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The Whit Walks of Hyde: Glorious Spectacle, Religious Witness, and Celebration of a Custom

In the north of England, during the nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, Whit walks represented a public celebration of religious witness by individual Sunday schools, holding colourful processions through industrial streets. Little academic work has previously been done on this phenomenon, although there is scattered evidence available at the local level. The existence of sets of interviews with elderly people, however, has enabled a systematic analysis of their recollections to be carried out, supported by local newspaper reports over an extended period. This article highlights the changing nature of these religious celebrations, set against the social and cultural background of the period.

> School after school filed past, with its emblazoned banner, and a vanguard of dainty, white clad little maidens. The whole was one moving panorama of youth and bright colour.[1]

Introduction

The graphic description above is of a Whitsuntide walk, a regional celebration that brought brightness and enjoyment into an industrial environment often characterized by drabness and the hardships of mill and factory life. This annual church and chapel Sunday school procession was an important part of working-class community life in the north of England for the best part of the nineteenth century and well into the twentieth century. The tradition was celebrated in many towns and cities in Lancashire, Cheshire, and Yorkshire.[2] One notable facet of this custom was that the Whitsuntide walk was an occasion when religion emerged from the churches and chapels, and displayed itself on public streets as part of the processional culture of the locality.

1. *North Cheshire Herald*, 20 June 1908, 4.
2. Lancashire, for example, Barrow-in-Furness, Manchester, Liverpool, Preston, Wigan, Blackburn, Oldham. Cheshire, for example, Warrington, Bickerstaffe, Padgate. Yorkshire, for example, Bradford, Saddleworth, Sheffield, Halifax.

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This article initially examines the Whit walks in a broad cultural setting, in northern England, before looking in detail at one town as a case study, using local source material. By focusing on the threefold impact of the Whit walk, as a street spectacle, a witness of faith, and a leisure custom, we can, perhaps, begin to appreciate the influence this tradition might have as a powerful ingredient of local heritage. Such traditional observances help to preserve and enhance the identity of both the community and the individual within it, and when set within a religious framework, are influenced by and reflect those ideas and atmosphere.

Earlier work on voluntary organizations has demonstrated such interaction between community and religious institutions using data from working-class oral interviews.[3] The wide range of leisure, celebratory, and philanthropic opportunities offered by the churches and chapels to adherents and non-adherents alike was an example of the effectiveness of "diffusive Christianity" in penetrating most levels of society. Many of the celebratory annual events such as socials, festivals, and anniversaries became customary and were thus embedded in a way of life and culture. Among many of these oral interviews in the data were recollections of the custom of the annual Whit walk. Not only was this public religious celebration memorable at an individual level but also its organization was on the lines of an urban street festival. With the elements of theatre, excitement, and colour, the occasion married the heritage of religious culture with working-class leisure customs in many towns and cities in northern England. The survival of the walks over a long period illustrates the existence of a small area of religious practice that appeared able to adapt to outside cultural changes. It implies that the event was highly valued, occurring as it did on a public holiday and probably in competition with other distractions, suggesting that this custom was deeply interwoven into the fabric of local communities.[4]

This religious custom is examined below in terms of three main aspects — the underlying cultural influences, the increasing popularity of processions, and their role in public space — that are used to provide a background against which to consider the specific case of the Whit walks of Hyde and their evolution over time.

Underlying Cultural Influences

Celebrating the High Church festival of Pentecost seven weeks after Easter, and usually occurring during the end of May or the beginning of June, Whitsuntide was considered to be one of the most popular of all the calendar festivals in parts of Lancashire, as in other areas of England. By the end of the eighteenth century, though, the religious significance of the celebration was declining, one reason being the removal of the associated secular festivities from the vicinity

3. D. Entwistle, "'Hope, Colour, and Comradeship': Loyalty and Opportunism in Early Twentieth-Century Church Attendance among the Working-Class in North-West England," *Journal of Religious History* 25 (2001): 20–38.
4. Hyde Whit walks, for example, survived until the 1980s. Warrington walking day is still in existence.

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of the church. Moreover, these customary pleasures, especially drinking, sexual licence, fighting and blood sports, were increasingly seen to threaten the authority, property, morals, and sensitivities of the middle classes and religious groupings such as the Evangelicals and Nonconformists. This older popular culture, however, proved resistant to any imposed changes. In the 1980s, Golby and Purdue challenged the idea of historians such as Malcolmson that most traditional popular pastimes disappeared from urban areas by the end of the eighteenth century, and suggested that the ability of many customs to survive, adapt, and flourish in new circumstances avoided any sharp break in many cultural practices. On the contrary, many popular pastimes were characterized by continuity, and the provision of them was often marked by an acceleration of the commercial element already present in the pre-industrial culture.[5] In drawing attention to the Lancashire customs of wakes and pleasure fairs, Walton and Poole remind us of this continuity by pointing to the resilience and adaptation of such traditions found within the tightly knit communities in that area. Indeed, by the end of the eighteenth century, a rich variety of local holidays and customs was already established in the urban areas of south and east Lancashire.[6]

Common amongst these customs, and relevant to this article later, was that of "guizing," or disguising, also known as "mumming." The custom was widespread throughout Britain and Europe and was characterized by elaborate costumes, including cross-dressing, the wearing of facial disguise, hobby-horses, and begging. More than a simple release of holiday exuberance at times of seasonal change, it allowed behaviour outside the acceptable norms and was often affiliated to rebellion, disorder, and reversals in the social hierarchy.[7]

One of the main components of "guizing" appears debatable though. Bushaway sees the practice of begging as part of the economy of the labouring poor but distinguishes between casual beggars and those entitled to charity or dole as a customary rite from their own community, a nicety that has been empha-

5. J. M. Golby and A. W. Purdue, *The Civilisation of the Crowd. Popular Culture in England 1750–1900*, rev. ed. (1984; repr. Stroud: Sutton, 1999), 7, 12, 50, 65, 83, 89; R. W. Malcolmson, *Popular Recreations in English Society 1700–1850* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1973), 170–71; also H. Cunningham, *Leisure in the Industrial Revolution* (London: Croom Helm, 1980), 39–41.

6. J. K. Walton and R. Poole, "The Lancashire Wakes in the Nineteenth Century," in *Popular Culture and Custom in Nineteenth Century England*, edited by R. D. Storch (London: Croom Helm, 1982), 100–102; J. K. Walton, *Lancashire. A Social History, 1558–1939* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1987), 56, 83, 182.

7. D. Ogier, "Night Revels and Werewolfery in Calvinist Guernsey," *Folklore* 109 (1998): 55–56; N. Z. Davis, "The Reasons of Misrule. Youth Groups and Charivaris in Sixteenth Century France," *Past & Present* 50 (1971): 46–49; C. Phythian-Adams, *Local History and Folklore* (London: Bedford Square Press, 1975), 23; A. Howkins and L. Merricks, "'Wee Be Black as Hell'. Ritual, Disguise and Rebellion," *Rural History* 4, no. 1 (1993): 41–46. For these customs in Lancashire and Cheshire see, for example, A. W. Boyd, *A Country Parish. Great Budworth in the County of Chester* (London: Collins, 1951), 68–69; R. Hutton, *The Stations of the Sun. A History of the Ritual Year in Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 200–202; D. Iredale and J. Barrett, *Discovering Local History* (Bucks: Shire Publications, 2003), 13; J. Harland and T. T. Wilkinson, *Lancashire Folk Lore. Local Customs, Superstitious Beliefs and Practices* (London: Warne, 1867), 252; S. L. Corbridge, *It's An Old Lancashire Custom*, rev. ed. (1952; repr. Preston: Guardian Press, 1964), 58–62; J. Westwood and J. Simpson, *The Lore of the Land. A Guide to England's Legends* (London: Penguin, 2005), 389.

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sized in a traditional Lancashire wassailing song: "we are not daily beggars, that beg from door to door, but we are neighbours children, that you have seen before." Hutton enlarges this concept of begging to include those callers who, since the Middle Ages, offered entertainment in exchange for spare money or food.[8]

How far then can we assume that these northern Whit walks were the latest in this line of continuity of popular local custom? Certainly Bushaway noted that the English countryside walks at Whitsuntide, of an earlier period, were copied in the annual processions of some nineteenth-century industries and trades. And, more pertinently, Gunn has suggested that the Whit walks featured in many civic rituals in Lancashire from the 1850s onwards were a revival of older festive customs.[9] The urban Whit walks of northern England, however, did not originate within a rural framework, although occurring during a holiday week that perpetuated many of these traditional customs, including hospitality, fairs, races, and excessive drinking. The walks were a working-class custom newly created out of industrialization, appearing initially in Manchester, where the growth of Raikes's Sunday school movement of the 1780s had spread rapidly with the presence of many working-class children in the city. Laqueur has argued that these Sunday schools arose from the efforts of local groups of all social levels, not only from those of middle-class reformers.[10]

There appear to be two main reasons for the introduction of the walks. Firstly, the Sunday schools and middle-class reformers felt it pragmatically necessary to provide a counter-attraction to the Manchester race meetings at Kersal Green held during this week which offered secular temptations to both adults and children.[11] Secondly, Walker uses the evidence of a Church of England Sunday school anniversary committee circular to suggest the custom arose from a decision to mark denominational status. Up to 1800, the management of the Sunday schools in the area was done by a joint committee of the Church of England and Nonconformists. When this alliance broke, the Church of England committee resolved in 1801 to celebrate its independence by parading its own scholars annually through the city on Whit Monday to attend divine service.[12] It seems reasonable, therefore, given the visual impact of the spectacle, to conclude that both the Church of England and Nonconformist

8. B. Bushaway, *By Rite. Custom, Ceremony and Community in England 1700–1880* (London: Junction Books, 1982), 182–89; J. Harland, *Ballads and Songs of Lancashire, Ancient and Modern* (London: Routledge, 1875), 97; Hutton, *The Stations of the Sun*, 56–70, especially 60.

9. Bushaway, *By Rite*, 44–46; S. Gunn, *The Public Culture of the Victorian Middle-Class. Ritual and Authority and the English Industrial City 1840–1914* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), 168.

10. T. W. Laqueur, *Religion and Respectability. Sunday Schools and Working-Class Culture 1780–1850* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1976), 42, 99; S. J. Fielding, "The Catholic Whit-Walk in Manchester and Salford 1890–1939," *Manchester Regional History Review* 1 (1987): 3–4; Walton and Poole, "The Lancashire Wakes in the Nineteenth Century," 100.

11. Laqueur, *Religion and Respectability*, 236. Also, Warrington walking day started in 1832 to bring Sunday schools into parish church for sermons but later was perhaps used to counter the Newton races, see National Fairground Archive website, "Going Walking. Warrington Walking Day and its Fair," The University of Sheffield, accessed 7 January 2012, http://www.nfa.dept.shef.ac.uk/history/charter/warr.html.

12. B. M. Walker, "The Whit Walk as a Holiday from the 'Manufactory'," *Manchester Guardian*, 8 June 1957.

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institutions of the neighbouring towns subsequently saw such a public demonstration of faith and solidarity as an imaginative way to advertise their schools, as well as providing sober alternatives to traditional Whit pastimes. The inclusion of Catholic schools in the Manchester Whit walks did not happen until 1844, by which time the occasion was an integral part of the area's leisure calendar. Further Catholic participation, fuelled by the mass immigration during these Irish famine years, later added a national dimension to religious rivalry. In an analysis of the Catholic walks in the city, Fielding brings into focus the sectarian nature of such Whit processions and this will be explored subsequently in relation to Hyde.[13]

This new urban custom of holding Sunday school walks at Whit week took root, with each town setting its own pattern of celebrations, although with common trends. From their church or chapel, scholars processed, in Sunday "best" or, for girls, special white dresses, two or more abreast in the roadway, along fixed routes including the main thoroughfares, carrying banners and singing hymns, accompanied by clergy, teachers, and some form of musical escort. At a central place there was a gathering for a religious service before returning to their schools to enjoy a "treat." A collection of parents, relatives, well-wishers and onlookers provided an often-crowded pavement audience. The age range of the participants, in some places, became wider and included church officials, adult associations connected with the church and "old" scholars. Whit Monday or Whit Friday were the usual choices for the day of the walk, but importantly, as this was a sectarian occasion, the different denominations in each town wished to parade separately, not together, and not necessarily at the same time of day. Some institutions did not want to participate at all, and for some outlying schools the distance from the centre was too far.[14]

The Increasing Popularity of Processions

As we saw earlier, this occasion was an opportunity for religion to leave its own domain and participate in the everyday leisure activity of public street parades within the local community. The urban Whit walks, of whatever denomination, should therefore be viewed in context as part of a revitalized traditional processional culture that emerged in the late-Victorian and early-Edwardian period. Public street processions ranged widely from the highly organized royal

13. In the1851 religious census, almost one sixth of Lancashire's worshippers were Catholics; of these, Preston and Liverpool each had a third; Wigan and Manchester each a quarter, see Walton, *Lancashire*, 184; Fielding, "The Catholic Whit-Walk in Manchester and Salford," 3–10.

14. For descriptions of Whit walks see, Fielding, "The Catholic Whit-Walk in Manchester and Salford," 3–10; A. Davies, *Leisure, Gender and Poverty. Working-Class Culture in Salford and Manchester 1900–1939* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1992), 124–26; V. Toulmin, *Electric Edwardians. The Films of Mitchell and Kenyon* (London: British Film Institute, 2007), 167–69; A. Prescott, "'We Had Fine Banners'. Street Processions in the Mitchell and Kenyon Films," in *The Lost World of Mitchell and Kenyon. Edwardian Britain on Film*, edited by V. Toulmin (London: British Film Institute, 2004), 130–32; A. Croll, *Civilising the Urban. Popular Culture and Public Space in Merthyr c. 1870–1914* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2000), 202–7; for a contemporary account see W. H. Mills, *Grey Pastures*, 2nd ed. (1924; 2nd ed. London: Chapels Society, 2003), 15–20. Examples of walking days. Whit Sunday: Manchester Italian Catholics, Merthyr Nonconformists. Whit Monday: Manchester Protestants, Preston Anglicans, and Catholics. Whit Friday: Manchester Catholics, Hyde all denominations, Ashton-under-Lyne all denominations.

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visits, military parades, and civic occasions to more loosely structured groups of voluntary organizations, societies, and clubs, such as local friendly societies, temperance groups, trade unions, churches, and Sunday schools. Processions not only represented the visible symbols of religious, political, and community identities, but were also an integral part of the common culture of working-class streets, the sites of most social interaction. Davies emphasizes the importance of free and informal street activities within this culture, in the lives of those whose poverty restricted access to commercial leisure. Processions and parades provided the spectacular elements of street entertainment within a spectrum that encompassed, at the humblest level, "sitting on doorsteps" watching the world pass by.[15] This working-class street culture has been illuminated dramatically with the recent discovery and documentation of filmic record of English everyday local life in the early 1900s. The Mitchell and Kenyon collection shows the working classes, in towns and cities, both at work and leisure, including participation in civic and religious processions.[16] Prescott emphasizes the impact of these cinematic scenes that portray the "energy, vibrancy, jostling and rough physicality" of working-class streets and inhabitants not available in written and photographic evidence.[17]

The Role of Processions in Public Space

Prior to the mid-nineteenth century, the well-to-do in society associated public processions with rowdiness, protest, and criminal street behaviour, often within a slum environment, and Prescott points to inevitable anxieties in middle-class attempts to change these older street festivals into occasions for civilized rational recreation. Crucially, the issue was about the social space of urban areas, how it was to be used, and by whom. Several historians have focused on the importance of this question to explain the move towards more orderly and organized street celebrations. Gunn, for example, analyses middle-class strategies of identifying social types by appearance, dress, and behaviour, and similarly of identifying safe or dangerous streets and districts by reliance on press and police reports. Croll widens the view of this class-based analysis, but emphasizes the notion of streets being neutral spaces of freedom, open to all members of the public. Additionally, he highlights the powerful influence of publicity and shame, not only through official surveillance and the press, but by the general observation of others, which surely persists in the warning "what would the neighbours think?"[18]

In the second half of the nineteenth century, middle-class tensions concerning processions diminished. The self-disciplined collective behaviour of the working classes in public spaces was perceived as being more civilized and the

15. Davies, *Leisure, Gender and Poverty*, 109–41.
16. Toulmin, *Electric Edwardians*, 165.
17. Prescott, "'We Had Fine Banners'," 125; also Gunn, *The Public Culture of the Victorian Middle-Class*, 164–68, 172; Croll, *Civilising the Urban*, 3, 205.
18. Prescott, "'We Had Fine Banners'," 129–30; Gunn, *The Public Culture of the Victorian Middle-Class*, 175, 60–66, 72–75; Croll, *Civilising the Urban*, 5–9, 63–68, 102. Also Golby and Purdue, *The Civilisation of the Crowd*, 101; Toulmin, *Electric Edwardians*, 154; Cunningham, *Leisure in the Industrial Revolution*, 76–80.

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middle classes enthusiastically promoted processional activity as a respectable form of orderly leisure. The urban environment, too, had improved, with social and municipal reforms supplying new symbols for local community and civic pride. Urban processions now had a wider role than the traditional provision of street theatre. Gunn suggests several other facets that appear to have relevance for the Whit walks.[19] Firstly, processions affirmed the right of the participating social groups to walk freely in public spaces, thus ensuring their recognition within the local community. This was a significant opportunity for women, and the minority groups of Nonconformists, Catholics, and the Irish, who consequently were able legitimately to occupy the public areas of their town. Secondly, a message about social hierarchy was conveyed by the relationship of the procession to its surrounding space. Prescott ranks the Manchester Catholic Whit walk as occupying an intermediate position in this hierarchy, with its highly structured organization, closed-off streets, and spectators kept at a distance — all indicators of a respectable, and respectful, occasion.[20] Thirdly, processions symbolically embodied the ideas of power and leadership. Gunn has explored this facet in the context of civic occasions, where the visible side of authority, in both individual and institutional form, is shown to onlookers in a public space. If the roles of ministers of religion and Sunday school officials, processing according to their degree of importance, are substituted for those of municipal leaders, the parallels become apparent.[21]

The Whit Walks of Hyde

The recording and preservation of relevant material about the Whit walks at the local level has been widely undertaken; public libraries and local history groups in many individual towns hold ephemera and produce articles, and personal memories are often posted on websites. But the custom is largely unexplored academically and deserves more attention given its almost ubiquitous presence on these working-class streets.[22]

Recent advances in the academic field of religious enquiry, particularly by Brown and Williams, have looked at innovative strategies of assessing the ordinary individual's interpretation of religious practices to give a wider appreciation of religious feeling and consciousness, and of the interplay between the social, cultural, and psychological aspects of people's lives.[23] Some of these fresh methodological approaches, however, have been criticized. Nash, for instance, points to the limitations of using any single avenue to discover

19. Gunn, *The Public Culture of the Victorian Middle-Class*, 166–82.
20. Prescott, "'We Had Fine Banners'," 6, 129–30.
21. Also Toulmin, *Electric Edwardians*, 154–55, 169; Croll, *Civilising the Urban*, 204; Golby and Purdue, *The Civilisation of the Crowd*, 101, 186.
22. For example, Fielding, "The Catholic Whit-Walk in Manchester and Salford," 3–10; D. Forrest, *Warrington Walking Day. A Brief History* (privately printed, 2003); National Fairground Archive website, "Warrington Walking Day," The University of Sheffield, accessed 29 December 2011, http://www.nfa.Department.shef.ac.uk/history/charter/warr.html. Press cuttings held at Bradford West Yorkshire Public Library and Liverpool Local Studies Central Library.
23. C. Brown, *The Death of Christian Britain. Understanding Secularisation, 1800–2000* (London: Routledge, 2001); S. Williams, *Religious Belief and Popular Culture in Southwark, 1880–1939* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

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meanings in religious narratives. He recommends reintegrating the role of religious history into its wider social and cultural context of everyday living and emphasizes empirical investigation into the narrative structures of "religious episodes" to discover the messages that people believe in and the values they profess, and to provide individual experiences of telling the story of "how it was."[24]

Consequently, in an attempt to focus more systematically on the individual experiences of Whit walks, occurring as they did during the formative years of childhood and adolescence, we have chosen to examine this one "religious episode" in the form of a single case study, looking at the custom up to the beginning of the 1930s in the northern town of Hyde, backed up by additional data from Preston. A group of elderly residents in Hyde has provided an archive of recollections of growing up within this community, in the first quarter or so of the twentieth century, which helps to explain the persistence of the walks as a "red-letter day" for the town, and provide the basis of the analysis that follows.

Hyde is situated in north-east Cheshire on the border with south-east Lancashire and within a few miles of Manchester. Until the end of the eighteenth century, Hyde was an agricultural area of a few scattered farms and cottages, but thereafter, along with its neighbours, it rapidly became part of the industrializing Lancashire cotton and engineering scene. Several contributory factors help to explain this phenomenon besides the geographical position and climate of south-east Lancashire, including an established, though limited, textile industry, and a growing population. Initially, the labour market for these eighteenth-century developing industrial towns was mostly supplied by short-distance migration, and, as Joyce points out, many of the newcomers from the surrounding villages and countryside would have been no strangers to an industrial environment.[25] The only other significant, but later, incomers — conspicuous by their culture, accent, religion, and poverty — were the Irish immigrants who settled predominantly in Liverpool, Manchester, Preston, and Wigan, and to a lesser extent in some of the cotton towns lying further east. Otherwise, Lancashire's workforce relied mainly on natural increase, the county having one of the highest birth rates and youngest populations in England. As Walton indicates, the resulting local and familial roots helped to consolidate local customs, practices, and kinship ties.[26] Additional to opportu-

24. D. Nash, "Reconnecting Religion with Social and Cultural History: Secularisation's Failure as a Master Narrative," *Cultural and Social History* 1 (2004): 318–20, 323.
25. P. Joyce, *Work, Society and Politics. The Culture of the Factory in Later Victorian England* (London: Methuen, 1982), 105; Walton, *Lancashire*, 20, 123–24. From 1801 to 1851 the population of south-east Lancashire and north-east Cheshire trebled. Manchester's population quadrupled to over 300,000. By 1851 the population of Lancashire was over two million. T. Middleton, *Hyde as an Industrial Centre and Place of Residence* (London and Cheltenham: Burrow, 1918), 7; Hyde's industries were based on cotton, hat-making, engineering, rubber, paper and leather; T. Middleton, *History of Hyde and its Neighbourhood* (Hyde: Higham Press, 1932), 59–66, 349, 369; S. G. Jones, "Recreational and Cultural Provision in Hyde Between the Wars," in *Looking Back at Hyde*, edited by A. Lock (Ashton-under-Lyne: Tameside Metropolitan Borough, 1986), 131. The population of Hyde in 1921 was approximately 33,500, with 8,000 working in cotton mills.
26. The Irish-born population of Lancashire doubled between 1841 and 1851 to 191,000 or ten per cent of the county's inhabitants, accounting for seventeen per cent of Manchester and district,

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nities for employment, the new workforce in Hyde required religious provision. At the end of the eighteenth century there was one Dissenting chapel with the nearby townships catering for Anglican followers, but from 1814 onwards around thirty churches and chapels of many denominations, including a few missions, were gradually established in the town. Consequently, a variety of denominations and persuasions could take part in the town's annual Whit walks. In the event, Anglicans, Nonconformists, and Roman Catholics chose Whit Friday morning to walk along set routes from their respective churches and chapels, in separate processions to the town hall, the principal civic building in the central market square, by way of local streets and main thoroughfares.[27]

In 1925, several religious leaders in Hyde were asked whether their walks conferred any religious benefit on the schools, or were regarded simply as show. The Church of England vicar thought the processions should be all on one route as "it would be a much finer sight," and the spectators "could take their stand in one place instead of having to rush from one corner to another." The Primitive Methodist minister said, "I'm afraid the danger is that most people regard them as a spectacular display and think no more about it from one Whitsuntide to the next." The Congregationalist minister's opinion was that "they are a kind of rallying point for local custom." The town clerk, also a Congregationalist, saw the real value of the walk in its religious significance, "the meeting of many schools together shows the unity and solidarity of the Sunday school movement."[28] While mindful of Croll's point that any symbolic performance offers different messages to, and also demands different responses from, both participants and spectators, we have chosen the above denominational comments to frame an analysis in which three "messages" about the tradition can be examined. We recognize, however, that inevitably there will be other meanings besides these three aspects of spectacle, religious witness, and custom.[29] These three comments though, cannot indicate how the tradition was embedded in the consciousness of the community. A better gauge of this comes from those townsfolk who took part. Their individual memories and experiences give important additional perspectives to understanding the culture of the walks and bring into sharper focus the ways in which such religious events were incorporated into ordinary lives. Even with the qualification that memories can be both selective and filtered, oral sources still offer a valid component to historiography, with authentic voices of the community giving insight into the interplay between institutions and the people.

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seven per cent of Ashton-under-Lyne, ten per cent of Stockport, see Walton, *Lancashire*, 252–53, 83; F. Neal, *Sectarian Violence. The Liverpool Experience 1819–1914* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988), 8. Of the percentage of Irish-born residents in the seven north of England counties in 1851, sixty-four per cent were in Lancashire, twelve per cent the West Riding of Yorkshire, eight per cent in Cheshire, but negligible in the remaining four counties.

27. Churches and chapels in the annual Hyde Whit walks of 1885 were seven Anglican Church of England; fifteen Nonconformist; one Catholic, see *North Cheshire Herald*, 26 May 1885, 6. See Jones, "Recreational and Cultural Provision," 137, in 1921, Hyde had thirty places of worship, and twenty-five by the end of the 1930s.

28. *North Cheshire Herald*, 4 June 1925, 5.

29. Croll, *Civilising the Urban*, 206–8.

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In a project organized through Age Concern, seventy Hydeonians, aged from sixty to ninety-six years, were interviewed in their own homes or in local care homes between 1988 and 1990 by a team of local volunteers, many of them pensioners themselves.[30] They were asked about their childhood and early working days in the town during the first thirty years of the twentieth century. Out of this sample, twenty-eight women and nine men, mainly working class and born between 1889 and 1925, specifically mentioned the Whit walks (see Appendix I).

The old market town of Preston is situated northwest of Manchester's conurbation, and in the early twentieth century was dominated by cotton mills and numerous religious institutions. The town's annual Whit walks were held on Whit Monday, with members of the Protestant Orange Order walking first, followed later in the morning by the Catholics, and the Anglican schools in the afternoon; Nonconformists did not take part. Contemporary memories in respect to the spectacle, religious witness, and custom of the Whit walks in this town were used to add to the experiences in Hyde. Twenty-six women and thirteen men, mainly working class, and born between 1884 and 1927, described taking part in such occasions. They were part of a larger sample interviewed by Elizabeth Roberts for the North-West Oral History Project, designed to shed light on everyday life in Preston, Barrow-in-Furness, and Lancaster in the years 1890 to 1930 (see Appendix I).[31]

Both the Hyde and the Preston interviews focused on the socio-economic circumstances of the respondents but the interviewing techniques in each were different. In Hyde there was no interview schedule and sometimes only written reminiscences. A lack of structure meant that respondents could channel topics into areas of their own interest, thus interviewers were not able to follow specific lines more thoroughly. Roberts, in the North-West Oral History Project, however, used a set schedule of 370 questions, but the closed nature of these caused certain limitations by not offering prompts to explore wider issues. Questions about religion were only a small component of this schedule, and information on Whit walks arose within this by chance. But, whereas the Preston sample had information on current denominational allegiance, there was no indication of this in the Hyde sample. In spite of these restrictions, respondents in both samples often spontaneously offered personal recollections, thus strengthening the data in richness and depth.

To complement these oral data, another source was the local weekly newspaper which, as Croll points out, was the standard vehicle for broad coverage of the Sunday schools' Whitsun activities in the late-Victorian period and, additionally, emphasized their symbolic "messages."[32] The *North Cheshire*

30. Living Memories of Hyde Project 1990; transcripts of interviews held at Tameside Local Studies and Archives Centre, Central Library, Ashton-under-Lyne, Greater Manchester.
31. E. M. Roberts, *A Woman's Place. An Oral History of Working-Class Women 1890–1940* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1984). Transcripts of interviews held at the Centre for North-West Regional Studies, University of Lancaster, showed early twentieth-century Preston had seventeen Church of England; eighteen Nonconformist; and six Catholic institutions, identified by Entwistle, "'Hope, Colour, and Comradeship'," 23–24.
32. Croll, *Civilising the Urban*, 208.

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Herald reported the Whit walks of Hyde and district, giving annual descriptions of the processions, the numerical strengths of pupils and teachers involved, and editorial comment. The paper not only represented the social and cultural environment of the town but also reported all events related to church and chapel life, expressing religious views from the broad platform of editorial and column writers, the local ministry, and readers' correspondence. Caution is needed, however, when handling press reports, as the commentary can be unreliable, changes in editorial policy shifts emphasis, and presentation of annual occasions become a stale conventionality, divorced from live events. The main advantage, though, is that they support basic continuity. The *North Cheshire Herald* was sampled two to three years in each decade from 1851 to 1900; prior to 1857 there was little or no mention of the walks. From 1900 to 1930, each year was examined as church and Sunday school affairs gradually featured less prominently than previously, while from 1914 onwards, many aspects of society affected by the First World War were reflected in the local press.[33] We draw, therefore, on two perspectives — that of the interviewees who experienced the walks at one particular period in their personal history, and the chronological view from the press that monitored trends during the period examined here. The breadth of information from these first-hand experiences and reportage gives many insights into this little researched area of religious celebration. All of these sources were then used to consider what the walks signified within the framework of spectacle, religious witness, and custom.

Glorious Spectacle

Who took part in the Whit walks? As noted above, all those who were connected to a religious congregation walked, from the very young to veterans, and for some families walking at Whit became an intergenerational tradition. In Hyde, estimates of an expected eight to ten thousand scholars, teachers, officials, and congregation overall were frequently published, with the higher total usually confirmed after the event. The release of these figures immediately prior to the walk probably was an incentive to the schools and raised the expectations of the prospective spectators.[34] Mr G1Preston (hereafter cited as P) explained, "the Sunday schools in Preston were big when they walked, it were a boast of who could walk the strongest with the most clients. Now I belonged to the young men's bible class at St Matthew's. They didn't all attend but when they walked there would be near enough 200 in it." Hyde schools probably were no different. Usually, the *North Cheshire Herald* published the total number of pupils and teachers of twenty-three schools annually, excepting the Catholics on most occasions, and of those, twelve schools giving the most consistent information were sampled for the same year, twice a decade between 1880 and 1923. There was little variation in the annual totals for either boys or

33. *North Cheshire Herald* established 1854, and held at Tameside Local Studies and Archives Centre, Central Library, Ashton-under-Lyne, Greater Manchester; Walton and Poole, "The Lancashire Wakes in the Nineteenth Century," 104–5, on the use of press sources.
34. Estimates of "thousands" were not unusual, see Toulmin, *Electric Edwardians*, 168; also Prescott, "'We Had Fine Banners'," 130–31.

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girls over this period except for the 1920s when numbers did decline from various causes, including the First World War. The percentage of boys remained between forty-four per cent and forty-eight per cent of the overall total during the years sampled. It is unclear, however, whether these figures were attendance or membership statistics, although by 1922 the system was clarified, and they were restricted to active attenders only.[35] The occasion did offer opportunistic rewards that might disguise any true allegiance, as admitted by Mr 020Hyde (hereafter cited as H), "when the Whit walks was on I used to go for me bun and milk. That's the only time I went. All the kids in the street used to fall in at Cavendish Street. We'd wait till they walked all round and then drop in, all of the team was in it, you know."[36]

The spectators came not only from Hyde but also from neighbouring districts and even further afield, using the occasion as an opportunity to visit friends and relatives or renew links with their former churches, and in 1928 approximately 12,000 people had lined the routes of the procession in Hyde.[37] In Preston, according to Mrs 143H, chairs, forms and window spaces above shops were organized, on a commercial basis, for spectators along the route. And Mr F1P recalled that, "I've seen me down on Church Street, well, we used to book seats a month beforehand for Mum and Dad and the family. I've been down there at six o'clock waiting for my Dad to claim them because we had paid for them, a front row seat. We had to be down Winkley Square by very early on, bitterly cold sometimes on a Whit Monday morning."

What were the elements of this impressive spectacle that annually drew so many people? The initial impact on the crowds was auditory, as brass bands formed the vanguard of the majority of Sunday school processions, conveying the religious message of the occasion, as well as keeping the walkers together, accompanying the hymn singing with glittering instruments and lifting flagging spirits. The origins of these bands reflected not only roots in the early chapels and Sunday schools but also the many facets of contemporary working-class life.[38] In Hyde, some form of musical accompaniment to the processions was noted in the press from 1856 onwards, either church string or reed orchestras, or as their popularity spread, brass bands and, although expensive, the latter were increasingly hired, with most of them coming from outside the area, the town having only three or four in the locality. Oral data and the *North Cheshire Herald* both give the impression that to afford a hired brass band was the epitome of success; when Flowery Field School in Hyde was congratulated in choosing "common sense" above "sentiment" in foregoing the "tremendous expense" of engaging a band, the school emphatically replied that

35. Hyde Sunday school population 1880–1913 was some 4,700 based on twelve schools' annual returns, sampled every five years in *North Cheshire Herald*; *North Cheshire Herald*, 26 May 1922, 6, for percentage of boys.
36. For opportunism, see Entwistle, "'Hope, Colour, and Comradeship'," 32–35; also Mr 096H, Mrs 105H.
37. *North Cheshire Herald*, 3 June 1928, 4; also 7 June 1906, 4; 3 June 1909, 4; 12 June 1909, 4.
38. For bands see Prescott, "'We Had Fine Banners'," 127; Corbridge, *It's An Old Lancashire Custom*, 68–69; Golby and Purdue, *The Civilisation of the Crowd*, 135, 106–7; J. Walvin, *Leisure and Society 1830–1950* (London: Longman, 1978), 97, 103–6.

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it was "not walking without the band," and subsequently did not contribute a procession that year. Face had been maintained.[39] Tellingly, Mrs G4P made the general observation, "it's nothing without a band, is it?" From the returns in the *North Cheshire Herald* it appeared many schools hired the same bands annually, which strengthened feelings of community and continuity, clearly expressed by Mrs 005H, "we picked us own, like I said, it was Lindley Band every year. They came up from Yorkshire to Mossley station and then come up Stamford Road playing 'Hail Shining Morn,' you see. Then they'd come to the school for their breakfast and they always had, we used to call it salad tin, and it were like mustard and cress and all that, you see, mixed up together. Oh, they knew us, as we knew them, in a sense."

Behind each band came a colourful array of banners with religious motifs, often a biblical scene, and the names of their respective churches, all proclamations of allegiance and identity, and an advertisement of spiritual faith. Painted and gilded on silk, their appearance was gaudy and theatrical, with this heritage of popular fairground art relying on the nineteenth-century common decorative imagery of heraldic devices, scrollwork, and ribbons to convey strong visual messages, as well as giving a "rich touch of pageantry" to drab industrial streets.[40] Mansfield suggests that the parading of Sunday school banners at Whit week was a late nineteenth-century development; however the earliest available report of the use of such banners in Hyde was in 1856. Banners, both Anglican and Nonconformist, were not generally noted in the *North Cheshire Herald* except if "new" or "newly painted," therefore, it is assumed their use was taken for granted.[41] Like bands, they were potentially expensive items, but essential to preserve status, and consequently many were homemade or produced cheaply locally, often copying designs by the main manufacturers. The latter produced the most impressive banners, heavy to manoeuvre and needing relays of strong men to carry the supporting poles in sockets around their necks, probably at agonizing cost. Ten respondents, both in Hyde and Preston, recalled walking under the banner or helping to steer it, while Mr B10P remembered, "banners held aloft, girls and boys helping to steer them with long ropes, the banner carriers struggled along dodging tram wires and trying to keep them steady come wind come weather."

The main visual attraction was the costume of the processionalists that, with the uniform of the bandsmen, was an explosion of brightness and colour, in vivid contrast to the daily utilitarian garb. Most of the female respondents' memories centred on white dresses, straw hats, veils, wreaths, baskets of

39. *North Cheshire Herald* annual Whit returns 1854–1930 listed hired bands: military, railway, police, factory, industrial, chapel and church, town bands from outer districts; *North Cheshire Herald*, 7 June 1900, 6, for Flowery Field School.

40. A. J. Lewery, *Signwritten Art* (Newton Abbot: David and Charles, 1989), 87–89, 112; also see A. J. Lewery, *Popular Art. Past and Present* (Newton Abbot: David and Charles, 1991), 25, 50; D. Weinbron, "The Good Samaritan. Friendly Societies and the Gift Economy," *Social History* 31, no. 3 (2006): 333–34.

41. N. Mansfield, *Radical Rhymes and Union Jacks. A Search for Evidence in the Symbolism of Nineteenth Century Banners* (Manchester: Department of History, University of Manchester, 2000), 24, also 10, 18, 26, 29, 31; *North Cheshire Herald*, 31 May 1856, 4. For example of banners in walks see *North Cheshire Herald*, 9 June 1860, 5; 26 May 1885, 6.

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flowers, and insubstantial footwear. Although press reportage focused mainly on these aspects, this was not a gender specific occasion as boys were well represented, even though their appearance was rarely commented on other than being smart, neat, and clean. The *North Cheshire Herald* recorded the event pictorially, sometimes with advertisements for the sale of postcards showing views of the processions and, more recently, photographic records of the walks have been reproduced in local books; nonetheless, the absence of colour cannot convey the full visual impression.[42]

Evidence from local photographs and from the Mitchell and Kenyon film archive should not seduce us, however, into accepting that this was the "full frame." Toulmin suggests that the Mitchell and Kenyon collection "demonstrates how parades and processions were manifestations of local and community pride,"[43] but such visual records surely would show only the most attractive features. For example, the pièce de résistance of most Sunday school processions was the banner party that, also being adjacent to the band, was the focus of attention and admiration. In reality, though, the overall quality of any such spectacle was not guaranteed. In neighbouring Ashton-under-Lyne, the "eminence and beauty" grouped under the banner was followed by a mediocre procession that produced little admiration or enthusiasm from the dwindling crowd.[44] The impression is that a banner party was an exclusive and privileged contingent and, from Mrs H4P's painful recollection, selected for its visual perfection. Although crippled, "I used to like to walk but my mother must have felt so sorry for me. One year I had gone to this here get together where they picked them for the banners. Somebody had picked me and I went home thrilled to bits. Mum said, 'You'll have the best frock there is, I'll see to that.' It was a beautiful frock. Then, they come at the last minute and said that there was somebody that had attended longer than me and they put me in my place. But I knew what it was for, I didn't need telling, well, I ask you, look me over, I'm more or less deformed." Moreover, contrary to the impression given in Toulmin's account that processions reflected local pride, the contrasting description below of Hyde's Salvation Army's procession underlines the existence of a dimension quite different to the flamboyance portrayed in the filmic and photographic records. In bringing to the fore its less fortunate members, the community could not but be aware that the Army's "children were the most poorly clad. One little girl was without stockings, others looked as if extraordinary efforts had been made to cover them with clothing anything like good enough to pass the keen gaze of the critical crowds of onlookers."[45]

42. For appearance see *North Cheshire Herald*, 19 June 1897, 6; 15 June 1905, 6; 13 May 1913, 4. For press photographs see *North Cheshire Herald*, 27 May 1920, 6; 16 June 1922, 7; 1 June 1923, 7. Also Fielding, "The Catholic Whit-Walk in Manchester and Salford," 5–6, for appearance. B. Sole, *Hyde. The Archive Photographs Series* (Stroud: Chalford, 1995), 84–88; B. Sole, *Hyde. The Second Selection* (Stroud: Chalford, 1998), 75–81; P. Taylor, *Hyde. The Third Selection* (Stroud: Tempus, 2002), 28; W. Cullen *et al*., *Living Memories of Hyde* (Ashton-under-Lyne: Living Memories of Hyde Project, 1990), 123.
43. Toulmin, *Electric Edwardians*, 155.
44. Mills, *Grey Pastures*,18.
45. *North Cheshire Herald*, 1 June 1907, 5, for Salvation Army.

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Significantly Whitsuntide was the time of year when parents traditionally were expected to buy their children new clothes, and importantly, the annual walks provided an additional, and notable, occasion to parade them. The expenditure, not only of money but time and effort, made the walks more than an ordinary children's event. New clothes advertised a standard of respectability and involved both family and individual pride, demonstrating parental ability to provide and, although such an achievement was difficult for ordinary folk, it ensured continued acceptance in daily working-class life. Whit Friday in Hyde was thus a public opportunity to evaluate oneself and neighbours on a socio-economic scale.[46] The *North Cheshire Herald* acknowledged the importance of this public parade of best wear, in "the unspeakable delight of tripping along an avenue of admiring sightseers." This provision of new garments created great difficulties for poorer families, but the spread of credit facilities during the late nineteenth century eased the situation, if used with caution, but only Mr 096H mentioned this probably usual strategy.[47] For some, however, this fine apparel was only temporary: the clothing of two Hyde respondents was soon pawned while other interviewees may not have wished to reveal, what again, was probably a common occurrence. Eleven respondents in Hyde remembered Whitsuntide as the time of year they had new garments, which for Mrs 078H and Mr 096H were specifically limited to a "dress to walk in," and "a pair of trousers or a jersey." Mrs 034H observed that, "there was a lot of people that would never have had any new clothes if it hadn't been for Whitsuntide. You see, everybody liked to see their children well turned out for Whit Friday," but not everyone was so fortunate. Although no respondents in either Hyde or Preston referred to this, some children had to stay cooped up indoors out of sight on the day of the walk, rather than appear on the streets in evidently old clothes: "and if you couldn't come out in new clothes, you didn't come out at all."[48]

As we have seen, there was competition amongst the various Sunday schools to put on a creditable performance for the local community, where the consequent standing of each institution depended upon its overall turnout and appearance. This understandable rivalry between denominations could also extend to intra-denominational contest. Mr S4P belonged to St Ignatius Catholic church in Preston which, "was determined that their procession next Whitsuntide would be the most brilliant of them all. So my father and his cronies used to be secretly plotting in our parlour, new imaginative tableaux that would do the English Martyrs in the eye." Invariably the Catholics turned out in full

46. C. Bundy and D. Healy, "Aspects of Urban Poverty," *Oral History* 6, no. 1 (1978): 90–93; Golby and Purdue, *The Civilisation of the Crowd*, 178, also 109. Seven Preston interviewees said their Anglican churches helped parents provide clothes for the walk but required conformity in style, material and colour.
47. *North Cheshire Herald*, 20 June 1908, 6, for quote; Davies, *Leisure, Gender and Poverty*, 124–6; Prescott, "'We Had Fine Banners'," 131; Golby and Purdue, *The Civilisation of the Crowd*, 141; Bundy and Healy, "Aspects of Urban Poverty," 90; Ms 083H and Mr 020H for clothing pawned.
48. Quotation Fielding, "The Catholic Whit-Walk in Manchester and Salford," 6. See also Mills, *Grey Pastures*, 16; R. Roberts, *The Classic Slum* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1971), 38–39.

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force and mounted the best show, with uniformity of costume and appearance, and seen as producing the most eye-catching procession in Preston, "better dressed, better organized, more spectacular"(Mr B7P). In Hyde, all the schools had a "very nice" turnout but "it has never been the custom for any of them to make a display comparable to that of St Paul's Roman Catholic Church," whose colourful costumes and flowers were "worthwhile going a long way to see." The press also noted that the town's only Catholic church was a "deep lover of processions" and, presumably religious, "ceremonies."[49]

Religious Witness

Were the interviewees actually aware of the biblical significance of this occasion? Hyde respondents did not refer to this association, or to the event being a procession of witness, but the connection between the Whitsun walks and witness of faith can be seen through twelve accounts covering "worshipping," "prayers," and "hymn singing" (or simply "singing") during the processions. In Preston also, respondents generally did not mention this connection, but prompted by her interviewer, Mrs W4P knew it was a procession of witness. Catholic interviewees Mr S4P and Mr B9P, though, were specific about the purpose of the walk: "I think everybody was quite clear why it was done. The Catholic Church was only really emerging from the days of persecution and it was a demonstration of faith and so on. This is the impression I have gained from other people," but also, "the walk itself rather than the reason for it, was what was in most people's minds, and the dressing up for the occasion." Nevertheless, this was an important sectarian occasion for all the denominations, which a contemporary observer recalled as a day of "intense consciousness, both of self and schism."[50]

The preservation of sectarian identity was not only apparent in the different nature of each procession, as we have already seen, but also in the individual routes taken. For a town with many schools that walked at the same time of day, it was inevitable that routes, determined by custom, locality, and sometimes parish boundaries, would have to share common streets and main thoroughfares. In Ashton-under-Lyne, these separate processions "crossed one another at right angles and obtuse angles like caterpillars on a cabbage leaf."[51] To consolidate this sectarian aspect of the processions, there was often a civic destination for the separate sects where a short religious service was held. In Hyde, where all the sects and denominations walked at the same time of day, the Protestant schools assembled at the town hall, while the Catholics marched past it earlier.[52]

Sectarian differences were also apparent in the visual presentation of the processions. The Protestant Sunday schools, in the majority, and particularly

49. Quotes *North Cheshire Herald*, 16 June 1922, 7; 8 June 1912, 6; 15 June 1912, 6.
50. Mills, *Grey Pastures*,16.
51. Mills, *Grey Pastures*, 16.
52. Davies, *Leisure, Gender and Poverty*, 124. Manchester and Salford Protestant and Catholic walks had the same main civic destination, Albert Square; "Going Walking," in Warrington until 1920, only the Church of England processions met in the local park and marched past the town hall.

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the Anglicans, could afford to be easy-going on an occasion that, for them, as Fielding notes, was simply a scholars' parade. On the other hand, Catholic processions tended to include large numbers of adults, visibly adding weight to the importance of the faith and its members, as the Mitchell and Kenyon films demonstrate. In Hyde, St Paul's Catholic church regularly boosted its total of participants with "men and ladies of the congregation."[53]

The carrying of an open bible in some of the Anglican processions in Hyde, seems to have been the principal symbol of their religious witness, apart from their banners.[54] In contrast, St Paul's conveyed the strong visual message that this was a respectable parade, through good clothing and behaviour, and a serious religious ceremony, with impressive symbols, statues and banners, and religious tableaux, that sometimes contained Irish national motifs. Overall, then, the solemn demeanour of St Paul's procession "aroused both deep interest and not a little respectful admiration among the crowds."[55] The strict discipline and formality of a Catholic walk, however, could be physically taxing for younger children. Mr B9P had a medical examination to see that he was fit to walk but implied there were future benefits, "I think my parents found it difficult to pay for the clothes but were glad to do so as they thought it worthwhile, not only in this life but the next. They would have been ashamed not to have been there with their children looking nice." The Catholics in Preston and Hyde were thus able to define their social status publicly in a community that might suspect their respectability, religion, and ethnic background.

Significantly, these visible differences were the more benign features covering deeper problems, as spectators could not have been unaware of the sectarian facets of the walks. In Lancashire, the fiercest hostility among the working classes towards the Irish Catholic incomers occurred during the 1850s and 1860s, especially in the major centres of immigration, Liverpool, Manchester, and Salford, although less antagonism was found in the latter two. By the late nineteenth century, the Irish were part of the multi-faceted local working-class culture, and any latent religious tensions were more liable to surface during public events, such as the Whit walks. Nevertheless, differences were exacerbated by the anti-Catholic and anti-Irish antipathies of the Protestant Orange Order that provided a focus for working-class economic discontent. And although Orangeism was less virulent in Manchester than Liverpool, Neal points out that, of the thirty-five Orange lodges formed in 1815 in the north of England, twenty-five were to be found in and around Manchester, all

53. Fielding, "The Catholic Whit-Walk in Manchester and Salford," 4; Prescott, "'We Had Fine Banners'," 129, for Mitchell and Kenyon films; *North Cheshire Herald*, 8 June 1911, 6; 15 June 1912, 6; 24 May 1923, 8; 4 June 1925, 8; 9 June 1927, 8, for Catholic participation.
54. *North Cheshire Herald*, 17 June 1911, 4; 27 May 1921, 5, for open bible. See also P. Cliff, "Myths — Utilities and a Meaningful Existence 1900–1980," in *Christianity, Society and Education*, edited by John Ferguson (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1981), 130–31.
55. *North Cheshire Herald*, 28 May 1910, 5, "St. Paul's girls representing Erin, with colleens, green coloured dresses and red coats." Also *North Cheshire Herald*, 12 June 1925, 6; quote *North Cheshire Herald*, 4 June 1926, 6.

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of which were in textile towns that experienced industrial unrest.[56] Ten Preston respondents remembered religious hostility in the town, including six referring specifically to clashes between Catholics and Orangemen at the Whit procession. Mr B10P dramatically described, "the first procession on the streets on Whit Monday which was that of the Orangemen, with William of Orange riding on a white horse at the head of their column, with banners and brass bands playing evocative hymns with provocative words. It was not uncommon, when their procession came near to that of the Roman Catholics, which was normally on another route, for William of Orange to be unseated from his horse, and the statue of the Virgin Mary to be overturned from the float on which it was being transported." But even in these six recollections, very few mentioned open quarrels on the walk, except as legends and family stories of punch-ups in the earlier years. Yet, such oral traditions undoubtedly consolidated prejudices and stereotypes within the two communities.

Sectarian hostility was not mentioned in connection with the Whit walks in Hyde however, even though Hydeonians were neither immune to it, nor unaware of their Irish neighbours: "now there used to be a lot of friction, you know, hard feeling between Catholic and Protestant at that time" (Mr 035H); and "there were more that went to St Paul's in our street than there were other folk. Nearly all Helen Street were Catholic" (Mrs 143H). Hyde respondents, nevertheless, appeared to experience less profound sectarian differences and also more unity, on the day of the walk, compared to Preston interviewees, some of whom admittedly were transmitting hearsay.[57]

Why did Hyde seem to enjoy less fraught occasions? Firstly, the ratio of Catholic to Protestant institutions in Hyde, one to twenty-two, was very low, whereas in Preston it was one to six. Presumably this points to a local Irish population that was too small to be perceived as a serious social or economic threat, and which was sometimes itinerant. Mrs 143H remembered, "at that time, all round here they were all farms, it weren't like it is now, and they used to come from Ireland when it was harvest time working on the farms, aye, and after the harvest they used to go back, you know." Secondly, respondents in Hyde did not refer to the existence, or membership, of an Orange lodge in their town, but seven Preston interviewees did. Neal lists the location of 265 lodges in 1830, many of them in adjoining places to Hyde, but the town itself is not mentioned.[58] Lastly, the local press offers a further insight into relations between Protestants and Catholics in Hyde around 1910. The mayor, a member of St Paul's Catholic church, gave his mayoral donation to a local charity instead of to the traditional mayor's banquet. The *North Cheshire Herald* commented that "whatever their politics or religion, all must agree that Alderman Kenny's heart is in the right place. May he live long to serve us in a public capacity." The following year he "broke down the barrier of creed," in leading a civic memorial service to St George's parish church, "though it was not

56. Neal, *Sectarian Violence*, 8–9, 110, on Orange Order, 23, 32, 196, 251–52; Fielding, "The Catholic Whit-Walk in Manchester and Salford," 3; Davies, *Leisure, Gender and Poverty*,115.
57. Also see Walton, *Lancashire*, 252–53.
58. Neal, *Sectarian Violence*, 10, also 258–62, for Appendix list of Orange lodges in 1830.

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connected with the church to which he belonged." In Hyde, apparently, the interests of the community came before those of sectarianism.[59]

To sum up, therefore, all the sects and denominations in Hyde walked separately, although at the same time, on Whit Friday morning and it was perhaps fortunate for sectarian harmony that the individual schools were never large enough in numbers to create an impact unless they cooperated for this short period. After the schools had walked their own routes, fifteen of them assembled in the market square before the town hall for a united service, ending with the national anthem. The exceptions were St Paul's Catholic church and eight outlying schools.[60]

Most of the respondents remembered this congregation. Mrs 085H walked to the town hall and, "there's all this lovely singing, hymns. And the mayor was on the balcony and all his retinue behind him. And the VP's [sic] of the town were up there with him," along with the musical director and a minister giving an address. Nine interviewees were aware that the gathering was a "United Sing," or referred to it simply as "singing" or a "sing-song." Mrs 092H called it, "the community in the square, communal singing you know," thereby emphasizing this aspect of "togetherness." Although it has been accepted that most respondents realized they were there for a religious reason, which also involved civic dignitaries, few referred to the official title, the United Praise Service, or to the denominational cooperation behind it. Questioned about any rivalry among the Protestant churches in the square, Mrs 125H reflected that, "everybody was pals together — there wasn't any rivalry, no, no. Everybody was united. Yes."

The relevance of the Whit walks to the religious institutions and the Sunday school movement is neither part of the respondents' recollections nor, probably, would have been of much concern to them at the time, but was of importance to religious opinion in Hyde, as we have seen above. The religious significance of the walks was noted annually in the *North Cheshire Herald* during our period, but from 1900 onwards complaints that the Sunday schools no longer received the "prominence or recognition they deserved" echoed a wider dismay that allegiance to the movement was declining nationally. The Sunday school system, which had been gradually overtaken by the weekday schools since the 1870 Education Act, appeared to have finally served its purpose, and fears concerning its relevance grew. And yet, the walks could still serve as reminders of the continuing "influence and power" of, and the invaluable work done by, all the denominational institutions in the sphere of religious education, as well as continuing as a showcase for the numerical prosperity and progress of each school. Finally the walk, with this "grand finale" held in the town's square, could also be seen as a strong local custom. The subsequent impact of the First World War, however, undoubtedly made the future support of the Sunday school movement, and of the traditional walk, appear question-

59. *North Cheshire Herald*, 12 June 1909, 6; 28 May 1910, 4.
60. "Sunday School Returns," *North Cheshire Herald*, 7 June 1900, 6; 30 May 1901, 5. Whit walks eight Anglican schools, average number of scholars in each 433 (range 134–818); sixteen Nonconformist schools, average number of scholars in each 264 (range 92–605); one Catholic school, 438 scholars.

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able to contemporary observers, given the absence of many young men at the front "whose religious activities at home have been temporarily put a stop to." Clearly, by then this local custom was being threatened by outside forces, to be examined later.[61]

Custom

The paradox of custom is that, although dependent on rituals to form tradition, subsequent modification is needed in order to survive social changes. Thus traditions are invented, or adapted, as well as maintained, a very necessary process for modern societies seeking to establish roots. With this in mind, the third and final aspect being considered looks firstly at the custom of Whit walks in the context of existing local customs, and the "invention of tradition"; and secondly, it considers some of the adaptations to the visual and religious character made in the walks, particularly in Hyde, in response to social changes brought about by the First World War, altered leisure patterns, and civic development.

From the many sources documenting the traditions and customs of northern England, an array of regional and local practices emerges covering the full calendar year, many of them originating in High Church festivals. Prominent among those with religious connections was that of the late summer festival of the wakes, with the associated rushbearing and rushcart ceremonies. These have been studied in detail by Walton and Poole, and were as common in the textile towns and villages of south-east Lancashire and north Cheshire as the later Whit walks.[62] Although the Whit walk was a new industrial custom, as we saw earlier, it slotted easily into the variety of existing holidays and practices. The common traditions of fairgrounds and "guizing," for example, are linked to the walks in respondents' memories, thus illustrating this thread of continuity. Four Preston interviewees explained that when each individual procession had finished, the fairground was their next usual destination. Hyde respondent Mrs 143H had worked on her family's fairground business in Preston, "there were nobody on when they were all on the streets, and it used to be one dash. They used to come in waves, didn't they? There used to be a procession, then they used to stop, and they'd all come running on to the fair, and then another contingent'd come, and it used to go on all day didn't it?" In contrast, there was no mention of the existence of fairs in Hyde on the day of the walk, instead an afternoon of organized field games — "rational recreation" — was remembered by eight respondents.

61. Quotes *North Cheshire Herald*, 22 May 1902, 4; 19 May 1921, 6; 27 May 1915, 4; also see Cliff, "Myths — Utilities and a Meaningful Existence," 125–29.

62. For wakes and rushbearing and rushcarts see Walton and Poole, "The Lancashire Wakes in the Nineteenth Century"; R. Poole, "Oldham Wakes," in *Leisure in Britain 1750–1939*, edited by J. K. Walton and J. Walvin (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1983) 72–97; R. Poole, *The Lancashire Wakes Holidays* (Preston: Lancashire County Books, 1994), 1–27; A. G. Gilchrist, "The Lancashire Rushcart and Morris Dance," *Journal of the English Folk Dance Society* 1 (1927): 17–21; W. Bowman, *England in Ashton-under-Lyne* (Altrincham: Sherrat, 1960), 300–304; Corbridge, *It's An Old Lancashire Custom*, 58–62; Hutton, *The Stations of the Sun*, 356–58; Middleton, "History," 510–19.

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As we have seen, the tradition of having new clothes at Whitsuntide and for the walks was common in northern working-class families, with expenditure often disproportionate to income. Corbridge likens this to the intense rivalry at the time of the spring "guizings" in fifteenth-century Ashton-under-Lyne, where money was freely spent on new processional clothes. The costs of such seasonal celebrations, including "guizings," required funding, often by begging from the wealthier in the community;[63] but by the middle to late nineteenth century, according to Howkins as well as Poole, this mainly involved children seeking small change and food for their own enjoyment.[64]

In Hyde, five respondents recalled showing off their new Whit clothes in return for small amounts of change or "pennies," visiting nearby relatives, family friends, and neighbours on Whit Sunday morning for this purpose. Did this neighbourhood display of new and often festive clothes — an infrequent enough occurrence in working-class life — provide a similar entertainment as "guizing"? For Mrs 085H, "it was a luxury, you see, when you got pennies in your pocket, when you'd been round. It was a lot of money if you'd got six pennies in your pocket. And you'd buy an ice-cream and you were always told not to get ice-cream on your new clothes." While this practice can be seen as monetary opportunism, or even as publicity for parental achievement, if we accept Corbridge's suggestion that these new clothes were in the tradition of "guizing" then we can see the gift of "pennies" in the context of associated begging customs. Miss 003H thought this was quite clear, "children used to come knocking at your door wanting some money to be put in their pockets. They didn't call it begging, they said they'd come to show you their new clothes. I remember it gave me a good laugh. It was a form of begging really. I don't know what they did with the money, whether they just spent it on sweets or whether it did go towards paying for their new clothes."

In Preston, however, these two strands of "guizing" and begging were formalized within the Whit walks themselves. Ten respondents, of both Anglican and Catholic faiths, recall carrying a specially made small wrist purse or bag to collect "pennies" during the procession from onlookers known to them. Intriguingly, the traditional Lancashire begging song, quoted above, also contains the verse, "we have got a little purse, made of stretching leather skin, we want a little of your money, to line it well within."[65] And by implication, Mr T3P also linked the display of processional clothes to appropriate reward for the entertainment value, "they used to say that the nicer they looked the better they did with their coppers. They would come home many a time with a few shillings and they were delighted." Finally, to place this custom firmly in the doling tradition, whereby the local poor temporarily enjoyed the benefits of wealth,[66] Mr B7P admitted that, "the most embarrassing thing was that my mother would give each of us these piles of coppers, perhaps 4d or 5d each and

63. Corbridge, *It's An Old Lancashire Custom*, 60.
64. A. Howkins, *Whitsun in Nineteenth Century Oxfordshire* (Oxford: Ruskin College, 1974), 19; Poole, "Oldham," 86–87; Boyd, *A Country Parish*, 76.
65. Harland, *Ballads and Songs of Lancashire*, 97.
66. Bushaway, *By Rite*, 189.

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tell us that a lot of the tenants' children would be walking and when she saw them we would have to run out and give them a penny."

In summary, according to oral sources the recent custom of the Whit walk took different forms in Hyde and Preston. In Hyde it was remembered as a religious occasion separate from the customary secular enjoyments of the holiday week.[67] In Preston, however, the celebrations of the walk appeared, in some cases, to have been informally extended to include secular fairground amusements. Moreover, the processions here had adopted some aspects of the pre-industrial customs of doling and "guizing," the latter, though, appropriately unsullied by the subversive elements of masking, cross-dressing, and disorder.[68]

The acceptance of the new practice of Whit walks into the existing body of local customs occurred at the same time as an emotional response to national self-doubts of the late nineteenth century described as the "invention of tradition." This largely middle-class phenomenon focused on the perceived superiority of pre-industrial Tudor and Elizabethan England to create, and retreat into, an idealized cultural history, using as leitmotifs "rural" and "merrie" England. These new and rural myths, often reusing and adapting older traditions and rituals, influenced all things cultural, including customs, as well as the forms and trappings of public celebrations.[69]

In spite of their mainly religious emphasis, the Whit walks of Hyde were not immune to this phenomenon. Mrs 118H remembered that on St George's walk, "we had a tableau of a village wedding and they all dressed in 'olde worlde' things, you were walking in the procession you know all in one part like." In two successive years the press described how Flowery Field's Sunday school procession halted in front of the town hall and some of the members, "with bells attached below the knee," did folk dancing "to the musical accompaniment of their pastor." Between 1870 and 1890 the popularity of village May Queens and maypoles spread to most of Lancashire and Cheshire along with Morris dancing, although the urban setting of these could sometimes appear incongruous. The local paper recorded the presence of May Queens in Hyde's walks from 1912 to 1929, excluding the war years. All these reports except one, though, were of St Paul's walks, and strikingly, in 1925, "in the procession was the May Queen and the statue of Our Lady, the mother of Jesus, whom the little queen had been chosen to crown." Here again was the blend of a secular custom — but minus the profane maypole — and religious ceremony that additionally emphasized the primacy of the sacred.[70]

67. See also *North Cheshire Herald*, 12 June 1909, 4, report of processions, "and thus passed off this year's religious inspection."
68. See Howkins and Merricks, "Wee Be," 41–44.
69. A. Howkins, "The Discovery of Rural England," in *Englishness. Politics and Culture 1880–1920*, edited by R. Colls and P. Dodd (Kent: Croom Helm, 1986), 62–71; G. Bennett, "Folklore Studies and the English Rural Myth," *Rural History* 4, no. 1 (1993): 77–79; Hutton, *The Stations of the Sun*, 295–301; M. J. Wiener, *English Culture and the Decline of the Industrial Spirit 1850–1980* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 41–51.
70. Folk dancing *North Cheshire Herald*, 4 June 1926, 5; 9 June 1927, 6; quote May Queen *North Cheshire Herald*, 12 June 1925, 6; Hutton, *The Stations of the Sun*, 295–301.

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Changes in the Custom

Besides local traditions, there were also influences in the broader society that affected this custom. How were the walks altered in Hyde? Here, respondents did not generally reflect on this wider backcloth in their memories; consequently, much reliance has to be placed on the local press, whose annual comments highlighted changes in, firstly, the visual and, secondly, the religious aspects of the walks.

Visual Aspects of the Walks. The visual aspect of the walks was mainly influenced over the period by two factors: firstly, the familiar repercussions of trade cycles within the local community must have constrained the quality of the displays at times; secondly, the experience of the First World War changed, albeit temporarily, the character of the occasion. Joyful sounding brass bands, now depleted of musicians and with soaring expenses were replaced with appropriately solemn sounding string and reed orchestras and boys' bugle bands. The size and composition of processions changed as the young men departed. Patriotic colours and militaristic styles influenced children's clothing, reflecting wider than parochial concerns. In a spirit of popular patriotism, the *North Cheshire Herald* applauded small boys dressing as little soldiers and sailors, while admitting that khaki had been "conspicuous by its absence" in previous processions.[71]

Changed circumstances required rapid acceptance of, and adaptation to, a muted spectacle and schools unable to compromise faced difficulties. The annual high standard of St Paul's, for example, had become a custom in its own right. But for two years running, the school did not walk, one reason being the absence of its young men, thus implying a failure to meet public expectations, a fear presumably common to other schools. Although regretting St Paul's non-participation, the *North Cheshire Herald* pointed out that, "of course, all the Sunday schools of the Borough have members serving who are missed from the processions." When St Paul's walked next, in 1922, the customary standard was realized; bad trade of previous years had precluded a display that "would satisfy their aspirations." After the war, the custom in Hyde appeared to be challenged by secular comparisons with both the spreading influence of the cinema and, closer to home, the local annual popular September carnival. The walks were referred to as "pageants" and small children became "star attractions," while in 1924, an article called "Our Dull Drab Whitsuntide Processions," advocated more colourful dresses similar to the carnival brilliance.[72]

71. For conditions of local trade see *North Cheshire Herald*, 6 June 1895, 4; 7 June 1900, 6; 6 June 1917, 3; 16 June 1922, 6; for effect of First World War, see *North Cheshire Herald*, 27 May 1915, 5; 5 June 1915, 7; 24 June 1916, 4; 21 May 1917, 3; 6 June 1917, 3.

72. For St Paul's see *North Cheshire Herald*, 24 June 1916, 4; 6 June 1917, 3; 16 June 1922, 7; for comparisons with carnival see *North Cheshire Herald*, 6 June 1924, 8; Walks as "attractions" see *North Cheshire Herald*, 3 June 1928, 4; 1 June 1929, 4; Jones, "Recreational and Cultural Provision," 134, by late 1930s there were five cinemas in Hyde, which were an "obsessional hobby for large numbers of the local population."

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Religious Aspects of the Walks. Several Hyde respondents, as we have seen, recalled the United Praise Service in the central market square, with its community atmosphere, as the main focus for the Whit walks. This, however, was a recent development. Originally, the religious celebration was confined to each school walking to the homes of those connected to its own church, such as benefactors and influential members as well as the old and sick, in order to sing hymns. Additionally, some processions were accustomed to stop and sing a hymn in the market square at some point during their parade through the principal streets. A description of several church schools collectively singing in the square was reported in 1897, revealing both the novelty of this, presumably unsophisticated, first gathering.[73]

By the beginning of the twentieth century, growing fears about congestion and colliding routes underlined the need for a combined sing of all the Protestant schools in this central place. Apparently then, this new modification arose initially from organizational necessity rather than religious motivation. Although all Protestant denominations were encouraged to combine there was only partial success over the years, and the introduction of united services into these individual patterns of religious witness was neither seamless nor instantaneous. The difficulties of distance from the centre and of organization were undisputed, but the intractable issue appeared to be sectarian differences and many schools' insistence on retaining their independent decisions. Even events of national significance seemed not to have had much impact on traditional procedures. At a time when Sunday schools were supposedly losing their influence, ingrained habits were not changed until the war years. Reflecting on the protracted involvement in the war and future uncertainties, there was enthusiasm for a united intercessory service held by all the Protestant schools, in one area of Hyde, after their usual Whit processions. Thereafter more schools decided to adopt this interdenominational practice and by the end of the war, the local paper welcomed the "broader spirit in which true sectional differences were put aside."[74]

Although there were occasional lapses in full participation, the annual united service and the smaller services held in two outlying districts, were seen as an ideal way to promote unity among the Protestant churches, and to consolidate the power of these bodies in a rapidly secularizing post-war society. By the end of our period, this innovation had shaped the custom of the walks into a combined demonstration of religious solidarity and influence. What had started as a practice for the specific locality of each institution had become a tradition of communal religious witness.

73. For homes visited see *North Cheshire Herald* returns 1860–1890; *North Cheshire Herald*, 10 June 1897, 4. By 1920s some schools extended their walk to newly erected war memorials for fellow walkers killed in the war, source Mrs 011H.
74. Problems of congestion see *North Cheshire Herald*, 12 June 1909, 6; for difficulties see *North Cheshire Herald*, 4 June 1904, 6; 23 May 1907, 4; for fear that united service would interfere with visiting subscribers to school funds see *North Cheshire Herald*, 10 May 1913, 4; funeral of Edward the Seventh coincided with walks but a substituted combined civic memorial service was not acceptable, *North Cheshire Herald*, 19 May 1910, 4; for acceptance of united service see *North Cheshire Herald*, 5 June 1915, 7; 10 June 1916, 4; quote, 23 May 1918, 6.

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There were two other influences in the broader society besides the First World War that also affected the character of Hyde's Whit walks: firstly, the changing pattern of local working-class leisure pursuits; and secondly, civic or municipal development.

A major influence on the leisure habits of the nineteenth-century British working class was the expanding rail network which also offered the availability of cheap day tickets. This, coupled with rising standards of living for workers in some industries from the 1870s onwards, meant that one day, or more, away in the country or at the seaside was affordable. Fresh possibilities for the Whit holiday, therefore, implied choices for both participants and onlookers at Hyde's walks, although only one Hyde respondent mentioned a trip to the sea on Whit Saturday, with the church choir.[75]

How far then was this occasion affected by competition from the new commercial leisure opportunities? Advocates for the proposed United Praise Service strategically explained that thus condensing the morning's proceedings would allow extra time for holiday travel.[76] Such ideas came to nothing, though, and enthusiasm for the set pattern of the walks continued to be noted: "of course, the majority of holidaymakers will stop for the processions, their Whitsuntide would not be complete without seeing the children walk."[77] This "sentimental bond" was still in evidence after the war, onlookers seeing the occasion as a reminder of their own childhood participation.[78] But despite this understandable attachment, there were signs that community loyalty was failing. Significantly, one Sunday school had organized its procession for the previous Whit Sunday, "owing to so many people in the past leaving the district for the Whit holidays." This was somewhat precipitate, however. A coal stoppage during Whit week kept most people at home, resulting in one of the greatest assemblies in the square.[79] Notwithstanding these alternative leisure attractions, the local paper continued to enthuse over the large numbers anticipated, or present, at the walks, for the remaining period.

The gradual expansion of municipal building development and the inclusion of Hyde's walks into the municipal calendar both helped to cement what had originally been parochial celebrations into the wider community of the borough. The traditional location in Hyde for almost every school to sing a hymn during its particular procession, and later in the period, the United Praise Service, was the market square. The significance of this centre was reinforced in 1885, by the erection of a town hall and municipal offices, the most important buildings in the town.[80] The town halls of the provincial Victorian indus-

75. Walton, *Lancashire*, 294–96; Walton and Poole, "The Lancashire Wakes in the Nineteenth Century," 112–14; Golby and Purdue, *The Civilisation of the Crowd*, 98, 135; Cunningham, *Leisure in the Industrial Revolution*, 157–59; Jones, "Recreational and Cultural Provision," 134–35. *North Cheshire Herald* regularly advertised rail travel.
76. *North Cheshire Herald*, 10 May 1913, 4; 15 May 1913, 4.
77. *North Cheshire Herald*, 13 June 1914, 4.
78. *North Cheshire Herald*, 4 June 1925, 6; 31 May 1928, 6.
79. Quote *North Cheshire Herald*, 19 May 1921, 5, Muslin Street United Methodist Church; 27 May 1921, 4.
80. F. R. Stott, "1885, Hyde Town Hall," in *Looking Back at Hyde*, edited by A. Lock (Ashton-under-Lyne: Tameside Metropolitan Borough, 1986), 47–50.

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trial centres, described as powerful, visible expressions of civic anxiety, pride, and competitiveness, were built not only to administer local government but also designed as theatrical backdrops for the new national enthusiasm for civic celebration. And as we have seen above, accompanying rituals and symbols were both embedded and embodied in civic pageantry and processions. At its height, this ritual of civic expression echoed the key features of religious ritual: the main players were elaborately costumed, set pieces were recited, and officials acted as intermediaries.[81] It was now in front of Hyde's own new temple to civic religion that the schools individually sang and after 1918 joined together in the United Praise Service, and here that the religious ritual combined with civic ritual. In 1909 some schools laid their banners on the town hall steps, and while it is tempting to compare this with the ritual of laying of flags at church altars, a practical reason might have been that, as Mrs 085H pointed out, "each church had an allotted space which you pile into and leaned the banners up on the railings in front."[82] The two traditional anthems at the praise service, recalled by Mrs 125H and Mrs 176 H, offered a more striking relationship between religious and civic ritual: the opening religious festival hymn, very apt for an interdenominational gathering, "from year to year in love we meet, from year to year in peace we part," and the closing national anthem.[83] The most visible integration of the two rituals, remembered by several respondents, was on the town hall balcony where the two lead players were either an Anglican or Nonconformist minister, conducting the service, and the annually elected mayor, in ceremonial robe and chain.

The first appearance of a mayor at the walks seemed a tentative affair but thereafter the prominence of his role in civic approval became established. "Mr Dennerly of Union Street conducted from the balcony, *where by the way*, His Worship the Mayor wearing his chain of office, spent some time in witnessing the processions and giving a kind of official recognition to them" [italics inserted].[84] The ties binding the walks to Hyde's civic community were further strengthened by the gradual inclusion in the balcony party of the mayoress, aldermen, councillors, ministers of all the Protestant denominations, and prominent townsfolk. Many of these would most likely have "walked" when young.[85]

As the custom of holding individual walks in Hyde gradually evolved into this communal gathering in the town's centre, so the practicalities of maintaining order created its own traditions, such as increasing reliance on police marshalling. Advance press publication of the morning's arrangements, with

81. D. Cannadine, "The Transformation of Civic Ritual in Modern Britain: The Colchester Oyster Festival," *Past and Present* 94 (1982): 117–22; Gunn, *The Public Culture of the Victorian Middle-Class*, 163–65; Croll, *Civilising the Urban*, 67.
82. For banners on steps see *North Cheshire Herald*, 12 June 1909, 4, also Mrs 111H, Mrs 125H. G. Parsons, *Siena. Civil Religion and the Sienese* (Hampshire: Ashgate, 2004), 100, for banners at the altar.
83. Hymn also in "Whit Friday Arrangements," *North Cheshire Herald*, 1 June 1918, 6; 6 June 1919, 4; 27 May 1920, 5; 2 June 1922, 4; 24 May 1923, 8; 12 June 1924, 4; 4 June 1925, 8; 31 May 1928, 4; 12 June 1930, 5.
84. *North Cheshire Herald*, 4 June 1904, 6.
85. *North Cheshire Herald* annually printed the names of balcony party.

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the times, routes, and best vantage points, helped both participants and spectators, while the order of service and hymns involved the audience in a religious experience. The scope of information indicates how far the custom had become an orchestrated community event, and this further refinement of organizational patterns added a greater sophistication to the occasion.[86]

How influential, though, was the involvement of this municipal element in the custom of Hyde's Whit walks? In analysing a small local festival that was gradually taken over and reshaped by outside civic interests, Cannadine has implied that such municipalization leads to the decay of custom, which becomes, as a result, "less completely rooted in, and expressive of, the local community."[87] There are other reactions, however, to this oversimplified and somewhat pessimistic conclusion. Parsons, for example, in his more recent study of civic religion, has argued that deeply rooted local customs are able to adapt to external pressures, creating new versions of their traditions by continual reference to the broader historical framework of their civic culture and identity.[88]

In considering Hyde's Whit processions it might appear that from 1904 onwards the form, and therefore the essence, of the walks were overshadowed by municipal ceremonial, but there were several factors that suggest that this religious custom coexisted, on its own terms, with these municipal elements.

Firstly, as Gunn points out, a mayor and his corporation were the central focus of nearly every public ritual, personifying the municipal government, but Hyde's mayor and corporation did not take part in the walks in this capacity; processions were headed by their respective religious leaders.[89] Although these civic dignitaries were often staunch members of local churches and chapels, strict boundaries of role were observed for the walk, and a rapid transformation was required to accommodate both allegiances: "by virtue of his office, the Mayor, Mr Allen Shaw, will be unable to walk with Daisyfield United Methodists on Friday, but he will try to join in somewhere, before he goes to the Town Hall."[90] Secondly, the town hall was the "home" of the mayor and corporation and, as such, it was there that they gave a civic welcome to the religious processions as "guests." In 1916, for example, "the Mayor and Mayoress, Mr and Mrs Welch, wearing their chains of office, were waiting on the Town Hall steps to receive the schools for public singing."[91] At "home," the mayor shared "his" balcony with the local clergy, thus making clear to the watching crowds the equal role of religious and civic authority. Thirdly, this was an occasion that did not always demand civic dignity. On two successive years the same mayor, Mr Kenny, appeared on the balcony "strawhatted and smiling," but minus his "dazzling robe and glittering chain." The press admired his "democratic spirit," but the crowds who had expected a spectacle must have

86. See, for example, *North Cheshire Herald*, 9 June 1927, 6; 31 May 1928, 6.
87. Cannadine, "The Transformation of Civic Ritual in Modern Britain," 107–9, 128–30.
88. Parsons, *Siena*, 61–62.
89. Gunn, *The Public Culture of the Victorian Middle-Class*, 169–73.
90. *North Cheshire Herald*, 31 May 1928, 6.
91. *North Cheshire Herald*, 24 June 1916, 4.

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been disappointed.[92] Fourthly, towards the end of our period, the *North Cheshire Herald* drew attention to the veterans of the walks, noting those who held, and had held, civic office in the town. Among these were the aldermen, councillors, town clerks, and justices of the peace who had been church and chapel members for between fifty and seventy years.[93] Recalling her civic role, Mrs 111H noted her luck in being, "the last mayor to stand on the balcony. They did used to stand on the balcony like the royal family do on Trooping the Colour day." This religious allegiance was not passive. The mayor and mayoress, Mr and Mrs Mirfin, who herself had been a Sunday school worker for many years, both helped to initiate the united sings in the market square: "it was a credit to the town."[94] And at the concrete level, a highly visible sign of the walks in the borough, and of the relationship between religious and civic life was a large banner across the balcony of the town hall, during Whit week of 1918, with the invocation, "God Bless Our Sunday Schools," commissioned "at the instance of the Mayoress, Mrs Mirfin."[95] This overlap of dual roles, activities and experiences among the civic elite implied a parallel loyalty to both the interests of the town and the local Sunday schools, including the custom of the Whit walks. Contrary to being obscured by municipal concerns, it would seem that this permeability ensured that the walks of Hyde were strengthened by secular civic endorsement.

Conclusion

This article has looked at the phenomenon of Whit walks that — although a popular celebration, particularly in the north-west of England — has not received much prominence in religious academic history. The Whit walks represent an example of how a custom, based on a religious practice, was maintained over a long period, even though competing with alternative leisure activities. Initially we looked at the ways in which Whit walks could be viewed in relation to more general historical scholarship, in particular the underlying cultural influences leading to their introduction, and to the growth, in the mid-nineteenth century, of a popular appetite for processions.

This article has provided the framework for the oral historical research centred on the respondents in Hyde. The special value of this oral history is that it allows us to consider events, like these walks, within specific locations and over an extended time frame. It also shows what was important to those involved in these occasions, which offered a spectacle, as well as possibilities for religious witness and celebration of a custom.

Much of the evidence on Whit walks is currently held at local level. This article has drawn on the opportunities afforded by two systematic sets of interviews in Hyde and Preston to provide a structured exploration of people's memories of these events. Such corroborative evidence has given a sharper angle and a "thicker" feel to "how it was" in Hyde's Whit walks.

92. For mayor see *North Cheshire Herald*, 20 June 1908, 6; 12 June 1909, 4.
93. For veteran walkers see *North Cheshire Herald*, 9 June 1927, 6; 31 May 1928, 6.
94. For Mirfin see *North Cheshire Herald*, 20 June 1919, 8.
95. For banner see *North Cheshire Herald*, 1 June 1918, 6.

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Whereas evidence of the processions reinforces the spectacular element, particularly if it is in cinematic or photographic form, what we gain from the respondents is an important alternative perspective to the outward public show, while a detailed analysis of newspaper reports shows how the form and popularity of the custom changed over the years. The interviews showed the importance of the sectarian aspect of Whit walks, which could lead to much rivalry, and on past occasions to ill-feeling, as in Preston. In Hyde, though, this did not happen, perhaps because the divide between Protestant and Catholic was less marked. The individual Protestant Sunday schools paraded separately under their own banners, but gathered together for the "united sing" in the town's square, indicating the camaraderie that was mentioned in many accounts. Although most of Hyde's respondents' memories were of the new clothes and the theatrical aspect of the walks, one effect of this annual gathering may well have been the slow accumulation of religious feeling and familiarity. Even though the outward form of the Whit processions, in apparel and music, resembled traditional secular celebrations, the religious banners and motifs left no doubt that this was a religious occasion and not secular entertainment. In Hyde, this religious event was separate, in the main, from the secular enjoyments of Whit week. By contrast, Preston walks revealed a continuity of popular pastimes associated with pleasure fairs, "guizing," and begging customs. In Hyde, the framework of the municipal element helped to preserve the continuity of the walks. This was not an imposition of municipal forms or authority, but more a recognition of the value of the walks to the life of the community. Indeed, this was a community event that connected civic officials with ordinary citizens at a very personal level through the common experience of participation in the walks. This continuity produced a flexibility allowing adaptation to changes in local leisure patterns and to social changes brought about by the First World War.

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Appendix I

Occupational Distribution of the Complete Samples

Occupation	Hyde	Preston
Professional	5	2
Shop work	7	2
Mill or factory work	18	22
Other	3	4
Not stated	4	9

Hyde: Occupations of Interviewees Referred to in Text

Title	Reference number	Date of birth	Occupation
Miss	003H	1910	Teacher and lived on farm
Mrs	005H	1894	Cotton winder
Mrs	011H	1889	Cotton worker
Mr	020H	1912	Miner and railway worker
Mrs	034H	1902	Cotton and woollen mill worker
Mr	035H	1913	Various, including solicitor
Mrs	078H	1912	Cotton mill
Mrs	085H	1905	Laundry work
Mrs	092H	1901	Chemist's shop assistant and chemical works
Mr	096H	1915	Butcher and plasterer
Mrs	111H	1925	State registered nurse
Mrs	118H	1910	Mill worker
Mrs	125H	1900	Weaver
Mrs	176H	1914	?
Mrs	143H	1903	Cotton weaver

Preston: Occupations of Interviewees Referred to in Text

Title	Reference number	Date of birth	Occupation
Mr	B7P	?	?
Mr	B9P	1927	College lecturer
Mr	B10P	?	?
Mr	F1P	1906	Electrician
Mr	G1P	1903	Weaver
Mrs	G4P	?	?
Mrs	H4P	1903	Weaver, domestic servant
Mr	S4P	1915	Teacher
Mr	T3P	1886	Spinner, shuttle maker, insurance collector
Mrs	W4P	1900	Weaver

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