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## STYLES OF LIFE, THE “LABOUR ARISTOCRACY” AND CLASS RELATIONS IN LATER NINETEENTH CENTURY EDINBURGH\*

The idea of a “labour aristocracy” pervades writing about the British working class of the second half, and especially the third quarter of the nineteenth century.<sup>1</sup> This emphasis is, in my view, correct: the behaviour and consciousness of working people cannot be explained without some such concept of divisions within the working class. But this proposition has too often been allowed to conclude, rather than to commence the enquiry. The fragmentation of the manual working class into different strata and sub-cultures may take several forms, and is bound to have local and industrial variations. In approaching the problem it is necessary to draw a clear distinction between differences in the class *situation* of various groups of workers, and the *formation* of separate working class strata – a cultural and political process. Three main levels of analysis are relevant to this problem: the stratification within the working class, in terms of class situations (relative earnings, security, prospects and opportunities, position of subordination or autonomy in the workplace, and so on); the extent to which various strata of manual workers were distinguished by the cultivation of particular styles of life, and by commitment to particular sets of norms and values; and the consequences of these for institutions embodying the interest of manual workers as a class (unions, parties, etc.) and for the patterning of conflict and consensus in the society.<sup>2</sup>

The present paper is concerned with the second level of analysis: that is, with the extent to which we can detect the articulation of a cultural identity, a more or less self-conscious exclusiveness, by an

\* This paper is based on research for a Ph.D. thesis at the University of Edinburgh. I am indebted to my supervisors, Frank Bechhofer and John Simpson, for their advice and encouragement, and to Geoff Crossick and Anne Gray for commenting on drafts of this paper. An earlier version was read at the Centre for Social History, University of Warwick.

<sup>1</sup> For example, R. Harrison, *Before the Socialists* (London, 1965), especially ch. 1; E. J. Hobsbawm, *Labouring Men* (London, 1964), ch. 15.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. W. Weselowski and K. Ślomeczynski, “Social Stratification in Polish Cities”, in: J. A. Jackson (ed.), *Social Stratification* (Cambridge, 1968), pp. 178-9.

upper stratum of skilled workers. It is thus necessary, for the purposes of the argument, to assume the existence of a marked differentiation in the economic and work experience of different working class groups: there is in fact considerable evidence to support this assumption (at least for the local case under discussion), but in the present paper I can do no more than refer to that evidence.<sup>1</sup> The discussion will focus on two related areas of social experience: the development of urban neighbourhoods, housing conditions and aspirations; and the emergence of new kinds of leisure activity, especially in so far as this entailed a growth of various voluntary organisations. My hypothesis is that these developments reflect the artisan's feelings of exclusiveness and superior social status, his desire to project a distinct social identity.

A further set of questions must also be considered – questions often implied by references to the “aristocracy of labour”. To what extent did these cultural tendencies mediate and transmit the values of a dominant middle class? This question is a complex one. On the one hand, the commitment to values of “respectability”, “self improvement”, and so on seems to indicate the diffusion of a bourgeois ideology. On the other hand, the very same values might mean a vigorous resistance to any hint of subordination or deference, a fierce defence of the autonomy of working class institutions; at times (as in the trade union movement) they might even take on meanings partially antagonistic to those of the dominant economic individualism of the period.<sup>2</sup> The culture of the “superior” artisan cannot, therefore, be understood unless we recognise the existence of a real, and growing sense of class identity. Any analysis must account for this consciousness of class, as well as for the diffusion of values held by the dominant middle class. This is, I would argue, best seen in the perspective of Gramsci's concept of a “corporate” class consciousness. Gramsci was concerned with the fact that class antagonisms may be articulated, yet effectively contained “within the existing fundamental structures”. In his analysis he lays emphasis on the cultural domination of a “hegemonic class”, from whom the “subordinate classes” adopt a “conception of the world”, “for reasons of submission and intellectual subordination”.<sup>3</sup> The relevance of this analysis lies in the light it sheds on a recurring theme of the present paper: that of the essential am-

<sup>1</sup> This evidence is discussed in my thesis on “Class Structure and the Class Formation of Skilled Workers in Edinburgh, c 1850 – c 1900” (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Edinburgh University, 1972). All statements relating to Edinburgh during the period not otherwise substantiated are based on material in this thesis.

<sup>2</sup> For the ambivalence of these values, see R. Harrison, “Afterword”, in S. Smiles, *Self Help* (London, 1968, Sphere Books edition), pp. 268-9.

<sup>3</sup> A. Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, ed. and transl. by Q. Hoare and G. Nowell Smith (London, 1971), pp. 181, 327.

bivalence of the mid-Victorian artisan, and of the values of “respectability” to which he so often appears to be strongly committed. This seems to me to reflect precisely the kind of class consciousness characterised by Gramsci as “corporate”: a growth of separate class institutions and a sense of class identity went hand in hand with the formulation of goals and aspirations in a language “adopted” from the dominant class. The dominant ideology was thus mediated by the distinctive institutions of skilled workers, its meanings were to some extent reformulated, adapted to the situation of the artisan. The social subordination of the working class was thus indirect, mediated, organised through a complex network of institutions.

## I

### THE CLAIM TO “RESPECTABILITY”: RESIDENCE, URBAN NEIGHBOURHOODS, AND RECREATION

The community situation, aspirations and leisure patterns of the skilled worker must be set in the context of certain more general features of society in Victorian Edinburgh.<sup>1</sup> The city was marked by a long history as the capital of Scotland, the centre (even after the Act of Union) for national religious, legal and political institutions. The latter half of the nineteenth century, on the other hand, saw a considerable rise in population (from 160,302 in 1851 to 298,113 in 1901),<sup>2</sup> a rapid development of newer kinds of economic activity, and growth of new urban areas, beyond the boundaries of both the Old and New Towns. Business groups (mainly in commerce, finance, insurance, etc., rather than industry) and newer professions swelled the numbers of a middle class based traditionally on the legal, religious and administrative life of the city. Edinburgh was distinguished among cities of its size by the high proportion of its inhabitants engaged in middle class, and especially professional occupations. At the 1901 census, for example, nine per cent of males in the city were in what is called the “professional class”, far higher than for the three other major Scottish cities.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> For the economic and social characteristics of the city see I. MacDougall (ed.), *The Minutes of Edinburgh Trades Council, 1859-73* (Edinburgh, 1968), “Introduction”, pp. xvi-xviii. Editorial matter in this edition will in future be cited as MacDougall by page number; but all references to the text of the minutes themselves will be cited by date, regardless of whether they fall within the period covered by this edition.

<sup>2</sup> *Returns Relating to the Population of Counties, Cities, etc.* [Parliamentary Papers, 1852-3, LXXXIII]; *Census of Scotland, 1901, Vol. I* [PP, 1902, CXXIX]. These figures are for the Parliamentary Burgh.

<sup>3</sup> *Census of Scotland, 1901, Vol. III* [PP, 1904, CVIII], p. xl.

A large sector of local employment was based on the demand for goods and services created by this middle class. In 1881, 20.5 per cent of the occupied population were engaged in domestic service.<sup>1</sup> A diverse range of handicrafts catered for local consumer needs: clothing, furniture, coachmaking, leather trades, etc. Although this sector remained a notable feature of the industrial structure, it is those industries producing for extra-local markets which appear to be more dynamic in the second half of the nineteenth century.<sup>2</sup> These industries – including printing, engineering, rubber, brewing – were more heavily capitalised, and generally located in newly developing industrial districts around the railways, rather than in the town-centre back-streets which housed many of the older craft workshops. Edinburgh's working population was therefore occupationally heterogeneous. A feature common to most of the important local industries was, however, their high proportion of skilled labour. The importance of skilled trades is reflected in the spread of union organisation, the early foundation and continuous history of the Trades Council – and, indeed, in the rich documentary record available to the student of local working class history.<sup>3</sup>

The process of urban development led to the growing saliency of new “horizontal” divisions between social strata – including divisions between various strata of the working class. The increase in population and in the size of the city is no doubt one aspect of this: “One of the effects of increasing the size of the community is to make possible finer divisions in the status order”, since “it is possible to establish more homogeneous groups of a viable size from a larger population.”<sup>4</sup> (A related characteristic of urban growth is the emergence of specialised voluntary organisations of the kind examined later in this paper.)

A number of sources comment on the social mixture to be found in the tenements of the Old Town during the early to mid nineteenth century, the “different grades in the social scale (for even among the working classes there are many gradations) overlying each other with nearly all the regularity of geological strata”.<sup>5</sup> Proximity to work, the

<sup>1</sup> Calculated from occupation tables in Census of Scotland, 1881, Vol. II [PP, 1883, LXXXI]. Details of the procedures used in this calculation will be found in my thesis, ch. 2 and appendix.

<sup>2</sup> This is indicated by an examination of the growth-rates of different occupations: see ch. 2 of my thesis.

<sup>3</sup> See MacDougall, *op. cit.* Much of this material has become readily accessible through the work of Mr MacDougall and the Scottish Labour History Society.

<sup>4</sup> F. Bechhofer and B. Elliot, “An Approach to a Study of Small Shopkeepers in the Class Structure”, in: *European Journal of Sociology*, IX (1968), p. 190.

<sup>5</sup> J. Symington, “The Working Man's Home”, prize essay in J. Begg, DD,

location of the craft workshops among the tenements of the Old Town and in the back streets of the New Town (e.g., Rose Street and its lanes) was no doubt an important feature of this urban scene. The location of many newer and larger scale industrial enterprises in newly developing areas away from the town centre was thus a factor in the changes of the period. The effect of the early slum clearances (beginning in Edinburgh with Chambers' Improvement of the 1860's) and of the acquisition of urban land for railways and other town centre developments is also well known; whereas the more prosperous of the former slum dwellers were able to move to new and superior housing, the effect on the poorer, and probably more numerous group was to aggravate the overall housing shortage.<sup>1</sup> In one local instance: "The houses that were erected were too good for the class of tenants that we displaced in the lower part of the town; and the consequence was that the houses were never let; but they were exposed for sale they were very eagerly looked after by artizans of a superior class, who acquired them with the little savings they had of their own, or with the assistance of loans from investment companies."<sup>2</sup>

From the Royal Commission on Housing (1884-5) we get a picture of well marked and well understood gradations in types of working class housing in the city. Those living in one room only were "labourers and people of the poorer class";<sup>3</sup> at the upper end of the scale a "growing demand" was reported for self-contained flats, built in two storeys with outside stairs and thus separate street doors.<sup>4</sup> Housing of this type had been erected by the Cooperative Building Company; founded at the end of the masons' nine hours strike of 1861, it catered, according to its manager, for the "better class of working man".<sup>5</sup> The President of Edinburgh Trades Council reported a "general desire among our artizans to be laird of their own house, as the saying is".<sup>6</sup> The trend to owner occupation no doubt involved only a minority, even of the "superior" artisans; most manual workers of all occupational

Happy Homes for Working Men and How to Get Them (London, 1866), p. 161. This work is hereafter cited as Symington; Begg's own text is cited as Begg.

<sup>1</sup> For instances in other cities, see: C. M. Allan, "The Genesis of British Urban Redevelopment with special reference to Glasgow", in: *Economic History Review*, Second Series, XVIII (1965); G. Best, *Mid-Victorian Britain, 1851-75* (London, 1971), pp. 60-1; G. Stedman Jones, *Outcast London* (Oxford, 1971), pp. 160-78.

<sup>2</sup> Royal Commission on the Housing of the Working Classes (Scotland) [PP, 1884-5, XXXI], q. 18738, Clerk to the City Improvement Trustees.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, q. 19250, President of Edinburgh Trades Council.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, q. 18688, City Valuator and Assessor.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, q. 19071.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, q. 19185.

groups continued to live in rented flats of the tenement style. But among these there was a wide range, from district to district, street to street, even block to block or stair to stair. "Improved" blocks might thus be found interspersed among dwellings of a distinctly poor class.

Some statistical evidence, for the 1900's, is given in Table 1. Thirty-one per cent of the semi- and unskilled, but only 14 per cent of the skilled were reported as living in one room; conversely, 40 per cent of the skilled, but only 20 per cent of the semi and unskilled were reported as paying 3/6d or more weekly rent. These figures are derived from the published report of a survey conducted by the Charity Organisation Society. Their main concern was with the physical condition of schoolchildren, and the population studied was therefore defined by the pupils of a particular school (North Canongate), located in that old, poorer central district, from which, as I have argued, the more prosperous skilled workers had tended to move out. Although no precise information on the catchment area of the school has come to light, the survey population is almost certainly biased towards the least prosperous sections of the working class – this bias is, however, a conservative one with respect to my hypotheses about cultural differences within the working class. It should therefore be emphasised that the survey families are best treated as a population in themselves, rather than as representative of any wider population.

A further difficulty is posed by the regrettably small numbers in some of the occupations. In view of this, we should avoid reading too much into the *size* of percentage differences – for example, the three per cent of printers and 11 per cent of engineers in one room both represent just one household, but out of 30 and nine respectively – but focus instead on the *direction* of differences, similarities in the distribution of different variables, and the rank order of occupations. The important point to emerge from this approach is that the differences are consistent with a number of other indicators – particularly with an occupational analysis of economic conditions, as reflected in the children's heights.<sup>1</sup> This is especially striking with regard to the differences between the skilled trades. Three trades which appear to have been relatively prosperous – the printers, joiners and, above all, engineers – have 60 per cent and more in the "high rent" group. (The masons would certainly be included in any similar list of favoured trades for earlier years; but they suffered badly from the building depression of the 1900's, aggravated by the introduction of stone-

<sup>1</sup> See ch. 3 of my thesis for evidence regarding occupational differences in economic conditions.

cutting machines.<sup>1</sup>) This suggests, then, that differences in housing marked off a “superior” stratum of skilled workers, drawn from certain favoured trades, and from the best placed workers in other trades.

How, then, do the gradations in housing and neighbourhood relate to the spread of particular attitudes? What were the meanings to working people of movement to a different sort of housing? The evidence here inevitably becomes hard to interpret, with the familiar biases to the articulate and educated. Given this qualification, we can at any rate indicate the existence of certain attitudes and aspirations. Significantly, these had begun to emerge before the slum clearances of the '60's, so that the construction of improved dwellings at higher rents in place of the slums helped meet a pre-existing demand for better housing. And this demand did not simply reflect a desire to spend improved incomes on improved housing; it was associated with particular values and ways of perceiving the urban neighbourhood and its inhabitants. A common theme is the desire to escape identification with the inhabitants of the old central working class area. A typical comment is that of an “Old Journeyman Hatter” in his published reminiscences: “In a moral point of view these localities will never contain a well conditioned population.”<sup>2</sup> The winner of Dr Begg's essay prize on “The Working Man's Home” (a compositor by trade) complained of the difficulty of maintaining “respectable” standards in the old tenements, with their social mixture, gregarious street (or court or close) life and lack of privacy.<sup>3</sup> The proprietor of one superior block, who had managed to let only 12 out of 50 flats, attributed this to a stigmatisation effect from the low reputation of the neighbourhood.<sup>4</sup> The *North Briton* – a local radical paper with a working class orientation – advocated the provision of running water in dwellings, on the ground that: “It is grievous to find a decent woman, perhaps in feeble health, standing at a public well for an hour, waiting for a supply of water – perhaps in the midst of prostitutes and viragos.”<sup>5</sup>

Aspirations with regard to housing conditions and the urban neighbourhood thus reflect cultural divisions between strata of the working class. The movement to better housing was also an escape from the stigma of association with the poorer section of the population (often this must have been reinforced by racial and religious prejudice

<sup>1</sup> For the masons' condition in the 1900's, see Royal Commission on the Poor Laws, Appendix Vol. IX [PP, 1910, XLVIII], q. 97181, Law Agent to Edinburgh Distress Committee.

<sup>2</sup> *North Briton*, 27 April, 1861.

<sup>3</sup> Symington, *op. cit.*, p. 162.

<sup>4</sup> Royal Commission on Housing, *op. cit.*, q. 19154, J. R. Findlay.

<sup>5</sup> *North Briton*, 25 May, 1859.



Table 1

Housing Situation of Families Studied by Charity Organisation Society, Edinburgh 1904: By Occupation of Head of Household

Occupation	No	% in one room	% in three or more rooms	Weekly rent 3/6d or more	Mean weekly rent (shillings)
Printers*	30	3	27	60	3.53
Bookbinders	9	11	11	44	3.30
Masons	14	21	36	15	2.90
Joiners	10	20	50	66	3.70
Painters	31	23	19	22	2.95
Engineers	9	11	55	66	3.78
Metal workers**	18	22	28	22	2.76
Shoemakers	17	0	35	43	3.38
Misc. skilled	17	12	18	41	3.19
Skilled Total	155	14	28	40	3.22
Semi- & unskilled	26	31	15	20	2.69
Total	181	16	27	38	3.15

\* "Compositors" (14) and "printers" (sic) (16). These are combined, although compositors and machinemen were quite distinct occupations, since it is not clear that the authors of the Report made the distinction systematically.

\*\* Ironmoulders (7); other iron workers (4); brass finishers (7).

Source: Calculated from material on individual families: City of Edin. COS, Report on the Physical Condition of Fourteen Hundred Schoolchildren in the City, Together With Some Account of Their Homes and Surroundings, (London, 1906).

The COS studied the families of all pupils at North Canongate School in central Edinburgh. I have re-analysed data for all survey families in the specific occupations listed, and a 10 per cent random sample from the remainder divided into "miscellaneous skilled" and "semi- and unskilled" groups (19 households headed by widows, non-manual workers or otherwise unsuitable were dropped from the random sample).

against the Irish population). Asked whether the slum dwellers resented their poor conditions, A. C. Telfer, the President of the Trades Council (a joiner by trade) told the Royal Commission on Housing: "Properly speaking it is generally the Irish element, labourers and what not who live in that locality, and I must confess that I do not come into communication with them as a rule, so as to feel as it were the touch of their inner feelings in that respect."<sup>1</sup> (This ignorance had not inhibited the same witness from claiming earlier to represent "indirectly the working classes of Edinburgh generally" – perhaps an application of the doctrine of virtual representation.<sup>2</sup>)

This desire to escape the stigma of proximity to the "Irish element, labourers and what not" had a more positive counterpart, in the

<sup>1</sup> Royal Commission on Housing, op. cit., q. 19273.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., q. 19167.



values of domesticity and the home. The Reverend Dr Begg articulated these values from the standpoint of the Free Church social conscience:

“Man must not only have a covering, but a HOME. It is upon the right ordering of these little kingdoms that the peace and social order of all the great kingdoms of the world depends.”<sup>1</sup>

Like the stigmatisation of the disreputable poor this valuation of family life is an important feature of Victorian middle class ideology: like the social imagery of stigmatisation it found an echo in the “respectable” working class. Telfer complained to the Royal Commission that the cost of decent housing forced artisans to take lodgers, and that consequently “the home is not the home it ought to be”.<sup>2</sup> The prize essayist even had reservations about any extra-familial leisure pursuits at all, on the ground that they “must draw the head of the household away from his family at the time when he is most required, and give him a taste for engagements and companionships which can only be gratified beyond the pale of the domestic hearth”.<sup>3</sup> The author is not referring, as one might imagine, to brothels, nor even to pubs – but to reading rooms! No doubt this is an extreme statement of the values of domesticity; those groups most likely to have high aspirations with regard to housing were also, as we shall see, characterised by high levels of participation in various voluntary organisations. But there seems equally little doubt that, in milder forms, the positive evaluation of home and family life was quite widely diffused.

There is, then, a certain amount of evidence to support the hypothesis that residential patterns were related to particular kinds of value and aspiration, and to marked cultural divisions within the working class. Popular recreation, and participation in various voluntary organisations seem likewise to have been bound up with the projection of a sense of social superiority. Best has commented that in the 1850’s and 60’s we can detect the beginnings of “the leisure patterns of modern industrial urban mass society”.<sup>4</sup> The specialised organisations emerging in place of older ways of spending free time tended, however, to take the form of voluntary organisations, rather than of the business investment in leisure facilities more often associated with “mass society”. The newer leisure organisations provided in the first instance, not for an undifferentiated “mass”, but for more clearly identified social groups. Social identities were, indeed, partly created through the con-

<sup>1</sup> Begg, *op. cit.*, p. iv.

<sup>2</sup> Royal Commission on Housing, *op. cit.*, q. 19198.

<sup>3</sup> Symington, *op. cit.*, p. 178.

<sup>4</sup> Best, *op. cit.*, p. 199.

struction of particular styles of life, as the “superior” artisan sought to distinguish himself from the rest of the working class.

The new leisure patterns are associated with a rejection of certain aspects of the older popular culture, especially its drinking customs. This is reflected in “those evening entertainments called soirées so common among the sub-middle and working classes of society”.<sup>1</sup> The entertainment on such occasions was generally an eclectic mixture of popular songs (sentimental and humorous), recitations (Burns being a great favourite), humorous sketches, perhaps some painless adult education, and so on, together with (non-alcoholic) refreshments. Above all, there was nothing of a *risqué* character, for one feature of the soirée was that wives and “sweethearts” could safely be invited. I will cite just one example of the soirée: a gathering of “upwards of a thousand” printers and their womenfolk, at the invitation of William Nelson, the publisher, to hear a lecture on the “noble art” of printing and then “enjoy the humour and pathos of some of Scotland’s choicest national songs, including Burns’s proud protest, which could there be appreciated without any thought of social wrong – ‘A man’s a man for a’ that!’”<sup>2</sup> The *Typographical Circular*, a journal owned by the union, struck the note of working class respectability in its comment on the occasion: “Here were a thousand men, nearly all in superfine black coats and spotless shirt-fronts; a thousand women in tasteful dresses and bonnets of the latest mode [...]; and in all this great mass of the ‘lower orders’ not a word out of joint; not a gesture of impatience; no crowding, jostling [...]; nothing but courtesy and [...] perfect good breeding”.<sup>3</sup> The soirée was likewise the stock in trade of the Workingmen’s Club and Institute, formed in 1864 to provide “healthy recreation combined with mental improvement”<sup>4</sup>; of benevolent employers (like Nelson); trade unions; or any body desirous of holding a respectable social gathering.

The content of the cultural programme on such occasions is of some relevance to my theme. To assess the quality of that culture is a difficult, and possibly dangerous enterprise. One must nonetheless note a sense of its eclectic and undemanding character. It is in some respects a watered down version of the literature and art of the middle class, adapted for lower middle and upper working class audiences, diffused as the badge of “respectability” and “self improvement”. There are perhaps some more authentically popular elements: recitations and

<sup>1</sup> J. S. Blackie, *Notes of a Life*, ed. by A. S. Walker (Edinburgh, 1908), p. 228.

<sup>2</sup> D. Wilson, *William Nelson* (Edinburgh, 1889; privately printed), p. 82.

<sup>3</sup> Quoted by Wilson, *loc. cit.*

<sup>4</sup> *Scottish Typographical Circular*, October, 1864, according to which the committee were “principally printers”.

humorous sketches in broad Scots were favourite items on any programme. Even the desire for the trappings of the established culture might be inspired by egalitarian values, a stress on the independence and human dignity of the worker, and his needs as a "whole man". The acquisition of visible signs of refinement reflected the working man's demand for access to a cultural life from which he had hitherto felt shut out. As Smiles (whose writing affords one point of approach to the problem) argued: "The chief disadvantage attached to the calling of the laborious classes is, not that they are employed in physical work, but that they are too exclusively so employed, often to the neglect of their moral and intellectual faculties."<sup>1</sup> We find the same stress on the cultural needs of the "whole man" in Lord Gifford's address at the prize-giving of the Edinburgh Workingman's Flower Show:

"He had very great pleasure in taking part in the proceedings of that day, for he had sometimes thought and felt that some of their practical philanthropic movements were just perhaps a little too narrow and restricted in their influence. (Hear, hear.) It was quite right and necessary that the wants of the body should be supplied [...] But they seemed to forget that they had implanted in them by Him who made them tastes and aesthetic faculties which, if cultivated a little, would produce the highest, purest, and most elevating pleasure, and which served as a shield to protect their whole nature from what would otherwise defile it. (Applause.)"<sup>2</sup>

In interpreting this syndrome of cultural aspiration one is confronted, as so often in the analysis of Victorian attitudes, with the ambiguous nature of "respectability". On one hand, "it entailed a healthy self-respect, an assertion of personal worth over external condition"; but on the other hand, it tended to be defined in practice by "precisely that acquisition of external characteristics" condemned by Burns.<sup>3</sup> The ambiguity is nicely brought out by the Edinburgh printers, assembling in their "superfine black coats", to hear declaimed from the platform:

"The man o' independent mind,  
He looks and laughs at a' that."

The social identity of the "respectable" working man was thus created through a commitment to sobriety and propriety and con-

<sup>1</sup> Smiles, *op. cit.*, p. 206.

<sup>2</sup> *The Reformer*, 13 August, 1870.

<sup>3</sup> F. Reid, "Keir Hardie's Conversion to Socialism", in: A. Briggs and J. Saville (eds), *Essays in Labour History, 1886-1923* (London, 1971), p. 22.

sequent rejection of traditional drinking habits, and of that *demi-monde* which continued to attract “a curious throng, [...] a kind of hybrid between the gent and the pickpocket”.<sup>1</sup> More positively, the growth of those voluntary associations favoured by skilled workers was linked to their claim to be brought within the pale of civic respectability. (This claim, of course, played a part in the Reform agitation of 1866-67.) Those associations connected with thrift – Co-ops, Savings Banks, and so on – are a familiar theme of the social comment literature of the period: the emergence of certain kinds of organised leisure pursuit can, I would argue, be viewed in a similar light.

The best example of this is perhaps the Volunteer movement.<sup>2</sup> The initial conception was a force of “men of the classes having means of their own”.<sup>3</sup> But there was a remarkable response from skilled workers, demonstrating, one prominent Volunteer wrote, “even a higher public spirit than the professional Volunteers”.<sup>4</sup> Two artisan companies were among the eight companies originally raised in the city in 1859 (the others being occupational companies catering for the university, accountants, lawyers, etc.), and were said to be “the first genuine artisan companies in the kingdom”.<sup>5</sup> By 1868 there were eight artisan companies, whose 712 men together made up 37 per cent of the effective strength of the Edinburgh Rifle Volunteer Brigade; seven companies based on middle class occupations; and seven Highland companies (two of these were said to consist mainly of artisans).<sup>6</sup>

The artisans proved, moreover, to be the most consistent supporters of the movement; the business and professional elements tended to drop away when the war scare had passed, and “if it had not been for the zeal and energy of the working classes the Volunteer Force might have dwindled”.<sup>7</sup> This picture is borne out by an analysis of membership figures (in view of special factors affecting the Highland companies, these are excluded from the discussion). Whereas the other companies reach their peak of effective strength in the international crises of 1870-1 and 1877-9, the artisan companies are not affected by

<sup>1</sup> North Briton, 30 April, 1862; see also D. A. Jamieson, *Powderhall and Pedestrianism* (Edinburgh, 1943), p. 13.

<sup>2</sup> Dr H. Cunningham, who is currently working on a book on the Volunteers, made many helpful comments and suggestions, on which I have drawn in the following discussion.

<sup>3</sup> J. H. A. Macdonald, *Fifty Years of It: the experiences and struggles of a Volunteer of 1859* (Edinburgh, 1909), p. 3.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 24.

<sup>5</sup> W. Stephen, *History of the Queen's City of Edinburgh Rifle Volunteer Brigade* (Edinburgh, 1881), p. 61.

<sup>6</sup> Based on information about the various companies in Stephen, *op. cit.*, *passim*.

<sup>7</sup> Macdonald, *op. cit.*, p. 92.

these events, and their proportion of the total strength of the force consequently falls from 51 per cent in 1870 to 46 per cent in 1871.<sup>1</sup> It seems reasonable to infer from this difference in recruitment patterns that the nature of the skilled workers' attachment to the movement differed from the middle class elements'.

A part of the meaning of Volunteering certainly lay in the embodiment of values of patriotism and citizenship – values perhaps reinforced by the occasional Garibaldian overtones of the movement. It also had a relation to the growing enthusiasm for “healthy” recreation.

“The youths are enthusiastically in favour of it – some chance now of drill, or cricket or outdoor play in general after ‘supper’ [...] short space is wanted to bring the whole trade within the social pale [...] to allow the husband and father to have the fellowship with his family heretofore denied him – to enable the young to share the advantages of bodily recreation and culture enjoyed by the great bulk of the artisan class – to give the employers full return of nerve or brain force for which they pay at a uniform rate throughout the day; and, in short, to allow printers as a class to live, and move, and have their being like other rational people.”<sup>2</sup>

Thus the *Typographical Circular*, greeting the shorter hours gained in 1868. Swimming, golf, walking, excursions and seaside holidays, cricket, football were all growing pastimes in this period.<sup>3</sup> Above all, football. Like the other sports mentioned this seems at first to have been based on voluntary organisations (whether self-governing or under religious or other sponsorship). Football was thus initially part of the pattern of “healthy recreation”, distinguishing the respectable skilled worker with the ability and inclination to participate in voluntary organisations. However it seems to have acquired a wider following in the 1870's and 80's; by the 90's the pattern of organised

<sup>1</sup> Calculated from membership figures in Stephen, *op. cit.* Highland companies were excluded because of the special effects on recruitment of the clan associations, to which many Highlanders resident in the city belonged (Stephen, p. 336). The proportion of effective strength in artisan companies did not recover after the Franco-Prussian war (perhaps because of the slump of the later 1870's), while middle class recruitment rose again with the Balkan crises: the figures do not, however, cover a long enough time span to establish fully the effect of slumps or other factors on artisan participation.

<sup>2</sup> Scottish *Typographical Circular*, May, 1868.

<sup>3</sup> See, A. G. Docherty, “Urban Working Class Recreation before 1914” (unpublished undergraduate dissertation, Edinburgh University, Department of Economic History) for a valuable survey of recreational facilities in Edinburgh.

Table 2

Organisational and Leisure Affiliations of Families Studied by COS, Edinburgh 1904: By Occupation of Head of Household

	No*	% of households recorded as participants in:		
		Savings institutions**	Religious, temperance, etc.**	Voluntary organisations, sports and hobbies**
Printers	30	33	20	20
Bookbinders	9	55	33	22
Masons	14	21	7	7
Joiners	11*	27	18	18
Painters	33*	18	27	9
Engineers	9	33	78	11
Metal workers	18	33	22	17
Shoemakers	18*	17	28	22
Misc. skilled	17	35	41	18
Skilled Total	159*	28	28	16
Semi- & unskilled	27*	18	22	11
Total	186	27	27	15

\* Discrepancies due to inclusion here of families in furnished lodgings omitted from Table 1.  
 \*\* Savings institution: savings banks, friendly societies, co-op, thrift clubs, etc.; not trade unions.  
 Religious, temperance, etc.: all activities and facilities under religious or temperance auspices, as well as membership of Churches, temperance organisations, Salvation Army, etc.  
 Voluntary organisations, sports and hobbies: participation in any sort of voluntary organisation (working men's club, political parties, etc.) or any specific type of recreation, inside or outside the home; reported attendance at meetings, office-bearing, etc. in friendly societies is counted here, but simple membership of friendly societies is counted only under Savings institution.  
 Participation by any family member in these activities is counted; but no family is counted more than once for the same category of activity.

Source: See Table 1. Based on "Visitor's Comments" on individual families.

championships, with a large spectator element, and a sub-structure of boys' clubs, talent spotting, etc. underpinning the main local clubs, had emerged.<sup>1</sup> The development toward a pattern of "mass" leisure, less clearly based on restricted participation in voluntary organisations, seems to me important to broader changes in the working class.<sup>2</sup> But the main focus of this paper is on the existence of cultural differences within the working class, rather than on their possible erosion by late nineteenth century developments.

That such differences anyway continued to be important is indicated

<sup>1</sup> This is apparent from the columns of the Edinburgh Athletic Times (1895-6).  
<sup>2</sup> Cf. I. R. Taylor, "Soccer Consciousness and Soccer Hooliganism", in: S. Cohen (ed.), *Images of Deviance* (Harmondsworth, 1971), p. 141.

by Table 2. This is based (as mentioned in the notes to the table) on the "comments" on each family by the COS "lady visitors" who conducted the investigation. It seemed best to treat these comments as a measure of the perception of working class families in different occupational and other circumstances by middle class observers (the connection of this perception with a stereotype of the "respectable" worker is discussed in the final section). We are therefore concerned with the saliency of the activities mentioned in the middle class investigators' perception or recollection of the various families. The pattern of variation is, interestingly, similar to that in housing conditions (see above, Table 1 and accompanying text). The semi- and unskilled sample fall below the figure for all skilled occupations combined, on all three categories of activity; the printers, book-binders, engineers and miscellaneous skilled are above that figure on at least two out of three; and the building trades are below on at least two out of three. That there is an association between housing conditions and reported participation is borne out by analysis at the level of the individual families. Taking all occupations together ( $N=186$ ) 64 per cent of families paying 3/6d or more, but only 41 per cent of those in the lowest rent bracket (2/11d or less) are recorded as participants in one or more type of activity. Living in the higher rent houses, and being perceived as participants in the various activities are both part of a style of life, distinguishing in cultural terms the different strata of the working class.

The differentiation in styles of life is indicated by analysis of the social composition of four voluntary organisations (Table 3).<sup>1</sup> These

<sup>1</sup> In Table 3, Professions include: professions of well established status (law, medicine, Churches, etc.); professions of less established status (e.g. teachers) are in White collar II. Business includes: all types and sizes of business; White collar I: clerks, book-keepers, etc.; White collar II: managerial and supervisory (above foreman level), lesser officials (e.g., poor law officers, rail inspectors, etc.), teachers, and all other non-manual employees in posts with responsibility, or technical or educational qualifications other than the "three R's" needed for clerical work; Miscellaneous services: personal or public services not elsewhere classified (e.g. hairdressers, telegraphists); Other, miscellaneous: seamen, prison warder, cowfeeder, music seller, index maker, "stalker" (sic), "number-man" (sic). Wives and children among Flower Show Prizewinners classified by occupation of head of household (six of the untraced cases are households headed by widows, etc.); families with several prizes are counted only once, as are Bowling Club committeemen serving for more than one of the three years. Some skilled manual occupations with "several" (sic) Oddfellows' members have been counted as five each. The Oddfellows' list of occupations is apparently for the "1850's to 70's" (sic) but precise dates are not given. I am indebted to the Registrar General for Scotland for permission to consult census schedules, and to Mr T. Donoghue, secretary of the Lodge, for allowing me to consult the list of members' occupations on which the Oddfellows' figures are based.



Table 3

## Social Composition of Four Voluntary Organisations in Edinburgh

	% of membership of:			
	Members, Oddfellows, 1850's to 70's (estimated)	Members, Bruntsfield Links Allied Golf Club, 1869	Prizewinners, Flower Show, 1870	Committees, Bowling Clubs, 1890-92
Professions etc.	1 (2)	6 (2)	- (-)	20 (7)
Business	8 (16)	12 (4)	14 (11)	28 (10)
White collar I	2 (4)	9 (3)	3 (2)	31 (11)
White collar II	1 (2)	6 (2)	6 (5)	3 (1)
Retail employees, warehousemen	1 (2)	- (-)	5 (4)	3 (1)
Domestic service	4 (8)	- (-)	3 (2)	- (-)
Manual - skilled	71 (144)	61 (21)	59 (46)	6 (2)
Manual - semi- and unskilled	1 (3)	- (-)	8 (6)	- (-)
Manual - skill unclassifiable	4 (7)	3 (1)	1 (1)	- (-)
Miscellaneous services	4 (7)	3 (1)	1 (1)	9 (3)
Other, miscellaneous	4 (7)	- (-)	- (-)	- (-)
N traced (=100%)	202	34	78	35
Not traced	-	7	25	10

Some percentages add up to more than 100 due to rounding.

Source: List of members' occupation in: City of Edinburgh Lodge, No. 1 Branch of the Scottish Order of Oddfellows (duplicated, n.d. [c 1940]). Tracing of names and addresses in Census schedules: List of members, 1869, Bruntsfield Links Allied Golf Club, Minutes 1869-80 (ms. in Edinburgh Public Library); List of prizewinners, "Working Men's Flower Show", in: The Reformer, 13 August, 1870; List of officers of clubs affiliated to Associated Bowling Clubs of Edinburgh and Leith, in: J. Prestell (ed.), Edinburgh Bowling Annuals, 1890-92.

include three bodies of a recreational nature, and the Oddfellows Friendly Society, which had a certain social and cultural life among the members, as well as purely economic functions. (For the Oddfellows, it has been necessary to estimate, by assigning the arbitrary number five to certain skilled trades listed below, said to have "several" members: the effect is probably to underestimate the skilled manual category - this category is however still by far the largest, even excluding altogether the occupations of unknown size.) In the Oddfellows, the Golf Club and the Flower Show a majority belong to the skilled manual category, while semi- and unskilled workers are clearly under-represented. The Bowling Club committees, on the other

hand, have a predominance of middle class groups.<sup>1</sup> A detailed breakdown of the skilled category indicates high participation by those trades we might expect, from other evidence, to find represented in the “superior” stratum. Trades said to have “several” members in the Oddfellows include masons, joiners, engineers, shoemakers and gold-beaters; printers and furniture trades are the largest groups in the Golf Club; masons, joiners, smiths and shoemakers in the Flower Show.<sup>2</sup> The differentiation in voluntary organisation membership and recreational activity is not simply between different sorts of activity, but also sometimes between different organisations catering for the same activity. Thus, certain golf clubs drew their membership from professional and superior business groups.<sup>3</sup> Similarly, the university and professional based Grange Cricket Club was clearly of a more exalted social tone than the cricket clubs playing on the Meadows, which on one occasion asked the aid of the Trades Council in preserving their ground.<sup>4</sup> The occupational distinction between the different Volunteer companies is an example of the same tendency.

One can therefore point to the emergence of a range of socially stratified voluntary organisations, catering for various strata from skilled manual workers upwards. In this context it is worth examining the figures for the non-manual groups in Table 3 more closely. Whereas the two white collar groups and business together account for 11 per cent of the Oddfellows, 27 per cent of the Golf Club and 23 per cent of the Flower Show, they account for 62 per cent of the Bowling Clubs. Moreover it is notable that my White Collar I group, the clerks, are the largest single category in the Bowling Clubs, where they apparently associated with business and professional groups. Thus, although the leisure activities of some skilled workers brought them into contact with certain lower middle class groups (as is apparent from an inspection of the first three columns in Table 3) further dis-

<sup>1</sup> It may, of course, be misleading to compare committee composition with total membership composition, but the only available membership details for an individual Bowling Club show a similar pattern, with only one skilled worker among 18 new members: Minutes of Edinburgh Bowling Club, 1890-1 (manuscript notebook in Edinburgh Public Library).

<sup>2</sup> Unlike the other trades mentioned, the shoemakers did not enjoy an advantageous economic position. On the other hand, they were by far the most numerous of the skilled trades at this period – and there is anyway some evidence of a division within the trade between a favoured minority and the remainder.

<sup>3</sup> T. S. Aitchison and G. Lorimer, *Reminiscences of the Old Bruntsfield Links Golf Club* (n.p., 1904; privately printed).

<sup>4</sup> *Reminiscences of the Grange Cricket Club, Edinburgh* (Edinburgh, 1891); Minutes of Edinburgh Trades Council, 9 February, 1886; I am indebted to Mr J. Henry, secretary of the Council, for allowing me to consult the manuscript minutes for this period.

crimination is needed between elements of the middle class. "Business" in particular is a heterogeneous category, ranging from large local employers, to small shopkeepers and self-employed craftsmen of clearly working class origins and affiliations. The rather miscellaneous range of technically qualified or responsible occupations covered by the White Collar II category may well also have been recruited largely from skilled workers or their children. It is therefore arguable that skilled workers' contacts with non-manual groups would have been mainly with a relatively unformed, fluid and transitional lower middle class, composed of small businessmen, managerial and supervisory groups, technicians, minor officials, etc.<sup>1</sup>

This lower middle class belonged, I would argue, to a social world whose centre of gravity lay in the "superior" artisan, rather than to a middle class world, into which the "superior" artisan aspired to ascend. The clerks, on the other hand, seem to justify their reputation for "status climbing", with a pattern of association with business and professional middle class groups and a disproportionately low participation in those activities favoured by skilled manual workers.<sup>2</sup> This has certain implications for the analysis of class relations in the Victorian city. It is often suggested that the gap above the "labour aristocrat" was narrower than the gap below him.<sup>3</sup> This may well be true: but to establish fully his social location, and his likely orientation as a social actor, we must consider the gap above the "upper-working-cum-lower-middle-class". The critical divide may have been that between the locally dominant "established" middle class and more "marginal" non-manual strata: these latter strata would then have had in common with the skilled workers a claim to status recognition and participation in local affairs.<sup>4</sup> The class relationships involved in the pursuit of "rational recreation" are explored further in the remainder of this paper.

## II

### THE MEANING OF THE CLAIM TO "RESPECTABILITY"

The evidence already considered supports the "labour aristocracy" hypothesis, in that it suggests the emergence of a particular style of

<sup>1</sup> Similarly, Hobsbawm refers to the "shading over of the aristocracy of labour into other strata" (op. cit., p. 274).

<sup>2</sup> Cf. D. Lockwood, *The Blackcoated Worker* (London, 1958), pp. 29-32.

<sup>3</sup> For example, Hobsbawm, loc. cit.

<sup>4</sup> Vincent's stimulating comments on mid-Victorian popular Liberalism may be relevant here: J. R. Vincent, *The Formation of the Liberal Party* (London, 1966), pp. 79-80.

life and pattern of aspiration, distinguishing a “superior” stratum of skilled workers. I have also suggested the connection of this syndrome with values of “respectability”, “self improvement”, and so on, and with a marked concern for social status. In this respect the labour aristocracy can be seen as committed to a middle class value system. But the *meanings* of the values may yet have varied, in ways that gave rise to significant kinds of class tension. Moreover, attitudes and behaviour may well vary with the social context, and cohere only problematically. We have therefore to consider both the differential meanings of such values as “respectability”, and the extent to which they were in tension with alternative kinds of value and behaviour.

The behaviour patterns under discussion certainly had a meaning to middle class observers: they were often interpreted in terms of a model of the respectable, temperate, thrifty and self-improving working man. Dr Begg evokes the image nicely, in his description of the houses erected by the Cooperative Building Company: “When he enters – which, of course, he will do very respectfully – he will be greatly pleased with the clean and tidy interior of the dwellings, the carpets, arm-chairs, libraries, family Bibles, and, in a word, every appliance by which a man can make his home comfortable and happy.” And the inevitable moral follows:

“What necessity have such men for other engagements, during the comparatively short hours of leisure, beyond the range of their own families? Here is the true antidote to the public-house! What a struggle will such men make before they dream of applying for *poors’-rates!*”<sup>1</sup>

There were, no doubt, many variations on the theme, which cannot be examined here. That it is nonetheless valid to talk of a deeply held social imagery, structuring middle class social action, is perhaps indicated by one finding from the Charity Organisation Society survey: 71 per cent of those families described in terms of general approval (i.e. such epithets as “decent”, “sober”, “respectable”, and so on), but only 46 per cent of those not so described are also reported to participate in one or more of the activities analysed in Table 2.

The evidence suggests, then, that certain kinds of behaviour, especially likely to be found among skilled workers, had a particular meaning to concerned middle class observers. To determine the meaning attached to their behaviour by working people themselves is more problematic. In the first place, it must be emphasised that this paper has so far been concerned with only one facet of a complex

<sup>1</sup> Begg, *op. cit.*, pp. 46-7.

situation. The striving for social status, which has formed the interpretative thread of the preceding discussion, co-existed with alternative modes of conduct, sharply divergent from those of the middle class. The ideological defence of union organisation affords one point of approach to this question.

“‘A man can do what he likes with his own.’ Before this plea can be held as tenable, it must be seen how what any man calls his own has been acquired [...] independent of the joint-assistance and support of co-labourers [...] Well, were the rights and privileges, such as they are, of the journeyman printer, acquired by isolated exertion?”<sup>1</sup>

argued the *Typographical Circular*. The relative prosperity of the “aristocrat of labour” should not be allowed to blind us to the fact that he was inescapably caught up in the realities of working class existence in a violently cyclical low-wage economy: these realities led him to build protective institutions which, however they may have been overlaid with a rhetoric of “thrift” and “self help”, remained both cause and effect of deep rooted practices of solidarity and mutual aid. These practices are evoked in Thomas Wright’s account of the experience of tramping and the solidarity of the trade; in a striking passage he articulates a social ethic diametrically opposed to that of the Charity Organisation Society, and other influential carriers of the middle class ideology: “it is better to be ‘had’ sometimes than from over-suspicion to refuse such help as it is in your power to give to a case that may be one of real distress.”<sup>2</sup> The status aspirations, reflected in the new residential and leisure patterns of the third quarter of the nineteenth century, must therefore be seen as co-existing problematically with other, more solidaristic values and modes of conduct.

Certain general theoretical difficulties in such sociological concepts as “status”, “aspiration”, etc. are also relevant to the problem under discussion. A claim to “social honour” may reflect either a desire to ascend within a single, consensually legitimate status order; or an assertion of group consciousness within a more pluralistic type of social order. One might expect the latter type of phenomenon to emerge with the development of pluralistic and stratified institutions and subcultures in industrialising and urbanising societies.<sup>3</sup> This

<sup>1</sup> Scottish Typographical Circular, May, 1858.

<sup>2</sup> “The Journeyman Engineer”, *The Great Unwashed* (London, 1868), p. 160.

<sup>3</sup> For the problematic nature of “social status”, see R. Frankenberg, *Communities in Britain* (Harmondsworth, 1966), pp. 262-3; G. Neuwirth, “A Weberian Outline of a Theory of Community”, in: *British Journal of Sociology*, XX (1969); J. Rex, *Key Problems of Sociological Theory* (London, 1963), pp. 144-55;

general point has a bearing on, for example, the “status rivalry” between skilled manual workers and clerks – a rivalry discernible in the nineteenth century, though it has perhaps become more marked during the twentieth. Wright explains that his phrase *The Great Unwashed*: “exactly embodies the working-class idea of themselves, excluding, as it does, not only the ‘counter-skipper’ class, whom the great unwashed regard (unjustly perhaps) as their inferiors, but also professional men, merchants, M.P.s, and others”.<sup>1</sup> Feelings of this sort indicate the existence of social groups which have *alternative criteria* for allocating prestige. Whereas the clerk emphasises his clean hands and educational attainments, the skilled worker emphasises his skill and strength, the indispensability of manual labour – dirty hands are the sign one does useful work. This rather speculative analysis suggests that status claims cannot be assumed to reflect an unequivocal acceptance of the values of the dominant group in society; they may, on the contrary, reflect a certain social tension between groups with alternative value systems.

The claim to “respectability” must thus be set in the context of a strong sense of class pride. I would argue that it is properly interpreted as a claim to status recognition and citizenship on behalf of skilled workers as a corporate group. In some ways that claim was met by the 1867 Reform Bill. But at local level the tensions were harder to resolve. Partly this was a matter of the economic circumstances of skilled workers, and the consequently high visibility of their class position. The artisan Volunteers, for example, were without rifles, “while lawyers and merchants and civil servants swaggered with their short Enfields”, until the War Office were bludgeoned into subsidising the movement.<sup>2</sup> One can cite a series of apparently trivial local incidents, which nonetheless illustrate the meanings of class and status in Victorian Edinburgh. In 1858 the *North Briton* commented on the Burns centenary:

“It is the people alone who can truly keep the birthday of Robert Burns, for they best of all understand him and claim him as one of themselves. Do not, then, ye workingmen of Edinburgh, give him up to the higher classes of the city.”<sup>3</sup>

In the Minutes of the Trades Council we find a record of reiterated protest about community issues: against a proposed road through

J. H. Smyth, “Utility and the Social Order”, in: *British Journal of Sociology*, XXII (1971).

<sup>1</sup> “Journeyman Engineer”, op. cit., p. viii.

<sup>2</sup> Macdonald, op. cit., p. 31.

<sup>3</sup> *North Briton*, 1 December, 1858.

the Meadows “for the convenience of a comparatively small number of citizens”; an imputed slight to the working classes in the allocation of tickets for the Volunteer Review of 1881 “especially as they had contributed so much to the success of the Volunteer Movement”; restrictions of football, again in the Meadows.<sup>1</sup> There is certainly no lack of evidence for the resistance to any hint of patronage or social subordination. The *Typographical Circular* commented on proposals for a printers’ Volunteer company: “If the present movement fail it will be from the way in which it is managed, and from the very old-fashioned notion that if the thing be patronised by the ‘maister’ the men will of course ‘fall in’.”<sup>2</sup> At a meeting to discuss the formation of the Working Men’s Club, the secretary of the Edinburgh Typographical Society protested against: “a kind of demi-charitable affair, a hybrid between a soup kitchen and a penny reading room with in all probability interesting old women in black mittens to talk in a goody-goody strain to the recipients of their bounty”.<sup>3</sup>

How then, did this insistence on the social independence of the working man relate to middle class leadership in the urban community? This question is perhaps best answered by a rather impressionistic, and therefore tentative analysis of the organisational framework within which the life style of working class “respectability” was formed and projected. Voluntary organisations concerned with leisure provision ranged from facilities run entirely by and for working people, to those provided by philanthropic employers, churches and other middle class bodies, on a charitable or “patronage” basis. Organisations with a fairly clear-cut middle class central leadership, but also with relatively autonomous sub-units, of varying social composition, comprise a further category. The loose knit coalitions of Liberal politics exemplify this third type, as perhaps does the “spirit of emulation, and the friendly rivalry that existed between the various sectional bodies” of the Volunteers.<sup>4</sup> We would expect the nature of skilled workers’ attachments to vary with the form of organisation. Attachments to bodies of the “patronage” type are likely to have been limited, with a considerable “calculative” component – one fairly well documented case in point being the connection of working people

<sup>1</sup> Trades Council Minutes, 11 August, 1874, 2 August and 25 October, 1881.

<sup>2</sup> Scottish Typographical Circular, January, 1860. See R. Price, “The Working Men’s Club Movement and Victorian Social Reform Ideology”, in: *Victorian Studies*, XV (1971), for a stimulating analysis of middle class “patronage” and working class attitudes.

<sup>3</sup> North Briton, 13 April, 1864; the speaker, James Wilkie, is mentioned as secretary of the Typographical Society in the Trades Council Minutes, 9 October, 1860.

<sup>4</sup> Stephen, *op. cit.*, p. 62.



with facilities (especially educational) offered by churches and Sunday schools.<sup>1</sup> Given the resistance to patronage and deference, we would expect the fullest working class participation in those organisations (or sub-units of organisations) less directly controlled by middle class groups.

There is, however, a sense in which this whole range of organisations, facilities and activities were knit together, under middle class hegemony: the distinctive institutions of the artisan stratum were thus contained within a social world dominated by the middle class. This process is perhaps best seen as one of implicitly negotiated accommodation between middle class leadership and working class resistance to the more direct form of social subordination. Working men eager for “self improvement”, but loath to accept patronage could perceive this situation as one of bargaining, rather than of social subordination. The peculiarities of the local class structure are also important here: the diversity of the middle class, the rivalries between middle class groups and the non-industrial basis of many such groups made for a degree of pluralism in the leadership of local institutions.

Certain categories of public figure seem to have played key roles in linking the world of the “respectable” working class to that of the middle class. Voluntary organisations of all kinds were linked up into a network, largely through the overlapping activities of these individuals. Liberal Radical politicians (especially Town Councillors) were responsible for one set of links, often reaching working arrangements with the Trades Council.<sup>2</sup> Other identifiable categories include some philanthropists and social reformers (such as Dr Begg), professional men who would deliver lectures in the causes of “self culture”, and so on. Sometimes the categories overlap, as in the person of Lord Gifford, whom we have already met addressing the Flower Show exhibitors: a lawyer, associated with voluntary work in Dr Guthrie’s Ragged Schools, an “advanced politician”, he “often lectured to literary and philosophical societies”.<sup>3</sup> We frequently find Volunteer officers in similar roles. John Gorrie, a lawyer, was involved in the raising of the first artisan companies, lectured for the Trades Council on “diggings into the city records”, and judged the Working Man’s Flower Show; another Volunteer officer chaired a Trades Council public meeting, and later used the machinery of the Trades Council

<sup>1</sup> See, A. A. MacLaren, “Presbyterianism and the Working Class in a Mid-nineteenth Century City”, in: *Scottish Historical Review*, XLVI (1967); H. Pelling, *Popular Politics and Society in Late Victorian Britain* (London, 1968), pp. 30-1.

<sup>2</sup> MacDougall, *op. cit.*, pp. xxviii-xxx, p. 235, footnote. There are many similar references in the Trades Council Minutes and in the press for the 1860’s and 70’s.

<sup>3</sup> *Dictionary of National Biography*.

to appeal for recruits to the Volunteers; an Ensign of Volunteers marshalled the reform demonstration of 1866.<sup>1</sup>

Middle class public figures therefore graced the platforms, even of the more independent type of working class institution. This form of social recognition can be related to the status claims of the "superior" artisan. A characteristic note was struck by Lord Gifford at the Flower Show: "in addressing the assemblage before him as 'ladies and gentlemen' said he never used the word with more confidence than he did at that time because he believed that every workingman who loved and tended a plant was a gentleman, and every workingman's wife or daughter who loved and tended a plant was a lady."<sup>2</sup> The desire for this kind of social approval certainly reflects a degree of acceptance of the established order. But the consciousness involved is, at the same time, not precisely deferential. It is rather a kind of demagogic flattery: the notion of the gentleman appearing as a bizarre surrogate for the "citizen" of more rapidly democratised nations. Thomas Wright comments on this sort of rhetoric, with perhaps a hint of cynicism: "I am a working man – what a gentleman wanting my vote (if I had one) at election time, or the chairman at the prize-distribution meeting of an industrial exhibition, would probably call 'an intelligent artisan'."<sup>3</sup>

The pursuit of "respectability" therefore involved a complex class relationship between working people and middle class groups. The foregoing discussion is at best a rough sketch of the relationship, and is intended as much to formulate questions, as to answer them. It is nonetheless hoped that it has established the broader point, from which this paper began, of the importance of social experience outside the workplace to the problems of working class behaviour and consciousness in Victorian Britain. Class and the consciousness of class are complex historical phenomena: the many elements of ambivalence in the community situation and aspirations of the "superior" artisan illustrate this point clearly enough. The style of life created by the upper artisan stratum may be seen, from one point of view, as a transmission of middle class values, and certainly as an assertion of social superiority, a cultural exclusion of less favoured working class groups. On the other hand, the very pursuit of "respectability", especially insofar as it entailed claims to status recognition and

<sup>1</sup> For Gorrie: Stephen, *op. cit.*, p. 221; MacDougall, *op. cit.*, p. 72, footnote; Trades Council Minutes, 30 November, 1861; Reformer, 13 August, 1870. For the other officers mentioned: Trades Council Minutes, 20 February and 26 March, 1861; Scotsman, 19 November, 1866.

<sup>2</sup> Reformer, 13 August, 1870.

<sup>3</sup> "Journeyman Engineer", *op. cit.*, p. 126.

participation in local institutions, was a source of social tension, a focal point of class identity. In so far as the "aristocrat of labour" did accept certain values held by dominant groups in his society he interpreted and re-formulated them in terms of his own situation, mediated and diffused them through his own institutions.