last was this Town and Callern (Colerne) Wake or Revell, and between them a great part of the Workmen have been Revelling and drunkening ever since till this Morning, particularly Richard Broad and his Partner, who will hardly have finisht the Rail and Ballisters before you come, neither can we prevail upon them to send in the Coving Stones for the New Chimneys, and several other Things that are much wanted.<sup>1</sup>

A few days later the same correspondent was noting that "I misst some of the Workmen this day, particularly Ri. Broad and his People, and upon Enquiry find it to be Box Revel, so must not expect them before to Morrow."<sup>2</sup> Similarly, on 22 July 1765 the steward at Nocton, Lincolnshire was finding that "these two feasts at (Potter) Hanworth and Dunston have so turned our labourers' heads from work that we have not been able to get all our hay mown last week"; and a week later he reported that "this last week has been our horse race, which has been another help to keep our heads turned from minding business, and this week is our Assizes. I hope when they are all over we shall fall to business again."<sup>3</sup> Popular habits and business efficiency were, it is clear, often at loggerheads, and the proponents of the latter became increasingly intent on enforcing the

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<sup>1</sup> Gloucestershire R.O., D.1799/E 242.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., letter of 13 July 1702.

<sup>3</sup> Quoted in Sir Francis Hill, Georgian Lincoln (Cambridge, 1966), p. 54.



acceptance of behaviour which was consistent with, and an expression of, their most deeply felt social values.

There were more subtle ways too in which changing attitudes and behaviour served to undermine the practice of traditional recreation. The decline of these diversions cannot be entirely explained by reference to the outright attacks which were levelled against them or the appreciating concern for moral improvement and a strict labour discipline; their demise, it is clear, was partly a consequence of various other social transformations, changes of a more general sort, which carried significant implications for leisure activities. Vocal opposition to recreational customs was only the most visible indication of the tenuousness of their standing, for underlying these explicit tensions were a number of central, long-term social changes which accompanied the whole process of "modernization".

One of these important causes of recreational losses was the enclosure movement. Many outdoor recreations depended on an open field as the place for their exercise,<sup>1</sup> and if the field became enclosed it was often difficult to find any alternative playing place. In 1824 Robert Slaney wrote of how in rural areas, "owing to the inclosure of open lands and commons, the poor have no place in which they may amuse themselves in summer evenings, when the

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<sup>1</sup> See for instance the evidence included in the "Report from the Select Committee on Commons' Inclosure", Parliamentary Papers, 1844, V, passim.

labour of the day is over, or when a holiday occurs."<sup>1</sup> This was a familiar, though certainly not universal, problem. The Derby and Chesterfield Reporter of 8 March 1844 admitted to "a feeling of regret, when we have seen those pieces of common land, near to small towns and villages, on which the rural sports of generations have been followed, enclosed". William Howitt claimed that football "seems to have almost gone out of use with the enclosure of wastes and commons, requiring (as it does) a wide space for its exercise".<sup>2</sup> This was an exaggeration, but the trend was undeniable. Enclosure militated against popular recreation since it involved the imposition of absolute rights of private property on land which had previously been accessible to the people at large, at least during certain seasons of the year, for the exercise of sports and pastimes.<sup>3</sup> The social responsibility which was felt by a landlord in Berkshire, a rather exceptional occurrence, suggested that the usual consequences of enclosure were clearly not to the advantage of the common people's recreational traditions. "Since the enclosures have been made," he said, "I think some place should be provided for the exercise and recreation of the working-classes,

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<sup>1</sup> Slaney, Rural Expenditure, p. 200.

<sup>2</sup> Howitt, Rural Life (1840 edn.), p. 527.

<sup>3</sup> For references to such instances, see Christina Hole, English Sports and Pastimes (London, 1949), pp. 2-3; A. Temple Patterson, Radical Leicester: A History of Leicester 1780-1850 (Leicester, 1954), pp. 172-73, and William White, History, Gazetteer, and Directory of Leicestershire and Rutland (Sheffield, 1846), p. 94; and a letter from Thomas Brearey printed as an advertisement in the Derby Mercury, 29 January 1845.

and especially for their children. I have set out four acres at Oldworth as a play-ground for the children, or whoever likes to play. They have now their cricket-matches, their quoit-playing, and their revels there."<sup>1</sup> The 1845 Enclosure Act, in providing for the preservation of surviving village greens for popular diversions and in recommending the provision of a playing field in certain cases of the enclosure of waste land, explicitly acknowledged the losses which had often accompanied previous enclosures.<sup>2</sup>

There is evidence of numerous individual instances when an enclosure frustrated the practice of a traditional recreation. After the enclosure at Horsea in 1809, for instance, it was said that "the sport of foot-ball, which was much practiced up to that time, has necessarily been disused.... Matches were sometimes made between different villages, the play being from village to village, two or three miles apart."<sup>3</sup> The enclosure at Pudsey forced the feast from the nearby moor;<sup>4</sup> and at Ratby, Leicestershire

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted by Edwin Chadwick in M. W. Flinn's edn. of Chadwick's 1842 Report on the Sanitary Conditions of the Labouring Population of Great Britain (Edinburgh, 1965), p. 338.

<sup>2</sup> 8 & 9 Victoria c. 118, especially sections 15 and 30.

<sup>3</sup> Bedell, Account of Hornsea, p. 88.

<sup>4</sup> Lawson, Progress in Pudsey, p. 13.

the sports which were associated with the annual "meadow mowing" - dancing, "wrestlings, footballs, cudgel-playing, and other athletic exercises" - were terminated with the enclosure of the parish's fields.<sup>1</sup> Enclosure did away with a similar custom near Bicester:

At the mowing of Revel-mede, a meadow between Bicester and Wendlebury, most of the different kinds of rural sports were usually practised; and in such repute was the holiday, that booths and stalls were erected as if it had been a fair.... The amusements took place at the time when the meadow became subject to commonage.... These sports entirely ceased on the enclosure of Chesterton field.<sup>2</sup>

At one time the working people in Coventry played such games as football, quoits, bandy, bowls and cricket on a nearby open space of several hundred acres, but it was subsequently enclosed and the former sports were no longer allowed.<sup>3</sup> The official who investigated the living conditions in Portsmouth and its environs for the 1845 Inquiry into the State of Large Towns found that "formerly an open space, known as the 'Laboratory Field,' was much used by the inhabitants of Portsea for the purposes of exercise and recreation; but by its enclosure, by order of the Board of Ordnance, as well as by a similar curtailment of another open space, ... hardly any space

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<sup>1</sup> John Throsby, Select Views in Leicestershire (2 vols.; London, 1790 II, 83-84.

<sup>2</sup> John Dunkin, The History and Antiquities of Bicester (London, 1816) p. 269.

<sup>3</sup> "Report from the Select Committee on the Health of Towns", Parliamentary Papers, 1840, XI, pp. 369-70.

is left within easy reach but the ramparts of the surrounding fortifications."<sup>1</sup>

By the first half of the nineteenth century any kind of open space for recreation was very much at a premium. The custom of playing games on public thoroughfares was no longer tolerated; enclosure usually eliminated any public use of agricultural land; and the rapid growth of cities involved the appropriation of much open space, some of which had served as customary playgrounds, for commercial building. The consequences for traditional recreation of urbanization were widely acknowledged and much publicized. In 1833, for example, the Select Committee on Public Walks concluded from its investigations that during the previous fifty years, "from the increased value of Property and extension of Buildings, many inclosures of open spaces in the vicinity of towns have taken place, and little or no provision has been made for Public Walks or Open Spaces, fitted to afford means of exercise or amusement to the middle or humbler classes".<sup>2</sup> Equally gloomy conclusions emerged from subsequent investigations which gave some attention to the provision of recreation grounds: the 1840 Select Committee on the

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<sup>1</sup> "Second Report of the Commissioners for Inquiring into the State of Large Towns and Populous Districts", Parliamentary Papers, 1845, XVIII, p. 651.

<sup>2</sup> "Report from the Select Committee on Public Walks", Parliamentary Papers, 1833, XV, p. 339. This report contains much information concerning the lack of recreational facilities in cities.

Health of Towns,<sup>1</sup> Edwin Chadwick's 1842 Report on the Sanitary Condition of the Labouring Population of Great Britain,<sup>2</sup> and the two Reports from 1844-45 of the Commissioners for Inquiring into the State of Large Towns and Populous Districts.<sup>3</sup> The evidence presented by these reports told a dismal tale of speculative building, land expropriations, and civic indifference marching hand in hand to restrict the opportunities for popular recreation. The problem was to be found in varying degrees in all parts of the country. With one or two exceptions, very few industrial towns in the Midlands or the North had any public playing fields worth speaking of, though some might have access to a nearby field or moor on the sufferance of a landlord. In most places there were only very limited outlets for athletic exercises. In 1833 a Middlesex magistrate reported that previously in the vicinity of London, "Wherever there was an open place to which people could have access they would play, but they are now driven from all.... On sufferance formerly they were allowed to play, and they are now expelled from all.... I have witnessed their dissatisfaction at

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<sup>1</sup> Parliamentary Papers, 1840, XI.

<sup>2</sup> Edn. of M. W. Flinn, op. cit.; see especially pp. 335-39.

<sup>3</sup> Parliamentary Papers, 1844, XVII, and 1845, XVIII. See especially the evidence relating to point no. 24 of the Commission's questionnaire.

being expelled from field to field, and being deprived of all play-places."<sup>1</sup> At Basford, a suburb of Nottingham, it was found that

There is nothing in the shape of open ground for recreation in or around the village, and this want has been very much complained of. The school-boys are consequently driven into the streets, to their own injury, and to the general annoyance of the inhabitants. The want here complained of is likewise a fruitful source of bickering and recrimination between the young men of the parish and the owners and occupiers of lands, trespasses on the part of the young men, for the purposes of cricket-playing and other games, being very common. There are now no common lands belonging to the parish. Formerly there were very extensive grounds of this class; but in 1793 these rights were resumed and the grounds enclosed, but without leaving a single acre for the use of the public.<sup>2</sup>

This was a common sort of situation: customary playing spaces were nullified, no new alternatives were available. The weight of the evidence overwhelmingly points to the conclusion that prior to the mid nineteenth century, as cities were extending over the landscape and as land was being taken in for a variety of commercial purposes, many traditional playing grounds were eliminated, and that compensation, in the form of public recreation fields, was almost everywhere negligible. It was only in the second half of the century that parks and playgrounds were widely established and

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<sup>1</sup> Parliamentary Papers, 1833, XV, p. 354; cf. p. 398.

<sup>2</sup> Parliamentary Papers, 1845, XVIII, p. 618.

came to be generally regarded as essential amenities of urban life.<sup>1</sup>

The changing attitude towards "custom" was another cause of the decline of popular diversion. In the later seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries many activities of the common people were imbedded in traditions of customary practice. These customs were sustained and sanctioned by certain expectations about social behaviour for which there was a widespread, though increasingly fragile, consensus. The customary rights which the people claimed arose from fundamental assumptions about the reciprocity of social relations; they were based on presuppositions concerning the rights and obligations which were felt to be associated with the different ranks of the social hierarchy. The essence of a custom was that persons who exercised authority, politically or economically, were expected to make particular concessions in the interest of the labouring people. A custom, then, involved the assertion and recognition of a popular privilege. In the late seventeenth century, for example, the Dymokes of Scrivelsby, Lincolnshire were holding "certain lands by exhibiting on a certain day every year a milk-white bull with black ears to the people who are to run it down, and then it is cutt in pieces and given amongst the poor."<sup>2</sup> Whatever their

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<sup>1</sup> For a general discussion of playgrounds during this period, see J. L. Hammond and Barbara Hammond, The Age of the Chartists 1832-1854: A Study of Discontent (London, 1930), chaps. 7 and 8, and pp. 343-46.

<sup>2</sup> Diary of Abraham de la Pryme (Publications of the Surtees Society, LIV, 1870), p. 109. The custom seems to have been a kind of bull-running.



legal standing may have been, all customs had the same basic social significance: they imposed certain requirements on the more powerful people to provide, patronize, accept, or tolerate specific activities which were of especial benefit to popular interests. These standards and traditional ideals may have been diluted during the seventeenth century, but they certainly did not disappear. Many communities, it seems, preserved into the eighteenth century an accepted fabric of traditional rights and customs - the custom of gleaning in the fields, the right to gather fuel, the tradition of a rural feast which assumed the squire's patronage, the right to solicit (and obtain) donations on some annual holiday, the custom of sporting in a field at certain times of the year - a fabric of popular privileges which was sanctioned (as the people usually claimed) by usage "from time immemorial" and upheld through the value system of an oral tradition.

The language of custom and privilege is a recurring feature in contemporary sources. It was reported that on the Shrove Tuesday of 1636 at Penkridge, Staffordshire "the apprentices, <sup>and</sup> ~~the~~ servants, and young boyes of the town ... were sporting themselves according to the accustomed manner and liberty of that day".<sup>1</sup> At Randwick, Gloucestershire the people justified their annual revel by pleading "the prescriptive right of ancient custom for the licence of the day".<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Staffordshire R.O., Quarter Sessions Rolls, Epiphany 1636, No. 19. I am indebted to Mr. Farr of the Warwickshire R.O. for this reference.

<sup>2</sup> Rudder, History of Gloucestershire, p. 619.

When the SPCA was lobbying for the suppression of Stamford's bull-running in 1830, the magistrates expressed a reluctance to interfere, "alleging that the populace looked to it as a privilege which they had a right to claim, - as a privilege which had been granted them for many centuries, - as a privilege which could not now be refused to them without very serious disturbances."<sup>1</sup>

They regarded it as a "lawful ancient custom" which - though it could not be validated by a legal document - was sanctioned by the usage of (it was claimed) some 600 years. A similar view was taken of some of the Shrovetide football matches. Moreover, as we have already argued, there are many indications that such customs remained relatively unchallenged during the earlier eighteenth century; the gentry accepted them as legitimate, or at least harmless, traditional practices, and few were seriously inclined to question their continuance.

Among the customs which helped to support recreational life were those which provided that a specific field in a parish was to be made available, at least during certain times of the year, for sports and festivities; and the changing status of these special customs nicely illustrates the essential character of those long-term alterations which were influencing most customary rights. In many places the village green would have been the normal location

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<sup>1</sup> Voice of Humanity, I, 1830-31, p. 72.

for outdoor recreations, but in other communities the customary playground existed as a result of different circumstances. A case which was heard in the King's Bench in 1665 dealt with a disputed field of just this kind: in answer to the charge of trespassing in the plaintiff's close (in order to dance there), the defendant pleaded "that all the inhabitants of the vill, time out of memory, etc. had used to dance there at all times of the year at their own free will, for their recreation", and consequently were justified in continuing to do so.<sup>1</sup> It was expected that the privilege claimed would be recognized and accepted by everyone in the community. A document which survives from Great Tey in Essex provides a more detailed illustration of the use of this sort of field and the norms which authorized its existence. At the Quarter Sessions of January 1728 several parishioners were indicted by a copyhold tenant, John Lay, for breaking into his close to play some games and thereby destroying his oats. The defendants, pleading not guilty, claimed that Lay had only been admitted to the feeding and pasturage of the close and had no right to cultivate the land. The core of their case was that

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<sup>1</sup> "Abbot v. Weekly", English Reports, LXXXIII, p. 357. Judgment was given for the defendant.

The Close of Land here mentioned is a Common playing place and has been used as Such out of mind where the memory of man hath not been the contrary and hath been always used on particular days of Rejoyceing for the making of bonfires therein. The young people of Tey and the neighbouring parishes have been known to play at football and other games there constantly from time to time and particularly on every Trinity Monday which is the Time of the fair at Tey - and we prove this for upwards of 70 years and the old wittnesses who prove the Same which Boys say they have heard their fathers say they did play there and make Bonfires and no where else in the said Town....<sup>1</sup>

Similarly, in an action argued in the Court of Common Pleas in 1795 the defendants were charged with breaking into the plaintiff's close at Steeple Bumpstead in Essex and "playing there ... at a certain game called cricket, and other games, sports, and pastimes". One defendant pleaded

'That there now is and from time whereof, etc. hath been a certain antient and laudable custom used and approved of in the said parish ... that all the inhabitants ... have used and been accustomed to have, and of right ought to have had, and still of right ought to have the liberty and privilege of exercising and playing at all kinds of lawful games, sports and pastimes, in and upon the said close ... at all seasonable times of the year at their free will and pleasure....'<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Essex R.O., D/DBm T5B, document no. 84.

<sup>2</sup> "Fitch v. Rawling, Fitch and Chatteris", English Reports, CXXVI, pp. 614-17; see also Chelmsford Chronicle, 13 February 1795.

There are numerous references to such playing grounds. At Dorrington, Lincolnshire a piece of land called the "Play Garths" had been "left by an inhabitant for the young men and women of the village to play in" and was still being used in the early nineteenth century for dancing, "foot-ball, wrestling, and other athletic exercised".<sup>1</sup> Camping, the East Anglian version of football, was often played in a field specifically known as a "camping close"; this in fact was the name of the playing field in Steeple Bumpstead. A camping close seems to have been a familiar feature in many villages of East Anglia. One was still being used for recreations at Landbeach, Cambridgeshire in 1727 and at Burgh Castle, Suffolk during the early nineteenth century.<sup>2</sup> And at some time or other many other parishes had a camping close: Shepreth in Cambridgeshire; Buxhall, Fressingfield, Ashfield, Needham Market, and Harleston in Suffolk; Elsing, Hevingham, Mattishall, Denver, Garboldisham, and Swaffham in Norfolk.<sup>3</sup> At least two Bedfordshire parishes, Felmersham and Wyboston, had a field known as a "football close".<sup>4</sup> But in all these cases it is not known whether or not the fields were still being

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<sup>1</sup> Hone, Year Book, col. 984.

<sup>2</sup> William K. Clay, "A History of the Parish of Landbeach in the County of Cambridge", Publications of the Cambridge Antiquarian Society, VI, 1861, p. 60; and William A. Dutt, Highways and Byways in East Anglia (London, 1901), pp. 151-52.

<sup>3</sup> East Anglian, New Series, VIII, 1899-1900, p. 128; W. A. Copinger, History of the Parish of Buxhall in the County of Suffolk (London, 1902), p. 194n; and Charles Chandler, "On the Significance of some East Anglian Field-Names", Norfolk Archaeology, XI, 1892, p. 149.

<sup>4</sup> Bedfordshire R.O., GA. 1341 (Felmersham), X.202/193 and X.202/201 (Wyboston), all references from the mid seventeenth century.

used for recreational purposes during the eighteenth century.

It is evident that many of these customary rights were being undermined by the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Indeed, some of them may have been terminated during the seventeenth century: the camping close at Milton, Cambridgeshire, for instance, had been annexed to the rectory in 1653.<sup>1</sup> In individual cases the particular circumstances behind the loss of such rights are often obscure, but the long-term trend is reasonably clear. As economic changes accelerated, and as the market economy established a firmer grip on social thinking and behaviour, many customary practices came to be ignored or abrogated, with the result that the recreations they supported, their defences weakened, were increasingly restrained or forced into disuse. The Great Tey case of 1728 throws some light on how such a conflict might develop. The tenant of the playing field had apparently tried to dispense with the customary restrictions which were imposed on him by turning the close into arable, presumably because it was more profitable to do so - the defendants alleged that he "did break up and sow the said Close with oates ... purely (as he said) to make the Land his own and hinder the publick Rejoyceings there." They went on to offer

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<sup>1</sup> William K. Clay, "A History of the Parish of Milton in the County of Cambridge", Transactions of the Cambridge Antiquarian Society, XI, 1869, p. 25.

their version of the details of the dispute:

The time the Defendants Entered in to the said Close or playing place was on his present Majestyes proclamatation, at Gunpower or Treason, and at his said Majestyes Coronation, at all which times Bonfires were then made as usually have been for these ages past. The said Defendants and others of the parishioners of Tey aforesaid told the said Lay that he must not sow or break up the ground for it was a Common playing place and if he did that they would notwithstanding play there. All this was told him before he sowed the ground and the Defendants accordingly did play when the oats were in the Grass and made Bonfires at the times aforesaid which indeed spoiled part of them, there being but very few....

The former Tenants of the Close were so farr from pretending a right or to hinder the Youths playing and making Bonfires at publick Rejoyceings that John Hills a Tenant or occupier thereof on a day when the youth were going to play there (The Grass being pretty good he desired them to go into another of his fields and play there and spare the Close or playing place and gave the young men then present a large quantity of strong beer for their soe doing) and they accordingly played in his other Close.

.....

It's said the Defendants threw fire brands into the next close of John Lays adjoining and burnt his Corne. But so farr from that if any were thrown it was by John Lays own Son who pulled up the said oats and threw them into the Bonfire in the said Close. N. Bene. To show how farr the Defendants intended no malice or willfull destruction of the oates they offered John Lay after he had sown the Close to play in any other of his fields if he'd give them leave on Condition he'd noe more sow the said Close....

It was claimed too that the custom enjoyed the landlord's approval:

If it be said that the Ground is the Lord of the Mannors Then it's plain the Defendants have his leave for he holds his Court on every Trinity Monday and is usually present there - and in particular the Court after Lay had sown the oats, Lay desired Sir William Holton (Deputy Lord of the Mannor) to Grant his Warrant against the Youth then playing and he refused it. The said John Lay also applied to Mr. Tuffnell one of his Majestyes Justices who was at the Court and he also denied the said Lay a Warrant.

Although Lay's efforts failed on this occasion, it seems that the playing rights were lost - we do not know how - sometime before the end of the century.<sup>1</sup>

The Great Tey document is unusual in its richness of detail. For the most part the evidence concerning the manner in which such rights might have been lost is very sparse, though what exists is suggestive. In 1724, for instance, a dispute arose between the parish clerk of White Roding, Essex and a number of other parishioners: the latter, it was said, "pretend a right or claim for their playing att football and using other sports att all times when they shall think fit in a certain close or croft of Land called Grass croft part of the Glebe belonging to the parsonage of White Rooding aforesaid." The disputants agreed to have two Justices of the Peace consider the case, and if the parishioners could not produce "some Will Deed or other instrument in Writeing whereby to manifest and legally make appear the right title and claim of the

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<sup>1</sup> Essex R.O., D/DBm T5B, document no. 84; and An Account of the Tenures, Customs, etc. of the Manor of Great Tey, in the County of Essex, in a Letter from Thomas Astle, Esq. to the Right Honourable the Earl of Leicester, President of the Society of Antiquaries (London, 1795), pp. 13-15.



said Inhabitants of White Rooding for their playing and sporting in the said croft called Grass Croft as aforewaid that then they the said Inhabitants ... should and would sink and drop all their pretensions and claim of right and title to the said Croft for ever hereafter." No title could be presented and consequently the recreational rights were abandoned.<sup>1</sup> (In most such cases strong legal proof would not have existed, and as a result the customs involved were particularly vulnerable to the challenges of property rights; their principal defence - and one which was falling out of favor - was usage "from time immemorial".) In 1746 a similar kind of dispute was carried to greater judicial heights, the Court of Common Pleas. On this occasion the defendants, who were charged with trespass, pleaded a custom for "all the inhabitants of the town of Coleshill for the time being to have and enjoy the liberty and privilege of playing at any rural sports or games in the said close every year at all times of the year at their will and pleasure"; but the Court found for the plaintiff on the grounds "that the custom as laid extending to any rural sports was too general and uncertain."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>: Essex R.O., D/P 304/1/1, a note at the end of the parish register.

<sup>2</sup> "Millechamp v. Johnson and Others", English Reports, CXXV, pp. 1133n-1134n. The county was not identified: there are two parishes named Coleshill, one in north-west Warwickshire and another bridging the Wiltshire-Berkshire border, as well as a chapelry of this name on the boundary of Buckinghamshire and Hertfordshire.

One would be inclined to suspect that in many places where such customs lapsed some measure of force, subtle or direct, may have been applied in order to effect their dissolution. It is not likely that these rights would often have been readily abandoned or indifferently neglected by the common people. Sometimes a tenant or landlord may have decided unilaterally to disregard a customary practice, and in many cases little could be done about it. At times certainly a community would have organized resistance - during the early nineteenth century, for instance, a farmer in Purton, Wiltshire attempted to incorporate into his orchard a portion of the close which served as a playground, and he was vigorously (and successfully) opposed by the villagers<sup>1</sup> - but normally such resistance must have been difficult to sustain, especially in rural parishes with an unsympathetic resident squire. Few labouring men could have afforded to carry a dispute to the courts. Perhaps many disputed rights were lost by default. Others may have been settled in the vestry or at a manorial court or in the study of a local magistrate, in many cases, we might suppose, to the advantage of the man of property.

But whatever the circumstances of conflict may have been, it is evident that these sorts of recreational rights were widely in

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<sup>1</sup> Hone, Every-Day Book, II, col. 1207; cf. Burne, ed., Shropshire Folk-Lore, p. 366.

retreat. In East Bilney, Norfolk there was a field near the church called the "camping-land", and it was said in 1830 that "though that use of it has long ago ceased, the old inhabitants well remember the time when the lads of the village regularly repaired thither, after evening service on Sundays, to play foot-ball and other games."<sup>1</sup> Similarly, it was reported in 1890 that a close known as "Butts Field" in Coggeshall, Essex "has not been used as a playground within the memory of the oldest inhabitants, yet some of them have heard their parents say that it was formerly so used."<sup>2</sup> The right of access to a field called the "Foot Ball Garth" in Harewood in the West Riding may have been lost during the same period.<sup>3</sup> In 1844 the rector of Hitcham, Suffolk was complaining of "how entirely the labourers seem to be without innocent and manly amusements.... They have no village green, or common, for active sports. Some thirty years ago, I am told, they had a right to a play-ground in a particular field, at certain seasons of the year, and were then celebrated for their foot-ball; but somehow or other, this right has been lost to them,

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Forby, The Vocabulary of East Anglia (2 vols.; London, 1830), II, 53.

<sup>2</sup> George F. Beaumont, A History of Coggeshall, in Essex (Coggeshall, 1890), p. 250.

<sup>3</sup> John Jones, The History and Antiquities of Harewood (London, 1859), p. 168.

and the field is now under the plough."<sup>1</sup> By the 1830s the "camping close" at Boxted, Essex was being leased out as an arable field and part of it served as a gravel pit.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, the loss of such customary rights seems to have been a widespread phenomenon. Commenting on public walks, the investigator of the north-east for the 1845 Inquiry into the State of Large Towns reported that "in Sunderland, as in other towns visited, a strong impression was conveyed to me that the public are deprived of varied rights which at former periods they have been accustomed to enjoy".<sup>3</sup> "It is the abolition of the old custom", thought Hitcham's parson, "that is looked upon [by the people] as a grievance almost too heavy to be borne with patience, and which is not unlikely to be stored up in the memories of the three generations of the families offended; who look upon it as an actual infringement upon the rights of the poor."<sup>4</sup>

Customary practices declined for other reasons too. Custom is particularly the mark of the small, closely-knit community, and it tends to lose its force in a larger, more mobile, and more

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<sup>1</sup> J. S. Henslow, Suggestions Towards an Enquiry into the Present Condition of the Labouring Population of Suffolk (Hadleigh, 1844), pp. 24-25.

<sup>2</sup> "Thirty-Second Report of the Charity Commissioners, Part I", Parliamentary Papers, 1837-38, XXV, p. 628.

<sup>3</sup> Parliamentary Papers, 1845, XVIII, p. 557.

<sup>4</sup> Henslow, Labouring Population of Suffolk, p. 29.

impersonal world; for here the impact of a clear-cut and rigid public opinion is considerably lessened, and the free market very much more dilutes the strength of traditional habits. In the more diversified and anonymous urban world there are, as a rule, fewer possibilities for the imposition of customs and more for the exercise of free choice - though in practice the range of choice for the labouring people may be exceedingly limited. In the course of any process of "modernization" customary practices take a severe beating. But it still must be emphasized that many customary rights were forcibly undermined (especially in the countryside), and that their dissolution was often effected by men of property in order to enhance their own interests. Custom was one of the people's basic defences; it was one of the normative weapons of the weak against the strong, one of the ways in which power was disciplined and concessions enjoyed.<sup>1</sup> Custom was a constraint on the behaviour of their governors; it restricted their freedom of action (especially their freedom to dispose of property), imposed on them certain obligations, and in many cases limited their profits. In a society which was putting growing stress on the sanctity of

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<sup>1</sup> George Simmel, Conflict and the Web of Group Affiliations, transl. Kurt H. Wolff and Reinhard Bendix (New York: The Free Press, 1964), p. 95.

the individual, customary rights could easily come to be regarded as insupportable burdens.

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For the most part our discussion in this and the previous chapter has centred on the decline of recreational customs from around the mid-eighteenth century. Some of the efforts to curtail and regulate popular leisure have been examined and consideration has been given to a few of the attitudes, social circumstances, and economic changes which particularly militated against its survival. But this, of course, was not the first phase of such vigorous and determined opposition. The earliest significant expressions of hostility towards traditional recreation had emerged during the reign of Elizabeth, and they had been sustained, reinforced, and become common (though controversial) currency during the first half of the seventeenth century through the tradition of dissident puritanism.

The dissatisfaction of many puritans with the established sports and festivities had been often represented.<sup>1</sup> For these "preciser sort" of people the traditions of popular leisure were objectionable on a number of grounds, religious and secular concerns being subtly

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<sup>1</sup> See Hill, Society and Puritanism, chap. 5; Thomas G. Barnes, "County Politics and a Puritan Cause Célèbre: Somerset Churchales, 1633", Transactions of the Royal Historical Society, 5th series, IX, 1959, pp. 103-22; and Dennis Brailsford, Sport and Society: Elizabeth to Anne (London and Toronto, 1969), pp. 127-33.

compounded: they were thought to be profane and licentious - they were occasions of worldly indulgence, tempting men from a godly life; being rooted in pagan and popish practices, they were rich in the sort of ceremony and ritual which poorly suited the Protestant conscience; they frequently involved a desecration of the Sabbath and an interference with the worship of the true believers; they disrupted the peaceable order of society, diverting men from their basic social duties - hard work, thrift, personal restraint, devotion to family, a sober carriage. "Any exercise," declared Phillip Stubbes, "whiche withdraweth us from godlinesse, either upon the Sabbaoth, or any other daie els, is wicked, and to be forbidden."<sup>1</sup> The convictions and disposition of puritanism - reformist, opposed to conventional (especially primitive, mediaeval) practices, earnestly soul-searching, anxious about sin and salvation, firm on the necessity of dutifulness in one's calling - were totally incompatible with the inherent temper of recreational activities.

As one puritan minister exclaimed:

How perilous is it then to tolerate those prophane pastimes, which open the flood-gates to so much sin and wickedness, as the sad experience of all ages doth testifie? So that if I would debauch a people, and draw them from God and his worship to superstition and Idolatry, I would take this

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<sup>1</sup> Phillip Stubbes, The Anatomie of Abuses (London, 1583), f. 120.

course; I would open this gap to them, they should have Floralia and Saturnalia, they should have Wakes to prophane the Lords day, they should have May-Games, and Christmas-revels, with dancing, drinking, whoring, potting, piping, gaming, till they were made dissolute, and fit to receive any superstition, and easily drawn to bee of any, or of no religion....<sup>1</sup>

Similarly, Richard Baxter spoke out against those godless men - "Voluptuous Youths", he called them - "that run after Wakes, and May-games, and Dancings, and Revellings, and are carried by the Love of sports and pleasure, from the Love of God, and the care of their Salvation, and the Love of Holiness, and the Love of their Callings; and into idleness, riotousness and disobedience to their Superiors".<sup>2</sup> And though he did not completely condemn recreation, and even admitted that it might sometimes serve a purpose, he went on to list eighteen ways in which it should be regarded as unlawful, and these could easily have been interpreted to accommodate virtually all of the diversions then in vogue.<sup>3</sup>

The use, or misuse, of recreation developed into one of the notable tension-points in early Stuart England. It became an issue of high controversy, attracting the attention of widespread political and religious debate.<sup>4</sup> Opposing the convictions of the "preciser

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas Hall, Funebria Florae, The Downfall of May-Games (London, 3rd edn., 1661), p. 13.

<sup>2</sup> Baxter, Christian Directory, Book I, p. 390.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., Book I, pp. 387-88.

<sup>4</sup> Brailsford, Sport and Society, pp. 99-108.



sort" were the forces of conservatism - the court, Land, the church hierarchy, aristocratic values, probably the bulk of the poor. The reissue of the King's Book of Sports in 1633 (it was first published in 1618) was a sharp rebuff to puritan sensibilities, which it alluded to unsympathetically. It declared "that no lawful recreation shall be barred to our good people, which shall not tend to the breach of our aforesaid laws and canons of our Church". It sanctioned certain sports on Sundays after divine service and approved the custom of holding parish feasts. "... as for our good people's lawful recreation, our pleasure likewise is, that after the end of divine service our good people be not disturbed, letted or discouraged from any lawful recreation, such as dancing, either men or women; archery for men, leaping, vaulting, or any other such harmless recreation, nor from having of May-games, Whitsun-ales, and Morris-dances; and the setting up of May-poles and other sports therewith used: so as the same be had in due and convenient time, without impediment or neglect of divine service". As for wakes (and this was an addition in the 1633 declaration), "our express will and pleasure is, that these Feasts, with others, shall be observed, and that our Justices of the Peace, in their several divisions, shall look to it, both that all disorders there may be prevented or punished, and that all neighbourhood and freedom, with manlike and lawful exercises be used: and we further command all Justices of Assize in their several circuits to see

that no man do trouble or molest any of our loyal and dutiful people, in or for their lawful recreations, having first done their duty to God, and continuing in obedience to us and our laws".<sup>1</sup> The declaration was intended by Laud as one tactical move in the strategy to homogenize religious practice within the Established Church. His plan, according to one scholar, was that the royal order "should serve as a precise definition of those Sunday activities acceptable to the duly constituted ecclesiastical authority. Upon this foundation, he could build the structure of uniform practice in such matters throughout the kingdom."<sup>2</sup>

The puritans were not impressed. In attentiveness to the need for reform, complacency with regard to decadent customs, was bad enough; but outright, official approbation for such primitive remnants, proclaimed to the godly (and the ungodly) from the pulpits of the nation, was much more than could be tolerated. To many puritans it was a case of sin being licensed from on high. The Book of Sports, as Christopher Hill has remarked, "must have seemed profoundly, satanically wicked to Puritans, and to many of the industrious sort of people, just because [it] ... appealed to all that was unregenerate, popish and backward-looking in man, to all

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<sup>1</sup> "The King's Majesty's declaration to his subjects concerning lawful sports to be used", is reprinted in S. R. Gardiner, The Constitutional Documents of the Puritan Revolution 1625-1660 (Oxford, 3rd edn., 1906), pp. 99-103. See also L. A. Govett, The King's Book of Sports (London, 1890.)

<sup>2</sup> Barnes, "Somerset Churchales", p. 119.

the bad side (from their point of view) of popular tradition, which it was the function of preaching, discipline and Sabbatarianism slowly and painfully to eradicate.... But kings and bishops, so far from joining in this civilizing process, were pandering to the very worst instincts of natural man."<sup>1</sup> The proclamation sharply exacerbated existing sensibilities and reinforced the skeptics' fears, driving some of them to a more extreme position. The social rift was widened: the policy of established authority was revealed for all to see, and it was a policy (so many thought) "to enfeeble the Church and reconcile it with Rome";<sup>2</sup> the puritan clergyman who declined to read the declaration found their positions in jeopardy - some were censured, others suspended, a few were even deprived of their livings - and tensions were further aggravated.<sup>3</sup> Recreation became an issue which divided men, forcing them to take their stand for either traditionalism or reform; and on the whole "the industrious saints tended to set themselves apart from both the ldie rich" - "the leisured classes" with their customary notions of pleasure and fashion - "and the men whom the rich supported", including most of the poor.<sup>4</sup> Popular culture and godly culture were mutually hostile, and many of the common people chafed under

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<sup>1</sup> Hill, Society and Puritanism, p. 193.

<sup>2</sup> Barnes, "Somerset Churchales", p. 121.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., pp. 119-20; and Hill, Society and Puritanism, pp. 199-202.

<sup>4</sup> Walzer, Revolution of the Saints, p. 211.

the regime which the "saints" later imposed. In Maldon, Essex one such instance of disenchantment was duly recorded (the document is undated but appears to be from the Interregnum):

John Parker of Maldon charmaker sworne upon his oath saith that he being in the Company of Wm. Barnes of this Towne Cordwayner in the harvest feild in Lallmahall ground Last harvest did here the said William Barnes utter these words following (vizt): in former tymes when the Booke of Comon prayer was read the people did usually goe out of the church to play at foote ball and to the Alehouse and their continued till they ware drunke and it ware noe matter if they ware hanged.<sup>1</sup>

To the puritan conscience this was a voice of unregeneracy, and it was a voice which was especially associated with - as the eighteenth century was to phrase it - the "profligate multitude".

Our concern, however, is not so much with the puritan roots of "reformist" attitudes - though it is important to appreciate this background - as with the status of these sentiments, and the practical influence they exercised, after the Restoration. It is important, in other words, to assess the actual extent of popular leisure following the puritan onslaught and the degree to which it was tolerated during the several generations after 1660. Was the Restoration really accompanied by a full-scale revival of recreational customs? Or did the more rigorous spirit of puritanism continue to flourish, thereby imposing on social behaviour significant restraints? Were popular diversions still being condemned and strictly regulated - or was there a general inclination to leave them alone?

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<sup>1</sup> Essex R.O., D/B 3/3/149/7.

We cannot be at all certain of the extent to which popular recreation was rehabilitated after 1660. Clearly there was a powerful reassertion of traditionalism - tales of resurrected maypoles and renewed merrymaking have been frequently related;<sup>1</sup> but we have no firm idea of how typical such incidents were, or in what ways (if any) the revived customs differed from the old. Some recreations may not have regained all of their former vigour. Traditions revived are often more tenuously rooted than those which continue uninterrupted; although the attempt is usually made, the status ante bellum can never be fully restored. Writing of the traditional observances of Midsummer Eve, especially the omens associated with that day, John Aubrey claimed that "the Civil warres comeing on have putt all these rites, or customes quite out [of] fashion. Warres doe not only extinguish Religion and Lawes: but Superstition: and no suffimen is a greater fugator of Phantosmes, than gunpowder."<sup>2</sup> Some customs may have been so seriously weakened during the years before 1660 that they could not be brought to life again: churchales, for instance, appear to have dwindled away after the Restoration. But whatever changes may have been effected by this period of crisis, the evidence already examined (in chapters I and II) obliges us to conclude that, despite the years of conflict

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<sup>1</sup> See for instance Hill, Society and Puritanism, p. 186.

<sup>2</sup> Aubrey, Remaines, p. 26.

and disruption, a considerable abundance of sports, pastimes and festivities were actively retained during the century after the Interregnum. A few traditions may have been enfeebled, but on the whole it is improbable that there was any fundamental break in recreational practice as a result of the revolutionary experience.<sup>1</sup>

What, then, of the attitudes toward popular recreation during the later seventeenth and earlier eighteenth centuries? Did the puritan hostility, or a sentiment akin to it, survive beyond 1660? Or was it overwhelmed by a mood of easygoing permissiveness?

We have already emphasized the remarkably conservative sentiments, the paternalistic norms and patterns of behaviour, which are evident in the culture of the first half of the eighteenth century; many gentlemen, with their respect for antiquity, were favorably disposed to tradition, to ritual and ceremony (especially when the ceremony reinforced their own authority), to robust and manly sports,<sup>2</sup> to

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<sup>1</sup> Dennis Brailsford has contended that "Men's opportunities for recreation were probably curtailed rather than extended between 1660 and 1714", but like many of this author's observations on social behaviour, the claim is in no way substantiated. (Sport and Society, p. 252.)

<sup>2</sup> The treatise on wrestling by Sir Thomas Parkyns (The Inn-Play; or, Cornish-Hugg Wrestler), a Nottinghamshire Landowner, is an exemplary expression of this sentiment. Similarly, a letter to Parkyns by William Tunstall declared that "had our Ancestors been suffer'd to debase themselves with the Fashions, the Cringes, and Buffooneries of their Neighbours, and to lay aside their Exercises, of Running, Foot-Ball, and Wrestling; I dare not answer but They too, might have been twenty Years in reducing France to a Necessity of making that Peace, which they accomplish'd in One." (Ibid., 1727 edn., p. 4.) The military value of active exercises had been emphasized in the Book of Sports. A relatively late defence of the traditional, "manly" sports may be found in A. Jones, The Art of Playing at Skittles; or, the Laws of Nine-Pins displayed (London, 1773), pp. 9-11.

festive indulgences (as long as they were not too disorderly or expensive), to old, time-honoured customs - and they were little inclined to meddle with the people's affairs on the grounds of religion or morality. Old-fashioned paternalism included a large dose of tolerance - tolerance, of course, within certain well understood limits -, and as J. H. Plumb has recently reminded us, "Patriarchalism remained a powerful feature in English social attitudes" after the Restoration.<sup>1</sup> A defence of the Book of Sports, published in 1708, was just one expression of this hardy strain of Tory traditionalism, vehemently anti-puritan in temper:

... from that time [the death of Charles I] to this, we have been loaded with the pretended Statutes of Reformation; Laws, which if they were to be strictly executed, a Man must not be allow'd to drink a Pot of Ale, or take a Walk in the Fields, or play at Cudgels, or go to the Morrice Dancers, or any such innocent things on the Sabbath Day. But, Thanks be to God, the Awe of these things, which by the Policy of our Puritanical Invaders, was impressed on the Minds of Our People, begins to wear off again; and were we but once rid of some of our pretended Zealots for good Manners, whose Pretences have still made too much Impression, even in our Days; We might have some Hopes that those Days of Liberty might be restor'd....<sup>2</sup>

But the puritan outlook was by no means banished. Restoration and eighteenth century dissent helped to keep alive at least some of

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<sup>1</sup> J. H. Plumb, "Plantation Power", New York Review of Books, XIV, No. 4, 26 February 1970, p. 16.

<sup>2</sup> A Briefe Defence of the severall Declarations of King James the First and King Charles the First, Concerning Lawfull Recreations on Sundays (n.p., 1708), p. 24 (a copy is held in the Bod. Lib.).

the old belief, including its antagonism towards "idle customs" - "Lord ever keep me in good and sober Company," wrote a Lancashire nonconformist in his diary for 26 May 1738, "and ever give Grace and Strength to watch and guard against mad Frolicks, foolish sports, unseasonable and dishonourable Diversions, and wicked and sinful Irregularities" (he had been to the races that afternoon)<sup>1</sup> - and in the mid eighteenth century Methodism helped to reinvigorate this tradition of "ethical rigorism".<sup>2</sup> We have also stressed the strength and prevalence of those sentiments which favored a rigorous labour discipline, and these were probably of greater significance (though the two outlooks were often closely related). Many of the commentators on social and economic issues, and others as well, were keenly opposed to the habits of popular leisure; their concern for economic growth allowed slight sympathy for activities not obviously productive. To them what was economically dysfunctional could only be deplored, and theirs was a view which was acquiring appreciating support.

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<sup>1</sup> Diary of Richard Kay, p. 23. In a similar spirit the Bedford St. Peter's Moravian Church declared in 1754 that "It is very unbecoming Brethren and Sisters to keep or go to the Town Feasts, because it is an idle Custom received from the Fathers, and tho' manag'd in the best Manner, very like rioting and Drunkenness, and to stay at home for that on Sundays or any day, cannot be reconciled with Brethren and Sisters. They ought to be admonish'd about it, and by all means to abstain from that worldly Practice." (Bedforshire R.O., M.O. 34, p. 16, "Conference Book" for 1751-1761.)

<sup>2</sup> John A. Newton, Methodism and the Puritans (Friends of Dr. Williams's Library, Eighteenth Lecture, 1964), pp. 16-17.



These, in fact, were the two dominant types of social outlook, and both traditions were vigorously alive around the beginning of the century; they offered competing standards for assessing social behaviour and they represented opposing models of the desirable society - the one essentially backward-looking, the other energetically "progressive". The century after the Restoration can be seen as a period of transition in a specific sense: during these years the two principal traditions existed side by side as the crucial ingredients in a cultural admixture, and it was not until the second half of the eighteenth century that the victory of one tradition, and the disintegration of the other, can be clearly discerned. It is important to appreciate the resilience of the conservative tradition, especially the habit of paternalism, and to recognize its continuing hold on social attitudes, for there is a danger that its prevalence and power may be underestimated: historians are sometimes inclined to ring the death knell of decaying traditions long before their actual expiry. In the early 1700s many men were still intensely suspicious of "enthusiasm", of pleas for reform, of moral earnestness, and they reserved their favor for moderation, stability, and a cautious worldliness. In contrast to the earlier and later periods, the voice of reform was relatively muted. Sabbatarian sentiments, for instance, appear to have subsided during these years; certainly they were considerably less intense than they had been before 1660,

or were to be from the later eighteenth century.<sup>1</sup> Writing of Sunday observance, Edmund Gibson, Bishop of London, opined that "they who on all other days are confin'd to hard Labour, or are otherwise oblig'd to a close attendance on their worldly Affairs, must be allow'd in some measure to consider this as a Day of Ease and Relaxation from Thought and Labour, as well as a Day of Devotion; provided it be in a way that is innocent and inoffensive, and that the publick Offices of Religion be duly attended".<sup>2</sup>

Although much of the puritan doctrine survived, especially the concern for industriousness, it was partly submerged by the resurgence of traditionalism; many of the puritan beliefs were battered, diluted, and placed very much on the defensive. A definite leniency towards popular customs and practices became fashionable,<sup>3</sup> and the measured voices of social criticism were now found to speak in restrained, nicely modulated tones. "For when the Common Devotions of the Day

<sup>1</sup> See especially Whitaker, Eighteenth-Century English Sunday.

<sup>2</sup> Edmund Gibson, The Bishop of London's Pastoral Letter to the People of His Diocese (London, 1728), p. 46.

<sup>3</sup> There was, for example, very little official concern during the first quarter of the eighteenth century for the regulation of public houses or the activities which they supported. (S. and B. Webb, Liquor Licensing, pp. 20-21.) See also R. F. Bretherton, "Country Inns and Alehouses", in Lennard, ed., Englishmen at Rest and Play, pp. 175-80, for a discussion of the lenient licensing policy during the years 1660-1714.

are over," advised Henry Bourne with regard to the "Easter Holy Days", "there is nothing sinful in lawful Recreation."<sup>1</sup> Another writer, while supporting a respectful observance of the Sabbath, suggested that

Besides times of Rest on the Lords day, which they  Masters  ought, and are bound to allow their Servants, they should think of it, and allow them sometimes to recreate themselves: The Church hath Constituted Holy-days, and though they ought principally to be kept, by performing in them Holy and Religious Exercises, yet without doubt sports and pastimes at seasonable times may be used on these days: And Merciful Masters, if their Servants keep the Church duly, and be present at publique Prayers on Holy-days, they should allow them Liberty to Recreate themselves on these days, to use sports and pastimes.<sup>2</sup>

The recollections of the puritan revolution helped to impress upon men's minds the utility of cautiousness, of moderation, of customary practices.

The limited influence of "reformist" views can be explained in part by the fact that they had not yet conquered the culture of the countryside. Their main bases of support, the environments in which they flourished, were the urban and industrial regions. It was in these areas that the concern for labour discipline was moulded and formulated and from them that the appeals rose: John Clayton was based in Manchester, William Temple and Josiah Tucker in the

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<sup>1</sup> Bourne, Antiquitates Vulgares, p. 198.

<sup>2</sup> Nicholas Smith, A Sabbath of Rest to be kept by the Saints (London, 1675), p. 23.

commercial and manufacturing districts of the West Country; much of the sentiment for reform stemmed from London.<sup>1</sup> Most of the social criticism concerning the work force was focussed on the manufacturing people, not the agricultural labourers; disciplining the common people was thought to be especially (though not exclusively) an urban problem. John Houghton, for instance, thought that "the generality of the poor are very lazy and expensive, especially the manufacturers, as may be seen in London, Norwich, Manchester, and several other places".<sup>2</sup> This was where the emphasis was normally placed. "The Diversion of Cricket may be proper in Holiday-Time, in the Country;" thought one writer, "but upon Days when men ought to be busy, and in the Neighbourhood of a great City, it is not only improper but mischievous in a high Degree."<sup>3</sup> Rural diversions were much more readily tolerated than their counterparts in the city, especially in London:

In the Country the Plowman, the Labourer, and the Artificer, are satisfied with their Holydays at Easter, Whitsuntide, and Christmas. At the two former they enjoy their innocent Sports, such as a Cricket-Match, or a Game at Cudgels, or some other laudable Trial of Manhood, to the

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<sup>1</sup> London seems to have been ahead of most parts of the country in this respect: see Bahlman, Moral Revolution, passim; E. G. Dowdell, A Hundred Years of Quarter Sessions; The Government of Middlesex from 1660 to 1760 (Cambridge, 1932), pp. 27-33; and Radzinowicz, English Criminal Law, II, chap. 1.

<sup>2</sup> John Houghton, A Collection for the Improvement of Husbandry and Trade, ed. Richard Bradley (4 vols.; London, 1727-28), II, 283, essay of 16 April 1698.

<sup>3</sup> Gentleman's Magazine, XIII, 1743, p. 486.

Improvement of English Courage. At Christmas they partake of the good Cheer of that Season, and return satisfy'd to their Labour: But in this Town London, Diversions calculated to slacken the Industry of the useful Hands are innumerable: To lessen therefore <sup>1</sup> the Number of these, is the Business of the magistrate.

The concern for discipline, vigorously and repeatedly asserted, was very much a product of urban-industrial society: for it was in these areas - the industrial villages, the textile centres, the metropolis - that contractual relations particularly predominated, that class antagonisms were most acutely developed, that employment was least secure, that population density was highest, that anomie was most likely to occur; and consequently it was here that the problems of social control were most keenly sensed and most closely studied.<sup>2</sup>

In agricultural regions the impact of "reform" was relatively slight. The late seventeenth-early eighteenth century movement for the reformation of manners, for example, seems to have been concentrated in London and the larger provincial towns; in the countryside it enjoyed only fleeting and usually hesitant support, if any at all.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Public Advertiser, 2 September 1757.

<sup>2</sup> Adam Smith, with characteristic insight, touched on one of the central issues of social control. "While he remains in a country village", he said of the labouring man, "his conduct may be attended to, and he may be obliged to attend to it himself. In this situation, and in this situation only, he may have what is called a character to lose. But as soon as he comes into a great city, he is sunk in obscurity and darkness. His conduct is observed and attended to by nobody, and he is therefore very likely to neglect it himself, and to abandon himself to every sort of low profligacy and vice." (Wealth of Nations, ed. Cannan, II, 280.)

<sup>3</sup> Bahlman, Moral Revolution, passim; and Bretherton, "Country Inns and Alehouses", op. cit., p. 179.

"Country clergymen, in particular - clergymen interested in the cause of reformation like James Smith of Cambridgeshire or Samuel Wesley of Lincolnshire - felt that reforming societies, although they might serve the cause in cities, were difficult to organize in the country and relatively ineffective."<sup>1</sup> There are few indications that much was being done in rural areas to curtail Sunday sports<sup>2</sup> - it was reputed (such stories should be accepted cautiously) that Thomas Robinson, rector of Ousby, Cumberland in the early eighteenth century, was accustomed, "after Sunday afternoon prayers, to accompany the leading men of his parish to the adjoining ale-house, where each man spent a penny, and only a penny: that done, he set the younger sort to play at foot-ball, (of which he was a great promoter) and other rustical diversions"<sup>3</sup> - and numerous pieces of evidence suggest that Sunday recreations continued to be practised, if not actually condoned. In 1752, for instance, the parish of Cwston, Lincolnshire reported: "The parishioners not very regular, especially the young people as to keeping the Lord's day free from sports and diversions."<sup>4</sup> Much later a contributor to

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<sup>1</sup> Bahlman, Moral Revolution, pp. 97-98.

<sup>2</sup> See for instance Whitaker, Eighteenth-Century English Sunday, pp. 33-34.

<sup>3</sup> William Hutchinson, The History of the County of Cumberland (2 vols.; Carlisle, 1794), I, 224n.

<sup>4</sup> Joan Varley, "An Archidiaconal Visitation of Stow, 1752", Reports and Papers of the Lincolnshire Architectural and Archaeological Society, New series, III, 1948, p. 100.

Hone's Every-Day Book recalled that "When a boy, football was commonly played on a Sunday morning, before church time, in a village in the West of England, and the church-piece was the ground chosen for it."<sup>1</sup> Many country gentlemen were still sympathetically disposed to established customs and were not inclined to judge them overly nicely on "moral" grounds; they were concerned to preserve their reputations according to traditional standards, and they were willing for the most part to accede to the conventional expectations concerning the customs of their localities and their own role responsibilities. Toryism remained strong, and it staved off, though only temporarily, the pressures for moral improvement, most of which were city-based. Christopher Hill has pointed to and highlighted this contrast of outlooks:

After 1660 there is an almost self-conscious anti-Puritanism in the Anglican-dominated countryside. Great propaganda emphasis was laid on the alleged kill-joy activities of the major-general and Puritans generally during the interregnum.... As power was monopolized by the great landed magnates and the monied interest, so the lesser gentry found themselves isolated in their little islands of rural sovereignty. They became more and more resentful, nostalgic, Tory.

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<sup>1</sup> Hone, Every-Day Book, II, col. 374. There are other indications of the customary character of Sunday recreation: see for instance Gentleman's Magazine, LXXXIX, part i, 1819, p. 110, and XCII, part i, 1822, p. 223; and Wesleyan Methodist Magazine, 3rd series, V, 1826, pp. 73-74. As late as the early 1830s it was being claimed by one clergyman that some magistrates, "on the strength of the 'Book of Sports,' refuse to interfere with games, except such as are unlawful, on the Sunday." (Report from the Select Committee on the Observance of the Sabbath Day", Parliamentary Papers, 1831-32, VII, p. 430; evidence of J. W. Cunningham, vicar of Harrow, Middlesex.)

The almost deliberate rural paganism, cakes and ale, hunting and open-air virtues which they cultivated, were contrasted with the book-keeping sordidness and pettifogging plutocracy of London. The opposing moralities have their apotheosis in the novels of Fielding and Richardson.<sup>1</sup>

By the later eighteenth century the opposition to traditional recreation had clearly gained the upper hand. Refinement had triumphed over rusticity: the violence (or semi-violence), the "vulgarity" and "coarseness" of many customary sports, especially those of the countryside, were no longer so readily accepted; indeed, it was only during the Georgian period that most gentlemen came to regard them as brutal, gross and uncivilized. "The country affords almost as strong instances of cruelty, as town", declared a moralist in 1765, "for wrestling, single-stick, or even foot-ball, are never considered as diversions by the common people, but as attended with danger, mischief, or blood-shed."<sup>2</sup> The spirit of Addison, Steele, and their followers was gradually absorbed by the high culture, and popular and fashionable tastes became increasingly

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<sup>1</sup> Christopher Hill, Reformation to Industrial Revolution: A Social and Economic History of Britain 1530-1780 (London, 1967), p. 157. The tension between urban and rural values is a recurrent theme in Hill's Society and Puritanism: for instance (p. 191), "the puritan attack on Sunday sports should be seen as part of an attempt to impose the ethos of an urban civilization on the whole realm, especially its dark corners." See also Hill's "Puritans and 'The Dark Corners of the Land'", Transactions of the Royal Historical Society, 5th series, XIII, 1903, especially pp. 97-98.

<sup>2</sup> Village Memoirs: In a Series of Letters Between a Clergyman and his Family in the Country, and his Son in Town (London, 1705), p. 76. I am indebted to Mr. J. D. Walsh for this reference.



disassociated from each other. "Rude jollity and merriment of country feasts and fairs much less frequent now, than formerly", noted an observer in the early nineteenth century of the villages in the Lincolnshire wolds: "The refinement of manners, and a greater separation between the different ranks of masters and servants, together with the extending influence of sectarian preachers have repressed much of this old hospitality."<sup>1</sup> Upper and lower class standards for evaluating social behaviour came to have little in common - much less, certainly, than they had had around 1700 - and the customs which the people continued to honour were increasingly regarded from above as highly objectionable - primitive, barbaric, superstitious, heathenish, immoral, inconsistent with social propriety (in 1777 John Brand spoke of "the present fashionable Contempt of old Customs").<sup>2</sup>

The disposition towards traditionalism was gradually weakened by the growing concern for "improvement", a value which had many faces - refinement of manners, "rational" tastes, the cultivation of moral sensibilities, restraints imposed on some forms of personal

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<sup>1</sup> Society of Antiquaries, Edward James Willson Collection (Lincoln), XIII, p. 62.

<sup>2</sup> Brand, Popular Antiquities, p. 333.

indulgence, the streamlining of certain social and economic practices in the interest of efficiency. The gentry (and large farmers) became less and less inclined to conform to many of the older expectations concerning the conduct of their relations with the common people; the paternalistic norms (for instance, of tolerance and obligation) were losing force, and there was a waning interest in the kinds of patronage and ceremonial commitments which had previously been widely accepted. The character of this transition is suggestively reflected in a scene from Isaac Bickerstaffe's Love in a Village (1763): Justice Woodcock is a wealthy and fashion-conscious gentleman, Hodge a servant, and Hawthorn a squire of modest means and traditionalist leanings:

J. Woodcock [to Hodge] ... where have you and the rest of those rascals been? But I suppose I need not ask - You must know there is a statute, a fair for hiring servants, held upon my green today, we have it usually at this season of the year, and it never fails to put all the folks here-about out of their senses.

Hodge. Lord your honour look out, and see what a nice shew they make yonder; they had got pipers, and fiddlers, and were dancing as I com'd along for dear life - I never saw such a mortal throng in our village in all my born days again.

Hawthorn. Why I like this now, this is as it should be.

J. Woodcock. No, no, 'tis a very foolish piece of business; good for nothing but to promote idleness and the getting of bastards: but I shall take measures for preventing it another year, and I doubt whether I am not sufficiently authorized already: For by an act passed Anno undecimo Caroli primi, which impowers a justice of the peace, who is lord of the manor -

Hawthorn. Come, come, never mind the act, let me tell you this is a very proper, a very useful meeting; I want a servant or two myself, I must go see what your market affords; - and you shall go, and the girls, my little Lucy and the other young rogue, and we'll make a day on't as well as the rest.

J. Woodcock. I wish, master Hawthorn, I cou'd teach you to be a little more sedate: why won't you take pattern by me, and consider your dignity - Odds heart, I don't wonder you are not a rich man, you laugh too much ever to be rich.<sup>1</sup>

The Hawthorns of the stage and of social reality were decaying figures. With time the points of contact between popular and propertied culture were very much contracted. In 1821, for instance, a cottager from Waterbeach, Cambridgeshire was bitterly lamenting those changes which had undermined the former recreational practices: "Thirty years ago, pride, avarice, and bigotry had not destroyed the social intercourse between the sons and daughters of the farmers, and the sons and daughters of the labourers of our village."<sup>2</sup> As a result of the decline of hospitality, and the widening gaps between the social classes, some of the traditional recreational supports were withdrawn. Harvest feasts, for example, were in rapid decline, both in favor and practice, during the first half of the nineteenth century.<sup>3</sup> "The harvest home is a relic of servile customs", opined

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<sup>1</sup> Bickerstaffe, Love in a Village, Act I, scene vi.

<sup>2</sup> Denson, Peasant's Voice to Landowners, p. 17. See also Hutchinson, View of Northumberland, II, Appendix, pp. 5-6; and Richard Polwhele, ed., The Enthusiasm of Methodists and Papists Considered; by Bishop Lavington (London, 1820), p. cxxi (I am grateful to Mr. John Rule for this reference).

<sup>3</sup> Hone, Every-Day Book, II, cols. 788-89, and Year Book, cols. 1069-70 and 1172.

one observer, "and in ancient times was considered a part of the reward for customary services. The present mode of hiring labourers and servants has certainly rendered the custom unnecessary; yet it remains for the farmer to consider how far the prospect of the merry-making stimulates the exertions of the workmen."<sup>1</sup> Around the 1840s at East Burnham, Buckinghamshire it was said that "the labouring people entertained an unpleasant feeling towards the farmers, who, as they considered, disregarded their interests.... Some of the farmers even gave no 'harvest supper;' and I am afraid it must be avowed that between these classes no great friendliness subsisted."<sup>2</sup> Aids for traditional diversions and acquiescence in their practice were no longer so readily obtained. By the mid nineteenth century in Northamptonshire mumming was much less frequently observed: "in this age of refinement few only will allow their dwellings to be made the scene of this antic pastime, as the performers enter uninvited, suddenly throwing open the door, and one after the other enact their different parts."<sup>3</sup> Such

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<sup>1</sup> John Dunkin, The History and Antiquities of Bicester (London, 1816), p. 270.

<sup>2</sup> Some Account of the Hamlet of East Burnham, Co. Bucks., by a Late Resident (London, 1858), pp. 44-45.

<sup>3</sup> Anne E. Baker, Glossary of Northamptonshire Words and Phrases (2 vols.; London, 1854), II, 429; the same point was made in J. A. Giles, History of the Parish and Town of Bampton (Oxford, 1847), p. lxxv. It was said of the traditional Christmas customs that "the higher orders, unfortunately, are gradually withdrawing their sanction, so that in a few years there will scarcely be any traces left." (Sandys, Christmas Carols, p. cvii.)

forwardness was not to be tolerated, and the financial solicitations which were customarily associated with diversions of this kind were to be resisted rather than reciprocated. "If instead of giving them money when they call at their doors," suggested a Derby resident with regard to the Shrovetide customs, "people would order the police to take them up under the Vagrant Act, as I believe they can, we should soon get rid of the annual nuisance called foot-ball."<sup>1</sup> Similarly, the practices and processions of Plough Monday came to be regarded as unacceptable impositions and were increasingly met with hostility:

On the 8th inst. January 1816 a number of rude persons, calling themselves Plough Bullocks came to the house of the Rev. Mr. Brook of Tutbury, Staffordshire; and, because he refused to encourage their disorderly conduct by giving them money, they immediately proceeded to commit their usual depredations. Mr. Brook, according to the warning given them at the time, summoned the Ringleader before Sir Oswald Mosley, one of his Majesty's Justices of the Peace; who, after a severe but just reprimand, ordered him to pay costs and damages, and the sum of ten shillings to the poor of Tutbury. - Weak and ignorant people commonly suppose, that persons calling themselves Plough Bullocks have a right, on a certain day, wantonly to commit depredations upon the premises of those who refuse to give them money: but nothing can be more erroneous, or more reproachful to the laws of the county. The rude persons here referred to, who from year to year infest certain parts of the country, extorting money from the ignorant and unwary, are a great public nuisance; therefore, to suppress such disorderly and outrageous proceedings, we cannot help recommending all persons to withstand

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<sup>1</sup> Derby Mercury, 28 February 1844.

their violence, by accusing them to the magistrates. All such legal prosecutions, will obtain the sanction and encouragement, as well as the desired redress, from those in authority; and will assuredly by a public benefit to society.<sup>1</sup>

It should be noted, however, that there were still a number of gentlemen who continued to support the traditional practices, from a variety of considerations, and very much regretted their demise. Recreations were long regarded by some gentlemen as useful social tranquillizers; they encouraged cheerfulness, mollified the people's discontents, diverted their attention from political concerns, sometimes served as occasions of harmless tension-release - and contributed generally to the stability of the existing social order. It was thought that they helped to dampen down conflict and to reinforce sentiments of social well-being. This, for instance,

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<sup>1</sup> Derby Mercury, 1 February 1816. A letter in the Derby Mercury of 9 January 1817 took the same line: "The ignorant and unwary imagine that these lawless vagabonds have a legal right to pursue their disgraceful practices; who are so ignorant and infatuated, as to appeal for proof to the custom of the country, and the authority of their Almanacks!" The writer recommended that people "withhold their sanction from these disorderly ruffians, and ... summons them before the magistrates for every instance of lawless depredation". See also Howitt, Rural Life (1840 edn.), pp. 471-72; and Stamford Mercury, 20 January 1821, 14 January 1848, 15 January 1858, and 15 January 1864. The Stamford Mercury of 10 January 1840 expressed amazement at the degree of public support which was still obtained for the Haxey Hood custom in the relatively unprogressive Isle of Axholme: "to perpetuate this foolish, wicked, and utterly useless custom, the inhabitants almost to an individual provide for and invite their friends on the most extensive scale: even the farmers and respectable householders encourage it, by giving money or corn to the Boggans (Fools) who go from house to house for the purpose of begging on the two following days". Such resilience was clearly exceptional. (I am indebted to Mr. Rex Russell for some of these Lincolnshire references.)

was one of the arguments which William Windham advanced against the early efforts to outlaw bull-baiting.<sup>1</sup> Robert Slaney declared that without recreation, the common people would "become gloomy, morose, and dissatisfied, and would be ready on every opportunity to break into riot and rebellion".<sup>2</sup> "In order that the poorer classes should be happy and contented," he argued,

... it is not enough that they have adequate wages, and are thereby insured against poverty and sickness in old age. Privation of suffering is not enjoyment: that they may be cheerful at labour, they should have the reasonable hope of relaxation from toil before them, and look to a holiday occasionally for amusement. This is of the utmost consequence, not merely to the poor, but to the security of the great. The main title by which the few who are rich hold possession is, that the many who are not be contented and amused.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> "The habits long established among the people", he argued in 1802, "were the best fitted to resist the schemes of innovation; and it was among the labouring and illiterate part of the people that Jacobinical doctrines had made the smallest progress.... Out of the whole number of the disaffected, he questioned if a single bull-baiter could be found, or if a single sportsman had distinguished himself in the Corresponding Society.... The efficient part of the community for labour ought to be encouraged in their exertions, rather by furnishing them with occasional amusements, than by depriving them of one, ... for, if to poverty were to be added a privation of amusements, he knew nothing that could operate more strongly to goad the mind into desperation, and to prepare the poor for that dangerous enthusiasm which was analogous to Jacobinism". (Parliamentary History, XXXVI, pp. 833-34 and 839, debate of 24 May 1802.)

<sup>2</sup> Slaney, Rural Expenditure, p. 130.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., pp. 195-96; cf. pp. 124-28. "It is, then, the strongest interest of government and the rich, that a moderate share of amusements and relaxation should be within the reach of the poor." (Ibid., p. 130) See also Lord John Manners, A Plea for National Holy-Days (London, 1843), p. 19.

Some of the defenders of traditional sports stressed the encouragement they gave to martial qualities. Sport, it was argued, was the training ground for courage, perseverance, physical vigour, and group loyalty. This was a political concern which had often been expressed. Athletic sports, thought one writer, "are an excellent preparation for the military exercises, and render men fit to become defenders of their country."<sup>1</sup> William Windham claimed of the common people that "it is not unfair to attribute to their manly amusements much of that valour which is so conspicuous in their martial achievements by sea and land. Courage and humanity seem to grow out of their wholesome exercises."<sup>2</sup> Similarly, a correspondent approving of the Derby Shrovetide football match remarked that "I did not see a blow given, nor hear an oath uttered, and could not help anticipating what the power and spirit of these men would be who strove so hard for such an object, whenever their energy should be called forth in their country's service."<sup>3</sup>

With the full development of a capitalist society, and the consequent aggravation of class hostilities, men of conservative leanings were inclined to entertain a longing for a social order of patriarchal harmony, the sort of order which some of them associated

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<sup>1</sup> Lawrence, Treatise on Horses, II, 9; see also John Godfrey, A Treatise Upon the Useful Science of Defence (London, 1747), dedication.

<sup>2</sup> Parliamentary History, XXXV, p. 206, debate of 18 April 1800.

<sup>3</sup> Derby Mercury, 9 February 1815.



with community recreations. "It is an important consideration", wrote one parson, "whether a great means of promoting good-will between the different ranks of society, has not been wholly lost by suffering the old popular meetings [for sports and pastimes] to fall into disuse.... Old England once had its joyous holidays, when master met man, no longer as his superior, but as his fellow and brother".<sup>1</sup> This was the theme of a tract by Lord John Manners, A Plea for National Holy-Days (1843): the dominant ideal was that of the organic society, harmoniously structured on paternalist lines.<sup>2</sup> If wakes were to be properly regulated, suggested another observer, "they have a powerful tendency to do away with the want of fellow-feeling, which now subsists among the different degrees of men amongst us, and to bind all classes of the people together in one bond of Christian sympathy and love."<sup>3</sup>

But these had become very much minority views well before the mid nineteenth century. With the exception of some traditional squires, nostalgic Tories, men of the world, and of course many of the common people themselves, the decline of "rude diversions" and

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<sup>1</sup> J. A. Giles, History of Witney (London, 1852), p. 57.

<sup>2</sup> See also A Letter to Lord John Manners, M.P., on His Late Plea for National Holy-Days, by a Minister of the Holy Catholic Church (London, 1843).

<sup>3</sup> Bowstead, Village Wake, p. 9.

of "vulgar games" was usually applauded. For instance, it was reported in 1843 that "the silly Pagan custom, happily sinking into desuetude, of men's parading the streets dressed in colored rags and white external petticoats, was practised at Louth by half a dozen money-hunters on Monday last (Plough Monday)"<sup>1</sup> - and this was the kind of "progressive" outlook which was most often presented and most widely supported, at least among the people who counted. For the most part popular diversions were no longer sanctioned, and custom was being subjected to close examination. "Ancient customs are very well in their way ... but some are indeed more honoured in the breach than in the observance", as one source mildly put it.<sup>2</sup> "I know of nothing more detracting to the respectability of our town," wrote an inhabitant of Derby, "than the beastly and disgusting exhibition, absurdly called the 'Football play'.... This relic of barbarism, for it deserved not a better name, is wholly inconsistent with the intelligence and the spirit of improvement which now characterize the people of Derby".<sup>3</sup> This was a normal sentiment, only expressed here with particular vigour. "Seen at hand," confessed William Howitt, "there is a vulgarity in most popular customs that offends invariably our present

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<sup>1</sup> Stamford Mercury, 14 January 1848.

<sup>2</sup> Stamford Mercury, 15 January 1864.

<sup>3</sup> Derby and Chesterfield Reporter, 9 February 1844; on the same subject, see also a letter in the Derby Mercury, 29 February 1832.

tastes."<sup>1</sup>

It is evident as well that around the end of the eighteenth century an aggressive moral earnestness re-emerged in public life, sweeping aside much of the complacency which remained and galvanizing men for the task of moral reform. "Is it not a palpable truth," asked Henry Zouch in 1786, "that a spirit of unbounded licentiousness is gone forth, and every where pervades the land?"<sup>2</sup> "Moral" considerations rose to the forefront in public debate, imposing increasingly rigorous criteria for the assessment of every form of social behaviour. Ethical values were more vigorously injected into play activities, and it came to be assumed that "if recreation was permissible at all, it must be 'rational' and must prepare mind and body for work, instead of being an end in itself".<sup>3</sup> "Rational amusement" became a Victorian cliché, an expression of approval only for those pleasures which were patently moral and improving in intent. The new, more militant morality came to be widely accepted and powerfully promoted, and its most zealous advocates were energetic and persevering in the cause of reform.

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<sup>1</sup> Howitt, Rural Life (1838 edn.), II, 151.

<sup>2</sup> Zouch, Public Police, p. 16.

<sup>3</sup> "Work and Leisure in Industrial Society: Conference Report", Past & Present, No. 30, April 1965, p. 101, comment of B. H. Harrison.

One such activist was Denys Rolle, Esq., of Devon, whose obituary in 1797 pointed out that

As a magistrate, he was remarkably attentive to the morals of the people within his district, and successively laboured, though with great and long opposition, in suppressing village-alehouses, cock-fighting, and bull-baiting. Torrington, near which his seat stands, was a place much disgraced with these worse than savage diversions, and Mr. Rolle took extraordinary pains to correct the evil. For this evil he not only exerted his authority, as a magistrate, with great zeal and impartiality, but circulated large impressions of a pamphlet, written by himself, against such cruel amusements. In 1789 he printed an address to the nobility and gentry, circulated privately, calling for their concurrence in the great object which he had in view, of parochial reformation.<sup>1</sup>

A closer regulation of popular behaviour, an improvement in the common people's tastes and morals, a reform of their habitual vices, the instilling in them of discipline and orderliness: these were some of the principal objectives of the movement for the reformation of manners which arose in the later 1780s and matured during the following half century.<sup>2</sup> By the early years of Victoria's<sup>reign</sup> A

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<sup>1</sup> Gentleman's Magazine, LXVII, part ii, 1797, p. 1125; neither Rolle's pamphlet nor his address is to be found in the B.M. See also the interesting account of genteel doubts about the staging of a popular drama in the Monthly Magazine, VI, 1798, pp. 9-10; and E. P. Thompson, Education and Experience (Leeds University Press, Fifth Mansbridge Memorial Lecture, 1968), pp. 9-14 (which includes a lengthy quote from this letter).

<sup>2</sup> For general discussions of this movement, see the Appendix in S. and B. Webb, Liquor Licensing; Quinlan, Victorian Prelude; and Radzinowicz, English Criminal Law, III, chaps. 6-8. David Ogg has written of the reign of Charles II that "in no other period has there been such solicitude for the morality of the lower classes, or such determination to penalize their vices", but this honour is almost certainly misplaced: the period c.1790-1850 is much more deserving of the distinction. (England in the Reigns of James II and William III [Oxford, 1957], p. 530.)

there must have been few localities which were not experiencing the efforts of parson or squire, employer or chapel, philanthropic lady or temperance reformer, Bible society or charitable foundation, to civilize the labouring people and to enlighten them as to their real interests. A memorandum of a Sunday School teacher in Fulletby, Lincolnshire in 1846 is just one illustration of a movement which had penetrated virtually all corners of the land, though not always without opposition: before the Sunday school was established (around 1826), he said,

... the sabbath day in our village was awfully desecrated. The young men and youths, and some of the married men too, usually spent the chief part of the day in playing games of chance, football, nurspell, etc. by which the rising generation were allured to sabbath-breaking; and were brought under the demoralizing influence of wicked pursuits, and evil company. Under the counteracting influence of the Sunday School a change for the better soon begun to manifest itself; and though there was still much sabbath-breaking and immorality among our youth, to lament over, gambling on the Sabbath day was almost abolished until the present year, when it has been revived by the farm servants in the village; a set of raw, thoughtless, youths who have never had the moral training of a Sunday School. The revival of these pastimes on the Sabbath has already had its influence upon our Sunday school; and has given me considerable pain, and not a little trouble. Sometimes a few of the elder boys will come in late - hurried - and confused, and on inquiring the cause I have ascertained that a game of football was being played somewhere in the parish and thus some have been tempted to impinge upon the hours allotted to school, and others who ought to be present to play truant. The evil is further manifested by their inattention; their thoughts are so full of play that for the rest of the time it is difficult to engage their attention,

or to prevent them from whispering to each other; and on leaving school they have eagerly ran off to the forbidden pastime, and I have only mourned to see the seed I have been attempting to sow fall by the way side, to be trodden underfoot, or devoured by the fowls of the air.<sup>1</sup>

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"A mighty revolution has taken place in the sports and pastimes of the common people", wrote William Howitt at the beginning of Victoria's reign.<sup>2</sup> During the previous two centuries the character of popular leisure had been very substantially overhauled, and most of these remarkable changes had occurred, or at least been significantly accelerated, since the accession of George III. Virtually all contemporaries were in agreement concerning the basic facts of this trend, even when their assessments differed sharply. "All persons say how differently this season [Christmas] was observed in their fathers' days," wrote Robert Southey in 1807, "and speak of old ceremonies and old festivities as things which are obsolete."<sup>3</sup> "The few remnants of our old Sports and Pastimes are rapidly disappearing," observed an Oxfordshire parson, "and this is, in my opinion, a change much to be

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<sup>1</sup> Lincolnshire R.O., "Fulletby Sunday School, The Teacher's Diary 1846", Winn. 1/2, pp. 2-3.

<sup>2</sup> Howitt, Rural Life (1840 edn), p. 515.

<sup>3</sup> Robert Southey, Letters from England; by Don Manuel Alvarez Espriella (3 vols.; London, 1807), III, 102-03.

lamented."<sup>1</sup> "In my own recollection," said Howitt, "the appearance of morris-dancers, guisers, plough-bullocks, and Christmas carollers, has become more and more rare, and to find them we must go into the retired hamlets of Staffordshire, and the dales of Yorkshire and Lancashire."<sup>2</sup>

The decline of popular recreation, it is clear, was intimately associated with the gradual breakdown of what we now call "traditional society". With the rise of a market economy, and the accompanying development of new normative standards and material conditions for the conduct of social relations, the foundations of many traditional practices were relentlessly swept away, leaving a vacuum which would be only gradually reoccupied, and then of necessity by novel or radically revamped forms of diversion. Traditional recreation was rooted in a social system which was predominantly agrarian, strongly parochial in its orientations, marked by a deep sense of corporate identity; it could not be comfortably absorbed into a society which was urban-centred, governed by contractual relations, biased towards individualism, increasingly moulding its culture in a manner appropriate to the requirements of industrial production. In the new world of congested cities, factory discipline, and free enterprise, recreational

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<sup>1</sup> Giles, History of Witney, p. 57.

<sup>2</sup> Howitt, Rural Life (1840 edn), p. 422; cf. p. 526. The compilations of William Hone are full of references to the decline of customary diversions.

life had to be reconstructed - shaped to accord with the novel conditions of non-agrarian, capitalistic society - and the reconstruction was only gradually accomplished over a period of several generations. One indication of the very limited supply of alternative (and attractive) forms of diversion during the nineteenth century is the overwhelming importance of the role of the public house as a recreational centre for the common people. "At present," remarked Robert Slaney in 1833, "the poor workman in the large manufacturing town, was actually forced into the public house, there being no other place for him to amuse himself in."<sup>1</sup> And by this time conditions in the countryside were often not much better. In the short run, then, in this period of exceptionally acute social change, the dislocation of recreational life was keenly felt and only marginally alleviated. The low point of this particular process of social depression was roughly coincident with the second quarter of the nineteenth century: much of the traditional culture had disintegrated, and the new possibilities were only beginning to emerge. The reshaping of popular leisure was largely a phenomenon of the period after 1850.

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<sup>1</sup> Parliamentary Debates, 3rd series, XV, p. 1054, debate of 21 February 1833.



APPENDIX

The Reform Movement Against Cruelty to Animals

Although the Society for the Suppression of Vice (founded in 1802) had been incidentally concerned with attacking cruelty to animals,<sup>1</sup> it was only in the second quarter of the century that the cause came to be represented by a distinctive reform movement. The formation of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals in 1824, which was to become the dominant society,<sup>2</sup> along with the South Staffordshire Association for the Suppression of Bull-baiting,<sup>3</sup> initiated the movement, though its first decade

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<sup>1</sup> Brown, Fathers of the Victorians, pp. 407-08; and Quinlan, Victorian Prelude, p. 206.

<sup>2</sup> The main sources for the early history of the RSPCA, all of which are held in the Society's London offices, are the following: MS. Minute Book for 1824-32; MS. Minute Books Nos. 1-4 for 1832-42; and the printed Annual Reports for 1832-43. I am indebted to the Society for permission to consult its early records and to several of its officers, especially Mr. T. Richardson, for their personal attentiveness. Further evidence on the Society may be found in Lewis Gompertz, Fragments in Defence of Animals (London, 1852), pp. 173-80 and 273-77.

<sup>3</sup> Frederick W. Hackwood, A History of West Bromwich (Birmingham, 1895), p. 115; and John F. Ede, History of Wednesbury (Wednesbury, 1962), p. 155. Later references indicate that this, or some similar, organization continued to be active in the West Midlands: in 1828 the SPCA was in correspondence with a group known as the "Stafford Association to Prevent Bull-baiting" (MS. Minute Book for 1824-32, p. 59); in 1831 the Association for Promoting Rational Humanity Towards the Animal Creation received a donation from the "South Staffordshire Anti-Bull-baiting Association" (1831 Prospectus, p. 8, bound with the British Museum's copy of the issues of the Voice of Humanity); and in 1835 the Animals' Friend Society arranged some prosecutions in conjunction with the "West Bromwich Association for the Suppression of Bull-baiting" (Animals' Friend, No. 4, 1836, p. 4).

was very much one of insecurity, disorder and internal dissension. The SPCA was in frequent financial difficulties; its concentration on the prosecution of offenders and its use of paid informers was under attack from another society, the Association for Promoting Rational Humanity Towards the Animal Creation (organized by a group of secessionists from the SPCA), which enjoyed a brief existence from 1830 or 1831 until 1833;<sup>1</sup> and in 1832 one of the SPCA's prominent members, Lewis Gompertz, left the organization after a quarrel with his associates and set up his own group, the Animals' Friend Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals.<sup>2</sup> The societies enjoyed only partial public favor, for they were thought by many observers to be guilty of meddlesome and fanatical behaviour. The movement was also unsettled by the activities of fraudulent (or at least dubious) societies, whose promoters' main interest was the financial return forthcoming from zealous and

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<sup>1</sup> The evidence relating to the Association is to be found in the Voice of Humanity; for the Communication and Discussion of all Subjects Relative to the Conduct of Man Towards the Inferior Animal Creation, 3 vols.; 1830-33. See also the long article on "The Voice of Humanity" in the Bristol Mercury, 20 March 1832. The establishment of the Association itself seems to have succeeded the founding of the journal: during its first year the Voice of Humanity was sympathetically disposed to the SPCA.

<sup>2</sup> For details on the Animals' Friend Society, see the Animals' Friend, Nos. 1-9, 1833-41; and Gompertz, Fragments in Defence of Animals. The issues of the Animals' Friend for 1842-46 are missing from the British Museum, though some of their articles were reprinted in Gompertz's Fragments.

gullible animal lovers.<sup>1</sup>

The SPCA began to establish itself more securely after the early 1830s: by 1835 it had an energetic and full-time Secretary; in 1836 a timely legacy of £1000 allowed it to consolidate its position and expand its programme (and in particular to intensify its campaign against the Stamford bull-running);<sup>2</sup> and with time its supporters grew in numbers and its income became more substantial, especially after royal patronage was granted in 1839-40. Thereafter it enjoyed relative security. Faced with such a prospering competitor - which was accused, and not unjustly, with paying "extreme and intrusive adulation ... to nobility and rank"<sup>3</sup> - the Animals' Friend Society quickly collapsed, and by the mid 1840s

<sup>1</sup> See for instance the 15th Annual Report of the RSPCA, 1841, p. 183; and Gompertz, Fragments, pp. 177-78. One of these questionable characters was a man named Charles Wheeler, who served briefly as an inspector for the SPCA during its first few years; later he appeared periodically in various incidents connected with the reform movement, on most occasions in an incriminating light - soliciting money on false pretences, misrepresenting one of the other societies, collecting funds for imaginary projects. (SPCA MS. Minute Book No. 1, pp. 62 and 76-78; 6th Annual Report of the SPCA, 1832, pp. 18-20; 17th Annual Report of the RSPCA, 1843, p. 118; and Animals' Friend, No. 3, 1835, p. 19, and No. 4, 1836, p. 22.) In the 1830s Wheeler was running a concern known as the "Ladies Society for the Suppression of Cruelty to Animals". (Voice of Humanity, III, 1832-33, p. 116; Animals' Friend, No. 1, 1833, p. 9; and Wolverhampton Chronicle, 3 August 1836.)

<sup>2</sup> SPCA MS. Minute Book No. 2, pp. 92-93; and 11th Annual Report of the SPCA, 1837, p. 25.

<sup>3</sup> Gompertz, Fragments, p. 276

it was no longer issuing any publications or otherwise exercising influence.<sup>1</sup>

Blood sports occupied only a portion, and not the major portion, of the societies' energies. They were, however, partly responsible for some of the developments discussed in chapter III. Both the SPCA and the Animals' Friend Society applied pressure in favor of an effective law on blood sports, and their influence may have had some weight in the enactment of the 1835 Cruelty to Animals Act;<sup>2</sup> the SPCA was a major force behind the suppression of the Stamford bull-running and in the early 1840s it was active in prosecuting cockfighters; and the Animals' Friend Society was actively involved in the elimination of bull-baiting from the West Midlands. But on the whole it seems that they played only a secondary role in the decline of blood sports (and especially bull-baiting), for by the time they were actively established only the remnants of these diversions were still extant, and though pressure and publicity from London may have hastened their final demise, in the places where they did survive local hostility and intervention was probably of equal, if not greater, importance.

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., pp. 178-80<sup>273</sup>, and 276; and Animals' Friend, No. 9, 1841, p. 29.

<sup>2</sup> Gompertz, Fragments, p. 277.

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### A Note on the Sources

The most significant bibliographical feature about this enquiry is the lack of a well-defined body of essential sources. No primary sources are conspicuously of central importance, yet a great variety of material is relevant, or potentially relevant. There is no hard core of source material, no nucleus to which the scrappy and less substantial evidence can be related. Consequently, one is obliged to rely almost entirely on documentary fragments, drawn from a large number of scattered sources.

There are particular difficulties in making effective use of manuscript sources. The manuscript references to popular recreations are usually deeply imbedded in sources which bear largely on other topics - in parish records, in Quarter Sessions papers, in personal and estate papers, in national records concerned with public order - and normally they can only be extracted from these collections with the aid of good subject indexes. Without such indexes much time and energy would be consumed in order to turn up a mere handful of references. The majority of the manuscript sources cited in the text have been located through a search of some of these indexes, most of them in County Record Offices. Local materials have been consulted in the Record Offices of the following counties:  
Bedfordshire, Berkshire, Buckinghamshire, Cambridgeshire, Essex,

Gloucestershire, Kent, Lincolnshire, Middlesex, Northamptonshire, Oxfordshire, Staffordshire, Surrey, and Warwickshire. Enquiries were made of several other Record Offices but were not pursued, usually because of the absence of appropriate indexes. Incidents of public disorder reported in printed sources were sometimes investigated further in the Public Record Office.

The principal primary sources which were consulted for this study may be divided into six general categories: (1) full-length books, some of which bear directly on recreational topics; (2) local studies; (3) tracts, pamphlets, essays, and sermons; (4) diaries, journals, memoirs, autobiographies, and other literary sources; (5) newspapers and periodicals; and (6) Parliamentary papers. Local studies and literary sources provide the foundation for the first two chapters. Pamphlet material is of particular importance for some of the themes which arise in chapters III and IV. Newspaper and periodical sources are of great value throughout the thesis. The following bibliography of these materials is selective, but it is more selective in some areas than in others. Since the pamphlet evidence is probably the most difficult to locate, special care has been taken to list all those titles which are at all related to our general subject. In contrast, many of the local studies have not been included. Although the significance of the whole corpus of local material is considerable, many of the individual works are



only of marginal importance: their relevance is frequently confined to one or two brief references, or at best a couple of paragraphs. The listing of newspapers refers for the most part only to entire years, or to long, seasonal runs (such as those for the Stamford bull-running), which were systematically examined. The section on literary sources draws together most of the works which are referred to in the text.

The great majority of the printed primary sources were located in the British Museum, a few in the Bodleian Library, and several socio-economic tracts and discourses were consulted in the Goldsmiths' Library, University of London. Work on local materials was much facilitated by the resources of the Society of Antiquaries and, for Northamptonshire, by the holdings of the Northampton Borough Library. Legal sources were usually located with the aid of the English and Empire Digest.

The listing of secondary authorities concentrates on studies of various aspects of popular recreation, more general historical works which either bear on important dimensions of social change or include useful discussions of certain recreational themes, and works of a sociological or anthropological character. Although the latter are seldom cited in the text, it is proper to acknowledge their general assistance - in suggesting problems, in defining concepts, in offering comparative material, in helping to fashion a more fruitful outlook on the subject as a whole.

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