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Abstract

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. 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. This paper uses the prosopographical approach, to produce a collective biography, "carefully gathered biographical data on a group of individuals with common characteristics", 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.

19th Century Manchester

Public houses throughout the nineteenth century provided many men with an alternative environment to the workplace (Girouard, 1975). Harrison (1967) notes, "it was the sporting aristocrat and the publican...who, for the vast majority of the population, filled the recreational gap created by the decline of old leisure patterns" (p. 38), caused primarily by increased working hours and a reduction in free time, and by the 1870s, the pub was an established regular leisure activity for the masses, who were experiencing better standards of living and greater disposable incomes. Collins and Vamplew (2000) suggest "the promotion by landlords of sports involving human physical activity, such as pedestrianism, bowls and cricket, also laid the basis for alternative routes for the pursuit of leisure" (p. 4), providing excessive alcohol consumption, wagering (although the Betting Houses Act of 1853 encouraged illegal betting) and entertainment for the Victorian community (Lile, 2000).

'Foot-racing' or pedestrianism became a public house affair; as the countryside and fields became developed, the publicans became promoters, persuading individuals to compete near their facilities (Collins & Vamplew, 2002). "While appearing saviours of the sport on the one hand, (innkeepers) were also fully aware of the profit-making potential of such an enterprise" (Lile, 2000, p. 95), and from the 1840s publicans arranged and financed pedestrian events, knowing that spectators, sometimes in their thousands, would pay to view the match and then attend the prize-giving afterwards (Vincent, 2001).

The publican was even more essential to the survival of athletics in large cities. Attached to many urban hotels were open fields, some of which 'had been enclosed for a specific sporting purpose'" (Vincent, 2001, p. 45). While many of these London, Birmingham and Liverpool pubs have been well documented, Mutch (2003) considers that the history of Mancunian pubs is limited and that this is an area much in need of further exploration.

Although the issue of entrepreneurial sportsmen and their relationship to public houses has not been directly addressed there are abundant examples in the literature of individuals who combined their sporting activities with the role of licensee. In London in the 1840s, prizefighter Young Dutch Sam gave lessons at *The Black Lion*, which was “patronized by the friends of boxing and athletic sports in general” while Frank Redmond, at *The Swiss Cottage*, entertained all the “celebrated pedestrians” (Dowling, 1841, p. 271-272). Professional swimmer Frederick Beckwith was, variously, landlord of *The Leander*, *The Good Intent* and *The Kings Head*, all in Lambeth, between 1850 and 1877 (Day, 2008), while *The Feathers* in Wandsworth, run by rower J.H. Clasper, was popular with both scullers and swimmers (Bell’s Life in London Sporting Chronicle, 1878).

Outside of London, “peds” owned and frequented specific pubs. In 1855, pedestrian trainer James Greaves took over the *Ring of Bells* where anyone attending foot races in Sheffield area would “meet with every accommodation” (Bell’s Life in London Sporting Chronicle, 1855, p. 6). The professional mile record, set in a dead-heat at Manchester in August 1865, was established by William ‘Crowcatcher’ Lang, host of the *Black Horse* in Oldham Road, Manchester, and William ‘The Welshman’ Richards, landlord of the *Navigation Inn* in nearby Anscotts Road (Hadgraft, 2006). Trainer “Choppy” Warburton, born James Edward, was already an accomplished runner when he became landlord of *The Fisher’s Arms* in Blackburn in 1877 (Watson, 2006).

These are isolated biographies that stand alone and are often sketchy in nature. There is a clear need for more comprehensive collective biographical studies of these men. A collection of such biographies that explored these lives in more depth would be able to tease out common characteristics of the individual.

Prosopography

The term ‘prosopography’ has only been with us 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); with many prosopographical studies being focused on Mediaeval, Roman and Byzantine communities.

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 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).

There are two commonly used forms of prosopography; elite and mass. ‘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) whereas ‘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 (supported by 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.

Commonness is imperative to this method; the unique are of no importance as the average represents the collective, enabling common characteristics and unique traits of the group to be established in relation to the historical situ (Stone, 1971).

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 of the individuals (Shephard, 1992; Poulsen, 2004), with developments on previous research to be expected.

Biography and Prosopography

Prosopography produces biographical dossiers, not biographies. The manual authors call these biographical dossiers the ‘collective biography’.

Biography, autobiography and collective biography are focused upon individuals and all details of their lives. Prosopography, by contrast, is impersonal: prosopographers are only interested in individuals in so far as they relate to groups of connected persons sharing one or more common characteristic.

Dougherty illustrates this particularly well...standard biographical details - dates of birth and death, details of parentage and affinity – are added to details of professional training and careers to yield a very revealing account of the origins of the modern engineering profession. Prosopography as a comparative method emerges clearly from such studies (Keats-Rohan, 2007, p. 16).

Decisions about how to apply prosopography will be different in every case because sources differ from period to period, the questions of interest differ from historian to historian, and the available methods, or techniques, for data analysis continue to evolve (Keats-Rohan, 2007, p. 20).

Example Profile - 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 45 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).

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), being spotted at various grounds in Manchester until his death in 1865.