

# THE CATHOLIC WHIT-WALK IN MANCHESTER AND SALFORD

1890 — 1939<sup>1</sup>

Steve Fielding

Soon the square was awash with the agitation of ... restless youth and colour, the wind taking the banners and filling them out like bellied sails, and making the veils to stream and the slender shepherds' crooks, tufted with posies, to sway like beds of blown flowers. ... All round that animated picture the black facades of Manchester raised their monstrous unscalable walls, so that it seemed as though the exercise yard of a prison had for once been taken over for a riot of joy.<sup>2</sup>

As we grew into the city our unprejudiced and innocent acceptance of the gaiety and pageantry of the Walks became corroded. We began to be aware of the rivalry which existed between "them" and "us", especially in the matter of weather. We overheard ominous pronouncements, "Them dresses'll be in the pawnshop b'3 o'clock!" We were aware of some subtle social distinction between those who walked and those who did not.<sup>3</sup>

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Manchester and Salford (hereafter 'Manchester') are not associated with the sectarian hostilities that plagued Liverpool and Glasgow during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. There was, however, a substantial number of Irish-born Catholics and those second and third generation immigrants who considered themselves to be equally Irish. Occupational structure, the weakness of Orangeism and the smaller Irish population played their part in Manchester's relatively subdued sectarian antagonism. Perhaps more important has been the historian's seduction by the exotic experience of Liverpool and Glasgow, an experience which marks them out as having more in common with Belfast than any other British city.<sup>4</sup> Most discussion of the Irish in Britain is almost inevitably drawn to these two cities to the exclusion of all others (perhaps London is an exception). There is also a general neglect of Manchester's history after 1850, as if the city ceased to be important after cotton began to lose its economic dynamism. The absence of any sectarian hostility in Manchester is therefore more apparent than real.

Though there were fewer Irish-born, concentration of numbers had, since mid-century, promoted the evolution and continued existence of vibrant centres of Irish and Catholic life in certain areas of north Manchester, Hulme and Ordsall.<sup>5</sup> The Irish were part of the already complicated patterns and social identities and practices called, for convenience, 'working-class culture'. The Catholic congregations were essentially proletarian and the Church had established alternative leisure and welfare institutions for its adherents. Despite this, any study of this period should emphasise co-existence rather than confrontation. There were no ghettos and even in the areas of greatest Irish concentration, streets were mixed; both English and Irish shared the same informal support networks which were vital to working-class domestic life; street gangs were composed of juveniles of

both nationalities whilst they also attended the same lads' clubs; mixed marriages, though they often caused upset within families, frequently occurred. Nevertheless this was a co-existence periodically disrupted and overturned. Among the factors which increased tension between the two populations were high unemployment and municipal and parliamentary elections, when the struggle for Irish independence became a vital domestic political issue. After the mid-1920s only the former retained much power as the perceived threat to the British state receded with the granting of Dominion status to Dublin.

The most important — and annual — period in which rival hostilities were given new life was Whit-week, whose slowly diminishing influence was felt right up to the outbreak of the Second World War. Whit was one of the most important weeks in the working-class calendar, not only in Manchester but in many of the towns of Lancashire and Yorkshire, and had been since the beginning of industrialisation. As a holiday it had equal status with Christmas.<sup>6</sup> It was also the time for Anglican and Catholic parades or 'walks' in the centre of the city and for churches and Sunday schools of all denominations to parade about their parish. The first Anglican walk occurred in Manchester in 1801 a practice which soon spread throughout the region. The Catholics did not walk until 1844 during the great wave of immigration from Ireland. The Anglicans walked on Whit Monday the Catholics on the Friday. The Whit walks were always seen as being of great importance and significance, this feeling being best evoked by the *Manchester Evening News* headline of 1933: "1,700 Minor Casualties In Manchester's Big Whit Monday Walk, But It Was Well Worth It." The Catholic walk was regarded as even more important and was described in 1935 as being "in any year, no doubt, the biggest spectacle that Manchester affords."<sup>7</sup>

Whit had been a holiday celebrated in the countryside rather than in the towns during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. As Manchester was rapidly transformed from a small market town into the capital city of the world's first industrial region, so many thousands of country people were drawn into city life bringing their own culture with them. The Irish were a later and more identifiably separate component of this country-to-town migration and arrived in large numbers in Manchester only after Whit had been transformed into an urban holiday and the walks had become an established part of the city's leisure calendar. In some ways the only thing that had changed in Whit was its location, for it retained many of its rural attributes. Indeed, many aspects of the holiday survived well into the early twentieth century and beyond. Weddings, the visiting of friends and relations, and excessive drinking all continued to be popular. One of the initial reasons why the walks were instituted was to overcome the rowdy conduct which occurred during the

week, in particular as a counter-attraction to Kersal Moor races. As an attempt to 'improve' popular culture the walks were something of a failure (Manchester races continued to attract thousands during Whit), nevertheless as the nineteenth century progressed the walks did become *the* central event of the week sitting side-by-side with less respectable celebrations. This juxtaposition of secular and religious celebrations during Whit continued to be an abiding feature of the week.<sup>8</sup>

The first walk's main purpose was to express the rivalry that existed between the Established and Nonconformist Sunday schools. It was a competitive exercise. By mid-century the Catholic Church had supplanted the Nonconformists as the Anglicans' main rivals within both the city and the week. With the intervention of the Catholic Church the original, purely religious, competition had a national rivalry added to it. What had also emerged since 1801 was another form of rivalry still, one which occurred with equal vigour within both the Anglican and Catholic populations, concentrated upon the attainment of 'respectability'. By the late nineteenth century the walks had become not only an important source of communal hostility, but also — through their participation — an important index of a working-class family's social standing.

Whit was not the only time Catholics and Irish took to the streets and publicly proclaimed their discrete identity and allegiances to the rest of the city. Even the poor parish of St. Wilfred's in Hulme could manage four other processions around the locality in 1913 whilst nearly all churches managed a May Week parade and a Trinity Sunday walk within the parish bounds. Such events often mobilised more participants than the Friday walk. Nationalist parades and processions commemorating St. Patrick's Day or the death of the Manchester Martyrs were less important after the mid-1920s with the decline of a separate Irish political movement in the city. However they all had the similar effect of emphasising those differences that still existed between the Irish Catholics and the English.<sup>9</sup>

On Whit Friday spectators would gather along the streets of central Manchester as early as 7.30 a.m. just as each parish contingent congregated outside their church from where they would process to Albert Square. Each parochial body was led by its parish priests in their top hats, followed by church members who had been elected to the Council or had been appointed as magistrates; after them came the children and the confraternities, the rear being brought up by members of the general laity. Having reached the Square all participants (or after 1900 those who could squeeze into it) would sing 'Faith of our Fathers' and receive benediction from the Bishop of Salford who would then lead them along the route. Prior to 1887 the walk had begun at New Cross, Ancoats being the area where the majority of Irish immigrants settled, moving along Great Ancoats Street, down to Ardwick Green then across to Oxford Road and up to Piccadilly. Albert Square was not only a more grand place but it was also nearer to more churches as the population became more dispersed. During our period the course was shorter, running from the Square up Deansgate and then along Market Street to Piccadilly where the contingents would process back to their own parish where, perhaps, they would then have a parochial tea. All of the churches in the city were eligible to walk, though urban growth and the extension of the municipal boundaries meant that many of the newer churches on the edges found that it was not feasible. Mount Carmel, Blackley did not participate for this reason whilst St. Vincent's, Openshaw had to send

part of its contingent to Albert Square by tram. By the early 1900s twenty-two churches usually walked on any one Friday whilst there were separate walks in townships which had identities distinct from Manchester such as Gorton, Newton Heath, Failsworth and Stretford.

For Anglicans the walks remained a procession of their Sunday school children. The Catholic Church was concerned to have them as a demonstration representative of the entire Catholic body. The walk was still largely composed of children, but they walked as members of their parish day school. By doing this the Catholic hierarchy gave emphasis to what it saw as its most important possession: the church school. Separate education along religious lines was one of the most pronounced features of the Manchester education system as well as for many other Lancashire towns. Religious institutions had also largely colonised juvenile leisure until the early 1920s by which time commercial competition, in particular the cinema, was challenging for dominance over this field. Perhaps this explains why children were especially uninhibited in exchanging sectarian insults.<sup>10</sup> In this environment school battles took on an added significance, as Frank Doran, a scholar at St. Patrick's, Collyhurst, recalled,

*Talking of Abbot Street we often clashed with them in winter, fighting with snowballs. We would retreat to our school then get extra boys and chase them to their school, all the way shouting at them, "Ooh Prodidogs". They would chase us back shouting "Ooh Catholics".*<sup>11</sup>

Whit only served to underline what differences there were between the children. With one walk occurring at the beginning and the other at the end of the week the holiday was given a contrasting emphasis. Whit was also the occasion for one of the few trips that a child would make out of the city, organised by their respective churches and schools. Separate education did not socially segregate the children along religious lines: Frank Doran also attended Hugh Oldham Lad's Club as did many 'Prodidogs'. However as Peter Clarke has shown, attendance at Anglican schools had a considerable influence upon the adult's political opinions.<sup>12</sup>

Even if it were possible to isolate the walks as an exclusively children's event the commitment of family resources entailed by participation suggests that the parents still considered it to be very important. However the walk was not restricted to children and the Church was particularly keen to persuade men to walk because "the men give an air of the solidity of the Faith, of the hold the Faith has on Catholic manhood. The men claim respect for Catholic Interests..."<sup>13</sup> It seems clear that many resisted the call. The *Manchester Catholic Herald* noted in 1906 that there "was a good number of men, though considering the strong appeal made to them one would have expected a better turnout". That same year a correspondent estimated that on the separate walk made by St. Francis, Gorton only 200 out of 1,650 participants were men.<sup>14</sup> But many could not walk even if they wanted to. Friday, unlike Monday, was not considered to be a holiday by all employers: both Smithfield Market and the Corporation trams — large employers of Irish labour — operated in a normal manner.<sup>15</sup>

Despite such inconveniences the Church was able to mobilise significant numbers of Catholics, estimates varying from 18,000 in 1900 to 25,000 in 1922. This from a population of about 85,000 Catholics living within the Whit-walk catchment area in 1900.<sup>16</sup> St. Patrick's, Collyhurst which until the late 1930s was the largest,



*Watched by anxious mothers these unusually clean boys impatiently await the 'off'.*

poorest and most Irish parish in the city was reported on at least two occasions prior to 1914 as having a contingent of 3,000 parishioners. This was almost one third of the total parochial population. The Church needed to rally the faithful successfully because of the way it used the walks to demonstrate the extent of its power and influence to the local polity. They were an oblique warning to those who would meddle in the affairs of the Catholic Interest, particularly in relation to the church schools. Catholic councillors who walked did not show their allegiance to any particular party but to the Church, and whilst they walked in front of the rest of the laity they walked respectfully behind the priest. In 1931 all the elected representatives of St. Michael's ward — Labour and Irish to a man — walked with St. Patrick's.<sup>17</sup> This was during a period of strained relations between Catholic Labour members and many local party branches who were attempting to revise the accepted notion that in matters of 'conscience' Catholic councillors could put the interests of the Church before that of party policy. Some Catholic councillors went so far as to resign from the party and stood against official candidates.

The Friday walk allowed participants to assert their self-respect and social status both as individuals and as a community, in a society in which their religion was mistrusted and their nationality was subjected to endemic derision.<sup>18</sup> It is in this light that we should interpret the singing of the Catholic battle hymn 'Faith of our Fathers' in front of the mighty edifice of civic pride and power that was Manchester Town Hall. At the similar moment in the Anglican walk the National Anthem was sung. Together with Catholic members of the crowd they sang the story of the eventual triumph of both religion and individual after a long period of persecution. Bart Kennedy, who attended St. Anne's, Ancoats, recalled the emotion of

that moment,

*It's melody was one of those simple, thrilling, imperishable melodies born of a people in times stern and terrible. There was a sadness in it and at the same time there was a hope and exultation in it. And there was a firmness and resolve in it. There was at once a softness and a tenderness in it, and an indomitable resolution. It was that strange quality of fire that has been in the melodies that have inspired men to arise and overthrow iniquitous states and empires.<sup>19</sup>*

The inferior position of Church and the people within the city was, for a day, turned upon its head. As was observed in 1922, the walk "gives to Catholics a sense of their importance in the life of the city and to those of the different persuasion it gives much food for thought."<sup>20</sup> The 1920 walk must have made Catholics feel even more self-important as, to the strains of 'God Save Ireland', they were led out of Albert Square by the Bishop of Salford alongside of whom was Tom Fox, Catholic loyalist and the first Labour Lord Mayor of Manchester.<sup>21</sup>

Whit Friday was the most important public event in the life of both Church and people. Nevertheless it would be a mistake to see the walk as a straightforward expression of a united 'moral community'. The Catholic body was divided by status, class, politics and nationality, and such divisions were aired during the walk, with the Church as the often unwitting, though sometimes willing, accomplice.

Ordinarily the type of clothes worn by an individual was the most obvious and sensitive indication of his position within society.<sup>22</sup> Consciousness of inferior dress was an often-given reason why the poor did not attend church, as people were expected to 'dress up', though for some this might have been little more than an excuse.<sup>23</sup> Whit made

the possession of decent clothes even more crucial to participation in the mainstream of working-class life because it was the time of year when parents of all religions or none traditionally bought their children new clothes.<sup>24</sup> There was even a saying that to wear something new on Whit Sunday brought good luck.<sup>25</sup> They established status and in turn provided a means of entry to the Catholic walk because the Church's criteria were so much more strict: if the people looked shabby so did the Church.

To wear decent clothes on Whit Sunday might not have brought fortune, but not to do so brought shame upon individual and family,

*And on Whit Sunday all the children came out in new clothes. And if you couldn't come out in new clothes, you didn't come out at all, you stayed in the back yard, so nobody could see you. Because it was a kind of disgrace ....*<sup>26</sup>

As a child Elsie Osman usually stayed indoors. One year she made a brief foray into her street wearing a brightly coloured and loudly patterned second-hand dress, and not the conventional white dress, stockings and shoes. The shame of the contrast with other girls and the subsequent derision forced her to retreat inside where she remained for the rest of Sunday. Those who did likewise missed parading through the local streets in gangs, collecting pennies from neighbours and being taken to visit near-by relatives, all of which served to publicise their parents' achievement.<sup>27</sup> Even to have decent clothes was not good enough for the Catholic Church. The children were part of a carefully co-ordinated display and had to wear a consistent uniform; parents were obliged to purchase from the school, head-dresses, crooks, rosettes and sashes made by nuns.<sup>28</sup> Flowers were not obligatory but secular competitive pressures were exerted and ensured they were bought. One florist reported during the deep recession of 1922,

*The schoolchildren are here from seven in a morning, all clamouring to be served at once, and no matter how large a stock you lay in it seems impossible to satisfy the demand. We get some children whose parents will spend a sovereign or so in order that the child may look well in the procession, and we get poor kiddies who gaze wistfully on the flowers they have not the money to buy.*<sup>29</sup>

At Mount Carmel, Salford, it was the policy of the school that clothes could only be purchased through its agency which, in turn, bought them from Catholic retailers.<sup>30</sup> Whitsuntide was one more occasion for the parochial church to improve its over-burdened finances. The fate of those few who did not conform was plain enough: "If you turned up on Whit Friday in spite of all your parents had done ... without that rosette, you didn't walk."<sup>31</sup> Such pressures were not as intensive on the Anglican side because as the Established Church represented the majority, there was less of a need to take the walk so seriously. The Bishop of Manchester walked on Whit Monday in 1921 for the first time in 17 years.<sup>32</sup> The result was that the Catholic walk always made the Anglicans look dull and amateurish in comparison, something the Catholics observed with a certain smugness. The Catholic walk was famous not only for a superior show but also for unrivalled discipline. Children were rehearsed for weeks with those under seven being excluded because of unreliability in walking long distances and taking orders. In the downpour of 1932 this pursuit of order infuriated some parents because many priests kept the children walking, many of them crying and with dye running out of

their clothes and down their legs. They took the unprecedented step (for Catholics) of plucking their charges from out of the wet with the expressed intention, not of saving the child, but salvaging their hard-won symbols of respectability.<sup>33</sup> Clothes took the form of an investment to be deposited in the nearest pawnshop as soon as Whit was over but participation in the walk placed that investment in jeopardy. Not only rain threatened clothes, as even during hot Whit Fridays delicate white shoes were ruined by being smeared with tar from the melting road's surface.<sup>34</sup> In making the children walk in the rain the priest placed financial well-being in direct opposition to a well-ordered expression of loyalty to the Faith. It is perhaps not surprising that parents declined making yet another sacrifice.

There was no absolute standard for clothes and display applied to every church, and it was obvious to observers which were the poor and which were the richer parishes. Similarly, during periods of high unemployment, it was noted that the display of working-class contingents was more than usually restrained. During the 1920s the walks were said to provoke a 'friendly' rivalry between St. Wilfred's, Hulme and the neighbouring but much richer parish of the Holy Name, Chorlton-upon-Medlock as to which would have the better display. It was a contest that the Holy Name invariably won.<sup>35</sup>

The pressures exerted by the Church upon parents through their children were, paradoxically, easier on themselves. The Church was happy to have as many adults as possible and whilst the children were the crucial component of any parish display the adults walked at the back. However, some half-decent clothes were needed to ensure participation. The result was a combination of styles and status groups and classes. A journalist who walked with St. John's, Salford in 1933 accompanied an elderly man "in shabby clothes, but these had been carefully brushed and pressed for the occasion. By his side as a contrast (was) a young man in black coat and striped trousers".<sup>36</sup>

Though only a minority of the many thousands who watched the Friday walk were Catholic there was no organised expression of hostility or attempt to spoil the event. This led the *Manchester Evening News* to mistakenly declare in 1921 (the year of an I.R.A. bombing campaign in the city) that "on these occasions, happily, people forget racial or religious differences."<sup>37</sup> People did not forget. Their hostility was expressed sullenly, individually or under the influence of drink, back in familiar working-class districts rather than in the centre of the city. On Whit Friday one Protestant woman made her individual protest by symbolically not washing her front doorstep, as was the custom at the start of the weekend. Conflict did not occur on a city-wide basis but unevenly, affecting individuals, families and streets at different times, for in a large city composed of separate working-class 'villages' there was no credible central organisation willing or able to take advantage of it. It is no coincidence that three sisters who lived in the St. Patrick's parish recalled the Trinity Sunday parade as the only time they felt any anti-Catholic hostility, and even then it was expressed by the 'look' of certain members in the watching crowd.<sup>38</sup>

The weather was vitally important to the success of the walks. The infamous Manchester rain could destroy them and transform them into a shambles. To have good weather was seen as a sign that God was on your side, especially if it had rained on your rival's day. "Those of the opposite faith used to pray for rain on Whit Friday ...

But the same applied to the other side," one participant recalled.<sup>39</sup> It was when the prayers were not answered and when God apparently endorsed the opposition that trouble could follow. A former Knott Mill resident remembered the situation after 1918,

*It was pretty bitter an' all; say Whit Monday was a nice day, a glorious day and it rained on Whit Friday, oh there was terrible, it'd be terrible, there'd be fights all over the place, because the weather hadn't been good for Whit Friday. And it was the same if the weather was good for Whit Friday and it was bad for Whit Monday.*

*Who would be fighting?*

*It was fighting amongst neighbours. There was always a punch-up, like ... just a scrap between you. It'd be forgotten, like, you'd meet in the pub and it'd be forgotten.<sup>40</sup>*

It was surely no accident that Whit-week was remembered as the occasion both for drink and for sectarian conflict. It was the time when those who did not normally drink did so and when the religiously apathetic recalled their nominal allegiance. "My dad was a Catholic for Whit Friday only," recalled one respondent.<sup>41</sup> Mick Burke's Irish street-hawker mother had an altar in her front room and lived in fear of the priest, yet

*The only time she had off was Whit week when the house would be stacked with food and we all had to help ourselves. She'd say, "It's my week this week," and be on the booze all week, made up like the first lady of the land.<sup>42</sup>*

Mass Observation made the connection between drink and the parochial parades of both the Protestant and Catholic churches in Bolton during the late 1930s. They declared that, "The most open infringements of the legal (licensing) hours that we have observed took place during the Trinity Sunday Roman Catholic processions."<sup>43</sup> As suggested above, the effect of Whit was variable, and for those who came from areas in which there were few Catholics the public house could reinforce friendships which crossed sectarian lines.<sup>44</sup> However in those areas

where the Irish mainly lived, the combination of drink and religion could be explosive.

The participation of the Italian, Polish, Ruthenian or Ukrainian Catholics on Whit Friday did not provoke much, if any, hostility. There were at most two thousand of them, the Italians being the largest of these four minorities, and in 1914 there were only about one thousand, mainly living in St. Michael's parish, Ancoats. It was the large and noisy body of Irish Catholics which provoked the most ill-feeling with St. Patrick's as the centre of the Irishness. The predominant colour was green and amongst the brass bands were many Irish pipe bands, one of whom — the Terence MacSweeney Pipers — was named in memory of the imprisoned Mayor of Cork who died on hunger strike in Clerkenwell jail in 1920. As late as 1935 it could be said of the Catholic walk that,

*Most of the tunes played were Irish airs. One had seen a banner with the legend "God Save Ireland — 1898", and Irishness again and again drew attention to the processionists. It was no surprise, therefore, to find the stirring tune rousing spectators to sing was that "old Ireland shall again be free", or when that had finished to see a few steps of the jig performed in the side streets behind the spectators' backs.<sup>45</sup>*

Such joyous Irishness provoked a negative reaction amongst some of the spectators with one man being heard to declare, "You'd think we were in bloody Ireland, wouldn't you. Why the 'ell don't they play something English?"<sup>46</sup>

The walks were the occasion for the expression of a sentimental rather than a political nationalism. Despite the fact that many parish priests were active in the Nationalist movement the Church was less restrained when it came to showing its loyalty to the British state. During the height of the Boer War, a war bitterly criticised by Nationalist M.P.s, the parishes of St. John's and the Holy Name had many of their boys dressed as soldiers whilst the girls pretended to be nurses, all of them marching behind the Union Jack to the tune of 'Soldiers



*These Anglican girls pose for the camera under the watchful eye of respectable elders. Their flowers and white dresses were symbolic of the purity of the countryside. c. 1900.*

of the Queen'. Even the mainly poor and Irish St. Wilfred's had three boys dressed in uniform. The boys were dressed as Irish Guards whose exploits during the war had inspired Pat Rafferty's popular music hall song 'What Do You Think of the Irish Now?' which made the point that the real Irish character was represented on the field of battle in the service of the Empire.<sup>47</sup> Compared with the Anglican walk this patriotic message was relatively restrained. Mary Bertenshaw recalled the Monday walks during the First World War as being far more fervid and bellicose.<sup>48</sup> Whatever message the Church attempted to impose on the day, for the people it was largely an opportunity to have a good time, something that was naturally expressed in an 'Irish' manner. As one participant recalled prosaically, "You jigged all the way into town and back again."<sup>49</sup>

Not everybody jigged. For some the walks were a complete irrelevance, for others they actually spoilt their holiday by blocking up the city and impeding their passage to the Manchester races.<sup>50</sup> Many employers would have been glad to have done without Whit. As late as the 1890s those who had not already given up the struggle were being reluctantly forced by their employees to give up the whole week as a holiday, "finding how impossible it is to get through any satisfactory amount of work."<sup>51</sup> In 1930 the *Manchester Guardian* reported that the "business community" wanted the week turned into a long weekend (as it was in many other towns) and the walks to take place in a park out of Commerce's way. The

enlightened bourgeoisie's newspaper thundered that, "... it becomes increasingly clear as the years pass that the price we pay for a week of half-hearted junketing is too great". In fact during times of trade depression some employers extended the holiday as a means of saving money.<sup>52</sup>

Whit had always been a time for leisure, a leisure that was provided for profit and devoid of any religious content, though by the interwar period this commercial leisure had reached new levels of sophistication and appeal. Belle Vue had established itself as a popular place of entertainment by the late nineteenth century, whilst Blackpool was drawing increasingly large numbers of working-class people away from the city for part of the week, and up to 30,000 spectators watched the Roses cricket match at Old Trafford. As stated above, if non-religious leisure was much in evidence then it always had been. The Whit walks had been an attempt to give a religious gloss to what had been a period of largely secular celebration. It was possible for people to participate in both aspects of the week. We have seen how drink and religion often went hand-in-hand. However, after the First World War there were more alternatives to watching the processions. After the early 1920s there is some evidence that the Anglican walk suffered both from this competition with commercial leisure as well as an increasing religious apathy. On Whit Monday in 1922 there were as many people at Belle Vue as there were



*Her family's hard-won respectability was proudly displayed in this girl's white dress, socks and shoes.*

watching the walk. However, if this was decline it was not a terminal collapse and the walk occasionally rallied, in 1939 it was described as having one of the largest crowds in years.<sup>53</sup>

The same cannot be said of the more resilient Catholic walk. Both Anglican and Catholic walks suffered an apparent decline in the number of participants after the peaks of the immediately pre- and post-First World War years. Such a position is at least partly accounted for by the movement of population into outlying districts through the improvement in public transport before 1914 and the slum clearance of the interwar years. What is remarkable is that despite all its attractions commercial leisure failed to significantly diminish the popularity of the Catholic walk amongst Catholics whilst it still successfully provided a spectacle for non-Catholics. Perhaps this continued appeal to Catholics was in part due to the fact that being in the main the poorest members of society it provided a cheaper means of recreation in which the entire Catholic population could participate either by walking or by watching.

However the walks were not a mere appendage to popular leisure, though an influential strand in the historiography of religion states that the religious festivals of this period had little sacred content. This line of thought presumes that industrial urban culture in general and the working-class in particular had little place for religion. Any nominally 'religious' festival is consequently seen as an excuse for the expression of a proletarian hedonism which had little or nothing in common with the purposes of institutional religion.<sup>54</sup> This was nothing new. Rural society had been by no means 'religious' in the sense understood by these historians, whilst coercion by landowners played no small part in explaining the attendance of tenant farmers and labourers at church. Similarly the gap between popular and institutional religion was rarely bridged in either the village or city. Whit-walks had been part of a wider offensive to control this rural culture and turn it down less profane channels by giving a more devout shading to an essentially secular holiday. The walks were an urban response to tilt the balance more in favour of religion, and they were a partial success. As Hugh McLeod has pointed out one of the difficulties that the Established Church faced was that urban society was too closely tied to many aspects of rural culture.<sup>55</sup> The rural past influenced the extent of religious practice in the city. The success of the Catholic Church is partly attributable to its more popular role in the Irish village whilst in Britain the major urban centres were nearly all areas of a pre-existing low rural attendance.<sup>56</sup>

Contemporaries were similarly concerned that the walks were not 'religious' enough. In 1928 a Free Church minister complained that, "Whit-week processions savoured rather of a 'pagan pageant' and an occasion for dress and show. 'It is not as though these processions were

religious demonstrations,' he declared".<sup>57</sup> A small number of the Catholic laity were similarly concerned, especially in relation to the tunes played by accompanying bands. In 1907 one complained that to, "see a handsome banner of the Blessed Virgin being carried into Albert Square behind a band playing the latest music-hall ditty is something more than incongruous". The Catholic authorities were said not to mind this practice and denied any incongruity.<sup>58</sup> Given the strict clerical control of the procession it seems surprising that if they had objected they would have allowed the playing of such tunes as 'Stop Your Tickling Jock' and later 'Colonel Bogey'. As suggested above such complaints about the lack of religious purity in the walks were asking too much of a popular religion that was only rarely ever in perfect alignment with the requirements of the churches. In fact it was the Catholics who criticised the Nonconformists for this type of dogmatic puritanism. There was a tolerance of responsible drinking and gambling within the Church that would have shocked many Methodists. Canon Richardson, Chief Religious Inspector for the Salford Diocese was sanguine about low attendance at Catholic Sunday schools, declaring that "We can hardly blame our people for seeking recreation; if it is innocent perhaps it is the most useful thing they can do on a Sunday afternoon".<sup>59</sup> The *Manchester City News* was nearer interpreting the true situation in 1930, when it said that the walks "are striking manifestation of religious faith, a manifestation which fills the streets with colour and music, dispelling joyously the idea that gloom and sadness are necessary attributes of religion."<sup>60</sup>

If the Catholic walk was seen by the local press mainly in terms of spectacle we still must ask why people devoted so much time, energy and money to it. No other event assumed so much importance in the public calendar of both Church and people whilst no other event provoked so much feeling from those on the other side of the (usually latent) sectarian divide. There were other Catholic and Irish ceremonies and parades but the Friday Whit-walk had most influence because of the way it put Catholic and Protestant in direct competition. It temporarily refined and defined their differences. Participation in the walk at once pointed to the assimilation of the Irish into a wider culture under the auspices of the Catholic Church and at the same time showed how different they remained.

Durkheim's comment that ritual's function is to "awaken certain ideas and sentiments, to attach the present to the past and the individual to the collectivity,"<sup>61</sup> is relevant here.<sup>61</sup> What emerged on Whit Friday was a collectivity defined by Catholic and Irish ideas and sentiments founded upon a past largely distinct from the rest of society. As one contemporary recalled "it was God save the King Monday morning and God save the Pope Friday afternoon."<sup>62</sup> Catholics sang 'Faith of our Fathers' rather than the National Anthem. They wore green rather than red, white and blue.

#### NOTES

1. This article is partly based on research for a Ph.D. at the Centre for the Study of Social History, Warwick University dealing with the Irish and Catholic population in Manchester and Salford 1890 — 1939. It is not meant to be a general history of the walks, and is definitely a "work in progress".
2. Howard Spring, *Shabby Tiger* (1977 ed.), p. 128.
3. Edna Wood, *Memories of Whit Walks in the Twenties*, Manchester Central Library, Archives Department, MISC/712.
4. See Joan Smith, 'Labour Tradition in Glasgow and Liverpool', *History Workshop*, 17 (1984) and Tom Gallagher, 'A Tale of Two Cities: Communal Strife in Glasgow and Liverpool before 1914' in R. Swift and S. Gilley (eds.), *The Irish in the Victorian City* (1985). The 1911 Census reveals the proportion of Irish-born in each city as Manchester 2.6 per cent, Salford 2.8 per cent, Liverpool 4.6 per cent and Glasgow 3.7 per cent. This does not take account of those second and third generation immigrants who would have considered themselves to be 'Irish'.
5. The parochial population of St. Patrick's (Collyhurst) was 12,000; St. Wilfred's (Hulme), 7,900; Mount Carmel (Ordsall), 5,300. *Salford Diocesan Almanac* (1900).

6. Brenda M. Walker, 'The Whit Walk as a Holiday from the "Manufactory"', *Manchester Review* (1957), p.60.
7. *Manchester Guardian*, 15 June 1935. Manchester was the first town in the region to have a Whit walk. Others mentioned as having a walk in this period include: Ashton-under-Lyne, Bolton, Bury, Clitheroe, Dukinfield, Heywood, Hyde, Mossley, Oldham, Preston, Radcliffe, Ramsbottom, Rochdale, Shaw, St. Helens, Stalybridge, Stockport and Wigan.
8. This paragraph is mainly based upon William Doherty, *Reminiscences of Old Manchester and Salford Telling How We Kept Whitsuntide Sixty Years Ago ... By an Octogenarian* (Manchester, 1887) pp.10-16; J.T. Slugg, *Reminiscences of Manchester Fifty Years Ago* (Manchester, 1881), pp.308-10; Rachel Ryan, *A Biography of Manchester* (1937), pp.104-6; R.W. Malcomson, *Popular Recreations in English Society 1700 — 1850* (1973), pp.31-3. Thanks are due to James Kilmartin.
9. St. Wilfred's Log Book: *Manchester Catholic Herald*, 15 June 1906.
10. Robert Roberts, *Classic Slum* (1983), p.170.
11. Frank Doran, *Down Memory Lane* (n.d.), pp 7-8 (copy in Manchester Central Library, Local History Library).
12. P.F. Clarke, *Lancashire and the New Liberalism* (1971), p.67. Clarke does not think that the political effect of religious education survived the First World War. However, for most Catholics, and possibly many Anglicans, after 1918 the *voluntary schools issue* was still politically important. Separate schooling continued to fuel sectarian suspicion in the interwar years.
13. *Holy Name Messenger*, June 1910.
14. *Manchester Catholic Herald*, 15 June 1906.
15. Three sisters from St. Patrick's parish interviewed stated that their father was forced to work in the Market on Friday and, along with other workers, watched them walk past Smithfield's gates. Tape in author's possession.
16. Estimates in the local press give the number of participants for the Anglicans in 1900 (25,000), 1910 (24,000), 1920 (25,000), 1938 (20,000); and for the Catholics in 1900 (18,000), 1910 (20,000+), 1922 (25,000) and 1939 (20,000).
17. *Manchester Catholic Herald*, 20 May 1931.
18. Roberts, *Classic Slum*, p.170.
19. Bart Kennedy, *Slavery: Pictures from the Abyss* (1905), pp.117-18: *Manchester Catholic Herald*, 28 May 1910.
20. *Manchester Catholic Herald*, 8 April 1922.
21. *London Catholic Herald*, 15 June 1920.
22. See Mary Bentley, *Born 1896* (Swinton, 1985), pp.16-17.
23. The Catholic Church was by no means untainted by status division. A priest complained that pew rents were still widespread throughout the Salford Diocese, *Manchester Catholic Herald*, 23 August 1907. Bart Kennedy also noted that "In St. Anne's social distinction was regulated by the kind of clothes one wore." Kennedy, *Abyss*, pp.210-11.
24. Joe Toole, *Fighting Through Life* (1935), pp.7-8; Kennedy, *Abyss*, p.101.
25. A.R. Wright and T.E. Jones, *British Calendar Customs. England, Vol. I* (1936), p.160.
26. Manchester Studies Oral History Collection (hereafter Manchester Studies), tape 548.
27. Elsie Osman, *For the Love of Ada ... and Salford* (Swinton, 1984), p.35; Richard Heaton, *Salford My Home Town* (Swinton, 1982), p.10.
28. Manchester Studies, tapes 457 and 544.
29. *Manchester Catholic Herald*, 3 June 1922.
30. Manchester Studies, tape 487.
31. Manchester Studies, tape 457..
32. *Manchester Guardian*, 17 May 1921.
33. *Manchester Evening News*, 20 May 1932; *Manchester Catholic Herald*, 21 and 28 May 1932.
34. Richard Heaton, *Salford*, p.10; one pawnbroker grossed £500 in the Whit-week period, Colin Bundy and Dermot Healy, 'Aspects of Urban Poverty', *Oral History* (1978), p.90.
35. *Manchester Catholic Herald*, 15 June 1900, 28 May 1921, 3 and 17 June 1922.
36. *Manchester Evening News*, 9 June 1933.
37. *Manchester Evening News*, 16 May 1921.
38. Tape in author's possession.
39. Manchester Studies, tape 457.
40. Manchester Studies, tape 492.
41. Respondents' mother would only drink on Whit Friday, Manchester Studies, tapes 544 and 457. The three sisters recalled Whit as the only time that 'trouble' ever occurred.
42. Mick Burke, *Ancoats Lad* (Swinton, 1985), p.5.
43. Mass Observation, *The Pub and the People* (1970 ed.), pp.196-7, 326-7.
44. An inhabitant of Ardwick who walked with the Holy Name in the 1930s would meet his Protestant mates after their Monday walk and go for a drink, on Friday they would reciprocate. Tape in author's possession.
45. *Manchester Guardian*, 13 June 1935.
46. Mary Bertenshaw, *Sunrise to Sunset* (Manchester, 1980), p.93.
47. *Manchester Catholic Herald*, 15 June 1900; *Manchester Evening News*, 8 June 1900. On the effect the Boer War had, temporarily 'improving' the image of the Irish, see Melanie J. Tebbutt, "The Evolution of Ethnic Stereotypes: An Examination of Stereotyping with Particular Reference to the Irish (and to a Lesser Extent the Scots), in Manchester during the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries" (unpublished M.A. thesis, University of Manchester, 1982), p.60.
48. Bertenshaw, *Sunrise*, pp.91-3.
49. Tape in author's possession.
50. *Manchester Guardian*, 31 May 1890.
51. *Manchester Evening News*, 26 May 1890.
52. *Manchester Guardian*, 3 June 1922 and 13 June 1930.
53. *Manchester Guardian*, 6 June 1922; *Manchester Evening News*, 16 May 1932.
54. For example see A.W. Smith, 'Popular Religion', *Past and Present* 40 (1968) and J.H.S. Kent, 'The Role of Religion in the Cultural Structure of the later Victorian City', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 23 (1973).
55. H. McLeod, 'Class, Community and Region; The Religious Geography of Nineteenth Century England', *A Sociological Yearbook of Religion in Britain*, no.6 (1973).
56. *ibid.*, p.48.
57. *Daily Dispatch*, 5 June 1928.
58. *Manchester Catholic Herald*, 12 April 1907; *Harvest*, July 1907.
59. See the editorial on 'The Catholic Working Man', *Federationist*, June 1910; George Richardson, *Educational Statistics of the Diocese of Salford* (1905), p.18.
60. *Manchester City News*, 14 June 1930.
61. S. Lukes, *Emile Durkheim* (1981), p.469.
62. Tape in possession of Andy Davies, Ph.D. student, Kings College, Cambridge.