MANCHESTER WOMEN AND THEIR LEISURE: CHANGING EXPERIENCES FROM YOUTH TO MARRIED ADULTHOOD, 1920–1960

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You can't live the same way all the time. I mean there's different chapters in your life. Always look on it as different chapters. Like when you're a child and then you're in your teens and that's a different chapter and then you get in your twenties and you've different ideas, then, and you're married that's another chapter. And then you have your family, another sort of different life, another chapter.[1]

This article examines the leisure experiences of Manchester women in the period 1920–1960. It is based primarily upon a series of oral history interviews conducted with twenty-three Manchester women of working class and lower middle class backgrounds.[2] However, it also utilises a comprehensive survey of one local newspaper, the *Manchester Evening News* and the contemporary work of a number of researchers with an interest in leisure during the period. The theoretical underpinning is one informed by the work of feminist leisure studies researchers who have unpicked the assumptions built into the category 'leisure' and have re-conceptualised it taking account of the particular experiences of women.[3] Throughout this article, therefore, 'leisure' is approached less as self defined, discrete activity, and more as a mutable category, open to changing meanings and inseparable from its contextual and historical background.

The central aim here is to examine the relationship between Manchester women and leisure within the particular context of life cycle stage. Life cycle stage influenced individual's expectations concerning their leisure opportunities and experiences; it also determined society's opinion of appropriate behaviour and, indeed, provided an organising concept for this. Part one addresses youth; a stage in the life cycle often viewed as a golden age for leisure. The reasons for such a characterisation are established, its validity within this period is assessed and its expression within the Manchester area is explored. In particular, I demonstrate the popularity of dancehall and cinema amongst young women and examine the meanings which girls invested in these and other leisure forms. Part two assesses the changes in the relationship between women and leisure precipitated by entry into married life. Focusing upon shifting perceptions of leisure as well as issues of opportunity and constraint, it asserts that 'leisure' for adult women constituted a complex and ambiguous category. At the centre of this complexity there existed a movement away from the personal, towards a family leisure, rooted in notions of duty and service to others.

Leisure In Youth: Freedom and Independence?

I begin, then, by addressing the particular life cycle stage of youth, defined here as the period between leaving school and marrying, or, in the case of those who remained single, reaching the average age at marriage for their historical cohort. Youth was frequently seen as the pre-eminent period of leisure for women in their passage through the life cycle. The majority of respondents characterised the years between leaving school and marrying as years of freedom and independence; a period with no major responsibilities and no developed sense of duty to others. In effect, youth constituted a period of legitimate leisure. As Dorothy put it: "I'm awfully sorry that really my leisure ended when I started my family which was 1948. But I thought you might just be interested in, you know, before that." Margaret, recalling her early leisure experiences in the inter-war period, noted that: "I had nobody to bother about."

Documentary sources too exhibit a tendency to associate leisure with youth. For example, the *Manchester Evening News* reflected upon youth through an assessment of leisure; activity in this realm was regarded as constituting grounds for general assessments of young women's behaviour and their position within society. By the 1950s, the newspaper treated 'the teenager' almost as a distinct leisured class, and conducted quite wide-ranging surveys of teenage leisure behaviour.[4] Certainly, the association of youth with leisure became ever stronger over the period, reflecting the rising post-war wages of young people, able to buy into a mass leisure market. In the case of women, an intensified focus upon the years of 'youth', may have reflected the reality that these years of relative independence were becoming ever shorter, a result of the falling age at marriage.

For young women, the relationship between work and leisure appears well defined. Certainly the experience of earning a wage and being engaged in clearly defined hours of work does seem to have engendered an assumption amongst young women that they were entitled to time for themselves. As Pearl Jephcott observed in her national survey, published in 1942, "the girls say that when you begin to work you want to go out at night."[5] In particular, young women throughout this period pursued two forms of commercial leisure. In almost all of the interviews women referred to either cinema or dancing as the dominant leisure activity of their youth. As Freda recalled of the twenties: "Dancing was all the rage then, you see, dancing and the pictures were the two main ways of enjoying yourself." Neither dancing nor visits to the pictures were entirely the preserve of youth. Both activities, in fact, provide evidence of the way in which the same activity could carry different

meanings at distinct stages of the life cycle. However, youth was usually the period in life when most women had the time and money to enjoy these activities to the full.

Both documentary and oral evidence attest to the continued popularity of the cinema amongst young women across the period, although clear class differences in the experience of picture-going do emerge. A diary kept by one working class respondent, Irene, testified to 141 cinema visits in the year 1941. Freda, who contributed just half of her wages to her lower middle-class family economy, recalled attending the cinema every Monday, Wednesday and Friday. In contrast, Ivy, whose upbringing in Ancoats was framed by poverty, noted that, "we just went to the pictures on Saturday night. Well you only had enough spends to go once." She recalled that the money her mother gave her was just sufficient to pay for this trip, a block of chocolate and her contribution to the church collection. At a basic level, therefore, economic circumstance dictated the frequency of visits to the cinema.

Nonetheless, all of the women interviewed recalled that the cinema was generally regarded as a cheap form of leisure. Price of admission would, however, determine the type of cinema to which girls would go. Irene, a particularly keen cinema-goer, recalled one Ardwick cinema, the Coliseum, which had prices as low as tuppence. Her description of its interior confirms the link between the cost of admittance and quality of experience: "it was a huge barn of a place and the doors opened straight out into the street and if, of course we used to get fog, years ago, and if it was foggy the fog'd come seeping in and you couldn't see. You couldn't see anything." She also remembered usherettes spraying disinfectant in the air and noted that: "You could hardly see the screen for cigarette smoke sometimes." For those able to pay the slightly higher prices charged by city centre picture houses, a world of glamour and luxury replaced the seeping fog and lingering disinfectant. In periods of momentary affluence, a trip to the cinema allowed working-class girls access to a physical environment which differed markedly from their home experiences. As Irene explained:

> *Well you see erm, our homes weren't very comfortable. Er, just a two up and two down. We had no er, no hot water and the outside toilet. Er, just gas light and especially if you went to the Odeon, or the Paramount cinema, they were like palaces, so you could spend two or three hours just going inside cos they were wonderful, especially the erm, the Paramount. They were, they were, just like palaces inside. And er, you'd be taken out of your, well it was a bit of a miserable environment, for two or three hours, go to this lovely palace and sit in a comfortable seat and see er, well it, going to the pictures as it was called.*

The cinema also provided other forms of leisure appealing to the young woman worker, although, once again, these attractions were subject to class differentiation, particularly in the inter-war period. For example, Mary remembered the social aspect of visits to the cinemas of Didsbury and Withington, "all the picture houses they had cafes and you met your friends there and you had a coffee before you went into the pictures. First and second house pictures, picture houses everywhere." The Piccadilly cinema in the city centre offered its patrons restaurant, cafe and dancing facilities, as well as a programme of films. In contrast, the Ardwick Coliseum, or "bug hut" as Irene called it, organised mid-programme talent shows for its working-class clientele. For others, the cinema acted as a convenient place to meet

Paramount Cinema and Plaza Dancehall in Oxford Street, c.1930.
(Source: Manchester Central Reference Library, local history unit, computerised collection.)

boyfriends away from parental supervision. Others again regarded it as a convenient and cheap sanctuary from the cold, as Amy used the Manchester news theatre in the 1950s. Overall, the attraction of the cinema as a leisure activity for young girls is emphasised time and again in both documentary and oral evidence.

Dancing too was a very popular form of leisure amongst young women throughout this period, although less so than the cinema in the inter-war period and probably more so by the late 1950s. In 1937, Joan Harley noted that: "Dance halls are not as popular with the girls as cinemas, but many girls spend a considerable part of their time dancing. Its attractions are obvious. The girls enjoy the lights, the colours and the band. They feel excited at the opportunity of dancing with the boys they meet and hope to find 'romance'."[6] A news report of 1955 claimed that many teenagers danced at least twice and as many as eight times a week, spending an average of 7s 6d on ballroom tickets.[7] Oral testament provides strong evidence of the popularity of dancing amongst women of both working class and lower middle-class backgrounds. For example, Margaret stated: "I can't remember anything really except dancing from 14 to 21", and Freda, remembering her youth in the twenties, recalled that: "Dancing was all the rage then, you see, dancing and pictures were the two main ways of enjoying yourself."

Access to the dance hall was more costly than visits to the cinema, and made greater demands upon a young girl in terms of appearance and skill. Celia recalled that a trip to her local dance hall would have to constitute a whole week's leisure. However, those who could afford regular dances remembered them vividly and with great affection. Several women, particularly those whose dancing years spanned the pre-war and wartime period, had fond memories of trips to the Ritz and Plaza dancehalls in Manchester city centre. For example, Margaret recalled nights spent at the Ritz in Whitworth Street: "They had a turntable bandstand and one band used to play for half and then it would turn round and another band would play. That's where we used to meet the fellas." Another respondent, who worked on munitions during the war, would get up in the middle of the day to dance every afternoon at the Plaza. Dance halls such as these would often provide trained staff with whom to dance and improve your own dancing ability. As Andrew Davies has argued, dancing thus offered those working-class youths who could afford it an important opportunity to develop skills.[8]

Whilst many of the women interviewed did attend public dancehalls, other venues for dancing were available and catered for women of different social backgrounds. Amongst the lower middle-class women interviewed, Mary recalled that in the twenties, "there were dances everywhere. Everybody, every Saturday there were tennis club dances and er, hockey club dances, erm, Conservative people had dances, everybody either danced or went to the pictures on Saturday." Freda remembered tennis club dances, Joyce frequented dances at the Boys Brigade and Kate recalled going to dances at the local scout hut. In the 1950s, Amy danced at the students union as well as jazz clubs, such as the Bodega, in the city centre. Women of contrasting social backgrounds found opportunities to dance in their membership of one of the two Gaelic Leagues in existence up till the mid 1950s.

Some parents did, in fact, forbid their daughters from attending public dance halls, especially where these were licensed, on the grounds of 'respectability'.[9] Evidence for this type of parental control comes from women of all backgrounds and supports Davies's understanding of respectability as "a complex and multi-layered category."[10]

Paramount Cinema and Plaza Dancehall by night, 1932.
(Source: Manchester Central Reference Library, local history unit, computerised collection.)

For example, Joan noted that her parents restricted her dancing to ticketed affairs:

> *You couldn't go to a public dance, my mother and father wouldn't let you. Now that was a dance where you can just go in, and erm, pay money and go in. They would only let you go to a dance that had tickets. Church dance or, a charity dance or something like that, you know. Because of who you'd meet. Places like the Ritz, which, but there was, there were local places like that, it didn't have to be in town. But those places, no way.* Why, what was th' they thought you'd meet the wrong type of person there. What, rough or? *Rough and perhaps dangerous, you know.*

Similarly Celia, who frequented the Blackley Palais, was warned not to attend the Ritz during the war years because of its reputation as a "picking up place."

Manchester-based social researchers of this period all emphasised the attraction of the dance, regardless of venue, as an arena for meeting boys.[11] A *Manchester Evening News* report of 1955 asserted that "it is the easy opportunities of meeting members of the opposite sex that makes the dance hall such a popular rendezvous."[12] This aspect of dance culture appears to have become particularly pronounced in the post-war era, as traditional methods of 'picking up', primarily the Sunday evening Monkey Walk, began to die out.[13] Certainly some of the respondents did meet future husbands at dances and many others recalled boys they had met at a dancing venue. Ordinarily, women were not expected to ask a man to dance, they simply waited to be asked, however 'excuse me' dances did provide an opportunity for girls to choose their partners. Oral evidence does not, however, support a notion of women dancing only to gain contact with the opposite sex. Indeed, as Jephcott observed in 1942: "Girls generally go dancing in twos and are often quite content to dance with each other as well as with a boy partner."[14] Kathleen's recollections confirm this point: "Well usually, girls used to go together you see. And the girls'd dance together. And if, if a boy didn't er kind of fancy you and ask you to dance er, you danced together, you see."

Whilst the absence of a male partner did not preclude women from entry to the dance floor, the association of this particular leisure form with the act of finding a partner did control access to the dance hall itself. In her 1948 study, Jephcott recorded that: "As a matter of principle some stop dancing when they get engaged (if their boy is away that is). If they do not stop altogether, they go very much less, and say that somehow they are not interested in dancing now. Marriage in the case of most of the girls of this study puts an end to their dancing, anyhow for the time being."[15] Oral testament provides much evidence of the movement away from dancing upon serious courtship or marriage. Certainly, courting could act as a disruption to young women's leisure patterns, as Kathleen remembers: "Things didn't change very much I mean, I still w'used to go to Newton Heath Palais occasionally, until David came along, and then David didn't like dancing of course, so then it was, it was the cinema."

Despite the overwhelming popularity of dancing and cinema as leisure for young women, oral testimony also provides evidence of a wide range of alternative leisure enjoyed in youth, both inside and outside the home. Some women had memories of the more formal, organised leisure, associated with club, night school or church; guiding, amateur dramatics and organised rambling were particularly popular. Others enjoyed physical activity such as cycling, swimming, ice skating and tennis or spectator sports such as speedway and football.

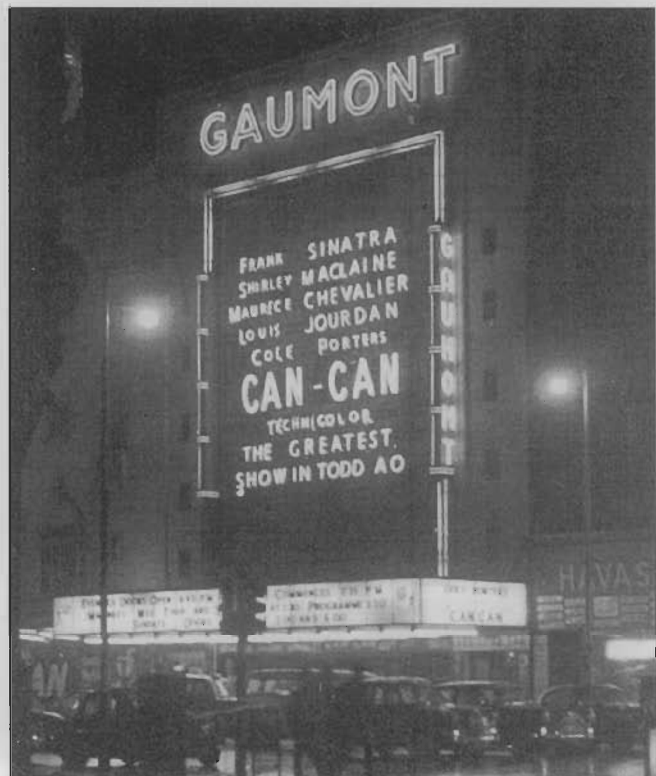
The involvement of young women in commercial, out of doors, forms of leisure, was founded upon their possession of spends, however limited, and their structured experience of time; both corollaries of their participation in the paid work force. However, oral testament also points to the importance of leisure of a less formal nature within young women's lives. In particular, socialising and friendship, often related to the workplace, seem to have played a vital role in the pursuit of spare time. For example, Jean noted the importance of 'high tea' to young people of her generation:

> *Go back to the 40s then, so, with this build up erm, of friends, erm, I think nowadays, you see young people do more late evening things don't they, erm, whereas with us you were invited to high tea. I quite miss this now, but when I think that erm, food was still very short you know, because it, it went on being rationed until 1953. And erm, but people would always endeavour to put this high tea on. And most weeks you know, you would be invit' you were invited somewhere like that, you know.*

She remembered visiting work friends and boyfriend's relatives in this manner. Others spoke with great fondness of particular friendships which persisted throughout their youth. Margaret recalled one particular friend with whom she lost contact during the war: "I loved her really. We were good mates. We fell out we did this we did that, we separated and that was it." Certainly, Jephcott identified the importance of the 'best friend' as a companion for leisure activity.[16]

For young women throughout this period, leisure was not only experienced outside the home; a variety of activities also took place within it, although the housing conditions of some working-class women in the inter-war period largely precluded such home-based leisure.[17] In her 1942 thesis, Olive Morgan detailed the popularity of reading as a cheap form of leisure for girls, as well as a form of romantic escapism, and Joan Harley noted that reading was an activity which girls could pursue at "odd moments", particularly if the activity consisted of magazine reading.[18] Distinct girls' magazines such as *Pegs Paper* (1919), *Oracle* (1933), and *Glamour* (1938), catered for the young consumer. For their audience, reading of this type constituted an enjoyable form of leisure, as well as a source of what Jephcott termed "informal education".[19] Specialist magazines catered for more specific interests. For example, Irene took two magazines every week, *Picture Goer* and *Picture Show*: "Cos I was film mad, so Id read these religiously." Ivy too stated that her great interest was reading: "But mainly in the house, I was reading. I was always in trouble for reading. 'Get your nose out of that book! Put some coal on that fire.' (laughs) 'Get your nose out of that book.' I was always in trouble for reading." In fact, she recalled the luxury of visits to the library: "Oh it used to be lovely, a full hour, you know, undisturbed reading."

Advertisements in the Manchester Evening News, 7th September, 1935.



Gaumont Cinema, Oxford Street 1960.
(Source: Manchester Central Reference Library, local studies unit, computerised collection.)

Oral testament provides evidence of the variety of leisure experienced by working girls in the period 1920–1960. However, youth was rarely a period of unbridled leisure for women, despite their status as wage earners. Both oral and documentary evidence shows that for many young women the constraints of time and money undermined any notion of unmitigated freedom. As Jephcott asserted in 1948:

> *The status gained by working, or rather by earning, carries the right to spend your non-working hours more or less as you like, and not as your mother dictates. That is the theory. In practice the girls' own good nature, pressing family needs and in some cases very definite parental control, mean that many are not nearly so free to come and go in their non-working hours as might be supposed from the hair-raising time-tables of an occasional one or two.*[20]

The organisation of procedures such as 'tipping up' and the allocation of spends, which were often influenced by gendered assumptions, acted as a control upon leisure opportunity. Similarly, the performance of household chores and other family duties, such as caring for ailing parents, could impact upon young girls' access to leisure, although the demands of the home had generally declined by the end of this period. The onset of courting could lead women to pursue the favoured activities of their boyfriend or to give up activities such as dancing which were associated with the act of finding a partner. Historically specific and class-based notions of appropriate behaviour and the constraints on behaviour informally enforced by the local community also acted as a break upon unimpaired freedom. More directly, harsh parental discipline could prove a major barrier to the enjoyment of freedom and independence in leisure.

Yet despite a range of obstacles which operated in different ways across the social classes and the historical period, the nature of the work/leisure relationship was such that women themselves perceived their youth to be a period of legitimate, personal leisure. Indeed oral testimony shows that women were, on the whole, far more likely to complain of some constraint upon their leisure in youth, than they were to object to its virtual absence in their married life. In youth women felt that they deserved personal leisure, and this sense of legitimacy was, at least in part, due to their engagement in paid work.

Leisure In Married Life: Duty and Service?

If leisure in youth was often conceptualised in terms of freedom and independence, then women's leisure in adulthood was inextricably linked to notions of duty and service. Certainly, once married, the relationship between work and leisure, within women's lives, changed. Whilst the paid work of youth legitimised leisure for young women, the unpaid work of married women limited both the opportunities for, and the expectations of, leisure. In effect a notion of leisure as earned through paid labour framed women's own perceptions of their right to leisure, as well as determining social constructions of the relationship between adult women and the concept. Moreover, social constructions of the 'good' wife and mother as someone who devoted her time to the needs of other family members militated against the exercise of personal leisure time. Such views could induce guilt in women who sought to prioritise their own pleasures either within or outside of the family. Indeed the extent to which leisure often necessitated work by the wife and mother meant that so-called 'family leisure' rarely

Church of England Whit Walk, Manchester, 1956. The Manchester Whit Walks were a time of work and self-sacrifice for some women as they struggled to dress their children for the occasion. (Source: Manchester Central Reference Library, local history unit. Photographic collection Ref. No. 60877, Class No. 280.)

provided unmitigated personal leisure for the women involved.

Further, whilst the relatively uncomplicated leisure status of young wage earning adolescent girls was founded upon a sense of freedom based upon economic independence, the financial independence of married women was less certain. Like the notion that women did not deserve leisure time because they were not engaged in paid work, there was a notion, often internalised, that they had not earned the right to take money for themselves. As the *Manchester Evening News* noted in 1920:

> *In the poorer classes a husband always spends more on himself than a woman. He must have his tobacco, his football matches and his drinks. The well-to-do man must also have his tobacco, his club, and his drinks. But what does the woman get? If she goes twice a week to the pictures or once to a theatre in one week she is thought extravagant, yet this is her only diversion.*[21]

The financial arrangements of the home were often rooted in a notion of the husband's right to spend money on his own pleasures. Like the adolescent, they expected an amount of spends. As Margaret noted of the years after the Second World War: "I had to do the finances. As long as he had his spends and his tobacco, he was a happy man." Women in command of a limited budget often had economic priorities other than the pursuit of personal pleasure.

Oral evidence clearly points, then, to both changing experiences and differing perceptions of leisure as the life cycle progressed. Respondents often recalled that the years after marriage, and particularly after the birth of children, heralded considerable change in their own leisure experiences. For example, Ivy recalled that after the war: "I had Derek I, er, well you just, life was the babies then. You know. Then I had Michael two years after and Paul two years after him. So I didn't really go anywhere then." Many of the women interviewed offered the view that once married they no longer needed, deserved or even wanted leisure for themselves. As Dorothy observed of the changes wrought by her marriage in 1946: "I felt that I'd had a lovely teenage life and er I wanted to settle down and erm, I really, not settle down that much but not do things without my husband, you know. You know, not too much anyway." Certainly most expressed the view that within the family, the leisure choices of others took preference over their own use of time.

Documentary sources too point to an indistinct notion of leisure for adult women. There is an oft-repeated assertion that the pleasures of women were more dependent upon domestic circumstances than they were for any other family member. Whilst occasional reference was made to the needs of women as individuals, more generally, women were addressed as part of, or, in the post-war period, as representatives of, the family unit. In effect, the personal pleasures of youth were replaced by a leisure rooted largely within the family, with the family itself becoming the source of personal happiness. Indeed, the *Manchester Evening News* 'Home Page' made the link between a woman's personal happiness and her home explicit. In 1935, its

editress proclaimed that: "It's not until you are married that you know what happiness is."[22]

Certainly the nature of work in the home impinged upon the time available to women for leisure. A work dictated by task, and organised around the timetables of other family members, led to a fragmentation of limited time. Moreover, notions of the work of wife and motherhood as more than a job because rooted in duty, but less than work because unpaid, led to an ambiguous definition of its nature. Several *Manchester Evening News* articles noted a tendency to regard housework as more akin to leisure than work. One writer of 1930 found it necessary to argue that: "housekeeping remains a job and not a pleasant recreation."[23] And in 1955 Joyce Stranger wrote under the title "The little woman's no lady of leisure."[24] Even when paid work was also performed the demands of home could eat up all available spare time, as is evident in Spring Rice's study of inter-war working-class wives.[25] After the Second World War, the increased participation of married women in the workforce, as part-time or casual workers, did not effect a notion of earned leisure. Women were viewed as being able to combine two forms of work, but neither was perceived to be a full-time job deserving of a leisure reward.

A subordination of personal choice in leisure to the desires of other family members is a common theme in the leisure experiences of adult women. Both documentary and oral sources point to a notion of women as facilitators, rather than the recipients, of leisure within the family; the expectation that the wife and mother should prioritise the needs of others is evident throughout the period. Certainly, women's work often serviced the leisure of other family members. In the *Manchester Evening News*, other people's leisure as work for women is a theme apparent in the general expectation, growing stronger throughout the period, that women were responsible for the leisure of their husbands. For example, in 1940 Ann Lewis castigated the archetypal "lonely woman" whose husband spent every night in the pub or club: "I'm willing to bet my new powder compact to a pair of clogs that you were to blame most of the time."[26] By failing to maintain her appearance, or being too busy with her home to spend time with her husband, the woman was accused of driving her husband away. The solution, according to Lewis, lay in improved appearance, the acquisition of some games to play together and the provision of the husband's "favourite ale". Here the onus was entirely on the wife to create an environment in which her husband would want to spend his leisure time. She must also present herself as attractive leisure for him if she was to keep him at home.

The role of co-ordinating leisure within the family did not extend only to the husband. Whilst the advent of children could generally curtail the amount of time available to women for leisure, the leisure of children, like that of the husband, often necessitated work by the mother. For example, Hannah remembered that in the 1940s and '50s, "school concerts, speech days, scout and brownie events occupied our spare time until the children grew older." Those working-class women who remembered the Manchester Whit Walks recalled both the work and the self-sacrifice entailed

Ritz Ballroom, Whitworth Street West, 1930.
(Source: Manchester Central Reference Library, local studies unit, computerised collection.)

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Advert for the Ritz Ballroom in the Manchester Evening News, 1960.
(Source: *Manchester Evening News*, 16th Dec., 1960, p.7.)

in preparing children for these annual processions into the city centre from the surrounding parishes. For example, Ivy recalled the struggles the women of pre-war Ancoats went through in order to provide new clothes for their children at this time: "They might go in the pawn shop the week after, but they had new clothes for Whit." Irene noted that her mother would probably do without to clothe them at this time and Dorothy remembered the walks as a time of worry for mothers: "You know, I think they must have spent all their money an erm, dressing the children up in all their finery, you know and erm, it was a big worry actually. A big worry. You know erm, I think for a lot of mums, even in my day you know er, a big worry." Certainly those women who made their children's clothes themselves invested both time and money in the process.

However, despite the emphasis placed upon leisure as an arena for service and duty to the family and the constraints of time and money which married women could experience, the sources do point to a demand for leisure and demonstrate some of the ways in which women pursued their own pleasures. On the whole, those activities which women did engage in during their adult lives tended to be less formalised and less commercially based than those of their youth. The primary reason for this was that they lacked the clearly defined time and often the financial resources to pursue such activities, although notions that married women did not 'deserve' leisure in the same way as wage-earning adolescents and men, had a clear impact on the type of activity pursued. Moreover, those activities most frequently enjoyed in youth, dancing and picture going, also carried certain meanings outside of their pursuit as leisure activities. Both were closely related to the act of courting: the dance-halls provided an arena for meeting boys and the cinema acted as a venue for courtship, away from the gaze of parental supervision. Whilst it has been shown that many young women enjoyed these activities for their own sake, it is clear that the meanings which they carried across the life cycle, encouraged the participation of women at some points and actively discouraged their participation at others.

Visits to the cinema were the most likely of these two commercial forms of leisure to be continued into adult life. As Kathleen Box's survey of 1946 revealed, only twenty five per cent of adult women never went to the cinema; adult women accounted for sixty two per cent of the adult civilian cinema audience in that year.[27] In the 1935 *Survey Of London Life And Labour*, it was suggested that: "Women mainly attend the afternoon performances. It is no uncommon sight to see women slipping into the cinema for an hour, after they have finished their shopping and before the children come home from school."[28] Like so many of the pursuits of adult life, cinema-going, was, it would seem, fitted in around the timetables of other family members.

The cinema itself was used by women for a variety of

purposes, something that has perhaps been overlooked by some historians who have focused upon the medium itself, rather than the meanings attached to the activity by picture-goers.[29] Generally, the act of 'going to the pictures' seems to have been of more importance to women than the content of the films they actually saw; a victory for practice over text which must cast some doubt upon the impact of film content on cinema audiences. For some, particularly working-class women of the inter-war period, visits to the cinema constituted a valuable break from household labour. Dorothy recalled her mother's visits to Manchester cinemas thus: "Now that was the only time she did sit down. You know she enjoyed it and erm, she took me in occasionally at night. But you know, in the house, you know if she was in the house, she was working." However, the cinema also provided an arena for childcare, with women taking their children to the cinema throughout this period. As Rowntree and Lavers observed in the post-war period: "Babies in arms, who are not infrequently both seen and heard in cinemas, particularly in the afternoons, are admitted free."[30] For others, who could afford baby-sitters or whose family were obliging and accessible, weekly visits to the cinema were a shared form of leisure between husband and wife.

Dancing, however, proved less amenable to pursuit over the life cycle. The association of the public dance hall with the act of courting, or more directly 'picking up', actively discouraged married women from attending. For example, Dorothy, who had danced frequently during the war at public dance halls, ceased to dance upon her marriage. The reasons she gives point clearly to the association of dancing with the rituals of courtship:

> *I did try going dancing when, we couldn't get baby-sitters, or we couldn't afford them. And erm, we had one night out a week each and erm, he went out about 9 o'clock, for a drink, got back about eleven. And he had a game of cards. And I tried going back to the Ritz and, with my sister, erm, but I didn't feel right, you know, I didn't feel right.* Why, why didn't you feel right? *Well I ended up dancing with other men when I had a husband at home, you know. I mean erm, er, erm, er I went for a few weeks and er (pause) it just didn't seem right. So I didn't do it you know, I mean I stopped doing it, you know, and erm, er, then we more or less we, except for the church dances, we then waited until my eldest girl was able to baby-sit for us, which she did when she was about 15. And then we danced a lot because we were able to do it, you know.*

The Manchester derby, 12th September 1925.
(Source: *Manchester Evening News*, 12th Sept., 1925, p.5)

The fact that she returned to dancing only when she could be accompanied by her husband points clearly to particular notions of how women can appear in public and with whom.

Other women did continue to dance throughout their married life, although the nature of the dances attended altered. For example, women from both class backgrounds attended dinner dances. Only one woman continued to frequent the public dance halls and this she did in the company of her husband who played in a jazz band. As she recalled, she perceived no fundamental difficulties in dancing with other men while he played, although his presence on the stage probably did act as a safe-guard for her: "And lads'd sometimes come up and say can I take you home. I'd say oh no, no er I'm going home with my boyfriend like he's in the band, or my husband as he was then. And they'd say, is your husband in the band and doesn't he mind you dancing with people and I'd say oh no no no no, not at all!". Their assumption that he would object to her dancing with other men demonstrates the strict etiquette which more generally accompanied married women's experience of dancing.

The extent to which women were more generally engaged in formal, outdoor leisure forms, was, however, limited. By far the largest proportion of women's leisure in adult life was taken up with less structured kinds of spare time activity. Informal leisure such as doorstep gossip, socialising with friends or visits to other houses demanded less in terms of time and money from those involved. It also fitted the largely fragmented time structures of married women working in the home and enabled children to be cared for simultaneously without recourse to a baby-sitter.

Oral testament reveals that a premium was often placed upon informal socialising; Melanie Tebbutt has illustrated the recreational function of gossip, as well as its role in the exchange of information and its function as a community policing system.[31] However, there were clear distinctions amongst women in the forms that such activity took; distinctions rooted in material circumstance and historical moment. For working-class women in the inter-war period, socialising and gossip provided an informal break from work which did not necessitate travelling out of the immediate vicinity of the neighbourhood. Ivy recalled that her Ancoats based mother "used to sit on the step, you know, you know, the front step and chat." And Jean recalled her own mother's street gossip on wash day. In this way work activity could be enhanced by the introduction of an element of leisure.

Historians such as Melanie Tebbutt and Elizabeth Roberts have pointed to the importance of neighbourhood networks in providing mutual aid and support to working-class women within this period. However, the inter-war period witnessed the beginnings of a movement away from the established working-class communities and into the new housing of Corporation or private estates. Ann Hughes and

Karen Hunt have outlined the implications which this move had for the new inhabitants of the Wythenshawe estate, noting, in particular, the commitment to privacy which the estates encouraged.[32] Women within these estates tended to relax inside their home, rather than in the street; certainly the new housing did not *necessitate* the street-based existence which stemmed from inner city conditions. Such women began to experience forms of social life similar to those of lower middle-class women whose increased access to both time and money enabled socialising to be conducted away from the home or at least apart from the work of running that home.

As the period progressed, then, interviewees recalled a more home-based, than street- based experience of socialising, one which involved reciprocated, and often planned, visits to each others houses. However, the new estates of the 1930s and 1950s were not bereft of the informal socialising of an earlier period; women often used their position as mothers to make contact with others. Elsewhere, the increasing participation of married women in the workforce provided a social outlet for women which was often highly prized. If contacts with other women were less easy, women continued to rely upon them for their personal leisure in the form of social life. For example, Edith recalled Friday night trips to the pub with her friend who lived across the road on an estate in New Moston: "Sometimes we'd go for a little drink. Go about half past nine and have a little drink and a talk and then come home you know. Could never go by myself."

Nonetheless, oral evidence is suggestive of a post-war movement towards a more family and couple-based experience of leisure. Home-based forms will be addressed shortly, however, it should be noted here that social life took on a more couple-based appearance over the period and across social classes. Celia recalled that during her married life in Miles Platting, she and her husband entertained other couples within their home. Joyce, a lower middle-class teacher, similarly remembered: "We'd have friends round for supper, yes and er either have a discussion or if they liked to play cards er we'd play, we'd play cards. And then we'd go to them, for er, for a supper. Wasn't so much, its more dinner parties now isn't it?".

Whilst social life itself became more home-focused over the course of the period, leisure activities more generally became focused upon the home. Reading, in particular, seems to have been an interest pursued by a number of women and one which fitted into the fragmented nature of women's time. As Kathleen recalled: "I've always read, I've always read. *Would you read in snatches or for longer periods?* Oh no. Oh no. Snatches. Yes. Because I, you know with, with the two young ones er, you don't get a lot of time and you know when they're asleep you've got to do, wash nappies or do something else and, but I, I always went to the library, you know." Reading was also, as Janice Radway has argued, a way of stating a claim to time for oneself, even when remaining within the home.[33] Other women found that the pursuit of handicrafts such as knitting or sewing presented a similar opportunity to pick something up and put it down as time allowed. As the *Manchester Evening News* noted in 1925, knitting was "just the thing while we wait for the pie to brown or for a husband to come in to tea; it is as much an expression of our busy crowded days as our shingled hair and one piece garments."[34] It could also, of course, constitute necessary work, and in wartime knitting for the troops was described in the press as a valuable contribution to the war effort.[35]

Finally, games too provided an inexpensive way of spending spare time within the home. Card games, in particular, appear to have been popular amongst women of different class backgrounds throughout this period. Joyce remembered her mother's whist evenings in pre-war Hulme, and Margaret stated that attendance at a whist drive was a key element of her weekly leisure. At the end of the period, Jane enjoyed evenings spent in the home playing cards with other couples. As she recalled: "So we used to have people come in and stay for the night and that and talk and play cards or whatever ... it was mostly er, again, activities created around the home ... It all sounds very boring now, when I repeat it to you, but it never seemed boring at the time ...".

Conclusion

Despite the limited opportunities for leisure recounted above, oral testament demonstrates a clear disjuncture in Manchester women's leisure experiences and perceptions of leisure over the course of the life cycle. Most of the women interviewed did conceptualise leisure as a youth based experience and related this to their role as full-time, paid workers. After marriage, and particularly after childbirth, leisure was no longer a central feature of their lives. Most commonly their own leisure preferences were subsumed into those of the family, with 'leisure' becoming a vehicle for service to husband and children. This is not to say that the women resented this. In many cases the women themselves perceived their lives to be necessarily discontinuous and talked about embracing their new lives, with the family itself becoming a source of pleasure. As Elizabeth Roberts has argued: "There can be no doubt that many women found great happiness and contentment in bringing up their children."[36] However, oral history suggests that, retrospectively, women did feel that they had given up something of themselves in their progression through the life cycle. For example, Dorothy stated that: "I only do what I want to do now, because for years I've done what everybody else wanted to do." And Elsie whose mother-in-law lived with her for twenty years, acknowledged a sense of personal freedom which she associated with the deaths of both mother-in-law and husband: "and er, she died and in the May, and erm, then my husband died one month after. But I, I felt a terrific sense of freedom, I thought suddenly, you know, less to do, it was wonderful."

Notes

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1. Interview with Mary.
2. The twenty-three women were contacted through letters to local newspapers and an appeal on GMR radio. The dates of birth of the interviewees ranged from 1907 to 1936. Seven of these women described their family background as middle class, whilst the remainder defined themselves as working class. More than half of the women spent at least part of their lives living in or nearby central Manchester; those who did not, lived in the northern and southern suburbs of the city. Only three of the women did not marry and only one of those who married did not have children.
3. For a recent survey of this work see B. Wearing, *Leisure and Feminist Theory* (1998).
4. 'Stepping out with the young set in 1955', *Manchester Evening News (hereafter MEN)*, 7 Jan. 1955, p. 2; 'Young people and their money. How do they spend it?', *MEN*, 28 Oct. 1955, p. 8; 'How does youth spend its leisure?', *ibid.*, p. 6.
5. P. Jephcott, *Girls Growing Up* (1942), p. 56.
6. J. L. Harley, 'Report Of An Enquiry Into The Occupations, Further Education And Leisure Interests Of A Number Of Girl Wage-Earners From Elementary And Central Schools In The Manchester District, With Special Reference To The Influence Of School Training On Their Use Of Leisure' (unpublished M. Ed. thesis, University of Manchester, 1937), p. 110 (hereafter 'Report of an Enquiry'). Harley used a combination of questionnaires and interviews to access the leisure interests of female wage-earners within central Manchester.
7. *MEN*, 7 Jan. 1955, p. 2.
8. A. Davies, *Leisure, Gender And Poverty. Working-Class Culture In Salford And Manchester, 1900–1939* (Buckingham, 1992), p. 89.
9. O. Morgan, 'A Study Of The Training For Leisure Occupations In A Senior Girls School In An Industrial Area, Together With An Enquiry Into The Use Made Of This Training By The Girls, After Their Entry Into Employment' (unpublished M. Ed. thesis, University Of Manchester, 1942), p. 115 (hereafter 'A Study of the Training for Leisure Occupations').
10. Davies, *Leisure, Gender and Poverty*, p. 172.
11. Harley, 'Report of an Enquiry' p. 203; Morgan, 'A Study of the Training for Leisure Occupations' p. 119; H. James and F. Moore, 'Adolescent leisure in a working class district, part II', *Occupational Psychology*, XVIII, 1 (1944), p. 31.
12. *MEN*, 7 Jan. 1955, p. 2.
13. For a detailed discussion of the monkey parade in interwar Salford and Manchester, see Davies, *Leisure, Gender and Poverty*, pp. 102–8.
14. Jephcott, *Girls Growing Up*, p. 121.
15. P. Jephcott. *Rising Twenty* (1948), p. 150.
16. *Ibid.* p. 159.
17. Andrew Davies argues that home-based leisure forms were pursued with difficulty in the cramped housing of the Manchester and Salford slums. *Leisure, Gender and Poverty*, p. 114.
18. Morgan, 'A Study of the Training for Leisure Occupations' p. 29; Harley, 'Report of an Enquiry', p. 125.
19. Jephcott, *Rising Twenty* pp. 111–3.
20. *MEN*. p. 142.
21. *Ibid.*, 16 Feb. 1920, p. 7.
22. *Ibid.*, 23 Jan. 1935, p. 6.
23. *Ibid.*, 4 Dec. 1930, p. 3.
24. *Ibid.*, 31 March 1955, p. 3.
25. M. Spring Rice, *Working Class Wives. Their Health and Conditions* (1939).
26. *MEN*, 2 Jan. 1940, p. 2.
27. Figures quoted in B. Seebohn Rowntree and G. R Lavers, *English Life And Leisure. A Social Study* (1951), pp. 228–31.
28. H. Llewellyn Smith (ed.) *The New Survey Of London Life And Labour. Volume IX. Life And Leisure* (1935), p. 46.
29. See, for example, J. Richards, *The Age Of The Dream Palace. Cinema And Society In Britain, 1930–1939* (1984), which, whilst acknowledging the popularity of the cinema amongst women, largely fails to explore the specific reasons for this popularity.
30. Rowntree and Lavers, *English Life and Leisure*, p. 232.
31. M. Tebbutt, *Women's Talk? A Social History Of 'Gossip' In Working-Class Neighbourhoods, 1880–1960* (Aldershot, 1995).
32. A. Hughes and K. Hunt, 'A culture transformed? Women's lives in Wythenshawe in the 1930s' in A. Davies and S. Fielding (eds.) *Worker's Worlds. Culture And Communities In Manchester And Salford, 1880–1939* (Manchester, 1992), p. 90.
33. J. Radway, *Reading The Romance: Women, Patriarchy And Popular Literature* (1987), p. 93.
34. *MEN*, 23 Oct. 1925, p. 10.
35. *Ibid.*, 12 March 1940, p. 7.
36. E. Roberts, *Women And Families. An Oral History, 1940–1970* (Oxford, 1995), p. 151.