A HISTORY of the SCOTTISH PEOPLE

LEISURE IN SCOTLAND 1840-1940

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This is Chapter 6 of 10. The others are:

Summary of Economy & Society, Education, Employment, Health, Housing, Income, Migration, Religion, Transport

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THE GROWTH AND COMMERCIALISATION OF LEISURE IN SCOTLAND 1840-1940

1.INTRODUCTION

Before examining the historical development of leisure a number of considerations governing the extent to which it is available and the level of participation in it have to be appreciated.

1. The consumption of leisure or recreation is determined by the hours of work and the standard of living. If people are poor and have to work long hours then leisure can only be something the elite in society can participate in. A mass leisure industry needs a population with enough free time and money to enjoy it.

2. Membership of social classes determines to a large extent the type and character of leisure activities. An obvious example is how rugby in Scotland has traditionally been seen as a middle-class sport, while football was working class until very recently.

3. Leisure has an association with place. Sports and pastimes are very different in the countryside than in towns, where space and order are important considerations in the types of permissible recreational activities.

4. Leisure has always been subject to some form or other of social control. The middle classes and the churches have, with varying degrees of success, attempted to exercise control over the recreational habits of the working classes.

5. Leisure has been important in creating a national consciousness, of making people feel they have more in common with those in other parts of the country. With the rise of popular newspapers and, particularly, the cinema and radio, people from all over Britain were discussing the same stories, the same programmes, or the same film. This brought people together.

Leisure, therefore, is not simply a matter of people exercising a preference over how to spend their free time, it impacts itself on society at a whole variety of levels.

Historically, leisure appears to have gone through three distinct phases of development. In the initial stages there was the pre-industrial 'rough culture' drunkenness, blood-sports and community games of a riotous nature and uncertain duration. Then there was an assault in the second half of the 19^{th} century by the middle classes and the churches on the leisure pursuits of the older society. They were seen as a threat to public order and Christian morality. More rational forms of recreation were promoted by these bodies for the lower orders. Subsequently there was the commercialisation of leisure in the late 1900s which led to the creation of a culture of mass entertainment rather than participation. Professionalism replaced amateurism.

2. LEISURE IN PRE-INDUSTRIAL SCOTLAND

To speak of leisure in the way we know it today, or even as it developed in the 19th century, would be misleading for this period. The Calvinistic revolution of the 17th century allowed the religious authorities to stamp out what they considered to be impieties and profanities. Christmas and other feast days associated with Catholicism which had allowed for more public holidays were swept away as popish follies. Work and prayer seemed to be the order of the day. However, the common people used weddings and funerals as excuses to let their hair down for several days at a time. Fairs and hiring markets for agricultural servants also provided excuses for drunkenness and promiscuity.

Gradually during the 18th century the Church relaxed its position. Among them middle classes social clubs grew in popularity as did the theatre. Race meetings attracted a following in the 1790s and towns, such as Ayr, Kelso and Edinburgh, established their own regular meetings. Dancing was popular from the 1770s among the better off. At the same time interest in blood-sports grew. Cock-fighting drew large audiences as did bare-fisted fighting. Games such as football tended towards violence and riot as sides were seemingly unlimited in terms of the number of players involved. The games were not subject to time limits and went on until people were exhausted or bored.

However, while leisure was being enjoyed to a greater extent by the middle classes, those in the ranks of the working classes were less fortunate. From the 1780s onwards they were increasingly subject to longer hours of work and more intensive forms of industrial discipline. A population used to working in the fields or in their homes had their working lives controlled by one of two things - nature or their preference for earning as opposed to spending. But industrial changes brought the need for a more disciplined labour force in the workshops and factories. Employers, therefore, acted to prevent workers from leaving their place of employment during working hours and to get them to apply themselves more rigorously to their tasks. The movement of people away from rural areas to the towns and cities deprived them of space and this resulted in the outlawing of popular community games of the pre-industrial order. As early as 1814, a ranger was appointed in Glasgow to keep ball games off Glasgow Green and to disperse crowds of noisy young people.

Penny theatres, although popular with the working classes, also drew the opprobrium of the respectable middle classes. In Glasgow, the Saltmarket/Jail Square area abounded with these establishments, offering cheap entertainment and alcohol which, according to one minister, were by-words for drunkenness, prostitution and every other vice imaginable. They were also very unsafe and the last major one (Anderson's City Theatre) burned down in 1848. Supplementing the penny theatres was the annual fair, another event subjected to religious condemnation. The Glasgow, or St Mungo's, Fair had been established in the 15th century as a religious celebration However, by the first half of the 19th century it was 'reduced to a day or two celebrated in blind drunkenness', attracting showmen, circuses, and freak shows from all over Britain.

Thus, while concern for public order was growing in the cities and industrial discipline was being imposed in the workplace with greater ferocity, the disorder and violence of the 'rough culture' continued to persist into the 1830s and 1840s. Part of the problem was the easy access to drink. The replacement of porter and stout by whisky provided a cheap route to oblivion and Scots applied themselves with dedication. Most of the drinking was done in licensed premises and they proliferated with remarkable speed throughout Scotland. Edinburgh, according to WH Fraser, had one pub per 30 families; Dundee had one for every 24 families; and Glasgow one for every 150 inhabitants. The idea of a pub on every street corner was more than just an alcoholic's fantasy. Young and old, men and women, all enjoyed a tipple sometimes with devastating effects. Sheriff Watson of Aberdeen recalled in 1831 a scene on New Year's Day, saying: "It is a pity there is no rational amusement for the operatives than idle by such a day. They have no enjoyment but whisky-drinking - old and middle aged men and women and boys and girls falling about in a state of intoxication at two o'clock [in the afternoon]."

Drunkenness, disorder and immorality all surrounded the social habits and pastimes of the lower orders and it was this 'rough culture' which faced a massive cultural assault from the churches and the middle classes in the mid-Victorian period.

3. THE GROWTH OF RATIONAL RECREATION

While patterns of leisure associated with pre-industrial society came under attack from the middle classes, there was also an increasing rejection of the rougher elements of the older culture by a large body of skilled workers. Total Abstinence Societies emerged in the 1840s and were associated with the Chartist movement. Moreover, as wages increased after 1850 and hours of work began to decrease many artisans moved away from pub life to home life. Sporting pastimes such as golf, bowling and quoits became popular with this stratum of Scottish society.

Both the state and employers played an important part in the process of redrawing the boundaries of respectable behaviour, particularly concerning drinking. Temperance lodges were set up in industrial plants, such as the Gartsherrie and Calderbank iron works in Lanarkshire. The Forbes/MacKenzie Act of 1853 introduced Sunday closing of licensed premises, although hotels were still permitted to sell alcohol on Sundays. On top of this,Temperance Societies, such as the Independent Order of Good Templars, were set up all over Scotland. Indeed, the Airdrie branch of the Templars with 4,000 members was the largest Temperance Lodge in the world. The working-class leadership, however, had given way to the middle-classes. These societies offered alternative entertainment in the form of concerts and soirees. The Good Templars ran amateur night talent contests, which were very popular, while the Abstainer's Union in Glasgow employed professional entertainers.

It was one thing to condemn drink, it was another to find something to take its place. A variety of approaches as part of the drive for more rational forms of recreation were used to draw the lower orders out of the world of drink and drunkenness. Recreation was to be used to prepare the mind and body for work, instead of simply being an end in itself. One initiative was the public parks movement which offered family recreation and a chance for social intercourse to take place between 'superior' and 'subordinate' classes. The opening of libraries, art galleries and museums, usually bank-rolled by wealthy philantropists, provided opportunities for self-improvement and education for workers. For young men of working-class origin organised sports, such as cricket and rowing, were introduced to draw them away 'from public houses and other evil devices', in the words of the Wishaw Cricket Club founders in 1856. The muscular Christianity preached by Thomas Arnold of Rugby School in England caught on in Scotland and middle class schools began to offer sports as part of the curriculum to their pupils.

For the less active the churches offered a massive range of clubs, missions and societies in which to spend one's spare time. There were bible classes, Sunday schools, mothers' kitchen prayer meetings, gospel temperance societies, and from the early 1880s the Boys Brigade. For those wishing less organised and arduous forms of recreation, promenading up and down the streets of the town was popular as it cost nothing and allowed young men and women to meet and form relationships.

The railways and steamships had an impact on leisure as travel to the seaside for holidays became more possible. Railways facilitated the rise of a newspaper-reading public and did much to encourage a sense of national identity. The growth of Clyde coastal resorts, by providing away days for workers in the west of Scotland, was also significant. By the 1870s going 'doon the watter' was an annual feature of working class life in Glasgow and the west of Scotland. However, many of the steamships offering a trip on the water were also floating public bars. At the end of the trip many day-trippers were worse for wear, as the drink took its toll.

By the 1880s leisure was becoming a much more controlled activity as drinking declined or, at least, was pushed more behind closed doors. Sports, games and pastimes became highly organised and their rules codified. However, the emphasis was still placed on participation rather than entertainment. Apart from the theatre, people in Scotland had to find ways of amusing and entertaining themselves. Unfortunately, this meant in many cases shebeens and brothels. Elspeth King, drawing on an article in the North British Daily Mail on the 'dark side of Glasgow', estimated that in the old city centre district there were 200 brothels and 150 shebeens in the early 1870s. Thus, in spite of the work of middle class reformers and the state, aspects of the old culture still remained.

4. THE COMMERCIALISATION OF LEISURE

From the 1880s the notion of guilt began to be taken out of fun. Free time was no longer viewed as a standing invitation for vice. The commercial exploitation of a mass market for leisure was responsible for this, as commercial concerns gradually replaced moral ones in the provision of recreation. One of the consequences of this was that, over time, the middle classes found it more difficult to control leisure. For much of the 20th century the focus of the conflict over recreation has been between freedom of choice and censorship.

4.1 FOOTBALL

The first signs of the coming of the mass market were signaled in the professionalisation of sport. Football was in the vanguard of change. The game had developed in the public schools of England as a reaction to the popular football of the pre-industrial era, and the rules were written down between 1845-1862. The reduction in working hours after 1850 saw workers take part in ever greater numbers. Many of the first club sides were works teams or were set up religious bodies. The first Scottish club was Queen's Park formed in 1867, but the take-off period was the 1880s. Celtic FC was formed by the Marist brother Wilfrid in 1887, who a few years before had formed Hibernian FC in Edinburgh. Celtic were the moving force behind the formation of the Scottish League, and that event not only created regular fixtures, but paved the way for professionalism, which was legalised in Scotland in 1893. This development reflected the way that society had polarised along class lines, with the middle classes still adhering to the amateur basis of sport, and the working class embracing the new professionalism. The demand for football quickly became immense with large crowds of spectators. This not only created public order concerns among the authorities, but the large crowds also made handsome profits for the owners of the clubs. Celtic returned a profit of £16,000 in 1898. Indeed, Glasgow produced the highest attendances at football matches in Britain before 1914. Encouraged by sectarian loyalties, people turned up in vast numbers to watch Celtic and Rangers play. In 1912 at Parkhead 74,000 turned up at one game and 65,000 attended a game at Ibrox in 1913. Although few club sides had this special appeal, ground capacities in the absence of attendance figures show that small clubs, such as Partick Thistle, had large expectations with space for 53,700 spectators.

4.2 MUSIC HALLS, THEATRES AND CINEMAS

Football was a man's game and women were conspicuous by their absence. However, other forms of entertainment flourished in this period which drew in the whole family, not just the male breadwinner. The music hall replaced the amateur concert party and was dominated by Moss Empires, with a string of theatres the length and breadth of Britain. The new theatres were alcohol free and concentrated on family entertainment. As such they were designed to appeal to the middle classes as much as the working classes. However, it was the latter who were the mainstay of the music hall. All the acts were performed by professional entertainers, further encouraging the passive nature of recreation.

The popularity of the music hall was soon challenged by the cinema. From 1896 cinemas began to be established in most Scottish towns and cities. The first purpose-built cinema in Scotland was the Electric Theatre in Sauchiehall Street, Glasgow, in 1910,. Within four years there were over twenty cinemas in Glasgow alone. By 1939 Glasgow had 114 cinemas with a seating capacity in excess of 175,000 - more cinema seats per head of population than any other city in the world.

The average Glaswegian went to the cinema around 51 times a year, while the figure for Scotland as a whole was 35, and for England 21. A survey, highlighted by CG Brown, of 8,000 West Lothian school children in 1937 shows that 36% attended the cinema once a week, 25% attended more than once a week, and only 6% never attended. The cheapness of entry also allowed the unemployed to attend. The Carnegie Trust found that in the 1930s, 80% of the young unemployed went to the pictures once a week. the cinema was condemned by school authorities as much as by the Labour Party for its cheap, sentimental content. Glasgow Parish Council in a private investigation of picture house in 1908 claimed that:

"The audience in all cases is representative of the lower working class and comprises all ages, from the unwanted infant in its dirty mother's arms to the elderly. I have also seen a few bookies' runners in those places."

But as the quality of the films improved the popularity of the cinema grew. Accordingly the cinema began to appeal to a wide spectrum of society. As a result, as early as 1925, there was perceived to be a need for some form of censorship to protect the morals of the younger generation.

4.3 LOCAL COUNCIL LEISURE FACILITIES

The provision of services by local councils, such as libraries and museums, was gradually diversified. They began to act as major providers of leisure services.

Public swimming baths and the extension of sporting facilities, such as municipal cricket and football pitches, were built. Glasgow Council opened its first swimming baths in Greenhead Street in 1878 By 1902 nine more had been built in different parts of Glasgow. By 1914 the Parks Department in Glasgow was responsible for an area of 1,561 acres and employed 350 people. There were also 22 council-owned concert halls by this date, providing alcohol free entertainment.

4.4 REGULATION OF LEISURE OPPORTUNITIES

However, local government was more prominent in the role of promoting order. From 1892 the Burgh Police (Scotland) Act provided the legal means for local authorities to interfere with practically all forms of recreational activity. In 1901 in Glasgow standing audiences were banned in theatres; children were prevented from entering billiard halls; playgrounds were subject to greater regulation. Regulation of licensing hours also became more stringent, with 10pm closing from the 1st World War and in some places even earlier.

5 INTER-WAR LEISURE MANIA

5.1 BETTING

Much of the panoply of control was aimed at regulating the morals of the young and the working classes. Gambling was the source of greatest concern. Betting on horse-racing became a popular pastime in 19th century Scotland, mainly due to the gambling laws being much less strict north of the border. The arrival of the 'football pools', gaming machines and, particularly, dog racing, after the 1st World War only increased the gambling mania among workers. Even the unemployment of the inter-War years did not diminish the passion for betting.

A Dundonian recalled that, in spite of mass unemployment, the 1930s were "surprisingly a good time for bookies ... The Howff, with as many as 400 punters in it at times was nicknamed the Paddock". Most of the betting was illegal and run by street bookmakers. Convictions for this activity rose from 141 in 1922 in Edinburgh to 303 in 1932. In Glasgow the situation was much worse with 2,759 recorded cases of betting offences in 1930 - two-thirds of the Scottish total.

There were 22 dog-racing tracks in Scotland by 1932 and whippet-keeping and racing were popular among the miners in Lanarkshire. Given the level of popularity of this kind of activity the state eventually gave up its attempt to suppress it and opted, as it had done with alcohol, to regulate it.

5.2 DANCING

The other mania of the inter-War years was 'dancing'. Indeed, it was said of Glasgow that it was 'dancing daft' with 159 registered dance halls in 1934. The radio also came into most homes and was important in raising standards of entertainment and thus furthering the trend towards professional entertainment, as well as a national consciousness.

5.3 OTHER RECREATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

The old ethos of self-improvement which had dominated 19th century recreational activity did not die out. The labour movement, which took a dim view of professional sport, dance halls and the cinema, offered healthy and wholesome alternatives. Socialist choirs, rambling clubs, art and reading circles, football leagues, girls' handicraft classes, and more, were set up in this period. But not all activities of this kind among workers were sponsored by the labour movement. Hill-walking and mountain climbing, the preserve of the rich in the 19th century, was taken up by the unemployed of the west of Scotland. Clubs, such as Craig Dhu and Lomonds, sprung up in the 1930s. Cycling was also hugely popular. Glasgow experienced a cycling craze in the later 1890s with 42 clubs in 1897. The unemployment of the inter-War years in no way diminished enthusiasm for the sport. In Dundee, it was said that on Saturday afternoons in the 1930s 'like great flocks of colourful birds congregating in preparation for migrating the cycling clubs gathered ... at the imposing gates of Camperdown Park'.

Faced with these encroachments into recreation from secular, commercial interests and socialist organisations, religious-inspired leisure activities began to decline. The Sunday School movement, which claimed 53% of all Scottish children in the age group 5-15 in 1900, saw that figure fall to 38% in 1931. Temperance organisations declined in influence and numbers after the failure to win a plebiscite in 1920 about introducing 'dry areas' in Scottish burghs. Alcohol consumption declined in spite of this as a result of higher duties and restricted hours of opening. The only religious organisations to see a rise in numbers were those catering for young people and offering sports. Following its introduction of Saturday football leagues in 1893, the Boys Brigade saw its membership grow from 12,796 in 1900 to 35,922 in 1934.

The transformation in leisure had taken place mainly because of the forces of commercialisation. The process, however, was never complete as aspects of the older culture survived into the 1920s and 1930s. The commercial sector had to compete with the still popular activities which attached themselves to the ethos of self-improvement or those that were provided by local authorities. But much of what might be considered recreation was unstructured; women gossiping on stairs or at their doors; children playing street games; people just congregating in groups talking. Indeed, life was lived on the streets to a degree inconceivable today.

However, the commercial sector became increasingly dominant. This initially posed problems of control for the middle classes and the churches. The knee-jerk reaction was to suppress what seemed unrespectable and/or a threat to public order. But gradually suppression gave way to a policy of control through the legal process or through quasi-official bodies. The upshot was the creation of a more passive form entertainment - spectacle rather than participation became the order of the day.

After the 1940s the arrival of television and, later, videos and home computers, meant that the processes of commercialisation and control were almost complete. Even in the area of games and sports activities were expert-centred. By 1988, 65% of all voluntary sporting activities were being organised by coaches and youth leaders. It is only aspects of the youth culture which remain free from commericialism and control by the state. However, as we have seen in the case of the hippy movement in the 1960s and the mods and rockers in the 1970s, they too succumb in time to the forces of commercialisation and order.

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