

'The One Great Pastime of the People'
Rugby, Religion, and the Making of Working-Class Culture
On the Industrial Frontier: Cape Breton & South Wales,
1850 - 1914

By
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A Thesis Submitted to
Saint Mary's University, Halifax, Nova Scotia
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree of Master of Arts in History.

February 2008, Halifax, Nova Scotia

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Date: [04/02/2008]



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ISBN: 978-0-494-41702-7
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ISBN: 978-0-494-41702-7

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Abstract

The frontier in history has often been used to describe a geographic boundary or as a synonym for the Wild West. However, in those industrial regions of the Anglo-Celtic Atlantic World the frontier played a very different role. The coal mining regions of Cape Breton and South Wales exhibit remarkably similar development in the second half of the nineteenth century. Immigration, the centrality of religion, temperance, labour activism, and rugby football all play a fundamental role in the emergence of a distinct coalfield society. Mining transformed Cape Breton and South Wales and, during the reign of King Coal, the two peripheries occupied centre stage in an imperial economy. Britannia's Children, in far flung corners of the world, took with them memories of home and used those to begin again, to play once more the one great pastime of the people: survival.

February 2008

This is a brief note to explain the use of sources in the text that follows. As will be noted the material used is unusual and this can be explained in a few ways. Recovering the voices of semi-literate workers is complicated and in certain circumstances impossible and this has led social historians traditionally to lean heavily upon newspapers. Yet, whilst there is a partial reliance in this text I have attempted to fill the void left with sources of a similar ilk: poems, songs, novels, and Royal Commission reports. The reason that these were chosen over the labour newspapers is that insofar as the labour newspapers do provide us with labour voices they are inevitably a voice for the trade unions which gives us access only to a certain portion of the workers. To be sure, miners were organised into trade unions but it is not entirely clear just how far the trade unions represented them entirely. The split in opinion surrounding Robert Drummond and J.B. McLachlan is evidence that mine workers held a variety of opinions that were not fully distilled in the radical press. Thus, we turn to other media which promoted contemporary opinion. Novels were written for middle-class audiences for the most part but Victorian 'social realism' exhibited in *Oliver Twist*, *Sybil*, or *Mary Gaskell* was part of that trend in the 1840s to do justice to the industrialisation of Britain and to *understand* it. The poems and songs, which feature prominently in the first chapter, are modern transcriptions of pieces composed in Scottish Gaelic. These no doubt played a role in the oral culture of the Gaels and were written by migrants themselves. Thus, they provide a window into the Scottish culture moving to Cape Breton and early reactions to that migration.

Ultimately this work engages with the 'mental' world of the workers, in particular miners, and thus the sources that are present and feature prominently are those that contributed to an intellectual culture. It was, though, not merely intellectual for these ideas influenced social

institutions such as rugby clubs, co-operative movements, and so on. Finally, it is worth explaining the use of 'working class' and 'miner' interchangeably. It is my view that the prominence of miners and those connected with coal mining on the two coalfields under investigation affords a certain flexibility in language and terminology. Miners are not simply the collier, the person who works the coalface. Miner means as well those connected with the entire process. In villages where the coal mine dominated people's lives I think it fair to say that the two verge on the synonymous.

'The One Great Pastime of the People'
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Working-Class Culture on the Industrial Frontier,
Cape Breton and South Wales, 1850 - 1914

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SIMON A. SKINNER

WHO TAUGHT ME MOST OF THIS

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Preface

When I first began this project at Oxford, Wales had just won the Six Nations Championship for the first time in many years. I set myself the challenge of working out why, in the midst of it all, did the working class of Wales play rugby when, on the face of it, the game was a middle class pastime that seemed at odds with the wider politics of the coalfield. I also wanted to understand what it was about the game that gives every Welshman hope that no matter how bad the week has been, watching the game on Saturday will make it better (even if we lose). Academics can often lose sight of the humanity of their subject, but when I began digging around I found myself immersed in a research topic that has brought nothing but delight and great fun.

I am indebted to a great many people for their help during the writing of this work. Beginning at the beginning: Mike Allen, sorely missed, who pushed me in the direction of the subject all those years ago. To Jonathan Davies, Linda Thomas, Anthony Davies, and Tony Giblett, I owe a debt that can never be repaid for it is they who taught me to love history and the pleasure of diving in at the deep end! To everyone else at Coedylan Comprehensive, past and (still) present who deserve more praise than they get. At Oxford there are a great number of people, friends especially, who made that time more fun than it might have been but special mention goes to Jeremy Catto – for giving me the chance in the first place – Mark Whittow, Mark Almond, Philip Waller, and Robert Beddard for putting up with me! Leif Dixon and Ian Forrest for getting me through Finals intact. Simon Skinner for being a constant source of inspiration, for finally drumming into me that religion is

important to study, and for never letting me forget about what we are definitely *not* allowed to call 'the Celtic Fringe'.

At Saint Mary's I want to thank everyone! Mac and Mark especially for sharing in the highs and lows of 'Grad School'. To Caroline, Candice, Jen, Kai, and Ian for a brilliant year! Professors in the department, all of them, who answered questions about almost everything at one time or another and always with a smile; Peter Twohig, though, deserves special mention: I hope this at last convinces you rugby is understandable? Doug Vaisey, who can find anything! Colin Howell, who has had to deal with my standing in his office doorway more often than was necessary and my going off the point in my thesis on more than one occasion, yet has proven to be a formative influence on my work and a better guide in the field of sport history I cannot think of. Hopefully I left him with a new understanding for Wales that he can explore in his well-deserved retirement.

The biggest thanks go to my family. Kate spent many hours sat on my lap bashing away at the keyboard trying to help and bringing me books I might need: Spot, Tigger, Winnie the Pooh, and all the others too sat alongside Marx, Gramsci, and Howell. Children make the best research assistants and one day she'll be able to read what happened! To Katrina for sisterly support; Dad for taking me along to Sardis Road and Cardiff Arms Park when I little: it's his fault that history has taken the place of a real job but he's never complained about my seemingly endless life as a student. Granny, to whom I owe my sanity, for stories about Scotland, Paisley, and for reminding me that the past is always human; finally Mam: in loving memory I dedicate this thesis to you.

ABBREVIATIONS

<i>BC</i>	British Critic and Quarterly Theological Review
<i>CMG</i>	Cardiff and Merthyr Guardian
<i>CWE</i>	Friedrich Engels, <i>The Condition of the Working Class in England</i> (London, 1987)
<i>GFP</i>	Glamorgan Free Press
<i>HBC</i>	Halifax British Colonist
<i>HC</i>	Halifax Chronicle
<i>HH</i>	Halifax Herald
<i>ILP</i>	Independent Labour Party
<i>ME</i>	Merthyr Express
<i>NS</i>	Nova Scotia
<i>PC</i>	Pontypridd Chronicle
<i>PP</i>	Parliamentary Papers (United Kingdom)
<i>PWA</i>	Provincial Workmen's Association
<i>SWDN</i>	South Wales Daily News
<i>WM</i>	Western Mail

New Beginnings (an Introduction)

History does nothing, said Karl Marx, it is men who do all this. Men make their own history, but in the terms and within the limits imposed on them by the history they inherit; always provided, of course, that they master that history and make a choice. To make history, to win historical autonomy, it is necessary to make a choice in historical awareness.¹

The history of working-class culture on the industrial frontier has tended to be neglected in favour of the metropolitan centre. The hinterland, however, reveals a much more exciting story if only because it is the story of where I, and many others, come from. The coalfield societies of Cape Breton and Glamorganshire have been the subject of much analysis from the field of labour history. The work that has been done on the working-class culture of both Cape Breton and South Wales has been of enormous benefit to historians and sociologists but much of that work has been insular. Dai Smith and Hywel Francis' magnificent work on the South Wales Miners Federation warrants special mention for its acknowledgement of the wider social conditions of the South Wales coalfield and the mutually constitutive effects of 'The Fed' and its region.² The SWMF, though, is only part of the history of the South Wales Coalfield and as the entire world knows Taffy loves his rugby.

Indeed more than the SWMF, perhaps, rugby union (or football to us Taffs) characterises the hopes and dreams of the entire coalfield. The Welsh national team is subjected to hundreds of thousands of individual criticisms every day with every man, woman, and child on the (now former) coalfield knowing better than the national coach. In Cape Breton a

¹ Gwyn Alf Williams, *The Welsh in their History* (London, Croom Helm Ltd., 1982), p. 201.

² Dai Smith & Hywel Francis, *The Fed: A History of the South Wales Miners in the Twentieth Century* (Cardiff, University of Wales Press, 1980).

hundred years ago rugby union held a similar position in the social and cultural life of the island. The Celtic Diaspora embraced an English public school game both in Cape Breton and Glamorgan because it reflected the nature of the industrial frontier. Here, where townships were governed by the colliery bell and only religion offered any respite from the realities of working underground, rugby became an essential part of an autonomous working-class sporting culture that reflected the aspirations of an entire community.

The industrial frontier is an undervalued concept in labour history. It reflects the unique character of the coalfield and helps us to understand the conflicted nature of recreational activity in those areas. The frontier, as described by the Oxford English Dictionary, is a 'part of a country, which fronts or faces another country; the marches; the border or extremity conterminous with that of another'³ Historians, of course, are never that straightforward and especially not when politics comes into play. The Frontier in American History has rejected this so-called 'Old World' understanding of the frontier in favour of one that describes a process of conquest, of American civilisation over native barbarism. The taming of the American Wild West, as Frederick Jackson Turner argued, was responsible for the institutions that the Americans hold to be fundamental to their society; their society was not born of a European past but rather born in the struggle to conquer the North American continent. Turner viewed the fostering of democracy and individualism along the moving frontier as the most significant contribution to the consistent renewal of American civilisation.⁴

³ J.A. Simpson & E.S.C. Weiner (eds.), *The Oxford English Dictionary*, Volume VI Follow – Haswed, (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1989), p. 218.

⁴ Frederick Jackson Turner, *Frontier in American History* (New York, 1920).

Whilst the frontier might be described as a process, Turner's American exceptionalism is difficult to palate. In Canada, J.M.S. Careless revised Turner's frontier thesis and argued that instead of being a rural relationship between civilisation and savagery, the frontier might be better understood as a relationship between metropolitan centres and hinterlands.⁵ For Careless the metropolis was the power centre that governed frontier and regional growth. The relationship between metropolitan centre and rural hinterland was one of subservient power and dependence. The influence of the metropolis, Careless argued, can be felt in all spheres. 'They might be displayed not only in economic structures, political fabrics, or social networks, but also in attitudes of regard, modes of opinion, or popular images and traditions – all, in turn, to affect identity'.⁶

The industrial frontier, though, defies both Turner and Careless. The working class, it seems, do not go gently into that good night. Hinterland societies, wrote Careless, 'might come to perceive their lot as one of subservience and exploitation'. Problematically the townships of the coalfield do not perceive their lot in relation to big cities, which in both contexts of this study are several hundred miles away; rather they perceive their lot in relation to each other. Each township has a fierce identity, which is fostered by its proximity to another coalfield township.⁷ The industrial frontier, then, breeds a new form of proletarian identity, one that requires close examination of the nature of the coalfield and not its relationship with the big

⁵ J.M.S. Careless, *Frontiers and Metropolis: Regions, Cities, and Identities in Canada before 1914* (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1989).

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

⁷ P. Stead, 'Working-class leadership in South Wales, 1900 – 1920', in *Welsh History Review*, vol. 6 no.3, p. 239.

city.⁸ It also requires us to think of the process of frontierism from the perspective of *below*, from the perspective of the working class, and from the perspective of the Celt.

The Celtic Atlantic World and the Development of Working-Class Culture

The North Atlantic is a sea that is easily crossed by travellers but it is one that rarely gets bridged by historians. Comparative studies of working-class culture on both sides of the Atlantic are rare but those studies that do exist have proven the fruits of such Herculean tasks.⁹ The internal divisions between the Celtic nations of the British Isles and England have been replicated across the world. Nova Scotia, as its name suggests, is home to a significant Scottish Diaspora, one which has held on to the *Gàidhlig* language of the Scottish Highlands and has replicated the tartanism of contemporary Scottish identity. Across Halifax, too, one notices a large number of Irish pubs reflecting the pan-Gaelic heritage of this part of Canada. If it was language that helped insulate the Celtic nations from the pressures of Anglicisation then it was through the making of a new culture that the Celtic nations ensured that their own distinctiveness would not be lost in the tide of English pressure.¹⁰

The term Celtic Fringe, in recent years, has come to be used as a by-word for a trend in British historiography to write English history with a bit of Celtic seasoning and call it

⁸ Although some work has been done to this effect, see for example: Martin J Daunton, *Coal Metropolis: Cardiff, 1870 – 1914* (Leicester, Leicester University Press, 1977); John Davies, *Cardiff and the Marquesses of Bute* (Cardiff, University of Wales Press, 1981). Both works, though, acknowledge the mutual relationship between the colliery towns of the Rhondda and the ‘coal’ metropolis of Cardiff.

⁹ For example: Deian R. Hopkin & Gregory S. Kealey (eds.), *Class, Community, and the Labour Movement: Wales and Canada 1850 – 1930* (Aberystwyth, 1987); for a useful analysis of the integration of British miners on the Vancouver Island coalfield see: John Douglas Belshaw., *Colonization and Community. The Vancouver Island Coalfield and the Making of the British Columbian Working Class* (Montreal, McGill-Queens University Press, 2002)

¹⁰ Cf. Michael E Vance & Marjory Harper (eds.), *Myth, Migration and the Making of Memory, Scotia and Nova Scotia 1700 – 1990* (Halifax, Nova Scotia, 1999); Michael Hechter, *Internal Colonialism. The Celtic Fringe in British National Development, 1536 – 1966* (Berkeley, California, 1975).

‘British’. Genuine Four Nations history, though, has yet to truly develop. Part of this Four Nations historiography, it seems to me, must be a recognition of the extension of the British Isles and its culture to other parts of the world – to Nova Scotia, to Dunedin in New Zealand, or to Patagonia in Argentina to name but three.¹¹ These regions are true extensions of Great Britain since these settlements were formed with a view to cultural preservation. Scottish settlers in Cape Breton, as Lucille Campey has noted, settled on that island not because of its economic possibilities but rather because it allowed the settlers to remain Scottish.¹²

The Celtic periphery – a periphery only from the perspective of England, I hasten to add – is much like the Maritimes in the sense that it is often seen as lacking a progressive and liberal (in its neo-conservative sense) ethic. Indeed as the electoral history of Wales and Scotland show over the last thirty years there has been a consistent, if a times wavering, support not for liberalism but socialism.¹³ Labour history then is a historiographical contribution to the wider debates surrounding the distinctiveness of the Celtic periphery in Britain. England, ‘the core’, is seen to ‘dominate the periphery politically and to exploit it materially’. Modernisation, Hechter argues, is an uneven process and so it creates relatively advanced and less advanced groupings within society, resources and power are distributed unevenly with the majority of it going to the advanced group.¹⁴ Thus, through the development of the British Isles (and indeed Canada) the richest region, the most advanced region comes to

¹¹ For a useful application of the Anglo-Celtic paradigm in the Australian context see: Alyson L. Greiner, & Terry G. Jordan-Bychkov, *Anglo-Celtic Australia. Colonial Immigration and Cultural Regionalism* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2002).

¹² Lucille H. Campey, *After the Hector: The Scottish Pioneers of Nova Scotia and Cape Breton, 1773 – 1852* (Toronto, Natural Heritage Books, 2004).

¹³ For an enlightening discussion of this topic see: W. W. Knox, *Industrial Nation: Work, Culture, and Society in Scotland 1800 – Present* (Edinburgh, 1999).

¹⁴ Michael Hechter, *Internal Colonialism*, p. 9.

dominate over the others. England, like Alberta and Ontario, because of their relative advancement triumph over other provinces of the country as a whole; similarly, the core is seen to be more diverse both economically and socially whereas the periphery is dependent and often highly specialised.¹⁵ This part of Hechter's argument is highly persuasive given the complete dominance of King Coal in South Wales and Cape Breton. Of course, dependency theory is not Hechter's brainchild, but the application of that theory to the British Isles is a useful starting point for the arguments that follow below.

Working-class culture on the periphery, then, if we follow dependency theory to the letter must be considered as somehow less advanced than the working-class culture of the core. Yet whilst this might be an obvious argument to make it is nevertheless flawed. Working-class culture on the periphery and at the core is subjected to different processes of formation. Therefore it is unhelpful to dismiss working-class culture at the periphery as being somehow backward compared to its more advanced cousin. To argue in such ways would be to fall foul of what might be called the 'metropolitan fallacy'.¹⁶ The industrial frontier, I think, helps us to overcome the issue of metropolitan fallacy because it provides a reference point for the examination of culture but it does so at the level of the periphery.

The History of Sport, or the Sport of History

Sport historiography is one of the newest sub-genres of historical enquiry. Developing out of the quest to write history from the perspective of *below*, sports historians have provided us with a glimpse into the popular culture not of Kings and Queens but ordinary people. Most

¹⁵ Hechter, *Internal Colonialism*, p. 9.

¹⁶ I am grateful to Colin Howell for this observation.

people would perhaps not consider (working-class) sport history to be an element of labour history, preferring instead to argue that it is a field in its own right, yet before I continue I want to make the case for considering (working-class) sport history as part of labour history. If one reads much of the historiography concerned with sporting culture and its development across the ages the telltale signs of history from below are omnipresent. Folk games, pastimes, sports, are all discussed with our own reference points.¹⁷

Growing up in South Wales my local village rugby team comprised builders, plumbers, electricians, street cleaners, and students. This was working-class rugby played in a working-class village. Mass sporting culture is of fundamental importance to those with the least in life because it provides emancipation from the harsh realities of the human condition. The few hundred people who regularly watched Ynysybwl RFC in the 1980s and early 1990s could escape the insecurities of their working lives for a few hours. The closing of the collieries in South Wales in that decade shattered the economic future of many families but in many cases rugby provided an escape. This all too real anecdote of just twenty-five years ago would have been almost certainly the same a hundred years ago. Strikes, terrible working conditions, and insecurity of employment all fuelled a desire for some escape. The history of working-class sporting culture, then, is the history of that harsh reality and working-class escapism. For this reason, I think, and it is a powerful one, should we consider sport history to be a proud part of labour history.

Irrespective of whether one accepts my argument that sport history's place lies within the greater fold of labour history or not, the influences of labour history upon the sub-genre are

¹⁷ Colin D. Howell, *Northern Sandlots: A Social History of Maritime Baseball* (Toronto, 1995); see Dr Howell's introduction for some very personal anecdotes on the importance of sport.

immense. The cultural approach to sport reflects labour history's research into class conflict and class consciousness; this approach suggests that the shaping of nineteenth-century sporting culture pitted bourgeois reformers committed to the twin ideals of amateurism and rational recreation against the people they sought to reform: the working class. Sporting culture, in this analysis, was a battlefield in which divisions of gender, class, race, and ethnicity (to name but a few) were played out. At the heart of this analysis, as one would expect, is the Marxist concept of capitalist relations and the mode of production. Extensions of this thesis, influenced by Gramscian notions of cultural hegemony, argue that the contest over professional and amateur sporting culture relates to the extension and diffusion of liberalism down through the social classes and the battle to prevent that.¹⁸ Seen in this light the development of sport involve what Raymond Williams has called 'the social relations of cultural production'; indeed this was the very making of history itself.¹⁹

The alternative to this cultural Marxism is the liberal – or modernisation – thesis. Whilst this is a thesis that has largely been discredited in recent years in the historiography of several sports, in rugby it is still going strong. This thesis emphasises the regulation of modern sporting culture – its rules, its regular programming, and national unions.²⁰ The classic work for rugby that enshrines the civilising process is that of Dunning and Sheard. The central argument is that a long-term change in patterns of violence-control has occurred in modern Western European societies between the Middle Ages and modern times'.²¹ Thus the modernisation of rugby is understood through the medium of changes in attitudes towards

¹⁸ Cf. Colin D. Howell, *Northern Sandlots*.

¹⁹ Raymond Williams, *Culture* (London, 1981), p. 67.

²⁰ Cf. Allen Guttmann, *From Ritual to Record: The Nature of Modern Sports* (New York, Columbia University Press, 1978); Eric Dunning & Keith Sheard, *Barbarians, Gentlemen, and Players: A Sociological Study of the Development of Rugby Football* (Oxford, Routledge, 1979).

²¹ Dunning and Sheard, *BGP*, p. 14.

violence.²² Yet there is a major problem with the civilising process in that it is a top down process. Consider the divisions between rugby league and rugby union after 1895 and we have a case that can be made for a civilising process. After all Northern Union regulations reduced the number of players to thirteen and removed the dangerous rucks and mauls in favour of a smooth transfer of the ball after a tackle. As with downs in American or Canadian football the NU tackle removed a significant element of danger from the game. A case for civilising processes one might think. Not so, as Tony Collins recognises, because of the top down nature of the civilising process paradigm – Northern Union was a working class development and so therefore is considered to be a more violent game.²³

The same must be said of the modernisation process. The top-down conceptualisation of ‘modern’ is problematic because it relates to liberal values of equality, secularism, and organisation, which are of scant relevance to working-class culture. For example, the modern style of play in rugby with four three-quarter backs is a Welsh invention, as is the development of the fly half.²⁴ Yet, this style of play was not recognised by the English unions for several seasons because they did not consider the Welsh side, with its working-class players, to be strictly amateur and therefore their innovations were a backward step. Modernism and modernisation theses suffer from this top-down approach and whilst they are illuminating are generally weakened by miscomprehension of a sporting culture which defies the logic of top-down diffusion.

²² For a criticism of Dunning and Sheard see Tony Collins, ‘History, Theory, and the Civilising Process’, in *Sport in History* 25:2.

²³ Collins, *History*, p. 301.

²⁴ <http://www.rugbyfootballhistory.com/positions.html> (accessed September 9 2007).

The study is split into five main themes. The first deals with the legacy of emigration and the parallel story of economic migration into the South Wales Coalfield and that out of Scotland to Eastern Canada. The first chapter, in this way, seeks to demonstrate that in writing work on the history of labour in Nova Scotia one should remain conscious of a perceived Scottishness and the long-term effects of Scottish settlement in the region. The second theme relates to the first in that it deals with the relations between social classes in Nova Scotia and South Wales examining the importance of culture as a means to overcome difference among workers and the role of culture in maintaining connections, imagined and real, with the 'old country'. The third theme is that of poverty, a powerful motivation for migration, to be sure, but also a symbol of commonality amongst working-class people in the face of top-down pressure to reform and moralise. The third chapter explores the intellectual context of moral understandings of poverty and seeks to incorporate rational recreation, muscular Christianity, and the temperance movement within those wider intellectual discourses. The fourth theme, then, is that of temperance and the drive to diffuse a form of middle-class respectability to the working class. The fourth chapter, in this regard, examines the fortunes of temperance in South Wales and Nova Scotia to illustrate the extent to which class relations in each region were *conflicted*. The fifth, and final, theme is that which connects the previous four together: the making of working-class culture on the industrial frontier. The fifth chapter, therefore is a case-study of the role of rugby union on each coalfield and an attempt to understand why the sport became so attached to working-class culture and its fortunes.

This study attempts to pioneer a paradigm of transatlantic labour history, which is sensitive to cultural production but also is sensitive to the important differences between proletarians that were 'rural' minded and those that are 'industrialised', for the distinction is not always

clear. An agrarian-proletarian may well be a first generation industrial worker, but he is also one that retains much of his rural assumptions, the agrarian-proletarian is, then, a rural émigré. The industrial-proletarian is Marx's hero, he is what one would consider to be the quintessential working-class but the mindset of the industrial-proletarian is such that labour relations at the immediate level are more important than absentee businessmen, for whom agrarian-proletarians pose greater problems given the close parallels between them and absentee landlords.

This thesis is also sensitive to the marginalisation of the Celtic world in the greater narratives of an Anglo-centric British history and is therefore my own contribution to the demands of 'Celtic' historians for recognition within the British narratives. A truly comprehensive and comparative account of the experiences of British workers both in the British Isles and in the Diaspora communities around the world is possible, but for now one must sadly content oneself with an illustration of just how rich that forgotten history is. The argument for a 'British' survey, after all, could not be more appropriate given the continued debate surrounding national identity initiated by Linda Colley's study of Britishness in the eighteenth century.²⁵

In fact, when I first mentioned I was going to tackle the question of rugby and religion on coalfields most people responded with bemusement. 'What history is there in rugby?' was the usual reply. Yet as this thesis hopefully will show, the role rugby played in industrial communities in the late-Victorian period sheds a significant amount of light upon the nature of Victorian society and in particular working-class reactions to the dominant ideology of Liberalism. The Victorian trinity of liberalism – conservatism – socialism is often left to

²⁵ Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707 – 1837* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1994).

political historians but it is my sincere hope that historians can stop living behind closed doors of particular themes of history and begin to embrace history as a totality. Social history cannot afford to be simply history with politics left out and nor can labour history be history with the so-called 'big people' left out. History is a process and it is what we make of it that counts; one thing is for certain, though, if we want history, we have to make history.

Chapter One – Britannia’s Children: The British Diaspora Abroad

Yet — yet Caledonia! when slumber comes o'er me,
 Oh! oft will I dream of thee, far away;
 But vain are the visions that rapture restore me,
 To waken and weep at the dawn of the day.
 Ere gone the last glimpse, faint and far o'er the ocean,
 Where yet my heart dwells — where it ever shall dwell,
 While tongue, sigh, and tear, speak my spirit's emotion,
 My country - my kindred — farewell, oh, farewell!

[John Imlach, 1799 – 1846]²⁶

The emigration of the British in the nineteenth century and the British Diaspora around the world is particularly telling in the North Atlantic where the formation of an Anglo-Celtic paradigm is not merely useful, but fundamentally important in understanding Nova Scotia’s relationship with the British Isles. Most Nova Scotians know that the Scots formed the bulk of the population in several regions of the province but in Halifax there is a significant Irish community as well. Britannia’s Children reached across the world but given the social and cultural transformations that affected the Diaspora communities it is important to tell the stories of each in turn. This chapter therefore seeks to explore the making of culture among the Diaspora community of Cape Breton: the Highland Gael. An exploration of the migrant Highlander makes clear that the diffusion of British sports and the so-called British ‘conservative’ myth is not a helpful explanation of the role of rugby union, for example, on

²⁶ http://www.rampantscotland.com/poetry/blpoems_farewell2.htm [accessed, 12 January 2008]

the island, nor is it a useful paradigm for the wider exploration of Diaspora culture in this corner of the world.

Before examining the Diaspora community in Cape Breton in detail, it is important to establish a number of key points relating to the growth of the Scottish community on the Island and to make some general comments about the nature of culture within Diaspora communities in other British contexts. The migration of the Highland Gael to Nova Scotia was one aspect of the large-scale exodus from the north of Scotland in the late-eighteenth and nineteenth centuries; migration southwards to the industrial centres along the Clyde Valley in search of work the factories and shipyards of Renfrewshire and to Glasgow. This migration provides us with a glimpse into the nature of Highland culture in its industrial Scottish context, which can then be compared to that of the industrial culture in Cape Breton.

In Wales, to provide a further parallel, the industrial frontier was fuelled by several migrant communities: English, Welsh-speaking Welsh, and Irish to name only those who would fall under the category of 'Britannia's Children' yet the effects of migration to the South Wales coalfield seems to have been somewhat different given the heterogeneity of the population. To the working population of South Wales, the growth of a working-class identity became conflated with the re-making of a Welsh identity; unlike in Cape Breton therefore the Diaspora communities are more difficult to separate from the refashioned whole.

The study of Diaspora communities is an important area of research in modern historical study and one that tells us much about the nature of extended societies. Were Diasporas

exiles, or were they migrating to preserve an idea of the 'Old World' in the New? These are the sorts of questions that one must ask of the evidence, yet more than that the study of Diaspora communities in relation to the Old World shows precisely the effects of locality on the re-making of identity and class relations. As the following chapters will attempt to show, the differences between an 'Old World' society such as that in South Wales or in Western Scotland and those of the 'New World' such as Cape Breton can be observed at the level of labour relations and in the formation of a distinctly working-class culture. Comparative history is a complex process but it is at this level of analysis, at the level of cultures that one must begin to question the desire to preserve the connection between the Old and the New.

Diaspora can be understood as 'networks of real or imagined relationships among scattered peoples whose sense of community is sustained by various communications and contacts'.²⁷ In a sense, the Scottish Diaspora, or the Irish Diaspora, is a cultural 'empire' which defies the breakdown of peoples into nation-states; yet it is not an 'empire' that is entirely settled for whilst the Diaspora seeks ways to integrate into its host society it is, Janus-like, also focused upon the 'old country'. To my mind the Diaspora community is one that does not sit comfortably in either world, they are (as they were) people dislocated from society with a culture and outlook specific to that existence. An examination of Diaspora communities must pay attention to the creation of myths of memory, that is the cultivation of a memory of an idealised homeland. In Nova Scotia, as Ian McKay has suggested, Scottishness has served a useful economic purpose and that 'Nova Scotia "became Scottish" in the second

²⁷ Anh Hua, 'Diaspora and Cultural Memory', in Vijay Agnew, *Diaspora, Memory, and Identity: The Search for Home* (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 2005, p. 192.

quarter of the 20th century'.²⁸ Idealised memory, then, is a formidable element in Diaspora identity and Diaspora culture.

Foucault argued that 'since memory is actually a very important factor in struggle (really, in fact, struggles develop in a kind of conscious moving forward of history), if one controls people's memory, one controls their dynamism'²⁹ Scottishness in the Nova Scotian context could be said to represent the liberal agenda that fondness for the 'old country' in that province is simply a product of political ambition; Ian McKay would argue thusly and indeed has done so.³⁰ Yet insofar as this construction and cultivation of an ideal can be seen as part of the liberal agenda it would be wrong to argue that a sense of Scottishness was a fabrication amongst first generation emigrants. Therefore whilst it is important to be sensitive to the 'idealisation' of collective memory and its political uses, it is equally significant to be attentive to the attachment of Diasporas to their homeland.

Cape Breton: Scotland Reborn?

The pattern of migration from the Western Isles and the North West Coast of Scotland to Cape Breton in the early nineteenth century and the populating of Cape Breton by the Highland Gael was to be replaced in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries by a pattern of industrial migration which reflect a shift to Lowland emigration. The Diaspora community in Cape Breton's industrial areas, then, might well be said to have been torn

²⁸ Ian McKay, 'Tartanism Triumphant: The Construction of Scottishness in Nova Scotia, 1933 – 1954', *Acadiensis* vol. XXI, No. 2, p. 8.

²⁹ Michel Foucault, 'Film and Popular Memory: Interview with Michel Foucault. Trans. Martin Jordan. *Radical Philosophy*, 11, p. 25.

³⁰ McKay, *Tartanism*, p. 5.

between the Gael and the Scot. Yet Cape Breton was not the only context in which this cultural conflict arose since Highland migration to the Lowlands of Scotland had been a factor since the late seventeenth century. In industrial Glasgow the migrant Gael became part of the working class and so the re-making of the working class in Glasgow with the pressures of integration and proletarianisation shaped his experiences. The Gaelic chapels of the city, for example, found it necessary to provide sermons in two languages because ‘those who understand Gaelic only are the working-classes, and unable to maintain a church exclusively for their own use; and that therefore an English service must be performed once a day, to induce the wealthier Highlanders who understand the English to take seats in the church’.³¹

In Cape Breton too the Gaelic language proved to be a unifying force in the face of pressure to Anglicise. For, as Eric Richards has noted ‘only where the Gaelic migrants created a dense local transplantation did the language persist – as on Cape Breton Island.’³² In other words, the migration of the Gael to Cape Breton could be seen as a distinct effort to preserve Highland culture in the wake of increased Anglicisation following Culloden. Indeed, Rusty Bittermann has concluded thusly, ‘they [the Gaels] helped to transfer to the New World a bitter condemnation of the agrarian transformation of the Highlands, portraying unwanted changes as arriving in the garb of alien commercial goals and lamenting the decline of a culture rooted in traditional values’.³³ The Highlanders disliked absentee landlords, whose power was absolute since it was this group, which instigated the Highland Clearances,

³¹ *Report of the Commissioners of Religious Instruction, Scotland 1837 – 1838*, Appendix III, p. 421.

³² Eric Richards, *Britannia's Children. Emigration from England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland since 1600* (London, Hambledon and London, 2004), p. 23.

³³ Rusty Bittermann, ‘On Remembering and Forgetting: Highland Memories within the Maritime Diaspora’, in Marjory Harper & Michael E Vance (eds.), *Myth, Migration and the Making of Memory. Scotia and Nova Scotia, 1700 – 1990* (Halifax, Fenwood Publishing, 1999), p. 256.

shattered the Highland way of life, and were thusly responsible for their dislocation.³⁴ Attitudes, as will be discussed below, to the industrial capitalists reflected this distrust and dislike of absenteeism.

The settlement of the Scottish Diaspora in homogenous regions of Cape Breton Island challenged the structure of the Highland clans and marks the beginning of their transformation into a class society, as one would expect to find in Lowland Scotland. The dislocation of the Highland Diaspora, thus, is threefold – sheltered settlement patterns in homogenous regions of the Island thereby shielding themselves from external influences, the circumstances under which emigration was undertaken; and the growth of social class in place of the traditional clan structure.³⁵ In contrast with South Wales, then, where the immigration of several disparate communities forced the remaking of Welsh society at exactly the point at which industrialisation was changing the nature of society anyway, the Scottish Diaspora on Cape Breton was forced to come to terms with its social dislocation, a dislocation that was not solved until the final transformation of Cape Breton into a class-based social hierarchy in the first decades of the twentieth century.³⁶

The implications of the above statement are numerous and have been little explored, unfortunately the limitations of space in this thesis ensure that an less than full treatment can be given here also. Nevertheless an examination of the integration of Highland Scots into a class-based industrial environment has been undertaken in Scotland itself and the narrative

³⁴ Eric Richards, *The Highland Clearances. People, Landlords and Rural Turmoil* (Edinburgh, Birlinn Ltd., 2002), p. 73.

³⁵ Stephen J Hornsby, *Nineteenth Century Cape Breton, A Historical Geography* (McGill-Queens University Press, Montreal & Kingston, 1992), p. 122.

³⁶ Brinley Thomas, 'The Migration of Labour in the Glamorganshire Coalfield, 1861 – 1911', in W. E. Minchinton (ed.), *Industrial South Wales, 1750 – 1914: Essays in Welsh Economic History* (London, 1969).

there suggests that cultural preservation was an important facet in the Highlanders' integration into the host society.³⁷ Gaelic culture was indeed preserved by the migration to the New World but the experience of settlement was, inevitably, a mixed one. Some, like Iain Sealgair, lamented his evacuation of the Highlands and presents us with a powerful image of Scotland the homeland:

I left my country, I left my heritage;
 My mirth remained over there.
 I left the friendly, hospitable place,
 And my beloved relatives there.
 I left the beauty and the place where it was seen,
 Land of the hollow and the cairn.
 It is the cause of my reflection that I could not
 Stay there forever.³⁸

This romanticised historical memory of the lost world of Scotland is indeed a powerful one but one that has been subjected to revisionism in recent years, a revisionism that seeks to emancipate the Gael from an anglicised historiography that assumes 'the common people of the Highlands ... have been careless of posterity: poor and mostly illiterate, they left little of direct record of their lives either before or after the clearances'.³⁹ Whilst this is partly true the oral history of the Highlanders cannot be ignored, it has been principally because the historians of the Highlands have often been ignorant of the Gàidhlig language. Whilst those

³⁷Charles W. J Withers, *Urban Highlanders: Highland-Lowland Migration and Urban Gaelic Culture, 1700 – 1900* (East Linton, Scotland, 1998)

³⁸ Margaret MacDonell, *The Emigrant Experience: Songs of Highland Emigrants in North America* (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1982, p. 81.

³⁹ Eric Richards, *A History of the Highland Clearances: Volume 1, Agrarian Transformation and the Evictions, 1746 – 1886*, (London, 1982), preface.

historians accept that Cape Breton was an important centre for the preservation of the Highland Gaelic culture they nevertheless find it difficult to be fully rounded in their judgements because of the language barrier. Clearly, as Michael Kennedy has shown, the Highland Gael did have an eye for posterity but it was as Richards rightly records not of a written form.⁴⁰

Iain Sealgair's cousin was far more damning in his understanding of Scotland and was sure of the direction the Diaspora's collective memory should take:

The land that you left is the land without kindness,
 Without humanity for the tenantry;
 But they are sorrowful leaving it
 And [facing] the storms over the sea,
 Poor people, descendants of cottars,
 Who were without stock, without herds of cattle;
 It is despicable to slander it, [this] land of prosperity,
 Where they are now men of worth.⁴¹

These two poems hint at the dangers of assuming that the Gael were unanimous in their appreciation of the auld country and what it had to offer them. Nevertheless despite Kennedy's timely reminder that this was the case we should be mindful of the fact that the Diaspora was dislocated and did refer to their newfound position in relation to the auld country whether their impression was favourable or antagonistic. Yet despite the antagonism

⁴⁰ Michael Kennedy, '“Lochaber No More”: A Critical Examination of Highland Emigration Mythology', in Marjory Harper & Michael E. Vance (eds.), *Myth, Migration and the Making of Memory. Scotia and Nova Scotia c.1700 – 1990* (Halifax, Nova Scotia, Fernwood Publishing, 1999), p. 275.

⁴¹ MacDonell, *The Emigrant Experience*, p. 91.

shown in some cases towards the auld country it is clear from the poetry of the Cape Breton Gaels that desire to be amongst countrymen was important in the choice of settlement. This is not to reiterate a long-believed fact but rather to suggest that settlement on Cape Breton was governed by cultural preservation and indeed as a result of that the Diaspora on the island remained dislocated from the wider Nova Scotian host society and, with its obvious antagonism toward Scotland, from the British Isles as well.

In several poems, for example, written by Cape Breton Islanders who emigrated to other parts of North America we find important clues as to the collective psyche of the migrants Gael:

Last year in Canada we were happy
 With relatives and compatriots all around us
 Now we have strayed to a forbidding land
 Without friend or relative to visit us.

[Song for Manitoba]⁴²

I would prefer to be among Gaels
 With their humanity and warmth
 Than among different nationalities,
 Bold, cold people.

[Song from California]⁴³

⁴² MacDonell, *The Emigrant Experience*, p. 167.

⁴³ MacDonell, *The Emigrant Experience*, p. 173.

The reason for such desires seems to have been the cultural shock of leaving behind Gàidhlig and the need to anglicise oneself: 'I am now compelled to turn to English / although I have no facility with it' lamented one poet.⁴⁴ Focusing on songs and poetry overcomes Michael Kennedy's reservations about the historiography of the Gael but it is, unfortunately, a selective redress since knowledge of Gàidhlig is slight in the modern world. Nevertheless recovering the voice of the Gael reveals, as the songs above show, a very clear desire to remain in a world that was comfortable: a homogenous society. This has significant bearings upon the rest of the thesis and in part confirms that the sensitivities of the Highlanders resulted in a distinct form of 'working-class' culture by the late-nineteenth century.

Moreover, the Highland society in Cape Breton, at least for the most part of the nineteenth century, was dominated by a rural way of life. The attitude of the Highland settlers to landlords is, as one would expect, articulated in their songs and poetry but the antagonism of the oral culture is directed towards the making of money and the exploitation of the Gael by absent landlords:

A plague on the landlords
 With their greed for money;
 They prefer flocks of sheep
 To their own armed hosts.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ MacDonell, *The Emigrant Experience*, p. 179.

⁴⁵ MacDonell, *The Emigrant Experience*, p. 63.

The implications of this will be explored in the next chapter but for now it suffices to say that rural attitudes affected the way in which the Highland Gael interacted with industrial capitalism. Robert Drummond, for example, has been criticised by modern historians for lacking a true Labourism and that his consensus trade unionism was reflective of his having ‘sold out’ to the ideology of Liberalism.⁴⁶ It seems to me that this presentation of Drummond is inaccurate, since quite clearly the desires of the wider workforce on Cape Breton were to overcome greed and this, in the understandings of mid-Victorian trade unionism, was a problem that could be negotiated rather than overturned by a revolution. Peasants in general are conservative in the sense that they wish to preserve what they have and this theme is expressed in the poetry cited above.⁴⁷ It is a theme that we will revisit in the next chapter.

South Wales: the Land of My Fathers?

Wales, as with Scotland, had its own highly developed sense of self that was expressed in songs and poetry. Clichés that mark Wales as the ‘land of song’ are replicated in the national anthem of which the first two lines run: ‘the old land of my fathers, is dear to me / old land where the minstrels are honoured and free ...’, yet it is a cliché that runs to the core of a modern Welsh identity. It is, of course, a manufactured identity but as Gwyn Alf Williams noted:

⁴⁶ Further discussion of Drummond and the episodic nature of Nova Scotian ‘Labourism’ takes place in chapter 3, for this reason no citation is provided here.

⁴⁷ Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (Moscow, Progress Publishers, 1934), p. 107.

Wales has always been now. The Welsh as a people have lived by making themselves in generation after generation, usually against the odds, usually within a British context. Wales is an artefact which the Welsh produce. If they want to. It requires an act of choice.⁴⁸

The nineteenth century marks the emergence of a new Wales, one that, for the first time, was not Welsh-speaking but Anglophone. This rupture from the past is the inheritance of the industrial revolution in Wales and needless to say was formative in the making of a new working class, a new society, and a new nation. Late-Victorian Wales can be reduced to the same features of industrialisation if we wish to do so: there was a certain shift of the population away from the land, Wales shared in the explosion of the population in the first decades of the twentieth century rising by over 400,000 people in the decade between 1901 and 1911 alone. What was different about the Welsh situation was that its culture was not Anglophone to begin with and so the rising bilingualism and even a monoglot Anglophonic culture is a transformation that cannot be ignored. In Glamorgan for example by 1911 only 393,692 out of a total county population of 1,120,910 spoke Welsh. What is clear, then, when we examine the industrial frontier in South Wales is that we are not analysing a society that is settled but one in a state of social flux and that is in a continued state of renovation and rebirth.

The decline of the Welsh language provides us with a metaphor for the rise of industrial capitalism in Wales and the sacrifice of traditional rural culture for the colliery. The insatiable demand for workers on the coalfield drew workers from across Britain and Ireland and so

⁴⁸ Gwyn A. Williams, *When Was Wales?* (Harmondsworth, 1985), p. 304.

English became the lingua franca of the brave new world of industrial capitalism. As the novelist Jack Jones recalled:

The Welsh were in a minority in Tai-Harry-Blawd, where they were mixed with English, Irish and Scotch people, whose grandfathers had been brought into Wales by the old Iron Kings. At first I knew only Welsh from my parents and grandparents, but as I went on playing with the Scott, Hartley, Ward and McGill children, I became more fluent than in my native language. Dad was annoyed when I started replying in English to what he said in Welsh, but our mam said, in Welsh: 'Oh, let him alone. What odds, anyway?'⁴⁹

By the 1870s, for example, 37 per cent of all those making the journey to the South Wales coalfield came from the agricultural counties of Cornwall, Devon, Somerset, and Gloucester. The 1911 census in fact shows that 236,064 people out of Glamorgan's population of 1,120,910 had been born outside of Wales. In this emigrant nexus the new population latched onto several things that helped bond them together as one workforce and one community. Of these rugby union became the most significant. Its growth as a national game reflected the needs of the new population on the coalfield to bond together as one working class. The making of rugby on the coalfield therefore mirrors the making of the working class and its culture in Glamorgan.

The discourse surrounding the decline of the Welsh language suggests that in the making of working-class culture in the coalfield there was a great deal of opposition to its having been an anglicised culture though largely from older generations:

⁴⁹ Jack Jones, *Unfinished Journey* (London, 1938), p. 22.

Sir, a good number of our Welsh parents cannot prevail upon their own children to learn the Welsh language upon their own hearths and among their own family and I admit that it is a most difficult matter in many instances in a town like Pontypridd where the English tongue is so predominant among all classes. Even in the Welsh chapel after a Welsh service we find as soon as the service is over that most of the conversation takes place in English.⁵⁰

Anglophobia is a theme that is often overstated in Welsh historiography but connected to the generational antagonism to the Anglicisation of youth and youth culture it is perhaps important to suggest that the reaction of the Welsh Nonconformists to the growth of rugby and a working-class culture in the late-nineteenth century was motivated in part by a fear over Anglicisation of Welsh culture and the loss of 'Wales' as a distinct cultural region:

...Ond y Cymru eu hunain sydd yn gollwng y Saesneg i fewn, ac yn gwneud egni i drïo y Gymraeg allan o'u teuluoedd, o'u capeli, ac o'u masnach, ac yn llwfr oddef i Saeson ei throï o'n llysoedd cyfreithiol. Mae at ewyllys y Cymru eu hunain i'r Gymraeg farw ne fyw, ac os lleddir hi arnynt hwy eu hunain y bydd yn bai. Gofaled pob Cymro gadw ei iaith ar yr aelwyd, yn yr addoldy, ac yn ei fasnach, a hi a fydd bwy.⁵¹

Anglophobia, though, cannot explain the whole story and whilst it is a factor it is not one that furthers our understanding of the development of rugby on the industrial frontier. Nevertheless the debates surrounding the decline of the Welsh language and the wider social context of the Welsh coalfield do remind us of the differences between our two regions. Cape Breton, as was shown above, presents itself as a society of cultural preservation that

⁵⁰ GFP, 26 April 1902.

⁵¹ Michael Daniel Jones, *Oes a Gwaith y Prif Athraw y Parch* (Bala, 1903), p.252. Translation: ...it is the Welsh themselves who are letting English in, and making an effort to turn Welsh out of their families, chapels, and trade, and timidly allowing the English to turn it out of our law courts. It is up to the Welsh themselves as to whether Welsh dies or lives, and if it dies the blame will be theirs. Let every Welshman keep his language on the hearth, in chapel and in business and it will live.

the Diaspora community on the island sought to maintain a Gaelic culture and that its responses to industrial capitalism were shaped by the historical memory of the Highlands. South Wales on the other hand is an example of a society that remade itself in the wake of large-scale immigration from several different regions. The Welsh language was overcome by the English language largely out of necessity and the cultural traits that one would now associate with South Wales – such as rugby – were part of the reforging of Wales: the next stage in the dialectical development of society.

Chapter Two – Labour and Liberalism on the Industrial Frontier

'If the balance of the classes is such a blessed thing, the sooner we get the balance equal, the better; for it's lopsided just now, no one can deny. So, representative institutions are the talismanic palladium of the nation, are they? The palladium of the classes that have them, I daresay; and that the very best reason why the classes that haven't got 'em should look out for the same palladium for themselves.'⁵²

The interplay between labour representation and the forces of liberalism tells us much about the nature of class relations and distributions of power on the industrial frontier. In Britain, there is a long-established historiographical tradition that examines that interplay with the ultimate goal of determining the pathological cause of what George Dangerfield called 'The Strange Death of Liberal England'.⁵³ Peter Clarke argued in the early 1970s that the Liberal Party and its dominant ideology of Liberalism was attractive to the working class and that class-based politics was the basis of Liberal support up until the First World War; the Liberals therefore did not decline with the change in the Franchise in 1918 but rather it was the division of the party between Asquith and Lloyd-George that undermined its appeal.⁵⁴ Ross McKibbin, in contrast, argued that irrespective of the Liberal advancements in class-politics, by 1914 Labour had become a class-based party based on three factors: trade union support, growing support amongst the enfranchised classes particularly at the municipal level, and Labour's growing confidence as evidenced by its electoral strategy. The split between Labourism and Liberalism was therefore apparent by 1914.⁵⁵

⁵² Charles Kingsley, *Alton Locke* (New York & London, The Co-Operative Publication Society, 1898), p. 281.

⁵³ George Dangerfield, *The Strange Death of Liberal England* (London, 1935; Chicago, Chicago University Press, 1998).

⁵⁴ Peter F. Clarke, *Lancashire and the New Liberalism* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1971), esp. pp. 393 – 7.

⁵⁵ Ross I. McKibbin, *The Evolution of the Labour Party, 1910 – 1924* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1974).

Without embroiling ourselves in the debates over the rise of Labour it is important to pick out a number of themes for our own purposes. The principal theme, of course, being the developing conflict between Labourism and Liberalism and the chronology of that conflict for it bears directly on the nature of class formation and class identities in Cape Breton given that the prominent union leader of the early twentieth century, James Bryson McLachlan was himself a product of the British Labour movement. Our second theme, connected intimately to the first is that of labour aristocracy: was the radicalism of men such as Keir Hardie or J.B. McLachlan a ‘radical liberalism’ or a socialism influenced by their Nonconformist background? The two are, to be sure, distinct. Our final theme, then, is the effect the conflict between Liberalism and Labourism had upon the coalfield in both South Wales and Cape Breton and to link this to our wider concern of working-class culture and the process of formation and re-formation thereof.

Lib-Labism, Mabon, and the Making of Labour in Glamorgan

The history of the Labour movement in Britain (and indeed the Maritimes) is a vast subject but it is entirely possible to draw out of that literature material on the culture of Liberalism and the culture of Labourism and to examine the production of those cultures. It is a generally acknowledged ‘fact’ of British history that ‘the Liberals had become the principal working-class party in most parts of the country by the 1880s’.⁵⁶ The Gladstonian Liberal Party promoted itself as a mass party, a national party, which served the interests of all that was progressive and ‘modern’ about the nation of *Great* Britain. Labour representation was

⁵⁶ Duncan Tanner, *Political Change and the Labour Party, 1900 – 1918* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1990), p. 19.

sought through the Liberal Party and the small body of Lib-Lab MPs that sat in parliament filled the Liberal benches. The national narrative of the Labour movement, though, obscures many of the important differences that separate Wales and Scotland from England. The Scottish Labour Party formed in 1888 and became an early outlet for key socialists such as Keir Hardie; in Wales the Miners' MP William Abraham (commonly known by his bardic name, Mabon) as Chris Williams has recently shown represented not so much the fusion of Labourism and Liberalism but rather stood at the vanguard of a rising Labour identity in South Wales.⁵⁷ While the earliest Lib-Lab MPs, Thomas Burt and Alexander MacDonald, were elected in the industrial districts of England their election appears to fit the traditional narrative of Liberal support for the candidacy rather than an explicit division between official Liberalism and Labour.⁵⁸

South Wales' Labour activism is well known and much of that focus has, rightly, been on Mid-Glamorgan. It is from here that the South Wales miners published 'The Miners' Next Step' in 1912, a syndicalist manifesto that called for mass activism without unionised leadership; it was here that the 1898 Miners' Strike resulted in the formation of the South Wales Miners' Federation, and it was here the Winston Churchill, as Home Secretary, ordered troops to intervene in the Cambrian Colliery dispute of 1910. The Valleys, in popular consciousness, then is intimately associated with the fortunes of coal mining and it is appropriate that the first miners' MP in Wales, Mabon, was elected Member of Parliament for the Rhondda in 1885.⁵⁹ Mabon proved to be the ultimate consensus figure in late-

⁵⁷ Chris Williams, *Democratic Rhondda. Politics and Society, 1885 – 1951* (Cardiff, University of Wales Press, 1996)

⁵⁸ Cf. John Shepherd, 'Labour and Parliament: the Lib-Labs as the First Working-Class MPs, 1885 – 1906', in Eugenio F. Biagini & Alastair J. Reid (eds.), *Currents of Radicalism. Popular Radicalism, Organised Labour and Party Politics in Britain, 1850 – 1914* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp. 187 – 213.

⁵⁹ David 'Dai' Smith, 'Tonypany, 1910: Definitions of Community', *Past and Present*, 87, May 1980.

nineteenth century Welsh politics; yet he was most certainly more of a working-class figurehead than Lloyd George, for as Kenneth Morgan has written in England he was new Liberal, but in Wales he was old Liberal.⁶⁰

What exactly did it mean to be ‘old liberal’? Liberalism in Wales was founded on Nonconformism and fed into the myth that Wales, in the nineteenth century, was the ‘Nation of Nonconformists’.⁶¹ An old Liberal, in Wales, was one that grew out of the Welsh-medium denominations, rather than the ‘Inglis Côt’ [native English causes] or the alien English-medium chapels. Welsh-medium chapels were considered to be the pinnacle of *Cymru Lân* (or pure Wales) and the bastion of that ideology of Welsh Liberalism in the Victorian period. The development of the ‘Inglis Côt’ was supposed to shield pure Wales from alien influences but it merely hastened the decline of the Welsh-medium Establishment. Nevertheless the English causes were initially welcomed:

Da, er lles eneidiau, ydyw fod amryw enwadau ymneullduol ereill yn deall arwyddiaith mewn perygl o ddiflannu o gymydogathau lle bu unwaith yn flodeuog, o herwydd esgeulusdra I wneuthur darpariaethau cyffelyb.⁶²

Yet the position of the native Welsh chapels in the late-nineteenth century came under increasing pressure not only from the forces of Anglicisation as Tudur Jones cites but from an altered attitude amongst the working class. W. R. Lambert’s assertion that ‘the chapel and

⁶⁰ K O Morgan, ‘The New Liberalism and the Challenge of Labour: the Welsh Experience, 1885 – 1929, in Brown, *Essays in Anti-Labour History*, p. 170.

⁶¹ R Tudur Jones, *Faith and the Crisis of the Nation. Wales, 1890 – 1914* (Cardiff, University of Wales Press, 2004), esp. pp. 1 – 4.

⁶² *Adroddiad Blynnyddol Gymdeithas Gehadol ... am 1864* (Aberystwyth, 1864) tudalen / p. 4. Translation: It is good for the salvation of the souls that the other Nonconformist denominations understand the times and are preparing to make linguistic adjustments; for our part we are not ready to see Methodism disappear from regions where it once flourished because of our failure to make similar preparations.

the pub constituted the twin foci of most nineteenth-century Welsh communities' certainly fits in the early nineteenth century when downward pressure to reform and moralise were less apparent;⁶³ however for the later period of the Victorian era it was precisely that downward pressure that pushed out the working class from the Nonconformist Establishment and into the sports clubs which quickly became working class to compensate. Rational recreation, moral reformism, and the doctrine of respectability then weakened the bonds of the working class to the chapel and religion became much more a personal choice than a 'duty'.

This sense of individual choice reflected the changing composition of society in the coalfield; by 1890 one in seven of the population of Wales had been born abroad with the greatest concentration of non-natives living in Glamorgan where non-Welsh-speaking immigrants numbered 139,031 compared with 121,653 who had migrated from more rural counties of Wales. Of those, for example, some 3000 people were Irish-born adding a sizeable Roman Catholic population to the religious mixture of Glamorgan in the 1890s.⁶⁴ Reaction to this migration from that purist element in native Welsh society was openly xenophobic:

Mae y dyglif Saxonaidd yng Nghymru wedi dwyn difyrion y byddau yn well i'n gwlad beidio byth eu gwelod. Carem i'r Saeson gadw eu rhedegfeydd, eu saethu a chigyddio colemenod, eu dawnsfeyudd nosawl a'r gwelyth llygredig.⁶⁵

⁶³ W. R. Lambert, *Drink and Sobriety in Victorian Wales, c. 1820 – c. 1895* (Cardiff, University of Wales Press, 1983), p. 13.

⁶⁴ Brinley Thomas, 'The Migration of Labour into the Glamorganshire Coalfield, 1861 – 1911', in W. E. Minchinton (ed.), *Industrial South Wales 1750 – 1914: Essays in Welsh Economic History* (London, 1969), pp. 51 - 2

⁶⁵ *Glamorgan Free Press*, 5 September 1891. Translation: The English deluge into Wales has brought amusements it would have been better for our country not to have seen. We would like to see the English keep their races, their shooting and butchering of pigeons, their night-time dancing, and their polluted lineage to themselves.

Of course the English brought with them a love of rugby too, and this was soon under attack for its being contrary to Welsh religious and social purity. Nonconformist Liberalism began to dismiss these new pursuits as not only racially inferior but also a step backwards in Welsh development. The remaking of the Welsh working class and the gelling together of its disparate parts was to become a reality because of the downward pressure of middle class disgust. In typically doom-laden terms *Baner ac Amserau Cymru* declared that:

Mae ysfa toedio's 'bel ddu' wedi disgyn yn bla ar fechgyn y Deheubarth. Gan dlawd a chyfoethog, crefyddol ac anghrefyddol, y bel droed ydyw pwnc y dydd a phwnc y nos. Truenus ydyw edrych arnynt bob dydd Sadwrn yn myned gyda'r cystadleuon troedawl. Ac y mae amryw o'r newyddiaduron dyddiol ac wythnosol yn cyflogi gohebwy'r i'w dilyn, ac yn hebgor colfnau hirion o'u gofod I roddi adroddiadau manwl o'r campau bwystfiliadd. Onid ydyw pethau fel hyn yn brawf diammheuol fod yr 'oes oleu hon' yn myned ei hol i 'dir y tywyllwch'?⁶⁶

The Welsh-medium chapels, driven by a puritanical sense of Calvinist theology refused to adopt a rounded and balanced doctrine that would enable them to adapt to the cultural demands of the new industrial working class just as the Roman Catholic Church or the English Nonconformist chapels had been able to do. Some ministers suggested that they 'would prefer to see the young people in the Church under [their] care pursuing sports in the most godforsaken places, than see sports being linked with the house of God'.⁶⁷ Others suggested that 'many current sports are innocent in themselves, though they had been

⁶⁶ *Baner ac Amserau Cymru*, 4 February 1885. Translation: The hankering after the 'black ball' has fallen like the plague on the boys of the South. Day and night, for the poor and the wealthy, the religious and irreligious, football is the talking point. It is pitiful to see them every Saturday travelling from one town to the other to take part in football contests. And several of the daily and weekly newspapers employ correspondents to cover it, and set aside long columns for the purpose of giving detailed reports of such bestial sports. Aren't things like this indisputable proof that this 'Age of Light' is returning to the 'Land of Darkness'?

⁶⁷ *Tyst* (18 October, 1889), p. 3–4.

undertaken in an evil manner. This is true, for instance of [rugby] football'.⁶⁸ More often than not though, the total hostility of the native Welsh churches was directed towards rugby, as this lecture by Reverend John Rees suggests:

Were churches what they professed to be why should their young men seek their pleasures in play-houses and on football fields? Football he declared to be the dullest and most senseless game the world had ever seen (laughter). Even an ape...would not disgrace itself by seeking pleasures in kicking a football. Why, if they and middle aged men found any pleasure in going to the pubs, theatres and football field then let them, in the name of God and for the honour, success and influence of the Church upon the world remain outside her pale (applause).⁶⁹

The Liberal Nonconformist middle class in Wales was afraid of working-class spectators meeting together, drinking, and gambling whilst they were not prepared to devote the same effort to reforming their character and seeking pleasure in the word of God. As Barrow Williams suggested:

The football *game* is a splendid exercise; but I appeal to you whether football *matches* with their thousands of spectators (who get their *recreation* "by proxy") is not quite a different thing? Is it not emphatically declared by the best and most observant of our leaders that "*professionalism*" and "*Gambling*" are making our popular plays a delusion and snare.⁷⁰

Rational recreation and middle class desire to reform the working class appears once more as a dominant theme of the Victorian Age. Sporting culture was fine, it was rational, insofar as

⁶⁸ *Report of the Union of Welsh Independents* (Bridgend, 1896), pp. 123 – 7.

⁶⁹ Reverend John Rees, *SWDN*, 5 May 1894.

⁷⁰ *Ibid*, p. 58.

one got through recreation what one did not get at work, 'is it not a principle of common sense', Williams continued, 'that a man should obtain in his amusement that which he lacks in his work?'⁷¹ For middle class professionals, rugby was a perfectly adequate pastime since solicitors, doctors, and teachers were largely passive in their work; for a miner, though, it was inadequate since rugby was not a mental stimulant and it was through education that workers would learn to become 'respectable'. Since workers were unwilling to give up their new pastimes, sport was condemned:

"He that *loveth sport* shall be a poor man," says Solomon – "a poor man" in the ordinary sense; a *poorer* man mentally; the *poorest* man spiritually.⁷²

Liberalism's downfall and the themes that Chris Williams detected in his work on Rhondda politics can be similarly found in the cultural sphere as has been shown. The 1885 electoral campaign fought by Mabon was contested on the issue of class and of the pressing need to represent the workers. It ended with Mabon's election, and 'the explicit division between official Liberalism and Labour'.⁷³

To observe the divisions between working-class culture and Liberal Nonconformity the Revival years of 1904 & 1905 provide a readily available, if poorly understood, case study. It is clear from the analysis above that, tensions between Welsh Nonconformity and the working class had polarised by the dawn of the twentieth century, if not earlier. Evan Roberts' Revival, then, was a frontal attack on that working-class culture and the last push to

⁷¹ *Conference Report of the Presbyterian Church of Wales Conference, Merthyr Tydfil 24, 25, 26 September, 1901*, (Merthyr Tydfil, 1901) p. 57.

⁷² Presbyterian conference report, p. 59.

⁷³ Williams, *Democratic Rhondda*, p. 37.

reverse the tide of Labourism on the coalfield. By the end of the first decade of the twentieth century one correspondent of the *Merthyr Express* felt confident enough to declare that:

The chapels have lost all their power because they have ceased to influence the people. It would open [a] Revd gentleman's mind a little to the attitude of the working man if he served behind a public house bar for one evening, and heard some of the remarks which I constantly hear about some the ministers of religion...The attack of the chapel people on the Church and on every other institution that rivals them in influence, is only evidence of the deep-rooted spleen for which they are now becoming notorious.⁷⁴

The only historian to study the Religious Revival and its connection to rugby, Gareth Morgan, concluded tentatively that '*possibly* the revival can be interpreted as the manifestation of conflict between two cultures'.⁷⁵ Yet this conclusion misunderstands both the severity of the conflict and the degree of polarisation that had taken place before the Revival years; similarly, his statement that the game's clashes with Nonconformity had scarcely weakened the chapel's powerful position in Welsh consciousness'.⁷⁶ Given the analysis above it hardly needs to be said that this conclusion similarly entirely misses the context of the Revival and the wider social context of Nonconformity's slip out of the refashioned national consciousness. For example, at the height of the Revival in November 1904, Cardiff played Swansea at the Cardiff Arms Park; 'there was a vast crowd stretching from the fire brigade station to the Angel Hotel' reported the *Western Mail*, 'while the thousands who paraded Queen Street made the scene one that was reminiscent of an international day'.⁷⁷ The Religious Revival slipped out of popular consciousness as quickly as it arrived; likewise, the

⁷⁴ *ME*, 12 October 1912.

⁷⁵ Gareth Morgan, 'Rugby and Revivalism: Sport and Religion in Edwardian Wales', *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, vol. 22 no.3 May 2005, p.436. My emphasis.

⁷⁶ Morgan, *Rugby* p. 436.

⁷⁷ *Western Mail*, 26 Jan 1905.

South Wales Press recorded the reactions of the Welsh supporters at the Wales versus Scotland International of April 1905: ‘the Welshmen forgot all about their revivals, and their language savoured of this world...Then Wales scored an equalising try, and when I looked down at my revivalist friend he was gripping a huge black bottle labelled somebody’s “special”’.⁷⁸

Working-class identity on the coalfield was governed more by allegiance to sporting culture than to religious fervour, for, on that cold November afternoon, it was the eighty-minute patriotism that dominated the popular mind. As the political scientist James Kellas correctly suggests, one can view national identity from the perspective of the working-class: ‘working-class nationalism is generally related to culture and football’.⁷⁹ The *Merthyr Express* summed up the role of the chapel in the remade working-class culture, ‘[While] the churches are half-empty’, reported the paper, ‘football matches ... do not fail to attract the people’.⁸⁰ Rugby had truly become, the one great pastime of the People.

Labourism in the New World: Cape Breton and the ‘Scottish Connexion’

The cultural trends that developed in South Wales in the 1880s are barely visible in Cape Breton before the twentieth century. Rugby football, for example, does not truly emerge before the first decade of that century, whilst amongst the British Diaspora in Nova Scotia more generally it was cricket that held the popular imagination. Alan Metcalfe has argued that cricket in Canada was a game of the social elite,⁸¹ yet insofar as that was true of the metropolitan centres such as Halifax focus upon the metropolitan should not lead us to

⁷⁸ *South Wales Press*, 16 April 1905.

⁷⁹ Cited, C. Harvie, *Nationalism in Scotland* (4th Edition, Abingdon, 2004), p. 23.

⁸⁰ *Merthyr Express*, 25 February 1911.

⁸¹ Alan Metcalfe, *Canada Learns to Play* (Toronto, McClelland and Stewart, 1987), pp. 80 – 4.

generalise about the experience of the 'hinterland'. On Cape Breton, in particular, cricket was resistant to the pressures of 'Canadian' baseball and remained a working-class sport for the British migrants there particularly amongst the coal miners of the island. Similarly on Prince Edward Island cricket and rugby predominated over North American sports. Baseball, as Colin Howell notes, 'was an afterthought'.⁸²

Therefore in analysing the connection between a predominantly British working class on Cape Breton and its relationship with other social classes we must be sensitive to the wider dimensions of the British labour movement for as David Frank has recently noted: 'in the history of labour leadership in the coal industry in North America, it is notable that some of the most influential leaders were British immigrants ... although local conditions differed, the home country experiences and perceptions of immigrant leaders played a part in shaping labour traditions in the new world'.⁸³ Thus Ian McKay's work on Robert Drummond as the principal figure in the Provincial Workmen's Association [PWA], cannot fully explain Drummond's connection to Scotland and his unionism without being aware of the state of mid-Victorian trade unionism in Scotland and Britain more generally.⁸⁴

'The Provincial Workmen's Association came into existence to have strikes dispensed with', wrote Drummond in his *Recollections*, a statement that is particularly suggestive of his unionist roots.⁸⁵ Similarly, he wanted 'mutual concession between employers and employed to seek to

⁸² Howell, *Northern Sandlots*, p. 34.

⁸³ David Frank, *J.B. McLachlan: A Biography* (Toronto, J. Lorimer, 1999), p. 51.

⁸⁴ Ian McKay, 'By Wisdom, Wile, or War': The Provincial Workmen's Association and the Struggle for Working Class Independence in Nova Scotia, 1867 – 1897', *Labour/ Le Travail*, 18 (Fall, 1986), pp. 13 – 62.

⁸⁵ Robert Drummond, *Recollections and Reflections of a Former Trade Union Leader* (Stellarton, 1926), p. 49.

have the work carried on to the advantage of both'.⁸⁶ As the first successful miners' Trade Union in Canada it is notable the extent to which the miners desired to be taken seriously as a skilled labour class; an important difference between the artisans and ordinary labouring men in Britain was unionism. As Foster and Hobsbawm (among others) have noted, 'the boundaries of the [labour] aristocracy and of trade unionism were normally ... believed to coincide'.⁸⁷ Drummond argued that the colliers of Cape Breton were indeed respectable. 'Bring a thousand miners together', he suggested to the *Royal Commission on the Relations of Capital and Labour*, 'and a thousand other men of no other trade will beat them as far as sobriety and good behaviour are concerned'.⁸⁸ The Trade Unions ultimately espoused the ideology and attitudes of the segment of society they served: namely, the labour aristocracy since 'that segment of the working-class [was] most closely attuned to consensus values'.⁸⁹ As Hobsbawm put it, these men were more receptive to middle-class values or respectability and self-help because they were 'better paid, better treated, and generally regarded as more respectable than the mass of the proletariat'.⁹⁰ The deliberate attempts of men like Drummond to fashion a 'respectable' image for the colliers of Cape Breton is in complete contrast to the image of the average collier in South Wales. There the South Wales Miners' Federation, which appeared at the end of the nineteenth century, has generally been considered to be part of the wider, socially embedded, Labour movement rather than simply

⁸⁶ Ibid. p. 31.

⁸⁷ Eric J Hobsbawm, *Labouring Men: Studies in the History of Labour* (London, 1964).

⁸⁸ *Report of the Royal Commission on the Relations of Capital and Labour in Canada, Evidence – Nova Scotia* (Ottawa, HM Stationers, 1889), p. 367.

⁸⁹ Trygve R. Tholfsen, *Working Class Radicalism in Mid-Victorian England* (London, Croom Helm Ltd., 1976), p. 269.

⁹⁰ Eric J. Hobsbawm, *Labouring Men. Studies in the History of Labour* (London, 1964), p. 272.

representative of that section of the working class that Hobsbawm and others have labelled 'labour aristocrats', as seems to have been the case in Cape Breton.⁹¹

Why then, was this respectability such a feature of Drummond's unionism? The answer, as has been suggested, lies in the developments of the British Trade Union movement and its location within the British working class. It would be far too straightforward to argue that the trade union movement was simply a conduit for middle-class respectability since this misses the legacy of working-class activism present through the trade unions and also the impulse toward respectability from within the working class itself.⁹² The appearance of Samuel Smiles' *Self-Help* on Drummond's bookshelf may be as indicative of a self-improving ethic as much as '*embourgeoisement*' of the workers. Nevertheless respectability was still a badge of membership and a yellow brick road to bourgeois sub-urban culture. 'Trades' Unions', wrote George Potter in the *Contemporary Review* 'are among the foremost proofs of the improved mental training of the working men, and, at the same time, of their increased power of self-control and self-restraint'.⁹³ Drummond's attitude then was not one of Conservatism but one of resignation to the social order and thus acceptance of the liberal way of doing things. Trade Union agitation had to be about mutual bargaining rather than strikes, which upset the natural order of society. This projection of an improved character was at the heart of mid-Victorian Trade Unionism in Britain and thus it is little wonder that Drummond brought this approach with him to Nova Scotia in the 1870s.

⁹¹ E. W. Evans, *The Miners of South Wales* (Cardiff, University of Wales Press, 1961), p. 170; also, R. Page Arnot, *South Wales Miners: Glouyr De Cymru. A History of the South Wales Miners' Federation, 1898 – 1914* (London, George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1967); Smith & Francis, *The Fed.*

⁹² Cf. Beatrice & Sidney Webb, *History of Trade Unionism* (London, Longmans, 1920)..

⁹³ George Potter, 'Trades' Unions, Strikes and Lock-Outs: A Rejoinder', *Contemporary Review*, XVII (1871), p. 529.

The industrial capitalists dominated South Wales; the coalmine owners and their henchmen had a singular control of local activities and a position in society, which defied any external governance. As Arthur Horner, the Welsh Communist Leader lamented, ‘the word of the Crawshays and their henchmen was the law of Merthyr’.⁹⁴ This was no less true of the Cape Breton coalfield for as McKay notes ‘the mine manager was the central figure in an anachronistic theatre of power’.⁹⁵ Polarisation of Liberalism and Labourism on the coalfield, then, inevitably meant a conflict between worker and capitalist, employer and employee. One historian has gone so far to say that this was an industrial feudalism,⁹⁶ a conclusion that is tempting to agree with especially given that the Crawshay family had a castle built to emphasise their power.⁹⁷ However, and it is an important reservation, the nature of industrial labour relations does not match the nature of feudal relations especially given the changes in the mode of production.⁹⁸

The PWA, then, was not ‘born in an atypical coalfield’ as McKay has written;⁹⁹ it was one that closely mirrored the social relations of the South Wales coalfield particularly the bleak power divisions between the employers and employed. Drummond, as with many Trade Union leaders in Britain, recognised this and contended to work within the system to change it for the better rather than to work from without. This is why the Trade Unions allied themselves to the Liberal Party under Gladstone in Britain and was why in the pages of the

⁹⁴ Arthur Horner, *Incorrigible Rebel* (London, 1960), p. 17.

⁹⁵ McKay, *Wisdom*, p. 20.

⁹⁶ John Mellor, *The Company Store: James Bryson McLachlan and the Cape Breton Miners, 1900 – 1925* (Toronto, 1983)

⁹⁷ Cf. John Davies, *Cardiff and the Marquesses of Bute* (Cardiff, University of Wales Press, 1981). Also, Idem., ‘Caerdydd, Dinas a Phrifddinas’, *Trafodion Anrhydeddus Gymdeithas y Cymmrodorion* (Cyfres Newydd: Cyfrol 12, 2005) / ‘Cardiff, City and Capital City’, *Transactions of the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion* (New Series: Volume 12, 2005).

⁹⁸ John Mellor, *The Company Store: James Bryson McLachlan and the Cape Breton Coal Miners, 1900 – 1925* (Toronto, Doubleday Ltd., 1983), p. xvii.

⁹⁹ McKay, *Wisdom*, p. 23.

Trades Journal Drummond promoted the image of the respectable miner. If the colliers were seen to be part of the social order rather than fighting against it, more could be achieved. As the motto of the PWA badges ran: 'None Cease to Rise but Those Who Cease to Climb'. This version of pragmatic Labourism was forced to exit stage right, quite literally. As Drummond himself noted: 'some wise men from the east, in other words some recently arrived Scotsmen, have taken possession of the PWA lodge at Sydney Mines, and are trying to introduce some old, new fangled notions'.¹⁰⁰

The first decade of the twentieth century marks the emergence of a fiery brand of Labourism directly inherited from Scotland. Men such as McLachlan were disciples of Keir Hardie the independently minded Scottish MP for West Ham and then Merthyr Tydfil (from 1900). The Lib-Lab pact which had served to elect working-class members of parliament since the 1870s, Hardie argued, merely increased the stranglehold of society over the workers: 'mind your own business, men: no one can have so much interest in your affairs as you should have yourselves.'¹⁰¹ McLachlan, to be sure, represents an entirely different episode in the history of the Nova Scotian Labour movement, but he was also influenced by a new scientific realism which saw poverty as an environmental rather than a moral problem, 'I wonder what he [Drummond] thinks cause the deformed legs, the drawn-up shoulders, the fallen-in chest and the 'clanny blinks' on the workers of such a town ... it is not steady work that causes such results, but oppressive work, filthy and abominable surrounding vitiated air'.¹⁰²

¹⁰⁰ *Halifax Herald*, 26 July 1906.

¹⁰¹ *Halifax Herald*, 18 July 1906.

¹⁰² *Halifax Herald* 22 August 1906.

The triumph of Liberalism on Cape Breton, as exemplified by Robert Drummond's Trade Unionism, was enforced by the lack of working-class self-education. In Britain for example, a number of collieries in the North-East of England and in South Wales had miners' libraries.¹⁰³ In South Wales, though, the tradition of poetry, eisteddfodau, and the Sunday School had all championed self-education and so it is unsurprising that one finds Miners' Libraries in abundance in the coalfield. McLachlan's suggestion that every lodge create its own library, then, was not without its parallels or inspiration in Britain. The activism of the South Wales coalfield can be attributed to the reading habits of the miners, here they read Marx and Einstein and discussed the ideas that flowed from those readings. McLachlan's singling out of works by Carlyle, Ruskin, Marx, and Adam Smith was part of this common drive amongst miners for improvement, 'the lack of independence of thought and action is, to my mind, the towering calamity of workingmen' he argued.¹⁰⁴ The *Halifax Herald* picked up this theme, 'The *Herald* is now pointing out how the workers of today may help to bring about a more rational mode of action in their trade unions – get a library and use it!'¹⁰⁵ The Miners' Libraries were an underground university.¹⁰⁶

If self-education and the development of purely working-class institutions of education can be seen as evidence of an autonomous working-class culture on the coalfield then it is interesting to note the significant delay in the emergence of this culture of self-education on Cape Breton. In Britain, colliery libraries had existed since the 1850s and had grown in earnest by the middle of the 1890s; it seems, then, that the production of an autonomous

¹⁰³ John Benson, *British Coalminers in the Nineteenth Century* (London, Longman, 1989), p. 152 – 154.

¹⁰⁴ *Halifax Herald*, 29 October 1906.

¹⁰⁵ *Halifax Herald*, 6 October 1906.

¹⁰⁶ W. H. Davies, *The Right Place, The Right Time, Memories of Boyhood Days in a Welsh Mining Community* (Swansea, C. Davies Publishers Ltd., 1972) p. 104 – 105.

working-class culture based upon the principles of Labourism and self-education on Cape Breton was influenced not from within but very much from without. It was the appearance of McLachlan and the transfer of the new, independent Labour ideas as defined by men such as Keir Hardie and Arthur Henderson, and the knowledge of working-class cultural institutions, that sparked off a radicalisation of Cape Breton and its working class. The first decade of the twentieth century, then, witnessed the making of Cape Breton's industrial working class. The next chapter explores the development of middle-class respectability and morality; in doing so it traces the origins of rational recreation and the conduit along which rational recreation and muscular Christianity travelled to Nova Scotia and disseminated through Nova Scotian polite society.

Chapter Three - Hymns and Arias

‘Two nations; between whom there is no intercourse and no sympathy; who are as ignorant of each other’s habits, thoughts, and feelings, as if they were dwellers in different zones, or inhabitants of different planets; who are formed by a different breeding, are fed by a different food, are ordered by different manners, and are not governed by the same laws.’

‘You speak of-’ said Egremont, hesitatingly.

‘The Rich and the Poor.’¹⁰⁷

Victorian perceptions of poverty underpinned bourgeois attitudes towards the working class. This chapter explores the intellectual debates surrounding poverty at the beginning of the Victorian period and connects those debates to the later developments of rational recreation and Muscular Christianity. The dramatis personae of the poverty as morality debate is one of the grandest in British history, men such as Thomas Arnold, John Henry (Cardinal) Newman, and the novelist Thomas Hughes all contributed to the intellectual conceptualisation of the working class and working-class culture. As will be noted in this chapter, these bourgeois developments were not without reaction among the working class. The philosophy of respectability and rational recreation as a means of escaping poverty had an important effect on what Hobsbawm and others have called the Labour Aristocracy.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁷ Benjamin Disraeli, *Sybil: Or the Two Nations* (London, Oxford University Press, 1956), p. 67.

¹⁰⁸ Eric J. Hobsbawm, ‘The Labour Aristocracy in Nineteenth Century Britain and Trends in the British Labour Movement’, in Idem. *Labouring Men* (London, 1964); John Foster, *Class Struggle and the Industrial Revolution. Early Industrialism in Three English Towns* (London, 1974); Patrick Joyce, *Work, Society, and Politics. The Culture of the Factory in Later Victorian England* (Brighton, 1980); Robert Gray, *The Labour Aristocracy in Victorian Edinburgh* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1976); Peter Latta, *A Labour Aristocracy: Skilled Labour in Amherst, Nova Scotia, 1891 – 1914* (Masters Thesis, Saint Mary’s University, 1991); Ian McKay, *Rebels, Reds, Radicals: Rethinking Canada’s Left History* (Toronto, 2005).

Rational recreation stemmed from a certain attitude to poverty. As a philosophy it was an offshoot of the dominant Liberalism of the Victorian Age. Thus where Peter Bailey first recognised rational recreation as ‘proceeding from a basic humanitarian sympathy with the plight of the urban masses’ he understood rational recreation as stemming from a desire to offset revolution.¹⁰⁹ Yet, whilst we might agree that rational recreation was an element of social control, it is from his later work that Bailey truly acknowledges rational recreation for what it was: ‘a specific value of considerable normative power’.¹¹⁰ Respectability was a badge of office for many of the labour aristocracy who sought a route of escape from the quagmire of working-class slums and severe poverty. Yet, whilst the labour aristocracy were infused with Smilesian self-help philosophies, the Victorian underclass and the vast majority of the working class were dislocated in the stream of respectable and rational leisure pursuits. To understand that dislocation let us now turn to the ‘condition of England’ question and the intellectual history of moral explanations of poverty.

Noetics, Tractarians, and Moral Poverty

In the early nineteenth century the Anglican Church became embroiled in an intellectual contest between the heavyweight thinkers of the age. Oriel College, Oxford, became home to two schools of theological and social thought, which were determined to pull the Church into different streams of sociological understanding. On the one hand, the Oriel Noetics, formed part of what Richard Brent (amongst others) has called the Liberal Anglican

¹⁰⁹ Peter Bailey, *Leisure and Class in Victorian England. Rational Recreation and the Contest for Control, 1830 – 1885* (London, Routledge, 1978), pp. 35 – 36.

¹¹⁰ Peter Bailey, ‘A Role Analysis of Working-Class Respectability’, in Idem., *Popular Culture and Performance in the Victorian City* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 31.

movement.¹¹¹ Responsible for much of the theory behind early Victorian social legislation, this group can be said to be the founding fathers of what sport historians recognise as ‘rational recreation’. Lining up against this cohort were another group of Oriel Fellows, John Henry Newman, John Keble, and Thomas Mozley who produced a series of tracts rebuking the theological and social thought of the Noetics. This group, known commonly as the Tractarians or Oxford Movement sought to emphasise a rustic, parochial version of the Church which they saw as being lost in the sea of modernisation and liberalism;¹¹² their social thought, importantly, mirrors the Young England novels of Benjamin Disraeli and characterises the conservative Victorian reaction to the dangers of liberalism, namely the explosion of class-consciousness, class warfare, and the severing of the duties of the rich in caring for the poor.¹¹³

Historians have yet to make the connection between rational recreation and the wider social thought of the Oriel Fellows of the middle decades of the nineteenth century yet the development of Liberal Anglican and Tractarian thought over those years feeds directly into what sport historians would recognise as rational recreation. Thomas Arnold, the Headmaster of Rugby depicted as ‘the Doctor’ in Thomas Hughes’ famous novel, was the key figure connecting the Muscular Christianity movement and its Noetic, Liberal Anglican

¹¹¹ Richard Brent, *Liberal Anglican Politics, Whiggery, Religion, and Reform 1830 – 1841* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1987); Idem, ‘Note: Oriel Noetics’, in M. G. Brock, (ed.), *The History of the University of Oxford Volume 6: Nineteenth-Century Oxford* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1997) Peter Mandler, *Aristocratic Government in the Age of Reform: Whigs and Liberals, 1830 - 1852* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1990).

¹¹² Simon A Skinner, *Tractarians and the ‘Condition of England’: The Social and Political Thought of the Oxford Movement* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 2004).

¹¹³ The novels of this period emphasise variously the nature of contemporary society and how the ‘respectable’ classes understood it; for a flavour see Benjamin Disraeli, *Sybil or The Two Nations* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1970); Elizabeth Gaskell, *North and South* (London, Penguin, 1995); Idem., *Mary Barton* (London, Penguin, 1976); Charles Dickens, *Hard Times* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1998).

germ.¹¹⁴ This section, then, attempts to fill that void, and will suggest that the legacy of rational recreation and its top-down attempts at diffusing socially acceptable sporting culture and sporting practices to the working class is a development of the clash between liberalism and conservatism in the nineteenth century and that the germ of the conflict between working-class sporting culture and middle-class religious, rational recreation lies in the intellectual fight in the Senior Common Room of Oriel College.

The nature of relations between sport and religion owes much to Thomas Arnold, both the man and the fiction. Under him Rugby school became a paragon of mid-Victorian manliness and his image was used to great effect by the muscular Christian authors Charles Kingsley and Thomas Hughes. Of course, it is to Hughes that we (and Arnold himself presumably) owe that picture of Rugby School as a leading promoter of sporting culture as a reforming culture. *Tom Brown's School Days* rests as Hughes' shrine to Thomas Arnold's brand of respectable and rational recreation. Arnold though seems to have been a strict headmaster insofar as it came to rooting out violence. His use of the rod to chastise the schoolboys of Rugby was designed to exorcise their wickedness, and to ensure that they would be rid of sinful acts (such as masturbation).¹¹⁵ Muscular Christianity, moreover, was an extension of Arnold's training regime, the Victorian principle of a healthy body and a healthy mind was part of it but more importantly than that Muscular Christianity was about the rooting out of the sinful 'pleasures' which brought about working-class poverty: drink, promiscuity, and gambling. By channelling sporting culture through Christian morals and virtues, Muscular Christianity emerged as a regimen for personal improvement.

¹¹⁴ Boyd Hilton, *A Mad, Bad, and Dangerous People? England 1783 – 1846* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 2006), p. 465.

¹¹⁵ *The Miscellaneous Works of Thomas Arnold* (1845), p. 365.

Alongside Thomas Arnold, Charles Kingsley, and Thomas Hughes, stand John Henry (Cardinal) Newman, John Keble, Thomas Mozley, and Frederick Oakley. Liberal Anglicanism met its ideological match in the Tractarian Movement. The Tractarians were concerned, amongst other things, with the relationship between the Church and the Poor. Oakley and Mozley in particular can be seen as true champions of the Poor insofar as they were understood to be a particular constituency of the Anglican Church. Their mission, as Newman recalled in his *Apologia Pro Vita Sua*, was ‘how were we to keep the Church from being liberalized?’¹¹⁶ Newman and the other Tractarians saw the Church’s mission as uniquely connected to the Poor: the Church was ‘the poor man’s court of justice’.¹¹⁷ Sporting culture, if it was part of a reforming process ought to be directed by the Church. Yet in contrast with Muscular Christianity, which promoted the values of self-improvement and was, in itself, a philosophy of life, Tractarian-influenced philosophies of recreation emphasised the role of the Church as a refuge and as a guiding force rather than a reformist institution. The underlying criticism of the Liberal Anglicans levelled by the Tractarians was that it upset the balance of society and most importantly the sense of Christian equality, as Frederick Oakeley lamented ‘Right is defined by Might’.¹¹⁸

‘The want of Christian sympathy between rich and poor’, exclaimed Oakeley, was the ‘glaring evil and crying sin of the time’.¹¹⁹ A situation that led to what Bosanquet blamed as ignorance of the patrician class for working-class diversity and their assumption that ‘everybody below a mechanic and a shopkeeper ... is little better than a thief, is one of the

¹¹⁶ John Henry Newman, *Apologia Pro Vita Sua: Being a History of His Religious Opinion*, (London, Penguin, 1994), pp. 39 – 40.

¹¹⁷ Thomas Mozley, ‘Pews’, *British Critic [BC]*, xxxii,64 (October 1842), p. 489.

¹¹⁸ Frederick Oakeley, *A Letter to His Grace the Duke of Wellington, Chancellor of the University of Oxford, upon the Principle and Tendency of a Bill now before Parliament, entitled, ‘A Bill for Abolishing Subscription to Articles of Religion in Certain Cases’* (Oxford and London, 1835), p.5; Simon A. Skinner, *Tractarians*, p. 255.

¹¹⁹ Frederick Oakeley, ‘Ancient and Modern Ways of Charity’, *BC*, xxix, 57 (January, 1841), p. 58.

offal of society, and ought to be swept off into some common sewer of filth and corruption by a scavenger-police'. The 'libellous and abusive descriptions of the lower orders of society', which he heard commonly around him were 'wholly anti-Christian'.¹²⁰ Liberal-Anglican views of the working-class, then, and the attempts to rationalise and improve their character were, so far as the Tractarians were concerned, outrageous and unnecessary. It was not the poor that lacked moral virtue but rather the reformers.

Moreover, the rights of the 'labouring classes' were being reduced according to the Liberal Anglican ethic. Working-class sporting culture suffered across the century from the lack of recreational space, a factor that reflected the lack of working-class *rights* to the land that it might be played on. Mozley took objection to the lack of working-class right to use of land that they helped create. Men, he argued, 'should be allowed a certain right of makership, paternity, and ownership, in everything that they have helped to create'.¹²¹ Yet such rights were not forthcoming, as several youths in Merthyr Tydfil discovered when they kicked a ball about on the street. Urban space did not belong to the working class despite the protestations of men like Mozley and those who violated the letter of the bourgeois law suffered the consequences, no matter their age.

Street football, for example, was frowned upon by both the local authorities and residents who frequently found the roads and pavements blocked. Indeed when a group of youngsters were caught playing football in a street in Dowlais they were brought before the local magistrate who despite hoping that 'they would all turn out good footballers' insisted that

¹²⁰ S. Bosanquet, *The Rights of the Poor and Christian Alms-giving Vindicated; or, The State and Character of the Poor and the Conduct and Duties of the Rich Exhibited and Illustrated* (1841), p.196

¹²¹ Thomas Mozley, 'Agricultural Labour and Wages', *BC*, xxxviii, 65 (January 1843), pp. 271 - 272

‘they must practise elsewhere than in the public streets’. Each youth was fined 2s 6d, an expensive lesson learnt.¹²² Working-class children naturally felt aggrieved at being fined for simply playing but when a boy was fined 2s in 1896 for playing with a bat and ball his mother’s complaint that ‘the children had nowhere else to play in’ was largely ignored.¹²³ Civilised urban spaces neglected the issue of recreation ground and it was not simply children that wound up as victims of the civilising process.

Lack of available ground was hardly conducive to the development of sport but the root cause of this failure to provide sporting space within the urban environment was the conflict over the purpose and values of working-class sporting culture. The lack of space ensured that sport was played in a rough and ready fashion on makeshift pitches, a feature that hardly endeared organised games to local landlords and bourgeois reformers. One correspondent to the *Merthyr Express* was quite certain as to who was responsible for the lack of recreational space:

Though the members [of the Merthyr Alexandras] had every confidence that this season would be one of the best ever known – a deal of new blood, good working committee men, having got together, and the financial aspect looking rosy – their hopes have been dashed through the lack of support accorded them by the people who, when opportunities occur, get upon public platforms and shout about what should be done for young men! Merthyr would years ago have come prominently to the fore in matters of recreation – football included – but for the miserable support given to the players.¹²⁴

¹²² *Merthyr Express*, 15 November 1890

¹²³ *Ibid.* 18 July 1896

¹²⁴ *Ibid.* 29 September 1900.

As we can see, then, the lack of what Mozley called *right* to space for the working class led to a situation in which sporting endeavour was restricted and so forced underground and to the public house, particularly in Britain.¹²⁵ The open conflict over the values of sporting culture and identity would not just go away and the attempt to rationalise urban space led to demands for places to play. Thus, the battle spilled over onto the streets and into the parks of the towns and cities. Contested values became contested environments. Yet it was the bourgeoisie who held the legislative means to govern land use, as Simon Gunn has argued, the middle class was able to ‘project its impress over a considerable part of urban existence from the spheres of work, leisure and education to the physical layout of the town, civic architecture and sanitary improvement’.¹²⁶ Right, indeed, was defined by might.

Muscular Christianity and the Growth of Victorian Liberalism

The particular set of values cherished by Victorian Liberalism triumphed the individual over anything else. In the middle of his novel *Tom Brown at Oxford*, Thomas Hughes breaks off the narrative to head off on an exposé of muscular Christianity and its merits. He distinguishes between musclemen and muscular Christians, the former having ‘no belief whatever as to the purposes for which his body has been given to him’. The muscular Christian on the other hand ‘does not hold that mere strength or activity are in themselves worthy of any respect or worship’. Veneration of sports teams, it seems, or of particular players, or indeed of particular sports was an aberration of Christian values, it was *immoral*. One’s physical form

¹²⁵ Cf. Emma Griffin, *England’s Revery: A History of Popular Sports and Pastimes, 1660 – 1830* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2005). Griffin describes the effects of legislation on the limiting of land use and the resulting reliance upon the public house for available land. She notes the impact of the agricultural and industrial revolution upon the availability of public space and common land.

¹²⁶ Simon Gunn, ‘The “failure” of the Victorian middle class: a critique’, in J. Wolff and J. Seed (eds.), *The Culture of Capital: Art, Power and the Nineteenth-Century Middle Class* (Manchester, 1988), p. 32.

is 'given him to be trained and brought into subjection, and then used for the protection of the weak, the advancement of all righteous causes, and the subduing of the earth which God has given to the children of men'.¹²⁷ *Tom Brown at Oxford*, despite its open veneration of muscular Christianity was much less popular than *Tom Brown's School Days* in which the philosophy of muscular Christianity is much more subtly employed.

Tom Brown was not the only muscular Christian hero of popular literature, although he is the quintessential English hero of that movement; Ralph Connor, the Canadian Presbyterian minister, utilised the muscular Christian hero in many of his earlier novels, notably *The Sky Pilot*.¹²⁸ The theme of baseball runs as a framing motif throughout the novel, leading to one section in which 'The Pilot' proves his worth as a baseball player but only to the bemusement of his compatriots. 'He [Hi Kendal] regarded the exchange of the profession of baseball for the study of theology as a serious error in judgement'. Of course, for Connor and Hughes the playing of sport and a theological understanding were not mutually exclusive, if anything the combination was a bonus, after all Connor's hero, the Sky Pilot, 'was recognized as the best all-round man on the field'.¹²⁹ The muscular Christian hero always wins in the end.

In Halifax, the dissemination of these muscular Christian ideas through the availability of novels by Hughes and Kingsley presents us with an interesting case of Liberal hegemony of social thought in Nova Scotia. The Halifax Mechanics' Institute Library, for example provides us with an intriguing glimpse into the potential reading habits of the Nova Scotian

¹²⁷ Thomas Hughes, *Tom Brown at Oxford* (Chicago & New York, M.A. Donohue & Company, 1922), p. 130.

¹²⁸ Ralph Connor, *The Sky Pilot: A Tale of the Footbills* (New York, Grosset & Dunlap, 1899).

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 71.

metropolis. Works of moral philosophy by Thomas Chalmers and Hannah More sat alongside the muscular Christian novels of Charles Kingsley and Thomas Hughes. Notably absent, however, are the social novels of Elizabeth Gaskell, Benjamin Disraeli, and Charles Dickens. Social criticism of the mid-Victorian Liberal project, at least in its novelised form, seems strangely absent from mid-Victorian Halifax and its public literary culture.¹³⁰ This may reflect the later industrialisation of Nova Scotia relative to the industrialisation of Britain, but the provision of works by Chalmers and the muscular Christian authors suggests that Liberalism, on the Eastern fringes of Canada, had assumed its hegemonic position as in Wales.

Yet, despite the absence of these social novels, mid-Victorian Halifax did not escape the ‘Condition of England’ question, though historians, like mid-Victorian Haligonians themselves, have refrained from discussing the ‘dark side’ of Victorian Halifax in these terms.¹³¹ Described by nineteenth-century observers as a dirty, dilapidated, and dull place, concern for its well-being and character hinged upon the poorer districts of the city. ‘Squalor, misery, filth, everything that is distressing and disgusting may be witnessed by the person who has courage to go into the proper streets and houses at the proper time’, wrote the *Presbyterian Witness* of those districts in Halifax; compared to Engels’ collection of depictions of working-class districts in British cities it is a wonder that historians have failed to transfer the ideas surrounding the ‘Condition of England’ question to Victorian Halifax, especially given (as we shall see) the reaction to those poor districts was influenced heavily

¹³⁰ Catalogue; with the Constitution and Rules, and the Act of Incorporation of the Halifax Mechanics’ Library (Halifax, James Bowes and Sons, 1860); Catalogue of Books at Y.M.C.A. Library (Halifax, 1858) here too the influence of Thomas Chalmers’ moral philosophy can be felt. For the importance of Chalmers’ moral thought see: Boyd Hilton, *The Age of Atonement: The Influence of Evangelicalism on Social and Economic Thought, 1785 – 1865* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1988).

¹³¹ Judith Fingard, *The Dark Side of Life in Victorian Halifax* (Halifax, Nova Scotia, 1989).

by Chalmers' thought. Compare the *Presbyterian Witness*, then, to one of Glasgow: 'the working class forms here some 78 per cent of the whole population, and lives in parts of the city which exceed in wretchedness and squalor the lowest nooks of St Giles and Whitechapel, the Liberties of Dublin, the Wynds of Edinburgh ... endless labyrinths of lanes or wynds into which open at almost every step, courts or blind alleys, formed by ill-ventilated, high-piled, waterless, and dilapidated houses.'¹³² On both sides of the Atlantic these districts alarmed the middle class and prompted speculation as to the cause. Such speculation, of course, led Thomas Carlyle to coin the phrase 'Condition of England' in the first place.¹³³

Ignorance of religion, sexual incontinence, and intemperance were all identified as underlying causes of working-class poverty. 'The high road', wrote Thomas Chalmers, 'to a stable sufficiency and comfort among the people, is through the medium of their character', by which he meant their moral and spiritual character.¹³⁴ Poverty, though, Chalmers maintained, was akin to a hell on earth that provided a valuable deterrent to laziness and failure to work, citing Paul he went to remind his readers that 'if a man will not work, neither shall he eat'; for Chalmers the conditions of poverty were necessary to prevent temptation to improvidence. The workhouse (or poorhouse as it was known in Halifax) was a physical expression of this notion; admission of poverty was an admission of improvidence and one needed to be taught how to be moral. 'It is by the efficacy of moral means', maintained Chalmers, 'working a moral transformation, and by that alone, that our deliverance will be

¹³² Friedrich Engels, *The Condition of the Working Class in England* (London, Penguin Classics, 1987).

¹³³ Thomas Carlyle, *Past and Present* (London, 1843).

¹³⁴ Thomas Chalmers, *On Political Economy in Connexion with the Moral State and Moral Prospects of Society* (Glasgow, 1832), p. 421.

effected'.¹³⁵ The seeds of rational recreation can be found in the absorption and critiquing of Chalmers thought, 'the world is so constituted', wrote the *North British Review*, 'that if we were morally right we would be physically happy'.¹³⁶

Morality, of course, was a religious issue and it is not surprising that many of the contemporary commentators on working-class poverty and their culture noted the seemingly irreligious nature of those labouring classes. Engels, for example, writing of the mining proletariat determined that 'the categories of religion are known to them only by their swear words' and that proletarian immorality was a feature of the labour process itself, 'their morality is destroyed by their work itself. That the overwork of all miners must engender drunkenness is self-evident'.¹³⁷ The judgement that drunkenness was a symptom of, rather than cause of, poverty was one that was common in socialist circles but it required Rowntree's survey of poverty in York in 1901 to finally convince the Liberal Establishment that this was the case, albeit less than fully even then.¹³⁸ Irreligion amongst the working class of Halifax, too, was a concern for the reform-minded bourgeoisie. John Steele, an Anglican missionary, claimed that the 'irreligiousness of the community surpasses in proportion anything of the kind he had witness in English cities'. John Grierson, as Fingard notes, identified 'abject ignorance' as the cause of 'the degradation and misery' of the upper streets of Halifax.¹³⁹ Here was Chalmers' vision of immorality and poverty writ large on the streets

¹³⁵ Thomas Chalmers, *Political Economy*, pp. 438 – 439.

¹³⁶ *North British Review*, II [1844 – 1845], p. 30.

¹³⁷ Engels, *Working Class*, p. 255.

¹³⁸ In 1902, the Liberal MP John Burns delivered a lecture *Brains Better than Bets or Beer* in which he reiterated the arguments of the early Victorian intellectuals. His solution too was working class self-help; the triumph of the individual in Victorian Liberalism held even during the period of so-called 'New' Liberalism. See Michael Flavin, *Gambling in the Nineteenth-Century English Novel: A Leprosy is O'er the Land* (Brighton, Sussex Academic Press, 2003), p. 62.

¹³⁹ Fingard, *Dark Side*, p. 119.

of Eastern Canada. Little wonder, then, that one finds Chalmers' works on the subject filling the shelves of local libraries.

Muscular Christianity and the Liberal Anglican philosophy of amusement focused its attention upon intemperance as a direct cause, rather than consequence, of working-class poverty. Temperance societies formed right across the Anglo-Celtic Atlantic world represent a consistent attempt to reform working-class culture and its reliance upon alcohol. Temperance became a badge of office and was an entrance requirement of the respectable middle class. The debates between Tractarians and Noetics and the importance of Oriel College's Senior Common Room may well have been fading into memory by the 1880s but the legacy of the intellectual struggle between paternalism and individualism certainly did not. The working-class culture that had formed as a result of the triumph of Liberal Anglicanism had moved away from the philosophy of rational recreation towards a moral economy of working-class sporting culture. The following chapter will explore the theme of polarisation and examines the impact of temperance upon the making of working-class culture.

Chapter Four – Temperance, Rationality, and Immorality

Most of us know very little about what goes on among workmen in the evening. We see them in their places during the day, we find them always ready to labour when they are called upon, and we set them down as men of temperate habits; inferring from their regularity that they are not guilty of excesses in their leisure hours. It is sometimes startling to find that we are entirely mistaken.¹⁴⁰

Temperance and its twin ideals of morality and respectability formed part of the dominant liberal ethic in the nineteenth century. The success, or lack thereof, of the temperance movement in Wales and Nova Scotia tells us a great deal about the success of liberalism to achieve a hegemonic position on the coalfield. Failure, as in Wales, further emphasised the split of the working class from liberal civil society; success, as in Nova Scotia, suggests that the labour movement in the Maritimes was far more passive than its British cousin. This chapter seeks to explore the nature of this difference and the consequences for the development of working-class culture on both sides of the Atlantic. Examining the diffusion of temperance ideas builds upon the intellectual debates over poverty, its causes, and potential solutions as discussed in the last chapter.

The attempt to forge a temperate society in the nineteenth century marked a separation from the Age of Reason and its freer attitudes towards alcohol and heavy drinking. The consumption of alcohol, after all, had been long part of rural custom and little, historically, had been considered wrong with the association of alcohol with popular culture. Where, in the eighteenth century, the bourgeoisie began to drink chocolate, tea, and coffee, the

¹⁴⁰ W. L. Sargant, *Economy of the Labouring Classes* (London, 1857), p. 353.

working class drank their beer. The appearance of gin was heralded by many notable commentators (including Daniel Defoe) as good for business and worthwhile economically; albeit the working-class gin craze of the early eighteenth century was a lethal craze: 'drunk for a penny, dead drunk for tuppence; straw free' ran the slogan of the London gin advertisers. Yet insofar as bingeing on gin was a working-class habit, hard drinking in the Age of Reason obeyed no social boundaries. The *Gentleman's Magazine* for 1770, for example, listed ninety-nine ways of calling a man drunk; Oxford dons, no less, were notorious for their varying poisons.¹⁴¹ It should be of no surprise, then, when the historian tells us that drinking was bound up with cultural life and popular traditions.¹⁴² The Atlantic Revolution of the late Eighteenth Century changed all of that.

The temperance movement was part of that conscious effort to stem the tide of working-class radicalism. Public houses were typical meeting places for working-class groups and in the wake of the French Revolution and the unrest following the Napoleonic Wars, middle-class respectables feared the public house as less a den of debauchery but more a den of unrest and revolutionary activity. Desire to upset the status quo, it was believed, was symptomatic of a deranged mind and drink was the surest route to derangement. The consequences for traditional working-class leisure pursuits are immediately obvious; large collections of workingmen were feared, and indeed banned in 1819 under the Seditious Meetings Act (60 Geo III cap. 6). Across Canada and Britain, traditional sporting practices came under increasing pressure from middle-class reformers as the reactions to working-class radicalism began to take hold. Shrove Tuesday football matches, for example, were one

¹⁴¹ Roy Porter, *English Society in the Eighteenth Century* (London, Penguin, 1982), p. 34.

¹⁴² W. R. Lambert, *Drink and Sobriety in Victorian Wales c.1820 – c.1895* (Cardiff, University of Wales Press, 1983).

victim of the reform agenda; in one Camarthenshire village local magistrates seeing the game as a public nuisance, suppressed it and hauled the ringleaders before them.¹⁴³

Temperance historiography has tended to be left to the temperance campaigners themselves. Notable exceptions in the British context are Brian Harrison and W. R. Lambert whose work on England and Wales (respectively) laid the foundations for academic study of the issue of temperance and Harrison's methodology is still used in modern works on both sides of the Atlantic.¹⁴⁴ *Drink and the Victorians* as with the rest of the temperance historiography makes clear the connection between teetotalism and religion; interestingly, though, it is the Nonconformist Protestant denominations that proved to be the most heavily involved in the leadership of the campaign, as Harrison notes 'two lists of ministerial abstainers published in temperance periodicals in 1837 and 1848 show the overwhelming predominance of nonconformists over Anglicans within the early teetotal movement'.¹⁴⁵ The impact of the temperance campaign, though, differed from region to region and reflects underlying religious adherences and theological influences. The following sections of this chapter examine temperance in Wales and Nova Scotia before we attempt to make comparative conclusions.

¹⁴³ *Gentleman's Magazine* (1839), p. 599.

¹⁴⁴ The historiography of temperance in Britain and North America is large but for good examples of the work that has been done see: Brian Harrison, *Drink and the Victorians* (London, 1971); W. R. Lambert, *Drink and Sobriety in Victorian Wales c.1820 – c.1895* (Cardiff, 1983); Elizabeth Malcolm, *Ireland Sober, Ireland Free' Drink and Temperance in Nineteenth-Century Ireland* (Dublin, 1986); Jan Noel, *Canada Dry. Temperance Crusades before Confederation* (Toronto, 1995); Ernest Dick, 'From Temperance to Prohibition in Nova Scotia', in *Dalhousie Review* 61.3 (1981).

¹⁴⁵ Brian Harrison, *Drink and the Victorians: the Temperance Question in England, 1815 – 1872* (London, 1971), p. 179.

1881, Sunday Closing, and the Temperance State in Wales

The attempt to forge a temperate state in Wales ultimately failed. It failed because the temperance movement could not convince the working class of the necessity for temperance and sobriety. Industrial workers, it seems would not accept the scripture of Victorian civil society. As Engels remarked ‘a class which bears all the disadvantages of the social order without enjoying its advantages, one to which the social system appears in purely hostile aspects – who can demand that such a class respect this social order?’¹⁴⁶ Engels argued, as did many radicals, that it was the industrialised nation that was to blame for working-class intemperance and that no matter one’s efforts to instil a sense of sobriety it would not work. The labour process would not allow for it. Insofar, Brian Harrison concludes, ‘the change in methods of production at last created a class with a direct interest in curbing drunkenness’.¹⁴⁷ It also created a class for whom alcohol provided a diversion from the realities of cyclical employment, low wages, and urban squalor.

The religious census of 1851 revealed the dominance of Nonconformism in Wales with nearly 80 per cent of all those attending a religious service on census Sunday in Wales sitting in a Nonconformist chapel. Revealingly, though, nearly 48 per cent of the population did not attend a religious service of any sort.¹⁴⁸ The inherent weakness of religion in Wales can be seen in its stark reality in the pages of the famous religious census, yet despite this the dominance of Nonconformism over the rest of the Welsh population means that it is to Nonconformist attitudes over temperance that we must inevitably turn. The potential for a

¹⁴⁶ Engels, *Condition*, p. 154.

¹⁴⁷ Brian Harrison, *Drink*, p. 40.

¹⁴⁸ *Census of Great Britain, 1851. Religious Worship, England and Wales. Report and Tables* (1853), pp. 122 – 125.

Liberal Nonconformist hegemony in Wales was great, for as the Calvinist Methodist journal, *Treasury* noted in 1881 ‘The chapel ... is the social centre around which its adherents gather; it is school, lyceum, club, church, all in one ... It is round the chapel that not only the associations common to all forms of Christian faith are wont to gather but those which spring from the use of a peculiar and ancestral tongue’; its Welsh-medium cousin *Y Traethodydd* recorded a similar view in 1852 that when the Welshman went to chapel he found ‘that which the Englishman goes to the playhouse to look for’.¹⁴⁹

The chapel, then, was one of the principal foci of Welsh cultural life for the most part of the nineteenth century, yet its stance on drinking and other forms of human pleasures left little scope for personal enjoyment in an age without the luxuries afforded to the modern generation. Methodism in Wales, after all, differed from its English cousin in that its theology was Calvinist rather than Arminian. Idle pleasures were dismissed as a distraction from the higher purpose of spiritual and moral improvement. As Edward Jones complained ‘Wales, which was formerly one of the merriest and happiest countries in the World, is now become one of the dullest’. Little wonder, then, that the emergent working class had begun to turn their backs on organised religion even by the 1851 census. The polarity of Welsh political and cultural life can be traced back to the hegemonic position of Calvinist Nonconformism in Wales and its connections to Victorian Liberalism.

The other principal focus for cultural life, and the locus for opposition to the Nonconformist hegemony, was the public house. A masculine republic as much as the chapel was feminine republic, the public house offered for many the only affordable and available recreational activity. As the *Cardiff and Merthyr Guardian* noted ‘it is not from the

¹⁴⁹ *Treasury*, 18 (1881), p.239; *Y Traethodydd*, April 1852, p. 454.

mere love of intoxicating liquors that people become drunkards, it is because they have nothing more enjoyable to do than to sit and drink'.¹⁵⁰ Middle-class reformers promoted working-class sobriety as a means of progressing beyond the squalid conditions of that class but as the *South Wales Daily News* reported in 1892:

A Rhondda Man suggested that the palatial-looking chapels, which were closed for six days a week and the cost of which was paid by the mass of the ordinary people, should be opened on week days for working men to spend their leisure time there. He advocated setting up chess and billiard rooms with newspapers, which could be attached to the chapels and would act as a counter-attraction to the public house.¹⁵¹

The only alternatives that truly flourished were libraries and these paid for by the workers themselves. Between 1870 and 1895 twenty-nine Workmen's Libraries were opened in Glamorgan and Monmouthshire, these were to become the jewel in the crown of the Welsh miners and their autonomous culture, for they were completely independent of middle-class involvement, these Institutes truly were, in the words of a recent historian, one of the greatest networks of cultural institutions created by working people anywhere in the world.¹⁵² To explore this theme and do afford it the attention it truly deserves would require a further thesis but the existence of the Miners' Institutes does suggest a more total separation of working-class culture from liberal civil society.

Contemporaries, obsessed still with the 'Condition of England' question and the horrors of industrial life began to connect intemperance with the need for stimulants given the severe

¹⁵⁰ *Cardiff and Merthyr Guardian*, 10 November 1845.

¹⁵¹ *SWDN*, 21 September 1892.

¹⁵² Jonathan Rose, *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes* (New Haven, 2001), p. 237.

degradation caused by industrial labour. Drunkenness was the quickest route out of that squalor and hardship. Industrial capitalism created a class for whom alcohol became the best means of masking the true nature of the new industrial society. Thus, self-worth might be considered as a factor in explaining working-class alcoholism given the shift from subsistence farming to cyclical work in less than a generation and the economic hardships that resulted let alone the physical maiming caused by the factory machines. Unsurprisingly, then, that in the iron town of Merthyr Tydfil there were 506 drinking places in existence by 1854, the equivalent of one for every ninety-three of the population.¹⁵³

The Sunday Closing (Wales) Act of 1881 deliberately targeted the working class and enjoyed a certain degree of success despite it being an overt attempt at social control. It, like the temperance movement as a whole, ultimately failed because it could not convince the proletariat of the merits of sobriety and certainly could not with the onset of working-class sporting culture in the early 1870s. Thus, the Sunday Closing Act must be seen not as the zenith of Liberal Nonconformity in Wales but actually the beginning of its rather rapid decline. It was the point at which Victorian civil society in Wales provided the working class with its clearest choice and a clear impetus to re-make its own identity. Importantly, the years following 1881 are marked by the significant and consistent failure of the chapels to respond positively to the problem of working-class leisure and a growing belief among the working class that the chapels were unsuited to the urban society that had begun to emerge in earnest by the 1880s. Brian Harrison's survey of religion and recreation in England published forty years ago highlights the previously symbiotic nature of religion and leisure,

¹⁵³ *Report of the Standing Committee of the House of Commons on Public Houses* (1854), XIV (231).

‘religion and recreation had once been closely integrated, but by the nineteenth century they were beginning to compete, not only for time but also in values’.¹⁵⁴

Thusfar, it has been convenient to consider South Wales as a Protestant region, yet as Paul O’Leary has reminded us the presence of the Irish on the coalfield does provide us with another community that ought not to be forgotten. The Irish community absorbed the doctrine of respectability much more readily than did Protestant workers for a number of reasons but at its root was surely the desire to overcome xenophobic attitudes towards Catholicism on the British mainland. The Irish community was perceived of as being squalid and morally corrupt, yet as O’Leary has suggested the Irish labour ‘aristocrats’ were particularly determined to adapt to the liberal ethic of respectability. ‘For many working-class Irish men and women’, he writes, ‘respectability embodied aspirations for a better and more stable life in an otherwise unpredictable world’.¹⁵⁵

The Catholic clergy in particular were noted as being ‘nearly without exception strong abstainers from drink’ and indeed within the Hibernian friendly societies medals were issued for sobriety to try and tempt Irish immigrants away from the drinking habits they were commonly associated with. Indeed, the response of the Irish Catholics in Wales to the doctrine of respectability was surely connected to the desire to create an alternative Irish culture in Britain and to undermine the xenophobia of the British mainland and its attitudes towards the Irish population per se. In effect, then, the Irish Catholics created an alternative

¹⁵⁴ Brian Harrison, ‘Religion and recreation in nineteenth century England’, in *Past and Present* 38 (December, 1967), p. 98 – 99.

¹⁵⁵ Paul O’Leary, *Immigration and Integration: The Irish in Wales, 1798 – 1922* (Cardiff, University of Wales Press, 2002).

working-class culture based on sobriety, respectability, and religion.¹⁵⁶ In some cases it worked, as *Y Traethodydd* noted in 1864, ‘while we view Catholicism as one of the main buttresses of the kingdom of darkness ... we do not wish to be so narrow and prejudiced as to deny some of the individuals within the encampments of the Roman Catholic Church the respect and admiration they might deserve’.¹⁵⁷

Catholic attempts to suppress drunkenness were effective, as the legacy of the Roman Catholic Society for the Suppression of Drunkenness suggests. Formed in December 1857 it had branched out to the rest of the major Irish districts in the coalfield by the next year, Cardiff, Treforest, and Swansea all drew support but in Newport it perhaps met with greatest acclaim, for as the *Monmouthshire Merlin* reported ‘very few cases of drunkenness are now met with among the Irish’.¹⁵⁸ The Protestant temperance reformers could not have failed to notice the success of the Irish campaign against drunkenness but one key difference ought to be observed. The Catholic Church did not protest against sporting activities, they were merely seen as another aspect of the expanding parochial network and the Catholic Church’s presence can be felt with the sporting culture of the coalfield. In Cardiff, St Peter’s Church was proud of the long-standing tradition of (Irish) Catholic rugby clubs in the city, ‘the old Catholic Clubs in the town have played their part in building up the City Club’.¹⁵⁹ In Merthyr Tydfil similarly the growth of rugby was sponsored by the Roman Catholic St Illtyd’s Church. Photographs show a large Irish contingent involved in the side but Irish Catholics were not

¹⁵⁶ Ibid. p. 204.

¹⁵⁷ *Y Traethodydd*, 1864, p. 110.

¹⁵⁸ *Monmouthshire Merlin*, 20 November 1858.

¹⁵⁹ *St Peter’s Magazine*, February 1925, p. 43.

the only ones to involve themselves in local sports. The Dowlais International Colliery produced several Spanish association football teams.¹⁶⁰

The contrast between the success of the Catholic temperance campaign and the failure of the Protestant campaign on the coalfield is a remarkable testament to the hostility of the working class to middle-class reformism towards their recreational practices without the provision of viable alternatives. Indeed the Nonconformist sects in South Wales seem to have been uniquely hostile towards working-class sporting culture in this period; yet it was a period in which the proliferation of recreational alternatives to the chapel and the public house was becoming much more apparent. The Taff Vale Railway for example began to run Sunday services in the 1840s providing working-class families the opportunity to travel beyond their immediate locale. With a minimum cost of 3 shillings per person for a return from 1847 onwards, this service was within reach of most mining families by the 1880s.¹⁶¹ Government statistics covering 1886 - 1902 suggest that the lowest weekly average wage for miners in South Wales was in the region of 19s 5d in 1887. By the early 1890s wages had caught up with the UK average of 33s 11d.¹⁶² Importantly the 1889 government survey on workingmen's expenditure shows that at least one Glamorgan collier felt able to spend 6d a week on recreation as well as 6d a week on beer.¹⁶³

The Sunday Closing Act was the subject of fierce debate throughout the 1880s since most people in the industrial areas of Glamorgan recognised that it simply did not work. Three years after the 1881 Sunday Closing Act (Wales) became law, the Liberal government

¹⁶⁰ cf. Photograph printed *ME*, 28 May 1987; several photographs held by Merthyr Tydfil Library.

¹⁶¹ D. S. Barrie, *The Taff Vale Railway* (2nd Edition, Tanglewood, Surrey, 1950), p. 11.

¹⁶² *PP*, 1903, LXIV, p. 790; the South Wales average for that year was 32s 11d.

¹⁶³ *PP*, 1889, LXXXIV, p.127 [c.5861].

attempted to introduce a similar piece of legislation for England, prompting a further media frenzy in Wales – reflection and an honest reappraisal of the effects of Gladstone’s Welsh legislation seem to have been the order of the day. Whilst the legislation mandated all public houses to remain ‘closed’ to local customers on Sundays, pubs could remain open so long as they sold alcohol only to those who were *bona fide* travellers. The *bona fide* clause, which required travellers to have made a journey of three miles at a minimum, was routinely, and easily, flouted particularly in the industrial areas. The industrial frontier of the Valleys meant that Pontypridd, for example, was at least three miles distance from outlying villages. ‘Porth bowni fidees’ was an adequate response if questioned by the police.¹⁶⁴

In the midst of that debate one columnist for the *Pontypridd District Herald* lamented upon the failure of Sunday Closing claiming: ‘If the women of the Rhonddas were polled the cry would be “Gladstone, for the sake of our families, gives us back the old statute”’.¹⁶⁵ In 1881 it was recognised that Gladstone’s initial bill with its ‘bona fide traveller’ clause was insufficient to prevent drunkenness within the town.¹⁶⁶ Such concern for the ability to function properly of the Act that, supposedly, heralded Wales’ entry onto the stage of national politics is interesting;¹⁶⁷ on the one hand clearly there was demand for Sunday Closing in Wales, even if, intriguingly, the Pontypridd newspapers used North Wales rather than local figures.¹⁶⁸ On the other, however, there is clear evidence of the bill having left a bitter taste in the mouth of local residents.

¹⁶⁴ *Western Mail* [WM], ‘*The Welsh Sunday Closing Act, Lord Aberdare’s Challenge to the Western Mail*’ (Cardiff, 1889), p. 29.

¹⁶⁵ *Pontypridd District Herald*, April 19 1884.

¹⁶⁶ *Pontypridd Chronicle* [PC], 26 April 1881; PC, 3 May 1881.

¹⁶⁷ K. O Morgan, *Wales in British Politics, 1868 – 1922* (Cardiff, 1963), p. 42 – 44.

¹⁶⁸ PC, 3 March 1881.

The Sunday Closing Act and the hostility of the working class to its moral code were key elements in the re-making of the working class and its culture in Wales during the late nineteenth century. Concern that workingmen were drinking large amounts of alcohol was omnipresent in the newspapers yet it is perhaps a telling sign of the growing class divisions on the coalfield that it was the liberal newspapers that were the most vehemently driven towards temperance and given over to portraits of the workers as drunkards. Several editors of the Pontypridd newspapers were prominent temperance campaigners, Iwan Jenkyn, for example, the editor of the *Glamorgan Free Press*, was a teetotal Baptist; therefore, the consistent stream of alcohol-related crimes that the local magistrates dealt with gave him ample material to illustrate the ills of drink and the necessity of abstinence. Nonconformist-inspired portrayals of alcohol and its related problems had prominence in newspapers such as the *Glamorgan Free Press* and probably satisfied and fed the prejudice of its liberal-minded, middle-class readership. In temperance columns throughout the 1890s alcohol was clearly identified as “the root of all evil” by several correspondents.¹⁶⁹ Unsurprisingly, the issue of temperance was intimately connected to the growth of a militant and politically minded labour movement.¹⁷⁰

The impact of the groundbreaking legislation upon Pontypridd highlights the failure of the (Nonconformist) Establishment to impose its will upon the working class. W. R. Lambert’s important study into drink and sobriety in this period reveals that Pontypridd was the most drunken place in South Wales, with a proportion of 9.1 convictions per 1000 of the population.¹⁷¹ This fact could hardly be lost on the Royal Commission appointed in 1889 to

¹⁶⁹ *Glamorgan Free Press* [GFP], 6 January 1894, 20 January 1894.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.* 20 June 1891.

¹⁷¹ W. R. Lambert, *Drink and Sobriety*, p. 48.

investigate the workings of the Act, with several personal estimates as to the level of drunkenness in the town. District magistrate Ignatius Williams, for example, suggested that between 1879 and 1888 convictions for Sunday drunkenness increased from 83 to 358 or, approximately, a four hundred percent increase.¹⁷² Indeed in its findings the Commission made a particular example of the town arguing “the circumstances of Pontypridd are so special, and present a case upon which we are so clearly of opinion that there has been a large increase in Sunday drunkenness during the last 10 years, that it merits special consideration”.¹⁷³ What lay at the heart of this recourse to drunkenness seems to have been the *bona fide* traveller clause and it remained at the heart of the entire controversy surrounding the 1881 Act.

The answer to the question as to why the *bona fide* traveller clause had such an effect can be found in the Royal Commission minutes, the magistrate Ignatius Williams explained to the Commission that ‘if a policeman goes round his section, and I think they visit the public-houses about every two hours or two hours and a half, if a man is found there he is questioned, and unless he can give a satisfactory account of himself, he is usually summoned’.¹⁷⁴ Lambert’s figures therefore, and those given by Williams to the Commission, show that Pontypridd may not necessarily have been any more drunk than other towns in the area, and that over-zealous police enforcement may well have been the cause: ‘The Stipendiary [Ignatius Williams] said that ... he did not see why people should be summoned because they were drinking, for, practically, in cases like this the police sought to deprive travellers of the privilege ... Sergeant Menhennick said that he had measured the distance

¹⁷² PP. 1890.XL.p565.

¹⁷³ PP.1890.XL xxviii.

¹⁷⁴ PP.1890.XL.565.

from the Railway Inn, Treforest, to the Havod Bridge, and it was 220 yards under the three mile limit'; the landlord and the men caught drinking in this case were fined substantially, 'the man Watkins was fined 15s, and the landlord £1 and costs'.¹⁷⁵ Those heading to the public houses on Sunday were, as Howells Key, one of the town's chemists, suggested to the Commission, working men, 'you must remember that they are entirely working men down here, and men who are fond of their beer'.¹⁷⁶

Of course, this growing polarisation between working-class socialists and middle-class liberals did not mean that the working class abandoned religion altogether. Merely that they chose to evade organised and sanctimonious religion. Or, more likely, they began to attend those chapels, which welcomed sporting culture as a mechanism for respectability, and moral reform English-language chapels located in Anglophone areas of Pontypridd such as Trallwn, or the Graig experienced a cultural renaissance.¹⁷⁷ As one Somerset collier recalled, 'the miners consider it a great waste of time, and of no spiritual service, to go and sit down in a church or chapel and listen to a *learned* man expressing himself in words which they do not understand ... they are mighty quick at detecting hypocrites'.¹⁷⁸ Nonconformity, then, remained a force on the coalfield but the fractures within the dissenting sects became much more observable.

¹⁷⁵ *South Wales Star*, 9 October, 1891

¹⁷⁶ *PP.1890.XL.580*

¹⁷⁷ *WM*, 1 March 1905

¹⁷⁸ Jonathan Presto, *Five Years of Colliery Life; Or, The Adventures of a Collier Boy in a Somersetshire Coal Mine: A Narrative of Facts* (London, 1884), p.52

From Temperance to Prohibition: Nova Scotia Dry?

Temperance in North America was far more successful than in Britain. Several states in the US introduced prohibition in the mid-Victorian period and in Nova Scotia petitions to ban the sale of alcohol entirely were received by the Provincial Legislature as early as 1851; in New Brunswick similarly a petition of 20,000 was presented to the Assembly in 1854.¹⁷⁹ Such popular demand for the outlawing of alcohol in the Maritimes proves, clearly, that temperance was much more important in the public agenda than in Britain; it also suggests some fundamental differences in the strength of the temperance movement compared to the British experience. Liberalism, it would seem, occupied a much more dominant hegemonic position in Maritime political and social life than it did in South Wales.

In dealing with temperance in Nova Scotia, one should not lose sight of the emigrant and the potential for forging a new society; the 1850s in North America marked the beginning of a successful battle against drink yet it was also the year that the *Scotsman* proclaimed:

That Scotland is, pretty near at least, the most drunken nation on the face of the earth is a fact never quite capable of denial. It may seem strange that Edinburgh, the headquarters of the various sections of a clergy more powerful than any other save that of Ireland, should, in respect of drunkenness, exhibit scenes and habits unparalleled in any other metropolis, and that Glasgow, where the clergy swarm, should be notoriously the most guilty and offensive city in Christendom.¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁹ Jan Noel, *Canada Dry: Temperance Crusades before Confederation* (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1995), p. 43.

¹⁸⁰ *Scotsman*, 22 May 1850.

The Maritimes offered a second chance, a chance to get the level of alcohol consumption *right*. Temperance in the Maritimes, as Jan Noel notes, was particularly strong; New Brunswick outlawed drink in 1856 – the only British North American colony to do so in the nineteenth century – and it is notable that the strictures against drink were directed against hard liquor, spirits in particular, which were the very foundation for Scotland’s drinking culture.¹⁸¹ Whilst Ernest Dick has argued that the temperance movement in Nova Scotia is notable for its religious character, he nevertheless argues that ‘Presbyterians most recently immigrated from Scotland were the least likely to be temperance supporters’.¹⁸² This may well be a result of timing; Dick’s periodisation is marked by the emergence of temperance campaigns in the 1820s, yet the evangelical element did not penetrate the Scottish Kirk until the late 1830s and 1840s. Thus the earlier emigrants from Scotland were less minded towards prohibition than their later counterparts. Temperance campaigns in Scotland were influenced by Thomas Chalmers and his moralistic inveighs on poverty and its causes, although he himself avoided close association with temperance until late in his life.¹⁸³ Jan Noel is correct to argue that a purely religious causality of temperance is not entirely convincing, but she fails to connect temperance to that issue of poverty and thus misunderstands the powerful connection between temperance and evangelicalism.

Temperance, of course, was first and foremost a badge of office. Respectability and sobriety were markers of the dominant liberal ethic even if, as with any dominant ideology, the ideologues did not entirely conform to its doctrine. The division between Catholicism and

¹⁸¹ Jan Noel, *Canada Dry*, p. 19; T M Devine, ‘The Rise and Fall of Illicit Whisky-Making in Northern Scotland, c.1780 – 1840’, *Scottish Historical Review* vol. 54:2 No. 158, pp. 155 – 177.

¹⁸² Ernest J Dick, ‘From Temperance to Prohibition in Nova Scotia’, *Dalhousie Review* 61:3 (1981), pp. 533 – 4.

¹⁸³ T. C. Smout, *A Century of the Scottish People 1830 – 1950* (London, William Collins & Sons & Co., 1986), p. 141.

Protestantism visible in Wales was more apparent in Nova Scotia where the success of the Catholics in recruiting adherents to the cause of temperance particularly amongst the newly arrived immigrants inspired by Father Mathew's crusade in Ireland. Needless to say given the high proportion of Catholics in Nova Scotia the wider successes of the Catholic temperance movement in part explains why calls for sobriety were more in vogue on the East coast of Canada than in the valleys of South Wales. Religious dichotomies, however, do not help to understand fully the extent to which temperance formed part of an overarching doctrine of respectability and rational recreation, in order to fully comprehend that ideology we need to understand temperance in the context of social class.

Temperance campaigners used a variety of methods, in Nova Scotia, to spread their message around the province, sermons, newspapers, and popular literature all testify to the importance of written culture to the campaign for sobriety. Social control, a term that has fallen out of fashion in recent years, nevertheless neatly summarises the reformist attitude of the middle-class in the early and middle Victorian periods and most especially when we consider temperance. This is not to deny the vigour of working-class temperance but it was the middle class who created the temperance movement and therefore had most to gain from its successful diffusion through the working class, namely tacet acceptance of middle-class cultural hegemony. As Jan Noel puts it 'they [the temperance campaigners] won the war: they caused a considerable decline of drinking in their own day and reversed public opinion in such a way that this decline would continue throughout the century'.¹⁸⁴

¹⁸⁴ Noel, *Canada Dry*, p. 40.

One aspect in the successful campaign fought by temperance reformers in Nova Scotia ought to be the proliferation of alternative activities to recreational drinking. The prominence of the Sons of Temperance in this regard cannot be over-emphasised; the *Halifax Citizen* noted in 1864 that in Tangier, ‘the members have recently established a reading room and library in connection with the Division, and have also furnished the room with chessmen and drafts [sic] with which to employ a portion of their leisure hours’.¹⁸⁵ Elsewhere, benefit concerts, tea parties, and marches all contributed to the construction of a sober society.¹⁸⁶ The imperialist fervour of the temperance movement is an intriguing aspect of its character, since despite the desire to forge a Canadian identity post-confederation at Temperance soirées both ‘God Save the Queen’ and ‘Rule Britannia’ were played to end the evening.¹⁸⁷ This imperialist connection is also reflected in the North British Society, which actively promoted patriotism and nationalism. Mid-Victorian respectability and rational recreation was, in this way, a means of fashioning an imperial race fit for governing the empire: one could not forge civilisation out of savagery if the people were drunk, after all.¹⁸⁸

Religion on the Industrial Frontier

Religion was important to miners and religious houses formed the basis of community socialisation all along the industrial frontier. In many cases the church or chapel was one of the first buildings constructed in new settlements and certainly remained the focus for community life beyond the colliery. Indeed, whilst it is not surprising that most labour

¹⁸⁵ HC, 21 April 1864.

¹⁸⁶ HC, 11 July 1870.

¹⁸⁷ HC 17 June 1869.

¹⁸⁸ *Annals of the North British Society of Halifax, Nova Scotia, from its Foundation in 1768, to its Centenary Celebration March 26th 1868* (Halifax, Nova Scotia, 1868). Note the regulations on liquor [article 16] ‘No liquor to be called for but by the Moderator or Stewards for the use of the Society. Any member offending in this case is to pay for whatever he may call himself. P. 11.

historians neglect religion to varying degrees, the importance of religion to many industrial workers in the nineteenth century cannot be over-emphasised. Yet, as Lynne Marks has made clear, working-class religion and religious practise was not necessarily the same as that of the middle class.¹⁸⁹

On the South Wales coalfield, in particular, industrialisation, as we have seen, overcame one of the traditional barometers of Welshness – religion. Wales is often seen as a ‘Nation of Nonconformists’ and whilst it is difficult to deny this was the case – the 1851 religious census indicates this to have been the case for example – the sources I have highlighted above would seem to make it possible to argue that religion was more of a polarising institution than one that brought people together under the banner of ‘Welshness’. If one examines the conversion figures for Ynysybwl, a village whose sports teams were among the worst affected during the Revival, from an initial conversion rate of 716 persons, leaping to 792 after Christmas 1904, this high-water mark fell away to 742 by February of 1905. Whilst this represents a higher level of conversion than in December 1904, it is worth noting that the revivalists used cumulative data, so therefore there is a more significant dip than can initially be understood from the figures. In Treorchy and Cilfynydd similarly the conversion rate stagnates, reaching their highest mark of 1468 and 721 (respectively). The data for Treorchy seems to have been misprinted, for in January 1905 it reads 1468 and in February: 1486. The converts were tallied by hand and under pressure so one must cautiously assume that February should also read 1468. Whilst Smith and Williams reproduced the *Western Mail's* reporting that ‘it is said that there is in Noddfa Sunday School a “football class”

¹⁸⁹ Lynne Marks, ‘The Knights of Labor and the Salvation Army. Religion and Working-Class Culture in Ontario, 1882 – 90’, in Laurel Sefton MacDowell & Ian Radforth (eds.), *Canadian Working-Class History: Selected Readings* (Toronto, 2006), p.79

comprised almost entirely of ex-footballers;¹⁹⁰ it is unusual that they do not engage with the conversion rates for towns such as Treorchy and Ynysybwl.¹⁹¹

Explaining the conversions of footballers in the winter of 1904 – 1905 is complicated and due to the lack of written testimony from those converted by the religious fervour of those months hampers that even more. We are left with a degree of reliance upon newspaper reporting, a reliance that can never be completely certain. In reading the newspaper accounts of those footballers that converted it is striking the number of them that refer to immoral acts such as gambling, or drunkenness.¹⁹² There is also a positive correlation between those areas that were strongly Welsh speaking and revivalist conversion. The strength of the Welsh language in the coastal towns was far weaker than in villages such as Ynysybwl and this would probably account for the limited incursion of Revivalist sentiment in Cardiff, Swansea or Newport. After all Evan Roberts, the Revival's figurehead, refused to preach in what he called 'English Cardiff'.¹⁹³ This leaves me in little doubt that the complicated relationship between Nonconformity and Rugby Union in this period was one of a perceived cultural threat. Yet that cultural schism had distinct class overtones.

The temperance movement was perhaps the biggest loser following the Revival. Rugby games could attract 20,000 people to the Arms Park in Cardiff to watch a game against Harlequins, yet the Merthyr Tydfil Wesleyan Methodist Circuit complained bitterly of an annual decline in its temperance supporters: 'temperance returns unsatisfactory' was reported

¹⁹⁰ *WM*, 30 November 1904.

¹⁹¹ David Smith & Gareth Williams, *Fields of Praise: The Official History of the Welsh Rugby Union, 1881 – 1981* (Cardiff, University of Wales Press, 1980), p. 127.

¹⁹² *WM*, 8 December 1904.

¹⁹³ *WM*, 8 February 1905.

in 1911. Two years earlier the adult members in the temperance league and the Band of Hope numbered forty for the whole of the Merthyr Tydfil area. Importantly the Welsh and English Methodist causes were merged in 1909 and so these figures do genuinely represent the entire Methodist temperance members for Merthyr.¹⁹⁴ Whereas the numbers just five years earlier had received praise from the committee 'very encouraging' the dramatic downturn in the fortunes of the temperance league suggests that there had to have been a climactic event that persuaded many of those previously loyal to the Methodist cause to abandon it.

The nature of the decline seems to suggest that it was the failure of the Revival to kill off rugby in Merthyr and as a result the emergence of professional rugby league and association football. Using the chapels' own membership figures one can see that at the height of the Revival the Merthyr Tydfil circuit had 282 full members, with approximately 200 others as trialists or junior members (June, 1905). Three months later this had slipped to 260 (September, 1905) and for the first meeting following the emergence of the professional rugby side in Merthyr the membership of the circuit rested at 239 (December, 1907).¹⁹⁵

The figures for December 1907 would perhaps represent the fall-off following the New Zealand rugby match in early November of that year. Local newspapers reported the match as extremely well attended with estimates ranging from 6,000 to 12,000 and remarked that 'the visit of the present New Zealand team has given an impetus to professionalism. What the end will be no one can tell, but there is some talk of a visit from an Australian

¹⁹⁴ 'Merthyr Wesleyan Circuit Quarterly Minutes, 1902 – 1914', Glamorgan Record Office, D/DwesMT/3, p. 109 & 142.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid. Membership figures are given *passim*.

professional team next winter'.¹⁹⁶ Whilst it is an exaggeration to suggest a direct link between rising rugby and falling chapel attendances, it is probable that sport played a role, much more so than Gareth Morgan suggests when he claimed that: 'the game's clashes with Nonconformity had scarcely weakened the chapel's powerful position in Welsh consciousness'.¹⁹⁷

A tour match of that kind possibly fuelled an accelerated decline within the temperance movement and chapel membership in general for that last quarter of 1907, for there seems to have been a less marked decline over the four years to December 1911 than in the thirty-six months between June 1905 and December 1907. It is probably the case that the temperance campaign in Aberdare underwent a similar decline, however statistical evidence is more difficult to ascertain since the minute books that have survived tend to address matters such as these in a rather hit-and-miss fashion. Nevertheless what can be understood is that following the Revival sport, particularly rugby, witnessed rejuvenation and as it did so the chapels lost more and more of their congregation. The number of chapels and former-chapels in the Valleys that were 'rebuilt' in the Revival period quickly became emptier than their less grand predecessors.

One must be careful not to overstate the destructive power of the religious revival. The game of rugby was formidably cemented as a form of working-class recreation and in the larger towns along the coast – Swansea, Newport, or Cardiff – the Revival seems to have had little impact upon the sport: the *Western Mail* reported that the match between Swansea

¹⁹⁶ *ME*, 9 November 1907.

¹⁹⁷ G. Morgan, 'Rugby and Revivalism: Sport and Religion in Edwardian Wales', in *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, vol. 22 no.3 May 2005, p. 436.

and Cardiff played in November 1904 at the height of the Revival was very much symptomatic of the level of support rugby had attained, ‘there was a vast crowd stretching from the fire brigade station to the Angel Hotel, while the thousands who paraded Queen Street made the scene one that was reminiscent of an international day’.¹⁹⁸ Likewise, the *South Wales Press* recorded the reactions of the Welsh supporters at the Wales versus Scotland international of April 1905: ‘the Welshmen forgot all about their revivals, and their language savoured of this world...Then Wales scored an equalising try, and when I looked down at my revivalist friend he was gripping a huge black bottle labelled somebody’s “special”’.¹⁹⁹

In Nova Scotia, the revival of religious evangelicalism in the decade either side of Queen Victoria’s death witnessed a growing assertion of the social gospel, a phenomenon that, not unlike the Welsh Religious Revival, sought to reinstate religious conviction and individual salvation. Indeed as Ramsay Cook has written, ‘what came to be called the social gospel was not merely a response to a perceived social crisis. It was also, perhaps principally, a reaction to a profound intellectual crisis, and as part of that questioning of the role of the clergy and the Church in modern society’.²⁰⁰ As with South Wales, then, institutional uncertainty in the Church was matched with a more assertively individual working class. Whereas the working class sought collective means of improving their lot under the harsh realities of industrial capitalism, individual salvation in the Church’s eyes – especially the evangelical Presbyterian Church of Canada – would have to precede social regeneration. For historians seeking a way of understanding that individualism and its prominence on both sides of the Atlantic in this

¹⁹⁸ *WM*, 26 Jan 1905.

¹⁹⁹ *South Wales Press*, 16 April 1905.

²⁰⁰ Ramsay Cook, *The Regenerators: Social Criticism in Late Victorian English Canada* (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1985), p. 175.

period, it seems both necessary and fruitful to revisit Chalmers' philosophy of self-improvement.

The problem with that individualism was that working-class attitudes had matured not with an individualistic Smilesian ideology but with a collectivist, indeed socialist, culture of salvation. To be sure religious notions of salvation were still present – the Christian socialism of men such as Keir Hardie testifies to this – but working-class identity was organised in part around collective organisation, such as sports teams or co-operatives.²⁰¹ Indeed working-class collective initiatives which were envisaged as being respectable from the point of view of the workers themselves – such as the Provincial Workmen's' Association – came under attack from the Presbyterian Church as early as the 1880s with particular attention being paid to strikes. The *Presbyterian Witness*, the leading Presbyterian journal in Nova Scotia, argued in March 1880 for example that 'public opinion, and still more powerful agencies, should be brought to bear upon working men so as to prevent these ruinous experiments in coercing the employers of labor [sic]'.²⁰²

As we have seen Drummond was not in favour of strikes and saw them as the last resort. The implicit understanding amongst the Presbyterian readers of the *Witness* was that the mechanism by which workers agitated for better wages – as a last resort if we believe both Drummond and the workers themselves – lacked social responsibility and was *typical* of working-class failure to assimilate respectable behaviour patterns despite the reformism of the Church and other institutions. 'Strikes are in the main foolish', ranted the *Witness* in

²⁰¹ Michael Savage & Andrew Miles, *The Remaking of the British Working Class, 1840 – 1940* (London, Routledge, 1994), pp. 59 – 65.

²⁰² *Presbyterian Witness* 6 March 1880.

March 1887, 'and costly luxuries to all concerned'. Worse still the journal concluded, 'the public at large have to pay larger prices for commodities'.²⁰³ The workers themselves felt that strikes could be publicly justified – thereby insisting upon a socially responsible usage – since as the PWA suggested they

Are not now, nor have they been, advocates of strikes, as a means of settlement of disputes, so long as a more peaceable method was available. At the same time they are not now, nor have they been, afraid to face the music when the alternative was an ignominious and unconditional surrender. The council unhesitatingly admits that strikes are bad, aye, almost unutterably bad, and yet they hold that there are things far worse than even a strike, and one of these is for workmen tamely and meekly to submit to imposition, injustice and fraud without murmur, and without complaining ... It is bad to strike and be pinched with hunger, but many times worse to submit to be plucked by grasping capitalists, without a fair fight for fair treatment.²⁰⁴

The separation in normative values and shifting definitions of respectability therefore had a profound effect upon the development of working-class identity, culture, and sense of purpose. As Michael Boudreau correctly concludes, 'while the provincial Church hoped to cure the ills of society by reforming the individual ... several elements within labour felt that only through collective action ... could their lives be significantly improved'.²⁰⁵ Inevitably though as with the situation in South Wales negative attitudes and dismissal of attempts from within the working class to forge their own response to industrial capitalism reinforced a sense of difference from the middle-class reformers and middle-class definitions of

²⁰³ *Presbyterian Witness* 5 March 1887.

²⁰⁴ *Provincial Workmen's Association of Nova Scotia and New Brunswick: Minutes of the Proceedings of the Grand Council, 1879 – 1889, Volume I, April 1, 1887*, p.141 (held at the Beaton Institute, Cape Breton University).

²⁰⁵ Michael Boudreau, 'Strikes, Rural Decay, and Socialism: The Presbyterian Church in Nova Scotia Grapples with Social Realities, 1880 – 1914', in Charles H. H. Scobie & G. A. Rawlyk (eds.), *The Contribution of Presbyterianism to the Maritime Provinces of Canada* (Montreal & Kingston, McGill-Queens University Press, 1997), p. 148.

respectability. By the era of McLachlan and openly radical Labourism on the Cape Breton coalfield churchmen in Halifax reported similar conditions to that of South Wales – the People were leaving the Church in droves. As James Carruthers complained in the *Halifax Herald*, ‘a “large congregation” of people may be found milling about in the streets instead of attending regular worship services’;²⁰⁶ they could also be found, as we shall see in the next chapter, at sports venues.

Socially, historians such as Boudreau consider the Presbyterian social gospellers to be ‘conservative’; however with their emphasis upon individualism and the orthodox assumptions of evangelicalism it seems perhaps more plausible to follow their intellectual origins to Liberalism rather than Conservatism. This nomenclature is important to understand since Conservatism particularly by the last quarter of the nineteenth century had fully matured into its Romantic ideal. Conservatism stressed the natural order of society with each class in its rightful place: ‘the rich man in his castle / the poor man at his gate / God made them, high or lowly / and order’d their estate’ as the third verse of the famous Victorian hymn ‘All Things Bright and Beautiful’ runs.²⁰⁷ It also held a central belief that each class within that society had a collective responsibility to the social whole. Given the emphasis amongst social gospellers upon individualism, the nomenclature used should refer us to Liberalism and not Conservatism. This also explains the fear of socialism shown by the *Presbyterian Witness* since its Liberal tendencies were naturally driven to a dislike of collective action and collective responsibility.²⁰⁸

²⁰⁶ *Halifax Herald* 18 February 1907.

²⁰⁷ This verse is no longer sung given its overt endorsement of the class system in Britain but the Romantic imagery is fundamental to the hymn’s purpose.

²⁰⁸ *Presbyterian Witness* 30 September 1905.

Unlike Wales where Protestant religion was in the ascendance, Nova Scotia's religious affiliation is more complex. In 1881, for example, the number of Roman Catholics in the province stood at 117, 487, which compared to a Presbyterian population of 112, 488.²⁰⁹ If we consider the prominence of Catholicism amongst the Highland Gael that settled on Cape Breton and the equal prominence of Presbyterianism amongst the Lowland Scots that settled in Halifax or elsewhere in mainland Nova Scotia the divisions mirrored those of Scotland itself. Yet, we should not consider that the Scottish Highlands lacked an evangelical philosophy since as Donald Meek has shown it certainly had one but that its purpose came to be directed towards the fight against injustice shown to them by the landlords during the Highland Clearances. If one seeks an answer, as perhaps we might, as to why the Gaelic population of the Cape Breton seems *passive* compared to that of the South Wales coalfield it is possible to point to the rural conservatism of the Gael but perhaps more useful to highlight the tendency in Highland evangelicalism to 'inculcate obedience to higher authority'.²¹⁰ This lends itself to the belief that rural religion is conservative in nature – according to the nomenclature outlined above – but we ought to be careful in assuming that all evangelism is conservative. The idiosyncrasies of Highland religion provide for differences in nomenclature.²¹¹

How religion fared, then, on the industrial frontier related to its perception amongst the working class. The working class of South Wales faced quite severe antagonism from the Welsh Nonconformist chapels and this antagonism resulted in the refashioning of working-class culture on the coalfield without the influence of organised religion. In Cape Breton, on

²⁰⁹ *General Report of the Census of Canada 1880 – 1881, Volume IV* (Ottawa, 1885), pp. 6 – 7.

²¹⁰ Donald E. Meek, *The Scottish Highlands. Churches and Gaelic Culture* (Geneva, WCC Publications, 1996), p. 34.

²¹¹ *Ibid*, especially pp. 36 – 38.

the other hand, an examination of the temperance movement would suggest that role of the Church was far more central to the working-class culture that developed prior to the appearance of McLachlan and other radical trade unionists. After that point working-class culture began to develop along similar lines to South Wales though the amenability of the Catholic Church to sporting culture ensured that the separation between worker and church was never complete on the Island.

This chapter has explored the fortunes of temperance in both South Wales and Nova Scotia and has thusly shown the defining importance of the success and failure of the liberal project in convincing the working class to adhere to the ideology of rational recreation, temperance, and respectability. The following (and final) chapter will explore the nature of sporting culture in the contested realm of the industrial frontier and examine the characteristics of a sporting culture that is defined by the polarisation of middle class and working class values and the class conflict present on the industrial frontier.

Chapter Five – Sporting Culture in Conflicted Realms

‘You say, you don’t see much in it all; nothing but a struggling mass of boys, and a leather ball which seems to excite them, except that the boys would be men, and the balls iron; but a battle would be worth your looking at for all that, and so is a football match. You can’t be expected to appreciate the delicate strokes of play, the turns by which a game is lost and won – it takes an old player to do that, but the broad philosophy of football you can understand if you will. Come along with me a little nearer, and let us consider it together.’²¹²

The preceding argument has bequeathed this chapter two diametrically opposed spheres of culture; the bourgeois, morally reformist, culture of rational recreation and the working-class, semi-professional sporting culture, which emerged as a reaction to the external pressures of the bourgeois reform agenda in Britain and transferred to Nova Scotia by a migrant, industrial workforce. This chapter, then, seeks to explore the nature of this class conflict in the context of rugby union on the industrial frontier. However, before I engage with the nature of that class conflict in both South Wales and Cape Breton, I wish to analyse the concept of cultural production and its importance in understanding the central role of sporting culture in conflicted realms.

Marx argued that working-class revolt would be ‘disciplined, united, organised by the very mechanism of the process of capitalist production itself’, in other words the cohesion of the working class is made such by the downward pressure of industrial capitalism upon those furthest away from the means of production. After all, ‘the question is not what this or that proletarian, or even the whole of the proletariat, at the moment considers its aim. The

²¹² Thomas Hughes, *Tom Brown’s School-Days* (London, Juvenile Productions Ltd., 1963), p. 103.

question is what the proletariat is, and what, consequent upon that being, it will be compelled to do'.²¹³ Class ultimately is a relationship, and not a *thing*. Culturally, then, the making of the working class is a characteristic of a relationship of abandonment; the working class in rejecting the liberalism of late-Victorian society were abandoned by that social order. Labourism, politically, and working-class culture, socially, is a reaction to that abandonment and the pressure placed upon the working class by the liberal hegemony.

Yet, as we have seen throughout this thesis the production of a separate culture is not simply *there* as a reaction to middle-class reformism. To argue such things is to ignore a significant section of the historiography and is to fall into the trap of analytical weakness. Concepts such as identity and culture do not simply exist: they are constructed. As a construct, then, culture and identity can be understood as having a definable purpose beyond common sense, after all it is true that everyone has an identity but not everyone thinks about the purpose and nature of that identity. This becomes the task of the historian seeking answers to questions of *why*. Constructing an identity is a selective process and one, which is a metaphor not simply for who we are but one that tells us much about the underlying social relationships and who we are *told* we are. For example, let us consider the following poem by R.S. Thomas:

We were a people wasting ourselves
 In fruitless battles for our masters
 In lands to which we had no claim
 With men for whom we felt no hatred

We were a people, and so are yet.
 When we have finished quarrelling for crumbs
 Under the table, or gnawing the bones
 Of a dead culture, we will arise

²¹³ Karl Marx & Friederich Engels, *Holy Family* (Moscow, 1956), p. 53.

Armed, but not in the old way.²¹⁴

Within the lines of Thomas' poem, entitled *Welsh History* we find a number of features of Welsh identity, a constructed identity let us not forget, some true and others entirely false. Welsh identity is most obviously fashioned in response to that of the English, the *masters* of the poem, for whom power was inevitable and from whom the Welsh took their scraps. Yet just as Nova Scotian antimodernism can be seen as a constructed commonsense that maintains hegemony, so too can these ideas of a defeated and controlled national history in Wales. In many ways this poem is antimodern and holds on to the rural, simplistic facets of Welsh 'identity' which can be subjected to the same analysis as Ian McKay used in his work *The Quest of the Folk*. For McKay, Nova Scotia's simple and idyllic culture is a feature of hegemony and the dominance of a particular social class since antimodernism denies class and a social hierarchy constructed around the principles of class. It is the foremost expression of Romanticism in the twentieth century, but just as Neo-Romanticism can be seen as a reaction to neo-Liberalism, so too there is a Neo-Marxism, which reminds us that class does matter.

Culture is, therefore, a response to hegemony and a reaction from the dominant class to that response. For if hegemony embodies a sense of reality for most people, which is its strength, then awareness of an alternative is fundamental to the construction of separate cultures and identities. Gramsci and those who have adopted his ideas conceive of the working class as a source for that alternative and so production of culture can be seen as a call and response. As we have noted above, working-class culture developed in opposition to that of the middle class but it was not always a negative opposition; respectability for example was clearly an

²¹⁴ R. S. Thomas, *An Acre of Land* (1952).

attempt to engage with the social order as it was, and it was the middle class, fearing a reduction in their own power, that quickly shifted the definitions away from those being adopted by the workers. Culture, and cultural production, is therefore a constant process.

Thus, sports such as rugby and football have often been glazed over in the history of Canadian sporting culture because of their British connection; as chapter one suggested their prominence in the Maritimes is not a feature of Maritime conservatism or quaint, old-country charm, but rather a result of the importance of an idealised social memory of the old country amongst the British Diaspora, particularly in Nova Scotia and more especially so on Cape Breton. Rugby, of course, served an entirely different purpose in South Wales, where it became a beacon for the reformation of a Welsh culture in the Valleys; a culture that was English-speaking, industrial, and working-class rather than Welsh-speaking, agrarian, and peasant. Nevertheless in the industrial context sporting culture closely allied to a working-class consciousness underlines the Marxist understanding of class formation. Rugby on the coalfield became a beloved pastime because it served to emphasise the social relations of coalfield society.

Conflicted Realms

Human society is, by its very nature, a divided thing. Class, gender, ethnicity, race, and age all divide one person from the next and those are to simply name the major variables that historians use to analyse a particular historical event. Society, then, is not a realm that it as peace with itself; at its most basic level *conflict* suggests a contest for power. Marxist historians conceptualise history as a process and one in which historical change is brought

about by revolutionary shifts in the mode of production. Men, Marx argued, make their own history, but they do not make it as they please; they do not make it under self-selected circumstances, but under circumstances existing already, given and transmitted from the past.²¹⁵ Conditions inherited from the past include, for example, patriarchal societies, a class structure which concentrates power in the hands of the few, or reflects a system of nation-states that again concentrates power in the hands of the few or even one nation-state acting in the name of many. In a social system such as this conflicts over power are based on a simple binary relationship: the haves and the have-nots.

The contest, in sporting terms, between amateurism and professionalism is one that can be understood easily in these broad theoretical terms. The philosophy of amateurism – sport for sports sake, the pleasure of playing – is a philosophy of a leisured class. One that can afford the time to spend on sport in this way; it is hardly the sporting realm of the average worker who enjoyed little time off in the week. Consider this interjection by a collier in South Wales:

How would these very good people like to live days, weeks and months underground without a sight of the sun ... Oh these very generous people have their nice cosy clubs or homes which they enjoy every day. But the collier has to live in discomfort in a small home, and for near six months in every year never sees the sun, except on the first day of the week.²¹⁶

²¹⁵ Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth-Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (Moscow, Progress Publishers, 1977) p. 10.

²¹⁶ *Merthyr Express*, 30 July 1881.

For workers then, amateur sport was an alien philosophy, for them sport had a purpose and because of the limits on disposable income payment for a player's skill was a tacet demand and a reflection of value placed on that skill. As the *Welsh Athlete* suggested:

It is no use for our football legislators to pretend to be goody-goody people ... they have known all along that professionalism does not exist in South Wales in its liberal sense, that for years past the various clubs have been in the habit of running up large hotel bills when they go from home. We all know that hotel bills can be made to prove anything, and no sane person would question what appeared to him to be even slightly extravagant did he know that some of the players had been compensated for the loss of a day's work, and that the item had been tacked on to the said hotel bill... If it is professionalism to compensate a sterling footballer who cannot afford to lose his work for a day and pay his own travelling expenses then we are in favour of professionalism.²¹⁷

Amateurism and professionalism underlines one aspect of the conflicted realm of society, namely that of money, a factor which almost certainly underlined one's social class. In the Canadian context, as Nancy Bouchier has shown, the definitions of amateurism and the restrictions placed upon sporting activity by a literal application of the meanings 'would have limited the participation of any soul who had competed in holiday events in years gone by and been awarded a small sum of cash'.²¹⁸ Whilst framing amateurism and professionalism in a class-based binary relationship it is important to understand that this was not greed that separated the 'respectable' world from its rough-and-tumble cousin but rather a different set of normative values, physical prowess was highly prized and the 'sport' of gambling was more institutionalised. The amateur, in the social class of sporting society, was the

²¹⁷ *The Welsh Athlete*, 5 October 1891.

²¹⁸ Nancy B. Bouchier, *For the Love of the Game: Amateur Sport in Small-Town Ontario, 1838 – 1895* (Montreal & Kingston, McGill-Queens University Press, 2003), p. 63.

gentleman, the aristocrat, whereas the professional was the proletarian forced to sell the only 'skill' he had, his labour. Of course, the observation that the amateur-professional debate is framed in the language of class is not a novel one but it is necessary to 'return to class' and to reincorporate class into our analysis of the nineteenth century for as Patrick Joyce, a leading postmodern scholar recognises, 'class mattered'.²¹⁹

Taking sport seriously as a job perhaps reflects the harsh realities the industrial frontier, where one's labour is only required as the economic conditions allow. As Dunning and Sheard suggest it was 'a change from the relatively harmonistic perception that characterised class relations between 1850 and 1880 to a more conflictual perception' that led to the open professionalism of rugby union in Northern England and South Wales in the period 1890 – 1914.²²⁰ Favourable economic conditions provided for a lapse in working-class radicalism and in periods of economic harshness that grim reality pushes workers together in a uniting voice of poverty, which as Gramsci argued:

Signifies that the social group in question may indeed have its own conception of the world, even if only embryonic; a conception which manifests itself in action, but occasionally and in flashes – when, that is, the group is acting as an organic totality. But this same group has, for reasons of submission and intellectual subordination, adopted a conception which is not its own but is borrowed from another group; and it affirms this conception verbally and believes itself to be following it, because this is the conception which it follows in 'normal times' – that is when its conduct is not independent and autonomous, but submissive and subordinate'.²²¹

²¹⁹ Patrick Joyce, *Visions of the People: Industrial England and the Question of Class, 1848 – 1914* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 5.

²²⁰ Eric Dunning & Keith Sheard, *Barbarians, Gentlemen and Players* (Oxford, 1979), p. 195.

²²¹ Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, (ed. & trans.) Q Hoare and G. Nowell Smith (London, Lawrence & Wishart, 1971), p. 327.

Whilst the growth of professionalism amongst the working class can be taken to suggest a growing class-consciousness within the sporting realm, it can also be indicative of the telltale signs of a shift towards the capitalist mode of production. Payment for sporting prowess was not a new phenomenon but sportsmen as wage-labourers was, which is immediately suggestive of a shift in the mode of production, although this was very much on a sport-by-sport basis in this period. In this way, therefore, we can understand sport as being part of a wider political economy and subject to the same labour process as factory production. Once infused with capitalist relations, sporting culture once again become an open front in the wider conflict over normative values between the dominant and the working-class hegemony. On Cape Breton for example, this can be felt in the social composition of local teams; the Glace Bay Team between 1902 and 1904 was composed of, for example, a bank manager, barrister, engineer, bank teller, stenographer, physician, and vice principal. The Reserve Mines team, in contrast, as well as the other colliery teams were equally socially homogenous and stocked with miners.²²² Whilst miners may well have played the game initially in bourgeois teams, they quickly migrated to working-class teams suggesting that workers were more comfortable playing with people of their own class.

Yet whilst class culture can operate as a full expression of the collective identity of a particular social class, it is, nevertheless, intersected by other, more apparent forms of collective culture. It is to these that we now must turn in order to demonstrate the conflicted nature of society at any point in time. The usefulness of class in forcing us to think in terms of relationships, binary or otherwise, is apparent when thinking about the gender divide. In

²²² Daniel A MacDonald, *Gridiron and Coal: The Making of Rugby Football in Industrial Cape Breton, 1900 – 1960* (unpublished M.A. Thesis, Saint Mary's University, 2001), p. 37.

this we might consider that there is but one binary relationship - that of masculine and feminine worlds - however as Thomas Dunk has shown perceptively male working-class culture instilled particular meanings of social class and class conflict. Class, as a historical tool, provides the historian with a structure but is not devoid of human agency. Since, whilst 'the class experience is largely determined by the productive relations into which men are born - or enter involuntarily,' the concept of class consciousness 'is the way in which these experiences are handled in cultural terms: embodied in traditions, value-systems, ideas and institutional forms'.²²³ Men, then, make their own *class* but not necessarily under conditions that they choose themselves.

Male working-class culture triumphs manual labour over intellectual endeavour, social status amongst working-class people is awarded through acts relating to work with one's hands. This is not to argue that the working class are unintelligent - I should hope we aren't - but rather to suggest, as Dunk has done, that the triumph of the manual is an important reaction to the hegemonic preference for intellectual labour and the value placed upon mental prowess amongst the middle-class elite.²²⁴ The debate surrounding rational recreation and Barrow Williams' desire that the workers exercise their mental faculties certainly exposes this dichotomy but modern academic sensibilities should not be afraid of recognising the value placed upon manual skill amongst a working class that has precious few opportunities to rise out of their station in life. In the sporting realm, therefore, the growth of professionalism and the payment of skilled players both related to the economic system and the need to

²²³ E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, p. 10.

²²⁴ Thomas W. Dunk, *It's a Working Man's Town: Male Working-Class Culture* (McGill-Queen's University Press, Montreal & Kingston, 2003), p. 136.

compensate players for loss of earnings and, at the same time, the predominant ethic within working-class culture that prized manual skill.

Thus sports such as boxing were considered as a 'noble art' amongst working-class purists but were considered a social nuisance and brutal by middle-class reformers. Jimmy Wilde, for example, a boxer from Tylerstown in the Rhondda became British Champion in the first months of the First World War and drew criticism from the middle class that he was earning money through frivolous activity whilst others were sacrificing their lives on the Western Front. Nevertheless Wilde's skill and prowess in the ring earned him widespread fame and supporters largely drawn from the working class.²²⁵ The Welsh folk-hero Guto Nyth Bran, likewise, earned his legendary status because of his speed but the mythology surrounding Guto emphasises that recognition for manual skill is commonplace amongst the working class.²²⁶

The value placed in Guto Nyth Bran's running is equivalent to the middle-class attribution of value to a university degree or professional qualification. In the sporting realm, then, a team that represents the aspirations of a locality overcomes the nature of the capitalist mode of production with its emphasis upon individualism and competition of individuals freely operating in the marketplace.²²⁷ Rejection of the value placed on education and the hierarchical status it achieves is certainly a feature, as Dunk recognises, but I would hasten in taking it too far. As we have already explored, the Miner's Institute Libraries and

²²⁵ Dai Smith, 'Focal Heroes: A Welsh Fighting Class', in Richard Holt (ed.), *Sport and the Working Class in Modern Britain* (Manchester, 1990).

²²⁶ Guto Nyth Bran's gravestone is in Llanwonno Church, near Ynysybwl, Glamorgan. It records that Guto died after having beaten Prince in a race between Newport and Bedwas. A race that had prize money of 1000 guineas, so exhausted was Guto that when his lover Siân-o-Siop patted him on the back to congratulate him, he collapsed and died. Every year on New Year's Eve the Nos Galan Races are run in memory of the race.

²²⁷ Cf. Karl Marx, *Capital* (Oxford, 1999), ch. 1.

McLachlan's colliery libraries were an important instrument in raising the educational standards amongst the working class, of course it was self-education which afforded choice but working-class anti-intellectualism cannot be pushed too far since hostility to intellectualism was tempered. Nevertheless as Hall et al. suggest, anti-intellectualism

Represents the response of a subordinated social class to the established hierarchical class system and the social distribution of "valid" knowledge that accompanied that hierarchy (especially as marked out educationally by certificates, examination passes, diplomas, degrees, and so on). Its anti-intellectualism is a *class* response to that unequal distribution of knowledge: a response from a class which emphasizes practical knowledge, first-hand experience of *doing things*, because it is the response of the *working class*.²²⁸

Working-class culture on the industrial frontier was principally a response to the harsh realities of industrial capitalism rather than specifically the established hierarchical class system for whilst it would be futile to deny the existence of class – nor should we do so – the nature of the industrial frontier requires us to understand the nature of class relations in an environment in which an established bourgeoisie is very thin and in which power is concentrated into the hands of the industrial capitalists and not shared with middle-class professionals. Yet the definition of middle class in mining towns is problematic since whilst the 1911 census for Caledonia, Glace Bay (for example) tells us that there are clerks, merchants, and journalists the number of these professions is small and almost all live within the same housing districts as the coal miners and labourers working at the Caledonia Mine. Retrospective assumptions about professions and which would indicate a petty-bourgeois status is unhelpful but one tentative conclusion might be that the character of Caledonia

²²⁸ Stuart Hall, et al., *Policing the Crisis: Mugging, the State, and Law and Order* (London: MacMillan Press, 1978), p. 152.

would lead these journalists and clerks to identify with the miners whom they knew rather than the industrial capitalists who tended to be absent from the locality.²²⁹

The restrictive franchise in Canada before 1920 would almost certainly have made for parity amongst the clerks, journalists, and engineers given their disenfranchisement and so if we analyse the local level in terms of enfranchised and disenfranchised we can clearly see that the grip on power politically,²³⁰ if less so socially, was certainly in the hands of the industrial capitalists. Viewed this way then, we can overcome some of the problems of definition and whilst it is not a perfect measure by any means it is a serviceable one. The implications for this on sport are obvious, since the control of land and the political means to change access to land did not rest with the disenfranchised. The contested terrain of the sporting realm therefore also reflects the struggle for the emancipation not just of the working class but also those whom in other contexts might be considered to be petty bourgeois.

In this instance therefore, the role of sport in defining respectability and of defining class is crucial since the values attached to sporting prowess and the specialisation of skill on the rugby field was clearly a route to 'professionalism' and a higher social standing even within a working-class culture. Social standing in working-class culture prizes, as we have seen, manual skill over intellectual prowess. Sport therefore can play a vital role in the definition of a working-class hierarchy, naturally the role of club captain is a prized one and its award afforded a certain amount of respect and admiration. Whilst I share MacDonald's

²²⁹ Census of Canada, 1911: <http://www.collectionscanada.ca/archivianet/1911/index-e.html> [accessed 3.x.2007].

²³⁰ Prior to the Dominion Elections Act of 1920, the basis of Canadian enfranchisement was property. Thus, working-class people were almost entirely excluded from the vote. As in Britain there were slow expansions to the Franchise, such as in 1878, but before 1920 there was very little potential or incentive for workers to vote. Likewise, railway workers and miners were excluded from voting completely before 1885.

reservations about simply labelling the Caledonia Amateur Athletic Club as simply a miner's team – its membership surely reflected the different jobs people did – it is possible to label it a 'working-class' team and more so given the suggestion that the class boundaries in mining towns might operate differently from urban centres where the social classes are more obviously defined.²³¹

Rugby on the Industrial Frontier

Having explored the role of sport in contested realms, it now follows that we explore the nature of rugby on the industrial frontier. In many ways we have been tracing its story throughout this thesis but here I wish to examine a particular aspect of the sport in its industrial context. This is, namely, the understanding that is commonplace within the historiography, which simply put states that rugby for miners was a sport that reflected their strength and that the more strenuous the work the more physical one's exercise.²³² This may, in part, be true but it does not explain very much. Nor should we concern ourselves with the narrative of origins and the Montreal as the cradle of sport in Canada thesis. These tales divert our attention away from the bigger picture, which is that sport such as rugby is played by people with very little in regions that do not matter very much and are considered peripheral to national and international events. This in itself suggests something fundamental about the nature of the sport in these realms: rugby as an important means of expressing

²³¹ MacDonald, *Gridiron and Coal*, p. 38.

²³² Neil Hooper, *A History of the Caledonia Amateur Athletic Club*, (M. Phys. Ed. Thesis, University of New Brunswick, 1988) p. 13.

one's identity and in so doing helps shape that identity. Questions of identity can lead historians in all sorts of directions and in some cases very misleading ones.²³³

Rugby's origins in South Wales reflect the game's original creation in the public schools of England. In the 1850s and 1860s schoolmasters in Wales from Llandovery, Brecon, Cowbridge, and Monmouth began teaching the game to boys after learning the game themselves at Oxford or Cambridge. By the 1870s with the game widely diffused in schools those emerging from the education system craved the means of carrying on playing outside of the school environment; thus the Neath club was formed in 1871 by a group of solicitors and other professional workers, with an old Llandoveryian in their number. Cardiff (1876) and Swansea (1873) were essentially winter-offshoots of the earlier cricket clubs. Likewise, in Pontypridd (1876) the game was introduced to the town by young professionals including Edward Treharne, a medical student, a member of the first Welsh international side that faced England in February 1881. The decade following the foundation of the Welsh Rugby Union in 1881 is marked by an extraordinary transition from middle-class to working-class as the bulk of the teams in the Welsh Valleys became centred upon industrial rather than professional businesses. The Dowlais Football Club for example wore jerseys emblazoned with a blast furnace motif, the symbol of the Dowlais Iron Works for whom most of the players worked.

²³³ David L. Andrews, 'Sport and the Masculine Hegemony of the Modern Nation: Welsh Rugby, Culture and Society, 1890 – 1914', in Timothy Chandler and John Nauright (eds.), *Making Men: Rugby and Masculine Identity*. This article using theoretical assumptions argues that rugby was an integral part of the 'imagining' of Wales at the turn of the twentieth century. He lays emphasis upon the middle-class aspect of the game in Wales but ignores its working-class popularity.

With teams orientated towards work it is perhaps unsurprising that the sport should have become working-class so quickly but there are other important factors at play which mirror the social changes on the coalfield. A significant proportion of the immigrants to the coalfield came from the South West of England, particularly Somerset, a county that 'is essentially a football county, one of the best in England'.²³⁴ The migrants from that region of the country bringing with them a love of the game helped speed up the process of the games proletarianisation. Nevertheless by 1889, the Bristol-based *Amateur Sport* journal was able to note that 'in South Wales the Rugby game commands the popular attention and Association has had to "take a back seat"'.²³⁵ 1905 marks the greatest moment of Welsh rugby history for in front of 47,000 people (witness the rise of popular rugby there) the Welsh international side defeated the New Zealand All Blacks three points to nil and the working-class realities of rugby in Wales were acknowledged. As the *South Wales Daily News* reported:

The men – these heroes of many victories that represented Wales embodied the best manhood of the race ... We all know the racial qualities that made Wales supreme on Saturday ... It is admitted she is the most poetic of nations. It is amazing that in the greatest of all popular pastimes she should be equally distinguished ... the great quality of defence and attack in the Welsh race is to be traced to the training of the early period when powerful enemies drove them to their mountain fortresses. There was developed, then, those traits of character that find fruition today. 'Gallant little Wales' has produced sons of strong determination, invincible stamina, resolute, mentally keen, physically sound.²³⁶

1905 and the discourse surrounding the victory over New Zealand reveals the potency of rugby as a metaphor for social identity. The shamelessly patriotic article by the *South Wales*

²³⁴ *Amateur Sport*, 25 September 1889.

²³⁵ *Ibid.* 11 September 1889.

²³⁶ *SWDN*, 18 December 1905.

Daily News underlines many of the aspects of the game for which the Welsh had been derided for decades, particularly the importance of working-class players to the Welsh game. We can see quite clearly that the prizing of physical skill, typically important amongst the working class, was elevated to the status of national identity and indeed *racial* characteristics. Gallant little Wales is therefore more than simply a metaphor for Wales' position within the British Empire but also the position of its working class within the Imperial population.

On Cape Breton, the attachment to rugby for the working class is likewise a metaphor for social power within a larger social framework. On the eastern edge of Canada and outside of the influence of any major city, Cape Breton's attachment to rugby is a story of difference. In the same way as South Wales, though, working-class rugby begins elsewhere. Ostensibly rugby was introduced to Cape Breton in 1899 by a group of university students hired to work at the Dominion Iron and Steel Corporation, one of whom a man from the old country named Jones may well have been Welsh.²³⁷ Education, as in Wales, seems to have provided a useful mechanism by which middle-class sport was diffused to the working-class hinterlands. By 1901, teams from Sydney, Glace Bay, Port Morien, and Louisbourg were all in existence and competing against each other under the banner of the Cape Breton Rugby Association. MacDonald's thesis outlines the nature of rugby on the industrial frontier; he notes that in Sydney working-class players were poorly represented but in those areas most obviously connected with the coal mining industry such as Reserve the teams were more heavily working-class. This pattern is similar to that of South Wales, the small village teams where connection to the coalmine was direct, such as Ynysybwl, Cilfynydd, or Treorchy, were heavily working-class but in Cardiff, where the professional workers were more in

²³⁷ MacDonald, *Gridiron and Coal*, p. 32.

abundance, teams maintained middle-class representation. The homogeneity of sides such as Reserve or Ynysybwl more adequately reflects the context of the industrial frontier than simply work-based camaraderie.

Unlike South Wales, however, rugby on Cape Breton seems to have been more culturally homogenous. The Caledonia Rugby team (if they may be adequately taken as a reflection of the Island as a whole) reflects this, in 1911 for example the surnames of the team contains McIntyre, McKenzie, McDonald, Weir, McLean; by 1920 the team remained heavily Scottish: MacKenzie, Burns, MacKay, MacDonald, MacVicar, Cameron, though Joseph Boutillier's appearance suggests that we should not assume the demography of the Island remained static. To further emphasise this point we might look to the Intermediate team of 1923, which included surnames such as Driscoll and Lawley, names that are Irish and English respectively. Rugby did not simply diffuse from the middle class since popular enthusiasm for the game and the speed with which sports became working-class defy that logic but determining whether immigrants to Nova Scotia from Britain brought with them a love of the game in the same way that immigrants from Somerset did in South Wales is almost impossible. We can make assumptions but it seems best simply to leave the possibility there.

By the eve of the First World War, then, in both Cape Breton and South Wales rugby was firmly rooted in the popular consciousness of the working class. As we have seen numerous teams competed in leagues across the coalfield and this helped to foster closer cultural connections between the various industrial townships that had been united politically with the miners' unions and through the experiences of strikes. Rugby, then, can and ought to be seen as a part of the cultural production of the working class and the growth of the sport as

the one great pastime of the people is an important aspect in the *making* and *remaking* of class. Nevertheless we should not lose sight of the oppositional manner in which class and identity is forged.

In that year, 1910, the game was the subject of a sermon by a Presbyterian minister from Pembrokeshire, whose words illustrate the acceptance of rugby by Nonconformity, the minister rejected 'the rigid system under which he had been brought up [that] had led him to believe that football matches were of such a character that it was wrong for Christian people to support them'.²³⁸ This pre-war period marked an era of reconciliation, a *détente*, between the chapels and the working-class culture they had tried to suppress. Indeed the novelty of a South African touring side in 1907 brought with it proof that being a good Christian could be promoted on the rugby pitch. The visiting South African Captain Paul Roos in their winter tour of 1906 – 1907 gave a unique 'sermon':

Men could not all be ministers, but they could preach by their words and actions, and could do so in playing football, as in the everyday walks of life. There the players' actions could be seen by thousands and if their conduct was good, it would appeal to others. Let them take Christ into the football field, not only as players, but as spectators and try to disassociate themselves from the idea that footballers and athletes were fighters and drunkards ... football was excellent moral training, and in it were the true spirit and enjoyment of sport.²³⁹

The period immediately before the outbreak of the Great War saw industrial strife on both sides of the Atlantic: the bitter strike of 1909 on Cape Breton was followed by the Cambrian Colliery Dispute of 1910 on the South Wales Coalfield; and as such the reconciliation of the

²³⁸ *WM*, 6 January 1910.

²³⁹ *ME*, 5 January 1907.

chapels to the working-class therefore marks the end of the polarisation of culture on the coalfield. This highlights the importance of understanding identity as a process and the fact that its parameters undergo continual change and adaptation. Working-class culture in South Wales never entirely abandoned religious adherence but it did abandon the antagonistic brand of religious sentiment. On Cape Breton, where Catholicism was more prominent, the antagonism shown towards rugby was much slighter but it did have its detractors such as Professor Woodman of Dalhousie University who complained that rugby lacked 'individual play' and thus hampered spontaneity within the game.²⁴⁰

The specialisation of roles in the game surely suggests that this was an inaccurate appraisal of the sport; certainly the scope for individuality on the rugby field is no more hampered than on the American football field. The triumph of individuality within Liberalism is perhaps in evidence here as MacDonald suggests but it may be more basic a criticism than that.²⁴¹ In sports such as baseball or cricket an individual's prowess with the bat is at the forefront of the game, whereas in rugby the collective nature of the game belies any individual brilliance. This is less a clash of liberal ideology with the sport itself but probably more individual taste. The 'Liberal Order' as McKay has termed his paradigm and it is clearly one that MacDonald is influenced by is an example of benefit of hindsight and we should not be so quick to throw liberalism at every suggestion of individualism, this is clearly a case where caution should not be thrown to the wind.

This chapter has explored the nature of sport, generally, in contested realms and also more specifically the nature of rugby on the industrial frontier. In characterising the industrial

²⁴⁰ *Sydney Record*, 20 November 1905.

²⁴¹ MacDonald, *Gridiron and Coal*, p. 35.

frontier as contested terrain we have noted that power relationships in industrial townships is one of clear divide between enfranchised and disenfranchised and that whilst Canada proved to have the more limited franchise the relationship between employer and employed was largely similar in both South Wales and Cape Breton. Rugby therefore was an inherent component of the disenfranchised, working-class culture that emerged in the coalfield as a form of social order. Working-class prizing of manual skill and the social hierarchy constructed around that triumphalism lent itself to sport and the natural hierarchy of responsibility within teams. In the absence of a clearly definable middle class this informal social hierarchy provides us with a glimpse into the nature of working-class culture on the industrial frontier and how it operated.

The One Great Pastime of the People: A Conclusion

I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence:
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I –
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.²⁴²

Working-class culture and identity as we have seen is invented. It exists only because working-class people invented it. Whilst it would be futile to suggest that the workers exist only because they invented themselves, they had no choice but to sell their labour, but in defining themselves as a working class instead of multiple classes their relationship with the rest of Victorian society became defined in such ways as to maintain the working-class self distinct from the middle – or upper-class ‘other’. Industrial capitalism fractured society and collapsed the moral economy of the pre-industrial world; subsistence was replaced by the labour process and the rural transformed into urban sprawls. Likewise industrial capitalism splintered conceptualisations of nations, regions, and provinces. Wales became two nations – North and South – as Cape Breton splintered into Rural and Industrial. Industrial Cape Breton, focused upon Sydney, was drawn into an imperial economy but became socially introvert removed from the metropolitan influences of Greater Halifax. Likewise the South Wales coalfield, for centuries under the metropolitan dominance of Bristol dissociated into intensely localised cultures: the Valley defined one’s existence. The working-class identity and culture that we have traced in this essay was a reaction to that introversion. The making of working-class culture on the industrial frontier therefore was a story of re-emergence.

²⁴² Robert Frost, ‘The Road Not Taken’, *Mountain Interval*, in *Complete Poems of Robert Frost* (New York, Chicago, San Francisco, Holt, Reinhart and Winston Publishers, 1964), p. 131.

That re-emergence can only be defined as a process; a remodelling of relationships both internal and external, and the construction of a further *imagined* class-consciousness to which the workers ascribed. Sporting culture is an important element in that *imagined class* but is not the formative element; that, it seems to me, is the polarisation of Labourism and Liberalism and the effects that had on the wider social realm. This is not to deny the spontaneity of culture but since politics and economics define social status they have a greater impact upon the former than the other way around. This thesis has attempted to forge a comparative paradigm and to suggest the benefits of incorporating Nova Scotia and particularly Cape Breton into wider narratives of an Anglo-Celtic Atlantic world. The diffusion of ideas from the British Isles to Nova Scotia in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries had a formative impact upon the making of the working class in (what we might call albeit ahistorically) 'Scottish' Canada and indeed it seems that the organic development of a radical Labourism on Cape Breton would be lacking were it not for the connection of Cape Breton to the British labour tradition.

The interplay between the workers and organised religion is the most important social story of the last quarter of the nineteenth century yet it is a story that has often been overlooked in favour of the political narratives of organised Labour. As we have seen though, beneath the political sphere the divisions between religious social gossellers and the voices of labour are more than simply metaphors for growing class-consciousness they were active agents in the development of class awareness. Gramsci argued that every man, in his own way, could be a philosopher, placing emphasis upon the autodidact culture present within many working-class communities. As was suggested in the preceding argument working-class self-education was a fundamental tool in the making and remaking of culture and class-consciousness. For

workers on the industrial frontier, respectability was a self-defined *thing*; it could mean the ability to understand Marx, the owning of Sunday best and ample opportunities to wear it, or grace and flair on the (rugby) football pitch. As Gwyn Alf Williams wrote of the working class of the South Wales coalfield (it applies equally to the Cape Breton one too), 'it was a people sustained by all the dense and interlocking networks of working-class life, with its bubbling world of imprisoned talent often marooned and mauled among the dark and bitter struggles, the harsh, hacking, unremitting labour, the disasters which could kill 300 men and boys at a time and blight whole communities'.²⁴³ In these communities rugby certainly was the one great pastime of the people. This is the human reality of history *from below* and it should not be forgotten.

This thesis has presented liberalism as a version of common sense and in many ways; liberalism seems to be a social metaphor for common sense in that mirror world beyond academia. Yet in understanding this liberalism historically and analytically we can remove ourselves from its bounds and stand back to view not common sense and irrationality but rather social forces at play. Liberalism therefore can be seen not as merely common sense but as the defining 'ideology' of a social order, the *Weltanschauung*. I placed ideology into inverted commas in that sentence in order to suggest that ideology is perhaps the term that is most often used and explored but is one that only tells us part of the story. Gramsci saw hegemony as beyond more than the total sum of ideology, for him hegemony went beyond a specific set of normative social values that are an expression of a particular class, he saw hegemony as an active process, a constructive process in which that ideology is built into

²⁴³ Gwyn Alf Williams, *When was Wales*, p. 224.

every facet of civil society. It becomes what Ian McKay has called, a *liberal* order.²⁴⁴ Hegemony disguises alternative ideologies: in Britain today, for example, the struggle for the ‘Centre’ ground in politics is a perfect example of cross-party consensus on the essential tenets of liberalism.

As we have seen in this thesis, alternatives can and do manifest themselves at various flashpoints within history. Nova Scotia, for example, seems to have had a pervasive liberalism, which was particularly successful in shaping society in the nineteenth century, yet as we have seen above the appearance of new ideas and patterns of discourse underlined how weak the common sense of liberalism can be when subjected to changes in consciousness. McKay has argued, in the vein of Raymond Williams, that the supposed traditions of Nova Scotia in the twentieth century are a feature of this liberal hegemony. For as Williams wrote, ‘tradition is in practice the most evident expression of the dominant and hegemonic pressures and limits ... what we have to see is not just ‘a tradition’ but a *selective tradition*: an intentionally selective version of a shaping past and a pre-shaped present, which is then powerfully operative in the process of social and cultural definition and identification’.²⁴⁵

Whilst for the nineteenth and most of the twentieth century this liberal order held firm, in the first decades of the twentieth century, the last decades of the *Age of Empire* as Hobsbawm has characterised them, the workers of the province as elsewhere in the Atlantic World – in Glasgow, the Clyde Valley, and South Wales – threw off this liberal yoke and fashioned their

²⁴⁴ Ian McKay, *Reds, Rebels Radicals. Rethinking Canada’s Left-History* (Toronto, BTL Books, 2005), pp. 61 – 62.

²⁴⁵ Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 115; for McKay, see Ian McKay, *The Quest of the Folk, Antimodernism and Cultural Selection in Twentieth Century Nova Scotia* (Montreal & Kingston, McGill-Queens University Press, 1994), esp. ch. 5.

own culture distinct from but nevertheless connected to, the liberalism of the day. This thesis has attempted to show how we might observe this process of social *making* and to show that there were correctives to the social order from those who suffered most from it. Religion, the social gospel, and the rise of mass sporting culture are merely metaphors for the larger process of class formation and growing class-consciousness. It may well be that tradition has gotten hold of the popular imagination once more; however for brief moments there was bipolarity and working-class institutions that stood free of middle-class interference. This is a world that can be reconstructed and this thesis represents only part of that story. It is I hope, a way in, but is merely a prologue and should be viewed as such.

Comparative history is invariably difficult since human society despite widespread similarities ultimately throws idiosyncrasy into the mix to confound even the most diligent of historians. I am not the most diligent of historians but remain, as I have always done, awestruck at the power of the human spirit in those coal towns. I have been underground, in the pitch black, with only the dripping water from the coalface to break the eerie silence. That was a museum tour and was perfectly safe. In reality that sanitised vision of the past cannot truly bring us closer to the human experiences of working underground. Life above ground can be understood but often unashamedly connected to our own experiences and as a means of connecting the present to some point in the past. That was never my intention with this work, merely to show the importance of seeing working-class culture for what it was.

Nevertheless, the difficulties of comparative work force historians to be more imaginative with their methodology and the benefits of such work are enormous. Forging a new paradigm inevitably leaves one open to the charge of muscular theorising and whilst this

thesis can be perhaps criticised for its use of theory, the theoretical framework overcomes the empirical challenges of a transatlantic survey of working-class culture. This is not to argue that what appears above is a final statement of a brave new world of study, it is not and nor should it pretend to be. What I hope to have achieved in this work is to make the case for transatlantic comparative work, an understanding of human society that is not broken into selective fields of history, and one which breaks down the metropolitan mindset of historians past and present and the regionalist reaction to the overbearing centrism of metropolitan-hinterland paradigms.

When I first arrived in Nova Scotia I found myself immersed in a historiography constructed around the importance of the Atlantic Canadian *region* or the catch-all *Maritimes*; what I have attempted to do, successfully or otherwise, is to show that the *region* does not have to always be focused upon a *core* from within the political boundaries of the nation-state; cultural boundaries do not obey political limitations and Cape Breton is a prime example of a *region* that would be better understood as part of an Anglo-Celtic Atlantic World paradigm than it is as part of the on-going debates over English-Canada and French-Canada. Let those debates flourish but in recognising that the Maritimes are not conservative or 'antimodern' let us also recognise that the Atlantic world is as much part of the Maritime experience as the land borders with continental Canada. I recognise the weaknesses of the paradigm I have presented and its limitations but it is a start and better historians than I will recognise its potential for revitalising our understanding of Nova Scotia and its orientation in the global society.

The non-English regions of the British Isles have generally found themselves pushed to the side in the writing of 'British' history. Perhaps, demographically, this is a fair apportionment of space but it has always left me with a sense of something missing. A Celtic paradigm has come under attack from all sides in the debate over a Four Nations History since neither South Wales, nor Lowland Scotland, nor indeed large parts of Ulster can be adequately described as 'Celtic'. The Celtic Fringe needless to say as part of the historical lexicon is a redundant phrase and should be resigned to the rubbish heap. Yet the impulses of 'Celtic' historians to drive forward a British history need to be retained; from a personal perspective, though, I do not believe that a truly 'British' historiography will ever be forged no matter how hard the 'Celtic' historians try since the history of the British Isles will always be written from the perspective of the 'core' and not the periphery. It is, after all, an adequate reflection of social power. But in the same way as we can escape the metropolitan fallacy by focusing, introvertly, upon the hinterland so too can we escape the Anglocentric fallacy of 'British' history by comparatively examining the 'periphery'.

From this perspective, the making of the North Atlantic World in the nineteenth century is a story of the working class, it is a story of the periphery, and it is a story that deserves to be told from the perspective of the 'hinterland' and not the core. This is the future of Atlantic scholarship and I hope this thesis serves to introduce a joined-up history of *home*.

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