

Manchester Pedestrianism 1840-1880: A Collective Biography of 'Sporting Publicans'

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19th Century Manchester

Public houses in England throughout the nineteenth century provided many men with an alternative environment to the workplace. In particular, as the countryside and fields became developed, 'foot-racing' or pedestrianism became a public house affair with publicans becoming promoters and persuading individuals to compete near their facilities (Collins & Vamplew, 2002). The symbiotic relationship between entrepreneurial sportsmen and public houses has long been noted and there are abundant examples in the literature of individuals who combined their sporting activities with the role of licensee. However, these biographies are often sketchy in nature and there is a clear need for more comprehensive collective biographical studies of these men.

Prosopography

The term 'prosopography' has only been around since the 1920's, although the method has been established a lot longer than the word (Barnes, 1983). Prosopography originated in the early nineteenth century, being first used as a method to study the Ancient World (Verboven, Carlier & Dumolyn, 2007).

"Prosopography is a modern word for the study of individual persons in a larger context" (Keats-Rohan, 2007, p. 4).

The prosopographical method discusses persons according to name, establishing social context of groups, such as ethnic and regional origin, family connections and careers, traditionally linking these individuals to a variety of objects however, "'new' prosopography is equally concerned with the networks of which each individual forms a part" (Keats-Rohan, 2007, p. 13). This 'new' prosopography benefits from the computer age; new techniques and advancements has caused changes in historical thinking (Smythe, 2000).

Two Commonly Used Forms of Prosopography

1. 'Elite' prosopography involves the study of a small group of 'great' individuals, "conveying a sense of historical reality by a series of detailed case studies" (Stone, 1981, p.47)
2. 'Mass' prosopography is more concerned with social trends and social mobility, examining social ties and connections between people to help explain ideological or cultural change (Keats-Rohan, 2007), examining surviving evidence relating to persons of lower social status common to all historical periods (Tinti, 2006); the latter being used in this study

This research will produce a collective biography, following the creation of individual biographies produced using 19th Century national and local newspaper and periodical archives, photographs, census material, contemporary maps, and local and family histories (Denzin, 1989). The analysis of this data contextualises historical processes in a specific environment, highlighting the differing roles that publicans adopted within the Manchester pedestrian community.

Prosopography is the investigation of the common background characteristics of a group of actors in history by means of a collective study of their lives. The method employed is to establish a universe to be studied, and then to ask a set of uniform questions – about birth and death, marriage and family, social origins and inherited economic position, place of residence, education, amount and source of personal wealth, occupation, religion, experience of office and so on (Stone, 1971, p. 48).

The researcher has already selected on professions (publicans) and geographic location (Manchester) as initial defining features of the group. Stone (1987) defined these cohesive traits in terms of social phenomena; "gender, class, education, personal interests, religious belief, politics, attitudes, prejudices, ideals, economic interests, business enterprise, public activities..." (p. 46). Nevertheless, there are further avenues to explore including social structures, origins and economic classes (Shephard, 1992; Poulsen, 2004), with developments on previous research to be expected.

An Exemplar - James Holden

Born circa 1799, James Holden was reputable within Manchester's pedestrian faction, being noted as "the great stakeholder in Lancashire pedestrianism" (The Era, 1843). Owner of the White Lion, Long Millgate, his establishment became a well-recognised pedestrian haunt during his reign of over 35 years; newspapers printed his name and pub as a place to congregate (Bell's Life in London and Sporting Chronicle, 1838), for stakes to be held (Bell's Life in London and Sporting Chronicle, 1859), and sporting bodies to hold important meetings (New York Clipper, 1865).



Artist's impression of The White Lion, Long Millgate in 1877

James was not only renowned for his public house, he became involved in pedestrianism himself as a referee, judge and stakeholder (Bell's Life in London and Sporting Chronicle, 1854). By 1871 he had moved from the White Lion to an establishment in Salford, The Custom House Hotel, and very much retired from the pedestrian scene, although being spotted at various grounds in Manchester until his death circa 1880.

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Public houses in England throughout the nineteenth century provided many men with an alternative environment to the workplace. In particular, as the countryside and fields became developed, 'foot-racing' or pedestrianism became a public house affair with publicans becoming promoters and persuading individuals to compete near their facilities (Collins & Vamplew, 2002). The symbiotic relationship between entrepreneurial sportsmen and public houses has long been noted and there are abundant examples in the literature of individuals who combined their sporting activities with the role of licensee. However, these biographies are often sketchy in nature and there is a clear need for more comprehensive collective biographical studies of these men. A compilation of in-depth biographies, a methodology called prosopography, would help tease out their common characteristics, such as gender, class, education, personal interests, and religious beliefs (Stone, 1987). This paper uses the prosopographical approach, to produce a collective biography, "carefully gathered biographical data on a group of individuals with common characteristics" (Erard & Bancel, 2007, p. 67), and to contextualise historical processes in a specific environment, of a mid 19th Century Manchester publican with a strong involvement in local pedestrianism. An initial group of five publicans has been investigated and it is clear that while there are commonalities with respect to their sporting backgrounds, age, class and family, there are also differences, notably with respect to their sporting roles within Manchester pedestrian circles.

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