

**POPULAR THEATRE IN MANCHESTER 1880-1903:
COMMERCIAL ENTERTAINMENT, RATIONAL RECREATION
AND POLITICS**

by

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ABSTRACT

This thesis investigates the leading popular theatres in central Manchester between the years 1880-1903. It was a time of rapid change that saw the rise of mass entertainment in which the theatres and music halls played a major part. This is a study of theatre as industry, rather than the content of what could be seen on its stages.

These developments are discussed as part of a nascent night time cultural economy being driven by the comparative rise in wages and reduction of working hours of the urban workforce. With the power to choose how to spend their disposable income and how to use their leisure time, the growing working and lower middle classes as consumers could exercise influence over the purveyors of commercial entertainment and demand what they wanted to see.

The series of case studies investigate the networks of sociability that emerged and operated in and between the managements of the theatres and connected them with the rising press. Theatre, and specifically pantomime, is seen at the centre of a series of interlocking narratives that connected the industrial city, rational recreation, the 'bohemian' network of socialist writers and artists and audiences in late nineteenth century Manchester.

For
CHARLES JACKSON ROBINSON
1884-1975
and
DONALD ROBINSON
1919-1990

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Painting – Artist: H. E. Tidmarsh © Courtesy of
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Part of Chapter One appears in an earlier form, in Day, Dave (ed.) (2013) *Sport and Leisure Histories*. Manchester: Manchester Metropolitan University.

INTRODUCTION

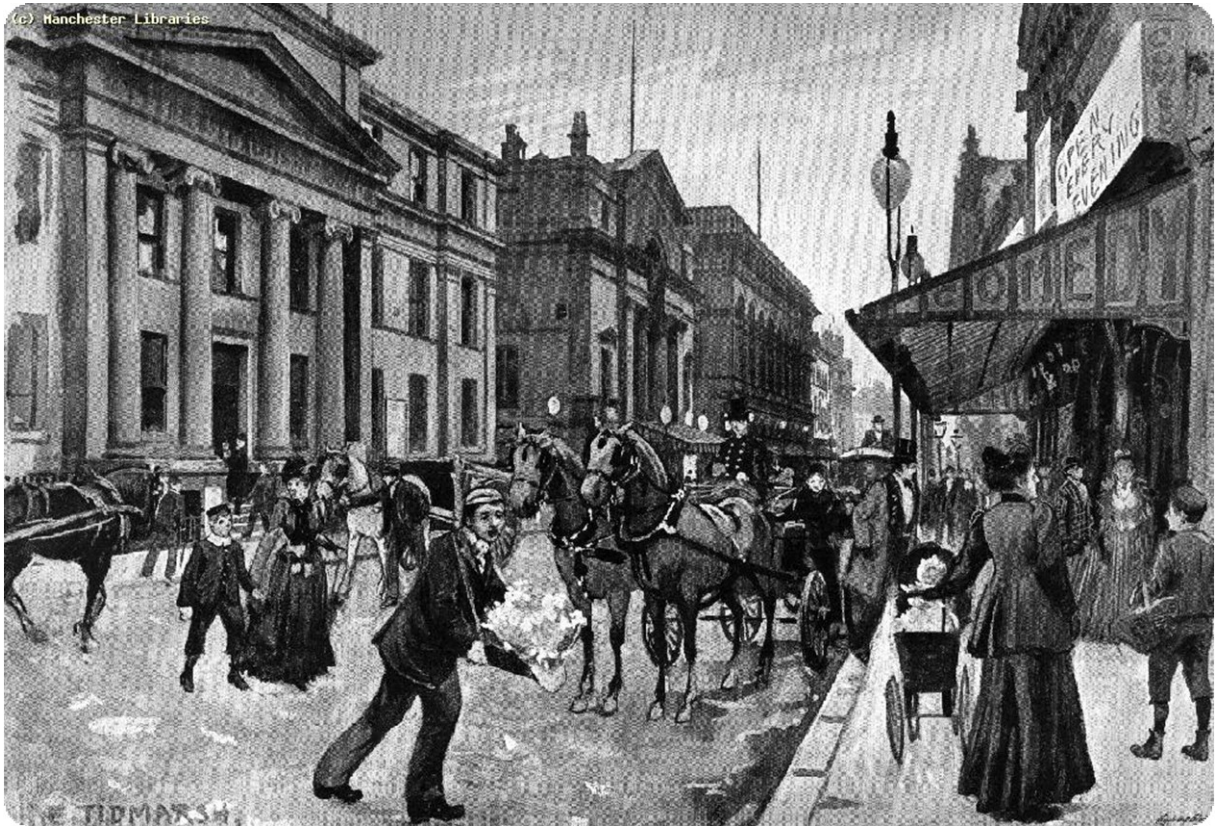


Figure 1¹

The above illustration shows Manchester's bustling Peter Street in the 1890s, looking towards Deansgate from a vantage point which today would be standing outside Central Library. The second building down, on the left, is the Theatre Royal, with the Free Trade Hall beyond. On the right is the entrance to Mr Hardacre's Comedy Theatre. This is the spatial and temporal location of my thesis.

In 1994, in their survey of the *Manchester Theatres*, Wyke and Rudyard advocated that:

¹ Painting – Artist: H. E. Tidmarsh © Courtesy of Manchester Libraries, Information and Archives

Considerable research is also needed to unlock the business and managerial methods of those who operated the theatres. In general, theatre histories have given insufficient attention to box-office receipts, yet for lessees the difference between revenues and costs was the central fact of life. [...] Here the fact that our knowledge of the lives, let alone business methods and dealings, of lessees of the stature of Fred Barney Egan, J. Pitt Hardacre and Richard Flanagan, rarely exceed that available in their press obituaries is an obvious barrier.²

Twenty years later, it is still the case that little academic research has been published about the history of popular theatre in late Victorian Manchester. The three research questions in my thesis have emerged from some of the gaps in knowledge identified by Wyke and Rudyard. I intend to begin to address their overdue challenges by examining the theatres of central Manchester's 'theatreland' between the years 1880 to 1903. The quotation above forms the basis of my first research question – who were the managers of the city's leading theatres and how did they operate their theatres? Their names are known already and their tenure, and the pattern of movement of managers around the Manchester theatres, can be seen in Appendix One. My research provides a more in-depth understanding of their backgrounds and careers, and the diverse routes that brought them into theatre management and informed their policies and ambitions. This information is vital to develop an understanding of the social and business relationships at the basis of the networks that evolved around and between them.

² Wyke, Terry, Nigel Rudyard and Manchester Central Library, (1994) *Manchester Theatres*. Manchester: Bibliography of North West England. pp. 12-13 Of the managers noted by Wyke and Rudyard above, Frederick Bailey Egan, known as 'Barney,' had died in 1877, outside the scope of my thesis. Richard Flanagan, noted for his spectacular Shakespearian revivals and his later association with the work of Annie Horniman, is only mentioned briefly. See Gooddie, Sheila (1990) *Annie Horniman: A Pioneer of the Theatre*. London: Methuen. John Pitt Hardacre, however, as an influential manager in the Manchester theatres of the day, is a significant figure in my research and the focus of Chapter Six.

My second research question emerges from Wyke and Rudyard's observation of the functioning of the relationship between the theatres and the press:

A further important and largely neglected theme in the history of Manchester's theatre is the role played by the press. The rise and apparently increasing influence of the dramatic critic has only been lightly sketched and in truth, we know little about the journalists who wrote about the local theatre.³

Here, I go beyond a discussion of the local journalists who wrote dramatic criticism, to establish the existence of networks that connected journalists and theatre managements and discover mutually beneficial relationships that saw some of those journalists author plays and pantomimes that were produced on the stages of Manchester theatres. In some cases, as we shall see, the journalists also became involved in more practical roles with the productions. I have been unable to find any previous academic references to these networks. Whilst Robert Blatchford and the *Clarion* are mentioned in histories of socialism and journalism, the *Clarion* journalists writing for, or connected to, the theatre that I examine in Chapters Four, Five and Six do not appear to have attracted the attention of scholars previously. My research into the networks and the *Clarion*, therefore, contributes to new academic knowledge about the history of theatre in Manchester.

The third thorny question posed by Wyke and Rudyard that I consider is 'Where did the boundaries of the theatre end and music hall begin?'⁴ I suggest that this is somewhere in the evolution of late Victorian pantomime, and that a symbiotic relationship developed between the two forms of commercial entertainment, with pantomime acquiring the function of a bridge between theatre and music hall. Music hall for its part can be seen as having undergone a metamorphosis into variety

³ Ibid., p. 14

⁴ Ibid., p. 7

theatre as it aspired to be judged as respectable. I examine this notion with particular reference to the rising popularity of mass entertainment in Manchester. The national debate about the respectability or otherwise of music hall was played out in Manchester, centring on the debate surrounding opposition to the licensing of the proposed Palace Theatre of Varieties and attracting attention from stakeholders with every shade of opinion. This has been discussed by scholars including Chris Waters and Dagmar Kift, but here I refer to the first appearance of the debate that was triggered by the announcement of the sale of shares in the proposed new venture. I connect this to a parallel debate about respectability in the pantomimes on the stages of the city's popular theatres.⁵

My research investigates popular theatre in Manchester as industry, rather than the content of the productions that could be seen on the stage. Claire Cochrane has observed that:

Theatre as industrial practice is positioned within a very complex economic nexus. Even at its most idealised it cannot remain isolated from the way economic factors inhibit, for example, the circulation and cost of raw materials, and, indeed, other commodities, *including people*.⁶

In line with her reference to the 'people' factor, the series of case studies I present here have at their core significant figures connected to the management of the Manchester theatres and the informal networks of sociability surrounding them that influenced their actions, in particular their associates in the press.

⁵ Waters, Chris (1986) 'Manchester Morality and London Capital: The Battle over the Palace of Varieties' in Bailey, Peter (ed.), *Music Hall: The Business of Pleasure* Milton Keynes: Open University Press. and Kift, D. (1996) *The Victorian Music Hall: Culture, Class and Conflict*: Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

⁶ Cochrane, Claire (2011) *Twentieth-Century British Theatre: Industry, Art and Empire*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. p. 172

Scope

The temporal scope of my thesis is 1880-1903, a crucial two decades that saw the end of independently owned theatres on Peter Street and Oxford Street, known as 'Theatre Street' locally, central Manchester's smaller scale equivalent of the West End in London. This period also saw music hall and pantomime reach the height of their popularity. At the core of my research, the spatial scope takes in Manchester's three leading dramatic theatres of the day: the Theatre Royal, the Prince's Theatre and the Comedy Theatre. The case studies follow the fortunes of their respective managements during this period that saw the management model under which they were operated change from three independent theatres in 1880 until the moment in 1903 when they all came under the control of one company – United Theatres Ltd. I also refer to the parallel development of the Palace Theatre of Varieties, which both competed with and complemented the evolution of management in the dramatic theatres.⁷

THEATRE	YEAR OPENED
The Theatre Royal – 1775, 1807	1845
The Queen's – 1831	1870
The Prince's	1864
The Comedy	1884
The St. James's	1884
The Palace of Varieties	1891

Table 1⁸

The table above lists the major theatres that were operating in central Manchester during the timeframe that is the subject of my thesis, along with the

⁷ The Manchester Palace Theatre of Varieties was opened in 1891, by a consortium led by George Edwardes following the success of the Empire in London. The resistance to it being built and the licensing difficulties it's owner faced are discussed in Chapter Two and in Waters, Chris (1986) 'Manchester Morality and London Capital: The Battle over the Palace of Varieties' in Bailey, Peter (ed.), *Music Hall: The Business of Pleasure* Milton Keynes: Open University Press.

⁸ Wyke and Rudyard, *Manchester Theatres* p.25

dates they opened. The dates in italics indicate the previous existence of those theatres in different buildings and the date that they were opened. The Queen's Theatre had been the first competition for the Theatre Royal. Its 1870 building was situated several streets away from the cultural quarter, on Bridge Street. By the 1880s its programming policy moved towards including more music hall and it no longer produced a pantomime every year. The St. James's Theatre, located close to The Palace of Varieties on Oxford Street, presented a mixed programme of variety theatre, with occasional pantomimes and presentations of legitimate theatre, but even from 1894, when it came under the management of Richard Flanagan, it was never a great success and it became the first Manchester theatre to be converted into a cinema in 1907.⁹ It does not feature in the thesis, but is worthy of note here as an illustration of the expansion of theatre building that was taking place in the 1880s, and it gives an indication of what was happening in Manchester at that time with increased competition for the leisure pound, or perhaps shillings and pence, of the potential audiences.

In order to be able to explore the networks with the Manchester press in detail, I have restricted my investigation to the *Manchester Guardian* and the *Clarion*. I give some consideration to the *Manchester City News* in reference to its connection to Charles Rowley in Chapter Three where I examine a network with a different view of leisure to the theatrical networks of sociability that are my main focus. The case studies highlight events that were specific to Manchester, but can also be seen to mirror the experience of trends in theatre management that were happening across the country at this time.

⁹ Ibid., p.53

Methodology

I have taken an interdisciplinary approach to this research which examines mass entertainment. I argue that it is at this time that mass entertainment became a site to test the boundaries of what leisure-time behaviours and activities were thought acceptable at the end of the nineteenth century.

My research is presented using the voices of the protagonists of the cases studies as evidence wherever possible. I have used a biographical approach. The thesis includes some personal history of the figures who are the focus of the case studies in order gain some understanding of their views and experiences. I use genealogical methods, searching official records such as civil registration and census returns to build a framework of basic biographical facts about the lives of the personalities that form the main focus of each chapter.

A further concept in my research design is that of mediation, the ways and means by which the past is communicated to us. Few primary source materials survive for this period of Manchester theatre history. It was certainly a turbulent period of great change in the leisure economy and it is unfortunate that, for example, no account books have survived from Manchester. In Chapter One Captain Bainbridge admits to not having kept proper financial records, while in Chapter Three I note that John Ivor Rushton notes in his thesis that the Ancoats Brotherhood did not keep adequate records about who their members were.¹⁰ I have also made use of memoirs and autobiographies and biographies where available, and some published articles written by some of my subjects.

¹⁰ Rushton, John Ivor (1959) *Charles Rowley and the Ancoats Recreation Movement, 1876-1914*. Unpublished M.Ed. Thesis, University of Manchester.

Whilst acknowledging that all reported speech and written evidence is mediated by the method of its communication, by cross referencing different newspapers and other resources I offer a more complex account of the period. For example, the figures I have used in Chapter One when discussing the bankruptcy of Captain Bainbridge are reported as being the same in a number of newspapers and by Jill Sullivan who has also addressed the topic.¹¹ Where other researchers have written on subjects connected to the Manchester theatres I have also consulted their citations and found none other than those I have used here.

In the 1960s and 1970s, after E. P. Thompson published *The Making of the English Working Class*, projects such as History Workshop had developed the 'history from below' approach.¹² The 1980s saw a shift in the wider approach to the study of history labelled the 'linguistic turn,' that favoured post-structuralist cultural theory and a reconsideration of the meanings of class. This had the effect of considering class as a concept produced by discourse, rather than as a way in which access to capital and power was structured.

Helen Rogers has recently commented on this development with reference to Gareth Stedman Jones *Languages of Class*, published in 1983, stating 'People seemed to slip from history ... everything was a text.'¹³ She goes on to make the case for the re-emergence of history from below in current approaches to a new version of materialist history. This, as she says, may be in part due to the potential of

¹¹ Sullivan, Jill (2011) *The Politics of the Pantomime: Regional Identity in the Theatre 1860-1900*. Hatfield: University of Hertfordshire Press. pp. 66-71

¹² Thompson, E. P. (1963) *The Making of the English Working Class*. London: Pelican. (1980)

¹³ Rogers, Helen (2015) 'The Revival of History from Below' *BAVS Talks 2015* Bavsvideos www.youtube.com - <https://youtu.be/rToJag5WgWI> accessed 28 May 2015

digital access to archive materials which facilitates a 'democratization of knowledge' and the resultant rise in interest of public history and the two way process of engagement with groups and individuals from the wider community. My research is part of the 'return to history from below' that Rogers describes. In the case of John Pitt Hardacre, the subject of Chapter Six, much is said about him, and opinions offered by his enemies, perhaps more so than his friends. He published no memoirs and there is no biography of him. Reports of court proceedings present him as vociferous in his own defence. However, there is little documentation of his voice in other situations. Through newspaper interviews and humorous articles he contributed to the *Clarion* and occasional references to him in others' memoirs a more balanced picture emerges. I argue that it is possible then, from his own words, to create a more rounded and accurate picture of the man from which to interpret his actions and motivations, more so than from the texts of the verdicts of third party reports of actions brought against him that would be favoured in a post-structuralist reading.

I have been able to use these voices from reported speech in newspaper reports and interviews and also written accounts such as newspaper comments, memoirs and letters to the Editor. This approach is most apparent in Chapter Two which forms a discussion of the autumn 1889 debates in the letters pages of the *Manchester Guardian* that tested public opinion about the acceptability of the commercial leisure industry most notably music hall and pantomime. Where the voices of the main protagonists are reported in the other chapters, the opinions of the wider public in Manchester are presented in their own words in Chapter Two.

In his essay 'How Manchester is Amused,' Simon Gunn has suggested that the rise of the cultural economy is cyclical and that Manchester at the end of the nineteenth century should be seen as an early example of a successful night time economy which parallels the rise of the creative and cultural industries that have formed part of our modern experience of the city since the 1980s. Clearly the provision of commercial theatre predates the Victorian era, but Gunn's theory is concerned with the move from small scale enterprises owned by individuals towards the commercialization of entertainment on a grand scale, which he identifies as originating in the 1860s. My thesis is framed within Gunn's notion of this fledgling cultural economy:

The renaissance of the last two decades of the twentieth century had its antecedents in the emergence of a night-life and a 'cultural quarter' in Manchester in the last third of the nineteenth century, between the 1860s and the early 1900s. In important respects recent attempts at a culture-led regeneration have, wittingly or not, replicated certain features of an earlier historical phase of urban culture, even as they have worked to erase other aspects of Manchester's past.¹⁴

Gunn's theory underpins the findings of my own research which suggests that it is possible to track the evolution of a city through the development of its entertainment industry. The history of theatre and more broadly the rise of mass entertainment is then central to the social history of cities, and here specific to Manchester.

In the last third of the nineteenth century commercial leisure provision managed on the grand scale was exemplified by the speculative theatre building of

¹⁴ Gunn, Simon (2008) 'How Manchester is Amused: The Cultural Economy of the Industrial City, 1860-1920' in Heßler, Martina, and Clemens Zimmerman (eds.) *Creative Urban Milieus: Historical Perspectives on Culture, Economy and the City*. Frankfurt: Campus Verlag. p. 101

dramatic theatres, and the rise of the music hall as it evolved into variety theatre, when being seen to be 'respectable' was vital to social acceptability. At the very end of the period we might also note the beginnings of cinema, though it is too early for its powerful influence to have yet been felt, and is not, therefore, discussed here. At the same time sport can be seen being organized on a commercial basis and competing for audience share with the theatres, alongside the appeal to their pockets as consumers by the new department stores.¹⁵

It is perhaps ironic that the cultural economy of the twenty first century depends on the creative and digital industries, but also increasingly on heritage tourism that harks back to the Victorian past. Recent restoration projects in Manchester include Elizabeth Gaskell's former home on Plymouth Grove. The Whitworth Art Gallery and the city's Central Library.¹⁶ May 2015 saw the opening of HOME Manchester as a new cultural flagship organisation for Manchester.¹⁷ With major television companies Granada and the BBC now sited at MediaCityUK in Salford, amid a cluster of smaller digital and media companies the city is strongly positioned to see economic growth within the creative industries. This has required a collaborative approach from networks both formal and informal for the twenty-first century partner organizations and stakeholders. Through my enquiries into the lives of some of the leading figures of the late Victorian incarnation of Manchester's

¹⁵ See the Manchester connected examples of James, Gary (2008) *Manchester: A Football History*. Halifax: James Ward and Briggs, Asa (1956) *Friends of the People: The Centenary History of Lewis's*. London: B. T. Batsford Ltd.

¹⁶ Mrs Gaskell 's House. MEN 2 October 2014 <http://www.manchestereveningnews.co.uk/news/greater-manchester-news/home-novelist-elizabeth-gaskell-set-7871067>

Whitworth Art Gallery MEN 11 February 2015 <http://www.manchestereveningnews.co.uk/whats-on/whitworth-art-gallery-reopens-preview-8617839>

Central Library MEN 21 March 2014 <http://www.manchestereveningnews.co.uk/whats-on/whats-on-news/pictured-central-library-reopens-after-6856735>

¹⁷ HOME MEN 21 May 2015 <http://www.manchestereveningnews.co.uk/whats-on/arts-culture-news/home-everything-you-need-know-9297156>

cultural quarter and the social and interpersonal dynamics within the informal networks that could be found operating in the rising commercial entertainment sector I intend to provide evidence in line with Gunn's theory about these parallel developments of the late nineteenth and early twenty-first centuries.

Manchester

Simon Gunn asserts that 'The size of Manchester in Victorian times, made it significant and of interest at an international level.'¹⁸ Labelled the 'shock city' of the 1840s by Asa Briggs, its reputation as Cottonopolis, having grown as the world's first manufacturing town with the rise of the textile industries in the industrial reputation, had changed by the late nineteenth century.¹⁹ As the mills moved out of town to places like Oldham and Stalybridge, Manchester itself had become a merchant city of warehouses and financial institutions. With industrialisation it had also become a centre for engineering. Not only its size, but its rapid growth from a small town with a population of 95,000 in 1800, to 505,368 in 1891 and 543,872 on the 1901 census make it remarkable.²⁰ Manchester had only been awarded city status in 1853 and in the last quarter of the century was still a young city whose citizens were seeking to establish its cultural identity.

Manchester itself is also of interest because of its place in the history of socialism and radical politics. It holds a position of unique significance in the struggle for democracy for the events of 16 August 1819, which became known as 'Peterloo'

¹⁸ Gunn, Simon (2008) 'How Manchester is Amused: The Cultural Economy of the Industrial City, 1860-1920' in Heßler, Martina, and Clemens Zimmerman (eds.) *Creative Urban Milieus: Historical Perspectives on Culture, Economy and the City*. Frankfurt: Campus Verlag. p. 101

¹⁹ Briggs, Asa (1968) *Victorian Cities*. London: Penguin Books (1990). p. 57

²⁰ A Vision of Britain Through Time website http://www.visionofbritain.org.uk/census/SRC_P/4/EW1901GEN

or the 'Peterloo Massacre.'²¹ It is also the city Engels chose for his seminal 1844 case study of *The Condition of the Working Class in England*.²²

The idea of Manchester being privileged beyond other towns and cities for the influence it enjoyed, recurs within my case studies. One reason for this, I suggest, was the reach of the influence of its press. A. J. P. Taylor noted the local and national importance of the Manchester press of the day. Shortly before the *Manchester Guardian* became the *Guardian* and moved its publication to London in 1960, Taylor prophesied that move and wrote that in the Victorian and Edwardian eras:

Manchester had its own daily newspaper of international reputation, and for that matter, its own Sunday journals of somewhat different character. It had too in the *Clarion* the best Socialist paper ever produced in this country.²³

That daily, the *Manchester Guardian*, and the *Clarion* had a direct influence on the development of the theatre industry in Manchester and also gave Manchester the advantage of a voice in the evolution of theatre at the national level, beyond that which was enjoyed by other provincial towns and cities.²⁴ These features of this significant city make a study of how its citizens used their leisure time relevant on a national as well as local and regional level.

Pantomime and Music Hall

It would not be possible to discuss pantomime, the dominant genre in late Victorian dramatic theatre, without also considering music hall which rose to become the most

²¹ Poole, Robert (ed.) (2014) 'Return to Peterloo.' *Manchester Region History Review*. 23. Manchester: Manchester Metropolitan University Press.

²² Engels, Frederick (1844) *The Condition of the Working Class in England*. London: Panther Books. (1982).

²³ Taylor, A. J. P. (1957) 'The World's Cities: Manchester,' in *Encounters*. 8: 3. pp. 3-13. p.9

²⁴ See, for example, discussion of the participation of Robert Courtneidge and the *Clarion* in the National Theatre debate in Chapter Five.

popular form of commercial entertainment as it went through a metamorphosis into variety theatre in the 1890s.

One of the features of pantomime is its ability to continually reinvent itself to reflect the contemporary cultural tastes of the day. As stated above where I identified my research questions, pantomime can be seen to have developed a function as a bridge between music hall and the dramatic theatre. I suggest that, whilst the two forms of entertainment were in direct competition, it should also be noted that, both benefitted from absorbing elements from the other genre so that a symbiotic relationship evolved. Each needed to reinvent itself in order to present the audiences with something novel to retain their interest. This is evidenced by both pantomime and music hall reaching the height of their popularity, and attracting their largest audiences, in the 1890s. The theme of the tension between the two genres and the contradiction of them both complementing and competing with each other will recur in the case studies that form the main chapters of my thesis.

Pantomime was at the core of the activities of the theatres all the year round. It had the longest season of up to three months in the theatres' programmes when it was on stage and visible to the public. Outside of the pantomime season the managers and staff were still occupied with preparations for the next season and the accompanying administrative duties. The investment of time and energy was due to the potential for vast profits that could be generated from the large attendances and ticket sales of the success of a well received pantomime. Bankruptcy was not uncommon in the theatre industry and the managements of theatres often relied on the income from the annual pantomime to absorb losses made during the run of less popular productions. Reference to pantomime is also vital to my thesis because

of its function in the theatres' connections with the press, as it is in the authorship of pantomime books of words that we see journalists first entering into business relationships with the theatres, beyond the usual journalistic practice of publishing reviews in their newspapers.

The Networks

For the purposes of my thesis I define the networks that are at its core as informal social networks for the mutual benefit of the members of several interest groups. As discussed more fully in Chapter Three, Charles Rowley founded the Ancoats Brotherhood as a formal organization in 1889, having existed as the Ancoats Recreation Movement since 1874. Their reluctance to keep records about their members is evidence of their desire for informality as well as a handicap for the modern researcher. It draws attention to Rowley's, perhaps romantic, aspiration to be a 'group of friends.'

Rowley himself represented the Ancoats Ward as a Councillor on Manchester City Council, and other councillors were involved in his Recreation Movement. The Church and the City authorities are quite clearly formal organizations with statutory responsibilities. However, it is the attempts to influence policy through the complex informal networks of friendship that are the main focus of my research.

Laurel Brake has observed the complexity of the 'unexpected range of connections' of nineteenth century journalists, for her 'prompting curiosity about the ghostly dynamic of interlocking structures.'²⁵ Brake makes reference to the *Clarion* newspaper, and the movement that grew around it due to its existence as a social

²⁵ Brake, Laurel (2011) "'Time's Turbulence': Mapping Journalism Networks' in *Victorian Periodicals Review*, 44: 2 pp.115-127. p. 115

network that was promoted amongst its readership.²⁶ I would note here, however, that whilst this is true, and the founders of the newspaper approved of this development, they did not start the Clarion Fellowship themselves. Robert Blatchford recalled that:

In the early years of the *Clarion* a number of Birmingham readers, who had formed a Clarion Cycle Club [1895], wrote to the paper to say that their members would like to meet the staff. A meeting was arranged with the result that the writers and readers of the *Clarion* became friends.²⁷

Perhaps what Blatchford went on to say about the Fellowship gives an indication to his feelings about his other networks when he stated ‘The Fellowship was a real, right thing. We made many genuine friendships and kept them.’²⁸ For the members of the *Clarion* then, I argue that their networks were more than a ‘ghostly dynamic’, they had material connections and consequences.

‘Dynamic, interlocking structures’ serves well to indicate the complexity of the networks that recur in the case studies, where individuals may be members of more than one group and may move between those groups at different times. Because their structures of the networks are not formal, their membership may be seen as fluid with the possibility that members may find themselves comprised by having sympathies with opposing sides in a debate. As will be seen, whilst *Clarion* journalists wrote about socialist ideals, they also earned money writing scripts for commercial pantomimes.

²⁶ Ibid., p. 115

²⁷ Blatchford, Robert (1931) *My Eighty Years*. London: Cassell. p. 202

²⁸ Ibid., p.203

Leisure, Class and Respectability

In 1998, David Cannadine suggested that it was 'at best regrettable' that 'in recent years historians had spent so much time and effort denying that' Britain was still a class bound society.²⁹ He argued for the validity of class theory writing 'Even if, in its crudest forms, the Marxist approach to class no longer carries conviction, that is no reason for dismissing class altogether.'³⁰ He continued by being critical of the 'linguistic turn' in the study of history that appeared in the late 1970s stating 'class is not just about language.'³¹

Where Marx was on to something was in his insistence that the material circumstances of people's existence – physical, financial, environmental – do matter in influencing their life chances, their sense of identity, and the historical part which they and their contemporaries may (or may not) play.³²

For Cannadine then 'there is reality as well as representation.'³³ In the case studies I present here I consider events from everyday life, and the effects in practice of these examples as sites of debate about the problem of leisure. They reflect issues that were the subject of national topical concern. My research falls into the era of Lawrence's 'classic period of 'the rise of class politics' between 1880 and 1920.'³⁴

²⁹ Cannadine, David (1998) *Class in Britain*. New Haven: Yale University Press. p. 16

³⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 16-17

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 17

³² *Ibid.*

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ Lawrence, Jon (1998) *Speaking for the People: Party, Language and Popular Politics in England, 1867-1914*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. p. 17

Stuart Hall argued that any study of popular culture must start from the 'more or less continuous struggle over the culture of working people, the labouring classes and the poor.'³⁵ He states:

The changing balance and relations of social forces throughout history reveal themselves, time and again, in struggles over the forms of the culture, traditions and ways of life of the popular classes. Capital had a stake in the culture of the popular classes because the constitution of a whole new social order around capital required a more or less continuous, if intermittent, process of re-education, in the broadest sense.³⁶

For Cannadine the Marxist approach was too simplistic. It is now necessary for class to be considered where it intersects for example with theories of race and gender. The classes to be found in the late nineteenth century were quite different from the reductive broad strokes of the tripartite economic divisions of working class, middle-class and the gentry that were used to discuss class in the first half of the century. In the urban culture of the 1880s and 1890s an infinitely more complex class system had emerged, with new occupations adding new labels such a lower middle-class and upper middle class, and the questions of who belonged where. This brought about some increased opportunities for social mobility and aspirations to move between classes. Shop assistant and office clerk were now common occupations amongst city dwellers, as were new opportunities in public transport and engineering. Caroline Radcliffe has summarized this increasingly complex structure of the class system in a forthcoming essay. My study of Manchester in this thesis also suggests that the stratification of the classes was a relational and dynamic

³⁵ Hall, Stuart (1981) 'Notes on Deconstructing the Popular' in Storey, John (ed.), *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture: A Reader*. London: Pearson and Prentice Hall. (1998). p. 442

³⁶ Ibid.

aspect of urban and social history, rather than a set of fixed categories. Radcliffe argues that:

There was a significant proliferation of the 'lower-middle-class' - shopkeepers, clerks and office workers, for instance - merging into the middle-class above and the working class below, with classes becoming indistinct and hard to place and this has been reflected in the more recent scholarship on nineteenth century theatre and music hall.³⁷

The changes in working practices were accompanied by comparatively better pay and reduced working hours, paving the way for the expansion of the commercial leisure industries, where the new workforce could opt to spend their disposable income and free time as members of the audience.³⁸ This trend is confirmed by F. M. L. Thompson who keeps things in perspective when observing 'In general most people enjoyed more free time from the 1870s onwards, although the increases were unevenly spread and for some were slender.'³⁹

Andrew Davies notes that:

Following the trend established in studies of working class culture, historians of leisure have generally paid much less attention to the role of poverty and household budgeting in determining patterns of working class social life.⁴⁰

The very poorest members of the working classes would be unlikely to constitute part of the regular audiences for commercial entertainment, perhaps not even able to

³⁷ Radcliffe, C. (forthcoming 2015/16) 'Theatrical Hierarchy, Cultural Capital and the Legitimate/Illegitimate Divide' in Yeandle, P., K. M. Newey and J. Richards (eds.) *Politics, Performance and Popular Culture: theatre and society in nineteenth century Britain*. Manchester: Manchester University Press. (No pagination information available at the time of writing).

³⁸ For a detailed discussion of the changes in working practices and the increases in leisure time see Cunningham, Hugh (1993) 'Leisure and Culture' in Thompson, F. M. L. (ed.) (1993) *The Cambridge Social History of Britain 1750-1950: Volume 2 People and their environment*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. pp. 279-339.

³⁹ Thompson, F. M. L. (1988) *The Rise of Respectable Society: A Social History of Victorian Britain, 1830-1900*. London: Fontana. p. 276.

⁴⁰ Davies, Andrew (1992) *Leisure, Gender and Poverty: Working-class culture in Salford and Manchester, 1900-1939*. Buckingham: Open University Press. p. 3

afford an annual family visit to the pantomime. Whilst acknowledging that these non attenders of commercial entertainment are an important topic, space and the scope of my thesis does not permit a detailed discussion here.⁴¹

At the opposite end of the social scale, F. M. L. Thompson suggests that ‘the more leisure the working classes had, the less censorious and alarmist were the propertied classes about the ways in which the workers used it.’⁴² The gentry, then, could be said to have largely disregarded the working classes at the end of the nineteenth century. Conflicts over the problem of leisure that are under discussion in my thesis can be seen to come from a section of the middle classes who challenged a working class culture which they found to be a threat to their own aspirations for society.

Thompson positions religion as being at the core of ‘middle-class lifestyles’ in mid-Victorian Britain.⁴³ Tristram Hunt’s reasoning for the decline of the Victorian cities chimes with Thompson’s view. He cites nonconformity as being at the heart of that religion saying:

The cultural disintegration of the Victorian city owes much to the decline of nonconformity. Not only were the Unitarians and Congregationalists typically at the forefront of nineteenth century civic culture, but the very identity of the industrial city was often predicated upon a sense of being part of the Puritan elect.⁴⁴

Theirs was a culture of duty, service and improving oneself. Hunt describes their attributes saying

⁴¹ See Andrew Davies (1992) in note 11 above, for a detailed discussion of poverty and access to leisure.

⁴² Thompson, F. M. L., *The Rise of Respectable Society.*, p. 276

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p.251

⁴⁴ Hunt, Tristram (2004) *Building Jerusalem: The Rise and Fall of the Victorian City.* London: Wiedenfield and Nicholson. pp. 466-467

The middle classes were the industrious class, the heroes of self-help who since the eleventh century had been the architects of Europe's, commercial, political and cultural progress. The Victorian city was but the latest manifestation of their urban identity; civic pride a testimony to bourgeois self confidence.⁴⁵

Their leisure time must be spent productively. In *Leisure and Class in Victorian England* Peter Bailey states that 'rational recreation', promoted by the god-fearing middle classes, appeared during the recession of the 1840s, claiming 'rational recreation had proceeded from a basic humanitarian sympathy with the plight of the urban masses.'⁴⁶ He continues to describe the relationship that developed between the reformers and the music halls writing:

Middle-class observers reacted to the demotic vigour of the halls with mixed feeling: some derived a measure of encouragement from the phenomenon, but the bulk of reformers were disturbed by the halls as a further manifestation of the generally debased tastes of the masses.⁴⁷

Bailey adopts his own view about the success of music hall by the end of the century suggesting 'By the late Victorian period it could be claimed that the music hall had been assimilated to the cultural apparatus of capitalist society. In reality the conversion was far from complete.' This he attributes to the 'particular chemistry of artist and audience.'⁴⁸ Ironically for the reformers he claims that in the face of fear from some quarters about the potential for trouble amongst rowdy music hall audiences:

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 467

⁴⁶ Bailey, Peter (1978) *Leisure and Class in Victorian England: Rational Recreation and the Contest for Control 1830-1885*. London: Routledge. p. 35

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 147

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 168

Managements had succeeded in impressing something of a more compliant manner upon the members of this robust institution. In a sense big business had succeeded where the social reformers of recreation had failed.⁴⁹

This is evidence that supports my own argument that, despite vociferous protests from minority, if significant, groups in society it was inevitable that commercial leisure providers would eventually get their way as the mass of the public were willing to part with their money to be entertained when it was seen that music hall caused no moral harm even if its content was not of an 'improving' nature. Not only did this increase the wealth and influence of the circuits, it saw support for the reformers dwindle in inverse proportion.

Temperance

Closely connected to the topic of religion was the question about the consumption of alcohol and the influence of the temperance movement at this time. This is investigated by Brian Harrison in *Drink and the Victorians: The Temperance Question in England 1815-1872*.⁵⁰ The date Harrison chooses to end his study is significant for my thesis as it suggests that by 1880 when my thesis begins, and more so by the 1890s when the owners of the Palace Theatre of Varieties found themselves embattled over the topic of a justices licence to sell alcoholic beverages in its refreshment bars, the influence of the temperance movement was already on the wane.

In his more recent study, *The Politics of Alcohol*, James Nicholls supports Harrison's view that temperance reformers had become influential in the mid

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Harrison, Brian (1971) *Drink and the Victorians: The Temperance Question in England 1815-1872*. London: Faber and Faber.

nineteenth century because they organised themselves formally in order to petition the authorities. Nicholls states that 'Organised teetotalism was a revolutionary idea.'⁵¹ It appealed to some members of the working classes, because 'It held out, especially to those who had previously been reviled as drunks, the promise of more than mere emancipation or even respectability.'⁵²

Nicholls concludes that whilst the temperance reformers formed a significant and vociferous minority within the community 'to many outsiders, teetotallers were frankly mad.'⁵³ He indicates the importance of a drinking culture in the limited leisure opportunities of the poor saying:

Before organised sport, public libraries, parks and museums – not to mention cinemas, concert halls and holiday resorts - there was literally nowhere for working people to socialise other than the pub. To remove the pub was to tear the heart out of the community; to stop drinking was to make oneself an outcast.⁵⁴

It is not surprising then that people expected to be able to enjoy a drink when they visited the theatres and music halls, or that the temperance reformers increasingly found themselves in conflict with the majority of the public. Nicholls states that 'Teetotallers blamed the sufferings of the poor on alcohol rather than systemic inequalities.'⁵⁵ This also alienated the 'respectable moderationists.'⁵⁶

By 1894 when Robert Blatchford defended the poor in *Merrie England*, the focus on alcohol had the function of distracting public attention away from problems

⁵¹ Nicholls, James (2009) *The Politics of Alcohol: A History of the Question of Drink in England*. Manchester: Manchester University Press. p. 100

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 103

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 104

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 101

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 104

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 103

of slum housing and exploitation of the workers by unscrupulous employers.⁵⁷ In

Harrison's words:

The suspicion kept cropping up among working men, and especially among socialist critics of the temperance movement, that working people suffered from the centrality of the drink problem in political debate.⁵⁸

The simplistic argument of alcohol as the single cause of poverty and immorality, and the decline of the influence of the temperance reformers in late Victorian era can be seen to underpin the case study in Chapter Two.

The struggle of the middle classes to hold back the advancing tide of commercial mass entertainment would inevitably fail as, except for minor and temporary victories along the way, by the time period I examine here, the campaigners were increasingly rejected by members of their own classes.⁵⁹ This shift can be seen in Golby and Purdue's view of the dominance of music hall as popular entertainment by the end of the nineteenth century:

Music halls did not provide a class based entertainment in the way that the broadsides did, but then in the years between the height of the popularity of broadsides and the growth of a mature music hall, Britain had developed into a highly industrialized, urban nation and inevitably there was bound to be some shift from a class based to a mass based entertainment. One thing remains clear – music halls were immensely popular. They attracted the working and the lower middle classes in large numbers and towards the end of the century, an even wider section of the population.⁶⁰

⁵⁷ Blatchford, Robert (1895) *Merrie England, Etc. (Cheap Edition)*, London: Clarion Office, Walter Scott. Harrison, Brian, *Drink and the Victorians*, pp. 398-399

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 404

⁵⁹ For a detailed discussion of the culture of the Victorian middle classes see Gunn, Simon (2000) *The Public Culture of the Victorian Middle Class: Ritual and Authority in the English Industrial City, 1840-1914*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

⁶⁰ Golby, J. M., and A. W. Purdue (1999) *The Civilisation of the Crowd: Popular Culture in England 1750-1900*. Rev ed. Stroud: Sutton. P. 177

The vociferous reforming groups within the middle classes were attempting to preserve an era that was passing. As Thompson has observed:

What changed was also the concept of respectability: the formally unacceptable became acceptable as the working classes became somewhat better understood and as they asserted their powers of self-expression.⁶¹

Increased levels of literacy following Forster's Education Act of 1870 gave elementary education to all and may have contributed to their ability to communicate on more even terms. Popular leisure 'was now in the hands of the people themselves, protected from the imposition of middle-class values by the collective power of the working class purse.'⁶² Their resistance to the forms of rational recreation preferred by the middle-class was replaced with that of their own taste. Thompson summarizes this effectively, commenting 'The thinking working man quite rationally preferred enjoyment in music hall comfort to the discomfort of attending political meetings about remote and pointless causes.'⁶³

What was acceptable in mass entertainment and commercial leisure provision at the turn of the twentieth century had now largely become a negotiation between the providers and their expanding audiences. Battles with the authorities over censorship and licensing would happen later in that century. At the end of the nineteenth century:

Commercial provision meant, on the whole, quieter, more civilized, and in a sense more disciplined leisure behaviour. It did not mean business control or dictation of popular tastes. People paid for what they liked and enjoyed, what

⁶¹ Thompson, F. M. L., *The Rise of Respectable Society*, p. 277

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 289

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 324

they found entertaining, and if the leisure industry did not supply the right mixture it did not prosper.⁶⁴

These tensions between the middle and working classes will be seen to be played out in the case studies that follow.

Literature Review

Manchester has been popular as a case study for historians ever since Frederick Engels wrote *The Condition of the Working Class in England* in 1844 and published the bleakest possible assessment of its citizens.⁶⁵ Certainly it has been a city of extremes creating wealthy industrial barons in contrast to the impoverished 'hands.' Asa Briggs's reference to Manchester in the 1840s being the 'shock city' of its age was well earned.⁶⁶ Tristram Hunt has questioned Engels' motives in his new appraisal of the fortunes of the city. Manchester is just one of the cities he writes about in *Building Jerusalem: The Rise and Fall of the Victorian City*.⁶⁷ Of Engels he suggests:

Engels's aim was to create the impression that the entire English working class existed in this state of utter dehumanity and he subtly applied this account of the dispossessed Irish to the broader working-class community of Manchester. He ignored differences between the casual labourers of the Irish quarter, and the better-off, regularly employed mechanics of Ancoats and elsewhere.⁶⁸

Hunt credits Gareth Stedman Jones with recognizing Engels's Marxist ambitions, in offering this simplistic view of a single 'working class.'⁶⁹ By the end of Victoria's

⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 289

⁶⁵ Engels, Frederick (1844) *The Condition of the Working Class in England*. London: Panther Books. (1982).

⁶⁶ Briggs, Asa (1968) *Victorian Cities*. London: Penguin Books (1990)

⁶⁷ Hunt, *Building Jerusalem*

⁶⁸ Ibid., pp. 42-43

⁶⁹ Jones, Gareth Stedman (1983) *Languages of Class: Studies in English Working Class History, 1832-1982*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

reign, the single class that Engels described had been replaced by the multiple classes that Jon Lawrence refers to as inhabiting ‘ the classic period of ‘the rise of class politics’ between 1880 and 1920 in *Speaking for the People: Party, Language and Popular Politics in England, 1867-1914*.⁷⁰

Hunt’s Epilogue examines the fall of the mighty Victorian cities during the twentieth century and asks if they can rise again. Now, in the early twenty-first century, Manchester and its creative industries can be seen to be in the ascendant once more with the opening of all the new and refurbished cultural venues that I described in the Introduction above. Hunt’s words confirm Simon Gunn’s view of Manchester in the 1890s experiencing the rise of a new cultural economy, and support Gunn’s theory that such an economy is cyclical. This agreement underpins the theory which frames my thesis.

The Study of Theatre History

The New Historicist approach to theatre has slowly become a topic of discourse since the late 1980s, opening the way for scholars to examine the context within which texts and performance were created. Previously, the study of theatre history had privileged text over context. However, as Davis and Emeljanow have suggested:

The Victorian audience lived its own culture and its own network of economic and social relationships; it did not exist only in auditoriums for the benefit of the scholar.⁷¹

⁷⁰ Lawrence, Jon (1998) *Speaking for the People: Party, Language and Popular Politics in England, 1867-1914*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. p. 17

See also Engels, Frederick (1844) *The Condition of the Working Class in England*. London: Panther Books. (1982).

⁷¹ Davis, J. and Emeljanow, V. (2001) *Reflecting the Audience: London Theatre Going, 1840-1880*, Hatfield: University of Hertfordshire Press. p. 227

The same can be said of the people who worked in theatre, the managements, authors and performers. Rather than limiting my focus to the libretti, performance or what appeared on the stage in individual performances, I examine instead the social and economic context.

In *New Readings in Theatre History*, Jacky Bratton recognises the uncertainty amongst theatre historians about 'what we should be doing' and the challenges for theatre historians in the twenty-first century to agree on and establish a suitable collective approach to theatre and performance research. Her answer is return to the surviving primary sources and ask twenty-first century questions of them unencumbered by the grand narrative approach to the study of theatre history incorporating also a genealogical approach. I draw on this methodology to underpin my own approach to Manchester theatre history with my study of surviving memoirs and genealogical research into the subjects of my case studies, in order to build a framework of their life through which to consider the detail of the events that form their individual histories.

Much of the previous scholarship on the various elements that are brought together in my thesis and form part of a literature review have already been discussed under the sub-headings above. In conducting a literature review, my most significant finding was that little has been published that is devoted specifically to the history of the theatres of Manchester; less still that has the rigour of academic research. J. L. Hodgkinson and Rex Pogson's *The Early Manchester Theatre: 1750-1807* is a highly regarded academic text.⁷² However, as the dates indicate, it falls

⁷² Hodgkinson, J. L., Rex Pogson and the Society for Theatre Research (1960) *The Early Manchester Theatre, 1750-1807*. London: Anthony Blond.

outside of the temporal scope of my research. Similarly, Richard Foulkes' *The Calverts: Actors of Some Importance* examines Charles Calvert's time as manager of The Prince's Theatre between 1864 and 1874, once more before my investigation begins.⁷³ Shelia Gooddie's biography, *Annie Horniman: A Pioneer of the Theatre*, gives consideration to Manchester with reference to Horniman's experiment in repertory theatre at The Gaiety Theatre.⁷⁴ However, this did not begin until 1907, so it is once more outside my remit.⁷⁵ Falling between the years discussed in the above works, my thesis examines a period of transition that saw the last flourishing of the grand independently owned theatres, before financial pressures saw the majority of theatres move into the ownership of larger circuits.

In my early research, I consulted some of the available texts that are works of local history. Joyce Knowlson published *Red Plush and Gilt* in 1984.⁷⁶ This gives a brief overview of the city's theatres, but without quoting sources. Natalie Anglesey produced a short history of *The Palace Theatre Manchester* in 1981 at the time of its reopening to raise funds for the cost of its refurbishment.⁷⁷ Such publications are useful as a starting point, but a more rigorous scholarly study is required.

As stated when introducing my research questions, the starting point for my research has been Wyke and Rudyard's *Manchester Theatres*, a 1994 survey of the city's theatre history through the rich theatre collection held in the archives at

⁷³ Foulkes, Richard (1992) *The Calverts: Actors of Some Importance*. London: Society for Theatre Research.

⁷⁴ John Pitt Hardacre's Comedy Theatre was renamed The Gaiety Theatre following its sale in 1903. It is the same building where Miss Horniman's theatre was based.

⁷⁵ Gooddie, Sheila (1990) *Annie Horniman: A Pioneer of the Theatre*. London: Methuen.

⁷⁶ Knowlson, Joyce (1984) *Red Plush and Gilt: the Heyday of Manchester Theatre during the Victorian and Edwardian Periods*. (No Publisher credited).

⁷⁷ Anglesey, Natalie (1981) *The Palace Theatre Manchester*. Manchester: Pan Visuals.

Manchester Central Library.⁷⁸ Their purpose in writing this book was to promote the theatre collection and stimulate interest for further scholarly research for which they highlighted some potential areas and research questions. It includes brief entries about individual theatres and other venues. However, by the authors' own suggestion, these entries have not been intensively researched and as they expected, some of the information given has proved to be at best superficial and occasionally wrong.

One of the areas they suggest would be a fruitful research topic was the Broadhead circuit of theatres that were established on the fringes of the city, for example in Hulme and Ardwick. Broadhead has been the subject of Victoria Garlick's recent University of Manchester thesis.⁷⁹ Garlick's research has benefitted from being granted access to the private collection of the Broadhead family to widen academic knowledge of the circuit in Manchester and across the North West. Broadhead built his theatres on the edge of cities and in smaller towns. This topic complements my own research into the theatres of central Manchester, and at times we make reference to the same secondary and sometimes primary resources in the relevant areas of our respective theses. Taken together, our respective studies offer fresh accounts of regional theatre, presenting a rounded view of entertainment provision to cater to the tastes and pockets of a wide range of audiences.

My work on the *Clarion* considers an area of the theatre press that Wyke and Rudyard acknowledge has not been explored and uncovers new knowledge about

⁷⁸ Wyke, Terry, Nigel Rudyard and Manchester Central Library, (1994) *Manchester Theatres* Manchester: Bibliography of North West England.

⁷⁹ Garlick, Victoria (2015) "'Quick, Clean, Smart & Bright': An Investigation into the Role of the Broadhead Family and their Popular Entertainment Circuit in the Theatre of North-West England, with Particular Reference to the Manchester Region'. Unpublished PhD thesis. University of Manchester. (embargoed until 2017)

the involvement of members of the press in the operation of the theatres. Given the lack of primary resources that have survived from the era in relation to the theatres, the thesis would not have been possible without the rich resources to be found in the newspapers and periodicals of the day that operate as primary sources in this thesis.⁸⁰ In the case of the journalists of course, what they write is the primary source of their body of work.

Where possible I have tested anecdotal evidence by comparing it to known facts. In his memoirs, Robert Courtneidge, for example, does not include the dates of events he recounts.⁸¹ However, using the table of pantomime productions in the theatres that I constructed from newspaper advertising, and using statutory records from civil registration I am able match those facts to the evidence Courtneidge supplies. I discuss the anecdotal evidence with the notion of how they are mediated to the reader in mind. This enables me to clarify the sequence of events and offer some detail about those events from Courtneidge's own perspective, for example his explanation for his personal reasons for leaving Manchester in 1903 compared to that provided in newspaper reports of the presentation and dinner given in his honour on that occasion.⁸²

I have also consulted several unpublished theses most of which were written quite some time ago. They approached their subjects with academic rigour and their authors have often also noted the lack of primary sources left by their subjects. The most comprehensive scholarly account of Charles Rowley is John Ivor Rushton's

⁸⁰ Note: In the cases where I have found specific references to the Manchester theatres and Blatchford or Rowley by other authors I have studied the references given and found no other primary sources than those I have discovered myself.

⁸¹ Courtneidge, Robert (1930) *I Was an Actor Once*. London: Hutchinson and Co. Ltd.

⁸² *Ibid.*, pp. 180-181

1959 unpublished University of Manchester M.Ed. thesis *Charles Rowley and the Ancoats Recreation Movement, 1876-1914*.⁸³ At that time Rushton had the advantage of being able to interview personally, several elderly people who had been members of Rowley's movement in their youth, giving his work a valuable perspective unavailable elsewhere. A more recent examination of Rowley's legacy appears in Audrey Kay's 1993 essay in the Ancoats special edition of the *Manchester Region History Review*.⁸⁴ Amongst the primary resources I discuss in relation to Ancoats are Rowley's memoirs and *The Workshop Paradise and Other Papers*, the Manchester newspapers, and the collection of programmes of the Ancoats Brotherhood held at the Working Class Movement Library in Salford.⁸⁵

Whilst my research has not discovered any private collections, aside from visits to the holdings of primary sources in the archives listed, I have had access to the microfilms of the Pettingell Collection of pantomime books held in the Templeman Library, University of Kent at Canterbury.⁸⁶ Productions that appeared on the Manchester stages are well represented. As with the pantomime books held in Manchester Central Library, these include valuable evidence of commercial

⁸³ Rushton, John Ivor (1959) 'Charles Rowley and the Ancoats Recreation Movement, 1876-1914'. Unpublished M.Ed. Thesis, University of Manchester.

⁸⁴ Kay, Audrey (1993) 'Charles Rowley and the Ancoats Recreation Movement 1876-1914, *Manchester Region History Review*, 7: pp. 45-54.

⁸⁵ Rowley, Charles (1911) *Fifty Years of Work Without Wages (Laborare est Orare)*. London: Hodder and Stoughton.

Rowley, Charles (1905) *A Workshop Paradise and Other Papers*. Manchester: Sherratt and Hughes.

⁸⁶ Pettingell, Frank, and the University of Kent at Canterbury Library. *The Popular Stage Drama in Nineteenth Century England: The Frank Pettingell Collection of Plays in the Library of the University of Kent at Canterbury. Volume 2 – Pantomimes*. Microfilm Database. Primary Source Media, Reading.

The actor, artist and journalist Frank Pettingell (1891-1966) acquired many of these pantomime books from the family of the actor Arthur Williams (1844-1915.) The collection contains pantomime books from the 1880s through until about 1920, and is divided into two sections for London and the provincial theatres.

Pettingell, Frank. Biography. University of Kent website

<http://www.kent.ac.uk/library/specialcollections/theatre/pettingell/biography.html> Accessed 28 May 2015

Williams, Arthur. Biography. University of Kent website

<http://www.kent.ac.uk/library/specialcollections/theatre/williams/biography.html> Accessed 28 May 2015

advertising that gives an indication of the growing retail trade and how audiences might spend their income, along with information about performers, theatre staff and the pricing policies, dates and times of performances and ancillary services, such as the sale of refreshments, and the pantomime libretti. I have used this to gather information that traces the increasing commercialism of the theatres and their awareness of evidence of a more formal approach to their communications that distanced them from their audiences. This effect can be seen also in the libretti which through the years lose much of their local and topical content.

In her 1993 essay 'Reading for Economic History' Tracy Davis argues that 'theatre histories in Britain invariably ignore economic and business perspectives.'⁸⁷ Her 2000 book that followed, *The Economics of the British Stage 1800-1914*, is acknowledged as the seminal work in this field and provides a comprehensive study of all aspects of theatre finance.⁸⁸ Whilst not referencing the Bainbridge case, there is useful discussion of the topic of bankruptcy during the period, and a brief reference to the bankruptcy of Charles Bernard that I also mention in connection to Bainbridge. Discussed in more detail in Chapter One, the theories she advances about the root causes of bankruptcy underpin my views about Bainbridge's experience, most significantly her references to less experienced speculators over extending their finances by expanding too quickly following an initial success.

Jill Sullivan conducted research into regional pantomime as industrial practice in her University of Nottingham PhD thesis from 2005 where her case studies focus

⁸⁷ Davis, Tracy C. (1993) 'Reading for Economic History.' *Theatre Journal*, 45: 4 pp. 487-503.

⁸⁸ Davis, Tracy C. (2000) *The Economics of the British Stage 1800-1914*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

on Nottingham and Birmingham.⁸⁹ She includes specific reference to the Bainbridge bankruptcy case in her monograph *The Politics of the Pantomime*.⁹⁰ Our respective research develops into different aspects of the topic influenced to some extent, no doubt, by the type of material culture and archive holdings available in relation to the cities that form our case studies. I discuss Sullivan's view of Bainbridge as a starting point to presenting my own findings about his case in Chapter One.

2005, the year that Sullivan's thesis was completed, marks the beginning of a period of new scholarly interest in Victorian pantomime. After David Mayer's seminal work on early pantomime, *Harlequin in his Element*, published in 1967, pantomime all but disappeared from academic view, only resurfacing in the 2000s, with a number of essay collections, and at the time of writing further publications in the pipeline.⁹¹ A significant contribution to the field is found in *Victorian Pantomime: A Collection of Critical Essays* edited by Jim Davis.⁹² Sullivan's contribution examines the local and topical content of the pantomime scripts, which was an important feature of in house productions and 'an essential component in establishing a recognisable identity for local pantomime, one that reflected the town of city in which it took place.'⁹³ Her findings support my view that the annual pantomime had particular significance in the theatrical calendar beyond the economic realities.

⁸⁹ Sullivan, Jill A. (2005) *The Business of Pantomime: Regional Productions 1865-1892*. Unpublished PhD thesis. University of Nottingham.

⁹⁰ Sullivan, Jill (2011) *The Politics of the Pantomime: Regional Identity in the Theatre 1860-1900*. Hatfield: University of Hertfordshire Press.

⁹¹ Mayer III, David (1969) *Harlequin in His Element: The English Pantomime, 1806-1836*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.

Davis, Jim (Ed.) (2010) *Victorian Pantomime*. Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan. For a detailed discussion of the evolution of Victorian pantomime see Richards, Jeffrey (2015) *The Golden Age of Pantomime: Slapstick, Spectacle and Subversion in Victorian England*. London: I. B. Tauris.

⁹² Davis, Jim (Ed.) (2010) *Victorian Pantomime*. Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 156

Joanna Robinson's essay explores the concept of mapping the annual pantomime onto the physical and social place in which it was performed. Her methods create an opportunity to construct a model of the pantomime which locates it in its physical and temporal space. With Nottingham as her case study this identifies a further dimension which values the study of theatre in its social and cultural context. She recognizes the need to understand the place of pantomime beyond the walls of the theatre stating that the mapping of pantomime necessitates a focus on 'the series of relationships between that annual performance and other elements in the town.'⁹⁴ Both essays then, support my choice of pantomime as a cross cutting theme through my thesis.

Dagmar Höher's investigation into music hall audiences challenges assumptions that have been commonly made about the composition of music hall taking a quantitative approach to her study by consulting newspaper reports of the day reporting on the casualties of fires and panics in music halls including examples in Manchester. She presents a sophisticated picture of the auditorium by the end of the nineteenth century, demonstrating that although audiences were diverse there was little mixing of the classes. They were segregated, as at the theatres, by the practice of charging different prices for seating which filtered them into different areas of the building. She describes this in practice in Manchester in the 1890s at the Tivoli a 500 capacity venue on Peter Street close to the Theatre Royal describing 'the class based division of the provincial music hall scene' of the 1890s saying:

⁹⁴ Ibid., p. 139

Manchester's Alexandra had, for example, two seating areas in the 1860s. Renamed the Tivoli in the 1890s, it had six – similar to most variety theatres of the time.⁹⁵

The same practice can be observed in the theatres, with the pricing of admission listed in the pantomime souvenir books of words. I am able to build on these findings amongst the letters I discuss in Chapter Two relating to the licensing and pantomime debates. The opinions expressed by these voices of the day confirm Höher's findings were also true in the dramatic theatres.

Audience

In *Reflecting the Audience*, Davis and Emeljanow make the case that to understand theatre in the Victorian era we must understand the composition and behaviour of its audience. They make the case also that the audience is not a fixed entity. It evolves in line with public taste and the current accepted norms of social behaviour

The social and cultural implications of a play performed at a Victorian theatre, and therefore the play itself, cannot be completely comprehended unless one is aware of the audience for which it was performed, and that audience will change, theatre by theatre, district by district, decade by decade.⁹⁶

They take as their case study the London theatres, in the years 1840-1880, ending at the moment my thesis begins. Whilst provincial towns experienced a smaller number of competing theatres, due to the provincial towns being of smaller geographical size than the metropolis, this equally meant a smaller catchment area and potential audience. Their findings, however, can be applied to the provincial theatres and they

⁹⁵ Höher, Dagmar (1986) 'The Composition of Music Hall Audiences' in Bailey, Peter (ed.), *Music Hall: The Business of Pleasure*. Milton Keynes: Open University Press. p. 88 **Note:** Höher is the maiden name of Dagmar Kift.

⁹⁶ Davis, J. and Emeljanow, V. (2001) *Reflecting the Audience: London Theatre Going, 1840-1880*, Hatfield: University of Hertfordshire Press. p. 227

claim that this principle will prove true 'in any theatre district.'⁹⁷ They confirm also the diversity of class and other distinctions to be found in the audiences of the day writing 'London theatre audiences in the mid-nineteenth century were so diverse that generic definitions are clearly inappropriate.'⁹⁸

These findings, in their respective venues, have parallels with Dagmar Kift's discussion of the evolution of music hall which includes a quantitative study to establish the composition of music hall audiences by observing the details of casualties of fires and panics in music hall as they were reported in the newspapers of the day.⁹⁹ She also finds that all classes and social groups were to be found within the audience. Both studies underpin my own findings about the diversity to be found amongst Manchester audiences that I discuss in Chapter Two where I quote evidence given by George Scott to the Palace licensing hearing, and comments made by the *Manchester Guardian* that are in line with their views.

Chris Waters's discussion of the Manchester Palace of Varieties forms part of his wider examination of *British Socialists and the Politics of Popular Culture, 1884-1914*. This book was the first to connect the history of the socialists to the history of the evolution of popular culture, and most significantly for my purpose here, to the growth of commercial entertainment. Waters's appraisal of Blatchford's support for the Palace of Varieties examines the contradiction with his socialist views stating

It is ironic that the socialists should throw their support behind the Palace, and, hence, by implication behind an industry that was in the process of re-making working class culture and reducing the space available for autonomous forms

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Ibid., p.226

⁹⁹ Höher, Dagmar (1986) 'The Composition of Music Hall Audiences' in Bailey, Peter (ed.), *Music Hall: The Business of Pleasure*. Milton Keynes: Open University Press.

of working-class expression. Blatchford often spoke out against ‘commercial tyranny’, although because he rejected the teetotal Puritanism of individuals like John Burns he came to accept the arguments put forward by music hall proprietors in Manchester.¹⁰⁰

Waters’s theories concerning the complex views of the socialists have an important function in underpinning my own observations of their contradictory nature.

There is also little pre-existing scholarly research published about the Manchester based journalists and newspapers that feature in this thesis. Robert Blatchford and the *Clarion* are often mentioned briefly in newspaper and socialist histories, but seem little more than a footnote in history.¹⁰¹ None of these limited appraisals of their contribution investigate the extension of their skills into a different aspect of their work into theatre and the theatrical community.

I have returned to Blatchford’s own memoirs and several early accounts of his life and career written by contemporaries who knew him personally.¹⁰² Of particular interest is the slightly later 1951 biography, *Robert Blatchford*, by Laurence Thompson.¹⁰³ As A. M. Thompson’s son, he had a privileged first hand view of the network surrounding Blatchford, Thompson and Hardacre that cannot be found in other accounts. Judith Fincher’s 1971 MA thesis gives scholarly consideration to

¹⁰⁰ Waters, Chris (1990) *British Socialists and the Politics of Popular Culture 1884-1914*. Manchester: Manchester University Press. p. 33

¹⁰¹ For example Mutch, Deborah (ed.) (2013) *British Socialist Fiction, 1884-1914*. 5 vols. London: Pickering and Chatto Ltd.

A new biography of Blatchford by Tony Judge, *Tory Socialist*, was published in 2013. Judge makes a passing reference to Blatchford’s unsuccessful musical comedy, *In Summer Days*, but makes no deeper study of his connection to the theatre. Judge, Tony (2013) *Tory Socialist: Robert Blatchford and Merrie England*. Charleston: Mentor books. pp. 25-26

¹⁰² For example Blatchford, Robert (1931) *My Eighty Years*. London: Cassell.

Lyons, Albert Neil (1910) *Robert Blatchford: The Sketch of a Personality: An Estimate of Some Achievements*. London: The Clarion Press.

¹⁰³ Laurence Thompson was the son of Blatchford’s *Clarion* co-founder and friend A. M. Thompson, and his book also makes significant reference to his own father and to John Pitt Hardacre who he recalled from his childhood.

'The Clarion Movement: A Study of a Socialist Attempt to Implement the Cooperative Commonwealth in England 1889-1914'. Logie Barrow's thesis 'The Socialism of Robert Blatchford and the "Clarion," 1889-1918'. I refer to both in Chapter Four. My study of this theatrical connection has allowed me to contribute new knowledge in my thesis, by taking an alternative approach to the *Clarion* founders' philosophy that offers a new perspective on their socialist ambitions.

In 1907 Blatchford would go on to publish a vision of his ideal socialist utopia in a fantasy novel entitled *The Sorcery Shop*.¹⁰⁴ Although Blatchford was an admirer of William Morris, their views on theatre could not have been more different.¹⁰⁵ In her study of late Victorian socialist fiction, *The Victorian Press and the Fairytale*, Caroline Sumpter includes reference to the writing of Blatchford and other founder members of the *Clarion*, along with an examination of the *Clarion* itself.¹⁰⁶ I go beyond Sumpter's remit of research into journalists writing socialist fairytales to be read, by taking a direction away from the written page to consider their writing for the purpose of being performed on the stage. My investigation offers the possibility to see how the theatre connected to their philosophy and romantic notion of a socialist idyll. It also suggests how the *Clarion* journalists were able to reconcile theatre, and especially pantomime, with the capitalist reality of commercial entertainment that brought them financial rewards for their work and which at first reading appears to be at odds with their socialism.

¹⁰⁴ Blatchford, Robert (1907) *The Sorcery Shop: An Impossible Romance*. London: The Clarion Press.

¹⁰⁵ Salmon, Nicholas (no date) 'The Unmanageable Playgoer: Morris and the Victorian Theatre' <http://www.morrissociety.org/publications/JWMS/SP98.12.4.Salmon.pdf>

¹⁰⁶ Sumpter, Caroline (2008) *The Victorian Press and the Fairy Tale*. London: Palgrave MacMillan.

There has been little published recently that examines the development of music hall and its monopoly of mass entertainment in Manchester during the period under investigation. The work of Dagmar Kift and Chris Waters can no longer be considered recent, but they continue to have relevance that underpins my findings about the controversy that surrounded the early days of the Palace Theatre of Varieties, the opposition of the reforming church and temperance campaigners, and its subsequent difficulties with the licensing authorities.¹⁰⁷ For his purpose Waters states early in his essay that the furore over the licensing of the Palace 'began in October 1890 when the directors applied for a music hall entertainment licence.'¹⁰⁸ My research examines the debate that took place a year earlier, in 1889, as concerns began to arise. Much of that early correspondence was speculation as there was nothing tangible to complain about at that point. Whilst both Kift and Waters make reference to the coverage in the newspapers the debate, the letters to the Editor are not central to their work. For much of their sources, they largely made use of the reports and editorials provided by the journalists. I write here about the exchanges that took place in the correspondence columns in line with my methodology that uses the voices of ordinary people to present the point of view from some sectors of the general public. These findings are discussed in Chapter Two, but each approach suggests that the fear about the moral character of its patrons was not a cause for a moral panic.

¹⁰⁷ Kift, D. (1996) *The Victorian Music Hall: Culture, Class and Conflict*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Waters, (1986) 'Manchester Morality and London Capital: The Battle over the Palace of Varieties' in Bailey, Peter (ed.), *Music Hall: The Business of Pleasure* Milton Keynes: Open University Press.

¹⁰⁸ Waters, 'Manchester Morality and London Capital'

The previously existing literature specific to the themes of my research can then, be seen to be limited, opening opportunities to contribute new knowledge to the academic canon.

Synopsis

Captain Bainbridge's tenure of the Manchester Theatre Royal which spans the 1880s is the subject of Chapter One. It forms a case study of a model of theatre management that was falling out of favour at that time as commercial theatre became big business. From the mid-century onwards one-man operations were being converted to limited companies and bought up by large circuits, mostly based in London. Bainbridge became part of such a syndicate early in his time at the Theatre Royal, but as is seen this was short lived and he continued as the sole lessee until his bankruptcy in 1889. The informal network within which he operated was strongly influenced by London's theatre managers; most notably his friend and business associate Augustus Harris at Drury Lane. This saw him in the habit of leaving his theatre to visit London twice each week. His story and the movement between theatres of the central Manchester managers in the immediate wake of his demise set the scene for the main focus of the thesis between 1889 and 1903.

Chapter Two is devoted to the public debate in the Manchester press about the Palace Theatre of Varieties, and the parallel debate about the city's pantomimes. The opposition the owners of the Palace experienced when applying for a licence for

their new variety theatre has been investigated previously as noted above. The use of the 1889 debates in the letters pages of the *Manchester Guardian* enables me to give a voice to the people of the city representing various sections of the community and shades of opinion. These debates provide a microcosm of aspects of the 'problem of leisure' that was being discussed at a national level, which can be seen to account for why what should have been a little local difficulty attracted so much attention outside of Manchester.

Chapter Three explores the Ancoats Recreation Movement and its figurehead Charles Rowley. It presents a network at work in the city that was vying for the hearts and minds of audiences with the theatres and other commercial entertainment opportunities at work in the city of Manchester. Their approach, through rational forms of recreational activities, sometimes complemented and often opposed the theatres. Rowley was enabled to devote time to his philanthropic ambitions due to the commercial success of his family's picture framing business, and previous studies of Rowley have not considered his own influence on the local press as a shareholder and board member of the *Manchester City News*. This is evidence of a complex relationship between these networks in which their ambitions can be seen to overlap at times and to contradict themselves.

Chapter Four introduces the weekly periodical the *Clarion*, and investigates the roots of Robert Blatchford and Alexander Mattock Thompson's interest in the theatre, together with their practical involvement with the Manchester theatres during the period under consideration. Both are seen to write for, produce or invest in productions, whilst also writing about theatre and publishing reviews in their newspaper. The commercial concept of fun can be seen to complement the more

rational recreational and social activities that they promoted to members of the Clarion movement which operated in tandem with the paper. This creates something of a paradox, as Blatchford was known to be a supporter of Rowley's work when he first became a socialist. Both men advocated that people should have 'fun' in their leisure time, but their respective ideas of how that should be achieved took different routes.

After Bainbridge the two leading managers of the day whose case studies I follow in Chapters Five and Six are Robert Courtneidge at the Prince's Theatre and the Theatre Royal, and the fiercely independent John Pitt Hardacre at the Comedy Theatre. Their histories are examined with particular reference to their business relationships and personal friendships with members of Manchester's socialist press, most notably Blatchford and Thompson of the *Clarion*. Chapter Five includes an examination of Courtneidge's bid to win a place that would allow Manchester to make a regional contribution in establishing a National Theatre.

In Chapter Six I investigate 'The Hardacre Case' which was a celebrated and notorious scandal at the time that brought the curtain down on the era of the independently owned theatre in the city centre. I suggest that Mr Hardacre at the Comedy Theatre was made a scapegoat, by an informal alliance of the moral reformers and the authorities who were seeking a new target following the comparative failure of their campaign against The Palace of Varieties and the embarrassment of the Manchester Police Scandal.

CHAPTER 1

THE BANKRUPTCY OF CAPTAIN BAINBRIDGE

On 3 April 1889 Captain R. B. Bainbridge (1846-1904), lessee of the Theatre Royal appeared before Mr. Registrar Lister in the Manchester Bankruptcy Court 'to undergo his public examination.'¹⁰⁹ After the first creditors' meeting on 26 March the *Standard* in London had summarized that 'The Debtor alleged bad business, the failure of the last pantomime, and the competition of new theatres in outlying towns as the cause of his failure.'¹¹⁰ Certainly, Captain Bainbridge had invested vast amounts of money in the production of his pantomimes, but if the pantomimes at the Theatre Royal had been spectacular then so was the scale of his bankruptcy. The *Manchester Times* confirmed the total figures stating 'The debtor's statement of affairs shows net liabilities £32,380. 4s. 7d., and assets, after payment of preferential creditors, £354. 6s. 6d.; having a deficiency of £32,025. 18s. 1d.'¹¹¹

Captain Bainbridge's tenure of the Manchester Theatre Royal 1880-1889 and the crisis his eventual bankruptcy brought to Manchester's longest established and best known theatre, provides a foundation for the chapters that follow. This chapter examines theatre as commercial entertainment and the pressures on the theatre manager to make a profit in an age when there was no public funding to support the drama. In particular, I examine the role of the annual pantomime in supporting the fragile financial balancing act that determined the solvency of the theatre. Far from

¹⁰⁹ *Liverpool Mercury*, 4 April 1889. np.

¹¹⁰ *London Evening Standard*, 27 April 1889. p. 3

¹¹¹ *Manchester Times*, 30 March 1889. p. 7

being a light hearted frivolous show to amuse children at a family Christmas outing, the annual pantomime was a serious business at the very core of the operation of the theatre requiring the attention of the manager throughout the year.

Manchester is not the best city to choose to investigate the finances of the late Victorian theatre, as almost nothing of the accounts of individual theatres appears to have survived. Frequent references to proper accounts not having been kept were made during Captain Bainbridge's bankruptcy hearing, so it is unsurprising that no records can be found in any archive. Through the reports of the bankruptcy that appeared in newspapers of the day it is possible, however, to draw together a broadly accurate picture of the details of the theatre's accounts over the nine years of his tenure of the Theatre Royal and to gain an understanding of the events that year on year saw his debt increase to its inevitable conclusion. I also consider the position of Manchester as provincial theatre and its relationship with the London theatre, in particular Bainbridge's sometimes turbulent business transactions with the notoriously litigious Augustus Harris at Drury Lane.

Captain Bainbridge's experience is a cautionary tale of the naive speculator who conforms to a type Tracy Davis has identified in *The Economics of the British Stage 1800-1914*: 'it is worth stressing that insolvency also reflects the human experience of business – for debtors and creditors – and the intersections of theatre business with local and regional economies.'¹¹² I would add to this the intersection with the local communities whose attendance or otherwise determined the theatres'

¹¹² Davis, Tracy C. (2000) *The Economics of the British Stage 1800-1914*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. p. 196

annual income, and the relationships forged with the local press who could influence public opinion.

The route that Bainbridge chose led to his own destruction. Beyond the actions of the manager and staff of the theatre, outside influences contributed to his downfall and, as will be seen, one small error in judgement saw Bainbridge fail to recognise a specific moment that marked a shift in the Manchester public's taste for pantomime, leading to the relative failure of his 1888-89 pantomime the *Forty Thieves*.¹¹³

Following years of precarious finances due to Bainbridge's failure to exercise adequate financial control, this was the final straw that ensured that his tenure of the Theatre Royal ended in bankruptcy. Equally, Bainbridge leaving the Theatre Royal was a catalyst that saw change sweep through the theatrical community in Manchester in the summer of 1889. Along with the proposal to build a new Palace Theatre of Varieties, this formed the shape of the management of the theatres of central Manchester that would remain quite stable for the next decade.

Arguably, at this time, Manchester became the most important city in the British theatrical world outside London, in part because the Theatre Royal had one of the very few stages outside London capable of accommodating the large sets of productions from the Drury Lane theatre. It was due also, however, to the large number of theatres in the centre of the city that doubled between 1884 and 1891 as they competed for local and visiting audiences.

¹¹³ Doyle, Thomas F. (1888) *The Forty Thieves*.

The capacity of the Theatre Royal and the ever present pressure to uphold the reputation of a patent house was over and above what was expected of the managers of the city's other major theatres, as was acknowledged in the Press. 'When Captain Bainbridge produces a new pantomime at the Theatre Royal he has more than ordinary responsibilities. He must feel the stress of the pantomime traditions of the house.' remarked the *Manchester Times* at the beginning of its review of *The Forty Thieves*, noting the capacity and size of the stage at the city's largest theatre:

A successful pantomime at the Theatre Royal – and such is "The Forty Thieves" - must be rich in spectacle, and must be built upon a large scale. That which suits the little Vaudeville would never do for the big Drury Lane.¹¹⁴

When Captain Bainbridge was the lessee and manager at the Theatre Royal, although his misfortunes were largely attributable to his own actions, pantomime as the dominant genre directing management practice in the Victorian theatre can be seen as having played a role in the significant events on that downward spiral. Whilst in theory the manager had absolute power to decide how his theatre should operate, a dependency on a healthy income from the annual pantomime dictated many of his actions.

The Theatre Royal was Manchester's longest established and best known theatre, having been awarded the status of a patent house in 1775 and, therefore, able to present drama legitimately. This former privileged position continued to inform the reputation of the Theatres Royal long after the abolition of the patent with the Theatres Regulation Act 1843 that opened theatre to commercial speculation and

¹¹⁴ *Manchester Times*, 29 December 1888. p. 5

the building of many new theatres.¹¹⁵ The Manchester Theatre Royal of Bainbridge's day was the third building to hold the name and had opened in 1845.

The career of Captain Bainbridge

Richard Bousfield Bainbridge (1846-1904) was born in Manchester, into an affluent, middle-class family with military and American connections. His background contrasted strongly with the early experiences of other theatre managers to be discussed in this thesis. The *Manchester Guardian* reported that 'Before he became connected with the theatre he was a captain in the 53rd regiment, and subsequently in a militia regiment.'¹¹⁶ This omitted to mention that his military career, begun at an early age, was in the American army.

On his return to England he joined the militia in Liverpool, then shortly afterwards, in August 1880, he became a partner in the Theatre Royal in Manchester. The event was acknowledged in the *Manchester Guardian* where it was announced that:

In consequence of the dissolution of partnership between Mr. John Duffield and Mr. John Lawton, the management of the Theatre Royal will be continued by Mr. Duffield, with whom will be associated Mr. R. B. Bainbridge, who was formerly connected with Niblo's Theatre at New York.¹¹⁷

It was later noted that Bainbridge 'had then a capital of £3,000, which he had borrowed from his aunt.'¹¹⁸ His career in theatrical speculation, therefore, began with a loan and he would never move into profit. Whatever his experience in New York

¹¹⁵ For detail of the *Theatres Regulation Act 1843*, which allowed drama to be presented on the stages of theatres other than the patent houses see Rowell, George (1967) *The Victorian Theatre*. Ebenezer Baylis and Son London: Oxford University Press. p. 13

¹¹⁶ *Manchester Guardian*, 4 April 1889. p. 8

¹¹⁷ *Manchester Guardian*, 19 October 1880. p. 6

¹¹⁸ *Manchester Guardian*, 4 April 1889. p. 8

might have been, Bainbridge himself did not refer to it in the evidence given to his bankruptcy hearing where it was reported that 'In answer to the Official Receiver (Mr. C. J. Dibb), the debtor stated that he was never engaged in any business prior to his embarking in theatrical speculations.'¹¹⁹

He was obviously ambitious; buying out John Duffield's share of the business on the latter's retirement in 1881, to become sole lessee with a lease that was due to run until the August of 1889. Rather than consolidate his business in Manchester, his next move was to take on a twenty-one year lease of the Royal Court Theatre in Liverpool from 1 September 1881. Bainbridge was now required to find £2000 in rent for the Theatre Royal each year along with 'a further rent of £1,000 for properties, scenery, &c.'¹²⁰ Added to this was the sum of £2030 for the rent of the Royal Court each year.

The roots of the financial difficulties that Bainbridge brought upon himself can be seen here, as they match a number of factors that conform to a pattern that Tracy Davis has observed that she claims were common amongst theatre managers declared to be bankrupt. She notes 'Almost all the deposed managers had interests in several properties, either concurrently or consecutively.'¹²¹ And:

Often the managers were successful in one theatre venture then reinvested their capital in another site, repeating the pattern and overextending their

¹¹⁹ *Manchester Guardian*, 4 April 1889. p. 8

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*

¹²¹ Davis, Tracy., *The Economics of the British Stage 1800-1914*, p. 192

credit and personal resources until calamity struck one of the properties, pulling the whole enterprise down.¹²²

What is startling in the Bainbridge case is the speed and over-confidence with which he over-extended himself. On 5 September 1882 Bainbridge used his stake in the two theatres as his capital investment to become a partner in a syndicate operating these two theatres and the Prince's Theatre in Manchester. The syndicate he joined comprised of three highly experienced theatre managers John Hollingshead, Michael Gunn and Richard D'Oyly Carte, but it was to be very short lived. The *Manchester Times* reported that 'The syndicate was dissolved early in 1883, and his share of the losses was about £2,000' but Bainbridge claimed that 'When the syndicate terminated he was quite solvent.'¹²³

Bainbridge's recollections, as will be seen below, are not always accurate especially when discussing the timings of certain events. If all the dates above are correct then the syndicate lasted no more than eight months. This raises some questions about the syndicate and why it was dissolved so quickly.

Discussing the models for the management of theatres that existed in the nineteenth century, Tracy Davis has suggested that 'partnerships tended to develop around the need to consolidate resources and to combine skills. When the needs changed, so did the partnerships.'¹²⁴ The stress is, however, on the most desirable quality in a business partner was the ability to inject capital to ensure stability and allow for further development. According to Davis 'There is no strict teleology of

¹²² Ibid., pp. 192-193

¹²³ *Manchester Times*, 6 April 1889 p. 5

¹²⁴ Davis, Tracy., *The Economics of the British Stage 1800-1914*, p. 247

perfectability, for the entrepreneur's personality, experience, and circumstances, especially access to capital, played a large part in determining what the options were.¹²⁵ Bainbridge and his associates match this model of the likely bankrupt whether as a partnership or Bainbridge as an individual. Davis notes also that 'Rational choice, in these cases, seems to amount to a desire for wider and wider disbursement of influence, or control over a market sector.'¹²⁶ A sole lessee like Bainbridge can then, be seen to be most vulnerable to the influence of his own ego, without the ability to share risk and absorb the effect of losses and with only his own vanity and ambition for counsel. His overconfidence appears to have been a major factor in compounding his failure to control his finances effectively.

It is likely that the problems with the partnership were connected to the Royal Court and the difficulties Bainbridge had in attracting an audience. While for Bainbridge the syndicate would have brought skills and investment, the prospect of impending financial difficulties would have no doubt alarmed his new partners, who may have questioned his chaotic management methods and lack of experience. Following the added burden of the shared costs of dissolving the partnership, in 1883 Bainbridge sold the lease to Carl Rosa leaving himself free to focus on the Theatre Royal.

The venture at the Royal Court would prove disastrous for Bainbridge and have repercussions that would blight the future of his whole operation. In his 1889 bankruptcy hearing he admitted that:

¹²⁵ Ibid., p. 247

¹²⁶ Ibid., p. 193

on that theatre he lost £10,000, the reason being that the Liverpool public did not appreciate the entertainment he provided for them, and did not extend to it the patronage required to support the heavy expenses to which he was put.¹²⁷

The *Manchester Times* was less tactful when it reported his view as 'the entertainment he provided for the Liverpool public was too good for them.'¹²⁸

The court was then told that with regard to the Theatre Royal, 'From 1883 up to the present Mr. S. R. Platt had a share in the profits under the Partnership Law Amendment Act.'¹²⁹ Bainbridge continued to diversify his interests and become involved in other speculative projects, no doubt hoping to clear his debts, but once more these proved to be failures that only served to exacerbate his problems. During the bankruptcy hearing, details came to light of a loss of £3,700 incurred by investing in a touring production of the light opera *The Beggar Student*. Bainbridge also became a partner in a switchback railway. This fairground attraction formed part of the entertainment at the Manchester Royal Jubilee Exhibition 1887. Disputes with his partner in this venture, Mr. S. Lee Bapty, General Manager of the exhibition, led to court proceedings and the loss of any profits.¹³⁰

At the first meeting of creditors on 26 March 1889 his unsecured liabilities were listed. These amounted to:

£32,120. 11s. 9d. include 8 claims for loans and cash advanced amounting to £25,161. 0s. 10d. Amongst these are claims of the bankrupt's aunt for £11,500, his sister for £1,300, and Mr. Platt for £7,000; the consideration for

¹²⁷ *Manchester Guardian*, 4 April 1889. p. 8

¹²⁸ *Manchester Times*. 6 April 1889. p. 5

¹²⁹ *Manchester Times*. 30 March 1889. p. 7

Samuel R. Platt was an engineer and at the time of Bainbridge's bankruptcy the Director of the Manchester Ship Canal Company. He was also the Chairman of the Works Committee of Salford Council from 1887-1891.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*

Mr. Platt's claim is stated to be for 'loans and cash advanced under the Partnership Law Amendment Act.'¹³¹

There are also claims for £800, 'loan and hire of scenery;' £850 part profits of 'switchback railway;' and £987. 7s. 6d. for law costs.'¹³² The statement of assets listed:

Properties, scenery, dresses, &c. (the value of which is unascertainable, as they have been mixed with properties, &c., belonging to Mrs M. H. Bainbridge), have been seized under distraint for rent, the amount claimed being £830. 50 £1 shares in the Rotunda Theatre Company Limited, Liverpool (fully paid). 100 £1 shares in the Folly Theatre of Varieties, Manchester, fully paid. Half share in the Switchback Railway situate in the Winter Gardens, Southport, estimated to produce £250. Jewellery, consisting of a watch, chain, and ring, value £1. 11s. The performer's rights of the "Sultan of Mocha"; £500 in shares in the Theatre Royal Company Limited; and £500 in shares in the Masonic Hall Company Limited.¹³³

When questioned in court about the judgement that led to his losses he admitted that he had 'been contracting debts since 1884 with a knowledge of his insolvency', "as a rule the profits of the pantomime have made good the other losses; but lately there has been a general falling off of receipts."¹³⁴

He had succeeded in surviving this way for five years by his own admission, but considered against the chronology of events it seems clear that the root financial difficulty was carrying the £10,000 loss made at the Royal Court in 1883. Bainbridge admitted when discussing the £18,000 that he claimed had been lost at the Theatre Royal that, 'The remainder has been lost in Manchester, but through not having kept proper books of account, I am unable to show by accounts how this deficiency has

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ *Manchester Times*. 30 March 1889. p. 3

arisen.¹³⁵ The report of the Official Receiver commented that 'It would appear that the bankrupt has kept no books of account, but with regard to the Theatre Royal he states that, in Mr. Platt's interest, proper books of account have been kept by Messrs. Samuel E. Cottam, of this city, chartered accountants who have from time to time prepared profit and loss accounts, but no general balance sheet.'¹³⁶ When the case was closed in November of 1889, the financial accounts remained incomplete as recorded by the *Manchester Guardian*.

The Official Receiver (Mr C. J. Dibb) said an affidavit had been filed by the bankrupt stating that he had complied as fully as he could with the order of the court as to the filing of accounts. – The Registrar: If you are satisfied that is all that is necessary. – The Official Receiver said that he was not perfectly satisfied, but he believed that he had got the best accounts that the bankrupt could file.¹³⁷

The *Manchester Times* quoted Bainbridge as stating that 'I had no capital of my own to start with, but about 1882 I became entitled under the will of Colonel Bousfield to a legacy of £1,000, which was paid to me shortly afterwards.'¹³⁸ Colonel Nathaniel George Philips Bousfield, MP for Bath (1874-1880), died on 21 May 1883. The timing is relevant here, because it would have been some time after this date when Bainbridge received his legacy, and it would have arrived just in time to be swallowed up in keeping him solvent when the syndicate with Hollingshead, Gunn and D'Oyly Carte was dissolved.¹³⁹

¹³⁵ *Manchester Times*. 30 March 1889. p. 3

¹³⁶ *Ibid*.

¹³⁷ *Manchester Guardian*. 28 November 1889. p. 7

¹³⁸ *Manchester Times*. 30 March 1889. p. 3

¹³⁹ There was an amount of £1,300 owing to Bainbridge's sister, Elizabeth, at the time of his bankruptcy hearing, possibly indicating that she inherited a similar amount at this time, which could have been borrowed to balance the books. This would have allowed him to disguise his £2000 loss on the syndicate.

His failure to keep adequate accounts is evidence of a chaotic method of management likely to have exacerbated the later financial difficulties as well as allowing Bainbridge to avoid acknowledging the scale of his debt. His willingness to gamble, and failure to control the finer details of his spending, combined with the bad luck he experienced at times, to seal his fate.

The breakdown of the large sums owing indicates a somewhat reckless 'spend to accumulate' policy on Bainbridge's part. He told the bankruptcy court that:

He did not think it was a rash and hazardous speculation to take the *Beggar Student* on tour. The play had been successful in London, and he anticipated a big success in the provinces. The production of plays was generally of a hazardous nature; in fact, all theatrical business was speculative.¹⁴⁰

Reviews were not unfavourable: 'Notwithstanding the counter attraction at one of the other theatres a large and enthusiastic audience assembled to welcome it on its return visit.'¹⁴¹

The Role of Pantomime in Captain Bainbridge's Bankruptcy

Bainbridge identified the immediate cause of his financial troubles as the failure of the pantomime *The Forty Thieves*, presented at the Theatre Royal for the season 1888-89, which resulted in a loss of £8000 from which he could not recover. Jim Davis quotes Davenport Adams' view which 'implied that the only benefit derived from pantomime was the monetary surplus that kept so many theatres open for the rest of the year.'¹⁴² It was not unusual for many theatres around the country to be entirely dependent on the success of every 'annual' for their survival, but I will

¹⁴⁰ *Manchester Times*. 6 April 1889. p. 3

¹⁴¹ *Black and White*. 29 April 1887. p. 5

¹⁴² Davis, Jim (Ed.) (2010) *Victorian Pantomime*. Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan. p. 5

discuss Bainbridge's approach to pantomime production and this specific failure in some detail, because it serves to illustrate the current state of pantomime in Manchester theatre in the late Victorian era.

The Theatre Royal had a reputation for presenting the most spectacular pantomimes even when spectacle was the fashion at all theatres. This was the stress of the public expectation 'of the pantomime traditions of the house.' Bainbridge invested heavily to uphold this record.¹⁴³

It was not unreasonable for Bainbridge to expect that his pantomime would rescue his finances for another year, as all eight of his previous pantomimes had, but he was caught in a precise moment that can only be seen in hindsight, when the balance of public taste in pantomime made a definite shift from spectacle to music hall, persuaded perhaps by other forward thinking managers whose commercial sense allowed them to recognise the music hall was less expensive to stage than spectacle. Bainbridge's experience draws attention to the vulnerability of theatre finance and the high risk strategy of being dependent on the unpredictable success of a product subject to the tastes of a fickle public. Here was a specific moment that marked an evolution in Manchester pantomimes where public desire evolved to demand a pantomime still spectacular, but constructed around comedy with music hall at its core and greater opportunity for audience participation. The trend for novelty variety acts and music hall songs had been growing in the previous ten years, in Manchester it was the 1888-1889 season that saw the balance of popular

¹⁴³ See appendix 4 (i) for an illustration of Captain Bainbridge's pantomime *Babes in the Wood* from the 1883-84 season.

content tipped in favour of music hall. This was a national trend, but may have happened in a different year in other provincial cities.

The *Manchester Guardian* in its Christmas Eve review of the Manchester pantomimes for 1888-89 stated that the season would run for 'at least two months.'¹⁴⁴ *Sinbad the Sailor*, the Prince's Theatre pantomime for that year was successful enough to run for thirteen weeks. Even given the lengthy Christmas season, pantomime had a disproportionate influence on the theatres to the space it occupied in the annual programme, making their financial security dependent on its annual success. As the *Manchester Guardian* observed:

It is perhaps a strange taste that fills the theatres for those two months and leaves them half empty for the greater part of the other ten, but it exists – we cannot honestly say that it has been created by the managers, - and the managers have to meet it.'¹⁴⁵

During the bankruptcy hearing Captain Bainbridge informed the court that outside of the pantomime season 'while the expenses of the theatre remained the same, the travelling companies took such large sums – in some cases as much as 77½ per cent of the gross receipts – that, although these engagements were popular, there was nothing at the end of them left for the local manager.'¹⁴⁶ As an in-house production, the pantomime allowed the theatres, while responsible for the production costs, to retain all the income, making it desirable for the theatre managers to prolong the run of a successful pantomime. The question of the scarcity of popular touring companies that could draw an audience year round is discussed in Chapter Five.

¹⁴⁴ *Manchester Guardian*. 24 December 1888. p. 5

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ *Manchester Guardian*, 4 April 1889. p. 8

Augustus Harris and the Drury Lane Pantomimes

Bainbridge divided his time between the North West and his address in London and was an associate of Augustus Harris Jr., later to become Sir Augustus Harris. He appears to have been impressed by Harris' management style enough to aim to emulate him by copying many of his ideas in programme at his own theatres. This is especially apparent in the grand pantomimes presented at the Theatre Royal during Bainbridge's tenure and in his willingness to spend whatever was necessary to ensure he had the most extravagant and spectacular pantomime in Manchester.

From the mid 1890s the previous year's Drury Lane pantomime transferred to Manchester's Theatre Royal. In 1896 when The Theatre Royal presented Harris's final pantomime, the 1895 production of *Cinderella*, Manchester's advertising openly boasted of its provenance as 'The Gorgeous Drury Lane Pantomime'.¹⁴⁷ The biggest West End stars may have been replaced, but this was the latest, most fashionable production being made available to provincial audiences. In the 1880s Bainbridge did not refer to Drury Lane pantomimes in his advertising, but there is evidence that he was not only influenced by them for his own productions, but that he had business relations with Harris that included hiring sets and costumes from Drury Lane for Manchester. In *The Politics of the Pantomime* Jill Sullivan has discussed this with reference to evidence of a dispute between the two managers.¹⁴⁸ In February 1887, Harris had sued Bainbridge for what he believed to be money owing to him from his contract to supply sets and costumes for *Bluebeard*. This was settled out of court

¹⁴⁷ *Cinderella*. 1896

¹⁴⁸ Sullivan, Jill (2011) *The Politics of the Pantomime: Regional Identity in the Theatre 1860-1900*. Hatfield: University of Hertfordshire Press. pp. 66-67

and it was confirmed that ‘The misunderstanding between Mr. Harris of Drury Lane, and Captain Bainbridge of Manchester Theatre Royal, has been amicably settled.’¹⁴⁹

An examination of the productions of the two theatres during this period and descriptions of the extravagance of the production values of the Theatre Royal pantomimes in the press suggests that this was a regular occurrence. Part of the agreement between the two managers was that Bainbridge would arrange repairs to the properties and costumes as required.

Sullivan states that *Bluebeard* ‘had been Augustus Harris’s Drury Lane production, but was notably advertised as a London pantomime, featuring instead a new, locally created scene illustrating the building of the Manchester Royal Jubilee Exhibition,’ and that Bainbridge preferred ‘to emphasise the local status of his theatre.’¹⁵⁰ This overlooks the original libretto that was written for Manchester by Thomas F. Doyle. Doyle was Bainbridge’s resident stage manager at the Theatre Royal throughout the 1880s and wrote the libretti of the pantomimes from 1884 onwards. When *Bluebeard* was presented in Manchester in celebration of the year of Queen Victoria’s Golden Jubilee it was advertised as the ‘Grand Jubilee Pantomime,’ and included the scene celebrating the forthcoming Manchester arts exhibition as described by Sullivan. While the Manchester show owed much to the magnificent Drury Lane properties, the use of Doyle’s original libretto defines the show as a Manchester pantomime and the use of Harris’ sets and costumes to complement this can not detract from that. There is an impression that Bainbridge might have been criticised in some quarters about the similarities between his pantomime productions

¹⁴⁹ *Manchester Times*. 26 February 1887. p. 3

¹⁵⁰ Sullivan, *The Politics of the Pantomime*, p. 66-67

and those at Drury Lane which may explain the emphasis on the local nature of productions in his advertising, as Sullivan has noted. The strap line on the classified advertisement for the opening performance of the *Forty Thieves* in the *Manchester Guardian* was the 'Production of a new and entirely original comic pantomime.'¹⁵¹ It is likely that Bainbridge would have witnessed the pantomimes at Drury Lane and quite possible that his 'all-accomplished lieutenant' Doyle would also have done so.¹⁵² It would then be difficult to not, at the very least, be influenced when creating their own pantomimes, if not deliberately making near copies with local references included.

The failure of the *Forty Thieves* at the Theatre Royal 1888-1889

Bainbridge scaled down the grandeur of the 1887-88 pantomime, following his legal issue with Harris. The local journal *Black and White* commented that:

When I say that judged by the ordinary Royal standard, 'Old Mother Goose and the Sleeping Beauty' is not a gorgeous pantomime, it must not be supposed that it is poorly staged, but simply that there are no processions of "amazons in glittering armour;" in short, that the fun is more prominent than the spectacular part of the business, a state of things which no one is likely to grumble at.¹⁵³

Unfortunately, Bainbridge did not remember that for the *Forty Thieves* in 1888, when it was noted that there was a return to extravagance. The fact that there is no 'dark scene' at the opening of either show, as remarked on by Michael Booth in relation to the Drury Lane production, suggests that the two productions were staged in a

¹⁵¹ *Manchester Times*. 22 December 1888. p. 2

¹⁵² *Manchester Guardian*, 1 December 1888. p. 6

¹⁵³ *Black and White*. 20 January 1888. p. 34

similar way.¹⁵⁴ If Bainbridge's *Forty Thieves* was not produced with some collaboration from Augustus Harris, then indications are that the Manchester production made efforts to copy it.

The Drury Lane production of the *Forty Thieves* concluded with a procession that celebrated the Queen's forthcoming Jubilee. In the Manchester production two years after the Jubilee, the finale of the pantomime was a transformation scene with a more local theme and not a procession. The pantomime book credits Doyle as having written the libretto 'expressly for this Theatre.' The book also credits Harry Potts and W. Muir as the resident scenic artists in the listing of the Theatre Royal staff. The reviews make reference to scenery painted by Potts and H. P. Ryan. Manchester had at least some of its own scenery then, but it is not impossible that some costumes and properties could have been hired from Drury Lane.

Booth discusses Augustus Harris' 1886-1887 production of the *Forty Thieves* saying:

It was such a luxurious production that estimates of its cost were put at between £15,000 and £20,000; it certainly outdid all its Drury Lane predecessors in show and expense.¹⁵⁵

Two years after the production appeared at Drury Lane the *Manchester Times* reviewer of the Manchester production commented that 'Mr. Doyle begins at the beginning of the story and dispenses with supernatural preliminaries.'¹⁵⁶ The references to Harris dispensing with the 'dark scene' indicate a similarity with the Manchester production in which Doyle departed from his previous style. If Doyle, by

¹⁵⁴ Booth, Michael R. (1981) *Victorian Spectacular Theatre 1850-1901*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul. p. 87

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ *Manchester Times*. 29 December 1888. p. 8

himself or under instruction from Bainbridge, aimed to copy the Drury Lane production too closely, such limitations on Doyle may have had an adverse affect on the Manchester production.

The excesses of the staging of the spectacular form of pantomime at the height of its popularity in the 1880s cannot be over estimated. Massive investment in lavish costumes and properties, along with the employment of vast numbers of performers and the technical complexities of transformation scenes and other special effects required theatre managements to create an enormous budget for their 'annual'. Opting out was not possible as the managers were not only caught up in a race to meet audience expectations, but needed to be able to compete effectively with the city's other theatres as each vied to be ranked as the best. The return to spectacle with the *Forty Thieves* met with the approval of the *Manchester Times* reviewer who appreciated that 'The scenery is more than usually brilliant; and the dresses and spectacular effects are unlikely to be eclipsed elsewhere.'¹⁵⁷

The *Manchester Times* reviewer added to his approval of the sets and costumes saying:

The pantomime, moreover, has the merit of being well acted. The company is composed of artists who, with a trifling exception, draw neither their inspiration nor their manners from the music halls. And when we add that Mr T. F. Doyle has again written the book we have fitly capped the meed of praise.¹⁵⁸

The *Era*, however, was somewhat critical of Doyle because he 'makes a rather too extensive use of punning, but on the whole the book is well written.'¹⁵⁹ The

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

overall verdict of the *Forty Thieves* on Christmas Eve in the *Manchester Guardian* had been a little more guarded:

On the whole, the fair verdict appears to us to be that the company gives an all-round performance of considerable merit, and that the spectacular part of the entertainment is first-rate, but that it somewhat lacks salient features, over and above its first-rate acrobatic element, and that to make the great success which is in sight quite certain such features should if possible be found.¹⁶⁰

With hindsight the advice that the pantomime needed to include more novelty and music hall acts in order to become a 'great success' is an early indication of that it was not quite hitting the right note with audiences, whilst Bainbridge's investment in the spectacular had achieved his ambition it seems.

In every review and comment on the *Forty Thieves* the acrobatic act the Schaafer Troupe were well received. Comparing what was said about the Theatre Royal pantomime with the other pantomimes in Manchester for that year it becomes apparent, that while the other major theatres continued to include spectacular effects in their pantomimes, this year saw them rebalance the emphasis of the entertainment to incorporate more music hall acts and more of the current popular music hall songs that audiences were already familiar with and could sing along to. Possibly, trying to repeat the London success of two years previous, and without the music hall stars of the Drury Lane production, wrong-footed Bainbridge and Doyle, leaving the Theatre Royal pantomime just slightly old-fashioned and unable to capture the interest of the public. Bainbridge and Doyle can be seen here perhaps to have failed to anticipate this trend in audience taste that had been recognized and capitalized on by Garcia and Ramsay. By February 1889, the second reviews and a number of subsequent

¹⁶⁰ *Manchester Guardian*. 24 December 1888. p. 5

articles, while being generally supportive of Bainbridge and Doyle personally, indicate some perceived weaknesses in the production and likely reasons for it being unable to compete effectively for audiences against the pantomimes appearing in Manchester's other major pantomime houses.

The *Manchester Guardian*, on 5 February, suggested that the *Forty Thieves* was becoming a little stale. 'The effect of a run of several weeks upon an average pantomime is not wholly beneficial. The plot and story of the book almost disappear, and unless they are replaced by something very entertaining in the way of "gags" or "business," we confess that we miss them.'¹⁶¹ The reviewer does go on to suggest that 'On the other hand, all the military evolutions, ballets, and spectacular effects for which this theatre is so deservedly famous become as perfect as good stage management, training and practice can make them.'¹⁶² This cannot, however, save *The Forty Thieves* from appearing to compare unfavourably with *Aladdin* at the Comedy Theatre where:

At this theatre they seem to have published, as it were, a second edition of the pantomime. Not that the old edition was by any means tiring the audiences, if we may judge by the numbers present, but because the management seem inclined to think that plenty of novelty is a good thing.'¹⁶³

There is also an indication that attendances at the Theatre Royal were falling:

The Schaafer troupe of acrobats are to be seen at every performance, and if the pantomime depended on their exertions alone, it would, we think, draw crowded houses to witness their wonderful evolutions.'¹⁶⁴

¹⁶¹ *Manchester Guardian*. 5 February 1889. p. 5

¹⁶² *Ibid.*

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

Edward Garcia, proprietor of the Comedy Theatre, had a background as a music hall caterer and at this time owned also the Folly music hall further down Peter Street on the opposite side to the Comedy Theatre. The Folly, in which Bainbridge owned one hundred £1 shares, was then the largest music hall in Manchester, though soon to face competition from the new Palace Theatre of Varieties. It is unsurprising therefore that Garcia was best placed to take advantage of the rise of music hall and to incorporate it most effectively into his pantomimes. He extended the appeal of his pantomime into February by introducing a second edition and changing acts to ensure continued 'novelty' that rewarded audiences making a return visit later in the season. This demand for the inclusion of music hall, songs, stars and acts would continue to increase through into the 1890s.

Along with the success of Garcia's pantomime at the Comedy Theatre, Thomas Ramsay, the manager who would become Bainbridge's replacement at the Theatre Royal, when asked in 1893 which of his pantomimes had had the longest run recalled that it was *Sinbad the Sailor*, at the Prince's Theatre during the last year of my manager there. That would be in 1888. *Sinbad* was played for thirteen weeks.¹⁶⁵ When his interviewer pointed out that 'in recent years managers had not striven after the magnificent in the production of pantomimes, to the extent that they strove not very long ago,' Ramsay agreed, stating that the taste for "elaborate displays and long processions" had passed, and that "long ballets" were "now out of favour".¹⁶⁶ In the same interview he continued to explain that 'The taste for the gorgeous has been

¹⁶⁵ *Manchester Times*, 22 December 1893. p. 8

¹⁶⁶ See appendix 4 (ii) for an illustration of Ramsay's pantomime *Cinderella* from the 1891-92 season

dying for some time, and what the people of to-day undoubtedly want is a funny pantomime – something brisk and bright, that will make them laugh'.¹⁶⁷

The difficulty facing the Theatre Royal in its bid to increase ticket sales for the *Forty Thieves* was not limited to the successful productions of its competitors. The original music composed for the pantomime could not compete with the choice of current popular songs being incorporated into the rival theatres' pantomimes.

By 13 February, as the end of the pantomime season approached, the *Manchester Guardian* published an article discussing the original music that had been heard at that year's pantomimes. The work of R. E. Lawson at the Theatre Royal was commended. 'Perhaps there is an absence of the larger movements which in previous years have accompanied grand spectacular scenes at this theatre, but Mr. Lawson's task has everywhere been performed with tact and judgment.'¹⁶⁸

In earlier reviews an absence of catchphrases amongst the comic characters had been commented on along with a lack of popular songs 'The songs too are weak. In only one case was the refrain taken up by the audience, and some one really popular song is almost essential to a pantomime.'¹⁶⁹ What the audience wanted now, in short, was familiar songs from the music halls that they could sing along with, as was popular with audiences in London. Along with the earlier quotation that referred to performers who 'draw neither their inspiration nor their manners from the music halls' this suggests that there was little in the *Forty Thieves*

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

¹⁶⁸ *Manchester Guardian*. 13 February 1889. p. 5

¹⁶⁹ *Manchester Times*. 29 December 1888. p. 8

that would appeal to the regular visitors to the music halls.¹⁷⁰ With the especially successful pantomimes at the Prince's and Comedy theatres that year it was perhaps inevitable that the Theatre Royal pantomime would struggle to attract the necessary attendances.

By the end of the nineteenth century, following the introduction of music hall stars and their routines and ever-increasing spectacle, pantomimes had evolved once again, but continued to appeal to a wide cross-section of the community.¹⁷¹

Jim Davis discusses the influence of the mid-century pantomime which due to 'its emphasis on spectacle and the non-verbal' is allowed 'to function as a democratic medium socially, as a satirical and even subversive medium politically, and as a form of advocacy for consumerism materially.' As he says, 'It may well be that all these traits continued as pantomime changed its forms and structures to emerge in the more hybrid and modern manifestations that became familiar from the end of the nineteenth century.'¹⁷² The further evolution of pantomime to become increasingly dominated by music hall acts suggests perhaps a cyclical nature. The extravagant forms of pantomime popular in the 1880s, presented spectacular scenes to the audience, but required them only to gasp in amazement rather than present opportunities for audience participation that had been an essential part of the mid-Victorian pantomimes. The inclusion of music hall functioned to redress this balance in the form of pantomime that became closer to variety theatre in the 1890s. This was not entirely new then, but a more modern version of the audience participation that had featured more strongly in the mid-Victorian era, supporting Davis's theory about the function of pantomime operating as 'a democratic medium socially.'

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

¹⁷¹ Davis, Jim, *Victorian Pantomime*, p. 2

¹⁷² Ibid. p. 5

The Failure to Connect with the Audience

In an article entitled 'Preparing the Pantomime,' published at Christmas 1888 the *Manchester Guardian* observed that:

If a caterer is not in touch with the people for whom he provides, and does not know their palate to a nicety, he is apt to make sad mistakes by endeavouring to foist upon them unpalatable commodities, which they reject, to the consequent shrinking of his funds.¹⁷³

Ironically, this was published at the exact moment that Bainbridge made this mistake. The judgment was a fine one. Prior to the beginning of that year's pantomime season there were reports of a letter signed by a group of ladies 'whose names include some of the best known in Manchester' that had been sent to the lessees of all the Manchester theatres.¹⁷⁴ They objected to indecent costumes, the language used and the representation of drunkenness on the stage, and appealed for a more respectable form of pantomime to be presented in the theatres. The paper commented that

There can be no doubt, it seems to us, that these ladies represent a large body of opinion, any more than it can be doubted that pantomime has of late years become less and less suited for children. The modern pantomime is in fact little but a spectacular burlesque, with large borrowings from the music halls.¹⁷⁵

The paper went on to express the view that 'The managers, we suppose, would answer that they are and must be business men first of all, and they must give the public what the great mass of the public demand,'¹⁷⁶ whilst suggesting also that:

¹⁷³ *Manchester Guardian*, 19 December 1888. p. 5

¹⁷⁴ *Manchester Guardian*, 11 December 1888. p. 5

¹⁷⁵ *Manchester Guardian*, 5 February 1889. p. 5

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

Of course they may be mistaken in their view of the public taste and that this is what the “appeal” apparently intends to hint. We confess we should like to see the experiment of a real good old-fashioned children’s pantomime – with little dancing, little singing and the most detailed and faithful development possible of the fairytale - tried in at least one of the Manchester theatres this Christmas. The result of the experiment would probably be a welcome surprise to the bold manager who tried it.¹⁷⁷

The *Manchester Times* review of *Aladdin*, at the Comedy Theatre reported the appearance of the theatre manager on the opening night. ‘During the performance on Saturday evening Mr. Edward Garcia appeared on the stage and was received with hearty applause. He said he came, as the servant of the public, to render an account of his stewardship during another year.’ The report continued to say that:

He desired especially to refer to a letter which, in common with the theatrical lessees of the city, he received a little while ago, signed by a number of ladies. The communication referred to the pantomimes, and made certain suggestions. Prior to receiving that letter the subject with which it dealt had had his earnest consideration. He believed that the Christmas entertainment he had provided would meet the views of those who signed the memorial. He had endeavoured at any rate to produce a pantomime that would please everybody and offend none. (Applause) Everything that could be regarded as suggestive or vulgar had been avoided. An honest effort had been made to keep the pantomime free from coarseness, and he trusted the result would be satisfactory. The ladies and gentlemen engaged for the leading parts held prominent positions in the profession, and did not rely for success on vulgarity of any kind.¹⁷⁸

This exercise in public relations appears to have been a carefully planned pre-emptive move by Garcia, designed to deflect attention from the content of the pantomime. In its review of *Aladdin* the *Manchester Guardian* responded to Garcia’s speech saying:

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

¹⁷⁸ *Manchester Times*, 29 December 1888. p. 8

It is a thoroughly bright and deserves to be a thoroughly popular pantomime, but we fail to recognise the influence of the “ladies petition,” which Mr. Garcia insisted had had so great an effect on his managerial mind. We are by no means certain that a manager could not produce a paying pantomime which should yet be in perfect taste throughout, but it is very evident that managers themselves think differently. After all “the stage but echoes back the public voice,” and one has only to note the distribution of the applause to be assured that in a pantomime the public does demand buffoonery, wild burlesque, the maddest horse-play and a certain amount of vulgarity. At the same time we are convinced that the public knows how to keep these things in bounds.¹⁷⁹

The newspaper offers the voice of reason tempering the extreme views of both sides of the argument and crediting the mass of the public with the ability to make a sensible and informed judgment without the fear of all descending into a morass of depravity. Certainly a reading of the pantomime books for *Aladdin* and the other Manchester pantomimes the 1888-89, as the newspaper suggested does not show their moral tone to be any different than those of the previous year. The point to be made here is that Garcia was a greater politician than Bainbridge in using his skills in public relations to manipulate the public mind to believe that their concerns were being addressed, and that his 1888-89 pantomime would be more wholesome in its content than in recent years, before it had even been reviewed.

The Temperance movement was especially strong in Manchester and, as the complaint addressed by Edward Garcia above shows, it was a regular complaint made against the pantomimes that they were no longer a suitable entertainment for children. The drunken state of Cassim, one of the characters from Bainbridge’s *Forty Thieves*, was a plot device that allowed him to forget the password to the robbers cave and to be caught by them. It was also the cause of much comic business. The *Manchester Times* described how ‘Having helped himself to the treasures of the cave

¹⁷⁹ *Manchester Guardian*, 24 December 1888. p. 5

Cassim seals his fate by getting drunk and forgetting the “open sesame.”¹⁸⁰ Even here then the *Forty Thieves* would displease an influential and vociferous minority in the community.

Introducing a second edition and changing acts to ensure ‘novelty’ that rewarded audiences making a return visit later in the season as we have seen prolonged its popularity. It remains the case though that the demand for the inclusion of music hall, songs, stars and acts would continue to increase through into the 1890s. Garcia succeeded in making the right judgments about the pantomime tastes of potential audiences for Christmas 1888. The hazard of theatrical speculation to which Bainbridge referred would prove true though, when Garcia was himself declared bankrupt owing £6000 in 1890, following the failure of the Princess’s Music Hall in Leeds.

It would not be possible to discuss late Victorian pantomime without considering also the parallel rise of music hall as a form of popular entertainment. There was much criticism of pantomimes that absorbed elements of music hall from quarters that demanded an imagined ‘traditional’ pantomime. The traditional pantomime that people who held this view each had was an individual idea of what a ‘traditional’ pantomime was and they would be unable to agree on a definitive form. Writing in 1949, A. E. Wilson noted that everyone has a notion of ‘traditional’ pantomime that matches the style of pantomime they recall from their own childhood saying:

Fifty years ago playgoers declared that there was nothing like the pantomimes of their boyhood to be seen and on every such occasion there have been

¹⁸⁰ *Manchester Times*, 29 December 1888. p. 5

many who have not hesitated to say: "pantomime is dying." I have read such a statement in the newspaper of a hundred years or more ago.¹⁸¹

It was inevitable that pantomime would adopt elements of music hall as the music halls were where a large proportion of the community chose to spend their leisure time. As music hall moved to become more respectable and evolved into variety theatre, pantomime functioned as the bridge between music hall and the legitimate theatre. In the introduction to the collection of essays on *Victorian Pantomime* Jim Davis writes that:

Pantomime in the Victorian era was not only an all-pervasive form of popular entertainment, but also functioned as a way of seeing, even as a metaphor, in shaping perceptions of the contemporary world in just as forceful a way as has long been credited to melodrama.¹⁸²

As music hall became all-pervasive in pantomime in the 1890s I suggest that it took on that role of reflecting a heightened version everyday life back to the audience, accounting in part for its popularity within pantomime. The Bainbridge bankruptcy can be seen to mark the moment when music hall moved from being an additional feature of pantomime to an essential core element by which it could be identified.

The role of Bainbridge's senior staff in the theatre's management and finances

At the time of his bankruptcy Bainbridge employed a sizeable senior management team in post at the Theatre Royal comprising the Stage Manager – Thomas F. Doyle, an Acting Manager – Thomas Manchester, and a Business Manager - John H. Stringer. R. E. Lawson was the resident Musical Director and H. Potts and W. Muir were credited as the Scenic Artists.

¹⁸¹ Wilson, A. E. (1949) *The Story of Pantomime*. London: Home and Van Thal. p. 133

¹⁸² Davis, Jim, *Victorian Pantomime*, p. 2

Bainbridge himself remained in the habit of travelling regularly between Manchester and London. As a member, he frequented a number of gentlemen's clubs and he was, as the details of his assets shown above indicate, a freemason.¹⁸³ The day to day operation of the theatre was then in the hands of the three experienced members of staff, Stringer, Manchester and Doyle. His relations with these staff and the instructions under which they worked cannot be known and the responsibility for the finances and management remain with Bainbridge himself. His limited recall of his own finances revealed at the bankruptcy hearing support the view that he was not as well acquainted with the affairs of the theatre and its operation as he should have been. The actions of his staff, their responses to his business decisions, and what was being spent without doubt had an important influence on the fortunes of the theatre.¹⁸⁴

There is more evidence to allow the nine year working relationship between Bainbridge and T. F. Doyle to be examined here in some detail to understand better Doyle's role and how the relationship functioned. Doyle, I suggest, held a position of more than usual influence for a stage manager, as Bainbridge had little experience of theatre when he arrived at the Theatre Royal, especially the technical aspects of its management. Doyle was also already a familiar figure to Bainbridge's audiences.

¹⁸³ Augustus Harris, John Pitt Hardacre and many of the other theatre managers were also freemasons.

¹⁸⁴ It is worthy of note here that John Stringer became the Business Manager in 1887, on the departure of Peter Watson. Both were known as managers in the Manchester theatres and Watson would later become manager at the Palace of Varieties. Watson's departure coincided with the Augustus Harris *Bluebeard* case referred to above. This raises the question as to why Watson left. It is only possible to speculate about whether he left amicably, or if Bainbridge blamed him for the events. It may also be the case that he recognised the bankruptcy looming and chose to leave, unhappy with the way Bainbridge was conducting the theatre, as this could potentially have a detrimental effect on his own reputation. We cannot know, but the date remains significant.

Bainbridge would therefore have been dependent on Doyle from the early days of their association.

Thomas Finnellan Doyle was born in Ireland in 1838. The earliest reference I have discovered for him in Manchester is his appearance in the pantomime *Red Riding Hood and Little Bo Peep* at the Theatre Royal at Christmas 1874. He had a small comic part playing 'Fox' where his performance was well received:

The Fox, Mr T. F. Doyle, is undoubtedly the most amusing character in the piece. This animal is supposed to be mischievous rather than wicked, and, unlike the wolf, only by accident a villain.¹⁸⁵

Early in 1880 the same paper commented that Manchester's Queen's theatre had a new stock company and that

The members of the old company have been scattered in different directions since last December; Mr. Doyle for instance having gone to Liverpool – a loss not easy to repair.¹⁸⁶

Later the same year though he had returned to Manchester to become stage manager for Bainbridge at the Theatre Royal, also taking a role during the period from 1881-83 when Bainbridge was lessee of the Liverpool Royal Court theatre. In all references to Doyle in the newspapers, especially in the pantomime reviews the authors give no introduction to Doyle assuming that the reader knows who he is. This indicates the length of his presence in the theatrical life of the city and his popularity with Manchester audiences.

In considering the Bainbridge era at the Theatre Royal and how he descended into bankruptcy, it is important to raise the question as to what role Doyle might have

¹⁸⁵ *Manchester Guardian*, 21 December 1874. p. 6

¹⁸⁶ *Manchester Guardian*, 10 March 1880. p. 7

played. It is not possible to know with certainty how the relationship between Bainbridge and Doyle functioned, but some discussion is useful here to consider whether Bainbridge regarded Doyle as an employee to follow instructions or as does perhaps seem more likely that the man consistently referred to in the newspapers as 'Captain Bainbridge's able lieutenant' was allowed a greater influence in the operation of the theatre.

Doyle was more than eight years older than Bainbridge. He had also begun his theatrical career at a much younger age as a performer, and had travelled to work in many theatres as a comic actor, stage manager and later as the author of pantomime libretti. By 1880 when he took up the post of stage manager in Manchester, he may well have had nearly thirty years experience while Bainbridge was by his own later admission a novice in the world of theatrical management.

Whilst an employee at the Theatre Royal Doyle also created his own comic touring theatre company, though this appears not to have been long lived. He also maintained a relationship with the Liverpool theatres where he and his company appeared. This was announced in the *Manchester Guardian* which said 'The old Manchester favourite; Mr T. F. Doyle has organised a company which will commence a provincial tour at the Theatre Royal, Bradford, on August 13th, opening with "On the Bench" and "Columbus the Younger."¹⁸⁷ In August they played at the Prince's Theatre in Manchester when the reviewer, after expressing some concern over the general nature of 'comedy drama' gave a mostly favourable and quite detailed review, noting that 'Mr T. F. Doyle is a popular and careful comedian, and he has many friends who will no doubt wish him success in his enterprise as the manager of

¹⁸⁷ *Manchester Guardian*, 18 June 1883. p. 6

a company under his own name.¹⁸⁸ Doyle's reputation as a popular performer amongst Manchester audiences made him a useful addition to Bainbridge's operation beyond his stage management role.

The tour was timed to take place when the Theatre Royal was quiet and he could best be spared from his duties there, and while Bainbridge was in the process of selling his interests in Liverpool. Now aged forty-five it can be seen that Doyle had ambitions of his own, not only in management, but also to increase the opportunities for him to continue to perform. It is only possible to speculate, however, about how successful this venture was for him financially, and how he reacted to seeing the effects of the financial troubles of his employer.

I have been unable at the time of writing to find any letters from Doyle or interviews with him in newspapers either in Manchester or his later career in Sheffield. It is unfortunate that a man who was so articulate on the stage and in the librettos to his many successful pantomimes should have no voice. We hear very little of Doyle's voice to give any direct information about how he viewed the job or how to he believed theatre should be produced. Only in the arguments that preface his pantomime books for *Bluebeard* (1886) and *Old Mother Goose and the Sleeping Beauty* (1887) does Doyle address the reader and these comments relate only to the story of the pantomime that they are about to see.

The role of a Victorian Stage Manager would have been considerably different to the twenty-first century interpretation of that position. It also varied from theatre to theatre, but the title as it was used in the nineteenth century suggested a post with a

¹⁸⁸ Manchester Guardian, 22 August 1883. p. 8

great deal of influence in more in line with that of a modern creative director. As such Doyle would be making significant decisions in what appeared on the stage at the pantomime. In the days of the stock company when the theatres created their own productions, this has particular significance. As the stock system declined in favour of hosting the productions of touring companies, the resident stage manager would provide technical services and represent the house. The pantomime would be his main opportunity each year to demonstrate his own creative abilities and a matter of pride for the theatre and its staff.

In the *Britannia Diaries of Frederick Wilton*, Jim Davis has summarized the duties of stage manager that were performed by Wilton at the Britannia theatre in London during the mid Victorian era. Wilton took up this post some thirty years earlier than Doyle was in residence in Manchester, but Doyle would no doubt have recognized much of the experience of Wilton's working day. As Davis says the 'functions as stage manager were many and various':¹⁸⁹

He was responsible for what happened on stage during performance; for marking up the scripts of new melodramas and pantomimes and ensuring that the carpenters, scene painters and property men created the effects required; and for rehearsing the play. [...] Another task was the drawing up of the weekly playbills and newspaper advertisements, as well as correcting the proofs once the playbill was printed. Just before the Christmas pantomime commenced he also had to compose and copy our pre-performance puffs for distribution to the newspapers.¹⁹⁰

¹⁸⁹ Davis, Jim (Ed.) (1992) *The Britannia Diaries 1863-1875: Selections for the Diaries of Frederick Wilton* London: The Society of Theatre Research. pp. 37-39

¹⁹⁰ Ibid. p. 37

In addition, Davis notes that the stage manager had duties for discharging staff 'Whilst new actors and actresses were hired by the management.' He also liaised with the authorities in matters related to licence transfers and renewals.¹⁹¹

In the case of Doyle, as the pantomime author, his role in the theatre had even greater influence. There is also evidence of Doyle's greater reputation as a pantomime author and interests outside of the Theatre Royal as early as 1884, when his libretto for *Cinderella*, 'localised by Edmund Finn,' was used at the Theatre Royal in Melbourne, Australia.¹⁹² I suggest that Doyle took a leading role in the creative control of the pantomime. If that was the case and he did not have equal responsibilities towards the financial control, his enthusiasm for creating the most magnificent pantomime in the city may have lead to excessive expenditure that Bainbridge was failing to monitor.

A further question arises as to how aware Doyle and other members of the staff may have been about the full extent of Bainbridge's financial difficulties. As creditors pursued payment, it is reasonable that, especially senior members of Bainbridge's management team would have recognised that shortages existed, but as Bainbridge continued to borrow money from his family to provide a temporary resolution to his problems, they may not have been properly aware of the finite nature of his resources.

At the beginning of December in 1888 the *Manchester Guardian* introduced the forthcoming pantomime at the Theatre Royal, the ill fated *Forty Thieves*, and

¹⁹¹ Ibid. p. 37-39

¹⁹² Fantasia, Josephine V. (1996) *Entrepreneurs, Empires and Pantomimes: J. C. Williamson's Pantomime Productions as a Site to Review the Cultural Construction of the Australian Theatre Industry, 1882 to 1914*. PhD thesis. The University of Sydney. p. 413

commented that four of the city's theatres were to produce pantomimes for the Christmas holiday season. Their expectations of Bainbridge and the pantomime at the Theatre Royal were high:

As in former years, we will give a few preliminary notes each week on each production – commencing this week with the Royal. Here Captain Bainbridge, with his all accomplished lieutenant in this particular line (Mr. T. F. Doyle), serves up one of his customary gorgeous displays in “The *Forty Thieves*.”¹⁹³

The paper gave credit to Doyle for the production and the article suggests that Bainbridge now allowed Doyle's contribution to be recognised, as can be seen in this comment:

We need only add that the libretto has been written and the pantomime designed by Mr. Doyle, and will be produced by him, under the general superintendence of Captain Bainbridge, on Saturday evening, 22nd Inst.¹⁹⁴

The wording of the credits on the cover of the book of words for the *Forty Thieves* would have had to have been approved by Bainbridge and it credits the originator of the pantomime as ‘GRAND CHRISTMAS PANTOMIME “The Forty Thieves,” – written expressly for this Theatre by T. F. Doyle.’ Then in smaller lettering below it states ‘and produced under the direction of Captain Bainbridge and the Author.’¹⁹⁵

The reviews of the 1888 pantomime the *Forty Thieves* as seen above were somewhat ambivalent towards Doyle's script especially when the second reviews came in after Christmas and the pantomime was known not be attracting the attendances expected. His use of a tried and tested formula may have been in need of refreshing to reflect the changes in audience tastes. At the end of 1889, following the bankruptcy at the Theatre Royal, Doyle was commissioned to write the libretto for

¹⁹³ *Manchester Guardian*, 1 December 1889. p. 9

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁵ Doyle, T. F. (1888) *Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves*. Theatre Royal, Manchester. Pantomime Book of Words.

the pantomime at the Queen's Theatre, the first for its new manager John Pitt Hardacre. In its first notice for *Robinson Crusoe* the *Manchester Guardian* complained that

It has a number of excellent points, but the effect as a whole is disappointing. This is in large part due to the treatment of the story. The author seems to have aimed at an acting pantomime, and a company has been brought together which could have done justice to a production on such lines, but as it stands at present nothing could be more loose and incoherent.¹⁹⁶

The review of *Robinson Crusoe* suggests the removal of some of the additional songs and that 'With some revision of this kind there is no reason why the pantomime should not become a success.'¹⁹⁷ The 'acting' pantomime, short on music hall and novelty acts was the main misjudgement of the current fashion for pantomime that had failed for Bainbridge the previous year. It is possible then that the actions of the reliable Doyle may have contributed to the failure that finally forced Bainbridge into bankruptcy.

All indications are that Bainbridge had great respect for Doyle. Bainbridge speaks only of himself and his own actions during the bankruptcy hearing. In seeking reasons to be blamed for his bankruptcy he speaks of 'bad business, the failure of the last pantomime, and the competition of new theatres in outlying towns as the cause of his failure,' with which this chapter opened.¹⁹⁸ He attacked the gossip about himself that was circulating in Manchester, but at no point did he attempt to apportion blame to the actions of any members of his staff. The owners of the theatre, the 'Manchester Theatre Royal Company Limited,' must also have been confident in the abilities of Doyle and Thomas Manchester as it was announced that

¹⁹⁶ *Manchester Guardian*, 26 December 1889. p. 8

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁸ *Evening Standard*, 27 March 1889. p. 3

they had been re-appointed as Stage Manager and Acting Manager respectively, when the company stepped in to temporarily manage the theatre on Bainbridge's departure.¹⁹⁹

Conclusion

With hindsight it is possible to see in the detail of Captain Bainbridge's bankruptcy, issues that were common in theatres across the country, but also in this case specific to Manchester. Bainbridge's experiences were not unusual, though perhaps on a larger scale than most. The timing of his bankruptcy illustrates the need of the theatre management to remain at all times aware of changes in the taste of their patrons. It is the nature of pantomime to be continually re-invented and to absorb new forms of popular commercial entertainment. Bainbridge's bankruptcy occurred when he failed to anticipate the public desire for a pantomime that more closely resembled music hall.

Captain Bainbridge's departure from the Theatre Royal brought about several changes in the management seats at some Manchester theatres that also coincided with movement at others. This meant that by the beginning of the first pantomime season of the 1890's the management of the Manchester theatres looked very different from that of the previous year.

Bainbridge was one of the theatre managers who contributed to the 'Tyranny of Pantomime' debate in September 1889. Writing about the failure of his last pantomime and still in denial about his history of insolvency, he complained that he

¹⁹⁹ *Manchester Guardian*, 21 March 1889. p. 8

had been forced into bankruptcy when 'Rumour with its ever-envious and bitter tongue gave out that "I was bankrupt."' He went on to state that:

The result everyone knows; but I am satisfied in my own mind, under these very damaging rumours, that nothing I could have been done or presented would have been successful. This was the only failure I had out of the nine pantomimes I produced.²⁰⁰

Whilst it is possible that some of the public may have been wary of the quality of the pantomime before it opened, the reviews and word of mouth should have largely quashed rumours about the standard of the pantomime, but the details of his insolvency were obviously true and difficult to contain when they were a matter of public record. At the time of his bankruptcy he owed '£987. 7s. 6d. 'for law costs,'²⁰¹ accrued because 'He had had 20 writs served upon within the last 12 months, and several creditors had issued executions, which had brought about further losses by forced sales.'²⁰² Bainbridge had been operating on the brink of bankruptcy for the majority of his tenure of the Theatre Royal and news of the writs must have reached many people, especially the journalists responsible for reviewing the pantomime. His ability to control of the situation crumbled as his creditors moved in and he finally toppled into bankruptcy with the failure of the *Forty Thieves*.

Bainbridge's claim that 'theatres in outlying towns' contributed to his financial difficulties are contradicted by the major successes of the pantomimes during the 1888-1889 season at The Prince's Theatre and The Comedy Theatre. During his tenure of the Theatre Royal the fiercest competition was from these theatres in close proximity, The Comedy having only opened in 1884.

²⁰⁰ *Manchester Guardian*, 11 September 1889. p. 7

²⁰¹ *Manchester Times*, 30 March 1889. p. 3

²⁰² *Manchester Times*, 6 April 1889. p. 3

It is also the case that some of the judgments to be made about where Bainbridge went wrong could not be made until some years had passed and the developments and changes in public taste can be viewed from a distance. For all that Bainbridge failed to control his finances; he must earn some respect for managing to keep the theatre open during five years of insolvency.

CHAPTER TWO

THE PANTOMIME AND MUSIC HALL DEBATES IN

THE *MANCHESTER GUARDIAN* 1889

The “critic jury of the pit” will at this season of the year unbend to laugh over the follies of pantomime, but is stern to rebuke mere demoralising exhibitions, and may be left to enjoy its annual rough-and-tumble pantomime undisturbed by visions of a more graceful entertainment.²⁰³

Several months after the bankruptcy of Captain Bainbridge, in the autumn of 1889, two parallel but connected debates concerning pantomime and the music hall appeared in the correspondence pages of the *Manchester Guardian* under the headings the ‘Proposed “Palace of Varieties”’ and the ‘Tyranny of Pantomime’.²⁰⁴ At their core they reflected topics that were current in the national debate concerning the problem of leisure. The ‘Letters to the Editor’ page of the *Manchester Guardian* became the arena where correspondents tested to their utmost the extremes of acceptability concerning what should be allowed on British stages, and questioned the new behaviours of audiences who were now benefitting from the comparative increases in leisure time and disposable income, and choices about how to use their free time.

The above quotation from the reviews for Captain Bainbridge’s final pantomime gives credit to the audience for being able to discern what is good or bad

²⁰³ *Manchester Guardian*, 24 December 1888. p. 5

²⁰⁴ Note: For the purpose of this chapter, and due to the quantity of letters, discussion is limited largely to the letters appearing in the *Manchester Guardian* where the debate originated, but it is the case that it created much interest in the city at the time and that other newspapers in Manchester reported on the topic, published correspondence and expressed their own views. This provides a rich source of primary evidence of giving voice to the views expressed by members of the audience for such entertainments and the wider public in their own words.

and what is morally acceptable. There may have been some influence from advertising and comment in the press, but they now had the ultimate sanction in the resulting attendances figures and ticket sales. Central to the purpose of this chapter is an opportunity to discover the opinions of the general public in their own words and to gain some understanding of the balance of public opinion in favour or otherwise of pantomime and music hall. In an editorial piece that accompanied the two debates the *Manchester Guardian* stated:

The whole discussion is one more illustration, and an extremely cogent one, of the monstrous absurdity of the system which gives the citizens of Manchester no voice – except such as they may utter in our columns – in the settlement of a question which so nearly concerns them.²⁰⁵

This comment was directed initially at the question of the licensing of theatres and music halls for the sale of strong drink. The debate serves here to draw attention to the role of the newspaper as a forum for its readers to make their individual and collective opinions heard at a time when they had few other opportunities. There is also the possibility of there being a further unacknowledged agenda, perhaps one that the campaigners were not themselves aware of. The letters quoted reveal the insecurities of the middle classes as the working classes no longer looked to them for the lead, but instead made their own choices. Variety theatre, intended to give a greater reputation for respectability that would appeal to the middle classes, now threatened to undermine support for their campaign from a different quarter.

Asa Briggs has argued that as early as the 1840s:

contemporary observers, British and foreign, came to the conclusion that the social divisions of Manchester were creative rather than destructive, that they

²⁰⁵ *Manchester Guardian*, 11 September 1889. p. 5

generated something more than riots and disturbances, and that they deserved prophets rather than policemen to understand them.²⁰⁶

This contrast between Manchester and what he suggests was the case in other towns and cities, identifies the city as a case study worthy of interest. His comment refers to the outspoken nature of its people and their ability to adapt to new circumstances that enabled Manchester to become a leading centre for progress and innovation in the Victorian era.

The debates originated from Manchester's middle classes who indulged in the 'censorious interference' identified in my Introduction.²⁰⁷ As Briggs states: 'The natural language of Manchester, when it turned from interest to principle, and from manufacturers and merchants to 'patriots' and 'deliverers,' was the language of the Bible.'²⁰⁸ It is possible to identify some of the authors and the offices that some of them held. The non-conformists were strongly linked to the temperance campaigners with whom they formed an alliance to attack the 'unwholesome amusement' they saw encroaching into the cultural spaces of the city.

Peter Bailey draws attention to the middle-class experiences of leisure in the late Victorian period and the shift towards commercialization and mass entertainment saying 'It is important that the middle classes not be left neglected in the growing research into the history of leisure in the nineteenth century, for they did much to determine the moral and ideological climate of its growth.'²⁰⁹

²⁰⁶ Briggs, Asa (1968) *Victorian Cities*. London: Penguin Books (1990). p. 95

²⁰⁷ Thompson, F. M. L. (1988) *The Rise of Respectable Society: A Social History of Victorian Britain, 1830-1900*. London: Fontana. p. 250

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p.123

²⁰⁹ Bailey, Peter (1998) *Popular Culture and Performance in the Victorian City*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. p. 29

Simon Gunn answers Bailey's call and has used Manchester as a case study in his research into the culture of the Victorian middle classes. He speaks also of 'a relative paucity of research' into middle-class culture that 'contrasts with the profusion of studies of Victorian popular culture, of music hall, melodrama, the pub, popular religion, the social organisations of the nascent labour movement.'²¹⁰ Taking up the challenge, Gunn has observed that 'If religion was one axis of the culture of middle-class respectability, then art was the other.'²¹¹ Pantomime and music hall were the antithesis of the high culture of classical music and 'the drama' favoured by the church and temperance reformers, and as such were thorns to be eliminated from the sides of their model of a cultural ideal for Manchester. Here then is another 'creative social division' struggle in the evolution of Manchester's cultural identity with its divisions along class lines. Civic pride was always close to the hearts of Mancunians and the introduction of the 'alien capitalists' thread can be seen to have been a trump card played to attract a response from the increasingly secular community of Manchester unmoved by moral arguments.

With the benefit of hindsight and being able to assess the parallel debates in their entirety, the modern researcher is able to observe features and patterns in the publication of the letters that suggest connections between some of the authors, and that the originators had colluded to provoke and direct the debate and to plant seeds

²¹⁰ Gunn, Simon (2000) *The Public Culture of the Victorian Middle Class: Ritual and Authority in the English Industrial City, 1840-1914*. Manchester: Manchester University Press. p. 2

²¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 134

of concern about the proposed variety theatre into the minds of the mass of the citizens of Manchester.²¹²

Manchester was a stronghold of the temperance movement and the twin forms of commercial theatre were regarded by them and many groups in the community with religious affiliations, as vulgar, and a threat to decency and the moral welfare of citizens. The attempts to manipulate public opinion aroused strong emotion amongst correspondents. Here I examine the contents of the parallel debates for their significance to Manchester specifically, to discover the function of pantomime and music hall in the cultural and political struggle taking place at the local level at a specific moment in time. As the debates unfolded in Manchester they were being watched keenly around the country as a microcosm of similar topics relevant to the evolution of commercial entertainment being experienced in other cities and at a national level. This is evident in a number of letters contributed to the debate that were not local in origin.

A case might be made that pantomime now existed in the shadow of music hall even on its own territory of the theatre, because of its dependency on the stars and acts adopted from music hall to win its audience. Meanwhile music hall relied on its inclusion in pantomime to appear on the stage of legitimate theatres in its ambition to become a 'respectable' form of entertainment. Caroline Radcliffe has alluded to the progress of music hall towards respectability through the example of Dan Leno

²¹² Questions arise about the authenticity of some of the letters and whether they did originate from the source indicated by the signature. These questions were also asked by correspondents in later columns of the paper. The denouement of the debate is arguably performative as authors adopted different personas to advocate their views to the populace at large in a bid to win support for their position and influence public policy as it developed.

(1860-1904), ‘the acknowledged “head of the variety profession,”’ and possibly the most famous pantomime dame stating

Sovereignty of territory emerges through the circumstances of Leno’s Royal Command. In November 1901 he received the first *formal* command of a music hall artist to perform before any King or Queen. [...] The media emphasised that this was a honour previously granted only to the cream of the legitimate acting profession, notably Henry Irving, and as such was an immense recognition of the respectability the “variety profession” had gained.²¹³

While scholars have previously discussed the notoriety that accompanied the building of the Palace Theatre of Varieties, most notably in Chris Waters’s essay ‘Manchester Morality and London Capital,’ the discussion has focussed on the period from October 1890 onwards, when the new venue was nearing completion and its owners made their first licence application.²¹⁴ I concern myself here with the public war of letters that took place over twelve months earlier, where the roots of the conflict can be seen and the lines of battle drawn. At this time the first physical manifestations of the new building were becoming apparent as the foundations began to be excavated.

The ‘Proposed Palace of Varieties’ correspondence gives the impression that its opening letters at least were orchestrated by the alliance between members of the churches and temperance movement, though the membership of both was often made up broadly of the same people and their networks of associates. The ‘Tyranny of Pantomime’ thread appears to have been generated by chance as its content grew from a single complaint that referred only the monopoly of pantomime in the city’s

²¹³ Radcliffe, Caroline (2006) ‘Dan Leno: Cultural Hegemony in the Victorian Theatre’. Unpublished PhD thesis, Royal Holloway, University of London. p. 200

²¹⁴ Waters, Chris (1986) ‘Manchester Morality and London Capital: The Battle over the Palace of Varieties’ in Bailey, Peter (ed.), *Music Hall: The Business of Pleasure* Milton Keynes: Open University Press. p. 161, n. 62

theatres at Christmas time.²¹⁵ This theme was developed by later correspondents to question the moral values being presented on stage, to mourn the loss of what they perceived to be an innocent children's entertainment and to criticize the very limited number of titles that were repeated each year. In order to examine the arguments being made it is necessary to consider the allegiances of the *Manchester Guardian* itself as the stage on which the debates took place.

Charles Prestwich Scott and the Manchester Guardian

The *Manchester Guardian* had been founded in 1821 as a radical response to the Peterloo Massacre of 1819. By the late nineteenth century it was a successful regional daily newspaper with a national, largely middle-class, readership. In 1889 its editor was the well known and much respected Charles Prestwich Scott. He would hold this post for fifty-nine years, the last thirty of these as proprietor and as will be seen his influence in Manchester extended beyond his newspaper. Referring to Scott's first thirty years as editor, his biographer J. L. Hammond quotes J. L. Garvin, a noted journalist later to become editor of the *Observer*, as writing:

In the first half of those thirty years the *Manchester Guardian* had become a paper that gave the educated public of Manchester all that the *Times* gave to the educated people of London. In the second half it became, in Mr Garvin's words, 'a paper that the whole world had to reckon with.'²¹⁶

Scott was supportive of the theatre in general and from the 1880s onwards appointed some of the most respected dramatic critics of the day to review the Manchester theatre. Hammond noted that in the *Manchester Guardian*:

²¹⁵ *Manchester Guardian*, 3 September 1889. p. 6

²¹⁶ Hammond, J. L. (1934) *C. P. Scott of the Manchester Guardian*. London: G. Bell and Sons Ltd. p. 59

From this time anybody who brought a good play to Manchester, or anybody who tried to raise the standard of acting and the intelligence of the theatre, could count on the judgement of a brilliant man of letters.²¹⁷

In his essay 'Manchester Morality and London Capital' Chris Waters has made a detailed study of the Manchester's Palace Theatre of Varieties and its protracted struggle to obtain a licence to sell liquor. This issue would not be resolved until after the Palace Theatre of Varieties closed for refurbishment and reopened as the Palace Theatre in 1913. In his notes to this essay Waters expands on the affiliations of the Manchester press in the controversy stating:

Just as the proprietor of the *Chronicle* owned stock in the company and sided with the Palace, C. P. Scott of the *Manchester Guardian* was a magistrate who voted against the Palace and aired his views in that paper.²¹⁸

My purpose here is to establish that it is necessary for the letters to be read with an awareness of a potential editorial bias in the selection of correspondence chosen for publication. The debate as we read it today is a version of the correspondence and opinions expressed, as mediated by the newspaper's policies or by its editor's selection, and possible editing, of the letters submitted for publication.²¹⁹ Scott may have opposed the Palace, but an editorial article on 11 September likely to have been written by Scott himself, eloquently summarized the main arguments of both sides, and states that the subject had 'been discussed from every conceivable point of view.'²²⁰

²¹⁷ Ibid., p. 55

²¹⁸ Waters, *Manchester Morality and London Capital*, p. 161

²¹⁹ While accusations of bias were made during the course of the correspondence, this appears to have been before letters supporting the Palace had been received at the *Guardian* office, and the paper does present all sides of the argument.

²²⁰ *Manchester Guardian*, 11 September 1889. p. 5

The paper was living in interesting times. Whether George Edwardes and the shareholders in the new company timed their new venture to coincide with the new Local Government Act 1888 coming into force in 1889 or not, the Council and its members were still working to decide how the new licensing laws should be implemented. Manchester City Council chose to devolve their licensing powers to the Watch Committee which became responsible for the issuing of licences. At this point, however, it was still unclear how the new powers would be administered:

The theatrical licence will, under the Local Government Act, be either granted or refused by the City Council; but there appears to be some doubt as to whether the application for a drink licence will also come before them.²²¹

The editorial offered an explanation of the considered stance taken by the *Guardian*, which suggests that Scott's opposition to the Palace of Varieties was more complex than Water's statement implies. Certainly his newspaper was not in favour and concludes that 'We are perfectly willing, and even anxious, that our music halls should be reformed, but fail to see that to secure this object it is necessary to add to their number.'²²²

The paper concedes that 'We must say frankly that to the new theatre, simply as a theatre, we do not think successful objection can be taken.'²²³ Certainly, Scott's distaste for music hall is apparent:

Now music hall is not a very elevated or elevating form of entertainment. But to say that it is actively demoralising is to say too much. It is a concession to human stupidity, to human weariness after a hard day's work, but it is much

²²¹ Ibid.

²²² Ibid.

²²³ Ibid.

less of a concession to human vice and weakness than is commonly supposed.²²⁴

The newspaper also observed, however, that music hall was a democratic form of entertainment where the performer was less remote from the audience:

The performers are almost invariably recruited from the masses of the people. [...] There is an intimate communion and freemasonry between the performers and the public and the most successful "music-hall artiste" is the one who can get the audience to roar the chorus most resonantly at him. The audience take a more direct and lively part in the whole business than they do at the theatre.²²⁵

Whilst offering an opinion that 'the phenomenon is indeed a curious one,' the article sympathizes with music hall audiences and supports the fact that 'there is a large and legitimate demand, under modern conditions of overwork and strain, for an entertainment which shall make no demand on the intellectual faculties whatever.'²²⁶ In its effect on the audience the paper suggests 'It is bad for their intellects no doubt, as for their morals, it is generally neither good nor bad, but just indifferent.'²²⁷ It also observed that 'The bulk of the audience appears always to consist of respectable tradesmen or artisans, accompanied by their wives or sweethearts.'²²⁸

For the *Manchester Guardian* then, music hall in itself, while not desirable and not a productive use of people's leisure time, posed no real moral danger. The concern that was recognized was with the effects of alcohol on otherwise respectable members of the audience and its attraction for members of the *demi-monde*. The *Manchester Guardian* was convinced that this was at the core of the problem, offering the opinion that 'it is already evident that the pivot of the controversy will be

²²⁴ Ibid.

²²⁵ Ibid.

²²⁶ Ibid.

²²⁷ Ibid.

²²⁸ Ibid.

this question of the drink licence.²²⁹ On this point Scott's newspaper stood firmly with the complainants and called for further investigation into, and a clarification of, how justices' licences were awarded to places of entertainment stating:

The fact appears to be that when a theatrical licence is granted it carries with it – as the DEPUTY MAYOR put it the other day "inevitably" the license to sell intoxicating drink. When one has been given, the other has never been refused. More light is wanted on this "inevitable" connection of the two licences, and it is to be borne in mind that the "full" drink licence is not inevitably connected with the theatrical, at all events not with the music and dancing licence. The existing music halls are, we believe; licensed only for the sale of wine and beer.²³⁰

This would become not only a central topic amongst the objections to the licence, but would attract letters from councillors, magistrates and solicitors, both named and anonymous, to the debate. The lack of clarification about the administration of the new licensing laws continued to create grey areas in City Council policy for many years as a game of cat and mouse took place between the authorities and the owners of the Palace of Varieties, where it appears the Council took advantage of some vagueness to apply the bylaws according to their whims. The authorities became adept at using, or perhaps abusing, their licensing powers to manipulate their relationships with the purveyors of commercial entertainment. This would not only compromise the Palace of Varieties, but as will be seen in Chapter Six, was used ten years later as a tool to bring about the demise of John Pitt Hardacre at the Comedy Theatre.

²²⁹ Ibid.

²³⁰ Ibid.

The two debates

As a collection, the letters in the two threads illustrate the issues under discussion and the support for all sides of the debate surrounding the desirability of the building of a new variety theatre in Manchester by a London based consortium of businessmen led by George Edwardes. In tandem with this, letters appearing under the heading the 'Tyranny of Pantomime' addressed other aspects of the effects of the commercial dependency of theatre on the pantomimes while both threads raised the issues of respectability and the moral welfare of audiences and performers. What quickly becomes apparent is that the divisions of opinion are broadly drawn along class lines.

The subject of the Palace had received much attention in the press since the shares had first been floated in January 1889, but here I focus on the two hundred and seventeen letters that were published under the heading 'The Proposed Palace of Varieties' between 3 September and 8 October 1889.²³¹ The debate reached a peak on 14 September when twenty two letters appeared. On a number of occasions articles and editorial comments also appeared related to the topic. With such a quantity of letters many issues were discussed during the course of the correspondence. By far the greatest subject of concern expressed was on the theme of drunkenness, but objections were also raised making assumptions about the decency of costumes and the expected bawdiness of songs. A bid to appeal to the secular elements in the community appeared in references to the consortium of London businessmen investing in the Palace who would be depriving Manchester owned businesses from making profits from its citizens.

²³¹ This was a male dominated debate. Only three correspondents identified themselves as women.

The opposition to the new Palace of Varieties

In his introduction to *The Politics of Alcohol* James Nicholls observes:

Because drinking is such a ubiquitous social activity, the way it is framed in public discourse – the kinds of problems it is associated with, and the kinds of solutions which are proposed – acts as a barometer of the cultural anxieties and political attitudes which are at work in any particular period. Drink is interesting for many reasons, but the main interest here is how ideas about drink provide an insight into the wider culture.²³²

This holds true in relation to the storm of protest that attached itself to the proposal to build the new theatre of varieties on a much larger scale than any of the existing music hall venues in the city, a venture in keeping with the demand for music hall as its popularity soared. The proposed new variety theatre became the high profile hostage of an alliance between the temperance movement and groups representing various churches and other religious interests, appropriated in a campaign orchestrated by the United Kingdom Alliance to focus attention on their determination to remove the scourge of drunkenness from Manchester.²³³

The opening letter in the Palace debate was signed by Fred H. Smith of Swinton Park, a comfortable middle-class suburb north of Manchester. He stated that 'The promoters of the Palace of Varieties are pressing forward, and their plans, I believe are passed. The next step will be the application for a licence which the Council under the new Local Government Act are empowered to grant.'²³⁴ He went on to warn that 'amusements around which are associated all the elements that constitute danger especially to young men and women, I feel a bounded duty to

²³² Nicholls, James (2009) *The Politics of Alcohol: A History of the Question of Drink in England*. Manchester: Manchester University Press. pp. 2-3

²³³ Note: The temperance organization the United Kingdom Alliance was founded in Manchester, already a stronghold of the temperance movement in 1853. It would continue to be based in the city until 1918.

²³⁴ *Manchester Guardian*, 3 September 1889. p. 6

strenuously oppose.²³⁵ Smith's letter closed with an appeal for action to the church and moral reformers, and to those with more earthly concerns, advocating that:

If we speak out now, and with no hesitating voice, this thing can be defeated and alien capitalists who desire a dividend out of our shame taught how a free community can protect its honour.²³⁶

It was assumed that impressionable young audiences would be subjected to unsavoury performances of bawdy songs and lewd, suggestive dancing and find themselves led astray by association with members of the *demi-monde* who would make up a large part of the audience. An editorial piece quoted 'The Nonconformist' who wrote that:

The proposal to licence a new theatre of varieties in Manchester, and the strenuous opposition which has been given to it by the Christian Church, are more than matters of merely local interest. It is the question of drinking that is, we believe, the point, and not the question of simply licensing another place of entertainment. In these hard-working days people must and will have recreation, and the fear is that when intoxicating drink is united with such amusement, whether in palaces of varieties or, we may add, in other recreations quite above suspicion in themselves, the tendency is for evil.²³⁷

The pattern of letters that were published in the *Manchester Guardian* indicates that Smith and his associates were orchestrating a deliberate campaign to manipulate public opinion. This is supported by events that the editorial in the *Manchester Guardian* reported on later in September. On 21 September, an item appeared in the paper that gave details of a meeting that had taken place the previous day at the YMCA on Peter Street at the heart of Manchester's theatre district. The meeting had been convened by 'the Executive Committee of the

²³⁵ Ibid. See also p. 101 in this thesis.

²³⁶ Ibid.

²³⁷ *Manchester Guardian*, 28 September 1889. p. 5

Manchester Branch of the Church of England Temperance Society.²³⁸ It was called 'with a view to action being taken to oppose the granting of a licence to the proposed Theatre of Varieties, now in the course of erection in Oxford Street.'²³⁹

Amongst those present at the meeting chaired by Rev. Cannon Kelly were Mr. F. H. Smith, Mr. F. W. Crossley and the Rev. G. S. Reaney. There were also 'a number of ladies.'²⁴⁰ Smith stated that he had received letters of support from 'a large number of leading citizens.'²⁴¹ The names of many people present at the meeting or whose apologies were recorded would appear on the correspondence pages during the course of the debate over the following weeks. The writers of the initial group of letters supported the views expressed by Fred Smith, but did not draw attention to the fact that they were members of the same group. Frank Crossley began his first letter on the topic 'May I express the heartiest concurrence with the letter of Mr. Fred H. Smith in yours of the 3rd inst., on this subject?' implying a formal distance between the two authors.²⁴²

The *Manchester Guardian* itself confirmed their status as well known figures locally on 11 September noting 'The first correspondence arose out of a letter from Mr Fred H. Smith, (promptly followed by similar protests by well known philanthropic workers like Mr F. W. Crossley, Mr. G. S. Reaney and Mr Leonard K. Shaw).'²⁴³ At the advertised meeting on 20 September the resolution to oppose the granting of a licence to the Palace of Varieties was passed and a sub-committee to lead the

²³⁸ *Manchester Guardian*, 21 September 1889. p. 9

²³⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

²⁴¹ *Ibid.*

²⁴² *Manchester Guardian*, 5 September 1889. p. 7

²⁴³ *Manchester Guardian*, 11 September 1889. p. 5

campaign 'consisting of the chairman, Mr. F. H. Smith, the Rev. Cannon Hicks, the Rev. Dr. McFadyen, and Mr. F. W. Crossley was appointed with the power to select a general committee, and Mr. F. W. Crossley was appointed treasurer.'²⁴⁴ Smith and Crossley had then legitimized their respective positions to speak on behalf of the society and claim they had great support behind them.²⁴⁵ Edward Mynott describes how:

In 1889 Crossley spent about £20,000 in converting the old Star Music Hall into the Star Mission Hall. All the old buildings were pulled down and replaced with a meeting hall which held a thousand people, with residencies attached for the workers, and bathrooms and coffee rooms for the use of the surrounding population. Crossley and his wife and daughter lived in a modest house adjoining.²⁴⁶

The demolition of the old building and the appropriation of its name in the new venture were symbolic of Crossley's philanthropic fervour. As Crossley completed his construction project and went on to manage his new Mission Hall, it seems that he had unwittingly provided Edwardes and his investors with the opportunity to fill a gap in the market left by the demolition of the old 'Star.' Henry C. Devine commended Crossley in his letter supporting Smith's call to action writing:

To think of a gentleman like Mr. Frank Crossley expending thousands of pounds in purchasing an old music hall like the 'Star,' razing it to the ground, and erecting upon its site a palace for the welfare of the people, and that then

²⁴⁴ *Manchester Guardian*, 21 September 1889. p. 9

²⁴⁵ Fred Smith was a well known as a member of the temperance movement and took an active role on a number of their committees. Frank Crossley had founded Crossley Brothers, an engineering company that is now a part of Rolls Royce, with his brother William in Manchester in 1867. He was also an active temperance campaigner, becoming a vice-president of the United Kingdom Alliance. Edward Mynott has noted that 'By the 1890s Crossley was probably the city's most famous philanthropist and certainly its most eccentric.'

Mynott, Edward (1997) 'Frank Crossley – Saint or Sinner?' *Manchester Region History Review*, 11 pp. 52-59. p. 52

²⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 56

within twelve months another more obnoxious building should be commenced in a prominent position, is very deplorable.²⁴⁷

A further meeting, this time of the temperance movement, took place on the 22 October and the confidence of the campaigners against the new variety theatre at this time is striking in the newspaper's report of the event. The article began by stating that 'The United Kingdom Alliance held its annual meeting in Manchester yesterday, and the proceedings served at least to show that the Temperance party is in good heart and feels the forces behind it growing.'²⁴⁸

In the same article the *Guardian* commented that:

No one can fail to have been struck by the immense and salutary change which has followed on so small an extension of popular power as is involved in giving to County Councils the supervision and licensing of theatres. In London a higher standard has instantly been demanded in the conduct of the houses, and in Manchester we have seen how vivid is the interest which is roused by the mere proposal to establish a theatre of a new type. In these things we have only a faint and distant foretaste of the power and volume of opinion which would be roused were the control of drink traffic, in however small or remote a degree, to be brought within the legal control of the people of the various localities.²⁴⁹

This optimism assumes that the majority of the public would vote in line with the views of the temperance campaigners. It fails to recognise the views of the audiences who continued to patronise the various type of establishments that served alcohol in large numbers.

²⁴⁷ *Manchester Guardian*, 6 September 1889. p. 7

²⁴⁸ *Manchester Guardian*, 23 October 1889. p. 5

²⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

The 'Alien Capitalists'

Approaching the topic from another angle, campaigners also made a bid for the support of the secular community who remained unmoved by moralising arguments of the churches. Here they played on the pride of Manchester people in running their own affairs. In a city keen to promote a progressive, commercial image, opposition to the London consortium who owned the Palace was perhaps a more effective way to appeal for the public support. The 'alien capitalist,' or capitalists to be more accurate, to whom Fred H. Smith referred in his letter of 3 September, were George Edwardes, several of the other directors and many of the shareholders of the Manchester Palace of Varieties Ltd. company, who were London based.²⁵⁰ Local philanthropist and former councillor Charles Rowley, who will be the subject of Chapter Three, wrote to comment on the profit motive that attracted the owners of the Palace to Manchester saying:

The public should realise that the granting of all the licences these people require will be equal to a gift of twenty thousand pounds, or even more; for the difference between such property licensed and unlicensed is simply enormous. These people come here and ask our City Council or our justices to give them this enormous privilege of money-making by debauchery.²⁵¹

Many local people from all classes were happy to attend such entertainment but would prefer to keep its profits in the local economy. That the Manchester theatre proprietors allied themselves with the reforming elite in this point is perhaps telling here. They had missed an opportunity and while they claimed to be

²⁵⁰ Edwardes had less well publicised interests in several of the Manchester theatres. He had achieved national notoriety as the proprietor of the already controversial Gaiety theatre and the Empire Palace of Varieties and Alhambra in London, which was a cause of alarm for the critics of his Manchester project.

See Donohue, Joseph (2005) *Fantasies of Empire: The Empire Theatre of Varieties and the Licensing Controversy of 1894*. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press.

²⁵¹ *Manchester Guardian*, 28 September 1889. p.5

concerned about the moral welfare of the audience, the only concession they made towards admitting concern for its potential affect on their own box office returns was to suggest that there were enough theatres in Manchester already. A rejection of the Palace scheme would perhaps present an opportunity further down the line for a more sympathetic reception to a locally owned venture.

The call to oppose the granting of a licence was the weapon chosen hoping that this would halt the building process, as, if it would not be possible to gain a licence, it would be unprofitable for the commercial company to continue with their project. It would, however, be a further eighteen months before the 'alien capitalists' were in a position to apply for a licence for their completed building. Why then would Smith be so concerned to campaign against the granting of a licence at this time? Part of the answer is that the debate in the *Manchester Guardian* appeared in the aftermath of the 'Great Dock Strike' of August 1889 in London which ended in victory for the dockers.²⁵² Across the nation the middle classes feared greater agitation from a wave of strikes that followed across the country: a fear that Smith could exploit to win support for his cause.

However, I would suggest that the main reason for this early action is indicated in Smith's reference to 'the new Local Government Act.' The Local Government Act of 1888 came onto the statute books in 1889. Accordingly, this was the first year that the Watch Committee became responsible for the issue and renewal of performance and liquor licences. The pre-emptive strike against the

²⁵² For further detail see McCarthy, Terry (1988) *The Great Dock Strike of 1889*. London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson

Palace and its directors from Smith and his fellow campaigners suggests an attempt on their part to exert influence on the policies that the Watch Committee would develop as they adjusted to their new responsibilities. If this could be achieved, by the time the Palace directors came to apply for a licence a prejudice would already have been established against the Palace and other potential ventures of a similar nature.

Support for the Manchester Palace of Varieties

In spite of the determined campaign being prosecuted by the reforming elite there was no shortage of people who welcomed the arrival of the Palace of Varieties promising as it did a high class' form of variety entertainment in a spacious environment. F. M. L. Thompson has said that by the end of the nineteenth century music hall provided 'a programme for audiences who were indifferent to politics.'²⁵³ This implies that by the 'naughty nineties' the reforming campaigners were losing the support from the middle classes and that all classes were attending music hall and variety entertainments without concern for their public reputation in line with their indifference to the working classes that I noted in my introduction.

The *Manchester Guardian* confirmed that:

The assailants have not had it all their own way, and some vigorous letters, amongst which we would particularly mention that signed "A Working Man" have been written in defence of the proposed addition to Manchester's places of amusement.²⁵⁴

As a shareholder in Manchester Palace of Varieties Ltd., William T. Day wrote from his London office to assure readers of the high class entertainment that would

²⁵³ Thompson, E. P. (1968) *The Making of the English Working Class*. London: Pelican. (1980) p. 324

²⁵⁴ *Manchester Guardian*, 11 September 1889. p. 5

be provided and respectability that would be ensured by the way the house would be managed. He confirmed that the investors in the project approached it as any other commercial venture saying:

The promoters do not pose as philanthropists, nor are they impertinent enough to suggest that they are "concerned only and solely for the morality of the city and the elevation of the citizens." They profess nothing of the kind; they are businessmen who have entered into a business speculation in a business manner, strong in the belief that the Manchester Palace will turn out a sound and remunerative investment, and they intend to conduct this place of entertainment in such a manner as shall give offence to none, save those whose bigotry and intolerance prevent their forming or expressing a fair or just opinion of any subject outside their own immediate prejudices.²⁵⁵

This confirms Chris Waters's observation that 'The management may have convinced itself that its venture was a worthy one, but it failed to convey the message to the city's moral and political guardians.'²⁵⁶ He does, however, understate the argument as the vitriol directed at the Palace and its supporters and dogged repetition of many unsubstantiated claims by the protesters indicates that at no point in the debate were they prepared to consider any explanations or points of view other than their own. As Waters concludes 'Not simply a feud between a music hall and its critics, the battle over the Manchester Varieties is illustrative of a larger struggle to redefine the relationship between capitalism and morality, leisure and respectability, and also between popular culture and the state.'²⁵⁷

The Palace debate differs from the Pantomime debate in that a wider cross section of the public and the music hall audiences begin to make their opinions heard, most objecting to the dictatorial tone of many of the letters of the temperance

²⁵⁵ *Manchester Guardian*, 25 September 1889. p. 9

²⁵⁶ Waters, *Manchester Morality and London Capital*, p. 143

²⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

reformers. Many of them claimed not to attend music halls, whilst out of hand dismissing them as dens of vice. The voices of the working classes began to be heard in the strident responses to the reforming elite. 'Working Man' whose letter was published on 10 September rejects the interference of religious and temperance campaigners saying:

There is no class of their countrymen for whom working men have a greater contempt than that insipid, goody-goody class which has the impudence to lecture workmen on their morality and pleasures. Thank heaven, the English magistrates are a square-headed lot yet, and they do the right thing for us.²⁵⁸

He had already made the point in favour of the new variety theatre which he terms 'our new Workmen's Palace.' This illustrates that already though the building was not yet complete the working classes were keen to support the venture and already had a sense of ownership of it as an audience. 'Working Man' identifies himself as a member of the respectable working classes looking forward to visiting the new theatre stating that:

As a working man and a Saturday night visitor of the music-hall, I am glad to know we are going to have a Theatre of Varieties worthy of our city. In the meantime we have not got a first-class music-hall equal to those of Birmingham, Liverpool, or Glasgow and in this respect at any rate Manchester is quite out of the running.²⁵⁹

The spirit of competition with other cities and the Manchester people's determination to have a least what everyone else has recurs in the comments of other correspondents.

Whilst the greatest numbers of the working classes would be unlikely to have read the *Manchester Guardian*, there is a significant quantity of correspondence

²⁵⁸ *Manchester Guardian*, 10 September 1889. p. 9

²⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

submitted to this debate that claims to represent the working classes. The high standard of grammar and command of the English language that is observed in these letters suggests that they originate people with a relatively high standard of education. Several of them are critical of those philanthropists who claim to speak on their behalf. One correspondent, signing himself 'Radical Romford,' attacked those middle-class reformers saying:

As an artisan, I would like to join with 'Working Man' in repudiating those self-elected caretakers of the morality of our order. The parsons and other preachers who have contributed to the discussion would have us believe we are a terribly bad and depraved lot. They would make believe our tastes and aims were of the lowest debased type.²⁶⁰

He concludes:

I wonder what the well-to-do's would say if we workers were to step in and interfere with their choice of amusement or their resorts. Well, let them mind their own business, we can well manage ours without their interference. I heartily wish the promoters well with their new venture.²⁶¹

Clearly this section of the community that were being vilified by the campaigners, were well equipped to represent and defend themselves and their correspondence. This appears not to have been a feature of the Fred Smith's original plan to control the direction that would be taken by the debate. On the same day a neutral observer who signed himself only as 'B' summarized the concerns of the debate saying:

So far I fail to see any disposition on the part of the opposing parties to come to any compromise. May I suggest a *modus vivendi*? The opponents of this scheme object to it on three grounds 1. Because drink is to be sold there. 2.

²⁶⁰ *Manchester Guardian*, 13 September 1889. p. 7

²⁶¹ *Ibid.*

Because prostitutes will congregate there. 3. Because obscene performances will be given there.²⁶²

He suggested that the first two objections were both 'futile' and 'beyond the influence of your correspondents' stating that the licensing magistrates are 'gentlemen who will be as unbiased by the appeals of "Wesleyan brethren", past or present, as by 'Everyday Young Man' and who will give the licensing application when it is made 'just the same amount of consideration as to its necessity, as any other new application.' Prostitutes, he comments, are to be found in any place of entertainment in the city and 'if they pay their money they are free to enter, and so long as they conduct themselves reasonably well they are free to remain.' He advises also that 'Respectability can keep apart from the drink and the prostitutes in this theatre as they can in any other, but there should be some control over the language on this stage as there is over the dramatic one.'²⁶³

His solution is that audiences should have the power to complain to the authorities about bad language on the stage with the penalty being the withdrawal of the licence. There is some question here about whether he is referring to punishment of the performer or the venue, but 'B's lengthy letter does summarize the main points raised in relation to the Palace debate. 'B's logical approach to the issues under discussion contrasts sharply with some of those claiming to have at the centre of their concerns the moral welfare of the young people of the city, who made up a large percentage of the audiences for pantomime and music hall. Frank Crossley warned the owners of the Palace:

²⁶² *Manchester Guardian*, 28 September 1889. p. 5

²⁶³ *Ibid.*

Let these persons know that their licence will be opposed. Lovers of pure art and healthy recreation will join to protect their fellows from the selfishness that trades on their basest passions, attracts the vicious from the surrounding districts, and destroys our own youth in uncounted numbers.²⁶⁴

Authenticity

An appraisal of this debate would not be complete without considering the question of authenticity which must be raised about the true origins of some of the letters published in the debate. The reader has a sense when reading the letters that some are not what they purport to be and have been submitted with mischievous or even malicious intent to discredit the case presented by those supporting the opposite side of the argument to the author. This appears to happen with letters both for and against the new variety theatre.

‘Everyday Young Man’ begins his letter:

I am a “fellow about town,” and until now though not exactly posing as a saint, have enjoyed life and not felt particularly wicked. Your letters on this Palace of Varieties have however, thoroughly wakened me up, and I see that my type is regarded by many as quite a case of special ungodliness. I am in “diggings” with another fellow, a musical chap with a banjo, and we are employed at highly remunerative salaries in the city.²⁶⁵

He continues to describe how in the evenings after work they attend the theatre, music halls and ‘at homes’ and ‘get back to enjoy a cigar and brandy and soda, sinners that we are!’. The letter ends ‘People must and will have amusement, and our so-called philanthropists won’t admit it.’²⁶⁶ The letter is written in a cavalier tone and seems calculated to include references to all the vices of which the reformers complain. It produced a flurry of indignant responses from the reformers stating that

²⁶⁴ *Manchester Guardian*, 5 September 1889. p. 7

²⁶⁵ *Manchester Guardian*, 24 September 1889. p. 12

²⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

this was exactly the type of moral degeneration amongst the young that was feared by the unelected guardians of the city's respectability and moral welfare.

The most melancholy contribution to this debate is, I think, the vulgar biography of the 'Everyday young man' which appeared in Tuesday's issue. There is no doubt that his life is a sample of the lives led by the majority of English provincial young men. The feeble aping on the part of these clerks of the manners and easy enjoyment of moneyed aristocrats, their petty conceit that such a life is a *beau-ideal* of the good sort of fellow who knows how to steer safely between the extremes of Puritanism and rakishness, and their ill concealed consciousness that they are excellent types of Balzac hero are a powerful commentary on the subtle demoralizing influences that such institutions as the Palace of Varieties breed. E.S.²⁶⁷

The letters can be taken at face value and 'everyday young man' could quite innocently believe his own argument, or as seems more likely be attempting deliberately to bate those opposed to the Palace. While its tone is mocking of the reformers the same letter could just as easily have been written by one of their number attempting to prove their own idea of young men as a thoroughly bad lot, and to discredit the attendees of the music halls.

At the opposite extreme of opinion and claiming to represent the youth of the city for whose moral safety the reformers are especially concerned is a letter signed 'Charlie', who claims to be 'just a young lad.' He writes 'The young men and women of Manchester ought to be very grateful to noble men like Messrs. Beales, Shaw, and Johnson, for taking such an active part in opposition to the proposed "Palace of Varieties," but is it not time that we spoke out ourselves?'²⁶⁸ Towards the end of his letter he states 'It is within the power of the young men and women of Manchester to

²⁶⁷ *Manchester Guardian*, 27 September 1889. p. 6

²⁶⁸ *Manchester Guardian*, 14 September 1889. p. 5

say they will not have it, and it only needs a united effort on our part to prevent them getting a licence.'²⁶⁹

The letter is articulate, his case is carefully composed and the level of sophistication in his turn of phrase gives the impression of having been written by someone beyond his years. It uses the language of Smith and Beales and accords with their ambitions for the youth of the city. The impression received is that it would seem to be attempting to incite them to the course of action that the philanthropists would like them to take.

For the modern reader, less familiar with the language of the day, trying to judge the true intentions contained within the individual letters is more difficult. However, these suspicions are recognized and supported by other contributors to the debate and the question of authenticity attached to some of the correspondence becomes a topic in itself within the main debate as accusations flew about the true identities of the authors of some of the letters.

Related to this were complaints about those correspondents who chose to sign their letters with a pseudonym, as the reformers accused those who concealed their identity of not having the courage of their convictions. Several of the supporters of the Palace defended this by stating that some writers, by the offices they held, would have been prevented from expressing an opinion. On the 17 September 'Liberty' responds to this suggesting that 'your correspondents who charge the supporters of this scheme with covering themselves under the protection of anonymity' do so because:

²⁶⁹ Ibid.

the supporters generally are persons who are not in as good positions as the opposers, and they have to be very careful how they disclose their names in supporting a scheme of this kind, lest their employers (who might be of the same way of thinking on this subject as the general body of opposers of it) might discharge them.²⁷⁰

‘Working Man’ whose initial letter has been referred to above was one victim of these claims. Henry Beales, a Sunday school superintendent who contributed several letters to the debate and attended the 20 September meeting enquired ‘A Working Man’ – who is he? – a director or a shareholder, which?’²⁷¹ ‘Working Man’ defended himself, retorting ‘I am neither a director nor a shareholder in the new company, and have nothing to do with it in anyway.’²⁷²

It remains possible though, that correspondents on both sides of the debate are not quite what they seem and using the newspapers columns to gain an advantage in the argument. Here it seems again, that providing their names and often their addresses was an agreed action as part of the co-ordinated campaign of the reformers, since so many of them condemned those who chose to withhold their identities. It is unlikely that the origins of many of these letters could ever be proved. My point is that not everything may be taken at face value. For the purpose of discussion here, however, even a letter that has been written with mischievous or even malicious intent and whose author may not be who they (usually he) purport to be, remains valuable to illustrate the points that were being raised within the debate. Clearly, the level of subterfuge that took place within the debate suggests the strength of feeling and high stakes considered to be involved in seeking a resolution

²⁷⁰ *Manchester Guardian*, 17 September 1889. p. 10

²⁷¹ *Manchester Guardian*, 13 September 1889. p. 7

²⁷² *Manchester Guardian*, 18 September 1889. p. 7

to these issues that were regarded of great importance towards devising the future standards of acceptable behaviour for the community of Manchester.

The Ulterior Target

While much of the opposition to the Palace claimed to be centred on the question of drunkenness and sobriety, a reading of the correspondence as a whole creates a suspicion that there is an unidentified other in underlying motives of the debate and that the stated objections do not tell the whole story. It seems that at a deeper level there was an unacknowledged concern over the potential effects amongst the working classes of this unknown quantity that was the new 'variety theatre'. This has also been observed by other scholars.

Referring to the 1889 campaign Dagmar Kift suggests that 'the reformers' ulterior target was 'variety', which they associated with a certain category of London halls whose atmosphere was charged with bohemianism and prostitution.'²⁷³ This draws attention to the term 'variety' itself and the differing meanings attributed to it by the disparate groups embattled over the subject. The owners of the Palace were keen to stress that it was a 'variety theatre' not a 'music hall' and claimed greater affinity with Manchester's legitimate theatres rather than its music halls. During the licensing hearing in March 1891, the *Manchester Times* quoted George Scott, by then the manager of the Palace, saying:

²⁷³ Kift, D. (1996) *The Victorian Music Hall: Culture, Class and Conflict*: Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. p. 158

When asked under cross examination by Mr Addison QC, MP if he had managed a music hall before, he replied 'I am not applying for a licence for a music hall now. It is a theatre of varieties.'²⁷⁴

For them 'variety' meant greater respectability rather than less. It can be seen as inevitable then, that as long as the two sides were effectively speaking different languages and each had a different understanding of the term at the core of their dispute, they were unlikely to comprehend each other's argument, let alone negotiate any kind of consensus. The tone and content of the letters and statements of the reformers indicates to the reader that they were determined from their opening complaint not to comprehend any explanation or consider any other point of view that was presented to them.

Variety was becoming established as the most popular form of commercial entertainment at a difficult time when the economy had returned to recession. Resistance to the Manchester Palace of Varieties can be interpreted as an outward manifestation of unspoken fears among the ruling elite that anticipated an uprising amongst the workers. During their leisure time there were no rules or codes of behaviour that governed the members of the working classes. The Palace of Varieties became a very visible target on which the supporters of the church and temperance reforming elite could focus their fears. With their protests the reformers had effectively excluded themselves from entering such a building, creating the possibility for it to become a subversive meeting place for large numbers of working-class people if they so desired.

²⁷⁴ *Manchester Times*, 27 March 1891. p. 7

The 'Tyranny of Pantomime' debate

On Saturday, 31 August 1889 an item appeared in the 'Literary and other Notes' column of the *Manchester Guardian* giving details of the forthcoming season at the Prince's Theatre in Manchester. This was of particular interest because the theatre was under new management.²⁷⁵ The details of Thomas Charles' plans for the autumn season included light opera, comedy and drama supplied by familiar, well respected touring companies. The item ended with a note that 'Mr. Charles is now making active preparations for the production of his pantomime.'²⁷⁶

This single comment sparked the controversy under the heading the 'Tyranny of Pantomime' that featured in the letters page in tandem with the 'Proposed Palace Theatre of Varieties' debate. Few of the contributors commented on the relationship between the two threads of discussion, but this was highlighted by the newspaper itself in its editorial column where it was noted that:

A goodly portion of our space today is again devoted to letters from all sorts and conditions of men on the two cognate subjects of "The Proposed Manchester Theatre of Varieties" and "The Tyranny of Pantomime."²⁷⁷

According to the newspaper the content of the 'Tyranny of Pantomime' debate was 'of a much less serious kind' than that about the new variety theatre, but stated that they were 'not without connection.'²⁷⁸ The paper was keen, however, to offer a judgment on pantomime in a similar vein to its views on the music hall.

²⁷⁵ Thomas W. Charles had been associated with theatre for many years, recently arriving from Nottingham. It would emerge in some of the later correspondence he had learned his management skills at the Prince's Theatre during the period that the much respected Charles Calvert was its manager, between 1864-1874.

²⁷⁶ *Manchester Guardian*, 31 August 1889. p. 6

²⁷⁷ *Manchester Guardian*, 11 September 1889. p. 5

²⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

The taste which demands the music hall also demands the pantomime. We allude to the modern pantomime – not the old-fashioned children’s pantomime which used to be written by men like PLANCHE. There is no doubt that pantomime has become contemptible, and that it is a reflection on our civilisation to have the Manchester stage exclusively devoted to this form of entertainment during the Christmas holidays.²⁷⁹

While favouring the suggestion made by several contributors to the topic that at least one theatre could profitably present a Shakespearean revival during the holiday season, the paper indulged in some of the fence sitting that they used when giving a view on the variety theatre, conceding:

We cannot dispossess pantomime, and do not want to. The public demand it and there is no reason why they should not get it. The quality of the entertainment is no doubt very capable of improvement, and if the managers really will think more of the children and less of the young gentlemen in the stalls, so much the better. But as long as the public flocks to pantomime it would be cruel indeed to prevent the managers from reaping their one harvest of the year.²⁸⁰

C. P. Scott and the eloquent dramatic critics he employed at the *Manchester Guardian* were then only too aware of the managers’ dilemma and took a pragmatic line, whilst also declaring a preference for a more wholesome pantomime.

Correspondents claiming to represent the people of Manchester, some playgoers and others who did not patronize the theatres, exchanged views with several of the managers of Manchester’s major theatres – Thomas Charles himself, Edward Garcia, and Captain Bainbridge.²⁸¹ Four pantomimes were in preparation for the major theatres in Manchester for Christmas 1889. Thomas Ramsay, Charles and Hardacre

²⁷⁹ Ibid.

²⁸⁰ Ibid.

²⁸¹ Following Captain Bainbridge’s bankruptcy, Thomas Ramsay moved from the post of acting manager at the Prince’s theatre to become manager at the Theatre Royal. This allowed for Thomas W. Charles to become lessee of The Prince’s Theatre. The same year saw the soon to become controversial figure of the actor manager John Pitt Hardacre buy the lease of the Queen’s Theatre from Richard Mansell. Edward Garcia was proprietor of the Comedy Theatre and the St James’s Theatre, along with The Folly music hall.

were all presenting their first “annual”, at least in their present theatres. Garcia was preparing *Cinderella* for the Comedy Theatre, but would present a programme of music hall over the Christmas period at the St James’s and the Folly.

The first letter under the heading ‘The Tyranny of Pantomime’ appeared in the issue of 3 September. By coincidence it was the same day as the thread of the ‘The Proposed Manchester Theatre of Varieties’ began. The title heading phrase does not appear in the body of the letter and it remains unclear whether this was the title given by the writer of the letter, who signed himself only as ‘D’, or was created by Scott or a sub-editor at the newspaper. Initially, what the ‘tyranny’ debate complained of was the monopoly of ‘idiotic’ pantomime across Manchester’s major theatres during the winter months.²⁸² However, the phrase is then taken up by other correspondents later in the debate, often with their own interpretation of ‘tyranny,’ a term well used by the Victorians to sensationalize many forms of perceived injustice and dictatorship.

The *Manchester Guardian* reviews of the 1889-1890 pantomimes adopted the popular views expressed by correspondents during the ‘Tyranny of Pantomime’ debate. The reviewer of the first night of Mr. Charles’ 1889 production of *Babes in the Wood* supplies what appears to be the paper’s stance to clarify what was thought desirable in the modern pantomime:

Harlequin, with clown, pantaloons and the rest are dying a natural death, and the pantomime of to-day, no longer capable of any exact definition, may be described as a fairy medley, with songs, dances, scenery and spectacular effects, and as much comic business as author, manager, and actors can work up among them and import into the piece. Nor must the pantomime of to-day be considered wholly or even mainly a children’s entertainment, though we

²⁸² *Manchester Guardian*, 3 September 1889. p. 6

trust that that will always be the best pantomime in public estimation where the children are well catered for; and we are clear that nothing should be brought from the music hall or elsewhere that children ought not to see and hear.²⁸³

It is necessary therefore for the letters to be read with an awareness of potential editorial bias in the selection of correspondence printed in relation to the controversy over the theatres and their pantomimes as much as those in the closely related subject of the music halls and the Theatre of Varieties. The *Guardian's* comment that modern pantomime is 'no longer capable of any exact definition' can be read as symptomatic of the current incarnation of pantomime that needed to locate itself in the space it occupied within popular culture, between serious drama and the music hall, and of the confusion felt by the middle classes attempting to define their own culture as separate from that of the working classes.

Some of the correspondents to the pantomime debate echoed the views on the music hall elements in pantomime that were expressed by William Davenport Adams and showed a concern for the effects that the more unsavoury aspects might have on children:

The objection to music-hall artists on the stage is not only that they help to take bread out of the mouths of "the profession," which is a minor consideration for the public, but that they have the effect of familiarising audiences, and children especially, with a style and kind of singing, dancing and "business" which, however well it may be relished by a certain class of the population, ought steadily to be confined to its original habitat.²⁸⁴

The various arguments brought in by correspondents present a rounded picture of the concerns common with national views on pantomime in its form at that time, along with the wider topic of mass entertainment then under discussion. The

²⁸³ *Manchester Guardian*, 23 December 1889. p. 8

²⁸⁴ Davenport Adams, William 'The Decline of the Pantomime' in *The Theatre*, 1 February 1882. p. 88

majority of the correspondents indicate that they are Manchester 'men about town'. Though few give addresses, most describe theatre going experiences in Manchester, often over many years. The nature of the occupations they lay claim to, and the language in which they write, reinforces the impression of a debate restricted to the middle classes.

There are twenty eight letters published under the heading 'The Tyranny of Pantomime'. Of these four are signed 'X'. All these appear to be from the same author as he refers to and takes ownership of his previous comments. Three other correspondents submitted two letters each. Unlike in the 'Palace of Varieties' correspondence where many of the authors were keen to be identified, only four of the contributors to the 'Tyranny' debate signed with their own name. These were the three theatre managers Garcia, Charles and Bainbridge, and an A. Evans about whom I have found no other information. Several identify themselves by profession, two solicitors, Parson and The Colonel. One letter is signed from 'An Old Playgoer' and the remainder sign with initials or pen names such as 'Diogenes' and 'Justice.' Two include addresses in Swinton and Didsbury, both quite affluent areas at that time. Garcia and Charles give their theatre addresses, while Bainbridge writes from The Trafford Club.

Several references appear in the correspondence to the pride and aspirations of Manchester people in matters of culture and taste. 'Parson' writes:

For the credit of our town and our boasted taste in theatrical matters let our managers be more careful in their selection and more strict in their supervision of material – that is all that is needed, and then they will free us, not from the

tyranny of pantomime, but from the tyranny of the vulgar, trashy, pseudo-pantomime which has most unluckily assumed its place.²⁸⁵

Much of the criticism is reserved for the 'mere music hall slush' described by 'Parson' that has entered pantomime in recent years and the "'music hall artists" who can neither act nor sing.²⁸⁶

It is a popular misconception that Victorian Manchester was a smoky factory town. Asa Briggs has described how:

Manchester was far more than a 'metropolis of manufacturers'; it was above all a centre of trade for the whole region linked with a whole world.²⁸⁷

By the time Scott took up his post as Editor at the *Manchester Guardian* the factories had moved to the outlying towns and Manchester was a young city developing as a business and financial centre, with more offices and warehouses than mills. The landscape of the city struck visitors as early as the 1830s when they found that 'the warehouses of Manchester were more impressive than the mills; massive, simple, austere, they were later to be praised for their 'real beauty.'²⁸⁸ They were held to represent 'the essentials of Manchester's trade, the very reason for her existence.'²⁸⁹

Scott's biographer notes the concerns of Manchester's middle classes of the day saying that 'The causes that now engaged her best energies were not connected with spreading her trade over the world but with the development of her own

²⁸⁵ *Manchester Guardian*, 5 September 1889. p. 7

²⁸⁶ *Ibid.*,

²⁸⁷ Briggs, Asa (1968) *Victorian Cities*. London: Penguin Books (1990). p. 105

²⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 106

resources of taste, mind and character.²⁹⁰ The people of Manchester, he suggests, were seeking to define themselves and Manchester as a leading city of the world.

A cosmopolitan city, Manchester could benefit from the love of music, painting, and literature that rich merchants who made their home there had brought from countries where a feeling for art and grace and the humanities had suffered less damage from the Industrial Revolution.²⁹¹

It was from some sections of the middle classes that the pantomimes were attacked and a snobbery towards the regular pantomime audiences and visitors from out of town with whom they did not wish to share an auditorium was displayed.

'D.'s initial complaint was that all the theatres are given over to pantomime, which he describes as a 'menace' and a 'depressing and degrading form of amusement,' for three months in the winter.²⁹² He advocates a subscription season at one of the theatres that would provide a programme of Shakespearian revivals and drama throughout the winter season. This and many of the topics introduced by later correspondents raised issues common in the concerns about pantomime being discussed at a national as well as the local and regional level.

Morality

In Manchester the main focus of the debate then shifts from 'D.'s complaint about pantomime monopolising the theatres at Christmas to questions about morality and some of the elements that now featured in the modern pantomime that enraged members of the Manchester bourgeoisie. Several of the letters include reference to the dancers of the ballets, mostly to comment on the flimsy costumes that were

²⁹⁰ Hammond, J. L. (1934) *C. P. Scott of the Manchester Guardian*. London: G. Bell and Sons Ltd. p. 52

²⁹¹ *Ibid.*

²⁹² *Manchester Guardian*, 3 September 1889. p. 6

deemed indecently revealing by Victorian standards. 'Catalini' suggests that 'anything would be better than the exhibition of vulgarities and half naked girls which is one of the principal attractions of principal attractions of modern pantomimes.'²⁹³ 'M. A. N.' complains that the children's entertainment has been corrupted and that 'it is not fair to our children to make them responsible for what is rather an appeal to the "average sensual man."²⁹⁴ 'Justice' raised the question:

If the ladies who yearly take their children to the pantomimes consider that they are thereby responsible for what their money supports, and accuses them of being complicit in the degradation of the dancers asking 'is there not also evil in those who without thought use their money and position to bribe their less fortunate sisters to do what is morally degrading?'²⁹⁵

Diogenes asked 'What has the Church and Stage Guild to say to pantomime, burlesque and all the rout?'²⁹⁶ These attempts to manipulate the consciences of those amongst their own class who attended the pantomimes, did not perhaps win the support they expected.

On 4 October a letter appeared from the Church and Stage Guild, signed by Stewart Headlam, its Honorary Secretary, stating that on behalf of 'the many London dancers among its members' the Guild 'protests about the slanders on their character which have been recklessly and ignorantly made by many of the opponents of the proposed Manchester Theatre of Varieties.'²⁹⁷ These music-hall dancers were the same ones employed for the pantomimes, and suffered the same assumptions made about them.

²⁹³ *Manchester Guardian*, 4 September 1889. p. 7

²⁹⁴ *Manchester Guardian*, 9 September 1889. p. 6

²⁹⁵ *Manchester Guardian*, 11 September 1889. p. 7

²⁹⁶ *Manchester Guardian*, 6 September 1889. p. 7

²⁹⁷ *Manchester Guardian*, 4 October 1889. p. 7

Two main areas of contention then can be seen to emerge from the debate; those letters that cluster around questions of morality and those that can be grouped together as examples of a resentment amongst some sections of the middle classes who consider themselves excluded from a leisure provision to which they claim to have made a contribution by regular year round patronage of the legitimate theatres. Their resentment extends to those in the community who visit the theatres only once a year and are assumed to be from the working classes. 'Catalini' writes of pantomime on 4 September:

I think it high time that some protest should be raised against this annual infliction, especially when it is remembered that it is people from the surrounding towns that patronise this class of entertainment, and not the regular playgoers. It seems to me that the latter class – those who support the theatre all year round – ought to be considered before those who only visit it once a year.²⁹⁸

He also complains that visitors from outside Manchester are filling the theatres. Several of the writers support the idea that one of the theatres should 'refrain from pantomime' and present instead a production of Shakespeare to please the regular playgoers.

Read as a collection the letters raise an issue that is specific to Manchester and its own identity, and the self-image its citizens were trying to promote. Three of the correspondents appeal directly to their reader's sense of civic pride. These middle-class Mancunians display a confidence, arrogance even, of Manchester's image of itself as a progressive, influential city. The letters are a valuable resource for the modern historian giving a snapshot of the view of the people of Manchester at

²⁹⁸ *Manchester Guardian*, 4 September 1889. p. 7

a specific moment. 'If there are not playgoers in Manchester to support more reasonable pieces, what becomes of our reiterated boast of the superior healthiness and "robustness" of provincial, and especially of Manchester, taste?'²⁹⁹ Of the monopoly of pantomime on the Christmas stage it was complained:

That the lovers of the drama in Manchester should be totally unprovided for during the whole of that time, while the stages of our three theatres are given up to an entertainment whose vulgarity is only surpassed by its stupidity, does not argue well for the superiority of artistic taste of which Manchester people are wont to boast.³⁰⁰

The conceit of these Manchester men is apparent in the demanding style of their correspondence. They considered 'vulgar' pantomime a threat to the image they wished to present of their city and how this is exemplified by the taste and habits of its citizens. They recognise a discriminating taste in theatre as representing Manchester to the outside world and are concerned for the reputation of themselves and their city. Manchester's independent state of mind and self-definition is also illustrated in its dislike of venues in Manchester being owned and operated by the 'alien capitalists' from London.

Attack on the working classes

Several of the correspondents openly complain about the pantomime because it attracted audiences from the working classes. M. A. N. suggested that pantomime 'appeals to the country lout as well as to the man about town.'³⁰¹ This contrasts sharply with the view given by Bainbridge at this bankruptcy hearing that 'He attributed his failure to bad business, and ascribed that bad business to the fact that

²⁹⁹ *Manchester Guardian*, 4 September 1889. p. 7

³⁰⁰ *Manchester Guardian*, 6 September 1889. p. 7

³⁰¹ *Manchester Guardian*, 4 September 1889. p. 7

so many theatres had sprung up of late in Lancashire towns, where the same companies that appeared in Manchester played, and where pantomimes were also produced.³⁰² Ironically, it was of course, the income from the pantomimes that the theatres relied on to support the theatres' ability to present serious drama during the rest of the season.

Unlike in the 'Proposed Palace of Varieties' correspondence, there are no letters in the 'Tyranny of Pantomime' debate that claim to come from members of the working classes. As the debate continues, however, several correspondents speak up on their behalf to defend pantomime from those who believe it should be discontinued altogether. One such, signed only as 'Solicitor No.2', recalled that

Pantomime in our city has for years past provided hard-worked men and women in their short leisure with genuine fun and, with rare exceptions, innocent if boisterous amusement, and will do so, I trust, for years to come.³⁰³

'H. A. C.' of Didsbury's letter on the 14 September was printed under the title of the 'Proposed Theatre of Varieties' debate, but brought the two lines of discussion together recognising that 'both of which are closely connected'.³⁰⁴ He advises the middle-class readership of the *Guardian* that due to their long working hours 'The Lancashire working folk like pantomime for the same reason they like the variety entertainment, because they can be amused without effort on their part.'³⁰⁵

He goes on to warn of the potential consequences of a successful campaign to prevent them from having access to such entertainment:

³⁰² *Manchester Guardian*, 4 April 1889. p. 8

³⁰³ *Manchester Guardian*, 6 September 1889. p. 7

³⁰⁴ *Manchester Guardian*, 14 September 1889. p. 5

³⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

The great lesson, after all, for our would-be reformers and professed philanthropists is to educate the tastes of the people, not to close the music-halls and stop the pantomimes, which would only drive them to very much worse resorts and more depraved amusements.³⁰⁶

On 16 October the *Manchester Guardian* printed a report entitled 'The Recreations of the People; Conference of Working Men.'³⁰⁷ This event the previous evening in Salford had been presided over by Rev. H.T. Smart and was in effect a conference for middle-class supporters of rational recreation, at which a number of 'Working men were invited to give information in answer to' a series of questions relating to how they and their associates spent their leisure time. It is the nearest the paper gets at the time to reporting working people's own descriptions of their views on leisure other than in its correspondence pages. There is no specific reference to pantomime, but the music halls are discussed. Mr. Joseph Waddington is the working man whose views are most reported. The author of the piece reported Mr Waddington as saying that

There was the "Cass;" [Cassandra Music Hall] he did not find much pleasure going there, but the entertainment came down to the level of the people who went to it. If they wanted to succeed in raising the level of entertainment this was the class of people they would have to begin with. [...] He thought the men who preached to working people must stand on one side and let the working people provide for themselves.³⁰⁸

The working classes do not appear to have felt the need to have their leisure choices dictated to them.

³⁰⁶ Ibid.

³⁰⁷ *Manchester Guardian*, 16 October 1889. p. 7

³⁰⁸ Ibid.

The theatre managers' view

'The Colonel,' whose name appears as a regular contributor to the correspondence page on many topics, writes with reference to the relationship that exists between a manager and his patrons. 'The Manager naturally endeavours to benefit himself, whilst the playgoer suits his own taste and convenience.' He was perplexed to report that in the evidence from the bankruptcy hearing of Mrs. Saker at the Alexandra theatre in Liverpool earlier that year 'it was said that most of the private companies proved to be losses, and that management recoup themselves from the pantomimes.'³⁰⁹

Captain Bainbridge had cited the loss of £8000 on his 1888-89 pantomime the *Forty Thieves* as the immediate cause of his bankruptcy at the hearing in March 1889. On 11 September his quite lengthy letter to the pantomime debate appeared in the *Guardian*, replying to a number of the issues raised. He stated 'Managers are but tradesmen, and sell what the public call for. At present they prefer pantomime at Christmas.'³¹⁰ There remains here the irony that the drama was dependent on pantomime in a way that the unfavoured music hall was not. Though several correspondents accept that the managers present pantomime in order to make a profit and balance their accounts, the association is not made that the legitimate drama for which the writers of most of these letters assert their preference is subsidised by the commercial success of the pantomimes patronized by the masses. There is no reference to the fact that without the pantomimes no theatres would survive for the presentation of drama during the rest of the year.

³⁰⁹ *Manchester Guardian*, 6 September 1889. p. 7

³¹⁰ *Manchester Guardian*, 11 September 1889. p. 7

The editorial that appeared in the *Manchester Guardian* on the day that Bainbridge's letter was published was sympathetic to the precarious position of the theatre managers, describing Bainbridge's letter as throwing 'a lurid light upon the position of an unfortunate manager.' Repeating the comments heard at Bainbridge's bankruptcy hearing the article spoke of the shortage of high class touring companies to fill the theatre outside of the pantomime season, and advised readers that:

The manager, therefore, looks to pantomime to recoup the losses of the year. It is quite true that pantomime does not always meet his hopes. Some recent Manchester pantomimes have caused great pecuniary losses. Still there is an undoubted demand for this kind of entertainment, whereas the demand for the better kind suggested is as yet unproved.³¹¹

The letters of Edward Garcia and Thomas Charles were published together on 6 September. Both men demonstrated a keenness to supply what the patrons demand and agreed, as did Bainbridge, that not all pantomimes are entirely respectable. Garcia assured readers that 'my author has received positive instructions to write a pantomime on the olden lines, which I sincerely hope will please both young and old.'³¹² Charles, newly installed as lessee of the Prince's theatre found the debate 'most welcome in view of my great desire to be in touch with the public I am so anxious to please.'³¹³ Charles had though detected that the 'tyranny' of pantomime's monopoly at Christmas is less the issue than the questions of decency in some productions of 'poor pantomime' stating 'I take it, the feeling is not so much against pantomime as a pleasing entertainment for the holiday season, but as to the way it is sometimes placed on the stage.'³¹⁴ Bainbridge, now without a

³¹¹ *Manchester Guardian*, 11 September 1889. p. 5

³¹² *Manchester Guardian*, 6 September 1889. p. 7

³¹³ *Ibid.*

³¹⁴ *Ibid.*

theatre, pointed out that 'A theatre is not a church, but simply a place of amusement, which, it is true, may be made an instrument for good or evil.'³¹⁵

Conclusion

Whilst the initial complaint is that there is no alternative to pantomime in the theatres during the Christmas season, the topics commented on are quickly brought round to the moral concerns over the innuendo of the music hall songs and jokes, and the revealing dresses of the girls employed as 'ballet ladies'. The writers were overwhelmingly male and from the middle classes, so they can only be representative of one section of the potential audience. This allows historians to consider a middle-class view of their own culture and opposition to a culture that they did not understand. They feared the music hall encroaching into the theatre which they regarded as their exclusive domain. Some letters were purely about self interest while others showed genuine concern for the moral welfare of the dancers in the ballet and the children in the audience. Complaints about the content of jokes and songs were centred on their innuendo and sexual suggestiveness.

Alan Kidd has stated that in the late nineteenth century Manchester faced 'recurrent social crises' that 'were those of the big commercial city, not the mill town,'³¹⁶ and that these problems:

... revived the middle-class impetus to social and cultural intervention in the lives and habits of lower social classes and groups. The desire to reform the morals and 'civilise' the senses of the working class (the drive to 'Christianise'; to introduce temperance, thrift and industriousness, to encourage 'healthy habits' and a higher moral tone) remained the source of much middle-class

³¹⁵ *Manchester Guardian*, 11 September 1889. p. 7

³¹⁶ Kidd, A. J. and K. W. Roberts (1985) *City, Class and Culture: Studies of Cultural Production and Social Policy in Victorian Manchester*. Manchester: Manchester University Press. p. 15

social thought and action. The disappointing results that generally accrued from this only slowly undermined its ideological significance.³¹⁷

This can be seen in the campaign against the 'Proposed Palace of Varieties' and the debate about the 'Tyranny of Pantomime' that were divided along class lines. Feeling their own ideology under threat, the church and temperance reformers within the middle classes with their own ideological mission to reform, attempted to appropriate the popular leisure pursuits of pantomime and music hall to assert their own authority and impose their values on the city. These were inevitably self-defeating. The real approval for commercial entertainment was measured not in words, but in the attendance figures and box office returns of the various providers of entertainments. Ultimately, it was the audiences as consumers who directed venue managements in what should appear on the stage. The limited successes of the middle-class reforming elites to recreate the working classes in their own image were gained amongst those from the artisan class, the autodidacts and the aristocracy of labour who already had aspirations to join the middle classes. The contested area between the commercial entertainment of pantomime and music hall and its opposition by the advocates of rational recreation is examined further in Chapters Three and Four. Here it will be seen as a confused territory where gains were subject to making tactical, practical compromises to attract support from the working classes. Rigid adherence to the ideology of rational recreation only served to alienate the majority of people from the lower middle and working classes.

³¹⁷ Ibid.

CHAPTER THREE

CHARLES ROWLEY AND THE ANCOATS BROTHERHOOD

Two of the letters published in the 1889 Palace of Varieties debate were contributed by Charles Rowley, an omnipresent figure in Manchester at that time. The Ancoats Recreation Movement was formed in 1874 when the philanthropist Rowley, at the same time that its founder and lifelong figurehead joined Manchester City Council as the councillor for the Ancoats ward. At this time, as discussed below, he also became a shareholder in the *Manchester City News* indicating perhaps a serious intent to make a career in public life. In 1876 the movement was constituted more formally as the Ancoats Recreation Committee. The Movement and, from 1889 its elite core the Ancoats Brotherhood, became effectively synonymous with the ideology of the energetic and charismatic Rowley himself.³¹⁸ As a social network it had a very different approach to the uses of leisure than the commercial interests of the theatre managements and the press. Yet, as will be seen here and in Chapter Four, at times their apparent opposition is contradicted and their activities align.

This chapter considers the role of the Ancoats Brotherhood, and the wider Ancoats Recreation Movement, in defining the cultural landscape of late Victorian Manchester and their ambition to introduce the urban working classes in Ancoats to the best in the culture valued by the middle classes. During the 1880s and 1890s the

³¹⁸ For my purposes here I refer to the organization using the names appropriate to the dates of events under discussion. The Ancoats Recreation Movement is also used in broader terms to encompass supporters who were not necessarily part of the elite Brotherhood in the later years. For the Manchester press, however, the three titles were used interchangeably, indicating that it is likely this was also the case with the general public.

Ancoats movement rose to the height of its influence advocating rational recreation and wholesome amusement for all. The movement is evidence of how a significant minority in the community organized to respond to what they believed was lacking in the cultural life amongst the working classes of Ancoats. It is as a case study to measure its success, and that of Rowley himself, in delivering and establishing a demand for rational recreation against the swelling tide of commercial entertainment, that a whole chapter here is devoted to the Ancoats Brotherhood and their version of socialism. Here the notion of 'fun' and how it was defined by different interest groups in Manchester also becomes central.

An alternative Mancunian response to the problem of leisure, was taken by Robert Blatchford and the *Clarion* movement, a study of which forms Chapter Four. Although both organizations presented themselves as socialist, whilst Rowley was a Liberal councillor on Manchester City Council, Blatchford was a founding member of the Independent Labour Party. Rowley always refused the title of leader, despite being the most active member of the Ancoats movement. As unofficial leaders of their respective movements, both Rowley and Blatchford were recognized as figureheads and both were celebrated and achieved wider recognition nationally and to a lesser degree internationally. They represent different views of the 'problem of leisure' debate as it continued unresolved into the early years of the twentieth century. These movements have relevance to my thesis because of their Manchester origins and the part they played in the development of the cultural identity of this city. Equally both movements were at the height of their influence during the 1890s and into the beginning of the new century giving them additional relevance to the discussion about what was unique to the city in its development.

They represent in broad terms opposing sides of the debate, but this was a complex picture and I suggest that while advocating different routes to reach their goals, the long term aims had much in common. The *Clarion* approach will be seen as the antithesis to that adopted by the Ancoats Brotherhood. In considering their response to pantomime and music hall these chapters also explore to what extent that had an influence on how successful they were in achieving their respective ambitions towards winning the support of their desired audience, the wider public of Manchester.

The views and arguments presented by Rowley and the Ancoats Recreation Movement bear further investigation here as they were representative of a significant middle-class minority within the community of the day that identified itself as socialist. It is first necessary to establish Rowley's credentials as a leading citizen in Manchester and the position of the Ancoats Recreation Movement, for which 1889 had brought significant developments by formally establishing the Ancoats Brotherhood, shortly before the time of the *Manchester Guardian* debates.

Charles Rowley

Charles Rowley M.A., J.P. died at the age of ninety three on 6 September 1933. The following day the *Manchester Evening News* said of him in its obituary notice:

Rowley of Ancoats was perhaps the most romantic and remarkable figure that Manchester has ever produced. Through the Ancoats Brotherhood which he founded, his fame travelled among cultured and thoughtful people all over the English speaking world, and his efforts to better

the lot of slum dwellers among who he was born, brought men to Manchester whose visits lent fame and distinction to the city.³¹⁹

He was a familiar figure in Manchester throughout the period covered here due to his involvement in many areas of public life and the public offices he held. His name appeared regularly in the newspapers. Not only was he influential and well respected in Manchester, but he was an ambassador for the city to the outside world. Through the social and business circles in which he moved he was able to persuade many celebrated figures, most notably culturally influential personalities, to visit Manchester and address local audiences at meetings of the Ancoats Recreation Movement. The men, and sometimes women, to whom the *Manchester Evening News* was referring included William Morris, Walter Crane, William Michael Rossetti, Peter Kropotkin, Janet Achurch, Henry Irving, Keir Hardie and George Bernard Shaw.

It is perhaps surprising that Rowley has not attracted more attention from modern scholars, but this may be due, at least in part, to the limited number of primary resources available. What has been written has been dependent on the same small pool of resources that discuss his life and career, some letters, and the collection of Ancoats Brotherhood programmes held at the Working Class Movement Library. It seems that the Ancoats Recreation Movement did not keep extensive records. Audrey Kay, in her essay on Rowley in the Ancoats special edition of the *Manchester Regional History Review*, describes how:

It is difficult to discover the identities of the new members of the Ancoats Brotherhood. No official record was kept of initiates, in keeping, according to Rowley, with what he regarded as the free spirit of the Brotherhood.³²⁰

³¹⁹ *Manchester Evening News*, 7 September 1933. p. 7

Writing in 1959, John Ivor Rushton also noted that there is relatively little material available with which to research Rowley and the Ancoats Movement. His unpublished M.Ed. thesis for the University of Manchester is a valuable addition as at that time he was able to interview personally several, by then elderly, surviving members of the Ancoats Recreation Movement.

The views of Rowley and the Brotherhood have relevance to the evolution of commercial entertainment in the period discussed here from 1880-1903. Rowley and the Ancoats Recreation Movement are a specific example of a cultural organization that played an important role in the development of the identity of late nineteenth century Manchester and how its citizens engaged with leisure activities. They acknowledged the potential influences of leisure on the citizens of Manchester and its reputation in the wider world. They took an active role in attempting to steer public opinion and municipal policy to favour their views.

During Rowley's long career he was critical of commercial entertainment, and especially disapproving of music hall and variety theatre. He did, however, advocate that people should have 'fun'; this was a type of 'fun' on his own terms that had its foundations in the 'rational recreation' movement that had begun in the 1840s.³²⁰ He described 'good drama' as the 'best fun.' 'Light theatre' was included in his definition of 'good drama', in which it appears, he did not exclude a 'good pantomime.' His criticisms it seems were not a rejection of pantomime in its entirety, but directed at the current music hall infused form of pantomime.

³²⁰ Kay, Audrey (1993) 'Charles Rowley and the Ancoats Recreation Movement 1876-1914', *Manchester Region History Review*, 7: pp. 45-54. p. 49

³²¹ For a more detailed discussion of rational recreation in the 1840s see Peter Bailey (2010) in *Leisure and class in Victorian England: Rational Recreation and the Contest for Control, 1830-1885*.

The Ancoats Brotherhood

Ancoats is frequently acknowledged to have been one of the worst, and usually 'the worst,' most deprived, slum district of Manchester throughout the Victorian era. Adjacent to the city centre, many of its inhabitants could be found in the pubs and music halls during their leisure time, and in the 'gods' of the city's theatres for the pantomimes. These were the people whom the Ancoats Brotherhood hoped to attract. No environment was riper for social and cultural experimentation than Ancoats. The organization began informally, when a group of 'the cultured type of middle-class Mancunian' friends met with philanthropic aims to bring cultural activities to the slums of Ancoats to improve the lives of its impoverished residents.³²²

Rushton suggests that Rowley's motive for founding the Ancoats Recreation Movement lay in his:

belief that Art has a great part to play in human education, that aesthetics have a bearing on the formation of character and human conduct, and that if an area such as Ancoats is created on a basis of pure economic convenience, then the immediate result will be human depravity of the Ancoats-rough type, and various types of idiocy throughout society.³²³

Rowley used his fundraising skill as 'beggar in chief', to play a vital role in the creation of Thomas Coglean Horsfall's picture museum in Ancoats, though the picture museum was not specifically an Ancoats Recreation Committee project.³²⁴ Logie Barrow refers to the Ancoats movement as 'Charles Rowley's semi-political Ancoats

³²² Kay, *Charles Rowley and the Ancoats Recreation Movement 1876-1914*, p. 45

³²³ Rushton, John Ivor (1959) *Charles Rowley and the Ancoats Recreation Movement, 1876-1914*. Unpublished M.Ed. Thesis. p. 58

³²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 133

Brotherhood.³²⁵ This holds true when discussing the ambitions of the movement until the turn of the twentieth century, when it seems Rowley accepted that the wider ambitions to increase its working-class membership would not be realized and they focussed instead on providing the programmes of high art and music that pleased their loyal middle and lower middle-class supporters. Within these boundaries the Brotherhood could claim to have been successful over many years, waning slowly in the Edwardian period, but surviving until 1935, two years after Rowley's death.

Rowley, as the respected figurehead, and the organization that he represented are illustrative of the rational recreation movement that indulged in 'ensorious interference' in working-class culture. With activities that stressed education and self improvement as the respectable way to live, movements such as Ancoats Recreation were able to appeal to the lower middle classes and those who made up the aristocracy of labour, encouraging aspirations of social mobility and respectability. The Ancoats Recreation Movement, and its elite branch the Ancoats Brotherhood, were known for their lectures, 'At Homes,' and typical of the activities they promoted were visual arts appreciation, classical music and literature, along with physical pursuits such as rambling and cycling.

While Rowley was keen in his memoirs to describe his own contribution to the projects with which he was involved rather than giving details about what others had done, Rushton suggests he took credit for the work of others and aimed to give the impression that he alone was responsible for the creation of the Ancoats Recreation

³²⁵ Barrow, L. J. W. (1975) *The Socialism of Robert Blatchford and the "Clarion," 1889-1918*. Unpublished PhD thesis, Birkbeck, University of London. p. 33

committee.³²⁶ This overlooks a passage in *Fifty Years without Wages* however, where Rowley acknowledged the foundation of the Ancoats Recreation Committee in 1876 as a collective achievement saying:

We got a committee together, gathered some money, and started a number of rousing things. We placed bands in the two parks in the neighbourhood; now the Corporation do it. Having got as a result of my own election cry, baths and washhouses and a public room, we proceeded to use them profusely, the public needing no prod to enjoy the fine swimming and other baths. We had excellent exhibitions of pictures, workmanship, and flower shows for a long series of years. These things are now done, and done better, by other organizations, some municipal, some philanthropic. Our aim has always been to stimulate, to get ideas, even ideals, into practical form and then, when more powerful bodies in command of cash take them up, we turn to something else and try fresh experiments.³²⁷

The movement became formally constituted as the Ancoats Recreation Committee in 1882, marking the moment when the movement launched its first Sunday afternoon lecture series. The Ancoats Brotherhood, described in Rushton's 1959 thesis as 'an enigma,' only came into being on 4 March 1889.³²⁸ The members of the Brotherhood, however, became an elite formed of Rowley's influential friends and acquaintances. The cost of the annual membership of the Brotherhood and the additional events and excursions in effect excluded many of those from the working classes. Rushton suggests that the reason behind the formation of the Brotherhood was to increase the financial security of the Movement:

The creation of the Ancoats Brotherhood may therefore, be seen, in part as a means of subsidizing the Recreation Movement through the functions of a

³²⁶ Rushton, *Charles Rowley and the Ancoats Recreation Movement 1876-1914*, p. 36

³²⁷ Rowley, Charles (1911) *Fifty Years of Work Without Wages (Laborare est Orare)*. London: Hodder and Stoughton. p. 197

³²⁸ Rushton, *Charles Rowley and the Ancoats Recreation Movement 1876-1914*, p. 87

related body whose members were able to afford both a membership fee of one shilling, and such further charges as particular activities required.³²⁹

This theory is supported by the evidence Rushton provides that in the financial year '1888-89 the Movement's annual deficit was at its worst.'³³⁰ The Brotherhood, he suggests, was created to tackle this problem, as 'an exclusive and wealthy movement within the Recreation Movement, which it helped to finance.'³³¹ Both Waters and Rushton refer to the early success of the Sunday lectures that were not only free, but that also offered substantial refreshments to the visitors. When the lavish refreshments were reduced to tea and biscuits, because the high cost of providing them made this practice no longer viable for the Recreation Committee, numbers fell away quickly. Whilst the reduction in numbers and the fickle nature of the ungrateful mass of the public were a salutary lesson to the fledgling movement, the lectures became more manageable and provided a more realistic picture of the extent of their influence with which to plan their campaign to convert working-class tastes to the high arts.

The fickle nature of audiences was to demonstrate itself once again in grumblings from some speakers who objected to being the 'meat in the sandwich' between two halves of a concert of classical music. The programmes of the concerts were arranged this way, however, to dissuade members of the audience who, once the musical part of the evening had finished, were in the practice of leaving during the refreshment break, the hosts then being embarrassed by the main speaker having to deliver their lecture to a depleted house. The popularity of the musical content of the Brotherhood programmes is evidence of Simon Gunn's claim about the

³²⁹ Ibid., p. 86

³³⁰ Ibid., p. 85

³³¹ Ibid., p. 87

late nineteenth century rise in interest in classical music. In line with the middle-class foundations of the Ancoats movement he observes that from the mid-nineteenth century 'music came to have a particular importance in the culture of the provincial middle-class in England.'³³² At this time Gunn suggests:

There was a significant shift in the organisational basis of concert life. The world of semi-private concerts was opened up in the industrial cities, creating a secular public sphere for music while simultaneously maintaining and even augmenting the prestige of classical concerts as the cornerstone of high culture. The most striking and successful example of this process was the Manchester Hallé concerts.³³³

Whilst the Hallé concerts offered tickets at prices within the range of many middle and lower middle-class audiences, it is easy to see how the free concerts in Ancoats would attract large attendances, with the middle classes willing to travel some distance to Ancoats, an area of the city they would not normally visit. Indeed, many would avoid the area if at all possible. For Rowley and his associates, while the middle-class tourists were not their target audience, to persuade them to visit Ancoats was an achievement in itself, via which they hoped to improve the reputation of the area.

It was Rowley's energy and enthusiasm for the cause that drove the Ancoats Recreation Movement from its inception until his retirement in 1924 at the age of eighty-five. The positions taken and views expressed on behalf of the Brotherhood are widely accepted to be the views of Rowley himself as suggested by Rushton. This informs all discussion of the Ancoats Brotherhood and its position on all forms of theatre and commercial entertainment.

³³² Gunn, Simon (2000) *The Public Culture of the Victorian Middle Class: Ritual and Authority in the English Industrial City, 1840-1914*. Manchester: Manchester University Press. p. 135

³³³ *Ibid.*, p. 137

Defining Rowley and the Ancoats Brotherhood

Charles Rowley was born in Ancoats on 11 October 1839. His father, also named Charles, was a socialist, who at the age of sixteen had been present at the Peterloo massacre of 1819.³³⁴

His pride in his father, a self made man who 'though in the ordinary acceptance of the term he was not "educated" at all, had a wonderful instinct for fine literature' is evident in his memoirs.³³⁵ Rowley suffered from ill health throughout his life and claimed to have educated himself at home with books from his father's library:

Being very delicate in childhood, I never went to school. Reading came by nature somehow, and by choice; a constant browsing on these and other fine books gave me, it is to be hoped, a good turn. Then came the life of the streets of Ancoats in the forties and fifties, working at the bench in a developing workshop; and so went on a process of education more or less valuable.³³⁶

Offering a good service at reasonable prices attracted noted artists based in the metropolis to do business with his father. This would lead to the younger Charles beginning what would become lifelong friendships with successful artists including Frederic Shields, the Rossettis and Ford Madox Brown. Rushton observed that:

By the time Charles Rowley was twenty years of age his father's business was firmly established, so that from the cotton famine onwards Rowley had the leisure and means to devote himself increasingly to social affairs, following the

³³⁴ Rowley, *Fifty Years of Work Without Wages*, p. 5. Throughout Charles Jnr.'s childhood regular visitors to the family home included Sam Bamford and other notable Peterloo veterans. In Rowley's memoirs *Fifty Years of Work Without Wages (laborare est orare)* he recalls these early influences that would inform the socialist politics and philanthropic values that would inform his adult life.

³³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 7

³³⁶ *Ibid.*

tradition of service which had been established before he was born amongst the best Manchester families.³³⁷

The period of hardship in the 1860s, caused by the Cotton Famine, made a profound impression on the young Rowley. He recalled:

The American Civil War came on us in the height of our prosperity, and vast numbers of us were plunged to the depths of misery by the cotton famine. At home we had our own soup kitchen, with aids of all kinds for our immediate neighbours. When on the larger public relief committees, we saw as visitors the interiors of the very homes of these neighbours in a familiar manner which one could never hope to obtain in any other way. The memories of the squalor and the potency of the odours of those appalling, stinking slums can never be effaced. We had been living next door to them all our lives, and yet we were not aware of their bestial condition.³³⁸

These experiences formed Rowley's views and actions throughout his long career. Shocked by these revelations, Rowley's instinct was to help and his sense of duty would lead him into a life of service to the community. His *Manchester Evening News* obituary, written some fifty two years later noted that 'Rowley was a loyal son of his native city. He loved it, and unlike some Mancunians he never ran it down. He believed that it was one of the finest managed cities in Britain.'³³⁹ Rushton comments on philanthropic activity that influenced Rowley at this time saying 'A Liberal tradition of social service had been developed amongst certain of the notable Manchester families.'³⁴⁰ These were the social circles in which he mixed.

Audrey Kay has summarized Rowley's political stance saying:

In politics, Rowley always described himself as a socialist, but his socialism took a hybrid form: Fabian collectivism was mixed with utopian communism. In philosophy, to complicate matters further, there were in Rowley aspects of

³³⁷ Rushton, *Charles Rowley and the Ancoats Recreation Movement 1876-1914*, p. 32

³³⁸ Rowley, *Fifty Years of Work Without Wages*, p. 32-33

³³⁹ *Manchester Evening News*, 7 September 1933. p. 7

³⁴⁰ Rushton, *Charles Rowley and the Ancoats Recreation Movement 1876-1914*, p. 19

elitism coloured by romanticism, what Lukacs has called a romantic anti-capitalist.³⁴¹

This complexity of his views combined with the length of his career perhaps goes some way to explain the many contradictory statements made by Rowley over the years, causing the modern reader to reappraise continually the available evidence provided by Rowley and others writing about him. Chris Waters describes Rowley as an 'environmental determinist' and states that 'Rowley, in his recreational work in the slums of Ancoats in Manchester, never escaped the didactic concerns that guided most middle-class cultural workers.'³⁴²

With his knowledge of the slum conditions, aged thirty five, Rowley became a City Councillor, gaining the necessary influence to begin to improve the lot of those living in the slums of Ancoats. Rowley recalled his entry into local politics thus:

In 1875, being induced by neighbours to contest our native ward for the City Council, a new era of work set in. A cry was required, and this was hit upon – "Baths and Wash-houses and Public rooms for Ancoats." Although, as we have pointed out, the city was doing high socialism without saying so, this cry of mine was howled at as the revolutionary raving of an irresponsible incompetent and declared to be wildly impossible. We soon, however, got all that we asked for, and more, for noble baths are spread around the city and no sky has fallen in.³⁴³

Having achieved some success in the improvement of sanitation, housing conditions and public health, and demonstrating a flair for campaigning, Rowley turned his attention to education and the arts which he believed would enable the workers to raise themselves out of poverty and act as a civilising influence on the 'Ancoats Rough'.

³⁴¹ Kay, *Charles Rowley and the Ancoats Recreation Movement 1876-1914*, p. 46

³⁴² Waters, Chris (1990) *British Socialists and the Politics of Popular Culture 1884-1914*. Manchester: Manchester University Press. p. 78

³⁴³ Rowley, *Fifty Years Without Wages*, p. 50

The Manchester City News

In 1874 Rowley became a shareholder in the *Manchester City News*, and a member of the Board in 1877.³⁴⁴ Between 1879 and 1883 Lee notes that the proprietors of the *Manchester Guardian* acquired a majority shareholding in the paper, including some shares held by its Editor, Charles Prestwich Scott. 'The effect was to transfer the business to the *Guardian*, although the paper continued to be run independently by Nodal and the Board led by Milner.'³⁴⁵

This aspect of Rowley's life has been overlooked in Rushton's thesis and the work of more recent scholars. It allows me to throw a slightly different light on Rowley and raises some questions about his tendency towards self promotion. Certainly, Rushton would not have been directed to look for this as Rowley makes no reference to this interest in his memoirs.

Clearly, Rowley would have had financial motives for becoming involved with this commercial venture. However, given what is known about Rowley's taste for self-promotion, the soon to be City Councillor would find it useful to have access to, and some control over, the press. More importantly perhaps were the connections this would bring him, beyond his own artistic and literary connections.³⁴⁶

³⁴⁴ Lee, A. J. (1973) The Management of a Victorian Local Newspaper: the Manchester City News, 1864-1900, *Business History*, 15: 2, pp. 131-149. P.

³⁴⁵ Ibid.,

³⁴⁶ J. H. Nodal, referred to by Lee above, had joined the Board of the *Manchester City News* in 1868, becoming Editor in 1871 and remaining involved with the paper until his death in 1909. George Milner was a wealthy cloth merchant who obtained shares in the paper in 1874, and became Chair during the period 1880-1900. Both Nodal and Milner were listed as members of the Board of the Ancoats Recreation Committee in the first surviving annual report from 1884. The *Guardian* Editor C. P. Scott would also become involved in the Ancoats Recreation Movement and was the host of an 'At Home' to celebrate ten years of the Ancoats Brotherhood in 1899, where Mr and Mrs Charles Rowley would be the guests of honour.

Rowley's business activities and commercial interests demonstrate that for all his fellow feeling for the working man and devotion to service, Rowley was pragmatic enough to reconcile himself to finance himself and his family via commercial activity and the profit motive. His frequent references to working in his father's workshop and his lack of education enabled him to claim kinship with the working man he aimed to attract to the work of the Ancoats Recreation Movement.³⁴⁷

Rowley was nothing if not determined to present himself as a Manchester and Lancashire man. In his entries on the national censuses for 1881 and 1891 respectively, his occupation is stated as 'Carver and Gilder' and 'Managing Director Dealer in Works of Art And Picture Frames' without reference to his public offices. Only on the 1911 census is he recorded as 'Retired J.P.' His book, *A Workshop Paradise*, is a collection of mostly undated articles that had appeared in the Manchester newspapers in the years before 1905. In several of these pieces Rowley stresses his local credentials as one of the people. In an article entitled 'Our Folk Speech', he states:

Now we in our village on the North side of Manchester are hardly suburbs, and no apostle to the genteels would find a more congenial field of operation up our way. We may be "backward," we may talk in the vernacular, we are certainly full of old-fashioned ways and sayings, but we are not genteel, and that is certainly something to be thankful for.³⁴⁸

Certainly, these are often humorous; tongue in cheek pieces, but Rowley appears genuine in wishing to be regarded as part of the community. Rowley never acknowledged himself as a member of the middle classes though clearly he was.

³⁴⁷ Rowley, *Fifty Years Without Wages*, p. 9

³⁴⁸ Rowley, Charles (1905) *A Workshop Paradise and Other Papers*. Manchester: Sherratt and Hughes. p. 116

His thoughts on class in British society are illustrated in this comment an article that can be dated approximately to 1898 or 1899:

The first thing is to break down snobbery, caste, and patronage. That is not very easy, for in one way or another we are most of us blighted by these things. Get rid of them, boycott them, and I for one am certain that we have the conditions and the human material to make and keep a right Merry England.³⁴⁹

He relished his northern credentials in relation to the south and the metropolis. In part this can be attributed to a practical desire to appeal to voters when the City Council elections came round, but Rowley does not appear to have recognised the way people he met would have related to him, for clearly his business ownership and shares in the *Manchester City News* indicate his position as a member of the middle classes.

A charismatic leader

As the figurehead of the Ancoats Recreation Movement, Rowley proved to be a charismatic and persuasive leader. This contributed greatly to the early success of the organization. Rowley was by all accounts full of contradictions. The frail health he claimed to have suffered from since childhood and frequent recuperative holidays in the Italian Alps contrasted with the energy he invested in the many public duties he undertook. At times he was a City Councillor, a Justice of the Peace, private businessman, a Board member of various business and charitable organizations and a member of various gentlemen's clubs, such as Manchester's Reform club, which he joined in 1876 shortly after his election to the Council and just as he began to form the Ancoats Recreation Movement. Rushton suggests that all this activity was 'in

³⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 64

part, because it enabled him to demonstrate to the world at large that his physical fragility cloaked a powerful being.³⁵⁰ This energy suggests, however, that at times his fragility may have been overstated as he grew into adulthood, borne out perhaps by his eventual death at the age of ninety-three.

Many authors referred to Rowley's ability to make friends and to persuade them to assist him in his various projects and causes. Rushton quotes the Ancoats Recreation Programme of 1918-19 where Mr Cumberland describes Rowley as 'a little red flame of a man' taking note of Rowley's short stature and red hair and flowing beard. This phrase would ever after be used in references to Rowley by his friends. The only criticism Cumberland could make of Rowley is that 'he was pleased with himself.'³⁵¹ Any reader of *Fifty Years of Work Without Wages* will be aware of Rowley's tendency towards name dropping and self satisfaction as it recurs throughout his reminiscences about the notable people he formed friendships with. This tendency was commented on too in his obituary which read 'in Art, Charles Rowley's appreciation of 'The Best' was coloured by the great social work in which he was engaged and by the desire to throw a little reflected glory upon himself.'³⁵²

On the topic of the Ancoats Brotherhood Audrey Kay also notes that 'He deliberately kept this intimate company for his own, favoured clique. A glance though Rowley's autobiography reveals, also, that he was an inveterate name dropper.'³⁵³ Rowley obviously enjoyed his friendships with celebrated people who he admired. Much of his memoirs are taken up with recalling these friendships. The name

³⁵⁰ Rushton, *Charles Rowley and the Ancoats Recreation Movement 1876-1914*, p. 35

³⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 35

³⁵² *Ibid.*

³⁵³ Kay, *Charles Rowley and the Ancoats Recreation Movement 1876-1914*, p. 47

dropping was perhaps an unintentional side effect of his enthusiasm to share exciting experiences and new ideas with everyone he met. While Rowley enjoyed basking in this reflected glory, it should not be allowed to detract from his genuine desire to deliver his vision of improved living conditions to his neighbours in Ancoats and across Manchester. With such improvements in their physical conditions making concerns about disease and poor sanitation no longer a distraction, he believed this would free their minds to aspire to appreciate great art.

Rushton comments on Cumberland's criticism saying:

This seems a small fault, but this egocentricity played no small part in the continuance of the Recreation Movement and may be responsible for a certain obscurity concerning developments during its early years. An optimistic Romantic view of human nature is a basic factor in Rowley's early outlook, so that it is by no means surprising to learn of his egocentricity when it is realised that self-absorption is a failing of Romantics generally.³⁵⁴

Rowley's self absorption and unwillingness to share the spotlight would ultimately contribute to the decline of the Recreation Movement which was recognized by the wider public for the iconic figure of Rowley himself, rather than the achievements of the organization. When Rowley retired in 1924 the Movement that was already in decline, as times changed, had no recognized personality to replace him and quietly faded away.

One of Rowley's skills was his ability to create a large network of sociability that included many of the leading citizens of Manchester and encompassed influential people with national and international reputations. His persuasive entreaties enabled him to attract the necessary financial contributions to improve the social amenities available to the people of Manchester, and to present an impressive

³⁵⁴ Rushton, *Charles Rowley and the Ancoats Recreation Movement 1876-1914*, p. 35

range of speakers to the Sunday Lectures at the New Islington Hall. In 1911 in a humorous piece that was received too late to be included as the epilogue to *Fifty of Years Without Wages*, George Bernard Shaw commented on Rowley's powers of persuasion complaining of 'the tyranny of Ancoats' and stating that:

It is my firm belief that 90 per cent of the deaths that have occurred in the last quarter-century among the public-spirited men of this country are due to diseases of which the seeds were planted during untimely journeys to Manchester. Rowley is the only man alive who could induce any sane man to go to Manchester unless he had urgent and lucrative business there, and he abuses his powers mercilessly.³⁵⁵

Certainly, the name dropping in which Rowley indulged himself was founded in his genuine connections to a wide range of celebrated figures who allowed themselves to be flattered by Rowley's invitations to speak at the Ancoats Brotherhood events at the New Islington Hall. This is confirmed in the programmes held in the archives of the Working Class Movement Library in Salford.³⁵⁶ In the circles in which Rowley mixed, people of influence from all walks of life regarded him and the Brotherhood to have enough standing to make the journey from the metropolis profitable to their reputation if not their pockets.

Rowley and the theatre

Rowley was a strong supporter of the theatre throughout his life and counted amongst his influential friends George Bernard Shaw and Sir Henry Irving, both of whom were guests at his home when visiting Manchester. He traces this love of theatre in his memoir, *Fifty Years of Work Without Wages*, describing with great

³⁵⁵ *Manchester Guardian*, 2 November 1929. p. 8

³⁵⁶ A range of programmes for the activities of the Ancoats Brotherhood over many years are available to consult in the Working class Movement Library in Salford. The catalogue can be consulted online at <http://www.wcml.org.uk/search-the-catalogue/catalogue-introduction/>

enthusiasm, his introduction to illegitimate theatre as a boy writing 'Close by was a canvas theatre, a penny gaff, or "slang" as we called it. Here one got one's early taste for drama.³⁵⁷ This refers to his childhood in the 1840s when by his own admission, but for his delicate health he may well become an 'Ancoats Rough' in of one of the 'scuttling' gangs notorious in crime in the slums of Manchester at this time.³⁵⁸ Rushton comments that Rowley's early experiences of theatre 'had inspired him with a love of drama which never palled.'³⁵⁹ Clearly, he enjoyed memories of the illegitimate popular theatre he had experienced as a boy.

His *Manchester Evening News* obituary also notes his ability to extend his social network to incorporate influential people from the world of the theatre into his social circle:

He was a great theatre-goer, and it was in the course of visits to Manchester theatres that he made some of his most valued friendship. It was thus that he met Sir Henry Irving, Miss Horniman, Henry Arthur Jones, Beerbohm Tree, Granville-Barker, Max Beerbohm and William Peel. All these helped him with his work at Ancoats at times. When Irving was in Manchester he and Rowley usually had supper together at the Queen's hotel.³⁶⁰

In the two letters Rowley contributed to the 'Proposed Palace of Varieties' debate in the *Manchester Guardian* he introduced himself as 'an old playgoer', he stated 'I look upon the drama, if adequately presented in a well-managed theatre, as the finest and soundest entertainment yet discovered for healthy men and women.'³⁶¹

It is clear then that Rowley and the Ancoats Recreation Movement had a favourable view of theatre and the drama. They distinguished drama from the

³⁵⁷ Rowley, *Fifty Years of Work Without Wages*, p. 10

³⁵⁸ Ibid.

³⁵⁹ Rushton, *Charles Rowley and the Ancoats Recreation Movement 1876-1914*, p. 93

³⁶⁰ *Manchester Evening News*, 7 September 1933. p. 7

³⁶¹ *Manchester Guardian*, 7 September 1933. p. 7

entertainment programmes of music hall, musical comedies and pantomime which they argued was excluding drama from the major theatres. In Rowley's own words 'It is pitiable to think that we have no real drama. None of the healthiest and most delightful of all amusements, continually in our midst.'³⁶² As will be explored in more detail in Chapter Five with Robert Courtneidge's engagement with the 'State of the Drama' debate, this period was a moment in theatre history that saw a marked disconnect between popular theatre and 'the drama.' Rowley was decidedly on the side of the drama. When attacking the proposal for the building of the new Palace of Varieties and the taste for the popular amongst Manchester audiences he wrote:

It is no use moaning about the decline of the drama. Its venom comes from a well-known quarter. The music hall, the theatre of varieties, the childishness of pantomime, and the poorest of opera bouffe have all contributed to undermine the taste of thoughtless theatre-goers. It is one of our modern diseases to require everything smart and showy. [.....] Our amusements are deadly dull, even under their guise of an artificial smartness which soon loses its piquancy.³⁶³

This gives a clear insight into his taste for theatre. Once again though, Rowley's statement about pantomime contradicts his own behaviour and the regular reports from his friends about his capacity for 'fun.' His views on pantomime appear ambivalent and contradictory, this was because when expressing opinions on pantomime he was effectively discussing two different things. He favoured the form of pantomime popular in his youth and into the early 1880s, but rejects the new modern form in danger of being subsumed into music hall. His views on pantomime can perhaps be divided from those on music hall in a comment ten days later when discussing entertainments provided at schools and other 'institutions' in which he

³⁶² *Manchester Guardian*, 18 September 1889. p. 7

³⁶³ *Ibid.*

said 'In my opinion the influence of the music hall has blighted all of them, just as it has blighted the lighter work at our theatres.'³⁶⁴

Contributing to Rowley's obituary in the *Manchester Guardian*, his friend Richard Cross wrote:

Even now I find it difficult to form a true estimate of what has made him such a notable figure in our social life; he was so many sided, he could enjoy a good pantomime at Drury Lane or a grand opera at Covent Garden.'³⁶⁵

This is a further example of the contradictions to be found both within Rowley's own writing and in the reports of others, concerning his views and actions. As in Manchester, Drury Lane pantomimes included a large element of music hall and relied on its biggest stars to attract an audience. Dan Leno, Herbert Campbell, and Marie Lloyd, often criticized for the risqué nature of her songs, all appeared in pantomime there regularly. Along with Rowley's own reports of the penny gaffs of his youth, we can only speculate about how he reconciled his delight in 'a good pantomime' with his professed views about music hall. Not being a regular visitor to the Manchester music halls during the years under investigation here, he may not have connected what they offered with the splendour of Drury Lane and his visits with his celebrated friends.

Given the length of his career in a life that spanned nearly ninety four years it is to be expected that some of his views changed over time. However, as a successful politician with the ability to charm influential figures noted for their irascibility, such as George Bernard Shaw and William Morris, into assisting him in his projects, it is likely that he was able to present a view most convenient to his

³⁶⁴ Manchester Guardian, 28 September 1889. p. 5

³⁶⁵ *Manchester Guardian*, 7 September 1933. p. 4

cause at any time on a given topic in order that it should be resolved to his satisfaction. This does, however, make it more difficult to present his definitive view on many issues.

The Manchester Dramatic Art Committee

The Ancoats Brotherhood's pursuit of 'good' theatre was demonstrated again in 1898 with the formation of the Manchester Dramatic Art Committee. The cultural arena in which the various forms of commercial entertainment and wholesome amusement competed for audiences, had in its background strong influences from 'elevating' rational recreation exemplified by the Ancoats Movement. Here my purpose is to confirm the support of the Ancoats Brotherhood for the genres in theatre that could be regarded as wholesome amusement, and a municipally funded theatre that would allow the authorities to influence the content of the programme to be presented. The creation of this new committee, though separate from the Ancoats Brotherhood, illustrates their ongoing interest in social reform through culture even though by 1898 they focussed their activities more on providing a programme of cultural events.

On 17 February 1898, the *Manchester Guardian* reported that

A meeting of ladies and gentlemen interested in a proposal to form a committee "for the encouragement of the representation of Shakespeare's plays and the support of dramatic art worthy of a great city" was held last night at the Manchester Town Hall. Sir W. H. Bailey presided in the absence of the Lord Mayor, and among others present were Judge Parry, Mr J. T. Foard, Dr Pankhurst, Mr J. E. King, Mr. Charles Rowley, Mr. C. Hughes, Mr. A. Darbyshire, Mr. George Milner, Mr. T. C. Horsfall, Mr. J. K. Pyne, Mr. W. Goldthorpe, Mr. B. S. Attwood, Mr. T. C. Abbott, Mr. E. Horkheimer, and Dr.

Emrys Jones. The meeting was described by one of the speakers, perhaps humorously, as “representative of the best intellect of the city.”³⁶⁶

Many of the names above can be listed as the usual suspects and most were paid up members of the Ancoats Brotherhood. The reference to ‘perhaps humorously’ suggests that the attendees at the meeting were on familiar terms. Mr. F. R. Benson was well known in the city as a regular visitor with his own theatre company, known for its popular productions of Shakespeare.³⁶⁷ He delivered the address entitled *The Relation of the Drama to Civic Life*. The purpose of the meeting was ‘to consider the question of municipal theatres’ because those attending were of the opinion ‘that it was very important that wholesome amusement should be presented to the people.’³⁶⁸ The concerns amongst the cultural elite in Manchester about the entirely commercial nature of the theatre available in the city gave them a desire to establish a theatre managed on an alternative model. The question Benson hoped to answer was ‘how could they best obtain deliverance from the tyranny of the dividend?’³⁶⁹:

He did not wish to seem ungrateful: he knew that without the assistance of the financier the dramatic art would be in a still more deplorable condition than it was. Still less did he desire as a manager to appear to be attacking the class to which he belonged. He was merely voicing the wide-spread discontent at the purely financial system on which Manchester and other cities allowed their theatres to be managed.³⁷⁰

Judge Parry then suggested potential models for the creation of a municipal or endowed theatre but that ‘it would set at rest the minds of a good many worthy

³⁶⁶ *Manchester Guardian*, 17 February 1898. p. 5

³⁶⁷ Wearing, J. P. ‘Benson, Sir Francis Robert (1858-1939)’ J. P. Wearing *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. Ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison. Oxford: OUP, 2004. Online ed., edited by Lawrence Goldman. January 2011.

³⁶⁸ *Manchester Guardian*, 17 February 1898. p. 5

³⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

aldermen and town councillors if he said that the Committee did not intend to ask the ratepayers' to finance the building of a municipal theatre.' To illustrate the types of theatrical programme of which the Committee disapproved he informed the meeting that 'There was a healthy dissatisfaction as to the way in which the theatres were at present conducted. Pantomimes and "Geishas" were all very well, but you could have too many of them.'³⁷¹

The issues raised by this new Dramatic Art Committee illustrate an ambivalent relationship with theatre here for the socialist ambitions of the Manchester middle-class philanthropists and advocates of municipal socialism. The ambivalence of the tacit acceptance of pantomime hinges on the financial necessity for theatres to present a commercial programme in order to meet the high costs of theatrical production and the 'tyranny of the dividend' necessary to please the shareholders. Frank Benson, who managed a touring Shakespeare company himself, is realistic in his address to the meeting about the financial implications for theatre.

Rowley and Commercial Entertainment

Rowley was aware of the need for a commercial element to fund leisure opportunities for the people. Rowley's enthusiasm for 'fun' for the people is the topic of an article entitled 'Merry England', possibly an ironic title directed in response to Robert Blatchford's book of this name.³⁷² He wrote

It is safe to say that there never was a time thanks, to free trade, when so much genuine well-being and hearty pleasure was enjoyed by the mass as by the people of England at this time. It is simply a marvellous achievement.

³⁷¹ Ibid.

³⁷² Though undated, the warning referring to the potential for Britain being 'drawn into a wicked and senseless war in Africa' locates the piece to 1898 or 1899, just prior to the Boer War.

There is nothing abroad so general as the ordered brightness and happy outdoor pleasuring such as we see nightly at the Earl's Court Exhibition, or daily, and especially on Sundays, on the river Thames, or at the Zoo, or the hundred and one pleasure places in London. It is the same with differences, hereabout. Look at Belle Vue and its harmless fun and jollity, or even the Saturday night pageant in Manchester. There is a round of certain streets focussing on Shudehill Market which provide a weekly fair all year round on fine Saturdays and Sundays.³⁷³

Rowley's view of the reputation of the street fairs is challenged by Jenny Birchall's 2006 discussion of the 'Monkey Parades' that accompanied the Saturday and Sunday night street markets around Shudehill and Oldham Street, the main thoroughfares leading to the Ancoats area of the city. Quoting the unidentified author of an article in *Comus*, Birchall defines the 'monkey parades' of the late nineteenth century thus:

On Sunday evenings, Oldham Street was the location of the popular 'monkey parades', a social activity for young working-class men and women that involved walking up and down the street and the possibility of meeting a partner.' During this time, one spectator commented, 'the street presents more of the appearance of a fair, with a great deal of rough horseplay, its bustle, its merriment and its unseemingly rowdyism'³⁷⁴ This pursuit, along with all the noise, colour and activity that it brought with it during summer evenings seemed all the more offensive due to its commencement on a so called day of rest, and it weighed heavily on the minds of newspaper writers and readers.³⁷⁵

Building on the work of Simon Gunn, Birchall suggests that:

The space of Oldham Street itself has recently been recognised as a contested arena, in which multiple uses and meanings of space clashed and co-existed, as members of different class groups sought to use the space in their own ways.³⁷⁶

³⁷³ Rowley, *A Workshop Paradise*, p. 59-60

³⁷⁴ *Comus*, 14 February 1878, p. 6

³⁷⁵ Birchall, Jenny (2006) 'The Carnival Revels of Manchester's Vagabonds': Young working-class women and monkey parades in the 1870s' *Women's History Review*, 15, 2, pp. 229-252. p. 230

³⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 231

While Rowley's interpretation of the street fairs may have been more innocent than some of the activities taking place, it is likely that a large proportion of the crowd were simply having fun. To attend the Brotherhood events at the New Islington Hall the middle classes would find themselves passing through these contested areas of space. In the same way they found the working classes encroaching into the areas of the city that were considered to be their own domain, namely the theatres that were being invaded by the music hall and variety acts and the 'tyranny' of modern pantomime that were feared to drive out the 'good drama' favoured by Rowley and his supporters.

After going on to describe railway excursions to the seaside and into the countryside, and access to cheap food and affordable Sunday best clothing, he criticises the 'sentimental philanthropists' of the middle classes saying:

Amateur philanthropists and the namby-pamby may say that all this is too rough, not refined enough. That is as we may expect as a growl from rich folk who can so easily buy themselves out of what displeases them. That is all very well, but as some snobs dearly love a Lord there is a vast majority of us which feels happiest in a crowd. The tragedy and comedy of life is so much more in evidence. Moreover, the skilled caterers can do so much more for the scores of thousands than they can do for themselves.³⁷⁷

Rowley did then recognise a value in the provision of commercially provided leisure activities, and in their professionalization and increased efficiency. Having identified music hall as the villain, Rowley went on to clarify his own idea about what 'fun' should be saying:

It is because the underlying influence of music halls and theatres of varieties sap our love of genuine fun, destroy the taste for real dramatic work, and, worst of all perhaps, pollute the ear. The degradation of all these desirable

³⁷⁷ Rowley, *A Workshop Paradise*, p. 61

things – good fun and plenty of it, fine drama, noble or refreshing music – can, I believe, all be traced to these influences.³⁷⁸

No detailed explanation was offered as to how the music hall and variety theatre achieves this destruction, but Rowley was not to be swayed. He concluded his letter to the *Manchester Guardian* setting out his opposition to the proposed building of the Palace Theatre of Varieties by warning

I have seen a good many Theatres of Varieties, at home and abroad, and cannot commend them either on the score of entertainment or, which is always common and poor even when it is smart, or on the ground of physical and moral health. I heartily hope that we may not only keep this current venture sterile, but do something to shut up our present stupid and vicious institutions of the same genus.³⁷⁹

The ‘moral health’ to which Rowley refers above and the moral development of young adults is perhaps the danger that concerns him the most:

This new venture, if allowed to proceed, will degrade taste, lower an already poor moral tone, especially among our young men and women, and disgust everybody but the stock-jobbing crew who wish to foist it upon us. I am quite prepared to acknowledge to the very utmost that we are unfortunately living in a very dull and dismal town. It is a standing puzzle to some of us how we may best relieve this unnatural and depressing state of things. Well, whatever else may serve to lift us out of our slough, the music hall and its habitués are at the opposite pole to the true remedy.³⁸⁰

Rowley then advises the readers of the *Manchester Guardian* that before the time comes when it will be necessary to oppose the granting of a licence for the Palace:

Meantime let us try and realise some rational amusement for such of us are hard worked and live in a dismal place, and who have no hobby to fill that leisure which Thackeray said was a very good garment to look at but a very bad one to wear.³⁸¹

³⁷⁸ *Manchester Guardian*, 28 September 1889. p. 5

³⁷⁹ *Manchester Guardian*, 18 September 1889. p. 7

³⁸⁰ Ibid.

³⁸¹ *Manchester Guardian*, 28 September 1889. p. 5

The fun that Rowley advocates can be seen from his own words to be rational forms of recreation. While he wanted people to enjoy themselves, their choice of leisure pursuit must be of an improving nature and require some physical or intellectual work from the audience to meet with his approval.

Chris Waters writes of Rowley that 'In the 1890s he had alienated Blatchford when he refused to support Blatchford's campaign for the Manchester Palace of Varieties.'³⁸² His 1889 letters to the *Manchester Guardian* advocated opposition to campaign against the Palace as has been seen. Blatchford's relationship to pantomime and music hall forms Chapter Four, but here this incident marks a parting of the ways between the socialism of Blatchford and that of Rowley. Until this point the two had been friends and when Blatchford was first introduced to socialism the early work of the *Clarion* movement had much in common with the methods adopted by Rowley in Ancoats. The distinction between them is perhaps an indicator of the onset of the waning of the influence of the Ancoats Brotherhood as Blatchford was able to maintain a closer connection to the cultural taste popular with a greater number of the mass of the people. In the mid 1890s the *Clarion* Movement can be seen to have picked up the baton from the Ancoats Recreation Movement to drive a social reform agenda forward in the pages of the *Clarion* newspaper. Its very different concept of fun and their relationship with commercial entertainment will be seen in Chapter Four.

The inability of Rowley and the Ancoats Brotherhood to accept the choice of the mass of the public who embraced music hall and variety theatre limited their appeal. The Ancoats Brotherhood achieved a great deal of success playing to a

³⁸² Waters, *British Socialists and the Politics of Popular Culture 1884-1914*, p. 79

niche market of the aristocracy of labour and the lower middle classes who aspired to become educated and move up the social scale. Rowley, however, would become frustrated with their inevitable inability to find a 'wholesome amusement' that would achieve the mass appeal of the commercial forms of entertainment that came to dominate late Victorian culture. Where Blatchford adapted to meet the tastes of the 1890s audience, Rowley could not compromise and as a consequence the Ancoats Brotherhood was unable to maintain its level of influence outside of its niche supporters.

Rowley's egocentricity and his disillusionment

For all that Rowley retained his enthusiasm for the activities of the Ancoats Brotherhood and continued to organize its programme there are a number of occasions where he expresses his frustration at being able to discover a leisure activity that would provide 'wholesome amusement' and attract the public in the same numbers that he observed regularly visiting the music hall and popular theatre, and who could be frequented the numerous pubs in Manchester. The Ancoats Brotherhood achieved its highest membership of two thousand people in 1900, but by then its ambitions to elevate the population, initially of Ancoats, but then of Manchester more widely had largely been abandoned in favour of tailoring its programme of events to the more achievable goal of supporting those people who already shared its interests and valued the opportunity to have access to the arts. These were mostly members of the middle classes and those from the aristocracy of labour who aspired to join them.

Kay suggests that Rowley's disillusionment had begun as early as 1889 saying:

The 1880s were the most fruitful periods at Ancoats Recreation as far as the attempting to disseminate cultural values which were unequivocally aimed at the reform of Ancoats were concerned. After the formation of the Brotherhood in 1889, it is clear that Rowley became depressed about progress in this direction. He gave up ideas of local social reform and applied himself to the provision of entertainment and fun for a more wide-ranging audience.³⁸³

Certainly Rowley's correspondence with the *Manchester Guardian* supports this claim:

One thing is clear, and it has been to most of us for an age, and that is that the provision for amusement made by most of our educational and religious agencies are the dimmest of deadly failures. The tea-party and its like are frightful examples of goody-goody boredom, at least to everybody except the youngsters, who like a feed and a row. For grown up folk they are a wearisome infliction on the sense of duty of those who feel that they ought to be there. I am sure a good many people are feeling the most insuperable difficulty of amusing a mixed-body of young but grown-up people without being dull or vulgar.³⁸⁴

Rowley also brings to the fore here the concern of philanthropic organizations such as the Ancoats Brotherhood for the moral welfare of the city's young adults. While he recognised the problem, what he could never suggest was a satisfactory solution. This was to be a crucial problem for all the organisations and individuals that promoted rational recreation for it would be their failure to attract sufficient numbers of people to their ideas of how to occupy their leisure hours that would ultimately lead to losing the battle with commercial entertainment. The people would chose to relax and be entertained in their own time rather than the continued activity required by rational recreation.

³⁸³ Kay, *Charles Rowley and the Ancoats Recreation Movement 1876-1914*, p. 52

³⁸⁴ *Manchester Guardian*, 28 September 1889. p. 5

This raises questions about the working classes and whether they wished to be 'elevated' through the rational recreation practices that their middle-class hosts aspired to for them. Waters reports that Rowley denied that the purpose of the Ancoats Recreation Movement was to improve the working classes with whom he claimed kinship and that it 'merely desired amusement without elevation.'³⁸⁵ The evolution of the Brotherhood suggests that this must be questioned. Rowley attacked critics of the movement in *Fifty Years of Work Without Wages* saying 'most of this peddling fault finding has been indulged in by people who never come to us and have really no idea what superb audiences we gather.'³⁸⁶ This referred to criticism of the programme which included 'Beethoven, the best of fine arts, noble lectures, excellent painting with a constant flow of fine quotations, in a purely working-class district'³⁸⁷ and stated that 'We don't recognise class, but trust to character.'³⁸⁸ Enthusiastic about these successes Rowley opined 'how we aroused the dormant faculties of many remarkable but obscure men and women can never be told.'³⁸⁹

It is easy to accuse Rowley of elitism and a lack of connection with the mass of the working classes in Manchester, in particular Ancoats, that the Ancoats Recreation Movement was originally created to serve. During its lifetime the movement did develop to appeal to the aristocracy of labour and the lower middle classes, but I would suggest that in part this was due to the need to serve the requirements and aspirations of those people who most regularly attended its events.

³⁸⁵ Waters, *British Socialists and the Politics of Popular Culture 1884-1914*, p. 79

³⁸⁶ Rowley, *Fifty Years of Work Without Wages*, p. 211

³⁸⁷ Ibid.

³⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 212

³⁸⁹ Ibid.

Waters notes that for the recreation events 'Rowley claimed that he wanted to keep clear of religion.'³⁹⁰ Rowley himself described his ideal for the organisation:

As leader of the movement I have been firmly possessed of one idea – namely, to go only for the best. Surely in such a huge community of workers there is a fair percentage of good heads, strong hearts, good folk all round.'³⁹¹

In the evidence that does survive about Rowley and the Ancoats Movement, there is no suggestion that the formation of the elite Brotherhood was a conscious or malicious exclusion of the working classes from the movement. The impression is rather that in Rowley's delight in the company of like minded people and with the energy and enthusiasm he invested into the movement he failed to see that he was moving away from the people he originally aimed to serve. What became effectively a form of elitism was due perhaps to some naivety and lack of awareness on Rowley's part in failing to see, for example, that the cost of a day's railway excursion remained prohibitive for some of the less well paid of the working classes. As time passed Rowley was unable to discover how to inspire and retain a working-class audience and by the turn of the century the membership of the Brotherhood was becoming a more middle-class once again. As Waters has observed:

Unfortunately, neither Rowley nor those socialists who gave him their tentative support knew how to translate the desire for beauty into effective political activity. For them the connection between middle-class culture and socialist politics indeed remained 'mysterious.'³⁹²

³⁹⁰ Waters, *British Socialists and the Politics of Popular Culture 1884-1914*, p. 79

³⁹¹ Rowley, *Fifty Years of Work Without Wages*, p. 198

³⁹² Waters, *British Socialists and the Politics of Popular Culture 1884-1914*, p. 80

Conclusion

Charles Rowley and the Ancoats Brotherhood are a useful case study because they were witness to and players of some influence in the development of the cultural and social life of Manchester throughout the late Victorian period and into the early years of the twentieth century. They were also a faction promoting a particular kind of theatre and entertainment. The most extreme attacks on commercial entertainment were made by the temperance campaigners and some of the religious groups of the reforming elite that began the debates in the *Manchester Guardian* in the autumn of 1889. Rowley as seen above, took part in this debate, advocating rational forms of recreation as the genuine fun that should fill the peoples' leisure time. Through the Ancoats Brotherhood that he had brought formally into being in March 1889, he made practical attempts to provide alternatives to the unacceptable forms of entertainment that endangered the moral welfare of the people.

The wider Ancoats movement became established from the early 1880s when they were most driven to engage with and elevate the mass of the working classes in Ancoats and across Manchester. From 1889 onwards, as observed by Kay, they began to express frustration with their inability to reach these people as they recognise that after their initial successes they were getting no closer to fulfilling this ambition. While the membership grew steadily in its early years, this would inevitably plateau when all those people inclined towards the activities of the movement had joined. This can also be seen in Waters's suggestion for the need to formally create the elite group of the Brotherhood within the Ancoats Recreation Movement brought about by the financial difficulties of the movement.

Both Rushton and Kay make reference to Rowley's egocentricity. Looking back from a twenty first century perspective, this can be seen to have handicapped Rowley and the movement as they, and especially he, failed to recognise that the people they wished to attract to join them did not share their aspirations, or value the arts and high culture enough to allow the Recreation Movement to expand further.

As the figurehead and main driver of the organization the policies of the Brotherhood appear to have been Rowley's. The Brotherhood worked from the beginning with the misguided assumption that all the citizens in their community shared their enthusiasm for high culture and desired to 'be improved' through a system of 'self improvement'. In all of Rowley's own writings his joy in the Arts and enthusiasm to share this, and to make high culture accessible to everyone is apparent. He does not, however, appear to question whether the people with whom he wants to share his own cultural tastes find this desirable. There is no evidence that he considered whether there might be valid alternative philosophies and values to those he promoted. The enthusiasm of this 'little red flame of a man' and the energy he devoted to his passion to improve the lot of his fellow citizens can be seen in the many projects with which he became involved is readily apparent.

His disillusionment at the failure, on his terms, of the Brotherhood can be seen as a personal one. The establishment of the Brotherhood marks the beginning of a change for the organization, and for Rowley himself, as it can be seen to have begun to consolidate its position and its reputation for providing programmes of high quality events for its followers. The Movement from this time continued to have considerable success in providing for the more limited audience of a sizeable minority within the artisan and lower middle classes who did aspire to self improvement through

education, and who appreciated the opportunities for access to the arts that Rowley and his celebrated friends and associates provided. This was an achievement unprecedented for an impoverished district such as Ancoats. As Audrey Kay has noted 'by 1900 most of the good work of the Brotherhood was done' and it had achieved its highest membership numbers of 2000, but the organisation continued until 1935, shortly after Rowley's death and by appealing to the middle classes ensured that Ancoats received visitors from out of its area that went some way to improve its reputation as a respectable if never wealthy district.

In 1889, Robert Blatchford had written a series of articles in the *Morning Chronicle* bringing to public attention the plight of those living in extreme poverty in the poorest districts of Manchester including Ancoats. He was also in favour of rational forms of recreation, but his version of socialism centred around a theory that people should only do what they enjoyed. Rowley who insisted that filling leisure time was an entirely serious business would not be able to capture the public imagination so successfully. The next chapter explores how Blatchford and his associates took advantage of commercial entertainment, especially pantomime and the theatre, manipulating it to allow their brand of utopian socialism to appeal to a much broader section of the community.

CHAPTER FOUR

ROBERT BLATCHFORD AND THE *CLARION*

In this chapter I investigate the influence of the socialist press on the theatres in Manchester using the *Clarion* as a case study, a very different type of newspaper to the national daily, the *Manchester Guardian*. Like the *Guardian*, however, the *Clarion*, a weekly socialist newspaper published in Manchester, also achieved a national and international readership. The *Clarion*, as will be seen, has often been mentioned, if briefly, in studies of the history of socialism, socialist fiction or the Victorian and Edwardian press, but has been the subject of little research in its own right.

I examine the networks of sociability and business that connected the theatrical managers in Manchester to the city's socialist journalists and the extent of their influence over what appeared on the stages of the leading theatres. Specifically, I seek to discover how the members of the *Clarion* Board and their associates were able to reconcile their socialist values and ideals with mass entertainment, especially with its most commercially overt forms, pantomime and music hall. Most significantly, I examine their role in the production of pantomimes in Manchester, from the mid 1880s through to the turn of the twentieth century. At this time the amount of political satire in pantomime content was being reduced for commercial reasons. In Manchester some popular theatre was increasingly being appropriated by the middle-class urban elite in a dangerous game of social politics, and manipulated to their own ends, as I discuss in Chapter Six. Here I establish the position of the socialist press in relation to Hardacre.

The *Clarion* Newspaper

On 12 December 1891, the *Clarion* was launched in Manchester, by Robert Blatchford, his brother Montagu Blatchford, and their fellow journalists Alex Thompson and Edward Fay.³⁹³ A whole socialist movement grew around the newspaper, which survives in the *Clarion* cycling clubs that remain today.³⁹⁴ Each member of the *Clarion* Board developed individual as well as collective relationships with the theatre which will be discussed in greater detail.

Alex Thompson, in his autobiography wrote that the initial funding to set up the newspaper was acquired amongst the members of the Board as follows:

We raised a capital of £400 between us. Mont contributed £50, R. B. and I raised £350 on our insurance policies. Fay of course had nothing. There was no provision for interest on the investment, nor any preference for the capitalists.³⁹⁵

Robert Courtneidge, at this time, became a practical, if silent, supporter in founding the *Clarion*. Thompson continued, to describe how:

A young actor of my acquaintance named Robert Courtneidge, though a Scot and distrustful of Socialism, lent me £100 which he had saved. That was the extent of our outside investment, and the investor insisted that no interest should accrue.³⁹⁶

³⁹³ All four members of the *Clarion* Board, and often other contributors to their newspaper, wrote using a pen name and sometimes several pen names. The prolific Blatchford became well known to his readers as 'Nunquam,' shortened from the Latin '*nunquam dormio*,' meaning 'I do not sleep.' The most used of Thompson's pseudonyms was 'Dangle,' a reference to Sheridan's 'Mr. Dangle' in *The Critic* who 'could never do things by halves.'³⁹³ Montagu Blatchford was known as 'Mont Blong' or 'Boggs,' and the flamboyant Fay was remembered by the public as 'The Bounder.'

³⁹⁴ Pye, Dennis (1995) *Fellowship is Life: The Story of the Clarion Cycling Club*. New ed., Bolton: Clarion Publishing (2004)

³⁹⁵ Thompson, Alex (1937) *Here I Lie: the Memorial of an Old Journalist*. London: George Routledge and Sons Ltd. p. 67

³⁹⁶ Ibid.

Party politics do not ever seem to have attracted him, but Courtneidge's support for the *Clarion* philosophy is evident in his loan to Thompson. It is not known if he was formally a *Clarion* member, but as is seen in Chapter Five, he was active throughout his life in promoting the cause of fair salaries and working conditions for actors.

The weekly paper was published in Manchester during the first years of its existence, from 1891 to 1895, when its success and circulation figures that usually achieved 30,000 each week in the 1890s created a pressure that forced its owners to move their operation to London. Stanley Harrison has observed that the success of the *Clarion* newspaper led to the development of other activities in its name writing:

This paper became a movement in itself. Around its missionary vans, cycling clubs, Cinderella clubs to entertain children from the slums, *Clarion* choirs, handicraft guilds, and holiday camps, a nation-wide society of hopeful people came together in the name of human fellowship.³⁹⁷

Modern social historians usually acknowledge the work of Robert Blatchford in the development of the *Clarion*. This is, however, most often limited to a paragraph noting the most basic facts, naming Blatchford as Editor, and describing the paper as if he was its sole proprietor, as here by James Moore:

Robert Blatchford, or Nunquam of the *Clarion* newspaper, was the popular and flamboyant face of local socialism. Already well known for his work at *Bell's Life* and the *Sunday Chronicle*, Blatchford made his *Clarion* into one of the most lively popular journals of the day.³⁹⁸

The *Clarion's* public face might have been Robert Blatchford, but his version of socialism was one which did not advocate an acknowledged leader. Like Charles Rowley, Blatchford was also the reluctant figurehead of a brotherhood, although the

³⁹⁷ Harrison, Stanley (1974) *Poor Men's Guardians: A Survey of the Struggles for a Democratic Newspaper Press 1763-1973*. London: Lawrence and Wishart. p. 171

³⁹⁸ Moore, James R. (2006) *The Transformation of Urban Liberalism: Party Politics and Urban Governance in Late Nineteenth Century England*. Aldershot: Ashgate. p. 218

name they went by was the *Clarion* Fellowship. The position of editor became his by default. In his memoirs he stated:

The *Clarion* having now been forced out into the white light of popularity, it fell to me to attend socialist meetings. Neither of my partners would show his face on a public platform, so I had to go. I used to say that each member of the *Clarion* staff did as he pleased, except the Editor, who did what he was told. There was truth in it. I hated public speaking.³⁹⁹

Whilst he was its notional figurehead, the *Clarion* operated on much more democratic lines. Deborah Mutch has acknowledged that the *Clarion* was not managed by Blatchford alone writing that: 'In 1895 the *Clarion* relocated to London, where Blatchford remained the primary editor but was occasionally aided by Thompson.'⁴⁰⁰

Little credit has been given to the other members of the *Clarion* Board, especially Alexander Mattock Thompson, without whose contribution the *Clarion* would not have been founded or become the most successful and longest surviving socialist periodical of its day. Blatchford formally held the position of Editor, but evidence supplied by his lifelong friend and business partner. Thompson, suggests that, in the early days at least, the organization of the paper was somewhat dysfunctional. The Board, it seems, operated more as a collective. Many years later Thompson wrote in his autobiography that:

The Editor's function on the *Clarion* was as perfunctory as my job of business manager. We had no solemn conferences to discuss policy, nor any pontifical commands from the alleged Editor. Each man wrote what he thought on whatever subject happened to interest him at the moment of composition, and as he was sometimes interested in his home and family, his private affairs quite frequently competed for space with the High Politics of the British

³⁹⁹ Blatchford, Robert (1931) *My Eighty Years*. London: Cassell. p. 198

⁴⁰⁰ Mutch, Deborah (ed.) (2013) *British Socialist Fiction, 1884-1914*. 5 vols. London: Pickering and Chatto Ltd. vol. 2. p. 1

Empire. The Editor never thought of altering his staff's "copy": in fact, he never saw it.⁴⁰¹

The impact of the *Clarion* to be discussed here considers the involvement of all the members of the *Clarion* Board and some of their close associates, often members of the *Clarion* movement, from Manchester's theatrical community.

Robert Blatchford (1851-1943)

Blatchford himself was not a performer as an adult and did not write for the pantomimes, but here I establish his connections to the theatrical community and ambitions for a theatrical career.

Robert Peel Glanville Blatchford was born on 17th March 1851 in Maidstone, the second son of John Glanville Blatchford, 'an unsuccessful strolling comedian' and Georgiana Louisa Corri.⁴⁰² She was an actress of Italian descent, 'the daughter of Montagu Corri, a theatrical composer.'⁴⁰³ Blatchford's biographer Laurence Thompson describes the musical Corri family as 'a bohemian family, fecund and clannish in the Italian manner, noisy practitioners of the bassoon, the flute, the fiddle and the kindred arts.'⁴⁰⁴ The Blatchfords's father died when Robert was two years old leaving Louisa to bring up their two small sons alone. She struggled to make ends meet, travelling the country finding what work she could in small acting roles.

In his memoirs Blatchford recalled that it was common practice for the children of cast members to be employed when a child was required for a bit part in a show.

He summarized his experience on the stage saying:

⁴⁰¹ Thompson, Alex, *Here I Lie*, p. 85

⁴⁰² Thompson, Laurence, *Robert Blatchford*, p. 1. Note also that Laurence Thompson was the son of Alexander Mattock Thompson.

⁴⁰³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

My professional career – I allude to the profession – was brief and not financially significant. The highest salary to which I attained was a penny a night and a bath bun, and I retired at the age of ten.⁴⁰⁵

As the boys grew older they would earn pennies running errands for the theatres.

Laurence Thompson describes Blatchford's interest in theatre thus:

Love of the theatre came to him with his Corri blood – not the auditorium side of the theatre, but the dusty block and tackle and the discarded flats of the scene dock, the smell of greasepaint in dressing rooms, the chatter and excitement and deep, deep despair of that theatrical institution known as the stopping dress-rehearsal.⁴⁰⁶

When Robert was fourteen, his mother obtained a post as a dressmaker and gave up life on the stage. The family settled in Halifax, where his older brother Montagu, (1848-1910), was apprenticed to a lithographic printer and Robert to a brushmaker. Rejecting this occupation shortly before completing his apprenticeship, Blatchford joined the army where he stayed for six years rising to the rank of sergeant. After leaving the army, and now with a wife and two small children to support, Blatchford was introduced to Alex Thompson in 1885. Thompson was already working for Edward Hulton, the proprietor of the *Chronicle* in Manchester, and on his recommendation Hulton appointed Blatchford, first to *Bell's Journal*, and then, in 1887, to the *Chronicle* based in Manchester. Logie Barrow describes the subjects of his popular columns in the *Sunday Chronicle* as including 'the theatre, gossipy banter – and politics.'⁴⁰⁷ This mix of interests would inform Blatchford's journalistic style throughout his career and indicate his desire to be associated with the theatrical community when in Manchester.

⁴⁰⁵ Blatchford, *My Eighty Years*, p. 17

⁴⁰⁶ Thompson, Laurence, *Robert Blatchford*, p. 67

⁴⁰⁷ Barrow, L. J. W. (1975) 'The Socialism of Robert Blatchford and the "Clarion," 1889-1918'. Unpublished PhD thesis, Birkbeck, University of London. p. 25

Blatchford first acknowledged his conversion to socialism in the *Sunday Chronicle* in 1889, when after reading Hyndman and Morris's pamphlet *A Summary of the Principles of Socialism*, he recognised his own views saying 'I saw that this collectivist idea [...] was juster, simpler and more perfect than my own scheme, and that it was very different from what I had believed Socialism to be.'⁴⁰⁸

In his position at the *Chronicle* Blatchford's personal fortunes turned and he rose to join the expanding middle classes, becoming Hulton's most popular and highest paid columnist. Blatchford recalled how that happy situation ended, writing:

The 'giddy round of fortune's wheel.' In March 1891, I had a fat bank balance and a salary of £1,000 a year. In October I was out of work and £400 in debt.⁴⁰⁹

Blatchford claimed that in September 1891 Hulton sacked him from the *Chronicle* due to the strength of socialist views that he had expressed over the previous two and a half years.⁴¹⁰ Barrow and Judith Fincher suggest, however, that the final straw for Hulton, was Blatchford's preoccupation with his ambitions in the world of theatre during the spring and summer of 1891, when his own comic opera *In Summer Days* was produced.⁴¹¹ Indeed, Fincher suggests that Manchester itself may have influenced the members of the *Clarion* Board to found their newspaper because when they worked at the *Sunday Chronicle*: 'between 1887-1891 the

⁴⁰⁸ *Sunday Chronicle*, 10 March 1889.

⁴⁰⁹ Blatchford, *My Eighty Years*, p. 193

⁴¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 192

⁴¹¹ *Ibid.*

philosophy of *Clarion* socialism was being formed by Blatchford and Thompson's interaction with their Manchester environment.⁴¹²

According to Laurence Thompson, it was unlikely that Hulton would have sacked Blatchford arguing that: 'In all probability Blatchford was not fired because of his socialist writing, for the circulation had increased from 100,000 when he began writing for the paper to 300,000 by 1891.'⁴¹³ He favoured the view, also advocated by Fincher, that 'It is more probable that he and Thompson lost their jobs because they neglected their newspaper work.'⁴¹⁴ Barrow's comment supports their claims about Hulton's reasons for sacking Blatchford when he wrote:

Indeed there is the possibility that the final straw may have been an unpolitical one: that Blatchford and a colleague were, during these months, losing money on a comic opera of Blatchford's. Possibly this was taking them too often away from their journalistic responsibilities.⁴¹⁵

In the summer of 1891 Blatchford used his own money to back the production of *In Summer Days*.⁴¹⁶ The music was written by Clarence C. Corri, cousin to the Blatchford brothers and musical director at the Manchester Theatre Royal in the 1890s. Blatchford stage managed the production himself, brother Montagu designed the posters, and the costumes were designed by William Palmer, an artist at the *Chronicle* who would become a member of the *Clarion* staff later that year. The production was supervised by John Pitt Hardacre of the Comedy Theatre, whose friendship with Blatchford is explored further in Chapter Six. This confirms the network of sociability at work, and the strength of the connections between the

⁴¹² Fincher, Judith A. (1971) 'The Clarion Movement: A Study of a Socialist Attempt to Implement the Cooperative Commonwealth in England. 1889-1914'. Unpublished M.A. thesis, University of Manchester. p. 19

⁴¹³ Thompson, Laurence, *Robert Blatchford*, p. 67

⁴¹⁴ Fincher, *The Clarion Movement*, p. 19

⁴¹⁵ Barrow, *The Socialism of Robert Blatchford and the "Clarion," 1889-1918* p. 30

⁴¹⁶ Blatchford, *My Eighty Years*, p. 192

socialists and Manchester's theatrical establishment. Laurence Thompson describes Hardacre's role in this venture saying:

The production was supervised by John Pitt Hardacre, lessee of a Manchester theatre, a Falstaffian person who played Macbeth or the Ticket of Leave Man with equal panache but unequal success, and has a fat little character part in the Blatchford story.⁴¹⁷

The *Manchester Guardian* review was not cruel and noted the warm reception of the Manchester audience, but suggested that Corri, though obviously talented and showing great potential was 'still so young that it is no disparagement to him to say that his studies are as yet incomplete.'⁴¹⁸ The production failed financially costing Blatchford £600, and leaving him £400 in debt. The necessity of having a London season in order to be fashionable in the provinces, mentioned also in the *Manchester Guardian* review, is worthy of note here as it contrasts audience expectations of musical theatre with those for the pantomime, where it was considered desirable that there should be a local production.⁴¹⁹

Laurence Thompson quotes the letter of a correspondent who wrote to the *Sunday Chronicle* exclaiming 'How are the mighty fallen!' and accusing Blatchford of being egotistical and betraying the socialist cause following the production of *In Summer Days*.⁴²⁰ Blatchford defended himself replying:

There are some stupid people who suppose that only solemn and heavy work is good. Have I not from the first day I began to write to you been trying to persuade you that one of the great wants of the people was the want of amusement and pleasure? Have I not told you a hundred times that the people want cheering more than they want improving? Is not the first line of

⁴¹⁷ Thompson, Laurence, *Robert Blatchford*, p. 68

⁴¹⁸ *Manchester Guardian*, 7 April 1891. p. 8

⁴¹⁹ Ibid.

⁴²⁰ Thompson. Laurence, *Robert Blatchford*, p. 67

my creed, “The object of life is to be happy”? People do not live to work. They work to live, and I would rather not live than live a drudge and a clod.⁴²¹

Here we see Blatchford defending his hedonist philosophy that life was only worthwhile if people could experience pleasure. His accuser insinuated that he was in it ‘for filthy lucre,’⁴²² and no doubt he hoped that his opera would be a popular financial success, but the years he devoted to spreading the message of collectivism and the pursuit of a happy life do not support the criticism of that accusation against him. Blatchford’s response provides an insight into his view and that of his associates in the *Clarion* Fellowship that allowed them to go on to support pantomime as a respectable form of entertainment. in spite of the fact that it was produced on a commercial basis.

Blatchford’s credentials as a supporter of the theatre can be established then, but what of the other members of the *Clarion* Board? Montagu Blatchford completed an apprenticeship as a lithographic printer. He had also inherited the Corri gift for music and would later found the choirs that appeared within the *Clarion* movement. Edward Francis Fay and Alex Thompson, however, demonstrate direct involvement in the production of pantomime. Their influence in the Manchester theatre is explored later in this chapter, but first I consider the late nineteenth century in which the *Clarion* was founded, and in which spirit the newspaper and the pantomimes would be written.

⁴²¹ Ibid. p. 68

⁴²² Ibid.

The New Socialism in Britain

My thesis is not a detailed study tracing the history of socialism in Britain at the end of the nineteenth century, but some understanding of its ideology is useful to understand the ideology of the Clarion movement.⁴²³ It would be fair to say that there were as many different definitions of socialism as there were people professing to be socialists at that time. The collection of important socialist essays from the period, Ruth and Eddie Frow's *The Politics of Hope* (1989), which includes examples by Blatchford and William Morris, makes that evident.⁴²⁴

Writing in 1954, Henry Pelling observed of the Social Democratic Federation in the mid 1880s that: 'as the working-class Radicals left the Federation the middle-class Socialists came in.'⁴²⁵ The socialism that emerged at this time took a different form from the radical socialism of the Chartist era in the 1840s. Whilst the aims of the earlier socialists had been confrontational in their opposition to the established authorities of the day, by the mid 1880s new forms of socialism were emerging that were less obviously political and seeking to convert the mass of the people to the ideals of socialism by consensus, and the policy of "permeation' of non-socialist parties' adopted by the Fabian Society.⁴²⁶ Much of the debate about socialist ideology at this time took place in the field of culture and leisure. Caroline Sumpter provides a clarification of the nature of new socialism in Britain when the *Clarion* was approaching the height of its popularity observing that:

⁴²³ For a detailed discussion of socialism see Waters (1990), Cole (1961), Britain (1982)

⁴²⁴ Frow and Frow, *The Politics of Hope*

⁴²⁵ Pelling, Henry (1954) *Origins of the Labour Party*. (2nd Ed.) Oxford: Oxford University Press (1965). p. 23

⁴²⁶ Britain, Ian (1982) *Fabianism and Culture: A Study in British Socialism and the Arts*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. p. 14

The largest pockets of socialist activity in the 1890s were found in Lancashire and the West Riding, and it was in Bradford, not in London, that the first ILP conference took place. Blatchford's *Clarion* was based in Manchester, where the Labour Church movement was founded and the Labour Prophet published until 1896. [...] These papers had strong affiliations to an ethical socialist movement, and a broad base of working class activists, a situation that did not always apply for a London left-wing press more reliant on middle-class support.⁴²⁷

The division in the socialist connection to the theatre was not just a middle-class/working-class phenomenon, but also a North/South divide in the character of socialism, where, in broad terms, the North continued to embrace popular theatre, whilst in the South the Fabians began to champion the controversial modern realist drama of Ibsen.⁴²⁸ Sumpter offers a further reason for the emergence of periodicals like the *Clarion*:

In a period in which the success of the New Unionism (most visible in the Dock Strike of 1889) appeared to augur success for a mass Labour movement, political organisations across the spectrum of socialism made the publication of a consciousness-raising organ an integral part of their mission. Of all the socialist papers that furthered that mission, Robert Blatchford's *Clarion* is best remembered. Styled as a 'pioneer of the Journalism of the future,' the paper astutely blended socialism with the techniques of the New Journalism.⁴²⁹

William Morris who was a speaker in the lectures programme of Charles Rowley and the Ancoats Brotherhood, was, it seems, aware of these differences of socialism in the North. The Fabian socialist John Bruce Glasier wrote in his recollections of Morris:

He spoke also of Robert Blatchford, whose extraordinary popularity as a journalist and as the author of '*Merrie England*' and editor of *The Clarion* was then uprising. He had heard, he said, a good deal about the remarkable influence of Blatchford's writings among the factory workers in the North.

⁴²⁷ Sumpter, Caroline (2008) *The Victorian Press and the Fairy Tale*. London: Palgrave MacMillan. p. 94

⁴²⁸ Britain, *Fabianism and Culture*, p.178

⁴²⁹ Sumpter, *The Victorian Press and the Fairy Tale*, p. 89

That, he thought, was a most encouraging sign, for he seemed to have a true grip of socialism, and appeared to possess the faculty of understanding the mind of the working class and of being understood by them.⁴³⁰

In the North, as indicated above, the working classes were the main drivers of socialism, while in the South the predominantly middle-class Fabians led the way in socialist thought. This is not to imply there were no middle-class socialists in the North:

Between the Liberal Party and the independent socialist groups stood the Fabian Society. The Manchester branch was formed in 1890 and two years later had a membership of 124. The organisation represented an eclectic group of socialists who widely disagreed as to socialist strategy.⁴³¹

This inability to agree on many topics would seriously impair the prospects for the socialists to succeed in achieving their dream of a socialist society: 'In an important sense the Manchester Fabians were not so much an adjunct of the early ILP but rather its forerunner.'⁴³²

It is important to note, then, that following his conversion to socialism through writing his series of articles about the abject poverty he witnessed in Ancoats, Blatchford set up the Manchester Fabian Society in 1890 while still writing for the *Sunday Chronicle*. In spite of the *Clarion* fraternity's capacity for fun and the light hearted tone with which they presented much of their newspaper, Thompson reported that 'Blatchford has his serious purposes too. In May 1892, seven men met in our one-room office to form an independent labour party.'⁴³³ These were the beginnings of the ILP from which the modern Labour Party originated. Blatchford

⁴³⁰ Glasier, John Bruce (1921) *William Morris and the Early Days of the Socialist Movement*. London: Longman, Green and Co. p. 137.

⁴³¹ Moore, *Progressive Pioneers*, p. 216

⁴³² *Ibid.*

⁴³³ Thompson, Alex, *Here I Lie*, p. 88

then, through the ILP and the Fabians made further marks for Manchester in the development of national social and political history.

The Clarion Fellowship and the Ancoats Brotherhood approached the problem of leisure from different directions, but teasing apart their views is complex as they also held views in common, and would at times appear to contradict their own philosophies. Chris Waters has observed this saying 'It was easy for socialists to condemn working-class uses of leisure. But it was more difficult for them to decide upon a policy to guide their actions in a world of mass entertainment.'⁴³⁴ Regular leisure time was a new concept in the late Victorian era. The problem of leisure and how it should be used was open to debate and experimentation. For the middle classes there was also the question of how to protect their own position of influence in the new society, and how to reconcile their own beliefs with the need to attract people to their cause which was then an issue that was ever present for them as they promoted their movements. As Waters describes, the question of leisure:

was debated endlessly by socialists, uneasy about the fact that even in their own society as a decrease in working hours did not appear to be accompanied by a desire to devote leisure to edifying pursuits.⁴³⁵

As well as holding different views about how to approach their task, the Clarion Fellowship and the Ancoats Brotherhood were effectively in competition to attract the greatest numbers of visitors to their cause.

⁴³⁴ Waters, Chris (1990) *British Socialists and the Politics of Popular Culture 1884-1914*. Manchester: Manchester University Press. p. 180

⁴³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 4

The socialist ideology of the *Clarion*

In his essay 'Robert Blatchford: Neglected Socialist' John W. Osborne describes Blatchford's style of socialism writing:

Blatchford suggested an unsystematic but positive variety of socialism which avoided malice and rancorous class consciousness. His simply written publications attracted readers who had benefitted from the rapid growth of literacy after government reforms of education began in 1870. These readers included ambitious members of the lower middle classes and artisans who desired self improvement. [...] Blatchford's socialism was personal, and his ideas were suggestive rather than detailed. He hated plutocratic greed and selfishness but wanted a more equal distribution of wealth to be achieved by legislation rather than force.⁴³⁶

Blatchford and the members of the *Clarion* identified themselves individually and collectively as socialist, but this was a very loose and sometimes contradictory definition. Osborne supports the view of Blatchford as a 'theoretical socialist.'⁴³⁷

Robert Blatchford is described by Caroline Benn in her biography of Keir Hardie as 'unashamedly a hedonist, posing a challenge to the long-dominant puritanical temperance wing of the Left.'⁴³⁸ Blatchford himself defined his approach to socialism as 'a whole way of life with a unique culture of its own.'⁴³⁹

Blatchford was regarded as the 'Manchester prophet' and associated with the ideas of various socialist political organisations. In 1892, for example, he was a founding member of the Independent Labour Party in Manchester. However, as Henry Pelling explains 'Fundamentally, Blatchford was not interested in politics – that is, in the humdrum work of organizing elections and obtaining members and support

⁴³⁶ Osborne, John W. (1997) 'Robert Blatchford: Neglected Socialist.' *Journal of the Rutgers University Libraries* LVIII: pp. 62-67. p. 64

⁴³⁷ Ibid.

⁴³⁸ Benn, Caroline (1997) *Keir Hardie*. London: Richard Cohen Books. p. 83

⁴³⁹ Waters, *British Socialists and the Politics of Popular Culture 1884-1914*, p. 180

for local electoral clubs and societies.⁴⁴⁰ Party politics were not attractive to him. Pelling considers him 'a powerful, popular journalist.'⁴⁴¹ He was a writer and a man of ideas looking to bring socialism and resolve the problems of poverty across the city. The effect of this is expanded upon by Stanley Harrison, who explained the mood amongst socialists present at the moment the *Clarion* was launched, in the wake of the social unrest that followed the Match Girls Strike of 1888, in turn enabling the Great Dock Strike of 1889. Harrison summarized the socialism in the *Clarion* claiming:

amid the rising militancy of the early nineties, after the big victories, the vague but potent and widespread idea that the day of justice was coming at last came to be strongly held. The *Clarion* was the journal that ministered to this mood, with its confused and latter-day Utopian hopefulness.⁴⁴²

A more personal view of the group philosophy and socialist ambitions of the *Clarion* Board that led to their newspaper being founded were summarized by Alex Thompson when he later reflected:

The bond of union between us four men was a common sentiment of altruistic idealism, of pity for the weak and suffering, of angry resentment against all forms of oppression. We were all 'pregnant of our cause' and very much in earnest. None of us had studied Karl Marx, but we had guiding texts which sufficed for our simple needs. One was 'Love thy neighbour as thyself,' which we extended to Walt Whitman's 'felon, the diseased, the illiterate person' – even the capitalist. We did not hate any of them but only wanted to do them good by altering the system which thwarted and cramped and distorted us all.⁴⁴³

Of the members of the *Clarion* Board he said 'We could not possibly have preached the class war, because we represented no distinctive class but that intermixture of

⁴⁴⁰ Pelling, *Origins of the Labour Party*, p. 97

⁴⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 92

⁴⁴² Harrison, Stanley, *Poor Men's Guardians*, pp. 169-170

⁴⁴³ Thompson, Alex, *Here I Lie*, p. 84

diversity which has reduced the creed of class hatred to absurdity in Britain.’⁴⁴⁴ The *Clarion* socialism then, in Thompson’s own words, was not a version of party politics, but an ideal of a society that they dreamt of. Jon Lawrence’s would seem to summarize the *Clarion* ideology most accurately in his comment that:

Socialists such as Robert Blatchford were clearly looking for something more transcendental – a new movement, a new source of idealism – not just a new political organisation.⁴⁴⁵

In *British Socialists and the Politics of Popular Culture 1884-1914* Chris

Waters refers to Blatchford’s support for the Manchester Palace Theatre of Varieties, which opened in 1891, in its struggle to win favour with the Manchester authorities and obtained a licence to sell liquor on the premises. This would seem an unlikely position to adopt given that Blatchford himself was teetotal. Charles Rowley opposed the Palace as was seen in Chapter Three.

For all the differences between Blatchford and Rowley in their ideas of the right road to socialism they had a friendship and great respect for each other. The complexity of the sometimes apparently opposing views of the Ancoats Brotherhood and the *Clarion* Fellowship are evident in this alternative view of their relationship presented by Judith Fincher: ‘Rowley moved within the *Clarion* circles and as late as 1904 participated with prominent Clarionettes at a Manchester *Clarion* Handicraft Exhibition.’⁴⁴⁶ Blatchford was capable of being flexible and pragmatic in order to attract people to his cause. In Waters’s view, after Blatchford inspected a number of other Manchester music halls:

⁴⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁴⁵ Lawrence, Jon (1998) *Speaking for the People: Party, Language and Popular Politics in England, 1867-1914*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. p. 202.

⁴⁴⁶ Fincher, *The Clarion Movement*, pp. 37-38. Note - Fincher cites reference to the Clarionettes Handicraft Exhibition in the *Clarion*, 4 November 1904, p. 5

In none of them did he discover any evidence of wholesome amusement. This survey forced him to conclude that the Palace of Varieties was the cleanest, best conducted music hall of the city. Blatchford and his colleagues thus came to accept the validity of the capitalist provision of certain forms of entertainment – providing the entertainment offered was acceptable in terms of their own hierarchies of pleasure. [...] The Palace may have been a capitalist venture, but it was one that treated workers as respectable consumers, capable of differentiating wholesome from disreputable pastimes.⁴⁴⁷

By applying this view to pantomime rather than its sister genre of music hall, it is possible to comprehend how Blatchford and his *Clarion* colleagues were able to reconcile their Socialist views to the large profits that could be made by the capitalist managements of the theatres. We see here not only an approval of people having the right to enjoy themselves, but that the *Clarion* brand of socialism acknowledged that the mass of the people were capable of making appropriate choices for themselves.

Waters does note, however, that the managements of the theatres aligned themselves with the temperance campaigners by objecting to the Palace being granted a drama licence in 1892.⁴⁴⁸ Evidently, this was an opportunist move in line with their fears of increased competition, rather than due to any moral conversion. Caroline Radcliffe's comment that, 'The legitimate theatre fought hard to prevent the music hall from overstepping the boundaries of cultural hierarchy,'⁴⁴⁹ suggests that this defensive response formed part of a concerted campaign on behalf of the theatres.

⁴⁴⁷ Waters, *British Socialists and the Politics of Popular Culture 1884-1914*, p. 33

⁴⁴⁸ Waters, Chris (1986) 'Manchester Morality and London Capital: The Battle over the Palace of Varieties' in Bailey, Peter (ed.), *Music Hall: The Business of Pleasure* Milton Keynes: Open University Press. p. 145-146

⁴⁴⁹ Radcliffe, Caroline (2006) *Dan Leno: Cultural Hegemony in the Victorian Theatre*. Unpublished PhD thesis, Royal Holloway, University of London. note. p. 2

The *Clarion*, Cinderella and the Fairytale

In *The Victorian Press and the Fairytale* Caroline Sumpter examines the fiction written in books, newspapers and the periodical press of the day. The title of her chapter on the 1890s Labour press asks 'I Wonder Were the Fairies Socialists?', and there she 'conceptualises these forgotten attempts to claim the fairy for socialism.'⁴⁵⁰ Socialist fiction was a regular feature in the *Clarion* and here Sumpter makes reference to Blatchford and Thompson and their connection to the children who were members of their 'Cinderella Club's transformed into the fairies by a visit to the countryside:

A. M. Thompson in the *Cinderella Annual* suggested that all fears for the 'London gutter child' were dispelled once they reached their rural destination: 'the bowers of the fairy realm had swallowed them up in its leafy enchantment.' This process of spiritual cleansing was sometimes seen to transmogrify the children themselves into supernatural beings; for Robert Blatchford's children were naturally 'the pretty, dainty, unstained mortal fairies.'⁴⁵¹

The first Cinderella Clubs that brought entertainment to poor children were set up by Blatchford and his associates whilst he was still employed at the *Sunday Chronicle*, after he began to write about the abject poverty he witnessed in the slums of Ancoats in 1889. Blatchford and Thompson's ideal of the children to be entertained at the Cinderella clubs indicates that they would have an interest in the fairy content of pantomimes. Blatchford described how the idea had occurred to him saying 'The painful experience of the slums was followed by a pleasant interlude; the

⁴⁵⁰ Sumpter, Caroline (2008) *The Victorian Press and the Fairy Tale*. London: Palgrave MacMillan. p. 88

⁴⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 211

founding of the Cinderella Clubs.⁴⁵² After meeting a match girl on her way to a Sunday school party, he remembered that:

as a poor child such parties gave me great delight. How easy to please a child, and a child of the poor. And why not, I asked myself, why not weekly parties for children of the slums? [...] My idea was not to teach or lecture the children, but to amuse them; but as they could not be amused if they were hungry, we decided to feed them first and entertain them afterwards. The club was a success from the word go.⁴⁵³

This idea of entertaining the children is a further illustration of the *Clarion* vision of socialism that allowed them to enjoy themselves without any demand to work to receive a reward. The desire to entertain in order to attract people to socialism may be a clue to their interest in writing for the theatre.

Further to Sumpter's examination of the fairytale in fiction, I extend the question to consider those members of the socialist Press in Manchester who wrote for the popular stage. It would seem to be an ideal genre for the socialist activists to infiltrate given that fairytales, fairies and other supernatural characters are important conventions in pantomime. It is a fruitful area to research when considering how the socialists were attempting to gain the support of members of the general public who were without any particular political affiliation.

Whilst socialist journalism and the writing of socialist fiction has attracted scholarly attention, to date the late Victorian socialist authors involvement in writing for the popular theatre and specifically pantomime has not been investigated.⁴⁵⁴

However, in the study of socialist journalism, many parallels exist in the authorship of

⁴⁵² Blatchford, *My Eighty Years*, p. 189

⁴⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 189-190

⁴⁵⁴ Mutch, Deborah (2005) 'The *Merric England* Triptych: Robert Blatchford, Edward Fay and the Didactic Use of *Clarion* Fiction.' *Victorian Periodicals Review* 38: pp. 83-103 and Mutch, Deborah (ed.) (2013) *British Socialist Fiction, 1884-1914*. 5 vols. London: Pickering and Chatto Ltd.

the pantomimes. Writing for the theatre, and most significantly writing pantomimes, was an extension of writing socialist fiction that was brought to life on stage.

The device of the pantomime transformation scene allowing the action to unfold in an 'otherworld' where anything was possible is a collective experience, parallel to writing a fairytale to be read by the reader as an individual at home. Blatchford presented a fictional account of the socialist idyll to which he aspired in his 1907 novel *The Sorcery Shop*, as a response to the many queries he received asking for clarification about how the world that he advocated in his collection of essays *Merrie England* would function in practice. It is subtitled *An Impossible Romance*, and so it appears to be.

It opens in a gentlemen's club where two of the club's members, Major-General Sir Frederick Manningtree Storm, Conservative M.P. for South Loomshire, and Mr. Samuel Jorkle, Liberal M.P. for Shantytown East, are met by the mysterious Mr. Nathaniel Fry who introduces himself saying 'I am a wizard - a magician.'⁴⁵⁵ Using his magical skills he immediately transports the politicians to a utopian idyll that is Blatchford's vision of a possible future Manchester. In the 'Author's Note' that accompanies his novel Blatchford declares the purpose in writing to be 'To indicate the possibilities of communal efforts, to show what might be done with England by a united and cultured people, and to meet the common arguments brought against socialism by the Storms and the Jorkles.'⁴⁵⁶ He explains the thinking behind his method saying:

⁴⁵⁵ Blatchford, Robert (1907) *The Sorcery Shop: An Impossible Romance*. London: The Clarion Press. p. 6

⁴⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. xiv Storm and Jorkle are characters from the book. Both are MPs.

The Utopian romance may at first sight appear to be an easy form of political exposition, but it has many difficulties. [...] To invent a new architecture and a new dress one needs to be a genius indeed. And I notice in "News from Nowhere" even William Morris takes refuge in generalisation.^{457/ 458}

Blatchford was then, able to claim that the novel was essentially vague about the details of the technology that the people inhabiting his utopia would use in their everyday lives.

There is a sense that journalists, not confined to those of the *Clarion* network, once successful in writing journalism, especially that which used a satirical tone, considered themselves automatically qualified to write fiction or for the theatre. In the theatre, pantomime seemed to be the favourite route into writing, suggesting perhaps a misconception that it was a soft option. This indicates the lack of value placed on pantomime and conveys the idea that it was regarded as disposable. It was as current as a newspaper, here for just one season, and to be quickly replaced by another. The arrogance of considering it to be an easy option exposed the weaknesses of otherwise successful journalists and saw the failure of many pantomimes, as will be seen later in this chapter. Given that the pantomimes were to all intents and purposes a commercial product delivered to consumers who were only required to pay their money and watch, how were the *Clarion* fraternity able to reconcile this with their own socialist ambitions?

It is possible that they saw pantomime as a point of access to reach a broader more middle-class audience whose members would not have attended the music hall or the rational amusements that were provided by the philanthropists. Pantomime as the bridge between music hall and the theatre gave access to a vast audience of

⁴⁵⁷ Ibid., p. xii

⁴⁵⁸ Morris, William (1890) *News from Nowhere*. Oxford: Oxford University Press

ordinary people of all ages, classes and views who had no political affiliations. It was also an annual opportunity to reach people who would not attend the theatre at any other time of year. For all its 'popular' appeal and its licence of 'carnival' during the Christmas holiday period pantomime, it was perhaps considered to be a step up the scale of respectability from music hall, so again, Blatchford's pragmatism in entering into a partnership with the exceptionally commercial form of entertainment that pantomime had evolved into can be seen to be working to help him achieve his aims.

The networks of sociability within which the *Clarion* fraternity operated were also very different to those of the Ancoats Brotherhood. They formed part of a community that centred on the managements of the theatres and others that operated in the commercial field. By promoting popular culture and moving between the cultural and commercial fields, the *Clarion* version of socialism was more accessible to ordinary people. The commercial aspect also allowed it greater success in the economic field than was enjoyed by the Ancoats Brotherhood, whose financial difficulties are discussed in Chapter Three.

Rowley's ideal of leisure took a more didactic view, his values imposing elite forms of art on the masses and offering education in how to appreciate it. Blatchford's approach allowed for greater choice and less effort on the part of participants. In the hedonistic *Clarion* interpretation of leisure there was some licence for relaxation and having fun without having to work for it. For Blatchford and his associates the pantomimes had the potential to be a tool to bring the mass of the people to socialism. The jovial style adopted by the *Clarion* was the tone of pantomime, and its conventions offered the writer the opportunity to introduce satire and other political comment, making the appeal of writing pantomime obvious. Whilst

Blatchford did not write for pantomimes other members of the *Clarion* Board did, with varying success as we shall see.

The *Clarion* Bohemian Circle

The amiable and supportive relationship between the theatres and the press at the time was recalled many years later when the Gaiety Theatre, formerly known as the Comedy Theatre when it was owned by Blatchford's great friend John Pitt Hardacre, was sold to become a cinema in 1921. Reported as the reminiscences of 'an old playgoer,' the *Manchester Guardian* printed a short article recalling the theatre's history which included recollections of the Hardacre era at the theatre:

In those days the Comedy was a great resort of pressmen. You would find all sorts and conditions there, from editors downwards. Sometimes these journalists took to writing plays and operas. Robert Blatchford wrote 'In Summer Days.' It was a great first night.⁴⁵⁹

The first evidence of members of the bohemian circle writing the Manchester pantomimes is in 1886 when E. F. Fay and William Wade provided the libretti for the Queen's and the Prince's theatres respectively.⁴⁶⁰ The mutually beneficial relationship that developed between the *Clarion* and Manchester's theatre managers appears to have been confirmed at the time when the *Clarion* was first launched. In its early days the paper gave much of its editorial space to the coverage of sport and popular entertainment, especially the theatre. In part this was, initially at least, due to the practicality of needing to fill column inches in the paper, and that all the members of the paper's founding board had written dramatic criticism in their previous roles at

⁴⁵⁹ *Manchester Guardian*, 1 January 1921. p. 8 Pitt Hardacre and the bar at the Comedy Theatre would become the subject of the scandal that forms Chapter Six.

⁴⁶⁰ William Wade was Assistant Editor at the *Manchester Times* and the author of all the pantomimes for Hardacre at the Comedy Theatre in the 1890s. See Chapter Six.

the *Sunday Chronicle*. In addition there were sound financial motives. As Alex Thompson recalled:

The commercial advertisers, the pillars of their country's press, were not propitious. The theatrical managers – more, I think, by way of sympathy to us than to advantage of themselves – supported us unstintedly. Announcements of all the Manchester shows – theatres, music halls, circus, concerts – and of the pantomimes in Liverpool, Edinburgh, Sheffield, Hull, Halifax, and Bolton, gave the *Clarion* in its early days the appearance of a stage paper.⁴⁶¹

Waters also quoted Blatchford's comment about the high content of theatre news when the paper launched saying that 'the *Clarion* would have been ruined in three months if it had devoted its columns solely to labour issues.'⁴⁶² A symbiotic relationship can be seen to have developed, in which the Press and the managements of the various theatres each became dependent on the product created by the other. Courtneidge's actions supported the establishment of the *Clarion* movement, although he along with their other theatrical ally in Manchester, Hardacre, were acting in contradiction to their positions in the world of commercial theatre, where they were responsible to generate a profit, Hardacre for himself, and Courtneidge for his employers and shareholders.

The question has been raised about whether those dramatic critics that wrote for the theatre found themselves in a position to write reviews of their own productions. Certainly it might be possible for an unscrupulous publication or writer to allow this. As noted with reference to T. F. Doyle in Chapter One, in *The Britannia Diaries* Jim Davis cites evidence of the Britannia stage manager Frederick Wilton writing puffs for the pantomimes that were supplied to the London newspapers during

⁴⁶¹ Thompson, Alex, *Here I Lie*, p. 116

⁴⁶² Waters, *Socialists and the Politics of Popular Culture 1884-1914*, p. 180

the 1860s, prior to the first performances of each annual production. This appears to have been a regular practice; as such references appear in mid-December every year. Wilton's diary entry for Christmas Eve 1865 states that he had spent the day 'writing critiques for newspapers.'⁴⁶³ These puffs are maybe perhaps best regarded as having a similar function to a modern Press release which might be reproduced in its entirety by a local newspaper or website. How widespread this use of puffs by the newspaper was at the end of the century can only be speculated upon, but here I consider evidence from the *Clarion* reviews of the Manchester pantomimes that included libretti written by Alex Thompson, and by other members of the bohemian circle.

The *Clarion* reviews for the 1902-1903 Manchester pantomime season at the Theatre Royal, the Prince's Theatre and the Comedy Theatre are unsigned. Whilst the Theatre Royal and the Comedy Theatre played *Dick Whittington* and *Cinderella* respectively, the Prince's Theatre faced additional competition from the Palace of Varieties which presented one of its occasional pantomimes that year. Both theatres had chosen *Robinson Crusoe* as their subject. The reviews are sited next to the Thompson's regular 'Stageland' column, signed in his pseudonym 'Dangle', where he comments 'Two pantomimes have I seen, but – oh, Sir! please I still would go.'⁴⁶⁴ Which two of the pantomimes he might have seen can only be guessed at. The review of *Robinson Crusoe*, Courtneidge and Thompson's last while Courtneidge was Managing Director at the Prince's Theatre, is effusive about Courtneidge's skills and the work he has committed to it. The scenery, the performances and the music

⁴⁶³ Davis, Jim (Ed.) (1992) *The Britannia Diaries 1863-1875: Selections for the Diaries of Frederick Wilton*. London: The Society of Theatre Research. p. 101

⁴⁶⁴ *Clarion*, 2 January 1903. p. 3.

are all praised, but no mention is made of the libretto or its authorship. In contrast William Wade and Jay Hickory Wood, the authors of the Comedy and Theatre Royal libretti respectively, are singled out for praise. The reviews of all three pantomimes are complimentary, and the *Clarion* does allow itself to trumpet about *Robinson Crusoe*:

All of Courtneidge's pantomimes have been tremendous successes – and his latest - and alack! – last at the Prince's is simply a superb production. [...] It only remains to be said that the reception of *Robinson Crusoe* on its first night was a triumph to all concerned.⁴⁶⁵

Whether this review is written by Thompson or one of his *Clarion* colleagues is uncertain. What can be said is that the judicious omission of praising the libretto of *Robinson Crusoe* demonstrates an honourable intent on behalf of the *Clarion*. The praise of Courtneidge is in similar vein to other descriptions of him in Thompson's autobiography,⁴⁶⁶ and in an article that Thompson wrote for *The Music Hall and Theatre Review* that was reprinted in the *Clarion*. The subject was 'Why I Wrote a Pantomime,' about his libretto for Courtneidge's *Cinderella* at the Theatre Royal for the 1899-1900 pantomime season. In ironic tone, as a drama critic, he complained:

Not many men in England have seen more pantomimes than I; and still, year after year, for various London and provincial papers, I have gone on suffering and describing them. What wonder, then, that I should thirst for revenge, [...] Then it came unto me, [...] It is a poor worm that has no turning; my turn was come. I would write a pantomime that was the very worst that ever yet was seen. [...] Instead of which Fate handicapped me with an accomplice – one Robert Courtneidge – a martinet of propriety, who would not permit me the slightest outrage against delicacy or reason, but actually insisted in making his pantomime as dainty, as rational, and as beautiful as good taste, indefatigable industry, and ungrudging outlay could make it.⁴⁶⁷

⁴⁶⁵ Ibid.,

⁴⁶⁶ Thompson, Alex, *Here I Lie*, p. 294

⁴⁶⁷ *Clarion*, 24 March 1900.

Evidence of a more cleverly disguised glowing review of the production, and his own work, would be hard to find. The ironic humour of his comments is typical of the *Clarion* style of wit.

This does, however, draw attention to a further point about the *Clarion*'s Bohemian circle. All the *Clarion* Board and their associates at other newspapers, such as William Wade, wrote drama criticism. Hardacre and Courtneidge occasionally contributed articles to the *Clarion*. Hardacre staged Blatchford's comic opera in his own theatres. Courtneidge commissioned Thompson to write pantomimes. Wade was commissioned by Hardacre to write pantomimes, whilst also reviewing the productions on the Comedy Theatre stage all year round. They all met regularly, socially and for business reasons, in the circle bar at the Comedy Theatre. The complex relationships were potentially quite incestuous. They would all, most likely, at some time, have found themselves in a position where they had to write a review of a production that one of their friends and current or potential future business associates were connected to. This perhaps influenced them to be kind when reviewing those productions, but the example above suggests, they would have put their credibility at risk with fellow journalists, if not their readers, if they had reviewed their own work.

The *Clarion* and the Pantomime

Edward Francis Fay (1853-1896)

Fay was born in to a middle-class family in Ireland and raised in Sheffield, though he retained his love of Ireland throughout his adult life and supported the Irish side in the issue of Home Rule. Fay was a larger than life character and his comrades were

used to him being always, and inevitably, short of money. Fond of his drink, he seemed an unlikely companion for the teetotal Blatchford, but the two became firm friends working at the *Daily Chronicle* in 1885. Blatchford described how when they first met 'He was almost a cynic; I was almost an idealist.'⁴⁶⁸ 'The Bounder' as Fay was known to his friends and readers, wrote drama criticism, fiction and political comment. In *The Bounder: The Story of a Man by his Friend*, the biography that Blatchford wrote following Fay's early death in 1896, at the age of forty-three, he recalled that Fay told him that he 'had written several plays' and went to London 'to try to get his plays produced.'⁴⁶⁹ He was unsuccessful, but the following year in 1886, Fay wrote a pantomime, *Babes in the Wood*, Richard Mansell's first 'Annual' as manager of Manchester's Queen's theatre. The pantomime was successful, and praised for its spectacular effects, but there were some criticisms reserved for its author. Its ambitious full title of *The Babes in the Wood, and Bold Robin Hood; or Herne the Hunter, the Merry Maid Marian, and the Big Bad Baron* seemed to be the problem according to the *Manchester Guardian* review, where it was argued that with so many major characters 'it was almost inevitable that he should rather neglect the story of the babes, which we are to suppose runs through the whole production.'⁴⁷⁰ Still the reviewer held out hope of the situation improving as the audience appeared to have enjoyed it:

It was received with much favour, and is almost certain, with some careful revision, to be a successful production. [...] The spectacular effects are there, and of fine quality, but the rollicking fun as yet is not. Of course, it takes some

⁴⁶⁸ Blatchford, Robert (1900) *The Bounder: The Story of a Man by His Friend*. London: Walter Scott Ltd. p. 28

⁴⁶⁹ Ibid. p. 22

⁴⁷⁰ *Manchester Guardian*, 28 December 1886. p. 8

time to work up this department of a pantomime, but with one exception, the raw materials are not particularly promising.⁴⁷¹

According to the *Manchester Times*:

The pantomime, written for the Queen's theatre by Mr. E. F. Fay, is called "*The Babes in the Wood*," but might with equal fitness have been given any one of half a dozen other titles. The aim appears, in short, to have been to adapt any material, congruous or incongruous, which would allow a certain number of scenes being shown in due course, and certain bits of burlesque introduced.⁴⁷²

By the second reviews at the end of January it was commented that 'This pantomime has not gained any continuity of action since the first night, but the characters have made much of their parts, and the business in the first half of the pantomime serves well to amuse the audience.'⁴⁷³ Despite the criticism, at the end of its run it was commented that 'After an honourable course of more than two months, the pantomime was withdrawn on Saturday.'⁴⁷⁴

There is no evidence of another pantomime by Fay having been produced, and it is unfortunate that no copy of his libretto appears to have survived by which to judge its satirical content. Favourable reviews of the comic actor John Wainwright in the role of 'Baron de Toujours Boozey' indicate a character in the mould of Fay himself.⁴⁷⁵ With Fay's enjoyment of burlesque, it seems likely that the pantomime was scripted with an adult audience in mind. Given his fondness for children, his later children's column in the *Clarion*, and his work with the Cinderella Clubs, it is perhaps surprising that his pantomime libretto was not more suited to their tastes.

⁴⁷¹ Ibid., p. 8

⁴⁷² *Manchester Times*, 1 January 1887. p. 3

⁴⁷³ *Manchester Guardian*, 25 January 1887. p. 8

⁴⁷⁴ *Manchester Guardian*, 8 March 1887. p. 5

⁴⁷⁵ *Manchester Guardian*, 28 December 1886. p. 8

John Pitt Hardacre (1855-1933)

Much more will be said about Hardacre in Chapter Six, but as the host of the Comedy Theatre, with a reputation as the man who ‘worked the bars in person’ he is mentioned here with reference to his association with the *Clarion*. He was known to be an enthusiastic member of the Clarion cycling club.

Early in 1891 when Keir Hardie visited Manchester to make a speech at an *Ancoats Brotherhood* event Laurence Thompson writes:

He spoke with influential members of the Brotherhood who were also members of the Watch Committee. They told him they were perturbed at the activities of John Pitt Hardacre, who was said to exercise the old theatrical *droit de seigneur* over his chorus girls.⁴⁷⁶

In 1891 then, we have an early example of the disapproval of the middle-class philanthropists who were already monitoring Hardacre and his theatre. During this meeting he received a message inviting him to meet Blatchford whom he had not met previously. He went to meet Blatchford in the Comedy Theatre bar and was reportedly horrified at the behaviour he claimed to have seen amongst the patrons of the bar.⁴⁷⁷ This was pantomime season when the theatre was at its busiest, with large numbers of staff, customers and a vast cast of ‘supers’ would have been frequenting the theatre bar throughout the day. Whilst Hardie’s reaction may have been extreme, it helps to build a picture of the lively nature of Hardacre’s management style.

In this extract from a short report about a speech Hardacre made to a group of socialists when he ‘reopened the labour bazaar at the Pankhurst Hall’ in Manchester, we not only have a clue to the philosophy behind *Clarion* socialism, but also to the

⁴⁷⁶ Thompson, Laurence, *Robert Blatchford*, p. 70

⁴⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

character of Hardacre himself. Humorous in tone, he was paraphrased by the newspaper thus:

One very big and genial form of Socialism was to be seen in the fellowships, and as he had gone around the country he had been proud of the power they possessed to make life more pleasing to their fellow men. (Hear, hear.) Philanthropists as a rule were serious, and talked about lifting mankind by means of free libraries and public parks, instead of a better means of social intercourse. The great demon which made the chasm between the classes was the demon of so called respectability. (Hear, hear) The great days of socialism had been to make prominent the spirit of comradeship. (Applause).⁴⁷⁸

The speech had been made on 15 April 1902, at the very time that Hardacre's dispute with the authorities was approaching its climax. Clearly, Hardacre was not to be cowed by his enemies.

Alexander Mattock Thompson (1861-1948)

The member of the *Clarion* Board who would go on to achieve greatest success with his libretti was Alex Thompson. Thompson had made some attempts at writing for the theatre, but with limited previous success. He described in his autobiography how one of his early commissions was when 'Richard Mansell had chartered me to write a new version of Hervé's *Chilperic*, for which he was to pay me a hundred pounds.'⁴⁷⁹

Thompson was several years younger than his *Clarion* colleagues. Born in Germany to an English family, he was relocated to live in Paris as a boy when his father anticipated the Franco-Prussian war in 1870. Moving between France, Germany and London, the family became caught up in the Paris Commune and his

⁴⁷⁸ *Manchester Courier and Lancashire General Advertiser*, 19 April 1902. p. 13

⁴⁷⁹ Thompson, Alex, *Here I Lie*, p. 294

wealthy father lost his fortune moving investments due to the war. Returning to England, his father committed suicide, and rather than following his father's plan that he would train to become a barrister, the young Alex: 'having by this time learned to speak my native language, drifted into journalism as junior clerk in the office of the *Manchester Examiner and Times*.'⁴⁸⁰ These early experiences enabled Thompson to move up the career ladder as a journalist more quickly than many of his contemporaries. He attributed this to his knowledge of European politics and fluency in French and German, which led to Edward Hulton offering him his position at the *Sunday Chronicle*, where he met the Blatchfords and Fay. He began writing drama criticism for the *Morning Chronicle* at an early age and later acknowledged his lack of experience for the post:

I set up as a theatrical reporter at the age of twenty. At that age I naturally had the advantage, which I lost in later years, of knowing all about it. This relieved me of the trouble of thinking, and made it easy to damn everything that was not obvious. [...] I came to be considered by some of the keenest deadheads who maintained Manchester's reputation for critical judgement, as a Dramatic Critic of outstanding importance, and wore astrakhan on my coat-collar.⁴⁸¹

He continued to write drama criticism and contributed other articles about the theatres as part of his duties for *The Clarion*. The key to adapting Thompson's writing talent to the theatre successfully, developing eventually into a long career writing pantomimes and musical theatre productions with Robert Courtneidge for Courtneidge's own production company was perhaps Courtneidge himself. By pairing him to collaborate with Jay Hickory Wood (then the rising star amongst the authors of the West End pantomimes), when commissioning the libretto for the 1898

⁴⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 32

⁴⁸¹ Ibid., p. 253

pantomime, *Sinbad the Sailor*, at the Prince's theatre, Courtneidge gave Thompson the opportunity to work with a master. Thompson owed Courtneidge a debt of gratitude, as this was effectively an apprenticeship and professional training that provided a safety net while he learned his craft. Thompson implied Courtneidge's role in his beginning to write for pantomime saying:

Chilperic and other unprofitable ventures – notably an adaptation from the French for Willie Edouin – brought me down at last to the writing of pantomimes for Robert Courtneidge who was then manager of the Manchester Prince's Theatre.⁴⁸²

The cheerful and irreverent style of writing that Thompson used in his autobiography, as in much of his work in the *Clarion*, conveys the idea that pantomime was not regarded as having the same artistic value as drama or the musical comedies that he and Courtneidge would become known for in the 1900s. It is unlikely that Thompson himself would be dismissive of pantomime from which he was making money, but this use of irony acknowledges his awareness of the views of some critics and campaigners. In spite of his success writing for the theatre Thompson always regarded himself as a journalist first, perhaps not himself recognizing the value of the pantomime. For his 1937 autobiography he chose the title *Here I Lie* and gave as its subtitle *The Memorial of an Old Journalist*. He was a journalist to the end.⁴⁸³

For the four years following *Sinbad the Sailor*, until Courtneidge left Manchester, Thompson and Courtneidge collaborated on the pantomimes for the Prince's Theatre. Thompson described how the partnership would later develop:

⁴⁸² Ibid., p. 294

⁴⁸³ Thompson, Alex (1937) *Here I Lie*

Since then we have worked together on many plays – pantomimes, comedies and even “straight” plays – *The Blue Moon*, *The Dairymaids*, *Tom Jones*, *The Arcadians*, *The Mousmé*, *Princess Caprice*, *The Bohemians* – and such success as these pieces have gained has been chiefly due to the inventive ingenuity and constructive craft of my partner.⁴⁸⁴

Close reading of the scripts reveals that Courtneidge and Thompson’s socialism is not to be found in their pantomimes. To achieve success in his career as an author for the theatre Thompson edited out any political satire or controversial comment.⁴⁸⁵ The script says more about Thompson’s European upbringing than about current events in the city.

His two careers, in what he continued to write for the *Clarion* and in capitalist theatre speculation, developed in parallel. The two worlds met in the hedonist world view of the *Clarion* Board. They wanted to attract the mass of the people to socialism, rather than exert an external pressure by dictating to them the purely rational approach to recreation that was advocated by the Ancoats Brotherhood. What is evident, when reading not only the libretti and reviews of their pantomimes, but in their memoirs and recollections in articles about the pantomimes, sometimes written many years after the event, the members of the *Clarion* Board and the other members of their extended bohemian circle had a genuine enthusiasm for pantomime, and wrote them for more than the money.

⁴⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁸⁵ Rather than make local references, in *Robinson Crusoe* (1902) Thompson’s libretto has a cosmopolitan theme with a broad spectrum of European characters and references.⁴⁸⁵ Our hero sails from the Port of Hull and all other scenes are in imaginary locations. The characters claim to be English, Scottish, Hungarian, Dutch, French and the star of the show is the comic character, Rudolph Dummkopf, the ship’s cook, played by James E. Sullivan, and written with an exaggerated German accent. No mention is made of Manchester. There is some innuendo and casual racism, but no reference to politics.

The Decline in Local and Topical Referencing

By the 1890s the topical political satire that had been an integral feature of pantomime was disappearing from the pantomime libretti. Jill Sullivan has also noted a 'general decline in local social referencing and political referencing [...] after 1900.'⁴⁸⁶ This she suggests can be attributed to 'visiting stars who would not have had the detailed local knowledge of earlier writers', 'political speeches and attacks on the government' being thought inappropriate during the first World War, and the 'decline of middle-class bourgeois culture after 1900.'⁴⁸⁷ This final point is perhaps also reflected in greater acceptance of variety theatre which became a respectable form of entertainment around this time. From a commercial angle, avoiding the satire of local and topical allusions in the pantomime librettos allowed for them to be played in any theatre without having to rewrite any of the script or re-rehearse scenes when touring. Politically, they were pragmatic in avoiding offending any of the public figures that were influential in within Manchester society.

I would further expand on these points by arguing that increasingly, due to the high expense of staging pantomime, productions would tour, or their props and settings sold on to be reused. This included the scripts and it was preferred if the minimum amendments needed to be made to 'lyrics and locals.' It is difficult to find any trace of local or topical referencing in the librettos of Thompson and Courtneidge. Making fun of local politicians or other establishment figures was more dangerous when these people had access to those who issued the theatres licences. In Manchester, this resonated especially in relation to Hardacre's experiences with the

⁴⁸⁶ Sullivan, *The Politics of the Pantomime*, p. 229

⁴⁸⁷ Ibid.

authorities as discussed in Chapter Six. At a time when the theatres were often in conflict with the licensing authorities it was perhaps thought to be best avoided. Continuing Sullivan's theme of the 'visiting stars,' by the late 1880s, and more especially into the 90s, the new role of pantomime to provide a cultural connection between music hall and the legitimate theatre saw increasing numbers of music hall performers incorporating their 'act' into the pantomime. With the arrival of the new variety theatres music hall was getting ever closer to achieving its aspiration to respectability. The story became more of a theme, linking the appearance of these stars and their popular songs which were the current taste of pantomime audiences.

The pantomimes authored by Courtneidge and Thompson for the Prince's Theatre appeared at the very end of the nineteenth century, their style no doubt owing something to the work of their ongoing collaboration with Jay Hickory Wood. While Courtneidge and Thompson wrote libretti for the Prince's Theatre pantomime 1899-1902, Wood provided the libretti for the Manchester Theatre Royal in 1900 and 1902.⁴⁸⁸ This connection with the London West End pantomimes is perhaps a clue to the evolution in the public taste for the next incarnation of pantomime becoming popular with the public as it moved into the twentieth century. Here though was an opportunity missed to promote the cause of socialism.

Conclusion

Ultimately, any judgment of the reasoning behind the journalists of the *Clarion* decisions to write pantomime and later other forms of theatre must be unsatisfactory. It seems to have been a natural progression of the influences of the social circles in

⁴⁸⁸ 'Wood, J. Hickory and W. H. Risque (1900) *Little Red Riding Hood*. Theatre Royal, Manchester' and 'Wood, J. Hickory (1902) *Dick Whittington*. Theatre Royal, Manchester. Both pantomime books of words.

which they mixed, and the experience of writing dramatic criticism for a variety of newspapers. Journalists across the country wrote pantomimes for their local theatres, but in the bohemian circle of the *Clarion* and with the circle bar at the Comedy Theatre as their 'club' created an ideal network for influencing the developments in theatrical community. The timing of the arrival of Hardacre in Manchester in 1887, close to the arrival around 1885 of Blatchford, Thompson and Fay made it a perfect storm. Courtneidge was also a regular visitor to the city as an actor before he became manager at the Prince's theatre. It is quite possible that they never recognised the contradiction of their professed socialist ideology with the financial gain made from the commercial theatre. The autobiographies of Blatchford, Thompson and Courtneidge give no indication of that irony.

The politics of Robert Blatchford and the bohemian circle that formed around the *Clarion* and its Board were not party politics. They were the issues of the day and the suffering they witnessed amongst the masses of the working class. Blatchford was in favour of rational recreation and improving, wholesome amusements, but he and the members of the *Clarion* fraternity favoured a different brand of socialism to that of the Ancoats Brotherhood, and embraced in their philosophy the commercial entertainment that was more attractive to the mass of the public than the limitations of purely rational recreation.

The 'impossible dream' of socialism for Blatchford and those he associated throughout his life could not have been realised. Outside of the *Clarion* Fellowship, there was disagreement between and within the various socialist factions including the Fabian Society and the Independent Labour Party. Their ongoing failure to agree on a plan to move their cause forward meant their membership disempowered

themselves. The inability to present a united front, or even a clear vision of what socialism meant ensured a failure to attract the support of the mass of the public. Alex Thompson took this view in 1937, looking back on the position of socialism in the 1890s and saying 'If three or four of the disinterested advocates of the co-operative Commonwealth could have agreed in those days of enthusiasm to work together, Britain would now be a Socialist State.'⁴⁸⁹

The *Clarion* itself was an example of the positive New Journalism that was reflected in the activities of the *Clarion* Board and the members of the Clarion fellowship. Their support for popular theatre in contrast with the largely Fabian support of realism and the serious drama has been largely forgotten, but as has been seen it marked a sharp division between two brands of socialism that manifested itself along class lines and along broadly similar lines a North/South divide. The members of the *Clarion* were serious about fun and their hedonist philosophy aimed to attract people to socialism by consensus.

Chapter Five examines the idea of Robert Courtneidge's proposal for a presence for the provincial theatres to take a leading role in the solution to the problem of the decline of the drama. The fears of the middle-class urban elite in Manchester that caused them to attack the hedonist lifestyle of the *Clarion's* bohemian circle are made apparent in the investigation into the Hardacre Case in Chapter Six. What is certain is that the *Clarion* became the most popular and longest surviving socialist newspaper and it achieved the highest circulation figures, continuing to be published until 1935.

⁴⁸⁹ Thompson, Alex, *Here I Lie*, p. 94

CHAPTER FIVE

ROBERT COURTNEIDGE AND THE STATE OF THE DRAMA

As discussed in Chapter Four Robert Courtneidge was a close associate of the members of the *Clarion* Board. Despite Alex Thompson's claim that Courtneidge was 'distrustful of socialism,' his support for the socialist cause was strong enough for him to lend the *Clarion* Board £100 in 1891, to bring their new newspaper into being.⁴⁹⁰ Robert Courtneidge maintained a relationship with the theatre in Manchester throughout his long career, first as an actor, then as a rising star amongst theatre managers and later returning to the city to present well received touring productions of musical comedies. As will be seen, pantomime was central to the successes he achieved as a manager in Manchester. His work in this genre as an actor, producer and venue manager enabled his pantomimes to make a reasonable claim to be a respectable form of entertainment, suitable for all the family, and he did much to ensure its aesthetic and commercial credibility.

This chapter is largely concerned with the period between 1896 and 1903 when Courtneidge began his career as a theatre manager in Manchester, first at the Prince's Theatre, and then in 1899 becoming Managing Director of both the Prince's and the Theatre Royal. Presiding over two of the city's major theatres and developing his reputation at a national level gave him greater significance on the national stage of British theatre history, than the lessee Captain Bainbridge or the proprietor John Pitt Hardacre who is the subject of Chapter Six. Whilst they had both achieved success and some notoriety at a local level, Courtneidge maintained control

⁴⁹⁰ Thompson, Alex (1937) *Here I Lie: the Memorial of an Old Journalist*. London: George Routledge and Sons Ltd. p. 67

of his reputation and used his comprehensive experience of the theatre and his personal credibility, towards influencing the development of a new and thriving British theatre for the twentieth century. Courtneidge's prominence in the ongoing 'state of the drama' debate, where he advocated a role for the leading provincial theatres in the training of performers and technical staff, kept Manchester to the forefront of thinking about the theatre at a national level.

Courtneidge did not proclaim his socialist sympathies loudly, but his activities championing improvements to the working conditions of performers and to ensure fairer contracts to protect their exploitation by unscrupulous managers are evidence of his concern for the good of others. He was able to use his natural charisma and his image as a respectable family man to avoid personal scandal and maintain good relationships with the authorities, and with Manchester's reforming elite, while at the same time promoting 'tyrannical' commercial pantomime in his theatres.

Supported by Thompson he launched his proposal for his new system for organizing the theatre at a national level and the training of actors in the pages of the *Clarion*. In his new model he advocated that this scheme should be led by and implemented in the provinces. It gained approval in principle from many leading figures in the theatre of the day, but he was unable to attract the practical support necessary to take his plan forward. Having failed to get the scheme adopted at a national level, Courtneidge approached his own Board to allow him to run an experiment on a smaller scale in Manchester, but he was thwarted again by their unwillingness to take any risk by investing shareholders money in the scheme. This lack of ambition was an opportunity lost for him and for the city to further increase its position as the leading provincial theatrical centre. Having reached this impasse

Courtneidge demonstrated the strength of his resolution and chose to leave Manchester. Courtneidge's bid for the elevation of the provincial theatres as a training ground for the national theatre offers a further aspect to previous research by scholars into the 'state of the drama' debate that exercised the minds of the theatrical community in Britain at the turn of the twentieth century.

In the summer of 1900 Alex Thompson, as the resident drama critic, introduced the topic of 'the state of the drama' to his regular column in the *Clarion*. Discussing his disappointment at the content of the theatrical season that was reaching its close, he raised concerns that had been the subject of debate across the country for some time. His article expressed fears for the future of theatre in Britain which was widely considered to be facing a challenge to its future survival as its audiences and therefore its box office returns declined. The causes, it had been suggested, were a shortage of high class companies able to fill the available weeks in the programmes of theatres around the country throughout the theatrical calendar, coupled with a proliferation of poor quality touring companies that were damaging to the reputation and box office income of theatres. Thompson then invited the London theatre critic William Archer, and Courtneidge as the incumbent Managing Director of both the Manchester Theatre Royal and the Prince's Theatre, to contribute their views on the subject to his newspaper. Reading the subsequent exchange of views that extended over the summer, suggests that Thompson and his pantomime writing associate and friend Courtneidge, had been discussing the issue and formulating a response that could offer a way forward, prior to that public invitation.

The emphasis of this chapter is to examine the position of legitimate theatre and the drama in late Victorian Britain, when the rise of popular and variety theatre

brought about a challenge to the serious theatre. The irony being here that the drama was dependent on being subsidized from the theatres' income from popular mass entertainment for it to be staged at any time in the theatrical year. Courtneidge had an entrepreneurial spirit which allowed him to devise a model for a national drama in response to concerns amongst theatre professionals about the poor quality of much of the work being staged both in London and around the country and the consequent falling attendances served to enhance his reputation at a national level.

Similarly, he was well versed in the experience of provincial theatre and the contribution it made to the national theatre. Whilst there had been ongoing discussion about this topic, Courtneidge brought a fresh approach by focussing his plan on the theatre of the provinces where he recognised the potential to provide a solid grounding for the training of actors. His words reinforced the importance of the contribution of theatres outside of London as he stressed their potential for taking a major role in securing the future development of a national theatre that was equipped to present the highest quality drama, both historical and modern. In the new plan he advocated, Courtneidge included a role for pantomime. Much of this chapter again discusses a newspaper debate, but this time the paper is the socialist weekly newspaper the *Clarion* which by 1900 was being published from London, while retaining most of its original editorial team and strong links with Manchester.

Courtneidge's Credentials

As an actor

Courtneidge was born in Glasgow on 29 June 1859. His father died when he was only one month old, and his mother took him and his sister to Edinburgh where they

lived with their grandmother and an uncle while she worked as a housekeeper. While they experienced great poverty, they had a loving and respectable upbringing which would influence Courtneidge in his adult life developing his work ethic, his interpersonal and managerial skills and his socialist ideology.

Having become fascinated with theatre following a visit with a workmate, the young Courtneidge, determined to become an actor, found himself a position as a bookkeeper with the sewing machine manufacturer Wilcox and Gibbs in Manchester. Once there he founded an amateur dramatic club and made the acquaintance of professional actors. Away from family influences, he soon gave up the relative security of a clerical job and a steady wage of £2 per week when offered a temporary position as a super in *The Babes in the Wood*, the 1877-78 pantomime at Manchester's Princes' Theatre, at a rate of 1/6 per performance. This engagement from mid-December until the end of February saw him working in a technical role with responsibilities for ensuring the gas jets remained lit, as well as appearing as a supernumerary. He impressed his employers enough to be offered further engagements for small parts taking him to Crewe, then back to Manchester to appear at the Queen's Theatre.⁴⁹¹

As Courtneidge's acting career developed he appeared in pantomime every year for nineteen years and returned to Manchester many times. He was a gifted comedy and character actor, not usually the lead, and although he did appear on the West End stage, the greatest part of his work was in touring the provinces. In the 1890-91 pantomime season he took the role of the villainous magician Abenazac in

⁴⁹¹ Courtneidge, Robert (1930) *I Was an Actor Once*. London: Hutchinson and Co. Ltd.

Aladdin at the Theatre Royal in Manchester during which period, if they had not been acquainted previously, he developed his friendship with Alex Thompson of the soon to be founded *Clarion* who would later play a prominent role as Courtneidge's writing partner in many pantomimes and musical comedies.

After many years building his acting career in England, in 1893 Courtneidge toured to Australia and New Zealand with the Gaiety Company after George Musgrave had seen him in pantomime and invited Courtneidge and his new wife, the actress Rosie Nott, to join them. Two years later, shortly after his return to England, his management potential was recognised and he was offered a position in Manchester following the death of Thomas W. Charles. He took up this new post on 17 February 1896. It was, as Courtneidge recalled, his first real managerial position:

I must relate that before I went to Australia, a chance remark led to my producing for two years a summer season of burlesque at the Theatre Royal, Edinburgh, then under the management of an old friend, Walter Hatton. Instead of losing money during that period, as he was used to doing, he gained in the two seasons a handsome profit. Hatton was the Chairman of the Company that owned the Princes' Theatre, Manchester and a vacancy occurring at this time the management was offered to me. It was a time of great hesitation, but finally I accepted.⁴⁹²

Courtneidge stated that he was somewhat reluctant to give up the itinerant life of the actor that he loved to move in this new direction, but his decision illustrates the pragmatic mind characteristic of a successful manager. Now a married man, the additional responsibility of two young children made the nomadic life unsuitable. He accepted a three year contract, with a view to returning to acting at the end of that term.

⁴⁹² Ibid. Courtneidge p. 158

As a manager

Writing his own memoirs in 1935 the respected critic James Agate stated that 'When I was a boy Manchester had only two theatres to which the really nice people went.'⁴⁹³ Discussing the production of *Aladdin* at the Princes' Theatre in the season 1900-01 he wrote:

The two really good theatres were the Royal, in Peter Street, where Irving and the heavier drama had their habitation, and the Princes', in Oxford Street, the home of Robert Courtneidge. Londoners know nothing about pantomime as Courtneidge purveyed it.⁴⁹⁴

Agate does not recall that by 1900 Courtneidge was Managing Director of both theatres enabling him to produce complementary programmes and pantomimes between the two houses, but the comment indicates a high regard for Courtneidge and the quality of the pantomimes he was able to produce. Courtneidge appears to have commanded the confidence and respect from all of his peers throughout every phase of his career. A charismatic and popular figure, he is described favourably in references when his name arises. Discussing Courtneidge's later success at the Shaftesbury Theatre in the West End where he became lessee in 1909, and his musical comedy productions, Walter MacQueen-Pope suggested that while Courtneidge had not quite achieved the same scale of financial success as George Edwardes, Courtneidge's achievements were made without the benefit of a large team behind him. He observed 'His memory endures and is honoured. Incidentally,

⁴⁹³ Agate, James (1935) *Ego*. London: Hamish Hamilton. p.60

⁴⁹⁴ Ibid.

he was a pantomime king, too, and his pantomimes were kingly in all respects. And George Edwardes could not do that.⁴⁹⁵

In the chapter in his memoirs that Courtneidge devoted to his years in management in Manchester, it is clear that he enjoyed his time developing his management skills and forming a network of friends and business associates with whom he would continue to work throughout the rest of his career. Further evidence of his love of the pantomime genre is found in Claire Cochrane's observation that after he left Manchester he 'was responsible for a string of musical comedy successes as well as his celebrated pantomimes.'⁴⁹⁶ This description of his year round duties provides evidence of the theatres' financial dependence on the success of the 'annual':

To acquire the knowledge of how to manage a first-class provincial theatre engrossed all my waking hours. In addition to supervising the work and the accounts of the theatre, I had to study the public taste, select the various attractions, arrange terms for them, and produce the pantomime. This entertainment was the most important event of the year, for there was little or no profit to be made out of the dramatic season, and a favourable balance sheet depended on the success of the Christmas season.⁴⁹⁷

The energy and money Courtneidge invested into his pantomimes points also to his performance background and an enjoyment of the creative aspect of the genre of pantomime and its status as an in house production that contrasted with the touring productions over which the resident managers of the provincial receiving houses had little influence. This frustration encouraged Courtneidge to develop his vision for a scheme that would offer training for actors and encourage the presentation of original

⁴⁹⁵ MacQueen-Pope, W (1947) *Carriages at Eleven*. London: Hutchinson and Co. Ltd. p. 185

⁴⁹⁶ Cochrane, Claire (2011) *Twentieth-Century British Theatre: Industry, Art and Empire*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. p. 60

⁴⁹⁷ Courtneidge, *I Was an Actor Once*, p. 169

work by living authors with the aim of improving the quality of what could be seen on the professional stage. His year round dedication to the pantomime is recorded in what he wrote in 1930

Pantomime was much in vogue at this time, and I endeavoured to make those I produced entertaining alike to both children and grown up people. In company with my friend A. M. Thompson I spent most of the year in drafting and writing the book. With C. Wilhelm, whose delightful designs for the Empire ballets and scores of London productions have never been adequately recognized, and Conrad Tritschler, a painter of genius, my wife and I mapped out the changing scenes that were a great feature of the productions. Backed up by a wonderful staff we produced year by year pantomimes that were successful in attracting record attendances to the theatre.⁴⁹⁸

The involvement of Wilhelm and Tritschler in itself confirms the lavish nature of the production, and this saw the beginning of his writing partnership with Thompson from the *Clarion*. Here was the foundation of the team that would go on to create many musical comedies in London and to tour nationally and internationally after Courtneidge left Manchester.

In 1898 Courtneidge and Thompson collaborated on their first manuscript and production for *Sinbad the Sailor* at the Prince's theatre. As noted in Chapter Five Thompson, who had made some attempts at writing for the theatre, but with limited success, credited Courtneidge for him beginning to write for pantomime.

The cheerful and irreverent style of Thompson's writing, used in his autobiography as it is in much of his work in the *Clarion* is a reminder that pantomime was not regarded as having the same artistic merit as drama or the musical comedies for which he and Courtneidge would later become known. Such was the quality of the pantomimes of the Prince's Theatre during this period that Courtneidge

⁴⁹⁸ Ibid. pp. 169-170

was able to claim that of some of the new stars he had discovered 'the glowing reports I made of their performances, brought down George Edwardes to see, and immediately engage them.'⁴⁹⁹ In its obituary for Courtneidge in 1939, the *Manchester Guardian* reinforced his claim, reporting that during Courtneidge's time in Manchester 'George Edwardes made a point of seeing all the Prince's Theatre pantomimes.'⁵⁰⁰ Edwardes it would seem was watching Courtneidge's growing success, as he would later employ him as a producer when he returned to London in 1905 after touring his productions of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *As You Like It* to Australia.

The *Manchester Guardian* obituary also noted the esteem in which he was held in Manchester, and revived the memory of the broad appeal of the pantomimes he created in the city saying:

His pantomimes at the Prince's not only pleased Lancashire audiences they attracted the attention of the theatre world, and his ideas were bought or borrowed by other theatre managers. Pantomimes being the principal source of the year's profits, his success gratified the directors; but his brilliant productions, on which he would spend the preceding twelve months preparing the details, and his eye for promising new artists, made him widely known.⁵⁰¹

It noted also that in spite of Courtneidge's original uncertainty about whether he should accept the post at the Prince's Theatre 'whatever Courtneidge put his hand to he did well.'⁵⁰²

He adopted a policy of producing his own original pantomime at the Prince's Theatre and complementing this by taking advantage of the large stage at the Theatre Royal to bring the previous year's Drury Lane pantomime to Manchester. In

⁴⁹⁹ Ibid. p. 171

⁵⁰⁰ *Manchester Guardian*, 8 April 1939. p. 7

⁵⁰¹ Ibid.

⁵⁰² Ibid.

this way Courtneidge and his employers can be seen as dominating theatre in Manchester at the turn of the twentieth century. 'There was great rivalry between the Theatre Royal, the Prince's, and the Comedy Theatre at pantomime time, but each year we managed to come first' Courtneidge later recalled.⁵⁰³ At this time these were the three leading theatres competing to produce the most successful pantomime in Manchester.

As a socialist and campaigner

All the material that is available referring to Courtneidge suggests a picture of a modest, unassuming man of great integrity, whose interpersonal and managerial skills, and enthusiasm for the theatre presented audiences with entertainment of the highest quality. The impression gained is of his creativity and charisma and a highly developed sense of justice and fair play. Courtneidge recognized that amongst a disparate group of individuals that made up the theatrical profession it was difficult to organize to be able to benefit from strength in numbers. As will be seen below his political skills and the respect he commanded amongst his peers gave would play a crucial role in beginning the process of forming one of the first collectives to represent the interests of members of the profession with the aim of ensuring fairer working conditions.

Courtneidge was never afraid to do the right thing. In the examination of the Hardacre case which forms part of Chapter Six, Courtneidge recognised an injustice and was willing to take the stand as one of the character witnesses for Hardacre. By November 1902 when the case took place Courtneidge was already working his

⁵⁰³ Courtneidge, *I Was an Actor Once*, p. 130

notice and planning to leave Manchester, so perhaps had less to lose than previously, but Hardacre had acquired a notoriety in the previous three years that was seriously frowned upon by some sections of Manchester's 'respectable' establishment.⁵⁰⁴

Courtneidge did not make political speeches or publicly nail his colours to socialism. It is not a term he refers to in his memoirs. He can, however, be seen to have been a socialist by many of the actions he took throughout his career. Alex Thompson's suggestion that he was 'distrustful of socialism' should perhaps be regarded as a red herring, intended as a humorous aside in the style typical of Thompson.⁵⁰⁵ His willingness to make a loan of £100 to the *Clarion* Board to complete the initial investment required to launch their newspaper in itself implies at least a sympathy with socialism. It is in his actions and the campaigns with which he became involved that a socialist bent is evident. The majority of the causes that Courtneidge took up occurred after 1903 when he left Manchester, but these views were alluded to and remained unaltered in his memoirs published in 1930.

Courtneidge's socialism can be seen to have been proactive in a quieter form than the political writing and debate to further the socialist cause that was the route preferred by Thompson, Blatchford and others associated with the *Clarion*. Though Courtneidge did at times contribute articles to the *Clarion*, their subjects were theatre related rather than a call for readers to convert to socialism. The campaigns in which he was active were related to specific issues within the world of theatre, but can be seen to be supported from a socialist ideology. Forty years before the formation of

⁵⁰⁴ *Manchester Guardian*, 20 November 1902. p. 4

⁵⁰⁵ Thompson, Alex, *Here I Lie*, p. 67

Equity in 1929, Courtneidge planted the seeds by organizing actors in an association that would begin the fight to improve their lot within an insecure profession. The organization he founded in Manchester was keen to state it was an association, not a union bent on creating conflict with managers. Managers, it was stressed, were welcome to join. Courtneidge's life experience had equipped him to see issues between actors and managers from both sides and arbitrate to find a mutually beneficial outcome to many disputes.

During the 1890-91 run as Abenazac in *Aladdin* at the Theatre Royal, Courtneidge chaired a meeting called to establish the Actors' Association to mediate between actors and managers in matters that affected both. This is an early example of an attempt to correct injustices in the theatrical world through collective representation, reflecting a national movement towards improving the lot of employees in all industries that mobilised across the country following the success of the Great Dock Strike in London in 1889. Claire Cochrane has also noted this meeting commenting that 'For actors collective organisation was both an acknowledgment of increased confidence in their status in society and a strategy to ensure reasonable working conditions and protection against exploitation.'⁵⁰⁶

Courtneidge, it seems, was always in the forefront of new developments, and evidently gaining a reputation as a campaigning figurehead for justice for the workers. Cochrane explains the unusual circumstances of employment in the theatrical world that could see men like Courtneidge taking the role of both managers and employees saying

⁵⁰⁶ Cochrane, *Twentieth-Century British Theatre*, p. 78

Every actor who led a company, however ad hoc and impoverished, was a manager. That same actor might then revert to being an employee in someone else's company. A trade union representing both employers and employees was thus something of an anomaly.⁵⁰⁷

Further to this for Courtneidge, whilst he was an actor with some company management experience at the inaugural meeting in 1891, as the Managing Director of a prestigious theatre in 1896 his status was still that of an employee. The anomaly, Cochrane claims, is why the new Actors' Association represented both sides of the equation and aimed to be conciliatory in their negotiations. In effect they functioned more as an arbitration service than a union.

The opening of the meeting was summarized in the press with Courtneidge, as Chair, describing its purpose thus:

They had met chiefly to discuss the desirableness of forming an association for the following purposes: - Removing certain abuses that brought discredit upon their calling, discussing amicably all differences between managers and actors, and striving in their corporate capacity to do everything in their power to elevate and advance their profession. – (Applause.) As to the question of membership, the general feeling, he believed, was that they should incorporate in the association managers, actor-managers, actors and actresses.⁵⁰⁸

The meeting, held at Manchester's Victoria Hotel, was reported to have 'attracted a good attendance' including F. R. Benson who Cochrane suggests, was along with Courtneidge, 'among the principal architects of the original aims of the Actor's Association.'⁵⁰⁹ Letters of support from notable members of the profession including Henry Irving and Arthur Wing Pinero were read with their apologies. Edward Terry wrote 'I think the movement a thoroughly good one, and the majority of the

⁵⁰⁷ Ibid. p. 79

⁵⁰⁸ *Manchester Guardian*, 2 February 1891. p. 8

⁵⁰⁹ Cochrane, *Twentieth-Century British Theatre*, p. 80

suggestions are most reasonable and fair.⁵¹⁰ At the close it was agreed that a list of those present willing to join the association should be taken and that membership should not exceed three shillings per year. In addition 'The following were appointed a provisional committee to communicate with all members of the profession and ascertain their views on the matter: - Messrs. Courtneidge, Hatchman, Hilliard, Brodie, Courtenay and Payne.'⁵¹¹

There was some controversy attached to this initiative. The following day an editorial in the *Manchester Guardian* defended the proposed new association from misconceptions that it was formed as an actor's trade union stating:

Playgoers will hope to hear more of the new Association formed at the joint meeting of actors and theatrical managers in Manchester last Sunday evening. The programme of the Association is entirely novel. It is not an actor's trade union as the *Saturday Review* hastily called it the day before it was born. We gather that employer and employed, actor and actress, are equally admitted to membership, and we do not gather that there is any intention of planting the wage-earning actor in a hostile camp over against the camp of the wage-paying manager.⁵¹²

The two main areas of immediate concern for the Association were reported as being:

The activity of the "bogus manager", who has a hundred tricks of paring and repudiating salaries and of inflicting heavy expenses on the actors of his company' and 'the notoriously bad sanitation of a great number of provincial theatres.'⁵¹³

The new Association gained credibility though when Sir Henry Irving agreed to be its first president.

⁵¹⁰ *Manchester Guardian*, 2 February 1891. p. 8

⁵¹¹ *Ibid.*

⁵¹² *Manchester Guardian*, 3 February 1891. p. 7

⁵¹³ *Ibid.*

Courtneidge's original attempts to begin the process of collectivization can be seen to have made slow progress, but he is to be credited with making the first practical steps towards gaining improved working conditions for his peers. In the same way he took the initiative to move forward the debate that had been under discussion since Matthew Arnold queried the future prospects of British drama in 1879, putting forward an ambitious scheme that, if adopted, would revolutionize the operation of theatres in Britain.⁵¹⁴

The condition of the drama

Here I first distinguish between the two elements of what had been discussed on several occasions at a national level as 'the national theatre.' The series of articles and letters in the *Clarion* discussion of 1900 did not concern itself with the aspect of the debate that campaigned for the building of a venue that would be a physical presence in London dedicated to the serious drama. Instead, the dialogue questioned the quality of all forms of theatre that were currently being presented to audiences on the stages of Britain and considered the potential for a new model of theatre operation that would enable theatres to compete effectively for an audience share amid the increasing choices becoming available to the public and competition from music hall and other commercial entertainment.

The decline of the drama and the case for the creation a national theatre in Britain had been raised regularly over many years and gathered momentum following the publication of Matthew Arnold's 1879 essay 'The French Play in London' on the occasion of the visit of the Comedie Française to play a season at The Gaiety theatre

⁵¹⁴Arnold, Matthew (1882) *Irish Essays and Others*. London: Smith, Elder and Co. See also the select Committee Reports (1866) *Theatrical Licenses and Regulations* and (1892) *Theatres and Places of Entertainment*.

in London. Arnold observed that in 1879 the theatre was increasing in popularity for the first time for many years. In his view:

The change is not due only to an increased liking in the upper class and the working-class for the theatre. Their liking for it has certainly increased, but this is not enough to account for the change. The attraction of the theatre begins to be felt again, after a long interval of insensibility, by the middle-class also.⁵¹⁵

His concern was that as the middle classes returned to the theatre only to find an 'English theatre without organisation, or purpose, or dignity, and no modern English drama at all except a fantastical one.'⁵¹⁶ In order to maintain this interest Arnold famously concluded 'The theatre is irresistible; *organise the theatre*.'⁵¹⁷ Without strong direction, until 1900 the theatre had continued to drift influenced only by the financial consideration that brought pantomime to the core of the survival of theatre and made theatre dependent on the financial success of the annual production. Falling between Arnold's essay of 1879 and *A National Theatre: Schemes and Proposals* first written and published privately by William Archer and Harley Granville-Barker in 1904, Courtneidge's appraisal of the situation and the need for strong leadership echoed Arnold's recognition of the potential for theatre if it could be freed from the financial constraints imposed by commercial operation.⁵¹⁸ He acknowledged the obstacles to the success of his scheme saying:

And if I place this stress upon the financial side, it is because I believe it reflects in a great measure the trend in public opinions. We are weighed in the balance, and many of our works are lacking (*Clarion*, 28 July 1900, 235).

⁵¹⁵ Arnold, Matthew (1882) 'The French Play in London' in *Irish Essays and Others*. London: Smith, Elder and Co. p. 234

⁵¹⁶ Ibid. p. 235

⁵¹⁷ Ibid. p. 237

⁵¹⁸ Archer, William and Harley Granville-Barker (1907) *A National Theatre: Schemes and Proposals*. London: Duckworth and Co.

At this time the funding model was commercial operation and there was no effective alternative. Courtneidge recognized that the managers' reluctance to try new work and new performers was due in part to the fickle nature of the audiences who were also unwilling to pay to see performances of unfamiliar titles that did not include their favourite stars. This conundrum continues today, but there is often an opportunity to apply for funding to bring new work to the stage. In Courtneidge's day this would require attracting investment from theatre speculators.

Courtneidge began his contribution to *The Clarion's* discussion of the condition of the drama by outlining the issues facing British theatre in 1900 and then providing a breakdown of the causes as his experience suggested to him. Courtneidge drew attention to three areas of concern writing 'Let us first consider what are the present evils, and then endeavour to suggest a remedy. There are three points that must be considered, the public, the play and the actor.'⁵¹⁹

On the expectations of the public he wrote 'that they desire entertainment.' and expanded on this stating:

I believe that the majority of playgoers would say that the drama should be primarily a form of amusement, under whose broad cloak everything that is good of its kind should have shelter, let it be pantomime, farce, comedy or tragedy. The entertainment should be clean and wholesome. The sensible playgoer would not despise the frivolity of farce or pantomime, or deny the claims of those who crave for more intellectual fare.⁵²⁰

The failure of the theatres to fulfil this desire was, he suggested, caused by a shortage of high quality productions available for provincial managers to book into their theatres. From his observations Courtneidge found that 'we might

⁵¹⁹ *Clarion*, 28 July 1900. p. 235

⁵²⁰ *Ibid.*

divide the entertainments into three classes.' Firstly, he approved of the type of high class 'annual visits' of the most successful actor managers naming the companies of Sir Henry Irving, Beerbohm Tree, F. R. Benson, George Edwardes, D'Oyly Carte and Wilson Barrett. He was also of the opinion that 'With this class we may incorporate the first-rate London company (generally composed, by-the-way, of country actors) presenting the latest London success, who may also pass muster and leave little room for anything but satisfaction.'⁵²¹ He identified however that there were not enough of these companies to fill the theatres in all the regions all the year round and theatre managers were forced to fill the weeks in between these superior companies with unsatisfactory fodder which failed at the box office. Courtneidge offered this description of the low grade offerings:

There remains a large proportion of the dramatic season monopolised by entertainments which neither attract the public nor satisfy the conscientious manager. It is composed of cheap companies representing worn out "London successes" and indifferent novelties. Carelessly played, thoughtlessly stage-managed, these dramatic crocks drag out a painful existence, minus profit or reputation.⁵²²

The main difficulty faced by provincial managers was that the limited number of first class touring companies meant that the seasons they were forced to present to the public contained many more weeks of the 'indifferent novelties' than of the high quality box office favourites.

Courtneidge then introduced the topic of the annual pantomime season as a distinct third class of production that the theatres included in their programme. As a supporter of pantomime and with a practical approach to the realities of operating two

⁵²¹ Ibid.

⁵²² Ibid.

successful principal provincial theatres in the same city he stressed that with the difficulties that faced the managements of theatres in making a profit all year round 'dependence must therefore be placed upon the pantomime for any profit upon the year's working.' This dependence led him to distinguish between variations within pantomime for which his approval was reserved for only the respectable, best quality productions:

We cannot give up the pantomime season, upon which so much depends, but if we are to preserve that form of entertainment, it must be purified and elevated. We must not be dependent upon an incoherent and careless libretto; we must not ask the actor to supplement the deficiencies of the author and eke out his precarious lines with red noses, baggy trousers, stale jokes and a réchauffé of concert hall songs and business. We must preserve the daintiness of nursery tales and appeal to the sympathies of the children, whilst catering to the artistic sensibilities of their elders, if we desire that this form of entertainment should continue for many years longer.⁵²³

He was concerned that there were also issues that needed to be rectified within the genre of pantomime if it was to continue to provide a strong financial base for theatres to plan their budgets around. The pantomime books for the Prince's Theatre between 1897 and 1902 are evidence of Courtneidge's views here. They are more tightly scripted than previous pantomimes at the theatre, more akin to the genre of musical comedy which would become Courtneidge's forte after he left Manchester. They offer much less opportunity for the actors to deviate from the script, and consequently less opportunity for risqué material, that the authors had not intended, to be introduced. The 1897 pantomime *Aladdin* was written by Courtneidge and John J. Wood. In 1898 the writing duties for *Sinbad the Sailor* were shared by Jay

⁵²³ Ibid.

Hickory Wood and A. M. Thompson. The four pantomimes from 1899 to 1902 were all penned by the partnership of Courtneidge and Thompson.

Courtneidge expressed concern about the actors of the day. While they were in his opinion 'more cultured' than those of twenty years or so earlier from who he had learned his craft as a young actor, they limited themselves to learn only a small number of roles that would be repeated around the country, some for many years, with the consequence of performances becoming inevitably lack lustre. In the past, he reminded the reader, the actors were required to learn many parts and change them frequently allowing them to develop their skills and stimulate their interest. At this time it was still common for actors to copy their own lines out of a single copy of the script.

He questioned also theatres and theatre companies lacking imagination and the courage to include lesser known plays and the work of new playwrights when planning their programmes, because producers and managers were unwilling to risk untried authors that they feared audiences would not support. This he argued led in its own way to a decline in attendances from modern audiences seeking novelty. Attempts to ensure a reasonable box office return by repeating the tried and tested box office successes of a previous era, he feared, could only deliver an increasingly downward spiral of diminishing returns.

When Thompson had invited Courtneidge to submit a piece to the *Clarion* on the topic of 'the state of the drama' he had issued the same invitation to William Archer, then London based dramatic critic of *The World*. While Courtneidge's expertise was gained largely in the genre of comedy and musical theatre, Archer approached the topic as a translator of Ibsen and a keen advocate of serious drama

and the work of modern playwrights. Archer's willingness to engage with the topic elevated the whole debate to attract attention at a national level as Archer, described by his biographer Thomas Postlewait as 'England's possibly most significant critic,' was at the height of his influence.⁵²⁴ Thompson would have known his attention would lend gravitas to the series of articles and correspondence, and mostly likely designed his invitations with this in mind.

In reply to Thompson's invitation Archer confined himself to commenting on the playwriting aspect of the perceived decline of the drama. Archer's response, given two columns of the front page of the *Clarion* and submitted before he could have read Courtneidge's piece, questioned whether it was indeed the case that the plays offered on the West End stage and touring the country in the season just ending had been of a lower quality than those of twenty years earlier that had sparked Matthew Arnold's comments. While this view had been the trigger for Thompson's original invitation, Archer rejected that concern and was not pulling any punches when, addressing Thompson by his pen name of Dangle, he attacked melodrama as the centre of any perceived decline. Here, he claimed, was a now jaded genre no longer able to appeal to the public:

I cannot even lament very bitterly that shrinkage in the domain of melodrama which you, Mr Dangle, note among the ominous signs of the times. It seems to me quite an open question as to whether the Adelphi may not be better employed as a home of musical farce, and the Princess's as a "continuous vaudeville" theatre, than they have been of late supplying antiquated, mechanical, brainless melodrama.⁵²⁵

Writing about spectacle in British theatre, Michael Booth has noted Archer's views on which genres it was acceptable to find in the programmes of professional theatres.

⁵²⁴ Postlewait, Thomas (1986) *Prophet of the New Drama: William Archer and the Ibsen Campaign*. Connecticut: Greenwood Press. p. 137

⁵²⁵ *Clarion*, 4 August 1900. p. 242

'Archer though much of his work was intent on promoting realism and social problem dramas, in particular the plays of Ibsen whose work he translated for the British stage, was not averse to pantomime.'⁵²⁶ While Archer did not make a specific reference to pantomime in his *Clarion* response Booth's comment indicates that, like Courtneidge he was of the opinion that there was a place in the theatre for 'good pantomime' if it was presented as a high quality, respectable amusement suitable for all the family.

Archer's comment assured Thompson that many new playwrights were in their ascendancy and that the most recent season which he agreed had been poor heralded better things to come. Archer ended his piece for the *Clarion* on a positive note claiming that a 'barren season is apt to be merely the prelude to a season of plenty' and was bold in stating that with regard to the authors currently writing for the theatre:

I avouch that it is my deliberate opinion that, as regards the talent engaged in its production, the English drama of today is in far better case than it has been at any time during the whole course of the nineteenth century.⁵²⁷

It is unfortunate that we do not have Archer's response to Courtneidge's scheme, and at first glance the two may appear to support entirely opposing views on the quality of new work available to the British public. In the 'Notes' at the front of the more widely published 1907 edition of *Schemes and Estimates for a National Theatre*, however, Archer and Granville Barker acknowledge Courtneidge as one of the 'advisers' to their proposals.⁵²⁸ Their scheme has at its centre a plan to establish a

⁵²⁶ Booth, Michael R. (1981) *Victorian Spectacular Theatre 1850-1901*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul. pp. 28 and 32.

⁵²⁷ *Clarion*, 4 August 1900. p. 242

⁵²⁸ Archer, *Schemes and Estimates for a National Theatre*, n.p.

dedicated theatre building in London, but in his preface to the new edition, dated 1907, Granville Barker acknowledged an omission from their original plan writing:

I would draw up a second set of figures, suitable to the foundation of an adequate repertory theatre in Manchester, Birmingham or some such provincial centre. For it is one of these cities, easier to stir in the expression of civic opinion, rather than to monstrous and inarticulate London, centre of all English thought and action though it may claim to be, that I look for the first practical step in theatrical organisation. That there are local tendencies towards a better understanding of a part which might be played in English life by a vitalised English drama cannot, I think, be denied.⁵²⁹

Elements of Courtneidge's ideas then are incorporated in Barker's new plan. At the time Barker was writing *Annie Horniman* was in the process of beginning her experiment in Manchester.

The 18 August issue of the *Clarion* contained a lengthy response to both Courtneidge and Archer's articles, signed only as 'A Provincial Critic.' His identity was most likely known to Thompson. This letter drew attention to the limited scope of Archer's response asking 'But does Mr Archer touch the kernel of the matter? What he has concerned himself with is the question of dramatic authorship, while what we poor provincials are troubled with is the quality of acting and the quantity of it.'⁵³⁰ For quality, the writer suggests that while Archer can select some highlights of the metropolitan season, there are not enough to multiply to supply the theatre all across the country. The effect then he argued was that 'in the provinces one is apt to consider the season as from pantomime to pantomime.'⁵³¹

This same contributor, who stated that he represented the view from an unnamed provincial town that was smaller than Manchester and had only two

⁵²⁹ Ibid. p. xi

⁵³⁰ *Clarion*, 18 August 1900. p. 263

⁵³¹ Ibid.

theatres, suggested that audiences supported the idea of combining visits from touring with seasons played by a resident stock company writing:

No one I know desires to do wholly away with the touring system, but what people do wish for is a season, like the pantomime season, when actors should work together, gaining experience in what may be called – if the term does not frighten them – the standard British drama with as wide a repertory of modern plays as authors could be induced to allow.⁵³²

This comment suggests a recognition of the value of pantomime to the theatre not only for its financial value to the theatre, but also for the opportunity it provided to the actor for training, and as a place to widen their experience.

Thompson reported each week in the *Clarion* over the summer, on the other newspapers that had joined the debate and printed letters on the subject, many from leading figures from the theatrical world. He particularly appreciated the letter from ‘A Provincial Critic’, in his column printed just below this report, as ‘an appallingly convincing statement of the barrenness of our provincial stage.’⁵³³

Courtneidge’s Proposed Model

Courtneidge did not claim that the observations he made of these issues were entirely new, nor that elements within the scheme he proposed had not been put forward previously. In a Post Scriptum to his article he gave credit to other contributors to the debate stating ‘I might add that the establishment of stock companies has been advocated by the *Stage* persistently and eloquently in many articles that I have read with interest.’⁵³⁴

⁵³² Ibid.

⁵³³ Ibid.

⁵³⁴ *Clarion*, 28 July 1900. p. 235

Considering the points made by these earlier contributions to the debate he had though devised a coherent plan bringing together some ideas that had been discussed previously. The most innovative feature of the model for a new system that emerged from his deliberations gave responsibility to the theatres in the provinces to lead the revival of the drama by creating a new repertory system staging new work by modern authors, which would offer the opportunity for training to young actors.

Courtneidge's article, written in letter form, outlined the plan he had devised to tackle the issues identified, which he believed would offer the best way forward to resolve these problems and ensure a healthy and innovative future for theatre in Britain. Such was the reputation that Courtneidge had already established for himself, that Thompson reported that the *Daily Mail* had greeted his article with the comment 'coming from such a source, will excite much attention.' Max Beerbohm, like Archer, was not satisfied with the progress being made towards a 'superior drama' and suggested that 'because the public is becoming slowly educated in serious drama it is becoming more and more food of music halls and musical farces.'⁵³⁵ The plan built on the ideas of other critics and theatre practitioners that had expressed concern over the state of the drama in Britain since Matthew Arnold's 1879 essay 'The French Play in London' had compared the standard of presentation of French and British theatre.

Courtneidge stated that his reasoning in devising the plan that he outlined in this article was that 'We suffer from too much centralisation, of that I am certain. The provinces are now practically dependent upon London for their plays and production'

⁵³⁵ *Clarion*, 4 August 1900. p. 242

and 'The drama lacks the stimulus and local artistic work that the provincial theatres used to supply, and my impression is that this is at the root of the mischief.' He perceived that there had been a decline in the quality of acting during the previous twenty years and summarized his belief as to its cause saying:

Nowadays the general run of actors do not at the outside, play more than half-a-dozen parts in a year. A great number go from year's end to year's end playing but one. How are they to perfect their work, when that work, to be successful, requires what they cannot obtain, *i.e.*, practice in the constant change of characters?⁵³⁶

Thirty years later this view held when, in offering advice to the aspiring actor he declared:

In the theatre, good looks, an aristocratic or pleasing manner and appearance, or an exceptional personality of any kind may cover up the defects of insufficient training and encourage the belief that the art of acting is an easy accomplishment. But there is no short path to excellence in acting. If you wish to become an artist, you can do so only by unceasing labour.⁵³⁷

In the scheme he was proposing, he claimed, 'in the endeavour to afford the actor the opportunity of thoroughly mastering his business there will come the solution of much of the present troubles.'⁵³⁸

The potential that Courtneidge recognized for the regions was for them to take a leading role in determining the future of theatre in Britain to create a theatre that could truly claim to be 'national' He commented on the number of new theatres appearing across the country and asked:

Theatres have multiplied very quickly of late. But where is the corresponding increase in plays and actors? Will the public always be satisfied with the present fare? I think not. I am sure not. Let us be wise and set our house in

⁵³⁶ *Clarion*, 28 July 1900. p.235

⁵³⁷ Courtneidge, *I Was an Actor Once*, pp. 265-266

⁵³⁸ *Clarion*, 28 July 1900. p.235

order, for the public, believe me, is not so gullible as many would have us understand.⁵³⁹

The way forward that Courtneidge advised for British theatre would:

establish a stock company whose name should be to the public a synonym for first class work, to the young actor, a guarantee that he shall have practice and opportunity, to the dramatist, a ready means of appealing to the public.⁵⁴⁰

He did not specify where this travelling stock company should have its base, but was determined that 'I believe we are nearing the time when a new system must be inaugurated in the provinces.'⁵⁴¹ Courtneidge's plan would bring about a valuing of the role of the provinces in broadening the opportunities of a first class training for actors needed to be acknowledged and supported by the leading houses of the metropolis to bring about a healthy, vibrant culture of theatre and reverse the decline in theatre going in Britain. It would not be until 1907 that Annie Horniman would arrive in Manchester to begin her experiment with a similar scheme at based at the Gaiety Theatre.⁵⁴²

Courtneidge's observation that the provinces were becoming too dependent on London was key to his new solution to the problem. The contribution of new work that originated in the provinces had become no longer valued as London had becoming increasingly the arbiter of fashion in theatrical taste. A sign perhaps of the effects of progress, that had made it feasible for middle-class audiences to travel to London on quite a regular basis by taking advantage of an efficient railway service. Courtneidge's plan would attempt to address this with his suggestion that the provincial theatre should have regular input into a varied programme that could be

⁵³⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁵⁴¹ Ibid.

⁵⁴² Gooddie, Sheila (1990) *Annie Horniman: A Pioneer of the Theatre*. London: Methuen.

offered in London if this scheme was adopted. This need for fresh and innovative work was stressed in his statement that 'The drama lacks the stimulus and local artistic work that the provincial theatres used to supply, and my impression is that this is at the root of the mischief.'⁵⁴³

The vision for the new stock company was to incorporate useful elements from the old stock system which required actors to learn many parts quickly, inevitably meaning they would understand their role in less depth. The best of the practices of the modern touring system where the actors knew only a few roles risked them becoming jaded and delivering a performance that lacked vitality. In Courtneidge's view:

Our aim should be to preserve the best qualities of both the old and the new school. We should avoid the drudgery which sterilised the so much of the older actor's work. We should try to open out fresh avenues for the aspiring dramatist.⁵⁴⁴

Of the need for new plays he wrote 'Again we cry for plays. I believe there are many mute inglorious Miltons only waiting for their opportunity.'⁵⁴⁵ His stock company would experiment with new work in the provinces. Courtneidge believed that the public had lost faith in the theatres and were seeking novelty. This can be read as an explanation in part for their turn away from theatregoing to visiting the music hall and why in the theatres it was the pantomime that could best be relied on to bring financial success. By combining the best elements of the two models of British theatre operation Courtneidge was convinced that he had discovered the route most likely to succeed in attracting the public back to the theatres in their masses, confident of the quality of the entertainment that they would be offered.

⁵⁴³ *Clarion*, 28 July 1900. p.235

⁵⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

He was passionate in placing his faith in the public to be able to discern and appreciate the best of entertainment:

I'm firmly of the belief that good work and honest endeavour will appeal to the public. It would never do to revive the stock system with all its faults of imperfect mounting and hasty performance.⁵⁴⁶

His plan here that this new stock system would be an evolution of the previous model confirmed the weaknesses that had led to its demise.

The problems of inaugurating the new scheme

Courtneidge was only too aware of the difficulties that would be faced in introducing such an ambitious scheme revolutionizing the model of business that had emerged during the previous twenty years. There was no shortage of voices who could not conceive of the possibility of high quality new work being produced away from the metropolis. In order for his scheme to succeed Courtneidge recognized that 'To do all this requires expenditure of money that can only be encompassed by the co-operation of all the principal provincial managers.'⁵⁴⁷

Here was the insurmountable hurdle. For such a scheme to succeed the majority if not all theatres across the country would need to cooperate and make compromises to operate as what Archer termed 'the uncommercial theatre' in order to bring them all long term benefit. As Tracy Davis has observed 'There might be collective public pride in the accomplishments of theatres and theatre artists, but apart from the regulation of the marketplace and the considerable affect that had on operations, theatres were independent businesses.'⁵⁴⁸

⁵⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁴⁸ Davis, Tracy, *The Economics of the British Stage 1800-1914*, p. 231

Aside from the financial considerations, such a scheme would require commercially operated theatres that were structured as independent businesses and, increasingly by 1900, small consortia and circuits of theatres, to share information and control. By design these businesses were historically committed to an operating model that necessarily placed them in direct competition with each other. Their responsibilities were purely to their shareholders.

No one had responsibility for the training of actors who were contracted by production companies to play specific roles. Courtneidge's *Clarion* article of 28 July does not include detail as to how such a scheme would be managed or how the financial input required would be sought. Following the discussion that continued in the paper throughout the summer Thompson gave the last word to Courtneidge, allowing him to defend his proposal against some criticisms and to expand on a few points in the issue of 29 September. Of the omission of detail as to how the scheme would function Courtneidge summarized:

I have purposely abstained from explaining how I should propose that the business working of my suggestions because, although the details are perfectly clear to my own mind, I do not believe this is the time or place to set such details forward. Enough that I am firmly convinced of the practicability of the scheme, and if others would believe with me in its desirability, I would be willing and ready to formulate it.⁵⁴⁹

In this final contribution to the *Clarion* debate of that summer Courtneidge expressed some frustration that the main criticisms which had been concentrated on not wishing a return to the old outmoded stock system. Even Sir Henry Irving had suggested that while Courtneidge's proposal had 'a good deal of valuable interest' he

⁵⁴⁹ *Clarion*, 29 September 1900. p. 311

'feared that the conditions which made the old stock companies have wholly disappeared.'⁵⁵⁰

George Bernard Shaw adopted a tongue in cheek tone throughout his long letter on the topic and recalled the former stock system without affection:

Mr Courtneidge remembers the old stock system. So do I, and surprised I am that a gentleman of his conscientiousness should endeavour to delude a young and innocent generation into believing that any but the most unquenchably sacred fire ever escaped their blighting influence.⁵⁵¹

Courtneidge fought back however, stating that a close reading of his first piece on the topic revealed his proposal to be an entirely new type of stock system that would benefit from the best elements of both operational models and that 'If my letter is carefully read it will be seen that my standard is a high one, and that I do not believe the public will be satisfied with indifferent work.'⁵⁵²

Max Beerbohm, like Archer, was not satisfied with the progress being made towards a 'superior drama' and suggested that 'because the public is becoming slowly educated in serious drama it is becoming more and more food of music halls and musical farces.'⁵⁵³ He was positive about Courtneidge's plan, as was Beerbohm Tree who held an opposite view to Irving:

I agree with [Courtneidge] that such an institution such as a stock company would be of inestimable benefit to the actors of the future and to the public of the present. In a democratic community such as ours, it is, I suppose, not to be expected that the authorities should extend to the legitimate theatre that encouragement that they give to the music-halls. On the Continent the theatres are State-supported, here they are State-ridden. But things change.⁵⁵⁴

⁵⁵⁰ *Clarion*, 11 August 1900. p. 255

⁵⁵¹ *Clarion*, 8 September 1900. p. 287

⁵⁵² *Clarion*, 29 September 1900. p. 311

⁵⁵³ *Clarion*, 25 August 1900. p. 271

⁵⁵⁴ *Clarion*, 4 August 1900. p. 242

While the debate was attracting attention at the highest level of the theatrical community, the inability of the theatrical knights and other leading figures in the theatre to agree amongst themselves on anything added a further level of obstruction to the chances of Courtneidge being able to get an agreement that would enable him to take this plan forward.

In addition to this problem the evolution of the system dependent on the quality of touring companies available to play at their theatres meant that they were staffed accordingly and lacked the experience of taking control of their own programme by regularly producing their own plays. The skills required to invent a pantomime were not always in evidence amongst the in house staff. By 1900 it was accepted practice for theatres, not even to produce their own pantomime, but instead contract a touring company to visit, or to purchase and adapt the previous year's pantomime from another theatre. It was not uncommon in the credits of the pantomime book to see 'lyrics and locals by' in addition to the name of the main author of the libretto, adding content that used local references to create an impression that their local pantomime have been written specifically for that theatre, and to develop the customary sense of ownership in the audience at any given theatre. Both the 1904 and 1905 Manchester Theatre Royal pantomimes, *Mother Goose* and *Crusoe's Adventures* were written by Jay Hickory Wood, with the addition of 'lyrics and topics by William Wade.'

As Courtneidge warned 'To do all this will, perhaps, mean in the first place a heavy loss; but eventually, I believe, a splendid profit, and an artistic impetus to the entire dramatic machine.'⁵⁵⁵ The prospect of a heavy short term loss for commercial

⁵⁵⁵ *Clarion*, 28 July 1900. p. 235

businesses that were often already operating in the very limits of solvency doomed Courtneidge's scheme. Even the potential to create large profits and, in the longer term, a more stable and reliable source of income where consistently better quality productions would be available to the theatre programmes all year round, could not encourage even the most successful impresarios to step forward to underwrite such an experiment. Here it can be seen that the industry as a whole was at a crossroads where choosing the wrong path would ensure the further decline of the theatre as audiences would turn to other forms of commercial entertainment as the place to spend their disposable income. While recognising their problem the leading figures in theatre management were unwilling to invest in an untried scheme. This fear and the need to achieve short term profits to appease company shareholders forced managers into inactivity, vacillating between the new experiment and staying with the diminishing returns of repeating what they knew and were comfortable doing.

In March 1901, Henry Arthur Jones commended Courtneidge and Thompson's efforts of the previous summer in his essay 'The Drama in the English Provinces,' but complained that:

Mr William Archer, Mr. Courtneidge (the manager of the two leading Manchester theatres), Mr. Thompson (the critic of *The Clarion*), Mr. George Bernard Shaw, and many others, continued the discussion for many weeks. Much truth was raked out, many complaints were made, some suggestions were started, and nothing was done.⁵⁵⁶

Having acknowledged the provincial theatres' financial dependence on pantomime, Jones noted the universality of its audiences writing that 'The local pantomimes are attended by all classes of playgoers, even those who rarely go into the local theatre

⁵⁵⁶ Jones, Henry Arthur (1901) *The Drama in the English Provinces, The Nineteenth Century and After*, 49: 289, pp. 431-444.

at other times.⁵⁵⁷ His considered and comprehensive essay summarized and reflected on Courtneidge's proposals and the *Clarion* debate, and gave greater consideration to the decline of the drama.

Jones's purpose was to ensure the future of an 'English drama.' Later in the same piece he regretted that 'We have no distinct drama at all. What beginnings or remains of a drama we possess are everywhere entangled with popular amusement.'⁵⁵⁸ For Jones then, whilst he was dismissive of pantomime as 'generally a formless perversion of a fairy tale with the latest popular music-hall songs introduced,' he did not suggest it was unacceptable as a leisure pursuit for those who chose it, but instead that 'it cannot be considered as drama.'⁵⁵⁹ His resolution to the problem of the decline in public taste for the drama was the hope that the mass of the public may learn to have different expectations of it as a separate form of theatre.

In the present confusion in the public mind between the drama and popular amusement lies the root of all our difficulties and embarrassments; in the public recognition that the drama and popular amusement are distinct things lies our only hope of one day possessing a national drama.⁵⁶⁰

Jones' solution for drama in the provinces, did not, however, entirely trust the local theatres to produce their own drama or train their own actors. Whilst recalling that Manchester was long known as a training school for actors' he advised that Courtneidge's new plan for actor training 'should perhaps be first tried in London.'⁵⁶¹

Loren Kruger has observed this class division between audiences, and the assumptions made by Jones and the elite amongst London's theatrical community writing that:

⁵⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 435

⁵⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 443

⁵⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 435

⁵⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 444

⁵⁶¹ Ibid., p. 440

Like the philanthropists, the advocates for an English national theatre saw the people in the familiar role as “populace” or “shifting multitude” in need of uplift. Themselves indifferent to the alternative claims of popular entertainments, the national theatre supporters were haunted by the nagging doubt that the masses would not recognize themselves in the invitation and would respond to the summons only under duress.⁵⁶²

Shaw, Jones and their associates were to be found amongst the middle-class philanthropists that made up the speakers in the lectures programme of the Ancoats Brotherhood. From Courtneidge’s comment above that the public ‘is not so gullible as many would have us understand,’ it would seem that he credited provincial audiences with the ability to discriminate between good and bad theatre and that he considered the fears of the philanthropists as unfounded.⁵⁶³

Conclusion

For all the further discussion that Courtneidge’s proposal brought about over the summer of 1900 and the favourable responses to the scheme in principle, this did not result in any action being taken. The socialist spirit of cooperation could not be translated to inspire the conservatism of commercial management. Courtneidge’s awareness of the financial burden on the position of the theatre manager indicated his understanding of the lack of courage on behalf of the industry to take such a risk when thirty years later he wrote:

That a theatrical manager can sometimes be embarrassed and his ideals curbed by the need of money, is a fact rarely considered by the critic, and yet the manager, like other tradesmen, must make his business pay or he must cease to function. If he happens to make a fortune, or be backed by one, he may give reign to his ambitions; if he lacks, he must be content with lower flights.

⁵⁶² Kruger, Loren (1992) *The National Stage: Theatre and Cultural Legitimation in England, France and America*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. p. 85

⁵⁶³ *Clarion*, 28 July 1900. p.235

If he avoids then the temptation to pander to depraved tastes and strives to amuse innocently, he will be called a "commercial manager", a term of opprobrium much in vogue with those lofty minds who seek only intellectual sustenance, and ignore the risk to the manager as beneath consideration. For them, as with the deadhead, with whom they are closely, almost inseparably, allied, art should be its own reward, and the attitude of the connoisseur a complete indifference and contempt for everything that bears the mark of public approval.⁵⁶⁴

Courtneidge continued to pursue his idea for a national repertory company. After no action was taken following the 1900 *Clarion* debate, in 1902 he approached his own board of directors at the Princes' theatre with a proposal to run an experiment, devised from the suggestions he had made in 1900, but on a smaller scale. This was after, aside from the success of his pantomimes, he had also produced highly praised revivals of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in the autumn of 1901 and *As You Like It* in 1902. He later described their response:

I wished also to try a stock season for a few weeks every year in Manchester, supported by subscription, during which I proposed to produce original plays by the best authors. I foresaw the growth of the music hall, and, both from the desire to do good work, and follow what I thought was a profitable course, I urged my views upon my fellow directors. I could not convince them, and as I am firm, my friends will say obstinate, when I have once made up my mind, I gave in my resignation. I did so three times until it was at last accepted, and on the 17th February, 1903, exactly seven years since I undertook the management of the theatre, I terminated my engagement.⁵⁶⁵

His ambitions frustrated, he embarked on a career as a producer of musical comedies, travelling first to Australia where he had sold his productions of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *As You Like It* to George Musgrave. A further insight

⁵⁶⁴ Courtneidge. *I Was an Actor Once*, p. 232

⁵⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 180-181

into his thinking and his vision for how the scheme could have developed appeared in his memoirs when he recalled:

My experience in management had brought me to the conclusion that to depend solely upon the travelling companies to supply the attractions, apart from the Christmas entertainment, was a foolish policy. There were not sufficient first class stars and companies to fill the vacant weeks. During a large portion of the year we very deservedly lost money and reputation. To remedy this was only possible by the amalgamation of the principal theatrical interests in the country. Had that been done we could have organized and trained separate companies for Comedy, Drama, and Light Opera, as well as a yearly Shakespearean production.⁵⁶⁶

This then was the potential of the loss to Manchester and the country, though Courtneidge would return to England for highly successful career as a producer based in London, when he often toured productions to Manchester. The opportunity for Manchester and the provinces to lead the way in reviving the fortunes of theatre in the face of competition from music hall and the cinema was lost. Only truly could it claim to be a national theatre if it was representative of the work being produced and performed throughout the whole of the country. Courtneidge's departure from the Princes' Theatre and the Theatre Royal in 1903 marked the end of an era, combined as it was with the departure of John Pitt Hardacre the owner of the Comedy Theatre just six weeks later, albeit in very different circumstances.

In appointing Courtneidge as Manager, Manchester Theatres Limited had employed a shining example of the ideal qualities of a modern theatre manager. In the increasingly professionalised industry that is described by Claire Cochrane in her observations about theatre management at the turn of the twentieth century:

⁵⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 180

It was of particular importance for a commercial management to nurture good relations with the community that supplied the paying audiences, and whoever had operational responsibility on a day-to-day basis had to maintain a very strong public profile. Increasingly, whether as owner-managers or acting-managers, the trend was to deliberately cultivate the appearance of respectable business professionals.⁵⁶⁷

Maintaining a reputation for respectability was always a difficulty for the flamboyant character of Hardacre who dispensed *bonhomie* and the free flow of drink in the bars of the Comedy Theatre. This did not damage his popularity with the public.

Hardacre's management style, reminiscent of a music hall caterer, looked back to an earlier time, and this would play into the hands of his enemies to bring about his downfall, which I examine in Chapter Six.

⁵⁶⁷ Cochrane, *Twentieth-Century British Theatre*, p. 64

CHAPTER SIX

THE HARDACRE CASE

This chapter examines the Hardacre Case and the role that pantomime was forced to play in the scandal surrounding the series of events that brought about the end of an era in the Manchester theatres. Manchester and its authorities did the city no credit as they contrived a deliberate plot to discredit the actor manager John Pitt Hardacre and force him out of Manchester. Hardacre was the proprietor and licensee of the Comedy Theatre which faced the Theatre Royal on Peter Street. He had become regarded as a symbol of decadence by the new leaders of the Watch Committee and the City Police who took up their posts in 1898.

Colluding with the ethical reformers within the church and temperance movements, the newly elected authorities in Manchester appropriated Hardacre's successful annual pantomimes and used them as a weapon against him creating a scandal in an attempt to deflect attention away from the after effects of the police scandal that engulfed Manchester at the end of 1896. This suggests that at that time pantomime was recognized as the most prominent genre within theatre for the urban reforming elite to have regarded it as such a threat to their ambitions. It serves to highlight just how much influence it had in the cultural life of Manchester society at the *fin de siècle*. Peter Bailey tells us that 'It has been well said that the problem of leisure for most commentators is the problem of other people's leisure.'⁵⁶⁸ This appears to have been at the core of the Hardacre Case. Having identified Hardacre and his network of friends and associates as symbolic of decadence in Manchester,

⁵⁶⁸ Bailey, Peter (1998) *Popular Culture and Performance in the Victorian City*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. p. 13

the Comedy Theatre and its bars would become the arena for the police and the Watch Committee to attempt to demonstrate their authority to the watching public and the press.

The zealots of the church and temperance movements had achieved only limited success in their campaign against the Palace Theatre of Varieties. The variety theatre had been refused a liquor licence, but it was awarded a licence to operate as a place of public entertainment and had confounded the protestors as it earned a reputation as respectable and trouble free from its opening in 1891. The flamboyant figure of Hardacre and the members of his 'Bohemian Circle' were well known and popular with the public of the city and the antithesis of everything the temperance reformers held dear. This made him an obvious choice when in alliance with the authorities, whose members were largely drawn from the same network as the temperance reformers, were looking for a high profile target to make an example of in the pursuit of their own agendas.

Writing in 1935, James Agate had a somewhat hazy recollection of the Comedy Theatre when, in contrast to his glowing tribute to Courtneidge and the turn of the century pantomimes at the Theatre Royal, on the same page, he wrote:

Over the way was the Comedy Theatre, a dingy hole where, during the pantomime season, it was whispered that patrons could drink behind the scenes and wink at the pretty ladies. There was a court case and I believe the allegation was disproved.⁵⁶⁹

His recollections are inaccurate as will be seen, but his comments suggest the lasting impression of the Hardacre era Comedy Theatre that was to pass into legend, as somewhere that respectable patrons would not venture. While the Comedy was not

⁵⁶⁹ Agate, James (1935) *Ego*. London: Hamish Hamilton. p. 61

quite as grand as the Theatre Royal, 'dingy' is perhaps an overstatement. It did attract large audiences at 'popular prices.' Once again though, the role of the pantomime in the cultural life of the city is brought to the fore.

The history of Hardacre's difficulties with the authorities is complex, taking place over a period of four years, along with previous allegations made in 1892. The action referred to as 'The Hardacre Case' is usually discussed in relation to the defamation case that Hardacre brought against Cllr Edwyn Holt, Deputy Chair of the Manchester Watch Committee, following comments made during a meeting of the committee on 4 September 1901. Before beginning an examination of the case it is necessary to clarify some details of the chronology of this complex and protracted series of events that added together to form a case where the truth is stranger than fiction.

A complaint was first made against the Comedy Theatre in 1892. This would be referred to during the evidence given at the various hearings that are to be discussed in more detail here, but no more complaints were then made until Chief Constable Peacock objected to Hardacre's application for the annual renewal of the theatre and excise licences at the licensing sessions in August 1900. The theatre licence, as will be seen, was eventually renewed without an excise licence. This was repeated at the licensing sessions of 1901 in spite of no further complaints having been received. At the hearing of 1902 the theatre licence was renewed for six months only, while the ban on alcohol sales continued. The proviso was added at this time that Hardacre would make arrangements to sell the theatre pending the outcome of a defamation case that he was bringing against Councillor Edwyn Holt the Deputy Chairman of the Manchester City Council Watch Committee that was due

to be heard in November 1902. The same evidence was repeated at all three licensing hearings, and again during the defamation hearing, with little new evidence added. All the hearings will be referred to during this examination of the case.

It should be borne in mind when considering the defamation case of November 1902 that on this occasion it was Hardacre who brought the suit and the Deputy Chair of the Watch Committee was the defendant. Such is the nature of the evidence presented and the hearing as reported, that it frequently appears that it was Hardacre on trial. In effect, he was, as the defamation suit was about Hardacre defending his reputation and his livelihood. The action would prove disastrous for Hardacre.

Whilst the evidence suggests that Hardacre could not have won this particular case, what becomes apparent is that he had no other methods at his disposal with which to fight the authorities and that he perhaps considered the publicity that the trial would bring would draw enough attention to the injustice of the position he found himself in that he would be vindicated and public opinion might shame the authorities into revising their decision. Hardacre was right that the licensing decisions that repeatedly found against him were unjust and the result of a conspiracy forged between his enemies in the establishment in Manchester, but he brought the wrong case. His difficulty was what was the right case to bring? The determination of the authorities in Manchester to force him out of the city, perhaps made him consider the risk worthwhile as he had nothing left to lose and no means of obtaining justice within their system.

Beyond the risk Hardacre took in bringing the case, a further dimension was added to the story, in his choice of the barrister he instructed to represent him. In the first licensing hearing Hardacre was represented by a Mr. Edgar. When he brought the suit against Holt his legal counsel was the celebrated society defence barrister Mr. Edward Marshall Hall K.C., M. P., later Sir Edward Marshall Hall, who had the reputation as ‘The Great Defender.’ This accounts in part for why the level of interest in what was already a notorious case should be so high. It was rare for Marshall Hall to appear for the prosecution, but this is further evidence that Hardacre was using attack as a form of defence. In Edward Marjoribanks laudatory *Famous Trials of Marshall Hall* his biographer describes him as ‘the best known advocate of the day,’⁵⁷⁰ or, in Andrew Rose’s terms ‘literally a household name.’⁵⁷¹ His mercurial character and awareness of the theatricality of his role are apparent in this quotation:

‘My profession,’ once said Sir Edward Marshall Hall, ‘and that of an actor are somewhat akin, except that I have no scenes to help me, and no words are written for me to say. There is no back cloth to increase the illusion. There is no curtain. But, out of the vivid, living dream of somebody else’s life, I have to create an atmosphere – for that is advocacy.’⁵⁷²

It is not surprising then that Hardacre would be attracted to Marshall Hall, who was of a similar character to himself. While the theatricality of the courtroom is evident, Marshall Hall was establishing a reputation for defending some of the most celebrated cases of the age. Marjoribanks recorded that, in 1898, shortly before Marshall Hall took silk:

One of the very last cases in which he appeared in a stuff gown was in an action for libel by W. S. Gilbert; Lawson Walton and Marshall Hall appeared for

⁵⁷⁰ Marjoribanks, Edward (1989) *Famous Trials of Marshall Hall*. London: Penguin Books. p. 10

⁵⁷¹ Rose, Andrew (2013) *The Prince, The Princess and the Perfect Murder*. London: Coronet. p. 196

⁵⁷² Marjoribanks, *Famous Trials of Marshall Hall*, p. 9

the famous rhymester and Carson for the defendants, a widely-read theatrical journal called the *Era*.⁵⁷³

The *Era* versus Gilbert trial may well have been what first attracted Hardacre's attention to Marshall Hall. As a man of the theatre himself he would more than likely have been familiar with the protagonists. Lawson Walton now faced Hall across the courtroom. Marshall Hall for his part, when later criticized for taking the Hardacre versus Holt case in 1902, defended his actions saying:

So far as the "Comedy" action of Mr. Pitt Hardacre is concerned, I am convinced that several of the charges brought against him were not only exaggerated, but absolutely and entirely false. I did my very best for the man; I was not successful.⁵⁷⁴

Although he did not win the case, it was considered that Marshall Hall had performed well. Further evidence that the presence of Marshall Hall greatly increased the public and press interest in the case is suggested in the report that 'his concluding speech lasting five and a half hours, to which no less than sixty members of the Bar came in to listen, almost winning the case for the plaintiff.'⁵⁷⁵

That the outcomes of the licensing hearings were pre-determined is evident when reading the detail of newspaper reports and available transcript from the hearings, and this was observed at the time.⁵⁷⁶ Robert Blatchford in his defence of Hardacre drew this to the attention of his readers saying:

I have heard it suggested that the case was decided before the evidence was heard, and that the object of a section of the Watch Committee is to deprive all

⁵⁷³ Ibid. p. 99

⁵⁷⁴ Ibid. p. 171

⁵⁷⁵ Ibid. p. 170

⁵⁷⁶ Greater Manchester Police Museum and Archive. MS 1324Q. Handwritten transcript of Hardacre licensing appeal hearing, 15 August 1900.

the Manchester theatre's of their excise licenses; but I will not deal with matters outside my knowledge.⁵⁷⁷

Cleverly worded, as that genie was now out of the bottle, and any reader to whom that idea had not occurred would now have to consider the outcome in that light.

The *Era* voiced concern about the injustice of the treatment of Hardacre following the first refusal of the excise licence and noting the powerless position in which Hardacre found himself saying:

We can hold out to Mr Hardacre little hope of redress by means of an application for a *mandamus*. Theoretically, the course is sound and legal; practically, the Court of Queen's Bench objects to reverse the decision of local justices. The manager in such a case is an absolutely helpless victim; and what is required is a sweeping reform in our arrangements for the licensing of places of amusement in the provinces.⁵⁷⁸

At this point no one appeared to have observed the motive to deflect attention from the recent history of the police and the Watch Committee, but with hindsight it is apparent that they were determined that the high profile figure of Hardacre should be used as an example to bring anyone whose lifestyle did not conform to their own ideal of respectability into line.

The background to the case

In 1893 a complaint about the Comedy Theatre had been received by the Watch Committee. This seems to have been the end result of a visit by two police officers in May 1892 who gave evidence at the 1900 licensing hearing and the 1902 defamation case. It was suggested that they investigated afterhours drinking at the Comedy Theatre and there was some suggestion that they had witnessed prostitutes present

⁵⁷⁷ *Clarion*. 29 September 1900. p. 313

⁵⁷⁸ *Era*, 6 October 1900. p. 17

in the bar. As notes from the incident ten years previously had been destroyed this remained as hearsay, but it was still presented in the police's evidence at the 1900 hearing. No further complaints were received about the theatre until 1900. In the years in between, the authorities in Manchester had been embarrassed by a humiliating scandal that began with its police force and had repercussions through the Watch Committee, leading to the Councillors of the wider Manchester City Council disassociating themselves from the Watch Committee.

It is necessary here to have some understanding of the 'Bannister Police Scandal' as it became known, and the damage it had done to the reputation of the police and the Watch Committee of Manchester City Council, in order to appreciate the position of the authorities at this time. In the November of 1896, Superintendent William Bannister, who was in charge of D division of the Manchester Police force, was forced to resign when it was proved that he had been involved with the operation of brothels in the area policed by D division, and that he had turned a blind eye to the activities of others operating in the same district while pursuing cases against those he considered to be his competitors. Some of his officers had colluded with him in this practice, while others were intimidated by Bannister, described at the Inquiry as 'a bad, bold man', to prevent them reporting his misconduct.⁵⁷⁹ The Watch Committee was further implicated as they had appointed Bannister to the post of Superintendent in 1882 against the advice of the then Chief Constable, Charles Malcolm Wood. They were also responsible for allowing Bannister the benefit of the doubt following a related incident in 1893. Thirty-nine other officers were dismissed or resigned in the wake of the 1896 scandal and more questions were then asked

⁵⁷⁹ *Manchester Guardian*, 25 May 1897. p. 12

about the integrity of the Watch Committee when Bannister was permitted to resign instead of being dismissed.

Eric J. Hewitt summarised the effect of the scandal on the Watch Committee in *A History of Policing in Manchester* writing ‘attempts to uphold the credit of the Watch Committee and the Police Force were not very convincing. Vehement attacks in the local newspapers prompted the resignation of the chairman of the Watch Committee’⁵⁸⁰

The *Manchester Guardian* in its editorial column was not pulling any punches when it complained that:

We have no sympathy with the weakness the Watch Committee have shown in dealing with BANNISTER. Offenders such as he should ought not be “allowed to resign” but should be dismissed from the force with ignominy, and it is a positive injury to the discipline and integrity of the force to take weak middle courses with a man who has used his position in the way BANNISTER has done.⁵⁸¹

In the same article it was suggested that ‘The disclosures of the past few weeks with regard to the conduct of one of the most responsible officers of the Manchester Police force cannot fail to fill the public mind with uneasiness as to the soundness of the police system under which this great city is governed.’⁵⁸²

The subsequent loss of public confidence within Manchester and the damage to the standing of the city and its Police Force across the country led to the Lord Mayor being forced to request intervention from the Home Office and an Inquiry being ordered by the Home Secretary Sir Matthew White Ridley. Mr J. S. Dugdale

⁵⁸⁰ Hewitt, Eric, J. (1979) *A History of Policing in Manchester*. Didsbury, Manchester: E. J. Morten. p. 99

⁵⁸¹ *Manchester Guardian*, 31 December 1897. p. 5

⁵⁸² *Ibid.*

Q.C., the Recorder of Birmingham was invited to investigate ‘the efficiency and discipline of the Manchester City Police.’⁵⁸³ The Dugdale Inquiry was conducted in the summer of 1897 and although the report found that the problems with policing in Manchester were confined to D division and the Chief Constable Wood was exonerated, his leadership was weakened and after extended sick leave to allow him to claim his full pension, he resigned in January 1898.

The other members of Manchester City Council were keen to distance themselves from the Watch Committee. As Hewitt described:

The council refused to ratify any of the Committee’s proceedings until the municipal elections were concluded. A special method of procedure was then adopted. Usually an outgoing Committee made recommendations to the City Council as to the composition of the incoming committee; on this occasion, however, the new Watch Committee was chosen by a ballot of the whole council, and included much new blood. The new Committee reconsidered the whole body of evidence given in the course of the Home Office Inquiry, and then drew up a fresh list of recommendations.⁵⁸⁴

One of the members of the original Watch Committee who survived the ballot was Charles Rowley of the Ancoats Brotherhood, the subject of Chapter Three, though it remains unclear as to whether he was sitting during the licensing hearings that involved Hardacre.

The Dugdale Inquiry was conducted in the summer of 1897 and its effects were still raw in Manchester when the Comedy Theatre chose to reference it in the finale of that years pantomime ‘written and invented exclusively for this theatre by Mr William Wade.’⁵⁸⁵ The seriousness with which the scandal was regarded in

⁵⁸³ *Manchester Guardian*, 25 May 1897. p. 12

⁵⁸⁴ Hewitt, *A History of Policing in Manchester*, p. 100

⁵⁸⁵ Wade, William (1897) *Whittington and his Cat*. Comedy Theatre, Manchester. Pantomime Book of Words. p.1

Manchester, and its impact on the reputation of the city, had by Christmas 1897 overshadowed the civic politics for over twelve months. Close reading of the *Whittington and his Cat* text also suggests that the location of the reference to the scandal on the final page of the script at the climax of the entertainment heightened the effect of the criticism of the City Police and the Watch Committee.⁵⁸⁶ This would have reflected poorly on the Council as a whole, leaving the audience as it did with this as the final joke with which they left the theatre. This argument is strengthened when reading the libretto as a whole, there are no other major references to events in the real city, perhaps reflecting the dominance of the scandal during that year, but having the effect of emphasising the barbed satire of the comments.

The final scene of *Whittington and his Cat*, written by Hardacre's regular pantomime author, the Deputy Editor of the *Manchester City News*, William Wade, would have stung the sensibilities of the wounded establishment and illustrates Hardacre's willingness to use the convention of topical satire in pantomime to be critical of those who abused their positions of authority.

Whittington and his Cat

Fitz. Aha! Then let him be tried by Court Martial!

Alice. Oh hadn't we better have the whole affair tried by the Watch Committee?

Dick. Yes, the Watch Committee had better deal with it.

Fitz. (*impatiently*). Oh go to the D ---- Division. No, a Court Martial is the thing. (*Dick assents. Jack is brought forward in chains in charge of the mates who sit as Nautical Assessors. Jack is charged not only with the fraud at Fitzwarren's but with attempting to scuttle the "Sally Spanker," off the coast of Morocco*).

⁵⁸⁶ Ibid. p. 55

Fitz. The sentence of the Court is that ----

1st M[ate] (to Fitz). You be hanged!

Jack. Hanged. I'm hanged if I will be!

Dick. It is for me, in my capacity of Lord Mayor to give him toffey – I mean beans. The sentence of the Court is that you straight 'way marry Mary Muggins or else ----

Jack. (anxiously). Or else?⁵⁸⁷

This would have drawn attention to Hardacre and not endeared him to the authorities. Jill Sullivan has observed that:

By 1890 the theatre had a new manager, Pitt Hardacre, whose chosen pantomime author for the remainder of the century was the local journalist William Wade. With the exception of pro-Conservative sentiments in the 1891 production, his pantomime scripts moved away from political commentaries to focus on local civic references and city issues.⁵⁸⁸

Hardacre did advertise his theatre as the 'Cosy Comedy' and promoted an emphasis on family entertainment in his pantomimes in particular. There was nothing subtle about the comments on the police scandal, but the very specific and localized nature of the satire in the Comedy theatre pantomime, as noted by Sullivan, can be seen as symptomatic of Hardacre's strained relations with the establishment throughout the time he was part of Manchester's theatrical community. This would continue after he had left when he retained connections with the friends and business associates in the city that he had acquired as proprietor of the Comedy Theatre, who formed his network of sociability, referred to in the press as the 'Bohemian Circle.'⁵⁸⁹

⁵⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸⁸ Sullivan, Jill (2011) *The Politics of the Pantomime: Regional Identity in the Theatre 1860-1900*. Hatfield: University of Hertfordshire Press. p. 202

⁵⁸⁹ *Manchester Guardian*, 1 January 1921. p. 8

Marjoribanks states that the Holt action 'was hard to fight owing to the great public prejudice aroused against Mr. Hardacre.'⁵⁹⁰ This would seem to be overstated as whilst some of Manchester's reforming urban elite may have chosen to be scandalized, the notoriety of Hardacre and his theatre served to increase attendances, with audiences titillated at the prospect of a risqué visit to the theatre. Certainly the 1902-1903 pantomime, *Cinderella*, ran to the end of March when the theatre closed as its licence expired. Anticipating this Hardacre may have considered changing the programme unnecessary, but the *Manchester Guardian* noted that:

Christmas pantomime continues to be the fare provided at the Comedy Theatre, and its power of attracting the public appears to be little less in March than it was in December. "Cinderella" is a fair specimen of its class, and if it is not art, it is a least clean.⁵⁹¹

The criticisms of the authorities may have disappeared by the 1902 pantomime then and its 'cleanness' may have been a disappointment to those theatregoers relishing the frisson of scandal, but at the sale of the theatre in May 1903 the auctioneer was able to open the sale stating that:

The theatre would seat 2,800 people, and at the popular prices generally paid realised £170 a night; but at special and pantomime rates £340 had often been the nightly takings. A fair estimate, calculated over several years, would give an average receipt of £500 per week. The theatre had had no greater success than the last pantomime, which brought in, he was informed, no less than £15, 880.⁵⁹²

The City Council's new Watch Committee sworn in in 1898, were then, keen to assert the position of the Committee itself, the police, and Manchester City Council

⁵⁹⁰ Marjoribanks, *Famous Trials of Marshall Hall*, p. 170

⁵⁹¹ *Manchester Guardian*, 3 March 1903. p. 7

⁵⁹² *Manchester Guardian*, 21 May 1903. p. 5

as a whole to be seen as fully in control of the city and to regain the confidence of its citizens and restore Manchester's respectable reputation. Satirical references in pantomimes and music hall, as in *Whittington and his Cat*, were not helpful to their cause. Perhaps unexpectedly the content of the librettos of the pantomimes themselves was not raised as an issue in spite of satirical references made previously. This might be interpreted as the authorities not wanting to draw attention to criticisms of themselves and having confidence that the questions they raised about Hardacre's morality would be sufficient for them to achieve their goal of removing his influence from Manchester.

Although the Comedy Theatre was not specifically implicated in the Bannister scandal a reference to Manchester theatres can be found in the evidence that the much respected Detective Inspector Jerome Caminada gave to the Dugdale Inquiry. Caminada emerged unscathed from the Inquiry, having arrested Bannister's associate William Taylor, which brought the scandal to light. The main evidence related to the Bannister case centred on vice, prostitution and the keeping of brothels, mostly in the geographical area of Manchester that was the responsibility of D division. While there was much evidence given relating to beer houses and public houses, there was no specific discussion of the theatres or music halls. However, Inspector Caminada mentioned in his evidence the case of the known brothel keepers Mr and Mrs Burns of Lower Ormond Street, Lower Ormond Street being within the area policed by D division. The *Manchester Guardian* reported Caminada's evidence to the Home Office Inquiry stating:

After Burns went to live in Lower Ormond Street, in the house in respect of which they were ultimately prosecuted, he was told they were keeping a

disorderly house. Inspector Goodwin made the report to him in October last, and so, in conjunction with Goodwin he went to the house occupied by Burns and his wife. He told Burns what he had heard, and said that if he found that the charge was true there would be a prosecution. Burns said that he had had two or three women, whose names he mentioned, who were engaged at the theatres, and two others who were engaged at the Palace of Varieties, staying in his house; but if that was the way the case was going he should dispose of this house. Burns was afterwards prosecuted for keeping a disorderly house.⁵⁹³

This not only indicates a connection implied between the theatres and prostitution, but also draws attention to the fact that as late as 1897, distinctions were still being made between the Palace of Varieties and the other theatres and the questions it raises about respectability. Whilst the Bannister case did not specifically involve Hardacre, when he brought his defamation case against the Watch Committee in 1902, his counsel Mr. Marshall Hall K.C., M.P. in his opening comments did state that:

he might have in the course of the case incidentally to refer to the police inquiry that had taken place years ago, and which led to the resignation of the late Chief Constable and the appointment of the present Chief Constable.⁵⁹⁴

In the wake of the Bannister Police Scandal a new reforming Chief Constable, Robert Peacock, was appointed. At the age of thirty eight Peacock had already held the post of Chief Constable for several forces and came to Manchester from the Oldham constabulary in March 1898. Andrew Davies has written a great deal on the topic of crime in Victorian Manchester and writes of Peacock:

He had joined the police in Bradford, Yorkshire, aged nineteen. In Manchester he inherited a force demoralised by poor working conditions, low pay, and recent revelations of widespread corruption in 'D' division.⁵⁹⁵

⁵⁹³ *Manchester Guardian*, 17 June 1897. p. 4

⁵⁹⁴ *Manchester Guardian*, 19 November 1902. p. 3

⁵⁹⁵ Davies, Andrew (2008) *The Gangs of Manchester*. Preston: Milo Books Ltd. p. 351

Along with raising morale in the force, Peacock needed to demonstrate to the people of Manchester and the outside world that the City Police, the new Watch Committee and the City Council had regained control of the city and eradicated the vice and corruption that had tainted its reputation as it prepared to move into the twentieth century. The Manchester theatre managers of the day with the highest profiles were Courtneidge and Hardacre. While Courtneidge always enjoyed a reputation as a responsible manager and respectable family man, the flamboyant, bohemian, hedonist Hardacre presented an ideal target for Peacock to demonstrate his ability to reinstate the police and the Watch Committee's positions of influence, and to regain the respect of the citizens of Manchester.

The Complaint against the Comedy Theatre

On 5 April 1900 Peacock wrote to Hardacre cautioning him 'to conduct the theatre and bar strictly in accordance with the conditions of his licence.' The letter informed him that complaints had been made about 'disorderly conduct almost every night in the bar', 'disorderly women' frequenting the bar and 'that intoxicants were sold until eleven o'clock.' The Chief Constable then informed to Hardacre that 'it would be his duty to report the whole of the facts to the Watch Committee.'⁵⁹⁶ Hardacre replied on 9 April stating that from his experience with the previous Chief Constable he believed he was permitted to keep the bar open until eleven o'clock, and that he 'was only too willing to meet any charge dealing with the question of loose women in order

⁵⁹⁶ *Manchester Guardian*, 19 November 1902. p. 3

that he might vindicate his position.’ No reply was made to that letter and his challenge was not acted upon.⁵⁹⁷

The campaign against Hardacre was begun in earnest on 23 September 1900 at the Manchester Licensing Sessions. The *Stage* reported that ‘All applications were granted unconditionally, except that made by Mr J. Pitt Hardacre for the Comedy’ and went on to summarise the details:

Mr. Hardacre’s application was opposed by the Chief Constable Mr. Peacock. The Chief Constable said he opposed the renewal of the license on three grounds. These were (1) that disorderly conduct frequently occurred at the bar of the theatre; (2) that women of known bad character were admitted to and permitted to remain in the theatre; and (3) that alcoholic liquors were sold and consumed in the theatre at times other than those when the theatre was open to the public for the performance of plays.⁵⁹⁸

The evidence, except for the reports of what Cllr. Holt had said during the Watch Committee meeting on 4 September 1901, had been discussed on three prior occasions, at the licensing hearings of 1900, 1901, and 1902, before the defamation trial of November 1902. The authorities had chosen a strong adversary when they targeted Hardacre who fought back rather than acquiesce to their wishes. In addition to the charges repeated from 1900 claiming that women of ‘bad character’ frequented the theatres bars, Hardacre’s enemies now increased the pressure with insinuations that Hardacre operated a brothel behind the scenes at the Comedy Theatre and very personal attacks on his character implying sexual assaults and even rape of young girls auditioning for roles in the chorus of his pantomimes. In his opening address at the defamation trial Mr. Marshall Hall advised those present that:

⁵⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁹⁸ *Stage*, 27 September 1900. p. 16

Mr. Hardacre would go into the box and would tell the jury that possibly with regard to the theatre there might have been matters of complaint, but he had been dealing with a difficult matter, and had done his best for the theatre. With regard to the personal charges he would say that they were absolutely false from beginning to end.⁵⁹⁹

The 'difficult matter' was the discipline of the theatre during the excesses of the pantomime season. The evidence presented to make Peacock's case against Hardacre had been gathered largely during the pantomime season at the Comedy Theatre. This it seems was a deliberate plan, calculated to attack the theatre at the time when mistakes and lapses would be most likely to occur and the theatre would be at its most vulnerable to criticism. In the 1902 licensing sessions hearing George Grubb, Hall Keeper at the Comedy Theatre and a retired police inspector, was asked by Holt's Counsel 'It is always a little more difficult to handle a theatre at pantomime time, and you had assistance'? Grubb 'Yes, it is.'⁶⁰⁰ The purpose of this question may have been to indicate that the theatre was not under adequate control, but it is proof here that the authorities were aware of the additional workload during pantomime season when all theatres were vulnerable to mistakes being made.

A production on the scale of the extravagant, lavish pantomimes of the period was a year round commitment, and during pantomime season the theatres would have been open for long hours. With two performances each day, a large cast with additional supernumeraries would be in the vicinity, as would large numbers of people attending performances and all of them requiring refreshments. The theatres technical and house management staff would be working around the clock to prepare for the next performance.

⁵⁹⁹ *Manchester Guardian*, 19 November 1902. p. 3

⁶⁰⁰ Greater Manchester Police Museum and Archive. MS 1324Q. Handwritten transcript of Hardacre licensing appeal hearing, 15 August 1900.

The evidence presented against Hardacre

Much of the evidence given at the licensing sessions in objection to the renewal of the licence at the Comedy Theatre referred specifically to events alleged to have taken place during the pantomime season. The use of the circumstances that surrounded the theatres during the pantomime season to persecute Hardacre is evident in the choice of dates when members of the police force entered the theatre in plain clothes and frequented its bars in order to make the reports that formed the subject of Chief Constable Peacock's complaint. These were stated to be 'the 15th, 16th, 17th, 23rd, 24th, 27th, and 31st March 1900 – the end of the pantomime.'⁶⁰¹

The charge that 'disorderly conduct frequently occurred at the bar of the theatre' was denied. 31 March 1900 was the last night of the run of *Bo Peep*, and Hardacre's benefit night. He commented on the theatre being noisy that night:

You have the one fact that we were then at the end of the pantomime. We had had the Relief of Ladysmith at that time, and there was a very strong warlike feeling going through the country, and my audiences were in a state of excitement every night, singing patriotic songs and so on.⁶⁰²

The evidence presented against Hardacre on this charge was confined to an incident in the theatre's dress circle bar when a table was turned over during some horseplay by a group of high spirited youths. This was observed by the undercover officers and referred to repeatedly during the various hearings, in spite of the situation being immediately resolved by theatre staff. While the authorities repeatedly claimed that Hardacre 'had continuously and for a long time had permitted bad characters to

⁶⁰¹ *Manchester Guardian*, 19 November 1902. p. 3

⁶⁰² *Ibid.*

frequent and drunkenness and disorderly conduct to occur at his theatre' no further incidents of the reported 'disorderly conduct' were cited at any of the hearings.

Laurence Thompson in his biography of Robert Blatchford describes the reaction of Hardacre's friends and his public support following the removal of his liquor licence in 1900 commenting:

When [...] the Manchester Watch Committee revoked Hardacre's licence, Blatchford came stoutly to his support in his paper the *Clarion* – together with much of the Manchester press – and riddled with ridicule some rather flimsy police evidence of hearsay and suspicion.⁶⁰³

Blatchford was present at the Licensing hearing and the *Stage* reported that he 'gave it as his opinion that the theatre was well-conducted.'⁶⁰⁴ The flimsy nature of the evidence the authorities provided to the 1900 hearing on the charge of loose women plying their trade in the bar was summarized by Blatchford saying:

The evidence as to the charge was to the effect that the constables – four young men who had acted as spies – had seen women, known to them as immoral, in the Comedy Theatre, and they had seen them "drinking with men" in the bars. They could not give the name of any one of these women; they could not give the address of any one of them; they did not know that any one of them had been convicted; they had not called the attention of the manager or manageress, nor of any servant or official in the theatre to the presence of such women. Asked how they knew the women to be immoral, they replied that they had seen them in the streets, or that "any woman who would stand at the back of the circle, or drink with men, must be immoral."⁶⁰⁵

A review of this evidence supports Thompson's assertion that the police evidence was 'flimsy' at best, and I will go further than he does to question police tactics and the unconvincing nature of the evidence presented, some of which was later discredited in a subsequent perjury case brought against several of the female

⁶⁰³ Thompson, Laurence (1951) *Robert Blatchford: Portrait of an Englishman*. London: Victor Gollancz Ltd. p. 71

⁶⁰⁴ *Stage*, 27 September 1900. p. 16

⁶⁰⁵ *Clarion*, 29 September 1900. p. 313

witnesses who had accused Hardacre of sexual impropriety during the casting of the pantomimes.

After much discussion Hardacre grudgingly accepted that the discrepancy that the Chief Constable complaint in relation to his interpretation of the closing time of the bar, was correct by the letter of the law, but qualified this by saying that he had been given to understand that he could stay open to serve members of the cast until 11.00pm, rather than having to close when the curtain fell, by the previous Chief Constable C. Malcolm Wood. When Marshall Hall questioned him on the stand on the first day of the 1902 trial their exchange confirmed that:

You now admit that drink had been sold, and you understand that it is against the regulations of the Watch Committee? – According to their reading of it, it is, but I hold a different view.⁶⁰⁶

His cross examination by Holt's defence counsel Mr John Lawson Walton K.C., M.P. pursued further detail on this topic:

Mr. Walton: Then I understand you to say your practice was, up to eleven o'clock, to allow the audience and the artists and any members of the public to use the theatre as a drinking saloon?

Mr. Hardacre said he did not allow the public there - only artists and audience. When the new Chief Constable came to the city, witness said he never got any different reading of the Act. The moment that he got any idea he was supposed to be doing what was wrong he stopped selling in his bars, and closed them immediately on the fall of the curtain.⁶⁰⁷

The obsession of Peacock and his associates and their determination to pursue Hardacre until they had achieved their goal and forced him to leave Manchester is clear in the reports of the licensing sessions that followed in 1901 and

⁶⁰⁶ *Manchester Guardian*, 19 November 1902. p. 3

⁶⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

1902, when no fresh charges were brought, but the weak evidence of the 1900 hearing was repeated and no credit given to the fact that no further complaint had been received about the theatre. Having given some ground on the charge of afterhours drinking, which Hardacre described as a charge 'against the theatre' attention was turned to the charges which Hardacre claimed were an attack on him personally and formed the greatest part of the seven days of the defamation suit.

Edwyn Holt is listed as a member of the Ancoats Brotherhood in the 1898-1899 winter programme of the Brotherhood. He and his supporters must have been confident that the defamation case the Hardacre brought against him would fail because as Marjoribanks noted 'He [Holt] agreed to waive the unassailable defence of privilege – that he had spoken as a public official in the course of his duty – and to fight the action out on its merits.'⁶⁰⁸ The comments that formed the subject of Hardacre's complaint in the defamation suit he brought against Holt were contained in a letter of complaint Holt had received that he read aloud to the Watch Committee in their meeting of 4 September 1901. As Holt had only read comments made by someone else that it was the business of the Watch Committee to respond to, it seems unlikely that Holt could have been found guilty of defamation with or without the benefit of privilege as the words were not his.

Holt, himself a 'member of a large and respected firm of solicitors',⁶⁰⁹ and his legal team must have been aware that the weakness of some of the evidence that the Police and Watch Committee presented would be shown to be false, but that in order to prove this embarrassment would be caused for Hardacre and further

⁶⁰⁸ Marjoribanks, *Famous Trials of Marshall Hall*, p. 170

⁶⁰⁹ *Manchester Guardian*, 19 November 1902. p. 3

damage to his reputation, raising questions as to his personal respectability and fitness to hold the licence. One example of this is in Hardacre's reply to the report that he had left the theatre late at night in the company of a woman and the inference that she was a prostitute. He refuted this by identifying the woman as his wife. In fact it was widely known that the woman Hardacre called his wife was Agnes Denby, who had lived with him as his wife since 1896, but who he could not marry as he was awaiting a divorce from his first wife, the actress Kate Read, from whom he had separated in 1892. It is improbable that Holt and Walton would not have been aware of this before the questioning began.

Agnes herself was a 'new woman'. Born in 1876, she was twenty years younger than Hardacre and played an important role in the management of the Comedy Theatre as the manager of the bar operation. She was always referred to as 'Mrs. Hardacre' and in her entry on the 1901 census she is recorded as 'Wife', with Hardacre as 'Head' of the household. Though they remained together they were never married in the eyes of the law or the church. Her death certificate in 1911, at the age of thirty five, is in her birth name of Agnes Ann Denby. I have been unable, as yet, to find evidence that he ever obtained a divorce from Kate, whose death in 1916 is recorded under the name of Kate Hardacre.

In cross examination Walton forced Hardacre to reveal details of maintenance arrangements between himself and Kate Read and suggested that the marriage had failed due to 'your infidelity and your cruelty.' This was denied and the bluff Hardacre was touchingly defensive of Agnes when responding to Walton's line of questioning in an effort to discredit her:

Who had charge of your dress circle bar? – The lady I call my wife. Not only the dress circle, but the whole of the refreshment department of the house.

The lady who lives with you as your mistress? – You can call her what nasty names you like.⁶¹⁰

Evidently, Hardacre's unconventional way of life was interpreted as a threat to respectable society by the establishment figures in Manchester and attracted their attention as an undesirable element to be eradicated. Such details of Hardacre's private life added to the salacious interest in the case.

Much was made by Hardacre's friends and counsel that while the police claimed the theatre's bar were frequented by many women of ill repute; they were unable to produce any of these women in court or to name them. The issue about the Chief Constable's objection to the licence on the grounds 'that women of known bad character were admitted to and permitted to remain in the theatre' was to cause the most debate.⁶¹¹

Again the authorities made use of the pantomime to imply that women employed at the theatre were involved in prostitution:

The plaintiff was questioned by Mr. Walton as to a wicket-gate which led from the dress circle bar to the rooms of the artists at the back of the stage. The plaintiff said that it was always kept fastened from the inside. People were allowed to go through if they were connected with the company.

The Judge: Members of the audience? – No, my own personal friends, who came on purpose to see me.

Mr. Walton: Were they admitted for the purpose of seeing ladies of the chorus? – They were admitted to see me on business.

That is not the answer to my question? – No, certainly not; Absolutely not.

Were they introduced to the ladies of the ballet? – No.

Were ladies of the chorus supplied with drink? – Yes, if they wanted it.

At that gate? – Yes, at that gate.

Paid for by men? – No.

During the performance? – No.

⁶¹⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹¹ Ibid.

Was not champagne in considerable quantities drunk? Yes, when I was there. Yes, drunk by members of the audience, who wished to treat the ladies of the ballet – No.

Do you mean to say that it did not exist constantly? – No.⁶¹²

Little regard was given by either side to the women and girls interviewed by the court. In Hardacre's counsel's opening comments:

Mr. Marshall Hall proceeded to refer to the other charges against Mr. Hardacre with special allusion to the allegations against him of personal impropriety. When the women upon whom these charges were based came into the witness-box the jury would see what class they were, and would be able to judge whether they were the sort of persons upon whose evidence reliance could be placed.⁶¹³

Whilst some of the women that testified against Hardacre were later convicted of perjury, the suggestion that the way they looked proved their 'class', or that they could be judged by looking at them, was a dangerous assumption. All of these women had been contracted to perform in the chorus of a touring pantomime that Hardacre took to Glasgow in November 1899. In *Actresses as Working Women: Their Social Identity in Victorian Culture* Tracy Davis has addressed the ambivalent situation of women in the theatrical profession. Of society's assumptions about actresses she observes:

For a large section of society, the similarities between the actress's life and the prostitute's or *demi-mondaine's* were unforgettable and overruled all other evidence about respectability. She was 'no better than she should be.'⁶¹⁴

This is evident throughout the Hardacre case. One of the difficulties that prevented the hearings reaching any conclusions about the morality of the women to be found in the bars at the Comedy was proving their intention in being there.

⁶¹² Ibid.

⁶¹³ Ibid.

⁶¹⁴ Davis, Tracy C. (1991) *Actresses as Working Women: Their Social Identity in Victorian Culture*. London: Routledge. p. 69

Hackney Coach Inspector Beckinsall had been a plain clothes police officer in 1896 and 1897 and he appeared as a witness for the Hardacre. The paper summarized his evidence saying:

It was impossible for an ordinary doorman or anyone not engaged to watch these women to always to know what sort of women they were. He was not aware of any disorder at the Comedy Theatre in the last two years. It was dangerous work looking after a certain class of women at pantomime times, because one was apt to see people who were quite honest. It would be easy to mistake chorus girls for a certain class of women.

The Judge: It is easy to make a mistake by judging from their dress? – Yes.⁶¹⁵

Robert Blatchford also challenged the judgements made about the women saying:

Now, it is well known to all regular frequenters of the Comedy that Hardacre's friends generally stand at the back of the circle. I have stood there often, and I could name a score of others who have stood there. And most of these men have at one time or another had their wives or daughters, or other ladies with them.

Moreover, it is a common thing for ladies from the other theatres or music-halls to stand there. I suppose, then, when I, or some other friend, has brought his wife or daughter into the bar, the intelligent police spy has jotted it down as another case of immorality.⁶¹⁶

Blatchford also cast doubt on the plain clothed police constables who had visited the theatre in March 1900 and who testified at the hearing, as 'young and inexperienced, and could easily make mistakes.'⁶¹⁷ He discredited them further describing how:

The dark constable, the red [headed] constable, the giggling constable and the other boy had beers, and lemons, and whiskies, and all manner of "liquors," and consumed them – probably at the Manchester ratepayers expense.⁶¹⁸

⁶¹⁵ *Manchester Guardian*, 21 November 1902. p. 4

⁶¹⁶ *Clarion*, 29 September 1900. p. 313

⁶¹⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶¹⁸ *Ibid.*

The evidence supplied by the police can be seen to be very weak then, and that it should be allowed to be the foundation of the refusal of an excise licence in the subsequent years of 1901 and 1902 when no further complaints had been received, confirms the pre-determined outcome of the Watch Committee's decision.

Was Hardacre Guilty?

In choosing Hardacre as the target of their campaign to ensure the respectability in the cultural life and society of Manchester, the authorities had taken on a formidable foe. John Pitt Hardacre arrived in Manchester as a theatre manager in 1889 to lease the Queen's Theatre from Edward Garcia. When the Queen's was seriously damaged by fire on 18 August 1890 Hardacre transferred his operations to the vacant Comedy Theatre as a temporary measure. This proved so successful that he remained there, becoming proprietor in 1893 following Garcia's 1890 bankruptcy. Details of Hardacre's biography become relevant here because it provides clues as to Hardacre's character and how he developed a management style that was closer to that of a music hall caterer than the manager of a legitimate theatre.

Hardacre was born in Bradford, Yorkshire, a stronghold of late Victorian socialism, on 2 November 1855. He was the only son of Benjamin Hardacre and Judith (nee Pitt). The 1851 census identifies Benjamin, age thirty-eight as still single and a 'tailor employing three men'. By 1861, his occupation is recorded as 'grocer and beer seller'. In 1862, when John Pitt Hardacre was just five years old his mother died. His father remarried in 1864 to Esther Fortune. Hardacre now had a step sister Mary (born 1858). A half brother and sister were then born to this marriage, Harold in 1867 and Ethel in 1869.

The 1871 census record shows the family at the same address in Bradford and Benjamin still as a 'grocer and beer seller'. In addition there was a boarder living at the house by the name of James Holroyd. His occupation is stated as 'traveller for brewery'. The young John was by this time fifteen years old and working as a 'stuff warehouse boy'.⁶¹⁹ A biographical piece in the *Manchester Programme* in 1898 states Hardacre was the 'son of a member of the Press in the town of Bradford' who by this connection 'early made acquaintance with plays and players'.⁶²⁰ In 1875, Benjamin Hardacre died; leaving John aged nineteen the responsibility of looking after his stepmother, step sister Mary and young siblings.

At the annual licensing sessions in August 1902 Hardacre applied only for the renewal of the theatre licence. The *Daily Mail* reported that 'the chief constable, in opposing the licence, had done his work fearlessly, regardless of the fact that Mr Hardacre was now a member of the city council'.⁶²¹

Peacock, like Hardacre was born in Bradford. He had first joined the police there and was likely to have still had connections there that helped him to discover a low point in Hardacre's past. The Chief Constable had been investigating Hardacre for some time and now Marshall Hall was obliged to open his application for the licence stating that he applied only for the theatre license because:

It had come to the knowledge of the police that Mr. Hardacre had some twenty-seven years ago, when a youth of nineteen, been convicted of the theft of three boxes of cigars under distressing circumstances, and he now realised

⁶¹⁹ 'Stuff' is a low grade fabric made from recycled woollen cloth. West Yorkshire is the main centre for its production.

⁶²⁰ *Manchester Programme*, 21 November 1898. n.p.

⁶²¹ *Daily Mail*, 15 August 1902. p. 3

that he was disqualified from ever holding a license to sell intoxicating liquor.⁶²²

He was in fact already twenty years of age, not nineteen, when the crime was committed, shortly after the death of his father, and he spent his twenty-first birthday in gaol in Leeds, in 1876, serving six months for 'larceny as a servant' for stealing from his employer. No evidence was offered on two further charges of embezzlement which were dropped.⁶²³ It was typical of Marshall Hall to stretch the truth in order to win sympathy for his clients. Nineteen sounded much younger than twenty. Hardacre had no other convictions, but as Marshall Hall noted, this did disqualify him from holding a liquor licence and played into the hands of those who were working to force him out of Manchester. The Manchester newspapers do not appear to have reported details of his earlier conviction, perhaps because of his position as a city councillor or out of personal regard as he had so many friends amongst the local press, and it was left to the national newspaper the *Daily Mail* to do so. As the police brought witnesses to attest to Hardacre's unworthiness to hold a license, it was the following day before the Watch Committee agreed to an extension of the stage play license for six months only. Depending on the outcome of his impending libel action against Edwyn Holt the deputy chair of the Watch Committee Hardacre intended to sell the theatre due he claimed to his 'ongoing persecution by the chief constable.'⁶²⁴

⁶²² Ibid.

⁶²³ England and Wales Criminal Registers, 1791-1892 (1876) Class: HO 27; Piece: 175; Page: 287

http://search.ancestry.co.uk/cgi-bin/sse.dll?db=CriminalRegisters&h=347734&indiv=try&o_vc=Record%3aOtherRecord&rhSource=1590

(Accessed 23 May 2013)

⁶²⁴ *Daily Mail*, 15 August 1902. p. 3

After his time in gaol Hardacre then became an actor, and later actor manager of a touring company. The *Manchester Programme* states that Hardacre first took to the stage at the age of twenty, somewhat ironically playing 'Counsel for the defendant in "Waiting for the Verdict," at the Wakefield Theatre.'⁶²⁵ By the time he reached Manchester as theatre manager he was already the lessee or proprietor of four other theatres. In addition to his companies tours of comedy and melodrama Hardacre was in the practice of touring pantomimes. These would tour after they had finished their run at his main house or be tried out elsewhere so that they would be well rehearsed by first night. His touring companies toured in productions of *East Lynne* and *The Ticket of Leave Man* for many years. A witness reminiscing in 1921 recalled that at his own theatre:

Hardacre would play Hamlet and Macbeth, to the despair of his friends. I remember leaning over the barrier at the back of the dress circle with Blatchford, looking on at Hardacre's interpretation of Macbeth. Never have I seen anything like it!⁶²⁶ (*MG*, 1 January 1921, 8).

Hardacre's success as an actor lay in his comedy roles. He was popular with audiences that attended his theatre as a performer and as their host, but to achieve this level of success had required a strong and determined personality. In 1898, in their regular 'People of Today' feature, the *Manchester Programme* wrote of Hardacre:

The romance and vicissitude attending the lives of votaries of the dramatic art were never more vividly shown than in the career of the genial proprietor of the Comedy Theatre in this city.

Mr J. Pitt Hardacre is today so well known as a shrewdly practical theatrical manager, and a hard headed man of the world to boot, that it seems at first

⁶²⁵ *Manchester Programme*, 21 November 1898. n.p.

⁶²⁶ *Manchester Guardian*, 1 January 1921. p. 8

sight almost strange that even in his youth he should have allowed a passion for the stage to tempt him to encounter the glorious uncertainties of the acting profession. But in addition to a practical ability and administrative capacity sufficient to make him a successful merchant or man of affairs, Mr. Hardacre possesses not only dramatic instinct but a gift of expression that turned in other directions would certainly have made him either an able journalist or a successful member of the bar.⁶²⁷

His obituary in the *Stage* in 1933 recalled that Hardacre was:

like many others of Yorkshire stock, a strong fighting man, and ready "to give as good as he got" in the course of not a few disputes or controversies. In build and demeanour he bore out well the description thus given, vigour and an air of pugnacity marking his appearance and mien.⁶²⁸

The evidence available in references from his friends and associates supports the view that Hardacre was energetic and ambitious, and that he was a dynamic individual pursuing success in business. At Christmas 1892, his friends at the *Clarion* published *Hardacre's Annual*, a souvenir to be sold at the theatre during the run of the *Mother Goose* pantomime, at the price of 2d.⁶²⁹ The humorous tone throughout adopts the style typical of the *Clarion*. A short item about Hardacre describes him as 'always sighing for new worlds to conquer'⁶³⁰ and briefly lists some of his accomplishments thus:

Not content with being an actor, the proprietor of several theatres and touring dramatic companies, a lecturer and entertainer at the Arts Club, a cyclist, a director of a mineral water company, a worker-of-the-bars in person, a composer of music – did he not surprise everybody with his Comedy gavotte last year? – he now, it is rumoured, aspires to become the editor-proprietor of a newspaper, which is expected to be brought into existence shortly⁶³¹

⁶²⁷ *Manchester Programme*, 21 November 1898. n.p.

⁶²⁸ *Stage*, 8 June 1933. p. 15

⁶²⁹ *Hardacre's Annual 1892-93*. (1892) Manchester: *Clarion* Newspaper.

⁶³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 2

⁶³¹ *Ibid.*

This piece notes also that he ‘comes in possibly for far more attention at the hands of the press than is usually accorded to other equally well-known public personages’ indicating his high profile in Manchester.⁶³² The written material that survives which describes Hardacre is in similar vein. It is evident that he had a great entrepreneurial spirit, worked hard and was thus able to become manager of the Queen’s Theatre only fourteen years after his first appearance as an actor.

It is important to note here the influence of the licensing trade and hospitality industry on Hardacre in his formative years. Being around large amounts of drink and people enjoying themselves, along with familiarity with the role of host throughout his childhood can be seen to have been the norm in his life that translated into the way he welcomed audiences and his personal visitors as a theatre proprietor. This will be seen to have repercussions for him in the charges made in the various hearings of the Hardacre Case. Hardacre was marked out by, and attracted attention through, the differences in management style between himself and his fellow theatre managers in Manchester at this time.

Peter Bailey comments on the ‘legendary *bonhomie*’ of the music halls and ‘attempts to understand friendship in the music hall as a distinctive stylistic and operational code in what is characterised as a socially intensive industry.’⁶³³ In this he concentrates his attention of the figure of the manager, as the public face of the venue. Some of them ‘entered music hall through theatre or showmanship, but among some very mixed and mobile careers the commonest way-station en route to full-blown proprietorship was that of publican, and the identification with the licensed

⁶³² Ibid.

⁶³³ Bailey, Peter (1998) *Popular Culture and Performance in the Victorian City*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. p. 80

trade remained strong.⁶³⁴ Hardacre's roots in the licensed trade were apparent in his approach to the management of his theatres where he resembled the model of a music hall caterer, rather than that of a manager of the legitimate theatre. The subject of 'treating' and the flow of champagne at the theatre was raised several times during the licensing hearings in an effort to discredit Hardacre and the ladies of the ballet at the Comedy Theatre. The style and calculation of these managers is noted by Bailey:

Fulsome public provision – monster programmes, the best in food and drink, luxurious amenities and, as we shall see, generous dispensations as friend and benefactor – these were the marks of the proprietor as public caterer. Ballooning liberality might at times float dangerously free from the restraints of conventional business sense or 'judgement', yet in the political and emotional economy of the music hall liberality was good business. Through style as much as practice the proprietor contrived to present himself as host of a great feast whilst simultaneously charging for it.⁶³⁵

Hardacre revelled in playing this character, transferring the music hall style of management to his theatres. What made him distinctive from other theatre managers in the city can be identified in the claim often voiced by his friends and appearing in promotional materials such as the pantomime books - 'Mr Hardacre worked the bars in person.' This phrase is taken up by William Wade in the *Whittington and his Cat* script referred to above. The effect was successful in attracting audiences to Hardacre's theatres and ensuring his popularity within his network of friends and business associates. Here it serves as evidence of the importance of his networks of sociability to the success of his business. Equally, it indicates how his methods had the potential to bemuse the supporters of the establishment and attract their disapproval. Hardacre then conformed to the type of a music hall proprietor in

⁶³⁴ Ibid., p. 81-82

⁶³⁵ Ibid., p. 83-84

contrast to the type of a businessman recognised as acceptable to the influence groups within Manchester's 'respectable' establishment.⁶³⁶

The case ostensibly against 'the Comedy Theatre' was not about the theatre but a method to disguise an attack on its real target - Hardacre himself and to act as a warning to the members of his 'Bohemian Circle' that Manchester would not endorse their hedonist lifestyle.⁶³⁷

Where this case has been referred to down the years it seems that the impression conveyed of Hardacre is that he was a bad man. It is not the overwhelming evidence of the injustice perpetrated by the authorities that has been recorded.

Details of the friendship and business association between Hardacre and Robert Blatchford have been described in Chapter Four. On the night of the 1901 census Blatchford is listed as a 'visitor', staying overnight at Hardacre's home in Bowdon, Cheshire. Hardacre's presence as a member of the Clarion Fellowship and cycling clubs has also been discussed. Blatchford's 1898 *Clarion* pamphlet number 23, *Real Socialism*, was a clarification of the aims of socialism and a defence to dispel the rumours and misinformation that surrounded it.⁶³⁸

Whilst defending socialism against rumours and charges of immorality Blatchford makes clear his views on prostitution. Grudgingly acknowledging that some socialists practiced 'free love,' in *Real Socialism*, Blatchford launched an attack on prostitution. He was sympathetic to the plight of women who were forced into prostitution as their only means of obtaining money. He was, however, unequivocal in his condemnation of the men who used prostitutes saying:

⁶³⁶ The term 'caterer' commonly applied to the managers of music hall was in popular use for theatre managers in Manchester in the 1890s, but was used specifically in reference to Hardacre.

⁶³⁷ *Manchester Guardian*, 1 January 1921. p. 8

⁶³⁸ Blatchford, Robert, (1898) '*Clarion* Pamphlet Number 23: *Real Socialism*' in Frow, Edmund and Ruth Frow (eds.) (1989) *The Politics of Hope: The Origins of Socialism in Britain 1880-1914*. London: Pluto Publishing Ltd.

I tell you, men, it would do a great deal for Socialism, if it were only to do that one good act of wiping out for ever the shameful sin of prostitution. This thing, indeed, is so horrible that I never think of it without feeling tempted to apologise for calling myself a man in a country where it is so common as it is in moral England.⁶³⁹

If it was true that Hardacre operated a brothel from his office it would have been impossible to hide the fact from a man of Blatchford's intelligence and worldly wise experience. Blatchford's sincerity and his views on prostitution make it inconceivable that he would have maintained his association with Hardacre or argued to defend his good character, if this was true. In Blatchford's own words:

When I go to Manchester the Comedy is my club. I stay at Mr. Hardacre's house, and I am constantly in his theatre. I am a man of years and of wide experience, and I do not usually carry my eyes in my pocket. The charge was an insult to Hardacre and has no foundation.⁶⁴⁰

Following the licensing hearing of 20 September 1900 when Hardacre's application was only approved for the staging of plays on the condition that an excise licence was not included in the licence, Blatchford made a vigorous defence of his friend in a lengthy piece in the *Clarion* entitled 'The Comedy Scandal,' which began:

I was present in Manchester last week when the Watch Committee, on the evidence of the police, refused J. Pitt Hardacre an excise license for the Comedy Theatre, and I am resolved, as far as I can, to minimise the effects of that unfair decision. [...] I cannot go into the police evidence in detail; but it was a mere tissue of suggestions and trivialities. I sat in the Lord Mayor's Parlour, and, like the respected editor of the *City News*, I was astonished by the revelation of the system of paltry and despicable espionage to which theatrical managers are exposed in an English city.⁶⁴¹

Blatchford then set out his qualifications about detail in which he knew the operation of the Comedy Theatre and to express an opinion the character of Hardacre saying

⁶³⁹ Ibid. p. 92

⁶⁴⁰ *Clarion*, 29 September 1900. p. 313

⁶⁴¹ Ibid.

I have known Hardacre and the Comedy Theatre for ten years. I know every corner of the place. I know all the servants and officials. I know all the details of the management. I have been in all parts of the house at all hours. I doubt if any other man save Hardacre himself is better qualified to speak upon the conduct of the theatre, and I say that the charge of harbouring or of wilfully admitting immoral characters is untrue.⁶⁴²

The first two charges relating to the different interpretations of the law about when the theatre bar must close were passed over quite quickly, but with reference to the suggestions that Hardacre presided over a house of ill repute he said:

It is the third charge that is so serious. Here we have the manager of a Manchester theatre charged with "harbouring" immoral women. That is to say keeping an immoral house. As the Watch Committee deprived the theatre of its excise license it is evident that they held this charge to be proved.⁶⁴³

One of the difficulties with the case for Hardacre was that he was not being tried in a court of law, but judged instead in the Mayor's Parlour, by members of the Watch Committee, members of whom were colluding to discredit him. Hardacre could not get an unbiased hearing and the continuance of his good name became dependent on the views of the public and the press. Blatchford called them to action saying:

The system of police espionage is un-English and abominable, and that the actions of a panel of ignorant bigots on the City Council will, unless promptly checked by the public of Manchester, endanger the Liberty of the more intelligent and broad-minded citizens of that city. What public action may be taken I do not know as I write these lines; but I hope my Manchester readers will give my old friend J. Pitt-Hardacre their best support.⁶⁴⁴

⁶⁴² Ibid.

⁶⁴³ Ibid.

⁶⁴⁴ Ibid.

Conclusion

There were no real winners in the Hardacre Case. While achieving their goal to rid themselves of Hardacre and prove that they were able moral guardians of the city, the authorities failed to convince a significant section of the public who disapproved of their treatment of Hardacre. It was the *Era*, a London based periodical, which observed that:

The refusal of the Manchester Watch Committee to grant Mr. J. Pitt Hardacre, the popular manager of the Comedy Theatre, Manchester, an excise licence has caused intense indignation in *Cottonopolis*. The newspapers have been flooded with letters expressing sympathy with Mr. Hardacre, and distress and disgust with the manner in which he has been treated; and public opinion seems to be very strongly against the Watch Committee's refusal.⁶⁴⁵

Hardacre was forced to sell his theatre. At the auction on 20 May 1903 the theatre was sold for £25,000 to Mr Kershaw representing The United Theatres Company, already the owners of the Theatre Royal and the Prince's Theatre.⁶⁴⁶ The Manchester theatres now entered a new era as larger theatre circuits became the norm.

It is perhaps Laurence Thompson's report of Blatchford's comments on Hardacre that indicate what made him vulnerable to the criticism of his enemies, the moralising defenders in the city's urban elite:

Hardacre was not a brothel-keeper, nor anything but one of the naughty boys and girls, who was often drunk, was not quite respectable in his morals, but was enormously generous to the unfortunate of his profession, and a fervent supporter of the Ancoats Cinderella club [The *Clarion* children's club] until the good people who ran it requested him to take his tainted money elsewhere.⁶⁴⁷

⁶⁴⁵ *Era*, 6 October 1900. p. 17

⁶⁴⁶ *Manchester Guardian*, 21 May 1903. p. 5

⁶⁴⁷ Thompson, Laurence, *Robert Blatchford*, p. 71

Thompson's summary of Hardacre seems a fair one. He was as Thompson suggested, 'not quite respectable,' and could be economical with the truth at times. There is the criminal conviction of his youth to consider, although that was a relatively trivial offence and appears to be related to financial difficulties in supporting the family soon after his father's death. It is in his favour that he had no further convictions as he matured.

In his biography of Marshall Hall, Marjoribanks introduction to the Hardacre case supports my theory about the direction from which the persecution of Hardacre came. Writing in 1929 he stated:

He [Marshall Hall] was briefed by Mr. Pitt Hardacre, in his celebrated action for defamation, which cast a terrible light on the sordid side of life in a great, modern city. Mr Hardacre had been for many years the lessee of the Comedy Theatre, Manchester; during the nineties it appeared that the police had been lax in enforcing the licensing regulations; but there followed on their laxity a grave police scandal, and a new regime was inaugurated. Mr. Hardacre's theatre was the first target for their reforming zeal, and the Watch Committee opposed the renewal of his licence.⁶⁴⁸

Hardacre took responsibility for looking after his family when his father died. All of them joined the theatrical profession and worked with him. He was reported to be generous and loyal to his friends.⁶⁴⁹ After he left Manchester Hardacre continued to have a successful career in theatre management.⁶⁵⁰

There is also evidence that in his later years he appeared as an after dinner speaker reminiscing about his life in the theatre.⁶⁵¹ No detailed accounts of these

⁶⁴⁸ Marjoribanks, *Famous Trials of Marshall Hall*, p. 170

⁶⁴⁹ *Clarion*, 29 September 1900. p. 313

⁶⁵⁰ He remained a controversial figure and continued to bring legal cases against members of Manchester's Watch Committee to defend his name in the wake of the Comedy Theatre scandal, winning damages in cases heard at Liverpool. See *Manchester Guardian*, 4 December 1906. p. 14

⁶⁵¹ *Manchester Guardian*, 7 March 1925. p. 1

events have been found to date, but Hardacre would seem to be an ideal raconteur. Unlike the other figures that have been studied in some depth in this thesis, I have been unable to find any published memoirs or an autobiography by Hardacre. This is perhaps due to the scandal that was attached to his name and publishers being unwilling to be seen to associate themselves with a figure about whom opinions remained divided.

CONCLUSION

The rich history of theatre in Manchester has long been neglected as a subject for academic research. This was observed by Wyke and Rudyard as long ago as 1994, in their survey, *Manchester Theatres*.⁶⁵² It is only recently that some of the challenges that they set out to researchers have begun to be addressed.⁶⁵³ I suggest that this is due in part to the lack of primary resources and material evidence, by way of the business records of the individual theatres that have survived from the late nineteenth century.

Of the theatres included in my research, only the Theatre Royal and the Palace Theatre still stand. The Theatre Royal ceased to be a theatre when it became a cinema in 1921. The Palace, then a variety theatre, but now a theatre, is the only one that the functions to entertain audiences with its varied commercial programme. This puts the memory of the Victorian theatres in further peril and increases the urgency to record their histories.

During my research librarians responsible for the theatre collection held in the archives of Manchester's Central Library have told me of their wish that their holdings attracted more users.⁶⁵⁴ This desire of library staff was one of the motivations for the writing of Wyke and Rudyard's book over twenty years ago. Although this extensive

⁶⁵² Wyke, Terry, Nigel Rudyard and Manchester Central Library, (1994) *Manchester Theatres* Manchester: Bibliography of North West England.

⁶⁵³ See also the recent work of Garlick, Victoria (2015) *"Quick, Clean, Smart & Bright": An Investigation into the Role of the Broadhead Family and their Popular Entertainment Circuit in the Theatre of North-West England, with Particular Reference to the Manchester Region*. Unpublished PhD thesis. University of Manchester. (embargoed until 2017)

⁶⁵⁴ Since the reopening of Manchester Central Library in 2014 following a major refurbishment project, the Theatre Collection in Special Collections is now curated under the name Archives+.

collection does not include business records from the period under investigation, my research has benefitted greatly from the holdings of playbills, programmes, ephemera and, most significantly, from the eighty four pantomime ‘books of words’ that are mostly from the Manchester theatres in the years that form the temporal scope of my thesis.

The theatre as industry in Manchester that I have examined here has become a case study that is underpinned by Simon Gunn’s theory about the development of its cultural economy as cyclical. He suggests that late Victorian Manchester was a prototype in microcosm of the cultural economy that would emerge from the 1980s onwards when the creative and digital industries lead economic recovery after the recession in the late 1970s. The late nineteenth century was a period of opportunity for the purveyors of the rapidly expanding mass entertainment industry that was driven by the mass working-class culture of the new working classes that for the first time had some disposable income and some leisure time in which to choose how to spend it. Gunn identifies Manchester as a model of the first night time economy.

This class led interpretation of events that Jon Lawrence identifies as the ‘classic period of the rise of class politics’ is a sophisticated notion of class that saw the number of classes proliferate during the late Victorian era.⁶⁵⁵ The class system stratified with new categories such a lower middle-class appearing based largely on occupation and economic factors. This facilitated the potential for people to move up or down the social scale.

The city itself was changing. Habbo Knoch observes:

⁶⁵⁵ Lawrence, Jon (1998) *Speaking for the People: Party, Language and Popular Politics in England, 1867-1914*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. p. 17

Between the 1880s and 1910, central spaces of inner city areas were transformed into interrelated and connected mono- and multifunctional zones of gatherings, amusements and commercial activities.⁶⁵⁶

The city was then an ideal location for mass entertainment to become the site to test what were now the new acceptable norms for the use of leisure time. The reforming campaigners that represented some sections of the multiple middle classes are seen in the case studies I have presented, not only to be opposed by the working classes, but also throughout the period losing their influence in other middle-class circles.

This can be seen in F. M. L. Thompson's comment that:

The masses at play in the 1890s were generally accepted as reasonably well behaved, exuberant maybe but essentially harmless, engaged in legitimate and necessary relaxation and recreation in ways that may not be to the taste of the more genteel and educated classes, that were tolerable as long as excesses were avoided and a proper separation of the classes was preserved.⁶⁵⁷

That proper separation was all too physically evident. All classes might visit the theatres, especially in the pantomime season, but they were filtered into separate areas of the auditorium by ticket price to ensure they were with their own kind. The ambitions of the theatrical entrepreneurs were then dependent on providing an entertainment that their potential audiences wanted to attend and the customers' ability to pay. The rise of mass entertainment was, then, negotiated between the consumers and the speculators. This is supported by Thompson's view that:

⁶⁵⁶ Knoch, Habbo (2008) 'Life on Stage: Grand Hotels in Urban Interzones Around 1900' in Heßler, Martina, and Clemens Zimmerman (eds.) *Creative Urban Milieus: Historical Perspectives on Culture, Economy and the City*. Frankfurt: Campus Verlag. p. 148

⁶⁵⁷ Thompson, F. M. L. (1988) *The Rise of Respectable Society: A Social History of Victorian Britain, 1830-1900*. London: Fontana. p. 277

The capitalist system itself, therefore, operating through the openings which the entertainment market presented to entrepreneurs, emerged as the guarantor of popular sovereignty over popular leisure.⁶⁵⁸

This was the environment in which the informal networks that have emerged from my research were operating. Throughout all the case studies undertaken here I have endeavoured to present the evidence of the voices of people who were part of or witness to the events investigated wherever possible in a 'history from below' approach. This provides an alternative approach in the absence of the material evidence that would have been contributed by artefacts that have not survived, such as theatre account books. The theme of mediation and questioning how evidence is communicated to us runs through the thesis as a whole and I have sought to cross reference material wherever possible.

The managers of Manchester's leading theatres acquired a certain celebrity status in the city. Newspaper articles referring to them began with the assumption that the reader knew who they were. My research into the biographical details of their lives and backgrounds has uncovered new knowledge with which to better understand how they operated their theatres and their actions in response to events and circumstances. Whilst several authors have discussed the Bainbridge bankruptcy case, my biographical study of the man himself adds a new dimension to inform an understanding about the methods and policies that were ultimately the route to his demise. Each of the biographical studies I have made has the potential for further research into events outside the scope of this thesis.

My research has contributed new knowledge about the informal networks of sociability operating in Manchester. In particular I go beyond considering the

⁶⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 289

relationship between theatre managements and the local journalists as critics to describe the practical relationship between the founders of the *Clarion* newspaper and the theatres working together in the production of pantomimes and musical comedies. This has been balanced by the case study of the network led by Charles Rowley and the Ancoats Brotherhood, another movement that has attracted little detailed scholarly consideration, being representative of the reforming elites that promoted rational forms of recreation. The relationship between the two movements is complex and there were many grey areas and points where their beliefs overlap. The resulting case studies do not present a black and white picture where their opposing points of view are easily identified. With not dissimilar goals this perhaps suggests that the greater success of the *Clarion* can be attributed to their superior ability to recognise what the public wanted and methods of communicating with the masses.

This networking also played a role in permitting Manchester's theatrical community greater significance than other provincial towns and cities in the development of theatre at a national level. Here, I present new knowledge about Robert Courtneidge's influential work as the Managing Director of two of the biggest theatres of the day in Manchester. In informal partnership with A. M. Thompson of the *Clarion*, he made a bid to bring influence out of the metropolis to Manchester and the provinces in the long running debate over a national theatre. If they had achieved this ambition the evolution of theatre in Britain might have taken a quite different direction. This is also valuable knowledge that adds a regional dimension to a national debate.

I have also presented new knowledge about the Hardacre case. Hardacre is a figure about whom historians of Manchester and theatre historians have been aware, but the case has been overlooked as a topic for scholarly research. His name is mentioned in hushed tones in relation to gossip and scandal, but the injustice of his treatment by the authorities is not well known. He is a forgotten figure in theatre history, but in his time he was a celebrated figure in Manchester, popular with the public as the manager who 'worked the bars in person.' He was successful entrepreneur able to profit from the new economic climate, and very shrewd in judging the tastes of his audiences. The case study here begins a process to ensure that both sides of the story are known. It is valuable not just in the history of theatre, but also to understand the motives and actions of the authorities and reforming campaigners.

My thesis is just a beginning. There is still great potential for further research into Manchester's theatres, music halls and other venues of mass entertainment from the late Victorian period, as there is from earlier periods and the more recent past. There are still many avenues of research into the Manchester theatres that were identified by Wyke and Rudyard which have not yet been tackled. Taking my own research forward, there is further work to be completed in biographical examination into other figures significant to the history of the Manchester's theatres that space has not permitted me to include here. This will form the basis of future projects. As identified by Wyke and Rudyard the theatre collection held in Manchester Central Library is full of little studied artefacts and the potential for further research into Manchester's theatres would appear to be infinite.

To summarize my thesis has investigated a topic previously overlooked by scholars. That is the theatre, and specifically pantomime, that was at the centre of a series of interlocking narratives that connected the industrial city, rational recreation, the 'bohemian' network of socialist writers and artists and audiences in late nineteenth century Manchester.

APPENDIX 1 – THE MANCHESTER THEATRE MANAGERS 1880-1903

Year	THEATRE ROYAL	PRINCE'S THEATRE	QUEEN'S THEATRE	COMEDY THEATRE
1880	John Duffield/R B Bainbridge	Charles Bernard	J C Emerson	
1881	Captain R B Bainbridge	Charles Bernard	J Salter/J C Emerson/A C Smith	
1882	Captain R B Bainbridge	John Hollingshead	J Salter/J C Emerson	
1883	Captain R B Bainbridge	John Hollingshead	J Salter/J C Emerson	
1884	Captain R B Bainbridge	John Hollingshead		Edward Garcia
1885	Captain R B Bainbridge			Edward Garcia
1886	Captain R B Bainbridge	J C Smith	Richard Mansell	Edward Garcia
1887	Captain R B Bainbridge	J C Smith	Richard Mansell	Edward Garcia
1888	Captain R B Bainbridge	Thomas Ramsay	Richard Mansell	Edward Garcia
1889	Thomas Ramsay	Thomas W Charles	J Pitt Hardacre	Edward Garcia
1890	Thomas Ramsay	Thomas W Charles	<i>closed due to fire</i>	J Pitt Hardacre
1891	Thomas Ramsay	Thomas W Charles	J Pitt Hardacre	J Pitt Hardacre
1892	Thomas Ramsay	Thomas W Charles	Richard Flanagan	J Pitt Hardacre
1893	Thomas Ramsay	Thomas W Charles	Richard Flanagan	J Pitt Hardacre
1894	Thomas Ramsay	Thomas W Charles	Richard Flanagan	J Pitt Hardacre
1895	Thomas Ramsay	Thomas W Charles - <i>died 1895</i>	Richard Flanagan	J Pitt Hardacre
1896	A D Corry (Acting Mgr)	Robert Courtneidge	Richard Flanagan	J Pitt Hardacre
1897	A D Corry (Acting Mgr)	Robert Courtneidge	Richard Flanagan	J Pitt Hardacre
1898	Robert Courtneidge	Robert Courtneidge	Richard Flanagan	J Pitt Hardacre
1899	Robert Courtneidge	Robert Courtneidge	Richard Flanagan	J Pitt Hardacre
1900	Robert Courtneidge	Robert Courtneidge	Richard Flanagan	J Pitt Hardacre
1901	Robert Courtneidge	Robert Courtneidge	Richard Flanagan	J Pitt Hardacre
1902	Robert Courtneidge	Robert Courtneidge	Richard Flanagan	J Pitt Hardacre
1903	Oscar Barrett	Oscar Barrett	Richard Flanagan	Oscar Barrett

APPENDIX 2 – MANCHESTER PANTOMIMES 1880-1903

Year	THEATRE ROYAL	PRINCE'S THEATRE	QUEEN'S THEATRE	COMEDY THEATRE
1880	<i>Bluebeard</i>	<i>Cinderella</i>	<i>Jack the Giant Killer</i>	
1881	<i>Little Bo Peep</i>	<i>Robinson Crusoe</i>	<i>Aladdin</i>	
1882	<i>Sinbad the Sailor</i>	<i>Robin Hood</i>	<i>Beauty and the Beast</i>	
1883	<i>Babes in the Wood</i>	<i>Jack and Jill</i>	<i>Little Red Riding Hood</i>	
1884	<i>Aladdin</i>	<i>Ali Baba and the Forty Other Thieves</i>	<i>The Queen of Hearts</i>	<i>Blue Beard</i>
1885	<i>Dick Whittington and his Cat</i>	<i>Cinderella</i>		<i>Jack and the Beanstalk</i>
1886	<i>Bluebeard</i>	<i>Robinson Crusoe</i>	<i>The Babes in The Wood</i>	<i>Little Red Riding Hood</i>
1887	<i>Old Mother Goose and the Sleeping Princess</i>	<i>Beauty and the Beast</i>	No panto	<i>Dick Whittington</i>
1888	<i>The Forty Thieves</i>	<i>Sinbad the Sailor</i>	<i>Blue Beard</i>	<i>Aladdin</i>
1889	<i>Dick Whittington</i>	<i>The Babes in the Wood</i>	<i>Robinson Crusoe</i>	<i>Cinderella</i>
1890	<i>Aladdin</i>	<i>Little Bo Peep</i>	closed due to fire	<i>Robinson Crusoe</i>
1891	<i>Cinderella</i>	<i>Dick Whittington</i>	No panto	<i>The Fair One with the Golden Locks</i>
1892	<i>Little Red Riding Hood and Bonnie Boy Blue</i>	<i>Aladdin</i>	<i>Cinderella</i>	<i>Mother Goose</i>
1893	<i>Babes in the Wood</i>	<i>Cinderella</i>	<i>Sinbad the Sailor</i>	<i>Goody Two Shoes</i>
1894	<i>Sinbad the Sailor</i>	<i>Little Red Riding Hood</i>	<i>Bluebeard</i>	<i>Jack and Jill</i>
1895	<i>Jack and the Bean Stalk</i>	<i>Robinson Crusoe</i>	<i>Robinson Crusoe</i>	<i>Cinderella</i>
1896	<i>Cinderella</i>	<i>Bold Robin Hood</i>	<i>Little Red Riding Hood</i>	<i>Aladdin</i>
1897	<i>Aladdin</i>	<i>Puss in Boots</i>		<i>Whittington and his Cat</i>
1898	<i>The Babes in the Wood</i>	<i>Sinbad the Sailor</i>		<i>Red Riding Hood</i>
1899	<i>Forty Thieves</i>	<i>Cinderella</i>		<i>Little Bo Peep</i>
1900	<i>Little Red Riding Hood</i>	<i>Aladdin</i>		<i>Robinson Crusoe</i>
1901	<i>Jack and the Bean Stalk</i>	<i>Sleeping Beauty and the Wish Stone of Wistaria</i>		<i>Babes in the Wood</i>
1902	<i>Dick Whittington</i>	<i>Robinson Crusoe</i>	No Panto	<i>Cinderella</i>
03	<i>Bold Robin Hood</i>	<i>The Forty Thieves</i>	<i>Goody Two Shoes</i>	No panto

APPENDIX 3 – MANCHESTER PANTOMIME AUTHORS 1880-1903

Year	THEATRE ROYAL	PRINCE'S THEATRE	QUEEN'S THEATRE	COMEDY THEATRE
1880	Frank W Green/John F McArdle	J Wilton Jones	J T Denny	
1881	Frank W Green	John F McArdle	J T Denny	
1882	John F McArdle	Robert Reece	John F McArdle	
1883	E Edmonds	John Dallas	J Wilton Jones	<i>Opened 1884</i>
1884	T F Doyle	Harry Nicholls	J Wilton Jones	
1885	T F Doyle	Henry Nicholls		John Wilton Jones
1886	T F Doyle	William Wade	Edward Francis Fay	John Wilton Jones
1887	T F Doyle	William Wade		J Wilton Jones
1888	T F Doyle	George Dance	J P Taylor	R Newman (aka William Wade)
1889	George Dance	George Dance	T F Doyle	J J Dallas
1890	Horace Lennard	George Dance	<i>Closed due to fire</i>	No panto
1891	Fred Locke	Arthur Brown/Edgar Wyatt		William Wade
1892	Fred Locke	John Wilton Jones	Harry McLelland	William Wade
1893	Fred Locke	Horace Mills/T W Charles	T F Doyle	William Wade
1894	Fred Locke	J Wilton Jones/T W Charles	J J Sullivan	William Wade
1895		J Wilton Jones/T W Charles		William Wade
1896	Augustus Harris/Arthur Sturgess	John Wilton Jones	Eric J Buxton	William Wade
1897	Arthur Sturgess/Horace Lennard	John J Wood/Robert Courtneidge		William Wade
1898	Arthur Sturgess/Arthur Collins	Jay Hickory Wood/A M Thompson		William Wade
1899	Arthur Sturgess/Arthur Collins	A M Thompson/Robert Courtneidge		William Wade
1900	Jay Hickory Wood/W H Risque	A M Thompson/Robert Courtneidge		William Wade
1901	A H Smith	A M Thompson/Robert Courtneidge		William Wade
1902	Jay Hickory Wood	A M Thompson/Robert Courtneidge		William Wade
1903	William Wade			

APPENDIX 4 (i)



***Babes in the Wood* – Theatre Royal, Manchester. 1883-1884**
(*The Illustrated Sporting and Dramatic News*, 2 February 1884, 516)

APPENDIX 4 (ii)



Cinderella – Theatre Royal, Manchester. (1891-1892)
(The Illustrated Sporting and Dramatic News, 30 January 1892, 677)

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Note: A large number of nineteenth century newspaper and periodical references are included in this thesis. The majority of these do not credit the individual author or give a title. Therefore, individual articles are not listed here, but may be consulted using the details in the footnotes below the text for the periodicals and newspapers listed below. Many are available online. The newspaper and periodicals are included below, with where possible, details of their online access, or holdings of print if known.

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