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From 'the People' to 'the Citizen': the Emergence of the Edwardian Municipal Park in Manchester 1902 - 1912

Introduction

This paper examines the transition from the Victorian to the Edwardian municipal park in Manchester. It focuses on the acquisition and development of the 650 acre Heaton Park by Manchester City Council during the years 1902 – 1912. It argues that the purchase of the park marked the transition from the Victorian idea of parks as improving spaces for 'rational recreation' to the Edwardian idea that parks offered spaces for many diverse activities centred around active citizenship and social responsibility. Although this represented a re-framing of many Victorian ideas about leisure, it also resulted in a redefinition of the role of a municipal park in the Edwardian city from a place for 'rational recreation' to one in which the individual citizen takes on a more active role.

Beaven and Griffiths have suggested that citizenship in the Edwardian period was refocused away from the urban arena and onto the Empire¹. This paper contests this view and demonstrates that active urban citizenship remained a potent social force in the landscape of the urban park. Such parks offered the opportunity to both establish and display not only a sense of civic pride in the city but pride in the collective ownership of that space. Municipal parks, therefore, represented a place where urban citizenship could be continually forged and contested, both by park authorities and by the park visitors themselves.

¹ B. Beaven and J. Griffiths, 'Creating the Exemplary Citizen: The Changing Notion of Citizenship in Britain 1870-1939', *Contemporary British History*, 22 (2) (2008), 209.

The initial impetus for municipal parks was provided by the 1833 Select Committee on Public Walks which identified the need for 'public walks and places of exercise calculated to promote the health and comfort of the inhabitants'². Manchester was to be one of the most active local authorities in providing municipal parks. From the mid-1840s, Manchester had begun to acquire public spaces such as Queen's Park in Harpurhey which was gifted to the city in 1846 by the Hoghton family. Philips Park was also given to the city as a gift by the Philips family in 1846. The 31 acres was named after Mark Philips, the town's first MP and a campaigner and supporter of public parks³. Even so, as late as 1895, the Manchester philanthropist, T.C. Horsfall, was arguing that most of the inhabitants of the city grew up in virtually complete ignorance of birds, flowers and trees due to the lack of open spaces⁴.

Thereafter, the City Council also began to purchase small areas of land to facilitate the need for more public spaces. Alexandra Park in Whalley Range (60 acres) was bought from Lord Egerton in 1868, Cheetham Park (5 acres) bought from Lord Derby in 1885 and Boggart Hole Clough (145 acres) was bought in 1893. Manchester City Council established an Open Spaces Committee in February 1893, followed by a Special Committee in 1894 to study the need for public leisure spaces in the city⁵.

Manchester provides a useful example of the development of open space in an urban environment. It was without a resident aristocracy from the early nineteenth

² *Report from the Select Committee on Public Walks with the Minutes of the Evidence Taken Before Them* (Parliament, House of Commons, 1833), 2.

³ C. Latimer, *Parks for the People: Manchester and its Parks 1846-1926* (Manchester, 1987).

⁴ T. C. Horsfall, 'The Government of Manchester', *Transactions of the Manchester Statistical Society*, 8 (1895), 4.

⁵ R. Nicholls, *Trafford Park: the First Hundred Years*, (Chichester, 1996), 14-15.

century, a situation which permitted a relatively unencumbered urban development. Manchester City Council took full advantage of this by establishing itself as a provider of public services such as gas, lighting and electricity to its citizens. This opportunity to develop without the constraints of a landowning aristocracy differentiates Manchester from other British cities such as Birmingham, whose expansion was heavily influenced by the Calthorpes⁶. From an international perspective, the example of Heaton Park adds to existing work on the wider social, economic and political significance of urban parks such as that by Rotenberg and Prendergast on Vienna and Paris respectively⁷. Although Prendergast identifies urban parks as neutral spaces, free of the tensions of city life, this paper suggests that, in fact, parks such as Heaton Park reflected these tensions, replicating and, at times, enhancing them⁸.

Existing academic studies of public parks in Britain tend to concentrate on the emergence of the Victorian park and regard them as emblematic of the wider Victorian project of providing leisure time activities as an alternative to other, less acceptable pastimes like drinking or gambling. Latimer has pointed out that the parks were approved of by both the Church and the police as a source of good moral influence and as a form of social control, particularly of the working classes⁹. Parks have also been identified as an expression of civic pride or municipal authority¹⁰; as having a civilising

⁶ D. Cannadine, *Lords and Landlords: The Aristocracy and the Towns 1774-1967*, (Leicester, 1980), 59

⁷ R Rotenberg, *Landscape and Power in Vienna*, (Baltimore, 1995). C Prendergast, *Paris and the Nineteenth Century*, (Oxford, 1995).

⁸ Prendergast, *Paris and the Nineteenth Century*, 174.

⁹ Latimer, *Parks for the People*, 9.

¹⁰ D. Fraser, 'The Edwardian City', in D. Read, (ed.), *Edwardian England*. (London, 1982), 56-74.

M. Billinge, 'A Time and A Place for Everything: An Essay on Recreation, Re-creation and the Victorians', *Journal of Historical Geography*, 22 (4) (1996), 443 - 459.

effect on their visitors¹¹; providing an escape from crowded city life¹² or as a microcosm of the wider society and its reinforcing of class differences¹³. Some vestiges of these ideas remained into the Edwardian era – especially parks as emblems of civic pride and as a refuge from the city. However, these original ideas were also being continually refined and enhanced as the twentieth century developed. The Victorian idea of rational recreation in particular was enhanced to include notions of public spiritedness, accountability and communal responsibility.

The transition from the Victorian to the Edwardian period presents an opportunity to reassess and redefine the role and purpose of the municipal public park through the kaleidoscope of changing social, moral and economic norms¹⁴. The emphasis of many writers on parks is on the mid-Victorian period, the nascent years for most public recreational spaces. However, variable historical, social and political trends during the Edwardian period impacted on how such parks were developed and used. The experience of Heaton Park can be used to refine and redefine the Victorian ideal of a public park and can provide a new approach to the study and understanding of the municipal park in the Edwardian era. This paper will demonstrate how Heaton Park set the agenda for subsequent municipal park development in Manchester and how this new agenda was driven by evolving ideas about citizenship and social responsibility.

¹¹ Conway, *People's Parks*.

¹² J. Harrop, *Illustrated Handbook of the Manchester City Parks and Recreation Grounds* (Manchester, 1915), 6.

¹³ A. R. Ruff, *The Biography of Philips Park, Manchester 1846-1996*, (University of Manchester, 2000).

¹⁴ J. Harris, *Private Lives, Public Spirit: A Social History of Britain 1870 – 1914*, (Oxford, 1993), 40.

Defining and designing the municipal park

The word 'park' was initially used to refer to the deer park beyond the formal gardens that abutted a country house. Parks were originally used for the practical purposes of deer hunting, grazing and for providing food for the consumption of the residing family¹⁵. This definition of a park was later expanded in the eighteenth century to describe a landscape park which referred to an open expanse of land with occasional clumps or belts of trees that was designed to provide a view for the owner or visitor. The aim of this kind of landscape was to demonstrate the wealth and power of the owner and to create a space that appeared 'naturally occurring' to the spectator. These parks were the product of landscape designers such as William Kent, Lancelot 'Capability' Brown, Humphrey Repton and William Emes, the latter said to have been involved in the landscape design of Heaton Park. As Williamson points out, these parks were the '*sine qua non* of true gentility', but they also represented a contrast to the urban landscape - secluded, private and rural¹⁶.

Frederick Law Olmsted (1822-1903), an American landscaper, was an influential writer on parks and park design in the nineteenth century. In 1851, he visited Birkenhead Park near Liverpool, which was laid out by Joseph Paxton in 1845¹⁷. Birkenhead is generally acknowledged as the first publicly funded municipal park in

¹⁵ T. Williamson, *Polite Landscapes: Gardens and Society in Eighteenth Century England*, (Stroud, 1995), 22.

¹⁶ *Ibid*, 85.

¹⁷ C. Beveridge and C. Hoffman, (eds.), *The Papers of Frederick Law Olmsted: Volume 1, Writings on Public Parks, Parkways and Park Systems*, (Baltimore and London, 1997), 73.

Britain¹⁸. Olmsted's response to Birkenhead was framed by the apparent variety of its visitors. He observed that 'the privileges of the garden were enjoyed about equally by all classes' and refers to it as a 'People's garden' and 'the People's own'¹⁹. His emphasis on the simple and natural was allied with the belief that a park should be a complete contrast to the townscape and should, in fact, serve to screen the townscape from the park visitors' view.

This aspect of park design was an important feature of some of the most influential landscape designers in Britain – John Claudius Loudon and Joseph Paxton. Loudon designed Derby Arboretum in 1840. Paxton had worked for the Duke of Devonshire at Chatsworth and designed Birkenhead Park (1845) and Kelvingrove Park in Glasgow (1854)²⁰. Both Loudon and Paxton were influenced by John Nash's designs for Regent's Park in London (1826) and by Humphrey Repton's principles for landscape design²¹. They worked to accommodate the often-competing demands of the early public parks – designing a restful and varied landscape and providing sufficient amenities for large numbers of visitors²². They subscribed to the idea of screening the park boundaries from visitors, created scenery designed to lead the visitor through a series of discrete walks and Loudon even prescribed the type and location of seating

¹⁸ A sometimes controversial claim - Moor Park in Preston was created when the Town Council enclosed the town moor in 1833 and Victoria Park in east London was opened in 1845. Derby Arboretum opened in 1840 but was based on donated, not purchased, land.

¹⁹ Beveridge and Hoffman (eds.), 71, 73.

²⁰ Conway, *People's Parks*, 47.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 76.

²² *Ibid.*, 83.

within Derby Arboretum²³. All of these elements were central to the Victorian idea of the public park as a place of relaxation and contemplation.

Heaton Park was purchased by the City of Manchester in late 1901 from the Earls of Wilton for £230,000. The estate consisted of 650 acres, water and mineral rights, buildings such as Heaton Hall, designed by James Wyatt in 1772, several lodges, a temple, a home farm and a stable block. The city's secured debts at the time of the Heaton Park purchase amounted to £17m, largely as a result of the investment in the Manchester Ship Canal. At the time, the Council was one of the largest businesses in the city, aided by the increase in rates from several extensions of the city's boundaries²⁴. By 1905, Manchester had invested extensively in water supply, tramways and gas and electricity supply and the addition of a large public space like Heaton Park presented another opportunity to add to the territory of the city which had been expanding since 1885.

The idea of the park as a rustic retreat from the busy town or city was an especially influential one which can be observed in the writings of Robert Lamb, the general superintendent of parks in Manchester from 1890 - 1914²⁵. Lamb suggested that the environment provided by a public park should be a respite from employment, describing Manchester's Platt Fields Park (purchased by the City Council in 1908) as an 'immense expanse of greensward, grateful and refreshing to the eyes that have pored over ledgers and accounts all day'²⁶. This was also part of a tradition of romantic anti-

²³ Ibid., 79.

²⁴ A. Kidd, *Manchester: A History*, (Lancaster, 2006), 153.

²⁵ Lamb had a background in gardening and horticulture and had been employed in the conservatory at Buckingham Palace (*Guild Journal*, August 1912. Manchester Local Studies, newspaper cuttings).

²⁶ J. J. Sullivan, *Illustrated Handbook of Manchester City Parks and Recreation Grounds*, (Manchester, 1915), 74.

urbanism which had been prevalent in the Victorian period, an idea that was beginning to be challenged by the Edwardian era²⁷.

The municipal parkscape as a direct contrast to the urban environment was being eclipsed by ideas about citizenship and social responsibility. While the boundaries of citizenship were far from immutable, its persistence was in marked contrast to the limited aspiration of the mid-Victorian parks promoters. There have been suggestions that the Victorian period marked the end of the presence of the urban elites at municipal level²⁸. However, Law's work shows the influence of Manchester City Council members from occupational groups such as wholesale and retail merchants and professionals, for instance, journalists, estate agents and civil engineers until 1903 and beyond²⁹.

The membership of the Parks and Cemeteries committee at the time of the purchase of Heaton Park mirrored the composition of the City Council itself, with a Conservative majority. The committee had a Liberal chairman whose casting vote was needed to secure the park. The final vote did not split along party lines with four Conservatives and three Liberals voting in favour of the purchase and five Conservatives and two Liberals against. The primary concerns of those who opposed the purchase were the location of the park outside the city boundary and the price being asked. These were resolved by the consent of the local authority, Prestwich Urban

²⁷ P. Marne, 'Whose public space was it anyway? Class, gender and ethnicity in the creation of the Sefton and Stanley Parks, Liverpool: 1858 – 1872', *Social and Cultural Geography*, 2, (4), (2001), 424.

²⁸ Beaven and Griffiths, 210.

²⁹ G.S. Law, 'Manchester Politics 1885-1906', (Unpublished University of Pennsylvania PhD. thesis, 1975), 295-6.

District Council, to the incorporation of the park after the purchase and the inclusion of extra portions of land in the final offer from Lord Wilton³⁰.

City Council members continued to be mindful of the need to inculcate values like self-help, discipline, civic pride and social responsibility in the urban environment. The official opening ceremony at Heaton Park, held on 24 September 1902, was an occasion to reaffirm these ideas. 300 dignitaries and an estimated 6,500 people attended to hear the Lord Mayor, Alderman James Hoy, express the hope that the park would add to the health benefits experienced by the population of Manchester and to credit the citizens for providing the impetus for the park movement in the city³¹. While much of this can be viewed as the usual self-congratulatory rhetoric typical of such occasions, ideas about self-help and active citizenship were a significant component of civic life during the Edwardian period and will be discussed in the following sections. The first examines the ability of all citizens to both access and use the park, while the second investigates the relationship between active citizenship and recreation.

Redefining the Edwardian park: access and usage

Heaton Park in the Edwardian era was a physical symbol of the political power of Manchester City Council to the north of the city. It also represented the confidence of the civic elite which was running the city. This elite was more socially diverse than the old landowning aristocratic elite had been but was no less keen to display its cultural

³⁰ C. O'Reilly, 'Aristocratic Fortunes and Civic Aspiration: Issues in the Passage of Aristocratic Land to Municipal Ownership in Later Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Century Manchester With Particular Reference to the Sale of Heaton Park', (unpublished Manchester Metropolitan University PhD. thesis, 2009).

³¹ *Manchester Courier*, Municipal Enterprise, 25 September 1902, 10.

power³². Parks and open spaces were important symbols of the Edwardian city and its ability to provide for a community of citizens and their health, education and recreation. All of these aspects are visible when we come to examine the development of Heaton Park in the years after its purchase.

Situated four miles north of the city centre, Heaton Park was quite some distance from the major centres of population to the south of the city. There were regular trams to the park from the city centre and special fares available at weekends to encourage visitors. Inside the park, inequalities were also evident in the charges for use of the facilities (boating, bowling, tea rooms) but these were options that could easily be ignored in favour of a walk around the park or a picnic on the lawns.

A park of this size posed significant problems for the traditional methods of regulation such as the park-keeper. Initial attempts to supervise the public in the park were met with some hostility: visitors were told to keep off the grass, they were restricted to the main walks in the park and prevented from exploring the more remote wooded areas³³. This was a continuation of the Victorian response to transgressive behaviours such as gambling, drinking, vagrancy and the desire to suppress romantic or sexual behaviour in public spaces like parks, art galleries and libraries. The size of Heaton Park made such regulation impractical, however, and the role of the park-keeper eventually gave way to park patrollers who performed a variety of tasks such as sweeping paths and giving directions to visitors as well as the implementation of the

³² J. Stobart, 'Identity, Competition and Place Promotion in the Five Towns', *Urban History*, 30 (2), (2003), 167.

³³ *Manchester Guardian*, In Heaton Park: A Great Holiday Throng, 27 June 1902, 6. *Manchester Guardian*, More Visitors to Heaton Park, 28 June 1902, 5.

parks' bye-laws³⁴. The move to a multi-functional patroller is a characteristic of the Edwardian park and demonstrates the self-regulatory nature of Edwardian citizenship.

Reliable information about the number, gender and social background of visitors to the park during the early years is difficult to ascertain, but some clues are available. A 1905 statement about music in the Manchester parks collated by the General Superintendent, demonstrates that £475 was spent on providing music in Heaton Park during the season, which attracted an estimated number of 693,600 visitors³⁵. Visitor numbers at other, smaller parks like Alexandra and Philips Parks show 232,000 and 242,000 visitors respectively in the same period³⁶. We know from contemporary photographs that the park was often crowded and was far from offering a rural idyll to its visitors (Figures 1 and 2). The numbers of people in this photograph confirms the popularity of music, especially brass bands, in the parks at this time (1906). Conway points out that music was perceived to have an important moral influence but it also leant another element to the cultural education of the people and complemented art galleries and museums³⁷. Heaton Park had music on Saturday afternoons and evenings and on Sunday afternoons³⁸. The presence of such crowds in the park, especially at weekends, is a challenge to the idea that a public park provided a restful contrast to the bustle of urban life. Indeed, it seems often to have replicated it.

The Edwardian recreational park, however, did facilitate a different kind of visitor – one who could concentrate on their own individual needs and interests and did not

³⁴ Manchester Archives, Parks and Cemeteries minutes, (36), 121-2

³⁵ Manchester Archives, Parks and Cemeteries minutes, (25), 146.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 145.

³⁷ Conway, *People's Parks*, 131.

³⁸ Sullivan, *Illustrated Handbook*, 33.

depend on being in company. Crantz has argued that this individual usage allowed visits to the park to be dictated by the free time schedules of individual visitors and permitted park keepers to divide up each day into sections to offer facilities to different types of visitors³⁹. This was in an era when even working people had an increased amount of leisure time⁴⁰. While Crantz was writing about urban parks in the United States, there is support for such individual usage as walking and reading in the photographs of park visitors at Heaton Park.

The sense of civic pride in parks like Heaton Park experienced by its visitors is difficult to estimate with any certainty due to lack of data. These photographs help to confirm the consistent popularity of the park with all age groups and the sheer numbers of those who were able to access it. They also demonstrate that some of the use made of the park was now on an individual basis. Earlier parks had emphasised use by a family unit who would visit the park and promenade together. Group outings to Heaton Park are still evident in some contemporary photographs (Figure 3). This image shows the aftermath of a group outing in the refreshment tent, with a mixture of men, women and children. The prosperous nature of their dress reinforces the fact that people of the poorest class in Manchester did not have regular access to the park. This is echoed in an account of the 1905 Whit weekend in Heaton Park by the *Manchester Guardian*, which noted that ‘the poor were conspicuously absent’⁴¹. The Victorian people’s park

³⁹ G. Crantz, ‘Women in Urban Parks’, *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 5 (3), (1980), 86.

⁴⁰ B. Beaven, *Leisure, Citizenship and Working Class Men in Britain 1850 – 1945*, (Manchester and New York, 2005), 16.

⁴¹ *Manchester Guardian*, Whit Monday: Manchester at Heaton Park, 13 June 1905, 7.

was predicated, in part, on the provision of open spaces where all social classes could mingle. The later municipal park demonstrates the ultimate impossibility of this aim.

There is also the question of whether the working classes would even have been able to access parks like Heaton Park based on the availability and cost of transport to them. In the 1906 municipal elections, Philip Cohen, the Liberal candidate for Medlock Street ward, argued that the poor of Hulme received no benefit from the money spent on Heaton Park as they could not afford the sixpence tram fare to get there⁴².

Therefore, Heaton Park was not a park for all of the people but for those who lived nearby or those who could afford to pay to visit it; in other words, the largely middle-class local residents. The question of the lack of easy access to the park by the working classes in particular highlighted the fact that most working class districts did not have their own local parks. Areas of Manchester such as Hulme, Ancoats and Gorton mounted unsuccessful campaigns for parks from the 1840s. This suggests that something more than a mere desire to provide open spaces motivated the purchase and locations of the existing parks. The Victorian ideal of the people's park that inspired Olmsted was not in fact a reality but a myth. Parks such as Heaton Park were contested spaces, whose meaning was volatile and unpredictable.

Henry Coupe, writing to the *Manchester Guardian*, protested the holding of political demonstrations in favour of votes for women in municipal parks on a Sunday, claiming that churchgoers like himself had to 'pick their way...to their places of worship' through parkside streets past 'men and women whose cleanliness...(was) an open

⁴² *Manchester Guardian*, Municipal Contest, 1 Nov. 1906, 4.

question'⁴³. The fact that some park visitors felt that the park was attracting the 'wrong type' of visitor, suggests that the parks were not people's parks in the true meaning of the term – parks were contested spaces in which people confronted each other without the possibility of the more delineated demarcation prevalent in other urban spaces, all of which were less easy to establish in the open space of a park. These protests are also indicative of an attempt by some park visitors to encourage or impose their values on others. Historians such as Wyborn have argued that it was the City Council that tried to do this but it is clear from this evidence that park visitors themselves did not agree what constituted a municipal park, how it was to be used or by whom⁴⁴. While the suffrage meetings were permitted by the Parks and Cemeteries committee, other political groups found it more difficult to secure space in Manchester's parks – branches of the Co-operative Society made a series of prolonged attempts to gain access for their gatherings⁴⁵.

Meller has proposed a link between civic pride and social citizenship in which the municipality assumes responsibility for the welfare of all citizens⁴⁶. The corollary of this is that the city dweller reciprocates in accepting the care of the urban environment as a part of their civic duty. Municipal parks such as Heaton Park provided an ideal space in which these social relationships were enacted and leisure and citizenship became intertwined.

⁴³ *Manchester Guardian*, letters, 22 Jul. 1908, 5.

⁴⁴ T. Wyborn, 'Parks for the People', 8.

⁴⁵ P. Gurney, 'The Politics of Public Space in Manchester, 1896 – 1919', *Manchester Region History Review*, XI, (1997), 17.

⁴⁶ H.E. Meller, *Leisure and the Changing City*, (London, 1976), 203.

Redefining the Edwardian park: recreation and citizenship

While the provision of amenities was initially pragmatic at Heaton Park, the later developments such as the golf course and the boating lake were more characteristic of the Edwardian park than the Victorian. The earlier emphasis on rational recreation gave way to more segregated sports facilities, reflecting the differing appeal of certain sports to men and women⁴⁷. Cycling and tennis were enjoyed mainly by women while football and cricket were more popular with men. Such facilities are in contrast to the earlier Victorian inclination to provide more general amenities for walking, sitting and observing the planting schemes and often had the effect of dividing up park visitors by gender and class. The *Manchester Evening Chronicle* welcomed the opening of Heaton Park as conducive to 'healthy and manly' development⁴⁸. The yoking together of physical health and masculinity indicates the slow provision for women's recreational needs in the late Victorian period. Often participation in such sporting activities was regarded as unladylike and women were welcomed in public parks more for their stabilising influence than their ability to make active use of the facilities⁴⁹. However, this situation did not persist in the longer term, mainly due to women's desire to actively participate in sports such as tennis and to the growing acceptance of at least some sports as permissible for women.

The first municipal golf course in Manchester was opened at Heaton Park in 1911 and was characteristic of the continued attempts of the Parks and Cemeteries

⁴⁷ K. McCrone, *Sport and the Physical Emancipation of English Women 1870 – 1914*, (London, 1988), 13.

⁴⁸ *Manchester Evening Chronicle*, editorial, 25 Sept. 1902, 2.

⁴⁹ Crantz, *Women in Urban Parks*, 82.

committee to expand the number of recreational facilities at the park. The course covered 140 acres of the park and it is clear that, in part, the impetus was due to other cities making similar provision in their public parks⁵⁰. At the opening ceremony for the new golf course, Alderman Harrop, chairman of the Heaton Park sub-committee, commented that it had been felt that 'Glasgow, Edinburgh and other cities were well ahead of them (Manchester) and now they were determined to see that they in Manchester were not left behind'⁵¹. The Lord Mayor, Charles Behrens, expressed the hope that the working classes would use the course and that they might 'find the game well within their means'⁵². At a price of one shilling for the first round of golf and sixpence for each subsequent round, this was not likely to be the case⁵³.

This was borne out by the golfers, one of whom commented that the difficulty posed by the course would deter those who were beginners and that the facility was therefore more suited to those who were already members of other, more expensive, courses elsewhere⁵⁴. Golf was an increasingly popular sport during this period, there being more than twenty golf clubs within a twelve mile radius of the city of Manchester, many with memberships of three hundred or more⁵⁵. The existence of municipal golf courses like the one at Heaton Park did not fulfil its aim and actually contributed to the

⁵⁰ Sullivan, *Illustrated Handbook*, 23.

⁵¹ *Manchester Courier*, Municipal Golf, 8 Sept. 1911, 10.

⁵² *Manchester Guardian*, Municipal Golf, 8 Sept. 1911, 3.

⁵³ *Manchester Guardian*, editorial, *ibid.*, 6.

⁵⁴ *Manchester Guardian*, letters, 12 Sept. 1911, 4.

⁵⁵ *Manchester Evening News*, editorial, 24 Sept. 1902, 2.

social stratification of park visitors and the exclusion of many. Cunningham has suggested that, by the end of the nineteenth century, public leisure facilities reinforced the desire for class exclusivity as a result of the appropriation of formerly aristocratic pursuits such as hunting by the middle-classes, the invention of class-specific sports like golf and tennis and the imposition of a middle-class ethos on sports such as rowing and athletics⁵⁶. While this may be difficult to prove, it does provide an explanation for the increasingly class-bound nature of leisure at the end of the nineteenth century and militated against the ideal of recreation as a tool for unifying social classes advocated in the 1840s. It also marks the gradual abandonment of ideas such as rational recreation.

The Parks and Cemeteries committee used unemployed men to excavate, line and fill a 12 ¼ acre boating lake at Heaton Park which was opened in March 1913. The lake complemented those already in existence in Boggart Hole Clough and Platt Fields Park and some 2,333 men worked on it⁵⁷. The total cost of the lake (including the building of several islands) was £21,000. One hundred boats were purchased to be hired out while two electric launches took people around the lake for 2d. each⁵⁸. As well as building the lake itself, they also built a road that went around it and a landing stage. The use of working men for this purpose has a poignancy when one returns to one of the original arguments for the purchase of Heaton Park – to provide a sanctuary for the working classes, a peoples' park. Here, the people or, more specifically, the working classes were being used to build amenities that they likely could not afford to use themselves.

⁵⁶ H. Cunningham, *Leisure in the Industrial Revolution*, (London, 1980), 132.

⁵⁷ *Manchester City News*, Manchester, Salford and District News, 22 Mar. 1913, 7.

⁵⁸ *Manchester Courier*, Heaton Park Lake, 18 Mar. 1913, 12.

The didactic nature of the public park was refined further with the proposal to move the Greek classical façade of the old Manchester Town Hall (built 1822 – 1825) to one of the city’s municipal parks in 1912. A campaign to support the saving of the colonnade was undertaken by some prominent individuals such as the Bishop of Salford Louis Casartelli, the artist Sir Lawrence Alma-Tadema and Middleton architect Edgar Wood. Despite the decline in interest in the Gothic Revival style at this time, feelings were still mixed about the historical significance and relevance of classical styles of architecture. A rediscovery of the English Baroque tradition of Wren and Vanbrugh during the Edwardian period did not result in a widespread return to classical style per se⁵⁹. However, both the Victorians and Edwardians did retain a strong sense of affinity with the history and culture of ancient Greece as Turner has demonstrated⁶⁰. He suggests that this can be explained in part by the Greeks’ association with the birth of democracy, an ideal still cherished in the early years of the twentieth century⁶¹. The links between the façade and the old Town Hall therefore had even more resonance for the civic authorities and helps to explain their desire both to preserve and display it.

In May 1912, the committee resolved to erect the colonnade at Heaton Park (Figure 4). Half of the estimated £2,000 cost of relocating the façade was to be met by the Corporation and the other half by public subscription. The symbolic nature of this decision cannot be underestimated. Stobart has argued that town halls have functioned

⁵⁹ A. Service, *Edwardian Architecture: A Handbook to Building Design in Britain 1890 – 1914*, (London, 1977), 144.

⁶⁰ F. Turner, *The Greek Heritage in Victorian Britain*. (London and New Haven, 1981), 11.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 11.

as important symbols of municipal authority⁶². The use of a classical façade of a former town hall in this manner served as a reminder of the civic history of Manchester. It re-emphasised the public ownership of the park and the civic vision of those instrumental in its purchase. The façade was to act as a potent symbol of the history of the city and those who served it and created it. Relocating the façade to the park moved a part of Manchester's civic history into what had previously been a privately owned space developed by generations of one aristocratic family. The removal of the Town Hall façade to Heaton Park was both an attempt to preserve an element of Manchester's civic and architectural history and to connect the park visitors directly to their own history and that of their city. A newer form of park history was emerging that could co-exist with the park's original history but that had a different meaning for its visitors and served not only to legitimate the municipal owners but all of the people of the city⁶³.

A desire to preserve the past (even the relatively recent past represented by the façade) had begun to gather pace during the Victorian era and this continued into the Edwardian period. During the same time as the debate about the preservation of the old Town Hall colonnade, Lord Curzon purchased the fifteenth century Tattershall Castle in Lincolnshire which was to be restored and opened to the public⁶⁴. A sense of national pride in Britain's heritage was beginning to establish itself, accompanied by the idea that the past was worth preserving for more than mere aesthetic reasons. The National Trust had been established in 1893 and acquired its first property, four and a half acres of

⁶² J. Stobart, 'Identity, Competition and Place Promotion', 168.

⁶³ D. Lowenthal, *The Past Is A Foreign Country*, (Cambridge, 1985), 44.

⁶⁴ *Manchester Courier*, Concilio et Labore, 16 May 1912, 6.

cliffland, in Wales in 1895⁶⁵. The original Town Hall building itself was not considered for preservation in its entirety and the transfer of the façade to Heaton Park meant a loss of its original context. Nevertheless, it meant that the colonnade was preserved for the public and its consequent visibility gave any passer-by the opportunity to gain an immediate impression of the past⁶⁶. Linking park visitors so strongly to a reminder of the city's past can be interpreted as an attempt to make people feel like custodians of their own civic history. However, it must be acknowledged that this attempt was not entirely successful. A letter to the Parks and Cemeteries committee in 1915 noted that the writer observed park visitors gazing at the façade and wondering what it was⁶⁷. Such public amnesia rendered the façade a mere civic folly, a landscape adornment without any evident purpose.

The Edwardian period gave rise to an increasing tendency to conceive of poverty as a national problem characterised by the need for physical efficiency⁶⁸. There had been much discussion about the poor physical condition of army recruits from the industrial cities during the Boer war. This had led to an acknowledgement that the people of Britain were an important national resource who needed to be nurtured and encouraged towards the peak of physical fitness⁶⁹. The provision of facilities for physical exercise in municipally owned parks was a consequence of this perception of the need to maintain levels of physical fitness among the population. Exercise facilities in public

⁶⁵ M. Waterson, *The National Trust: The First Hundred Years*, (London, 1994), 37.

⁶⁶ Lowenthal, *The Past*, 245.

⁶⁷ Manchester Archives, Parks and Cemeteries minutes, (35), 201.

⁶⁸ E. P. Hennock, 'The Measurement of Urban Poverty: From the Metropolis to the Nation 1880 – 1920', *Economic History Review*, New Series, 40 (2), (1987), 214.

⁶⁹ G. R. Searle, *The Quest for National Efficiency: A Study in British Politics and Political Thought 1899 – 1914*, (London, 1971), 60.

parks were not exclusively an Edwardian idea – the three original public parks in Manchester and Salford all had gymnasia (Peel Park had archery butts). The provision of this kind of equipment was an acknowledgement that parks were not simply open spaces for polite perambulations but had a more pragmatic purpose. Rodrick has argued that the Victorians tended to see leisure time as a contrast to idleness and as a valuable entity that should not be wasted⁷⁰. This idea was further developed in the Edwardian era with the expansion and development of certain areas in parks devoted to particular sports – for instance, bowling greens, tennis courts and the boating lake in Heaton Park. This spatial zoning of the park indicates the commitment to and popularity of sporting activities and the desire of the park authorities to encourage this.

Meacham has argued that the Edwardian period gave rise to a new understanding of social democracy that emphasised the idea of the community and good citizenship⁷¹. This vision of democracy was defined by the harmony between nature and the individual and one that worked to idealise the past and improve on the present. This idea reached its artistic high point in the garden city movement of Raymond Unwin, Barry Parker and Ebenezer Howard during the early years of the twentieth century. The garden city was specifically designed to merge the country and the city and to encourage communal activities such as tennis and bowling. Here, amenities were a right not a privilege and their proper use was a cornerstone of good citizenship⁷². Such an idealisation of the past and an attempt to improve the present can

⁷⁰ A. Rodrick, *Self-Help and Civic Culture: Citizenship in Victorian Birmingham*, (Aldershot, 2004), 15.

⁷¹ S. Meacham, 'Raymond Unwin 1863 – 1940: Designing for Democracy in Edwardian England', in S. Pedersen and P. Mandler (eds.), *After the Victorians: Private Conscience and Public Duty in Modern Britain*, (London and New York, 1994), 79.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 93.

be seen in the Edwardian developments in Heaton Park – the relocation of the old Town Hall façade and the provision of amenities dedicated to particular sporting activities. Fraser argues that this progression from Victorian moralism to Edwardian pragmatism was a logical one which resulted in the beginnings of a practical approach to town and urban planning⁷³. Proposals were already under discussion for suburbs laid out according to garden city principles in Alkrington and Fairfield in Manchester in 1912⁷⁴.

Harris points out that the Edwardian era was characterised by the ideal of active citizenship which included a commitment to good physical and moral health⁷⁵. She suggests that trade unions, co-operatives and friendly societies all provided opportunities and models of good citizenship but this could also be extended to the role of public parks at this time. A healthy citizenry contributed to a healthy nation and formed the building block of a well-ordered society⁷⁶. Fraser has developed this idea further and argued that it was city councils themselves that operated as the personification of citizenship through their closeness to the communities which they served⁷⁷. The environment of a public park could offer the opportunity to develop not just physical health but a sense of public spiritedness and civic identity. This was very much linked to emergent ideas about citizenship and collective responsibility for one's

⁷³ D. Fraser, *Power and Authority in the Victorian City*, (Oxford, 1979), 170.

⁷⁴ *Manchester City News*, Garden City movement, 27 Apr. 1912, 5.

⁷⁵ Harris, *Private Lives, Public Spirit*, 193.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 250.

⁷⁷ Fraser, *Power and Authority*, 159.

surroundings – a substantial move away from the Victorian idea of parks as patrolled by park-keepers and attendants who bore total responsibility for the park's upkeep and maintenance.

The Edwardian park offered both a continuity and a breach with its Victorian forebear. With increasing amounts of free time available for leisure, the citizens took full advantage of the municipal park but those who benefited most had both the recreational skills and the access to the spaces. The working classes remained on the periphery and the needs of particular groups of users such as women were yet to be fully met or even recognised. Parks continued to function as social arenas where models of good behaviour and citizenship could be observed and imitated. The restrictive atmosphere of the Victorian park gradually eased as responsibility for rectitude passed from the park-keeper to the individual visitor. The effect of this was a transfer of emphasis from the passive strollers (whose needs were still accommodated) to the active users whose various recreational needs could be served simultaneously. A new type of diverse cityscape was now capable of serving a new kind of citizen – one whose demands for public leisure facilities were only nascent.

Conclusion

Heaton Park's history cannot be solely accounted for by an examination of the social and political factors in its development. Its transformation from a private, rural estate into a public recreational space necessitates a more thorough approach that acknowledges the competing interests not just of the City Council, but of its visitors and

of commentators like the local press. A new appreciation is needed of the connections between physical space, urban history and local political agendas.

The notion that a public park had a civilising affect on its users (or ‘rational recreation’) has been a popular one among academics. Writers such as Billinge, Conway and Wyborn have interpreted parks as spaces where it was intended that the individual user underwent a behavioural transformation and adopted middle class (or ‘rational’) values⁷⁸. Wyborn has suggested the model of ‘rational recreation’ as the most appropriate explanation for the creation of public parks in Manchester but this is problematic.

There has been an over-emphasis on the Victorian park at the expense of later Edwardian advances, and too much emphasis on rational recreation and social control which offer a limited view of the practical usage of parks. The concept of rational recreation does not allow for unintended uses made of these parks for meetings and games and offers no prospect of the visitor’s individual enjoyment of the space. While Edwardian public parks were an evolution of those which originated in the Victorian period, they also developed their own character and established new ways for some people to spend their increasing amounts of leisure time.

It is difficult to view the actions of Manchester’s Parks and Cemeteries committee as merely a direct desire to replicate or transmit middle class values to park users as suggested by rational recreation. The political allegiances of the committee members at this time offer few clues to its decision-making processes. It mirrored the changing composition of the wider City Council in those years, with a slight decline in the

⁷⁸ Billinge, ‘A Time and A Place for Everything’, 443 – 459. Conway, *People’s Parks*, and A. Offer, *Property and Politics 1870-1914: Landownership, Law, Ideology and Urban Development*, (Cambridge, 1981).

numbers of Tory and Liberal members, combined with a small increase in those from Labour and Independents. It is certainly the case that the committee did try to regulate visitor behaviour in all of its parks and elements of this desire remained in place in the Edwardian years. As Gunn has remarked, one of the earliest types of behaviour encouraged in public parks was promenading, which provided park visitors with a model of orderly public behaviour⁷⁹. This explains the need in the early parks to create walkways lined with plants and trees to facilitate gentle strolling. The 1833 Select Committee had singled out Manchester as particularly in need of such spaces due to the temptations of alternative pursuits such as drinking and gambling⁸⁰. Rational recreation, therefore, grew out of an attempt to provide role models for public behaviour and to encourage the adoption of the values of a new urban middle-class which considered itself both culturally and morally superior⁸¹. This idea resulted in regulated and monitored public parks where noticeboards were erected to inform visitors of the park rules which were enforced by park attendants.

Marne has suggested that the concept of 'the people' was originally intended to be classless and inclusive of all social classes⁸². However, this social inclusion did not include everyone as women, and working class women in particular, were not especially perceived as having recreational needs at this time and were excluded from discussions about how municipal parks should best be used. Frow has argued that 'the people' are

⁷⁹ S. Gunn, *The Public Culture of the Victorian Middle Class: Ritual and Authority in the English Industrial City 1840 – 1914*, (Manchester, 2000), 76.

⁸⁰ Wyborn, 'Parks for the People', 4.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁸² Marne, 'Whose public space was it anyway?' 437.

not a homogenous group and cannot all appropriate any space equally⁸³. Furthermore, Joyce has pointed out that shifting definitions of ‘the people’ resulted in the emergence of such concepts as the common good and social citizenship⁸⁴.

The evidence from Heaton Park demonstrates that it was not a people’s park in the Victorian sense of the term – it was mainly visited by those who lived nearby or who had access to public transport. It promoted an active engagement with its facilities and amenities, although passive strolling and contemplation were also encouraged. The linguistic change from the ‘people’ to the ‘citizen’ is also significant. While it is true that both terms were often used interchangeably especially in the later Victorian newspapers, by the Edwardian period, the use of ‘citizen’ was more widespread. Rodrick has remarked that citizenship was a very ambiguous term before the 1870s and encompassed potentially all of those who had a general interest in the welfare of the nation⁸⁵. From the late Victorian period, we find the model of citizenship becoming more pro-active and socially aware. The needs of the Empire were undoubtedly to become more significant as the twentieth century advanced – the use of Heaton Park as a training camp for the Manchester Regiment prior to their deployment in the First World War demonstrates that park evolved into a space that could accommodate such imperial needs while continuing to function as public leisure spaces⁸⁶. Thus, imperial, national and local citizenship could co-exist and were not mutually exclusive.

⁸³ Frow in Rodrick, *Self-Help and Civic Culture*, 424.

⁸⁴ P. Joyce, *Visions of the People: Industrial England and the Question of Class 1840 – 1914*. (Cambridge, 1991), 191.

⁸⁵ Rodrick, *Self-Help*, 67.

⁸⁶ M. Stedman, *Manchester Pals*, (Barnsley, 2004), 27.

Heaton Park's status as a former aristocratic estate is also noteworthy. Many urban parks were developed from donated land or paid for by public subscription. Hugh Prince failed to differentiate between estates or private parks which subsequently became public spaces, and public parks which were created from scratch⁸⁷. Taylor has recognised that almost all of these once-private landscapes were originally designed as an immediate and insistent revelation of personal political power⁸⁸. However, she does not develop this point to accommodate parks which were previously part of aristocratic estates and which were then acquired by public bodies. Nor does she discuss the implications of a change from private to public ownership and the subsequent opening of the space to visitors. The symbolic significance of former landed estates like Heaton Park was altered from representing the political, social and economic power of the aristocracy to that of the municipal authority. Offer has suggested that local councils now had 'levels of power, patronage and prestige', all aspects of the social position previously enjoyed by the local aristocracy⁸⁹. This was certainly evident in Manchester, with its lack of a resident aristocracy and relatively unconstrained urban development from the 1830s. While the landscape of the park was now more accessible to the public, it remained a space that could only be experienced by those who had easy access to it.

Nonetheless, the park was a powerful symbol of the new Edwardian active citizenship and the enthusiasm with which people embraced and used the new park

⁸⁷ H. Prince, *Parks In England*, (Shalfleet Manor, 1967).

⁸⁸ H. A. Taylor, *Age and Order: The Public Park as a Metaphor for a Civilised Society*, (London & Gloucester, 1994), 17.

⁸⁹ A. Offer, *Property and Politics 1870-1914*, (Cambridge, 1981), 221.

demonstrates the close correlation between civic pride and the individual citizen. While Beaven and Griffiths have identified this period as one in which the idea of the individual urban citizen was on the wane to be replaced by the imperial citizen, this paper has shown that the municipal park provided an ideal space in which to continue to develop local citizenship skills and values⁹⁰. These could be experienced in multiple ways and could be contested by groups or individuals but they were no less significant for that. While Heaton Park did not live up to the ideals of Olmsted's people's park, it continued to be successful as a recreation space and contributed to the territorial enlargement of the city of Manchester, a fact that should not be overlooked. The addition of Heaton Park consolidated that expansion and sent a clear message to surrounding townships like Prestwich and Middleton of Manchester's territorial ambitions. In that sense, it is illustrative of the civic pride of Manchester and her City Council at this time and represents the first real flourish of the Edwardian municipal public park in the city.

⁹⁰ Beaven and Griffiths, 209-10.

Figure 1 – A crowd in front of the bandstand, Heaton Park 1906



Source: Manchester Central Library Local Image Collection

Figure 2 – A crowded Saturday at Heaton Park, 1906



Source: Manchester Central Library Local Image Collection

Figure 3 – Group Outing in the Refreshment Tent, Heaton Park 1904



Source: Manchester Central Library Local Image Collection

Figure 4 – The Old Manchester Town Hall Façade at Heaton Park, 1912



Source: Manchester Central Library Local Image Collection

