



Histories of Participation, Value and Governance Symposium  
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**Public park histories,  
cultural policy and everyday  
participation in Manchester and  
Salford**

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# Park histories

Focus on Peel Park (1846), Queen's Park (1846), Albert Park (1877), Mandley Park, Cheetham Park (1886)

- How are parks managed?
- Who managed them and how were they paid for?
- How do they relate to the communities they serve?
- How are the parks designed: what types of architecture, planning and design for cultural participation are contained in these parks (museums, bandstands, walkways and sports fields)?
- What evidence of participation (and its regulation and facilitation) is there?
- Do attitudes towards parks shift considerably over time?

# The policy rationale for public parks

- Industrialisation & rapid urbanisation enclosing land and distancing countryside
- C18 romantic movement for public access to (rural) land translated into cities, where parks were enclosed, private spaces for the wealthy
- 1833 *Select Committee on Public Walks* leads to calls from regional politicians and public health officials for public access to green space in order to alleviate the worst aspects of industrial residence.
- These were urban anxieties of newly industrialised 'shock cities' - concerning morality and health



# Letter from Dr JP Key, Manchester

In the view of the physician, the lack of leisure facilities left the:

'labouring population of Manchester... without any season of recreation, and is ignorant of all amusements, excepting that very small portion which frequents the theatre. Healthful exercise in the open air is seldom or never taken by the artizans of this town, and their health certainly suffers from this deprivation.

'The reason of this state of the people is, that all scenes of interest are remote from the town, and that the walks which can be enjoyed by the poor are chiefly the turnpike roads, alternately dusty or muddy. Were parks provided, recreation would be taken with avidity, and one of the first results would be a better use of the Sunday, and a substitution of innocent amusements at all other times, for the debasing pleasures now in vogue.'

# The Weir family in Peel Park



# The Northern School of park organisation

- led by Joshua Major: 'A spacious promenade, and to have a great variety of pleasure ground' with well chosen trees and shrubs
- The summer bloom of rhododendrons and evergreen plants led Salford Corporation to describe the effect as 'highly satisfactory', and one that 'afforded much gratification and pleasure to the large and increasing numbers of visitors to the Parks'
- But 'by no means, allow the indecent practice of open bathing in these waters; provision ought to be made for that purpose elsewhere.'

Joshua Major (1852) *The Theory of Landscape Gardening* London: Longman, Brown, Green and Longmans

# Salford Parks Committee, Annual Report, 1847

Time	Friday	Saturday	Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	
5.30 - 8.00 am	140	100	140	100	120	100	140	
8.00 am - 12.00 pm	380	592	860	440	340	240	300	
12.00 - 4.00 pm	751	920	740	960	820	580	820	
4.00 - 6.00 pm	330	1200	900	560	400	300	380	
6.00 - 9.00 pm	1094	1780	3980	2200	1480	1080	1340	
Walness Gate	365	575	860	632	410	340	280	
<b>Total</b>	3060	5167	7480	4892	3570	2640	3260	30,069

# Discipline and regulation

- Gendered spaces – separate male and female gymnasia; the regulated female flâneur
- Walking as an ideal pursuit of working classes – to emulate their social superiors, with activities that interfered with the purity of walking banned (drinking, gambling, dirty clothes)
- Debates about the 'right to roam' over grass – Major favours cordoning off to prevent new walkways;
- Gardeners employed as moral guardians; posters banning improper language



# Ordered nature



# Park-keepers as taste-makers

- Systems of administration including parks committees, handbooks, and a system of park attendants
- In early C20, William Pettigrew, Manchester's Chief Parks Superintendent introduced 'fair balance' – aims to provide entertainment in the open air as well as access to nature
- Public spending increased providing opportunities for entertainment and education: music concerts, dances, lantern parades and public lectures

# Parks as music policy and industry

- Expenditure on music grew from £160 in 1894 to £4000 in 1914
- Close watch kept on programming and repertoire, balancing lighter music with 'the very best class of music' to ensure all the music as 'real value'
- Parks Committee a key player in explicit cultural policy
- "Park music has revealed itself as a thoroughly popular movement...while in other ways the City Council is only as yet toying with the idea of principal music, and is still half affrighted at the thought of it, the Parks Committee finds itself hailed as the general impresarios of the populace for out-of-door music" (Music in the Parks of Manchester; Manchester Guardian, 8 June 1914)
- Costs of bands and bandstands led to new revenue models – "playgrounds that paid for themselves"



# 'The Bandstand, Peel Park, Salford', LS Lowry, 1931





# The public park now

- Austerity measures: asset transfer from public sector provision to community ownership; local taxation or sale of land to private owners or developers
- Parks as public liabilities for local authorities
- The Heritage Lottery Fund /NESTA Rethinking Parks – seeking new business models
- Parks as 'commons' – UEP project exploring how to develop social infrastructure in Cheetham Park, North Manchester using everyday participation as creative engagement