

**The leisure activities of the rural working classes
with special reference to Norfolk 1840-1940**

Carole King, M.A.

School of History

University of East Anglia

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the
requirements for the degree of
Master of Philosophy / Doctor of Philosophy
May, 2015

“This copy of the thesis has been supplied on condition that anyone who consults it is understood to recognise that its copyright rests with the author and that use of any information derived there from must be in accordance with current UK Copyright Law. In addition, any quotation or extract must include full attribution.”

Table of contents

<i>Abstract</i>	v
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	vi
<i>Abbreviations</i>	vii
Chapter 1. Introduction.....	1
Leisure and work.....	1
Social structure.....	5
Methodology.....	6
Agriculture.....	11
Religion.....	13
Time for leisure?.....	15
Social change.....	17
Chapter 2. Historiography of rural working class leisure.....	20
Chapter 3. Traditional leisure and its critics.....	28
Rural recreations before and during the Victorian era.....	28
Early opportunities for sport.....	31
Boxing and prize-fighting.....	35
Horse racing.....	38
Opposition to workers' choice of leisure.....	42
Rise and development of fairs.....	52
Decline of fairs.....	63
Circuses and menageries.....	74
Conclusion.....	76
Chapter 4. Broadening horizons: transport and technology.....	78
Public transport.....	80
Railways.....	80
Motor transport – Buses.....	82
Transport improvements and holidays.....	85
Personal transport.....	87
Bicycles.....	87
Motor transport – Cars and motorcycles.....	90
The open air movement.....	92

Cinema, including the magic lantern and dissolving views.....	95
The modernisation of the fairground	101
Conclusion	103
Chapter 5. New venues: reading rooms and village halls in Norfolk.....	105
Introduction.....	105
Nature of the evidence and methodology	105
Why and how were reading rooms founded?.....	113
The development of reading rooms	121
The geographical distribution of reading rooms	130
Membership profile.....	133
Day-to-day running of the reading room – finance.....	136
Architectural styles of reading rooms	139
The decline of reading rooms.....	142
Village halls	144
Conclusion	153
Chapter 6. The changing character of rural sport.....	155
‘Muscular Christianity’	155
Cricket.....	157
Football	169
Amateur/professional ethos.....	173
Conclusion	174
Chapter 7. Rural working women’s leisure.....	176
Female societies	184
The Mothers’ Union.....	189
Girls’ Friendly Society.....	200
Nonconformist women’s organisations	202
Conclusion	206
Chapter 8. The Women’s Institute movement.....	208
Historiography	209
Structure and early history	216
Contrast between the WI and alternative leisure possibilities	217
Explaining the WI movement	218
The WI’s international roots	220
The foundation of the British WI movement.....	222

The WI in Norfolk.....	224
Training, competitions, resolutions, libraries – empowerment.....	234
Conclusion.....	241
Chapter 9. Conclusion.....	243
Bibliography.....	246
A] Primary sources.....	246
i. Unpublished archives.....	246
a) The National Archives, Kew.....	246
b) Norfolk Record Office, Norwich.....	247
c) Norfolk Federation of Women’s Institutes.....	250
d) Holkham archives.....	250
e) Newspapers.....	250
ii. Parliamentary Papers.....	251
iii. Printed material.....	252
a) Norfolk.....	252
b) General.....	254
B] Secondary sources.....	256
a) Books – Norfolk.....	256
b) Books – general.....	258
c) Articles.....	267
d) Dissertations and theses.....	271
e) Websites (All retrieved 16.5.15).....	272

Tables

Table 1: Norfolk fairs in 1883.....	55
Table 2: Trading in Norfolk fairs in 1883.....	58
Table 3: Norfolk fairs 1854-1937.....	67
Table 4: National expansion of motorcycle ownership.....	91
Table 5: List of known reading rooms in Norfolk.....	107
Table 6: Norfolk cricket clubs between 1891 and 1898.....	162
Table 7: Norfolk villages with information on cricket grounds.....	163
Table 8: Norfolk publicans offering cricket facilities.....	164
Table 9: Norfolk football clubs 1900-1937.....	173

Table 10: Development of the Mothers' Union in Norfolk.....	191
Table 11: WI members as a percentage of village female population in 1931.....	228

Table of figures

Figure 1: Bob Rythorne of Heacham.....	19
Figure 2: Estimated per capita consumption 1800-1935.....	43
Figure 3: Baptist Sunday School outing from Stalham.....	83
Figure 4: A set of films could be hired from Coe's of Norwich.....	100
Figure 5: Plan of Hilborough reading room.....	123
Figure 6: Reading rooms and population chart.....	131
Figure 7: Distribution of reading rooms in Norfolk	132
Figure 8: Sidestrand reading room.....	139
Figure 9: Plan of Keswick reading room.....	141
Figure 10: Suffield reading room.....	141
Figure 11: Illustration from catalogue published by Boulton and Paul Ltd.....	142
Figure 12: Growth of Norfolk Women's Institutes 1918-1940.....	224
Figure 13: National growth of Women's Institutes 1915-1940.....	234

Maps

Geographical spread of fairs in Norfolk, 1854.....	64
Geographical spread of fairs in Norfolk, 1883 and 1896	65
Geographical spread of fairs in Norfolk, 1912 and 1929.....	66
Women's Institutes founded in Norfolk in 1920 and 1925 or before.....	225
Women's Institutes founded in Norfolk in 1930 and 1935 or before.....	226
Women's Institutes founded in Norfolk in 1940 or before.....	227

Abstract

This thesis seeks to address an acknowledged gap in the historiography of leisure – that of rural working class leisure activities. The first objective of this thesis is therefore to investigate different types of rural leisure, including ‘rational recreation’, traditional and innovative, and gender-specific pastimes. Using Norfolk as a case study, I examined a range of different leisure opportunities. The second objective is to question the changing nature of leisure provision and the impact that this had on rural lives, and it was found that opportunities for leisure increased considerably throughout the period 1840-1940. This was brought about by better working conditions, including fewer working hours and higher wages. Technology also played a key role, providing increased availability of transport, both public and personal, and this allowed access to urban recreations, unavailable in the countryside. Some traditional pastimes endured, while others were replaced by new forms of entertainment, such as the cinema and modernised fairground attractions. Other innovations included the rise of local sports, for instance cricket and football, and alternatives to the public house – reading rooms and village halls, the latter being open to all sections of society and not solely men. Arguably, rural women benefited most from these remarkable transformations. The introduction of new societies, such as the Mothers’ Union and the Women’s Institute led to considerably enhanced lives for their members. There is clear evidence of the gradual adjustment from widespread philanthropy to self-determination among working people, and together with the remarkable alteration in outlook produced by the First World War, this increasingly caused local communities to take control of their own leisure provision. This is consistent with the social changes occurring in all spheres of rural life.

Acknowledgements

During the course of this research I have been helped by many people who have given me access to records and materials. I would like to thank the staffs of the Norfolk Record Office and the Norfolk Heritage Centre, who have always been considerate and supportive, while the staffs of both the county library service and the university library have been particularly helpful. A special thankyou is due to Christine Hiskey, the archivist at Holkham Hall, with whom I spent a pleasant day researching local sports records. This thesis has similarly benefited from the assistance I received from the staff at the National Fairground Archive at the University of Sheffield. I am also very grateful to those correspondents who answered my appeals for information, particularly about reading rooms and village cricket teams. Their local knowledge has been invaluable. I am greatly indebted to Cindy Brookes, secretary of the Norfolk Federation of Women's Institutes, who kindly allowed me free run of the Federation's collection of WI books and documents. Professor Tom Williamson has supervised my research and subsequent thesis and has been unstintingly generous in the time and effort he has dedicated to advising and above all encouraging me in my endeavours. Most of all, however, I must thank my husband, Mike, without whose unfailing encouragement and support throughout, this thesis would not have been completed.

Abbreviations

AOS	Agricultural Organization Society
GFS	Girls' Friendly Society
MU	Mothers' Union
NFWI	National Federation of Women's Institutes
NRO	Norfolk Record Office
ODNB	Oxford dictionary of national biography
TNA	The National Archive
VCA	Village Clubs Association
WEA	Workers' Educational Association
WI	Women's Institute
YMCA	Young Men's Christian Association

Chapter 1. Introduction

Increased means and increased leisure are the two civilizers of man.

Benjamin Disraeli (speaking about the working classes in 1872.)¹

This thesis is about the recreational activities of the rural working classes during the period between 1840 and 1940, with special reference to the county of Norfolk. It considers how the leisure pursuits available to working people changed during this time. During the last sixty years there has been an increasing interest among historians in many aspects of the study of leisure. Yet while numerous investigations have been made into urban leisure, little academic attention has been paid to the situation in the countryside. This study examines the transformation in leisure during the century under examination and the impact this had on the rural working class. It focuses on the opportunities for recreation at different periods, the average person's behaviour in a leisure situation and last, but not least, the impact of leisure on country people's social well-being.

The choice of Norfolk for this research is particularly appropriate, in that it was relatively sparsely populated, and most settlements in the county comprised small villages or hamlets. Norfolk's urban population expanded, it is true, between 1851 and 1951, with the total inhabitants of the three largest towns – Norwich, King's Lynn and Great Yarmouth – increasing from 29% to 42% of Norfolk's population.² But even in 1951, over half of the county's residents therefore lived in either small towns or villages, some obviously more isolated than others. This gives a manageable focus to the study and allows greater potential for rural research than in another more densely populated county.

Leisure and work

What is 'leisure'? The dictionary defines it as 'the state of having time at one's own disposal' or 'free or unoccupied time'. The latter definition is less satisfactory, as one can be occupied, while pursuing a leisure activity. For the purposes of historical

¹ 'Mr. Disraeli at Manchester', *The Times*, 4 April 1872, p. 5.

² John Wright, 'Population change 1801-1951' in Trevor Ashwin and Alan Davison, *An historical atlas of Norfolk* (Chichester, 2005), p. 142. For the reasons for this expansion, see pp. 12-13 below.

Introduction

research, many historians have debated the definition of leisure but have been unable to reach agreement. Peter Borsay suggests that perhaps ‘leisure becomes what is left when all the more important and serious areas of life have been accounted for’ but counters this with the idea of “‘serious’ leisure’, which ‘often “mimic[s]” work or education. ... The promotion of “rational recreation” during the Victorian era can be read in this light’.³ This, of course, devalues the more frivolous or inconsequential forms of leisure, such as visiting the cinema or theatre, drinking, gambling, days out at the seaside and ‘retail therapy’, the latter a modern reflection of our more affluent society. These two types of diversion could also be described as ‘good’ or ‘bad’, which in turn raises the idea of conflict of values.⁴

Money, or the earning of money, seems to be at the root of most definitions: this would be particularly appropriate in discussions of the working class. It is understandable, as money is the basic exchange for the necessities of life. A negative outlook is expressed in the following with no suggestions of how to utilise the free time available:

[leisure is] (1) ... a chance to shake off the fatigue of work ... (2) ... escape from the daily boredom of performing a set of limited and routine tasks.⁵ [These were necessary in order to earn the necessary money to live. This is certainly the case for numerous people, but many others find their daily work interesting and absorbing.]

... Leisure ... is the time which is left over after work and other obligations have been completed.⁶

Conversely, and more positively:

... for some people the question [‘what is leisure?’] is answered by saying that leisure is *freedom from* the necessity of work [again, in order to avoid poverty]; it is time in which those things which are interesting and enjoyable can be pursued. ... Leisure ... is a *positive experience of freedom*; of freedom to enter into obligations and relationships, to pursue interests and opportunities. Such freedom is never total ...⁷

³ Peter Borsay, *A history of leisure* (Basingstoke, 2006), pp. 5, 7.

⁴ Michael A. Smith, Stanley Parker and Cyril S. Smith (eds.), *Leisure and society in Britain* (London, 1973), p. 12.

⁵ Joffre Dumazedier quoted in Borsay, *A history of leisure*, pp. 5-6.

⁶ H. Cunningham, ‘Leisure and culture’ in F. M. L. Thompson (ed.), *The Cambridge social history of Britain 1750-1950* vol. 2 *People and their environment* (Cambridge, 1990), p. 279.

⁷ Smith, Parker and Smith (eds.), *Leisure and society in Britain*, pp. 4-5.

Introduction

It is equally important to define ‘work’. It is – again according to the dictionary – ‘activity involving mental or physical effort done in order to achieve a result’ with the additional explanation: ‘employment as a means of earning income’. This is interesting in that it could be argued therefore that leisure – ‘free or unoccupied time’ – requires no mental or physical effort and involves no worthwhile result. This is clearly untrue, as is unambiguously demonstrated in this thesis.

It seems that it is difficult if not impossible to arrive at a single agreed definition of leisure. Any precise explanation would appear to depend on the particular aspect under discussion. ‘Above all, virtually every confident generalization disguises counter-trends and exceptions’ – a concise caveat to keep in mind.⁸ For this research I have adopted the simple everyday meaning of ‘free time’, that is, time free from compulsory obligations, to use, within reason, exactly as one wishes.

This said, the links between work and leisure in the countryside are sometimes particularly imprecise. A good example of this is the Victorian (and later) practice of travelling from the city to pick hops for a few weeks in the summer, mainly in Kent.⁹ This was a working holiday, which might be considered a contradiction in terms. Another blurring of the boundaries is, more generally, provided by the custom of singing while working, as for example while crow-scaring:

O, you nasty black-a-tops [blackbirds],
Get off my master’s radish tops,
For he’s a-comin’ with his long gun,
And you must fly and I must run.¹⁰

Agricultural work songs were common in the first half of our period of interest and helped to boost efficiency while lessening monotony. This was not leisure; nevertheless, the act of singing gave pleasure even while undertaking a less than pleasurable task. In a similar manner, work was accompanied by conversation and social interaction between workers. In E. P. Thompson’s words:

⁸ Dave Russell, ‘The making of modern leisure: the British experience, c.1850-c.1960’, in Tony Blackshaw (ed.), *Routledge handbook of leisure studies* (Abingdon, 2013), p. 16.

⁹ An interesting description of its contrasts can be found in George Orwell, *The Orwell diaries* (London, 2010), p. 16.

¹⁰ Barry Reay, *Rural Englands* (Basingstoke, 2004), pp. 132-133; Ted Goioa, *Work songs* (Durham, North Carolina, 2006), p. 53.

Introduction

social intercourse and labour are intermingled – the working-day lengthens or contracts according to the task – and there is no great sense of conflict between labour and "passing the time of day".¹¹

Although my definition of leisure is uncomplicated, certain questions nevertheless arise from it. One concerns religion, which was undoubtedly pursued by its adherents in 'free time' but in its role as patron providing recreational opportunities, church and chapel were also frequently seen as a respectable alternative to the pub as a community centre.¹² Furthermore, both church and chapel approved of the 'Protestant work ethic'¹³ and censured idleness, and this attitude, when held strictly, led to a disinclination to spend time in 'useless' pursuits. This viewpoint changed, however, towards the turn of the century, as the temptations of new pastimes grew, undermining the habits of church-going and fostering indifference to religion.¹⁴ In this thesis, I have not regarded religion *in isolation* as a leisure pursuit, although where relevant I have discussed it in relation to other recreational activities, and later in this chapter I have outlined its general impact on the community.¹⁵

Leisure could also be described as time which is not spent earning or raising income or adding to the family purse in any way. This raises the case of poaching which unquestionably takes place in 'free time' and could therefore be described as a leisure activity. It also, however, adds in kind to the family income. So is leisure time always spent in pleasurable activities, or, as in poaching, can it be used for clandestine purposes which benefit the perpetrator?

A distinction hitherto unexplored by historians is that between organised (e.g. cinema, outings, club meetings) and unorganised leisure (e.g. drinking, gambling, reading, gardening). The former could be described as formal recreation, which has to be planned and must have time allocated for it. It is often predictable, methodical and may have a regular timetable. It is also likely to include association with others.

¹¹ E. P. Thompson, 'Time, work-discipline, and industrial capitalism' *Past & Present*, 38 (December 1967), p. 60.

¹² Eric J. Evans and Jeffrey Richards, *A social history of Britain in postcards 1870-1930* (London, 1980), p. 103.

¹³ Although this particular term was first coined in 1905 by Max Weber in *The Protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism*, its essential tenets had been endorsed from the time of the Reformation onwards.

¹⁴ C. P. Hill, *British economic and social history 1700-1982* (London, 1985), pp. 220-221.

¹⁵ See p. 13.

Introduction

Unorganised leisure, on the other hand, is casual and free and easy and, in contemporary terms at least, may even be morally lax. It is often a solitary pursuit, although not always.

Another distinction can be drawn – between older (and therefore ‘traditional’) and newer, ‘innovative’ forms of leisure. The latter became more accessible during the second half of our period of interest because of new technology and improved disposable income. As Emma Griffin points out, however:

with so much of the country effectively untouched by the onset of industrialisation we are forced to concede that our understanding of the ways in which economic conditions have historically influenced cultural practice still remains limited in the extreme.¹⁶

Social structure

It is necessary to have a clear definition of the “working class”, but this is also challenging. The idea of social class is extremely complex; nevertheless, the idea of three broad strata of society – upper, middle and lower (or working class) – forms a useful starting point for discussion.¹⁷ These strata are commonly defined as economic or (less frequently) cultural groups. Originating in Marxist theory, the simplicity of such a scheme was increasingly challenged in the 1970s and 80s by academics on the left as well as the right. It was mooted that each echelon of society had its own complex hierarchy, rooted in income and appreciation.¹⁸ Moreover, although the upper class still endured, the First World War unsettled the British class system, as the middle classes began to impinge on the classes both above and below them.¹⁹ Among sociologists, these interesting but difficult questions have been the subject of much deliberation.²⁰ For the purposes of this thesis, however, and in order to avoid becoming overinvolved in detail, the straightforward Marxist definition of the working class is used: ‘...that class of modern wage labourers who, having no means of production of their own, are reduced to selling their labour power in order

¹⁶ Emma Griffin, ‘Popular culture in industrializing England’, *Historical Journal*, 45:3 (2002), p. 623.

¹⁷ Christensen and Levinson, *Encyclopedia of community* (Thousand Oaks, Calif., 2003), pp. 189-191.

¹⁸ Lawrence James, *The middle class, a history* (London, 2006), pp. 253, 273.

¹⁹ A. J. P. Taylor, *English history, 1914-1945* (Oxford, 1965), p. 173.

²⁰ For some examples, see the work of Pierre Bourdieu, Stanley Aronowitz, and T. H. Marshall among others.

Introduction

to live.’²¹ For the rural working class this description thus includes agricultural labourers but not their employers, the farmers. Because of their similar income and hours of work, however, the definition has to be expanded a little to include village artisans – those skilled in different crafts such as blacksmithing, saddlery, wheelwrighting and so on – even though many were self-employed and therefore did have ‘means of production of their own’. Rural working women formed part of this class, especially in the earlier part of the period I am addressing. They were a vital part of village economy, doing field work, keeping poultry, gleaning, working as charwomen, taking in washing or occasionally dress-making.²²

Methodology

One approach to the theme of this thesis would be to break it down into its various aspects and deal comprehensively with a defined and limited number of these, for example fairs, village brass bands, annual celebrations (Christmas, May Day, Sunday School anniversary), to suggest just a few. If this policy was followed, the majority of the remaining components of the subject would generally be ignored. The result would be like a completed jigsaw with many pieces missing. Thus the perspective of the subject would be limited and possibly distorted. If, however, the subject is dealt with broadly, the various leisure activities would still be considered meticulously, although necessarily less exhaustively.

Borsay agrees with this latter approach to a certain extent:

surely it would make more sense to study, as most have done, the separate areas that constitute recreation. But this poses a problem, where to stop? If sport, why not soccer, bowls, curling, angling, or horse racing ... all these forms of leisure possess their own separate organizations, rules and rituals. However, these categories can easily become prisons, narrowing the vision to the point at which study becomes a closed system in which the chronicling of arcane conventions, extraordinary events, superstars ... [is] justified in their own terms. If meaningful analysis is to take place, a line has to be drawn between categorization and generalization.²³

²¹ Note by Friedrich Engels to the 1888 English edition of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, 'Manifesto of the Communist Party' in *Selected works* (London, 1943), vol. 1, p. 204.

²² Seebohm Rowntree and Kendall, *How the labourer lives* (London, 1913), pp. 87, 94, 129, 151, 171, 199.

²³ Borsay, *A history of leisure*, pp. xiv-xv.

Introduction

In other words, a happy medium between the two should be the aim. This thesis attempts to follow this advice, not only by examining certain discrete recreational activities in detail but also by putting these activities firmly in the context of the daily life of their participants.

A serious research challenge is how to discover the actual activities of the poorer classes. These have left fewer traces than their wealthier neighbours, who not only often wrote diaries, journals, letters and autobiographies which have been preserved, but also were more frequently recorded in pictures and newspaper reports. Nevertheless, it is possible to discover salient facts, not so much about individual members of the working classes as about this level of society as a whole.

In this respect, perhaps the most valuable resource is contemporary newspapers, although when first consulting them, the historian may feel overwhelmed by the sheer amount of information available.²⁴ In East Anglia alone, for example, in the Victorian period, *Eastern Daily Press* (founded in 1871), *Norfolk Chronicle and Norwich Gazette* (1769), *Norfolk Herald* (1867), *Norfolk Mail* (1876), *Norwich Mercury* (1713?) and *Norfolk News* (1845) were just six of the many available periodicals available to the public.²⁵ In addition, there were numerous local newspapers, such as *Cromer and North Walsham Post* (1890), *Dereham and Fakenham Times* (1880), *Diss Express* (1864), *Downham Market Gazette* (1879), *Lynn Journal* (1875) and *Yarmouth and Gorleston Times* (1880).

The researcher has to address the problem of where to begin to search this embarrassment of riches. One immediate aspect of his investigations is the availability of copies of these publications. A search in the British Library newspaper catalogue reveals about three hundred Norfolk titles, but a positive

²⁴ Historians who have benefitted from the evidence found in newspapers include MacMaster, 'The battle for Mousehold Heath', *Past & Present*, 127 (1990), p. 121 and thirteen further newspaper references throughout the article; Gary Moses, 'Reshaping rural culture? The Church of England and hiring fairs in the East Riding of Yorkshire c. 1850-80' *Rural History* (2002), 13:1, p. 80 and ninety-four further newspaper references; S. A. Caunce, 'The hiring fairs of northern England, 1890-1930', *Past & Present*, 217:1 (2012), p. 221 and ten further newspaper references.

²⁵ The dates indicate their foundation. For a comprehensive list of local newspapers published between 1700 and 1900, see Rex Stedman, *Vox populi. The Norfolk newspaper press, 1760-1900* (Thesis for the Fellowship of the Library Association, 1971).

Introduction

decision was made to examine the newspapers available in Norfolk archives.²⁶ It is probable that these had the greatest circulation and would represent local opinion most accurately. A sampling strategy was adopted, because it would have been impracticable to read every issue of the chosen newspapers. Copies from two or three months about every five years were scanned, for example, January, April and September 1840, then February, May and October 1845 and so on. By this method the researcher can be reasonably confident that he has found the great majority of the seasonal events reported.

There are other important sources of evidence. Diaries were not usually written by members of the working classes, particularly in the earlier part of the period under discussion, and those few which were composed have seldom survived.²⁷ The diaries consulted for this study were written principally by farmers (rural middle class), keeping a record of their work, and incidentally adding tantalising snippets of information about how they and their labourers spent what little free time they had. Other diarists included clergymen and ‘gentlewomen’, who occasionally described their part in organising outings or entertainments for their less affluent neighbours. The fact that workers’ diaries are particularly difficult to find presents one of the difficulties of this research. In addition, diary entries about workers’ activities could be regarded as unsubstantiated testimony, which ideally should be confirmed from another source. Clearly, newspaper reports could be similarly assessed. Parish magazines published by local churches nationwide for over one hundred and fifty years are also an effective source of information, and in Norfolk a good selection has survived.²⁸

Photographs must not be ignored, and Norfolk is fortunate in its online collection, *Picture Norfolk*, a digital archive of historical images recording the development of the county up to the present day.²⁹ The main drawback in the use of early photographs is in their uneven coverage of their period, due to their variable survival. Even so, they allow the researcher glimpses of the reality experienced by local

²⁶ <http://catalogue.bl.uk>

²⁷ Steinitz, *Time, space, and gender in the nineteenth-century British diary* (New York, 2011), p. 7.

²⁸ <http://www.cofe.anglican.org/about/diocesesparishes/parishmags/history.html>.

²⁹ <http://www.picture.norfolk.gov.uk>

Introduction

people, and a single photograph is sometimes more enlightening than a whole written chapter and can link ‘the material world to ordinary written sources’.³⁰

Other resources include the records of organisations formed to foster particular recreations. Examples include the Cyclists’ Touring Club, the Mothers’ Union, and the Women’s Institute. Local records of all these are held in the Norfolk Record Office, which also cares for documents concerning rural Working Men’s Clubs and Friendly Societies (both had a strong social element), reading rooms, bowling and quoit clubs, cricket clubs and football clubs. Those local estate archives in private hands can be accessed with permission and provide information unavailable elsewhere.³¹

Some records, however, are available only in national collections; for example, the documents of the National Fairground Archive at the University of Sheffield comprise a unique collection of material dealing with the culture and history of travelling fairs from the 1800s to the present day. Particularly useful for this study is an almost complete run of the trade journal *Merry-go-round*, which gives accurate dates for the appearance in Norfolk of, for example, bioscope shows and a scenic railway. Ephemera – posters advertising circuses, funfairs and other local events, postcards or tickets to special occasions, membership cards for reading rooms, cricket teams and various local organisations – can occasionally be found in record offices and often give useful information. The use of the social research organisation, Mass Observation, was considered. As it was founded as late as 1937, however, its benefit to this thesis would have been minimal, and it was regrettably rejected.

Oral history may contribute significantly to the researcher’s objectives as a means of accessing recollections unobtainable in other ways; it can preserve the experiences of people who perhaps have neither the skill nor the aspiration to write down their memories. This is particularly important historically in the case of members of the working class, whose literacy may have been limited. The impact of a range of significant movements of social change on these people and their families (hitherto

³⁰ David Dymond, *Researching and writing history* (Salisbury, 1999), p. 39.

³¹ Holkham Hall archives, for example, have preserved records concerning local cricket.

Introduction

difficult to assess) may become clear through recorded interviews.³² These can be retrieved through audio collections such as that housed at the Norfolk Record Office and also through transcribed and published compilations, for instance the countrywide efforts in the 1970s and 1990s of Women's Institutes, which collected local reminiscences by individual county.³³ These memories extend back in some cases to the 1880s, giving first-hand evidence of contemporary rural life. Particular oral transcriptions also exist, but it must be remembered that although sincere, memories may be inexact or even erroneous and therefore must be used carefully, with perhaps other forms of evidence to confirm their accuracy.³⁴

In addition to documents pertaining to leisure activities there are those which relate to associated places or structures. Authentication of these can be found in plans (sometimes for buildings no longer in existence), contemporary Ordnance Survey maps, correspondence, bills, Charity Commission schemes, insurance policies. These were especially useful for proving the existence of certain reading rooms. In fact the only proof of the establishment of a particular reading room may occur in a bill for its construction, or its indication in an O.S. map.³⁵

Lateral thinking is vital in using all these sources, as evidence is often available only in this indirect way. Commercial directories and census returns, produced decennially from 1841 onwards, were used with care, often yielding a wealth of occupational detail. Information to be extracted from Parliamentary papers is not always easy to uncover, but undoubtedly persistence is worthwhile, as irrefutable testimony of important rural social changes can be revealed. Parliamentary papers do not always cover the whole country; nonetheless they can help to develop a general picture of conditions in the countryside at a specific time, giving an immediacy not easily obtainable elsewhere. Early films proved to be disappointing

³² David K. Dunaway and Willa K. Baum (eds.), *Oral history: an interdisciplinary anthology* (Lanham, Md., 1996), pp. 8, 92.

³³ Norfolk Federation of Women's Institutes, *Within living memory. A collection of Norfolk reminiscences written and compiled by members of the Norfolk Federation of Women's Institutes* (Ipswich, 1972); Norfolk Federation of Women's Institutes, *Within living memory. Compiled by the Norfolk Federation of Women's Institutes from notes sent by Institutes in the county* (Newbury, 1995).

³⁴ For example, Mary Chamberlain, *Fenwomen. A portrait of women in an English village* (London, 1975); Stephen Counce, *Oral history and the local historian* (London, 1994), p. 103.

³⁵ Examples occur at Bradfield – see pp. 125-126 – and at Felmingham and Felthorpe – see p. 108.

as a resource, as they were not particular enough for this study, tending to concentrate more on urban leisure.

Secondary sources come in different forms in this digital age. The Internet is a prime source of information, although it must be used with great caution. Books, articles, dissertations and theses on specific aspects of leisure provide significant corroboration of particular points of interest. The specific methodologies used for researching individual aspects of rural leisure are described in later chapters of this thesis.

In order to set the wider context in which leisure activities occurred, there follows a short consideration of the main contributory influences – agriculture, religion and social change – and their general effect on communities.

Agriculture

During the first two-thirds of the nineteenth century, advances in agriculture and a growing market provided by an expanding population, large-scale urbanisation and industrialisation brought in a ‘golden age’ for farmers. Apart from some minor fluctuations, Norfolk prospered due to its position in the vanguard of agricultural improvements. Indications of success were apparent everywhere, except in the poorest workers’ homes. Sheep and crops of grain, roots and pulses all flourished in different areas according to soil type.³⁶

From the 1870s, agriculture was affected by a succession of failed harvests, and, above all, by cheap imports of American wheat and Australian beef, mutton and wool.³⁷ There was a significant shift, even in the arable districts of eastern England, from growing cereals to permanent pasture.³⁸ In a few districts, characterised by particularly infertile soils, such as Breckland, some land went out of cultivation

³⁶ Susanna Wade Martins, ‘Agriculture in the mid-19th century’, in Ashwin and Davison (eds.), *Historical atlas of Norfolk*, pp. 137-138.

³⁷ Naomi Riches, *The agricultural revolution in Norfolk* (London, 1967), p. 155; Susanna Wade Martins and Tom Williamson, *The countryside of East Anglia. Changing landscapes, 1870-1950* (Woodbridge, 2008), p. 11; Trevor May, *The economy 1815-1914* (London, 1972), pp. 190-191.

³⁸ Alun Howkins, *Death of rural England* (London, 2003), pp. 12, 13; Alun Howkins, *Poor labouring men. Rural radicalism in Norfolk 1872-1923* (London, 1985), pp. 2, 4, 6.

Introduction

altogether.³⁹ As one observer commented, ‘I ... saw fields once arable but which now have ceased to grow any crop but thistles...’⁴⁰ Landowners, of whom there were 10,096 in Norfolk in 1873, were especially concerned, as rents declined sharply, farms increasingly changed hands, old loyalties were dissolved and standards deteriorated:⁴¹

the land will be run with its labour bill brought down to an irreducible minimum; the hay and straw will be sold off it instead of going back to the soil as manure, weeds will be left to seed, drains to choke ... it will need capital, skill, and six or eight year of time to bring them [the deteriorated acres] round.⁴²

Nevertheless, the picture was not one of unrelieved gloom, and as elsewhere, Norfolk farmers diversified:

nearly all the landholders ... had another trade which they combined with farming. ... One is a builder as well as a farmer, and another ... does ... a good deal of carting.⁴³

These alternative occupations, including dairying, orchards and market gardening, expanded rapidly in the inter-war years, particularly where there were good rail links to towns and cities.⁴⁴ Although it had served Norfolk for over 200 years, the four-course rotation system (based on turnips, clover, barley and wheat) was changed by the adoption of sugar beet as a major crop. The number of sheep diminished, while the number of dairy cattle increased.⁴⁵

Already, before the start of the depression, workers had been leaving the countryside – in East Anglia as elsewhere – to seek a better life in urban and industrial areas, or in the colonies. The national rural population decreased by almost half from 40.1%

³⁹ Alun Howkins, *Reshaping rural England*, p. 146. The number of agricultural labourers fell from 983,919 in 1881 to 689,292 in 1901. David Thomson, *England in the nineteenth century* (Harmondsworth, 1950), p. 195.

⁴⁰ Parliamentary paper 1893-94, XXV, *Royal Commission on Labour. The Agricultural Labourer. England. The Report of Mr. Aubrey Spencer on the Poor Law Union of Maldon (Essex)*, p. 699, quoted in Howkins, *Reshaping rural England*, p. 141. The effect of the depression varied from region to region, however, depending upon soil types, crops grown, and adaptability of individual farmers. Howkins, *The death of rural England*, pp. 9-10.

⁴¹ Howkins, *Poor labouring men*, p. 4; Pam Barnes, *Norfolk landowners since 1880* (Norwich, 1993), p. 17.

⁴² H. Rider Haggard, *A farmer's year* (London, 1987), pp. 33-34.

⁴³ H. Rider Haggard, *Rural England* vol. 2 (London, 1902), p. 457.

⁴⁴ Hill, *British economic and social history*, p.102.

⁴⁵ Alec Douet, ‘Agriculture in the 20th century’, in Ashwin and Davison, *Historical atlas of Norfolk*, pp. 178-179.

Introduction

in 1861 to 21.9% in 1911.⁴⁶ Compared with other occupations, agricultural labourers' wages were the lowest in the country, and as a result impoverishment was extensive.⁴⁷ The exodus increased significantly from the late nineteenth century. Agricultural labourers' wages rose from about 11s in the 1870s to a maximum of £2 5s per week in the 1920s, although they remained low by urban standards.⁴⁸ Villagers continued to migrate to towns, where not only wages but also housing conditions were better.⁴⁹ Fewer farm workers were needed, decreasing in Norfolk by 10,000 between 1929 and 1942. These trends, combined with the expansion of towns and suburbs, ensured that by 1991 90% of the total population lived in urban areas.⁵⁰ At the same time, with improvements in transport systems – especially the introduction of bus services – village self-sufficiency slowly but surely became a past tradition.

The variety of communities in Norfolk was large. Rural villages were the norm, interspersed by the occasional market town. Some areas comprised estates owned by the gentry, while elsewhere small owner-occupiers farmed the land. The contrasting attitudes of those with power towards social customs and particularly towards providing various amenities – schools, almshouses, reading rooms, etc. – ensured markedly different levels of local services from district to district.⁵¹

Religion

After a period of decline, Nonconformity experienced a revival in the 1820s.⁵² Lack of premises did not deter the worshippers' fervour. In *Lavengro* (1851), George Borrow described an open-air meeting in Norfolk:

... then there was a cry for a hymn ... Everybody joined in it: there were voices of all kinds,

⁴⁶ Census of England and Wales, 1871. General report. Vol. IV, Appendix A, p. 38; Census of England and Wales, 1911. Preliminary report ... p. ix.

⁴⁷ K. D. M. Snell, *Annals of the labouring poor: social change and agrarian England, 1660-1900* (Cambridge, 1985), p. 375; Hill, *British economic and social history*, p. 98.

⁴⁸ Howkins, *Reshaping rural England*, pp. 95, 277.

⁴⁹ Susanna Wade Martins, *History of Norfolk* (Chichester, 1997), pp. 117-120.

⁵⁰ *Count me in. Census 2001. 200 years of the census in Norfolk.*

[http://collection.europarchive.org/ea/20080630092159/;](http://collection.europarchive.org/ea/20080630092159/)

[http://statistics.gov.uk/census2001/bicentenary/pdfs/norfolk.pdf.](http://statistics.gov.uk/census2001/bicentenary/pdfs/norfolk.pdf)

⁵¹ Stephens, 'Schooling and literacy in rural England' *History of Education Quarterly*, 22:1 (1982), p. 76.

⁵² Howkins, *Reshaping rural England*, pp. 182-185.

Introduction

of men, of women, and of children ... The crowd consisted entirely of the lower classes ... –
... unwashed people, people of no account whatever, and yet they did not look a mob.⁵³

In due course chapels were built in most centres of population, enthusiastically supported by their adherents, often labourers or artisans.⁵⁴

The rapid growth of nonconformism in the nineteenth century came about to a large extent because of the Established Church's neglect of the needs of the common working people. The ordinary parish clergyman was frequently unable to connect with them. This left a gap, and nonconformity took advantage of this.⁵⁵ Its beliefs and doctrines appealed to the less well educated sections of society; indeed, one early history of Primitive Methodism claimed that they attracted people hitherto uninfluenced by religious practices.⁵⁶ This enthusiasm spread, in spite of local persecution during the decades up to 1870.⁵⁷ One result was that thousands of working people nationwide set about bringing the essential tenets of religion, as they saw them, to local children. Consequently, national membership of Sunday Schools of all denominations soared from almost half a million in 1831 to three and a half million in 1870.⁵⁸ As these schools taught basic reading as well as Christian principles, this escalation brought about some increase in young people's literacy before the introduction of compulsory education.⁵⁹

Primitive Methodists especially flourished, claiming a national membership of 132,000 in 1860, with more than 70 chapels being built in Norfolk during the following two decades.⁶⁰ The connection with politics of Baptists and Methodists

⁵³ George Borrow, *Lavengro* (London, 1906), p. 156.

⁵⁴ Janet Ede and Norma Virgoe, 'Protestant nonconformity' in Ashwin and Davison, *Historical atlas of Norfolk*, p. 144; Howkins, *Poor labouring men*, p. 45.

⁵⁵ Hill, *British economic and social history*, p. 214.

⁵⁶ John Petty, *The history of the Primitive Methodist connexion* (London, 1860), pp.5-6.

⁵⁷ Howkins, *Reshaping rural England*, pp. 183-184.

⁵⁸ Philip B. Cliff, *The rise and development of the Sunday School movement in England 1780-1980* (Redhill, 1986), p. 129. Laqueur, however, does not agree with Cliff's statistic for 1831, giving instead a figure of 1,096,000. Even so, there was still a significant upsurge in membership. Thomas Walter Laqueur, *Religion and respectability. Sunday Schools and working class culture 1780-1850* (London, 1976), p. 44. Membership of Sunday Schools continued to rise, reaching more than six million in 1911. K. D. M. Snell, 'The Sunday-school movement in England and Wales' *Past & Present*, 164:1 (1999), p. 126.

⁵⁹ J. M. Golby and A. W. Purdue, *The civilisation of the crowd: popular culture in England, 1750-1900* (Stroud, 1999), p. 129.

⁶⁰ <http://www.methodist-central-hall.org.uk/history/THEPRIMITIVEMETHODISTS.pdf>; Tom Williamson, 'The Norfolk nonconformist chapels survey: some preliminary results' in Tom

Introduction

did not endear them to the establishment. Methodists were in close contact with the working classes and were leaders in early trade unionism, Joseph Arch, the founder of the National Agricultural Labourers' Union (1872), being a Primitive Methodist.⁶¹ By the turn of the century, however, the increasing affluence and involvement in business of their members weakened their earlier radicalism, and they became an accepted part of rural life. As the new century advanced, politics became subordinate to the spiritual aspects of religious life. The churches' social control, previously such a strong force, became a minor influence.⁶²

In the meantime incumbents of the established church were suffering from dwindling incomes. H. Rider Haggard commented in 1898: 'the losses of country clergymen ... are not confined to the wasting of their tithe. ... the glebe land is either thrown on to their hands or must be re-let at a great reduction'.⁶³

This was confirmed by Augustus Jessopp, Rector of Scarning: 'the ... difficulty is the want of money. We ... are ... living from hand to mouth, and it is sometimes all but impossible to raise ten or twelve pounds in an impoverished country parish for *anything*'.⁶⁴

This lack of funds varied. Rectors and vicars received substantially different stipends. The size of the living in terms of income and property also varied. In the last quarter of the nineteenth century, several clergy funded the building of schools and occasionally reading rooms. Many neglected churches were restored, paid for by local landowners, the clergy themselves or by public subscription combined with fundraising.⁶⁵

Time for leisure?

For as long as records have been kept, evidence has been found of the need for people to escape from their normal routine to engage in a different kind of activity.

Williamson and Norma Virgoe (eds.), *Religious dissent in East Anglia* (Norwich, 1993), pp.62-63.f

⁶¹ Alun Howkins, 'Arch, Joseph (1826–1919)', *ODNB*.

⁶² Howkins, *Death of rural England*, p. 21.

⁶³ Rider Haggard, *A farmer's year*, p. 454.

⁶⁴ Augustus Jessopp, *Arcady: for better for worse* (London, 1887), p. xiv.

⁶⁵ Susanna Wade Martins, *Norfolk a changing countryside 1780-1914* (Chichester, 1988), p. 75; Benjamin John Armstrong, *A Norfolk diary* (London, 1949), pp. 255, 269, 271, 281.

Introduction

Many examples exist of the desire to engage in pursuits other than those compulsory to work.⁶⁶ During the first half of our period of interest, poverty and long hours of labour for the most part constrained the ‘common people’ to what might be termed very basic leisure activities – drinking, sports and sex. Although they took part in everyday uncomplicated activities, they nevertheless also enjoyed a variety of pursuits at various times of the year. Borsay introduces the idea that: ‘workers, willy-nilly, would carve out leisure time, however restricted the structure of work that surrounded them’, and this seems plausible, for human nature needs the promise of something to look forward to during the grind of unremitting toil.⁶⁷

Although the working classes ‘carved out’ time for leisure, that time was nonetheless extremely limited. This is arguably in direct contrast with the situation of their forebears, and it may be a myth that working hours have steadily decreased because of the advent of technology. It has been suggested that in the fourteenth century, the average labourer in England worked 1,440 hours annually, while his counterpart in 1840 worked between 3,105 and 3,588 hours, making what little free time he had very precious indeed.⁶⁸ Even if these statistics are debatable (because collection of statistics in the United Kingdom only became systematic in 1856), the general trend suggested is probably correct – work time had increased gradually over time.⁶⁹

Daily hours of work were very long. Teammen on the farm, in charge of horses, started at 5 a.m., while agricultural labourers worked from daybreak or 6 a.m. in summer. In winter they finished at 3 p.m., however, as daylight extended, so did the hours, with harvesting requiring labour from dawn to dusk.⁷⁰ Even after mechanisation of agricultural work, which theoretically allowed more leisure time, Bennett upheld the idea that ‘the [working] hours today [1914] are usually longer than they were three centuries ago!’⁷¹

⁶⁶ See Chapter 3.

⁶⁷ Borsay, *A history of leisure*, p. 195.

⁶⁸ The low estimate assumes a forty-five week year; the high one assumes a fifty-two week year. These statistics are taken from Juliet B. Schor, *The overworked American: the unexpected decline of leisure* ([New York,] 1991), p. 45.

⁶⁹ Jesse H. Ausubel and Arnulf Grübler, ‘Working less and living longer: long-term trends in working time and time budgets’, *Technological Forecasting and Social Change*, 50 (1995), p. 196.

⁷⁰ L. Marion Springall, *Labouring life in Norfolk villages 1834-1914* (London, 1936), pp. 36, 38-39.

⁷¹ Ernest N. Bennett, *Problems of village life* (London, [1914]), p. 81n.

Introduction

Of course, in some occupations labour was not controlled by the clock, but by the obligations of the allotted work. Obvious examples are those of the domestic servant, at the beck and call of his or her master, and also the agricultural labourer, where the different seasonal tasks ruled his day.⁷² Even here, however, with the invention of steam power and later the internal combustion engine, the time needed for many agricultural tasks in the second half of the nineteenth century and early twentieth century was gradually reduced. Consequently, it eventually became possible to decrease labourers' working hours, thus gradually reversing the purported national trend mentioned above. This reduction was due also in no small part to the exertions of the fledgling agricultural labourers' trade union movement in the early 1870s.⁷³ Norfolk was particularly in the forefront of political agitation concerned with improving the lot of agricultural labourers. Not only were those in Norfolk among the most poorly paid in the country, a fact which itself engendered discontent, but also only in this county did the National Agricultural Labourers' Union survive with enough vigour to elect Joseph Arch, its founder, as Member of Parliament for North-West Norfolk in 1885.⁷⁴

Eventually the shortage of labourers caused by the drift of manpower to the towns to find better paid employment meant that those remaining in the countryside could start to specify their own conditions of work.⁷⁵ The gradual and wide-ranging general reduction in working hours in the second half of the nineteenth century, opened the way by degrees to changes in workers' lifestyles, allowing them to participate in what has been termed as *nonwork* (a combination of free time and unpaid labour time).⁷⁶

Social change

In 1848 Cecil Frances Alexander (1818-1895) wrote the famous hymn *All things bright and beautiful*, which contained the verse:

⁷² A detailed description of how an agricultural labourer spent his time in the late nineteenth century is given in Richard Jefferies, *The toilers of the field*, pp. 84-88.

⁷³ Pamela Horn, *Labouring life in the Victorian countryside* (Stroud, 1987), p. 128.

⁷⁴ May, *The economy 1815-1914*, p. 201; Howkins, 'Arch, Joseph (1826-1919)', ODNB.

⁷⁵ John Lowerson and John Myerscough, *Time to spare in Victorian England* (Hassocks, 1977), p.14.

⁷⁶ Ausubel and Grübler, 'Working less and living longer', p. 196.

Introduction

The rich man in his castle,
The poor man at his gate,
God made them, high and lowly,
And order'd their estate.

This divine endorsement of the class system sums up a prevalent contemporary way of thinking. According to some academics, working people had a distinct sense of social class, which affected everything they did. Explaining this, Peter Borsay suggests that they had ‘a sense of “them” and “us”, and among the latter a “group warmth” ’ and that they were ‘rough, raucous, earthy, concrete, anti-intellectual ... [and took] pleasure in the gaudy and effusive.’⁷⁷ These traits are found in many accounts of their recreational pursuits throughout our period. In the mid-nineteenth century there was an enormous gulf between the rich and the poor, and the plight of the ‘poor man at his gate’ began to affect the conscience of many people, leading to an era of concentrated beneficence throughout the country, albeit with expectations of deference in return.⁷⁸ Subsequently, higher wages and consequently higher levels of disposable income, combined with falling prices, gradually led to improved standards of living.⁷⁹ Statutory limitations on hours of work had also been introduced, while the Bank Holidays Act (1871) provided for six holidays during the year.⁸⁰ In the Norfolk countryside, these conditions were not universal, although agricultural workers’ wages were reasonably stable, in spite of the depression of the late nineteenth century.⁸¹ Leisure possibilities hitherto unknown became available. There were greater opportunities for physical movement, resulting first from railways and later from bicycles and motor transport. The stern principles of duty, thrift and hard work, so assiduously promoted by individuals like Samuel Smiles (1812-1904), were gradually relaxed, as society became more flexible in its attitudes.⁸² By 1870 even Sunday entertainment, which had been attacked during the earlier part of Victoria’s reign, became the norm with excursion trains being laid on, and bands

⁷⁷ Borsay, *A history of leisure*, p.86.

⁷⁸ Howkins, *Reshaping rural England*, p. 76.

⁷⁹ Peter Mathias, *The first industrial nation. An economic history of Britain 1700-1914* (London, 1983), p. 345.

⁸⁰ R. C. K. Ensor, *England 1870-1914*, p. 166; Alan Delgado, *The annual outing and other excursions*, p. 25.

⁸¹ Wade Martins and Williamson, *The countryside of East Anglia*, p. 150.

⁸² Kenneth Fielden, ‘Samuel Smiles and self-help’, *Victorian Studies*, 12:2 (1968), p. 161.

Introduction

playing in the parks.⁸³ The surge of inventions further produced the phonograph (1877), cinema (1890s onward), telephone (1900s), radio (1920s) and later television (1936). Some of these are discussed in greater detail in Chapter 4 of this thesis.

In discussions of all these changes it is easy to lose sight of how they affected the



Figure 1: Bob Rythorne of Heacham

average individual. Let us take a typical village inhabitant as an example. This is Mr Bob Rythorne (Figure 1).⁸⁴ The only information we have about him is on the label attached to this portrait: ‘Bob Rythorne aged 78 who started as a farm labourer at 6 years and worked for 66 years at Heacham to 1925’. He was therefore born about 1847, and his life covers most of our period of scrutiny. Typical of thousands of rural workers throughout Norfolk, he represents all those who are the focus of this

study. It is the purpose of this thesis to explore and explain what recreational opportunities, if any, were possible for people like Bob, and to investigate how these were exploited or why they were rejected.

The information emerging from this research suggests that the power to make decisive decisions affecting the proletariat gradually passed from the upper and middle classes to those most concerned with the results of those decisions. As Mike Huggins points out, working-class people gained the ability ‘to be active in the making of their own leisure’, and ‘any attempt to impose a moral and reforming hegemony clearly failed’.⁸⁵ This happened in every aspect of their lives and by means of detailed analysis is demonstrated time and again within different leisure pursuits throughout this thesis. As we shall see, the working classes grasped their new found autonomy with both hands, eventually becoming more self-reliant and independent.

⁸³ J. A. R. Pimlott, *Recreations* (London, 1968), pp. 52-53.

⁸⁴ <https://norfolk.spydus.co.uk/cgi-bin/spydus.exe/ENQ/PICNOR/BIBENQ?BRN=727953>

⁸⁵ Mike Huggins, *Flat racing and British society, 1790-1914: a social and economic history* (London, 2000), p. 4.

Chapter 2. Historiography of rural working class leisure

In research the horizon recedes as we advance and is no nearer at sixty than it was at twenty.
... Research is always incomplete.¹

In this chapter a survey is given of the academic literature concerned with the topic of the recreational activities of the rural working classes. The phenomenal rise in interest in the history of leisure generally in the second half of the twentieth century is described, and attention is drawn to some imbalance in research dealing with rural recreation. The scarcity of extant sources available to the historian investigating rural workers is noted, as this fact may have deterred researchers in the past from focussing on this specific aspect.

About two hundred years ago the history of sport and recreation began to attract the interest not of the great historians of the day, but rather that of keen amateur antiquaries, such as Joseph Strutt (1749-1802).² Further historiographical forays into the world of leisure during the nineteenth century very often took the form of an interest in local practices and customs and were made principally by collectors of folklore, superstition and beliefs, John Glyde (1823-1905) being the prime example in a Norfolk context.³ Initially these studies were confined to the traditions of the working classes, particularly the rural working classes, whose distinctive customs and values emphasised their identity. This country-wide interest led to the formation of The Folklore Society in 1878, whose concern was as much anthropological as folkloric.

Up to the middle of the twentieth century, however, professional historians generally disregarded leisure as a significant subject for historical research. It was perhaps considered too trivial for serious consideration, when compared with the established themes of political, constitutional, administrative, diplomatic or economic history

¹ Mark Pattison, *Isaac Casaubon* (1892), p. 422.

² Joseph Strutt, *Glig-Gamena Angel-Deod: or the sports and pastimes of the people of England*. (London, 1801).

³ John Glyde, *The Norfolk garland : a collection of the superstitious beliefs and practices, proverbs, curious customs, ballads and songs, of the people of Norfolk* (London, 1872). Other publications were William Andrews (ed.), *Bygone Norfolk* (1898), which includes H. E. H. Gillett, 'Sports and pastimes of old Norfolk'; Walton N. Dew, *A dyshe of Norfolk dumplings*. (London, 1898); Charles Mackie (ed.), *Norfolk and Norwich notes and queries: upon matters of history, genealogy, archaeology, folk-lore, literature, etc., relating to the county and city*. (1896-1899) 2 vols. Reprinted from the *Norfolk Chronicle*.

and was given merely a passing mention in studies in the emerging field of social history, which had its own difficulties of relationship with the other historical disciplines, especially political history, to which I shall return later.⁴

There then evolved a movement of new writing on leisure, which built to a crescendo at the turn of the twenty-first century, with the realisation that the topic was a suitable and therefore important and challenging subject for study.⁵ The early researchers approached the fresh area of enquiry with enthusiasm. Robert Malcolmson, indeed, hardly paused to explain what leisure meant to him in his investigations, before launching into a detailed description of the effect of industrialisation on recreation in England.⁶ Further historians explored the field, emphasising the changes in recreational practice brought about by England's expanding economy resulting from the Industrial Revolution; they also stressed the enormous impact of railways on leisure, which, opening up the countryside, encouraged changes in leisure habits.⁷ This research, however, centred mostly on the urban, industrial scene, with some notable exceptions; Anthony Veal is therefore exactly right, when he concludes that 'students [that is, historians] of leisure and

⁴ Adrian Wilson, *Rethinking social history* (Manchester, 1993), p. 26. G. M. Trevelyan's famous (some say notorious) 1944 definition of social history has since been discounted – 'Social history might be defined negatively as the history of a people with the politics left out'. George Macaulay Trevelyan, *English social history* (London, 1944), p. vii – as the essential links between social history and political history have become clear. See also pp. 25-26.

⁵ Richard Hoggart, *The uses of literacy* (London, 1957); Raymond Williams, *Culture and society, 1780-1950* (London, 1958); E. P. Thompson, *The making of the English working class* (London, 1963); Robert W. Malcolmson, *Popular recreations in English society, 1700-1850* (Cambridge, 1973); Michael A. Smith, Stanley Parker and Cyril S. Smith (eds.), *Leisure and society in Britain* (London, 1973); Stephen G. Jones, *Workers at play: a social and economic history of leisure, 1918-1939* (London, 1986); Brad Beaven, *Leisure, citizenship and working-class men in Britain, 1850-1945* (Manchester, 2005); Gary S. Cross and John K. Walton, *The playful crowd. Pleasure places in the twentieth century* (New York, 2005); Judith Flanders, *Consuming passions: leisure and pleasure in Victorian Britain* (London, 2006); Roger Spalding and Alyson Brown (eds.), *Entertainment, leisure and identities* (Newcastle, 2007).

⁶ 'The meaning of the term "recreation", about which sociologists have debated, need not detain us; for a definition we may draw on Samuel Johnson, who spoke of "diversion" (the eighteenth-century equivalent of recreation) as "Sport; something that unbends the mind by turning it off from care"'. Malcolmson, *Popular recreations in English society, 1700-1850*, p.4.

⁷ Peter Bailey, *Leisure and class in Victorian England. Rational recreation and the contest for control, 1830-1885* (London, 1978); James Walvin, *Leisure and society, 1830-1950* (London, 1978); H. Cunningham, *Leisure in the Industrial Revolution c.1780-c.1880* (London, 1980); John Clarke and Charles Critcher, *The devil makes work: leisure in capitalist Britain* (Basingstoke, 1985); Arthur Jordan and Elisabeth Jordan, *Away for the day : the railway excursion in Britain, 1830 to the present day* (Kettering, 1991).

work came to see contemporary forms of leisure and work as a product of industrial development, with only a hazy impression being gained of work and leisure in non-industrial societies.’⁸

Barry Reay has argued strongly that the *nouveau riche* urbanites were better served in terms of leisure provision than their country cousins: ‘those who lived in the cities and large towns had greater choice [of leisure activities]. Consequently, the ... increased spending power associated with the labour of new wage-earners was disproportionately an urban affair’.⁹

Bob Bushaway, moreover, has suggested that in the course of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the burgeoning capitalism of England gradually extended to the countryside, causing a rift between the poorest people and the richer landocracy, thus affecting rustic traditions.¹⁰ Reay also identifies the subject area which has not attracted the attention of historians:

... the history of rural leisure in Victorian and Edwardian England forms something of a historiographical vacuum between the agreed richness of the early modern period (with its feasts, fairs, wakes and ales) and the urban/industrial focus of the organized sports of the later nineteenth century.¹¹

Over thirty years earlier, this situation had been clearly signalled by Gareth Stedman Jones, when he included ‘the ideologies of poor villagers, [and] rural craftsmen’ in his argument for further research:

far more attention has been paid to the ways in which entrepreneurs or the propertied classes attempted to change popular uses of leisure time than to the ways in which craftsman, artisan or working-class activists attempted to organise their non-work time or sought to re-orientate the use of non-work time by others. ...

⁸ Horn, *Labouring life in the Victorian countryside*, chapter 7; Robert W. Malcolmson, ‘Leisure’, in G. E. Mingay (ed.), *The Victorian countryside* (London, 1981); Reay, *Rural Englands, labouring lives in the nineteenth century*, chapter 6; Anthony J. Veal, ‘A brief history of work and its relationship to leisure’ in John T. Haworth and Anthony J. Veal (eds.), *Work and leisure* (London, 2004), p. 15.

⁹ Reay, *Rural Englands*, p. 119.

¹⁰ Bob Bushaway, *By rite. Custom, ceremony and community in England 1700-1880* (London, 1982), pp. 21-22.

¹¹ Reay, *Rural Englands*, p. 119.

It is a major step forward to have opened up this vast area of social history – ... [enabling] us to re-examine ... labour history in the light of a much broader knowledge of the ideologies of poor villagers, rural craftsmen, manufacturing artisans, factory and casual labourers.¹²

Jones continued his argument by suggesting that our knowledge of these ‘ideologies’ was still incomplete and inadequate. Since he wrote these words in 1977, great strides have been made in leisure historiography, as Borsay points out.¹³ Nonetheless, in spite of Jones’s strong indication of a gap in historical research, the situation with regard to rural leisure was largely ignored during the following thirty years. It is therefore Reay’s ‘historiographical vacuum’ which presents the challenge that I wish to address, concentrating on the regional study of Norfolk and extending the period beyond the Edwardian era to the beginning of the Second World War.

Many aspects of leisure are common to both urban and rural people, and one particular characteristic invited interest, when, ‘borrowing’ sociological ideas, it was realised that the concept of leisure presupposes the existence of work, and this interdependence of leisure and work has attracted some attention comparatively recently.¹⁴

Drink, or rather the evil of drunkenness among the proletariat in both town and country, was a source of much public debate in the nineteenth century, and this led to the rise of the worldwide temperance movement. This feature of leisure has been dealt with by many historians, including the relatively recent work by John Greenaway, James Nicholls and Henry Yeomans.¹⁵ The process of social control and class conflict over this and other types of uncontrolled recreation has attracted

¹² Gareth Stedman Jones, ‘Class expression versus social control?’ *History Workshop Journal*, 4:1 (1977), pp. 162-163.

¹³ Borsay, *A history of leisure*, pp. xiii.

¹⁴ Veal, ‘A brief history of work and its relationship to leisure’ in Haworth and Veal (eds.), *Work and leisure*, pp. 15-33. A specific aspect of this subject is dealt with in Haia Shpayer-Makov, ‘Relinking work and leisure in late Victorian and Edwardian England: the emergence of a police subculture’, *International Review of Social History*, 47:2 (2002), pp. 213-241.

¹⁵ Brian Harrison, *Drink and the Victorians. The temperance question in England 1815-1872* (London, 1971); Lilian Lewis Shiman, *Crusade against drink in Victorian England*. (Basingstoke, 1988); John Greenaway, *Drink and British politics since 1830. A study in policy making*. (Basingstoke, 2003); James Nicholls, *The politics of alcohol: a history of the drink question in England*. (Manchester, 2009); Henry Yeomans, ‘What did the British Temperance Movement accomplish? Attitudes to alcohol, the law and moral regulation’ *Sociology*, 45:1 (February 2011), pp. 38-53.

the attention of historians, attempting to analyse the tensions arising from competing social and economic factors in society.¹⁶

A more optimistic idea of the progress of humanity, explored by Norbert Elias, has been used to explain not only the gradual ‘improvement’ in manners but also the reduction in brutality in society during the nineteenth century, while at the same time the immense influence of the upper classes’ social control of the workers was acknowledged.¹⁷ In leisure practices this is exemplified in the increase in gentler pursuits such as football, cricket, fishing, bowling, cycling and even reading and the decrease in cruel ‘sports’ such as badger baiting, cock fighting and dog fights, encouraged by the passing of the Cruelty to Animals Act in 1835.¹⁸ Many of these diversions have their own specialist historians, whose individual input to the historiographical scene, when integrated into the wider picture, gives his/her own particular slant on the whole subject.¹⁹

Besides the collection of customs and folklore mentioned above, in the last quarter of the twentieth century local histories of specific sports appeared, and these gave some idea of varied regional preferences and occasionally of limitations to what was possible in certain geographical areas.²⁰ Like folklore practices, these recreations

¹⁶ Richard N. Price, ‘The Working Men’s Club’, *Victorian Studies*, 15:2 (1971), pp. 117-47; Stedman Jones, ‘Class expression versus social control?’ pp.162-170; Bailey, *Leisure and class in Victorian England*. (1978); E. and S. Yeo (eds), *Popular culture and class conflict 1590-1914: explorations in the history of labour and leisure* (Brighton, 1981); D. Kift, *The Victorian music hall: culture, class and conflict* (Cambridge, 1996).

¹⁷ Norbert Elias, *The civilizing process* 2 vols. (Oxford, 1969, 1982). This was first published in German in 1939 entitled *Über den Prozeß der Zivilisation*.

¹⁸ Martin Lyons, ‘New readers in the nineteenth century’ in Guglielmo Cavallo and Roger Chartier (eds.), *A history of reading in the west* (Cambridge, 1999), pp. 313, 314. For a discussion on this decrease, see Emma Griffin, *England’s revelry* (Oxford, 2005), pp. 243-244. *Cruelty to Animals Act (1835)* 5 & 6 William IV. c. 59.

¹⁹ Nathaniel Stanley Fleischer, and Sam E. Andre, *A pictorial history of boxing* (London,1960); John Ford, *Cricket, a social history* (Newton Abbot, 1972); Andrew Ritchie, *King of the road: an illustrated history of cycling* (London,1975); Tony Mason, *Association football and English society 1863-1915* (Brighton, 1980); Cavallo and Chartier (eds.), *A history of reading in the West* (Cambridge, 1999).

²⁰ Some examples are: A. H. Morriss, ‘Cycling in the 1880s’ *East Anglian Magazine*, 41 (November 1981), pp. 34-35; D. E. Johnson, *Victorian shooting days: East Anglia, 1810-1910* (Ipswich,1981); M. B. Smith, ‘Victorian entertainment in the Lancashire cotton towns’, in S. P. Bell (ed.), *Victorian Lancashire* (Newton Abbot, 1974); R. W. Ambler, ‘The transformation of harvest celebrations in nineteenth-century Lincolnshire’, *Midland History* 3 (1976), pp. 298-306; Gary Moses, ‘“Rustic and rude”: hiring fairs and their critics in East Yorkshire c.

often highlighted local individuality, underlining significant differences in economic activity and social structure.

Attitudes to historical writing have changed radically over the past seventy years. With historians' acceptance of social history and more specifically leisure as a 'proper' subject for investigation came a desire to use more sophisticated methods of enquiry, which were at one and the same time more scrupulous and more laborious. Descriptive techniques were no longer considered sufficient. To achieve a balanced methodology, concepts and methods were 'borrowed' from various social sciences, mainly sociology, anthropology and demography – even political science was occasionally involved.²¹ This interdisciplinary approach was spearheaded by Keith Thomas in a seminal essay entitled 'The tools and the job' published in the *Times Literary Supplement* in 1966 as part of a collection of eight articles by leading historians, including E. J. Hobsbawm and E. P. Thompson, in a special issue named *New ways in history*.²² The idea of using other disciplines for guidance was innovative at the time, although it is now regarded as an axiomatic principle of historical study. In 1970 the appearance of the first volume of the *Journal of interdisciplinary history*, directly inspired by *New ways in history*, did not resolve the divide between those historians who readily accepted interdisciplinarity and those who did not. This dissension, however, had mainly disappeared by the 1990s, when most historians were happy to take advantage of its benefits.²³

In 2007 Jeffrey Wasserstrom related the recent progress of the discipline, detailing its unforeseen and therefore unexpected changes since the publication of *New ways in history*. The first of these was the decline in interest in historical quantification or cliometrics, which although still used, does not, as previously anticipated, have a place in the forefront of research, thus dashing the hope that history would at last be

1850-75', *Rural History* 7:2, (1996), pp. 151-175; Vic Gale and Jean Gale, *A brass heritage: 100 years of Chertsey and Addlestone village bands* (Addlestone, 1993).

²¹ Wilson, *Rethinking social history*, pp. 16-17.

²² Keith Thomas, 'The tools and the job' *Times Literary Supplement*, 7 April 1966, pp. 275-276.

²³ Jeffrey N. Wasserstrom, 'New ways in history, 1966–2006' *History Workshop Journal*, 64:1 (2007), p. 280. For a further account of these changes, see Keith Thomas, 'New ways revisited. How history's borders have expanded in the past forty years' *Times Literary Supplement*, 13 October 2006, pp 3-4.

a scientific discipline, uncoloured by personal bias.²⁴ Another unanticipated change has been the shift of attention from class to race and gender, the latter understandable in the light of increasing consideration of multiculturalism and feminism in society in general.²⁵

These new ways of writing history, as inspired by the innovators of the 1960s onwards, have many merits. Nevertheless too much revisionism may lead to a situation where historians ‘throw away the baby with the bathwater’; or more exactly, what is essential or valuable may be rejected along with the inessential or useless. It would be a matter of regret and even reproach to refuse to recognise the value of the contribution made by such great historians of the past as W. L. Burn, George Kitson Clark and G. M. Trevelyan.²⁶

Focusing my attention on the working class as a group, to some extent, returns to an earlier tradition in history of studying ‘history from below’, an approach stimulated by the founding of both the academic journal *Past & Present* in 1952 and the History Workshop in 1966, which initiated its journal *History Workshop Journal* ten years later.²⁷ The founders of *Past & Present* included a number of Marxist historians, including E. P. Thompson, Christopher Hill and E. J. Hobsbawm, who highlighted the various ways in which the powerless working classes were restricted by the long established practices of society. These historians needed imagination, creativity and ingenuity, in order to extract evidence from documents where that evidence was marginal and had previously been completely ignored.²⁸ Besides being imaginative and creative, they were nevertheless also rigorous and objective in their pursuit of almost inaccessible testimony. This is especially difficult when researching the *rural* working class, as there are even fewer existing records giving information of this particular section of society.

²⁴ The journal *Past & Present* was originally subtitled *A journal of scientific history*. Significantly, however, this has now changed to *A journal of historical studies*.

²⁵ Wasserstrom, ‘New ways in history’, p. 283.

²⁶ W. L. Burn, *The age of equipoise: a study of the mid-Victorian generation* (1964); George Kitson Clark, *The making of Victorian England* (1962); Trevelyan, *English social history* (1944).

²⁷ Tim Harris (ed.), *Popular culture in England, c. 1500-1850* (Basingstoke, 1995), p. ix.

²⁸ These innovative methods were later to inform the research of feminist historians and the Subaltern Studies Group, both investigating ‘history from below’ and illustrating the shift of interest to gender and race.

Working women played an important economic role in rural society. Contemporary sexual politics, however, particularly during the early part of our period, meant that men's leisure practices were unlike those experienced by women, and this has interested some historians.²⁹ Yet again, however, the rural aspect has been largely neglected, leaving a void needing to be filled.

As Keith Sandiford pointed out as long ago as 1981, leisure of all kinds was such a vital part of everyday life that it could not be disregarded in an investigation of the culture of the time.³⁰ This idea is just as true today. The study of recreation and pastimes gives evidence of the increasing use of technology and, importantly, reveals the attitudes of both the élite and the workers towards morality, fairness, class, decency and restraint. More specifically, examination of the leisure of the rural working classes opens a new window into their lives, giving us hitherto unidentified insights into social and economic change in the countryside.

²⁹ Kathleen E. McCrone, *Playing the game: sport and the physical emancipation of English women, 1870-1914* (Lexington, Kentucky, 1988); Andrew Davies, *Leisure, gender, and poverty: working-class culture in Salford and Manchester, 1900-1939* (Buckingham, 1992); Claire Langhamer, *Women's leisure in England, 1920-1960* (Manchester, 2000); Catriona M. Parratt, *"More than mere amusement": working-class women's leisure in England, 1750-1914* (Boston, Mass., 2001); Selina Todd, 'Young women, work, and leisure in interwar England' *Historical Journal*, 48:3 (2005), pp. 789-809.

³⁰ Keith Sandiford, 'The Victorians at play: problems in historiographical methodology', *Journal of Social History*, 15:2 (1981), pp. 271-88, p. 282.

Chapter 3. Traditional leisure and its critics

Rural recreations before and during the Victorian era.

Before the great changes brought about by the impact of technology in the countryside, the regularly recurring events of the agricultural year were of prime importance and dictated either when more hours of labour were essential, allowing very little leeway for leisure, or when the farm routine was less demanding, making some free time available. Work was much more intensive at times of seed sowing and harvesting, but during the periods immediately after these concentrated episodes of exertion, labourers set to enjoying themselves with extra gusto, and these celebratory times became accepted as customary and eventually traditional. May Day and harvest home are two examples of this. Disorder and drunkenness were common features of many recreations uncontrolled by those in power, and this situation was a source of growing concern to the authorities in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.¹

Harvest home with its tradition of ‘largesse’ often resulted in unruly drunken frolics in the local alehouse, and evidence of this and other misdemeanours due to the ‘misuse’ of leisure is regularly found in the records of contemporary civil and ecclesiastical courts.² In an effort to reduce misconduct, this essentially secular custom was gradually replaced by a religious harvest festival, and this dispossession reflected the increasing social regulation practised by both church and landowners. The church year itself had an impact on leisure. The principal holy days (holidays) were observed – Christmas, Shrovetide, Easter and Whitsuntide, together with local patronal saints’ days (for instance, any church dedicated to St. Giles would celebrate its patronal festival on 1 September).³ These major festivities continued in spite of the fact that the Reformation of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries had been hostile to saints, miracle plays and the ceremonial processions of the religious guilds, which had operated in most if not all villages. Indeed the Reformation undermined

¹ Virginia Berridge, *Temperance: its history and impact on current and future alcohol policy* (York, 2005), p. 3. <http://www.jrf.org.uk/sites/files/jrf/1859354203.pdf>

² Malcolmson, *Popular recreations in English society*, pp. 5, 24-25.

³ Reay, *Rural Englands*, pp. 115-117.

the ritual year, paving the way to the gradual predominance of regular non-spiritual celebrations.⁴ These included such secular events as the fair, which was a happy highlight of the village year, attracting itinerant showmen and traders from distant parts of the country.

Fairs were generally but not exclusively held in the autumn after harvest and were regarded as a last opportunity for conviviality before the hardships of winter prevailed. They were mostly granted by charter in the medieval period, a process which gave them legal status. Besides offering recreational opportunities, they were of great economic importance, as a venue for sales of livestock, dairy products and hardware.⁵ Occurring partly for business and partly for pleasure, fairs had another important purpose – that of hiring staff, and the first hiring fairs can be traced to the Statute of Labourers in 1351. These Statute fairs were always regarded as celebratory events.⁶ They continued until the end of the nineteenth century, although their original purpose had been overtaken by the extra entertainment paraphernalia, which were prompted by the large numbers of people attending. Some places had more than one fair a year. Contemporary Norfolk directories occasionally list these. For example, in 1854 New Buckenham with a population of 766 could support three fairs each year, on the last Thursday in May and September and also on 22 November, while Cawston, population numbering 1184, also enjoyed three fairs, on 1 February and the last Wednesday in April and August.⁷ Although they were obviously popular, however, not everyone welcomed them. In 1858 the Revd. Greville Chester, Rector of Fardish in Bedfordshire, represented the current opinion of those in positions of authority, when he preached a sermon clearly explaining the reasons both for the popularity of fairs and also why they should cease forthwith:

... the farmers are content to hire them [farm servants] with little or no inquiry as to their character. ... But mingled with these, thus going forth for the first time, full of hope ... and lovely in the innocence of youth ... are those to whom the ways of vice and profligacy are a business and a delight. And these last ... are *as likely as any* to obtain good places. ... In this way ... the Statute Fair becomes a time of fiery temptation and fearful peril to the young.

⁴ Borsay, *A history of leisure.*, p. 61.

⁵ Walvin, *Leisure and society, 1830-1950*, p. 115.

⁶ Malcolmson, *Popular recreations in English society, 1700-1850*, p. 23.

⁷ Francis White, *History, gazetteer and directory of Norfolk* (Sheffield, 1854), pp. 42, 419, 825.

The hirers find that the Statute Fair saves them a deal of trouble in the hiring of their servants, and that to go on in the old way, without inquiry or thought, saves the mind and conscience from many a pang and irksome scruple. ... And to the class of farm-servants a day of change and amusement of *any* sort is pleasurable after the long, dull round of unrelieved toil which is the lot of too many to meet with. Thus, those who might put a stop to the system do not; and thus those who are most of all injured by it use deadly poison as if it were wholesome food.⁸

Fairs will be discussed in greater detail later in this chapter. Other annual rural occasions were celebrations of New Year, Plough Monday and Midsummer. Less regular were merrymakings of a different kind, to mark national events such as coronations, royal weddings or anniversaries, or rejoicings over military victories. These occasions were usually marked by extravagant feasting and drinking by all classes.⁹

Visiting the public house was a common way of spending free time, and the frequent resulting drunkenness caused much concern to those in authority. Nonetheless public houses fulfilled an important social role. Particularly in rural areas, venues for meeting up with friends were rare indeed, although this was more of a problem for men than for women. Unsatisfactory working class housing and the draw of companionship and warmth were more than sufficient additional reasons for spending free time there:

men often return home in the winter evenings at between 5 and 6 o'clock. In some cases they find an uncomfortable, small and crowded room, with, perhaps, a small fire, parents unhappily married, ill-behaved children, and other discomforts. Here they would naturally have to sit till bed-time, say three or four hours of the coldest part of the day.¹⁰

However, these were not the only reasons for frequenting the pub. Men were regarded as antisocial if they did not conform to the drinking traditions of their friends. This custom was widespread during the preindustrial era and especially in

⁸ Greville J. Chester, *Statute fairs. A sermon preached at the parish churches of Farndish and Puddington, Bedfordshire* (London, 1858), pp. 5, 7, 9,

⁹ One typical example is the relief of Mafeking on 17 May 1900. Page 12 of the 26 May edition of the weekly *Norfolk Chronicle and Norwich Gazette* entitled 'The relief of Mafeking' contained descriptions of joyful village celebrations, with flags being flown, firing of a Royal Salute, peals of church bells, fireworks and bonfires, processions and special thanksgiving prayers in church.

¹⁰ Parliamentary Paper 1852 [1479] [1480] *Committee of council on education: Minutes, correspondence, financial statements and reports of H. M. inspectors of schools, 1851-52* vol. II p. 39.

the early part of our period lingered in the countryside. Giving and receiving drinks strengthened the social links of commitment and mutual benefit within a work group.¹¹ As late as the 1890s leisure in village life was still a luxury unknown to most.¹² In 1891 G. F. Millin toured the countryside for the *Daily News*, reporting verbatim on village life:

“The people have to be up at five in the morning and ... in bed by 7 or 8 o’clock.” This gentleman [a Congregational minister in rural Essex] ... had tried to get up evening entertainments, and ... to start a library... but he couldn’t keep an interest in it, and it had to be dropped. “The hours of labour are so long, and the work is so heavy, that it leaves the people fit for nothing in the way of mental improvement at the end of the day?” “It leaves them fit for nothing but bed.”¹³

This seems extreme and is one person’s experience, although it could be indicative of local social conditions.

Early opportunities for sport

Before the Victorian era the range of recreational options had included sports for both participants and spectators, which today would be generally regarded as cruel or barbaric – bear and bull-baiting, cock-fighting, badger baiting, camping (an early dangerous form of football) and bare-knuckle prize-fighting, cock shies, dog fights, shin kicking, for instance.¹⁴ The prevalent attitude towards animals in the eighteenth century was outlined succinctly by the poet, William Somerville (1675-1742), in his poem *The Chase* (1735). This explained, with what must have seemed balanced arguments at the time, the reasons for man’s total right to use animals as he wished:

The brute creation are his property,

¹¹ Marianna Adler, ‘From symbolic exchange to commodity consumption: anthropological notes on drinking as a symbolic practice’, in Susanna Barrows and Robin Room (eds.), *Drinking. behavior and belief in modern history* (Berkeley, 1991), p. 382.

¹² Jeremy Burchardt, ‘Reconstructing the rural community: village halls and the National Council of Social Service, 1919 to 1939’, *Rural History*, 10:2 (1999), p. 194.

¹³ [George F. Millin,] *Life in our villages by the Special Commissioner of the ‘Daily News’ being a series of letters written to that paper in the autumn of 1891* (London, 1891), p. 12.

¹⁴ William Hone, *The table book* (London, 1827), p. 245-49; Griffin, *England’s revelry*, p. 232; Leonard P. Thompson, ‘Cock-fighting in Norfolk’, pp. 268-71; R. W. Ketton-Cremer, ‘Camping – a forgotten Norfolk game’, *Norfolk archaeology*, 24 (1932), pp. 88-92; David P. Dymond, ‘A lost social institution: the camping close’, *Rural History*, 1:2 (1990), pp. 165-192; John Whale, ‘Daniel Mendoza’s contests of identity’, *Romanticism*, 14:3 (2008), pp. 259-271. Cock shies was a game in which sticks were thrown at a cock, causing terrible injury before the final death blow. The killer was awarded the bird.

Subservient to his will, and for him made.
As hurtful these he kills, as useful those
Preserves; their sole and arbitrary king.
Should he not kill, ...
... the teeming ravenous brutes
Might fill the scanty space of this terrene,
Incumbering all the globe: should not his care
Improve his growing stock, their kinds might fail,
Man might once more on roots and acorns feed,
And through the deserts range, shivering, forlorn,
Quite destitute of every solace dear,
And every smiling gaiety of life.¹⁵

Thus the idea that animals had been provided solely for man's exploitation led logically to the further idea that they could be used for recreational purposes. Is there, however, a sense of justification of man's actions in these lines? Somerville defends the common attitude to animals, thereby unwittingly perhaps, allowing that a defence is necessary. This defence may have been an answer to some early stirrings of conscience within society, stirrings which culminated in the outright banning by law of cruelty to animals exactly a century later.

There are various reasons why amusements involving cruelty or viciousness eventually became unacceptable. Those involved with animals were particularly frowned upon, sometimes for practical reasons because of the rowdiness of the spectators rather than the suffering caused. Gradually, however, many people began to be conscious of the torture these diversions were causing. As Keith Thomas has argued, they became more sensitive, eventually reacting with outrage at the brutality involved, as demonstrated in 1803 in a poem by William Blake (1757-1827) – 'A robin redbreast in a cage puts all heaven in a rage' – a completely different viewpoint from Somerville's.¹⁶ It must be remembered that these viewpoints were those of the élite, and it could be argued that the attitudes of these (probably urban) protesters had been sanitised because they were removed from the reality existing in rural districts, where the basic necessity to raise and kill livestock for food inevitably blunted 'finer'

¹⁵ *A complete edition of the poets of Great Britain* vol. 8 (London, 1794), p. 469.

¹⁶ William Blake, *Auguries of innocence* (1803); Keith Thomas, *Man and the natural world. Changing attitudes in England 1500-1800* (London, 1984), p. 149.

instincts. If this was so, there was therefore an urban/rural divide in addition to a class rift. Whatever the case may be, towards the end of the eighteenth century a succession of local acts attempted to suppress these entertainments.¹⁷ This did not entirely quell them, as they often had a long tradition. Unlawful events were even still advertised and supported:

April 17 [1802].—(Advt.) “Bear Baiting. Henry Gerrard respectfully informs the public that there will be a Bear Baiting in a meadow belonging to the Ferry Farm House, Great Yarmouth, on Monday next, the 19th inst., in the afternoon. Admission 1s.; 6d. to be returned in liquor.” (The baiting was prevented by the action of the county justices.)¹⁸

Pub signs were another form of advertisement for the entertainment on offer. Many pubs with ‘Cock’ in the title had facilities for cock fights, while the ‘Bull’ advertised bull-baiting and the ‘Bear’ bear-baiting. Changes in popular culture, however, caused some landlords to revise their private opinions. In Wells-next-the-sea, for example, ‘The Fighting Cocks’ pub started trading in 1752 and retained its name until 1840, when it is possible that widely held opinion caused its renaming to ‘The Leicester Arms’.¹⁹ If this was the case, other publicans were not so perceptive – pubs named ‘The Fighting Cocks’ existed in Winfarthing in 1854 and in West Beckham and Burgh-next-Aylsham in 1883; in 1845 ‘The Bull’ could be found in Thurgarton, and in 1854 in East Harling and Stoke Ferry.²⁰ ‘The Bear’ is conspicuous by its scarcity, being found only in Attleborough in 1854 and North Walsham from 1789 onwards.²¹ One must not place too much importance on the fact of these names, but they are an interesting indication of possible previous local attractions.

Vigorous opposition to these sports inevitably drove them ‘underground’. Sustained attempts were made to stop the cruelty, and many bills were presented to Parliament before the Cruelty to Animals Act was passed in 1835, although cock-

¹⁷ Rachel Vorspan, ‘“Rational recreation” and the law’ *McGill Law Journal*, 45:4 (2000), p. 901.

¹⁸ ‘Bear baiting’ [Advertisement] *Norfolk Chronicle and Norwich Gazette*, 17 April 1802, [p. 3], Charles Mackie (comp.), *Norfolk annals* vol. 1, 1801-1850 ([Norwich?] 1901), p. 13.

¹⁹ Michael Welland, *The history of the inns and public houses of Wells* (Wells, 2012), p. 21.

²⁰ Francis White, *History, gazetteer and directory of Norfolk 1854* (Sheffield, 1854), p.375; *Kelly's directory for Cambridgeshire, Norfolk & Suffolk* (London, 1883), pp. 228, 262; William White, *History, Gazetteer, and Directory of Norfolk 1845* (Sheffield, 1845), p. 766; White, *History, gazetteer and directory of Norfolk, 1854*, pp.760, 639.

²¹ White, *History, gazetteer and directory of Norfolk, 1854*, p. 822; Pam Warren (ed.), *North Walsham in the nineteenth century* (North Walsham, 1993), p. 10.

fighting was not outlawed nationally until 1849.²² Thus pre-industrial sports noteworthy for their unruliness and callousness, slowly surrendered after the 1850s to more well-ordered and ‘morally respectable’ pastimes, which did not involve animals, such as cricket and football.

From the Middle Ages early football had numerous forms, arguably the most dangerous of which was camping or campball, which was popular in East Anglia and mostly limited to this area and south-eastern England.²³ It was a mixture of football, rugby and all-in wrestling, often played barefoot. ‘Savage Camp’ was a version where boots were worn, and it was not unknown for fatalities to occur.²⁴ Place-names reveal where this game was frequently played, as in ‘Camping Land’ in Whissonsett, Norfolk.²⁵ It was encouraged by the gentry, among whom was William Wyndham, (1750–1810), of Felbrigg Hall near Cromer, who instigated many matches on his land. In his opinion, the game ‘combined all athletic excellence; ... to excel in it, a man must be a good boxer, runner, and wrestler ...’.²⁶ There was little resemblance between this game and modern football, although as Walvin indicates, there is a distinct connection between the two in the strength and toughness, together with the skills and aims needed to play the game.²⁷ The last recorded match was on 31 August 1831.²⁸ Camping was a disorganised sport, and the systematic rules of football, developing along much more structured lines, were still in the future. As Batchelor comments:

²² John K. Walton and Robert Poole, ‘The Lancashire wakes in the nineteenth century’ in Robert D. Storch (ed.), *Popular culture and custom in nineteenth century England* (London, 1982), p. 105. Although it was illegal after 1849, cock-fighting survived into the twentieth century, as evidenced by its practice on a farm in Old Buckenham, Norfolk in 1928. This led to a court case, and the defendants were fined. ‘Cock-fighting charges’, *The Times*, 17 July 1928, p. 13. Random cases are still being reported in this century, e.g. Kate Hilpern, ‘What lies behind the rise in animal fighting?’ *Independent*, 20 October 2007. <http://www.independent.co.uk/environment/nature/what-lies-behind-the-rise-in-animal-fighting-395210.html>

²³ Dymond, ‘A lost social institution: the camping close’, p. 185.

²⁴ Edward Moor, *Suffolk words and phrases: or, an attempt to collect the lingual localisms of that county* (London, 1823), pp. 64-65.

²⁵ www.whissonsett.com/history.htm. Other examples include ‘camping-pightle’ at Swaffham, East Bilney, Hawstead and Stowmarket, all mentioned in Ketton-Cremer, ‘Camping – a forgotten Norfolk game’, p. 91.

²⁶ Robert Forby, *The vocabulary of East Anglia* (London, 1830), p. 51.

²⁷ James Walvin, *The people’s game. A social history of British football* (London, 1975), p. 6.

²⁸ ‘Camping’ *Norfolk Chronicle and Norwich Gazette*, 3 September 1831 [p. 2], Mackie (comp.), *Norfolk annals* vol. 1, p. 308.

no two villages had the same rules. No two sides agreed upon what were foul tactics and what was fair wear and tear. There was a feeling in the air that someone somewhere should reduce the game to a uniformity.²⁹

This uniformity eventually came about with the formation of the Football Association in 1863, as discussed in Chapter 6 of this thesis.

In addition to the harsh diversions described above, less disquieting recreations were available, for instance the annual festivals of sports organised by local philanthropists such as Colonel Mason in Necton, Norfolk. His event first took place in 1817 and included ‘wrestling matches, foot-races, jingling-matches, jumping in sacks, wheelbarrow races, blindfold, spinning matches, whistling matches, grinning ditto through a horse-collar, jumping matches’.³⁰ Some of these ‘sports’ were entertaining diversions for the spectators rather than efforts towards organising serious track and field events for potential rural athletes. They appealed to the more active sections of the community, while others were attracted by ‘rational recreation’ in the form of reading rooms, Mechanics’ Institutes or village social clubs. Although these were often provided by benevolent well-to-do men of authority in the district, they rarely gave opportunities for sport.³¹

While the further development of sporting opportunities is discussed in Chapter 6, it is pertinent at this point to trace the progress of two examples of early traditional sport – boxing and horse racing – which both successfully continued into the twentieth century.

Boxing and prize-fighting

Wrestling and boxing were popular in the early nineteenth century but suffered from the same drawbacks of disorderliness, riot and unlawful assembly as traditional sports involving animals. In the 1830s an attempt at regulation was made by Charles Layton, who published a pamphlet illustrating the basic holds and rules of Norfolk wrestling.³² The spectacle appealed to all classes, as described by William Hazlitt, in

²⁹ Denzil Batchelor, *Soccer. A history of Association Football* (London, 1954), pp. 4-5.

³⁰ John Chambers, *A general history of the county of Norfolk* (Norwich, 1829), pp. 646-649.

³¹ Dennis Brailsford, *British sport, a social history* (Cambridge, 1997), p. 71.

³² Charles Layton, *The whole art of Norfolk wrestling: with rules and orders relating thereto: for the use of landlords, &c: where wrestling matches are held* (Norwich, 1837).

his essay *The Fight* (1822) which described an open-air contest in a field near Hungerford, Berkshire:

the crowd was very great when we arrived on the spot; open carriages were coming up, with streamers flying and music playing, and the country-people were pouring in over hedge and ditch in all directions, to see their hero beat or be beaten.³³

Thus, to a certain extent, the classes were intermingling in their common interest in this spectator sport. Prize fighting had always been linked with the criminal element of society, however, and the powerful sideline of gambling had corruptly influenced nearly all concerned with organising a bout. Cheating, disqualifications and even fatalities were common throughout the sport.³⁴ Gambling was not restricted to boxing, as during previous centuries it had been rife throughout the sporting world, notwithstanding Puritan opposition during the Commonwealth (1649-1660).³⁵ The emerging bourgeoisie disapproved, as exemplified in the series of satirical engravings *Industry and Idleness* by the artist William Hogarth (1697-1764), particularly *The Idle 'Prentice at Play in the Church Yard during Divine Service*, which shows the disrespectful apprentice gambling and cheating with some pence on top of a tomb in a churchyard.

The degeneracy engendered by gambling was deplored by George Borrow (1803-1881) in his description of early nineteenth century pugilism in East Anglia, and this decadence eventually led to the sport becoming socially unacceptable.³⁶ Without the support of the upper classes, prize-fighting therefore began to decline nationally. By 1860, however, it was still a matter of enough concern for questions to be asked in Parliament:

Mr. W. Ewart ... believed that there was a lingering notion in the minds of many persons that the continuation of these "prize-fights" was favourable to the manliness of the English character. That there was any truth in such a notion he distinctly denied.

³³ William Hazlitt, (pseudonym : Phantastes), 'The fight', *The new monthly magazine and literary journal*, 3, 14, (1822), p. 107.

³⁴ Jack Anderson, 'Pugilistic prosecutions: prize fighting and the courts in nineteenth century Britain', *Sports Historian*, 21:2 (2001), pp. 37, 39, 41.

³⁵ Mark Clapson, *Popular gambling and English culture, 1845-1961* (Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Warwick, 1989), p. 21; Jan McMillen (ed.), *Gambling cultures: studies in history and interpretation* (London, 1996), p. 181.

³⁶ George Borrow, *Lavengro*, pp. 161, 162.

Sir George Lewis [said] I do not find there is the slightest doubt that a fight of this nature is an illegal act. It is clearly a breach of the peace. ... It has not been the habit of the Government of this country to institute prosecutions in cases of this sort, even at a time when they were much more common than they are now, and therefore more likely to cause inconvenience and confusion. But it is open to the local authorities, when any fight takes place, to institute a prosecution in the ordinary way, and bring the matter before the proper tribunals.³⁷

Prizefights had not been banned by law *per se* but were considered to be unlawful assemblies. This meant that not only the participants were offenders but also all the spectators.³⁸ Nevertheless, the general perception in the countryside was that the fights themselves were illegal. Yet this did not deter local enthusiasts, even though when caught they frequently received custodial sentences:

Blazer was a wheelwright ... [in Ditchingham]. He was a great hero to us boys, being a noted boxer who fought many a Sunday morning match at the Pubs round about, which was agin the law and more often than not the police were after him. ... the fight started, but in the first round Blazer knocked Perowne down and broke his thigh. By this time the police were up to them and collared Blazer, who got ten weeks in Norwich jail.³⁹

5 October [1852] A prize-fight took place on St. Andrew's Green, near Bungay, between James Perowne, of Norwich, and James High, of Ellingham. ... The police endeavoured to take possession of the ring, but were put to flight by the mob; and the men fighting to a finish, High was declared the victor. Principals and seconds ... were subsequently committed for trial, and at Beccles Quarter Sessions, on October 18th, were bound over to keep the peace.⁴⁰

At this stage, as mentioned earlier, unlawful assembly and riot were the main reasons for arguments against prizefights, but as the century advanced, policing became more efficient and attitudes towards violence gradually changed, resulting in a trend towards prize fighting prosecutions for assault, even if the spectators had been orderly and there had been no breach of the peace.⁴¹ The Queensberry Rules of 1867, calling for the use of padded gloves and the abolition of holding and wrestling, attempted to decontaminate the sport, but for years they were disregarded by many

³⁷ HC Hansard, Vol 157, cols. 2051-2055, 20 April 1860.

³⁸ Anderson, 'Pugilistic prosecutions', p. 42.

³⁹ George Baldry, *The rabbit skin cap. A tale of a Norfolk countryman's youth* (Woodbridge, 1939), p. 48.

⁴⁰ 'Bungay October 7' *Norfolk Chronicle and Norwich Gazette*, 9 October 1852, Mackie (comp.), *Norfolk annals* vol. 2, p. 16.

⁴¹ Anderson, 'Pugilistic prosecutions', p. 44.

fighters who continued in their old-style, more turbulent manner. The general public attitude to boxing was negative:

[1870] Matches are got up by stealth, and by a combination of many backers of humble circumstances ... Now that an efficient rural police is established throughout the country, with electric telegraph wires parallel with each line of railway, we may confidently anticipate that these lawless proceedings will soon be at an end.⁴²

Improved policing and modern communications would thus combat this undesirable feature of society. About 1890 the Pelican Club in London created a series of rules based on the Queensbury Rules, which were approved in 1891 by the newly established National Sporting Club (NSC). This organisation controlled British boxing until the founding of the British Boxing Board of Control in 1929, which then took on the NSC's rules, revising them in 1947. This ongoing stricter regulation gave some propriety to the sport, with the consequence that it was then supported by all classes.⁴³

Horse racing

This general support was not forthcoming for all sports. Horse racing is an example of this.⁴⁴ In the middle of the nineteenth century it fostered great antagonism, especially from the church, because of the violence and gambling it engendered and its magnetism for the criminal fraternity including prostitutes and fraudsters. In the 1860s a spirited correspondence on the subject was published in *The Times* newspaper.⁴⁵ Under the pseudonym of 'Palmerworm', the Hon. Sydney Godolphin Osborne (1808-1889), religious minister and philanthropist, clearly and strongly outlined his objections to 'the turf':

... year by year it is getting more and more disreputable, its "business" falling into the hands of men who make no secret of their utter disregard of all the rules of honour. It is corrupting to the very core many a young man on whose future life depends the question of the utter ruin or preservation of many a vast estate. ... It is breeding up a race of boys and men in the

⁴² Delabere P. Blaine, *An encyclopædia of rural sports* (London, 1870) p. 1229. The reference to the police refers to the County Police Act of 1839, which allowed county police forces to be set up. Norfolk was one of the first, establishing its force in 1839.

⁴³ <http://nipperpatdaly.co.uk/rulesofboxinghistory.htm>;

<http://www.linkedin.com/company/national-sporting-club>

⁴⁴ Neil Wigglesworth, *The evolution of English sport* (London, 1996), p. 26.

⁴⁵ *The Times*, 'The turf', 4 January 1862 p. 10; 'The turf', 7 January 1862 p. 8; 'The turf', 9 January 1862 p. 11; 'The turf', 30 May 1867 p. 14.

training stables to whom honesty must become an almost unknown luxury. ... It is giving to the nation in return no one advantage that can weigh for one moment against the curse of a perennial school of vice and deceit, promoted by men of rank and wealth, simply in the main, to afford a high gambling excitement, free from any ... restraint in the way of honourable rule.⁴⁶

Nevertheless, it flourished nationwide, having been rescued by its aristocratic connections from the extinction desired by many, and gradually the Jockey Club (founded in 1752), working hard to gain respectability for the sport, reformed it and gained acceptance in society, due in no small part to the influential backing of the Prince of Wales, later Edward VII.⁴⁷

In Norfolk racing was first recorded in Great Yarmouth in 1715, while the first race meeting at Fakenham was held in 1905, both racecourses continuing to flourish to this day.⁴⁸ Racing also formerly took place at other sites, including Aylsham (Blickling), Beeston-next-Mileham, East Dereham, Wisbech (Emneth), Holt, Swaffham and Thetford (just over the border in Euston, Suffolk).⁴⁹ For reasons now lost, however, racing was discontinued at these locations. The 'race grounds' at Aylsham, Beeston, Emneth and Holt are identified in William Faden's 1797 map of Norfolk, while the course at Swaffham is found in Andrew Bryant's 1826 map and is also mentioned in White's 1845 directory:

horse races were formerly held yearly, upon the broad heath on the south-west side of the town, in September, but they declined more than twenty years ago, though efforts have since been made to revive them. In the centre of the race-course, twelve acres have been cleared and levelled for a cricket ground.⁵⁰

⁴⁶ 'The turf', *The Times*, 4 January 1862 p. 10.

⁴⁷ Richard Holt, *Sport and the British: a modern history* (Oxford, 1989), p. 23; Brailsford, *British sport, a social history*, pp. 72-3.

⁴⁸ <http://www.horseracingresults.co.uk/racecourse/Yarmouth>;
http://www.fakenhamracecourse.co.uk/racing_history.htm

⁴⁹ Clare Buxton, *18th and early 19th century race grounds in Norfolk and Suffolk* (Unpublished M.A. dissertation, University of East Anglia, 2005), pp.28, 54; NRO, PD 86/191 Advertisement for East Dereham races, 1857; NRO, T/MS C 8 Thetford races [various documents] 1773-1781.

⁵⁰ William Faden, *Faden's map of Norfolk* (Dereham, 1989), pp. 9, 14, 18. Aylsham race course is also alluded to in *Robson's commercial directory of Beds, Bucks, Cambridgeshire, Hunts, Norfolk, and Suffolk, with Oxfordshire ... 1839* (London, 1839), p. 11. At that time, races were apparently held there annually on the 'two-mile race-course'. Andrew Bryant, *Bryant's map of Norfolk in 1826* (Fakenham, 1998), p. 44; William White, *History, gazetteer and directory of Norfolk 1845*, p. 384.

For a short time during the nineteenth century (after being discontinued in 1782), racing also took place at Thetford⁵¹:

horse races were held here [Thetford] from an early period until 1620, when they occasioned such tumults, that they were suppressed by the Privy Council. They were revived in 1833, but discontinued about six years ago [c. 1839].⁵²

Formal horse racing therefore took place in several places in Norfolk, but by the beginning of the twentieth century it had dwindled to two race courses at Fakenham and Great Yarmouth. Informal racing was another matter and must have occurred in many locations, as described below. Because of their informality, however, these events were usually not regarded as important enough to be recorded.

Horse racing is unquestionably a quintessential spectator sport; as Vamplew points out, it ‘has no real recreational version for participants: pony clubs and gymkhanas are not the equine equivalent of backyard cricket or playground soccer’.⁵³ It was and still is predominantly a vehicle for gambling, whether at formal racecourses or at an impromptu arrangement quickly organised by local people, as in George Baldry’s lively description of just such an event on Bungay Common at the turn of the century:

Waxy ... was the hero of the evening, telling us all manner of tales ... and ... how about getting up some racing? He’s a rare chap for hoss racing. ... Sam the Landlord says he’ll put in his two old ponies and a gypsy chap what was there says he’s got half a dozen in his drove ... and it was all fixed for the next Saturday afternoon. The next thing was to find the jockeys, Happy Jack reckoned I could be one, Skinny says ... he’ll be another, and the Gypsy has two lads that ride like monkeys so we are fixed for four ... which ‘ud be more than enough as some riders are sure to turn up if they hears there is some racing on. ...

[On the Race Day] we go off to the Common where the people was drawing in large numbers. ... The Snobs [a group of shoe-menders] were busy picking out their ponies for each race. ...Up they gets and trotted round two or three times all the crowd laying bets.⁵⁴

The rural origins of horse racing are embodied in the modern term ‘steeplechase’, which comes from the eighteenth century when horses used to race from one village

⁵¹ Buxton, *18th and early 19th century race grounds in Norfolk and Suffolk*, p. 58.

⁵² William White, *History, gazetteer and directory of Norfolk 1845*, p. 400.

⁵³ Wray Vamplew, ‘Horse-racing’ in Tony Mason (ed.), *Sport in Britain, a social history* (Cambridge, 1989), p. 215.

⁵⁴ Baldry, *The rabbit skin cap*, pp. 158-161.

steeple to the next, jumping fences and ditches and generally negotiating the many obstructions in the countryside.⁵⁵ The sport originated in Ireland but soon became popular in England and eventually internationally. Besides formal race meetings – the first recognised English National Steeplechase took place on Monday 8 March 1830 – there were also village events, and the informality of these is well illustrated in a contemporary (1839) engraving of a race which took place in Suffolk.⁵⁶ The description, *The finish – a good five still alive – Grand Chorus, “The Lads of the Village”* – highlights the potential dangers of the sport.

Although the evolving railway system widened the spectator catchment area and attendance at racecourses was free until 1875 allowing all classes the opportunity to be present, it is clear from George Baldry’s further description of the race on Bungay Common that these extemporaneous local rural meetings were attractive only to the working classes, who could behave spontaneously, enjoying the day with their friends.⁵⁷ In this way, although formal racing required great sums of money to fund racecourses, horses and jockeys, rural working men by dint of imaginative organisation were able to take pleasure in their own version of the sport.

With the advent of entry fees, spectators increasingly tended to be male, while even greater interest in racing, stimulated by detailed accounts of meetings in the popular press, encouraged widespread betting particularly among the working classes.⁵⁸ Racing throughout the country was curtailed by the First World War but resumed with renewed enthusiasm during the inter-war years.⁵⁹ In Norfolk this meant the reopening of Great Yarmouth and Fakenham racecourses, which, with the continuing improvement in transport facilities, were now open to a wider public from the surrounding districts. Gambling reached new heights with perhaps four million people betting regularly on horses. In the late 1930s only football surpassed this, as ten million in England as a whole enjoyed a small weekly gamble.⁶⁰

⁵⁵ Anne Holland, *Steeplechasing. A celebration of 250 years 1752-2002* (London, 2003), pp. 20-23, 28-35.

⁵⁶ John Harris (1791–1873), engraver, after Henry Alken (1785–1851), *The First Steeple-Chace [sic] on Record; Nacton Church, and Village* (London, 1839).

⁵⁷ Vamplew, ‘Horse-racing’, p. 216.

⁵⁸ Huggins, *Flat racing and British society, 1790-1914*, p. 19.

⁵⁹ David Tubby, *A history of Great Yarmouth racecourse* (Great Yarmouth, 2011), p. 31.

⁶⁰ Mike Huggins, *Horseracing and the British, 1919-39* (Manchester, 2003), p. 16.

Opposition to workers' choice of leisure

Transformed attitudes to work affected opinions on leisure. Those who had not had the opportunity previously now realised that they had the chance to enjoy recreational activities other than those snatched moments of relaxation at work (perhaps gossiping or clandestine newspaper reading), drinking at the local alehouse or the Sunday visit to church.⁶¹

Many other radical social changes occurred between 1840 and 1940 throughout Britain. Increasing prosperity, and the national prestige resulting from high levels of industrial production and foreign trade, induced complacency among the mid-nineteenth century middle classes. On the positive side, as indicated above, Samuel Smiles, author of *Self-help* (1859), enthusiastically promoted qualities such as duty, hard work, sobriety, respectability and thrift.⁶² By contrast, reactions against the contemporary social evils of mass poverty, poor working conditions and lack of educational opportunities were exemplified by Thomas Carlyle in *Past and present* (1843), Charles Dickens in 'social purpose' novels such as *Hard times* (1854), and Matthew Arnold in *Culture and anarchy* (1869), all searching analyses of Victorian society.⁶³ These works breached the middle classes' self-satisfaction, and many who had the resources attempted by means of philanthropic actions to improve the working classes' conditions, including their leisure activities.

During the first half of our period of interest, therefore, the few recreational pleasures available to the rural working man came under pressure from a variety of critical scrutineers, who took this self-imposed duty very seriously. These included local landowners, clergy of both the Established and Nonconformist Churches and others in positions of authority. They were particularly concerned with the 'improper' use of the workers' free time, judging, in many cases correctly, that the public house would frequently be the first port of call, and that this would lead to drunkenness and immorality. They saw intoxication among the working classes as a serious social problem, and this stimulated the formation of the temperance movement in the early

⁶¹ See pp. 3-4, 115.

⁶² See p. 18. Fielden, 'Samuel Smiles and self-help', p. 161.

⁶³ Hill, *British economic and social history*, p. 178. These were revealed through the reports of various Royal Commissions, one example being *The Children's Employment Commission, the operation of the Poor Laws Commission (1832)*. Thomson, *England in the nineteenth century*, p. 101.

1830s, which was supported by all churches.⁶⁴ There developed a tendency away from the notion of moderation ('the social glass') to that of complete abstinence ('taking the pledge').⁶⁵ In spite of the strenuous efforts of the temperance workers, alcohol consumption, particularly that of beer, rose during the Victorian era as shown in George Wilson's graph (Figure 2):⁶⁶

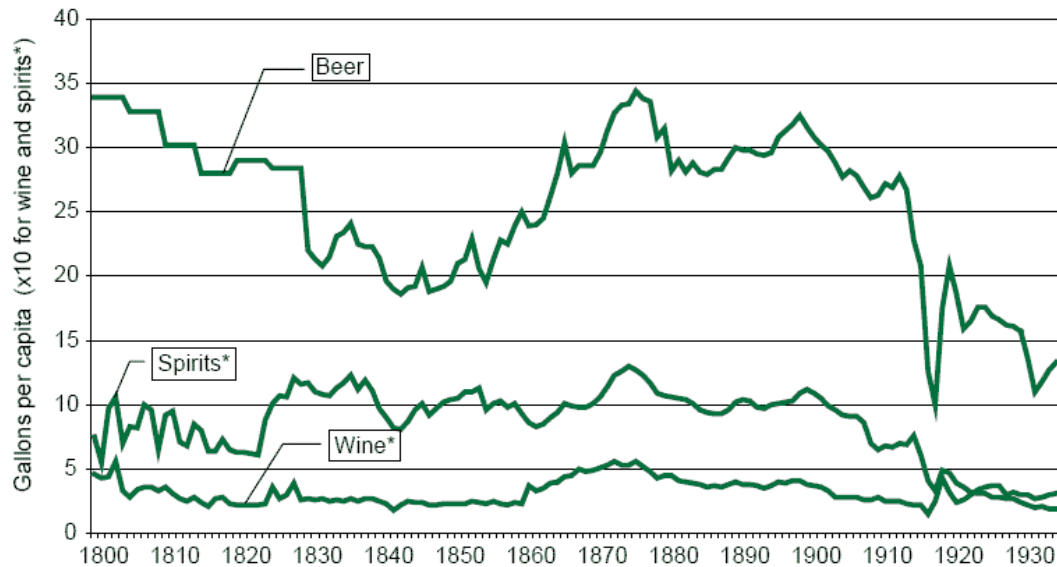


Figure 2: Estimated per capita consumption 1800-1935

Nationally consumption of both beer and spirits peaked during the 1870s and 1900s. Unable to persuade people to reform their drinking habits and inspired by events in the United States, prohibitionism was proposed by a new temperance organisation, the United Kingdom Alliance for the Suppression of the Liquor Traffic, founded in 1853, which suggested legal measures to revolutionise alcohol consumption. It supported the idea of a local veto, giving neighbourhoods the opportunity to go 'dry', and reached its highest point of popularity in the 1880s but had declined in influence by 1900.⁶⁷ Although one meeting in 1867 in Norwich has been traced, Norfolk was

⁶⁴ Harrison, *Drink and the Victorians*, pp.104-106.

⁶⁵ Mathias, *The first industrial nation*, p. 190.

⁶⁶ George B. Wilson, *Alcohol and the nation: a contribution to the study of the liquor problem in the U.K. from 1800 to 1935* (London, 1940), quoted in:
<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200910/cmselect/cmhealth/151/15106.htm#n11>

⁶⁷ Jack S. Blocker, David M. Fahey, Ian R. Tyrrell, *Alcohol and temperance in modern history: an international encyclopedia* (Santa Barbara, 2003) vol. 1, p. 627; James Kneale, 'The place of drink: temperance and the public, 1856-1914', *Social and cultural geography*, 2:1 (2001), p.43.

not greatly affected by this organisation.⁶⁸ While the rate of alcohol consumption was a real problem in some parts of England particularly in some northern counties, Norfolk was one of the least prone to irresponsible drunkenness, as shown in an interesting map, ‘Geographical distribution of drunkenness’, showing county levels of drunkenness between 1889 and 1893. In a range of six levels of drunken offences, Norfolk was placed among those counties on the second level.⁶⁹ The following example gives striking reasons for the worry of those in authority:

[1881] some time ago we received a requisition signed by 60 inhabitants of a rural parish inviting us to take part in a public meeting to protest against the drink traffic. It was therein stated that “a few months ago a man was found dead through drink”; several others have since drunk themselves to death; another has just died of *delirium tremens*, and while his remains were being buried the body of another, who was also a notorious drunkard, was found floating in a pond.⁷⁰

To take the place of recreational drinking, it was suggested that leisure opportunities should be reformed by making available improving pastimes, both educational and recreational. ‘Rational recreation’, as this movement became known, thus attempted by paternalistic social control to regulate the life of the working classes in the middle class image. It was hoped thereby to assist in the general amelioration of their living standards. This positive idea became a focus for various reforming bodies, and several educational schemes, including Mechanics’ Institutes, Mutual Improvement Societies and evening classes, were launched under its auspices.⁷¹ The uncompromising Victorian values associated with the ‘gospel of work’ were slowly eased, and by 1870 even Sunday entertainment was reluctantly accepted.⁷²

Both church and chapel were traditionally much involved with people’s free time, in spite of their frequent indifference to religion.⁷³ When people did attend Sunday

⁶⁸ ‘1867 May14.—A great public meeting, in support of the United Kingdom Alliance, was held at St. Andrew’s Hall, Norwich, and was addressed by General Neal Dow, who had taken a prominent part in the passing of the Maine Liquor Law.’ ‘United Kingdom Alliance’ *Norfolk Chronicle and Norwich Gazette*, 18 May 1867 p. 5, ‘Charles Mackie, *Norfolk annals: a chronological record of remarkable events in the nineteenth century: (compiled from the files of the "Norfolk Chronicle")*. vol. 2, 1851-1900, p. 167.

⁶⁹ Joseph Rowntree and Arthur Sherwell, *The temperance problem and social reform* (London, 1900), between pp. 84 and 85.

⁷⁰ David Lewis, *The drink problem and its solution* (London, 1881), p. 242.

⁷¹ Bailey, *Leisure and class in Victorian England*, p. 35; see also pp. 2, 35, 44, 76, 155.

⁷² See p. 18.

⁷³ Richard Jefferies, *Hodge and his masters* (Stroud, 1992), p. 216.f

services, this took place in leisure time, although they may have regarded it more as a regular duty to God than as recreation. This observance carried with it an inbuilt condemnation of many other ways of using one's leisure. In 1850, according to the *Bible Christian Magazine*, these included 'the ballroom, the card-table, the village wake, the race-course, the bowling-green, the cricket-ground, the gin-palace, or the ale-house'.⁷⁴ This extreme view suggests that non-spiritual activities were to be avoided at all costs: and unsurprisingly, they were not enthusiastically received by the general populace, as shown by the Religious Census of 1851, which revealed diminishing congregations.⁷⁵

The middle and upper classes, particularly those living in towns, also worried about rural depopulation, and they compassionately tried to alleviate hardship. Augustus Jessopp, rector of Scarning, remarked:

what is wanted now ... is that some kindly attempts should be made to afford our country people some facilities for recreation and some intelligent amusement. How to do this is a much more difficult problem to solve than might seem to be the fact.⁷⁶

The local inhabitants, however, presumably looked upon these 'kindly attempts' with suspicion. They were already controlled during their working day; now their free time was also to be organised for them.

The alehouse was much to be preferred, where there was neither any effort to 'improve' the working man nor any innate criticism of him.⁷⁷ It is difficult to assess how much the numerous philanthropic efforts affected the average rural worker. The various working class movements such as the Mechanics' Institutes (founded in 1823) or the Working Men's Clubs (1862) were more successful in an urban setting.⁷⁸ For instance, in 1851 J. W. Hudson could list only eight Mechanics' and Literary Institutions in Norfolk, and all were situated in towns.⁷⁹ Working Men's Clubs, which represented another attempt to promote 'mental improvement, by means of recreation and refreshment, free from intoxicating drinks', likewise made

⁷⁴ *Bible Christian Magazine*, quoted in Cunningham, *Leisure in the Industrial Revolution*, p. 179.

⁷⁵ Horace Mann, *Census of Great Britain, 1851: religious worship in England and Wales* (London, 1854), p. 93.

⁷⁶ Jessopp, *Arcady*, pp. xiv.

⁷⁷ Jefferies, *The toilers of the field* (London, 1893), pp. 100-104.

⁷⁸ Asa Briggs, *The age of improvement 1783-1867* (Harlow, 2000), p. 194; Thomas Kelly, *A history of adult education in Great Britain* (Liverpool, 1992), pp. 121-122.

⁷⁹ J. W. Hudson, *The history of adult education* (London, 1969), pp. 228-229.

little impact in rural Norfolk.⁸⁰ In contrast, the temperance movement met with some success. As mentioned above, the movement had the churches' approval, and its events and meetings, including those of the Band of Hope, were frequently mentioned in parish magazines:⁸¹

Sprowston Parochial Magazine February 1892⁸²

on ... Wednesday our Temperance Society mustered in still greater force, about 100 sitting down to tea in the infant school at 5.30. ... After some good fun ... Mrs. Wickham kindly presented Temperance Medals to members of the Band of Hope who had been [in] regular attendance for a year ...⁸³

An interesting attitude was shown by the Vicar three months later:

on Wednesday, May 11th, the Band of Hope met in the school at 6 o'clock for tea ... At 8 p.m. the adult members of the Temperance Society joined the juveniles, and united with them in a service of song, entitled, "Jack the Joiner". The Chair was taken by the Vicar, who commended temperance, while he cautioned us against an uncharitable teetotalism. ...⁸⁴

The alarming fact of falling congregations may have stimulated the clergy and other religious authorities to compromise, and they started to include secular recreations in the annual church programme of events and also occasionally to involve village organisations.⁸⁵ Nevertheless, religious themes were sometimes but not always included:

Loddon [1860] – On the evening of Wednesday November 28th, in the school-room, there was a lecture upon Bells and Bell-ringing, with illustration by a performance upon hand-bells. ... The entertainment was gratefully concluded with the performance of the National Air by the rifle corps band.

Swanton Morley [1895] – The Church Association van visited the village last week, and an open-air address, illustrated by the magic lantern, was delivered by Mr. Brookes, ... on "The

⁸⁰ From the prospectus of the Revd. Henry Solly (the founder of the Working Men's Clubs), quoted in George Tremlett, *Clubmen. The history of the Working Men's Club and the Institute Union* (London, 1987), p. 13. Kelly, *History of adult education in Great Britain*, p. 191.

⁸¹ The Church of England went so far as to establish its own Church of England Temperance Society. The Band of Hope was a temperance organisation for working-class children founded by Wesleyan Methodists in Leeds in 1847. Lilian Lewis Shiman, 'The Band of Hope movement' *Victorian Studies*, 17 (1973), pp. 49-74.

⁸² Sprowston, a village near Norwich, had a population of 1782 in 1881. William White, *History, gazetteer and directory of Norfolk 1890* (Sheffield, 1890), p. 793.

⁸³ MC 2251/24, 935X6 Sprowston Parochial Magazine, February 1892.

⁸⁴ MC 2251/24, 935X6 Sprowston Parochial Magazine, June 1892.

⁸⁵ Lowerson and Myerscough, *Time to spare in Victorian England*, p. 106.

life of Joseph". Despite the inclement weather, there was a fair attendance.⁸⁶

The religious census must have signalled a warning to the church, because as Howkins has shown, up to the outbreak of the First World War the church experienced a period of genuine development and was influential in village affairs.⁸⁷ Events such as bazaars, concerts and other philanthropic entertainments were organised as counter-attractions to such 'undesirable' pursuits as those listed in the *Bible Christian Magazine*. They were almost exclusively directed by the local vicar or landowner. Report after report in Norfolk newspapers attest to this:

Toft Monks. [1860] During Passion week special services for the working classes were held in the parish church on the evenings of Wednesday, Thursday, Good Friday, and Easter Even, all of which were numerously attended. The exertions of the Rev. G. R. D. Walsh, M.A., in this and the neighbouring parish of Haddiscoe, appear to have been accomplished with much success.⁸⁸

Bacton. [1860] On Friday September 28th, one of those Harvest Homes which are happily becoming more common every year in our Eastern Counties took place at the retired village of Bacton. The idea of such a gathering having been suggested by the vicar was cordially responded to by the principal farmers in the parish. There was a thanksgiving service in the church, at half past four o'clock, which, in spite of the unfavourable weather, was fully attended. After service the masters and their labourers, with some of the tradesmen of the parish, ... partook of an excellent dinner in the new National School-room, which was tastefully decorated for the occasion. About a hundred people were present, the vicar occupying the chair. After dinner some toasts were given, which were heartily welcomed by the men, particularly "The Employers of labour", which was proposed by the vicar, amid the most enthusiastic cheers. ... the festivities of the evening ... were prolonged until half past ten o'clock. The party then separated, having enjoyed themselves in a harmless and not unprofitable manner. ... The dinner was provided mainly at the expense of the farmers, the labourers being admitted free. ...⁸⁹

This tendency to control continued throughout the nineteenth century, with many expressions of gratitude on the part of the recipients of this benevolence.

Swanton Novers. [1885] ... on Friday Swanton had one of its best parish teas ... About 270 including children and choir, treated by the squire (C. Atkinson, Esq.,) sat down to tea at the

⁸⁶ *Norfolk Chronicle and Norwich Gazette*, 'Loddon' 8 December 1860, p. 5, 'Swanton Morley' 6 April 1895, p. 5.

⁸⁷ Howkins, *Reshaping rural England*, pp. 66-7.

⁸⁸ 'Toft Monks' *Norfolk Chronicle and Norwich Gazette*, 14 April 1860, p.5.

⁸⁹ 'Bacton' *Norfolk Chronicle and Norwich Gazette*, 6 October 1860, p. 5.

Rectory, in three divisions, in a large marquee, kindly lent by Lord Hastings. ... The proceedings closed with hearty cheers for the Rector and Mrs. Rolfe and the squire. ... We believe these social gatherings do much to promote a kindly feeling among all classes.⁹⁰

During the early decades of the twentieth century a gradual change occurred. Although philanthropic gestures still took place, self-determination started to gain ascendancy. Unwittingly and with increasing regularity, non-élite independence of charitable control became the norm as local people – middle-class residents but also members of the broader working class, as defined earlier – began to take a greater lead in the provision of leisure facilities. As we shall see throughout this thesis, this significant trend was demonstrated many times in varying circumstances. In the following reports, for example, without paternalistic intervention from the local élite, either the villagers themselves organised their own diversions or the County Council provided an interesting and useful way for country people to spend their leisure time.

Elsing. [1905] – A pleasing entertainment was given in the Elsing Reading Room on Saturday evening by the teachers and scholars of the Council School.⁹¹

Felthorpe. [1910] – A course of six lectures on “Home Nursing” has just been completed by Mrs. Stuart Harris, County Council lecturer. The lectures have been very well attended and greatly appreciated... about sixty were present.⁹²

In the early twentieth century church organisations were still obviously under the aegis of the local clergy. Sunday Schools were in the front line of persuading the rising generation to adopt the different ways of leisure approved by those in a position of control. As already stated, these leisure activities were offered as rival attractions to what was regarded as undesirable. Christmas parties and annual excursions were two successful examples of this. It has been argued, however, particularly in the case of Nonconformist churches, that these departures from the old ways came about ‘less because of enforcement from above than of persuasion from below’.⁹³ This was due to the working-class origins of the Sunday School

⁹⁰ ‘Swanton Novers’ *Norfolk Chronicle and Norwich Gazette*, 1 August 1885, p. 5.

⁹¹ ‘Elsing’ *Norfolk Chronicle and Norwich Gazette*, 30 December 1905, p. 6.

⁹² ‘Felthorpe’ *Norfolk Chronicle and Norwich Gazette*, 8 January 1910, p. 6.

⁹³ Cunningham, *Leisure in the Industrial Revolution*, p. 41.

movement, which gave the workers a proprietorial interest in the development of their local Schools.⁹⁴

Thus both church and chapel in the twentieth century continued to influence how rural people spent their free time. To 'sugar the pill', as it were, entertainment or diversion of some kind was an essential element of membership of church organisations. Accordingly, Christmas treats and summer outings were customary for members of the church choir and were regarded as compensation for their loyal weekly attendance at practice and services. The treats often involved the whole village, and reports of these events in parish magazines convey a real sense of community. A typical example follows:

Besthorpe [1888] On Friday July 22nd took place the annual Church Sunday School Treat. ... The children ... walked to the Church in procession carrying flags, and accompanied by their Teachers. On this day everything is given up to the children ... There was a good Church full of people at the 3 o'clock service. ... The youthful audience was very quiet and seemed to understand what was said to them. Service over, all repaired to the large meadow belonging to the Vicarage and indulged in swinging and games of all sorts. An additional attraction this year was afforded in the shape of a Punch and Judy show ... Tea was served at 5 o'clock and was done thorough justice to by the youngsters, who sat down to the number of 95. When their tea was over and they had run away to play, their Mothers with such of the old people as could get to the Vicarage had tea in their turn while ladies of the parish and other friends had tea in the house; altogether the number present not including babies was quite 250, the largest number I have yet had the pleasure of entertaining at the School treat. This includes the Bible Class, who always come on this occasion. ...⁹⁵

As Besthorpe had a population of about 480, it is obvious that over 50% of the local people were present.⁹⁶

One noteworthy and important development is that during the nineteenth century the church gradually 'sanitised' the village festive year. The church and social élite were committed to respectability, self-control, thrift and philanthropy, and this led to an irresistible desire to control and in their eyes improve the activities of their 'inferiors'. A pertinent event attests to this. Harvest home celebrations had been in existence for centuries and had been a cause for concern for some time:

⁹⁴ Laqueur, *Religion and respectability*, p. 3.

⁹⁵ NRO, MC 2251/7, 935X6 Besthorpe parish magazines. *The Banner of Faith*, August 1888.

⁹⁶ William White, *History, gazetteer and directory of Norfolk 1883*, p. 149.

the Earl of ALBEMARLE, in a public address at Banham, in Sept. 1855, enters elaborately into the evil and degrading effects of *largess* at Harvest-homes.

"How do they return their thanks to God for a plentiful supply of food for another year? *They get drunk.* Each man at the end of harvest receives a certain present from his employer, and then a party go round and ask for 'largess.' The largess man, having begged all he can, goes to the public-house to get drunk. I won't follow him in the orgies which take place at the public-house; *but the immorality—the gross, shocking immorality of both sexes—ought not to be lost sight of.* ... I know, as a county magistrate ... that *a great portion of crime* arises from those habits of drunkenness which prevail among our rural population. I think that the labourer is worthy of his hire, and deserves some reward after he has done a hard spell of work; but I wish to save that labourer from the *temptations* to which he is at present exposed. ..."⁹⁷

In the previous year, in an effort to address this problem and to reform previous ways, the alternative new custom of harvest thanksgiving had been introduced:

[1854] the first harvest thanksgiving festival held in the county took place at Brooke. It was the result of an attempt made by the vicar, the Rev. Dr. Beal, "to put a stop to the disgraceful scenes which too often characterise the close of harvest, and to the system of *largess*, which gives rise to cases of the grossest description." After service at the church, men, women, and children had dinner on the vicarage lawn. ...⁹⁸

This event attracted national interest, and *The Times* reported that:

long before the hour fixed for Divine service the church was filled in every part, and many persons were unable to obtain admission. ... At the conclusion of the service upwards of 300 persons sat down to dinner in front of the vicarage house. ... The attempt to put an end to the system of public house harvest feasts, in which neither wives nor children can join, and in which excesses of a gross description often take place, appears, in this instance, to have been eminently successful. Nothing occurred to mar the festivity. ...⁹⁹

Even though the tone of this report appears somewhat self-satisfied, the occasion does seem to have introduced an element of family celebration to an otherwise disorderly custom. It is impossible to discover what the participants thought of the change, but the fact that 300 people attended (from a village population of 756) perhaps indicates a measure of acceptance of the transformed tradition.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁷ Lees, Frederic Richard, *An argument for the legislative prohibition of the liquor traffic*, p. 221.

⁹⁸ 'Harvest thanksgiving' *Norfolk Chronicle and Norwich Gazette*, 8 September 1854, Mackie (comp.) *Norfolk annals* vol. 2, p. 33.

⁹⁹ 'Harvest thanksgiving and festival', *The Times*, 14 September 1854, p. 7.

¹⁰⁰ E. Hunt, *Hunt & Co.'s Directory of East Norfolk with part of Suffolk 1850* (London, 1850), p. 121.

Another radical adjustment in village life took place in the playing of church music. Organs had originally been used to accompany choir and congregation but after the Restoration were largely replaced by church or chapel bands – teams of enthusiastic local instrumentalists, who during the week worked locally on the land or in the village.¹⁰¹

Southrepps 19th century. ... a gallery was always in use at the west end of the church. Besides seating some of the congregation it held men who provided music for the services, the instrument being, we think, fiddles.¹⁰²

The bands, however, went into decline in the nineteenth century, appearing only on special occasions: ‘near Wood Norton 1910. ... the Rector’s Brass Band used to play on Festival Days, seated in the west gallery’.¹⁰³

Church organs regained their traditional hold, caused in some cases by the advent of the barrel organ.¹⁰⁴ Thomas Hardy famously described one church band in *Under the greenwood tree* published in 1872. In the preface to his book, he commented sorrowfully on the passing of an old institution:

this story of the Mellstock Quire and its old established west-gallery musicians... is intended to be a fairly true picture, at first hand, of the personages ... and customs which were common among such orchestral bodies ... fifty or sixty years ago.

One is inclined to regret the displacement of these ecclesiastical bandsmen by an isolated organist (often at first a barrel-organist) or harmonium player; and despite certain advantages in point of control and accomplishment ... the change has tended to stultify the professed aims of the clergy, its direct result being to curtail and extinguish the interest of parishioners in church doings.¹⁰⁵

So the old church bands disappeared, and whether this was an improvement or not is open to question. A happy outcome ensued, however. Rather than let their musical skills go to waste, the bandsmen frequently transferred their allegiance and founded new bands associated with local village organisations, often with religious links or connected with the social movements of the time. These included the temperance

¹⁰¹ Christopher Turner, ‘Barrel organs’ *BIOS Reporter*, 21:2 (1997)

<http://www.immanuelsground.com/articles/B-Org1.htm>

¹⁰² Norfolk Federation of Women’s Institutes, *Within living memory* (1972), p. 69.

¹⁰³ Norfolk Federation of Women’s Institutes, *Within living memory* (1972), p. 66.

¹⁰⁴ David Drinkell has evidence of the existence of barrel organs in seventeen Norfolk churches.

<http://www.norfolkchurches.co.uk/norfolkorgans2.htm>

¹⁰⁵ Thomas Hardy, *Under the greenwood tree* (London, 1903). Preface.

movement, missions, Friendly Societies, the Salvation Army and the Co-operative movement. Some of these bands continued well into the twentieth century. In Norfolk at the turn of the century the Independent Order of Rechabites had several Tents or branches, at least one of which, in Hethersett, had a band.¹⁰⁶ At about the same time Salvation Army bands existed in Sheringham and North Walsham, while there is evidence of bands in many other places in the county.¹⁰⁷

Rise and development of fairs

Initially formed to resolve difficulties of distribution, fairs allowed skilled craftsmen to demonstrate their expertise, discuss the latest ideas and of course sell or barter their goods. The number of fairs expanded greatly between 1200 and 1400, and they became a regular commercial feature of the English countryside.¹⁰⁸ The word 'fair' is derived from the Latin 'feria' meaning holiday, while the dictionary defines 'fair' as '*a regular gathering of buyers and sellers at a time and place ordained by charter, statute, or custom. Now especially (a part of) such a gathering devoted entirely to amusements*'.¹⁰⁹ The history of fairs bears out this definition, because their origin as a crucial centre of trade extends back to antiquity. The charter mentioned in the dictionary was granted by the king to loyal noblemen and ecclesiastical dignitaries, who took full advantage of it by imposing tolls and taxes.¹¹⁰ Many of these fairs lasted for centuries, an example in Norfolk being Cley fair, first granted in 1253 and

¹⁰⁶ This was a Friendly Society founded in 1835 as part of the temperance movement to promote total abstinence from alcohol. Their branches were known as 'Tents'.
<http://www.picture.norfolk.gov.uk>. Hethersett Rechabites 1908.

¹⁰⁷ <http://www.picture.norfolk.gov.uk>. Sheringham Salvation Army Band c. 1914; photo of North Walsham Salvation Army Band – http://www.northwalshamarchive.co.uk/archive_item.aspx?entry_id=76. Other examples include: Cawston and District Silver Prize Band founded 1886; Corpusty Methodist Chapel Band, active in 1890s; East Winch Britannia Brass Band, active in 1910; Great Massingham Silver Band, active in the early 1900s; Harling Saxhorn Band, active in 1875; Hilgay Silver Band (<http://www.hilgaysilverband.co.uk/about-the-band.htm>), active in the 1890s; Holt Brass Band, active in 1892; Loddon Band founded 1907 (http://www.loddonband.org/index_files/Page358.htm); Mulbarton and Swardeston Brass Band, active in 1914; New Buckenham Silver Band founded 1887; Reephams Temperance Band, active in 1900s (<http://www.norfolkbrass.co.uk>); Scole Brass Band, active in 1882; Stibbard Silver Prize Band; Archangel Band of the Oddfellows, Terrington St Clement, active in the early 1900s; Whittington Brass Band active in 1899 (Most of these bands are listed in <http://www.ibew.org.uk/link01.htm>).

¹⁰⁸ In these two centuries 4860 were chartered. 1999/00 HC 284 *Environment, transport and regional affairs committee. Environment sub-committee. Travelling fairs* vol. II, p. 42.

¹⁰⁹ *Shorter Oxford English dictionary*.

¹¹⁰ David Kerr Cameron, *The English fair* (Stroud, 1998), p. 14.

still operating in July 1883.¹¹¹ The medieval origin of many Norfolk fairs is listed in the *Gazetteer of markets and fairs in England and Wales to 1516*. Thus those listed in *Craven & Co's commercial directory of Norfolk* published in 1856 can be traced to their medieval origins. These include Banham (charter granted 1338), Castleacre (1470), Diss (1300), Feltwell (1283), Gissing (1379), Gressenhall (1229), Harleston (1228), Harpley (1307), Hempnall (1380), Hockham (1272), Litcham (1297), Loddon (1265), Lyng (1295), Norwich (1199), Oxborough (1249), Reepham (1277) and Shipdham (1245). Fairs as centres for trading were instituted, therefore, not only in large towns but also in small settlements and were clearly a significant part of rural economy for more than five hundred years.

There was another kind of fair, known as a Statute Fair, hiring fair or Mop Fair. The purpose of this was to provide an annual opportunity (usually but not always on Michaelmas Day, 29 September) for servants in search of employment to assemble together and for employers to find a suitable farm servant or labourer for the following year. Such crowds attracted all the decorative features and attractions of a funfair, and these turned into major festivals in their own right, also however attracting condemnation for the drunkenness and immorality involved.¹¹² Both types of fair had important economic, social and cultural influences on the life of the people. They came about for very practical purposes and evolved over hundreds of years into a combined institution differing greatly from its precursors. The element of entertainment was initially very basic but slowly expanded and eventually superseded the fairs' original purposes. Examples of trading fairs where the entertaining element was gradually increasing can be found in eighteenth-century Norfolk:

NORFOLK FAIRS

Ingham fair reaches four or five miles round on every side. We breakfasted at Hasbro', baited [stopped for food or rest] at Ingham, and dined at Brunstead; a circuit which Mr. B. and his friends take every year among their relations and acquaintances. This species of sociability and hospitality is not peculiar to Ingham: Walsham, Worstead, South-reps, Alboro', St. Faith's, &c. &c. have their fairs, more famed for their hospitality than the business transacted at them; except the last, which is one of the largest fairs in the kingdom.

¹¹¹ Samantha Letters, *Gazetteer of markets and fairs in England and Wales to 1516* <http://www.history.ac.uk/cmh/gaz/gazweb2.html>: [Norfolk] (2010). William White, *History, gazetteer and directory of Norfolk 1883*, p. 10.

¹¹² Howkins, *Reshaping rural England*, pp. 111-112.

Yorkshire has its *feasts*; other countries their *wakes*; and Norfolk its *fairs*.¹¹³

Historians have investigated fairs as part of the general leisure scene, although little has been written since Cameron produced his standard work in 1998.¹¹⁴ More specific interest in hiring fairs has been shown by Gary Moses and Michael Roberts, and the particular subjects of fairground bioscope shows and boxing have been researched by Vanessa Toulmin.¹¹⁵ For the most part, however, wide-ranging scholarship on the history of English fairs is sparse, and it is overdue for fresh investigation and analysis. Apart from the articles by Moses and Roberts, no attention has been given to small local fairs, although this is an interesting and largely unexplored field of enquiry. The reason for this is clear. There is a serious lack of hard evidence of village fairs. A search in the national archives is disappointing, while county archives reveal little more than notices of abolitions. Trade journals such as *The Showman* and *The World's Fair* concentrated mainly on the great fairs, for instance (as local examples), King's Lynn Mart and Norwich Easter Fair. Newspapers also reported on these but ignored small country events. The evidence that does exist tends to be anecdotal, mainly in village local histories.¹¹⁶ While this is unreliable as a source, it can be useful as an indicator of social attitudes and has an immediacy lacking in more formal data. The gap in research indicated above is addressed in this chapter, which concentrates mainly on the county of Norfolk.

The largest fairs occurred in the county's principal towns – Norfolk, King's Lynn, Thetford and Great Yarmouth – and attracted people from a wide area of the surrounding countryside. Nevertheless, this left large expanses of the county without

¹¹³ Mr. (William) Marshall, *The rural economy of Norfolk: comprising the management of landed estates, and the present practice of husbandry in that county* (London, 1787) vol. 2, p. 261.

¹¹⁴ Cornelius Walford, *Fairs past and present. A chapter in the history of commerce* (New York, 1967), first published in London in 1883; E. H. Bostock, *Menageries, circuses and theatres* (1971), first published in London in 1927; M. Willson Disher, *Fairs, circuses and music halls* (London, 1942); William Addison, *English fairs and markets* (London, 1953); Ian Starsmore, *English fairs* (1975); David Kerr Cameron, *The English fair* (1998).

¹¹⁵ Moses, 'Rustic and rude', pp. 151-75; Moses, 'Reshaping rural culture?', pp. 61-84; Michael Roberts, '“Waiting upon chance”: English hiring fairs and their meanings from the 14th to the 20th century', pp. 119-60; Vanessa Toulmin, 'Telling the tale' *Film History*, 6:2 (1994), pp. 219-237; Vanessa Toulmin, *A fair fight: an illustrated review of boxing on British fairgrounds* (Oldham, 1999).

¹¹⁶ For example, Keith Entwistle in *A century of faces and places; a history of Aldborough and Thurgarton 1900-200* (Aldborough, 2002) mentions Aldborough fair, its location, composition and the fist-fights it provoked, pp. 4-5, 8-9, 10; Alan B. W. Flowerday describes Ingham's annual stock and fun fair in *Ingham past and present* (Letchworth, 2002), pp3-4.

access to these pleasures, particularly in the early part of our period, before the improvements in transport. Alive to this lack and interested in the possible business opportunities, itinerant showmen were willing to travel from town to village throughout the county. Very little attention was paid by the press to these small fairs, and few records of them exist, as already noted. Editors of local newspapers such as *Norfolk Chronicle and Norwich Gazette* and *Eastern Daily Press* evidently believed that their readers had no interest in happenings in the countryside, unless, that is, there was an element of inherent sensationalism, such as a crime or a devastating accident. Although this attitude gradually changed, reports of fairs were still unaccountably lacking.

One promising way of tracing their existence is through surviving trade directories. The editors of these recognised that fairs were to a large extent venues for trading and consequently listed towns and villages with the regular times of year when fairs occurred there. From these entries it is possible to construct a kind of schedule throughout the county.

As a random example, William White's *Directory* of 1883 shows 117 fairs occurring in Norfolk (Table 1).¹¹⁷ These specific places include Norwich, the large towns mentioned above and also various small towns, such as North Walsham; the vast majority, however, are villages with populations of hundreds rather than thousands. This suggests that fairs were a significant feature not only of urban life but also of the countryside.

Table 1 Norfolk fairs in 1883

<i>Town/Village</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Town/Village</i>	<i>Date</i>
Weasenham	Jan 25	Harpley	July 24
Cawston	Feb 1	Gissing	July 25
Lynn	Feb 14	Binham	July 26
Wymondham	Feb 14	Watton (Sheep Fair)	first Wed in July
Downham (Winnold Horse Fair)	Mar 3	Cley	last Fri in July
Hingham	Mar 7	Martham	last Tue in July
Aylsham	Mar 23	Thetford (Wool)	second Fri in July
Elmham	Apr 6	Horning	third Thu in July

¹¹⁷ William White, *History, gazetteer and directory of Norfolk 1883*, pp. 10-11.

Traditional leisure and its critics

<i>Town/Village</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Town/Village</i>	<i>Date</i>
Wells	Shrove Tue	Swaffham (Sheep Show)	third Wed in July
Attleburgh	Thu before Easter	Dereham	Thu before July 6
Massingham	Tue before Easter	East Burnham	Aug 1 and 2
Loddon	Easter Mon	Thetford (Magdalen)	Aug 2
Mattishall	Tue before Holy Thu	Heacham	Aug 3
North Walsham	Day before Holy Thu	Attleburgh	Aug 5
Norwich	Day before Good Fri	Castleacre	Aug 5
Oxborough	Easter Tue	Thetford (Lambs)	Aug 16
Scole	Easter Tue	Bacton	first Mon in Aug
Scottow	Easter Tue	Cressingham Magna	first Wed in Aug
Yarmouth	Fri and Sat in Easter week	Cawston (Sheep Show)	last Wed in Aug
Cawston	Apr 14	Harleston	Sep 9
Methwold	Apr 23	Shouldham	Sep 19
Holt	Apr 25	Kenninghall	Sep 30
Frettenham	first Mon in Apr	Forngett	first Thu in Sep
Lynn (Cattle Fair)	second Tue in Apr	Kipton Ash, on Hempton Green (Sheep Show)	first Wed in Sep
Castleacre	May 1	Aylsham	last Tue in Sep
Harling	May 4	Watton (Sheep Fair)	second Wed in Sep
Worstead	May 12	Diss (Statute Fair)	third Fri in Sep
Thetford	May 14	Harling (Sheep Show)	first Tue after Sep 12
Rudham	May 17	Dereham	Thu before Sep 29
Wymondham	May 17	Hingham	Oct 2
Fring	May 21	Shouldham	Oct 11
Briston	May 26	Watton	Oct 11
Downham	first Fri in May	Hockwold	first Wed after Oct 11
Foulsham	first Tue in May	Wymondham	Oct 12
New Buckenham	last Thu in May	Stratton	Oct 12
Swaffham (Sheep Show)	second Wed in May	Briston	Oct 13
Pulham Market	third Thu in May	Rudham	Oct 14
Attleburgh	Thu before Whitsun	Gaywood	Oct 17
Coltishall	Whit Mon	Lynn (Cheese Fair)	Oct 17
Cromer	Whit Mon	Harling	Oct 24
Happisburgh (Pleasure Fair)	Tue after Whit Tue	Litcham	Nov 1
Hempnall	Whit Mon	Massingham	Nov 8
Hempton	Whit Tue	Diss (Cattle, etc.)	Nov 8
Hingham	Whit Tue	Watton	Nov 8
Ingham (Cattle)	Mon after Whit Mon	Lyng	Nov 20

Traditional leisure and its critics

<i>Town/Village</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Town/Village</i>	<i>Date</i>
Ludham	Thu after Whit week	New Buckenham	Nov 22
Southrepps	Tue fortnight after Whitsun	Holt	Nov 25
Stowbridge	Sat after Whit Sun	Fring	Nov 30
Walsingham	Mon fortnight after Whit Sun	Northwold	Nov 30
Aldborough	June 21	Swaffham (Sheep Show)	first Wed in Nov
Banham	June 22	Downham	second Fri in Nov
Gaywood	June 22	Lynn (Cattle Fair)	second Tue in Nov
Winfarthing	June 25	Feltwell	first Wed after Nov 20
Reepham	June 29	Loddon	first Mon after Nov 22
Shipdham (Stock and cattle)	last Mon in June	Gressenhall	Dec 6
Harleston	July 5	Stoke Ferry	Dec 6
Broomhill	July 7	Hempnall	Dec 11
Watton	July 10		
Kenninghall	July 18		

Important characteristics, such as sheep and lamb shows, stock and cattle sales or even a cheese fair are noted. More information for each fair can sometimes be found by examining individual village entries in the directories; for instance, the main purpose of Weasenham Fair on 25 January was to sell ‘toys, etc.’¹¹⁸ Such particulars are not always given, however; the individual entry for Cawston, for example, listed as taking place on 1 February, does not mention the village fair.

Fairs were always transient, lasting one day or perhaps two or three.¹¹⁹ Then they disappeared, leaving a bare, silent space of earth where so much noisy, busy activity had taken place. Concerned not so much with local produce, which was sold in the weekly market and by the nineteenth century in local shops, they brought regional and inter-regional goods to parts of the country, where they might otherwise be unavailable.¹²⁰ The products were usually seasonal – hops, cheese or wool, for example.¹²¹ This tradition was still evident in a small number of fairs, particularly

¹¹⁸ William White, *History, gazetteer and directory of Norfolk 1883*, p. 777.

¹¹⁹ Cameron, *The English fair*, p. 1.

¹²⁰ Addison, *English fairs and markets*, p. 60.

¹²¹ Alan Dyer, ‘The urban economy’ in Robert Tittler and Norman Jones (eds.), *A companion to Tudor Britain* (Oxford, 2004), p. 334; Cameron, *The English fair*, p. 147.

urban ones, in the later part of the nineteenth century. Thus, in Norfolk in 1883 there occurred a wool fair in Thetford in July and a cheese fair in King's Lynn in October.

Table 2 Trading in Norfolk fairs in 1883

<i>Town/Village</i>	<i>Specialty</i>	<i>Month</i>
Lynn	Cattle	April, November
Swaffham	Sheep	May, July, November
Watton	Sheep	July, September
Thetford	Wool	July
Thetford	Lambs	August
Cawston	Sheep	August
Hempton	Sheep	September
Harling	Sheep	September
Lynn	Cheese	October
Diss	Cattle	November

The timing of fairs was traditionally related to the church's year, as is demonstrated by the many Norfolk fairs held round about Easter (10) and Whitsun (12), although surprisingly there are not any listed as Christmas fairs. This may have been because of difficulties of access caused by seasonal bad weather. Another compelling motive was the seasons of the agricultural working year, and this led to a preference for spring or autumn fairs in areas where a pastoral economy was dominant. A glance at Table 2 will confirm that this idea was generally valid in Norfolk.¹²²

Further examination of trade directories leads to some interesting results.¹²³ Between 1839 and 1929 by far the most frequently occurring fairs were those dealing with

¹²² Table 2 uses data from William White, *History, gazetteer and directory of Norfolk 1883*. For information on pastoral areas of Norfolk, see Wade Martins, 'Agriculture in mid-19th century' in Ashwin and Davison (eds.), *Historical atlas of Norfolk*, p. 138.

¹²³ The directories used were: *Pigot's directory of Norfolk, 1839* (London, 1839); W. White, *History, gazetteer and directory of Norfolk 1845*; F. White, *History, gazetteer and directory of Norfolk, 1854*; E. R. Kelly (ed.), *Post Office directory of Cambridgeshire, Norfolk and Suffolk [Part 2: Norfolk]* (London, 1869); J. G Harrod, *Royal county directory of Norfolk with Lowestoft in Suffolk, 1877* (Norwich, 1877); W. White, *History, gazetteer and directory of Norfolk, 1883*; *Kelly's directory of Norfolk 1896* (London, 1896); *Kelly's directory of Norfolk 1904* (London, 1904); *Kelly's directory of Norfolk 1912* (London, 1912); *Kelly's directory of Norfolk 1929* (London, 1929).

cattle (260), whether on their own or with horses, sheep, other stock, cheese, toys, pedlary or pleasure. Second to these were the pleasure fairs, which took place on 113 occasions, perhaps also involving cattle, pedlary or toys. Again sometimes linked with other trading elements, sheep fairs were also important, although to a lesser extent (72). The nomenclature used in directories can be confusing. 'Stock', for instance, is presumably an all-embracing term used to denote any livestock raised for profit, but does this include cattle, sheep and horses? This type of fair occurred 57 times. It is significant that pleasure fairs were so frequent, even with trading elements included.

Even though the main purpose of a fair might be buying and selling for profit, such a concourse of people attracted itinerant entertainers, always on the look-out for their own business opportunities. They added an extra festive dimension to the fair and gradually became an expected part of it. The importance of fairs as the answer to the problems of distribution for long-distance and international trade declined, however, with the development of the railways and the improvement in road construction. It might be thought that the importance of markets in the village economy would have caused this decline earlier than the advent of transport improvements. However, this was not the case, because markets and fairs had differing emphases, and it is important to stress these dissimilarities, existing from the Middle Ages onwards. Markets concentrated on trading local produce very regularly (usually weekly) and provided everyday necessities, while fairs, generally larger concerns altogether and occurring much less frequently (annually or semi-annually), offered goods in bulk, perhaps wool or provisions, for people to stock up for a season. Thus, as Addison points out, markets were principally 'for small-scale, [and] fairs for large-scale trading'.¹²⁴

As the trading and/or hiring constituents of the fair diminished, pleasure interests took their place, although buying and selling never disappeared completely. A small concern could earn an honest penny by travelling from village to village in between attending the big urban fairs, as in this description of an incident in 1854:

¹²⁴ Addison, *English fairs and markets*, p. 60; Cameron, *The English fair*, pp. 19-20.

we made money at King's Lynn, and, what was better, went on making it at the fairs we took in the Lincoln, Cambridge, Norfolk, and Suffolk district, while we were waiting for the great Easter-tide fair at Norwich. ... On our way to Norwich fair, at Long Sutton, a mere village, we did what is known in the profession as 'blank moulding'. On a wide space in the turnpike road we put down a few seats and something in the shape of a ring, made up a few of the old-fashioned grease-pot lights with tallow and rags for wicks, and announced a grand performance. There was no charge to view the latter, as the ring was perfectly open, but we charged a penny for all who wanted a seat. We presented a lively little programme of juggling, rope-walking, trick-riding, etc.

Profits were made by 'nobbing' (going round with a hat) the audience half-way through the performance.

... we had quite a gala night in the village, myself and company sitting among our patrons drinking four-ale and smoking long pipes. The collection was a very good one, too; in fact, our bit of 'blank moulding' quite paid expenses, besides making us some new friends, and giving us an excellent advertisement.¹²⁵

The constituents of the fair, intended to entertain the crowds, were diverse and became ever more extravagant and flamboyant in design, often with elaborately carved and gilded wagons and booth fronts. This flamboyance was a consequence of the improvement in roads, which enabled not only the bare necessities but also increasingly heavier loads to be transported. The side-shows, while subsidiary to the main attractions of roundabouts and other rides, were wide-ranging – theatrical booths, circus, ghost shows (illusions), waxworks, freak shows, boxing/wrestling challenges, the wild animal shows known as menageries and at the turn of the century bioscope shows.¹²⁶ In the early part of our period, before the development of mechanical attractions, side-shows were the main components of the fair, although rudimentary amusement rides existed, hand operated or horse-driven.

Finding local descriptions of fairs is problematic. A vibrant description of St. Bartholomew's Fair in London by William Wordsworth is, however, available:

All moveables of wonder, from all parts,
Are here – Albinos, painted Indians, Dwarfs,
The Horse of knowledge, and the learned Pig,

¹²⁵ 'Lord' George Sanger, *Seventy years a showman* (London, 1966), pp. 135- 137.

¹²⁶ Eventually the circus and the menagerie joined forces, becoming one entity and touring separately from the fair. Rodney N. Manser, *Circus. The development and significance of the circus, past, present and future* (Blackburn, 1987), p. 108.

The Stone-eater, the man that swallows fire,
Giants, Ventriloquists, the Invisible Girl,
The Bust that speaks and moves its goggling eyes,
The Wax-work, Clock-work, all the marvellous craft
Of modern Merlins, Wild Beasts, Puppet-shows,
All out-o'-the-way, far-fetched, perverted things,
All freaks of nature, all Promethean thoughts
Of man, his dulness, madness, and their feats
All jumbled up together, to compose
A Parliament of Monsters.¹²⁷

Needless to say, the smaller fairs visiting Norfolk villages could not present such a huge range of novelties. Wordsworth nevertheless gives a good idea of the type of side-show generally to be expected in the mid-nineteenth century.

One side-show, the theatrical booth, was important in that it brought English drama to the countryside, although it must be acknowledged that it was found more frequently in large urban fairs. As the entertainment aspect of fairs began to predominate, extra booths were set up to house performances and exhibitions. These were often of a sensational nature – freak shows or displays of prizefighting.¹²⁸

Surprisingly, unlike their American counterparts, British freak shows have largely been ignored by historians. In fact the only two books on the subject to date were published relatively recently in America.¹²⁹ For centuries people have often regarded with interest, wonder or horror those whose bodies are different from society's ideas of normality. Those considered different have had difficulty in finding employment, and some were forced by circumstances to exhibit themselves. For others, however, life as a 'freak' or curiosity gave them self-confidence and emancipation from being 'different'. In addition, a sense of kinship was engendered by living in a circus or fair among others similarly handicapped, banishing social exclusion and inequality, and frequently this lifestyle brought financial independence and even celebrity. The avoidance of research on this topic may be due to its provocative and even now

¹²⁷ William Wordsworth, *The prelude*. Book 7, lines 706-718, published posthumously in 1850. This fair was suppressed in 1855 because it spread 'moral pollution'. Walford, *Fairs past and present*, pp. 240-242.

¹²⁸ M. Willson Disher, *Fairs, circuses and music halls*, p. 33.

¹²⁹ Marlene Tromp (ed.), *Victorian freaks. The social context of freakery in Britain*. (Columbus, 2008); Nadja Durbach, *Spectacle of deformity: freak shows and modern British culture*. (Berkeley, 2009).

contentious nature. It presents challenging or disturbing images, and there is the possibility of accusations of potential or hidden voyeurism. The terms ‘freak’ and ‘freak show’ have many offensive, negative and uncomplimentary implications, which make them difficult to use objectively.¹³⁰ Even so, this lack of investigation is remarkable, given the social questions raised by the mere existence of freak shows, society’s varying attitudes towards them and the manifold variety of artistes performing throughout England, not only in fairs but also theatres, music halls, shop fronts and penny gaffs.¹³¹ In the first half of the twentieth century, as social attitudes to deformity and disability changed and became more compassionate, people turned against previously favoured freak shows. These were now judged to be exploitation masquerading as entertainment, and their popularity waned.¹³² Nonetheless, in some cases these performances lasted well into the twentieth century, in spite of society’s general disapprobation of the spectacle of deformity.¹³³

Evidence of specific freak shows is difficult to find, apart from those of high profile characters such as General Tom Thumb (Charles Stratton 1838-1883, an American midget who toured extensively in Britain), the “Elephant Man” (Joseph Merrick 1862-1890, an English man with severe deformities, exhibited as a human curiosity) and the “World’s Ugliest Woman” (Mary Ann Bevan 1874-1933, an English woman who, developing acromegaly, a disease causing severe disfigurement, decided to exhibit herself in order to support her family).¹³⁴ Freak shows were, however, so established as a ‘normal’ part of every fair, that it is reasonable to argue that they were seen in all the villages visited by fairs.

Fairground boxing and wrestling contests were similarly popular. They had started in the seventeenth century appealing to all classes and although later unpopular with the upper classes were still favoured by the workers during the Victorian era,

¹³⁰ This attitude is discussed in Jocelyn Dodd (et al.), *Buried in the footnotes: the representation of disabled people in museum and gallery collections* (Leicester, 2004), p. 19, and Jonathan Tooke, *Hidden histories: discovering disability in Norwich’s museum collections* (Norwich, 2006), pp. 10, 12, 17.

¹³¹ <https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/nfa/researchandarticles/freakshows>

¹³² <http://www.vam.ac.uk/content/articles/d/development-of-circus-acts/>

¹³³ <http://www.fairground-heritage.org.uk/newsite/learn/learn-freaks.html>

¹³⁴ <http://www.vam.ac.uk/content/articles/t/tom-thumb>; Frederick Treves, *The elephant man and other reminiscences* (London, 1923), p. 16; *World’s Fair*, 30 December 1933; http://phreeque.tripod.com/mary_ann_bevans.html.

reaching their zenith of popularity in the 1860s.¹³⁵ The English boxing champion, Jem Mace (1831-1910), born in Beeston in Norfolk, served his apprenticeship as a bare-knuckle pugilist in fairground boxing booths. Becoming for a short time a circus proprietor in his own right, he gave exhibitions of boxing in his own and other touring circuses.¹³⁶ His cousin and constant companion, Pooley Mace (1839-1912), was also a skilled pugilist and was the victor in at least two public prize-fights in the King's Lynn area, which were reported in the *Norfolk Chronicle and Norwich Gazette*.¹³⁷ The success of boxing booths demonstrates the allure of spectacle of any kind, whether on the fairground or elsewhere.¹³⁸ The magnetism of something unusual was of course also a facet of freak shows, menageries and circuses.

Decline of fairs

Comparison of data from several directories shows that the number of fairs gradually decreased over our period of interest, as is demonstrated in the maps on pages 64-66. Although using different directories calls into question the matter of consistency in the statistics, there is nevertheless no doubt about the gradual trend towards fewer fairs appearing on village greens or other venues throughout the county.¹³⁹ Why did this decline happen? It was certainly not indifference on the part of potential customers, as demonstrated by a young person's typical reaction to a fair at the village of Terrington St. Clement in 1930:

one night there was a fair in the village. I was longing to see it at night, with the lights on the roundabouts, and to hear the especially noisy music. ... I will never forget the excitement of that night's visit to the little fair.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁵ <https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/nfa/researchandarticles/boxingbooth>

¹³⁶ <http://jemmacelifehistory.co.uk>

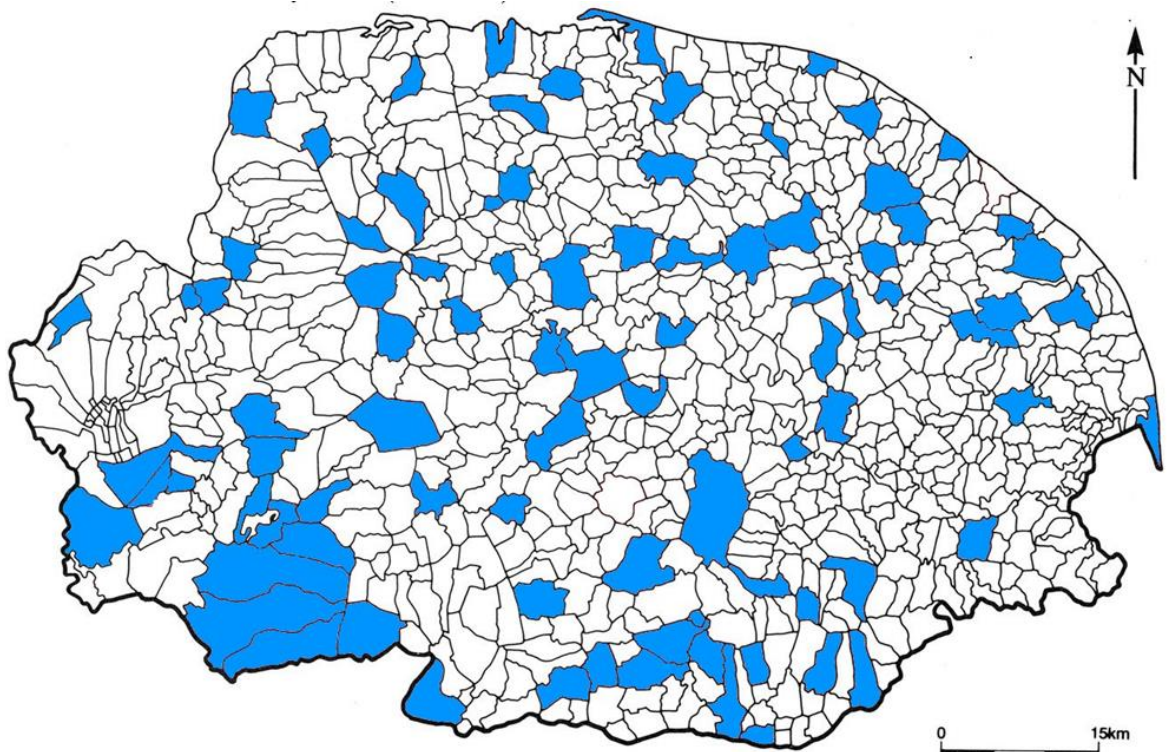
¹³⁷ *Norfolk Chronicle and Norwich Gazette*, 'Pooley Mace' 24 September 1864 p. 6, 'Lynn' 16 September 1865 p. 6, Mackie (comp.), *Norfolk annals*, pp. 138, 150.

¹³⁸ The attraction of an extraordinary event was particularly evident at the execution in Norwich of Samuel Yarham for murder in April 1846, when between 20,000 and 30,000 people from the city and the surrounding countryside gathered on Castle Hill to witness the event. A fair set up to take advantage of the crowds was very successful. 'Execution of Samuel Yarham,' *Norfolk Chronicle and Norwich Gazette*, 18 April 1846, [p. 2].

¹³⁹ Other venues are evidenced by the name 'Fairstead', which appears in several places, not only in Norfolk. Examples also exist in Bolton in Lancashire, Chelmsford in Essex and Newmarket in Suffolk. This 'proof' should be approached with caution, however, as the name can also mean 'a fair or pleasant place'. See also note 153 below.

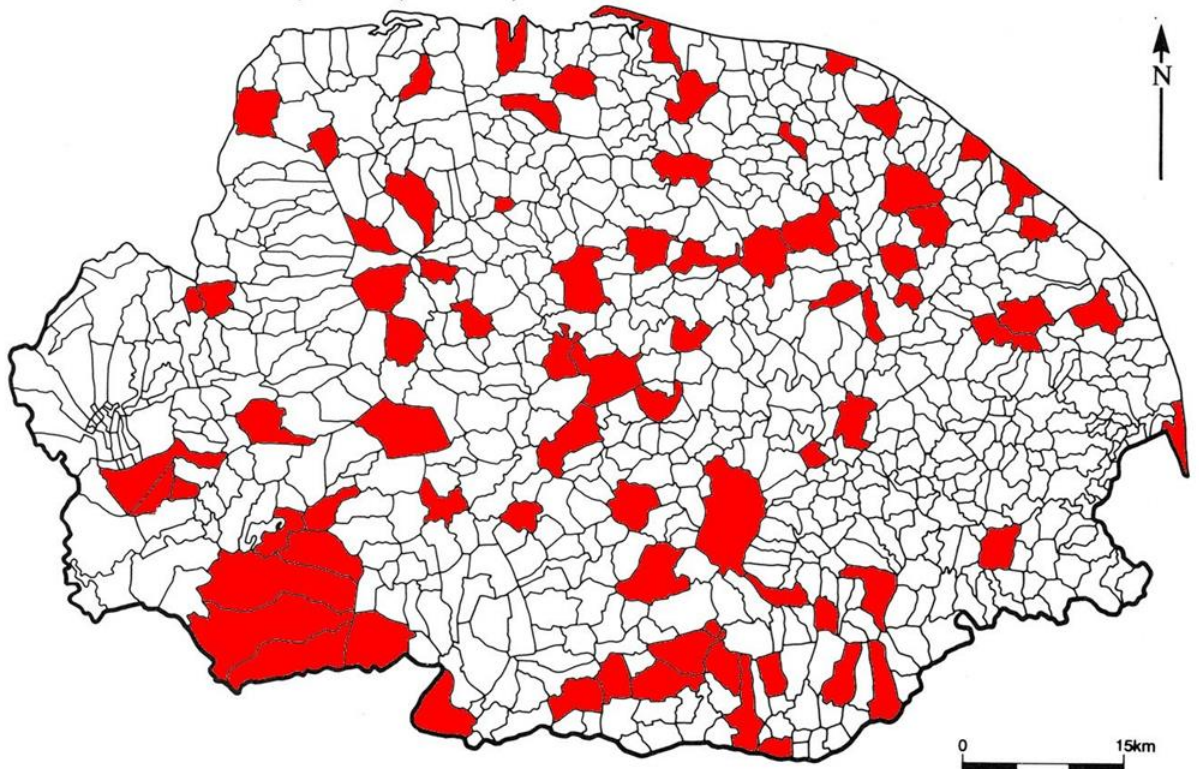
¹⁴⁰ Norfolk Federation of Women's Institutes, *Within living memory*. (1972), p. 60.

She anticipated an evening of fun and frolic and was not disappointed. Further evidence of the popularity of rural fairs is revealed in contemporary photographs, showing crowds of fairgoers in the countryside.¹⁴¹

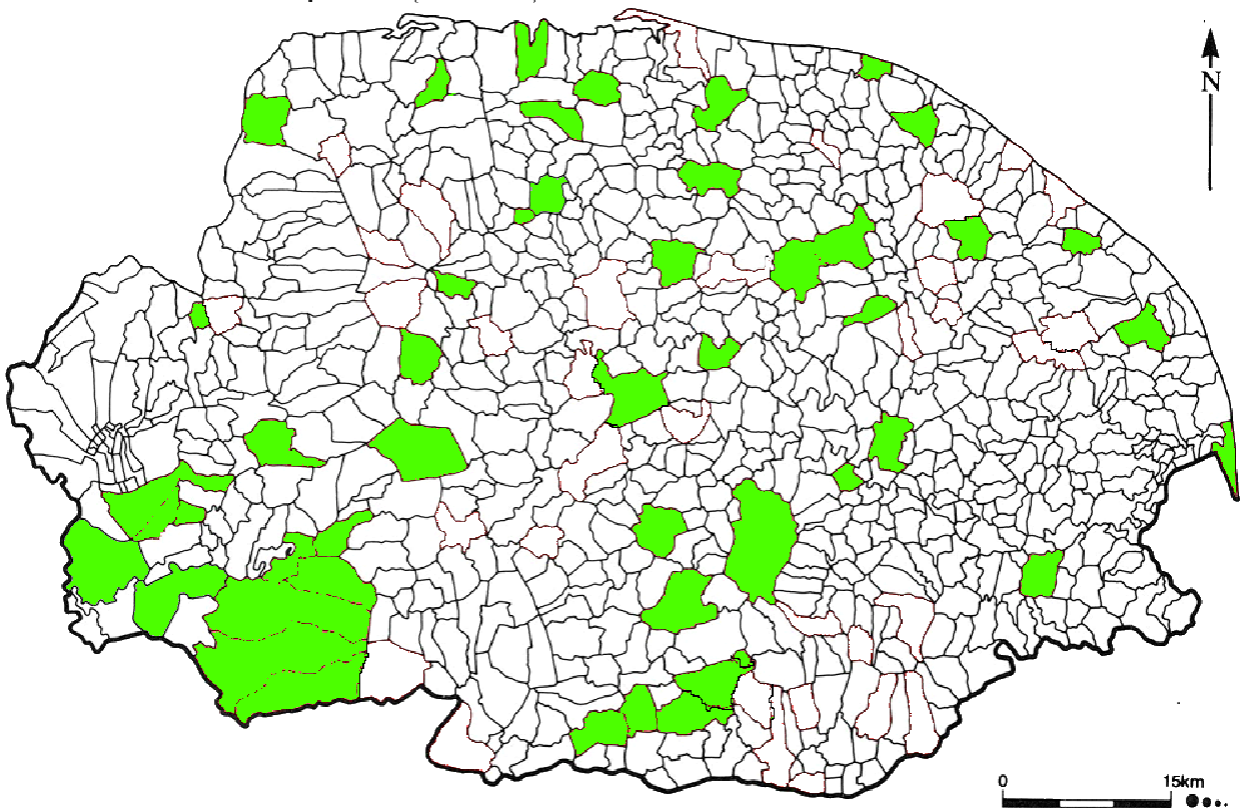


Geographical spread of fairs operating in Norfolk, according to Francis White, *History, gazetteer and directory of Norfolk 1854*.

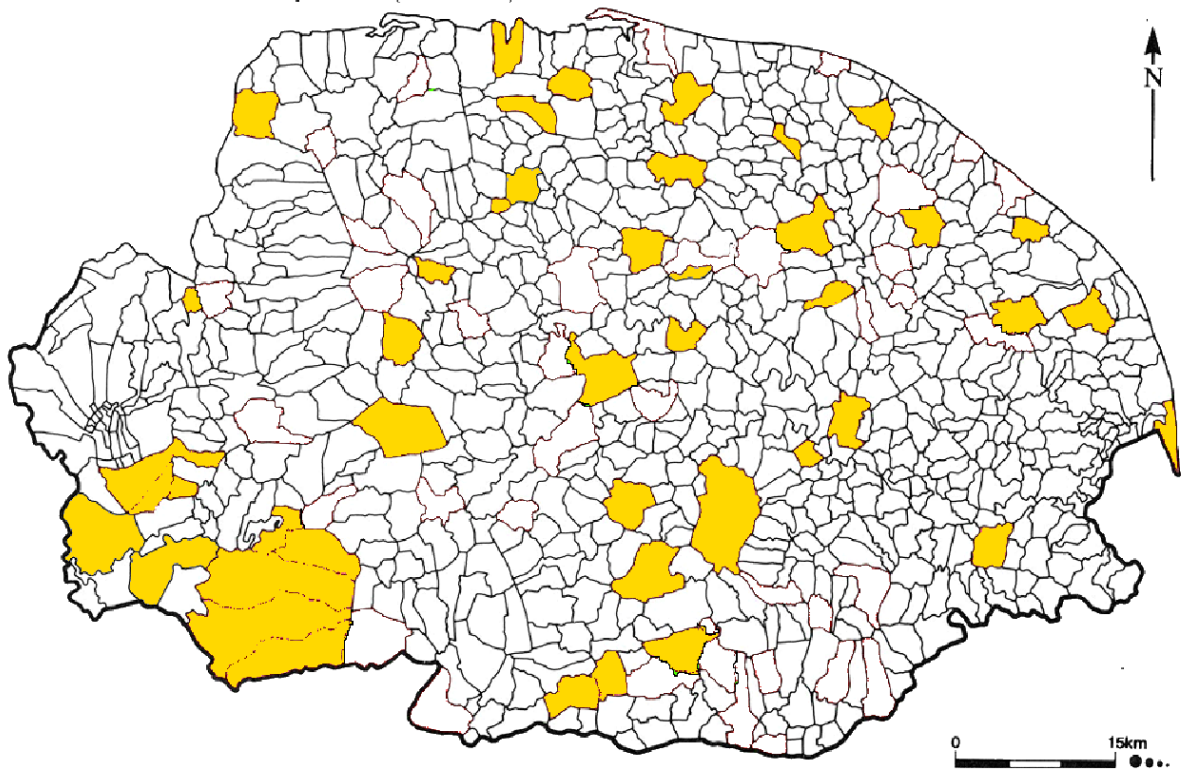
¹⁴¹ A good selection of photographs can be found in Gordon Winter, *A country camera 1844-1914* (Harmondsworth, 1973), pp. 88-93.



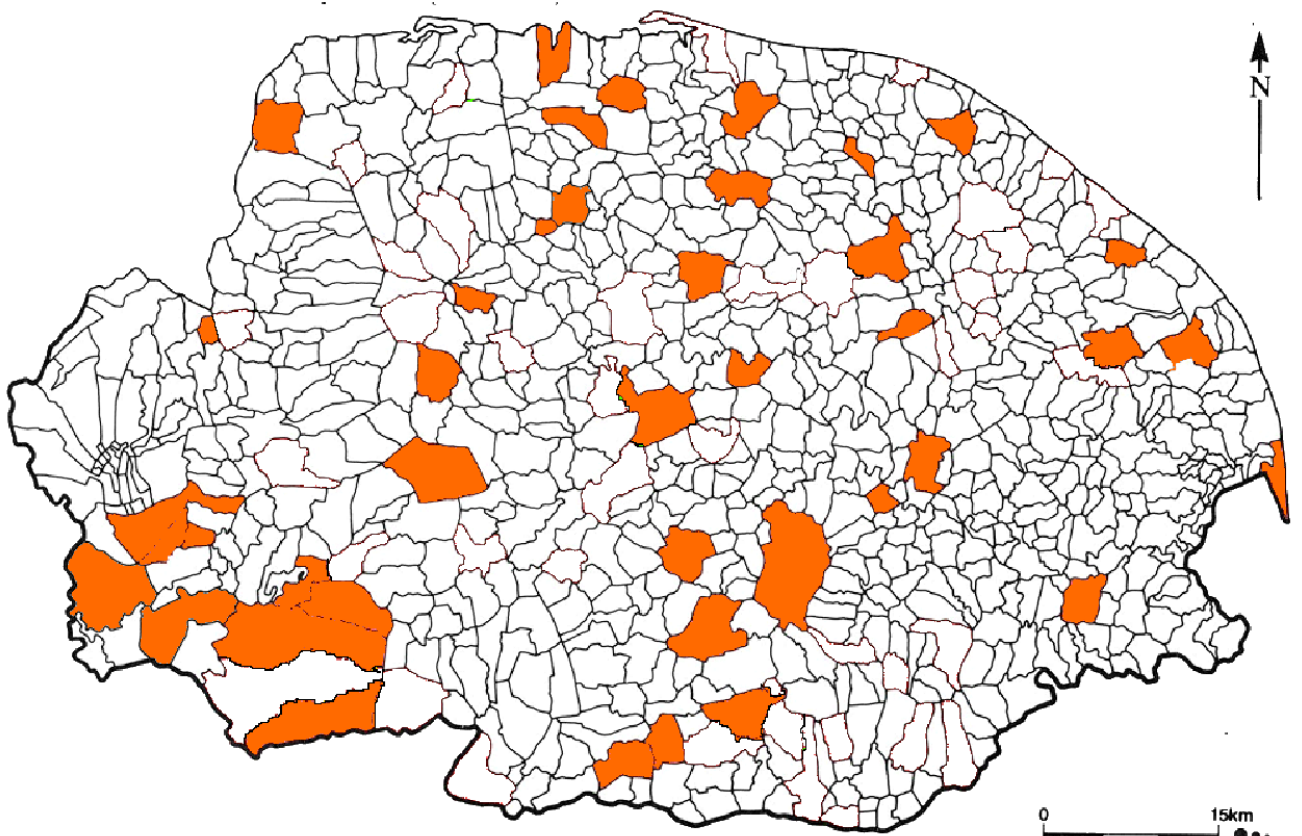
Geographical spread of fairs operating in Norfolk, according to *Kelly's directory of Norfolk 1883*.



Geographical spread of fairs operating in Norfolk, according to *Kelly's directory of Norfolk 1896*.



Geographical spread of fairs operating in Norfolk, according to *Kelly's directory of Norfolk 1912*.



Geographical spread of fairs operating in Norfolk, according to *Kelly's directory of Norfolk 1929*.

Table 3 Norfolk fairs 1854-1937

<i>Year</i>	<i>Number of fairs</i>	<i>Directory</i>	<i>Difference in numbers</i>
1854	136	Francis White's	
1856	124	Craven & Co.'s	12
1883	117	William White's	7
1896	75	Kelly's	42
1912	61	Kelly's	14
1933	51	Kelly's	10
1937	48	Kelly's	3

This gradual shrinking in numbers was aggravated by mounting rural depopulation, which adversely modified the essential role of many country fairs. From Table 3 we can see that the greatest decrease in numbers happened between 1883 and 1896, and this was a direct consequence of the passing of the Fairs Act in 1871. There had been many laws passed aimed at regulating the conduct of fairs, but this statute was the first which allowed their legal abolition 'on representation of magistrates, with consent of owner':

whereas certain of the fairs held in England and Wales are unnecessary, are the cause of grievous immorality, and are very injurious to the inhabitants of the towns in which such fairs are held, and it is therefore expedient to make provision to facilitate the abolition of such fairs.¹⁴²

The reason, why the Fairs Act of 1871 was considered necessary, becomes clear upon examination of specific cases. The Norfolk Record Office has in its care documents describing the individual results of this legislation, of which the following is a typical example:

... a pleasure fair has from time immemorial been held in the ... parish of Banham annually on the 22 day of June and John Oddin Taylor is entitled to certain tolls and profits arising from such fair and ... John George Fardell and William Gaymer and George Newson as representing the parishioners of Banham have represented to ... John Oddin Taylor ... that the annual holding of the said fair is a public mischief and a private nuisance in that the said

¹⁴² *Fairs Act, 1871*, c. 12; for further information on other relevant laws, see Walford, *Fairs past and present*, pp. 12-53.

Parish during the said Fair is resorted to by many disreputable persons and that immorality intemperance and other vices are promoted thereby. And ... John Oddin Taylor has consented in deference to the feelings of the parishioners thus expressed to give his consent under the provisions of "The Fairs Act 1871" to the abolition of the said pleasure fair.¹⁴³

This is interesting, because although John Taylor was lord of the manor, he lived in Norwich twenty-one miles away and possibly did not have a great knowledge of the day to day affairs of the village, therefore accepting the opinions of those villagers who had most local power. John Fardell was the resident rector, William Gaymer was a farmer and George Newson was a landowner and also a farmer.¹⁴⁴ These men were probably not the main consumers of the pleasurable aspects of the fair. Did they canvass the opinions of those who were – possibly the working men and their families? It is unlikely. It may be that they felt that the fair was a nuisance, in that it affected their employees' ability to work the following day through the unpleasant after-effects of overindulgence. One concern may have been that time spent at the fair ate into normal working time: '1900 Sept 5 Wednesday All helping to Thresh &c ... got done about 11 a.m. Men did no more to Day went to Kipton Fair ...'¹⁴⁵

Admittedly this is a very short diary entry, but there seems to be an element of acceptance of a long-established tradition by the farmer. Nevertheless, at Banham the *status quo* was not tolerated, and the abolition of the fair was one more example of social control.

The 'grievous immorality' mentioned in the Fairs Act – the disreputable side of fairs – had been a source of worry to the church and those in authority for many years. As the fair's serious commercial aspect dwindled, its fundamental nature changed. The hiring fair was a particular cause for disquiet. These gatherings attracted all the paraphernalia and attractions of a pleasure fair, turning them into almost independent festive celebrations, while also attracting censure for the intoxication and debauchery involved.

¹⁴³ NRO, PD 552/45 Parish records of Banham, Banham Heath and Church Green. Agreement for the abolition of a fair at Banham 1873.

¹⁴⁴ *J. G. Harrod & Co.'s royal county directory of Norfolk with Lowestoft in Suffolk, 1877*, p. 34.

¹⁴⁵ NRO, MC 2612/4/2, 988X9 [Papers of Miss (Doris) Mary Daplyn ... Farm Day books of Green Farm, Thursford].

As early as 1856, Greville John Chester, then a curate in Yorkshire, published a long, earnest sermon, entitled ‘Statute fairs: their evils and their remedy’, which included many cautionary examples of the results of these events. He suggested that ‘the apathy of the gentry and clergy’ was one of the main reasons why nothing was being done to correct matters but admitted that some improvements were taking place, such as the fact that the railways, where they existed, transported many servants back home to the countryside ‘at an early hour’ and thus greatly reduced ‘the number of drunken cases’ and presumably the possibility of further immorality on that particular occasion.¹⁴⁶ Another Yorkshire curate, James Skinner, was similarly concerned and in 1861 published ‘Facts and opinions concerning statute hirings’. In this he reported respected citizens’ observations of the amusements available after the ‘business of the day... [had] drawn to a close’:

the inexperienced lad and lass, with the fruits of their last year’s labours in their pockets, are naturally led for refreshment to the neighbouring public-house ... most without moral control, and all without the control of masters, or ... parents ... The very devils in hell would delight and be satisfied with the orgies and revels that follow.

... drinking, dancing and singing with drunken men and prostitutes.

... thousands upon thousands date their destruction of body and soul to their attendance at the Statute Fairs.¹⁴⁷

These are strong words indeed, but these descriptions are one-sided, and it would be instructive to have a testimony from one or two of the servants who attended these fairs. Skinner was not a harsh man – ‘these poor labourers look forward to the period when released, for a brief space, from their constant toil they shall enjoy that rest which brings them back with cheerfulness to their work’. He wanted to act fairly towards the farm servants and suggested the establishment in towns and villages of register offices, where servants could enrol and employers could enquire about potential employees. He insisted, however, on the retention of the holiday itself – ‘It

¹⁴⁶ Greville John Chester, *Statute fairs: their evils and their remedy* (York, 1856), pp. 15, 20. This advantage of the railways was again perceived about ten years later in a Parliamentary report: ‘hiring fairs are productive of great immorality, but it is generally admitted that the railways are, to a great extent, amending this, conveying the young people to the fair in the morning instead of overnight’. 1867-68 [4068] *Commission on the employment of children, young persons, and women in agriculture (1867). First report of the commissioners*, p. 70.

¹⁴⁷ James Skinner, *Facts and opinions concerning statute hirings respectfully addressed to the landowners, clergy, farmers and tradesmen of the East Riding of Yorkshire* (London, 1861), pp. 7, 9, 10.

may be sometimes ... converted into a scene of revelry and drunkenness, but it has blessings, advantages which it would be unwise and unkind to forego'.¹⁴⁸

In the south Norfolk village of Weeting in 1852, the curate Francis Luke was in a perfect fever of condemnation of fairs in general, but, unlike Skinner, he had no sympathy at all with the fairgoers and no suggestions for improvement:

...the low publican with greedy thirst of unhallowed gains, ministers to the basest passions of the lowest in the land. Here are collected the very refuse of society, the Pariahs of humanity, who for a few hours turn the retired and silent green into a perfect pandemonium ... As the night draws on, excess and anger, hate and violence end the scene. ... This concentration of depravity, this degradation of humanity, this hotbed of future pain and misery, they call it a Fair.¹⁴⁹

The church's disapproval was not universal, as shown in this much milder reaction from yet another curate in a diary entry written in the same year as Luke's diatribe:

1852 Tuesday 10th February ... Wombwell's Collection of Wild Beasts (No. 2) I should like to see the [?] and the Yak or Peophagus – but cannot as they don't exhibit before four. ... Had a very pleasant evening. ... Walked home in the rain and heard from Gibbet Hill the unwonted sounds of Wombwell's brass Band playing the British Grenadiers.

Wednesday 11th February ... The Menagerie left for Yarmouth – after having cleared more than £40 in this small place! [Martham]¹⁵⁰

Not only clergy were concerned. Public opinion generally was strongly against hiring fairs, and this was voiced locally in 1855:

Rudham Fair. This half-yearly gathering was held on the 17th inst., and as has been the case from time immemorial, was hailed by the rustic population as the source of their greatest enjoyment. The stock fair is virtually at an end, nothing being shown but donkeys, while the pleasure department certainly becomes "small by degrees and beautifully less". Indeed the attendance this time was unprecedentedly small, an event not to be regretted, seeing that vice and immorality are, as it were, loose for the time being.¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁸ Skinner, *Facts and opinions concerning statute hirings*, p. 16.

¹⁴⁹ Francis Vyvyan Luke, *History of the parish of Weeting* (Weeting, 2004), p. 88.

¹⁵⁰ NRO, MC 1098/1 Diary [of Revd. Edward Samuel Taylor of Martham and Ormesby]; Francis White, *Directory of Norfolk* (1854), p. 456.

¹⁵¹ *The Times*, 'Wages of agricultural labourers', 15 November 1858, p. 6; 'British Association for the Advancement of Science', 22 August 1868, p. 4; 'Dorchester Candlemas fair', 15 February 1871, p. 11; 'The statute fairs', 1 January 1872, p. 7; F. O. Morris, 'Statute hirings', 24 January 1873, p. 7; 'The social science congress', 13 October 1875, p. 10; 'Dorsetshire

Although the ‘rustic population’ hailed the fair as ‘the source of their greatest enjoyment’, attendance ‘was unprecedentedly small’ – an interesting contradiction. In this particular instance, the reformers eventually won the day, and the fair was abolished in 1875.¹⁵²

At Great Cressingham and at North Elmham in the 1870s, subscription lists were drawn up in order to defray the expenses incurred by the abolition of the fair.¹⁵³ At North Elmham Lord Sondes of Elmham Hall and the vicar, the Revd. Augustus G. Legge, paid £2 and £1 respectively, and thirty-six names follow with subscriptions between one shilling and £1.¹⁵⁴ This list includes ten farmers, two blacksmiths, two bakers, two plumbers, a bootmaker, butcher, chemist, coal merchant, cooper, grocer, miller, relieving officer, saddler, schoolmaster, shopkeeper, tailor and a wheelwright.¹⁵⁵ It omits, of course, those living on minimal wages, whose attitude to the move is unrecorded.

It is true that some members of the social élite held more liberal views. The Chief Constable of Oxfordshire thus commented in 1867:

there are many statute or hiring fairs in this county, and I cannot see any objection to them. Farm servants must have their recreations as well as their betters, and those who attend such fairs are generally well conducted and as sober as persons of the country working class are when they can get beer. Girls will get sweethearts and occasionally have bastard children in spite of all Acts of Parliament.¹⁵⁶

labourers’, 8 February 1886, p. 7; ‘Rudham Fair’, *Norfolk Chronicle and Norwich Gazette*, 26 May 1855, [p.2].

¹⁵² TNA, HO 45/9392/49039 Fairs: East Rudham, Norfolk. Abolished 1875.

¹⁵³ NRO, PD 131/85 Parish records of Great Cressingham. Lease for 7years of profits and dues of Lammas Fair 1794-1872. A list of 13 subscribers of similar makeup to that in North Elmham. This list is dated April 23 1872, the abolition being completed later that year. ‘The area where the fair was held is still marked on the Ordnance Survey Map as “Fairstead”’. Wayland Partnership Development Trust, *A history of Great Cressingham* (2011), p. 21. The name of Fairstead is used in various places, giving potential clues to past locations of fairs, e.g. Fairstead Lane, Hempnall; Fairstead Close, Pulham Market; Fairstead Drove, Shouldham; Fairstead Close, North Walsham; Fairstead Road, Sprowston. NRO, PD 209/457 Parish records of North Elmham. Subscription list and solicitor’s bill relating to abolition of fair. The list is dated 10 October 1876.

¹⁵⁴ Legge, Rev. Augustus George, M.A. (vicar). E. R. Kelly (ed.), *The Post Office directory of Cambridge, Norfolk and Suffolk* (London, 1875), p. 270.

¹⁵⁵ Identified in Kelly’s directory (1875) and also Harrod, J.G., *Royal county directory of Norfolk with Lowestoft in Suffolk* (Norwich, 1875), p. 161.

¹⁵⁶ 1868-69 [4202] *Commission on the employment of children, young persons, and women in agriculture* (1867). *Second report of the commissioners*, p. 364.

Indeed, hiring fairs were still widespread in many parts of England well into the second half of the nineteenth century. In Norfolk, however, it was officially reported in 1867 that:

in Norfolk, happily, it [the hiring fair] has died down in most of the places at which it used to be held – at Swaffham and Fakenham, for example – into little more than a pleasure fair, and the hirings appear to take place with just as great facility without it.¹⁵⁷

Some staggered on as late as the 1940s.¹⁵⁸ But most, if they survived, metamorphosed completely into pleasure fairs.¹⁵⁹ Their original purpose gradually disappeared, as labour registry offices were established and newspaper advertisements for farm servants became more common during the second half of the nineteenth century.¹⁶⁰ In this way, as their commercial aspects decreased generally, all forms of fair became one genre with occasional emphases on particular features, for instance, ‘Foulsham, fair for cattle & pleasure, first Tuesday in May; Castleacre, fairs, May 1 & August 5, for toys’.¹⁶¹

Although hiring fairs *per se* may thus have declined, opposition to fairs on the part of the local élite continued, and many were closed by abolition orders through the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. They included the fairs of Harleston (1871), Gaywood (1871), Watton (1871), Great Cressingham (1872) and North Walsham (1872) among others.¹⁶² Ratification of a request for abolition was not, however, a

¹⁵⁷ 1867-68 [4068] *Commission on the employment of children, young persons, and women in agriculture (1867). First report of the commissioners*, p. 41.

¹⁵⁸ Downham Market, three large fairs for horses & cattle are held yearly ... and, for hiring servants, on the Saturday fortnight before & the Saturday after Old Michaelmas day. *Kelly's directory of Norfolk 1937* (London, 1937), p. 8. This custom actually lasted in Downham Market to the end of the Second World War. Downham Market & District Amenity Society, *A history of Downham Market* (Downham Market, 1999), p. 235.

¹⁵⁹ 1999/00 HC 284 *Environment, transport and regional affairs committee. Environment sub-committee. Travelling fairs* vol. II, p. 42.

¹⁶⁰ Horn, *Labouring life in the Victorian countryside*, p. 159.

¹⁶¹ *Kelly's directory of Norfolk 1937*, p. 8.

¹⁶² Including those mentioned above: NRO, PD 713/65 Order by the Home Secretary for the abolition of the annual fair held at Horsham St. Faith on 17 October 1873; TNA, HO 45/10231/B37095 Fairs: Gaywood, Norfolk. Order of Abolition. 1871 B37095; HO 45/10231/B37083 Fairs: Harleston, Norfolk. Order of Abolition. 1871 B37083; HO 45/10231/B37096 Fairs: Watton, Norfolk. Order of Abolition. 1871 B37096; HO 45/9300/10408 Fairs: Attleborough. Abolished 1872; HO 45/9309/12838 Fairs: Bacton, Norfolk. Abolished 1872; HO 45/9300/10514 Fairs: Great Cressingham. Abolished 1872; HO 45/9317/15782 Fairs: Lyng, Norfolk. Abolished 1872; HO 45/10231/B37105 Fairs: North Walsham, Norfolk. Order of Abolition. 1872 B37105; HO 45/9304/11805 Fairs: Pulham, Norfolk. Abolished 1872; HO 45/9320/16891 Fairs: Scole, Norfolk. Abolished 1872; HO 45/9304/11652 Fairs: Weeting-with-Broomhill, Norfolk. Abolished 1872; HO

foregone conclusion. Martham fair is a case in point. It received official authorisation for abolition in 1872 on the recommendation of magistrates. The owner, however, later claimed that his consent had not been obtained, and the order was rescinded, allowing the fair to continue.¹⁶³ It was nevertheless finally abolished in 1900.¹⁶⁴

A brief glimpse of popular opposition to the closure of fairs, albeit urban rather than rural, is provided by the case of Great Yarmouth during the First World War. In July 1916 the local vicar, the Venerable Archdeacon Charles Lisle Carr, wrote a letter outlining his objections to the Yarmouth Easter fair. These included ‘the noise made by the mechanical Organs ... absolutely intolerable’ and the ‘useless expenditure [of public money] which the coming of the Fair involves’. He concluded that:

... the loose demeanour of girls and boys ... fosters that want of self discipline which is at present making the behaviour of young people such a serious problem for the Magistrates and philanthropic workers of the Town. The scenes which are common during the Fair days are a disgrace to the Town.’¹⁶⁵

Two months later a public protest meeting against the proposed closure was organised by the Honorary Chaplain of the Showmen’s Guild (interestingly, another clergyman), Revd. T. Horne, and a resolution was passed asking the Home Office for a public enquiry. This resulted in a letter to the permanent under-secretary, Sir Edward Troup. Enclosed was a petition from the seventeen principal traders and shopkeepers in the Market Place, who claimed that the fair was ‘a source of wholesome and quite harmless amusement for ourselves and children’.¹⁶⁶ Following this spirited opposition, the Town Council eventually agreed to the fair’s continuance. It was still functioning successfully in 1931, when visited by a young

45/9341/22237 Fairs: Harpley, Norfolk. Abolished 1873; HO 45/9324/17992 Fairs: Weasenham St. Peters, Norfolk. Abolished 1873; HO 45/9379/42281 Fairs: Crimpleham, Norfolk. Abolished 1875; HO 45/9392/49039 Fairs: East Rudham, Norfolk. Abolished 1875; HO 45/9388/46897 Fairs: Great Massingham, Norfolk. Abolished 1875; HO 45/9145/56975 Fairs: Litcham, Norfolk. Abolished 1876; HO 45/9433/63185 Fairs: Acle, Norfolk. Abolished 1877-78; HO 45/9621/A16139 Fairs: Hingham, Norfolk. Abolished 1882; HO 45/9952/B32096 Fairs: Cawston Fair Norfolk. Abolished 1900.

¹⁶³ TNA, HO 45/9309/12515 Fairs: Little Walsingham, Norfolk. Application to abolish, refused. 1872; HO 45/9301/10991 Fairs: Martham. ... 1872-3.

¹⁶⁴ TNA, HO 45/9953/B32294 Fairs: Martham Fair. Abolition 1900.

¹⁶⁵ NRO, Y/TC 90/2/1 Great Yarmouth Borough archives. Town Clerk’s department. Abolition of fair.

¹⁶⁶ NRO, Y/TC 90/2/1 Great Yarmouth Borough archives. Town Clerk’s department. Abolition of fair.

haulier from Reedham, who, cycling eleven miles from his village, is a good example of the extended catchment area of urban fairs made possible by improved personal transport:

what a fantastic evening we had, the familiar steam organ, the galloping horses, the cake walk, swing boats, coconut shies, rifle ranges and many other side-shows of attraction. ... Everything was going with such a swing, that I felt as if I was out of this world.¹⁶⁷

The large, flourishing fairs in the county's cities and towns continued well into the twentieth century.¹⁶⁸ The smaller rural fairs, however, continued to be at the mercy of those in authority, who almost unanimously were hostile to their continued existence. What the rural working class lost, in terms of excitement and variety, is encapsulated in a description made of Aldborough at the turn of the century:

the Green would be fairly covered with stalls, showbooths for boxing and conjuring. ... There would be roundabouts. The first the writer remembers were pushed around from inside and we boys would take part and have a free ride for our services, and then came those with pony attached and we lost our free rides. Then came the real steam-horses which were very grand, lit up at night by the old oil flares. There would be cheap jacks, men dancing on hot irons, sword swallows, Wild West shows etc. ... The fair did not pass off too smoothly as there would be free-fights as most of the outstanding quarrels of the local fairs were settled at Aldborough this being the last local fair of the year. There would be occasional quarrels among the van dwellers, the writer having seen living vans turned over with people in them and a good deal of rough play.¹⁶⁹

Circuses and menageries

Although villages could not expect the huge extravaganzas afforded to cities and towns, they did not miss out entirely. Before railways revolutionised transport, conveyance of people and goods had to be by road, and circus proprietors used this necessity for their own advantage, as in the case of Sanger at Long Sutton.¹⁷⁰ If the circus did not actually put on a show in the village, there was still the opportunity to witness the cavalcade passing through, with perhaps the excitement of viewing exotic animals in mobile cages. An example of this occurred in December 1845,

¹⁶⁷ Arthur Stanley Broom, *Bob's boy. The life story of a Norfolk countryman* (Norwich, 1984), p. 68.

¹⁶⁸ A list of fairs in 1929 includes those in the towns of Aylsham, Downham Market, Fakenham, Holt, King's Lynn, Norwich, Swaffham and Great Yarmouth. *Kelly's directory of Norfolk 1929*, p. 10.

¹⁶⁹ Entwistle, *A century of faces and places*, pp. 8-9.

¹⁷⁰ See pp. 59-60 above.

when a tiger broke free from a menagerie travelling through Potter Heigham causing terror in the village. Fortunately it was soon captured unhurt and without anyone being injured.¹⁷¹ These processions were well worth seeing, as they could include such animals as alpacas, elephants, lions, panthers, polar bears, rhinoceroses, tigers and tapirs.

One of the factors that made circuses so popular was that they travelled to their audiences, an important fact at a time when rural people rarely ventured beyond the nearest market town. These individual enterprises were not small side shows tied to fairs but operated independently. In the 1850s and 1860s the possibility of a ready-made audience in every village with no other entertainment immediately within reach encouraged many aspiring entrepreneurs to set up their own circuses, which stopped at smaller settlements in addition to larger urban areas.¹⁷² Indeed George Sanger claimed that every community in England with a population of over one hundred people had been visited by a Sanger's circus, while James William Chipperfield, of the famous Chipperfield circus family, boasted that he knew every village in Great Britain.¹⁷³ Cost, however, was still a hindrance for some people: '1890 [as a child I was] ... taken to Holt, walking a distance of four miles to see a Circus go round the town. Not to *go* to the circus – that would have cost too much money'.¹⁷⁴

Although by definition, the purveyors of travelling entertainment did not linger long in one place, they were nevertheless affected by elements of local social control, as demonstrated by the opposition to and closure of numerous fairs. This tended to have a greater impact on smaller fairs, which visited villages rather than towns, thus impinging on rural leisure. It is also arguable that the improvements in transport contributed to the decline of smaller fairs, in that they allowed access to the probably more favoured larger fairs, circuses and menageries in towns, while developments in technology increased the variety of available diversions.

¹⁷¹ 'Escape of a tiger' *Norfolk Chronicle and Norwich Gazette*, 22 December 1845, Mackie, (comp.), *Norfolk annals* vol.1, p. 468; <http://www.heritagecity.org/research-centre/at-leisure-in-norwich/the-circus-in-nineteenth-century-norwich.htm>.

¹⁷² M. Willson Disher, *Fairs, circuses and music halls*, p. 32.

¹⁷³ <http://www.vam.ac.uk/content/articles/v/victorian-circus/>; Rupert Croft-Cooke (ed.), *The circus book* (London, 1948); <http://www.twjc.co.uk/books/thecircusbook.html>

¹⁷⁴ Norfolk Federation of Women's Institutes, *Within living memory*. (1972), p. 61.

The temporary nature of the whole spectrum of travelling entertainment belied its long-lasting effect on the lives of rural working people. The drabness and lack of excitement of their everyday routine were accepted as the norm, until the arrival of some form of 'foreign' leisure activity, whether it be a dancing bear, an itinerant musician, a circus, a menagerie or a fair, all with their impressions of very different lives. The varied experiences, provided by leisure activities imported from unknown regions, not only opened up previously unimagined exotic visions of the world but also with unrestrained enjoyment countered the monotony and hard unremitting toil of ordinary life.

Conclusion

In the nineteenth century village people were gradually dispossessed of many of their former celebratory customs. Harvest home and church/chapel bands, for instance, were replaced by religious harvest festivals and organs respectively; fairs, cruel animal sports, racing, boxing and gambling all came under pressure, and – with the exception of fairs and gambling – were either abolished (animal sports) or developed along more 'acceptable' lines. The pleasure side of trading or hiring fairs was popular, but they stimulated antagonism because of the drunkenness and immorality they generated. In spite of their popularity, they eventually declined, not only because of opposition but also as a reflection of people's easier mobility enabling them to visit the larger town and city fairs. Public houses were frowned upon, and consternation expressed about drunkenness and its consequent evils. Alternatives, particularly 'rational recreation', were suggested, but these were not always positively accepted, although the temperance movement with its attendant recreational offerings had some success in rural areas.

There is no doubt that philanthropists in the nineteenth century wished for a better world for the working classes. The evidence of hardship, poverty and in some cases execrable working conditions was irrefutable, particularly in the earlier part of the period. Optimistic upper class perfectionists wished for a kind of Utopia – a place where the ideal of the ordered society was approved by all, and where everyone accepted his station in life without question. This unrealistic proposition understandably never became actual, and an uneasy compromise was reached by the

turn of the century, whereby the working man gradually took charge of his own purposes and intentions, both in work and leisure.

In many ways the First World War sealed the fate of the old order, when so many young men did not return from service overseas, including a disproportionate number of those from the upper classes.¹⁷⁵ Although the vision of Lloyd George's 'land fit for heroes to live in' was overtaken by significant economic hindrances, a new social and political confidence sprang up amongst rural communities. During the inter-war years local people – both middle-class residents and members of the broader working class – began to take control of leisure pursuits, often organising them down to the last detail without any interference. At the same time they were exposed to entirely new forms of recreation, the consequence of a range of technological advances. It is these latter developments which form the subject of the next chapter.

¹⁷⁵ Taylor, *English history, 1914-1945*, p. 120.

Chapter 4. Broadening horizons: transport and technology

Country life is not dull to those who are brought up to it. On the contrary, it is full of interest. Strange as it may appear to those who have not experienced it, there is an intense delight to the cultivator of luxuriant crops in a garden or allotment ... Then, the village gossip, vacuous as it seem to an outsider, is interesting above all other things to the villagers. There is no lack of merriment in the gatherings of men and lads to be found in village streets on summer evenings ... or in the meetings of familiar acquaintances in the public-houses ...¹

These words, spoken by Mr. William Bear, an Assistant Commissioner from Streatham in 1892, about the country people of Woburn in Bedfordshire, would have been endorsed by many élite commentators in nineteenth-century England. Such a description would not, however, have been recognised so enthusiastically by rural working people, for it does not acknowledge the extent to which human nature loves novelty, sadly lacking in village life at the start of the period investigated. This situation gradually changed as new pastimes appeared, augmenting or even replacing the few existing recreational opportunities available to country people.

Historians of leisure have focused their attention on the combined impact, from the late nineteenth century, of increases in leisure time, and higher disposable incomes. The weekly half-holiday was introduced in the 1860s, and the term ‘weekend’ became common parlance during the following decade.² The Bank Holidays Act (1871) ensured a national minimum of public holidays, and the important link between the holiday and the health and contentment of the nation was finally realised, when the Holidays with Pay Act (1938) marked the end of a twenty-year campaign for paid leisure time. In Norfolk, however, agricultural labourers were already benefiting from seven days’ holiday pay.³ Additional considerations are the reduction in family size, which fell from 3.5 to 1.7 children during the twentieth

¹ 1893-94. [C.6894-1] *Royal commission on labour. The agricultural labourer* vol. 1. *England*. Part 1, p. 18b. See also Seebohm Rowntree and Kendall, *How the labourer lives*, pp.173, 206.

² Pimlott, *Recreations*, p. 40.

³ Jones, *Workers at play*, p. 19.

century, and the fact that domestic labour-saving appliances became the norm, releasing time from housework drudgery.⁴

While these changes in living conditions were of crucial importance in transforming leisure opportunities, it is arguable that a whole range of technological changes were equally significant.⁵ These brought new forms of entertainment to the countryside. The piano's supremacy in many English parlours was challenged when Thomas Edison (1847-1931) introduced his phonograph to England in 1888. Quickly becoming popular, this together with the later introduction of radio enhanced people's knowledge of music, although it simultaneously reduced live music in the home. Regular radio programmes began in 1922 and limited television broadcasts in 1936. These reinforced 'the uniformity of the English people', subtly weakening regional differences. By 1939 90% of homes owned a 'wireless set', although television did not have the same impact until the 1950s.⁶ But technological change also allowed greater personal mobility: railways brought working people a wider vision.⁷ Railways, and subsequently motorised transport, allowed rural people opportunities to reach not just local towns but also cities, with their undreamed of entertainments, such as music halls, theatres and, at the turn of the century, cinemas. This new pleasurable contact with urban life engendered discontent with what had been acceptable before, particularly among young workers, and was said to be a factor in the contemporary rural depopulation, so perturbing to those in authority.⁸

There was, needless to say, a complex interplay between improvements in working conditions – in terms of pay and holidays – and technological change. As Ogburn put it: 'technology changes society by changing our environment to which we, in turn, adapt. This change is usually in the material environment, and the adjustment we make to the changes often modifies customs and social institutions'.⁹

⁴ Joe Hicks & Grahame Allen, *A century of change: trends in UK, statistics since 1900*, p. 5.

⁵ Pimlott, *Recreations*, pp. 54-5; Borsay, *A history of leisure*, pp. 15-16; Jones, *Workers at play*, pp. 34-61.

⁶ Taylor, *English history, 1914-1945*, pp. 234, 307.

⁷ Springall, *Labouring life in Norfolk villages*, p.19.

⁸ Seebohm Rowntree and Kendall, *How the labourer lives*, p. 325; Bennett, *Problems of village life*, pp.77-8.

⁹ William Fielding Ogburn, 'How Technology Changes Society', *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, vol. 249 (1947), p. 81.

With the multiplication of fresh methods of spending the increasing available leisure time, new industries sprang up, devoted to recreation management. One of the most remarkable was that of Thomas Cook (1808-1892), who started his famous travel company in July 1841 with a successful one-day rail excursion at a shilling a head from Leicester to Loughborough.¹⁰ In this manner the concept of travel for pleasure was born. For many people visiting the seaside was a novel experience, prompted by the extension of the railways along the coasts of England, while cheap travel made it a feasible proposition for all classes.

Public transport

Railways

The media were quick to seize their chance and encouraged the new railway companies to place advertisements, urging the working classes to take advantage of these novel opportunities.

Excursion trains. It is very much to the credit of the Directors of Railways, that they have ... [promoted] the ... recreation of the middle and working classes, by running, at intervals, cheap trains between the principal places on their respective lines; which enable many thousands to make excursions ... who, under ordinary circumstances, would be confined in their own localities.¹¹

The potential customer is left in no doubt about the popularity of this new mode of transport. It was still new, because this particular line had opened only two years previously.¹²

On Monday morning ... a train started from Yarmouth ... The larger proportion of the travellers, 1500 in number, were country people, of the working classes ... The train was increased at every station as it progressed towards London, till it reached the number of 52 carriages, containing about 2000 passengers, including children. They arrived safe in London at a quarter past 5 o'clock ... The passengers thus forwarded to the metropolis can return by any afternoon train, up to Monday next.¹³

¹⁰ Delgado, *The annual outing*, p.39.

¹¹ 'Excursion trains' *Norfolk Chronicle and Norwich Gazette*, 4 July 1846, [p. 2].

¹² D. I. Gordon, *The Eastern Counties. A regional history of the railways of Great Britain* vol. 5, p. 177.

¹³ 'Excursion trains' *Norfolk Chronicle and Norwich Gazette*, 4 July 1846, [p. 2].

In the same year the Norfolk and Eastern Counties Railway introduced a yet cheaper rate of travel and termed it 'Fourth-class':

Fourth-class trains. The directors of the Norfolk and Eastern Counties Railway, with a view to give the poorer classes greater facilities in travelling by railway, have started a fourth-class train, ... from Yarmouth to Norwich, and through to London, for 7s 6d; and a return ticket available from Monday, or any other day to the following Sunday for 10s, which is little more than ¼d per mile. This arrangement must be a great boon to many persons, who will now be enabled to visit London, to which high fares would prove a prohibition.¹⁴

Railways became a normal means of transport, enabling fast access for rural residents to the city of Norwich: '[1900] April 12 Thursday ... Fred drove W. Bushell and JB to Thursford Station for Tombland Fair 9.23 A.M. train. ... Fred came and met us at the Station about 6.30 P.M. Jennie & Cart'.¹⁵

Gaining in popularity, excursions by train continued into the early twentieth century, the 'heyday of cut-rate excursion traffic'.¹⁶

In April 1924 the Empire was celebrated at the British Empire Exhibition at Wembley. ... There was great excitement in our home: Mother was taking my sister and me ... to Wembley. Norwich Co-op had chartered a train and were picking up at North Walsham. ... [A detailed description of the Exhibition follows.] ... The last thing I remember as I fell asleep on the train was hearing singing:

Let's go to the Exhibition, Exhibition 1924
That's the place to be, Oh! It's better than the sea
So all take a holiday and go to Wemberley!¹⁷

Bulk transport meant low fares, and occasionally firms would charter a train for the staff annual outing.¹⁸ One disadvantage, however, was that remote places were not capable of being visited by rail. In contrast, from the early 1900s a charabanc (an early form of motor coach) provided a more flexible, door-to-door service. Another way of counteracting this difficulty was to use a mixture of transport. In June 1910 a

¹⁴ 'Fourth-class trains' *Norfolk Chronicle and Norwich Gazette*, 5 December 1846, [p. 2].

¹⁵ NRO, MC 2612/4/2, 988X9 Papers of Miss (Doris) Mary Daplyn ... Farm Day books of Green Farm, Thursford, 1897-1901.

¹⁶ T. C. Barker and C. I. Savage, *An economic history of transport in Britain*, p.113.

¹⁷ Norfolk Federation of Women's Institutes (1995), *Norfolk within living memory*, pp. 230-231.

¹⁸ Barker and Savage, *Economic history of transport in Britain.*, p.15; photograph of Wymondham, Briton Brush Company staff excursion to Skegness. <https://norfolk.spydus.co.uk/cgi-bin/spydus.exe/ENQ/PICNOR/BIBENQ?BRN=712526>

party of scholars, ranging in age from seventeen to seventy, from the Carrow Men's First Day School, left Norwich by train for a day in London. Arriving at Liverpool Street Station, they transferred to motor buses for a tour round historic sites of the city. After an interesting time, they travelled back to Norwich, again by train.¹⁹ The flexibility of the charabanc, however, and the comparatively quiet roads made this vehicle, rather than the train, the preferred method of transport for excursions. This preference extended into the era of the 'pleasure coaches' in the 1930s, when their earnings increased by 20% between 1932 and 1935.²⁰ Hence travel became a possibility for those whose horizons had largely been restricted to the local market town. Indeed the journey itself became part of the enjoyment of a day out, while the rural population appreciated a wider view of the world.

Motor transport – Buses

'[1912] The Aunt I visited at Horstead told of how before buses or trains, she and her husband walked seven miles each way whenever they visited Norwich, sometimes even pushing a pram.'²¹ In addition to 'Shanks's pony', in the Victorian era those of small means had recourse to the local carrier, who provided the passenger and delivery services, albeit primitive, crucial to rural residents, particularly those who lived in communities not yet linked to the railway network. Nearly every village had its own carrier or one that passed through. Useful though carriers were, they had disadvantages. Their average speed was three miles an hour, and their vans were distinctly uncomfortable.²² Nonetheless, they provided an important service and were in particular demand on market days. Organised excursions were popular from the Victorian period onwards. Charities sent children to the seaside, Sunday school outings took place annually, and villages arranged special pleasure-trips.²³ Sometimes a steam engine hauled more than one farm cart

¹⁹ Delgado, *The annual outing*, pp.72-74.

²⁰ J. A. R. Pimlott, *The Englishman's holiday, a social history* (London, 1947), p. 257.

²¹ Norfolk Federation of Women's Institutes (1973), *Within living memory*, p. 114.

²² Philip Bagwell and Peter Lyth, *Transport in Britain: from canal lock to gridlock* (London, 2002), p. 38.

²³ 11 August 1898. NRO, MC 2612/4/2, 988X9 Farm Day books of Green Farm, Thursford. This entry mentions the London Children's Country Holiday Society. This was the Children's Country Holiday Fund, which was established in 1884 by Reverend Samuel Barnett and his wife Henrietta. Originally called "The Children's Fresh Air Mission (Off to the Country)" the charity's aim was to take children from London's slums to the country or seaside for

at a time, as on the Baptist Sunday School outing from Stalham (Figure 3). The engine could travel at four miles per hour but was restricted to two miles per hour in town (The Locomotives Act 1865), so the outing was not bound for a distant destination.²⁴ A horse can trot at eight to ten miles per hour, and it is difficult to understand why horses were not used, unless the traction engine was regarded as a novelty.²⁵



Figure 3: Baptist Sunday School outing from Stalham

These engines were used for agricultural purposes, and as farmers regularly lent wagons for charitable functions, this provision of transport was not unusual.²⁶

Excursions therefore occurred before the general introduction of motorised transport in the 1910s and 20s, although distances were necessarily limited. The advent of the motor bus service made a tremendous difference. Faster and more comfortable than the carrier's van, the bus brought country people into towns where cinemas and other

holidays in the fresh air. In 1886 the name changed to The Children's Country Holidays Fund (CCHF). July 22 1873 60 Sunday school children taken to Hasbro [Happisborough] for a treat in 2 vans furnished by Mrs Walter and Brisley. High tea in tithe barn. NRO, MC798/1796x8 Diary of Mrs George Wilkinson of Mundesley. Photograph of an outing party in a wagonette outside the bakery, Heacham. <https://norfolk.spydus.co.uk/cgi-bin/spydus.exe/ENQ/PICNOR/BIBENQ?BRN=712175>

²⁴ <http://www.dft.gov.uk/dvla/forms/~media/pdf/leaflets/inf57.ashx>

²⁵ <http://www.ultimatehorsesite.com/info/horsespeedmph.htm>

²⁶ Derek Rayner, *Traction engines and other steam road engines*, pp. 12-13.

recreational activities beckoned. By 1930 most main and many secondary roads were served by this form of transport, enabling isolated communities to participate in their 'regional, economic and social network.'²⁷ In the early twentieth century, at Forncett St. Peter, a village 14 miles from Norwich, local buses were evidently well used, bringing the amenities of the city within easy reach.²⁸ An interesting corollary of the availability of easier travel was that people could work further away from home, and the time used to get to and from their employment may have reduced their leisure hours.²⁹ Nevertheless, there is no doubt that more people now had access to urban entertainment.

In the first three decades of the twentieth century train operators were in increasing competition with bus companies. In a map of Norfolk railways, it is noticeable that trains did not reach large tracts of countryside.³⁰ Before the motor age, independent horse-drawn bus services frequently existed to connect outlying communities with main railway junctions such as Norwich, permitting rural residents to travel further afield, possibly even to London. These were gradually replaced by motor buses in the early twentieth century. To counteract this competition, by Act of Parliament in 1904 the Great Eastern Railway obtained powers to build a fleet of buses, offering routes to and from numerous towns and villages, including Ipswich, Lowestoft, Norwich, Chelmsford and Bury St. Edmunds.³¹ Thus, Loddon, a village not on the railway network, 11 miles south-east of Norwich, could now be connected with the city.³²

The delights of London and other cities became even more available, as long-distance bus services developed after the mid-1920s, when rivalry between transport companies kept fares low. Cross-country coaches could compete directly with trains in the time the journey took, because few or no changes were necessary, and also most coaches acted as local buses at the country end of the route, eliminating for

²⁷ Barker and Savage, *Economic history of transport in Britain*, p.164; James Walvin, *Beside the seaside: a social history of the popular seaside holiday* (London, 1978), pp. 110-111.

²⁸ Photograph of a rural bus, Forncett St. Peter. <https://norfolk.spydus.co.uk/cgi-bin/spydus.exe/ENQ/PICNOR/BIBENQ?BRN=712903>

²⁹ K. Liepmann, *The journey to work*, p. 50.

³⁰ Ashwin and Davison (eds.), *Historical atlas of Norfolk*, p. 153.

³¹ John Hibbs, *The history of British bus services*, p. 48.

³² Photograph of a Great Eastern Railway bus, Loddon. <https://norfolk.spydus.co.uk/cgi-bin/spydus.exe/ENQ/PICNOR/BIBENQ?BRN=712898>

many people an extra journey home from the terminus.³³ In *English journey* (1937) J. B. Priestley (1894-1984) reasoned that coach travel had ‘annihilated the old distinction between rich and poor travellers’, as it presented ‘luxury to all but the most poverty-stricken’.³⁴ Bagwell disagrees, however, because ‘the poor who travelled by coach still had to make their own way to and from the coach stations. The rich could drive from door to door.’³⁵

The introduction of motor buses and the charabanc’s evolution from a horse-drawn vehicle to a motorised one facilitated the transportation of more people in a single vehicle, as in an outing in the 1920s arranged by the firm of Arthur Brett and Sons, a Norwich furniture manufacturer, when forty employees could be accommodated in one conveyance.³⁶ Charabancs, common in England during the early twentieth century, were usually open-topped.³⁷ Their development after the First World War was encouraged by the government’s decision to sell 60,000 War Department lorries at low prices.³⁸ Many of these vehicles were converted into charabancs. In Norwich the firm of Bush and Twiddy constructed them with bodies of ash-wood, metal cladding, upholstered seats and collapsible canvas hoods.³⁹ The overall design was not altered until the 1930s, when they became obsolete with the development of the touring coach.⁴⁰ Charabancs were popular for sight-seeing, pub or social club excursions, or ‘works outings’ and were used principally for day trips, as they were not comfortable enough for longer journeys.

Transport improvements and holidays

In the 1930s motor coaches (then still known as ‘charas’ to many people) allowed a widening social group to enjoy not only day trips together but also seaside holidays. As Walvin observes:

³³ Hibbs, *History of British bus services*, p. 165.

³⁴ J. B. Priestley, *English journey*, p. 48.

³⁵ Philip S. Bagwell, *The transport revolution from 1770* (London, 1974), p. 228.

³⁶ Photograph of St. Benedict’s, Fountain Yard, outing from Arthur Brett and Sons, Norwich.
<https://norfolk.spydus.co.uk/cgi-bin/spydus.exe/ENQ/PICNOR/BIBENQ?BRN=724817>

³⁷ Delgado, *The annual outing*, p. 139.

³⁸ Bagwell, *The transport revolution from 1770*, p. 224.

³⁹ Jill Howard, *Mascot coaches and the Votier family*, p. 11.

⁴⁰ Delgado, *The annual outing*, p.139; Hibbs, *History of British bus services*, p. 71.

there is something particularly cohesive about trips in a motor coach which is absent in a train and, for succeeding generations of working people and their children, the chara trip ... remains a formative experience and memory. Coach trips evolved their own games, their songs, their customs.⁴¹

As their period of recreation would last for a limited time, the holidaymakers were determined to make the most of every minute. The journey to the resort therefore itself became part of the whole leisure experience. These particular travellers were frequently the first generation of their class to embark on an annual holiday, and familiar faces from home were welcome in the 'foreign' environment of the seaside resort.⁴² In a sense they were pioneers, because until the 1920s and 30s many working class people preferred to stay at home, using their holiday period to offer hospitality to friends and family or enjoy increasingly popular day-trips or safe local pleasures, whether generated by the pub or the church/chapel.⁴³ As a result of higher wages, this viewpoint was typically replaced during the inter-war years by a sense of adventure and a desire to see more of the world outside the native village.

A particular type of holiday made possible by both visionary entrepreneurs and the growth of railway and coach services was the holiday camp. Butlin's first holiday camp opened in Skegness, Lincolnshire at Easter 1936, offering three meals a day and free entertainment from 35 shillings to £3 a week. It was immediately overwhelmingly successful.⁴⁴ The idea of the holiday camp first arose in the 1890s on the Isle of Man, where the Cunningham Camp, for men only, stipulated no swearing, drinking or gambling, and the accommodation was in candle-lit tents.⁴⁵ Despite the stringent rules, the camp was a success, and others soon followed suit. J. Fletcher Dodd, a grocer and founder member of the Independent Labour Party and active in the Clarion Cycling movement, opened a Socialist camp in 1906 at Caister-on-Sea in Norfolk, claiming that it was the only camp with a railway station.⁴⁶

⁴¹ Walvin, *Beside the seaside*, pp. 111, 112.

⁴² Steven Braggs and Diane Harris, *Sun, fun and crowds. Seaside holidays between the wars*, p. 37.

⁴³ John K. Walton, 'The demand for working-class seaside holidays in Victorian England' *The Economic History Review*, new series, 34:2 (1981), pp. 262-263.

⁴⁴ Pimlott, *The Englishman's holiday*, p. 248.

⁴⁵ Miriam Akhtar and Steve Humphries, *Some liked it hot. The British on holiday at home and abroad*, p. 38.

⁴⁶ Colin Ward and Dennis Hardy, *Goodnight campers! The history of the British holiday camp*, pp. 60-61, 19, 26.

Paternalistically he hoped to improve the quality of life for working people, encouraging shared pursuits in a spirit of comradeship.

After the First World War other camps sprang up, and by 1934 the London and North Eastern Railway (LNER) found it worthwhile to establish two special services – the Suffolk Camp Express and the Norfolk Camp Express – to serve visitors to the many coastal camps between Lowestoft in Suffolk and Hemsby in Norfolk.⁴⁷

These ventures known as ‘pioneer camps’ were all comparatively small with basic conditions. Butlin’s ideas were different. He wanted to cater not for hundreds but for thousands. To do this, he cooperated with the LNER, who, interested in promoting holiday travel, agreed to pay 50% of Butlin’s advertising costs, when his second camp opened in 1938 at Clacton in Essex on a LNER line. The date coincided with the Holidays with Pay Act, which further increased the popularity of the camps. The cost was nonetheless too high for most working class people, who still patronised the traditional boarding houses, spent their period of rest with friends or relations or even had no holiday at all.⁴⁸

Personal transport

Bicycles

As we have seen, public transport was transformed by new technology. Personal transport benefitted similarly. The safety bicycle with its pneumatic tyres was developed during the late nineteenth century and superseded the difficult and unsafe ‘penny-farthing’ or high wheeler bicycle. Cycling became popular as a pastime, yet again expanding leisure opportunities, but its cost was a deterrent factor, and most working-class buyers were young bachelors on regular incomes.⁴⁹ Nevertheless, through hire purchase, thrift clubs and other forms of saving, those who most desired bicycles gradually acquired them.⁵⁰ Their popularity is illustrated by a Cyclists’

⁴⁷ Susan Barton, *Working-class organisations and popular tourism, 1840-1970* (Manchester, 2005), pp. 148-149.

⁴⁸ Ward and Hardy, *Goodnight campers!* p. 63; Pimlott *The Englishman’s holiday*, p. 223; http://www.seasidehistory.co.uk/20s_30s_holiday_camps.html

⁴⁹ For example, a safety bicycle was advertised for sale in the *North Wales Chronicle* on 25 January 1890. Although the list price was £18.18s, the cash price was £11.10s. James McGurn, *On your bicycle. An illustrated history of cycling*, p. 132.

⁵⁰ Beaven, *Leisure, citizenship and working-class men in Britain*, p. 110.

Parade Service in 1907 at Stanford in Norfolk, although the vicar did not display any marked enthusiasm:

IX Sunday after Trin. Cyclists Parade Service. The presence of the Cyclists did not make any very great difference to our morning congregation there were 3 or 4 Motor Cars, 3 or 4 Motor cycles and perhaps 20 cycles. ...⁵¹

The arrival of the bicycle stimulated far-reaching changes in society. Even the working classes could now afford to journey considerable distances, as apart from walking, cycling was cheaper than any other type of travel. If they could not afford to own a bicycle, they could hire one:

[1915] having reached my teens I was elevated to a monstrosity we called a 'Boneshaker' hired from a character called 'Dodger' ... My steed cost sixpence per hour, so I lost as little time as possible on the seven mile journey to Horstead.⁵²

This new freedom began to weaken the rigid English class structure, as the bicycle was favoured by all classes. It could be argued that it was genderless and unchaperoned and encouraged the existing movement towards female emancipation. Although it was suitable for courtship, it could also be sociable, and the freedom from motorised traffic encouraged its frequent use.⁵³

[1910] I was given a bicycle on my thirteenth birthday. Very few cars were seen on the roads at that time, and my friends and I could cycle quite safely through the country lanes. We went for picnics on Ringland Hills, or on one of the many Commons around Norwich. In later years we cycled to the sea, and thought we were fashionable in our knee-length bathing costumes.⁵⁴

By the 1930s the bicycle's popularity had not waned; the national cyclists' organisations – the Cyclists' Touring Club and the National Cyclists' Union – had a membership of nearly 60,000.⁵⁵ This was in spite of the increased availability of motor transport. Cars were still too expensive for the average working-class person, while for convenience public transport could not compete with the bicycle for comparatively short distances. Due to mass production, a new Raleigh bicycle was

⁵¹ NRO, PD 55/39, Diary of Revd. A. F. Ebsworth who held West Tofts and Stanford 1907-1914.

⁵² Norfolk Federation of Women's Institutes (1973) *Within living memory*, p. 118.

⁵³ H. G. Wells's cycling novel, *The wheels of chance, a bicycling idyll* (1896), vividly illustrates this democratising freedom.

⁵⁴ Norfolk Federation of Women's Institutes *Within living memory* (1973), p. 119.

⁵⁵ Pimlott, *The Englishman's holiday*, p. 235.

available for under £5 or 9s 7d a month on hire purchase, while the average weekly wage of a Norfolk labourer was between 30 and 35s.⁵⁶ Nonetheless, enthusiasts had saved up for their bicycles well before this, because reports from the turn of the century show that many owned their own machines. In 1900, for instance, a bicycle parade was planned as part of the Flower Show in Neatishead, a village in the Norfolk Broads.⁵⁷ Five years later in Dersingham in west Norfolk, it was reported that ‘the usual cycling and athletic sports took place ... attended by about 1,000 people’, obviously attracting villagers from the surrounding area.⁵⁸ Among the celebrations for the King’s coronation in 1911, a cycle race was held in Hethersett.⁵⁹

The national cycling clubs – the Cyclists’ Touring Club, the Socialists’ Cycling Club (afterwards known as the Clarion Cycling Club) and the National Cyclists’ Union – were all established before the First World War.⁶⁰ Most of these organisations had a political focus, making complaints during the 1920s and 30s attempting to oppose the government’s anti-cycling plans.⁶¹ Working-class in character, the Clarion Club was also political, mixing politics with pleasure, as its members often distributed Socialist literature when cycling to country villages.⁶²

Local societies were also established, for example, the Norwich Wesleyan Cycle Brigade, whose members went into the countryside to promote their interests to others – a remarkable example of integrating interests: ‘[1900] Surlingham. – At the Wesleyan Chapel, on the 8th inst., the Norwich Wesleyan Cycle Brigade ... gave an entertainment consisting of singing, readings, and a gramophone’.⁶³

⁵⁶ Jones, *Workers at play*, p. 14; Wade Martins and Williamson, *The countryside of East Anglia*, p. 151.

⁵⁷ ‘Neatishead – Flower show’ *Norfolk Chronicle and Norwich Gazette*, 12 May 1900, p. 5.

⁵⁸ ‘Dersingham’ *Norfolk Chronicle and Norwich Gazette*, 17 June 1905, p. 6.

⁵⁹ Photograph of Hethersett Coronation Festivities, cycle race. <https://norfolk.spydus.co.uk/cgi-bin/spydus.exe/ENQ/PICNOR/BIBENQ?BRN=712136>

⁶⁰ Jones, *Workers at play*, p. 63.

⁶¹ Stephen G. Jones, ‘State intervention in sport and leisure in Britain between the wars’, *Journal of Contemporary History*, 22:1 (January 1987), p. 169.

⁶² McGurn, *On your bicycle*, p. 135.

⁶³ ‘Surlingham’ *Norfolk Chronicle and Norwich Gazette*, 17 November 1900, p. 9.

The Gothic Minstrels were another local group who made full use of their bicycles. They toured the county giving musical performances in towns and villages and were still in existence in the 1930s.⁶⁴

At Hockering in 1905 a reading room was opened, and it was 'hoped that before long, arrangements will be made to providing cyclists ... with tea and coffee and a convenient wayside rest', indicating that cycling was now a commonplace activity in the countryside.⁶⁵

Expensive holidays were out of reach for many people. Enterprising members of the working class, however, solved the problem by acquiring tents, packing them onto their bicycles and setting off on a camping holiday. Thus the bicycle offered fresh opportunities, freedom and fellowship. It also promised health, independence and a new kind of relationship between the sexes.

Motor transport – Cars and motorcycles

The pattern of rural leisure changed once again with the arrival of cars in the early twentieth century, and especially as their numbers increased rapidly in the inter-war years. Although cars were not then initially affordable to most members of the working class, they were regarded as desirable, as evidenced by an attraction at Great Yarmouth in 1927, where you could be photographed in a car on the beach.⁶⁶ In the 1930s this desire to own a car was increasingly satisfied by the growing second-hand car market. If the cost was still too high for the aspiring working-class owner, the necessary outlay could be shared within the family or with a friend, thereby bringing 'traditional working-class cultural and spending patterns to the sphere of motoring.'⁶⁷ Hire-purchase was another possibility, but prospective car owners were often reluctant to use this method. It was considered to be 'not quite nice', and there was a hint of shame in using it. Perhaps there was a disinclination to incur debt which was not absolutely necessary. Nevertheless, hire-purchase *was* used in the purchase of *new* cars in 65-70% of all sales by the late 1930s. Thus, although cars were owned mainly by the middle and upper classes between the wars, the upper levels of the

⁶⁴ Gothic Minstrels minute book, <http://www.norfolkancestors.org/lse/minutebook/php>.

⁶⁵ 'Hockering' *Norfolk Chronicle and Norwich Gazette*, 2 December 1905, p. 7.

⁶⁶ Norfolk Federation of Women's Institutes, *Norfolk within living memory* (1995), p. 235.

⁶⁷ Sean O'Connell, *The car and British society. Class, gender and motoring, 1896-1939*, p. 35.

working classes, using various financial procedures, were able to acquire them. Mass ownership, however, did not occur until the 1950s, when Britain experienced a phase of greater prosperity.⁶⁸ In rural Norfolk in the 1920s and 30s, the car remained a novelty for many years:

very few people in Westacre owned a car, with exception of those who lived in the big houses. ... The rest of the community either walked or rode their bicycles. The majority fell into the second category.⁶⁹

Marsham. I can remember just seeing the first motor car that came through Marsham – the vision was partly blurred owing to the amount of white dust which covered the roads in those days.

Saxlingham. I can also remember the first Motor Car that came to the village – folk used to go on to the road to watch it go by – a real thrill.⁷⁰

An alternative to the car for impecunious ambitious travellers was the motorcycle. For affordable holidays and excursions motorcycles, complete with side-cars and even trailers, came into their own. In the 1940s and 50s Ed Mitchell, a bank messenger from Norwich, took his family on holiday using this method:

we didn't have the money to go to hotels and boarding houses but once you had the camping gear and paid for food and petrol, you had no further expense. It was a cheap holiday and a nice one, too, if the weather was decent.⁷¹

The motorcycle rapidly became popular, as shown by the official statistics:⁷²

Table 4: National expansion of motorcycle ownership

<i>March</i>	<i>Motorcycles in thousands</i>
1910	36
1911	48
1912	70
1913	98
1914	124

Table 4 indicates that its popularity was such that in 1924 there were more motorcycles than cars on British roads (496,000 to 474,000), and in 1929 an

⁶⁸ O'Connell, *The car and British society*, pp. 20, 24-25, 31, 33.

⁶⁹ Derek Bumfrey, *A boy's eye view of Norfolk village life* (Witney, 1997), p. 49.

⁷⁰ Norfolk Federation of Women's Institutes (1973), p. 121.

⁷¹ Akhtar and Humphries, *Some liked it hot*, pp. 55-57.

⁷² Barker and Savage, *Economic history of transport in Britain*, p.141.

unsurpassed record was reached with the registration of 790,000 motorcycles.⁷³ Nevertheless, in the 1930s when prices of ‘baby’ cars – the Austin Seven and the ‘Bullnose’ Morris, for instance – were reduced, that popularity diminished, as people’s wealth and therefore their aspirations improved.⁷⁴

The open air movement

One working class pastime assisted by the development of transport technology was the open-air movement. Based on walking and cycling, it burgeoned in the inter-war years. An unexpected ramification of the population drift from rural areas to the towns and cities was the urban workers’ desire to escape in their free time from their surroundings to the liberty of the countryside, epitomised in Ewan McColl’s famous lines written in 1932:

I may be a wage slave on Monday
But I am a free man on Sunday.⁷⁵

This desire may have been stimulated as Gertrude Jekyll explained:

the workers in the industrial cities of England have usually either come from the country themselves or can trace a rural origin a generation or two back, and the majority of English people look with longing to the countryside.⁷⁶

By 1930 about 100,000 ramblers regularly emerged from towns and cities to stride across the countryside.⁷⁷ The nationwide passion for hiking culminated in the formation of the Ramblers’ Association in 1935. In 1926 the Council for the Preservation of Rural England was founded and three years later lobbied the Prime Minister, Ramsay MacDonald (1866-1937), a ‘keen mountaineer’, for the establishment of national parks.⁷⁸ The Prime Minister was ‘a great man for the open-air life and followed it rigorously’ and had previously supported the bills for access

⁷³ Bagwell and Lyth, *Transport in Britain*, p. 86.

⁷⁴ Bagwell and Lyth, *Transport in Britain*, p. 99.

⁷⁵ http://www.traditionalmusic.co.uk/song-midis/Manchester_Rambler.htm

⁷⁶ Gertrude Jekyll, *Old English household life* (London, 1975), p. 5.

⁷⁷ Frank Trentmann, ‘Civilization and its discontents: English neo-romanticism and the transformation of anti-modernism in twentieth-century western culture’ *Journal of Contemporary History*, 29:4 (1994), p. 586.

⁷⁸ The National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act was eventually passed in 1949. Mark Clapson, *The Routledge companion to Britain in the twentieth century* (London, 2009), p. 358; Roger Sidaway, *Resolving environmental disputes: from conflict to consensus* (London, 2013), p. 22.

to the mountains.⁷⁹ The mass trespass of four or five hundred ramblers in 1932 on Kinder Scout in the Peak District of Derbyshire was undertaken to emphasise the ‘right to roam’ in many areas of England closed at that time to ramblers.⁸⁰

This ardour for hiking applied mainly to urbanites, but it had an impact on the lives of rural people. Because of the agricultural depression, farmers were increasingly diversifying their activities to boost their incomes, offering bed and breakfast accommodation and welcoming tourists.⁸¹ For cyclists the problem of accommodation was also met by the Cyclists' Touring Club, which gave seals of approval in the form of a plaque showing the CTC symbol, mounted on an outside wall of hotels and restaurants offering good accommodation and service.⁸² Without the improvements in transport previously described, the memberships of the Youth Hostel Association (founded in 1930)⁸³ and the Ramblers' Association (1935)⁸⁴ would not have grown as they did. In its first year, the Ramblers' Association had almost 1200 individual members and over 300 affiliated rambling clubs, while by 1939, the YHA had opened 297 hostels with over 83000 members.⁸⁵ In its handbook the YHA emphasised the availability of public transport, giving distances to the nearest railway stations and information on local bus services.

Workers were still hindered, however, in financing membership of recreational clubs. The lowest paid found it difficult to afford the subscriptions, equipment and occasional necessary travelling expenses. As Jones stresses, there was the further complication of class prejudice, with its attendant differing values, ‘creating difficulties of social mix, group solidarity and popular acceptance of aims and objectives’.⁸⁶ These societies therefore tended to attract members from the middle rather than the working classes.

⁷⁹ ‘Successor to Mr. Ramsay MacDonald’, *The Age*, 23 November 1937, p. 10; Sidaway, *Resolving environmental disputes*, p. 22.

⁸⁰ ‘Mass trespass on Kinder Scout’, *Guardian* (1932). Retrieved 25 July 2015 from <http://www.theguardian.com/uk/1932/apr/25/1>

⁸¹ Wade Martins and Williamson, *The countryside of East Anglia*, p. 117.

⁸² Few of these plaques survive, but some still exist as in Fakenham and King's Lynn. <http://www.wingedwheels.info/wwhist.htm>

⁸³ Oliver Coburn, *Youth hostel story*, p. 18.

⁸⁴ <http://www.ramblers.org.uk/about-us/our-history.aspx>

⁸⁵ Coburn, *Youth hostel story*, pp. 52, 53.

⁸⁶ Jones, *Workers at play*, pp. 65-66; Cross and Walton, *The playful crowd*, p. 115.

After the First World War, the word 'hiker' entered the English language, and nationally hiking as a recreation became extremely popular.⁸⁷ It was open to both men and women without distinction and helped in the growing movement towards women's self-determination. Yet it was not without its critics, who feared that moral standards were being lowered as a result of the new freedom in social interaction between the sexes.⁸⁸

Non-commercial organisations, such as the Co-operative Holiday Association (CHA), established in 1891, largely overcame these criticisms, emphasising their aims of fellowship, popular education and enjoyment. They had no strong political agenda, unlike Socialist organisations such as the Clarion Clubs and the Workers Travel Association (founded in 1921). The founder of the CHA, the Revd. T. A. Leonard, a Congregationalist minister, hoped to 'help people to find joy in music, literature, nature study, and that best of all exercises, walking, with all that it brings to mind and body'.⁸⁹

On the other hand, it is likely that walking never became a popular pastime for country people in Norfolk and probably throughout rural England. In the nineteenth century particularly, because of the dearth of transport, walking often considerable distances was the normal means of reaching a desired destination, and they were not discouraged by its remote location.⁹⁰ Walking therefore was not a leisure activity, as it was an essential means of travel:

12th April 1894 Thursday Fred [an agricultural labourer] at home & walking to Fakenham [6½ miles from Thursford] for a Cycle that he had come from London by G[reat] E[astern] Railway.⁹¹

In 1918 Coopers in Diss had a bus. One had to walk to Diss from Scole [2½ miles] to book seats on the bus ...⁹²

Hence for rural workers recreational walking was not at all innovative, while cycling, once they had overcome any financial obstacle, was a pleasure to be freely enjoyed.

⁸⁷ *New shorter Oxford English dictionary* (Oxford, 1993).

⁸⁸ Coburn, *Youth hostel story*, p. 6.

⁸⁹ Quoted in Pimlott, *The Englishman's holiday*, p. 170.

⁹⁰ See pp. 132, 232 for examples of this.

⁹¹ NRO, MC 2612/4/1, 988X8 Papers of Miss (Doris) Mary Daplyn ... Farm Day books of Green Farm, Thursford, 1894-1897.

⁹² Norfolk Federation of Women's Institutes, *Norfolk within living memory* (1995), p. 43.

Cinema, including the magic lantern and dissolving views

Not all innovative leisure was experienced out of doors, and not all technological development was in transport. The cinema is a good example. Initially cinema was a curiosity – a progression from early visual media popular in the nineteenth century. These included the Mutoscope and Thomas Edison's Kinetoscope, both of which provided viewing to one person at a time.⁹³ Most important, however, was the magic lantern, an image projector developed in the 1600s, which reached its peak of popularity between 1860 and 1890, when perhaps twelve hundred peripatetic lantern lecturers toured England.⁹⁴ One of the lantern's great advantages was its portability, allowing it to be taken into villages everywhere, bringing to the rural population hitherto unimagined ideas and images. This medium was used for entertainment, but also for charitable fund-raising, education, and political canvassing:

[1885] Sprowston – *Entertainment* – A very successful entertainment of dissolving views was given in the National School-room, on Monday evening, for the purpose of aiding the Teachers' Benevolent Fund. The room was well filled. ... The views of English cathedrals and Japan were highly appreciated by the adult portion of the audience, whilst the comic slides suited the children. ...⁹⁵

[1895] The Unionist Van is in the division in charge of Mr. Atkins and Mr. Robert Taylor, who exhibit a magic lantern, and give an interesting lecture. On Monday, a meeting was held in the White Horse club-room, at Kenninghall, when there was a good attendance. On Tuesday, a meeting was held at North Lopham, and on the following day the van proceeded further afield.⁹⁶

[1915] Burston. A magic lantern entertainment for the parents and children of the Strike School was given on Monday evening by Mrs. Higdon, head teacher. ... The entertainment was greatly enjoyed ...⁹⁷

⁹³ The Mutoscope was a flip-book based motion picture device, while the Kinetoscope used a strip of perforated film, viewed at high speed over a light source.

⁹⁴ Joss Marsh, 'Dickensian "Dissolving views": the magic lantern, visual story-telling, and the Victorian technological imagination', *Comparative critical studies*, vol. 6, 3, (2009), p. 333.

⁹⁵ The 'ancestor of the cinematic dissolve, whereby ... light was slowly stopped down on one lens and one image and brought up on another, with perfect registration, so that the second image slowly ... replaced the first on the illuminated screen'. Marsh, 'Dickensian "Dissolving views"', p. 334. 'Sprowston – Entertainment', *Norfolk Chronicle and Norwich Gazette*, 28 February, 1885, p. 5.

⁹⁶ 'The Unionist van' *Norfolk Chronicle and Norwich Gazette*, 20 April 1895, p. 8.

⁹⁷ *Norfolk Chronicle and Norwich Gazette*, 5 February, 1915, p. 8.

Magic lantern exhibitions attracted all social classes, families and children, depending on the subject, and when the cinematograph or moving picture machine was developed, public excitement knew no bounds. Showmen were the first cinematograph proprietors. In 1896 in Norwich, Gilbert's Modern Circus of Varieties, with its clowns, equestrians and performing dogs, topped its bill with *The Royal Cinematographe – the animated photographs – presenting with marvellous accuracy scenes of everyday life*. The audience applauded the various short films enthusiastically.⁹⁸ The cinematograph, or 'bioscope show', then progressed to the fairground, when Randall Williams (1846-1898), a well-known travelling showman, introduced it at the King's Lynn Mart in 1897.⁹⁹

About the best and up to date of the entertainments is that of Mr. Randall Williams, who in a tent splendidly lighted up by an electrical arc lamp, exhibits some excellent 'living pictures' by means of a cinematograph apparatus, the collection including a serpentine dance, The Czar in Paris, a Paris boulevard and march past of the Royal Blues.¹⁰⁰

By the following year, in spite of the frequent poor quality of presentation – scratches on the film and numerous breakdowns in operation – the idea had been so successful that it generated many similar enterprises.¹⁰¹ Hitherto undreamed-of scenes were now available:

the subjects depicted are of the most diversified order, and range from the travel pictures, upon which the thousands condemned to stay at home gaze with envious delights, to the representations of notable scenes and incidents of topical interest and to the screaming comic film.¹⁰²

As Vanessa Toulmin indicates, historians have studied the inception of the cinematograph in depth, but more from the technological aspect and the production and subjects of early films than taking into account the impact on contemporary leisure.¹⁰³ These bioscope shows were for many rural inhabitants their first introduction to the fledgling cinema, years before the establishment of permanent

⁹⁸ Stephen Peart, *The picture house in East Anglia*, pp. 1-2.

⁹⁹ Peart, *The picture house in East Anglia*, pp. 7-8.

¹⁰⁰ *Lynn Advertiser*, quoted in Peart, *The picture house in East Anglia*, p. 7.

¹⁰¹ Peart, *The picture house in East Anglia*, pp. 7-8.

¹⁰² *The Showman and Market Trades Gazette*, 2 October 1908, quoted in Vanessa Toulmin, 'The cinematograph at the Nottingham Goose Fair, 1896-1911' in Alan Burton and Laraine Porter (eds.), *The showman, the spectacle and the two-minute silence* (Trowbridge, 2001), p. 82.

¹⁰³ Vanessa Toulmin, 'Cuckoo in the nest', *The Moving Image*, 10:1 (2010), p. 52.

dedicated buildings. The new phenomenon of electric light used both to project the films and for internal and external illumination of the film booth also fascinated them, as it was not yet available in their homes.

For the first thirteen years of its life, the infant cinema belonged principally to the fairground, allowing people in more remote areas access to one of the new wonders of the age. This was because, by the beginning of the twentieth century, cinematic equipment had become mobile enough to be taken with comparative ease to any desired location, and this business opportunity was seized by imaginative local entrepreneurs:

[1910] Little Massingham. Mrs. Meredith ... entertained the members of the Boys' Club to a cinematograph exhibition in the Parish-room last week. The excellent films shown by Mr. A. E. Coe, of Norwich, included one of the King's visit to Norwich, as well as views in the new colour photography and a series of comics.¹⁰⁴

A projector, an operator and a set of films could be hired from Albert Coe (Figure 4), who in addition had a staff of cameramen, filming important local events.¹⁰⁵ Thus, in 1902, he offered such subjects as 'A ride through ... London on a motor car ... showing Coronation Decorations ...', 'The return of Lord Kitchener ...', 'The Coronation procession', 'Ferreting and shooting rabbits in a Scotch forest' and 'Children's tea party (Comic)'. Film required heavy and expensive equipment and processing but was increasingly being used by photographic businesses. Early record films to show to local audiences were made by individuals and companies who had previously been giving photographic or magic lantern shows. These were very popular and were advertised with the slogans: 'See yourself as others see you' or 'Have you been cinematographed?' The novelty of seeing themselves actually in a film proved irresistible. As Vanessa Toulmin points out, these local films 'were a

¹⁰⁴ 'Photographers ... Coe, A. E., & Son, 32, London Street, Norwich.' *Kelly's Directory of Norfolk, 1912*, p. 804. This film show was presumably a diversification of his normal occupation. 'Little Massingham' *Norfolk Chronicle and Norwich Gazette*, 29 January 1910, p. 7.

¹⁰⁵ David Cleveland, *East Anglia on film* (North Walsham, 1987), pp. 8, 11-12.

simple marketing venture to film as many faces as possible, thus providing a ready-made paying audience, desiring to see themselves reproduced on screen'.¹⁰⁶

While theatres and music halls in cities and towns played their part in the introduction of cinematograph shows, the fairground remained the main venue for the rural public exhibition of moving pictures until the establishment of permanent buildings dedicated to that particular purpose.¹⁰⁷ The visiting fair was an outstanding feature of the village year, and for many rural inhabitants its bioscope shows were their introduction to the embryonic cinema.

The Cinematograph Act of 1909 was concerned with the safety of film-goers, as there had been some major accidents involving loss of life due to the inflammability of nitrate film. The Act introduced safety regulations and also the idea of licences for the showing of films, and this hit travelling showmen particularly hard, as they had to procure a licence for each place where they set up their film show.¹⁰⁸ In addition to this, the travelling film shows were beginning to lose their audience. The growth of permanent cinemas with their better equipped and more luxurious surroundings and the improvement in public transport combined to undermine the popularity of itinerant bioscopes. By the end of October 1909, the *World's Fair* had estimated the existence already of about 1000 'picture theatres'.¹⁰⁹ The trend towards watching films in a comfortable environment spread rapidly in Norfolk, and by 1920 towns throughout the county offered both urban and rural dwellers willing to travel a reasonable distance, the opportunity of a regular visit to a permanent cinema. These cinemas were opened throughout Norfolk as follows: King's Lynn and Norwich (1911); North Walsham (1912); Downham Market and Thetford (1913); Aylsham, Cromer, East Dereham, Great Yarmouth and Sheringham (1914); Diss

¹⁰⁶ This novelty had grown stale by 1939, as the audience desired to see something other than a familiar face. Vanessa Toulmin, 'Local films for local people' *Film History*, 13:2 (2001), pp. 118, 121, 129.

¹⁰⁷ Stuart Hanson, *From silent screen to multi-screen. A history of cinema exhibition in Britain since 1896* (Manchester, 2007), pp. 13-14.

¹⁰⁸ David R. Williams, 'The Cinematograph Act of 1909: an introduction to the impetus behind the legislation and some early effects' *Film History* 9:4 (1997), p. 349.

¹⁰⁹ *World's Fair*, 30 October 1909.

(1916); Watton (1919); Attleborough (1920).¹¹⁰ This was the first generation to experience a commercial entertainment unlike any before it.

These specially constructed theatres were restricted to urban areas, therefore necessitating travel from the countryside. Those villagers who for any reason could not visit an urban cinema were still catered for by mobile exhibitors, successors to the fairground showmen. These new entrepreneurs typically visited regularly and used the local village halls to show their films. One example was Bert Wells, who had formerly run a cinema in Hunstanton. When it burnt down in 1922, he started a regular tour of local villages – Dersingham, Docking, Heacham and Snettisham among others – with a three ton lorry, generators and two film projectors. The appearance of electricity in a village normally lit by paraffin lamps was yet again a great novelty. The local people anticipated his visits with pleasure, as is evidenced by his affectionate nickname, ‘Bert, the picture man’. A similar post-war enterprise was undertaken by Ernest Swain and Dick Joice, who transported their mobile cinema in an old pick-up truck and whose itinerary covered Bilney, the Burnhams, Docking, Grimston and Massingham.¹¹¹

The cinema with its strong influences was a matter of disquiet for many people, particularly women. As Deirdre Beddoe points out, ‘the cinema had become a very powerful and influential medium by the 1930s’, and the image of women portrayed on the screen was not always in line with the ideal of the ‘angel in the house’, a stereotype which, though Victorian, was still inspirational and influential well into the twentieth century.¹¹² Hollywood with its strong American bias distorted reality through its screen goddesses (Hedy Lamarr and Ginger Rogers are examples) and blonde temptresses (Jean Harlow, Mae West), and the fear was that children particularly would accept this interpretation of women as the goal to aim for. Another anxiety was that, with the increase in public transport, women seemed to be

¹¹⁰ Peart, *The picture house in East Anglia*, pp.41, 57, 147-170; <http://www.historyofwatton.org.uk>.

¹¹¹ Peart, *The picture house in East Anglia*, pp. 72-73, 120; <http://www.hunstantonnewsletter.co.uk>, December 2009.

¹¹² Deirdre Beddoe, *Discovering women's history*. (London, 1983), p. 37. *The Angel in the House* is a poem by Coventry Patmore (1823-1896) about an ideal happy marriage. ‘The angel in the house’ eventually signified a woman who epitomised feminine perfection – a wife and mother who was selflessly dedicated to her children and submissive to her husband.

ALBERT E. COE,
32, London Street, NORWICH.

NEW SUPPLEMENTARY LIST
Of the Latest Cinematograph Films for Season 1902-3.

All of the highest quality, and selected with the greatest care: forming an Entertainment the excellence of which cannot be surpassed.

Our New Machine gives a Perfect Picture, as steady as possible, brilliant, sharp, and distinct, and free from flicker.

✓ **SET 16.** ✓ A ride through the streets of London on a motor car, on June 25th last, showing Coronation Decorations, Canadian Arch, &c.—125 feet.

✓ The Colonial Review by the Prince of Wales.—120 feet.

iii ✓ The King's dinner to 14,000 London people at Fulham. The Prince of Wales makes a speech and Sir T. Lipton leads the cheering. Grand portraits of the Prince and Princess of Wales, the Bishop of London, &c.—120 feet.

iv ✓ The Indian Review. Arrival of the Prince and Princess of Wales, Duc d'Aosta, Lord Roberts, and English and Indian Potentates on their way to the Review. 120 feet.

✓ Review day on H.M.S. "Trafalgar" The bluejackets amuse themselves in the dinner hour. They have a dance together, and the funny sailor tells a laughable story with great gusto.—70 feet.

SET 17. i. The return of Lord Kitchener. The "Oratavia" coming alongside. Kitchener coming down gangway. Converses with Col. Stackpool and off -ers after inspecting the Guard of Honour. The drive from the station and fine portrait of Kitchener as he steps into his carriage.—240 feet.

ii. Return of the Boer Leaders. The "Saxon" coming alongside, the generals come down the gangway, Botha first, then Delarey and De Wet. A view of Lord Kitchener in a straw hat and Lord Roberts in a cap.—120 feet.

iii. The visit of the Shah. Review of Horse Artillery before the Shah.—120 feet.

✓ **SET 18.** **The Coronation Procession.**

i. The Procession leaving Whitehall on its way to the Abbey.—275 feet.

ii. The Procession passing through Wellington Arch up Constitution Hill on its way to Buckingham Palace after the ceremony. Splendid view of the crowned King and Queen in the State Carriage.—325 feet.

✓ **SET 19.** i. Ferreting and shooting rabbits in a Scotch Forest.—100 feet.

ii. An excursion steamer arriving at Blackpool.—75 feet.

iii. The Polar Bear in his tank at the Zoo.—60 feet.

iv. Giving the Fire Alarm and turn-out of the Leicester Fire Brigade.—50 feet.

v. Off to the Fire. Engines passing through two streets at a gallop. A fine film.—60 feet

vi. Life-saving at a fire—men jumping into blankets.—50 feet.

vii. Children's tea party. (Comic).—40 feet.

viii. A Norwegian Water-fall.—60 feet.

ix. The heaviest train that ever left Scotland—leaving Caledonia Station, Edinburgh. 50 feet.

Figure 4: Projector, operator and a set of films could be hired from Coe's of Norwich.
Source: Cleveland, *East Anglia on film*, p. 8.

‘escaping’ from their domestic duties to enjoy leisure pursuits much more frequently than hitherto, with the cinema, as it was comparatively cheap, being one of their most regular destinations.¹¹³ The supposition was that family life would suffer to the detriment of husband and children. From the cinema-goer’s point of view, however, the ‘pictures’ introduced a world of excitement and glamour, allowing spectators to escape for a few hours from their normal (perhaps burdensome) world. Where money was not too scarce, ‘by the 1920s a new working-class habit was developing, that of going together to the cinema on a Saturday night’ – providing an opportunity for man and wife to enjoy an evening out in each other’s company.¹¹⁴ As public transport improved, this practice rapidly spread to the countryside. It has also been suggested that there was a link between the decline in pub attendance and the increase in visiting the cinema as a couple or as a family.¹¹⁵

The modernisation of the fairground

Nowhere was the technological transformation of leisure more dramatically displayed than in the fairground. In order to assemble an audience, exhibitors on fairgrounds were always on the lookout for novelties to replace those attractions which were no longer popular or successful. Fairground side-shows survived into the twentieth century but dwindled in popular favour, and although still viable they were superseded in popularity by the new riding machines. While the Industrial Revolution and the consequent increase in the retail trade had been a calamity for some fairs as noted above, the rise in technological competence was seen as an opportunity by many showmen. The mechanical proficiency of the new rides increased rapidly from the introduction of steam power at the end of the nineteenth century to the development and appropriate use of electricity in the twentieth century. The first recorded steam driven ride appeared at Aylsham Fair in 1865, demonstrated together with a steam organ by Samuel George Soame (c.1837-1917),

¹¹³ Proctor, ‘Home and away: popular culture and leisure’ in Deborah Simonton (ed.), *Routledge history of women in Europe since 1700* (London, 2006), p. 330; Eileen Green, Sandra Hebron and Diana Woodward, *Women’s leisure, what leisure?* (Basingstoke, 1990), p. 49; Langhamer, *Women’s leisure in England 1920-60*, p. 60.

¹¹⁴ K. Roberts, ‘Men only, please’, *New Statesman*, 3 February 1984, quoted in Green, Hebron and Woodward, *Women’s leisure, what leisure?* p. 49

¹¹⁵ Diana Gittins, *Fair sex, family size and structure 1900-39* (London, 1982), p. 55.

an agricultural engineer from nearby Marsham.¹¹⁶ It was not completely satisfactory, and Frederick Savage (1828-1897), another agricultural engineer based in King's Lynn, having inspected Soame's machine, decided to develop it. Previously, roundabouts had been driven by young boys or ponies pulling round the frame. Horses had been used similarly to drive threshing machines, which Savage was manufacturing at the time. The rapid popularity of his new carousel spurred him on to build further ingenious rides, a few examples being: Cakewalk (1880s, named after a fashionable dance – a gangway, with a handrail, that rocked backwards and forwards while customers attempted to walk on it), Sea-on-Land (1880, boats that rocked on a revolving platform), Gallopers (1885, a more elaborate carousel), Tunnel Railway (1885, a circular track of 40 feet diameter, imitating the on-going transport transformation, where the attraction was the dark tunnel for half the ride), Razzle Dazzle or Whirligig (1893, rotating ride which simultaneously dipped from side to side), and Steam Yachts (1894, swings).¹¹⁷ These machines provided greater speed and stomach-turning revolutions, together with the clamour, smoke and odour of steam centre engines, the raucous music of steam organs and dazzling lights provided by Savage Sparklers (steam-powered electric light engines).

Steam power was used very successfully for railways, yet on the land, the roads, and ultimately on the fairground it did not persist for very long. Used exclusively until the First World War it was developed with exceptional engineering skills and techniques for many different applications, including power for switchbacks, the generation of electricity for lighting, scenic railways and road locomotives (showman's engines) used for haulage and/or powering fairground rides.¹¹⁸ Nevertheless, by the 1920s steam power in fairgrounds was losing its supremacy before the challenge of electricity, and by the 1940s steam vehicles were heading in their thousands to scrap yards. Electricity was now used to power and illuminate the

¹¹⁶ David Braithwaite, *Fairground architecture* (London, 1976), p. 37; Chris Fisher, 'Soame of Marsham', *Journal of the Norfolk Industrial Archaeology Society*, 3: 1, 1981; Ronald H. Clark, *The steam engine builders of Norfolk* (Yeovil, 1988), pp. 208-9; NRO, BR 50/13 Photograph of Samuel Soame with steam roundabout engine [1865].

¹¹⁷ <http://www.fairground-heritage.org.uk/newsite/learn/learn-sr.html>; Clark, *The steam engine builders of Norfolk*, pp. 192-4; David Braithwaite, *Savage of King's Lynn. Inventor of machines and merry-go-rounds* (Cambridge, 1975), p. 67; Braithwaite, *Fairground architecture*, pp. 43, 45, 55, 60, 62.

¹¹⁸ Anthony Beaumont, *Fairground steam* (Hemel Hempstead, 1972), pp. 25, 29, 45, 72.

fairground rides, and new electricity-powered dodgems (1920s) appeared reflecting the contemporary enthusiasm for motor cars, alongside fast rides with futuristic designs. The bright displays with their strong electric lights were great attractions in themselves.

All the rides described above were not of course available at small country fairs, but there was usually at least one, which was regarded by many as the focal point of the fairground.¹¹⁹ In May 1911 at Briston fair in Norfolk, for instance, it was reported that Gallopers and a scenic motor switchback were present.¹²⁰ For the price of one or two pennies per ride or sideshow visit, all the experiences of the fair combined to lift the local people into an extraordinary world. Colour was a salient feature. Little colour was manifest in their homes or work, other than that provided by the seasons. At the fair the ornate, gaudy and even opulent designs of the showfronts blazed with colour, and it has long been held that bright colours, particularly red, orange and yellow, have a positive psychological effect, lifting depression and promoting a happy feeling of well-being.¹²¹

Conclusion

It is clear that from the middle of the nineteenth century, working people in rural areas began to enjoy formerly unknown leisure experiences. The very fact that earlier generations had been unable to do this made them eager to grasp the unusual condition of being at leisure, as manifested by the gusto with which they seized the chance of travel presented by the railways, and subsequently by motorised road vehicle. New methods of travel were a wonder in themselves, but their greatest effect was to transport people to experiences – music halls, theatre, cinema, exhibitions, city visits, and eventually holiday resorts – previously inaccessible forms of entertainment which were themselves transformed by new technologies. In the home, moreover, new entertainments could be enjoyed through the phonograph or gramophone, radio and – for the few, by the 1930s – television. None of these new experiences would have been possible, of course, without the improvements in living

¹¹⁹ Lorraine Ward, *Frederick Savage, Victorian Fairground Manufacturer of King's Lynn*, p. 3.
<http://www.museums.norfolk.gov.uk/view/NCC095974>.

¹²⁰ *World's Fair*, June 3, 1911.

¹²¹ Grant Allen, *The colour sense: its origin and development* (Boston, 1879), pp. 226-228.

standards accomplished through reduced working hours and rising wages. But it is arguable that the impact of new technologies *per se* has been insufficiently emphasised by historians of leisure.

Chapter 5. New venues: reading rooms and village halls in Norfolk

*Introduction*¹

Together with the arrival of new forms of leisure came the appearance of new venues for leisure activities in the countryside, and in this chapter their two principal forms will be examined – the reading room and the village hall. Their origins, their impact on the neighbourhood and their wider effect on people's lives are comprehensively investigated. Most attention will be paid to the reading room, an institution whose roots lay deep in the total history of the period, and which was shaped by many forces – political, religious, economic and technological.² Its history exemplifies many of the key themes of this thesis, including social control and changes in gender relations. Village halls, the successors to reading rooms, are also considered and discussed, but not in as much detail, as historians such as Burchardt and Grieves have already considered them in depth.³

Nature of the evidence and methodology

Very little previous research has been undertaken on the subject of reading rooms, in contrast to the generally later village halls.⁴ Various reasons for this have been given – lack of primary source material and difficulty in extracting information from 'low-grade sources, notably press and parish magazines'.⁵ Reading rooms, although widespread nationally, were not governed by a central body, with the result that there are no relevant official records, such as are to be found for the contemporary Working Men's Club and Institute Union.

¹ Part of this chapter formed the basis for my MA dissertation (UEA): *The rise and decline of village reading rooms with particular reference to Norfolk* (2007), which in turn contributed to an article in the journal *Rural History*: 'The rise and decline of village reading rooms' *Rural History*, 20:2 (2009), pp. 163-186.

² Richard D. Altick, *The English common reader* (Chicago, 1957), p. 3.

³ Burchardt, 'Reconstructing the rural community', pp.73-94; Keith Grieves, 'Common meeting places', *Rural History*, 10:2 (1999), pp. 171-192.

⁴ Two useful articles have, however, been published: Owen Stinchcombe, 'Researching village reading rooms' *Local Historian*, 20:4 (1990), pp. 155-157, and Christopher Partrick, 'Reading rooms and literary institutes of the Yorkshire Dales' in R. F. White and P. R. Wilson (eds.), *Archaeology and historic landscapes of the Yorkshire dales* (Leeds, 2004), pp. 203-212. Burchardt, 'Reconstructing the rural community', pp. 193-216; George Monger, 'Rural community centres', *Folk Life*, 31:1 (1992), pp. 63-76; Grieves, 'Common meeting places', pp. 171-192.

⁵ Stinchcombe, 'Researching village reading rooms', p. 155.

There is, nonetheless, an opportunity for researching this subject in Norfolk, as there are more than seventy pertinent records in the Norfolk Record Office. They range from many records to do with one particular reading room, as in the case of Northwold, to a solitary account of the sale of furnishings of Wickmere Reading Room following its disbandment.⁶

Commercial directories are useful, although occasionally their information is inconsistent. Thus, although they appear to work to a given formula, the existence of reading rooms is mentioned for some villages and not for others, even though evidence from elsewhere authenticates their existence at the relevant date. Directories also appear to have been more concerned with buildings than institutions. An example of this is found in Swanton Abbott. In 1884 the local people were eager to have a reading room, but as no building was available, the Rector offered two rooms in a cottage.⁷ While this temporary measure was in being, no reading room was recorded as a building in any directory, although the secretary (apparently of the reading room in the Rector's cottage and usually the Rector himself) was listed in subsequent directories as a resident of the village.

It is possible to chart, at least in broad terms, the proliferation of reading rooms in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century because they are marked and labelled on the six inches to one mile Ordnance Survey First Edition map (which in Norfolk were surveyed in the 1880s and early 90s) and on the Second Edition (surveyed in 1904/1906), as well as on subsequent revisions where available. From these sources and from commercial directories a list of 164 reading rooms has been compiled, noting, where known, attributes such as date of opening, form of construction and present use (Table 5).

⁶ NRO, P/CH 2/329; P/CH 2/177; PC 75/19; PD 373/172; PD 373/178; PD 373/183; PD 373/181; PD 373/281. These include accounts, Charity Commission Schemes at various dates, a trust deed and committee minutes, all for Northwold Reading Room; PD 112/34 Account of the sale of furnishings of Wickmere Reading Room.

⁷ NRO, PD 146/49 Swanton Abbott Coffee and Reading Room.

New venues: reading rooms and village halls in Norfolk

Table 5: List of known reading rooms in Norfolk

<i>Location</i>	<i>OS grid ref. of village/town</i>	<i>Construction</i>	<i>Date of opening</i>	<i>Present use</i>	<i>Evidence</i>
Alburgh	TM 265 871				OS map 2nd ed.
Ashill	TF 886 045				NRO PD 548/60
Attleborough	TM 045 953	Brick	1863		<i>Kelly's directory</i>
Aylmerton	TG 180 397				OS map 2nd ed.
Aylsham	TG 193 268				<i>Kelly's directory</i>
Baconsthorpe	TG 119 370	Two-storey flint			Charity Commission register
Banham	TM 070 867		1899		<i>Kelly's directory</i>
Belton	TG 485029				NRO PD 530/40
Bergh Apton	TG 306 013				<i>Kelly's directory</i>
Billingford (nr. Dereham)	TG 014 203				<i>Kelly's directory</i>
Billingford (nr. Diss)	TM 163 786				<i>Kelly's directory</i>
Binham	TF 982 397				<i>Kelly's directory</i>
Blakeney	TG 026 436				<i>Kelly's directory</i>
Blofield	TG 333 095				OS map 2nd ed.
Bracon Ash	TM 195 994				Charity Commission register
Bradfield	TG 271 333	Brick with tile roof	1910	Residential	Surviving building. NRO PD 47/27
Bradwell	TG 504 039	Brick with tile roof	1902	Community library	OS map 2nd ed. Harry Bonner and Stephanie Beckett Moore, <i>A brief history of Bradwell Reading Room Trust.</i>
Brampton	TG 221 245		1880		Surviving building.
Brancaster	TF 773 440		1905		<i>Kelly's directory</i>
Brinton	TG 036 357	Brick with tile roof		Private house	Charity Commission register
Briston	TG 060 323	Brick with tile roof			Surviving building
Brooke	TM 285 991				OS map 2nd ed.
Bunwell	TM 115 935				OS map 2nd ed.
Burgh next Aylsham	TG 217 253	Brick, timber clad (new building)	1919	Community functions	Charity Commission register. Correspondence with Mrs Rosemary Topping, Burgh.
Burgh St. Margaret and St. Mary	TG 445 144				<i>Kelly's directory</i>
Burnham Market	TF 835 423				<i>Kelly's directory</i>

New venues: reading rooms and village halls in Norfolk

<i>Location</i>	<i>OS grid ref. of village/town</i>	<i>Construction</i>	<i>Date of opening</i>	<i>Present use</i>	<i>Evidence</i>
Buxton	TG 227 223	Brick with tile roof	1883	Private house	OS map 2nd ed.
Castle Rising	TF 664 248		1898		<i>Kelly's directory</i>
Catton	TG 229 122				<i>Kelly's directory</i>
Cawston	TG 133 239		1863		NRO BUL 4/221, 614XI.
Cley	TG 044 437				<i>Kelly's directory</i>
Costessey	TG 181 114		1907		NRO PD 280/65
Cringleford	TG 195 059		1911		<i>Kelly's directory of Norfolk, 1912, p. 101.</i>
Cromer	TG 221 415		1879		TNA BT 31/2566/13400
Denver	TF 612 016				OS map 2nd ed.
Dickleburgh	TM 167 825	Corrugated iron and timber			NRO PD704/30
Diss	TM 113 799				<i>Kelly's directory</i>
Downham Market	TF 612 033				<i>Kelly's directory</i>
Drayton	TG 179 136				OS map 2nd ed.
Dunton	TF 878 300				NRO PD 215/25
East Barsham	TF 916 340	Brick and flint with tile roof	1918	Private house	NRO PD 178/43
East Dereham	TF 986 135				<i>Kelly's directory</i>
East Harling	TL 992 861				<i>Kelly's directory</i>
East Rudham	TF 826 284	Brick with tile roof	1887	Private house	<i>Kelly's directory of Norfolk, 1904, p. 412.</i>
East Tuddenham	TG 192 428				OS map 2nd ed.
East/West Runton	TG 078 112				<i>Kelly's directory</i>
Eaton next Norwich	TG 216 071				NRO MC 389/40
Elsing	TG 051 169		1903		<i>Kelly's directory</i>
Fakenham	TF 920 297				<i>Kelly's directory</i>
Felmingham	TG 249 293				OS map 2nd ed.
Felthorpe	TG 162 180				OS map 2nd ed.
Filby	TG 472 134				<i>Kelly's directory</i>
Foulsham	TG 032 244		1897		<i>White's History, etc. 1883, p. 275.</i>
Framingham Pigot	TG 278 037				<i>Kelly's directory</i>
Garboldisham	TM 003 814				OS map 2nd ed.
Gaywood	TF 633 205	Corrugated iron			<i>Kelly's directory</i>

New venues: reading rooms and village halls in Norfolk

<i>Location</i>	<i>OS grid ref. of village/town</i>	<i>Construction</i>	<i>Date of opening</i>	<i>Present use</i>	<i>Evidence</i>
Glandford	TG 041 416	Brick and stone with tile roof	1900		NRO PD 677/4
Gorleston	TG 526 032				<i>Kelly's directory</i>
Great Bircham	TF 766 322				<i>Kelly's directory</i>
Great Hockham	TL 952 924			Demolished	Charity Commission register
Great Melton	TG 132 062				NRO PD 479/11
Great Yarmouth	TG 523 075				<i>Kelly's directory</i>
Gresham	TG 160 384				OS map 2nd ed.
Gressenhall	TF 960 170	Brick with tile roof	1904	Village hall	<i>Cromer and North Walsham Post</i> 15 October 1904. <i>Charity Commission register</i>
Gunthorpe	TG015345				<i>Kelly's directory</i>
Hackford-next-Reepham	TG 099 219				<i>Kelly's directory</i>
Haddiscoe	TM 439 969		1906		NRO PD 208/31
Hainford	TG 226 188				<i>Kelly's directory</i>
Halvergate	TG 418 069				<i>Kelly's directory</i>
Harleston	TM 242 832		1872		<i>Kelly's directory</i>
Helhoughton	TF 866 265				NRO PD 368/68
Hempstead	TG 104 370				<i>Kelly's directory</i>
Hethersett	TG 149 051				<i>Kelly's directory</i>
Hilborough	TF 822 003				NRO HIL 1/144-146, 870X7
Hilgay	TL 619 975				<i>Kelly's directory</i>
Hockwold cum Wilton	TL 724 879				<i>Kelly's directory</i>
Holkham	TF 891 440	Brick with tile roof	1886	Social centre	<i>Kelly's directory of Norfolk, 1904</i> , p. 190. OS map 2nd ed.
Honingham	TG 103 116				OS map 2nd ed.
Hunstanton (Old)	TF 687 423				NRO DC 16/2/1
Ickburgh	TL 808 948				<i>Kelly's directory</i>
Ingworth	TG 192 296	Brick with tile roof			Surviving building
Kelling	TG 089 423	Flint with tile roof	1915	Bookshop, gallery and tea room	Date on building
Kenninghall	TM 035 860				<i>Kelly's directory</i>
Keswick	TG 206 046				OS map 2nd ed.

New venues: reading rooms and village halls in Norfolk

<i>Location</i>	<i>OS grid ref. of village/town</i>	<i>Construction</i>	<i>Date of opening</i>	<i>Present use</i>	<i>Evidence</i>
Letheringsett	TG 062 388	Brick and flint with tile roof	1910	Village hall	<i>Kelly's directory of Norfolk, 1912, p. 227. Charity Commission register</i>
Limpenhoe	TG 396 039				OS map 2nd ed.
Lingwood	TG 363 085				OS map 2nd ed. NRO PC 123/1/5
Litcham	TF 885 177				NRO PD 459/152
Little Walsingham	TF 932 370		1866		<i>Kelly's directory</i>
Loddon	TM 361 985				<i>Kelly's directory</i>
Long Stratton	TM 195 425				<i>Kelly's directory</i>
Marsham	TG 197 251	Brick with tile roof	1857		Date on building.
Melton Constable	TG 038 329	Brick with tile roof			<i>Kelly's directory</i>
Mulbarton	TG 192 007			Demolished 1975	<i>Charity Commission register</i>
Mundesley	TG 311 367				<i>Kelly's directory</i>
Mundford	TL 801 933		1901		<i>Kelly's directory</i>
Narborough	TF 746 131				<i>Kelly's directory</i>
Necton	TF 882 096	Brick and flint with tile roof	1861		Date on building. NRO PD 143/64
North Creake	TF 853 382	Brick with tile roof			OS map 2nd ed.
North Elmham	TF 990 206		1875		NRO PD 209/456
North Walsham	TG 283 302				<i>Harrod's directory</i>
North Wootton	TF 642 244				<i>Kelly's directory</i>
Northrepps, Church Street	TG 244 392				<i>Kelly's directory</i>
Northrepps, Cross Dale Street	TG 229 392	Brick and flint with tile roof			<i>Kelly's directory</i>
Northwold	TL 749 967	Stone and brick with tile roof	1876	Private house	NRO PC 75/19
Old Buckenham	TM 062 914				<i>Kelly's directory</i>
Overstrand	TG 246 406	Corrugated iron and thatch originally, now metal roof	c.1919		Correspondence with Mr Terence Richards, Overstrand. NRO PC 117/10

New venues: reading rooms and village halls in Norfolk

<i>Location</i>	<i>OS grid ref. of village/town</i>	<i>Construction</i>	<i>Date of opening</i>	<i>Present use</i>	<i>Evidence</i>
Paston	TG 317 348	Brick with cement rendering and tile roof			OS map 2nd ed.
Pulham St. Mary Magdalen	TM 208 852				<i>Kelly's directory</i>
Reepham	TG 097 231				<i>Kelly's directory</i>
Ringland	TG 133 140			Village hall	OS map 2nd ed.
Ringstead	TF 778 409				OS map 2nd ed.
Roughton	TG 219 369	Brick and flint with tile roof	1911?	Private house	NRO PD 394/47
Runham	TG 465 112				OS map 2nd ed.
Salhouse	TG 314 149	Brick with tile roof	1897	Private house	Date on building. OS map 2nd ed.
Scole	TM 148 789	Brick with tile roof	1908	Private house	Jessie Mallows, <i>Scole from past to present</i> , p. 13. Charity Commission register
Sculthorpe	TF 897 310				<i>Kelly's directory</i>
Shotesham	TM 249 991				<i>Kelly's directory</i>
Shouldham	TF 673 087				NRO PD 356/129
Shropham	TL 983 930				OS map 2nd ed.
Sidestrand	TG 261 396	Brick and flint with tile roof		Youth and disability centre	<i>Kelly's directory</i>
South Creake	TF 857 361				<i>Kelly's directory</i>
South Walsham	TG 361 130				NRO PD 252/190
Southburgh	TF 996 047		c.1876		<i>Kelly's directory</i>
Southery	TL 619 948				<i>Kelly's directory</i>
Southrepps	TG 254 366				<i>Kelly's directory</i>
Stalham	TG 374 251				<i>Kelly's directory</i>
Stanhoe and Barwick	TF 805 368	Brick with tile roof	1886	Village hall and social club	Date on building. NRO MC 542/53, 777X7
Stiffkey	TF 971 432				<i>Kelly's directory</i>
Stoke Holy Cross	TG 234 019				<i>Kelly's directory</i>
Stone Hill (near Rackheath)	TG 276 141				OS map 2nd ed.
Strumpshaw	TG 350 079				OS map 2nd ed.
Suffield	TG 229 327	Corrugated iron	1900	Village hall	OS map 2nd ed.
Swaffham	TF 821 088				<i>Kelly's directory</i>

New venues: reading rooms and village halls in Norfolk

<i>Location</i>	<i>OS grid ref. of village/town</i>	<i>Construction</i>	<i>Date of opening</i>	<i>Present use</i>	<i>Evidence</i>
Swanton Abbott	TG 263 254		1884		NRO PD 146/49
Swanton Novers	TG 019 320	Brick with tile roof	1888	Private house	Date on building. OS map 2nd ed.
Syderstone	TF 832 327				OS map 2nd ed.
Terrington St. Clement	TF 549 200				<i>Kelly's directory</i>
Thelveton	TM 160 912				<i>Kelly's directory</i>
Thompson	TL 919 966	Brick with cement rendering and tile roof			<i>Kelly's directory</i>
Thorpe Market	TG 240 358	Brick with tile roof		Village hall	Surviving building
Thorpe St. Andrew	TG 267 097				<i>Kelly's directory</i>
Thurne	TG 404 155				<i>Kelly's directory</i>
Tittleshall	TF 894 211		1863		<i>Kelly's directory</i>
Tivetshall St. Mary	TM 166 859				<i>Kelly's directory</i>
Topcroft	TM 263 929				NRO PD 389/65
Tottington	TL 877 958				<i>Kelly's directory</i>
Upper Sheringham	TG 144 418		1863		<i>White's History, etc. 1883, p. 674.</i>
Upwell	TF 502 028				<i>Kelly's directory</i>
Warham	TF 948 417	Brick with tile roof	1892		NRO PD 502/98
Watton	TF 916 007				<i>Kelly's directory</i>
Wells	TF 917 435	Stone with tile roof	1897	Harbour office	English Heritage <i>Images of England</i> website. <i>Kelly's directory</i>
Weybourne	TG 108 430	Brick with tile roof	1904	Private double garage	Date on building. Peter Brooks, <i>Weybourne</i>
Wickmere	TG 172 334				NRO PD 112/34
Wiggenhall St. Germans	TF 593 140				OS map 2nd ed.
Wimsbotsham	TF 618 052		1903		<i>Kelly's directory of Norfolk, 1904, p. 525.</i> OS map 2nd ed.
Witton			1909		NRO SO 156/1
Wiveton	TG 037 430				<i>Kelly's directory</i>
Wolferton	TF 657 282	Carr stone and brick	1893		<i>Kelly's directory</i>
Wood Norton	TG 012 280				<i>Kelly's directory</i>
Wroxham	TG 298 170	Brick with tile roof	1909	Social club	Date on building

<i>Location</i>	<i>OS grid ref. of village/town</i>	<i>Construction</i>	<i>Date of opening</i>	<i>Present use</i>	<i>Evidence</i>
Wymondham	TG 108 015	17th century timber-framed building	1864	Tourist information centre	W.H.R. Brickmann, <i>Some records, etc.</i>

Where reading room membership lists have survived, an idea of the members' day-to-day activities can sometimes be identified. Lesser sources of information include seventeen Charity Commission correspondents. The present Commission dates back to 1853, and since then many reading rooms have come under its supervision.⁸ About half of the listed correspondents replied to a circulated questionnaire; some of course were more helpful than others and included relevant press cuttings and photographs, both recent and historic.

Why and how were reading rooms founded?

The growth of mass literacy preceded the development of compulsory primary education, although not everyone benefited from this progress.⁹ In 1851 Henry Mayhew (1812-1887) described how, in a 'small and obscure village' in Norfolk, fascinated by current sensational events the illiterate took advantage of one who had learnt to read:

he saw, one evening after dark, through the uncurtained cottage window, eleven persons, young and old, gathered round a scanty fire, which was made to blaze by being fed with a few sticks. An old man was reading, to an attentive audience, a broad-sheet of Rush's execution ... He read by the fire-light.¹⁰

Skill in reading instigated a working-class desire for books, and in many newly created village reading rooms, this was satisfied by small lending libraries.¹¹ Friendly societies and mutual improvement societies also offered educational elements. These societies were popular, 'self-help' strategies designed to provide material support to the working classes, but also frequently offering educational and

⁸ Norman Alvey, *From chantry to Oxfam* (Chichester, 1995), p. 31.

⁹ 'Male literacy was about 70% in 1850, and 55% of females could read.' Lyons, 'New readers in the nineteenth century' in Cavallo and Chartier (eds.), *A history of reading in the west*, p. 313, 314; Pamela Horn, *The Victorian and Edwardian schoolchild* (Gloucester, 1989), pp. 11, 34.

¹⁰ Henry Mayhew, *London labour and the London poor* vol. 1 (London, 1851), pp. 280-281.

¹¹ Examples of these are Alburgh, Castle Rising, Gresham, Holkham, Melton Constable and Mundford. *Kelly's directory of Norfolk 1904*, pp. 26, 85, 159, 190, 253, 263

social elements.¹² They were often founded and run by local vicars – a common example of paternalism.¹³

Between 1840 and 1940 the growth of education opened people's eyes to a world beyond their own community. The government did not directly see this as the primary purpose of education, however, but through the 1870 Elementary Education Act encouraged its development to bring Britain up to the industrial standard of its European rivals.¹⁴ By 1880 313 schools were established throughout Norfolk, and in 1891 free schooling finally removed the obstacle of school fees.¹⁵

It was a different matter for adult education. As early as 1825, the great reformer, Henry Brougham (1778-1868), stirred the public conscience, when he published *Practical observations upon the education of the people*, promoting 'the gospel of the alphabet' and appealing to employers to assist the new Mechanics' Institutes.¹⁶ These institutes attracted many skilled workers but not the unskilled labour force.¹⁷ Yet they did demonstrate a growing interest in evolving an education for the general masses.

Evening schools became an important source of adult learning.¹⁸ In the 1851 census Norfolk was reported to have fifty-eight such schools, forty-one of which were also used as day schools.¹⁹ Those who attended included twenty-two domestic servants, 138 agricultural labourers, twenty-three labourers of other kinds, 271 artisans and 211 of no stated occupation. This education was not completely free, and payments by the scholars ranged from 1d (one penny) to '5d and upwards'. Government grants completed the necessary costs. Most, but not all, of these schools taught reading (51) and writing (52), with arithmetic (41), English grammar (9), geography (14), history

¹² Many provided their members with books, including fiction, from small (average under 1,000 volumes) club libraries. Kelly, *History of adult education in Great Britain*, p. 175.

¹³ Howkins, *Reshaping rural England*, p. 80.

¹⁴ Horn, *The Victorian and Edwardian schoolchild*, p. 15.

¹⁵ Wade Martins, *History of Norfolk*, p. 87; *Elementary Education Act 1891* (54 & 55 Vict c 56)

¹⁶ Briggs, *The age of improvement 1783-1867*, p. 194; Kelly, *History of adult education in Great Britain*, pp. 121-122.

¹⁷ Kelly, *History of adult education in Great Britain*, p. 117.

¹⁸ These were complementary to the Mechanics' Institutes, founded in 1823. Sometimes the schools were run privately by day school teachers, while others were organised by the local clergy. Kelly, *A history of adult education in Great Britain*, pp. 155, 157.

¹⁹ Parliamentary Paper 1852-53 [1692] XC.1 *Census of Great Britain 1851: Report and tables*, pp. ccviii, ccxi, ccxiii.

(7) and religious knowledge (3) also sometimes being available. Even mathematics, modern or ancient languages and drawing were offered by rare individual schools.²⁰ Some forty years later, there were only twenty evening schools in Norfolk, perhaps a reflection of the effect of free education.²¹

In the countryside, the school-room was usually the only available venue for public use. In 1851 Hudson enthusiastically advocated its use:

Mechanics' Institutions are peculiarly fitted for the labouring classes of the community; and the village school-room when converted in the evening into a reading-room with a green baize covering for the tables, a few maps on the walls, and a cheerful light and blazing fire, forms a pleasing picture of peace and happiness.²²

As already noted, long before it became compulsory, elementary education had an impact on literacy, increasing the demand for recreational reading matter.²³ Consequently, newspapers became more popular, developing their readers' social consciousness. Indeed, as books and newspapers became cheaper during the nineteenth century, reading became a norm of daily life.

In Norfolk the *Eastern Weekly Press* was launched in 1867, continuing as the *Eastern Daily Press* in 1870. Its original aim was 'to guide the working-classes politically and morally' – another controlling influence. A sister title, the *Eastern Evening News*, appeared in 1882. The popularity of newspapers was extensive: 'the chief extravagance of this family is a half-penny evening newspaper', and again 'you will see teammen sitting on their corn bins reading their penny newspapers, when ... they should have been ... feeding their master's horses'.²⁴

The media were quick to take advantage of the situation. By 1904 Norfolk had twenty-two local newspapers, and mass advertising appeared in these and in popular

²⁰ Parliamentary Paper 1852-53 [1692] XC.1 *Census of Great Britain 1851: Report and tables*, pp. ccviii, ccxi, ccxiii.

²¹ Parliamentary Paper 1896 [314] LXIV.489 *Return with respect to Evening Continuation Schools for each administrative county and county borough of number of schools ... 1894-95*, p. 2.

²² Hudson, *History of adult education*, p.191.

²³ W. B. Stephens, 'Literacy in England, Scotland, and Wales, 1500-1900' *History of Education Quarterly*, 30:4 (1990), p. 561.

²⁴ Howkins, *Reshaping rural England*, p. 240; Seebohm Rowntree and Kendall, *How the labourer lives*, p. 163; Springall, *Labouring life in Norfolk villages*, p. 79.

magazines, suggesting extra ideas for leisure.²⁵ As mentioned above, however, spare time was initially in short supply.²⁶

The foundation of reading rooms was an extensive national phenomenon during the second half of the nineteenth century, continuing into the twentieth, but it was known as a concept even before Victoria came to the throne. One of the earliest references to the idea is in a Parliamentary Paper of 1834 on the administration of Poor Laws:

in the parish of Edgbaston Dr. Johnstone ... established an adult school, with the view, by teaching the labourers to read, of affording them a rational occupation and diverting them from mere sensual indulgence; ... nearly 80 adult persons are now subscribers to a room which he has provided for them, and where they are engaged during their leisure moments in reading. Not one of these men now ever apply to the overseer for relief, though many amongst them were formerly paupers and notorious drunkards. ...they do now maintain themselves, and subscribe to the reading room instead of the alehouse.²⁷

Such sentiments were not universally endorsed, as this example from Yorkshire in 1842 makes clear:

I have a reading-room open one night in the week, where the members have access to a number of cheap monthly and weekly periodicals. ... Though I have chess-boards, &c., in the reading-room, some of the young men say they would rather give 2d. for a pint of ale than pay this small subscription for books.²⁸

The idea of instituting reading rooms as a direct alternative to the public house was an attractive suggestion to those in authority. The objective was frequently emphasised by expanding the particular institution's name, for example, Swaffham Coffee Tavern and Reading Rooms for Working Men, Lord Nelson Coffee Tavern, Reading Rooms and Public Hall (Cromer), Swanton Abbott Coffee and Reading Room.²⁹

Intemperance, however, was not the only reason for the foundation of reading rooms.

²⁵ *Kelly's directory of Norfolk 1904*, p. 759.

²⁶ See p. 16.

²⁷ Parliamentary Paper 1834 [44] *Royal Commission of inquiry into administration and practical operation of poor laws. Appendix (A). Part II. Reports from Assistant Commissioners*, p. 17a.

²⁸ Parliamentary Paper 1842 [380] [381] [382] *Royal Commission on children's employment in mines and manufactories. First Report (Mines and collieries). Appendix*, p. 290.

²⁹ *The Swaffham Parish Magazine*, November 1878; William White, *History, gazetteer and directory of Norfolk 1883*, p. 215; NRO, PD146/49 Swanton Abbott Coffee and Reading Room.

Jeremy Burchardt suggests that ‘stemming the decline of the rural population was the main motive for their establishment’, but the original intention was also bound up with contemporary attitudes to philanthropy, recreation and self-help.³⁰

One aspect of this was the creation of many rural reading rooms which were not only to fill a gap in the provision of alcohol-free recreation but also to provide the working man with educative materials unobtainable elsewhere. In 1862 *A plea for reading rooms in rural parishes* was published anonymously by ‘a Country Curate’. He appreciated the establishment of Mechanics’ Institutes and lecture rooms in towns but appealed for the provision of a similar type of institution ‘for the *adult rustic*’.³¹

...let a reading room be provided and he will have a refuge from these evils [idle thoughts and temptations, and intoxication], he will have a place where he can spend his evenings in a quiet, rational and improving manner ... The night school acts as a feeder to the reading room. Their functions are entirely distinct the one from the other, and they both work together for good.³²

One interesting feature of his argument was slipped in almost unnoticed in the description of the ideal premises:

anyone with a cottage larger than his neighbour would gladly lend a room for the purpose; a few well chosen books, a good fire, and plenty of light, the weekly penny (*for it should not be gratuitous*) [my italics] would go some way towards firing and light, and the rest would be readily provided by subscription.³³

Perhaps there is a sense here that one values what one pays for, and self-respect is kept intact. Self-help was a popular concept at this time, as promoted by Samuel Smiles, and the involvement of the user of the reading room in its upkeep, even if only through his weekly payment of a penny, was important.³⁴ But the use of rooms in cottages in this manner is rare if not unknown in Norfolk. As mentioned above, the Rector of Swanton Abbott allowed the use of two rooms in a cottage belonging to him, but no record has been found of a reading room being set up in a villager’s

³⁰ Burchardt, ‘Reconstructing the rural community’, p. 203.

³¹ *A plea for reading rooms in rural parishes by a country curate* (Derby, 1862), p. 3.

³² *A plea for reading rooms in rural parishes*, p. 4.

³³ *A plea for reading rooms in rural parishes*, p. 5.

³⁴ ‘Whatever is done *for* men and classes, to a certain extent takes away the stimulus and necessity of doing for themselves.’ Samuel Smiles, *Self-help with illustrations of character and conduct* (London, 1859), p. 1.

home. This is entirely comprehensible in the context of poor working-class housing, which presented difficulties in the way of any extra burden such as the provision of premises for public use.

The school might be pressed into service, as at Tittleshall, where the Infants' School was used as a reading room every evening.³⁵ One ironic provision of premises occurred in Scole, as described by Jessie Mallows:

growing lads finding no room in the cottage would drift into the public house, and often into bad habits. ... Two rooms in the southern portion of the Inn were available for hire. The upper room was equipped as a Reading Room and fulfilled its purpose. From that came the desire and determination to build a Reading Room.³⁶

The 'Country Curate' took it for granted that money would be available without difficulty – 'the rest would be readily provided by subscription' – and this suggests that philanthropy was an accepted custom.

The necessity for reading rooms is becoming more and more apparent. There is in many a desire for books, and the cheap literature of the day is fostering and encouraging this desire. Food, intellectual food, the people will have...³⁷

This was not necessarily true. We have the example given above of the young men's preference for ale rather than books or intellectual games such as chess. This is not an isolated example:

we have established in this very place [South Durham] a reading-room, to which the men may have free access at a penny a week; none of the workmen subscribe to it. It is supported with works intended for the improvement of the people, some magazines, Chambers' Journal, Chambers' Instruction for the People, and useful and easily intelligible productions, but the workmen will not read. They find more amusement at bowling and at quoits, and gossiping together. Many who once could read have lost the power to do so for want of practice.³⁸

Occasionally a demand for a reading room came explicitly from working people themselves. One example is a printed appeal by wherryemen of the Norfolk rivers of

³⁵ White, *Directory of Norfolk 1883*, p. 745.

³⁶ Jessie Mallows, *Scole from past to present* (Ipswich, 1962), p. 13.

³⁷ *Plea for reading rooms*, p. 6.

³⁸ Parliamentary Paper 1842 [380] [381] [382] *Royal Commission on children's employment in mines and manufactories. First Report (Mines and collieries). Appendix*, p. 152.

Yare, Bure and Waveney, shrimpers, musselmen and dwidlers (i.e. marshmen who maintained dykes and watercourses). It is spelt phonetically and includes a list of over 120 signatories with their places of residence, which were as far north as North Walsham and as far south as Bungay in Suffolk.

This appeal is to testify to the Publick that we have for a Long time been watching the arnest movent that has Been made in Yarmouth to reform the werehemen of our river and the unceceing Efforts of the Clergey and Scriptur Reader to Bring us the message of salvation they have Long time talked of Bilding us a Chapple and Reding Room whear we may pass away our spare time in gain knowledg we are truley anxious to see it set on foot at once and hereby subscribe our Names.³⁹

There is no date on this document, but St Andrew's, the wherryman's church, was consecrated in 1860, and thus this appeal must have been earlier. No evidence has been found of a separate wherryman's reading room, but it may have been incorporated into the church.

Such cases were exceptional, however. As already mentioned, most village reading rooms in Norfolk were set up either by clergy or by a local philanthropic landowner. They were sometimes founded by public subscription (as at Bradwell, Roughton and Scole), although not as often as urban reading rooms, where the greater population made appeals for money more feasible.⁴⁰

Sometimes village reading rooms were built as a memorial to a local person, as at Stanhoe, where in 1886 the Mary Esther Hollway Reading Room was established thirty years after her death by her son, Henry Calthrop Hollway Calthrop, a principal landowner in the area.⁴¹ Occasionally they were created to celebrate a national cause for rejoicing. At Salhouse, Edward Foote Ward of Salhouse Hall presented the village with the site for a reading room.⁴² This was erected in 1897 'in commemoration of 60 years reign of Queen Victoria'.

³⁹ NRO, MC634/24 Printed appeal of the wherryman of the Yare, Bure and Waveney.

⁴⁰ Harry Bonner and Stephanie Beckett Moore, *A brief history of Bradwell Reading Room Trust* (Bradwell, n.d.); NRO, PD 394/47 Correspondence and other papers re parish reading room (Parish Records of Roughton); Mallovs, *Scole from past to present*, p. 13.

⁴¹ *Kelly's Directory of Cambridgeshire, Norfolk & Suffolk, 1892*. [Part 2: Norfolk] (London, 1892), p. 613; MC 542/53, 777X7 Draft deed of gift of a memorial reading room in Stanhoe conveyed by Hollway-Calthrop to trustees (1932).

⁴² *Kelly's Directory of Norfolk, 1912*, p. 436.

Five years later a new king was crowned, and ‘as a permanent memorial of the Coronation’ Lord Stafford decided to donate £100 towards the erection of a reading room in the village of Costessey. Unfortunately the cost of the proposed building amounted to considerably more than his donation, and contributions were sought from local people – one of the few examples of village subscription. This eventually amounted to £62. As this sum was still not enough, it was suggested that approaches should be made to Mr. Andrew Carnegie (1835-1919), and also Mr. Passmore Edwards (1823-1911) both great benefactors of the time. Passmore Edwards responded promptly, regretting that he could not help, while Andrew Carnegie replied that he would only grant money to parishes who had adopted the Libraries Act of 1892. Administrative difficulties over this and also over the proposed site for the reading room then led to a considerable delay. Eventually in 1907 Carnegie donated £195, and the building became known as the Reading Room and Library.⁴³

At Holkham in 1886, the Earl of Leicester benevolently constructed ‘a beautiful building in the Swiss cottage style, with a tower ... at the cost of £1,500, as a reading-room and library for the workmen and labourers on the Holkham estate’. Similarly, on 5 December 1893, the Prince of Wales opened a reading room in the village of Wolferton, three miles from his estate at Sandringham. This was for the use of ‘the servants and workmen employed on the Sandringham estate’.⁴⁴

Even if there is no overt evidence, certain reading rooms have obviously been provided by the local landowner, as stylistically the building matches the dwellings which he made available for his workers. An example of this can be seen at Glandford, where a rather impressive edifice (now a private house), complete with shaped gables, matched the smaller dwellings exactly in design. In this particular case, there is actual documentary evidence that Sir Alfred Jodrell (1847-1929), ‘lord of the manor and owner of the parish’, had the reading room erected about 1900 ‘for the use of the Parishioners’.⁴⁵ In fact, with money earned from the cotton industry in the north of England, he completely rebuilt the whole of the rather ramshackle

⁴³ NRO, PD 280/65 Costessey Reading Room committee minutes.

⁴⁴ *Kelly's directory of Norfolk 1904*, pp. 190, 530.

⁴⁵ *Who was who 1929-1940* (London, 1941); *Kelly's directory of Norfolk 1904*, p. 159; NRO, PD 677/4 Bishop's licence to perform divine service in the Reading Room.

village, and it would seem that the reading room was part of the building programme.⁴⁶

Exceptionally a reading room might be lent to the village. This was the case in Haddiscoe, where the reading room was founded in 1906.⁴⁷ Three years later correspondence with the Charity Commissioners mentioned that the Provost and Fellows of Kings College, Cambridge were lending it to the village presumably free of charge 'on condition that it is used and kept in repair'.⁴⁸ As well as private ownership and altruistic lending, a reading room was occasionally hired for the purpose, as at Hockwold-with-Wilton, where the village Temperance Hall was 'let to the vicar for a parish reading room'.⁴⁹

The development of reading rooms

The earliest extant reading room discovered in Norfolk is in Marsham. This was set up as a Mutual Improvement Institution in 1857, but local people state that it used to be known as 'the reading room' (although now it is used as a village hall).⁵⁰ There was obviously an overlap of intention between the two. Mutual improvement societies were characteristic institutions for self-help and were frequently set up by individual groups of working men.⁵¹ In many places they existed alongside Mechanics' Institutes and evening schools but were more informal in their organisation. Because of this informality, few records of their activities survive, and these can only be discovered in the autobiographical writings of working men.⁵² No early records have been found for Marsham, but the very existence of a designated building points to the spontaneous enthusiasm of those villagers. This enthusiasm was presumably fostered by a local farmer and miller, George Shreeve and also by Captain John Henry Warnes of Bolwick Hall, one of the principal landowners in the

⁴⁶ Jenefer Warwick James and Peter Stone, *Sir Alfred Jodrell 1847-1929* (Dereham, 1996), pp. 2-3.

⁴⁷ NRO, PD 208/31 File of vouchers and accounts for erection of Haddiscoe reading room 1906-1907.

⁴⁸ NRO, PD 208/160 Correspondence with Charity Commissioners.

⁴⁹ *Kelly's directory of Norfolk 1904*, p. 189.

⁵⁰ Date on the building.

⁵¹ Fielden, 'Samuel Smiles and self-help', p. 160; Price, 'The Working Men's Club movement', p. 125.

⁵² J.F.C. Harrison, *Learning and living* (London, 1961), pp. 50, 51.

area, whose names are inscribed on stones on the front of the building.⁵³ Besides the formal stones, some of the bricks have been carved with names: T. Blyth [Thomas Blyth, farmer of 15 acres with no labourers], I. Delph [John Delph, hand loom silk weaver and parish clerk], S. Delph, Wm. Edward, Isaac Jex [police constable, S. Marylebone, London, born in Marsham], J. Shreeve [John Shreeve, dealer in old stores], S. G. Soame [Samuel G. Soame, machinist (general)], H. Stageman [Henry Stageman, hand loom silk weaver] and Miss L. Warnes [Elizabeth Warnes, independent lady].⁵⁴ These are not hasty graffiti, but have been carefully inscribed, and it is probable that they record the names of those who supported the new venture financially. Not all of these names are traceable, but their presence on the building testifies to the interest of the community in the enterprise.⁵⁵

In 1861 a much grander building altogether appeared in the village of Necton. This was founded by William Mason of Necton Hall, the lord of the manor and was not only a reading room but also a ‘young men’s home’. William Mason was an active philanthropist in his area, having previously donated a new organ to the church and built a National School for the village.⁵⁶ The ‘Church Reading Room and Library’ was situated immediately opposite the church and was doubtless meant for the use of all parishioners. This is the most elaborate reading room discovered in Norfolk, with the possible exception of the one in Holkham. After William Mason’s death, Miss Mason, his daughter, became lady of the manor and continued the family’s interest in the reading room, lending newspapers and contributing to the upkeep through a small

⁵³ *Post Office directory of Cambridge, Norfolk and Suffolk, 1869*, p. 348. This situation is noticeably different from the general trend of landowners’ social control of local people, but of course there are exceptions in every situation.

⁵⁴ Francis White, *Directory of Norfolk* (1854), p. 428; TNA, 1851 census: HO107/1810/633/7; Francis White, *Directory of Norfolk* (1854), p. 427; TNA, 1851 census: HO107/1810/646/33; 1861 census: RG9/78/62/42. Isaac Jex is a particularly interesting name, as he left home, going to London to join the police force. Was he still at home when the building was constructed, or did he send money home to support an endeavour he thought was worthwhile?; 1851 census: HO107/1810/631/2; 1861 census: RG9/1207/86/5. See also p. 101 for more information on Samuel Soame; 1851 census: HO107/1810/641/22; 1861 census: RG9/1207/87/7.

⁵⁵ Cf. ‘It was ... customary for villagers and Sunday school children to lay a brick, sometimes initialled, together with a suitable donation [for the local non-conformist chapel].’ Janet Ede, Norma Virgoe, and Tom Williamson, *Halls of Zion* (Norwich 1994), p. 17.

⁵⁶ Francis White, *Directory of Norfolk* (1854), p. 733.

annual donation of seven shillings and six pence.⁵⁷ The location of a particular reading room within the community varies from place to place. Sometimes it was placed in the very heart of the village, as in Brinton, Great Hockham, Gressenhall, Stanhoe and Weybourne. Elsewhere it was near the centre but in a side road; this situation occurred at Northwold and Overstrand. Reading rooms were built on the edge of the village at Glandford, Letheringsett, Thorpe Market and Wroxham. As indicated above, distance was no deterrent, and occasionally a reading room was isolated from its village, as in the case of Sidestrand and Suffield. There is no easy explanation for this variance of situation. It does not seem to relate at all to any contemporary fashion. Land may have been cheaper at the edge of the village, it may have depended on the land that was available at the time, or it may have been the landowner's subjective decision as to where in his estate he wished to position the building.⁵⁸ An interesting example of the latter condition can be found in the case of Hilborough, where the reading room was next to a loose box as part of the glebe farm and presumably established by the church (Figure 5).⁵⁹

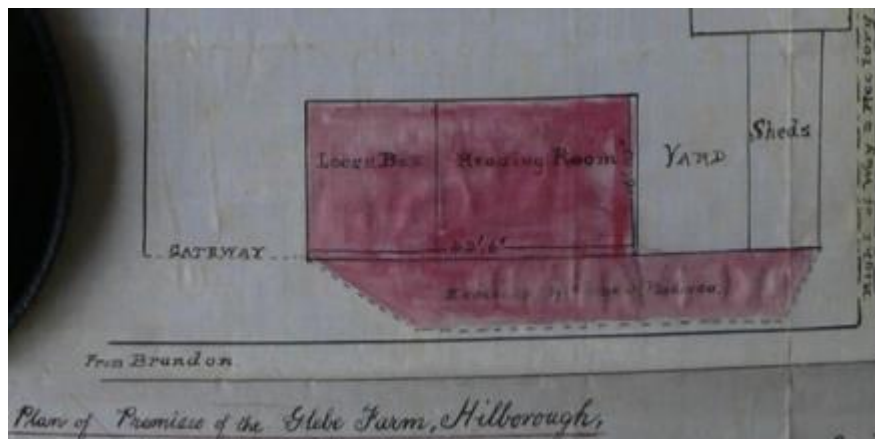


Figure 5: Plan of Hilborough reading room

Yet another illustration of this is at Hunstanton, where the local landowner, Hamon le Strange, placed the reading room right on the sea front between a billiard room

⁵⁷ J. G. Harrod, *Royal county directory of Norfolk 1877*, p. 339; NRO, PD 143/64 Necton reading room accounts, lists of donations and subscriptions.

⁵⁸ Ede, Virgoe and Williamson, *Halls of Zion*, p. 15.

⁵⁹ NRO, HIL 1/144-146, 870X7 Conveyance of 49 acres of glebe land and farm buildings, reserving Reading Room, with plans (1908-1909).

and a shop.⁶⁰

Cromer was unusual, because it had two almost contemporaneous reading rooms. The first one was started as a limited company, complete with memorandum of association.⁶¹ Its title left no doubt as to its purpose – The Cromer Coffee Tavern Reading Rooms and Public Hall Company Ltd. In White's directory for 1883, it is listed as 'Lord Nelson Coffee Tavern, Reading Rooms and Public Hall Co. (lim.), Office, Jetty Street; J. K. Frost, secretary; Rooms, Station Road', indicating that there were actually two sites in the town connected with the company.⁶² The actual 'tavern' was a fairly large building, offering besides a hall for 'lectures and public entertainments', a library, reading and recreation rooms. Its objects, apart from the usual promotion of 'social recreation and mutual improvement among the working classes', included the buying and selling of 'every kind of refreshment except intoxicating liquors, also books, newspapers, and the like ...'⁶³ The establishment lasted until 1890, when it was 'resolved that the Company be wound up voluntarily', no explanation being given.⁶⁴

One reason for the closure might have been the success of the other reading room in Cromer. This was entitled the 'Cromer Working Men's Reading Room Mutual Improvement Society' and was situated in Chapel Street in a building, which had previously been used as a Methodist chapel.⁶⁵ The premises appear to have been quite sizeable, with 'a large lofty upper room ... having two fireplaces and capable of seating 150 people'. A downstairs room was used as a committee or class room. The reading room had developed from 'The Cromer Christian Fellowship Society' founded in 1888, which was later known as 'The Fishermen's and Working Men's Club of Cromer'. There was therefore a strong religious influence; indeed the rules laid down that 'one evening each week be set apart for Bible study' and that 'each succeeding Vicar is to be appointed a trustee'. The club's first annual report

⁶⁰ NRO, DC 16/2/1 Plan of proposed billiard room, reading room and shop in Hunstanton (no date – late 19th century).

⁶¹ TNA, BT 31/2566/13400 Cromer Coffee Tavern Reading Rooms and Public Hall Company Ltd.

⁶² White, *Directory of Norfolk 1883*, p. 215.

⁶³ TNA, BT 31/2566/13400.

⁶⁴ TNA, BT 31/2566/13400.

⁶⁵ Most of the following information has been taken from P. S. Barclay, *The history of the trustees of "The Cromer Working Men's and Fishermen's Reading Rooms"* (Cromer, 1988).

described a very successful year (1890-91) with a membership of 213 working men over 18 years old: 'Every evening ... around 8.30 p.m., there were on average ... 50 seated at the tables or around the fires either reading books or papers or playing chess or draughts or talking and smoking'.

It seems feasible that this club poached members from the 'Lord Nelson', thus contributing to the latter's demise in the very same year, as the population (2,193 in 1891) was probably not large enough to sustain two such similar institutions.⁶⁶

Almost half of the reading rooms whose opening dates have been identified were established in the twentieth century. Surprisingly none was built as a memorial to the First World War fallen, although East Barsham and Burgh were instituted with the returning soldiers in mind.⁶⁷

The church's influence was still strong at the beginning of the twentieth century. At Bradwell, where the reading room was founded in 1902 on land given by the Rector, the initial conveyance stipulated that neither land nor building was to be used 'for any purpose whatever inimical to the Church of England ... nor for the purposes of gambling, card playing, dancing or theatricals'.⁶⁸ Although Haddiscoe reading room, built in 1906, was the property of King's College, Cambridge, it was run by a local committee, to which were sent bills for initial purchases of trestles, forms, tortoise stove, games and so on; by 1909 all local people had access to a small integrated lending library.⁶⁹ Hence local people, in some places, were at last beginning to take control of their own affairs. This nevertheless was still a rare situation. The reading rooms in Costessey (1907), Witton (1909), Letheringsett (1910), Cringleford (1911), Roughton (about 1911), East Barsham (1918) and Overstrand (about 1919) were all set up and to some extent controlled by local landowners, while in Bradfield (1910) the church was apparently responsible for the establishment of the reading room, as

⁶⁶ *Kelly's directory of Cambridgeshire, etc., 1892*, p. 356.

⁶⁷ NRO, PD 178/43 East Barsham reading room minutes 1918-1931; correspondence with Mr. M. Grix, Burgh-next-Aylsham.

⁶⁸ Bonner and Moore, *A brief history of Bradwell Reading Room Trust*.

⁶⁹ NRO, PD 208/31 Accounts for erection of Haddiscoe reading room; PD 208/160 Correspondence with Charity Commissioners.

the bills for its construction and furnishing were sent to the local incumbent.⁷⁰

Where reading rooms were set up under the aegis of the local clergyman or landowner, in most cases there was a happy equilibrium between those in authority and local people. At Cawston in Norfolk in 1863, the local landowner, W.E.L. Bulwer, on donating a reading room to the village, hoped that:

they [the villagers] will be enabled to pass some of their evenings rationally and profitably, without being driven to the bar or to the tap room as the only place of resort. ... [Books of simple and useful information] will supply the means ... of carrying on the great work of SELF-INSTRUCTION. ... And now let me say that the share I have taken in this undertaking – namely the providing this room – will be of little avail, unless the frequenters of it are prepared to take a permanent interest in maintaining its purpose and carrying out its objects. ... An undertaking of this sort, in order to be successful, must be self-supporting...⁷¹

Here are expressed the archetypal Victorian attitudes to paternalism and altruism ('providing this room'), recreation ('pass some of their evenings rationally and profitably'), alcohol and the working classes ('without being driven to the bar or to the tap room'), and self-help ('an undertaking of this sort, in order to be successful, must be self-supporting').

At times the tension between villagers and the establishment – a 'them and us' syndrome – was highlighted by the use of the reading room. A case in point occurred in Topcroft as late as 1934. The Rector, Revd. Thomas Jesse Walker, spoke to members of the reading room, which at that time was being used as a Young Men's Club:

[a new Rector] might fear the coming of a day when the building erected by church people for the use of the Church, would be looked upon as a sort of Public Hall to which the inhabitants of Topcroft had a right of entry. If he really had such an impression it would be his duty as representing the Bishop to close the Room for a time so that even to the most ignorant its possession by the Church should be put beyond all contention. ... On one evening of the year the door will be locked, after due notice of course, to make it clear to the

⁷⁰ NRO, PD 280/65 Costessey Reading Room committee minutes; SO 156/1 Witton Reading Room minute and account books; *Kelly's directory of Norfolk, 1912*, pp. 101, 227; NRO, PD 394/47 Papers re Roughton reading room; PD 178/43 East Barsham reading room minutes; correspondence with Mr. Terence Richards, Overstrand; NRO, PD 47/27 Bills and receipts for building and furnishing Bradfield Church or Parish Room.

⁷¹ NRO, BUL 4/221, 614XI. W.E.L. Bulwer, *Address at the opening of a Reading Room at Cawston*, pp. 3, 4, 9.

most thoughtless that your presence here is a privilege granted you by the Church, and nothing more than a privilege.⁷²

A protest was made by one of the local people, Daniel Rushmore, the secretary of the local Oddfellows, who argued that the action would not be legal, because they paid a (nominal) rent of a shilling a year, but remarkably he got little support from his fellow villagers (according to Revd. Walker). It is clear from the above what Revd. Walker thought of the country people; his use of the phrase, ‘even to the most ignorant’, puts it beyond doubt that the class divide was still very much alive. The condescension in the repeated word ‘privilege’ underlines this unhappy state of affairs.

It is no wonder that there was objection even at that time to what would now be regarded as high-handed treatment. Social mores had changed permanently, with the help of the catalyst of the First World War. Writing in 1920, Lawrence Weaver outlined the problem clearly:

the efforts to create a new focus in the village club during the last few decades have not been very successful, because they have not been the outcome of the people’s own desire, but usually of the good will, sometimes authoritatively, even aggressively, displayed, of those who desired to lead the village in the right way. ... The old men have had their mental horizon extended, and the young men who are coming back to the land will not be content with the old conditions. ... The foundation of all schemes should be reliance upon the communal spirit, so that everything which is attempted would not be imposed from the top, but built up from the bottom.⁷³

His term ‘village club’ included the reading room, which he thought of as a village meeting place without a hall. He further suggested that the pre-war patriarchal system of squire and peasant was a thing of the past and that in future the village community would be ‘self-governing in all its relationships’. One distinction between town and country was the difference in size of population. Accordingly:

the men’s club, the boys’ club, the institute, the reading room, the free library, the allotments association, the football club, the cricket club, and a score of other specialised organisations may flourish side by side in the towns; in the village they must all be combined and

⁷² NRO, PD 389/65 Text of address by Revd. T.J. Walker.

⁷³ Lawrence Weaver, *Village clubs and halls* (London, 1920), pp. 1, 2-3.

coordinated.⁷⁴

A shift in the original purpose of the village reading room can now be seen. It was to be all things to all men. The idea of improvement was to be subordinate to that of recreation. Pastimes were already allowed in reading rooms – billiards, chess, draughts, piano-playing, to name but a few – but in the minds of the unrealistic philanthropists they were always meant to be subservient to the main idea of betterment and self-help through reading.

The old attitudes of benevolent interference did not disappear overnight. In East Barsham in 1918, ten months before Armistice Day, Mr. D. J. Coleman presented the village with a reading room. The minutes of the first reading room committee meeting record that Mr. Coleman, having been elected as President, ‘said for the time being he was keeping it [the reading room] in his own hand to see how far it was used and appreciated’. At the first annual general meeting on 23 January 1919, he hoped that ‘soldiers about to be demobilized ... would find it helped to make country life more interesting’, and ‘suggested perhaps a special visitor night might be good, or a lecture or discussion on some subject of interest each fortnight’. His intentions were clearly good, but there was still a definite element of control and even manipulation. The Vice-President, John Thistleton Smith, a local farmer:

spoke of the landlord’s interest in the village and congratulated the parish on having such a good landlord who was so thoroughly interested in the social and moral welfare of those who lived upon his property, and referred to his care of cottages and their improvement, the Reading Room, etc.⁷⁵

There is a fine line between leadership and domination, and although it is evident that paternalism was still active in the countryside, it would gradually give way to the people’s wish for self-government, as society in general moved towards full democracy.

Where the original foundation of the reading room was funded by the church, problems about the ownership of the property occasionally arose, as in the case of Topcroft, mentioned above. This situation also caused difficulties at Warham and at

⁷⁴ Weaver, *Village clubs and halls*, p. 3.

⁷⁵ NRO, PD 178/43 East Barsham reading room minutes 1918-1931.

Baconsthorpe. In the former village, the land, on which the reading room was built, was donated by the Earl of Leicester in 1892 and was later transferred to the Churchwardens and Rector in trust, while the building itself was provided by the Rector, Revd. Charles T. Digby, who stipulated that the Chairman or President must always be the current Rector.⁷⁶ He further laid down that the Room was not to be used for political meetings or gambling. A solicitor's letter written in 1939 commented wryly: 'there is little doubt that whereas the Room was erected for the use of the Parish by the Rector he did not divest himself and his successors from the actual control of the property!'⁷⁷

All went well for many years, until in the 1950s dissension arose between the then Rector, Revd. F. W. Rideal, and the Parish Council as to ownership and control, the Rector making various claims including the church's right of 'absolute control' and the Parish Council refuting most of the church's arguments. As arbiter the Charity Commission corresponded with both parties and in 1953 finally gave an authoritative decision:

[the donors of the land and the building] would not have wished and could not have envisaged their gifts becoming a bone of contention. To obviate any such risk the Commissioners suggest that ... the property might be vested in the Official Trustee of Charity Lands instead of in the Norwich Diocesan Board of Finance. In practice this will make little difference. ... The Scheme might direct that the Reading Room be managed by a body of trustees consisting of the Rector acting *ex-officio* and four representatives to be appointed by the Parish Council, and the other two by the Parochial Church Council.⁷⁸

Unfortunately there is no record of the success or failure of this plan.

The problem at Baconsthorpe in 1957 made front page news, when the Rector there, Revd. C. S. Little, refused to allow the use of the reading room for the distribution of the parish charity, Newman's Charity, to old age pensioners and householders in the village. This was a mere symptom of the underlying controversy, which had been simmering for months – the church wished to sell the reading room over the heads of the local people, 'because it had become a serious liability'. Becoming angry, the

⁷⁶ *Kelly's directory 1904*, p. 506.

⁷⁷ NRO, PD 502/98 Warham reading room charity 1935-1969.

⁷⁸ NRO, PD 502/98 Warham reading room charity 1935-1969.

chairman and other members of the committee took matters into their own hands and entered the building by ladder, thereafter successfully handing out the charity money.⁷⁹ Again regrettably no record of the aftermath has been found.

These three examples – Topcroft, Warham and Baconsthorpe – suggest that the upper classes, including the clergy, were losing much of their ascendancy in local society. The enfranchisement of the middle and working classes earlier in the century helped them to realise that they had a voice which mattered, and this spilled over into a wish to be involved in the management of local affairs. From the solitary protest getting little support in Topcroft in 1934 to outright rebellion in Baconsthorpe twenty years later, ‘ordinary’ people came to realise that they could take control of their own lives without direction from their ‘betters’.

The geographical distribution of reading rooms

Village reading rooms were set up nationwide, and if those listed in the trade sections of *Kelly’s* directories between 1911 and 1914 are counted, in conjunction with population statistics recorded in the 1911 census, the ratio of reading rooms to population can be calculated, giving a ‘snapshot’ of reading room provision throughout the country at that time. As can be seen in Figure 6, the county best served was Westmorland, Norfolk coming eighth out of a list of thirty-three counties.⁸⁰ The numbers after each county represent the number of persons in that county served by each reading room. In Norfolk, for example, one reading room theoretically served 7130 people. In reality, many villages had no reading room, and their inhabitants therefore had no access to its benefits. Careful study of the statistics given seems to indicate that rural counties were better supplied with reading rooms than those in the neighbourhood of great cities, e.g. Warwickshire and Staffordshire (both influenced by Birmingham), or Cheshire (Liverpool and Manchester), although there is a danger of overstating this.

⁷⁹ *Eastern Daily Press*, ‘Village hall ‘opened’ ’ 23 April 1957, p. 1, ‘Parish charity defeats reading room lock-out’, p. 8.

⁸⁰ Directories for this particular period were not available online for every county – Cambridgeshire, Lancashire and Nottinghamshire are missing from this chart, for example – but this representative list gives a good indication of comparative provision.

Population served by each reading room between 1911 and 1914

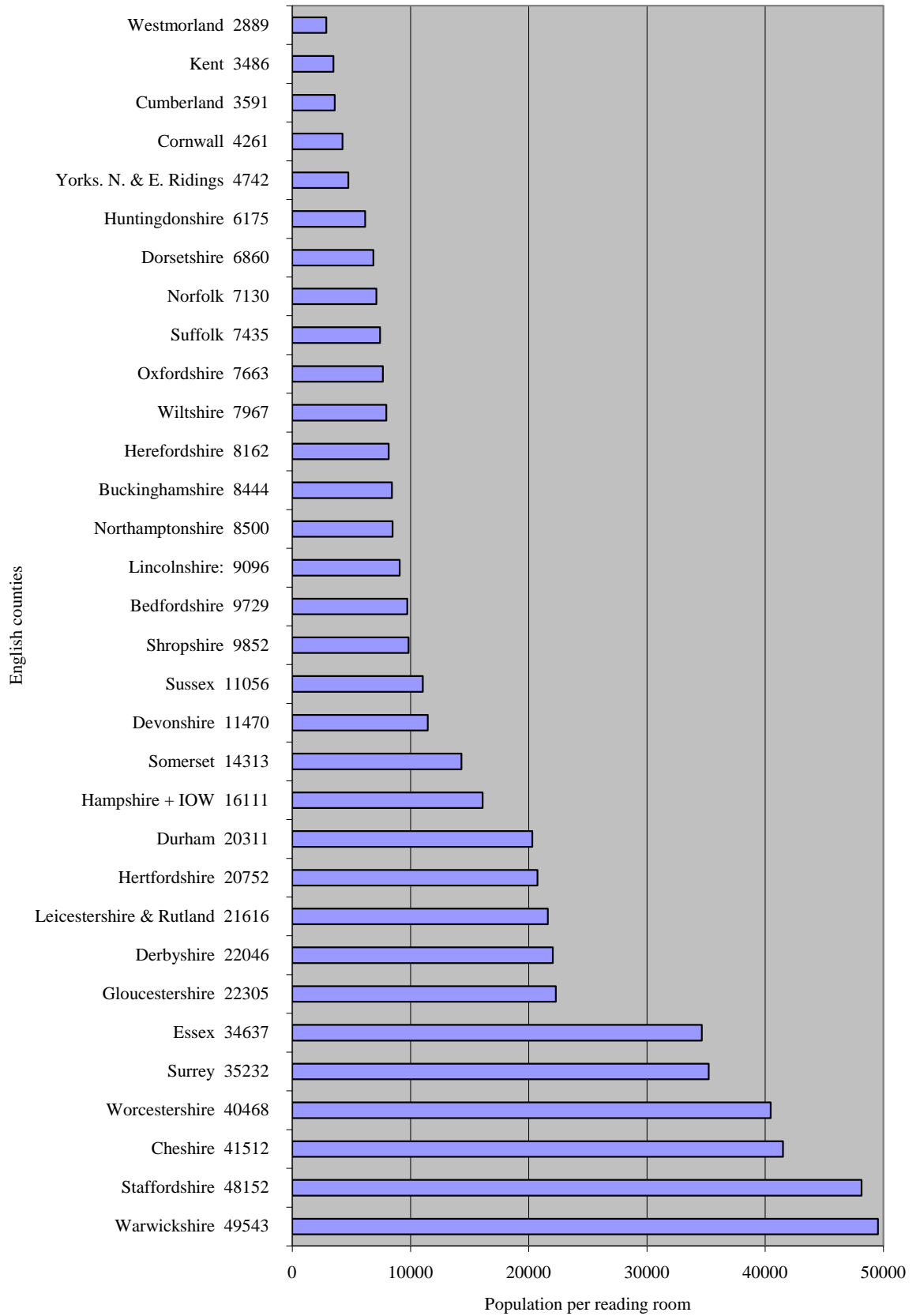


Figure 6: Reading rooms and population chart

In Norfolk the distribution of reading rooms was reasonably widespread, as is demonstrated in the accompanying map (Figure 7).



Figure 7: Distribution of reading rooms in Norfolk

Country people from childhood had been used to walking everywhere, and the remote location of a desired destination was no deterrent. It is recorded that in 1884 among the seventeen members of Swanton Abbott reading room were men from Worstead (2.6 miles away), Sloley (2.2 miles), Skeyton (1 mile) and Westwick (1.3 miles).⁸¹ Occasionally a reading room might become too popular, with people joining from quite distant villages. In 1921 at East Barsham, for example, it was decided ‘that for the present outside members shall be admitted from West and North Barsham, Houghton and Great Snoring only’.⁸² Another explanation of this ruling could be that there was a strong sense of community here, and only people who ‘belonged’ to the village were allowed membership. Strangers were not welcome and indeed were often regarded with suspicion.⁸³ The distance from East Barsham to these other villages varied from one to just over two miles, suggesting that

⁸¹ NRO, PD146/49 Swanton Abbott Coffee and Reading Room.

⁸² NRO, PD178/43 East Barsham reading room minutes 1918-1931, 5 December 1921.

⁸³ K. D. M. Snell, *Parish and belonging, community, identity and welfare in England and Wales 1700-1950* (Cambridge, 2006), p. 43.

previously would-be members had come from further afield. Occasionally reading rooms were to be found in adjacent villages, as in Strumpshaw and Lingwood, or Mulbarton and Bracon Ash, where the two buildings were about a mile apart, but this is unusual.⁸⁴

The concept of a reading room as an alternative meeting place gradually spread. It is not always possible to find an accurate date for specific openings, but an impression of how fast the idea was taken up can be gained from the dates which are known. Out of a total of over 160 reading rooms known to exist at some period in Norfolk, 49 opening dates have been determined, and these are listed in Table 5.

Of course, not every village had a reading room. Provision depended upon local circumstances. Perhaps the local landowner was interested in the welfare of the people of the neighbourhood and philanthropic enough to donate a piece of ground and/or the building, as at Ashill and Witton (1909).⁸⁵ Possibly the rector felt it was important enough to try to keep his parishioners out of the public house by providing an alternative meeting place, as at Gressenhall in 1904.⁸⁶ Again, if the people themselves really wanted the facilities which would be provided by a reading room, they contributed their own hard-earned money towards the project. Finally, the necessary finance on occasion came from outside the county, as at Burgh, where the War Office donated a timber army hut at the end of the First World War, to be used as a reading room for ex-soldiers.⁸⁷ If none of these conditions was met, the village had to suffer the lack of amenities that a reading room would have provided.

Membership profile

The membership of almost all reading rooms was entirely male. This is logical, as the rooms were predominantly thought of as an alternative to public houses, which were primarily a male preserve.⁸⁸ One exception to this general rule was the Necton reading room, which was founded in 1861. Eleven years later it was decided to

⁸⁴ OS map 2nd ed.

⁸⁵ NRO, PD 548/60 Letter from Mordaunt Edwards, Hardingham Hall, 19 April 1911; SO 156/1 Witton Reading Room minute and account books 1909-1960.

⁸⁶ *Cromer and North Walsham Post*, 15 October 1904; correspondence with Mr. D. W. Bunning, Gressenhall Green.

⁸⁷ Correspondence with Mr. M. Grix, Burgh-next-Aylsham.

⁸⁸ Harrison, *Drink and the Victorians*, p. 47.

admit women, and in May 1872 five women paid their quarterly subscription of six pence and became full members. By the following May two had dropped out. During the next five years female membership decreased still further, until in 1878 only one brave woman remained. Although the decision to admit female members had been taken, the atmosphere in the reading room must have been uncomfortable for them. There is no record of any particular concessions being made to make them feel welcome. No women's papers were taken, for example. The typical reading room games – billiards, draughts, etc. – perhaps did not appeal to them. Whatever the reason, the experiment of allowing women into a men's world was ahead of its time and was probably doomed to failure from the start. The only other case of women's involvement in reading room membership happened at Cromer. There the rules of the Cromer Working Men's Reading Room Mutual Improvement Society (1880) stated: 'that Ladies be allowed to become Subscribers to the Library ... a quarterly subscription of one shilling and sixpence.'⁸⁹ This of course is a limited form of membership, and whether the invitation was taken up is unknown. Mulbarton Reading Room's change of name in 1925 to 'The Mulbarton Men's Club' underlines the contemporary attitude.⁹⁰ This particular aspect of reading rooms has not completely died out, as there is still a reading room in Polruan, Cornwall, whose membership is open only to men.

General rules of membership included prohibition of 'intoxicating liquors', as would be expected.⁹¹ They also forbade swearing and bad language, disorderly conduct and gambling of any sort.⁹² This last rule was taken to extremes in Swanton Abbott, where in 1885:

it was brought before the committee that a majority of members wished to adopt the plan of playing games for cups of cocoa, and the committee at once decided ... that such a plan was contrary to the rule against gambling ... and therefore could not be allowed.⁹³

⁸⁹ NRO, MC 97/116, 541XI Cromer Working Men's Club and Reading Room – MS notes, reports, rules.

⁹⁰ Mulbarton Men's Club Minutes Book, in the possession of Mrs. Jill Wright, Mulbarton.

⁹¹ For instance, Mulbarton reading room rules: 'no person in a state of intoxication shall be permitted to enter or remain in the room'. Mulbarton Men's Club Minutes Book.

⁹² NRO, PD146/49 Swanton Abbott Coffee and Reading Room; PD502/97 Warham reading room member's card, 1929.

⁹³ NRO, PD146/49.

Disorderly conduct sometimes happened despite the rules. In 1895 at Swanton Abbott, the manager complained that some members were unable to use the room because of others' misbehaviour.⁹⁴ He was authorised to exclude any offenders. Other reading rooms solved the problem of noise by erecting a partition 'for the comfort of those who may choose to amuse themselves with games, apart from those who prefer reading', or by keeping the piano locked (rather defeating the object of its purchase!)⁹⁵ The problem of noise was recognised at Cromer, with an uncompromising rule stating that 'no music or singing shall be continued if a majority of those present object to it, while at Mulbarton 'all loud talking to the annoyance of others' was 'strictly forbidden'.⁹⁶

In order to encourage membership, in 1879 the committee of Cromer reading room decided to form a Cricket Club, which would be open only to reading room members, unless an annual subscription of five shillings was paid, two-fifths of which would go to the funds of the reading room. This venture met with some success, as was reported in January of the following year: 'the Cricket Club ... promises to be very attractive and useful in keeping the Society together during the summer'.⁹⁷

This idea of a sporting connection is not unique. Owen Stinchcombe reports a similar situation in Gloucestershire, where rifle club membership in some villages was open only to reading room members.⁹⁸

For some places (Litcham 1887, Necton 1871, North Elmham c.1875, Northwold 1884) lists or partial lists of members have survived, and it is possible to analyse their social class with a study of these lists and use of contemporary directories. At Litcham only the important members are listed, specifically those who gave donations. Revd. W. A. W. Keppel, who owned 1300 acres in the district, donated £1. He was not the incumbent, who was Revd. George W. Winter. The latter, remarkably, is not mentioned in the accounts. Mr. Ward [John Ward, grocer, draper

⁹⁴ NRO, PD146/49.

⁹⁵ NRO, PD 373/178 Northwold committee minutes 1884; PD215/25; PD 146/49.

⁹⁶ Barclay, *History of Cromer reading rooms*; Mulbarton Men's Club Minutes Book.

⁹⁷ NRO, MC 97/116, 541X1. Cromer Working Men's Club and Reading Room.

⁹⁸ Stinchcombe, 'Researching village reading rooms', pp. 156-57.

and wines and spirits agent] paid 4s. The amount received from monthly members is recorded as one total. The reading room obtained its newspapers from Mr. Nicholas Polkinhorne, who was also a general stationer, tobacconist, confectioner, National schoolmaster, assessor and collector of taxes, poor's rate collector and postmaster. He was obviously a good diversifier. The secretary and treasurer of the reading room was Alfred Hopson, a farmer.⁹⁹

Necton's list yields better results. Here the individual members are named and included six farmers, two shoe makers, a blacksmith, a farm bailiff, a grocer and draper, a miller and an organist and teacher of music – an eclectic group of people, with the expected emphasis on rural employment.¹⁰⁰

At North Elmham the list of members is divided into two sections – honorary and ordinary members. The honorary members donated 10s or £1 and included Lord Sondes, the local vicar, a surgeon, a corn, cake and coal merchant and four farmers. The ordinary members paid a subscription of 5s and again earned their livelihoods in various ways. In a list of nineteen members there were a tailor and draper, a grocer, draper and insurance agent, a schoolmaster and organist and a wheelwright.¹⁰¹ Unfortunately the occupations of the other fourteen members have not been recorded. Finally a partial list is extant for Northwold. The members here included a miller and farmer, a blacksmith and a shoe maker.¹⁰² The lack of information in the directories about many members may indicate that these were agricultural labourers, who were not deemed worthy of inclusion, confirming yet again the great class divide.

Day-to-day running of the reading room – finance

The everyday routine of the reading room was financed by the subscriptions of the members and also by donations from local wealthy patrons, and several accounts have survived to give a reasonably accurate explanation of how much money was

⁹⁹ NRO, PD 459/152 Litcham Reading Room balance sheet; White, *Directory of Norfolk 1883*, p. 400.

¹⁰⁰ NRO, PD 143/64 Necton reading room accounts; *Post Office directory of Cambridge, etc., 1869*, p. 357; Harrod, *Directory of Norfolk 1877*, p. 339.

¹⁰¹ PD 209/456 North Elmham Reading Room Society committee minutes and accounts. (Parish Records of North Elmham, 1875-1883); Harrod, *Directory of Norfolk 1877*, p. 161.

¹⁰² NRO, PD 373/183 Northwold Reading Room accounts; White, *Directory of Norfolk 1883*, p. 432.

available and how it was spent. Particularly interesting are the accounts for the setting up of a reading room, as they give particulars of what was thought necessary for the first year. The village had doubtless never had such an institution before, and so this was a completely new idea. Accordingly, at Swanton Abbott, the first expenditure in 1884, apart from necessary furniture, lamps, etc., was on eight spittoons, two boxes of draughtsmen and newspapers.¹⁰³ Word of mouth seems to have been the principal method of publicising new reading rooms, but here the committee was progressive enough to issue notices and twenty-five handbills ‘in the neighbourhood stating that any one of the committee will receive the names of those who desire to be members of the temporary Reading and Coffee rooms.’¹⁰⁴ In the following four years four pairs of quoits and billiard cues were bought. The idea of billiards was short-lived, however, as the proceeds of the sale of the billiard table were put towards the purchase of a piano funded also by the income from concerts, sales of programmes and a magic lantern exhibition.

At Haddiscoe in 1906 Revd. Lawson selected for the new reading room four draughts boards, four draughtsmen, four dominoes, two dozen cribbage pegs and four cribbage boards. Also *The Eastern Daily Press* was taken.¹⁰⁵ From the first, therefore, games were seen as an integral part of the *raison d'être* of a reading room, although they were not always introduced without controversy. At North Elmham, for instance, where chess and draughts were already offered, it was proposed in 1876 to procure a bagatelle board ‘with the understanding that playing for money be strictly prohibited’. However, this proviso was not enough for one member, who proposed an amendment to the effect that ‘a bagatelle board be not purchased’. In committee this amendment was overridden by six to two.¹⁰⁶

Newspapers were essential, and some details of those taken have survived. The most comprehensive list records the Swanton Abbott subscriptions in 1884: *Farm and Home*, *Cassell's Saturday Journal*, *The Argus*, *The Daily Press*, *Rare Bits*, *The Penny Illustrated*, *The English Mechanic*, *The Alliance*, *The Standard* and *The*

¹⁰³ NRO, PD 146/50 Treasurer's book, Swanton Abbott Coffee Room.

¹⁰⁴ NRO, PD 146/49. Swanton Abbott Coffee Room minutes.

¹⁰⁵ NRO, PD 208/31 File of vouchers and accounts for erection of Haddiscoe reading room.

¹⁰⁶ NRO, PD 209/456 North Elmham Reading Room Society committee minutes and accounts.

Graphic – an ambitious list for such a small village. This initial enthusiasm did not last, because in 1887 subscriptions to all the periodicals were cancelled and replaced by a single newspaper, *Eastern Daily Press*. The decision was taken to pay ten shillings and six pence annually to Jarrold's lending library for three books for the use of members, these books to be regularly changed. Later it was found that no one wanted to read the books, and Jarrold's supplied an English Dictionary, an atlas and a map of Norfolk instead.¹⁰⁷ These examples show that no one had any idea how successful the reading room would be, and therefore any initiative tended to be experimental.

Income also accrued from social evenings, fêtes, lantern lectures, whist drives, Red Cross lectures, the hire of chairs (all these in 1922, Great Melton), sale of old papers (1887 Litcham, 1901 Helhoughton), use of the billiard table (1914 onwards Northwold, 1917 Belton), allotments rent (1876 onwards at Northwold), and the hire of the room to outside organisations such as the Oddfellows (1874 Necton), the Women's Institute (1921 and 1922 Great Melton), Norfolk County Council evacuee school, ARP (air-raid precautions), clinic (1940 Overstrand) and the Home Guard (1941 Overstrand and 1943 Great Melton).¹⁰⁸

The idea was that the reading room should be self-supporting, as emphasised by Mr. Bulwer at Cawston in 1863, but this was not always the case.¹⁰⁹ Helhoughton recorded a deficit of 5s in 1901, for example.¹¹⁰ On the whole, however, fund-raising and regular subscriptions kept the reading rooms running smoothly. There is certainly no record of serious financial difficulties.

¹⁰⁷ NRO, PD 146/50 Treasurer's book, Swanton Abbott Coffee Room.

¹⁰⁸ NRO, PD 479/11 Account book for Great Melton Reading Room, etc., PD 459/152 Litcham Reading Room balance sheet, PD 368/68 Balance sheet for Helhoughton Reading Room, P/CH 2/177 Norman Reading Room, PD 530/40 Belton parish account book, PD 373/183 Northwold Reading Room accounts, PD 143/64 Necton Reading Room accounts, PD 117/10 Overstrand Reading Room account 1940-4, PD 479/11; PD 117/10 Overstrand Reading Room account 1940-41.

¹⁰⁹ NRO, BUL4/221, 614X1, Bulwer, *Address at the opening of a Reading Room at Cawston*.

¹¹⁰ NRO, PD 368/68 Balance sheet for Helhoughton Reading Room.

Architectural styles of reading rooms

Where the buildings have survived, a picture emerges of the general architectural design of a reading room, extending into the twentieth century. This was greatly dependent on the original method of foundation – that is, how much money was available. As a general rule, where money was almost no object and was supplied by the local landowner, grandiose buildings were erected, as at Necton and Holkham, or perhaps slightly less imposing, as at Glandford. Where the local clergyman was responsible for the finance, more modest premises were donated, typified by Gressenhall and Warham. If the building had been funded by public subscription, the style tended to be utilitarian. An example of this can be found at Scole.

Not all reading rooms were purpose-built. Sometimes use was made of a building which had outlived its original function. Northwold reading room, for example, was previously an old farmhouse, while Wells reading room was converted from the southern half of a lifeboat house.¹¹¹ Other examples include reading rooms in Buxton, formerly a laundry, and in Eaton, where again an old farmhouse was given a new function.¹¹²

Where reading rooms were designed for the purpose, they occasionally followed the architectural fashion of the period. This can be seen at East Rudham, where the Marquess of Townshend gave the building to the village in 1887. This was when the Gothic Revival movement in architecture was at its height. Traces of this



Figure 8: Sidestrand reading room

are found in the pointed windows of East Rudham reading room, and also at Paston, although there is none of the excessive flamboyance typified in other Norfolk buildings of the genre such as Beeston Hall, Cromer Hall, Heacham watermill or Thorpe Market church, with their turrets and spires. If the Gothic Revival movement

¹¹¹ *Kelly's Directory of Cambridgeshire, etc., 1892*, p. 499;

<http://www.imagesofengland.org.uk/Details/Default.aspx?id=407187&mode=quick>

¹¹² NRO, MC 389/40 Royal Norfolk Nurseries Estate inc. Reading Room (1884).

was the style of paternalism, the Arts and Crafts style of architecture could be said to be a symbol of a secular, anti-urban society.¹¹³ The influence of this movement on Norfolk reading rooms can be seen in such features as simpler windows, examples being found at Letheringsett and Sidestrand (Figure 8). Another feature of these two last reading rooms is the use of an extremely durable and easily obtainable local material, namely flint, which has been used for building in Norfolk since Roman times.¹¹⁴ Other examples are at Crossdale Street, Glandford, Kelling and Roughton. The other very common construction material was brick, used in Norfolk since the fifteenth century. In the early nineteenth century there were around two hundred brickyards throughout the county, and it is safe to say that brick was the most popular material used for reading rooms.¹¹⁵ Examples include Barsham, Bradfield, Brinton, Briston, Gressenhall, Ingworth, Keswick, Marsham, Salhouse, Stanhoe, Swanton Novers, Thorpe Market, Warham, Weybourne and Wroxham. These brick buildings had very few architectural pretensions. They were built for a specific purpose, and the result was a utilitarian style. From this appeared what could be termed a ‘typical’ reading room, with one storey, a porch and inside either one or two rooms. A perfect example of this can be seen in the surviving plan for Keswick reading room, which was opened in 1887 (Figure 9).¹¹⁶ Apart from the porch and the large end window, the building is completely plain. Inside along the walls there was to be ‘filleted boarding’ – matchboarding – which was frequently used in reading rooms.

¹¹³ Roger Dixon, and Stefan Muthesius, *Victorian architecture* (London, 1985), p. 50.

¹¹⁴ Bernard and Elizabeth Orna, *Flint building in Norfolk* (Worthing, 1984), p. 7; Nikolaus Pevsner and Bill Wilson, *Norfolk 1* (London, 1997), p. 20.

¹¹⁵ Pevsner and Wilson, *Norfolk 1*, p. 26.

¹¹⁶ NRO, BR 35/2/64/11. Keswick reading room; *Kelly's directory of Norfolk 1904*, p. 212.

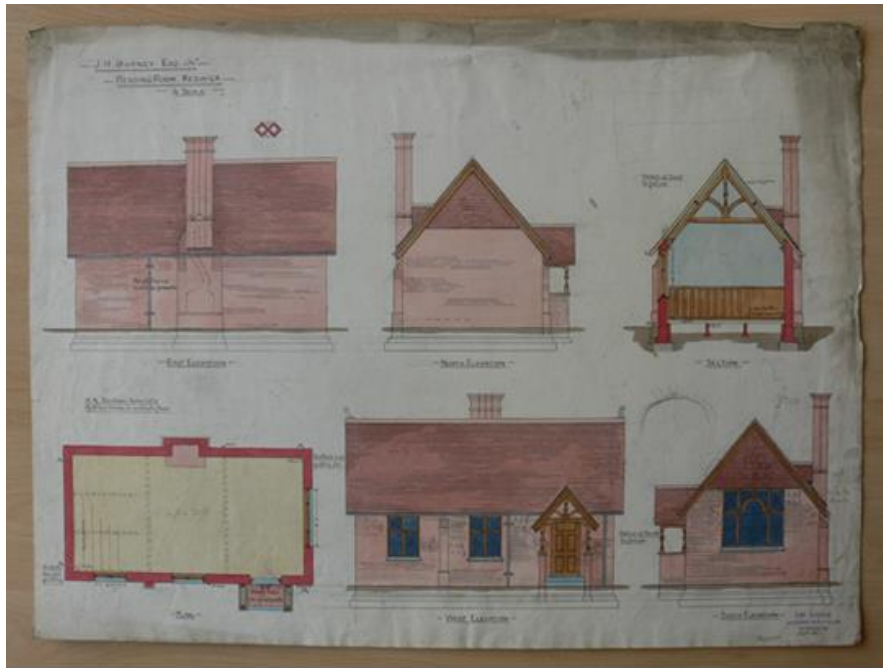


Figure 9: Plan of Keswick reading room

A more unusual category of building was that constructed of corrugated iron. This was the result of greater expertise in the use of timber and steel and also better techniques in mass production. Popular in the early twentieth century, it was the type used for ‘tin tabernacles’, but occasionally similarly built reading rooms appeared, as at Dickleburgh, Overstrand and Suffield (Figure 10).¹¹⁷ At Overstrand, as stated above, the building was used as a military hospital, before being converted into a reading room. The building has been reclad with a modern version of corrugated iron, but the original can still be seen on the gable. These buildings were provided by the flourishing Norwich firm of Boulton and Paul Ltd. (Figure 11), which supplied this type of construction, in addition to many other styles of iron buildings, throughout England. As can be seen in this illustration from a



Figure 10: Suffield reading room

¹¹⁷ Ede, Virgoe and Williamson, *Halls of Zion*, p. 37; NRO, PD704/30 Dickleburgh insurance policies and papers.

catalogue produced in 1888, these buildings were sold in different lengths and frequently lined with matchboarding.¹¹⁸

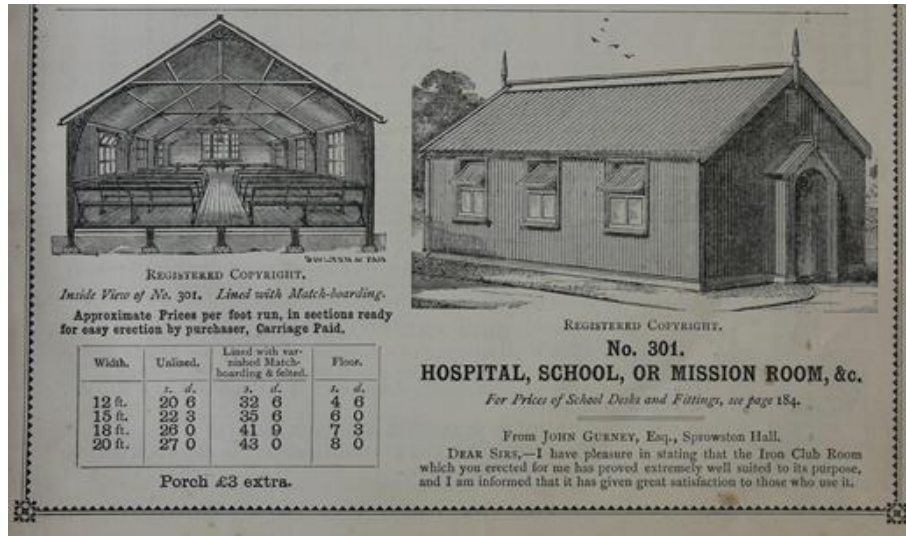


Figure 11: Illustration from catalogue published by Boulton and Paul Ltd.

A feature of some reading rooms was an adjoining house or cottage, which was used to accommodate the caretaker. This did not occur frequently but can be seen at Thorpe Market, Stanhoe and Overstrand. The architecture sometimes matched that of the reading room, as at Stanhoe (brick built and tiled), but not always.¹¹⁹ At Overstrand, for example, the reading room is constructed of corrugated iron, while the attached cottage has walls of flint. This raises the question of whether or not the caretaker's accommodation preceded the reading room and was used for this purpose as a matter of convenience.

The decline of reading rooms

As discussed in the previous chapter, the many technological advances of the time fundamentally affected social conditions, by improving living standards and working conditions and offering alternative methods of spending leisure time. During the same period educational provision was slowly improving, although standards were lower in rural areas, and adult education was accessible through the W.E.A. and the

¹¹⁸ Terence Richards, *Visitor's guide to Overstrand* (Overstrand, 2005); conversation with Mr. David King, Suffield; NRO, BR 273 Boulton and Paul catalogues, etc.

¹¹⁹ NRO, MC 542/55, 777X8 Draft deed of gift by Hollway-Calthrop of the Mary Hollway Memorial Reading Room, Stanhoe with caretaker's cottage adjoining (includes plan) (1932).

Women's Institute.¹²⁰

These innovations profoundly affected the status of reading rooms. In addition, their original purpose of providing alcohol-free recreation and education had mostly disappeared. Membership began to diminish, as people chose other diversions. In 1934 Warham reading room committee decided to close 'owing to shortage of members', and 'for some time the room was not used at all'. It must have reopened, however, as the minutes of a reading room committee meeting in 1949 have survived.¹²¹ Lack of modern conveniences and sparse material comforts also discouraged membership.

It seems that the main decline of reading rooms occurred after the period covered by this thesis, as post-war Britain struggled to return to normality. The concept of reading rooms was seen as outdated, as village life was improved with, for example, the arrival of the 'Welfare State', secondary education up to the age of 15 and new housing.¹²²

When a disused reading room was sold, it was frequently converted to residential accommodation, as in Bradfield, Brinton (after use as a furnishing fabric showroom), Buxton (after use as a Scout Hut), Cley, East Barsham, East Rudham (after use as a soldiers' canteen), Glandford, Gresham (after use as a post office), Northrepps, Northwold, Roughton, Salhouse, Scole and Swanton Novers.¹²³ Other exceptional applications were a gallery and tea room (Kelling), a young disabled people's activity centre (Sidestrand) and a double garage (Weybourne).

Sometimes a building was restored and converted into a village hall, often with extension(s). This could only be done, if the original space was large enough to accommodate the size of gatherings expected. Examples of this can be found at Paston, Overstrand, Suffield, Thompson, Thorpe Market and Warham. In these

¹²⁰ Caitlin Adams, 'Rural education and reform between the wars' in Paul Brassley, Jeremy Burchardt and Lynne Thompson (eds.), *English countryside between the wars* (Woodbridge, 2006), pp. 39, 43-44.

¹²¹ NRO, PD 502/98 Warham reading room charity 1935-1969.

¹²² Hill, *British economic and social history 1700-1982*, pp. 290-292.

¹²³ Correspondence with Mrs. C. Flower, Brinton; correspondence with Mr. R. Kelham, Cley; 'Points of interest', *Eastern Daily Press*, 27 December 2003, p. 52 (EDP magazine); Arnolds estate agent's particulars; correspondence with Mr. Michael Hall, Scole.

places the name has been explicitly changed to ‘village hall’, whereas elsewhere the reading room has kept its name but functions as a modern village hall.¹²⁴ This latter situation is seen at Burgh, Gressenhall and Holkham.

In spite of the obvious versatility of these reading room buildings, upon closure many were simply demolished. No written record has been discovered of this, but local residents sometimes remember what happened. Occasionally, as noted above, a village hall was erected on the site or a garden designed (as in Great Hockham), but in many cases, there is absolutely no trace of the previous building.

Village halls

As previously noted, the subject of village halls is already well documented, and it is therefore unnecessary to examine them in minute detail. In a work on rural leisure it is, however, necessary to comment briefly on their founding and consequent impact. This section therefore discusses the reasons for the establishment of village halls, their funding and management and their influence as a social class leveller and promoter of gender equality.

As we have seen, in the early part of our period social centres for village meetings were scarce. If it had enough room and the requisite facilities, the pub was available for such celebrations as harvest suppers and weddings.¹²⁵ For other events the school-room was called into service more often than not. But pubs and schools were not the only buildings used for recreational purposes in the nineteenth century. Some village halls had been converted from other buildings. A list is given in the *Village halls in England 1988* survey:

- Hall originally built as:-
- School/Sunday school
- Church hall
- Barn/Cow shed
- Reading room
- Miners’ welfare institute

¹²⁴ NRO, PC 117/5 Subjects include donation to Parish Council of reading room and its re-naming as the Parish Hall, 1938-1939, plan of reading room, no date (Overstrand Parish Council minutes, 1938-39).

¹²⁵ Monger, ‘Rural community centres’, p. 65.

RAF/Army hut¹²⁶

There were some purpose-built halls, where villagers collaborated to raise the necessary funds. Snettisham Memorial Hall is an early instance. It was built in 1888, when to commemorate the Golden Jubilee of Queen Victoria the local people raised £500 by selling £1 shares.¹²⁷ This was unusual at that time, because as we have seen, the establishment of social amenities was generally in the hands of local landowners through a sense of either duty or altruism, one example being Gimingham, where in 1896 Sir Thomas Fowell Buxton built a village hall.¹²⁸ In the early 1930s, however, the hall was given by his son to the Church, and eventually in 1976 it was sold to the Parish Council for a nominal sum of £5.¹²⁹ Occasionally a hall was built to honour one person, as in Cawston, where the village hall – the Cecil Cawston Memorial Institute – was built in 1912 in memory of Cecil Cawston, a local young man who died in the Boer War (his name and the name of the village are coincidental). Almost twenty years later a similar situation occurred in Pentney, where the Howlett Memorial Hall was opened in memory of Miss Hannah Howlett, a zealous Baptist church worker.¹³⁰ Yet another instance was in Eccles. The village hall there, known as the Garnier Hall, was erected in 1924 in memory of Canon E. T. Garnier.¹³¹ An event of national note was sometimes honoured locally. Such was the death of King George V in 1936, which prompted the construction of Briston's Memorial Pavilion, the cost of which had been met by 'the proceeds of a house-to-house collection, special offertories at the Parish Church and Congregational Chapel, a grant of £20 from the Norfolk King George V Memorial Fund, and a gift of £100 from Lord Rothermere'.¹³²

Records show that nationally over one fifth of rural communities (21.02%) were provided with village halls before the First World War.¹³³ The turning point in the

¹²⁶ Louise Beaton, *Village halls in England 1988* (Fairford, 1988), p. 15.

¹²⁷ <http://www.norfolk-on-line.co.uk/snettisham/pages/memorialhall.php>

¹²⁸ Monger, 'Rural community centres', pp. 65-66.

¹²⁹ <http://giminghamvillage.weebly.com/village-hall.html>

¹³⁰ 'Memorial Hall at Pentney', *Eastern Daily Press* 14 October 1931 p. 3, 'Howlett Memorial Hall', p. 9.

¹³¹ NRO, PD 95/41 Plans and elevations for the village hall, erected in memory of Canon E. T. Garnier.

¹³² 'Briston's Memorial Pavilion', *Eastern Daily Press*, 2 August 1937, p. 11.

¹³³ Beaton, *Village halls in England 1988*, p. 13.

provision of most halls, however, came after the war, when there was serious discontent with current rural leisure facilities, stimulating an upsurge in the construction of new halls. This discontent was logical, as men returning from the war and women returning from war work away from their villages had been introduced to new ideas and experiences far removed from their previous humdrum existence. As a result they were less content with the existing state of affairs that greeted them on their homecoming.¹³⁴ Friction arose as they tried to settle back into normal routines. It was obvious that a solution to the problem was necessary. In 1918 the Ministry of Reconstruction produced two idealistic wish lists for every village:

... a parish or village hall, or library, in which meetings, and lantern and other lectures could be held, the newspapers, magazines, and books read, and other reasonable recreation obtained. ... a parish field for cricket, football, &c., and for the village feast and other outdoor festivals.¹³⁵

... a normal minimum ... should include ... a village hall, preferably part of the school buildings, furnished with a stage and small rooms behind for use as dressing-rooms, the hall to be used for play and for meetings.¹³⁶

Weaver succinctly defined the difficulty:

it is idle to ignore the fact that the church is no longer a common meeting ground. The village tap room has to a small extent served as a club, but not very worthily, and not at all properly for the youth of the countryside or for the women of the cottages. ... the War has changed the values and the characters even of our oldest institutions.¹³⁷

The control of reading rooms by 'outside' forces contrasts strongly with the democratic organisation of the village halls which sprang up in the first quarter of the twentieth century. Dissatisfaction with the current leisure provision in villages had been growing, and initiatives, such as the Young Men's Christian Association (Y.M.C.A., founded in 1844), the Workers' Educational Association (W.E.A.,

¹³⁴ Grieves, 'Common meeting places', p. 172; Jeremy Burchardt, ' "A new rural civilization": village halls, community and citizenship in the 1920s' in Brassley, Burchardt and Thompson (eds.), *The English countryside between the wars. Regeneration or decline?* p. 29.

¹³⁵ 1918 [Cd. 9079, 9080] Ministry of Reconstruction. Report of the Agricultural Policy Sub-Committee ... , p. 81.

¹³⁶ 1918 [Cd. 9166, 9232] Ministry of Reconstruction. Advisory Council. ... p. 12.

¹³⁷ Weaver, *Village clubs and halls*, pp. 1, 2.

founded in 1903), the National Federation of Women's Institutes (N.F.W.I., founded in 1915) and the Village Clubs Association (V.C.A., founded in 1920) had been created to reform social opportunities in the countryside, among other aims.¹³⁸ The pre-war paternalism was no longer so acceptable, and people wished to look after their own needs as a community. In 1924 Sir Henry Rew, chairman of the V.C.A., sympathised with this point of view:

in many cases the combined effort to secure a village hall has been the first step in the direction of common action ... which has aroused the interest of the whole community.¹³⁹

This was a momentous move away from the hitherto mostly passive acceptance of philanthropic hand-outs. It is true that the land on which village halls were built was often donated by local landowners, but their interest in the project generally did not continue. They did not usually try to organize or control the hall committee and in most cases had no involvement at all with the enterprise.¹⁴⁰ The ethos of village halls was very similar to that of reading rooms, but with a more relaxed attitude and without the element of overt self-improvement. The emphasis was on social activities and the ability for the community as a whole to meet together.¹⁴¹

Funded by public subscription and the United Services Fund, some village halls were built to commemorate those who had been lost in the war.¹⁴² The *Eastern Daily Press* reported the opening ceremonies of these memorial village halls in the 1920s.¹⁴³ In spite of the pressing need for a local social centre, not everyone was in

¹³⁸ Jeremy Burchardt, 'A new rural civilization': village halls, community and citizenship in the 1920s', p. 28; The Y.M.C.A. had been founded to protect young men in urban situations. It was very active during the First World War, and its post-war provision of recreational facilities soon spread throughout the country. Grieves, 'Common meeting places', pp. 182, 183; Adams, 'Rural education', p. 43; Howkins, *Death of rural England*, p. 33.

¹³⁹ *The V.C.A. News*, 6, December 1924, 3-4, quoted in Grieves, 'Common meeting places' p. 183.

¹⁴⁰ Burchardt, *Reconstructing the rural community*, p. 210. An instance of this is the anonymous donations making possible the building of Upper Sheringham village hall with an adjacent bowling green on land, bequeathed by a local landowner and conveyed to the Parish Council. 'A Committee of Management would be appointed, consisting of representatives of the Women's Institute, and the Football, Cricket, and Bowls Clubs.' 'Village hall for Upper Sheringham' *Eastern Daily Press* 19 October 1923, p. 5.

¹⁴¹ Grieves, 'Common meeting places', p. 185.

¹⁴² Grieves, 'Common meeting places', p. 185.

¹⁴³ Two examples are: 'Village hall for Upper Sheringham' *Eastern Daily Press* 19 October 1923, p. 5, Horning 19 September 1925.

favour of honouring the war dead in this fashion. In letters to *The Times*, two correspondents expressed their opinions:

the thoughtlessness, the actual selfishness of many of the proposals is amazing! The way the utilitarian point of view is being dragged forward in all directions shows a most unfortunate lack of imagination, and evinces no real desire to keep green the memory of the great heroism of the fallen.¹⁴⁴

However much may be desired a village hall or club, I submit that the commemoration of the dead should not be made a mere excuse for demands by the living for something that they would like to have.¹⁴⁵

Nevertheless, the ‘utilitarian point of view’ was accepted in many villages throughout England, as those still living sought to honour their lost comrades in a way which was both pragmatic and yet also paid homage to their sacrifice. Grieves suggests that this widespread movement of memorial village halls instead of memorial tablets in parish churches reflected the ‘onset of religious doubt in the aftermath of war’, an interesting concept of secularisation beyond the scope of this thesis.¹⁴⁶

Many halls were built because of the national desire to increase social and educational facilities in rural areas, although this desire did not immediately exist everywhere:¹⁴⁷

after long years of waiting the people of Horning on Saturday entered onto possession of a substantially built and well-equipped village hall. When the project was mooted about seven years ago, the idea of even an Army hut for reading and recreation purposes was so new and strange that it met with little sympathy. ... The spirited policy of the Parish Council led to the acquisition this year of a public recreation ground of over four acres. This brought the village hall much nearer, for the breezy plateau above the village provided just the site needed. ... The Horning Debating Society will shortly take up their quarters at the hall, and it will mainly be used during the winter as a men’s social club, with billiards, bagatelle, draughts, and other games, and supplied with current literature.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁴ W. Reynolds-Stephens, ‘War memorials’, *The Times*, 4 April 1919, p. 7.

¹⁴⁵ J. H. Round, ‘War memorials’, *The Times*, 9 April 1919, p. 8.

¹⁴⁶ Grieves, ‘Common meeting places’, p. 179.

¹⁴⁷ Louise Beaton, *Village halls in England 1998* (Cirencester, 1998), p. 63.

¹⁴⁸ *Eastern Daily Press*, 19 September 1925.

Such initial apathy was uncommon, as most villages welcomed the chance of a social centre. Many halls were built for no other reason than because there were few alternative local recreational possibilities. The post-war ready availability of RAF and Army huts sometimes provided a practical, economical solution to the lack of a suitable building, and a Norfolk example can be seen in the village of Heydon. In the inter-war period with or without philanthropic donations villagers mostly came together to work hard to gain their objective. Even local children could be involved: ‘the curtains were provided by the school children who sold calendars to raise money for the purpose. ...’¹⁴⁹

Horsford was a typical example of village endeavour:

17 June 1925. Parish meeting held at the School.

This meeting having been called to ascertain if it were the desire of the Parishioners that steps should be taken to erect a Parish Hall – the Chairman gave an outline of the efforts of the Parish Council in this direction – a site having been obtained as a gift from Mr. G. B. Bone of Drayton and definite promises of donations received from Leading Parishioners. He then moved on as follows:- “That this Horsford Parish Meeting duly convened gives consent to the proposal to erect a Parish Hall for the *religious and secular well-being of the whole of its inhabitants* [my italics] and for the enjoyment of innocent amusements and hereby pledges itself to do all within its power to further that object.” ... carried unanimously.¹⁵⁰

Three years later after many fund-raising efforts the hall was opened. Its management was ‘vested in the Parish Council’, and while generous gifts were still accepted with gratitude, the whole project was an excellent example of the new rural democracy then increasingly prevalent.¹⁵¹

The cost of a hall was often a problem. Villages were helped initially through the Village Halls Loan Fund, and later by grants from the Carnegie U.K. Trustees.¹⁵² These did not cover the whole expense, and many fund-raising efforts were necessary and sometimes also voluntary building labour (as at Roughton, Bawburgh and Rackheath), suggesting that philanthropic contributions were much less

¹⁴⁹ ‘Bodham village hall’ *Eastern Daily Press*, 4 February 1935, p. 12.

¹⁵⁰ NRO, PC 132/1/2 Horsford Parish Council minutes 1913-1925 and Parish Meeting minutes 1914-1925.

¹⁵¹ PC 132/1/3 Horsford Parish Council minutes 1925-1932 and Parish Meeting minutes 1926-1931.

¹⁵² Burchardt, ‘Reconstructing the rural community’, p. 200.

forthcoming than in the pre-war years.¹⁵³ North Creake raised over £1000 in three years, which, together with £315 from the Carnegie United Kingdom Trust Fund and an interest-free loan of £500 from the National Council of Social Service, was enough to upgrade and enlarge the former National School into a very respectable village hall, complete with dressing rooms, kitchen, billiard room and reading room. The newspaper report of the opening emphasised its necessity in that location:

the important position that the hall should occupy in the public and social life of the village can be indicated by the facts that North Creake is seven miles from the nearest town, has not a railway station, and has few means of recreation.¹⁵⁴

To spread the cost, now and again one village hall would serve a wider area, as at Eccles, where from the beginning the Garnier Hall was intended to serve the villages of Quidenham, Hargham and Snetterton besides Eccles.¹⁵⁵

All this exertion confirms the intensity of popular opinion. The village hall represented a move away from the pub as the main social venue in the village, fostering the village's sense of identity and providing a neutral cohesive and egalitarian focal point for all (unlike the gender-biased reading room or pub) and ideally an antidote to the increasing problem of rural alcoholism.¹⁵⁶ The ethos of pubs differed from that of village halls, in that pubs were run primarily for profit, whereas halls were organised for the benefit of local communities. Their social and educational importance was underlined in the annual report of the National Council of Social Service for 1924: 'the urgent need of halls to serve as centres for social and educational activities has been shown by all recent enquiries into conditions in rural areas',¹⁵⁷ and again in 1931-32: 'where there is no village hall there tend to be few

¹⁵³ *Eastern Daily Press*, 'New village hall at Roughton', 18 January 1932, p. 5, 'Bawburgh's new village hall', 19 February 1937, p. 11, 'Rackheath village hall', 11 December 1937 p. 11.

¹⁵⁴ 'North Creake village hall' *Eastern Daily Press*, 5 October 1933, p. 5, 'Great day for North Creake', p. 12.

¹⁵⁵ 'Village hall for Eccles' *Eastern Daily Press* 17 April 1925, p. 5.

¹⁵⁶ Burchardt, 'Rethinking the rural idyll', p. 78; Burchardt, 'Reconstructing the rural community', *Cultural and Social History*, 8:1 (2011), pp. 194, 207.

¹⁵⁷ NCSS, *Fifth annual report of the National Council of Social Service for the year 1924*, quoted in Burchardt, 'Reconstructing the rural community', p. 199.

village activities; the growth of active organisations is indeed almost impossible unless they can find an adequate meeting place'.¹⁵⁸

These 'adequate meeting places' could include church halls, Scout and Guide huts, Women's Institute halls and sports pavilions, which besides fulfilling their original function also provided accommodation for an assortment of village events.¹⁵⁹ The 'adequacy' of village halls was underlined by the fact that it was open to use by children (e.g. Scouts, Guides, Girls' Friendly Society, children's entertainment) and women (e.g. Women's Institute, Mothers' Union, keep fit classes), who had been denied any social participation in the local pub.¹⁶⁰

Speeches at village hall openings expressed hopes that the hall would be for all social classes:

the hall, ... he said, was intended for all classes in the village.¹⁶¹

... that hall would be the meeting place of all classes, of all parties, and all creeds. ... They did not want society divided into different classes; men and women were quite sufficient division.¹⁶²

This indicates that class divisions continued to exist at that time, even though they were seen to be undesirable and no longer acceptable.

'Rational recreation' was still the hidden agenda for some people, as revealed by the politician, George Edwards' comment: 'Mr. George Edwards, in a brief address, said he hoped that besides supplying recreation of all kinds the hall would afford opportunities for mind improvement.'¹⁶³ George Edwards had learnt to read and write only in adult life, and this idea was therefore close to his heart.¹⁶⁴ Village halls, however, principally improved the social life of the community, which led to improved interpersonal relationships.

¹⁵⁸ NCSS, *Voluntary service: being the annual report of the National Council of Social Service for the year 1931-2*, quoted in 'Conclusion' in Brassley, Burchardt and Thompson (eds.), *The English countryside between the wars*, p. 238.

¹⁵⁹ Beaton, *Village halls in England 1988*, p. 8.

¹⁶⁰ Burchardt, 'Reconstructing the rural community', p. 209.

¹⁶¹ *Eastern Daily Press* 'What Ludham wants' 9 August 1926, p. 6.

¹⁶² 'East Ruston village hall' *Eastern Daily Press* 12 June 1925, p. 5.

¹⁶³ Monger, 'Rural community centres', p. 68; 'What Ludham wants' *Eastern Daily Press* 9 August 1926, p. 6.

¹⁶⁴ George Edwards, *From crow-scaring to Westminster, an autobiography* (London, 1922), p. 32.

The management of a village hall was normally in the hands of a committee consisting of local men of differing occupations. The chairman was often the local landowner, but in time this post was gradually taken over by village leaders. The day-to-day running of the hall was organised by a separate committee of managers, who were working men from the village. An early example of this can be found at Stratton St. Mary, where the 1906 list of ‘governors’ and managers has survived. *Kelly’s directory of Norfolk 1908* states that the governors included the rector, the doctor, the resident at the Manor House and a farmer, while the managers were a saddler, a grocer, a chemist, a carpenter, a blacksmith and a stonemason.¹⁶⁵ Cooperation between the two committees appears to have been good:

5 April 1906 A letter was read from Managers requesting a voice in the selection of the Furniture, also bringing forward the question of lighting by means of “Carmein Gas”. It was agreed ... that a House Committee consisting of three Governors ... and two Managers be appointed to arrange about the Furnishing of the Hall, Lighting and Heating, continuing in office for a year it being understood that no resolution take effect until confirmed by the Governors.

In August of the same year the managers suggested ‘certain papers for the Hall. The following were agreed to by the Governors: *Daily Mirror; Answers; Titbits; M. A. P.; Punch; Strand & Windsor.*’¹⁶⁶

A similar situation existed at Wicklewood, where:

... the maintenance of order and discipline in the said Hall ... shall be ... left in the hands of a Committee of Managers which shall consist of not less than six nor more than eight bona fide working men being earners of wages and living in the Parish of Wicklewood who shall be nominated by the Vicar and approved by the said Governing Body.¹⁶⁷

Although there is still an element of control here, a distinct difference can be perceived between the management of reading rooms and village halls.

Village hall committee members were always men, who gratefully accepted help from women when appropriate. This would include providing teas at various social

¹⁶⁵ *Kelly’s directory of Norfolk 1908*, pp. 455-456.

¹⁶⁶ NRO, PD 122/72 Parish records of Stratton St. Mary Village Hall governors’ minutes 1906-1928.

¹⁶⁷ NRO, DN/ADR 16/1/22 Norwich Diocesan Archives ... Wicklewood village hall 1904-5.

functions and helping with other domestic matters. This was to change as attitudes altered:

24 April 1925 ... Public meeting June 22nd 1925 ... Capt Kitchener said he was of the opinion that three ladies should be placed on the committee; the following three ladies were then added Mrs Heath, Miss Barrett and Mrs Amis.¹⁶⁸

In due course another idea was to form two committees – one male and one female:

general meeting held in the village Hall Oct 10th 1933. 20 people were present. The business of the meeting included the appointment of the Men's and Women's Committees. [9 men's names; 9 women's names].¹⁶⁹

In these ways village halls brought to life the idea of equality in both class and gender.

The variety of activities which took place in the halls was far-ranging. Village societies used them – the British Legion, the Women's Institute, the Girls' Friendly Society, drama societies, keep-fit classes, Boy Scouts and Girl Guides – while entertainments included film shows, whist drives, Christmas parties and dances.¹⁷⁰ Clubs and societies meeting in the village hall provided social networks, which in many cases converged. Village life was therefore both enriched and enlivened with a choice of leisure opportunities other than church or chapel societies, reading rooms (where they existed) or the pub. In a positive way these multifarious activities helped to transform country people's outlook on life, already altered by demographic and employment changes resulting from the population shift from rural to urban areas.¹⁷¹

Conclusion

The education of the working classes was uppermost in the minds of many of those responsible for establishing reading rooms, but this concern was accompanied by strong feelings about the perceived problems of alcohol consumption. Reading rooms provided not only a venue for reading, but also an alternative to the public

¹⁶⁸ NRO, PD 653/177 Parish records of Ludham. Village Hall and Church Room. Minutes 1925-1954.

¹⁶⁹ NRO, PD 137/59 Cockley Cley Village Hall annual general meeting minutes 1933-1957.

¹⁷⁰ Burchardt, 'Reconstructing the rural community', pp. 211-212.

¹⁷¹ Monger, 'Rural community centres', p. 73.

house for evening recreation. There was no central, national structure to the movement: it depended on local initiatives, on the direct involvement of local landowners or clergy, although demand from local working people themselves, however, sporadically led to the foundation of reading rooms by public subscription. Gradually democracy superseded philanthropy, the original aim changed to become more generally recreational, and instead of being imposed upon, communities themselves began to make their own decisions about reading room organisation.

As the twentieth century progressed, reading rooms became an old-fashioned concept, and village halls began to supersede them, or if they were large enough, reading rooms themselves were converted into village halls. Of the remainder, although many were transformed into residential accommodation, large numbers have disappeared completely.

The reading room as an institution has passed into history but has left both tangible proof of its existence in the form of surviving buildings and records, and also interesting evidence of former lifestyles and attitudes. The village hall, on the other hand, has gone from strength to strength. It is usually publicly owned and is still administered by local people for the interest and enjoyment of the whole village.

Chapter 6. The changing character of rural sport

Over the century between Victoria's ascendancy to the throne and the outbreak of the Second World War, sport in rural Norfolk, as exercised by working men, developed from being an ephemeral deviation from the relentlessness of everyday life to a series of organised events of various kinds supported with differing degrees of enthusiasm.¹ It could be described as a mixture of entertainment, revenue and proselytism, and this idea is explored further within this chapter. Although sport in general as a subject for historical investigation is now firmly in the spotlight after years of neglect, historians have paid little attention to sport as practised within village society, and this topic is therefore ripe for examination.²

In the nineteenth century sport was promoted as character-building, and the church became involved. Early social control, however, gradually gave way to more democratic organisation. In particular cricket and football (the latter sport was working-class from the beginning) became very popular, and improved public transport allowed a range of more distant fixtures to be organised. Both these games were initially largely dependent upon the goodwill of the local church or landowner for suitable venues. During the inter-war years they flourished, becoming more self-sufficient and providing a certain cohesiveness to village life.

'Muscular Christianity'

In the second half of the nineteenth century sport and leisure in general became more a part of everyday life, due to the gradual upgrading in living standards and the continuing decrease in working hours, as previously discussed.³ There was a fear in the minds of the élite that this extra free time would not be used 'properly' by the working classes. In fact inimical opposition to the immoral features of popular

¹ Women were not actively involved in sport. Even in the 1930s the Women's League of Health and Beauty and keep-fit were regarded as suitably feminine and uncontroversial activities, while 'aggressive' sports such as football were considered to be inappropriate for women.

² Derek Birley, *Sport and the making of Britain* (Manchester, 1993); Dennis Brailsford, *British sport, a social history* (Cambridge, 1997); Jeffrey Hill, *Sport, leisure and culture in twentieth-century Britain* (Basingstoke, 2002); Tony Mason (ed.), *Sport in Britain* (Cambridge, 1989); Martin Polley, *The history of sport in Britain, 1880-1914* (London, 2004); Neil Wigglesworth, *The evolution of English sport* (London, 1996).

³ See p. 18 above.

recreation was led by church, chapel and Parliament.⁴ This led to the idea of ‘rational recreation’, whereby time would be spent profitably in mental or physical self-improvement, through reading rooms, Mechanics’ Institutes or virile sports.⁵ In 1859 the well-known reformer, Samuel Smiles, deplored ‘neglect of physical exercise’, which led to ‘discontent, unhappiness, [and] inaction’, emphasising instead the advantages of ‘abundant physical exercise’ in his advice on self-culture.⁶ Sports were seen as a means for building character through discipline and also the ‘harmonious development of mind, body and spirit’.⁷ The movement which came to be known as ‘Muscular Christianity’ emerged in the mid-nineteenth century and was most associated with the writings of Charles Kingsley (1819-1875), Anglican priest, university professor, historian and novelist, and Thomas Hughes (1822-1896), lawyer and author.⁸ These men encouraged the pursuit of healthy physical strength combined with Christian spiritual development. This idea appealed to those most affected by the Industrial Revolution – in other words, urban rather than rural workers. The upper classes saw it as one antidote to the poor working conditions so prevalent in factories, giving the working classes the opportunity to enhance their lives. The situation was different in the countryside, and the influence of the movement was less marked. Nevertheless, it had a certain consequence, in its impact on the clergy of all denominations. In the early nineteenth century, in a strong reaction against the wide-ranging Georgian permissiveness, they were antagonistic towards village leisure in general, as outlined in a poem by the novelist and poet, Thomas Love Peacock (1785–1866): ‘... the poor man's delight is a sore in the sight, And a stench in the nose of piety.’⁹ During the second half of the nineteenth century the Victorian preoccupation with health and fitness, however, and the trend towards athleticism promoted by the Muscular Christianity movement, eventually changed the clergy’s attitudes, and as described below, rather than being hostile, they became

⁴ Bailey, *Leisure and class in Victorian England*, pp.17-18.

⁵ Keith A. P. Sandiford, *Cricket and the Victorians* (Aldershot, 1994), p. 34.

⁶ Smiles, *Self-help*, p. 241.

⁷ Nick J. Watson, Stuart Weir and Stephen Friend, ‘The development of Muscular Christianity in Victorian Britain and beyond *Journal of Religion and Society*, 7:1 (2005), p. 6. <http://moses.creighton.edu/jrs/2005/2005-2.pdf>

⁸ Nick J. Watson, ‘Muscular Christianity in the modern age’, in Jim Parry, Simon Robinson, Nick Watson and Mark Nesti, *Sport and spirituality: an introduction* (Abingdon, 2007), p. 80.

⁹ *Rich & Poor; or Saint & Sinner*, published in *Tickler, Or, Monthly Compendium of Good Things, in Prose and Verse* (London, 1818) p. 166.

supportive of local sports, supplying encouragement and playing grounds, even in some cases joining their local teams. Their belief, that playing cricket was somehow an expression of Christian morality and that the two reinforced each other, was to extend into the twentieth century.¹⁰ Village women, however, did not figure in sports, except as spectators or in the supporting role of supplying refreshments.¹¹ The emphasis on masculinity stimulated by Muscular Christianity reinforced the propensity for male prejudice, which was so much the norm in Victorian society at large.¹²

Cricket

It is too simplistic to state that there was a great divide between the classes in their participation of sport – for instance, cricket for the upper classes and football for the working classes. Nevertheless, there is a grain of truth in this view. Sport was very much to the fore in the context of class inequality, particularly the aspect of social control. Social exclusivity was maintained by large subscriptions to various sports clubs (impossible for poor men) and sometimes the designated time of play would lessen the possibility of a working man's attendance.¹³ Moreover, as already noted, in the mid-nineteenth century the clergy were not always in favour of villagers wasting their free time on sports. A typical contemporary attitude was expressed by the Revd W. H. Henslowe when he attempted to persuade his parishioners in Southery, Norfolk, of the advantage of 'improving those Sabbath hours which are now so awfully lost in the Beershop and on the cricket field'.¹⁴ This viewpoint was to change radically. One (possibly cynical) reason for the transformation might be that the clergy decided that it would be more advantageous to cooperate with the potential cricketers and thereby possibly retain some element of control. They therefore took an interest in the team, either by playing on the field, by encouraging

¹⁰ Jack Williams, *Cricket and England. A cultural and social history of the inter-war years* (London, 1999), p. 143.

¹¹ A rare glimpse of women playing cricket is afforded by an account of ladies' matches in the late 1880s and early 1890s. These ladies, obviously upper class, were 'gathered from the country houses of the district'. David Turner, *The book of Narborough* (Tiverton, 2004), p. 134; Philip Yaxley, *Looking back at Norfolk cricket* (Dereham, 1997), p. 48.

¹² Sandiford, *Cricket and the Victorians*, p. 43.

¹³ Lowerson and Myerscough, *Time to spare in Victorian England*, p. 125; David Tubby, *Life in the Flegg villages, 1800-1950* (Gorleston-on-sea, 2012), p. 92.

¹⁴ NRO, PD 314/51 Parish Records of Southery (Diocese of Ely). Statement of Revd W.H. Henslowe concerning the period of his curacy at Southery, 1838-1840.

the promising young players or by becoming involved in the club's administration as its president or as a committee member.¹⁵ They also joined forces with the local gentry to influence the membership of the teams, even in the early period drawing up the rules for games played in their district.¹⁶ The following rules exemplify the desire to keep the club élite:

RULES OF THE BLICKLING CRICKET CLUB ESTABLISHED 1838 REVISED AT A GENERAL MEETING, ON WEDNESDAY 11TH APRIL, 1849.

... That the Annual Subscription be One Pound Ten Shillings ...

...That no Member be at liberty to introduce, to play, more than once, any person residing within 20 miles of Blickling, unless he be proposed as a Member – or belong to some public or private school – or is the son of a Member and under the age of 21 years. ...¹⁷

A curious early rule of the Norfolk County Cricket Club (founded 1827), which must certainly have deterred the working classes, was that 'all members, clergy men excepted, should wear at the annual meetings the uniform dress, "a dark blue coat with buttons lettered 'N.C.C.', with white waistcoat, etc."¹⁸ With directions such as these, any attempts at class integration were doomed to failure, and social divisions were considerably encouraged.

The Blickling rules can be compared with those of the Cranworth, Letton & Southburgh Cricket Club almost thirty years later.

1. The Club is open to all Parishioners.
2. Every one on becoming a Member binds himself to obey the Rules.
3. The Subscription for the Season is –
 To the Men's Club, 1s.
 To the Boys' Club, 6d.
 All Subscriptions must be paid in advance. ...
4. The contributions of Honorary Members are to be laid out on necessaries for the game, and nothing else.

¹⁵ Keith Skipper, *Going bats in Norfolk. True cricketing tales* (Wellington, 2010), p. 58; Robert Lee, 'Revolution and restoration', *Norfolk archaeology*, 44 (2002), p. 6.

¹⁶ Christopher Brookes, *English cricket. The game and its players through the ages* (London, 1978), pp. 7-8.

¹⁷ Handbill in Colman Collection in the Norfolk Heritage Centre. This annual subscription should be considered in the light of the average Norfolk labourer's wage at that time, which was 8 shillings a week. James Caird, *English agriculture in 1850-51* (London, 1968), p. 175.

¹⁸ David Armstrong, *A short history of Norfolk county cricket* (Holt, 1958), pp.7-8.

The changing character of sport

5. Playing on Sunday is strictly forbidden. Any one who violates this Rule, or is guilty of bad language or disorderly behaviour, will be dismissed from the Club.
6. All disputes that cannot be otherwise arranged are to be referred to the Clergy for settlement, and their decision shall be final.
7. A meeting of the Club shall be held at the beginning of the Season, to elect a President, Vice-President, and Secretary, together with a Committee of four others, who shall choose the Eleven when a Match is to be played, and manage the affairs of the Club generally. A meeting of four shall be deemed a *quorum*.

The Captain of the Eleven for the ensuing Season shall be elected at this meeting.

The Members of the Club are requested to do all in their power to protect the interests of Mr. LAMBERT, who kindly allows the Club the use of his field.¹⁹

The whole tone is different – inclusive rather than exclusive, not based on socio-economic foundations – and arguably exemplifies the general shift in public attitudes towards social class over this short period. The rules against Sunday playing, bad language or disorderly behaviour were in place, as was customary at this time. Rule 7 shows that the club was organised on a democratic basis. In addition, the local community was involved, in that the clergy were referred to for the resolution of arguments, while the venue for matches had been provided by a neighbouring farmer. The most noticeable difference, however, is in the subscription, which would have been affordable by most aspiring players – perhaps by instalments, although there is no evidence for this. This class cooperation extended into the next century, causing Pelham Warner, the famous cricketer and writer on cricket, to declare in *The Cricketer* in 1922: ‘a village [cricket] match is the truest democracy’.²⁰

Village cricket was not a Victorian innovation. It was already established in the eighteenth century according to a newspaper report of 1770, which mentioned a joint team from ‘Swaffham, Ashill, Fakenham, Rudham, Rainham, Necton, &c’, although the players’ social class was not specified.²¹ During the next decade matches at

¹⁹ Lambert James, farmer. E. R. Kelly (ed.), *Post Office directory of Cambridge, Norfolk and Suffolk 1875*, p. 243; NRO, PD 359/70 Parish Records of Cranworth with Letton. Charities. Cranworth, Letton and Southbergh cricket club rules, 1876.

²⁰ Quoted in Williams, *Crickets and England*, pp. 131-132.

²¹ J. S. Penny (comp.), *Cricketing references in Norwich newspapers, 1701 to 1800*, p. 15. *Norfolk Chronicle*, 25 August 1770 (advertisement).

Brinton, Foulsham, Thornham and Shipdham were reported, and a betting culture was inaugurated – ‘Great bets are depending, and much sport and company are expected’.²² The game was also a social leveller. Phibbs points out that because the players ‘traditionally dress identically in white’, this permitted a temporary equality between the classes, and L. P. Hartley mentions this in the semi-autobiographical novel, *The go-between*, describing a cricket match in 1900 between Brandham Hall (i.e. Bradenham Hall, Norfolk) and the local village:

I remember how class distinctions melted away, and how the butler, the footman, the coachman, the gardener, and the pantry-boy seemed completely on an equality with us ... All our side were in white flannels. The village team ... distressed me by their nondescript appearance; some wore their working clothes, some had already taken their coats off, revealing that they wore braces.²³

As we have seen, this common enjoyment of a sport was already in existence in the case of horse racing; nevertheless, it was the exception rather than the rule.²⁴ Phibbs also mentions the popularity of country houses as venues for cricket matches, and this was the case in Norfolk in such locations as Blickling, Felbrigg, Gunton and Holkham.²⁵ The clear evidence that these matches were often played between the country house team and a village team convincingly suggests that social classes were mingling, although no doubt with a strong degree of deference present.²⁶

Goulstone documented thirty-three Norfolk villages with cricket clubs operating during the last quarter of the eighteenth century.²⁷ These were mainly independent, but occasionally a club would join forces with another club or clubs, perhaps because it was too small to field a cricket team on its own – Aldborough with Thurgarton, Blickling and Aylsham, for instance – to play against another single or joint team, in this case, Lyng and Elsing in 1797. Distance was not too problematic for cricket

²² J. S. Penny, pp. xii, 24. *Norwich Mercury*, 26 July 1788.

²³ Phibbs, ‘The Englishness of Lancelot ‘Capability’ Brown’, *Garden History*, 31:2 (2003), p. 128; L. P. Hartley, *The go-between* (London, 1997).

²⁴ See pp. 35-36 above.

²⁵ Blickling is listed in J. Goulstone, *Early club and village cricket* (Bexleyheath, 1973) [no pagination]; Holkham archives E/O 1 (1) Holkham scoring book, 1876-79; NRO, GTN 7/4/1 Gunton Cricket Club score book 1857-1862; Felbrigg Cricket Club is listed in the 1896 and 1898 editions of the *Norfolk Cricket Annual*.

²⁶ Examples include South Creake against Holkham (12 July 1876) and Litcham against Gunton (30 and 31 July 1857).

²⁷ Goulstone, *Early club and village cricket*.

practice in this example, with a joint distance of about seven miles overall for the villages of the combined Aldborough team and two miles between Lyng and Elsing. On the other hand, the actual match involved twenty-one miles of travel for the away team. This must have been an ambitious undertaking in the days before railways and suggests a high level of enthusiasm and commitment.

Some commentators were pessimistic or dismissive about the success of village cricket, such as Augustus Jessopp (1824-1914), vicar of Scarning, an astute reporter of local society:

[1887] when, by great efforts, a man starts a cricket club, or gets new ropes for the bells, or sets up a village reading-room, the *keeping up* the plant is what we find hardest to manage.

There are scores — perhaps hundreds — of villages where the inhabitants have absolutely no amusements of any kind outside the public-house, where cricket, or bowls, or even skittles are as unknown as bear-baiting.

Here and there an energetic young parson starts a cricket club, and as long as he continues to play and do all the work the thing goes on in a languid and intermittent way. If he gives it up it falls to pieces, and the young fellows do not seem to care.

... as for cricket, it never was much of a poor man's game. As for anything else in the way of fun or amusement, it simply does not exist in our villages.²⁸

Thus, according to Jessopp, a mixture of lack of money and local people's apathy led to the absence of active cricket teams in many villages.

Jessopp has often been used as a historical source, but the evidence suggests that on this, at least, he was wrong. More and more villages fielded teams for competition in the course of the nineteenth century; and by the time he was writing, to judge from the *Norfolk Cricket Annual* for 1889 (the earliest issue available), 111 villages are recorded as having active cricket clubs.²⁹ In most cases their grounds and nearest railway stations are listed, and occasionally even the location of their dressing

²⁸ Jessopp, *Arcady*, pp. xiv-xv, 21, 113, 236.

²⁹ Castleacre, Sporle, Taverham, Walsingham, Litcham, Tittleshall, Lyng, Elsing and Thurgarton are mentioned in the press. J. S. Penny, p. xiv. Further evidence is found in the *Norfolk Cricket Club Book score book*, which covers the years 1833-1836 and 1854-1856 and mentions Brisley (1834), Brinton (n.d.), Hingham (1835), Litcham (1855 and 1856), Postwick (1855) and Reepham (1856), although again no details are given about the social status of the players. NRO, SO 15/1. *Norfolk Cricket Club Book score book*.

rooms.³⁰ This suggests that cricket clubs were making use of the developing network of railways to expand their range of fixtures. (The positive effect that railways had on rural leisure is a recurrent theme throughout our period.) Admittedly, in the 1891 edition, the editor complained of a lack of information, which grew over the next few years:

Table 6: Norfolk cricket clubs between 1891 and 1898

<i>Date</i>	<i>Number of cricket clubs listed</i>	<i>Editor's comment</i>
1891	108	In a few cases the Clubs have neglected to send in particulars; we are therefore compelled to repeat last year's information.
1893	85	In a few cases Clubs have neglected to send in particulars; we are therefore compelled to omit the information, and the Clubs alone are to blame for this omission.
1896	88	In many cases Clubs have neglected to send in particulars; we are therefore compelled to omit the information, and the Clubs alone are to blame for this omission.
1898	55	Repeat of 1896 comment. ³¹

The editor's comments in Table 6 draw attention to the fact that these lists are not complete and therefore are not wholly dependable. Nevertheless, there is a world of difference between Jessopp's assertion of apathetic villagers with no possibility of playing cricket and the lists of presumably enthusiastic clubs. Jessopp's comments are mainly subjective and are not substantiated by concrete examples. His perception of village leisure, as he pursued his daily round, was of a dearth of any kind of organised recreation, although according to the *Norfolk Cricket Annual* of 1889, Scarning Cricket Club, with its cricket ground 'near the Church' where he preached every Sunday, had been founded in 1886 – about the time Jessopp was writing *Arcady*. It is therefore impossible to reconcile his personal opinions with the formal reporting of the *Norfolk Cricket Annual*.

³⁰ W. S. Barker and J. H. Hatch (eds.), *Norfolk cricket annual season 1889* (Norwich, 1889), pp.89-107.

³¹ R. H. Legge and F. W. Watson (eds.), *Norfolk cricket annual season 1891* (Norwich, 1891); Robin H. Legge (ed.), *Norfolk cricket annual season 1893* (Norwich, 1893); Robin H. Legge (ed.), *Norfolk cricket annual season 1896* (Norwich, 1896); Robin H. Legge (ed.), *Norfolk cricket annual season 1898* (Norwich, 1898); Barker and Hatch (eds.), *Norfolk cricket annual season 1889*, pp. 89-107.

The lack of a dedicated cricket ground did not discourage the clubs listed in the *Norfolk Cricket Annual*. Among the recorded venues are found references to Mr. Gibbs' Meadow at Foulsham (1889), Sewter's Meadow in Lyng (1891) and Mr. Beales' Meadow in Stiffkey (1891), indicating sympathetic cooperation from local farmers. Other indeterminate descriptions include 'near Church' (Acle 1889, Seething 1893), 'near Rectory' (Ashill 1889, North Runcton 1889, Scoulton 1889, South Wootton 1891), 'centre of village' (Dersingham 1893, Great Walsingham 1889, Pentney 1889) and 'close to Station' (Stowbridge 1896, Wendling 1889, Wolferton, 1889) – in other words, wherever there was a space large enough and available for cricketers to set up a match.³²

It is worth noting how many of these venues seemingly involved the church or the local gentry. To a certain degree this was perhaps predictable given the need for space. In 1889, for instance, out of twenty-seven cricket grounds where some information about ground or dressing room was given, the location of ten was described as near the Church or Rectory or in the Church Meadow or actually in the Rectory grounds. Furthermore, of the same twenty-seven, twelve were found either near local country houses or within the Parks attached to their private estates. Thus 81% of these particular cricket clubs appear to have been influenced or assisted either directly or indirectly by those in authority locally. The statistics for 1896 are the last available, as the *Norfolk Cricket Annual* discontinued publication two years later until 1909, when it recommenced but with a different format.³³ Using accessible figures, Table 7 gives further clarification:

Table 7: Norfolk villages with information on cricket grounds

<i>Date</i>	<i>Villages with information on cricket grounds</i>	<i>Church</i>	<i>Gentry</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
1889	27	10	12	81%
1891	42	16	16	76%
1893	37	10	17	73%
1896	19	5	8	68%

³² This information has been extracted from the relevant *Norfolk Cricket Annuals*. This enthusiastic attitude persisted into the twentieth century. Merton cricket team, for example, which had existed from at least the 1860s although lapsing during both World Wars, revived in 1930 and used 'the big buttercup pasture in front of the Grove Farm' as a pitch. Joan Matthews and Helen Riley, *Merton: a brief history* (2011), p. 92.

³³ In the 1898 edition the editor remarked bitterly, "... the Cricketers of Norfolk, with a few exceptions, entirely failed to render the least help, or to show the slightest appreciation of his efforts." *The Norfolk cricket annual season 1909-10*, p. 7.

The figures are not totally reliable, because, as noted earlier, throughout his term of office, the editor was unsuccessful in persuading all the cricket clubs to forward their particulars to him. Nevertheless, from the existing data it can be seen that towards the end of the nineteenth century, control of country people's leisure in this particular instance was very gradually moving out of the hands of the upper classes into a more democratic situation. Moreover, as Table 8 indicates, although they may not have had land to offer, publicans in several villages seized the opportunity of possible extra trade, by providing dressing room facilities for the players.

Table 8: Norfolk publicans offering cricket facilities

<i>Date</i>	<i>Villages with information on cricket grounds</i>	<i>Publicans offering facilities</i>
1889	27	5
1891	42	10
1893	37	10
1896	19	6

Further evidence of the existence of village clubs exists in surviving contemporary photographs, and these often highlight an important side-effect of village cricket – the sociable aspect.³⁴ Players met fellow cricketers, who had hitherto been strangers. The tradition of providing tea involved the women of the village and turned the match into a community event. As noted above, villages occasionally collaborated. An example of this is the Dunton, Doughton and Tatterford Cricket Club, whose treasurer's accounts for 1887 to 1891 have survived. They contain a list of subscribers, including the family of the local vicar.³⁵ This is another indication of the interest and support of the church for cricket in the parish. The existence of a joint club of this kind meant that it was possible to join up with neighbouring communities and form a viable combined team, again increasing the social possibilities for country people, who were perhaps otherwise isolated. These particular three villages were very small – the population of Tatterford in 1891 was

³⁴ Alburgh cricket team 1908, <http://www.alburgh.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2012/01/Alburgh-Cricket-Team1.jpg>; Merton Cricket Club 1900, Matthews and Riley, *Merton – a brief history*, p. 93; Terrington St. Clement Cricket Club 1910, Terrington St. Clement history group, *The changing face of Terrington St. Clement* (King's Lynn, 2001), p. 78; Kilverstone team pre-1920, Yaxley, *Looking back at Norfolk cricket*, p. 33; Mileham Cricket Club 1920, Yaxley, *Looking back at Norfolk cricket*, p. 50. These are a few examples of many, of which a substantial number has been published in local village histories.

³⁵ NRO, BR 202/83 Treasurer's accounts of the Dunton, Doughton and Tatterford Cricket Club 1887-1891.

92; that of Dunton cum Doughton was 165.³⁶ To facilitate competition, leagues were set up.³⁷ One example is of special interest. The Mid-Norfolk Village Challenge competition was inaugurated in 1904, due to the enthusiasm of Revd. Francis Marshall of Mileham. He was particularly concerned that the labouring men of the villages should play for their own community in teams consisting of *bona fide* residents, an argument later promoted by Revd. F. A. S. Ffolkes.³⁸ Mileham Club won the Mid-Norfolk Shield in 1920, while seven years later Melton Park and Swanton Novers Cricket Club defeated Field Dalling to win the North Norfolk Village Cricket League Shield.³⁹ The extant list of winners of the Mid-Norfolk Village Clubs Cricket Challenge Shield (from 1904), the Norfolk Junior Cup (from 1891) and the Mid-Norfolk Boyle Cricket Cup (from 1911) provides evidence of the ongoing popularity of village cricket throughout the county during the first half of the twentieth century.⁴⁰

Benevolent employers encouraged their farmhands to participate, even allowing the use of horse and cart to facilitate transport and occasional free time midweek:

[1897] July 3 Saturday Fred Hoeing Turnips ½ day 18 acres afternoon Cricketing.

July 10 Saturday ... Fred Cricketing to Sculthorpe Prince & Cart.

July 28 Wednesday Fred ½ day Painting Cart & Cricketing afternoon (Hemptons) Prince & Cart. ...

July 31 Saturday Fred Painting Drum Morning Cricketing afternoon. ...⁴¹

In spite of this apparent well-being, at the turn of the century, fears were expressed for the continuation of village cricket, perhaps suggesting that Jessopp's pessimism was not unfounded. The main reason given was the possibility of alternative recreations:

³⁶ Kelly's directory of Cambridgeshire, Norfolk and Suffolk, 1892, pp. 382, 630.

³⁷ Trophies were competed for, including the Senior Cup (founded in 1884), the Saturday Junior Cup (1891), the Mid-Norfolk League Challenge Shield (1898), the Falcon Cup (the East Norfolk League, 1906), the Boyle Cup (1911) and the South Norfolk Village Cricket League Challenge Cup (1920). Yaxley, *Looking back at Norfolk cricket*, pp. 49, 51.

³⁸ Correspondence with Mr. Colin King, North Elmham; see p. 166 below.

³⁹ Yaxley, *Looking back at Norfolk cricket*, pp. 50, 51.

⁴⁰ Correspondence with Mr. Colin King, North Elmham.

⁴¹ NRO, MC 2612/4/2, 988X9 [Papers of Miss (Doris) Mary Daplyn ... Farm Day books of Green Farm, Thursford] 1897-1901 from 1 June 1897.

during the cricket months seaside trips are everywhere arranged, and a day at Yarmouth, Lowestoft, or Cromer, or a trip up the river is preferred to cricket. Many would play cricket if none of the opportunities existed.

It seems strange that so much interest and excitement should be displayed about local football, good or feeble, while there is a deplorable absence of anything of the kind in cricket.⁴²

Fifty-four cricket clubs are nonetheless listed in the 1898 edition of the *Norfolk Cricket Annual*. This unease about the state of village cricket continued over many years and prompted an article 'How to revive village cricket' by the Revd. F. A. S. Ffolkes (1863-1938) in the *Norfolk Cricket Annual* in 1910. In this he deplored the practice of allowing 'unqualified' men to play – to be precise, men not qualified by birth or residence:

... about 32 men were playing in all the matches; and this number represented the actual players for a large group of villages. ... often a village would turnout playing only two *bona fide* members. It came to this, that the villagers, who were only moderate players, had to make way for outsiders; and is it a wonder that village cricket as a reality died out in the land? How, then, to get villagers to play only *bona fide* members? The only way I can see is to group villages together and get them to agree that in all inter-village matches in that group they will abide by certain rules, one of these rules carefully defining the qualification of players for such matches. ...⁴³

This suggestion was taken seriously, and the result was reported in the 1926 edition of the *Norfolk Cricket Annual*:

of late years Shield, Cup, and League competitions have sprung up amidst the village cricket clubs, and are deplored by a good many people as tending to spoil the spirit of the game. ... [However,] I have found it a great prevention of that very bad habit (which used to prevail so much in the early days of my acquaintance with village cricket) of clubs selecting 7 or 8 from their own village and then filling up their XI with the 4 best men from neighbouring clubs thus causing great heart-burnings among their own members, who had paid their subscriptions and practised hard and then were not wanted when matches came. This trouble is almost entirely done away with by these competitions, as no one who is not a *bona fide* resident is allowed to play for a village.⁴⁴

⁴² Legge (ed.), *Norfolk cricket annual season 1898*, pp. 73, 84.

⁴³ Ffolkes, F. A. S., 'How to revive village cricket' in C. B. L. Prior (ed.), *Norfolk cricket annual season 1909-10* (Norwich, 1910), p. 88.

⁴⁴ *Norfolk cricket annual season 1926*, p. 107.

This may be another example of the gradual democratisation of village sport. A conflict of interest had appeared, and instead of the local élite's judgement and settling of the matter, it was dealt with by the villagers themselves. Certainly, evidence from elsewhere suggests a development from authoritarian yet benevolent management to autonomy, as at Old Buckenham:

... fine matches were played at Old Buckenham Hall. All were distinguished by Robinson's hospitality and the fact that he never charged for entry. ... He provided magnificent lunches and teas for the players and one report ... concludes, "the most amusing part would be to watch the reaction on the face of any village player taken there for the first time!"

... After Robinson's death in 1922 his successor ... allowed cricket to continue at the Hall though it also began to be played on the Green ... amongst the villagers. ...

The Hall later became a private school and the ground only available to village players during school holidays. Regular cricket moved to nearby farmers' fields, the Manor and the village Green.⁴⁵

More dramatic was the case of Overstrand. Here, the sports field was originally part of the resident landowner's estate and used as a private cricket ground by him and his friends; after his death the ground was bought by the villagers with money raised from a door to door collection and a generous donation. It was conveyed in 1935 'for the purpose of providing in perpetuity a cricket ground and sports ground for the use of the residents of and visitors to Overstrand'.⁴⁶

In some places the cricket club became involved with other community activities. As already mentioned in the discussion on reading rooms, in 1879 the committee of Cromer reading room decided to form a cricket club open only to reading room members unless a subscription was paid. This was not an isolated concept; in 1905 Booton reading room also established a cricket club, although in 1895 the impetus in Brinton was the other way around, in that the cricket club decided to institute a

⁴⁵ Robinson Lionel J.P. Old Buckenham Hall. *Kelly's directory of Norfolk 1916*, p. 74; Lionel Robinson (1866-1922) was not a typical Norfolk landowner, having made his fortune in Australia and on the London Stock Exchange. At Old Buckenham he created excellent facilities for cricket, shooting and the breeding of racehorses. Stephen Musk, *Lionel Robinson: cricket at Old Buckenham* (Cardiff, 2014); *The sporting life of Old Buckenham* (Old Buckenham, 1997), pp. 4-6.

⁴⁶ <http://www.overstrandonline.org/#/first-cricket-team-golf-days/4564122315>

reading room.⁴⁷ An insight into a contemporary social point of view is given in a comment in the 1895 newspaper report:

... he (Mr. Thwaites) wished to affirm that this motion [to establish a reading-room in the village] must not be regarded in any wise as antagonistic to the Rector's "Church" Reading-room recently established in Thornage, the distance of which from Brinton [1.3 miles] rendered its influence for good nugatory so far as Brinton was concerned.⁴⁸

It was important to keep good relations between villages, although in reality local people would have regarded this particular distance as negligible.

Further confirmation of the popularity of cricket in Norfolk villages is provided by the fact that it was taught in village schools. A formal photograph taken about 1911 shows a class of boys in front of Antingham with Southrepps School, two of whom hold cricket bats, clear evidence of the esteem in which the game was held.⁴⁹

Cricket teams therefore were well established in many villages by the outbreak of the Second World War. Almost every village also had its football and bowls teams. Cricket and football were especially popular as spectator sports.⁵⁰ For the players, however, there were certain basic dissimilarities between the two games, which must not only have affected their attitude to their chosen sport, but also have influenced that choice. In 1910 these differences were neatly outlined:

cricket is terribly extravagant in cost of play and in expenditure of time, its players spending much – often most – of their time idling in the Pavilion. At football we are hard at it throughout the game – the maximum of activity in the minimum of time – while its expense to players for a whole season is about one-tenth of that connected with cricket. Training for football is – or should be – very severe (to the advantage of the player's body and mind!), while for cricket we seldom train off the field. We give up playing football as a rule before thirty years of age, while we put on our pads often after fifty and still make runs. The comparative weakling can play cricket, when football to him is anathema.⁵¹

It would appear, therefore, that the two sports attracted different types of individual.

⁴⁷ 'Brinton' *Norfolk Chronicle and Norwich Gazette*, 26 October 1895, p. 8; 3 June 1905, p. 7.

⁴⁸ Samuel William Thwaites, certificated teacher. TNA, 1881 census: RG11/1986/78/17.

⁴⁹ NRO, C/ED 149 Records of Norfolk County Council, Education Department. Antingham with Southrepps School.

⁵⁰ R. Douglas Brown, *East Anglia 1939* (Lavenham, 1980), pp. 126, 127.

⁵¹ C. B. L. Prior (ed.), *The Norfolk cricket annual season 1909-10*, pp. 91, 95.

Football

In spite of the advent of ‘Muscular Christianity’, it is important to note that it was the exception rather than the rule for clergy to encourage working class sport.⁵² Nevertheless, the efforts at proselytism of those who were athletic, spread to football, and there were many church-sponsored teams. With the demise of camping (campball) as a popular sport, football was reorganised on new lines.⁵³ The Football Association was formed in 1863 and drew up an inaugural set of fourteen rules, while those who favoured the rugby style of hacking (kicking below the knee) and handling the ball, separated from the mainstream game to form the Rugby Football Union in 1871.

The first reference in the *Norfolk Chronicle* to football as distinct from campball was in December 1868, when it was announced that: ‘a club bearing the name of the Norwich Football Club has been started, and has already begun to play upon the Norfolk and Norwich Cricket Ground’.⁵⁴ Norfolk County Football Association was founded in 1881 and encouraged the game throughout the county, until in 1923 there were 433 local clubs, some in towns, but mostly in villages.⁵⁵ As David Tubby emphasises, unlike cricket, football was always a game played by the working classes rather than the gentry.⁵⁶ The later development of its popularity bears witness to this, because as the Saturday half day holiday became established, more and more workers were able to spend their new free time either playing or watching organised matches. As we have seen in the case of reading rooms, distance was no deterrent: ‘I can remember my father telling me that when he lived in Harpley they would bike to Melton Constable [a distance of 18 miles] to play a football match - they must have been keen!’⁵⁷

⁵² Bailey, *Leisure and class in Victorian England*, pp. 137-138.

⁵³ See p. 34.

⁵⁴ ‘Norwich Foot-ball Club’ *Norfolk Chronicle and Norwich Gazette* 19 December 1868 p. 5, Mackie (comp.), *Norfolk annals* vol. 2, p. 184.

⁵⁵ *The Norfolk football annual. Season 1923-4*, p. 62; *Norfolk County Football Association official handbook, 1924-25*, pp. 83-103.

⁵⁶ Tubby, *Life in the Flegg villages*, p. 101.

⁵⁷ Correspondence with Mr. David Steele of Brisley.

Men's interest in sport generally was greatly enhanced by their new reading skills, (provided by the Education Act of 1870), so that they could appreciate the sports press which burgeoned in the last quarter of the nineteenth century.⁵⁸

Cricket and football shared some particular difficulties. Like cricket, football also suffered from 'cherry picking', in that the best players were selected from a wide area to represent a small community.⁵⁹ This was recognised as a problem as early as 1882:

... it was thought by the smaller clubs that if ever they were to occupy a prominent position in the competitions something would have to be done to prevent certain clubs picking the "crack" players from all parts of the county. Accordingly at the general meeting in May, 1882, at Norwich, the now well-known "Radius Rule" and the question of residence were fully discussed. The former rule confines players to their own districts, and undoubtedly has proved a stimulus to the formation of village clubs.⁶⁰

This policy seems to have met with some success, as in 1890 the editor of the *Annual* celebrated the addition of many new clubs to the Norfolk Association, adding jubilantly, 'in fact, the figures have become reversed, and we have sprung from 13 to 31.'⁶¹

The two sports also had the problem of finding a suitable venue for practices and matches. Indeed in 1838 a commentator on English rural life was of the opinion that: 'foot-ball, indeed, seems to have almost gone out of use with the enclosure of wastes and commons, requiring a wide space for its exercise'.⁶²

This state of affairs changed over the following half century, as demonstrated by the following estimations. A cricket ground, officially circular or oval, had no fixed dimensions, although the area was usually approximately between 17,500 and 22,000 square yards. The 1863 Football Association rules, on the other hand, stipulated that the preferred size of a rectangular football field was between about 8,500 and 20,000 square yards. The minimum area of land required for football, therefore, was less

⁵⁸ William Baker, 'The making of a working-class football culture in Victorian England', *Journal of Social History*, 13:2 (1979), pp. 242-243; Walvin, *The people's game*, pp. 59-60.

⁵⁹ See p. 165 above.

⁶⁰ W. E. Hansell (ed.), *Annual of the Norfolk County Football Association, 1888* (Norwich, 1888), pp. 9-10.

⁶¹ W. E. Hansell (ed.), *The Norfolk football annual, 1889-90* (Norwich, 1889), p. 35.

⁶² William Howitt, *The rural life of England* (London, 1840), p. 527.

than half that needed for cricket, although it is unlikely that these standards were strictly adhered to by would-be rural players. Nonetheless, the fact that football required less land than cricket may have contributed to the greater ensuing proliferation of clubs for football than for cricket.

Just as village cricket teams had to make use of whatever ground was available, so local football enthusiasts played wherever land was obtainable, sometimes through the benevolence of the landed gentry or local farmers. The Narborough football team of the early 1900s, for instance, known as the Park Rangers, played in Narborough Hall Park. After the First World War Narborough and Pentney amalgamated and played their matches in a field off the West Bilney road, one more example perhaps of the move from philanthropic patronage to independence.⁶³ Another case occurred in Upwell, where in 1895, on the formation of a new football club, a local farmer allowed the use of a field free of charge.⁶⁴ Some villages, however, were not so fortunate in their benefactors:

[Wiggenhall St. Germans] how well I remember the forming of our local football team. It came about after everybody would play outside our local primary school, teams of twenty or more each side with ages ranging from small children to ancient grandparents right through summer months until late at night. It was decided at one such game that we should form a team. A meeting at one of the local pubs "Checkers" and a team evolved. Two teams were formed ... A ground was literally manufactured on an apple field about a mile out of town with an old shack for changing purposes.⁶⁵

Saham Toney [1920s] Sport in the village was a must, with a cricket and football team. There were no pavilions or playing fields – the game was played on a field occupied by cows and horses and cowpats had to be removed before every game. The players changed behind the hedge or in a barn or cowshed, and the teas for the cricketers were usually served in the barn by wives or parents.⁶⁶

The First World War brought club football to a temporary halt, but during the inter-war years, clubs reformed. The *Eastern Football News* was launched in September

⁶³ Turner, *The book of Narborough*.

⁶⁴ William P. Smith, *Discovering Upwell* ([Outwell], 2012), p. 125; *Kelly's directory of Norfolk, 1896*, p. 454.

⁶⁵ Beginning of The Great Wiggenhall Wanderers [Wiggenhall St. Germans]. A memory of St Germans, by Stephen Cook.

<http://www.francisfrith.com/uk/locations/wiggenhall-st-germans/memories/beginning-of-the-great-wiggenhall-wanderers-149237910>

⁶⁶ Norfolk Federation of Women's Institutes, *Norfolk within living memory*, p. 20.

1913 but ceased publication in April the following year. After the war, it restarted in 1919 and continued until once again war intervened in 1939. The early reports after the First World War give a sense of hope for the future, in spite of the inevitable losses which clubs had incurred:

[1919] September 6. Banham. ... We have a lot of young members who are keen on the game... We are looking forward to having a good team this season, and run well in the South Norfolk League.⁶⁷

September 20. At a general meeting ... it was decided to form a football club, to be known as the Walsingham United. ... Arrangements had already been made to procure the old football ground at Wells Road, and it was decided to keep the old colours which the United had carried so well in the past. It was also decided to enter the Wells and District League. The secretary will be glad to hear from local clubs wishing to arrange fixtures with 1st and reserve teams.⁶⁸

October 18. Shipdham Whispers. A good number of the old boys turned out. ... Our old centre-half, H. Rudling, has made the great sacrifice, and we feel his loss greatly. We hope that before next season a Dereham and District League will have come into existence.⁶⁹

Yet in spite of this enthusiasm, village football occasionally encountered the same problems of apathy as cricket, although it seems that this was exceptional:

October 18. Hindolvestone. Our Reserves met Holt Reserves, but the less said the better, Holt scoring 9 goals to 1. We are trying to run a Reserve team but unless the men turn out when chosen by the committee, well, it is hopeless. There were only seven men on the field at the start, and it was one-sided throughout.⁷⁰

At the 1920 annual meeting of the Norfolk Football Association the increase in the number of new clubs was explained with some satisfaction:

the formation of new clubs all over the country has been without parallel. The principle causes contributing to this have been that the returned soldiers ... were introduced to the big bouncing ball behind the grim lines of the battlefield, while in our villages the agricultural labourer has come into his own, and enjoys a half-day for recreation with the rest of the community which, thanks to the regulation of the much maligned D.O.R.A. he cannot, if he

⁶⁷ 'Banham' *Eastern Football News* 6 September 1919, p. 2.

⁶⁸ 'Walsingham United' *Eastern Football News* 20 September 1919, p. 4.

⁶⁹ 'Shipdham Whispers' *Eastern Football News* 18 October 1919, p. 4.

⁷⁰ 'Hindolvestone' *Eastern Football News* 18 October 1919, p. 4.

wished, spend ... at bagatelle or dominoes in the heated and sometimes foetid atmosphere of the village pub.⁷¹

From the statistics available, it can be seen that in spite of some fluctuations in Norfolk Football Association membership over the years, inter-war village football became a firm favourite (Table 9).

Table 9: Norfolk football clubs 1900-1937

<i>Year</i>	<i>Number of clubs</i>	<i>Clubs plus leagues and competitions⁷²</i>
1900		74
1913		254
1920	281	
1921	373	436
1922	384	459
1923	433	527
1924	419	519
1925	410	519
1936	371	
1937	385 ⁷³	

Amateur/professional ethos

Rural sport therefore had come into its own by the outbreak of the Second World War. From its organisation and domination by gentlemen of leisure to its eventual independence of control from above, with the general increase in available leisure time, sport attracted ever greater numbers as active participants or passive spectators, both important to the individual sport's well-being. Sports organisation as a whole was developing towards the ideal in which 'the initiative rests with private people in their self-organized groups, rather than in a market provision and certainly rather than in the hands of the state'.⁷⁴ Commercialism and professionalism had less impact in the countryside than in urban areas, where the controversy between these aspects and recreational/amateur sport caused great dissension. Amateur sport,

⁷¹ *The Norfolk football annual. Season 1920-1* (Norwich, 1920), p. 86. The mention of D.O.R.A. (Defence of the Realm Act 1914) referred to the legal reduction in public house opening hours, necessitating an alcohol-free afternoon gap of three and a half hours. This restriction was maintained after the war. Clapson, *The Routledge companion to Britain in the twentieth century*, p. 367.

⁷² These statistics include both urban and rural clubs. Leagues of local clubs were formed for the purposes of competition (for example the Catton and District League, the Dereham and District League) and had tiered structures, which gave even the smallest club the theoretical opportunity of eventually rising to the peak of the organisation.

⁷³ These statistics have been sourced from annual reports in *Norfolk football annuals* 1921-2, 1922-3, 1923-4, 1924-5 and 1925-6, and *Norfolk County Football Association handbook*, 1936-7 and 1937-8.

⁷⁴ Hill, *Sport, leisure and culture in twentieth-century Britain*, p. 134.

disregarding any financial profit, stimulated the idea of taking part for pleasure alone.⁷⁵ The debate being disputed in the larger towns and cities of England about commercialism and professionalism in sport was largely irrelevant in rural districts and smaller market towns, although the number of paying spectators at any match was undeniably of consequence to the material upkeep of the sport.⁷⁶ Indeed in Norfolk, the only professional football club was Norfolk City, founded in 1902.⁷⁷ This debate did not apply only to team sports. Prize-fighting, by its very nature, was motivated by money from the seventeenth to the mid-nineteenth centuries. When the Queensberry Rules came into force in 1867, amateur boxing gradually achieved respect, while professional boxing continued alongside it, allowing fame and wealth to be accrued by its successful participants, one of whom was Jem Mace (1831-1910), the Norfolk boxing champion.

Conclusion

It is evident that the development of rural sport was intimately connected with wider patterns of social change and, like the history of leisure venues, clearly reflects the weakening over time of traditional ties of deference. As the power of the landowner and the church over the daily activities of the villagers waned, so the confidence and organisational abilities of these same villagers grew and improved, although philanthropic, paternalistic contributions were still willingly accepted. Other factors, however, were also important in shaping the character of rural sport, just as they were in determining the character of other leisure activities. In particular, the lessening of working hours, together with the introduction of Bank Holidays and annual holidays, contributed to the ubiquitous growth of working men's interest in sports. Important distinctions arose, however, between the way that sport developed in urban and in rural areas, for in an urban setting sport frequently became a

⁷⁵ One early exception to this is the case of Fuller Pilch (1804-1870), a professional first-class cricketer born in the village of Horningtoft, who was enticed away from Norfolk to Kent in 1836 by the promise of £100 per annum. Armstrong, *A short history of Norfolk county cricket*, p.9.

⁷⁶ *The Times*, 'Mr. Chamberlain on open-air sports', 3 October 1892, p. 11, 'Athletics', 6 February 1911, p. 19, 'Professionalism in sport', 13 September 1913, p. 7; for further discussion on this subject, see Williams, *Cricket and England*, pp. 82, 114-131; Hill, *Sport, leisure and culture in twentieth-century Britain*, p. 140-144; Matthew P. Llewellyn, 'The curse of the shamateur', *International journal of the history of sport*, 28:5 (2011), p. 801.

⁷⁷ <http://www.heritagecity.org/research-centre/cultural-superlatives/norwich-city-football-club.htm>

The changing character of sport

business, with professionalism and commercialism taking hold, while remaining essentially amateur in the countryside.

Chapter 7. Rural working women's leisure

So far this thesis has discussed rural leisure principally in terms of male participation. Men's recreation takes centre stage in available records and is thus more evident to the historian. That is not to say, however, that women had no 'time off', but in the archives their leisure pursuits are either invisible (undocumented) or indistinct counterparts of men's pastimes. Discovering the history of rural women's leisure is therefore not straightforward. Leisure in women's lives should be considered together with their expertise, requirements, responsibilities and duties as well as work, both paid and unpaid. In the early part of our period women were a vital part of village economy, doing field work, keeping poultry, gleaning, working as charwomen, taking in washing or occasionally dress-making.¹ Contemporary relations between the sexes in terms of power, particularly during this early phase, meant that men's recreational activities were unlike those enjoyed by women. This difference could be a factor in the non-appearance of women in many histories of leisure, where 'men's experiences were treated as the norm'.²

The change in the position of women in society during the period under review was remarkable. In 1847 Alfred Tennyson (1809-1892) concisely outlined the contemporary view of women's place in society:

Man for the field and woman for the hearth:
Man for the sword and for the needle she:
Man with the head and woman with the heart:
Man to command and woman to obey;
All else confusion.³

This attitude was reflected in the fact that to all intents and purposes a woman belonged to her male relatives. Husbands and fathers had control over their wives and daughters.⁴ Furthermore, women's education was regarded as unimportant. Even after the 1870 Elementary Education Act, which ostensibly brought education

¹ Seebohm Rowntree and Kendall, *How the labourer lives*, pp. 87, 94, 129, 151, 171, 199.

² Green, Hebron and Woodward, *Women's leisure, what leisure?* p. 49; Langhamer, *Women's leisure in England 1920-60*, p. 39.

³ Alfred Tennyson, *The princess* (London, 1917), lines 427-431.

⁴ Mary Turner, *The women's century. A celebration of changing roles 1900-2000* (Richmond, 2003), p. 5.

to all, much of the curriculum directed towards working-class girls included subjects such as laundry, housewifery and cooking – useful for ‘careers’ in domestic service, which was the main option open to them.⁵ In this context it is not surprising that there was a definite segregation between men's and women's leisure, as noted in the case of both reading rooms and sport. It could be argued that this was partly rooted in working-class men's rarely questioned fears about women's basic natures, subconsciously deemed as sensual, irrational and even wicked.⁶ It has been asserted that at the heart of this antagonism was the desire to control, which was thwarted by men's ignorance of what women ‘got up to’ when they were not at home but out, perhaps enjoying themselves or conceivably engaged in an activity of which their husbands might disapprove.⁷ In some villages segregation of the sexes was practised even in church:

Gimingham 1910. ... They did not ... accompany their wives to church but followed them in later, sitting on the two back seats close together whilst the women sat in twos and threes further up.

Near Wood Norton 1910. ... Before the service began, the wives, mothers and younger women would be seated on the south side of the church, and as the five-minute bell began to toll the menfolk would straggle in and take their places on the north side. Families never sat together.⁸

Some contemporary commentators thought that women themselves were to blame. ‘I have no hesitation in declaring my full belief in the inferiority of woman, nor that she brought it on herself’, asserted Charlotte Yonge (1823-1901), the celebrated English novelist and one of the most influential associates of the Girls' Friendly Society (GFS).⁹

However, the gradual transformation of social customs challenging male supremacy, such as women's suffrage, and the decline in the size of families gave women a

⁵ Turner, *The women's century*, p. 15.

⁶ ‘There's not any such thing as a woman born bad, because they are all born bad, born with the badness in them. The thing is, to get them married before the badness comes to a natural head.’ This is a frequent working-class male opinion as expressed in William Faulkner's ‘Hair’, a short story written in 1931. *Collected stories of William Faulkner* (New York, 1943), p.133. For a discussion on this subject, see Nel Noddings, *Women and evil*. (London, 1989).

⁷ Parratt, *More than mere amusement*, p. 7.

⁸ Norfolk Federation of Women's Institutes, *Within living memory*. (1972), pp. 66-67.

⁹ Georgina Battiscombe, *Charlotte Mary Yonge* (London, 1943), p. 61.

novel sense of independence. This new attitude to life led to ambitions other than the traditional goals of marriage and motherhood, due in part to some of the developments already explored.¹⁰ For instance, the development of public transport, particularly in the early twentieth century, allowed women greater employment opportunities. They could now travel to the nearest town and perhaps explore new avenues of employment, such as office work. This change not only gave them a newfound economic status; it also manifested itself in their choices of leisure. At first there was a dearth of recreational opportunity but gradually, as spare time became more common, new possibilities for women materialised, conceivably alleviating their rural isolation.

The majority of women in England were working class. In the mid-nineteenth century, devoid of resources, they started to work sometimes as young as eight years old and continued until marriage.¹¹ Life was certainly hard for these women. If her husband did not earn enough to support their growing family, it was expected that a woman would work all her life, with short intermissions to have her children. It was not unusual to have a family of seven or eight or even more offspring, although the size of families gradually decreased during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.¹² In the countryside at the start of our period, almost the only occupations open to a woman were those of domestic servant, living-in farm servant or dairy maid. Most women, however, became agricultural labourers, whose tasks included such back-breaking work as weeding, hoeing, singling (a form of thinning) and stone picking, in addition to helping at harvest time. A typical example is that of Mrs Francis, who in 1875 on a farm near Ditchingham in Norfolk was paid seven

¹⁰ Penny Tinkler, 'Women and popular literature' in June Purvis (ed.), *Women's history: Britain, 1850-1945* (London, 1995), p. 144.

¹¹ 1867-68 [4068] *Commission on the employment of children, young persons, and women in agriculture (1867). First report of the commissioners. Appendix Part 1*, p. 12 and *Appendix Part 2*, p. 3; George Sturt, *Lucy Bettesworth* (Firle, 1978), pp. 9, 66.

¹² Leonore Davidoff, *Thicker than water: siblings and their relations, 1780-1920* (Oxford, 2012), pp. 79, 106; 'Between 1781 and 1831 the number of children born to them [married women] peaked at between 5.7 and 6.2.' 'Household size, of course, is different from family size. ... In 1851 the mean size of household was 6.2; by 1911 it was down to 5.5'. Eric Hopkins, *Childhood transformed: working-class children in nineteenth-century England*, pp. 101, 268. Michael Anderson, 'The social implications of demographic change' in Thompson (ed.), *The Cambridge social history of Britain 1750-1950* vol. 2: *People and their environment*, p. 39.

shillings for hoeing and singling seven acres of beet.¹³ On the coast net-braiding was important to the fishing industry and was often taken up by the fishermen's wives and daughters, who also helped their menfolk by boiling shrimps, preparing bait for the fishermen's lines and salting the fish. Along the north Norfolk coast women also cooked and dressed crabs for the hotel trade, besides gathering cockles ('Stewkey blues').¹⁴ With the growth since the later eighteenth century of the factory system which promoted much faster production, previous cottage industries such as wool-spinning had dwindled and failed. 'Since spinning and knitting have been nearly superseded by the use of machinery, our women and children have little to do except in harvest-time', was the case in Scole, Norfolk in the 1830s, and the domestic purse was immediately affected.¹⁵ To remedy this and because of childcare difficulties, women sometimes took in washing, instead of going out to work.¹⁶

In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries a working woman's status was inculcated from birth and accepted as normal. Those with fewer children or in better financial circumstances had more chance of pursuing their own inclinations. Very few, however, had an interest in 'politics, literary interests, study of any sort or music'.¹⁷ Some women in the middle and upper classes rebelled at their powerless condition, scrutinising, censoring and occasionally publishing books outlining their repression and desire to improve their quality of life.¹⁸ Yet the powerlessness of rural women should not be exaggerated. They were in charge of the family finances and frequently took pride in being breadwinners alongside their husbands,

¹³ Howkins, *Reshaping rural England*, p. 96; other evidence can be found in early photographs, such as Philip Hepworth, *Victorian and Edwardian Norfolk from old photographs* (London, 1972), photograph no. 117.

¹⁴ Jennie Kitteringham, 'Country work girls in nineteenth-century England' in Raphael Samuel (ed.), *Village life and labour* (London, 1975), p. 115; Trevor Lummis, *Occupation and society: the East Anglian fishermen 1880-1914* (Cambridge, 2002), pp. 121, 122; H. V. Morton, *In search of England* (London, 2000), p. 233.

¹⁵ Joyce Burnette, *Gender, work and wages in Industrial Revolution Britain* (Cambridge, 2008), pp. 39, 44.

¹⁶ Nicola Verdon, *Rural women workers in nineteenth-century England. Gender, work and wages* (Woodbridge, 2002), pp. 53, 63.

¹⁷ Margery Spring-Rice, *Working-class wives, their health and conditions* (Harmondsworth, 1939), p. 103.

¹⁸ These included Mary Somerville (1780-1872), Anna Jameson (1794-1860), Harriet Martineau (1802-1876), Harriet Taylor (1807-1858), Millicent Fawcett (1847-1929), Vera Brittain (1893-1970) and Winifred Holtby (1898-1935). For further discussion on this topic, see Dale Spender, *Women of ideas and what men have done to them: from Aphra Behn to Adrienne Rich* (London, 1982).

developing skills in managing everyday living in difficult conditions and coping with little money without incurring debt, all being well.¹⁹ The many surviving early twentieth century household accounts as described by Maud Pember Reeves give testimony to this.²⁰

It is impossible to gauge how these hard-working women managed to squeeze out some leisure time from their crowded working week, and this underlines the fact that the history of women's leisure is a history of conflicts between constrictions and opportunity. Together with shortage of time, the lack of independence suffered by women in comparison with men and their unequal access to leisure, as already highlighted with regard to sport, could have generated a very monotonous existence. Nevertheless, the vast majority of women somehow did make time to do something different from their everyday round.²¹

During the 1920s and 30s women became aware that bearing many children was putting their health at risk and also resulted in lower living standards. In addition to this, although not all women possessed them, labour-saving appliances such as vacuum cleaners and gas cookers made household tasks less burdensome. Relationships with husbands subtly changed, in that men now sometimes helped with domestic chores and with looking after children.²² Leisure activities were also more frequently shared, particularly with the rise of the cinema.²³ As the twentieth century progressed, opportunities for female recreation became more common, encouraged by such organisations as the Women's Institute and the Women's League of Health and Beauty (founded in 1930).²⁴

The problems involved in providing a definition of 'leisure' were discussed at the start of this thesis: defining women's leisure poses particular difficulties. Mark

¹⁹ Jean Hilary Sidenius, *A woman's place in the village: an oral history study of working class women's lives between 1890 and 1940 in and around Broadway Worcestershire*. (Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Warwick, 1993); Carol Dyhouse, *Girls growing up in late Victorian and Edwardian England* (London, 1981), p. 81.

²⁰ Maud Pember Reeves, *Round about a pound a week* (London, 1914), pp.80-87, 133-141.

²¹ Tammy M. Proctor, 'Home and away: popular culture and leisure' in Simonton (ed.), *The Routledge history of women in Europe since 1700*, p. 299.

²² Elizabeth Roberts, *A woman's place: an oral history of working class women 1890-1940* (Oxford, 1995), p. 202.

²³ Roberts, *A woman's place*, p. 123.

²⁴ Jill Julius Matthews, 'They had such a lot of fun: the Women's League of Health and Beauty between the wars', *History Workshop Journal*, 30:1 (1990), p. 25.

Slouka's general definition is attractive: leisure allows 'us time to figure out who we are, and what we believe'.²⁵ A distinction should perhaps be drawn between social leisure, for example clubs or organised sport; and uncommitted time available for a woman to relax doing some activity of her own choice, when her leisure identity would depend upon her individual personality. The options are not mutually exclusive, and most women would spend their free time in a mixture of both.

Although many pastimes were generally closed to them because of gendered participation, for example going to the pub and taking part in sport, female-only diversions included church women's meetings and Women's Institutes (early twentieth century onward), and these steadily multiplied as women's leisure time increased. These activities often also provided training in useful skills, in addition to education about the previously unknown world outside their rural situation. There were, however, some women living a hand-to-mouth existence for whom the small subscription fee made membership of available societies impossible. This was the case as late as the 1930s, when in her study of working-class wives Margery Spring Rice discovered that the cost of leisure was still a very real factor in their choices. Because of this, they tended to regard as recreation a variation of activity or location, particularly if it involved no expenditure: 'leisure is a comparative term. Anything which is slightly less arduous or gives a change of scene or occupation from the active hard work ... is leisure.'²⁶

The increase in female leisure opportunities resulted from the 60-hour week, established by law after 1850 and further reduced to 56 hours in 1878.²⁷ Although these reforms were aimed at urban workers, they had an influence in the countryside, and agricultural women workers had similar hours.²⁸ The labourers' working week was further reduced in 1924, when 50 hours for 25s became standard by law.²⁹ Of

²⁵ Mark Slouka, 'Quitting the paint factory' *Harper's* (November 2004), pp. 57-66.

²⁶ Spring-Rice, *Working-class wives, their health and conditions*, p. 99.

²⁷ *Factory Act 1850* (13 & 14 Vict c. 54); *Factory and Workshop Act 1878* (41 & 42 Vict. c. 16)

²⁸ 1843 [510] *Reports of special assistant poor law commissioners on the employment of women and children in agriculture*, p. 217. [Suffolk, Norfolk and Lincoln.] Their hours of work are usually eight in the winter, ten in summer; 1867-68 [4068] *Commission on the employment of children, young persons, and women in agriculture (1867). First report of the commissioners, with appendix part I*, pp. A6-7. A woman's wage was 8d for a day of eight hours.

²⁹ Howkins, *Reshaping rural England*, p. 285.

course it must not be forgotten that after their 60 or 56 hours of formal work, women then went home to hours of domestic duties.

It could be said that to some extent any loneliness experienced by women was relieved by their informal recreation, which consisted of gossiping to neighbours and friends about other neighbours, about their own husbands and children and about the past. The subject of gossip has been of continuing interest to sociolinguists, psychologists and anthropologists, besides historians, since the 1960s.³⁰ Historians, however, immediately have a problem with sourcing evidence for this unorganised form of leisure, as admitted by Melanie Tebbutt, author of the definitive work on this subject: '...if the voices of middle-class women are muffled in the historical record, those of their working-class sisters are often not even connected into the mainstream of written testimony about the past'.³¹

Gossip has long been regarded as a negative method of communication, 'a language of female secrets', trivial, idle or spreading rumour or scandal. It has therefore been scorned as trustworthy evidence.³² In addition, village women's gossip is perceived to be inferior and of no value, and as such not worth recording.³³ With some difficulty this challenge to the researcher can be met by extracting information from a wide assortment of sources, including diaries, newspapers and oral history.³⁴ It could be suggested that using this indirect evidence might strain the definition of 'gossip' – a casual conversation between two (probably female) people. One might submit perhaps that a diary is a conversation or gossip with oneself. However one considers it, this evidence can be as useful as more direct testimony, particularly as it would have been unselfconscious, without any consideration of future dissemination.

³⁰ Daniel Lord Smail, *On deep history and the brain* (Berkeley, 2008), p. 175. Recent works on gossip include: Joseph Epstein, *Gossip: the untrivial pursuit* (2011), Patricia Meyer Spacks, *Gossip* (2012) and Grant Michelson and Kathryn Waddington, *Gossip and organizations* (2012).

³¹ Melanie Tebbutt, *Women's talk. A social history of 'gossip' in working-class neighbourhoods, 1880-1960* (Aldershot, 1995), p. 7.

³² Deborah Jones, 'Gossip: notes on women's oral culture', *Women's Studies International Quarterly*, 3:2-3 (1980), p. 195.

³³ This idea of inferiority has diminished to some extent during the last thirty years after the publication in 1982 of Walter J. Ong's seminal work *Orality and literacy: the technologizing of the word*, in which he drew attention to the significance of orality – the verbal expression of thought – in societies where most (if not all) of the people are neither skilled in nor familiar with literacy. This of course was the working classes' situation in the earlier part of the period under examination.

³⁴ Tebbutt, *Women's talk*, p. 7.

In the mid-nineteenth century, illiteracy although decreasing was still widespread. During the period 1845-50 the annual rate of decrease was 1.34%, while from 1875-79 it was 5.37%, although generally 'the women ... still remain a considerable way behind the men from an educational point of view'.³⁵ If, therefore, women could not read about local happenings in newspapers, they might learn about them through word of mouth. Accordingly, uneducated women often relied on the spoken word, and gossip could spread information. It goes without saying that this was only one aspect of gossip. It was not always scandalous and was part of a 'wider social network of friendship and exchange'.³⁶ To be part of a gossiping network subconsciously reassured the members of that network that they were part of a group and not solitary. In areas where there was little else available as entertainment, gossip was enjoyable as a diversion from the monotony of their routine tasks and therefore fulfilled a valuable social function.³⁷ If there was a village shop, this became a meeting point and was sometimes the only social contact a woman had during the day, although there were frequently callers at the cottage door, including pedlars, tinkers, milkmen, coalmen and tramps.³⁸ Gossip was also a form of mutual support, helping to establish feelings of security and confidence. News was exchanged and worries shared, although the negative aspect of this, as pointed out by Ellen Ross, was that informal chat might be unkind and ill-informed. There was another side to gossip, in that it had an unsanctioned capability of strongly influencing people in the community to be clean and respectable, to maintain housekeeping standards, to control children's behaviour and to follow traditional standards of conduct.³⁹ In other words, it monitored the individual's behaviour

³⁵ David Vincent, *Literacy and popular culture: England 1750-1914* (Cambridge, 1989), pp. 53, 282; this was not the case everywhere, however, as in 1884 in Norfolk, the percentage of men who signed the marriage register 'by mark' was 18.7, while the figure for women was 11.9%. 1886 [C.4722] *Forty-seventh annual report of the Registrar-General of births, deaths, and marriages in England*, pp. viii, xli. Literacy and illiteracy were clearly allied to social rank, and consequently percentages of illiteracy were higher in the working-class population than in the middle and upper classes, where parents could afford to spend money on their children's education. This situation was gradually remedied by the provision of free, compulsory education for all children through Forster's Education Act in 1870.

³⁶ Julie-Marie Strange, *Death, grief and poverty in Britain, 1870-1914* (Cambridge, 2005), p. 7.

³⁷ Wolf Bleek, 'Witchcraft, gossip and death: a social drama', *Man*, New Series, 11:4 (1976), p. 528.

³⁸ Norfolk Federation of Women's Institutes, *Within living memory. A collection of Norfolk reminiscences* (1972), pp. 27-29.

³⁹ Melanie Tebbutt, 'Women's talk? Gossip and "women's words" in working class communities' in Andrew Davies and Steven Fielding, *Workers' worlds. Cultures and communities in*

within the community, by attempting to enforce a traditional moral code.⁴⁰ The undeniable negative aspect of this was the chance of gaining a bad name through gossip, and that could be upsetting to women living in small rural neighbourhoods. Gossip was therefore possibly hazardous, as it could cause certain people in a village to be ostracised. Furthermore, gossipers had to be careful:

no one hardly ever left the village. And there were no outsiders in the village either [in the Fens in the early twentieth century]. They was all married to someone in the village. You was afraid to talk of anyone, because they was all relations. You couldn't get far, that's why you kept together.⁴¹

Nevertheless, gossip maintained neighbourhood values and reduced loneliness, and the value of female support networks is obvious.⁴² Better education, improved housing and the reduction in the size of families during the inter-war years altered women's links with each other, lessened the impact of gossip and led to an increase in family privacy.⁴³ This idea of privacy had not hitherto been much considered in village life, as general poverty had encouraged mutual support and intimate knowledge of the background to one another's lives – an 'enforced intimacy' as Tebbutt describes it.⁴⁴ Respectability was now, however, a significant factor in everyday life, and gossip was seen to be unworthy and even dishonourable.

Female societies

In the nineteenth century in the countryside much of women's formal recreation was centred on the local church or chapel. Mothers' meetings, women's mission meetings and the Mothers' Union spring to mind, all by definition for women only, and these are investigated in this chapter. The non-sectarian and non-party-political Women's Institute, which eventually came to play a significant part in many

Manchester and Salford, 1880-1939 (Manchester, 1992), p. 61; Ellen Ross, 'Survival networks' *History Workshop Journal*, 15:1 (1983), pp.10, 14.

⁴⁰ Jones, 'Gossip', p. 196.

⁴¹ Chamberlain, *Fenwomen*, p. 32.

⁴² Sturt, *Lucy Bettesworth*, p. 13.

⁴³ This was one more instance of women's new-found ability to take control of their own lives, as ideas about birth control changed radically, and contraception became generally accepted and customary, in spite of the Government's refusal to allow free access to birth control information, largely due to moral objections. Jane Lewis, 'The ideology and politics of birth control in inter-war England', *Women's Studies International Quarterly*, 2:1 (1979), pp. 1, 42-44.

⁴⁴ Tebbutt, *Women's talk*, p. 69.

women's lives, was not founded in this country until the early twentieth century and is examined in particular detail in the next chapter of this thesis.

The general topic of female societies has attracted little attention from academics, although a number of histories have been written by members or those with a special interest in a specific organisation. These, while often useful, tend to be uncritical and eulogistic in character. Impartial accounts of various societies exist in passing references within texts dealing with the broader scene, and while these can be useful, they often leave the reader disappointed at the lack of specific detail.⁴⁵

Women's answer to men's associating in the sanctuary of the public house was gathering together with other women, and if no society existed locally, they sometimes joined forces to form their own:

[c. 1912] there was also a Friendship Club, started by Miss Hilda Mason, the Squire's daughter. Hilda said it was not fair that the men should get together at the pub and have their drink and smokes and put the world to rights while the women were left at home and so she formed the club for the women. They would take their knitting or sewing and enjoy a good gossip over a cup of tea and sometimes they had outings to places of interest.⁴⁶

Because all the organisations named above (mothers' meetings, women's mission meetings, Mothers' Union, Women's Institute) were exclusive to women, they were in control of their own management, with no outside interference from men, although occasionally the local clergyman took an interest, his presence presumably lending an extra air of respectability to the proceedings.⁴⁷

An emphasis on social class, however, was very much the norm, and these female gatherings, although mainly directed towards the poorer social groups in society, were administered by ladies with the necessary leisure to do so. In addition, women were commonly subservient to their husbands, dominated and controlled as a matter of course. As Prochaska discovered, husbands were happy to allow their wives to

⁴⁵ F. K. Prochaska, 'Philanthropy' in Thompson, *The Cambridge social history of Britain 1750-1950* vol 3. *Social agencies and institutions*, pp. 357-93; Parratt, 'Working girls' clubs' in her *More than mere amusement*, pp.149-87; Susie Steinbach, *Women in England 1760-1914, a social history* (London, 2005), pp.144, 145, 149-50; Paula Bartley, *Prostitution, prevention and reform in England, 1860-1914* (London, 2000), pp. 78, 89.

⁴⁶ Mary Nichols, *The mother of Necton. A century of Norfolk life* (Derby, 2000), p. 75.

⁴⁷ NRO, FC 16/475 Records of Great Yarmouth and Gorleston Methodist Circuit. Yarmouth, Deneside Chapel and Central Hall. Mothers' Meeting committee minutes 1908-1969.

attend mothers' meetings, not only because there was very little inconvenience to themselves but also because:

... we goes on with our work here; and it helps us to get many a nice bit of clothes, that we should have to go without if we didn't get them here, by paying a little at a time; and the children, too, ... is mostly in bed before we come.⁴⁸

In the last quarter of the nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries throughout the country numerous women's political organisations sprang up, indicating a surge in interest in gender equality and hope for the future.⁴⁹ The women who joined these societies, however, belonged mainly to the middle and sometimes upper classes.⁵⁰ Moreover, the societies were based principally in urban environments. To the rural female cottager, women's rights seemed an idea which applied to women with means and had no relevance to her own situation. She was often far too busy earning a living and keeping her family from starvation to concern herself with such ambitious ideas.⁵¹ The result was that even though some of these societies included leisure activities as they tried to improve the position of women and their rights and conditions of work, working-class women in the countryside were unwittingly consigned to ignorance of any possible advantages which might accrue from membership of one or more of these organisations.⁵² They would automatically support their husbands, who in any case, in order to keep their jobs, voted as their masters indicated, 'because after all, a lot of them couldn't read nor write proper. And they had to be told'.⁵³ This presumably was much less common after 1872,

⁴⁸ F. Prochaska, 'A mother's country: mothers' meetings and family welfare in Britain, 1850-1950' *History*, 74:242 (1989), p. 386; Mary Bayly, *Ragged homes and how to mend them* (London, 1860), p.198.

⁴⁹ Examples include Women's Suffrage Committees (founded in 1865), Women's Trade Union League (1874), Women's Liberal Associations (1880), Women's Co-operative Guild (1883), Women's Liberal Federation (1886), Women's Liberal Unionist Association (1888), Women's Franchise League (1889), Women's Industrial Council (1889), Women's Local Government Society (late 1880s), Women's Social and Political Union (1903), Women's Labour League (1906), Women's Freedom League (1907), Women's National Anti-Suffrage League (1908), Women's Tax Resistance League (1909).

⁵⁰ June Hannam, 'Women and politics' in Purvis (ed.), *Women's history: Britain, 1850-1945*, pp. 219, 222.

⁵¹ Tebbutt, *Women's talk*, p. 11-12.

⁵² Parratt, 'More than mere amusement', p. 157.

⁵³ Chamberlain, *Fenwomen*, p. 134-135.

when the Ballot Act introduced secret ballots, making it more difficult for voters to be pressured or intimidated.⁵⁴

There was a firm Victorian belief that politics were not women's business, and even when women over thirty were given the right to vote in 1918, most working-class women still subscribed to this opinion. Their attitude to politics and female suffrage was largely one of unconcern:

when they got the vote, the women, they worked hard for it, I suppose. ... But I wasn't that pleased to get it. Well, it didn't really worry me. I'm not a rebel. It didn't really affect country people. It were only in the cities, really. You see, in the country, women didn't bother about the vote, not round here. We liked to know women had got the voting. That the women were considered as fine as were the men.⁵⁵

This attitude seems to have been fairly common among working women throughout the country:

do you remember your mother voting at all before 1919?

No. My mother never bothered to vote at all. No, not even when they got the - you know, they fought for the vote and all that, and never went - no, she, never at time, she always said she'd never got time.⁵⁶

As there was no evident social or economic substitute for their daily existence, countrywomen preferred to keep to the familiar life they could recognise and understand. Overt political activity in the early twentieth century largely passed them by. They would often accompany their husbands to political meetings, not because of their interest in the subject, but because it was a novelty and perhaps because it was one of the few occasions when they could go out together.⁵⁷ At a conference of the National Council of Women of Great Britain, an independent, non-party-political organisation established in 1895, the delegates were advised that 'vast numbers [of] ... women and girls are not touched by such influences [women's organisations]. These must be reached in humbler fashion; they must be brought into contact more with the individual.'⁵⁸

⁵⁴ The Ballot Act, 1872 (35 & 36 Vict. C. 33)

⁵⁵ Chamberlain, *Fenwomen*, p. 132.

⁵⁶ *Edwardians Online*, Interview number 230, Mrs Grace Bessie B, year of birth 1901, born in Peckham. <http://www.qualidata.ac.uk/edwardians/search/interview.asp?id=230.asp>

⁵⁷ Chamberlain, *Fenwomen*, p. 132.

⁵⁸ Quoted in Parratt, *More than mere amusement*, p. 158.

Like so many innovative advances of the mid-nineteenth century, village women's recreational opportunities were inextricably bound up with class, altruism and reform. Mothers' meetings, for example, sprang from the philanthropic visiting societies of the early nineteenth century.⁵⁹ The very running of these organisations was an unacknowledged form of leisure for élite women, who saw it as their duty to improve the morality as well as the mundane conditions of life of those in less fortunate circumstances than themselves. This class division is seen in the administration of the various societies. The committee was almost invariably led by the local lady of the manor or vicar's wife, with the committee members coming from the same level of society as she did. This exclusivity very gradually changed during the early to mid-twentieth century towards a more equitable system, but because people find it difficult to change their accustomed behaviour, as late as 1920 a Mothers' Union discussion was held on whether women of all classes would be welcome as members of a proposed Young Wives' Fellowship: '... Mrs Causton explained the "Young Wives' Fellowship", the object of which was to bind together the better class young mothers in prayer and sympathy.'

Nevertheless, change was in the air, because this particular report continues:

one or two spoke of the danger of splitting up our mothers into two classes, i.e. "the better class" mothers and the "uneducated" and regretted anything which might divide the younger members from the older ones. Several present also felt that our Mothers' Union would suffer if young mothers joined this new movement instead of the Mothers' Union. [Proposed] "that each Deanery and Branch should have its own Committees, and that working women should be represented on them".⁶⁰

Education contributed to a more balanced society, because by the 1890s, compulsory education had created new schools, allowing more rural working-class girls than before to become teachers through the well-established pupil-teacher scheme. In addition, transport improvements facilitated access to work in local towns, where

⁵⁹ Prochaska, 'A mother's country', p. 379; Bayly, *Ragged homes and how to mend them*, pp.120, 252.

⁶⁰ NRO, SO 178/1/1, 794X2 Records of the Mothers' Union, Diocese of Norwich. Minutes, 1913-1920.

they might find work in shops or offices, perhaps using the new typewriting machines.⁶¹

The Mothers' Union

The Mothers' Union was founded in 1876 by Mary Sumner, a vicar's wife, and rapidly spread throughout the Anglican Communion in England and Wales.⁶² Mary Sumner was ahead of her time, because her hope was to cast off class divisions, enabling mothers both to support each other and also to learn the precepts of motherhood and Christian family life, with the emphasis on a strong moral base inside and outside the home.⁶³ The society's primary concerns were therefore the role of the mother and the nurture of children – to be carried out with a strong Christian element. In spite of its original purpose, from the beginning childless married women and unmarried women were permitted to join as Associate Members, thereby opening the association to all women, almost without exception.⁶⁴ The grass roots of the organisation were the branches formed in ecclesiastical parishes. Although at the start the MU was a group of meetings in parishes in the Diocese of Winchester, by the mid-1890s it had instituted a national governing body in London and at the beginning of the twentieth century had launched many branches overseas and had expanded its membership to 200,000.⁶⁵ It widened its scope to deal with multifarious existing social issues – runaway children, drug dependence, venereal disease, housing conditions and birth control – and predictably concentrated particularly on crusading against divorce and marriage breakdown.⁶⁶

The fundamental purpose of the organisation is summarised in its national declaration:

Objects:

To uphold the sanctity of marriage.

⁶¹ Hazel Hagger and Donald McIntyre, *Learning teaching from teachers: realising the potential of school-based teacher education* (Maidenhead, 2006), p. 8; Turner, *The women's century*, p. 15.

⁶² Olive Parker, *For the family's sake. A history of the Mothers' Union 1876-1976* (London, 1975), pp. 8-11.

⁶³ Pamela Johnston, 'Sumner [*née* Heywood], Mary Elizabeth', *ODNB*.

⁶⁴ <http://www.mundus.ac.uk/cats/12/1322.htm>

⁶⁵ James Obelkevich, 'Religion', in Thompson, *The Cambridge social history of Britain 1750-1950* vol. 3, p. 341.

⁶⁶ <http://www.mothersunion.org/media-centre/our-history>

To awaken a sense of the great responsibility of Mothers and others concerned in the care of children, in the training of boys and girls – the future men and women of England.

To organise in every place a band of Mothers, who will unite in prayer and seek by their own example to lead their families in purity and holiness of life.⁶⁷

The first object – the sanctity of marriage – was seen as a cause for concern because of the legal changes, starting with the Matrimonial Causes Act (1857), which gradually facilitated easier divorce. This idea was anathema to most members, and over time many resolutions were put to them to support the idea of indissoluble marriage. At the turn of the century these were passed by both the 'educated' and the working class members, but eventually the MU's uncompromising defence of marriage caused some controversy within the movement.⁶⁸

Through all this serious purpose, however, there ran a strong thread of fun and friendship, as is evident in these descriptions in the quarterly *Mothers' Union Journal*, a national periodical with a specific county cover, allowing items of local interest to be reported:

South Elmham. – On 29th December [1908] the members of the Mothers' Union in St. Margaret's and St. Peter's were invited to the District School-room, where a treat had been prepared, by many willing hands, in the shape of a bountiful Tea, followed by a Christmas Tree and a very amusing Gramophone [sic]. One and all expressed much gratitude and enjoyment.

Wells-next-Sea. – Mrs. Murison kindly invited the members of the Mothers' Union to Tea at St. Heliers, on Thursday, 21st July [1910]. Before and after tea games were indulged in and a pleasant time was spent. ...⁶⁹

With its first branch founded in Redenhall in 1889, Norfolk was no exception to the MU's markedly rapid expansion.⁷⁰ The first statistics available, in 1901, already

⁶⁷ NRO, PD 440/147 Parish records of Reepham with Kerdiston. Parish magazines. Norwich Diocese Mothers' Union Journal. 1909-1916.

⁶⁸ The MU's defence of marriage is demonstrated in the many pages of evidence given by Mothers' Union members in: 1912-13 [Cd. 6480] Minutes of evidence taken before the Royal Commission on Divorce and Matrimonial Causes. Volume II. Marriage was regarded as completely permanent, 'for better or worse' and if unhappy had to be endured. '... We take the line that happiness is not the ultimate end of everything', p. 194; Caitriona Beaumont, *Women and citizenship: a study of non-feminist women's societies and the women's movement in England, 1928-1950* (Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Warwick, 1996), p. 16.

⁶⁹ NRO, PD 440/147 Parish records of Reepham with Kerdiston. Parish magazines. Norwich Diocese Mothers' Union Journal. 1909-1916. Nos. 44, 50. April 1909, October, 1910.

⁷⁰ NRO, SO 178/1/1, 794X2 Records of the Mothers' Union, Diocese of Norwich. Minutes, 1913-1920.

Rural working women's leisure

show a very healthy presence in the county and apart from the occasional setback, this continued to increase during the first half of the twentieth century (Table 10).

Table 10 Development of the Mothers' Union in Norfolk⁷¹

<i>Year</i>	<i>Branches</i>	<i>No. of members</i>
1901	158	3030
1902	168	3562
1904	195	2890
1907	153	3910
1908	166	4239
1909	171	4616
1910	187	5391
1911	208	5850
1912	223	6321
1913	230	6521
1914	245	6625
1915	252	8310
1916	253	8340
1919	250	7790
1920	252	7813
1921	258	8528
1922	269	8922
1923	275	9621
1924	283	9856
1925	289	10149
1926	297	10933
1927	303	11239
1928	307	11509

⁷¹ These statistics have been extracted from: NRO, SO 178/4/1, 794X6 Annual reports of Norwich Diocese Mothers' Union 1901-1962.

Rural working women's leisure

<i>Year</i>	<i>Branches</i>	<i>No. of members</i>
1929	315	11803
1931	345	11939
1932	356	11895
1933	359	11794

It is notable that although many of these branches were urban, very many were also in small villages.⁷² This is borne out by early reports. In 1901, for instance, new branches were formed in Colby, Erpingham, Frettenham, Horsford, Hunworth, Intwood, Keswick, Metton, Roughton, Sloley, Wroxham, and Wreningham.⁷³ The population of these villages at that time ranged from 43 in Intwood to 691 in Horsford, all well under 1,000 but all capable of making use of the variety of opportunities offered by the MU.⁷⁴ As opportunities for recreational activity were scarce, anything unusual offered in the village was welcome.

The Mothers' Union aspired to be a positive influence in the community and strove against any negative influences.

[1902] ... the Norwich Diocesan Union ... is intended to include mothers of all classes in a parish. It is very much hoped that Mothers' Unions may ... be a means ... of raising the moral tone in many of the homes in our towns and villages.

[1908] The report forms tell us of very many meetings, devotional, social, and instructive, held over the Diocese, all being felt to be very helpful. One Secretary writes ... "Our branch is going splendidly, the members love it."

[1910] "Should mothers whose children are born before or shortly after marriage be admitted at once as M.U. members?" It was agreed that it is absolutely essential in these cases that a time of probation should be given – never less than two years. Mrs Sheepshanks [Diocesan President] urged that the Mothers' Union ought to be made a definite work for purity.⁷⁵

⁷² Typical urban examples were Attleborough (founded in 1915), Aylsham (1901), Dereham (1935), Fakenham (1901), Great Yarmouth (1907), Holt (1907), Swaffham (1901), Wymondham (1911) and Thetford (1901).

⁷³ These statistics and information have been taken from NRO, SO 178/4/1, 794X6 Annual reports of Norwich Diocese Mothers' Union 1901-1962.

⁷⁴ <http://www.visionofbritain.org.uk>

⁷⁵ NRO, SO 178/4/1, 794X6 Annual reports of Norwich Diocese Mothers' Union 1901-1962.

Many members worried about the impact of cinema on their children, and through the MU Watch Committee maintained a keen but somewhat hostile vigilance for objectionable films:

[1925] cinema shows leave much to be desired; the wild cow-boy films and the sickly sentimental love scenes are positively poisonous.

[1927] It is difficult to know how to cope with cinema shows, which one cannot report on as useful from any point of view. Having passed the Censor, it is difficult to get up any public feeling about them. One can only go to these in order to get first-hand knowledge, and then ... warn people of the danger. But it is slow educational work. ...

[1932] ... It was asked that it might be suggested to Headquarters that the names of good films showing in London and the provinces should be printed in "Workers' Paper" and in the "Mothers' Union Journal".

At length, concern reached such a pitch that a joint conference was arranged to deal with the matter: '[1933] ... March 29th. Cinema conference, arranged by the Mothers' Union, the National Council of Women and the Norfolk Federation of Women's Institutes ...'⁷⁶

The report on the conference in the *Norfolk Chronicle* mentioned the existence of 5,000 cinemas in England 'with a weekly attendance of 24 millions'. Unrelated, 'lurid and suggestive' posters advertising films were deplored. No definite plan of action was outlined, and the final relatively negative comment was: 'a generation was growing up which was film-conscious and cinema-minded. They could not provide their children with a better equipment for life than a strong dislike of the inferior and commonplace'.⁷⁷

It could be argued that one perspective of this is that every age has its own *bête noire* as regards the care and upbringing of children: concerns about the cinema were thus followed by anxieties about television, and subsequently the Internet. Perhaps, until it has settled down and become commonplace, every innovation has its detractors.

⁷⁶ These reports are all taken from NRO, SO 178/4/1, 794X6 Annual reports of Norwich Diocese Mothers' Union 1901-1962.

⁷⁷ 'Influence of films' *Norfolk Chronicle and Norwich Gazette*, 31 March 1933, p. 1.

The MU was positive about other recreational opportunities, however, if they fitted in with their ideals. One instance of this occurred in 1915, when a scheme for travelling libraries was suggested:

... by which good modern books might be brought within the reach of people living in small provincial towns or in rural districts. The idea is that the scheme should be worked, through the Mothers' Union Associates, in groups of villages, all under the control of a Central Authority in Norwich. ... The scheme has met with an enthusiastic reception among those who know how greatly the lack of good books is felt among the young people in our villages, and not only among the young but among the elder folk, both men and women.⁷⁸

This arrangement met with some success, although it eventually discontinued in 1928, when it became possible to obtain books in the villages through the Carnegie Trust. Mr. Andrew Carnegie, already mentioned in this thesis, was a millionaire and philanthropist, whose ruling philosophy was that personal wealth should be used to improve society generally.⁷⁹ In 1913 he inaugurated the trust, which helped to establish not only libraries but also village halls, local organisations and local amenities.⁸⁰

Perhaps as a consequence of the greater accessibility to books, a sharp lookout was kept to ensure that reading matter available within local MU communities was not pernicious or harmful, particularly as 'children have free access to public libraries':

[1923] there is a type of literature just now being widely read, especially by the educated girls. I trust these books may not find their way into the public libraries. [1925] Special care has been taken to see that post cards, papers, books, and all literature exposed for sale is of a nature that will not hurt the child mind.⁸¹

Another source of recreation – fairgrounds – was also a cause of worry to MU members, and in one case was dealt with in no uncertain manner:

⁷⁸ NRO, SO 178/4/1, 794X6 Annual reports of Norwich Diocese Mothers' Union 1901-1962, 1915.

⁷⁹ See pp. 119, 149.

⁸⁰ <http://www.carnegieuktrust.org.uk/who-we-are/history>; King's Lynn library, completely financed by Carnegie, was opened by the benefactor himself in 1905, and in the 1920s the Carnegie rural library scheme was very successful in Norfolk, serving 164 villages with a waiting list of 100 more communities. *Women's Institute seventh annual report*, 1926, p. 13. In addition, the *Eastern Daily Press* reported that at least three village halls (Bodham, North Creake and Rackheath) had substantial grants or loans from the Carnegie Trust. *Eastern Daily Press*, 'Bodham village hall' 4 February 1935, p. 12, 'North Creake village hall', 5 October 1933, p. 5, 'Rackheath village hall', 11 December 1937, p. 11.

⁸¹ NRO, SO 178/4/1, 794X6 Annual reports of Norwich Diocese Mothers' Union 1901-1962, 1923, 1925.

it was brought to my notice that indecent shows were held on the Fair-ground and that crowds were attending. I visited the Fair, paid to enter every show, and got the literature. Next day I called to see the proprietor, he was most attentive to my complaint; he had no idea of the nature of the shows, and promised to clear them off the Fair-ground. I visited again two nights later – he had kept his word – they had all departed. The proprietor, whose sole aim is to keep the Fair clean and wholesome, expressed the wish that I would always report to him on anything of this kind, and also invited my husband to hold services on the Fair-ground.⁸²

The MU Watch Committee of Norfolk was also concerned about greyhound racing, because of ‘the weakness of the law relating to gambling which is not adequate ... to safeguard the community against the evils of gambling in connection with Greyhound Racing’.⁸³

With the onset of the First World War, the MU redoubled its efforts to encourage and support its members, especially in their spiritual life. In Norfolk, as tabulated above, there were now two hundred and forty-five branches and over six and a half thousand members, and these numbers continued to expand throughout the war. With such a large membership to influence, the guidance of the leadership was crucial. Nevertheless, on the whole practical suggestions were conspicuous by their absence:

[1914] a Special Council Meeting was held on August 19th to consider ... what the Mothers' Union should do in this time of war. And it was resolved to forward Mrs. Sumner's letter and prayer to each member of the Mothers' Union.

Since the war began there is a deepening of the spiritual life and a realization of the need of prayer. Many have sons at the Front, or in training, and everyone is eager to help. In several parishes Belgians are provided for, largely by the M.U. There is much to encourage.⁸⁴

The flood of refugees, numbering 200,000, caused by Germany's invasion of Belgium, led to ‘an unprecedented encounter between civilians in exile and host communities in the allied states, mainly in France and Britain’, and the refugees' descriptions of their individual ordeals brought home the stark reality of the war to the ordinary people in England.⁸⁵

⁸² NRO, SO 178/4/1, 794X6 Annual reports of Norwich Diocese Mothers' Union 1901-1962, 1923.

⁸³ NRO, SO 178/4/1, 794X6 Annual reports of Norwich Diocese Mothers' Union 1901-1962, 1927.

⁸⁴ NRO, SO 178/4/1, 794X6 Annual reports of Norwich Diocese Mothers' Union 1901-1962, 1914.

⁸⁵ Pierre Purseigle, ‘A wave on to our shores’ *Contemporary European History*, 16:4 (2007), p. 428; Peter James Cahalan, *The treatment of Belgian refugees in England during the Great War* (Unpublished PhD thesis, McMaster University, Ontario, 1977), p. 7.

Sympathetic interest was widespread throughout the county, and outside the MU, independent groups gave practical aid to these needy people. This sometimes resulted in extra entertainments for local inhabitants:

Blofield. A very successful patriotic entertainment, organised ... on behalf of the Belgian Refugee Fund, was given in the Council Schoolroom on Friday. An excellent programme was provided, and there was a large and appreciative audience. At the conclusion, the stage decoration, ... was sold by auction ... the sum realised being £1. 12s. 8d., which was added to the fund.

Burnham Thorpe. In the Nelson Memorial-hall on Tuesday evening, Mr. Sam Peel (Wells) gave an interesting lantern lecture on the Great War. ... The proceeds were in aid of the Belgian Relief Fund.

Merton. The ladies of the Merton Working Party engaged on the good work of providing warm clothing for Belgian refugees, gave an entertainment on Thursday to welcome four Belgian soldiers wounded at Antwerp and Dixmude. ... The large audience evidently heartily sympathised with the gallant part played by the Belgian Army, and gave vent to their feelings by a rousing rendering of the Belgian National Anthem.⁸⁶

Nevertheless, in spite of the aid given to the refugees in some parishes, the emphasis within the MU was on developing the members' spiritual lives. The general opinion was that this was appropriate in a time of war, although one Norfolk member did query the situation, while yet giving no concrete suggestions as to practical actions:

[1917] as members of the Mothers' Union, we may ask ourselves whether we are seeking to *do* as much as we can for our fellow members. Never has our country needed more from the wives and mothers than now.⁸⁷

The records show only one instance of divergent thinking and action in one branch:

[1915] North Creak – The Quarterly Meeting for the M.U. was held on ... October 7th. ... it was proposed at the meeting to hold fortnightly meetings at which to make warm garments for our troops, the members paying so much each for the wool and materials, and so then be entirely their own offerings.⁸⁸

The MU's highlighting of the spiritual life and comparative neglect of practical issues is very different in character from the contemporaneous actions of the

⁸⁶ *Norfolk Chronicle and Norwich Gazette*, 'Burston', 'Blofield' 5 February 1915 p. 8, 'Merton' 19 February 1915 p. 8.

⁸⁷ NRO, SO 178/4/1, 794X6 Annual reports of Norwich Diocese Mothers' Union 1901-1962, 1917.

⁸⁸ NRO, PD 440/147 Norwich Diocese Mothers' Union Journals and Newsletters. April 1909 – 1916, 1915.

Women's Institutes, started in 1915 with the support of the Agricultural Organization Society. One of the main aims of the infant movement was to improve food production for the nation. This was essential in the face of the German U-boat blockade of 1916 and 1917. The WI is discussed in detail in the next chapter.

In contrast to the WI, the MU strove to promote the development of an ideal society, identifying and attempting to put an end to undesirable recreational elements. Their objects detailed above underlined their moral stance, which stemmed directly from the Victorian emphasis on honour and virtue in conjunction with the fight against social evils. Therefore even within the organisation, 'entertainments' were discouraged:

1913 the Diocesan Council of the Mothers' Union would earnestly advise that meetings in connection with the Mothers' Union should not take the form of 'Entertainments'. It is better, if possible, to keep Mothers' Union meetings apart from general parochial entertainments.⁸⁹

This had some effect, as eventually:

1935 ... we are hearing less about outings and much more about the regular Corporate Communion and Services in Branch life, and it is now fully understood that the Mothers' Union Branch does not organise Whist Drives or Dances in the parish.⁹⁰

Acceptable subjects for meetings were itemised in 1921:

M. U. Objects; M. U. Membership; devotional subjects; religious subjects; prayer; the marriage service; the marriage laws; Baptismal; confirmation; Holy Communion service; missions; temperance; public worship; friendship and fellowship; questions of health; infant and child welfare; moral questions; citizenship; how to use our vote; the Education Act; the story of our village church; children's entertainments (cinemas, etc.).⁹¹

Although the MU leadership did not regard the organisation as a leisure activity, nonetheless at the grass roots in the parish branches it was essentially considered as such, and in spite of the 1913 ruling, there is evidence from the 1920s and 30s of MU

⁸⁹ NRO, SO 178/1/1, 794X2 Records of the Mothers' Union, Diocese of Norwich. Minutes, 1913-1920.

⁹⁰ NRO, SO 178/4/1, 794X6 Annual reports of Norwich Diocese Mothers' Union 1901-1962.

⁹¹ NRO, SO 178/4/1, 794X6 Annual reports of Norwich Diocese Mothers' Union 1901-1962.

summer socials, outings, musical afternoons, Christmas parties, fêtes, 'sumptuous' teas and social evenings.⁹²

As we have seen above, the harmful elements within society identified by the MU included 'unwholesome cinemas' (1920), the impurity of the press (1920), fairgrounds (1923), and greyhound racing (1927). Thus both traditional and innovative forms of leisure were targeted. During the First World War, temptations which beset absent husbands were especially singled out:

1917 Mrs Sheepshanks spoke of the ... danger of temptation to married men away from their homes, and to married women whose husbands are away, which was never so great as now. Everyone must do her part by prayer ... to combat evil, to witness for purity of life.⁹³

Due to the MU's concern about the effect various recreations were having on society, it might be contended that one leisure activity was monitoring and attempting to control other leisure activities, one of the most difficult of which to influence was the consumption of alcohol. Temperance had been encouraged, particularly by the churches, since the early nineteenth century, and many temperance halls, both urban and rural, were built to provide a social facility for working people other than the public house, examples in Norfolk being in Aldborough, Downham Market, Gorleston, Hilgay, North Walsham, Shipdham and West Rudham.⁹⁴ Some indication of the strong influence of the temperance movement is given by the fact that in the 1850s and possibly earlier, girls were occasionally christened Temperance.⁹⁵ (According to one Victorian writer, however, this name had first been adopted at the time of the Reformation and was then mainly a 'peasant' practice.)⁹⁶ An early major concern of the MU was the free access of children to public houses. Indeed Mary Sumner brought this to the attention of members in the precepts printed in the first membership card: 'you are strongly advised never to give your children beer, wine or

⁹² NRO, SO 178/5/1, 794X7 Norwich Diocese Mothers' Union Journals and Newsletters. 1924-1954.

⁹³ NRO, SO 178/1/1, 794X2 Records of the Mothers' Union, Diocese of Norwich. Minutes, 1913-1920.

⁹⁴ See also pp. 115-116; Entwistle, *A century of faces and places*, p. 49; J. G. Harrod, *Royal county directory of Norfolk with Lowestoft in Suffolk, 1877*, p. 148; William White, *History, gazetteer and directory of Norfolk 1883*, p. 291; *Kelly's directory of Norfolk, 1896*, p. 171; *Kelly's directory of Norfolk, 1912*, pp. 27, 196; NRO, DN/EST 51A/8, Norwich Diocesan Archives. House, cottage and Temperance Hall in N. Walsham; NRO, MC 480 Papers of the Temperance Hall, Shipdham.

⁹⁵ *Hunt & Co's Directory of E. Norfolk with parts of Suffolk, 1850*, p. 72; *Craven & Co's commercial directory of Norfolk* (Nottingham, 1856), pp. 72, 78, 154.

⁹⁶ Charlotte Mary Yonge, *History of Christian names* vol. 2 (London, 1863), p. 483.

spirits without the doctor's orders, or to send young people to the public house'.⁹⁷ This unease about children's exposure to alcohol continued for the next thirty years with eventual demands for legislation to prohibit juveniles from entering pubs.⁹⁸ A government enquiry about female drinking habits brought many disquieting facts to light, resulting in the comment:

... we are agreed that the practice of allowing children in public-houses is most disastrous. The lessons which they learn at so tender an age are rarely, if ever, forgotten, and consequently they cannot have the same chance in life as a child brought up in a respectable home.⁹⁹

In the corridors of power there had long been concern about the connection between children and alcohol, and this resulted in legislation which gradually improved the situation.¹⁰⁰ The particular problem of children's access to public houses was dealt with in the Children Act of 1908, which, among other measures designed to provide protection to children, prevented them from entering pubs. This affected not only children's but also women's exposure to the temptations of alcohol, although this outcome was more manifest in urban districts than in rural areas, where pubs were mostly regarded as male domains.

The MU was eager to be recognized as a unique organisation: '1908 ... it is important that there should be no confusion between the "Mothers' Meeting" – a secular gathering, though combined generally with prayer and Bible as it is – and the distinctly religious aspect of the Mothers' Union'.¹⁰¹

It therefore becomes clear that the MU was making strong efforts towards an exemplary society, as previously noted. It is arguable that it represented an extension of the old nineteenth century moral order, albeit adapted to new social circumstances. The result was that many women were deterred from joining the organisation,

⁹⁷ Cordelia Moyse, *A history of the Mothers' Union. Women, Anglicanism and globalisation, 1876-2008* (Woodbridge, 2009), p. 253.

⁹⁸ Parker, *For the family's sake*, p. 88.

⁹⁹ Parliamentary Paper 1908 [3813] *Women and children in public-houses. Information obtained from certain police forces as to the frequenting of public-houses by women and children*, p. 5.

¹⁰⁰ From the 1880s there had been various Acts of Parliament restricting the consumption of alcohol in public houses by children under 14 years of age (1886), then prohibiting 'off-sales' of alcohol to them (1901), eventually raising the age to 18 years (1923). Joanna Bourke, *Working-class cultures in Britain 1890–1960: gender, class and ethnicity* (London, 1994), p. 74.

¹⁰¹ SO 178/4/1, 794X6 Annual reports of Norwich Diocese Mothers' Union 1901-1962.

because, as Cordelia Moyse has shown, increasingly its values were not those accepted by the wider society.¹⁰² There was a pronounced gap between the MU's idealistic objects and existing social reality, and this led to the Young Wives' Fellowship, originally founded in 1916 as a sister organisation to the MU, becoming independent in 1937.¹⁰³ It developed into an ecumenical organisation, welcoming women from all Christian denominations.

Girls' Friendly Society

Another female organisation, less well known today, was founded in 1875, one year before the MU. This was the Girls' Friendly Society and provided an association for girls from the age of twelve upwards. It was established in Hampshire by Mary Elizabeth Townsend, a clergyman's wife, concerned about working-class country girls who left home to work in towns and cities.¹⁰⁴ The organisation of the society was well suited to the contemporary hierarchy of social class. There were two categories of membership: the working class girls known as members, and the ladies called associates, who would befriend and guide the girls. (Mary Sumner was herself an associate of the GFS, using it as a model for the MU with the same managerial composition.)¹⁰⁵ The idea quickly became popular, until in 1880 there were nearly 40,000 members and over 13,500 associates.¹⁰⁶ Class distinction and privilege were not seen as barriers. They presented no difficulties and were accepted without question. Writing in 1915, Lady Addington remembered: 'the Members were principally drawn, in the country, from the little group of girls in the head Sunday-school class, and the Squire's daughter became an Associate, naturally, without any intervening steps of Candidate and Member'.¹⁰⁷

The purity of the individual member was considered to be paramount, and this was specified in the third object of the GFS, which was: '[n]o girl who has not borne a virtuous character to be admitted as a member; such character being lost, the member

¹⁰² Moyse, *A history of the Mothers' Union*, p. 137.

¹⁰³ <http://www.wivesfellowship.org.uk/about-us/the-history-of-the-wives-fellowship/>

¹⁰⁴ Brian Harrison, 'For Church, Queen and family: the Girls' Friendly Society 1874-1920', *Past & Present*, 61 (1973), pp. 108-109.

¹⁰⁵ Moyse, *A history of the Mothers' Union*, p. 18, 40; Harrison, 'For Church, Queen and family', p. 109.

¹⁰⁶ <http://www.gfsplatform.org.uk/our-history.html>

¹⁰⁷ Lady Addington, *Associates Journal*, August 1915, p. 6.

to forfeit her [membership] card.'¹⁰⁸ The idea was to bring respectable young girls together and thereby to keep temptations at bay, especially prostitution, and to train them in domestic responsibilities and spiritual values. The society's success was outstanding, as it doubled the number of its branches and members between 1902 and 1920.¹⁰⁹

In Norfolk in the early 1920s, branches of the GFS existed throughout the county, including Blofield, Brisley, Burnham, Depwade, Dereham, Diss, Fakenham, Gorleston, Happisburgh, Harleston, Heacham, Hingham, Holt, Humbleyard, Ingworth, Kessingland, King's Lynn, Loddon, Lothingland, North Walsham, Norwich, Repps, Rockland, Sparham, Swaffham, Wacton, Wells, West Brooke, Yarmouth and Yaxham.¹¹⁰ Although GFS branches were formed in towns – North Walsham, Swaffham and Yarmouth, for example – the movement was strongest in country areas, and branches materialised in villages, sometimes even very small communities.¹¹¹ This might seem a surprising state of affairs, because the temptations besetting the unwary were surely more numerous in urban settings than in the countryside, and it would seem logical to establish more branches where the need was greatest. The philosophy of the GFS, however, was explained by the Society's first historian, Agnes Money. Internal controversy over Object Number 3 (stated above) led to a schism among the Associates, some of whom broke away to form the Young Women's Help Society.¹¹² The GFS sought to *prevent* what they regarded as disaster (loss of virginity) rather than rescue girls from it and waged a 'battle for the purity of womanhood, for the possibility of virtuous Christian maidenhood'. To this end the Society created a 'system of Candidates, so that the little ones might be watched over from their earliest years, brought up in pure and holy ways, and then passed on to Membership with no need of question as to their

¹⁰⁸ Moyse, *A history of the Mothers' Union*, p. 119.

¹⁰⁹ Harrison, 'For Church, Queen and Family', pp. 109-111.

¹¹⁰ National Council of Women (Norfolk and Norwich branch 1922) (comp.), *Norfolk and Norwich handbook of women's activities (voluntary and otherwise)* (Norwich, 1922); NRO, PD 531/91 Girls Friendly Society, Happisburgh Branch, minute book, 1905-1920; NRO, PD 496/109 Parish Records of Wacton. Girls' Friendly Society register and accounts 1930-1935.

¹¹¹ Harrison, 'For Church, Queen and Family', p.119; these villages included Burnham Westgate (population in 1921 849) Brisley (301), Happisburgh (574), Ingworth (143), Sparham (224), Wacton (206) and Yaxham (401).

¹¹² Harrison, 'For Church, Queen and Family', p.118.

past'.¹¹³ This debate was finally resolved in 1936, when in an effort to combat falling membership the rule was modified to permit 'fallen' but repentant members to rejoin the Society.¹¹⁴

A wide-ranging choice of activities was offered by local branches, and this list from the Annual Report for 1900 helps to explain the popularity and rapid growth of the Society:

...Bible and Church History Classes...sewing, knitting, embroidery, basket-making, wood-carving, bookbinding, singing, French ambulance, nursing, musical drill and gymnastics ... in one Branch a weekly meeting for lectures or talks on topics of the day (chosen by the girls), such as South Africa, the Siege of Peking, Parliament and the Cabinet; papers also written on such subjects as "How an unmarried girl should spend a weekly wage of one pound". Social evenings are very popular, games of all kinds, recitations, also getting up entertainments.¹¹⁵

The list covers matters religious, practical, topical and social and demonstrates that, although the GFS was strongly connected to the Anglican church, it was not as religiously orientated as the MU. This comprehensive choice was not of course offered in every branch, but a substantial selection must have been proposed to account for the ever-expanding membership.

Nonconformist women's organisations

Apart from the political societies and the Women's Institutes, the organisations mentioned above were all established under the aegis of the Anglican church. By the 1880s, however, members of the Nonconformist churches were equal in number to their Anglican counterparts, totalling about 1.4 million, and their Sunday School membership exceeded the Anglican equivalent.¹¹⁶ These churches had similar female societies, which again were bound up with philanthropic deeds in addition to purely recreational events. The Quakers, for example, founded a Female Friend Society as early as 1827, and their accounts for 1836-37 include 'Lawn for 3 shirts 1/6, print for night gowns 2/2, 1½ yd of flannel 1/6, 6 yd of cotton for night jacket 3/-

¹¹³ Agnes L. Money, *History of the Girls' Friendly Society* (London, 1911), p. 18.

¹¹⁴ <http://www.gfsplatform.org.uk>

¹¹⁵ <http://www.gfsplatform.org.uk>

¹¹⁶ Obelkevich, 'Religion', p. 332.

tape 3d.' all no doubt destined for making up into clothes for the poor.¹¹⁷ In these early records there is no sign of levity of any kind, although it is probable that, like most women, the sewing group would gossip (but not scandalously) while working. At this date the authority of men over the women was still strong and accepted as normal practice:

... Harling 16th of 10 mo[nth] 1845

... This meeting is informed by minutes from men Friends that the report of the committee appointed to visit Eliz[abe]th Kent on her application to be admitted into membership being satisfactory the monthly meeting concludes to readmit her therein and appoint Richard Atmore and Francis Dix to inform her thereof.¹¹⁸

The Quakers were low in numbers in the mid-nineteenth century, unlike the Methodists, both Primitive and Wesleyan, who had a presence in most parishes throughout Norfolk.¹¹⁹ Different religious groups have been linked with class distinction, in that the established Church of England appealed to the upper and middle classes, while Methodism, particularly Primitive Methodism, was deemed to be more democratic and attracted numerous agricultural labourers and other workers, many of whom, because of their poor working and living conditions, had an antipathy towards local landowners and clergy and associated Anglicanism with the dominant classes and subjugation.¹²⁰ The actual organisation of the Methodist church was certainly not based on social class, and leaders were selected on the basis of ability and merit.¹²¹

In many communities the chapel was an important social meeting point for its members. The Methodist Sisterhood and the Women's Bright Hour were popular women's meetings, eventually amalgamating in some areas.¹²² Classes were also run for young girls between the ages of twelve and twenty-one, whose typical

¹¹⁷ NRO, FC 16 /168 Records of Great Yarmouth and Gorleston Methodist Circuit Wesleyan and post amalgamation Methodist, Churches Yarmouth, Deneside Chapel and Central Hall. Female Friend Society accounts 1837-1853.

¹¹⁸ NRO, SF 142 Records of Tivetshall Monthly Meeting.

¹¹⁹ Janet Ede and Norma Virgoe, 'Mapping nonconformity in Norfolk' in Virgoe and Williamson (eds.), *Religious dissent in East Anglia*, pp. 51, 55, 56.

¹²⁰ Ben Milner, *A history of Methodism in East Norfolk* (Gorleston-on-sea, 2009), p. 4. For further discussion on this subject, see Alun Howkins, 'Politics or quietism: the social history of nonconformity' in Virgoe and Williamson (eds.), *Religious dissent in East Anglia*.

¹²¹ Michael Friend Serpell, *A history of the Lophams* (Chichester, 1980), pp. 118-119.

¹²² NRO, FC 63/235 Records of Downham Market Methodist Circuit. Churches. Feltwell (ex-Wesleyan), Women's Bright Hour and Sisterhood meeting minutes Feb 1936-Feb 1983.

occupations included dress maker, servant, and pupil teacher. When there was no class meeting the reason was given as: school anniversary, United Camp meeting, Chapel anniversary, juvenile missionary meeting in the Chapel, Camp Meeting, Fellowship Meeting in the Chapel, Sunday School anniversary, Love feast in the Chapel, Service of song in the Chapel for Choir fund. These activities give a glimpse of the wide range of social opportunities open to young Methodist women in the last quarter of the nineteenth century.¹²³

Bible classes for women drew a following, and their solemn purpose must have been somewhat eased by the members' natural inclination to be sociable with each other. The classes' serious side was further lightened with affordable Christmas celebrations and annual summer treats:

17 June 1909 Dereham Wesleyan Methodist Women's Bible Class meets in Trinity Church at 3pm Sundays. ... Members to pay a weekly subscription of 1d half of which will go to meet expenses and treats, the other half to be returned in the shape of presents at Christmas.

22 July The first annual treat. ... in Mr Hunter's field at Toftwood ... It was decided that the members ... should each pay twopence and invited non members fourpence, the balance of expenditure being made up from the funds ...¹²⁴

Starting in the 1890s there was also a strong Methodist interest in missionary work, and women's auxiliary branches were started in towns and villages throughout the country.¹²⁵ Branch meetings were held sequentially in different geographical venues within a district, giving members a chance to travel further afield than they would normally do. Although the main purpose was to raise awareness of overseas work – 'so many interesting things we heard of people in other lands from our various speakers' – these meetings were also a pretext for mild entertainment and socialising:

1926 the April meeting was held at Halvergate. We were very fortunate in having with us as speaker Mrs John Smith who 52 years ago went out with her husband as pioneer missionaries to Africa. It was both interesting and inspiring to hear the stories of those early days of one

¹²³ FC 25/187 Records of Wymondham, Attleborough and Watton Methodist Circuit. Primitive Methodist and unidentified Methodist, churches. Wymondham. Class Books. 1881-1892.

¹²⁴ FC 75/17 Records of Dereham and Swaffham Methodist Circuit. Wesleyan Methodist, Dereham Circuit and Mid-Norfolk Mission. Women's bible class minutes and attendance register 1909-1913.

¹²⁵ <http://www.mundus.ac.uk/cats/4/952.htm>

missionary[']s] work. ... Mrs. Wilfred Sutton sang a solo and Miss Jeary read the monthly letter. ... There were 42 members present.¹²⁶

By 1912 Methodist social meetings in general had become so popular as to cause an element of concern among some church leaders, because in their opinion the 'flood of amusements, social gatherings and musical evenings' was affecting the spiritual life of the church.¹²⁷ It was decided that 'the Annual meetings ... and one social per month' would be completely adequate.¹²⁸ Nonetheless, women's meetings continued to be established:

October 1932 ... it was decided to hold a united weekly women's meeting from 2.45 to 4 o'clock and to call it the Methodist Women's Meeting and Women's Work.

The meeting, which it was agreed should be held one week at Mount Tabor, and the next at the Primitive Methodists was to take the form of one devotional and one sewing alternately. The second devotional to be a missionary meeting, the funds from which to be equally divided between the two chapels. It was also agreed that each meeting should begin with a hymn followed by a prayer, and finish with the usual cup of tea and biscuit at a charge of 1d or 1½ a cup (inclusive of biscuit).¹²⁹

Interestingly, however, the devotional aspect of their meetings prevailed, and about three months later: '3rd January 1933 ... it was ... resolved that the social and sewing meeting be abolished and each meeting be either devotional or a talk on some literary subject or one on travel'.¹³⁰

Strict standards were furthered six years later, but this may have been connected with the outbreak of war. History does not record whether these stringencies affected membership numbers: 'Oct 4th 1939 ... the question of having a cup of tea was again

¹²⁶ NRO, FC 47/518 Records of North Walsham and Aylsham Methodist Circuit. North Walsham Circuit Women's Missionary Circle and Women's Own. Minutes and reports 1935-1939; FC 21/209 Records of Acle Methodist Circuit. ... Acle Circuit Quarterly Meetings. ... Women's missionary Auxiliary Secretary's book 1926-1935.

¹²⁷ This disquiet about 'entertainments' was general at this time. See pp. 194-195 for the Mothers' Union's similar reaction.

¹²⁸ East Sussex Record Office NMB 15/5/3 Leaders' meeting minutes, Eastbourne Wesleyan Methodist Chapel, 9 January 1912, 16 April 1912, quoted in Howkins, 'Politics or quietism: the social history of nonconformity', p. 73.

¹²⁹ NRO, FC 63/229 Records of Downham Market Methodist Circuit Churches. Downham Mount Tabor (ex-United Methodist) United Women's Meeting (Sisterhood) and Women's Work meeting minutes. Oct 1932-Jun 1952.

¹³⁰ NRO, FC 63/229 Women's Meeting (Sisterhood) and Women's Work meeting minutes.

brought up, and after some discussion, it was decided to have a collection each week instead of tea and biscuits'.¹³¹

Traditional values were still indispensable for many women:

1928 May meeting held at Halvergate quite a number away busy spring cleaning etc. but in spite of this had quite a nice meeting ...¹³²

9 March 1937 The annual rally was held at Freethorpe. ... Attendance was rather thin, owing, perhaps, to the fact that many women were busy at home.¹³³

These particular opportunities for meeting others were of course open only to members of individual churches and were used by these churches to attract new members. The religious census of 1851 disturbingly revealed that the number of people attending church on census Sunday amounted to 60% of the population, leaving an 'alarming number of ... non-attendants', as Horace Mann, the organiser of the census, declared in his introduction to the published results.¹³⁴ Another matter to be considered is the fact that some rural people 'shopped around' among the different sects, perhaps doing as Joseph Ashby did, attending 'church in the morning and either the Primitive or the Wesleyan chapel at night'.¹³⁵ 'My mother often went to three different venues, not for the religious guidance, but to qualify for three outings and three parties at Christmas.'¹³⁶

This practice did not fully commit them to any one denomination but possibly allowed them to participate in the various advantages of commitment. If they did not join in any form of worship, on the whole they were denied its social and recreational aspects.

Conclusion

From the turn of the century village women and girls had a choice of leisure activities. The options so far considered, however, were in general broadly religious

¹³¹ NRO, FC 63/229 Women's Meeting ... meeting minutes.

¹³² NRO, FC 21/209 Records of Acle Methodist Circuit. ... Acle Circuit Quarterly Meetings. ... Women's missionary Auxiliary Secretary's book 1926-1935.

¹³³ NRO, FC 21/210 Records of Acle Methodist Circuit. Acle Circuit Quarterly Meetings. Women's Missionary Meeting minutes 1937-1955.

¹³⁴ Obelkevich, 'Religion', p. 337; quoted in Gerald Parsons and James Richard Moore, *Religion in Victorian Britain: sources* (Manchester, 1988), p. 315.

¹³⁵ Mabel Kathleen Ashby, *Joseph Ashby of Tysoe 1859-1919* (Cambridge, 1961), p. 77.

¹³⁶ Bumfrey, *A boy's eye view of Norfolk village life*, p. 170.

in nature, and to varying degrees reactionary in social character. They provided a sense of companionship and enabled women to socialize; yet at the same time they promoted an ideological agenda which was often backward-looking, and they possessed organizational structures which mirrored the traditional hierarchies of rural society, especially in the case of the Mothers' Union, the key roles in which were filled by the wives of incumbents and principal landowners. In the first half of the twentieth century such structures were increasingly challenged, in Norfolk as elsewhere, by the rise of a new spirit of self-determination which was manifested, above all, in the rise and development of the Women's Institute movement.

Chapter 8. The Women's Institute movement

'I don't think I ever heard so much laughter before. I think all of us who helped enjoyed the fun quite as much as the children.'¹

Writing in 1925, the distinguished radical journalist and writer J. W. Robertson Scott (1866–1962) defined a Women's Institute as:

... the village unit of a very human, democratic, non-party, non-sectarian organization, which prides itself, among other things, on the fact that every member, from the cottage to the Throne, pays a fee of two shillings a year, no more and not less.²

This description by Robertson Scott, an enthusiastic advisor to the National Federation of Women's Institutes, succinctly outlines the basic tenets held by the movement, which developed against a background of overwhelming social change. Although they do not sound unusual now, these fundamental propositions, in the class-ridden society of the time, were innovative. As we shall see, although the principles of equality and democracy remained, perceptions of what it meant to be a WI member gradually changed, and this is illustrated by the various histories written over time, with their changing views of the organisation.

The Institute would thus appeal to countrywomen of every religious or political persuasion or none. In an age of social inequality, equality of opportunity within the organisation was paradoxically a foregone conclusion. Local branches were independently governed and met monthly, offering a social occasion and practical help to all women who would take advantage of this chance to widen their horizons. A crisp definition of the aims and objectives of the association was published in the constitution: 'the main purpose of the Institute is to improve and develop conditions of rural life'.³

In fulfilling this ambition, the Women's Institute movement transformed the lives of countrywomen, not only becoming a national force for good but also through its

¹ NRO, SO 137/91, 701X2 Records of the Norfolk Federation of Women's Institutes. Hevingham, 18 December 1920.

² J. W. Robertson Scott, *The story of the Women's Institute movement in England and Wales and Scotland* (Kingham, 1925), p. v.

³ NRO, SO 137/821, 895X1 Records of the Norfolk Federation of Women's Institutes. Shipdham. Monthly meeting minutes, including [national] constitution and rules 1926.

international contacts and affiliations providing a significant means of linking women throughout the world. It provided women with previously inaccessible educational opportunities and the chance to build new skills, to take part in a wide variety of leisure activities and, although remaining non-partisan, to campaign on issues that mattered to them and their community.

The movement had a well-planned structure. At county level Institutes were organised into federations, which planned county-wide activities, making available opportunities which would have been difficult if not impossible for the individual Institute to provide. Federations were also trouble-shooters, solving difficulties and giving advice when asked. There was also a National Federation, which oversaw the whole movement, formulating rules of procedure, supervising and helping the whole movement to function smoothly. By joining a village WI, members were automatically affiliated to both county and national federations.

Historiography

From its early days the story of the development of the Women's Institute in England and Wales has attracted keen protagonists. This is not too strong a description of these historians, especially the earlier ones, because many of them were biased in favour of the movement and tended to overlook any contemporary negative criticisms. These partial histories gave an overview of how the Institutes saw themselves, explaining both their essential nature and their function within their local communities.

When the movement was ten years old, Robertson Scott, as 'a sympathetic and dispassionate outsider', decided that an account of its history was overdue, and it is due to his efforts that many of the minutiae of its early history have not disappeared into oblivion. It is not by any means an academic study but a straightforward account laced with Robertson Scott's personal opinions. The tone is occasionally and unintentionally patronising, for instance, 'This book records, happily, not only the growth of the Women's Institute movement, but the growth of women.'⁴ He wrote in a style peculiarly his own, and although that style might occasionally be criticised for its verbosity, *The story of the Women's Institute movement in England*

⁴ Robertson Scott, *The story of the Women's Institute movement*, pp. ix, xi.

and Wales and Scotland is now the cornerstone on which all later WI histories are dependent.

A completely independent history appeared in 1933. Janet Courtney (1865-1954), scholar, writer and feminist, produced *Countrywomen in council – the English and Scottish Women's Institutes* as an unauthorised account of the movement by an impartial observer. The author's opinion was that there was a gap in the historiography of the movement, in that the ordinary member was unaware of the historical background leading up to its establishment.⁵ Her book attempted to fill that gap, describing the national exercise of power, the rural poverty and daily struggle to survive from the eighteenth century onwards, followed by a clear outline of the development of the WI movement during its first seventeen years. In spite of her claim to impartiality, the author is unmistakably sympathetic towards the organisation, contrasting the earlier dearth of opportunity with the later cornucopia of choice available within the Institutes and emphasising the movement's inclusive nature:

there is no trace as yet of the sort of evils that have beset so many other movements. There is no 'swerve to the left', or any attempt on the part of extremists to assert themselves. From one form of danger the Institutes are saved by being not only non-party and non-sectarian, but also drawn from all sections of womanhood. If they are true to their principles, they should never engender class-warfare. ... the movement set one single aim before itself, the awakening and organizing of the countrywomen into a force which should re-vitalize and raise to a higher level the life of the countryside. From its straight path to that goal it has turned neither to right nor to left.⁶

Cicely McCall, the National Federation Education Organiser, published her *Women's Institutes* in 1943 in the series *Britain in pictures*. It is significant that her book appeared at a time of total war, as this fact affects the whole character of the book, which must be read with this bias in mind. She emphasises the positive contribution which the WI could make, not to the war effort as such, but to the improvement of conditions on the 'Home Front', particularly in the well-being of rural women and their families.⁷ Most of the illustrations deal with the practical side of WI

⁵ Janet E. Courtney, *Countrywomen in council* (London, 1933), p. v.

⁶ Courtney, *Countrywomen in council*, pp. 150-151.

⁷ The National Federation refused to contribute directly to the planning or continuation of the conflict but maintained its efforts to support its membership and the wider community during the

membership – a canning demonstration, a sewing working party, jam-making, fruit bottling and gardening, to name just a few examples. She stresses that the WI has always been concerned with improving the lot of rural women, stating that ‘in twenty-five years institutes have given countrywomen an opportunity of ... enjoying being together in a way which did not exist before’.⁸ The members’ increasing self-confidence and political awareness are described in accounts of local initiatives, such as the reinstatement of a doctor’s surgery or the building of a village hall. National WI campaigns, many of which had successful results, are also highlighted, including women police, a better water supply and cheap milk for mothers and babies.⁹ McCall sums up the impact of the movement thus:

Institutes have taught countrywomen to be articulate, they have taught citizenship and they have revived forgotten crafts. [The Institute’s] self-government has taught practical democracy, its classes and lectures have given members an opportunity to look beyond their village and beyond English shores. ... Members are well aware that a better world can only be built on co-operation not isolation.¹⁰

In 1953, Inez Jenkins produced another general history of the movement.¹¹ She had been connected with the National Federation almost since its inception. This official account is a clearer, more impersonal interpretation than the previous histories. Jenkins, an Oxford graduate, was the General Secretary of the NFWI from 1919 and still took a keen interest in the movement after her resignation in 1929. Besides outlining the organisational structure and history of the organisation, the book devotes separate chapters to the development of the principal areas of interest in Institute life – ‘craftwork’, ‘farm, garden, kitchen and market stall’, ‘music, dancing and drama’ and ‘international relations’. One chapter entitled ‘The lighter side’ illustrates the human events and attitudes which accompany any organisation. These may sometimes be mythical, but nevertheless they are valuable in representing changing views and opinions. One example will demonstrate this:

difficult period of the Second World War. This refusal was to protect the WIs’ pacifist Quaker membership. This immutable and controversial ruling resulted in a significant loss of membership, as members left to join the Women’s Voluntary Service (full title: Women’s Voluntary Services for Air Raid Precautions). The drop in membership is mentioned fleetingly in McCall’s book, p. 28.

⁸ Cicely McCall, *Women’s Institutes* (London, 1943), p. 12.

⁹ McCall, *Women’s Institutes*, p. 17.

¹⁰ McCall, *Women’s Institutes*, p. 48.

¹¹ Inez Jenkins, *The history of the Women’s Institute movement of England and Wales* (Oxford, 1953).

Mrs Harris had visited one of the first Institutes and had urged ... the importance of getting a good mixture upon the committee so that it might be as widely representative as possible of the different village interests. After the election the President wrote to tell Mrs. Harris how satisfactorily her injunctions had been fulfilled. 'We have done very well', the President wrote, 'we have elected five ladies, five women, and one school-teacher.'¹²

A more prejudiced treatment is *The acceptable face of feminism: the Women's Institute as a social movement* (1997) by Maggie Andrews, in which she contends that 'the NFWI was the largest women's movement in the post-suffrage era, [and] to women of the period it was a natural outlet for their feminist activities'. Andrews saw the organisation as 'a natural continuation of suffrage work', and indeed its early senior officers had been active campaigners for women's suffrage – Lady Gertrude Denman (1884-1954), national chairman, Grace Hadow (1875-1940), national vice-chairman, and Helena Auerbach (1872-1955), national treasurer.¹³ Andrews has redefined feminism for her own purposes, by giving important consideration to and acceptance of the role of women as housewives. Put simply, this new definition challenges the low status of housework and seeks to justify it to be as worthy of respect as any occupation suitable for either sex.¹⁴ This distortion of the definition of feminism is unhelpful and misleading, undermining the whole proposition of her argument. The main thrust of the WI movement was not intrinsically feminist, in the strict meaning of campaigning for women's equality. It was not the signal for the spread of feminism from the urban environment to the countryside. Instead, it initially facilitated the need of countrywomen to exercise in a practical and helpful

¹² In 1916 Mrs Nugent Harris became secretary of the AOS (Agricultural Organization Society) WI committee. In the 1920s she was chief of the organizing staff at the National Federation and also editor of *Home and Country*, the WI journal. Jenkins, *The history of the Women's Institute movement*, p. 141.

¹³ Maggie Andrews, *The acceptable face of feminism* (London, 1997), p. x. WI members have never been militant in their campaigns, and in that respect their philosophy is more akin to that of the suffragists than the suffragettes. Lady Denman was on the executive committee of the Women's Liberal Federation (1908–10), a non-confrontational organisation in favour of women's suffrage. Gervas Huxley, *Lady Denman, G. B. E. 1884-1954* (London, 1961), pp. 34-39; Piers Dudgeon (ed.), *Village voices* (London, 1989), p. 20. Grace Hadow was a tutor at Lady Margaret Hall, Oxford, and later in Cirencester set up a branch of the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies. Helena Deneke, *Grace Hadow* (London, 1946), pp. 54-6; Susan Cohen, *The Women's Institute* (Botley, 2011), p. 9; Elizabeth Crawford, *The women's suffrage movement: a reference guide, 1866-1928* (London, 2001), p. 111.

Helena Auerbach was treasurer of the National Union of Women's Suffrage until 1917. Huxley, *Lady Denman*, p. 91; Dudgeon (ed.), *Village voices*, p. 21.

¹⁴ Andrews, *The acceptable face of feminism*, pp. 82, 111.

way what they saw as their patriotic duty in a wartime situation. This book, derived from the author's doctoral thesis, augmented and strengthened the radical change which was occurring in the academic community's attitudes to the WI. The importance of the movement in the study of women's history was recognised, and it was now seen as worthy of academic attention. This is manifested by a number of articles, dissertations and theses.¹⁵

The title of Simon Goodenough's history, *Jam and Jerusalem*, emphasises the popular view of the movement. The Institutes did indeed make lots of jam, and William Blake's poem, *Jerusalem*, had first been adopted as their anthem during the 1920s.¹⁶ There is so much worthier of attention in the movement's history, however, that it is unfortunate that this title, used again for a television comedy drama series in 2009, expresses the general public's common image of the WI. It is misrepresentative (as the comedy series was), in that it does not prepare the reader for a proper insight into the organisation.

Goodenough, as an outsider, was given the remit to 'look at the WI as others see it – good and bad', and in this he was successful, giving a clear exposition of the meaning and ethos of the movement.¹⁷ Particular emphasis is placed upon an important aspect of WI democracy – the annual resolutions, which are the 'public expression of the movement's views and attitudes'.¹⁸ These reflected women's

¹⁵ Anne Stamper, 'Education and Women's Institutes' *Adult Education*, 59:1 (1986); Maggie Morgan, 'Jam making, Cuthbert Rabbit and cakes: redefining domestic labour in the Women's Institute, 1915–60' *Rural History*, 7:2 (1996), pp. 207-219; Lynne Thompson, 'The promotion of agricultural education for adults: the Lancashire Federation of Women's Institutes, 1919–45' *Rural History*, 10:2 (1999), pp. 217-234; Anne Stamper and Charlotte Drew, 'The role of the newly formed Women's Institute in providing for the education and training of countrywomen 1919-1939' (Paper given at a study day at the Museum of English Rural Life, Reading University on 17th September 2005); Alyson Laverick, *The Women's Institute: just jam and Jerusalem?* (Unpublished MA dissertation in Women's Studies, University of Wales, 1990); M. Leonard, *The Women's Institutes with special reference to the East Kent Federation of Women's Institutes* (Unpublished BA dissertation in Social History and Heritage Studies, University of Kent, 1996); Joanna Pearce, *But is it up to WI standards? Taste and culture within East Sussex Federation of Women's Institutes from 1965-1975* (Unpublished BA dissertation in History of Design, University of Brighton, 1998), Katherine Morton, *For Home and country: the Women's Institute and performances of rurality* (Unpublished BA dissertation, University of Manchester, 2009).

¹⁶ Interestingly, *Jerusalem* had been used by the National Union of Suffrage Societies in the 1918 celebrations of the enfranchisement of women over thirty years of age.

<http://www.thewi.org.uk/faqs/why-was-jerusalem-chosen-as-the-wis-anthem>

¹⁷ Simon Goodenough, *Jam and Jerusalem* (London, 1977), p. 4.

¹⁸ Goodenough, *Jam and Jerusalem*, pp. 22-23, 30-31, 34-35, 42-43, 58-59, 66-67.

concerns and the conditions of rural life. They were often ahead of their time, signalling to the nation that the WI was a powerful pressure group for change. Their frequent successful outcomes encouraged further provocative mandates, and Goodenough lists these in detail, firmly placing them in the context of contemporary social conditions.¹⁹ He sums up the spirit of the WI in his final chapter by defining it as a 'balance between fun and social responsibility, between the interests of the village and the necessities of organization'.²⁰

Goodenough's history is a popular sympathetic presentation, aimed at both the general public and WI members. During the final years of the twentieth century, three other histories appeared, intended for a similar market. These were *Village voices: a portrait of change in England's green and pleasant land 1915-1990*; a 75th anniversary celebration of rural Britain by the WI – *Britain's foremost women's movement* (1989) edited by Piers Dudgeon, *For home and country: war, peace and rural life as seen through the pages of the W.I. magazine* (1990) compiled by Penny Kitchen and *Extra ordinary women: a history of the Women's Institutes* (1995) by Gwen Garner. Like Goodenough these authors all present a common theme – how the WI helped to change a woman's place in society, encouraging her to take control of her own life. They are all copiously illustrated but have different emphases.

Dudgeon concentrates on an oral record of the movement's development, with many first-hand accounts of changing social conditions. Kitchen tells the same tale with a different perspective, presenting facsimiles of articles, advertisements, illustrations and correspondence. *Home and Country* was above all pragmatic, offering practical advice on such subjects as 'Details of expenditure of a house-keeping allowance of £2.5s.0d. a week (for working man and wife)' (1922), embroidery (1922), 'Furnishing the worker's home' (1937), and 'Three games for the social half-hour' (1938). Articles such as 'The cinema in the village' (1919), women police (1922), emigrating to Australia (1928) and a description of miners' working conditions by Aneurin Bevan (1937) raised awareness of the wider world and also social issues. Garner's is the only history published by the National Federation and therefore

¹⁹ These included the prevention of venereal disease through education (1922), women police (1922), National Savings (1926), home food production (1929), performing animals (1930) and working conditions for nurses (1938).

²⁰ Goodenough, *Jam and Jerusalem*, p. 120.

should be approached with caution, as it is a prejudiced account with no conspicuous criticisms, although to some extent this is also true of the other popular histories detailed above.

As the WI movement in Britain nears its centenary, it is possible for its historians to have a more balanced view of its past. *Bows of burning gold* (2005), written by a former NFWI Chairman, Helen Carey, to celebrate ninety years of the organisation, is an entertaining, illustrated history with a page (including a timeline of international events) dedicated to each individual year. *The Women's Institute* (2011) by Susan Cohen, a social historian, is a straightforward no-frills account. The changing trends of women's pursuits are clearly shown, with the theme running through which pervades the organisation, that is, for each individual WI to make its 'own mark on society' in a positive way.²¹

A force to be reckoned with: the history of the Women's Institute also appeared in 2011. It was written by Jane Robinson, a disinterested historian, who has no personal connection with the movement. Robinson writes in an informal style, emphasising that the WI movement has unfailingly celebrated female friendship and co-operation. Like Goodenough, she stresses that the organisation was always a reformist one, which campaigned on some difficult subjects, such as maternal health (1925), marine pollution (1926), and free school milk (1934), many of which were ahead of their time.²²

One might wonder at such a large number of histories of a single association; but a flourishing organisation will always require up-to-date information on its past, with the result that as fresh evidence is found and different versions of its history appear, new opinions, facts and figures are publicised.²³

Although the leadership was initially élite with a sprinkling of middle class women, the majority of the membership was working class. This fact can be established by perusing WI membership lists and comparing them with listings in trade directories,

²¹ Cohen, *The Women's Institute*, p. 5.

²² Jane Robinson, *A force to be reckoned with* (London, 2011), pp. 144-145.

²³ This is arguably true for many if not all organisations with a long history. Examples are the Scout Association, the Guide Association, the Y.M.C.A., all of which have been thoroughly researched during the twentieth century.

although admittedly these are somewhat limited in scope.²⁴ With few exceptions, these working class rural women have escaped the attention of historians.²⁵ Although as itemised above, there are several histories of the movement, these concentrate mostly on WI policies, the organisation's growth and how rural affairs were improved by the establishment of a village Institute. Not so much energy has been expended on exploring the sheer leisure side, how the individual woman was encouraged to come out of her shell, eventually becoming more outgoing, sociable and communicative.

Structure and early history

Published histories invariably attempt to dismiss the widespread image of the WI as the 'twin-set and pearls' lady controlling the countrywoman 'on Mum's afternoon out'. In the early years of the movement, however, the leaders were often members of the aristocracy or wives of prominent local landowners. The first national chairman, for example, was Lady Denman, and it was not until 1961 that a non-titled chairman was elected.²⁶ There was a similar situation at county level. In Norfolk, for instance, the county chairman was Lady Evelyn Suffield for many years. This situation gradually changed, however, and middle and working class members became willing to take responsible posts within their own organisation.²⁷ Locally it was also often a foregone conclusion that the lady of the manor would be elected president of the local WI, but this was not always the case. A typical example can be found at Hevingham WI in Norfolk, founded in 1918, where the president did indeed live in 'the big house' in the village; the rest of the committee, however, was composed of wives of farmers, a publican and a market gardener.²⁸

²⁴ For example, the Hevingham WI records already mentioned and any of the relevant Kelly's trade directories.

²⁵ Exceptions include Verdon, *Rural women workers in nineteenth-century England*; M. S. Casling, *English countrywomen. A century of change in agricultural economies and education 1900-2000* (Penzance, 2002).

²⁶ Lady Denman believed that the only justification for her inheritance of great wealth was service to the community. The wife of Baron Denman, the former governor-general of Australia, she was involved in many philanthropic undertakings besides her chairmanship of the WI, which lasted almost thirty years.

²⁷ McCall, *Women's Institutes*, p.13.

²⁸ NRO, SO 137/91, 701X2 Records of the Norfolk Federation of Women's Institutes. Hevingham; Kelly's *directory of the counties of Cambridge, Norfolk and Suffolk 1916* (London, [1916]), p. 187.

The contemporary importance and influence of the new Women's Institutes in the countryside cannot be overestimated. At a time when morale was at an all-time low, and there was a 'deep dissatisfaction manifest in the countryside with existing rural leisure provision', the influx of WIs into the villages was like a breath of fresh air.²⁹ Despite the fact that they knew little about them, women flocked to join their ranks. Although their only information had been gained by word of mouth, they understood that here was the possibility of social contact, gaining new friends, learning something new and lessening the boredom of domestic drudgery. In addition, they realised that neither religious nor political affiliation was required. Membership of the WI therefore appeared to have no negative aspects but to be of universal benefit, and this contrasted strongly with the limited number of other available opportunities.

Contrast between the WI and alternative leisure possibilities

These alternative opportunities, valuable as they were to some women, did require previous commitment, either sectarian or political. Mothers' meetings, for example, run by Anglican, Nonconformist and Roman Catholic middle-class women in both urban and rural areas, were a common form of philanthropy from the mid-nineteenth century. The strictly Anglican Mothers' Union, established in 1876, again promoted its own system of belief and also did not wholly succeed in overcoming the problem of class prejudice.³⁰ The King's Messengers Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, made an occasional appearance in the countryside, and besides the dissemination of doctrine, it had a social side.³¹ Apart from the intermittent appearance of the Unionist van with its magic lantern, no evidence has been found for political activity in Norfolk villages.³² In some villages even these diversions, church-based or political, were not available, Shelfanger in Norfolk being a case in point.³³ Perhaps there occurred 'in the year but one social'.³⁴ The need for a local

²⁹ Burchardt, 'Reconstructing the rural community', p. 195.

³⁰ F. Prochaska, 'A mother's country', pp. 380, 384. See also p. 186.

³¹ Norfolk Federation of Women's Institutes, *Norfolk within living memory* (1995), p. 228; NRO, PD 704/272 Parish Records of Dickleburgh with Langmere, Certificate for the King's Messengers Society for the Propagation of the Gospel Dickleburgh Parish Church Branch, 1931.

³² 'The Unionist van' *Norfolk Chronicle and Norwich Gazette*, 20 April 1895, p. 8.

³³ '[Shelfanger] was a village which had never had an organisation of any kind ... the vote for a Women's Institute was unanimous.' Norfolk Federation of Women's Institutes Finance and General Purposes Committee, *Minutes*, 19 July 1924.

Women's Institute was well illustrated by one woman's reaction: 'this is the first organization I've been able to join in the village. ... Everything else is got up by the Church or the Conservatives and I am a Catholic and a Liberal'.³⁵

The WI attracted a wide spectrum of members. As Goodenough puts it: 'some members belong to the "battling brigade", some prefer to drift with the tide, some are "loners", busy with their own craft,' and this reflected the abundance of subjects dealt with in the regular meetings.³⁶ The members were encouraged to follow their own interests. They were not judged or questioned about these. A relevant example, and in contrast with the MU (the main leisure alternative in most villages), was the WI's interest in the cinema. Instead of criticising members for their penchant for films, in 1919 *Home and country* published an article on 'The cinema in the village', promoting the advantages of a local cinema.³⁷ The magazine also regularly included good film reviews, as well as articles on craft and home-making. Like the MU the WI wanted to improve society, although in a positive, practical way. It kept its members up to date with the latest legislation on such subjects as rural housing and agricultural wages and helped them to budget the housekeeping money and keep their families healthy.³⁸ The MU, on the other hand, was much more interested in the spiritual welfare of its members and society in general. It is interesting to note, however, that, in spite of its stringent rules of membership, the Girls' Friendly Society, another Anglican society, was much more open to its members' interests, both recreational and practical.³⁹

Explaining the WI movement

The formation of the WI movement is inextricably associated with contemporary agricultural progress or the perceived lack of it. As previously explained, in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, after a period of comparative prosperity, British farmers faced a period of depression, for reasons which have been well documented

³⁴ Seebohm Rowntree and Kendall, *How the labourer lives*, pp. 223, 228.

³⁵ Goodenough, *Jam and Jerusalem*, p. 18.

³⁶ Goodenough, *Jam and Jerusalem*, p. 8.

³⁷ Mary C. Horne, 'The cinema in the village', in Penny Kitchen (comp.), *For home and country* (London, 1990), p. 32.

³⁸ Kitchen (comp.), *For home and country*, p. 9.

³⁹ See p. 200.

by both contemporary writers and later historians.⁴⁰ Having initially failed to alleviate this depression, the government of the day was anxious to deal competently with a difficult situation, and in 1889 the Board of Agriculture was set up to offer advice.⁴¹ Gradually, conditions began to improve. More fruit, flowers and vegetables were required to satisfy rising standards of living and, realising that their produce could be easily transported by rail for sale in distant locations, many farm labourers, especially those near the rail network, felt encouraged to take on small-holdings, market gardens and allotments.⁴² Further diversification included poultry keeping, an industry which expanded greatly between the wars.⁴³

The importance of agricultural education was realised, as innovative farming methods, technology and cooperation demanded new understanding on the part of country workers. To further this, the Agricultural Organization Society (AOS) was inaugurated in 1901. Its aims included the encouragement of farmers, small-holders and growers to cooperate in any beneficial way, but especially in buying and selling their produce.⁴⁴ At that time its membership, however, was strictly male, in spite of the indispensable involvement of women in agricultural affairs, and very few women were involved in its work. Eventually female membership was permitted, and a few joined but would not enter into discussions at meetings. 'We dare not because our husbands and sons would make fun of us' was their reasoning.⁴⁵ Centuries of ingrained repression could not be overcome immediately.

As we have seen, the Mothers' Union was growing in popularity, but it did not encourage women to be independently minded or self-reliant. In spite of the traditional paternalist image where all wives stayed at home and did not work for money, many of them, besides taking care of their families, played a vital role in the work of the farm – poultry and bee keeping, dairying and field work – thus assisting

⁴⁰ See pp. 10-13; Jeremy Burchardt, *Paradise lost: rural idyll and social change in England since 1800* (London, 2002), pp.79-80; H. Rider Haggard, *Rural England: being an account of agricultural and social researches carried out in the years 1901 and 1902*; Howkins, *Reshaping rural England*, especially chapters 6 and 7; R. E. Prothero, first Baron Ernle, *English farming past and present* (London, 1912), pp. 374-382; Wade Martins and Williamson, *The countryside of East Anglia*, pp.11-20.

⁴¹ Robinson, *A force to be reckoned with*, p. 33.

⁴² Springall, *Labouring life in Norfolk villages*, p. 122.

⁴³ Wade Martins and Williamson, *The countryside of East Anglia*, pp.46-47.

⁴⁴ Jenkins, *The history of the Women's Institute movement of England and Wales*, p. 3.

⁴⁵ Robertson Scott, *The story of the Women's Institute movement*, p. 22.

the rural economy with both domestic and agricultural competence.⁴⁶ This must also have been the situation in the smallholdings, which, as a result of the Small Holdings and Allotments Acts of 1907 and 1908, numbered well over one thousand in Norfolk by 1914.⁴⁷

Women who lived in a village setting could socialise with their neighbours over the garden fence but nevertheless had a constant round of work and very little leisure.⁴⁸ Others were isolated in farmsteads or cottages far from any neighbour, and as a result their social skills were limited. It seemed an insoluble problem. Countrywomen had not been trained to work together towards a common goal, they had had too narrow an education, and there were too many class barriers to be overcome.⁴⁹ The early feminist movement, aimed towards middle-class, educated women and so strongly supported by many in urban areas, was almost unknown in the countryside.

The WI's international roots

This problem was not of course restricted to England. It was a global phenomenon. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, defining and striving for equal political, economic, and social rights along with equal opportunities became the driving force for many women throughout the world. In rural areas, however, it was recognised that to achieve this goal, it would be necessary to proceed 'slowly but surely'. Consequently, in many countries countrywomen came together to share their problems. In 1904 Edwin Pratt gave a very favourable account of the new Women's Institutes first set up in Canada in 1897, and reported that their aims were:

to promote the knowledge of household science which shall lead to improvement in household architecture, with special attention to home sanitation, to a better understanding of the hygienic and economic value of foods and fuels, and to a more scientific care of children, with a view to raising the general standard of health of our people.

The home was to be the first and most important focus; however, he further quotes from the *Handbook on Women's Institutes* issued by the Ontario Department of Agriculture: 'if a woman is to rule wisely and well in her own home, it is absolutely

⁴⁶ Howkins, *Reshaping rural England*, pp. 204-5; Casling, *English countrywomen*, p. 52.

⁴⁷ Wade Martins and Williamson, *The countryside of East Anglia*, p. 57.

⁴⁸ George Bourne [Sturt], *Change in the village* (Harmondsworth, 1984), pp. 23-24.

⁴⁹ For a general discussion of the problems of rural people's lack of education, see 'The want of book learning' in Bourne, *Change in the village*, pp. 163-174.

necessary that she come in contact with others, that she should keep in touch with the great outside world'.

Even in this early period, therefore, women were being encouraged to reach out beyond the confines of their restricted environment.

The Institutes in Canada were the first in the world to be established and flourished to the extent of having a 'paid-up membership in the province of 4,583' by 1903.⁵⁰ The influence of the Canadian Institutes spread to other countries, and by 1925 WIs or their equivalents had been inaugurated in Ireland, Holland, Sweden, Denmark, Finland, Belgium, France, Germany, Austria, Russia, Poland, the United States, India, England, Wales and Scotland.⁵¹ Standing out in the front rank among all progressive contemporary rural agencies, therefore, were the countrywomen's organizations, manifesting a definite international social trend.⁵²

In 1904, more than ten years before the formation of the first British WI, an article in *The Times* highlighted the success of the WIs in Canada in stimulating 'that thirst for information on agricultural subjects which has been aroused throughout the Dominion'.⁵³ This broad hint, however, fell on deaf ears. Yet another attempt to arouse interest in the idea appeared in 1912 in a Board of Education report on agricultural education in France, Germany and Belgium. The author was R. B. Greig, who, impressed by the success of WIs abroad, suggested that:

here is an opportunity for women to organise Institutes for instruction dealing with improvement of country life, an opportunity to increase the comfort and prosperity of the home, to stem the tide of rural depopulation, and heal a national canker. The women of other

⁵⁰ Edwin A. Pratt, *The organisation of agriculture* (London, 1904), pp. 249-250.

⁵¹ In Ireland the Society of the United Irishwomen (UI), established in 1910, intended 'to organise the women of all classes in every rural district in Ireland for social service'; Horace Plunkett, Ellice Pilkington and George Russell, *The United Irishwomen: their place, work and ideals* (Dublin, 1911), p. 2; Robertson Scott, *The story of the Women's Institute movement*, p. 15; in Norway this was the House-mothers' Association, founded in 1898 and run on similar lines to Canada's WIs; similarly Belgium and France organised the Circles of Farmers' Wives (Cercles des Fermières); Board of Education, *Report on farm and agricultural schools and colleges in France, Germany and Belgium*, p. 20; Gurusaday Dutt, *A woman of India: being the life of Saroj Nalini (founder of the Women's Institute movement in India)* (London, 1941), p.141; the Scottish Women's Rural Institutes (SWRI), or 'Rurals' as they became affectionately known by their members, were founded in 1917. Cohen, *The Women's Institute*, p. 9

⁵² W. H. Stacey, 'Some agencies for rural progress in Europe', *American Sociological Society, Progress of Sociology*, 21 (1927), pp. 228-229.

⁵³ 'The organization of agriculture', *The Times*, April 6 1904, p. 10.

countries have accepted the opportunity and risen to the occasion, and the Governments of other countries have assisted them liberally with grants.⁵⁴

Yet despite the encouraging reports of their beneficial effects from Edwin Pratt and R. B. Greig, all efforts to launch Women's Institutes in Britain were futile, and it took the urgency of a war situation, with its concomitant food shortages and paradoxical radical new employment opportunities for women, to change the minds of those in authority.

The reasons for this pre-war disinclination are unclear. Plainly the importance of the role of women in the rural economy was unrecognised, and therefore the need for a national network of countrywomen's organizations did not seem to be calling for immediate attention. Perhaps there was thus a reluctance to spend public money on what was regarded as a minor cause. The Canadian Institutes were financed by the Canadian government, and advocates of the WI movement presumed that government money would also be available in England. Indeed, in the first phase of the movement, this proved to be the case. One of the greatest stumbling blocks, however, was prejudice. Essential principles of the new movement were democracy, co-operation and inclusiveness, and this proved too much for some people.⁵⁵ Those battling to introduce the new idea came 'up against opposition at almost every step, and worse, unreasoning prejudice, which ... came mainly from women.'⁵⁶

The foundation of the British WI movement

The spur which at last brought about the introduction of WIs to Britain, was the meeting in February 1915, of AOS Secretary, John Nugent Harris and Madge Watt, a Canadian, who, fired with missionary zeal, was to be instrumental in setting up Women's Institutes in Britain. Mr Nugent Harris had been interested in the idea of appropriate education in farm work for women and had moreover 'become impressed by the out-of-touch of the women folk on the farms with those questions that affect the life of every citizen'.⁵⁷ Although beset with difficulties on every side, he was

⁵⁴ Board of Education, *Report on farm and agricultural schools and colleges in France, Germany and Belgium*, p. 24.

⁵⁵ Andrews, *The acceptable face of feminism*, p. 19.

⁵⁶ Robertson Scott, *The story of the Women's Institute movement*, p. 34.

⁵⁷ Courtney, *Countrywomen in council*, p. 36; Constance Davies, *A grain of mustard seed* (Denbigh, 1989), p. 49.

eager to provide a remedy, believing unreservedly in the inherent worth of ever-widening mental horizons. Mrs Watt had been secretary of the Women's Institute Advisory Board for British Columbia, and after her arrival in England in 1913 she spoke on every possible occasion earnestly advocating the setting up of Institutes.⁵⁸ As soon as the First World War began, she started to write and speak about the ways in which a national interconnected association of institutes could improve the production of food. When the first British WI meeting took place in 1915 at Llanfairpwll in North Wales, it seemed logical that under the guidance of Mrs Watt it should be designed on the style of the groups in her home country.

Class prejudice was still much in evidence, nonetheless.

“We have no intention of allowing such a *radical* movement in *our* village,” wrote a determined Lady-of-the-Manor, fifty years ago [1915], to a request that a Women's Institute should be formed at her gates. She understood that, owing to a most undesirable system of voting, in which her vote would count for no more than any cottager's, there was no guarantee that she would be the Institute's chairman, and she considered the whole affair would be most unsettling for the village.⁵⁹

Antagonism and also indifference to the new organisation were thus still present, much to the distress of Mr Nugent Harris. ‘Apathy, and what was much worse, active opposition’, he wrote, ‘dogged us every step of the way during the two years, 1915-17’.⁶⁰ His faith in the idea nevertheless provided a strong link between the AOS and the infant movement, and it is arguable that without this link at that particular time the WI organisation in Britain would not have started successfully. Opponents must have been in the minority, because with financial help from the government, by the end of the war membership had burgeoned throughout the country to 12,000 in 773 WIs.⁶¹

The phenomenal growth of the movement can be demonstrated, using the county of Norfolk as an example and comparing it with England as a whole.

⁵⁸ Jenkins, *The history of the Women's Institute movement of England and Wales*, p. 9.

⁵⁹ The Women's Institute Jubilee Book 1915-1965 (London, 1964).

⁶⁰ Robertson Scott, *The story of the Women's Institute movement*, p. 35.

⁶¹ Stammer and Drew, ‘The role of the newly formed Women's Institute’, p. 2.

The WI in Norfolk

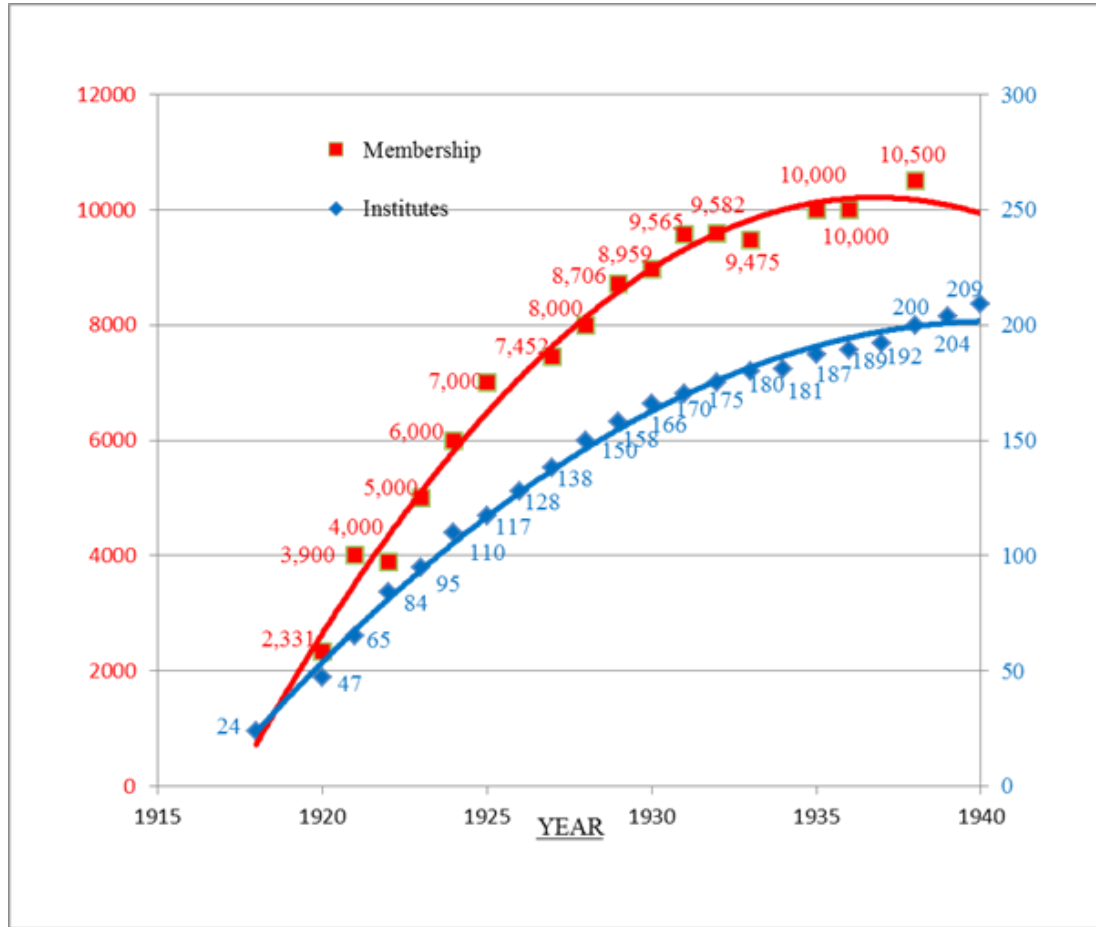
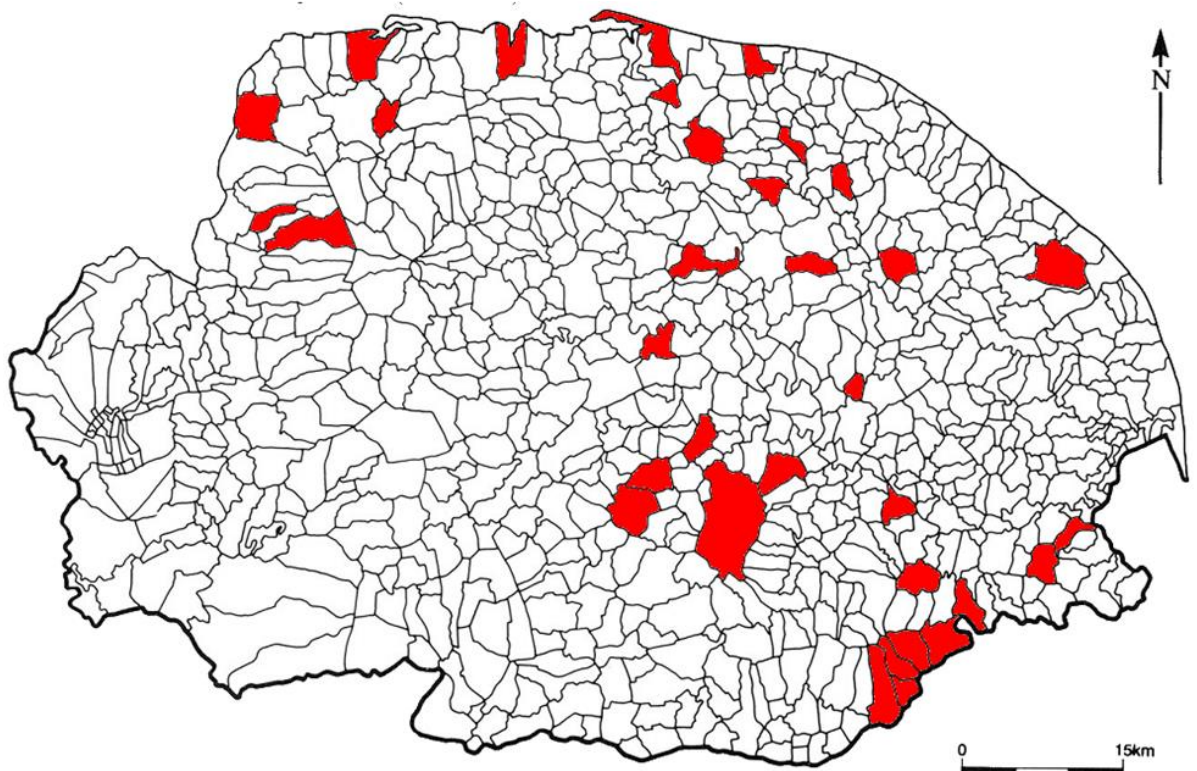


Figure 12: Growth of Norfolk Women's Institutes 1918-1940⁶²

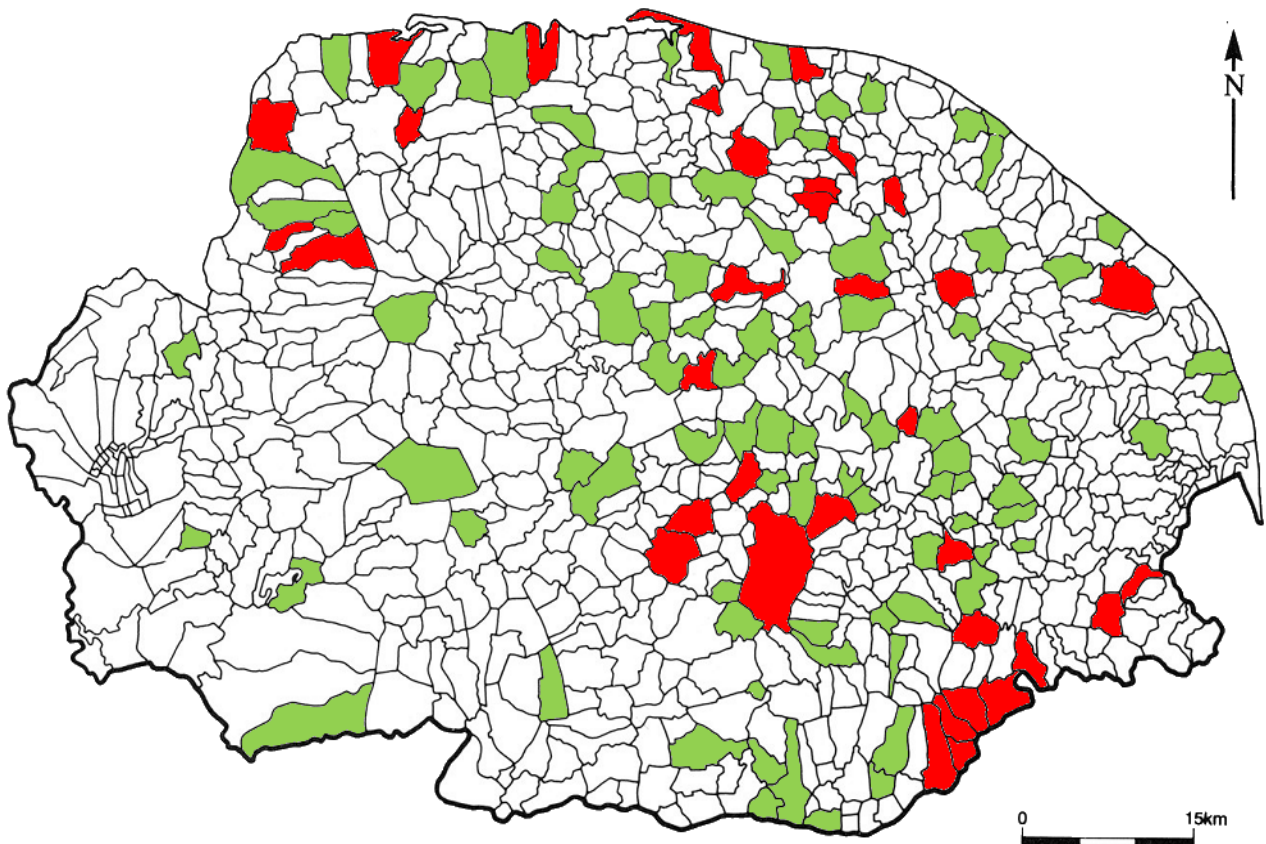
Figure 12 shows the remarkable expansion of the WIs in Norfolk during the 1920s which, with only a slight levelling out, continued right up to the outbreak of the Second World War. This slackening of the rate of increase is largely due to the fact that the county was gradually covered, and fewer and fewer villages were without an Institute.

⁶² These statistics have been taken from the *Norfolk Federation of Women's Institutes annual reports* for the appropriate years.

History of the Women's Institute movement with special reference to Norfolk



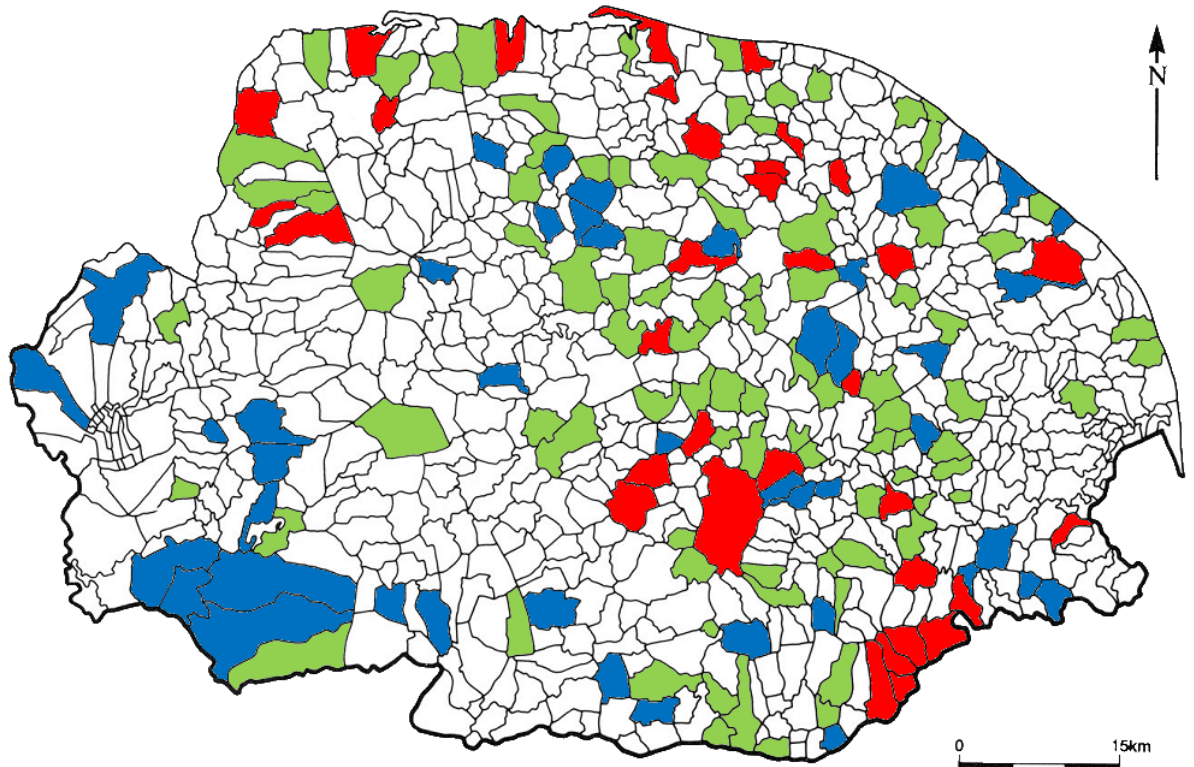
■ Institutes founded in Norfolk in 1920 or before.



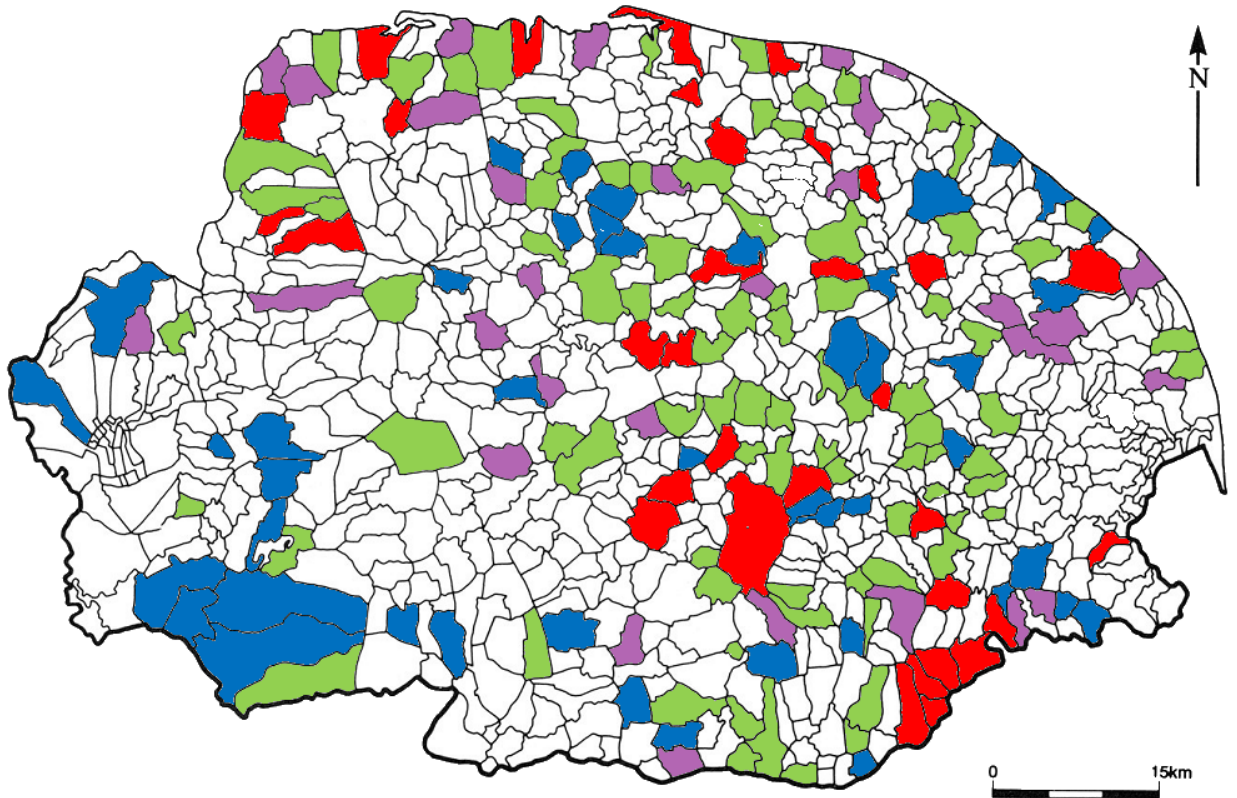
■ Institutes founded in Norfolk in 1920 or before.

■ Institutes founded in Norfolk in 1925 or before.

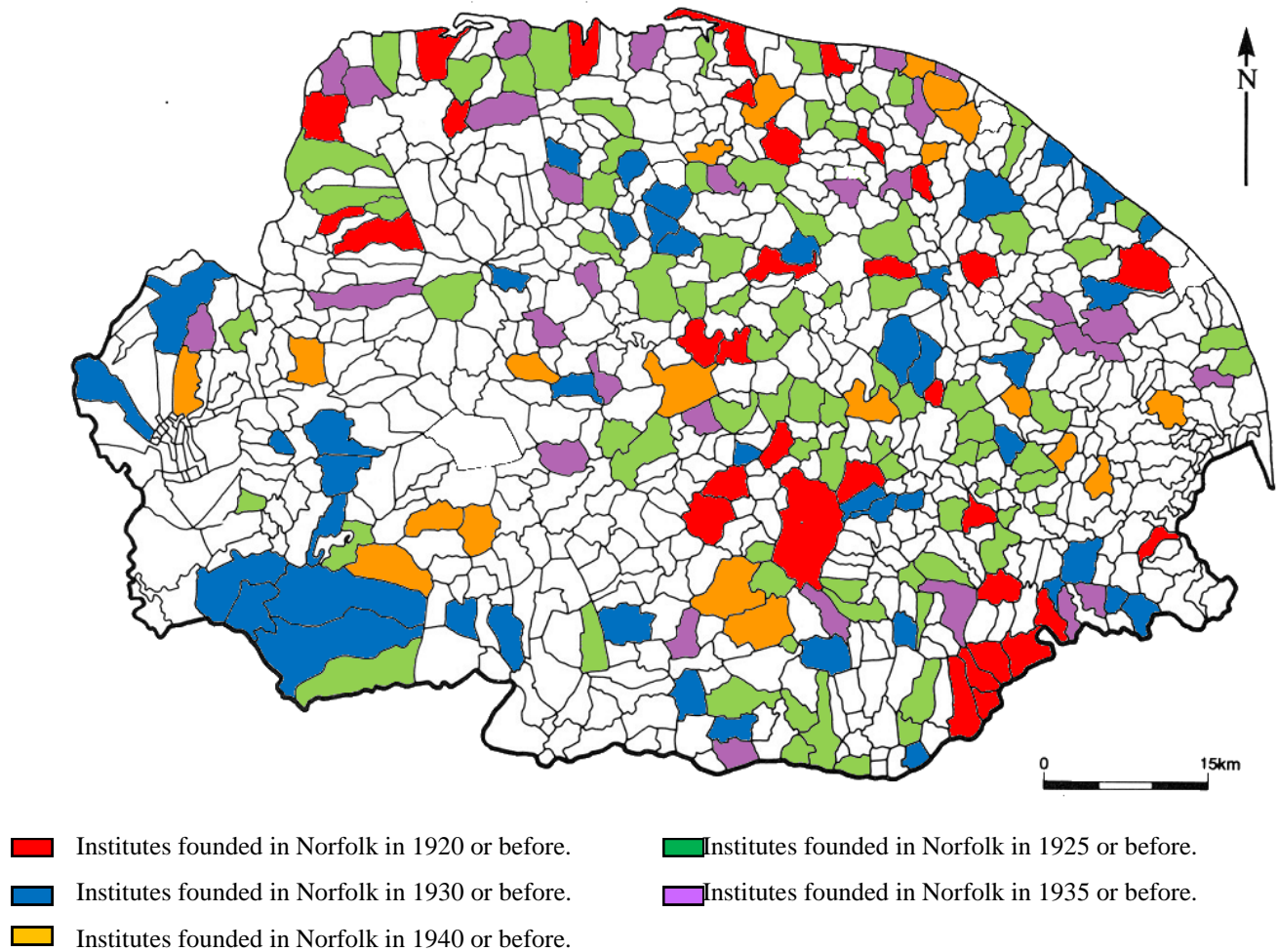
History of the Women's Institute movement with special reference to Norfolk



- Institutes founded in Norfolk in 1920 or before.
- Institutes founded in Norfolk in 1925 or before.
- Institutes founded in Norfolk in 1930 or before.



- Institutes founded in Norfolk in 1920 or before
- Institutes founded in Norfolk in 1925 or before
- Institutes founded in Norfolk in 1930 or before
- Institutes founded in Norfolk in 1935 or before



Initially it was noticeable that some Institutes were significantly larger than others. Was this simply related to village size? An answer to this question may be found in Table 11, which is a comprehensive list of WIs with their membership statistics in 1931. A base date of 1931 was chosen because it relates directly to the census returns of that year, from which parish populations are readily available. Although 1921, 1931 and 1941 would cover our period of interest, there were insurmountable problems associated with 1921 and 1941. WI records are available annually for Norfolk from 1919 onward, though the statistics for the early years did not develop into a consistent pattern until 1924. The 1921 census returns were therefore inappropriate, while there was no census taken in 1941 because of the war. The breakdown of the data available offered the distinction of male or female, but there was no option to deselect those under a given age, e.g. 18 years old.

History of the Women's Institute movement with special reference to Norfolk

Table 11 WI members as a percentage of village female population in 1931.

<i>Village/Town</i>	<i>Female population in 1931</i>	<i>WI membership in 1931</i>	<i>Percentage of women as members</i>
Diss	1803	69	4
Briston & Melton Constable	1137	62	5
Fakenham	1514	71	5
Hellesdon	1209	60	5
Swaffham	1482	80	5
Wymondham	2529	120	5
Melton Constable Park & Swanton Novers	588	42	7
Aylsham	1362	114	8
Blofield	589	50	8
Downham Market	1322	111	8
Hethersett	649	52	8
Hilgay	751	62	8
Lyng & Sparham	300	25	8
Methwold, Hythe & Brookville	627	50	8
Terrington St Clement	1406	113	8
Hevingham	341	30	9
Hingham	685	62	9
Horsford	366	34	9
Mundesley	585	55	9
Shipdham	602	55	9
Wells	1294	120	9
Hemsby	483	47	10
Sprowston	1113	110	10
West Walton	624	60	10
Great Ormesby	621	70	11
Great Snoring	169	19	11
Mattishall	332	38	11
Shouldham	228	24	11
Dersingham	805	100	12
Kenninghall	413	50	12
Lopham (North & South)	451	56	12
Stalham	517	61	12
Alpington, Bergh Apton & Yelverton	302	40	13
Ditchingham	538	71	13
Great Ryburgh	327	41	13
Poringland	369	48	13
Roydon	305	39	13
West Lynn	468	62	13
Woodton, Bedingham & Hedenham	345	44	13
Cawston	461	64	14
Drayton	355	48	14
East Harling & District	438	63	14
Feltwell	648	88	14
Gimingham & Trunch	457	65	14
Great Witchingham, Weston & District	381	54	14
Happisburgh & Walcott	350	50	14
North Elmham	445	62	14
Pulham St Mary	366	50	14

History of the Women's Institute movement with special reference to Norfolk

<i>Village/Town</i>	<i>Female population in 1931</i>	<i>WI membership in 1931</i>	<i>Percentage of women as members</i>
Snettisham & Ingoldisthorpe	842	121	14
Stoke Holy Cross	206	28	14
Stokesby	142	20	14
Surlingham	197	27	14
Tacolneston & District	170	24	14
Earsham	293	44	15
Fincham	295	45	15
Hockham	196	29	15
Knapton & Paston	298	45	15
Thuxton & Garveston	169	25	15
Wereham	230	35	15
Coltishall & Horstead	826	133	16
Harleston	941 ⁶³	151	16
Massingham	428	67	16
Scottow & Sloley	262	43	16
Creake	522	90	17
Forngett	235	41	17
Fransham	178	30	17
Loddon & District	523	90	17
Mundford	162	27	17
Salhouse	331	56	17
Trowse	321	55	17
Alburgh	201	37	18
Barshams, The	146	26	18
Billingham	131	24	18
Colkirk	170	30	18
Fritcham & Hillington	304	54	18
Foulsham	422	74	18
Framinghams, The	247	45	18
Fulmodestone	142	26	18
Heacham	1136	200	18
Hickling	417	74	18
Tasburgh	156	28	18
Baconsthorpe	137	26	19
Barford, Wrampingham & District	186	36	19
Bawdeswell & Foxley	290	54	19
Denton	161	31	19
Swannington	148	28	19
Bradenham	255	50	20
Gillingham	246	50	20
Rockland St. Mary	172	34	20
Stoke Ferry & District	314	63	20
Brancaster	471	97	21
Catfield	229	48	21
Crangleford & District	358	74	21
East Tuddenham	191	40	21
Elsing	119	25	21
Great Melton & Marlingford	260	54	21
Holkham	187	40	21
Burnham Thorpe	135	30	22

⁶³ This is an estimate of half the population of 1,882, given in *Town and county directory 1932*.

History of the Women's Institute movement with special reference to Norfolk

<i>Village/Town</i>	<i>Female population in 1931</i>	<i>WI membership in 1931</i>	<i>Percentage of women as members</i>
Buxton & District	238	52	22
East Carleton & District	146	32	22
Guist	153	33	22
Scole	277	60	22
Stibbard & District	181	39	22
Swanton Morley	259	56	22
Weasenham	242	53	22
Blakeney	348	80	23
Hoveton & District	467	106	23
Shelfanger	117	27	23
Wolterton & District	171	40	23
Worstead	355	80	23
Colby & Banningham	227	54	24
Hockwold cum Wilton	376	91	24
Marsham	261	62	24
Old Catton	345	82	24
Stanhoe & Barwick	185	45	24
Anmer	72	18	25
Colney, Earlham & Bawburgh	244	60	25
Rockland St. Peter	138	34	25
Southery	484	122	25
Wretham	135	34	25
Easton	154	40	26
Tibenham	215	56	26
Weybourne	162	42	26
Wortwell	157	41	26
Cley	326	87	27
Felbrigg-cum-Metton	131	35	27
Swardeston	215	57	27
Aldborough & Thurgarton	252	71	28
Booton & Brandiston	162	47	29
Brooke & District	251	72	29
Palling & Waxham	196	57	29
West Tofts & District	91	26	29
Morningthorpe, Fritton & District	138	41	30
Bacton-on-Sea	131	41	31
Postwick	182	56	31
Rushall	83	26	31
Barney & District	122	39	32
Burnham Market	571	183	32
Barnham Broom & District	160	52	33
Thornham	309	103	33
Thurlton & District	180	60	33
Gresham	496	65	35
St. Faith's & District	134	48	36
Ketteringham	92	34	37
Little Snoring	117	43	37
Hardingham	196	76	39
Hempstead, Holt	97	40	41
Honingham	139	62	45
Stockton	49	22	45
New Buckenham & District	218	100	46
Barningham & District	59	28	47

<i>Village/Town</i>	<i>Female population in 1931</i>	<i>WI membership in 1931</i>	<i>Percentage of women as members</i>
Heydon	128	61	48
Reepham & District	213	102	48
Upper Sheringham	153	76	50
Hempstead & Lessingham	156	79	51
Walsingham	195	102	52
Letheringsett	127	73	57
Ashby & District	39	25	64
Saxlingham	62	40	65
Whitlingham	49	34	69
Sandringham	96	70	73
<i>South Runcton & Holme</i>	<i>59</i>	<i>60</i>	<i>102⁶⁴</i>

In Table 11 the WI membership figures are expressed as a percentage of the 1931 census returns, and the results are organised in order of the percentage of WI members in a particular village compared with the total female population.⁶⁵ This list comprises 162 Institutes. There were six more in Norfolk at that time (i.e. Brockdish, Long Stratton and Wacton, North Walsham and District, Salle, Spooner Row, and Thorpe Village), but the data for these are unavailable for various reasons.

A number of interesting conclusions can be drawn from an examination of this table. One of the most striking observations is that the largest populations – those between one and three thousand – generally produced the smallest percentages of members. One could surmise that in these larger settlements, there were wider leisure opportunities than in the small villages in more remote areas, and women therefore had more choice. Nevertheless, a large number of residents did not always result in a small membership. One example can be found in Wells, of whose population of 1,294 women, 120 became WI members (9%), an unpredictably large number. Even more remarkable is the case of Sprowston on the outskirts of Norwich, which with a population of 1,113 achieved a membership of 110 (10%). It is difficult to explain these anomalies. Perhaps they were due to specific conditions, such as local dynamic leadership.

The corollary of the proposition, that in large populations only a small percentage became WI members, is of course that a very large percentage of women in the smallest villages joined their local WI, and this is borne out by the examples of

⁶⁴ See p. 232.

⁶⁵ The WI membership numbers were taken from the Norfolk Federation of Women's Institutes annual reports, while the census data were found using <http://.visionofbritain.org.uk>.

Whitlingham (population 49 – 69%), Saxlingham (population 62 – 65%), Ashby (population 39 – 64%) and Letheringsett (population 127 – 57%); in this case, there seem to be no exceptions.

Further inspection of the table reveals that similar populations did not always result in comparable memberships. For instance, Hardingham, Hockham, Palling & Waxham, and Surlingham, with a population of either 196 or 197, produced memberships of 76 (39%), 29 (15%), 57 (29%) and 27 (14%) respectively, while Walsingham with a population of 195 attained an astonishing membership of 102 (52%). Again, the reasons for this are uncertain. A clue may lie in the listing of WIs in the Norfolk Federation of Women's Institutes Annual Report of 1931. This frequently mentions surrounding villages served by the established WI, which presumably had members living in those villages. It may be that women were attracted from the neighbouring villages to one particular WI more than another. This circumstance may also explain the extraordinary percentage of 102 in South Runcton & Holme WI.

As mentioned in the chapter on reading rooms, rural people had always been accustomed to walking far and wide, and a distant destination did not discourage them. Because of this, one WI changed its meeting night to enable its members to walk safely about the village – there was no street lighting – and across the fields, in spite of the inconvenience of irregular meeting dates.

... 13th Dec [1929] ... Members were asked to decide as to whether the Institute meetings should be held on the Thurs. nearest to the full moon or not; as with that arrangement the last few meetings of this year would fall on the 1st Thurs. in the month instead of the 2nd. It was unanimously decided to keep the meeting on the moonlit night ...⁶⁶

Public transport improvements enabled women to travel further than had hitherto been possible; these journeys, however, were still restricted to certain rigid times and did not enable travel to meetings in the next village, particularly in the evening.⁶⁷ Lack of transport was still an impediment in the late 1930s, the existence of the WI being a mitigating factor: '... the outlook of the countryside is dominated by the

⁶⁶ NRO, SO 137/821, 895X1 Records of the Norfolk Federation of Women's Institutes. Shipdham, 13 December 1929.

⁶⁷ One woman remembered the once weekly or once daily bus from local villages to Norwich in the 1930s. Norfolk Federation of Women's Institutes, *Within living memory* (1972), p. 120.

distance factor ... the Institute movement has become [very useful] as a means of ventilating and to a certain extent overcoming that difficulty'.⁶⁸

The rapid growth in the number of Norfolk WIs was mirrored by similar progress in other counties, and the development of the movement as a whole in England and Wales can be seen in Figure 14 on page 231.⁶⁹ This reveals a pattern of growth similar to that of Norfolk and demonstrates the great need which countrywomen all over England felt for companionship and an outlet for their creativity. The gradual spread of WIs throughout Norfolk can be seen in the maps on pages 223-225. Interpretation of this information is problematic, but there are some interesting points to consider.

A conspicuous characteristic in the 1925 map is the fact that during the previous five years, many Institutes had been inaugurated in clusters. This trend had started before 1920 in the south-east, but it is particularly noticeable that by 1925, news of this new leisure opportunity for women had spread from village to contiguous village.

The map for 1940 – this has the greatest number of Institutes – shows, with a few exceptions, some clear gaps in the provision of WIs, and this possibly reflects the pattern of settlement of communities. Thus, in the area north-east and south-west of Swaffham, there is a dearth of Institutes, and this might be because of the low population of the hamlets and villages in these areas. This argument is invalid, however, as although it is true that populations here were low, Institutes were established elsewhere in the county in villages with even fewer female residents, e.g. Ashby (39), Stockton (49), Whitlingham (49) and Barningham (59).⁷⁰

⁶⁸ 'Norfolk Women's Institutes' coming of age', *Eastern Daily Press* 17 March 1938, p. 5. Cutting in [Norfolk] Federation scrapbook no. 5.

⁶⁹ The statistics for this graph have been retrieved from: NFWI annual reports of various dates; Helen Carey, *Bows of burning gold* (Skipton, 2005), pp. 10, 22; Cohen, *The Women's Institute*, p. 4; Courtney, *Countrywomen in council*, pp.46, 58; Jenkins, *History of the Women's Institute movement*, pp. 61, 62, 71; Anne Stamper, 'Breaking down social barriers', [unpublished article written September 2005] p. 10; Robinson, *A force to be reckoned with*, pp. 57, 58, 113.

⁷⁰ North Pickenham, Great Cressingham, Holme Hale, Rougham, West Acre and Roudham are all examples of villages in this area with a female population of less than 200. <http://www.visionofbritain.org.uk>.

Training, competitions, resolutions, libraries – empowerment.

Having established that the WI movement was eagerly accepted by rural women, let us now turn to the details of the organisation, which may explain their enthusiasm.

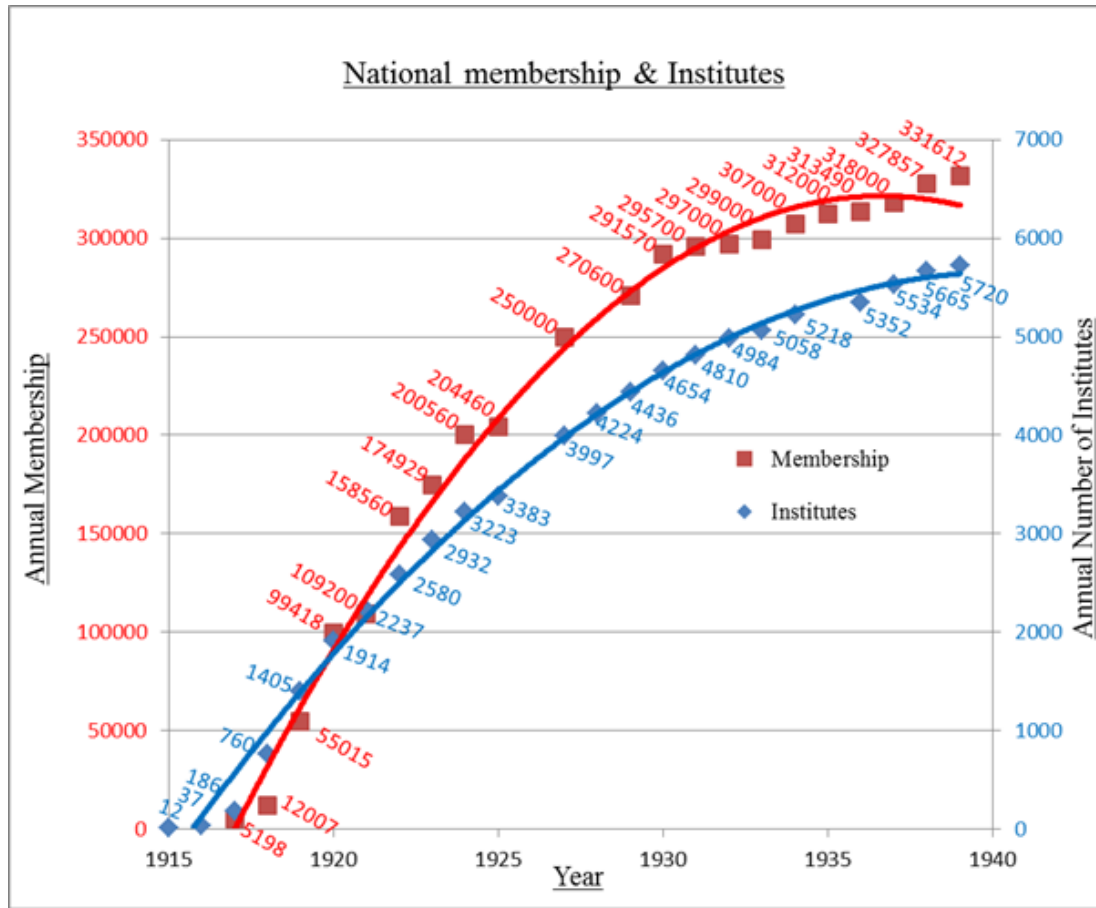


Figure 13: National growth of Women's Institutes 1915-1940.

How were these new 'clubs' perceived by their members? No less importantly, how were they perceived by the public? The members' perception can be divided into three levels – national, county and local. Because of financial constraints, in 1917 national responsibility for the growing movement was handed over from the AOS to the Women's Branch of the Board of Agriculture, which appointed the 33-year-old Lady Denman to take up the torch from Madge Watt.⁷¹ The latter nonetheless continued to work tirelessly to promote the cause, forming WIs throughout the country helped by assistant organisers, who were recruited and paid by the Board of Agriculture.

⁷¹ Courtney, *Countrywomen in council*, pp. 47-418.

The National Federation of Women's Institutes came into being in October 1917, when the number of Institutes had reached 137, over half of which sent delegates to the first national conference in London. Enthusiasm for the new movement stimulated a confidence in the new Management Committee to tackle such difficult questions as obtaining professional training for rural women.⁷² Limited agricultural training had been available from the late nineteenth century, and the Women's Land Army – the Board of Agriculture's answer in 1915 to the shortage of manpower during the First World War – trained its members to be able to carry out farm work.⁷³ Most agricultural education for women, however, was casual. Domestic training also was a case of informal instruction handed down from mother to daughter. The National Federation was determined to remedy this situation.

As the Board of Agriculture was sponsoring the Women's Institutes, it felt justified in encouraging its protégées to do all in their power to increase the food supply. Women throughout the country, particularly working-class women, greeted the guidance on this subject with interest. Lord Ernle described their situation:

few persons realise how much the stagnation of country villages is a women's question. Without their help every remedy is foredoomed to failure. ... Without ... interests rural life loses its zest; it becomes monotonous; it resolves itself into the struggle to make two ends meet on narrow incomes and the unvarying round of household duties. The health of the women suffers from sheer boredom. Their loss of interest in rural life ... contribute[s] to the depopulation of the countryside.⁷⁴

Countrywomen's reluctance to speak in a public meeting may have been an example of their feeling intuitively that they were second-class citizens, although they would not have expressed this in words.⁷⁵ They had no vote, they had had limited schooling, their housing left much to be desired, and last but not least their men were fighting a savage war and might never return. It is therefore unsurprising that when someone started to take an interest in them, they welcomed that interest.

⁷² By the end of 1919 there were 1,405 Institutes with a membership of 55,015.

⁷³ Established in the 1890s, the Agricultural Association of Women had as a main objective the training of daughters of professional families. This therefore did not impinge on the vast majority of rural women. Casling, *English countrywomen*, p. 13.

⁷⁴ R. E. Prothero (later Lord Ernle), 'Women on the land, 1917-19', *The land and its people* (London, [1925]), p. 170.

⁷⁵ See p. 219 above.

Following the German submarine blockade of 1917, food rationing was introduced early in 1918 and was not ended until 1920. This situation gave extra impetus to the WIs' efforts to help decrease food shortages. Examples of encouragement in this direction abound in contemporary WI minute books and include talks on cheese making, fruit bottling, the advisability of forming a Pig Club for keeping and fattening pigs, fruit and vegetable bottling and drying, rabbit keeping, bee-keeping, poultry rearing, and co-operative marketing of surplus garden produce.⁷⁶

Although food supplies were of great importance in a time of war, those guiding the infant movement were in no doubt that to improve the lot of rural women, additional issues should be addressed and that a much wider range of subjects should be introduced. Once the great strain on food supplies had been eased with the cessation of hostilities, a peace-time programme of wide-ranging interests – predominantly but not exclusively handicrafts – was inaugurated. Particularly after the extension of the franchise in February 1918 to women over the age of 30 (with some restrictions), the National Federation of WIs encouraged discussion and talks on the wider implications of enfranchisement, such as citizenship or campaigning on such subjects as better rural housing.⁷⁷ These ideas were taken seriously in Norfolk. Although 'a "non-political" attitude [was] to be maintained by all Institutes and Institute members', this did not prohibit members from interesting themselves in questions of national importance, in addition to their everyday concerns.⁷⁸

This is exemplified in a typical meeting in March 1919. Thirty-five members met to hear a speaker give an address on:

the work of Women's Institutes during the Period of Reconstruction. She pointed out how the health of the nation depends greatly upon the women, who have the training and rearing and feeding of the children. The necessity for cleanliness and fresh air. She spoke about

⁷⁶ NRO, SO 137/91, 701X2, Records of the Norfolk Federation of Women's Institutes. Hevingham, 3 July 1918, 14 May 1919; SO 137/13, 700X3 Records of the Norfolk Federation of Women's Institutes. Barningham and District, 13 June, 1 July, 8 August [1918], April [1919]; SO 137/542, 792X1 Records of the Norfolk Federation of Women's Institutes. Trowse, 5 February 1919; SO 137/55, 700X8 Records of the Norfolk Federation of Women's Institutes. Catfield, 10 July 1918.

⁷⁷ The first general election held under the new system was in December 1918; the new enfranchisement therefore had immediate relevance.

⁷⁸ A quote from a letter from the Federation read to the members of Trowse Women's Institute. NRO, SO 137/542, 792X1 Records of the Norfolk Federation of Women's Institutes. Trowse, 3 November 1920.

women's influence in the Home and upon the Men with whom they live who naturally do to a certain extent according to the opinions, ideas and behaviour of the womenfolk. The wider view was also mentioned; now that women have a voice in the Government of the country they ought to take a keener interest in politics and all questions concerned with the welfare of the state, should read the newspapers and try to understand what is being done in and for the country and particularly in the rural districts, where improvements will be to their own advantage.⁷⁹

At the same meeting there were also demonstrations on cheese-making and mending children's shoes, a competition for the best menu for a week's dinners, an exhibition of home-made bread and cakes, and the beginning of an Institute library, consisting of nineteen books, seventeen of which were lent out after the meeting. Only the most difficult to please would not have been attracted by such variety.

This diversity was energetically promoted by the National Federation in order to make women feel empowered, that is, to ensure that they began to take active charge of their own lives as against merely completing the unremitting cycle of chores. No guilt was to be felt in taking part in leisure activities, and this principle was actively supported by the increasingly varied range of classes and talks offered to members:

other activities of interest ... have included the provision of bath chairs, providing half the cost of a new system of lighting, weekly shops open during the season for the sale of garden produce, etc., the inauguration of several choral and dramatic societies, pianos purchased for the use to the village halls, slippers made and supplied free for children attending the elementary schools, and a large number of village libraries started. The interchange of visits between the Institutes is becoming an outstanding feature.⁸⁰

It could be reasoned that this is an echo of the widespread philanthropy of the nineteenth century but without the element of control which so often then accompanied the altruism of the upper classes. Indeed, from the outset, the idea of the individual Institute's self-government was strongly encouraged by the National Federation. For too long rural women had been controlled and dominated by those in authority. It was the Federation's mission to change the women's perception of themselves and to help them realise that improvements in conditions in the

⁷⁹ NRO, SO 137/55, 700X8 Records of the Norfolk Federation of Women's Institutes. Catfield, 12 March 1919.

⁸⁰ National Federation of Women's Institutes seventh annual report ... for the period ended 31 December 1923, p. 119.

countryside depended on them as much as on their male counterparts.⁸¹ This was to be achieved mainly through education, particularly in agricultural subjects, but eventually as interest waned in these during the inter-war period, the educational emphasis turned away from food production onto the conditions of countrywomen's lives in general. Until then, education for adults had been neglected in the countryside. In towns and cities there were many new initiatives. Examples included the Mechanics' Institutes (founded in 1823), the Co-operative movement (Rochdale Principles, 1844), University Extension classes (1860s), Working Men's Clubs (1862), University Settlements (1880s) and the Workers' Educational Association (1903).

These developments hardly touched the rural areas. During the inter-war period, however, thoughtful consideration was given to the general question of the 'practical education of women for rural life'. In 1926 the government asked Lady Denman to be Chairman of a committee deliberating on this subject, and the result two years later was the Denman Report, advocating education not only in 'the growing of produce in the field and garden, but also its subsequent utilization in the kitchen, and instruction in home management and crafts'.⁸² This advice had already been demonstrated as undeniably practicable in Women's Institutes throughout the country, with the bonus of WI training itself often being of a sociable nature, with 'everything stopping for a sit-down knife-and-fork lunch in the middle of the day, and a cream tea at the end'.⁸³

Nevertheless, training, however worthwhile, was not the only objective of the movement, and some years earlier the WI journal *Home and Country* had sounded a warning note:

whilst busy over classes for the provision of food and clothing and for the artistic decoration of the home, members of WIs will not forget there are other ways by which they may become

⁸¹ Goodenough, *Jam and Jerusalem*, p. 40.

⁸² Huxley, *Lady Denman*, p. 86.

⁸³ Casling, *English countrywomen*, p. 56.

good home makers besides purely practical means. The village has need of its Marys as well as its Marthas.⁸⁴

Individual WIs enthusiastically embraced this idea, forming drama and dancing groups, Institute libraries, choirs, and toy making circles.⁸⁵ At county level this trend was supported by the institution of a sub-committee dedicated to music, drama and folk-dancing, along with the Federation's affiliation to the appropriate county institutions.⁸⁶ The social aspect of these leisure activities was an important element, allowing women to learn how to be part of a team and to co-operate with others, while simultaneously affording a rare opportunity to relax away from their everyday responsibilities. Norfolk Federation also held increasingly successful annual exhibitions in Norwich. These consisted of handicrafts of all sorts accompanied by drama competitions.⁸⁷ Confidence grew, and eventually members competed not only within the Federation but also in independent county contests.⁸⁸

The diversity of WI activities is also illustrated by individual WIs' participation in community work. Leisure and spare time were frequently linked to notions of duty and service in women's thinking, and it was therefore to be expected that WIs, as consumers of that spare time, would involve themselves in work of benefit to those in need of help or welfare. The commonest incidence of this altruism occurred in the organisation of parties, particularly at Christmas, for the youngest and the oldest members of the community. Many reports confirm that this form of philanthropy was acceptable to both the givers and the receivers and was enjoyed on all sides.⁸⁹ In

⁸⁴ *Home and Country*, September 1920. Quoted in Voluntary Action History Society, 'Voluntary action of membership organisations: countrywomen organise their own education'. <http://www.vaahs.org.uk/vaahs/papers/vaahs4.pdf>

⁸⁵ 'A large number of institutes have started Libraries during the year. Many have also a Dancing Class and a Dramatic Club.' Norfolk FWI third annual report, 1922; 'A large number of Institutes have a Choir, whilst others have Pierrot and Minstrel Troupes.' Norfolk FWI eighth annual report, 1927; 'The Honorary Toy Teacher ... reports a growing interest in the production of Toys which many Women's Institutes are now taking up with enthusiasm.' Norfolk FWI second annual report, 1921.

⁸⁶ 'As a result of the first year's affiliation to the Norfolk Musical Competition Festival, three Institutes entered in the Singing Competitions, and one in the Folk-Dancing Competitions gaining the third place.' Norfolk FWI fifth annual report, 1924.

⁸⁷ Norfolk FWI sixth annual report, 1925.

⁸⁸ 'A greater number of Institutes are entering for the Norfolk and Norwich Musical Competition Festival.' Norfolk FWI ninth annual report, 1928.

⁸⁹ For instance: 'I don't think I ever heard so much laughter before. I think all of us who helped enjoyed the fun quite as much as the children.' NRO, SO 137/91, 701X2 Records of the Norfolk Federation of Women's Institutes. Hevingham, 18 December 1920; Heacham and

the earliest days of the movement, patriotism could be expressed by responding to a government appeal for fruit stones and nut shells for conversion into charcoal for respirators to protect soldiers from poison gas and also by entertaining returned soldiers.⁹⁰ Later efforts were itemised in *Norfolk Supplement*, a monthly periodical dealing with WI matters in the county. These special activities involved running WI girls' clubs, holding flower shows open to the surrounding villages, donating to various local charitable causes money raised by holding fêtes or jumble sales, and sewing and knitting for local hospitals.⁹¹

How did the public react to the new phenomenon of the WI? In 1918 *The Times* published an article describing it as 'a new movement for rural England', endorsing its aims and stressing that 'the women's institutes [would] ... make the lives of the people better, brighter and more cheerful than they had ever been before'.⁹² Four years later the same newspaper publicised the NFWI annual meeting at Kingsway Hall in London, outlining the resolutions to be debated, among which were 'Guards on omnibuses' and another urging the banning of the poleaxe in the slaughter of animals for human food.⁹³ The public was thus made aware that there was a serious side to the WI. The Government took a 'keen interest' in the movement and particularly in the ways WIs were attempting to stem the population 'drift to the towns'.⁹⁴

Yet in the early days not everyone was happy that the movement was being helped with funds from the public purse:

...although many farmers are in favour of brightening village life, ... they are inclined to agree with Alderman Tebbutt that the funds for these efforts should be raised by a voluntary subscription, instead of being taken from the taxpayers' pocket.⁹⁵

Hethersett, February 1931, Burnham Thorpe April 1932; *Norfolk WI Supplement to Home and Country* Nos. 56 and 70.

⁹⁰ NRO, SO 137/55, 700X8 Records of the Norfolk Federation of Women's Institutes. Catfield, 14 August 1918; SO 137/91, 701X2 Records of the Norfolk Federation of Women's Institutes. Hevingham, 4 June and 16 July 1919.

⁹¹ *Norfolk WI Supplement to Home and Country*, No. 98 August 1934; September, November, December 1936 Nos. 123, 125, 126.

⁹² 'Women's Institutes', *The Times*, 11 March 1918, p. 5.

⁹³ 'Women's Institutes', *The Times*, 22 May 1922, p. 18.

⁹⁴ 'Work of Women's Institutes', *The Times*, 21 May 1924, p. 12.

⁹⁵ *British Farmer*, 12 March 1921. Cutting in [Norfolk] Federation scrapbook no. 2.

Censure was also levelled at WI members for concerning themselves with international politics rather than handicrafts and produce. The *Eastern Daily Press* reported this criticism by Lady Margaret Strickland, when she opened a handicrafts and produce exhibition in Norfolk in 1932 and, needless to say, it 'provoked spirited replies' from WI officials on the platform, opposing this opinion. The public's attitude is reflected in the editorial in the same issue of the newspaper:

... a knowledge of the country's constitution and political history is no less valuable than a knowledge of making cakes. Citizenship is just as necessary a subject of study for women nowadays as needlework, and the Women's Institute movement would not be fulfilling its ideals if it did not teach these things along with the domestic arts which are so well illustrated at the exhibition now being held in Norwich. ... We must remember in this connexion that the chief benefit of the movement lies in brightening up and diversifying village life ...⁹⁶

Further approval came five years later in a report on the opening in Norwich of a WI exhibition which had a record number of entries: '... what the Institute has done for the country woman is now recognised on all hands. Disappearing crafts and recreations have been revived, the flow from village to town has been stemmed, monotony relieved'.⁹⁷

The WI was now regarded as a prestigious organisation and an accepted part of the rural scene, and women were proud to be members.

Conclusion

By the end of the 1930s a Women's Institute was accessible to most women in the county and indeed throughout the country. The movement revolutionised rural women's leisure, and this had a secondary positive effect on rural families. The WI did not offer merely a monthly afternoon or evening out, because of the welcome ancillary meetings to work on handicrafts or to practise for choirs, drama and folk-dancing competitions. There were also books to be read borrowed from one of the many WI libraries or possibly a WI bowls club to attend. Furthermore, for those willing to go the extra mile (e.g. president, secretary, treasurer), there were the preparations necessary for the next monthly meeting, planning future meetings and

⁹⁶ *Eastern Daily Press* 'Women's Institute and politics', 29 April 1932, p. 6, 'Norfolk's home crafts and produce', p. 10. Cutting in [Norfolk] Federation scrapbook no. 5.

⁹⁷ *Eastern Daily Press* 'Women's Institutes exhibition at Norwich', 23 April 1937, p. 9, 'The countrywoman shows the way', p. 10. Cutting in [Norfolk] Federation scrapbook no. 5.

events, preparing agendas, writing minutes and making sure the finances were healthy. These official tasks may perhaps not be regarded as leisure activities, but to these women they were new and interesting and therefore pleasurable.

From the beginning the success of the Institute movement lay in its realistic outlook, its democratic self-government and its determined ban on class consciousness, sectarianism and party politics, demonstrating to all that women were capable of successfully running an organisation. This led the way towards the eventual election of women on to the committees of other groups, for instance, village halls.⁹⁸ Institutes had a fundamentally liberal rather than intolerant stance, reflecting the move, already noted in this thesis, towards local communities taking greater control of their leisure activities. This is in noticeable contrast to the contemporary Mothers' Union. Each WI member knew that she was part of a much larger movement with help and advice available if necessary, both at county level and nationally. In this the association differed from many other more short-lived organisations, such as the reading room movement, in which each individual unit was an independent entity, and which flourished for half a century or so and then declined. Although the heady days of 1939 have gone, when the national membership totalled over 331,000, today the WI is still very much in existence with 212,000 members.⁹⁹

The WI, it must be emphasised, did not eclipse other women's organisations: the MU, in particular, continued to flourish throughout the period studied. These various groups offered new opportunities leading towards wider horizons and reducing the isolation which had beleaguered many countrywomen. But provision of leisure activities for women did not in itself reduce the extent to which they were barred from male recreation, and may even have allowed segregation to continue. As late as 1975, in one Fenland village, it was reported that:

although there are in the village cricket, football and angling clubs, they all, by their nature, exclude women. There is a bowling club which six years ago agreed to allow women to play. There is, however, insufficient support for a ladies' bowling club and *many of the men bowlers do not like playing with women* [my italics]. There is one lady bell-ringer.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁸ See pp. 152-153.

⁹⁹ <http://www.thewi.org.uk/about-the-wi>

¹⁰⁰ Chamberlain, *Fenwomen*, p. 144.

Chapter 9. Conclusion.

This thesis has explored largely uncharted territory, the field of rural leisure and its place in the lives of working people. This subject has been identified as a gap in the wider field of leisure studies by a number of historians, including Stedman Jones in 1977 and Reay in 2004. This neglect is partly a consequence of the nature of the source material; towns and cities are usually well documented with many surviving archives, while typically the evidence for smaller communities is sparse. This thesis does not seek to challenge the significance of urban recreation but rather to broaden the picture to include hitherto neglected, yet equally interesting and significant, aspects of leisure. These are part of the overall area of leisure studies and merit more investigation than they have received in the past.

The initial task of defining 'leisure' proved more complex than expected (Chapter 1), but for the purposes of this thesis a simple definition of 'free time' was adopted. Different kinds of leisure have been examined – organised and unorganised leisure, 'rational recreation', 'traditional' and 'innovative' leisure and gender-specific pastimes. The thesis sought, more specifically, to ascertain how far opportunities for leisure became more available in rural areas in the period under discussion, the causes of such a change and the impact that increased provision had on the lives of rural people, especially women. The results leave no doubt that leisure opportunities increased significantly for all social groups, but especially for working people, in the period studied. Although some traditional pastimes declined, their place was taken by a range of new ones, with the rise of local sports teams, the appearance of societies like the Mothers' Union and the Women's Institute, and the emergence of new meeting places, principally reading rooms and village halls. The various forms in which leisure could be practised mostly led to an enrichment of experience for its participants. This experience was often of a kind previously unanticipated and consequently encouraged further attempts at something new or different in other spheres of life. The Women's Institute is a particularly good example of this.

In this broad history of expansion and change three factors emerge as being of key significance. Firstly, earlier studies have emphasised the importance of better working conditions in the rise of increased leisure opportunities, although, in the case of rural communities especially, perhaps of equal significance were developments in technology. These led to a gradual improvement in personal and local public transport (bicycles from the late nineteenth century, railways from the 1840s and motor buses after the First World War),

as a consequence of which villagers were able to sample urban recreations, which differed greatly from those on offer locally. Technological change also increased the variety of pastimes available locally, from improvements in travelling fairs to cinema and radio.

Secondly, the increasing availability of leisure activities for rural women has, perhaps, been insufficiently emphasised in the past. While it is true that recreational opportunities for men also increased significantly in this period, provision for women arguably increased more, albeit starting from a much smaller base. The history of the WI is, once again, especially striking in this respect.

Thirdly, there were marked changes in the organisation of rural leisure, with clear evidence for a reduction over time in the role of local landowners and clergy, and a concomitant increase in the part played by the community as a whole. This development, the pace of which accelerated markedly in the inter-war years, can be seen in the organisation of local sports, in the provision of communal meeting places with the replacement of reading rooms by village halls and in the rise of the Women's Institutes. This development was associated, in turn, with a reduction in the dominance of leisure provision by groups, such as the established church, with clear ideological agendas. Increased community involvement was also doubtless encouraged by enfranchisement (Representation of the People Act 1884 – even though all women and 40% of adult men were still without the vote), and by local government reforms, with the establishment of elected Rural District Councils in 1894. The extent to which this can be read as an essentially 'working-class' movement is debatable: to a significant extent it reflects the occupation by the local middle class of positions of power vacated by traditional landowners and the institutions which they promoted, in the course of the twentieth century. This said, working people formed the backbone of the new organisations and – in the WI, as in local sports clubs – took leadership roles in them alongside middle class members.

The development of recreational opportunities cannot thus be understood in isolation from a range of broad social and technological factors. Nevertheless, specific political and economic circumstance could also be significant, as with the case of the Women's Institute, which was established in Britain in 1915 with the initial purpose of improving the production of food under wartime conditions (Chapter 8). Indeed, the First World War appears to have been a major catalyst in a number of respects, accelerating pattern of change already established, especially in the role of women: many women tackled men's jobs successfully, allowing their

menfolk to go abroad to fight, and at the end of the war were naturally unwilling to revert to their previous submissive state. Compelled to relinquish their jobs to the returning men, new skills and self-confidence were directed in new directions, and especially into community roles, and organisations such as the WI.

This thesis has thrown significant new light on the development of rural leisure in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Yet it can only claim to be an analysis of a limited number of aspects, within a circumscribed geographical area. Further research will produce different perspectives, and explore new avenues of enquiry. Possibilities may include examining leisure within the context of the individual's life-cycle as a whole, which has received very little consideration here, or indeed elsewhere. Historians have dealt with childhood recreation, adolescent pastimes or old age leisure, but no research has examined a lifetime's experience of leisure (and certainly not rural leisure) over distinct periods of history.¹ Other aspects of leisure, which offer scope for future additional research, are the interdependence of rural work and leisure, the recreational aspects of rural religion and music, and the country child at play.

The limitations of this study therefore offer opportunities for further exploration. Nevertheless, it has shone important new light on a subject which has, for too long, been largely neglected by historians.

¹ Pamela Horn, 'High days and holidays', in her *The Victorian country child* (Kineton, 1974); John Burnett (ed.), *Destiny obscure: autobiographies of childhood, education, and family from the 1820s to the 1920s* (London, 1982); Harry Hendrick, 'Children's leisure' in his *Children, childhood and English society 1880-1990* (Cambridge, 1997); John Springhall, *Youth, Empire and society. British youth movements 1883-1940* (London, 1977); Carol Dyhouse, *Girls growing up in late Victorian and Edwardian England* (London, 1981); Harry Hendrick, *Images of youth: age, class, and the male youth problem, 1880-1920* (Oxford, 1990); David I. Kertzer and Peter Laslett (eds.), *Aging in the past: demography, society, and old age* (Berkeley, 1995); Lynn Botelho and Pat Thane (eds.), *Women and ageing in British society since 1500* (Harlow, 2001); Pat Thane (ed.), *The long history of old age* (London, 2005).

Bibliography

A] Primary sources

i. Unpublished archives

a) The National Archives, Kew

BT 31/2566/13400 Cromer Coffee Tavern Reading Rooms and Public Hall Company Ltd.

Census of England and Wales, 1871. General report.

Census of England and Wales, 1911. Preliminary report

HO 45/9145/56975 Fairs: Litcham, Norfolk. Abolished 1876

HO 45/9300/10408 Fairs: Attleborough. Abolished 1872

HO 45/9300/10514 Fairs: Great Cressingham. Abolished 1872

HO 45/9304/11652 Fairs: Weeting-with-Broomhill, Norfolk. Abolished 1872

HO 45/9304/11805 Fairs: Pulham, Norfolk. Abolished 1872

HO 45/9309/12838 Fairs: Bacton, Norfolk. Abolished 1872

HO 45/9317/15782 Fairs: Lyng, Norfolk. Abolished 1872

HO 45/9320/16891 Fairs: Scole, Norfolk. Abolished 1872

HO 45/9324/17992 Fairs: Weasenham St. Peters, Norfolk. Abolished 1873

HO 45/9341/22237 Fairs: Harpley, Norfolk. Abolished 1873

HO 45/9379/42281 Fairs: Crimbleham, Norfolk. Abolished 1875

HO 45/9388/46897 Fairs: Great Massingham, Norfolk. Abolished 1875

HO 45/9392/49039 Fairs: East Rudham, Norfolk. Abolished 1875

HO 45/9433/63185 Fairs: Acle, Norfolk. Abolished 1877-78

HO 45/9621/A16139 Fairs: Hingham, Norfolk. Abolished 1882

HO 45/9952/B32096 Fairs: Cawston Fair Norfolk. Abolished 1900

HO 45/10231/B37083 Fairs: Harleston, Norfolk. Order of Abolition. 1871 B37083

HO 45/10231/B37095 Fairs: Gaywood, Norfolk. Order of Abolition. 1871 B37095

HO 45/10231/B37096 Fairs: Watton, Norfolk. Order of Abolition. 1871 B37096

HO 45/10231/B37105 Fairs: North Walsham, Norfolk. Order of Abolition. 1872 B37105

1851 census: HO 107

1861 census: RG 9

1881 census: RG 11

b) Norfolk Record Office, Norwich

BR 35/2/64/11 Keswick Reading Room plan

BR 50/13 Photograph of Samuel Soame with steam roundabout engine [1865]

DC 16/2/1 Plan of proposed billiard room, reading room and shop in Hunstanton (no date – late 19th century)

DN/EST 51A/8, Norwich Diocesan Archives. House, cottage and Temperance Hall in N. Walsham

FC 63/229 Records of Downham market Methodist Circuit Churches. Downham Mount Tabor (ex-United Methodist). United Women's Meeting (Sisterhood) and Women's Work meeting minutes. Oct 1932-Jun 1952

FX 220/1 Photocopy of transcript by R. A. Reyner of the diary of Eliza Yull Reyner ('Gentlewoman of Norfolk'), Litcham with index of places and persons 1842-1845

HIL 1/144-146, 870X7 Conveyance of 49 acres of glebe land and farm buildings, reserving Reading Room, with plans (1908-1909)

MC 2251 /7, 935X6 Besthorpe parish magazine. *The Banner of Faith*, August 1888

MC 2251/24, 935X6 Sprowston Parochial Magazine. Jan-Dec 1892

MC 2612/4/2, 988X9 [Papers of Miss (Doris) Mary Daplyn ... Farm Day books of Green Farm, Thursford]. 1897-1901 from 1 June 1897

MC 389/40, 729X8 Royal Norfolk Nurseries Estate off Newmarket Road inc. Reading Room (1884)

MC 542/53, 777X7 Draft deed of gift of a memorial reading room in Stanhoe conveyed by Hollway-Calthrop to trustees (1932)

MC 542/55, 777X8 Draft deed of gift by Hollway-Calthrop of the Mary Hollway Memorial Reading Room, Stanhoe with caretaker's cottage adjoining (includes plan) (1932)

MC 634/24, 785X1 Printed appeal of the wherrymen of the Yare, Bure and Waveney for a new church and reading room at Great Yarmouth (no date – pre-1860)

MC 97/116, 541X1 Cromer Working Men's Club and Reading Room – MS notes, reports, rules (1880)

P/CH 2/177 Northwold: Norman reading room (Charity Commission Accounts, 1923)

P/CH 2/329 Northwold: Reading Room (no date [1901])

PC 117/10 Reading room account (Overstrand Parish Council, 1940/41)

Bibliography

- PC 117/5 Subjects include donation to Parish Council of reading room and its re-naming as the Parish Hall, 1938-1939, plan of reading room, no date (Overstrand Parish Council minutes, 1938-39)
- PC 75/19 Copy Charity Commission Scheme: Caroline Amelia Norman Reading Room and Allotments (Northwold Parish Council, 1969)
- PD 112/34 Account of sale of furnishings of Wickmere Reading Room following its disbandment (1957)
- PD 131/85 Parish records of Great Cressingham. Lease for 7years of profits and dues of Lammas Fair 1794-1872
- PD 143/64 Necton Reading Room: accounts, lists of donations and subscriptions (1871-1879)
- PD 146/49, PD 146/50, PD 146/51, PD 146/52, PD 146/53 Swanton Abbott Coffee and Reading Room. Minutes and accounts (1884-1917)
- PD 178/43 Reading room minutes (Parish Records of East Barsham, 1918-1931)
- PD 208/160 Correspondence with Charity Commissioners regarding a proposal to contribute towards the up-keep of the parish reading room (Parish Records of Haddiscoe, 1909)
- PD 208/31 File of vouchers and accounts for erection of reading room (Parish Records of Haddiscoe, 1906-1907)
- PD 209/456 North Elmham Reading Room Society committee minutes and accounts. (Parish Records of North Elmham, 1875-1883)
- PD 209/457 Parish records of North Elmham. Subscription list and solicitor's bill relating to abolition of fair 1876
- PD 215/25 2 letters relating to partition in Reading Room (Parish Records of Dunton, 1911)
- PD 280/65 Reading Room committee minutes (Parish Records of Costessey, 1886-1905)
- PD 314/51 Parish Records of Southery (Diocese of Ely). Statement of Revd W.H. Henslowe concerning the period of his curacy at Southery, 1838-1840
- PD 359/70 Parish Records of Cranworth with Letton. Charities. Cranworth, Letton and Southbergh cricket club rules, 1876
- PD 368/68 Balance sheet and receipt for coal for the Helhoughton Reading Room (Parish Records of Helhoughton, 1901)
- PD 373/172 Trust deed of the reading room, Mrs Norman to Revd. Smith (Parish Records of Northwold, 1876)
- PD 373/178 Minutes of the Northwold reading room committee (Parish Records of Northwold, 1884)
- PD 373/181 Charity Commission scheme for the Norman reading room (Parish Records of Northwold, 1905)

Bibliography

- PD 373/183 Northwold reading room, statements of account (Parish Records of Northwold, 1916-1933)
- PD 373/281 Charity Commission schemes for Norman Reading Room and allotments (Parish Records of Northwold, 1967; 1969; 1971; 1972)
- PD 389/65 Text of address by Revd. T.J. Walker. (Parish Records of Topcroft, 1934)
- PD 394/47 Correspondence and other papers re parish reading room (Parish Records of Roughton, 1931-198)
- PD 440/147 Parish records of Reepham with Kerdiston. Parish magazines. Norwich Diocese Mothers' Union Journal. 1909-1916
- PD 443/126 Papers relating to use of disused school as a reading room (Parish Records of Bedingham, 1862, 1921)
- PD 447/111 Charity Commission scheme for Reading Room (Parish Records of East Tuddenham, 1961)
- PD 459/152 Litcham Reading Room balance sheet (Parish Records of Litcham, 1887).
- PD 47/27 Bills and receipts for building and furnishing Church or Parish Room (Parish records of Bradfield, 1909-1912)
- PD 479/11 Account book for Reading Room (Parish Records of Great Melton, Church and Benefice, 1910-44)
- PD 496/109 Parish Records of Wacton. Girls' Friendly Society register and accounts 1930-1935
- PD 502/98 Correspondence and papers. (Parish Records of Warham, Reading Room Charity, 1935-1969)
- PD 530/40 Parish account book, including reading room (Parish Records of Belton, 1917)
- PD 531/91 Girls Friendly Society, Happisburgh Branch, minute book, 1905-1920
- PD 548/60 Letter from Mordaunt Edwards, Hardingham Hall, concerning his intention to give the Reading Room to the churchwardens for use as a parish room. (Parish Records of Ashill, 1911)
- PD 677/4 Bishop's licence to perform divine service in the Reading Room (Parish Records of Glandford, 1900)
- PD 704/30 Dickleburgh insurance policies and papers
- PD 704/272 Parish Records of Dickleburgh with Langmere, Certificate for the King's Messengers Society for the Propagation of the Gospel Dickleburgh Parish Church Branch, 1931
- PD 713/65 Order by the Home Secretary for the abolition of the annual fair held at Horsham St. Faith on 17 October 1873
- SO 137/13, 700X3 Records of the Norfolk Federation of Women's Institutes. Records of closed or suspended Women's Institutes. Barningham and District

- SO 137/542, 792X1 Records of the Norfolk Federation of Women's Institutes. Records of closed or suspended Women's Institutes. Trowse
- SO 137/55, 700X8 Records of the Norfolk Federation of Women's Institutes. Records of closed or suspended Women's Institutes. Catfield
- SO 137/821, 895X1 Records of the Norfolk Federation of Women's Institutes. Records of closed or suspended Women's Institutes. Shipdham
- SO 137/91, 701X2 Records of the Norfolk Federation of Women's Institutes. Records of closed or suspended Women's Institutes. Hevingham
- SO 15/1 Norfolk Cricket Club book score book, 1833-1856
- SO 156/1, 747X1 Minute book of the general meeting, with accounts for 1922 (Witton Reading Room, 1909-1937)
- SO 178/1/1, 794X2 Records of the Mothers' Union, Diocese of Norwich. Minutes, 1913-1920
- T/MS C 8 Thetford races [various documents] 1773-1781
- Y/TC 90/2/1 Great Yarmouth Borough archives. Town Clerk's department. Abolition of fair. Proposed abolition of the Great Yarmouth Easter fair under the 1871 Fairs Act. Appeal by council to Secretary of State for home affairs and evidence of opposition

c) Norfolk Federation of Women's Institutes

- Norfolk Federation of Women's Institutes annual reports, various years
- Norfolk Federation of Women's Institutes Finance and General Purposes Committee, Minutes, 1921-1924
- Federation scrapbooks numbers 2 and 5 [Scrapbooks of newspaper cuttings]

d) Holkham archives

- E/O 1 (1) Holkham scoring book, 1876-79

e) Newspapers

- The Age* (Melbourne, Australia), 23 November 1937
- Cromer and North Walsham Post*, 15 October 1904
- Eastern Daily Press* (Norwich), various dates between 19 October 1923 and 27 December 2003
- Eastern Football News* (Norwich), 6 and 20 September 1919 and 18 October 1919
- Guardian* (London), 25 April 1932
- Norfolk Chronicle and Norwich Gazette*, various dates between 18 April 1846 and 19 February 1915
- The Times* (London), various dates between 14 September 1854 and 17 July 1928

ii. *Parliamentary Papers*

- 1834 [44] *Royal Commission of inquiry into administration and practical operation of poor laws. Appendix (A). Part II. Reports from Assistant Commissioners*
- 1842 [380] [381] [382] *Royal Commission on children's employment in mines and manufactories. First Report (Mines and collieries). Appendix*
- 1852 [1479] [1480] *Committee of council on education: Minutes, correspondence, financial statements and reports of H. M. inspectors of schools, 1851-52 vol. II*
- 1852-53 [1692] XC.1 *Census of Great Britain 1851: Report and tables*
- 1867-68 [4068] *Commission on the employment of children, young persons, and women in agriculture (1867). First report of the commissioners*
- 1868-69 [4202] *Commission on the employment of children, young persons, and women in agriculture (1867). Second report of the commissioners*
- 1886 [C.4722] *Forty-seventh annual report of the Registrar-General of births, deaths, and marriages in England*
- 1893-94 [C.6894-1] *Royal Commission on labour. The agricultural labourer vol. 1 England. Part 1*
- 1896 [314] LXIV.489 *Return with respect to Evening Continuation Schools for each administrative county and county borough of number of schools, scholars, annual grant by Education Dept. and income, 1894-95*
- 1907 [3813] *Women and children in public-houses. Information obtained from certain police forces as to the frequenting of public-houses by women and children*
- 1912-13 [6480] *Minutes of evidence taken before the Royal Commission on divorce and matrimonial causes vol. II*
- 1918 [Cd. 9079,9080] *Ministry of Reconstruction. Report of the Agricultural Policy Sub-Committee of the Reconstruction Committee, appointed in August, 1916*
- 1918 [Cd. 9166 ,9232] *Ministry of Reconstruction. Advisory Council. Women's Housing Sub-Committee. Final report*
- Ballot Act (1872) 35 & 36 Vict. c. 33*
- Cruelty to Animals Act (1835) 5 & 6 William IV. c. 59*
- Elementary Education Act (1891) 54 & 55 Vict c. 56*
- Factory Act (1850) 13 & 14 Vict c. 54*
- Factory and Workshop Act (1878) 41 & 42 Vict. c. 16*
- Fairs Act (1871) c. 12*
- HC 284 *Environment, transport and regional affairs committee. 1999/00. Environment sub-committee. Travelling fairs. Memoranda relating to the enquiry submitted to the Environment sub-committee vol. II*
- HC Hansard vol. 157, cols. 2051-2055, April 20, 1860

iii. *Printed material*a) Norfolk

- Armstrong, Benjamin John**, *A Norfolk diary. Passages from the diary of the Rev. Benjamin John Armstrong, Vicar of East Dereham 1850-88* (London, 1949)
- Baldry, George**, *The rabbit skin cap. A tale of a Norfolk countryman's youth* (Woodbridge, 1939)
- Barker, W. S. and Hatch, J. H.** (eds.), *Norfolk cricket annual season 1889* (Norwich, 1889)
- Borrow, George**, *Lavengro, the scholar, the gypsy, the priest* (London, 1906). First published in 1851
- Brickmann, W.H.R.**, *Some records of ye restoration of ye anciente market cross in Wymondham, Norfolk.* [Scrapbook of newspaper articles, programmes, etc., relating to the restoration of Wymondham market cross and its adaptation for use as a reading and news room. 1863-1871]
- Broom, Arthur Stanley**, *Bob's boy. The life story of a Norfolk countryman* (Norwich, 1984)
- Bryant, Andrew**, *Bryant's map of Norfolk in 1826* [First published in 1826] (Fakenham, 1998)
- Bulwer, W.E.L.**, *Address at the opening of a Reading Room at Cawston* (Bulwer of Heydon Family Papers, 1863. Printed pamphlet, BUL 4/221, 614X1, Norfolk Record Office)
- Bumfrey, Derek** *A boy's eye view of Norfolk village life* (Witney, 1997)
- Caird, James**, 'Norfolk' in *English agriculture in 1850-51* [First published in 1852] (London, 1968)
- Chambers, John**, *A general history of the county of Norfolk, intended to convey all the information of a Norfolk tour, with the more extended details of antiquarian, statistical, pictorial, architectural, and miscellaneous information, including biographical notices, original and selected.* (Norwich, 1829)
- Craven & Co's commercial directory of Norfolk* (Nottingham, 1856)
- Edwards, George**, *From crow-scaring to Westminster, an autobiography* (London, 1922)
- Faden, William**, *Faden's map of Norfolk* [First published in 1797] (Dereham, 1989)
- Glyde, John**, *The Norfolk garland: a collection of the superstitions, beliefs and practices, proverbs, curious customs, ballads and songs of the people of Norfolk* (London, 1872)
- Haggard, H. Rider**, *A farmer's year, being his commonplace book for 1898* (London, 1987)

- Haggard, H. Rider**, 'Norfolk', in *Rural England, being an account of agricultural and social researches carried out in the years 1901 and 1902*, vol. 2, pp. 448-535 (London, 1902)
- Hansell, W. E.** (ed.), *Annual of the Norfolk County Football Association, 1888* (Norwich, 1888).
- Hansell, W. E.** (ed.), *The Norfolk football annual, 1889-90* (Norwich, 1889).
- Harrod, J. G.**, *Royal county directory of Norfolk with Lowestoft in Suffolk, 1875* (Norwich 1875)
- Harrod, J. G.**, *Royal county directory of Norfolk with Lowestoft in Suffolk, 1877* (Norwich 1877)
- Hunt & Co's Directory of E. Norfolk with parts of Suffolk, 1850* (London, 1850)
- Jessopp, Augustus**, *Arcady: for better for worse* (London, 1887)
- Kelly, E. R.** (ed.), *Post Office directory of Cambridge, Norfolk and Suffolk [Part 2: Norfolk]* (London, 1869)
- Kelly, E. R.**, (ed.), *Post Office directory of Cambridge, Norfolk and Suffolk* (London, 1875)
- Kelly's directory of Norfolk 1896* (London, 1896)
- Kelly's directory of Norfolk, 1904* (London, 1904)
- Kelly's directory of Norfolk 1912* (London, 1912)
- Kelly's directory of Norfolk 1929* (London, 1929)
- Kelly's directory of Norfolk 1937* (London, 1937)
- Kelly's directory of the counties of Cambridge, Norfolk and Suffolk 1916* (London, [1916])
- Kelly's Directory for Cambridgeshire, Norfolk & Suffolk* (London, 1883)
- Kelly's directory of Cambridgeshire, Norfolk and Suffolk 1892 [Part 2: Norfolk]* (London, 1892)
- Layton, Charles**, *The whole art of Norfolk wrestling: with rules and orders relating thereto: for the use of landlords, &c: where wrestling matches are held* (Norwich, 183?)
- Legge, R. H.** and **Watson, F. W.** (eds.), *Norfolk cricket annual season 1891* (Norwich, 1891)
- Legge, Robin H.** (ed.), *Norfolk cricket annual season 1893* (Norwich, 1893)
- Legge, Robin H.** (ed.), *Norfolk cricket annual season 1896* (Norwich, 1896)
- Legge, Robin H.** (ed.), *Norfolk cricket annual season 1898* (Norwich, 1898)
- Luke, Francis Vyvyan**, *History of the parish of Weeting* (Weeting, 2004)
Transcribed from the manuscript 'History of the parish of Weeting' by Luke in 1852

Mackie, Charles (comp.), *Norfolk annals: a chronological record of remarkable events in the nineteenth century: (compiled from the files of the "Norfolk Chronicle")* vol. 1 1801-1850, vol. 2 1851-1900 ([Norwich?] 1901)

Marshall, Mr. (William), *The rural economy of Norfolk: comprising the management of landed estates, and the present practice of husbandry in that county* vol. 2 (London, 1787)

National Council of Women (Norfolk and Norwich branch 1922) (comp.), *Norfolk and Norwich handbook of women's activities (voluntary and otherwise)* (Norwich, 1922)

Norfolk County Football Association official handbook 1924-25

Norfolk cricket annual season 1926

Norfolk Federation of Women's Institutes, *Norfolk within living memory* (Newbury, 1995)

Norfolk Federation of Women's Institutes, *Within living memory. A collection of Norfolk reminiscences* (Ipswich, 1972)

Norfolk football annual. Season 1920-1 (Norwich, 1920)

Norfolk WI supplement to Home and Country, various dates

Petty, John, *The history of the Primitive Methodist connexion from its origin to the conference of 1859* (London, 1860)

Pigot's Directory of Norfolk, 1839 (London, 1839).

Prior, C. B. L. (ed.), *Norfolk cricket annual season 1909-10* (Norwich, 1910)

Robson's Commercial Directory of the six counties forming the Norfolk circuit: viz: Beds, Bucks, Cambridgeshire, Hunts, Norfolk, and Suffolk, with Oxfordshire ... (London, 1839)

The Swaffham Parish Magazine, November 1878, January and May 1882

Victorian and Edwardian Norfolk from old photographs [Introduction and commentaries by Philip Hepworth] (London, 1972)

White, Francis, *History, gazetteer and directory of Norfolk 1854* (Sheffield, 1854)

White, William, *History, gazetteer and directory of Norfolk 1845* (Sheffield, 1845)

White, William, *History, gazetteer and directory of Norfolk 1883* (Sheffield, 1883)

White, William, *History, gazetteer and directory of Norfolk 1890* (Sheffield, 1890)

b) General

Bayly, Mary, *Ragged homes and how to mend them* (London, 1860)

Bennett, E. N., *Problems of village life* (London, [1914])

Blaine, Delabere P., *An encyclopædia of rural sports or, A complete account, historical, practical and descriptive, of hunting, shooting, fishing, racing, &c.* (London, 1870)

- Bourne [Sturt], G.**, *Change in the village* (Harmondsworth, 1984) First published in 1912
- Brougham, H.**, *Practical observations upon the education of the people: addressed to the working classes and their employers* [Facsimile of 1825 edition] (Manchester, 1971)
- Chamberlain, Mary**, *Fenwomen. A portrait of women in an English village* (London, 1975)
- Chester, Greville John**, *Statute fairs. A sermon preached at the parish churches of Farndish and Puddington, Bedfordshire* (London, 1858)
- Chester, Greville John**, *Statute fairs: their evils and their remedy* (York, 1856)
- Christensen, Karen and Levinson, David**, *Encyclopedia of community: from the village to the virtual world* (Thousand Oaks, Calif., 2003)
- A complete edition of the poets of Great Britain*, vol. 8 (London, [1794])
- Dunaway, David K. and Baum, Willa K.** (eds.), *Oral history: an interdisciplinary anthology* (Lanham, Md., 1996)
- Goulstone, J.**, *Early club and village cricket* (Bexleyheath, 1973)
- Hartley, L. P.**, *The go-between* (London, 1997)
- Hazlitt, William**, (pseudonym: Phantastes), 'The fight', *The new monthly magazine and literary journal*, 3, 14, (1822), p. 107
- Holland, Anne**, *Steeplechasing. A celebration of 250 years 1752-2002* (London, 2003)
- Hone, William**, *The table book: or, Daily recreation and information concerning remarkable men, manners, times, seasons, solemnities, merry-makings, antiquities and novelties, forming a complete history of the year* (London, 1827)
- Howitt, William**, *The rural life of England* (London, 1840)
- Hudson, J. W.**, *The history of adult education* [Facsimile of 1851 edition] (London, 1969)
- Jefferies, Richard**, *Hodge and his masters* (Stroud, 1992) First published in 1880
- Jefferies, Richard**, *The toilers of the field* (London, 1893)
- Jekyll, Gertrude**, *Old English household life. Some accounts of cottage objects and country folk* (London, 1975) First published in 1925
- Lewis, David**, *The drink problem and its solution* (London, 1881)
- Mann, Horace**, *Census of Great Britain, 1851: religious worship in England and Wales* (London, 1854)
- Mayhew, Henry**, *London labour and the London poor; a cyclopaedia of the condition and earnings of those that will work, those that cannot work, and those that will not work* vol. 1, *The London street folk* (London, 1851)

- Millin, George F.**, *Life in our villages by the Special Commissioner of the 'Daily News' being a series of letters written to that paper in the autumn of 1891* (London, 1891)
- Morton, H. V.**, *In search of England* (London, 2000) First published in 1927
A plea for reading rooms in rural parishes, by a country curate (Derby, 1862)
- Reeves, Maud Pember**, *Round about a pound a week* (London, 1914)
- Robertson Scott, J. W.**, *The story of the Women's Institute movement in England and Wales and Scotland* (Kingham, 1925)
- Rowntree, B. Seebohm and Kendall May**, *How the labourer lives* (London, 1913)
- Rowntree, Joseph and Sherwell, Arthur**, *The temperance problem and social reform* (London, 1900)
- Sanger, 'Lord' George**, *Seventy years a showman* (London, 1966) First published in 1910
- Skinner, James**, *Facts and opinions concerning Statute Hirings, respectfully addressed to the landowners, clergy, farmers and tradesmen of the East Riding of Yorkshire* (London, 1861)
- Smiles, Samuel**, *Self-help with illustrations of character and conduct* (London, 1859)
- Spring-Rice, Margery**, *Working-class wives, their health and conditions* (Harmondsworth, 1939)
- Sturt, George**, *Lucy Bettsworth* (Firle, 1978) First published in 1913
- Tennyson, Alfred**, *The princess: a medley* (London, 1917)
The Women's Institute Jubilee Book 1915-1965 (London, 1964)
- Tickler, Or, Monthly compendium of good things, in prose and verse* (London, 1818)
- Treves, Frederick**, *The elephant man and other reminiscences* (London, 1923)
- Walford, Cornelius**, *Fairs past and present. A chapter in the history of commerce* (New York, 1967) First published in London in 1883
- Weaver, Lawrence**, *Village clubs and halls* (London, 1920)
- Winter, Gordon**, *A country camera 1844-1914* (Harmondsworth, 1973)
World's Fair, 30 October 1909; 3 June 1911; 30 December 1933
- Yonge, Charlotte Mary**, *History of Christian names*, vol. 2 (London, 1863)

B] Secondary sources

a) Books – Norfolk

- Armstrong, David**, *A short history of Norfolk county cricket* (Holt, 1958)

- Ashwin, Trevor and Davison, Alan** (eds.), *An historical atlas of Norfolk* (Chichester, 2005)
- Barclay, P. S.**, *The history of the trustees of “The Cromer Working Men’s and Fishermen’s Reading Rooms” and the property at No. 11 Chapel Street, Cromer* [Typescript] (Cromer, 1988)
- Barnes, Pam**, *Norfolk landowners since 1880* (Norwich, 1993)
- Bonner, Harry and Moore, Stephanie Beckett**, *A brief history of Bradwell Reading Room Trust* [Typescript] (Bradwell, n.d.)
- Braithwaite, David**, *Savage of King’s Lynn, inventor of machines and merry-go-rounds* (Cambridge, 1975)
- Brown, R. Douglas**, *East Anglia 1939* (Lavenham, 1980)
- Clark, Ronald H.**, *The steam engine builders of Norfolk* (Yeovil, 1988)
- Cleveland, David**, *East Anglia on film* (North Walsham, 1987)
- Downham Market & District Amenity Society**, *A history of Downham Market* (Downham Market, 1999)
- Ede, Janet, Virgoe, Norma and Williamson, Tom**, *Halls of Zion. Chapels and meeting-houses in Norfolk* (Norwich, 1994)
- Entwistle, Keith**, *A century of faces and places. A history of Aldborough and Thurgarton 1900-2000* (Aldborough, 2002)
- Flowerday, Alan B. W.**, *Ingham past and present* (Letchworth, 2002)
- Howkins, Alun**, *Poor labouring men. Rural radicalism in Norfolk 1872-1923* (London, 1985)
- James, Jenefer Warwick and Stone, Peter**, *Sir Alfred Jodrell 1847-1929* (Dereham, 1996)
- Johnson, D. E.**, *Victorian shooting days: East Anglia, 1810-1910* (Ipswich, 1981).
- Lummis, Trevor**, *Occupation and society: the East Anglian fishermen 1880-1914* (Cambridge, 2002)
- Mallows, Jessie**, *Scole from past to present* (Ipswich, 1962)
- Matthews, Joan and Riley, Helen**, *Merton – a brief history* (2011)
- Milner, Ben**, *A history of Methodism in East Norfolk* (Gorleston-on-sea, 2009)
- Musk, Stephen**, *Lionel Robinson: cricket at Old Buckenham* (Cardiff, 2014)
- Nichols, Mary**, *The mother of Necton. A century of Norfolk life* (Derby, 2000)
- Orna, Bernard and Elizabeth**, *Flint building in Norfolk* (Worthing, 1984)
- Pevsner, Nikolaus and Wilson, Bill**, *Norfolk 1. Norwich and north-east* (London, 1997)
- Richards, Terence**, *A visitor’s guide to Overstrand past and present* [Leaflet] (Overstrand, 2005)

- Riches, Naomi**, *The agricultural revolution in Norfolk* (London, 1967)
- Serpell, Michael Friend**, *A history of the Lophams* (Chichester, 1980)
- Skipper, Keith**, *Going bats in Norfolk. True cricketing tales* (Wellington, 2010)
- Smith, William P.**, *Discovering Upwell* ([Outwell,] 2012)
- Springall, L. Marion**, *Labouring life in Norfolk villages 1834-1914* (London, 1936)
- Terrington St. Clement history group**, *The changing face of Terrington St. Clement* (King's Lynn, 2001)
- The sporting life of Old Buckenham* (Old Buckenham, 199?)
- Tubby, David**, *A history of Great Yarmouth racecourse* (Great Yarmouth, 2011)
- Tubby, David**, *Life in the Flegg villages, 1800-1950* (Gorleston-on-sea, 2012)
- Turner, David**, *The book of Narborough* (Tiverton, 2004)
- Virgoe, Norma and Williamson, Tom** (eds.), *Religious dissent in East Anglia. Historical perspectives. The proceedings of the second symposium on the history of religious dissent in East Anglia* (Norwich, 1993)
- Wade Martins, Susanna and Williamson, Tom**, *The countryside of East Anglia. Changing landscapes, 1870-1950* (Woodbridge, 2008)
- Wade Martins, Susanna**, *A history of Norfolk* (Chichester, 1997)
- Wade Martins, Susanna**, *Norfolk, a changing countryside 1780-1914* (Chichester, 1988)
- Warren, Pam** (ed.), *North Walsham in the nineteenth century* (North Walsham, 1993)
- Wayland Partnership Development Trust**, *A history of Great Cressingham. Capturing our Wayland heritage* (2011)
- Welland, Michael**, *The history of the inns and public houses of Wells* (Wells, 2012)
- Yaxley, Philip**, *Looking back at Norfolk cricket* (Dereham, 1997)

b) Books – general

- Addison, William**, *English fairs and markets* (London, 1953)
- Allen, Grant**, *The colour sense: its origin and development. An essay in comparative psychology* (Boston, 1879)
- Altick, Richard D.**, *The English common reader. A social history of the mass reading public 1800-1900* (Chicago, 1957)
- Alvey, Norman**, *From chantry to Oxfam. A short history of charity and charity legislation* (Chichester, 1995)
- Andrews, Maggie**, *The acceptable face of feminism. The Women's Institute as a social movement* (London, 1997)

- Ashby, Mabel Kathleen**, *Joseph Ashby of Tysoe 1859-1919. A study of English village life* (Cambridge, 1961)
- Bagwell, Philip and Lyth, Peter**, *Transport in Britain: from canal lock to gridlock* (London, 2002)
- Bagwell, Philip S.**, *The transport revolution from 1770* (London, 1974)
- Bailey, Peter**, *Leisure and class in Victorian England. Rational recreation and the contest for control, 1830-1885* (London, 1978)
- Barrows, Susanna, and Room, Robin** (eds.), *Drinking: behavior and belief in modern history* (Berkeley, 1991)
- Bartley, Paula**, *Prostitution, prevention and reform in England, 1860-1914* (London, 2000)
- Barton, Susan**, *Working-class organizations and popular tourism, 1840-1870* (Manchester, 2005)
- Batchelor, Denzil**, *Soccer. A history of Association Football* (London, 1954)
- Battiscombe, Georgina**, *Charlotte Mary Yonge, the story of an uneventful life* (London, 1943)
- Beaton, Louise**, *Village halls in England 1988. The Ronseal village halls survey* (Fairford, 1988)
- Beaton, Louise**, *Village halls in England 1998. The report of the 1998 village halls survey* (Cirencester, 1998)
- Beaumont, Anthony**, *Fairground steam* (Hemel Hempstead, 1972)
- Beaven, Brad**, *Leisure, citizenship and working-class men in Britain, 1850-1945* (Manchester, 2005)
- Beddoe, Deirdre**, *Discovering women's history. A practical manual* (London, 1983)
- Bell, S. P.**, (ed.), *Victorian Lancashire* (Newton Abbot, 1974)
- Blackshaw, Tony**, (ed.), *Routledge handbook of leisure studies* (Abingdon, 2013)
- Blocker, Jack S., Fahey, David M. and Tyrrell, Ian R.**, *Alcohol and temperance in modern history: an international encyclopedia*, vol. 1 (Santa Barbara, 2003)
- Borsay, Peter**, *A history of leisure. The British experience since 1500* (Basingstoke, 2006)
- Botelho, Lynn and Thane, Pat** (eds.), *Women and ageing in British society since 1500* (Harlow, 2001)
- Bourke, Joanna**, *Working-class cultures in Britain 1890-1960: gender, class and ethnicity* (London, 1994)
- Brailsford, Dennis**, *British sport, a social history* (Cambridge, 1997)
- Braithwaite, David**, *Fairground architecture* (London, 1976)

- Brassley, Paul, Burchardt, Jeremy and Thompson, Lynne** (eds.), *The English countryside between the wars. Regeneration or decline?* (Woodbridge, 2006)
- Briggs, Asa**, *The age of improvement 1783-1867* (Harlow, 2000)
- Brookes, Christopher**, *English cricket. The game and its players through the ages* (London, 1978)
- Burchardt, Jeremy**, *Paradise lost: rural idyll and social change since 1800* (London, 2002)
- Burnett, John, (ed.)**, *Destiny obscure: autobiographies of childhood, education, and family from the 1820s to the 1920s* (London, 1982)
- Burnette, Joyce**, *Gender, work and wages in Industrial Revolution Britain* (Cambridge, 2008)
- Burton, Alan and Porter, Laraine** (eds.), *The showman, the spectacle and the two-minute silence. Performing British cinema before 1930* (Trowbridge, 2001)
- Bushaway, B.**, *By rite: custom, ceremony and community in England 1700-1880* (London, 1982)
- Cameron, David Kerr**, *The English fair* (Stroud, 1998)
- Carey, Helen**, *Bows of burning gold. Celebrating 90 years of the Women's Institute* (Skipton, 2005)
- Casling, M. S.**, *English countrywomen. A century of change in agricultural economies and education 1900-2000* (Penzance, 2002)
- Counce, Stephen**, *Oral history and the local historian* (London, 1994)
- Cavallo, Guglielmo and Chartier, Roger** (eds.), *A history of reading in the West* (Cambridge, 1999)
- Clapson, Mark** *The Routledge companion to Britain in the twentieth century* (London, 2009)
- Clarke, John and Critcher, Charles**, *The devil makes work: leisure in capitalist Britain* (Basingstoke, 1985)
- Cliff, Philip B.**, *The rise and development of the Sunday School movement in England 1780-1980* (Redhill, 1986)
- Cohen, Susan**, *The Women's Institute* (Botley, 2011)
- Courtney, Janet E.**, *Countrywomen in council. The English and Scottish Women's Institutes with chapters on the movement in the dominions and on Townswomen's Guilds* (London, 1933)
- Crawford, Elizabeth**, *The women's suffrage movement: a reference guide, 1866-1928* (London, 2001)
- Croft-Cooke, Rupert**, (ed.), *The circus book* (London, 1948)
- Cross, Gary S. and Walton, John K.**, *The playful crowd. Pleasure places in the twentieth century* (New York, 2005)

- Cunningham, H.**, *Leisure in the Industrial Revolution c.1780-c.1880* (London, 1980)
- Davidoff, Leonore**, *Thicker than water: siblings and their relations, 1780-1920* (Oxford, 2012)
- Davies, Andrew and Fielding, Steven**, *Workers' worlds. Cultures and communities in Manchester and Salford, 1880-1939* (Manchester, 1992)
- Davies, Andrew**, *Leisure, gender, and poverty: working-class culture in Salford and Manchester, 1900-1939* (Buckingham, 1992)
- Davies, Constance**, *A grain of mustard seed. An account of the founding of the first Women's Institute in Great Britain, with extracts from its Minute Books* (Denbigh, 1989)
- Deneke, Helena**, *Grace Hadow* (London, 1946)
- Disher, M. Willson**, *Fairs, circuses and music halls* (London, 1942)
- Dixon, Roger and Muthesius, Stefan**, *Victorian architecture* (London, 1985)
- Dodd, Jocelyn** (et al.), *Buried in the footnotes: the representation of disabled people in museum and gallery collection* (Leicester, 2004)
- Dudgeon, Piers**, (ed.), *Village voices. A portrait of change in England's green and pleasant land 1915-1990. A 75th anniversary celebration of rural Britain by the W.I. – Britain's foremost women's movement* (London, 1989)
- Durbach, Nadja**, *Spectacle of deformity: freak shows and modern British culture* (Berkeley, 2009)
- Dutt, Gurusaday**, *A woman of India: being the life of Saroj Nalini (founder of the Women's Institute movement in India)* (London, 1941)
- Dyhouse, Carol**, *Girls growing up in late Victorian and Edwardian England* (London, 1981)
- Dymond, David**, *Researching and writing history. A practical guide for local historians* (Salisbury, 1999)
- Elias, Norbert**, *The civilizing process*, 2 vols. (Oxford, 1969, 1982)
- Evans, Eric J. and Richards, Jeffrey**, *A social history of Britain in postcards 1870-1930* (London, 1980)
- Faulkner, William**, *Collected stories of William Faulkner* (New York, 1943)
- Flanders, Judith**, *Consuming passions: leisure and pleasure in Victorian Britain* (London, 2006)
- Fleischer, Nathaniel Stanley, and Andre, Sam E.**, *A pictorial history of boxing* (London, 1960)
- Forby, Robert**, *The vocabulary of East Anglia: an attempt to record the vulgar tongue of the twin sister counties, Norfolk and Suffolk* (London, 1830)
- Ford, John**, *Cricket, a social history* (Newton Abbot, 1972)

- Gale, Vic and Gale, Jean**, *A brass heritage: 100 years of Chertsey and Addlestone village bands* (Addlestone, 1993)
- Garner, Gwen**, *Extraordinary women. A history of the Women's Institutes* (Crediton, 1995)
- Gittins, Diana**, *Fair sex, family size and structure 1900-39* (London, 1982)
- Goioa, Ted**, *Work songs* (Durham, North Carolina, 2006)
- Golby, J. M. and Purdue, A. W.**, *The civilisation of the crowd: popular culture in England, 1750-1900* (Stroud, 1999)
- Goodenough, Simon**, *Jam and Jerusalem* (London, 1977)
- Green, Eileen, Hebron, Sandra and Woodward, Diana**, *Women's leisure, what leisure?* (Basingstoke, 1990)
- Greenaway, John**, *Drink and British politics since 1830. A study in policy making* (Basingstoke, 2003)
- Griffin, Emma**, *England's revelry. A history of popular sports and pastimes 1660-1830* (Oxford, 2005)
- Hagger, Hazel and McIntyre, Donald**, *Learning teaching from teachers: realising the potential of school-based teacher education* (Maidenhead, 2006)
- Hanson, Stuart**, *From silent screen to multi-screen. A history of cinema exhibition in Britain since 1896* (Manchester, 2007)
- Hardy, Thomas**, *Under the greenwood tree or The Mellstock Quire: a rural painting of the Dutch School* (London, 1903)
- Harris, Tim, (ed.)**, *Popular culture in England, c. 1500-1850* (Basingstoke, 1995)
- Harrison, Brian**, *Drink and the Victorians. The temperance question in England 1815-1872* (London, 1971)
- Harrison, J. F. C.**, *Learning and living. A study in the history of the English adult education movement* (London, 1961)
- Haworth, John T. and Veal, A.J. (eds.)**, *Work and leisure* (London, 2004)
- Hendrick, Harry**, *Children, childhood and English society 1880-1990* (Cambridge, 1997)
- Hendrick, Harry**, *Images of youth: age, class, and the male youth problem, 1880-1920* (Oxford, 1990)
- Hill, C. P.**, *British economic and social history 1700-1982* (London, 1985)
- Hill, Jeffrey**, *Sport, leisure and culture in twentieth-century Britain* (Basingstoke, 2002)
- Hoggart, Richard**, *The uses of literacy: aspects of working-class life, with special reference to publications and entertainment.* (London, 1957)
- Holt, Richard**, *Sport and the British: a modern history* (Oxford, 1989)
- Horn, Pamela**, *Labouring life in the Victorian countryside* (Stroud, 1987)

- Horn, Pamela**, *The Victorian and Edwardian schoolchild* (Gloucester, 1989)
- Horn, Pamela**, *The Victorian country child* (Kineton, 1974)
- Howkins, Alun**, *Reshaping rural England. A social history 1850-1925* (London, 1991)
- Howkins, Alun**, *The death of rural England. A social history of the countryside since 1900* (London, 2003)
- Huggins, Mike**, *Flat racing and British society, 1790-1914: a social and economic history* (London, 2000)
- Huggins, Mike** *Horseracing and the British, 1919-39* (Manchester, 2003)
- Huxley, Gervas**, *Lady Denman, G. B. E. 1884-1954* (London, 1961)
- James, Lawrence**, *The middle class, a history* (London, 2006)
- Jenkins, Inez**, *The history of the Women's Institute movement of England and Wales* (Oxford, 1953)
- Jones, Stephen G.**, *Workers at play: a social and economic history of leisure, 1918-1939* (London, 1986).
- Jordan, Arthur and Jordan, Elisabeth**, *Away for the day: the railway excursion in Britain, 1830 to the present day* (Kettering, 1991)
- Kelly, Thomas**, *A history of adult education in Great Britain* (Liverpool, 1992)
- Kertzner, David I. and Laslett, Peter** (eds.), *Aging in the past: demography, society, and old age* (Berkeley, 1995)
- Kift, D.**, *The Victorian music hall: culture, class and conflict* (Cambridge, 1996)
- Kitchen, Penny** (comp.), *For home and country: war, peace and rural life as seen through the pages of the W.I. magazine* (London, 1990)
- Langhamer, C.**, *Women's leisure in England, 1920-1960* (Manchester, 2000)
- Laqueur, Thomas Walter**, *Religion and respectability. Sunday schools and working-class culture, 1780-1850* (London, 1976)
- Lowerson, John and Myerscough, John**, *Time to spare in Victorian England* (Hassocks, 1977)
- Malcolmson, Robert W.**, *Popular recreations in English society, 1700-1850* (Cambridge, 1973)
- Manser, Rodney N.**, *Circus. The development and significance of the circus, past, present and future* (Blackburn, 1987)
- Marx, Karl and Engels, Friedrich**, *Selected works*, vol. 1 (London, 1943)
- Mason, Tony**, *Association Football and English society 1863-1915* (Brighton, 1980)
- Mason, Tony**, (ed.), *Sport in Britain: a social history* (Cambridge, 1989)

- Mathias, Peter**, *The first industrial nation. An economic history of Britain 1700-1914* (London, 1983)
- May, Trevor**, *The economy 1815-1914* (London, 1972)
- McCall, Cicely**, *Women's Institutes* (London, 1943)
- McCrone, Kathleen E.**, *Playing the game: sport and the physical emancipation of English women, 1870-1914* (Lexington, Kentucky, 1988)
- McMillen, Jan**, (ed.), *Gambling cultures: studies in history and interpretation* (London, 1996)
- Mingay, G. E.** (ed.), *The Victorian countryside*, 2 vols. (London, 1981)
- Moor, Edward**, *Suffolk words and phrases: or, an attempt to collect the lingual localisms of that county* (London, 1823)
- Moyse, Cordelia**, *A history of the Mothers' Union. Women, Anglicanism and globalisation, 1876-2008* (Woodbridge, 2009)
- New shorter Oxford English dictionary on historical principles*, 2 vols. (Oxford, 1993)
- Nicholls, James**, *The politics of alcohol: a history of the drink question in England* (Manchester, 2009)
- Orwell, George**, *The Orwell diaries* (London, 2010)
- Parker, Olive**, *For the family's sake. A history of the Mothers' Union 1876-1976* (London, 1975)
- Parratt, Catriona M.**, *'More than mere amusement': working-class women's leisure in England, 1750-1914* (Boston, Mass., 2001)
- Parry, Jim, Robinson, Simon, Watson, Nick and Nesti, Mark**, *Sport and spirituality: an introduction* (Abingdon, 2007)
- Parsons, Gerald and Moore, James Richard**, *Religion in Victorian Britain: sources* (Manchester, 1988)
- Pimlott, J. A. R.**, *The Englishman's holiday, a social history* (London, 1947)
- Pimlott, J. A. R.**, *Recreations* (London, 1968)
- Plunkett, Horace, Pilkington, Ellice and Russell, George**, *The United Irishwomen: their place, work and ideals* (Dublin, 1911)
- Pratt, Edwin A.**, *The organisation of agriculture* (London, 1904)
- Prothero, R. E.** (later Lord Ernle), *English farming past and present* (London, 1912)
- Prothero, R. E.** (later Lord Ernle), *The land and its people. Chapters in rural life and history* (London, [1925])
- Purvis, June**, (ed.), *Women's history: Britain, 1850-1945. An introduction* (London, 1995)

- Reay, Barry**, *Rural Englands, labouring lives in the nineteenth century* (Basingstoke, 2004)
- Ritchie, Andrew**, *King of the road: an illustrated history of cycling* (London, 1975)
- Roberts, Elizabeth**, *A woman's place: an oral history of working class women 1890-1940* (Oxford, 1995)
- Robinson, Jane**, *A force to be reckoned with. A history of the Women's Institute* (London, 2011)
- Samuel, Raphael**, (ed.), *Village life and labour* (London, 1975)
- Sandiford, Keith A. P.**, *Cricket and the Victorians* (Aldershot, 1994)
- Schor, Juliet B.**, *The overworked American: the unexpected decline of leisure* ([New York,] 1991)
- Shiman, Lilian Lewis**, *Crusade against drink in Victorian England* (Basingstoke, 1988).
- Sidaway, Roger**, *Resolving environmental disputes: from conflict to consensus* (London, 2013)
- Simonton, Deborah**, (ed.), *The Routledge history of women in Europe since 1700* (London, 2006)
- Smail, Daniel Lord**, *On deep history and the brain* (Berkeley, 2008)
- Smith, Michael A., Parker, Stanley and Smith, Cyril S.** (eds.), *Leisure and society in Britain* (London, 1973)
- Snell, K. D. M.**, *Annals of the labouring poor: social change and agrarian England, 1660-1900* (Cambridge, 1985)
- Snell, K. D. M.**, *Parish and belonging, community, identity and welfare in England and Wales 1700-1950* (Cambridge, 2006)
- Spalding, Roger and Brown, Alyson** (eds.), *Entertainment, leisure and identities* (Newcastle, 2007)
- Spender, Dale**, *Women of ideas and what men have done to them: from Aphra Behn to Adrienne Rich* (London, 1982)
- Springhall, John**, *Youth, Empire and society. British youth movements 1883-1940* (London, 1977)
- Steinbach, Susie**, *Women in England 1760-1914, a social history* (London, 2005)
- Steinitz, Rebecca**, *Time, space, and gender in the nineteenth-century British diary* (New York, 2011)
- Storch, Robert D.** (ed.), *Popular culture and custom in nineteenth century England* (London, 1982)
- Strange, Julie-Marie**, *Death, grief and poverty in Britain, 1870-1914* (Cambridge, 2005)
- Strutt, Joseph**, *Glig-Gamena Angel-Deod: or the sports and pastimes of the people of England* (London, 1801)

- Taylor, A. J. P.**, *English history, 1914-1945* (Oxford, 1965)
- Tebbutt, Melanie**, *Women's talk. A social history of 'gossip' in working-class neighbourhoods, 1880-1960* (Aldershot, 1995)
- Thane, Pat**, (ed.), *The long history of old age* (London, 2005)
- Thomas, Keith**, *Man and the natural world. Changing attitudes in England 1500-1800* (London, 1984)
- Thompson, E. P.**, *The making of the English working class* (London, 1963)
- Thompson, F. M. L.**, (ed.), *The Cambridge social history of Britain 1750-1950* vol. 2 *People and their environment* vol. 3 *Social agencies and institutions* (Cambridge, 1990)
- Thomson, David**, *England in the nineteenth century, 1815-1914* (Harmondsworth, 1950)
- Tittler, Robert** and **Jones, Norman** (eds.), *A companion to Tudor Britain* (Oxford, 2004)
- Tooke, Jonathan**, *Hidden histories: discovering disability in Norwich's museum collections. A research project for Norfolk Museums & Archaeology Service* (Norwich, 2006)
- Toulmin, Vanessa**, *A fair fight: an illustrated review of boxing on British fairgrounds* (Oldham, 1999)
- Tremlett, George**, *Clubmen. The history of the Working Men's Club and the Institute Union* (London, 1987)
- Trevelyan, George Macaulay**, *English social history. A survey of six centuries from Chaucer to Queen Victoria* (London, 1944)
- Tromp, Marlene**, (ed.), *Victorian freaks. The social context of freakery in Britain* (Columbus, 2008)
- Turner, Mary**, *The women's century. A celebration of changing roles 1900-2000* (Richmond, 2003)
- Verdon, Nicola**, *Rural women workers in nineteenth-century England. Gender, work and wages* (Woodbridge, 2002)
- Vincent, David**, *Literacy and popular culture in England 1750-1914* (Cambridge, 1989)
- Walvin, James**, *Beside the seaside: a social history of the popular seaside holiday* (London, 1978)
- Walvin, James**, *Leisure and society, 1830-1950* (London, 1978)
- Walvin, James**, *The people's game: a social history of British football* (London, 1975)
- White, R. F.** and **Wilson, P. R.** (eds.), *Archaeology and historic landscapes of the Yorkshire dales* (Leeds, 2004)
- Who was who 1929-1940* (London, 1941)

- Wigglesworth, Neil**, *The evolution of English sport* (London, 1996)
- Williams, Jack**, *Cricket and England. A cultural and social history of the inter-war years* (London, 1999)
- Williams, Raymond**, *Culture and society, 1780-1950* (London, 1958)
- Wilson, Adrian**, *Rethinking social history* (Manchester, 1993)
- Wilson, George B.**, *Alcohol and the nation: a contribution to the study of the liquor problem in the U.K. from 1800 to 1935* (London, 1940)
- Yeo, E. and S.** (eds), *Popular culture and class conflict 1590-1914: explorations in the history of labour and leisure* (Brighton, 1981)

c) Articles

- Ambler, R. W.**, 'The transformation of harvest celebrations in nineteenth-century Lincolnshire', *Midland History*, 3 (1976), pp. 298-306
- Anderson, Jack**, 'Pugilistic prosecutions: prize fighting and the courts in nineteenth century Britain', *Sports Historian*, 21:2 (2001), pp. 37-57
- Ausubel, Jesse H. and Grübler, Arnulf**, 'Working less and living longer: long-term trends in working time and time budgets', *Technological Forecasting and Social Change*, 50 (1995), pp. 195-213
- Baker, William**, 'The making of a working-class football culture in Victorian England', *Journal of Social History*, 13:2 (1979), pp. 241-251
- Berridge, Virginia**, 'Temperance: its history and impact on current and future alcohol policy' (York, 2005)
<http://www.jrf.org.uk/sites/files/jrf/1859354203.pdf>
- Bleek, Wolf**, 'Witchcraft, gossip and death: a social drama', *Man*, New Series, 11:4 (1976), pp. 526-541
- Burchardt, Jeremy**, 'Reconstructing the rural community: village halls and the National Council of Social Service, 1919 to 1939', *Rural History*, 10:2 (1999), pp. 193-216
- Burchardt, Jeremy**, 'Rethinking the rural idyll. The English rural community movement, 1913-26', *Cultural and Social History*, 8:1 (2011), pp. 73-94
- Counce, S. A.**, 'The hiring fairs of northern England, 1890-1930: a regional analysis of commercial and social networking in agriculture', *Past & Present*, 217:1 (2012), pp. 213-246
- Dymond, David P.**, 'A lost social institution: the camping close', *Rural History*, 1:2 (1990), pp. 165-192
- Fielden, Kenneth**, 'Samuel Smiles and self-help', *Victorian Studies*, 12:2 (1968), pp. 155-76

- Fisher, Chris**, 'Soame of Marsham', *Journal of the Norfolk Industrial Archaeology Society*, 3:1, (1981)
- Grievess, Keith**, 'Common meeting places and the brightening of rural life: local debates on village halls in Sussex after the First World War', *Rural History*, 10:2 (1999), pp. 171-92
- Griffin, Emma**, 'Popular culture in industrializing England', *Historical Journal*, 45:3 (2002), pp. 619-35
- Harrison, Brian**, 'For Church, Queen and Family: the Girls' Friendly Society 1874-1920', *Past & Present*, 61 (1973), pp. 107-138
- Hilpern, Kate**, 'What lies behind the rise in animal fighting?' *Independent*, 20 October 2007
<http://www.independent.co.uk/environment/nature/what-lies-behind-the-rise-in-animal-fighting-395210.html>
- Howkins, Alun**, 'Arch, Joseph (1826–1919)', *ODNB*
- Johnston, Pamela**, 'Sumner [*née* Heywood], Mary Elizabeth', *ODNB*
- Jones, Deborah**, 'Gossip: notes on women's oral culture', *Women's Studies International Quarterly*, 3:2-3 (1980), pp. 193-198
- Jones, Gareth Stedman**, 'Class expression versus social control? A critique of recent trends in the social history of 'leisure' ', *History Workshop Journal*, 4:1 (1977), pp. 162-170
- Jones, Stephen G.**, 'State intervention in sport and leisure in Britain between the wars', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 22:1 (January 1987), pp. 163-182
- Ketton-Cremer, R. W.**, 'Camping – a forgotten Norfolk game', *Norfolk Archaeology*, 24 (1932), pp. 88-92
- King, Carole**, 'The rise and decline of village reading rooms', *Rural History*, 20:2 (2009), pp. 163-186
- Kneale, James**, 'The place of drink: temperance and the public, 1856-1914', *Social and Cultural Geography*, 2:1 (2001), pp. 43-59
- Lee, Robert**, 'Revolution and restoration: paternalism, distance and dignity in the Victorian church', *Norfolk Archaeology*, 44 (2002), pp. 1-14
- Lewis, Jane**, 'The ideology and politics of birth control in inter-war England', *Women's Studies International Quarterly*, 2:1 (1979), pp. 33-48
- Llewellyn, Matthew P.**, 'The curse of the shamateur', *International Journal of the History of Sport*, 28:5 (2011), pp. 796-816
- MacMaster, Neil**, 'The battle for Mousehold Heath: "Popular politics" and the Victorian public park', *Past & Present*, 127 (1990), pp. 117-154
- Matthews, Jill Julius**, 'They had such a lot of fun: the Women's League of Health and Beauty between the wars', *History Workshop Journal*, 30:1 (1990), pp. 22-54

- Monger, George**, 'Rural community centres. Indicators of social and cultural change', *Folk Life*, 31:1 (1992), pp. 63-76
- Morgan, Maggie**, 'Jam making, Cuthbert Rabbit and cakes: redefining domestic labour in the Women's Institute, 1915-60', *Rural History*, 7:2 (1996), pp. 207-219
- Morriss, A. H.**, 'Cycling in the 1880s', *East Anglian Magazine*, 41 (November 1981), pp. 34-5
- Moses, Gary**, 'Reshaping rural culture? The Church of England and hiring fairs in the East Riding of Yorkshire c. 1850-80', *Rural History* (2002), 13:1, pp. 61-84
- Moses, Gary**, 'Rustic and rude': hiring fairs and their critics in East Yorkshire c. 1850-75', *Rural History* 7:2, (1996), pp. 151-175
- Phibbs, John**, 'The Englishness of Lancelot 'Capability' Brown', *Garden History*, 31:2 (2003), pp. 122-140
- Price, Richard N.**, 'The Working Men's Club movement and the Victorian social reform ideology', *Victorian Studies*, 15:2 (1971), pp. 117-47
- Prochaska, F.**, 'A mother's country: mothers' meetings and family welfare in Britain, 1850-1950', *History*, 74:242 (1989), pp. 379-399
- Purseigle, Pierre**, 'A wave on to our shores': the exile and resettlement of refugees from the Western Front, 1914-1918', *Contemporary European History*, 16:4 (2007), pp. 427-444
- Ross, Ellen**, 'Survival networks: women's neighbourhood sharing in London before World War I', *History Workshop Journal*, 15:1 (1983), pp. 4-28
- Sandiford, Keith**, 'The Victorians at play: problems in historiographical methodology', *Journal of Social History*, 15:2 (Winter 1981), pp. 271-88
- Shiman, Lilian Lewis**, 'The Band of Hope movement: respectable recreation for working-class children', *Victorian Studies*, 17 (1973), pp. 49-74
- Shpayer-Makov, Haia**, 'Relinking work and leisure in late Victorian and Edwardian England: the emergence of a police subculture', *International Review of Social History*, 47:2 (August 2002), pp. 213-241
- Slouka, Mark**, 'Quitting the paint factory: on the virtues of idleness', *Harper's* (November 2004), pp. 57-66
- Snell, K. D. M.**, 'The Sunday-school movement in England and Wales: child labour, denominational control and working-class culture', *Past & Present*, 164:1 (1999), pp. 122-168
- Stacey, W. H.**, 'Some agencies for rural progress in Europe', *American Sociological Society, Progress of Sociology*, 21 (1927), pp. 227-31
- Stamper, Anne**, 'Breaking down social barriers. Women's Institutes in England and Wales, 1915-1935' pp. 1-24

http://www.thewi.org.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0007/11113/breaking-down-social-barriers-the-wi-in-england-and-wales-1915-1935-.pdf

- Stamper, Anne**, 'Education and Women's Institutes', *Adult Education*, 59:1 (1986), pp. 33-38
- Stamper, Anne and Drew, Charlotte**, 'The role of the newly formed Women's Institute in providing for the education and training of countrywomen 1919-1939'. Paper given by Anne Stamper and Charlotte Dew at the study day, 'Education in rural areas in the interwar period', held at the Museum of English Rural Life, Reading University on 17th September 2005. http://www.thewi.org.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0011/11108/the-role-of-the-newly-formed-nfwi-in-providing-education-and-training-1919-1939.pdf
- Stephens, W. B.**, 'Literacy in England, Scotland, and Wales, 1500-1900', *History of Education Quarterly*, 30:4 (1990), pp. 545-571
- Stephens, W. B.**, 'Schooling and literacy in rural England, 1800-1914', *History of Education Quarterly*, 22:1 (1982), pp. 73-82
- Stinchcombe, Owen**, 'Researching village reading rooms', *Local Historian*, 20:4 (1990), pp. 155-57
- Thomas, Keith**, 'New ways revisited. How history's borders have expanded in the past forty years', *Times Literary Supplement*, 13 October 2006, pp. 3-4
- Thomas, Keith**, 'The tools and the job', *Times Literary Supplement*, 7 April 1966, pp. 275-276
- Thompson, E. P.** 'Time, work-discipline, and industrial capitalism', *Past & Present*, 38 (December 1967), pp. 56-97
- Thompson, Leonard P.**, 'Cock-fighting in Norfolk', *East Anglian Magazine*, 7:5 (1942), pp. 268-71
- Thompson, Lynne**, 'The promotion of agricultural education for adults: the Lancashire Federation of Women's Institutes, 1919-45', *Rural History*, 10:2 (1999), pp. 217-234
- Todd, Selina**, 'Young women, work, and leisure in interwar England', *Historical Journal*, 48:3 (September 2005), pp. 789-809
- Toulmin, Vanessa**, '“Local films for local people”: travelling showmen and the commissioning of local films in Great Britain, 1900-1902', *Film History*, 13:2 (2001), pp. 118-137
- Toulmin, Vanessa**, 'Cuckoo in the nest: Edwardian itinerant exhibition practices and the transition to cinema in the United Kingdom from 1901 to 1906', *The Moving Image*, 10:1 (2010), pp. 52-79
- Toulmin, Vanessa**, 'Telling the tale. The story of the fairground bioscope shows and the showmen who operated them', *Film History*, 6:2 (1994), pp. 219-237
- Trentmann, Frank**, 'Civilization and its discontents: English neo-romanticism and the transformation of anti-modernism in twentieth-century western culture', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 29:4 (1994), pp. 583-625

- Turner, Christopher**, 'Barrel organs', British Institute of Organ Studies, *BIOS Reporter*, 21:2 (1997)
<http://www.immanuelsground.com/articles/B-Org1.htm>
- Voluntary Action History Society**, 'Voluntary action of membership organisations: countrywomen organise their own education'
<http://www.vaahs.org.uk/vaahs/papers/vaahs4.pdf>
- Vorspan, Rachel**, '“Rational recreation” and the law: the transformation of popular urban leisure in Victorian England', *McGill Law Journal*, 45:4 (2000), pp. 891-973
- Walton, John K.**, 'The demand for working-class seaside holidays in Victorian England', *The Economic History Review*, new series, 34:2 (1981), pp. 249-265
- Ward, Lorraine**, 'Frederick Savage, Victorian fairground manufacturer of King's Lynn' <http://www.museums.norfolk.gov.uk/view/NCC095974>
- Wasserstrom, Jeffrey N.**, 'New ways in history, 1966–2006', *History Workshop Journal*, 64:1 (2007), pp. 271-294
- Watson, Nick J., Weir, Stuart and Friend, Stephen**, 'The development of muscular Christianity in Victorian Britain and beyond', *Journal of Religion and Society*, 7:1 (2005), pp 1-21
- Whale, John**, 'Daniel Mendoza's contests of identity: masculinity, ethnicity and nation in Georgian prize-fighting', *Romanticism*, 14:3 (2008), pp. 259-271
- Williams, David R.**, 'The Cinematograph Act of 1909: An introduction to the impetus behind the legislation and some early effects', *Film History* 9:4 (1997), pp. 341-350
- Yeomans, Henry**, 'What did the British Temperance Movement accomplish? Attitudes to alcohol, the law and moral regulation', *Sociology*, 45:1 (February 2011), pp. 38-53

d) Dissertations and theses

- Beaumont, Caitriona**, *Women and citizenship: a study of non-feminist women's societies and the women's movement in England, 1928-1950* (Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Warwick, 1996)
http://wrap.warwick.ac.uk/34736/1/WRAP_THESIS_Beaumont_1996.pdf
- Buxton, Clare**, *18th and early 19th century race grounds in Norfolk and Suffolk* (Unpublished M.A. dissertation, University of East Anglia, 2005)
- Cahalan, Peter James**, *The treatment of Belgian refugees in England during the Great War* (Unpublished PhD thesis, McMaster University, Ontario, 1977)
<https://macsphere.mcmaster.ca/handle/11375/15514>
- Clapson, Mark**, *Popular gambling and English culture. 1845-1961* (Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Warwick, 1989)
http://wrap.warwick.ac.uk/2825/1/WRAP_THESIS_Clapson_1989.pdf

- King, Carole**, *The rise and decline of village reading rooms with particular reference to Norfolk* (Unpublished M.A. dissertation, University of East Anglia, 2007)
- Laverick, Alyson**, *The Women's Institute: just jam and Jerusalem?* (Unpublished MA dissertation in Women's Studies, University of Wales, 1990)
- Leonard, M.**, *The Women's Institutes with special reference to the East Kent Federation of Women's Institutes* (Unpublished BA dissertation in Social History and Heritage Studies, University of Kent, 1996)
- Morton, Katherine**, *For Home and Country: the Women's Institute and performances of rurality* (Unpublished BA dissertation, University of Manchester, 2009)
- Pearce, Joanna**, *But is it up to WI standards? Taste and culture within East Sussex Federation of Women's Institutes from 1965-1975* (Unpublished BA dissertation in History of Design, University of Brighton, 1998)
- Sidenius, Jean Hilary**, *A woman's place in the village: an oral history study of working class women's lives between 1890 and 1940 in and around Broadway, Worcestershire* (Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Warwick, 1993)
http://wrap.warwick.ac.uk/36093/1/WRAP_THESIS_Sidenius_1993.pdf
- Stedman, Rex**, *Vox populi. The Norfolk newspaper press, 1760-1900* (Thesis for the Fellowship of the Library Association, 1971)

e) Websites (All retrieved 16 May 2015 unless otherwise specified)

- [http://collection.europarchive.org/ea/20080630092159/;](http://collection.europarchive.org/ea/20080630092159/)
<http://statistics.gov.uk/census2001/bicentenary/pdfs/norfolk.pdf>
Count me in. Census 2001. 200 years of the census in Norfolk (Retrieved 30 September 2014)
- <http://giminghamvillage.weebly.com/village-hall.html> *Gimingham village*
- <http://jemmacelifehistory.co.uk> *Jem Mace*
- <http://maps.nls.uk/os/6inch-england-and-wales/norfolk.html> *Ordnance Survey maps – six-inch England and Wales, 1842 - 1952*
- <http://nipperpatdaly.co.uk> *Nipper Pat Daly – Boxing wonderboy*
- http://phreeque.tripod.com/mary_ann_bevans.html *Mary Ann Bevans*
- <http://specialcollections.le.ac.uk/cdm/map/collection/p16445coll4>
Historical directories of England and Wales
- <http://www.carnegieuktrust.org.uk/who-we-are/history> *Carnegie UK Trust*
- <http://www.fairground-heritage.org.uk/newsite/learn/learn-freaks.html> *Freak unique – a potted history of fairground oddities*
- <http://www.fakenhamracecourse.co.uk/racing/history> *Fakenham racecourse*

Bibliography

- <http://www.francisfrith.com/uk/locations/wiggenhall-st-germans/memories/beginning-of-the-great-wiggenhall-wanderers-149237910>
A memory of Wiggenhall St Germans
- <http://www.gfsplatform.org.uk/our-history.php>
GFS (Girls' Friendly Society) Platform
- <http://www.heritagecity.org/research-centre/at-leisure-in-norwich/the-circus-in-nineteenth-century-norwich.htm> *The circus in nineteenth century Norwich*
- <http://www.heritagecity.org/research-centre/cultural-superlatives/norwich-city-football-club.htm> *Norwich City Football Club*
- <http://www.hilgaysilverband.co.uk/about-the-band.htm> *Hilgay Silver Band*
- <http://www.historicaldirectories.org>
- <http://www.history.ac.uk/cmh/gaz/gazweb2.html> *Gazetteer of markets and fairs in England and Wales to 1516*
- <http://www.historyofwatton.org.uk> *History of Watton*
- <http://www.horseracingresults.co.uk/racecourse/Yarmouth> *Racecourses – Yarmouth*
- <http://www.ibew.org.uk/link01.htm> *Internet bandsman's everything within (IBEW)*
- <http://www.imagesofengland.org.uk> *Images of England*
- <http://www.linkedin.com/company/national-sporting-club> *The National Sporting Club*
- http://www.loddonband.org/index_files/Page358.htm *Loddon Band*
- <http://www.methodist-central-hall.org.uk/history/THEPRIMITIVEMETHODISTS.pdf>
History of the Primitive Methodists (Retrieved 30 September 2014)
- <http://www.mothersunion.org/media-centre/our-history>
Mothers' Union – our history
- <http://www.mundus.ac.uk> *Mundus – gateway to missionary collections in the UK*
- <http://www.norfolkbrass.co.uk> (Retrieved 30 September 2014) *Norfolk brass bands*
- <http://www.norfolkchurches.co.uk/norfolkorgans2.htm> *Gazetteer of organs in Norfolk*
- <http://www.norfolk-on-line.co.uk/snettisham/pages/memorialhall.php> *Snettisham Memorial Hall*
- http://www.northwalshamarchive.co.uk/archive_item.aspx?entry_id=76
North Walsham Salvation Army Band, 1902
- <http://www.overstrandonline.org/#/first-cricket-team-golf-days/4564122315>
First cricket team and golf days, Overstrand
- <http://www.picture.norfolk.gov.uk> *Picture Norfolk*
- <http://www.poppyland.co.uk/index.php?s=ATTLEBOROUGH> *Attleborough*

Bibliography

- <http://www.poppylane.co.uk/index.php?s=DISS> *Diss*
- <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200910/cmselect/cmhealth/151/15106.htm#n11> *History of alcohol consumption*
- <http://www.qualidata.ac.uk/edwardians/search/interview.asp?id=230.asp> (Retrieved 30 September 2014) *Interview number 230, Mrs Grace Bessie B, year of birth 1901*
- <http://www.ramblers.org.uk/about-us/our-history.aspx> *Ramblers – our history*
- <http://www.theguardian.com/uk/1932/apr/25/1> *Mass trespass on Kinder Scout*
- <http://www.thewi.org.uk/about-the-wi> *About the WI*
- http://www.traditionalmusic.co.uk/song-midis/Manchester_Rambler.htm
Manchester Rambler
- <http://www.twjc.co.uk/books/thecircusbook.html>. (Retrieved 30 September 2014)
The circus book
- <http://www.vam.ac.uk/content/articles/d/development-of-circus-acts/>
The development of circus acts
- <http://www.vam.ac.uk/content/articles/t/tom-thumb> *Tom Thumb*
- <http://www.vam.ac.uk/content/articles/v/victorian-circus/> *Victorian circus*
- <http://www.visionofbritain.org.uk> *A vision of Britain through time*
- http://www.whissonsett.com/village_history *History of Whissonsett*
- <http://www.wivesfellowship.org.uk/about-us/the-history-of-the-wives-fellowship>
The history of the Wives' Fellowship
- <https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/nfa/researchandarticles/boxingbooth> *History of the boxing booth*
- <https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/nfa/researchandarticles/freakshows> *History of freak shows*