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### Introduction: defining leisure

Leisure, and how much of it workers had, has long been a question of particular interest to historians. In the mid-1960s, the economic historian Sidney Pollard placed the loss of customary leisure time at the heart of his analysis of the rise of the modern, capitalist economy. As he wrote: 'Men who were non-accumulative, non-acquisitive, accustomed to work for subsistence, not for maximization of income, had to be made obedient to the cash stimulus.'<sup>1</sup> And Pollard's suggestion that the early modern worker laboured in order to reach a minimum subsistence rather than in order to maximise income has resonated widely throughout many subsequent discussions of work and leisure in the early modern period. As David Levine has more recently summarised: those working the land in pre-industrial Britain 'worked enough to attain their targeted income and then simply quit'.<sup>2</sup>

Not only has the early modern worker been presumed to prefer leisure over surplus income, this preference has been regarded as having significance beyond the purely economic. In an article on 'Time, work-discipline and industrial capitalism', E. P. Thompson argued that the task-oriented, rather than clock-based, working patterns of the eighteenth century and earlier contributed to a better overall quality of life. According to Thompson, the 'demarcation between "work" and "life" was far less sharply drawn' in pre-industrial communities which worked to the task rather than the clock; for such workers, he concluded, 'Social intercourse and labour are intermingled' in beneficial ways.<sup>3</sup> Similar views concerning the blurring between work and leisure have been echoed by scholars working on pre-modern communities in continental Europe. William Reddy's work on the spinning industry in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century France, for example, broke

down the distinctions between entrepreneur, worker and consumer, noting that the spinners were all of these at once. Workers neither sought to 'maximise purchasing power as consumers [n]or minimize labour time as labourers.'<sup>4</sup> Their life was characterised instead by a search to balance the competing demands of work, consumption, and leisure.<sup>5</sup>

In addition to arguing that leisure tended to be more holistically incorporated into working patterns in the pre-industrial era, scholars have also suggested that workers enjoyed more of it.<sup>6</sup> Hans-Joachim Voth's study of working hours in Britain found a sharp increase in working hours in the period from the late eighteenth century to the middle of the nineteenth, with a correspondingly steep decline in the hours left for leisure.<sup>7</sup> There is also some evidence of increases in working hours in America at the turn of the century, as the growth of the nation's cities and industry led to an increase in the number of wage workers.<sup>8</sup>

The wide degree of consensus amongst scholars concerning the greater availability of leisure to the pre-industrial worker can be explained in part by the shared intellectual framework within which much of this work has been situated. Pollard's work was founded upon a concept of the pre-industrial moral economy borrowed from Engels, and the same set of working assumptions are implicit in a wide range of more recent interventions too.<sup>9</sup> Thus despite some disagreement in, for example, the chronology of decline, there is a common belief that pre-industrial communities enjoyed a relatively leisured existence, whereas capitalism pushed up working hours and reduced the opportunity for leisure. Surveying the long-term history of work and leisure in the US, Juliet Schor concluded: 'key incentive structures of capitalist economies contain biases towards long working hours [and] dramatically raise work effort'.<sup>10</sup> Moreover, there is wide agreement that something important was lost with the decline of older working patterns. As Douglas Reid nostalgically concludes, when the Black Country workers submitted 'to the norms of industrial

capitalism' by giving up their Saint Monday (the tradition of staying away from work on Mondays) 'the notion of a proper balance between work and leisure was lost'.<sup>11</sup>

Clearly, then, thinking about the relationship between work and leisure goes beyond the history of sports and recreations, and takes us to the heart of the nature of working life in pre-industrial societies. And in order to assess these various claims about the relatively leisured life of workers in the early modern period, it will be necessary to turn back to the historical record, and ask what evidence there is for workers' preferences. Let us start with a definition. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines leisure as 'free or unoccupied time ... which one can spend as one pleases'. Indeed, it was during the eighteenth century that 'leisure', hitherto conceived as an opportunity broadly defined, developed into a concept of time - or an opportunity - that was free from the pressures of work. Did early modern workers have a choice between work and 'leisure time', which they were able to spend as they pleased? And if so, what kind of choices did they make[DS3]?

### **Labour versus leisure**

Part of the difficulty in answering such apparently straightforward questions lies in finding appropriate historical sources. One well-used source has been the writing of the early political economists. It was certainly the belief of many contemporaneous writers that workers exhibited a marked preference for leisure time over work. In their eyes, the poor had a set of expectations for their consumption [DS4] of food, clothing and housing, and once they had earned sufficient to meet these expectations they traded labour for leisure. In the 1660s, the economic writer and merchant, Sir Josiah Child, set out the problem as follows: 'In a cheap year they will not work above two days in a week; their humour being such that they will not provide for a hard time; but just work so much and no more, as may maintain them in that mean condition to which they have been

accustomed'.<sup>12</sup> Similar views were echoed in the early eighteenth century by the Anglo-Dutch political philosopher, Bernard Mandeville. He asserted that 'Every Body knows that there is a vast number of Journey-men ... who, if by Four Days Labour in a Week they can maintain themselves, will hardly be persuaded to work the fifth; and that there are Thousands of labouring Men of all sorts, who will ... put themselves to fifty Inconveniences ... to make Holiday'.<sup>13</sup> But these, of course, were hardly impartial claims. Child, Mandeville and other political economists who wrote on the subject had a stake in keeping wages low and were thus eager to assert that high wages simply encouraged indolence and insolence by inducing labourers to turn down available work. Clearly if we are to make sense of workers' work and leisure preferences in this period, we will need to turn away from the judgements of their employers, and search for sources that better reflect the values and outlook of the workers themselves.

Early-modern workers have bequeathed a number of autobiographies, which we can use to probe this problem, and although such material is not abundant, it certainly provides an important counterpoint to the writings of upper-class observers. Inevitably, autobiographical material presents us with problems of representation and interpretation. Women [DS5] very rarely wrote autobiographies, and the men who did were, for the most part, unaccustomed to putting pen to paper.<sup>14</sup> Nonetheless, for all their complexity, autobiographies and memoirs represent a unique set of records in which working people set out to describe their lives in their own words and for their own purposes, and as such should form an important element in our attempt to understand the mental horizons and economic choices of the early modern workforce.

Let us start with the example of Edward Barlow. Barlow was born in 1642 in Prestwich, then a village about five miles from Manchester, now a settlement physically connected to the city through urban sprawl and subsumed administratively within the metropolitan county of Greater

Manchester. As a country dweller, it was not unusual that his first experience of paid work was farm work, but Barlow 'never had any great mind to country work'. Ploughing, sowing, hay-making, reaping, hedging, ditching, thrashing and dunging amongst cattle were all, in his opinion, 'drudgery'.<sup>15</sup> Nonetheless, Barlow was employed in agriculture on a casual basis - 'by the day' - for a number of years until his father found him an opening with a whitester in nearby Manchester. The work involved bleaching yarn for the weaving trade. He went on a 'liking', but returned two weeks later informing his parents that he did not in fact like it at all, and persuaded them to let him come back. But resettling at home was not straightforward. Returning to his village after refusing to be bound apprentice to a trade he did not like, he faced not only his father's displeasure, but also comments from the neighbours, 'asking why I could not stay at my place ... [and] hitting me in the teeth'.<sup>16</sup> The good folk of Prestwich, it seems, did not take too kindly to the return of a neighbour who turned down work in Manchester and had nothing better to say for himself than that he did not like it.

It is interesting to read Barlow's account of his early working life for clues about early modern understandings of 'work' and of 'leisure'. The most striking feature of work in Barlow's Prestwich, is simply that there was not very much work around at all. Prior to his apprenticeship to the whitester, Barlow was clearly not fully employed. He worked 'by the day', and only when his neighbours 'had any need of me'. He described himself as 'troublesome' to his parents when 'out of work'. Even when in work, he earned 'but small wages'. Yet despite these small and irregular earnings, he continued in Prestwich for some years as his father was unable to find anyone willing to take on an apprentice - he stayed with his parents until 'at last' his father heard of a man 'willing to take an apprentice'. Indeed, part of the reason that opening had arisen was because the master's mistreatment of his employees ensured an unusually high turnover of workers. Then there was the response of his neighbours when he refused to continue with the whitester and returned to the village. Their hostility to the return of one of their own suggests that Barlow's

return signified above all a little less work for themselves – a serious consideration when one day's work buys the next day's meal.

It would also clearly be mistaken to depict the young Edward Barlow as making an active choice between work and leisure. Barlow needed to work as his parents, being 'but poor people', were unable to feed him themselves. Yet despite this pressing imperative, Barlow was frequently out of work, leaving him 'always in want'. This was not a man choosing leisure; it was somebody suffering from what we would now term 'unemployment'. Even if we concede that Barlow's want of employment sometimes left him with time on his hands, it is hard to imagine that he experienced this time as 'leisure' in any modern sense of the word, as this lack of work reduced him to a state of severe want.

Whilst unemployment and under-employment were endemic through much of western Europe, the situation in America was rather different. In the first place, many of the early colonial settlers brought with them a deep-seated, protestant work ethic, which encouraged the principle of working from sunrise to sunset. No less importantly, however, the colonial emigrants settled in a land with abundant natural resources ripe for exploitation. In contrast to the densely populated European nations with comparatively limited employment opportunities they left behind, American settlers encountered little difficulty in finding full employment, and their hard labour reaped a tangible and immediate economic reward. This very much wider range of employment opportunities helped to foster longer working hours than were customary in much of Western Europe.<sup>17</sup> A study of the seventeenth-century Chesapeake has concluded that the new immigrants worked longer hours at more boring tasks, but in return consumed substantially better diets.

We have looked so far at workers who were tied to the work that their master provided, but not all early modern workers were tied into traditional master-servant relationships. This period also witnessed the growth of cottage industry. Sometimes also called domestic manufacture or 'proto-industry', it refers simply to production that takes place within the home. Small-scale rural industry of this nature had developed in England, the southern Low Countries, and southern Germany in the late Middle Ages, but a second wave of development in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries greatly increased the number of workers engaged in cottages industries such as spinning, weaving, knitting, metal-working, basket-making and straw-plaiting.<sup>18</sup> Is it possible that these independent workers enjoyed a more favourable situation with regard to leisure than those workers who were bound to an employer?

This certainly has been the view of many historians writing on the subject. The favourable position of weavers was first emphasised in Engels' *Condition of the Working Class in England*. As he explained, the weaver combined his weaving with smallholding, renting 'a little piece of land, that he cultivated in his leisure hours, of which he had as many as he chose to take, since he could weave whenever and as long as he pleased'.<sup>19</sup> And this view of the domestic workers as independent labourers, dovetailing their industrial avocations with small-scale farming and a healthy amount of leisure has echoed through the literature ever since Engels' work was translated into English in the late nineteenth century.

It is certainly the case that many of those who worked in cottage industry often did combine small-scale manufacture for the market with farming a small garden for domestic consumption. There is also real substance to the claim that the demarcation between work and leisure was more fluid for these independent workers, and that the ability to set working hours was highly valued. Most of the autobiographers engaged in domestic manufacture regarded their work as preferable to

agriculture, and the autonomy that came with weaving formed part of its appeal. Weavers and knitters were for the most part self-employed either owning their own looms or renting them in a shop. Either way, they set their own hours, which provided them with the very welcome option of trading work for leisure as they chose. Samuel Bamford approvingly noted that on exchanging his position in a Manchester warehouse for a loom, he became 'master of my own time', with the liberty to partake of 'country amusements with the other young fellows of the neighbourhood', a liberty which would quickly have led to his dismissal had he tried it at the warehouse.

Yet on closer reading, it becomes apparent that amongst many weavers the preference for leisure over labour was less pronounced than Engels proposed. Certainly, when trade was brisk and piece rates were high, some workers did opt to reduce their hours and take leisure instead. George Calladine, for instance, became an apprentice framework knitter in 1805 when the trade was prospering. After two years, he could complete his master's work and also 'with ease earn four shillings a day' for himself. With hindsight, Calladine regretted that the custom of paying by the task rather than the hour had encouraged him to become 'almost independent of his master ... very apt to idle away a day or two at the beginning of the week'.<sup>20</sup> Yet Calladine was a young man without dependents at this time; he was barely in his teens, and his preference for 'idling' his time might owe as much to his age as much as anything else. Others with a family to raise often made a very different calculation when faced with the same choice. They responded to high piece rates by working longer and maximising their income. A few of the autobiographers could hardly contain their surprise at the riches that weaving occasionally allowed them to amass. When Ben Brierley and his family took to weaving satin shawls they thought they had 'found a silver mine'. Ben was earning twenty-four shillings a week and his father thirty: 'such an income was enough to turn our heads, We seemed to be rolling in wealth'.<sup>21</sup> Clearly, different workers made very different decisions when confronted with the same set of circumstances.



Not only is the evidence of cottage workers' preference for leisure over labour inconclusive, we must also acknowledge that these periods of high wages were exceptional and usually short lived. Outside a few years of exceptional prosperity, most weavers and knitters were unable to earn steady year-long earnings. Indeed, all the autobiographers involved in these cottage industries encountered a recurring difficulty: one moment enjoying the boom times, the next plunged into poverty when demand for their goods fell sharply and rapidly away.<sup>22</sup> Nor was this simply a consequence of the eventual mechanisation of the industry during the industrial revolution, as Engels had argued. In 1747, many decades before the mechanisation of the hosiery industry, William Hutton was forced to look for a new master as a stockinger following the untimely death of his employer. Unfortunately, at this time 'trade was dead'. The hosiers could not find work sufficient for their own workers, still less take on a newcomer like him. He tried several warehouses, but 'all proved a blank', and Hutton was reduced to tears to think he had served seven years as an apprentice to a trade 'at which I could not get bread'.<sup>23</sup> In all, then, it is highly doubtful that weavers and other cottage workers whether in Britain or elsewhere in Europe enjoyed the favourable working conditions and access to leisure that Engels claimed. The high wage interludes always proved to be short-lived. At some point the bubble burst, and workers were back to working long hours for low wages[DS6].

This chapter has argued that we would be mistaken to conclude that western workers enjoyed long hours of leisure before 1800. Instead, much of the period between 1650 and 1800 was characterised by underemployment and unemployment, and whilst these conditions may have sometimes left workers with time on their hands this was rarely time that they were able to exploit for their own purpose. For agricultural and skilled workers who were bound to their employer by contract, the depressed labour market enabled employers to extract as much labour from their workers as they were able, safe in the knowledge they were unable to seek better conditions

elsewhere. The situation for independent cottage workers, such as weavers and knitters, was certainly more favourable when trade was good, though not all workers prized leisure above income, and outside these relatively brief interludes of prosperity, cottage workers by necessity worked long hours simply in order to achieve the income necessary for survival. The only major exception to this pattern was in the North American colonies, where the unusual combination of low population density and abundant natural resources provided workers with meaningful autonomy in the matter of how to divide their time between work and leisure. Towards the end of our period, however, there were the stirrings of economic growth that we now call the 'industrial revolution', which had the potential to destabilise traditional patterns of work and leisure. It is important to ask, therefore, what impact (if any) the onset of industrialisation had on older working patterns.

### **Industrialisation, working hours and time for leisure**

In order to address this question, let us turn to the work of economic historians that attempts to quantify exactly how long men spent at work in the early modern period, and when, if at all this started to change. Hans-Joachim Voth's study of court records from the London Old Bailey and the North Assizes between 1760 and 1830 argues for a reduction in leisure time over this period. By using these records to establish whether or not the witnesses of crimes were at work during the time a crime was committed, Voth has demonstrated an increasing working year from the end of the eighteenth century down to 1850, accounted for largely by the loss of customary holidays rather than an extension of the working day.<sup>24</sup> Set against this, however, recent work by Gregory Clark and Ysbrand van der Werf has argued against any changes in working hours. Their analysis suggests that working hours remained largely stable between the middle ages and 1800, and led them to dismiss the idea of a pre-industrial 'world of leisure and laughter where people rested often, worked sporadically, and preferred little for material consumption, preferring religion,

festivals, love, sport, and war'.<sup>25</sup> Why have economic historians' attempts to quantify the amount of time that men [DS7] spent at work yielded such different answers? Can these very divergent findings be reconciled, both with each other and with the qualitative evidence for high levels of unemployment that we considered above? And how do the experiences of women fit with these patterns?

The key to resolving these problems lies in rejecting totalising claims about the experiences of *all workers* at any given time, and acknowledging instead the great diversity of experience across the West, particularly with the onset of industrialisation – an extended and piecemeal process that occurred in Western Europe over a period of well over a hundred years. Even a supposedly *national* study such as Voth's, is in reality a *local* study of two English regions – London and the north east. Not only is Voth's evidence regionally specific, but these two regions were also highly distinctive. Both were urban, and Lancashire was also the crucible of the economic event later described as the 'industrial revolution'. In consequence, his data heavily over-represents skilled, urban workers and those engaged in manufacturing, whilst largely omitting those who worked on the land – it included almost no agricultural workers; just sixty-nine of almost one thousand observations, or seven per cent, were of farm-workers.<sup>26</sup> In other words, whilst Voth has convincingly demonstrated a rise in work-intensity in urban and industrial Britain, his evidence is largely silent about the fortunes of workers outside the heartlands of the industrial revolution.

Clerk and van der Werf, by contrast, explicitly sought to analyse labour effort in England over a period of six centuries, and in order to do so looked at two occupations that changed very little throughout this long period – grain threshing and sawing. Their research indicates that not only was there very little technological change in these two occupations over time, so too was there very little change in working patterns or work intensity. But here again, we run into problems of

representativeness. Two traditional sectors of the English economy cannot stand proxy for working experiences as a whole any more than London and Lancashire can. Rather than seeking general answers, it is more helpful to conceive of industrialisation as a process which broke down the much more homogeneous pre-industrial patterns. Industrial economies were much more complex and divergent than their predecessors, comprising traditional sectors (such as threshing and sawing) and modern sectors based in the industrial regions. As industrialisation began to spread across Europe ever larger numbers were drawn into more intensive working patterns, but even by the very end of the period under consideration here, 1800, the process was in its early stages.

The suggestion that traditional working patterns were starting to undergo changes in Britain's industrial regions but remained largely stable in much of the rest of Britain and Europe is further supported by evidence for child labour during the industrial revolution. It would clearly be mistaken to construe children's participation in the workforce as a simple choice between labour and leisure, as children rarely exercised any agency over when they started work. However, the extent to which children were employed in the labour market does help us to understand the ways in which that labour market operated in so far as children are more likely to be employed when demand for workers is high, and more likely to be 'unemployed' when the demand for labour is low.

In the absence of official records systematically recording the age at which children entered the workforce there has inevitably been some disagreement between historians concerning the extent of child labour throughout this period.<sup>27</sup> However, working-class autobiographies can be used to shed light on children's working patterns in what was an increasingly complex and divergent economy. The autobiographies reveal that the likelihood of being at work was highly contingent

upon where a child lived, with those in the industrial districts starting work several years earlier than their rural counterparts. In industrial Britain, the average age at which children started work was just eight and a half years. The situation in the agricultural districts was very different. Children in agricultural districts typically started full-time work around the age of eleven and a half – fully three years later than those living in industrial regions.<sup>28</sup> This relatively late age for starting work was a symptom of the generally low demand for labour in most rural districts that we have already observed. Beyond a small number of seasonal tasks with which small children could help (bird-scaring, planting, harvesting, and so forth) children lacked the strength and self-governance necessary to perform useful agricultural work throughout the year. Given the relatively large pool of adolescent and adult workers, employers preferred to select their workforce from these age groups rather than to hire children. The evidence from child labour, therefore, once again suggests that industrialisation signified a break with traditional working patterns, albeit a break that was highly localised in nature and, down to 1800, largely confined to Britain. At this date, large parts of Britain and most of western Europe were still unaffected by the industrial revolution, and discussions about changing patterns of labour and leisure need to be founded upon a proper appreciation of the fragmented and piecemeal nature of change.

Industrialisation tended to increase work intensity for both men and children, but what happened to women? Given the complex and diverse state of the European economy, women's experiences were inevitably varied too. Factories, manufacturing and (to a less degree) mining all offered new employment opportunities to women. As a result, just as the industrial districts witnessed a lengthening of male working hours and a reduction in the ages at which children started work, so did these regions witness an increase in women's participation in the workforce.<sup>29</sup> Outside [DS8] the industrial regions, female working patterns inevitably changed far less. James B Collins' work on France, for example, indicates the degree to which women remained clustered in the low-skill, low-pay sectors they had ever colonised – laundry work, needlework, and domestic service.<sup>30</sup> In

Leiden and Cologne, Martha Howell concludes that women's paid employment was 'concentrated in industries that had obvious roots in tasks in which women in subsistence households specialized.'<sup>31</sup> It was a pattern repeated across the globe.

Furthermore, no matter where women lived or what kind of work they did, suggesting that women were able to choose between labour and leisure fails to capture the reality of their lives. Middle-class women were less likely to engage in paid employment than their poorer peers, yet this did not mean they followed a life of leisure. All domestic labour was physically arduous in the pre-electric era, and with large families the workload could be considerable. The custom of many skilled workers and apprentices boarding with their masters further increased women's domestic work.<sup>32</sup> Many industries, such as the silk-industry centred in Lyon in France, were based in domestic workshops rather than separate mills, so even paid employment did not free women from domestic labour.<sup>33</sup>

The distinction between work and leisure was always more unclear for women than it was for men. After all, young women were rarely permitted to idle away their time within the home. Instead, they were occupied with the endless round of purchasing, preparing, and clearing away meals, cleaning, washing, and minding small children – labour intensive work, all to be done in an unpaid capacity.<sup>34</sup> For women, life alternated between paid and unpaid work rather than work and leisure, and many women found themselves regularly moving between these two options. From early childhood, girls were put to unpaid work in their family home and typically continued this work into adolescence. This was followed by an interlude between their late teens and early twenties in domestic service, mill work, or some other form of paid work outside the home. With the onset of marriage and motherhood, many women retreated from the labour market once again and were employed in performing unpaid housework inside the home. How long they spent there

depended upon how their married life unfolded. Those with reliable breadwinning husbands and large families usually found this marked the end of their participation in the labour market. But women who lost their breadwinner and those with no or few children often re-entered the labour market at some point after marriage.<sup>35</sup> Either way, however, it is hard to discern leisure in the lives of women with family responsibilities.

### **Popular leisure**

There is one final question that we need to address, and that concerns leisure itself. We have seen that pre-industrial workers often did work less intensively than became common in the industrial districts at the end of our period, but suggested that this is much better characterised as underemployment and unemployment than as 'leisure'. Nonetheless, all workers throughout this period enjoyed some periods away from work. It is necessary to consider both the experience of leisure in the pre-industrial world, and the ways in which this changed with the onset of industrialisation.

Social elites have always regarded popular sports and pastimes with some degree of anxiety, owing to the crowds, gambling and drunkenness that popular leisure often involves. These anxieties became particularly acute in England and New England with the rise of the puritans in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, but entered a period of abeyance during the long eighteenth century.<sup>36</sup> Throughout the eighteenth century, most social elites viewed the people's sports and pastimes as considerably less pernicious than the religious zeal, which had recently persecuted them. As William Stukeley explained 'the last age had discourag'd the innocent and useful sports of the common people, by an injudicious zeal for religion, which has drove them into worse amusements.'<sup>37</sup> Catholic Europe had generally always exhibited greater tolerance towards popular customs, viewing them as valued traditions that slotted into a conservative and

unchanging social order.<sup>38</sup> As a result, during most of the period under consideration here there was little elite interference with popular pastimes. William Borlase [DS9] marshalled all the traditional arguments in favour of popular recreation when he described parish celebrations as an occasion for 'civilising the people, for composing differences by the mediation and meeting of friends, for increase of love and unity by these feasts of charity, and for the relief and comfort of the poor.'<sup>39</sup> Such views played a powerful role in protecting popular pastimes from unwelcome elite interference throughout the long eighteenth century.

But although popular recreations were generally free from attack during this period, this did not straightforwardly translate into a vibrant recreational calendar for most working people. The reality for workers throughout most of pre-industrial Europe was that opportunities for recreation were limited, in both nature and extent.<sup>40</sup> Although workers did not work intensively, owing to generally low levels of employment, they were not always able to use their free time engaged in activities that we would recognise as 'leisure' [DS10].

Let us turn back, once more, to our disgruntled farm-worker from England, Edward Barlow [AM11]. Despite frequently being out of work, Barlow just once refers to something that corresponds to our modern understanding of leisure, and that was on a Sunday evening, after evening prayers. At this time, he used to meet 'with some of our neighbours' children, for we were used to resort together upon a holiday for to play together and discourse'. Throughout the following century, writers agreed that leisure could only be enjoyed outside the expected hours of work and prayer. 'Winter Sundays', for example, were the time that the Northamptonshire poet, John Clare, named as available for recreation. Clare, characteristically, preferred leaving his neighbours to play football, whilst he 'stuck to [his] corner stool poring over a book'.<sup>41</sup> Other writers indicated that the light summer evenings could also be exploited for recreation. 'As the days lengthened, in the evening



after our work was done, we assembled on our village-green to spend our time in some rustic amusements, such as wrestling, football, etc.,' wrote one small farmer.<sup>42</sup> Leisure, so far as these labourers experienced it, was not something that could be snatched during the working week, even if work happened to be slack. And although Sundays were generally kept free of work, leisure still had to be fitted around the demands of church.

These restrictions on popular leisure were even more pronounced in the lives of women, as Andreas Gestrich's study of the central European practice of *Lichstuben* reveals. Gestrich has looked at the different ways in which young men and women spent their evenings in two rural villages in Wurttemberg in southwestern Germany. The boys rented rooms in the locality where they could meet in the winter months. They spent their evenings together and at leisure. Women also rented rooms to meet in the evenings, but in contrast to their male peers, their use of these rooms was not completely free from work. Their *Lichstuben* were, literally 'lighted rooms' – that is rooms that were lit and heated so that women could save on fuel costs as they sat and worked – at spinning or needlework – together.<sup>43</sup>

Eighteenth-century writers not only testified that most leisure was something which occurred outside ordinary working hours, they also indicated that it was often very simple in form, requiring next to nothing in terms of space or resources. Across a Europe a host of outdoor recreations – wrestling, boxing, football, cricket and other now forgotten ball games – prevailed. High levels of inter-personal violence were tolerated in all of these sports, and although they were bound by certain rules and conventions, these rules were not codified at a national, still less, international level.

Football was amongst the most widely enjoyed athletic sports of early modern Europe. It was played in all regions and in many different forms: sometimes by large unequal teams traversing wide stretches of public land, sometimes through the streets of towns and cities, and sometimes in a more recognisably modern form, confined to pitches of fixed size. This variability was typical of early modern sports. No matter how football was played, however, it remained firmly rooted in the lower ranks of society. It was not unknown for social elites to participate in or promote the game, but in general they turned to sports such as hunting, coursing and cricket for exercise, and the game of football was left largely in the hands of the common people.

It has been widely argued that popular football in the eighteenth century and earlier was unruly and unstructured, and that it was not until the public schools redeveloped the game – introducing teams, pitches, and goals of fixed size – in the nineteenth century that the modern game was born.<sup>44</sup> Yet the traditional form of ‘folk football’ upon which this account is based was never widespread. There certainly are examples across Europe of great set football matches, linked to a certain date in the calendar, and played out between neighbouring settlements or parishes. In such games, the teams were composed of all the willing men from each community, so they were inevitably frequently of uneven size. Matches were played without identifiable positions or pitch, and local landmarks – the market cross, the village well, or the church porch – might serve as goals. Such games were clearly very different from football in its modern form. Yet annual set matches of this kind have been recorded in no more than a handful of towns and villages.<sup>45</sup> It is precisely owing to their exceptional nature that these kinds of matches have left a mark on the historical record. Most football was played on a much smaller scale and usually in a form much closer to the modern game than standard accounts allow. The early-modern game was not played according to nationally agreed rules: the size of goals, pitches and teams might all vary, so too might the length of play. But the absence of national regulations should not be confused with an absence of rules of any kind. Decisions about the nature of play were agreed before the start of the

game, and where matches were played competitively, these rules were carefully enforced. In Britain there is evidence of such games being advertised, along with their rules, in the provincial newspapers.<sup>46</sup> The advertising of such games suggests that football may also have had some appeal as a spectator sport at this time, though there is no evidence of large crowds being drawn to such events. For the most part, men enjoyed games of football as participants rather than as spectators.

The only athletic sport to rival football in popularity was cricket. The sport was enjoyed by aristocrats in the late seventeenth century and it grew steadily in popularity throughout this period.<sup>47</sup> Eighteenth-century newspapers advertising matches between gentlemen testify to the ongoing involvement of social elites, and the private diaries of parsons, millers, farmers, craftsmen, and shopkeepers indicate that cricket extended steadily to the middle ranks of society during the eighteenth century.<sup>48</sup> How far the game extended down the social scale is more difficult to establish on the basis of the evidence that has survived. There certainly was some involvement of the rural poor in the game of cricket, but the timing of many cricket matches – weekday afternoons – would clearly do much to restrict the involvement of those who needed to work for a living[DS12].

The only early modern sports which routinely drew in large crowds of spectators were those involving hand-to-hand combat, which we can subsume for convenience under the heading of ‘boxing’. All western nations had their own versions of inter-personal combat sports (as well as others, such as cock-fighting and bull-baiting, involving combats between animals), in which very high levels of violence were tolerated.<sup>49</sup>

**INSERT IMAGE 9.1** **HERE**[DS13]

**Figure 9.1. Bull-Baiting.** Plate from Henry Alken, *The National Sports of Great Britain... with Descriptions, in English and French*, 1823..

A manual from early eighteenth century Britain, for example, provided instruction for techniques such as head-butting, punching, eye gouging, and choking.<sup>50</sup> The largely unrestrained violence that was permitted may have helped to provide entertainment, but it also meant that organised fights had an unfortunate tendency to end in death, resulting in manslaughter charges for the victorious fighter. It was undoubtedly this which provided the spur for reform of the sport's rules. The first set of boxing rules were introduced by the champion fighter Jack Broughton in 1743, and known as Broughton's rules. Broughton also encouraged the use of 'mufflers', a form of padded glove, though their use remained optional for over a hundred years. Broughton's rules were further revised and consolidated in the nineteenth century, when the use of gloves was mandated. But boxing was clearly well ahead of the curve in the matter of the codification of its rule. Most sports did not adopt a set of nationally agreed rules at any point before 1800. Indeed, even the newly codified sport of boxing co-existed with a very wide range of non-codified combat sports, each played according to local **tradition**[DS14].

**INSERT IMAGE 9.2 HERE**

**Figure 9.2: Rural Sports. Cudgel Playing.** Engraving from *The Sporting Magazine; or, Monthly Calendar of the Transactions of the Turf, the Chace, and Every Other Diversion Interesting to the Man of Pleasure, Enterprize, and Spirit*, 1799..

In addition to sports that were organised and took place out-of-doors were a host of more informal recreational activities that took place inside the home. Through the colder winter months, families spent their evenings indoors – wiling away their free hours socialising with neighbours, reading aloud, singing and **storytelling**[DS15]. As we have seen in the case of Germany, some villagers rented rooms so that they could socialise with friends and neighbours as well as family. Indeed,

these pastimes formed the mainstay of most people's leisure activities in rural areas well into the nineteenth century. Much of the reason for this is simply because incomes were so low that most people did not have money to spend on leisure. Despite the occasional large-scale spectator events, such as prize-fighting and horseracing, most forms of leisure had to be accessed for free. Even many adult males lacked the spare income to spend on leisure and women and children certainly did. This did not entirely close down the workers' opportunities for leisure, but it did help to circumscribe the form that they took.

The major exception to this came in the form of annual festivals, carnivals, fairs, and parish celebrations. For most of the year, leisure activities were a somewhat desultory affair, but all European communities enjoyed an annual cycle of fairs, carnivals, and revels. More than any other occasion in the recreational calendar, these events provided labourers a day or more holiday. In the colder climates of northern Europe, fairs and parish feasts predominated. Fairs were complex occasions, typically spanning several days, and mixing both recreational and commercial functions. In smaller settlements, parish dedication feasts took the place of the trading fairs found in large towns. But at fairs both large and small, a recognisable set of entertainments – plays, freak shows, games, and races – could be found. Workers were accustomed to travelling several miles in order to enjoy the feasts and fairs that were celebrated in neighbouring communities and employers were expected to allow time off so their workers could attend. Few other events came round with such regularity to enliven the existence of the labouring classes.

**Insert image 9.3 here**

**Figure 9.3: The Consecration of a Village Church, c.1650.** Teniers, David the Younger (1610-90).

Flemish. Bridgeman

Fairs and parish celebrations were enjoyed in much of southern and Mediterranean Europe, too, but in these regions the Carnival season provided the greatest popular festival of the year.

Carnival was located in towns and involved drinking, the eating of luxuries such as meat and pancakes in advance of the arrival of Lent, masks, fancy-dress, processions and plays – all performed in the open air in public, civic spaces.

#### **INSERT IMAGE 9.4 HERE**

**Figure 9.4: Carnival in the streets of Paris, 1757.** Oil painting by Etienne Jeaurat (1699-1789).

Bridgeman.

Pre-Lenten carnival traditions were much weaker in the colder northern climates of Britain and Scandinavia, but here a condensed day of activities took place on Shrove Tuesday, making that day amongst the most widely celebrated in early modern Europe. William Fitzstephen's late twelfth-century history of St Thomas Becket included an account of cockfighting and football on Shrove Tuesday and repeated prohibition orders throughout following centuries suggest a continuous history of these customs throughout medieval and early-modern Europe. There is some evidence of the withdrawal of social elites from carnival and Shrovetide customs during the early modern period, with the celebrations becoming more plebeian and youthful in character. As the season's (or day's) activities sometimes involved masks and dressing up, and as celebrations occasionally got out of hand, it has sometimes been described as a time of licensed misrule.<sup>51</sup>

There were in addition a host of other dates punctuating the year that brought festivity and the cessation of work. Some, such as harvest celebrations, were tied to the agricultural year; others, Christmas and Easter, for example, were rooted in the Christian calendar. By the eighteenth century, many countries also had their own local celebrations, such as the newer anniversary of

Guy Fawkes celebrated in Britain. Coronations and royal birthdays were also celebrated in ever more lavish style as the eighteenth century progressed.

**INSERT 9.5 HERE**

**FIGURE 9.5: Celebrations at Lille in honour of the birth of the Dauphin, 1781.** Coloured engraving. Bridgeman.

Although some scholars have discerned a withdrawal of social elites from once shared popular customs over the early modern period, the more significant disruption to traditional leisure patterns came with the industrial revolution. As ever, the industrialising regions in the north of England were in the vanguard of change. Although industrialisation forced up working hours, this increase in work intensity did not have the negative effect on recreation that we might presume. Indeed quite the reverse. By the end of our period, workers in the urban and industrial regions enjoyed greater access to leisure than they did anywhere else. Here workers not only relaxed with such traditional activities as ball games and storytelling with neighbours, they also engaged in a raft of activities – alehouses, theatres, boxing matches, libraries, clubs and societies – much of which had previously been the domain of social elites. How might this counterintuitive outcome be explained? Why were longer working hours also accompanied by greater access to the world of leisure?

The reasons are inevitably complex, but two factors stand out. Firstly, industrial workers were able to command higher wages than those who worked on the land, which enabled them to engage in activities that had previously been beyond their means. Even such an apparently timeless activity as visiting the alehouse in reality required spare income that many eighteenth-century rural workers simply did not have. Money was also needed to access such varied entertainments as

plays, books, boxing matches, and cockfights, and workers could start to engage in these activities on a regular basis only when their earnings outstripped their basic needs.

The growth of clubs and associational activity that occurred at this time was also assisted by higher wages, but here a second, quite different, force was also at work. Engagement in the public sphere required workers to enjoy a degree of independence from their employers, and this independence was only attained when work became more abundant during the era of industrialisation. The cities permitted men to spend their evenings at night schools, in reading groups or book clubs, or in political clubs, where they could discuss ideas that might directly challenge the interests of their employers and social superiors. It was no accident that associational activity, trade-unionism, and political activism had all emerged in Britain's urban and industrial centres by 1800 whilst many such activities did not penetrate large swathes of rural Europe until well into the second half of the nineteenth century. These forms of recreational activity required a relatively autonomous and independent workforce of the kind only to be found in the high-wage industrial sector. And by the same token, it is also no accident that women were for the most part excluded from such activities, for although young, unmarried women did find work in the new factories and mills the experience often proved to be transitory. Once married with children, the mills girls traded their factory work for the unpaid work of the home - a role that had little of the social potential of well-paid work outside the home.

## **Conclusion**

From the evidence presented here, it is clear that we have to reject the suggestion that workers enjoyed a high degree of leisure in the early modern period. In spite the powerful hold of these claims on generations of historians, the evidence simply does not support this rose-tinted view. Working-class writers suggest, instead, that what has often been regarded as 'leisure' is better



understood as unemployment and underemployment, and that this did not facilitate leisure in helpful ways. The low demand for labour made workers highly dependent upon whoever could provide work, and left them vulnerable to long hours and exploitation. This gradually changed with the onset of industrialisation at the end of the eighteenth century. In the factory and mining districts, more work was available and although this resulted in an increase in working hours it was also accompanied by an extension in their opportunities for leisure. Higher incomes and greater autonomy permitted workers to engage in a raft of new leisure activities which had previously been the preserve of social elites. As a result, although industrialisation did not, initially, increase the workers' free time; it did enhance their ability to spend free time 'as one pleases' [DS16].

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<sup>2</sup> David Levine, *Reproducing Families: The Political Economy of English Population History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 21.

<sup>3</sup> Edward P. Thompson, 'Time, work-discipline and industrial capitalism', *Past and Present* 38 (1967): 60.

<sup>4</sup> Maxine Berg, Pat Hudson and Michael Sonenscher, eds, *Manufacture in Town and Country Before the Factory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983) 9–10; Deborah Simonton, *History of European Women's Work: 1700 to the Present* (London: Routledge Press, 1998).

<sup>5</sup> William Reddy, *The Rise of Market Culture: The Textile Trade and French Society, 1750-1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 33.

<sup>6</sup> Douglas Reid, 'The decline of St Monday, 1766-1876', *Past and Present*, 71 (1976).

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- <sup>7</sup> Hans-Joachim Voth, *Time and Work in England 1750-1830* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).
- <sup>8</sup> David Roediger and Philip Foner, *Our Own Time: A History of American Labor and the Working Day* (New York: Verso, 1989).
- <sup>9</sup> Friedrich Engels, *The Condition of the Working Class in England*, ed. D. McLellan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 15-17.
- <sup>10</sup> Juliet Schor, *The Overworked American: The Unexpected Decline Of Leisure* (New York: Basic Books, 1992), 7.
- <sup>11</sup> Reid, 'Decline of Saint Monday', 101.
- <sup>12</sup> Sir Josiah Child, *A New Discourse of Trade, Wherein are Recommended Several Weighty Points...* (Glasgow, 5<sup>th</sup> edn., 1751), 12.
- <sup>13</sup> Bernard Mandeville, *The Fable of the Bees: or, Private Vices, Publick Benefits* (London, 1724), 21
- <sup>14</sup> For a rare example, however, see: Mary Saxby, *Memoirs of a Female Vagrant Written by Herself*, ed. Samuel Greathead (London, 1806).
- <sup>15</sup> Edward Barlow, *Barlow's Journal of his Life at Sea in King's Ships . . . from 1659 to 1703*, ed. Basil Lubbock (London: Hurst & Blackett, 1934), 21.
- <sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 19-20.
- <sup>17</sup> Lois Green Carr, 'Emigration and the Standard of Living: the seventeenth-century Chesapeake', *Journal of Economic History* 52, no. 2 (1992): 271-291.
- <sup>18</sup> Franklin F. Mendels, 'Proto-Industrialization: the first phase of the industrialization process,' *The Journal of Economic History*, 32/1 (1972), 241-261. See also Charles Sabel and Jonathan Zeitlin, 'Historical Alternatives to Mass Production', *Past & Present*, 108 (1985): 133-76; Pat Hudson, 'Industrial organisation and structure', in Roderick Floud and Paul Johnson, eds., *The Cambridge Economic History of Modern Britain: Industrialisation, 1700-1860*, i. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).
- <sup>19</sup> Engels, *Condition of Working Class*, pp.15-16.

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- <sup>20</sup> George Calladine, *The Diary of Colour-Serjeant George Calladine, 19<sup>th</sup> Foot, 1793-1837*, ed. Major M.L. Ferrar (London: E. Fisher & Co, 1922), p.2.
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- <sup>25</sup> Gregory Clark and Ysbrand Van Der Werf, 'Work in progress: the industrious revolution?', *Journal of Economic History* 55/3 (1998): 830-43.
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- <sup>29</sup> Mary Jo Maynes, 'In search of Arachne's daughters: European girls, economic development and the textile trade, 1750-1880', in M. J., B.Maynes, Sølund, & C. Benninghaus, eds., *Secret Gardens, Satanic Mills: Placing Girls in European History, 1750-1960* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005), 38-53; Maxine Berg, 'What difference did women's work to the industrial revolution?', *History Workshop Journal*, vol.35 (No.1) (1993): 22-44.

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- <sup>32</sup> Emma Hart, Work, Family, and the Eighteenth-Century History of a Middle Class in the American South, *Journal of Southern History* 78 (2012): 551-78.
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- <sup>36</sup> Hanspeter Wagner, *Puritan Attitudes towards Recreation in Early Seventeenth-Century New England, With Particular Consideration of Physical Recreation* (Bern: Verlag Peter Lang, 1982).
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- <sup>39</sup> William Borlase, *The Natural History of Cornwall* (Oxford, 1758), p.300.
- <sup>40</sup> See, in particular, Robert W. Malcolmson, *Popular Recreations in English Society, 1700-1850* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973).
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- <sup>49</sup> For more detail see Emma Griffin, *England's Revelry: A History of Popular Sports and Pastimes, 1660-1800* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).
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