

## **Citizenship in the Industrial Boomtown: Narratives of work and leisure in Britain 1880-1914<sup>1</sup>**

*Brad Beaven University of Portsmouth, UK*

*John Griffiths Massey University, New Zealand*

The modern Coventry is largely new. Men flock to the city for work...the new-comers seem to acknowledge no local obligation beyond paying rents and rates. Hence the civic spirit declines...wealth accumulates, but the number of men with public spirit decays.

*Coventry Herald 26 August 1910*

The historiography of social citizenship has largely understood the movement as a philanthropic response to the socially distressed and poverty stricken inhabitants of the late nineteenth century inner-cities. In tracing the development of social citizenship, historians have been drawn to the activities of middle-class philanthropists in the East End of London, a comparatively new working class urban development which lacked civic leadership and housed a 'residuum' population. However, the fascination of historians with London's slum life during this period has drawn attention away from the provincial cities that sometimes displayed social problems of a different nature. This study's focus will be on Coventry which, in contrast with London's East End, was at the forefront of Britain's second industrial revolution and a centre of new found working-class affluence. Central to this inquiry will be an analysis of why the affluent worker was perceived as culturally degenerate by elites representing a cross-section of the political spectrum. Faced with this perceived degeneracy, the urban elites, like their London counterparts, responded by constructing and disseminating schemes of social citizenship. However, the emphasis of Coventry's social citizenship was placed less with charity and

munificence, but instead limited its scope to transmitting narratives of the idealised worker through the local press and other printed media. The article is divided into three sections. First we shall explore how social citizenship was shaped by the intellectual climate in Britain during the late nineteenth century. The second section will focus on Coventry's socio-economic structure, outline the city's civic elite and examine their analysis of the perceived degenerate bicycle and motor car worker. Finally, the article will investigate how the urban elite disseminated an idealised civic role for the working class based on a mythical artisan worker who was respectable at work and leisure and patriotic in both local and national affairs.<sup>2</sup>

The current historiography on social citizenship has placed the movement at the heart of contemporary discourse on the discovery of poverty in the late nineteenth century city. Clearly, the poverty discovered in rapidly growing cities such as London, Birmingham and Liverpool was a leading factor in shaping notions of citizenship in those urban areas.<sup>3</sup> However, this article will argue that social citizenship should be seen within a broader context, one that sheds light on the middle-class' increasing anxiety with modernity. This fear was never more apparent than in regions which experienced a socio-economic boom, with an influx of migrant workers due to the emergence of the 'new' industries between 1870-1914. Significantly, the growth of the 'new' cycle, motor and electrical industries occurred simultaneously with a rapid urbanization and the establishment of working-class neighbourhoods during the late nineteenth century. The growth of these 'new' consumer industries attracted a workforce which initially comprised semi-skilled young men who, due to the monotonous nature of their work, were rewarded with over-time opportunities and relatively high wages. In short, just as some social reformers began to describe the appearance of a morally and physically degenerate working-class in areas of poverty, others

acknowledged the emergence of a 'new' type of worker attracted to industrial boom towns in the midlands and south east.

Gareth Stedman Jones' *Outcast London* provided one of the first accounts of the middle-class' concern that the growth of the city and the shortage of housing was pushing the respectable working class into the same living quarters as the 'residuum' class. Indeed, Stedman Jones argued that with the decline of the respectable artisan in the 1880s, the social elite thought it imperative that a distinction be drawn between the 'true' working class and the 'residuum' poor.<sup>4</sup> This influential work set the agenda for historians interested in the problems that confronted the civic authorities during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Vincent and Plant's study of the philosophy of social citizenship also focused on attempts by idealists to transform poverty-stricken environments through the schemes such as Toynbee Hall. This project involved the placement of Oxford students in working-class neighbourhoods to act as role models in an attempt to create the exemplary citizen.<sup>5</sup> Meller's work pursued these themes by investigating the concept of social citizenship in a case study of Bristol between 1870-1914. The fear that civilization was under threat encouraged municipal councils to take an increased involvement in the cultural life of urban areas which would restore pride in the city through the fostering of neighbourhoods and communities.<sup>6</sup> Recently, Meller has shown how the concept of social citizenship altered when, after 1880, it became clear that new municipal buildings and facilities had not fostered a community free from poverty and disaffection. Consequently, the elites' perception of social citizenship shifted from the emphasis on municipal facilities to the social actions of the individual.<sup>7</sup>

During the 1860s and early 1870s, social observers had formed fairly optimistic views over the extent to which the working class could be culturally elevated. The Times in 1867

congratulated initiatives by government, employers and philanthropists at their attempts to cultivate workmen. A leading article proclaimed ‘who would not be the English workman? He is the spoilt child of the great British family...we are striving to take him by the hand and do him some good’.<sup>8</sup> A similar tone was struck by the economist Alfred Marshall who confidently asserted that ‘all ranks of society are rising; on the whole they are better and more cultivated than their forefathers were...in the broad backbone of moral strength our people have never been wanting; but now, by the aid of education, their moral strength is gaining new life’.<sup>9</sup> However, as early as 1877, the confident predictions that the working class would accept the civilizing hand of the middle class began to crumble. Notions of social citizenship seemed ineffective in penetrating the rapidly growing working class neighbourhoods which were becoming a feature of British urban life.<sup>10</sup> The Times now worried that civilization was under threat by the growth of the modern city which was breeding ‘a kind of human vermin. We may catch a few of them and put them in cages, moral or legal; but the mass of them will remain in their savage condition’.<sup>11</sup> By the 1890s, those writing about city conditions preferred to consider the future rather than the present. Samuel Barnett’s Ideal City (1894) was one of the few voices to suggest, in the Hegelian tradition, that the future city would be a socially integrated structure. The visitor to the modern city would be:

charmed by its first aspect: its variety of architecture, its beauty of colour, its freshness and purity. He would miss little of what he had left in the country. He would breathe easily, enjoy the play of change, and taste the quiet which comes from deeper feeling. And he would know none of the depression caused by great wealth or great poverty. In the IDEAL CITY none will be very rich, and none will be very poor.<sup>12</sup>

This utopian viewpoint was increasingly challenged by the turn of the century, particularly by observers who had dared enter the city. C.F.G. Masterman, for example, warned that the modern industrial city was actively corrupting the development of the Anglo-Saxon race which had traditionally been 'reserved' and 'silent'. Now there was 'turbulent rioting over military successes, Hooliganism...the "city type" of the coming years; the "street bred" people of the twentieth century; the "new generation knocking at our doors"'. Moreover, for Masterman, it was not the urban poor he described, but a new type of semi-skilled worker employed in monotonous tasks who was 'stunted, narrow-chested, easily wearied ; yet voluble, excitable, with little ballast, stamina, or endurance - seeking stimulus in drink, in betting, in any unaccustomed conflicts at home or abroad.'<sup>13</sup>

## II

It is against the backdrop of these intellectual trends that the urban elites developed their response to Coventry's rapid socio-economic transformation to a city of new workers and new industries. Until the latter half of the nineteenth century Coventry's economic and social infrastructure had been dominated by weaving and watchmaking, two trades which had traditionally employed skilled craftsmen since the eighteenth century. Although watchmaking struggled on into the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the weaving trade, by far the largest employer in Coventry, suffered a dramatic collapse due to the relaxation of tariff barriers in 1861.<sup>14</sup>

The establishment of the 'new' industries in Coventry can be traced back to the mid 1860s with the formation of the European Sewing Machine Company. The relatively weak market for sewing machines ensured that by 1869, the firm underwent reconstruction and, under James Starley's technical direction, began to produce bicycles. The firm had originally been

sited in Coventry as a replacement for the declining ribbon trade and to utilize the host of machine tool firms which had serviced the textile industry. Nevertheless, it was the pool of semi-skilled labour made redundant from the textile industry which proved the chief attraction for the firm's backers.<sup>15</sup> The production practices that prevailed in the cycle industry demanded a pool of workers that were usually young and semi-skilled.<sup>16</sup> Indeed, Coventry's staple industries prior to the establishment of the cycle trade, weaving and watch making, had both adopted similar semi-skilled work processes by the end of the nineteenth century.<sup>17</sup>

Such was the demand for cycles that, in Coventry, workers employed in the cycle trade increased from 400 in 1881 to 4,100 in 1891.<sup>18</sup> The number of cycle firms during this period increased from 16 in 1881 to 70 during the mid-1890s.<sup>19</sup> The social impact in Coventry, particularly in the 1890s when the industry entered a boom period, was immense. The city's population increased from 39,474 in 1871 to 69,978 in 1901. Although there were boundary changes and natural increases in population during this period, there can be little doubt that inward migration was a dominant feature in Coventry's demographic experience.<sup>20</sup> Consequently, by 1896, when Britain's motor industry was established in the city, Coventry had become a magnet for the young semi-skilled worker, particularly from the midlands and the southeast of England.<sup>21</sup> Indeed, the census reflects the growing importance of this sector of the population. In 1901, there were 6,001 cycle and motor workers in Coventry, rising to 13,000 in 1911. Of these 13,000 workers, 10,188 were under 35 whilst over 5,000 were under 25. The vast majority of workers in the motor industry were male. In 1911, there were only 1,116 women operatives from a total of just under 13,000 motor and cycle workers. However, the influx of women workers was increasing and matched, in percentage terms, the rise in male employment in the cycle and motor industries between 1901-1911.<sup>22</sup>



1900	2	5	5	7	14	1	1	2
1910	2	9	3	6	15	1	3	7
1918	2	4	5	10	9	1	6	10

*Sources: Coventry Municipal Handbooks, 1892, 1900, 1910, 1918; Coventry Watch Committee Minute Book 1914-21, Insurance Claims by city centre businesses, Kellys' Warwickshire Trade Directories 1890-1920*

However, those involved in industrial capital were consistently out-numbered by councillors who made their living through retail. With the new industrial capital largely dis-engaged from local affairs of the city, the retailers or 'shopocracy' held the upper hand in Coventry Council - a recipe that made for poor municipal amenities. Political controversies, which often cut across party lines, were largely between the "economic" factions in both parties, who objected to virtually any form of public expenditure and the "rest" who objected only to money being spent on most things'.<sup>27</sup> Prior to the election of Labour Councillors in 1905, the advocates of municipal spending were a minority of radicals in both the liberal and conservative parties who usually had connections with Coventry's old industries. For example, sitting on the 1901 council was John Gulson, a radical Liberal manufacturer and philanthropist who maintained that greater municipal intervention would generate an improvement in the people and 'carry light into many dwellings and make many a home happier'.<sup>28</sup> Others included Albert Tomson, a ribbon manufacturer who had campaigned for the establishment of a city technical college and Vincent Wyles a radical conservative from a watchmaking family who was a fervent advocate of municipal interventions into public health.<sup>29</sup> This cross-party alliance did achieve some notable successes. Between 1880-1914, the little public spending that did occur was channelled into the purchase of the city's essential utilities. In 1884 the corporation took over the gas works, since the private company was increasingly unable to cope with the new industrial demand the cycle trade had brought, and

in 1895 the city council founded the electricity power station.<sup>30</sup> The inability of the Coventry Electric Tramway Company to handle the increasing demand, particularly from those workers involved in the cycle and motor industries, also led to the Council purchasing the company in 1912.<sup>31</sup> However, urban landmarks, which in other cities had been municipally funded,<sup>32</sup> such as the Corn Exchange and public libraries were built largely through private finance. For example in 1868, the Council's reluctance to fund a public library led campaigners to elicit financial help from the Scottish-American Steel industrialist Andrew Carnegie who had funded a large number public libraries both in the United States and Britain.<sup>33</sup>

However, in contrast with other councils during this period, the municipal achievements in Coventry pale in comparison. Whereas Birmingham's council was dominated by Chamberlainite industrial capitalists with their visions of social citizenship translated into vast public spending schemes, the shopocracy in Coventry Council generally relied on private initiatives to improve Coventry's public building stock. Indeed, in 1901 Coventry Council refused to send a deputation to Birmingham to assess the city's municipal development and its applicability to Coventry as it was dismissed as a 'gigantic advertisement' stunt for the councillors' and their businesses.<sup>34</sup> The absence of a Chamberlainite faction in Coventry was vividly brought into focus by Bernard Shaw who visited the Coventry branch of the Fabian Society in 1912. Pulling no punches, Shaw remarked that:

You do not know what municipal housing is in Coventry. You are very backward in Coventry, and municipally you are rather stupid people...You may think that the employers in Coventry are the rich people of this country. They are not. They are nothing of the kind. They are very vulgar tradespeople; they are not the real thing in the least. Do you suppose rich people would come to live in this dirty, smoky place, this wretched

town that has grown and grown, where instead of sensibly knocking down your little town and building a fine big town to hold the enlarged population, you are trying to shove a big population into the little town.<sup>35</sup>

Shaw was speaking to the one voice of dissension in Coventry, a small band of socialists who had made little impact on civic affairs until the early twentieth century. The growth of the labour movement in Coventry had largely been under the auspices of the Trades Council, founded in 1890, which had assumed many tasks of a local labour party. Indeed, most of the key personalities that were to join the Social Democratic Federation (SDF) and the Labour Party had been involved at one time or another in the Trades Council. It was not until 1902 that a Labour Representation Committee (LRC) was formed which sought election on to the Board of Guardians and later in 1905 the council elections.<sup>36</sup> The socialists' strategy centred on pushing in a piece-meal fashion for the gradual municipalism of Coventry and an extension of the Council's services into social provision.<sup>37</sup> Perhaps one of the socialists' early achievements was the pressure exerted on the council over the building of council houses. New Coventry slums had developed as a consequence of the cycle boom during a period when there was an increased national awareness of the growth of urban degeneration. However, although the 1890 Housing Act permitted local authorities to undertake slum clearances and build replacement housing for the families effected, it was not until 1907 that Coventry went ahead with a scheme. The key figures behind the Coventry Housing Reform Council that campaigned for the council to adopt the act were two leading local socialists, Hugh Farren and George Poole, and a handful of philanthropists, radical clergy and Liberals. Although they were successful in pressuring the council to build 22 tenements in 1907, attempts to build a garden city on the outskirts of Coventry

were consistently rejected by the council and consequently Poole had to rely on a donation of £8,000 from the Coventry Cooperative to fund the project.<sup>38</sup>

Despite some success in the housing question, socialist activity in Coventry was hindered, not only by its relatively late start, but also by the poor state of relations that existed between the LRC and the SDF.<sup>39</sup> Moreover, there was almost no representation in these two parties from workers engaged in the new semi-skilled industries, a factor which further distanced from the vast majority of the workforce in Coventry. There can be little doubt that Coventry socialism was weak and alienated from the people they claimed to represent, a situation that prompted Carr to conclude that 'only a small number of people were active in them [socialist organisations] and only a minority of work people were encompassed by them. In 1914 most working class people were not involved in any organisation'.<sup>40</sup> The failure of late nineteenth century socialists to culturally elevate the working class finds resonance in the work of Waters, who describes a puritanical socialism attempting to promote citizenship based on thrift and temperance. As in many in other cities, the socialist vision failed. It is probably not surprising that the Coventry working class were recalcitrant given the Klondike-like atmosphere pervading the city by the early twentieth century.<sup>41</sup>

The composition of Coventry's Council, with its dominant 'economisitic' shopocracy, ensured that the city did not undergo a sustained period of physical renewal between 1870-1914. However, although concepts of social citizenship were not expressed through the construction of municipal buildings, notions of citizenship were increasingly diffused through the press, public meetings and organised leisure. The more municipal minded councillors, who were on the whole derived from traditional industrial capital, found the local press only too willing to support and diffuse a brand of social citizenship which placed the

nature of work at the heart of its philosophy. However, competing with this dominant notion of citizenship in Coventry were the small band of socialists who, by 1914, were offering an alternative form of citizenship with strong temperance and religious dimensions. The next section will demonstrate that both the councillors and socialists shared similar fears over the bicycle industry's monotonous work process and its role in producing a degenerate working class. Moreover, the councillors and socialists offered competing notions of social citizenship to help rectify the problem

Although Coventry continued to expand with the emergence of new factories, suburbs and housing estates, there was a general perception, expressed in the Liberal, Conservative and Socialist press, that the city was undergoing a cultural and civic decline. In 1891, the liberal newspaper the *Coventry Herald*, published a leading article which argued that Coventry was becoming a 'rougher town' due to the cycle workers who had been responsible for the working-class' decline in moral standards. In some cases, observers even described cycle workers as a different race to their counterparts in weaving and watch making believing that:

One thing clear enough is that the city has not absorbed its new people into its old history, traditions, and ways. There are two peoples: the one a settled and fast dwindling race, natives and those of long residence, whose outlook embraces the old and new period; the other the newcomers, who contribute little that is not frankly material to the common stock of knowledge.<sup>42</sup>

The municipally sympathetic Liberal and Conservative axis on Coventry Council and their supporters in the local press dominated contemporary discourse on the nature of social citizenship in the city. With their business interests firmly rooted in the city's old industrial structures, it is perhaps no surprise that their analysis of the problems that effected late nineteenth

century Coventry began with their perceptions of the changing nature of work. Indeed, the nature and form that new types of work took were used to map out the deficiencies in the cycle workers' character both inside *and* outside the workplace. It was the interlocking of three characteristics associated with the new industries - the monotonous nature of the work, the long hours, and the relatively good wages - which offered an explanation for observers of why workers appeared to reject local traditions that they believed had once bridged the gulf between social classes earlier in the nineteenth century. The mechanic, according to one observer, was engaged in 'a purely monotonous task. He leaves off late at night or Sunday afternoon, wearied out. He has no time to read, or think, or pray. His mind is not equal to anything that makes demand upon his intellect'.<sup>43</sup> The cycle trade, like many of the new industries involved in volume production, implemented over-time schemes during busy periods. As a result, workers could earn relatively good wages that far exceeded incomes of the 'traditional' weavers or watchmakers. This did not go unnoticed by a number of correspondents to the local press. One typical contributor noted that 'I am afraid a good deal of the money earned is spent, by which a little frugality and forethought might be saved, and that many a workman who does not at the present time think of putting by any portion of his wage, might by a little effort do so without much convenience to himself or his family'.<sup>44</sup> Among many middle-class commentators there was a shared assumption that workers were incapable of handling their new found affluence. Reverend Nye, a curate of Coventry Cathedral and a keen observer of working-class activities during the 1890s, was certain that long hours of labour would lead to a 'thrifless community'.<sup>45</sup> Nye believed that the 'new' worker wholeheartedly rejected the saving ethic since he claimed that cycle operatives 'would say "I've had to work hard for this, now I will have my fling. I've been kept to the grindstone all week. This afternoon and to-morrow I'll go on the loose."'"<sup>46</sup>

The belief that affluence and an alienating work experience was somehow corrupting a working class which in the past had been poor but respectable gained widespread support in the local press.<sup>47</sup> In one editorial, the *Coventry Standard* commented:

I hope its not libellous to suggest that the average cycle artizan – especially the young artizan – is a bit rough and something over. He may be smart enough and capable enough. But he strikes outsiders as imperfectly civilized; a little less betting, a little less thirst-quenching, a little less junketing in waggonettes would do him no harm. He might save money with advantage where he spends it.<sup>48</sup>

Throughout the period 1880-1914, reporters and correspondents commented on the seemingly incessant rise in crime, linking it to the city's growing prosperity that the cycle and motor industries had brought. The rationale for this position not only stemmed from the view that conspicuous consumption corrupted working people, but also that a prosperous city appealed to undesirable characters that were attracted to the 'lowest' types of cycle work. The trend of linking the new migrant workers with crime continued into the early twentieth century in 1906 *The Coventry Herald* published a survey entitled 'The growth of indictable offences in Coventry in the last ten years - from one cycle boom to another'.<sup>49</sup> By the end of the century, observers were producing both quantitative and qualitative evidence which 'irrefutably' correlated the rise of the cycle industry with an apparent increase in crime.<sup>50</sup>

The critique of the cycle workers' civic virtues, that had been led by the Liberal and Conservative press, found support from socialists who had begun organising themselves in Coventry from 1890. Despite offering competing notions of social citizenship, the municipally minded Liberal and Conservative axis on the Council and the early Socialists shared the view that new work processes had a degenerating effect upon Coventry's cycle operative. The Socialist

response to the cycle worker's cultural deprivation was to link pride in civic values and local patriotism with working-class self-improvement. Thus leading members of the socialist movement either held firm religious convictions or played a key role in Coventry's small but vocal temperance movement. For example, Roland Barrett who launched the *Coventry Sentinel*, a short-lived socialist newspaper, was an avid teetotaler who could often be found 'preaching' on the fusion of socialism and temperance from a wagon in the centre of Coventry.<sup>51</sup> Similarly, Hugh Farren, another pioneer of the Coventry labour movement was also secretary to the Coventry Temperance and Band of Hope Association who would play music in the 'allies and courts' of Coventry to 'elevate and brighten the dreary, dull routine lives of the dwellers in these places'.<sup>52</sup> Furthermore, another important influence in Coventry's socialist network was the Christian Socialist League led by Rev P.E.T. Widdrington whose St Peter's Vicarage became the home of the city's Fabian society. The religious and temperance dimension gave Coventry socialism a reforming zeal which attempted to encourage working-people to embrace an enlightened socialist popular culture. However, the attempt to instill a socialistic civic pride in the cycle worker consistently failed. The newly formed Independent Labour Party in Coventry regularly made a loss due to low membership and poor attendances at public lantern lectures.<sup>53</sup> Speaking in 1912, Widdrington viewed the outlook as 'gloomy' since the masses 'see no way out of their misery and are not convinced that socialism is the remedy'. Widdrington laid the blame for the failure of socialism squarely at the feet of the cycle worker as the high wages being earned were 'too largely expended on crude and trivial satisfaction by the population with little experience to guide them to a wiser outlay'.<sup>54</sup> These sentiments were echoed in early Socialist meetings when attempts were made to strengthen local support for the Labour Representative Committee. In 1903, James Walsh, a member of the LRC complained that:

if there was a place where men could be accused of being apathetic and indifferent to their own interests he thought Coventry claimed that description . He did not know of a place where men seemed so very dense, if they would excuse the term, or so very dull to their own absolute interest, as the average man in Coventry. This he attributed largely to the fact that many men living in Coventry had been drawn from other places because they had obtained employment here. For some reason or other there was a lack of local patriotism on the part of many of those which he had never been able to understand.

Walsh concluded by reminding Coventry workers that wherever a man might go for employment 'the duties of citizenship followed him'.<sup>55</sup> The Coventry socialists' disillusionment with the semi-skilled worker was shared by socialists at a national level. Writing in the *Clarion*, Leonard Hall complained that socialists had made the mistake of appealing 'exclusively to the manual labouring classes, who, stupefied by generations and lives of oppression turn a perfectly deaf ear'. Hall appealed for socialists to turn to the lower-middle-class and skilled working-class for support since this section of the community were more open to new ideas.<sup>56</sup> Indeed, the dominance of Coventry's skilled trade unions in the labour movement and absence of union activity in the bicycle industry during this period does suggest that Coventry socialists focused attention towards the top echelon of the working class.

### III

The failure of the socialists to make an impact on contemporary discourse ensured that notions of social citizenship were dominated by the urban elite associated with the city's traditional industries. One of the most important ways of diffusing this 'manufactured' civic spirit was the use of the local press and the promotion of literature which would be read by the working class. At the forefront of this movement was the *Coventry Herald*, owned by the Liberal

Charles Bray and edited by John Moir Scott between 1868-1914. Bray subscribed to a view that the diffusion of social citizenship could help civilize a working class and allow them one day to join the ranks of the middle class. He noted that 'the workmen at present without a higher moral development, cannot govern themselves and they would be best under a really philanthropic despotism of the capitalist'.<sup>57</sup> Bray's contact with the working class had largely been confined to his failed attempts at creating an arbitration system between manufacturers and weavers after the great strike of 1860. Significantly, the absence of formal trade unions in the emergent cycle industry denied Bray a point of contact with the 'new' worker, a situation which led him to redirect his energies towards promoting social citizenship.<sup>58</sup> The mantle of Bray's project after his death was taken on by John Moir Scott who was described as a 'faithful Liberal' and had been involved in the promotion of the Coventry Free Library.<sup>59</sup> However, the desire to encourage working-class people to embrace the ideals of social citizenship was not only held by the liberal press in the city. Reflecting the minority cross-party axis on the City Council, the conservative press in Coventry, such as the *Coventry Standard* and the *Coventry Times*, carried features defining the virtues of civic spirit and civic responsibility. Thus, on both sides of the liberal and conservative divide there was agreement on the need to comment on the development of the city and on the increasing number of new workers who were making it their home.

Between 1870-1914, there was a concerted effort on behalf of the Coventry press and urban elite to define and promote the ideal citizen, particularly the ideal working-class citizen. Once again, it was contemporary narratives of work from which the middle class drew inspiration. In effect, the urban elite created the exemplary citizen from an imagined traditional artisan worker who was conscious of his civic duties and his place in society. Whereas contemporaries viewed the new worker with uncertainty and disdain, the old traditional artisan

was perceived as a product of a more stable age which was free from the cultural anxiety that blighted the late nineteenth century. In a series of articles that appeared in the conservative *Coventry Standard* in 1900, for example, the ‘Old Time Coventry Weaver and Watchmaker’ were described in the following way:

Years have passed and the Coventry weaver is becoming only a memory, yet as one stands near St Mary’s Hall on a Saturday morning and sees the old freeman weavers hobbling to receive their pensions, it is with thoughts of regret for a trade that produced excellent citizens and gentlemen artisans’.<sup>60</sup>

Thus, in the public arena the weaver was regarded as an excellent citizen, an outward appearance which was matched by his private conduct:

The old time weaver was attached to his bread-winner the loom as is a sailor to his ship or a shepherd to his dog...he was staunch; he clung to his old ways and customs. He liked to sit by the hearth in his tall red house in the weavers quarters, and read the paper *his* father had read before him...Good husband, good patriot, good citizen was he.<sup>61</sup>

In another article the weaver was looked on as a:

Gentleman ...he cut no mean figure as he set out to work in black coat and tall silk hat. In his hand he carried a flag basket filled with ribbon he had woven. From six in the morning to seven at night he plodded on all the year round knowing nought of holidays save a visit to the district flower show. The weaver and his family were religious as well as industrious.<sup>62</sup>

Furthermore, the weavers’ leisure activities were also celebrated as one correspondent noted that ‘you would often see Coventry watchmakers in groups of two or threes still wearing their long

white aprons sauntering through country lanes, some of them perhaps gathering flowers'.<sup>63</sup> It is perhaps significant that the concept of citizenship embraced issues such as heritage, duty (both local and national), hard work, and rational recreation. The model artisan could draw on a long line of ancestors who had lived in the area and had been prominent in civic life. Coventry's civic history was fairly unusual as an Act in the Elizabethan period enfranchised all citizens who had completed a seven year apprenticeship.<sup>64</sup> Consequently, as freemen of the city the watch maker or weaver could become prominent in civic affairs. It is also clear that the exemplary citizen dressed smartly and used what leisure time he had in a rational individualistic manner. This mythical artisan worker had an affinity with the countryside, using his leisure rationally to wander in the country lanes educating himself in natural history and botany. Indeed, an important attribute that the older worker was purported to have held was an interaction with the countryside, since a fear of encroaching urbanisation was developing and the perception of a gulf between town and country was an important aspect of middle-class uncertainty by the 1890s.<sup>65</sup> However, to middle-class contemporaries, the gentle leisure pursuits of the artisans were, to some extent, a reflection of their experience in work. The work that this imagined weaver engaged in was one which required education, skill and intelligence since it was a craft that would result in an individual and unique product. The workprocess was also supposed to have instilled discipline in the weaver and respect for their masters, as one newspaper article noted that, 'masters were strict with apprentices. Employers would think nothing of boxing their (young apprentices) ears if they did not behave properly'.<sup>66</sup> In other words, this was a form of work which brought discipline, contentment and fulfillment both in and outside the work place. This analysis was extended to the new worker who was largely engaged in monotonous semi-skilled mass production, a work process which was thought to lead to unhealthy and irrational leisure pursuits. As we have

already seen, unlike the model artisan, the new workers' leisure was highly visible in the streets and thoroughfares of Coventry and the growing mass commercial ventures in the city.<sup>67</sup> Perhaps this view is best demonstrated with the following observation from a correspondent to the *Coventry Herald* who called himself a 'Peaceful Citizen':

We are really in Coventry at the mercy of the machinist. The weaver and the watchmaker in the height of the prosperity were not so rowdy. The cause is doubtless to be found in the fact that the peaceful art and craft of the weaver and the watchmaker have a more civilising effect upon the youth and allow him more opportunities for thought than does the fire of the forge and the clanging and hanging of the hammers in the cycle factory. The human product of a cycle works is a more boisterous creature than the human product of a weaver's or watchmakers shop. Is there no hope of civilising the machinist?<sup>68</sup>

These pronouncements on the problems with the new Coventry worker and the projection of the model citizen were reinforced by the publication of Joseph Gutteridges' autobiography in 1893. Gutteridge was an unusual working-class weaver in that he was in regular contact with the city's leading public figures, such as John Gulson, through his participation in a number of middle-class philanthropic institutions, the most notable being the Free Library Committee. There can be little doubt that it was the leading members of the Free Library Committee who funded and organised the publication of Gutteridge's autobiography. During the last pages of the autobiography Gutteridge briefly mentioned how his reminiscences had found publication. He stated that:

A number of gentlemen joined together...and arranged for me to receive a stipulated sum per week. This was done without my knowledge. All I know is that it is called an annuity and that I obtain these payments by cheques from the Savings Bank Hertford Street.<sup>69</sup>

The autobiography, then, and the accompanying press interest in the project reflected the urban elites' concerted effort to educate the working-class in their ideals of social citizenship. Gutteridge's autobiography implicitly attacked the habits and traits attributed to the semi-skilled migrant worker. Opening with a section on his family background, Gutteridge stressed his family's local ties and the ancestral involvement in the skilled trade of weaving which had brought him a sense of civic pride and involvement in the city.<sup>70</sup> Gutteridge's reminiscences of the workplace were overtly individualistic, condemning collective workplace customs and fellow striking workers.<sup>71</sup> Individualism was also a feature of Gutteridge's leisure since 'safe' and often rural forms of recreation such as the study of botany and rambling were stressed.<sup>72</sup>

In the final chapter of the autobiography Gutteridge looked back on his life during the nineteenth century and compared old and new Coventry. He complemented the city authorities on undertaking municipal improvement:

With the passing of the reform Bill a new public spirit came into existence. Coventry was infused with the new life, and from that time improvements in the sanitary, social political and educational conditions of the city may be chiefly traced. The citizens of modern Coventry appear to have realized their position and to have braced themselves to meet the requirements of the new times, and are looking hopefully forward to the future.<sup>73</sup>

#### IV

This article has demonstrated that it was not only poverty stricken inner-cities that generated schemes of social citizenship. The formation of large homogenous working-class neighbourhoods in industrial boom-towns also engendered an anxiety among urban elites that centred on the

corrupting influences of relative working-class affluence. For both the socialists and the urban elite on Coventry council, the modern city had ushered in new industries and an affluent working class that were in desperate need of their own brand of social citizenship. Despite their political differences, the urban elite and the Socialist activists shared a common concern with regard to the new industrial work-processes and the emergence of the affluent worker. The social citizenship project also served as a convenient cover to deflect attention from the urban elites' and socialists' own respective deficiencies. The small band of socialists could avoid any responsibility for the cycle industry's notoriously poor unionization and failure to ignite interest in socialist sponsored events by placing the blame at the feet of the new degenerate working class. Likewise, the social citizenship initiatives from the urban elite in Coventry based on the attempt to shift attention onto the bicycle worker for other reasons. Both the 'new worker' and the 'model artisan' were effectively cultural constructs designed to explain the perceived degeneration of the city and the working class. By presenting the working class with a moral choice of life-styles to adopt, the urban elite could sidestep awkward questions about industrial capitalism and its impact on modern urban life. After the Great War notions of citizenship tended to shift away from fears of cultural deprivation. In Coventry, the city's old civic elite were gradually replaced on the Council by captains of the bicycle and motor industries. They were untroubled by the 'new' operatives' work routines and the associated cultural traits, since they often owned the factories in which the affluent worker could be found.

Endnotes

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1. A earlier version of this paper was read at the Economic History Society Conference, St Catherine's College, Oxford, March 1999 and the Centre for Urban History, University of Leicester, November 2001. The late Professor Robbie Gray provided helpful comments and encouragement on earlier drafts. Our thanks also to Ken Lunn and Donna Loftus who also commented on the article.

2. For useful analyses of changing notions of citizenship and community see: D.Gilbert, "Community and Municipalism: Collective Identity in Late Victorian and Edwardian Mining

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Towns”, *Journal of Historical Geography*, 17, 3, 1991, p. 262; R. Pearson, “Knowing One’s Place: Perceptions of Community in the Industrial Suburbs of Leeds, 1790-1890”, *Journal of Social History*, 27,, 2, 1993, p.236.

3. *The Times*, 30 November 1877, p. 9.

4. G. Stedman Jones, *Outcast London: A Study in the Relationship between the Classes in Victorian Society* (Oxford, Clarendon, 1971), p.301.

5. A. Vincent and R. Plant, *Philosophy, Politics and Citizenship: The Life and Thought of the British Idealists*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1984. R.A. Evans, “The University and the City. The Educational Work of Toynbee Hall”, *History of Education*, 11, 1982.

6. H. Meller, *Leisure and the Changing City, 1870-1914*, Routledge, London, 1976, pp. 8-9.

7. H. Meller, “Urban Renewal and Citizenship: The Quality of Life in British Cities, 1890-1990”, *Urban History*, 22, 1, 1995, p. 64. See also T. Thomas, “Representation of the Manchester Working Class in Fiction, 1850-1900”, in A.J. Kidd and K.W. Roberts (eds), *City, Class and Culture. Studies of Social Policy and Cultural Reproduction in Victorian Manchester*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1985, p.194.

8. *The Times*, 2 May 1867, p.11.

9. A.C. Pigou, *Memorials of Alfred Marshall*, Kelley, New York, 1966, p.115.

10. A. Savage and M. Miles, *The Remaking of the British Working Class, 1840-1940* Routledge, London, 1994, pp.57-72.

11. *The Times*, 30 November 1877, p.9

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17. *Midland Daily Telegraph*, 15 March 1906.
18. P. McLeay, "The Wolverhampton Motor Car Industry 1896-1937", West Midlands Studies (1969), 100.
19. D.W. Thoms and T. Donnelly, "Coventry's Industrial Economy", in B. Lancaster and T. Mason (eds), *Life and Labour in a 20<sup>th</sup> Century City. The Experience of Coventry* (Cryfield, Coventry, 1986, p.13.
20. B. Lancaster, "Who's a Real Coventry Kid? Migration into Twentieth Century Coventry", in Lancaster and Mason (eds), *Life and Labour in a 20<sup>th</sup> Century City*, pp.58-60. For a study on the impact of migration into a light industrial region in the 1930s see M. Stacey, *Tradition and Change: A Study of Banbury*, Oxford UniveristyPress, London, 1960.
21. J. Zeitlin, "Emergence of the Shop Steward Organisation and Job Control in the British Car Industry" History Workshop, 10 (1980), p.127.
22. B. Lancaster, "Who's a Real Coventry Kid? Migration into Twentieth Century Coventry" Lancaster and Mason (eds), *Life and Labour in a Twentieth Century City*, p. 64.
23. K. Richardson, *Twentieth Century Coventry*, Macmillan, London 1972, p.11.
24. Thoms and Donnelly, "Coventry's Industrial Economy", p.15.
25. Lancaster and Mason, "Society and Politics in 20<sup>th</sup> Coventry", p. 342.
26. Coventry City Local Studies Library (hereafter CCLSL), "Newspaper Cuttings 1916-23",

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vol: II, p.37.

27. F.W. Carr, "Engineering Workers and the Rise of Labour, 1914-1939", PhD thesis, University of Warwick, 1978, p.18.

28. *Coventry Herald* 31 December 1904. Other philanthropic interests Gulson held were Member of the Management Committee of the School of Design (1845), Joint Secretary for the Mechanics Institute (1835), Chairman of the Board of Guardians (1884), Chairman of Coventry School Board after its establishment in the 1870's. See J. E. Short, *The John Gulson Story*, Leamington Spa, Warwickshire, 1978.

29. Richardson, *Twentieth Century Coventry*, p.185.

30. Richardson, *Twentieth Century Coventry*, pp. 216-17

31 For discussion on the problems of Coventry's tram service see *Coventry Herald*, 9 September 1910, also see Richardson, *Twentieth Century Coventry*, p. 217.

32 H. Meller, 'Urban Renewal and Citizenship', p. 65.

33. B. Poole, *Coventry. Its History and Antiquities* (J. R. Smith, London, 1870), pp.322-339, Richardson, *Twentieth Century Coventry*, p.271.

34. *The Reporter*, 28 September 1901.

35. CCLSL, A. Heap, "Scrap book", vol 6, p.163.

36. J.A. Yates *Pioneers to Power*, (Coventry Labour Party, Coventry, 1950), p.25.

37. Coventry Record Office (hereafter CRO), Acc 135, R. Barrett, "Socialism Made Plain", c. 1911.

38. CRO, Acc 836/2, H. Farren, "Newspaper Cuttings", 63, Richardson, *Twentieth Century*

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*Coventry*, 119-20.

39. Yates, *Pioneers*, p.29.

40. Carr, "Engineers", p.48.

41. C. Waters, *British Socialists and the Politics of Popular Culture, 1884-1914*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1990), chapter 6 **page numbers needed**

42. *Coventry Graphic*, 24 July 1914.

43. *Coventry Times*, 18 March 1891.

44. *Coventry Standard*, 27 June 1884.

45. Rev. Nye's concern with thrift, honesty and hard work rang a little hollow as during the 1890s he was forced to leave his position as Curate of Coventry Cathedral after it was revealed that he had in fact been sentenced to one year's hard labour in the 1860s after being convicted for fraud at Maidstone Assizes. For a detailed account of Nye's life see *Coventry Herald*, 12 May 1899.

46. *Coventry Times*, 18 March 1891.

47. Paul Johnson has shown that conspicuous consumption was also present, perhaps though to a lesser degree, in 'traditional' working-class culture. See P. Johnson, "Conspicuous Consumption and Working-Class Culture in Late Victorian and Edwardian Britain", *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 38, 1988, pp.27-42.

48. *Coventry Herald*, 14 August 1891.

49. *Coventry Herald*, 21 September 1906.

50. The bicycle itself was seen as an aid to crime see *Pall Mall Magazine*, March 1900.

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51. CRO, ACC 135, Roland Barrett, "Socialism made plain".
  52. CRO, ACC 835/2, Hugh Farren, "newspaper cuttings", p. 24.
  53. Yates, *Pioneers to Power*, p. 31.
  54. Richardson, *Twentieth Century Coventry*, p. 162; M. B Reckett, *P.E.T. Widdrington. A Study in Vocation and Versatility* S.P.C.K., London, 1961, p.55, and p.69.
  55. CRO, Acc 836/2, Farren, "Newspaper Cuttings", p. 46.
  56. *The Clarion*, 8 February 1896.
  57. CCLSL, C. Bray, *Phases of Opinion and Experience During a Long Life: An Autobiography* Longmans, London, 1884.
  58. CCLSL, C. Bray, *An Essay Upon Councils of Conciliation and Boards of Arbitration*, Longmans, London, 1861.
  59. Bray, *Essay upon Councils*.
  60. CCLSL, "Newspaper Cuttings 1911-15", p.1.
  61. *Coventry Standard*, 18 May 1900.
  62. CCLSL, "Coventry Herald Leading Articles, 1889-92", p. 38.
  63. *Coventry Herald*, 30 April 1915.
  64. P. Searby, "Chartists and Freemen in Coventry 1838-1860", *Social History*, 6 1977, p.784.
  65. For example, one local newspaper noted that 'Coventry is in a very real sense becoming more and

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more isolated from country life-to have fewer sympathies with the scattered populations around'. CCLSL, "Newscuttings Supplied by A. Heap", Vol. 8, p. 47. This was a fear reflected at a national level. For a middle class fear of urbanization and a rural antidote see M. J. Wiener, *English Culture and the Decline of the Industrial Spirit*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1981, pp.55-64. Also Marsh notes that 'The visible decline of the countryside prompted a sudden rush of nostalgic for rural life ... Love of the country became an article of faith as essential to respectability as the belief in manners or morality'. See J. Marsh, *Back to the Land: The Pastoral Impulse in Victorian England, 1880-1914*, **Publisher needed** London, 1982, p. 4.

66 *Coventry Herald*, 30 April 1915.

67. CCLSL, "Local Notes on the *Coventry Herald* 1900-6", p.310.

68. CCLSL, "Coventry Herald Leading Articles 1889-92".

69. V.E. Chancellor (ed), *Master and Artisan in Victorian England*, Evelyn, Adams and Mackay, London, 1969, 231.

70. Chancellor, *Master and Artisan*, p. 90. Indeed much of the first chapter of his autobiography is devoted to establishing his authenticity as a child of Coventry.

71. Despite Gutteridge's later public condemnation of the strike there is ample evidence to suggest that he did in fact participate in the weavers' strike of 1860, Chancellor, *Master and Artisan*, p.238.

72. Chancellor, *Master and Artisan* p. 84.

73. Chancellor, *Master and Artisan*, p.236.