

Malcolmson, Robert W. *POPULAR RECREATIONS IN ENGLISH SOCIETY, 1700-1850.*, (New York, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1973), XII + 188 pp. Illustrations, charts, notes, appendix, bibliography, and index. \$11.95.

Robert W. Malcolmson's book began as a doctoral dissertation at the University of Warwick in 1966. He has taken full advantage of his predecessors and the abundant source materials in England to write a thoroughly cogent, readable, and provocative history of English recreations from 1700-1850.

The author's definition of recreation was acquired from Samuel Johnson's, *A Dictionary of the English Language* (1775). Johnson defined "diversion (the eighteenth-century equivalent of recreation) as Sport; something that unbends the mind by turning it off from care." Some sociologists and philosophers would disagree with this paradoxical definition which classifies diversion, recreation, and sport as one in the same, but the central focus of Malcolmson's historical study is not marred by the problem of defining terms. He is primarily concerned with the rise and fall of traditional recreational practices during the period of his study and as a result discusses such pursuits as feasts, fairs, holidays, wakes, dinners, elections, births, deaths, and sports.

One of the major strengths of the book is the author's placement of the subject under study in the social and cultural context of the period. Care was taken in discussing the class background of participants and sponsors, religion, geographical similarities or differences, politics, labor issues, age and sex of participants, law, reform movements, and customs. Malcolmson made wise use of a variety of excellent source materials including a wealth of primary sources such as diaries, journals, memoirs, town registers, government papers, and local newspapers to illustrate his contentions of social change. Hints of more recent historical techniques such as psychological functionalism and the use of descriptive statistics to illustrate points added another intriguing dimension to the study.

Malcolmson covers in depth two themes to explain the demise of traditional recreations. These are the decline of cruelty and the parting of religion and recreation. The entire first chapter relates to Puritanism and subsequent chapters refer to the influence of clergy and church doctrine on popular diversion. Similarly, Chapters 6 and 7, "The Undermining of Popular Recreations" and "Popular Recreations Under Attack," are devoted to amusements like blood sports, boxing, and football which included some form of cruelty. However, the author also presents additional convincing hypotheses for changes in the nature of popular English recreations. These are especially enlightening when they are contrasted and compared with the information provided in Chapters 4 and 5 entitled "Social Contexts" and "Some Social Functions."

Although much of two chapters was devoted to blood sports, the author neglected to include some very important aspects of individual blood sports which figured favorably in their attractiveness and eventual decline. For instance: the relationship between bull baiting and the

spread of Mithraic bull worship which saw the bull as a symbol of strength and fertility; the religious connotation of the cock as the Devil's messenger since the cock crowed for joy when Peter denied God; or, the manslaughter charge filed against a participant in cock throwing when his cockstele struck and killed a child. Malcolmson also failed to place enough emphasis on bear baiting, which he said was not very popular, and neglected ratting completely. He also would have realized that the R.S.P.C.A. had a far greater impact on blood sports if he had consulted either Edward G. Fairholme and Wellesley Pain, *A Century of Work for Animals; The History of the R.S.P.C.A., (1824-1924)*. (London, 1924), Dix Harwood, *Love for Animals—and How It Developed in Great Britain*. (New York, 1928), or, Charles D. Niven, *History of the Humane Movement*. (London, 1967).

It was surprising not to find any treatment of the theatre, only a few pages on horse racing, nothing on card playing, and many common sports missing from a book devoted to popular recreations. At least some mention of the sports in England's educational institutions should have been included and the fine illustrations interspersed throughout the book needed some explanation. For instance, there is much meaning behind Hogarth's "The Cockpit" which depicts the various class backgrounds and behavior of those observing the fight.

Such criticism of course is insignificant when compared to the merit of Malcolmson's book. He develops useful interpretations and outlines issues that future research might solve. The author also exemplifies a style with which these future lines should be pursued. The book should be read and studied by all historians interested in English social history as well as those specializing in sport history. It will be a great loss if Malcolmson's methods and ideas do not result in exciting new analytical studies of recreation and sport. The author has produced a piece of first-rate scholarship.

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