

**Choosing to be deaf:
leisure and sport in the deaf community of
north-west England,
1945 – 1995**

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Abstract

This thesis reconstructs the history of deaf people's leisure and sporting activity since World War Two. Using north-west England as a case study, the research covers a period of fifty years and has resulted in both quantitative and qualitative data being collected. The quantitative approach has seen the first comprehensive examination of the leisure activities of this significant but largely misunderstood minority community. Revealing the hidden history of the deaf community's social practices gives rise to a reappraisal of the academic models used to determine membership of the community and questions the long-held perception of deaf people as being disabled. In addition, a number of qualitative issues are addressed here, including an assessment on the leisure choices and motivations of deaf people. Whilst the focus is primarily on deaf people, their leisure history is set within the broader contexts of the regional, community and leisure histories of north-west England. The ways in which trends and traditions in the wider population of the area have influenced deaf leisure are discussed and the ways in which deaf people's social lives might be seen to mirror or vary from those of their hearing neighbours are illustrated. Central to this process is an investigation of the development and central position of the network of social clubs provided for deaf people. These clubs acted as the surrogate homes of the geographically dispersed deaf community and their vital role in building and maintaining the community will be indicated. This research is based primarily on data gathered from newspapers produced mainly by and for a deaf readership. These sources provide an insight into the lives and views of deaf people that is not available elsewhere and their use is innovative as a means of reconstructing social history on this scale.

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My colleagues in the Deaf Studies team at the University of Central Lancashire consistently provided information and sources which helped considerably with accessing appropriate literature relating to the deaf aspects of this project. Their more general support was also much appreciated, as was the financial backing provided by my Heads of Department, Ken Phillips and Brian Rosebury. I would like to thank my friends amongst the deaf community for their interest and support for this research. In particular, deaf historian Len Hodson provided both useful information and equally importantly confirmation that my work was of interest and relevance to those people I was investigating, the British deaf community. Finally, but most importantly of all, I would like to offer my immense gratitude to all those contributors, most of whom will remain forever anonymous, who provided reports of their deaf clubs' activities for the pages of *British Deaf News*. In doing so, they provided an historical record of the deaf community that is simply not available from any other source. I dedicate this research to them and hope that I have used their insights into deaf life in a way they would find interesting.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Many groups and individuals within society are seen as disabled because of particular physical or mental characteristics. This view is based on long established medical models of disability, which have concentrated on notions of 'loss' or 'abnormality', as will be explained in later chapters.¹ The only time disabled people might be thought to constitute any form of community was when one was artificially created for them, such as a hospital, asylum or similar form of refuge. Even here, any resulting idea of disabled people belonging to a community was based not on notions of shared social identity but instead arose from people with a medically defined condition being gathered together in a shared location. However, this imbalance has been redressed in recent years, with an increasing caucus of research which approaches perceptions of disability from a social and cultural perspective.² This has helped to stimulate interest in rediscovering the social history of such groups, which has previously been largely ignored by historians. As will be demonstrated in this thesis, the academic community has acknowledged the existence of a distinct and identifiable 'deaf community' for a number of years and this research contributes to a greater understanding of the history of this section of society.³ Various models by which membership of the deaf community may be conferred or attained were devised and the ways in which deaf people expressed their shared social and cultural

¹ See for example Oliver, M. *The politics of disablement* (London, Macmillan, 1990), pp. 14-17

² Examples include Knight, J. *Excluding attitudes: disabled people's experience of social exclusion* (London, Leonard Cheshire Foundation, 1999); Mitchell, D.T. and Snyder, S. *The body and physical difference: discourses of disability* (Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press, 1997); Swain, J., French, S. and Cameron, C. *Controversial issues in a disabling society* (Buckingham, Open University Press, 2003)

³ These include Baker-Shenk, C. and Padden, C. *American Sign Language: a look at its history, structure and community* (Silver Springs, TJ Publishers, 1978); Kyle, J.G. and Woll, B. *Sign language: the study of deaf people and their language* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1985); Padden, C. and Humphries, T. *Deaf in America: voices from a culture* (London, Harvard University Press, 1988); Sutton-Spence, R. and Woll, B. *The linguistics of British Sign Language: an introduction* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1999)

identity followed from these discussions.⁴ This community is not comprised of people who view themselves as physically handicapped because of an inability to hear; instead the deaf community sees itself as having a distinct social, cultural and linguistic foundation which results from community members being deaf. In doing so, those people who came to constitute the deaf community were 'choosing to be deaf', by accepting and celebrating their deafness as a positive element of their lives. The cultural aspects of the deaf community are not seen by its members to be in any way 'abnormal'; they are merely responses to the specific requirements for communication and socialisation that result from shared deafness. As a consequence, many authors have sought ways to define the structure and culture of the deaf community in terms which reject the concept of deafness as a disability.⁵ In turn, interest in uncovering the hidden history of deafness and deaf people from a social and cultural perspective has grown from the last quarter of the twentieth century and is now the focus of much research.⁶ Even so, much of what passes for deaf history remains more concerned with recounting the histories of important places, organisations or individuals, rather than any detailed reconstruction of the lives of the people who made up the deaf community. These discussions and affirmations on the cultural aspects of deafness have been made without the support of any quantifiable evidence of the deaf community's main form of cultural expression - the shared leisure activities

⁴ Instances of the various models for determining membership of the deaf community are included in Baker-Shenk, C. and Cokely, D. *American Sign Language: a teacher's resource text on curriculum, methods and evaluation* (Washington DC, Gallaudet University Press, 1980); Higgins, P. *Outsiders in a hearing world* (London, Sage, 1980); Lawson, L. 'The role of sign in the structure of the deaf community' in Gregory, S. and Hartley, G.M. (eds.) *Constructing deafness* (London, Pinter Publishers, 1991) pp. 31-34; Padden and Humphries *Deaf in America*

⁵ Corker, M. *Deaf and disabled or deafness disabled?* (Buckingham, Open University Press, 1998); Finkelstein, V. 'We are not disabled, you are' in Gregory and Hartley *Constructing deafness* pp. 265-271; Ladd, P. *Understanding deaf culture: in search of deafhood* (London, Multicultural Matters, 2003)

⁶ Grant, B. *The deaf advance* (Edinburgh, Pentland, 1990); Lee, R. (ed.) *Deaf liberation* (London, National Union of the Deaf, 1992); Taylor, G. and Bishop, J. (eds.) *Being deaf: the experience of deafness* (London, Pinter Publishers, 1991); Van Cleve, J.V. (ed.) *Deaf history unveiled* (Washington, D.C., Gallaudet University Press, 1993) are just a few examples of this work.

of its members. Whilst the extensive discourses on deaf community membership have concentrated on identifying and promoting the distinct elements of deaf life, especially sign language use, a wider view that encompasses those elements of deaf life which do not differ significantly from those of hearing people has not been considered. Although the deaf community and deaf culture have been defined several times, these definitions have not included any quantitative data on the social life of the deaf community. The lack of empirical evidence to support the definitions of the deaf community suggests that there has been an implicit acceptance of the ways in which the deaf community has spent its communal leisure time and so expressed its shared culture. However, the activities which fall within this 'common knowledge' of deaf leisure have never been explicitly stated in anything more than general terms. It was the lack of quantitative evidence that first gave rise to this research, as a means of testing the validity of these models by comparing the theories expressed in them against the realities of deaf life.

One of the main ways in which deaf people spent their leisure time was to become members of their local deaf clubs, sharing their leisure time amongst others with similar experiences, interests and outlooks. The history and importance of the deaf clubs will be described, to illustrate the way in which these clubs collectively and individually served as social and cultural hubs for the deaf community. Precisely what social and sporting activities deaf people shared as members of deaf clubs, and how this helped in the development and maintenance of a community of deaf people, has never been investigated in such detail before. In much of the growing canon of literature in the emerging field of Deaf Studies, the activities of deaf club members are regarded as being of utmost importance in the development and maintenance of the deaf community. Therefore this research provides original and extensive data which illustrates both the extent to which deaf people have shared their leisure time, and the broad range of activities they chose to take part in. All aspects of social interaction are

considered, with quantitative data on leisure and sporting activities being assessed separately.

The deaf club has long been the place in which deaf people gathered together and in which deaf culture was celebrated and enjoyed.⁷ The concept of topophilia as it may relate to deaf clubs will be considered, as one of a number of sociological issues which are raised through the historical reconstruction and analysis of deaf leisure. Arguments will be put forward in support of the contention that membership of a deaf club represented attachment to a group of people as much as to a physical place, drawing on the work of Bale, Tuan and Wise in particular.⁸ Some commentators have given specific examples of the way deaf culture was expressed within the deaf clubs, but there has been no indication of the extent of these activities nor of what other ways deaf people may have found of spending their leisure time.⁹ There is certainly no indication that certain aspects of communal deaf leisure (and by extension deaf culture) were the same as those enjoyed by non-deaf people, or that deaf people may have taken part in certain activities for reasons other than being deaf. In addition, previous research has focussed on the deaf club as a place where deaf people gathered, rather than considering the deaf club as an entity and looking at the wider activities the members took part in as a group. By investigating more closely which leisure activities deaf people chose to take part in together, then a more detailed picture of deaf community life can be seen. From this, a greater insight into the way deaf people followed wider patterns of social and cultural behaviour can be gained.

⁷ Harris, Jennifer *The cultural meaning of deafness* (Aldershot, Avebury, 1995); Kyle and Woll *Sign language*, p. 11; Ladd, P. 'The modern deaf community' in Miles, D. *BSL, a beginners guide* (London, BBC Books, 1988) pp. 37-38; Mason, C. 'School experiences' in Gregory and Hartley *Constructing deafness* pp. 84 – 87; Padden, C. 'The deaf community and the culture of deaf people' in Wilcox, S. (ed.) *American deaf culture* (Burtonsville, Linstock 1989), pp. 1-16

⁸ Bale, J. *Sport, space and the city* (London, Routledge, 1993); Tuan, Y-F. *Topophilia: a study of environmental perception, attitudes and values* (London, Prentice-Hall, 1974); Wise, J. M. 'Home: territory and identity' *Cultural Studies* 14, 2 (2000) pp. 295 - 310

⁹ See for example Padden and Humphries *Deaf in America*

This in turn allows a fresh perspective on the distinctiveness and conformity of deaf leisure to be obtained; as will be shown, this conformity of leisure has important implications when the issue of whether deafness should be considered as a disability is raised at the conclusion of this thesis.

This research uses north-west England as a case study to reconstruct the history of deaf involvement in leisure and sport, using both 'empiricist' and 'reflectionist' approaches in identifying and considering both quantitative and qualitative issues. This approach was advocated by Hill and Williams as a methodology for dealing with the social history of leisure.¹⁰ Empirical data collection relating to the types and frequency of deaf club based leisure and sporting activity resulted in the first large-scale reconstruction of deaf leisure activity ever undertaken in Britain and the resulting data is used throughout this thesis for illustrative purposes. From this empirical data, the social choices made by deaf people could be identified and quantified in a statistical format. The research takes a combination of latitudinal and longitudinal approaches, by considering all the reported activities of members of twenty eight deaf clubs over a period of fifty years. In this way, a quantifiable analysis of deaf leisure and sport can be made, and specific patterns and trends in these activities can be identified. From this analysis, qualitative factors relating to issues of motivation, preference and choice can be raised and certain conclusions reached. The data was drawn from deaf newspapers, and was based on reports submitted by deaf club members themselves. Because of this aspect of the primary source materials used, it will be argued that the data accurately reflects the views and preferences of those people who are being considered by this research. The analysis of the data is not solely based on externally imposed criteria but is driven by a continuous reflection on the reasons for the leisure choices identified by deaf people themselves. As will be demonstrated in chapter

¹⁰ Hill, J. and Williams, J. (eds.) *Sport and identity in the north of England* (Keele, Keele University Press, 1996), p. 3

five, newspapers published specifically for a deaf readership have played an important role in maintaining contact across the deaf community. In doing so, they have served a similar purpose to local newspapers and have closely reflected the perspectives of the community. Whilst certain sections of these newspapers sought to inform and more latterly influence opinions amongst their readers, the pages devoted to reports of deaf club news remained very much concerned with reflecting the social lives of deaf club members and sharing this information with deaf people across the country. This information thus provides insights into a range of cultural aspects of deaf communal leisure. This makes these publications an important means of gaining insights into all aspects of the community across a considerable period of time. Many of the issues discussed in this thesis can be applied to other community groups, with the deafness of the participants being largely inconsequential when applying theoretical concepts of leisure activity to the data. Several of the principles used in this analysis could be equally applied to groups founded on the basis of shared national or ethnic heritage, gender or religious divisions, or geographical location to name just a few. Knowing how deaf people chose to fill their leisure time may have intrinsic interest and value in its own right, but as Richard Holt has argued, it is necessary to consider specific groups and communities within a conceptual framework.¹¹ This is provided by a brief history of leisure and sport in north-west England from 1945 onwards, together with a discussion of the role of leisure generally and sport in particular in the development of structured and identifiable communities. In this way, concepts relating to deaf leisure will be illustrated within a wider contextualisation of socialisation and community formation across the north west, and the deaf community will serve as an example of leisure development and purpose for many other groups in the region. The example of the deaf community provides a rare opportunity to analyse an identifiable social group comprising a significant

¹¹ Holt, R. *Sport and the British* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1989) pp. 357-368

number of people, spread over an extensive geographical area, and spanning a period of half a century. The amount of data and detail which has been uncovered because of this breadth of investigation makes this research unique in its scope, and of value and interest to a wide range of social historians. The fact that the group being considered were deaf people is not particularly significant in this respect; it is the fact that they took part in communal social activities which is of primary importance, as this provides a basis from which to investigate issues of community formation, maintenance and cohesion that can be applied more widely. This research thus contributes to a greater appreciation of the social history of the deaf community and to a broader understanding of the leisure history of north-west England in the post-war period.

The question of 'Who are these people we call deaf?' needs to be answered before any assessment of their social lives can be made and the extensive literature on deafness will be analysed to address this question. The methods of defining the deaf community outlined earlier have been largely unchallenged since the mid 1980s. Therefore the criteria for determining how membership should be assigned and recognised will be tested against the historical record provided by *British Deaf News*, to assess the veracity of these models from a historical point of view. Does the history of deaf leisure support or challenge the theoretical assumptions made about what becoming a member of a deaf club – what might be termed 'choosing to be deaf' – has involved? The history of deaf leisure will be shown to provide evidence which illustrates the ways in which the deaf community has changed during the post-war period and in which it may continue to evolve in the future. As part of this process, the way in which deaf people replicated the leisure and sporting activities of other communities within society will be demonstrated. In many ways, deaf people have shown themselves to be no different to anyone else in the ways in which they have chosen to fill their spare time, and evidence to support this conclusion is presented throughout this

thesis. This evidence also illuminates trends in community development which are found across society. For example, Puttnam contends that social networks have altered and fragmented since the second world war, and the analysis of the deaf community included in this thesis will be shown to support many (but not all) of Puttnam's arguments.¹² The same evidence will also be used to illustrate how ideas of the emergence of nation states put forward by Benedict Anderson can be seen in the political development of the deaf community.¹³ The deaf community will thus be shown to be no different to other social or cultural groups in certain aspects of its internal structures and patterns of growth.

Research questions

In its entirety, this thesis will argue that participation in leisure and sport have been central factors in the development and maintenance of the British deaf community, and that deaf clubs were the main providers and primary means of entry into that communal social life. Whilst leisure and sport will be shown to have served specific and vital purposes in establishing social and cultural cohesion within the deaf community, it will be clearly demonstrated that deaf people have not used leisure and sport any differently than other sections of the broader population. Certain activities may have been more prevalent than others in the social lives based around the deaf clubs, but their members did not engage in activities that were markedly different to those of their hearing counterparts. As will be seen throughout this thesis, it was not the types of activities that illustrate the importance of shared social activities to the deaf community. Instead, it will be demonstrated that it was the broader social, cultural and psychological benefits of such involvement that made leisure and sport such vital components in the establishment and continuation of the deaf community.

¹² Puttnam, R. D. *Bowling alone : the collapse and revival of American community* (New York, Simon and Schuster, 2000)

¹³ Anderson, B. *Imagined communities: reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism* (London, Verso, 1991)

In order to achieve these objectives, this research will seek to address the following questions, using innovative sources for data collection:

1. What leisure and sporting activities did deaf people engage in during the post-war period?
2. Were there specific activities that deaf people preferred over others?
3. How important have leisure and sport been in the social and cultural life of deaf people in Britain?
4. What role has involvement in leisure and sport activities played in the formation and maintenance of a distinct deaf community in Britain?
5. Has the deaf community shown any marked differences to other social or community groups in its use of leisure and sport?

These questions will be answered through a close examination of data collected from deaf oriented newspapers published between 1945 and 1995, and by comparing issues identified from the information gathered with theoretical discussions on the processes of community formation. The data gathered informs an analysis of the leisure motivations and choices of deaf people in terms of community coherence and maintenance. In these respects, this research demonstrates originality both in the focus of the research and in the sources used for the reconstruction of deaf leisure activities. This data is drawn from a source never previously utilised for this type of research and the topic of deaf leisure is one that has previously received no detailed attention by social historians. The data is drawn from deaf newspapers of the period, which provide an unrivalled insight into a community about which little is known amongst the general population. As will be shown in chapter five, *British Deaf News* and its predecessor *British Deaf Times* provide a unique opportunity to investigate an identifiable social group both longitudinally and latitudinally as well as cross-

demographically. The reports of deaf social life featured in the newspapers included all sections of the community, regardless of age, gender, religion or geography. This resulted in a data collection process that was able to represent the deaf community as a whole, rather than merely reflecting the interests or activities of certain sections of the community. Fuller details of the data collection process and the value of deaf newspapers as a research resource will be given in a later chapter. The types of leisure activity deaf people took part in between 1945 and 1995 are uncovered from this data, and the extent to which various activities featured in the social lives of deaf people and the deaf community will be determined. From this, the comparative popularity of certain activities can be assessed and trends in participation identified. Both chronological and geographical variations in levels of involvement generally, and with various activities specifically, can also be identified.

From this qualitative analysis, the importance of shared leisure and sporting activities in maintaining feelings of community amongst deaf people can be assessed. The ways in which leisure contributed to the formation of group and self-identity will be discussed and theories relating to the roles of leisure and sport within communities will be tested. This process will help to determine if and how leisure in the deaf community may replicate or differ from the roles and purposes such activities serve in other social and community groups. Both the sources used and the data derived from them provide a unique opportunity to gain intimate access to a community of people and to assess their engagement with each other and with outsiders. This allows questions to be raised about what this community did together and equally importantly, why they chose to take part in these activities. As this research will show, many of the activities deaf people enjoyed were the same as those of hearing people. Therefore, deaf people can be used as a case study for investigating the roles of leisure and sport across a variety of social groups. Additionally, an analysis of deaf people's social lives

provides an opportunity to learn more about a minority group who feel themselves to be oppressed and misrepresented by the majority culture (in this instance, non-deaf people). As will be shown, members of the deaf community reject perceptions of themselves based on medical or pathological models, and view themselves as a social, cultural and linguistic minority. This research therefore provides evidence against which both perceptions can be challenged and re-evaluated. This thesis therefore serves to provide a detailed history of deaf leisure that has never been uncovered before, which can then be used to investigate a wide range of aspects of deaf people's social and cultural lives. In order to begin this process, it is necessary to locate deaf people's leisure activities within the broader history of leisure and sport in north-west England, and indeed to define precisely which areas the region includes. This then will be the first topic to be addressed by this research, and will be the focus of the next chapter.

Chapter two:

Leisure and sport in north-west England since 1945

As will be shown later in this thesis, deaf club members were involved in a wide range of leisure and sporting activities between 1945 and 1995. Evidence drawn from deaf newspapers will show that much of the social life of deaf people was communal in nature, involving the presence of other deaf people and being centred on the deaf clubs. This continued a tradition of participation and choice of recreation activities that dated back to before the Second World War. However, these activities were not solely restricted to the physical premises of the deaf club nor to events which only involved other deaf people. Deaf club members' activities were influenced by what was taking place in the outside world and regularly involved interaction with their hearing counterparts. Factors which affected deaf leisure included regional preferences for certain activities (especially sports), economic factors brought about by changes in industry and commerce, and broader trends and changes in the social life of the region. Before dealing with the issues relating to deaf social life in subsequent chapters, it is necessary to set this analysis within the more general context of post-war leisure and sporting activity across the north west during this period. The purpose of this chapter is therefore to provide a brief history of some of the main elements of social and sporting life in the north west, in order to illustrate the circumstances within which the specific social activities of the area's deaf clubs were located. This history will inform the analysis of deaf club activities which constitutes the central focus of this research in later chapters. It is not intended to provide an exhaustive delineation of post-war leisure in the region or to attempt to define the culture of the region through a detailed analysis of these activities. This examination will concentrate on outlining the communal nature of much of the leisure activity of working-class people in north-west England and the ways in which this changed during the research period. In doing so, the developments in

deaf leisure and sport outlined later in this thesis will be contextualised. Certain leisure pursuits have been closely associated with the region and contributed to the region's cultural identity and these will be briefly addressed. The reasons for focussing on working class leisure are put forward later in this chapter. The role of social clubs, particularly in providing and promoting leisure and sport, will also be considered, as it is those aspects of deaf life which took place in and around the region's deaf clubs that are of interest to this research.

For the purposes of this research, north-west England is defined as the area extending from the River Mersey in the south to the Scottish border to the north, and from the Irish Sea coast to the borders with Yorkshire and Derbyshire on the east. These boundaries set the north west within the generally accepted understanding of 'the north' as outlined in Russell's examination of northern identity.¹ In essence, this area consists of the counties of Lancashire, Westmorland and Cumberland as they were constituted prior to county boundary changes in 1974.² The area of research also includes those parts of Cheshire which fall within these geographical boundaries, namely Stockport to the south of Manchester, Birkenhead and Wallasey on the Mersey estuary, and Warrington and Widnes, both of which lie to the north of the Mersey inland. Maps showing the location of deaf clubs within this area are provided in chapter five, and give an overview of the area under consideration.³ The region includes a wide range of topography, from the Lake District to the north, through the moors and valleys of east Lancashire to the wide floodplain of the Mersey to the south. The coastal plains of west Lancashire and the Fylde are another important feature, as is the expanse of Morecambe Bay. In addition to the Mersey, a number of other major

¹ Russell, D. *Looking north: northern England and the national imagination* (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2004), pp. 14-18; see also the map on p. xii

² Following changes in county boundaries introduced in 1974, Westmorland and Cumberland were merged to form the single county of Cumbria.

³ See pages 124 and 125 of this thesis for maps showing the area covered by this research

rivers drain the region, including the Irwell, Ribble, Wyre, Lune and Kent. This varied topography has influenced and been reflected in the economic characteristics of the region throughout the period of this research. Agriculture dominates in the north, particularly hill farming in Cumberland and Westmorland, with industry here restricted largely to the coastal fringes. Other important agricultural areas include west Lancashire between Preston and the coast on both banks of the Ribble.⁴ In east and central Lancashire, textile mills comprised the major employer in the immediate post-war years, as they had done since the late eighteenth century. As a result of workers migrating from the Caribbean and the Indian subcontinent, there was a marked diversification in the cultural make-up of the region's population, particularly in the established textile towns. However, textiles experienced a rapid decline from the early 1950s and no longer constituted a significant part of the region's industrial output well before the end of this research.⁵ The common perception of the 1950s and 60s is encapsulated in Harold Mcmillan's famous motto 'You've never had it so good'. However, Jeff Hill argues that in many northern textile towns the reality was far less upbeat, as the population experienced high levels of unemployment and deprivation because of mill closures.⁶ Hill outlines the effects this decline had in Nelson and the same process was occurring across the region to varying degrees, which had consequences for other industries whose fortunes were closely associated with those of the textile industry.⁷

⁴ Chaloner, W.H. *Palatinate studies: chapters in the social and industrial history of Lancashire* (Manchester, Carnegie, 1992) and Rollinson, W. *A history of Cumberland and Westmorland* (Chichester, Phillimore, 1996) provide useful geographical descriptions of the region's varied economy and industry

⁵ Singleton, J. 'The decline of the British cotton industry since 1940' in Rose, M.B. (ed.) *The Lancashire cotton industry: a history since 1700* (Preston, Lancashire County Books, 1996), pp. 296-324; Sandberg, L.G. *Lancashire in decline: a study in entrepreneurship, technology and international trade* (Columbus, Ohio State University Press, 1974)

⁶ Hill, J. *Nelson: politics, economy, community* (Keele, Keele University Press, 1997), pp. 142-143

⁷ Hunt, D. *A history of Preston* (Preston, Carnegie, 1992), pp. 249-250; Taylor, A. *20th century Blackburn* (Barnsley, Wharnccliffe Books, 2000), pp. 86-87 provide examples from other industries

Coalmining was one such industry and was a major employer throughout the north west, with pits found in the far north west (in the area around Maryport and Workington), east Lancashire (for example in Accrington and Burnley) and across the entire south Lancashire plain. Numerous mines were found in virtually all the towns of this area, such as those around Wigan, Newton-le-Willows, Leigh and St Helens. These too experienced a gradual and terminal decline from the 1950s onwards as demand from textiles and power stations diminished and geological problems made coal mining increasingly unprofitable. From 80 pits producing over twelve million tons of coal per annum in 1950, there were only nine active pits by 1975; other than a few open cast mines, there were no working pits in the north west by 1995.⁸ Various other industries were to be found in the region. Shipbuilding took place in Barrow in Furness and Birkenhead, imports and exports flowed through the various ports such as Liverpool and Heysham (and including the inland ports of Manchester and Preston) whilst fishing sustained towns such as Fleetwood and Whitehaven. Glass making was one of the main employers in St Helens, and chemical industries were important contributors to the local economies of towns including Whitehaven, Barrow, Warrington and Widnes. Paper manufacture, serviced by the importing of wood pulp through Preston and Liverpool Docks, was the basis of several large concerns in Blackburn, Warrington and the south Lakes area around Kendal.⁹ In addition, both heavy and light engineering concerns were based in many towns, with the Trafford Park industrial estate in Salford providing a concentrated location for a variety of engineering concerns that could be found across the region. As well as servicing the textile industry, the manufacture of printing presses, trains, cars and commercial vehicles all contributed to the wide range of industries to be found in north-west

⁸ Crosby, A. *History of Lancashire* (Darwen, Phillimore, 1998), pp. 118-119; Phillips, C.B. and Smith, J.H. *Lancashire and Cheshire from AD 1540* (London, Longman, 1994), pp. 327-330

⁹ Phillips and Smith, *Lancashire and Cheshire*, pp. 317-320

England.¹⁰ As traditional industries such as textiles and mining declined, new industries such as aircraft manufacture took their place and smaller light engineering concerns and service industries came to be increasingly important as employers. Although the region experienced a severe economic downturn during the 1980s, the diversity of industry allowed sustained economic recovery to occur from the early 1990s.¹¹ So although cotton is most closely associated with industrial production in the north west, it was by no means the only source of employment or income in the region.

As a result of this preponderance of industry within the region, coupled with labour intensive agricultural production, the majority of the region's population might reasonably be considered to be working class. The industrial history of the north west has helped to build a perception of the region as being to some extent insular, and this has resulted in the inhabitants of the north west being seen to have a strong regional identity, as well as contributing to a broader conception of 'the north' as a whole. This identity has been the subject of much research in relation to leisure and especially sport, in which links between regional and sporting identities can be identified. Several writers have investigated the issue of northern identity from various perspectives, and both the industrial heritage of the region and the leisure activities of its inhabitants – especially the sports enjoyed by the working classes – have been shown to contribute to this commonly held view.¹² This social background, together with other factors such

¹⁰ Typical examples of the various industries to be found in the north west can be found throughout Clark, T. *A century of shipbuilding: products of Barrow in Furness* (Lancaster, Dalesman, 1971); Crosby, *History of Lancashire*; Hay, D. *Whitehaven: an illustrated history* (Beckermet, Michael Moon, 1979); Hunt Preston; Marlow, P. *Liverpool: looking out to sea* (London, Cape, 1993); Taylor *Blackburn*

¹¹ Crosby, *History of Lancashire*, pp. 118-119

¹² Russell's *Looking north* is particular relevant to this research, as it investigates the impact of a number of cultural activities on perceptions of northern England. Examples of the relationship between northern identity and sport include Collins, T. *Rugby's great split: class, culture and the origins of Rugby League football* (London, Frank Cass, 1998); Hill and Williams *Sport and identity*; Huggins, M.

as the proximity of the coast and the types of work people were employed in, all helped to influence the leisure activities enjoyed by the majority of the region's inhabitants. For instance, there are definite links to be found between the textiles towns and the ways in which their inhabitants took their annual holidays, and between specific industries and participation in certain sports. Whilst accepting that the population of the north west was not solely comprised of working-class people, they did comprise the majority and their activities were more representative of the region's general trends in leisure, sport and culture as a result. There has been little or no research undertaken into the leisure activities of agricultural workers in the region, whilst the social histories of a number of north-west towns provide a variety of insights into the leisure pursuits of their inhabitants.¹³ As will be shown in later chapters, all the deaf clubs identified and investigated by this research were found in towns, and there are a number of ways in which deaf clubs might be considered working-class institutions. For these reasons, it is the activities of working-class people from the industrial towns that will be examined here. The majority of deaf club members lived and worked in towns and were thus subject to the myriad influences of those amongst whom they lived.

Following the cessation of hostilities in 1945, the social patterns of the region established before the war began to re-emerge. However, as in many other aspects of post-war regeneration, participation in leisure and sport underwent radical changes over the next fifty years. Established ways of spending free time were supplemented or replaced by new opportunities and aspirations, driven in

'The regular re-invention of sporting tradition and identity: Cumberland and Westmorland wrestling c. 1800-2001' *The Sports Historian* 21, 1 (2001) pp. 35-55

¹³ For example Beattie, D. *Blackburn: the development of a Lancashire cotton town* (Ryburn, Krumlin, 1992); Hill *Nelson*; Hunt *Preston*; Kidd, A.J. *Manchester* (Keele, Keele University Press, 1996); Muir, R. *A history of Liverpool* (Wakefield, SR Publishers, 1970); Walton, J.K. *Blackpool* (Keele, Keele University Press, 1998)

part by an increase in disposable income and changing attitudes towards leisure as a social activity. As a result, the forms of cultural expression represented by engagement in leisure and sport underwent a period of major change. The cities and towns of the region provided numerous opportunities for their inhabitants to spend their weekly leisure time and disposable income. The prosperity of the region had seen the provision of libraries, art galleries, parks and other civic amenities in towns across the region during the Victorian and Edwardian periods and these were still popular venues for a variety of leisure activities in the years after the second world war.¹⁴ These sites could assist in the communal expression of the region's cultural heritage, by acting as venues for older local traditions, such as egg rolling. Derived from the older Lancashire tradition of pace-egging, in which boiled eggs were decorated and paraded around parishes and towns, egg rolling still takes place in Preston's Avenham Park every Easter Monday. The townsfolk would gather there to roll Easter eggs down the steep slopes of the park, and the continuation of this traditional activity was as closely identified with the setting as it was with the town's communal cultural heritage.¹⁵ For Prestonians, egg rolling was not quite the same when it was performed elsewhere, for example when bad weather meant alternative venues had to be found, such as yards, gardens or even staircases. Avenham Park was also one of the main venues for the festivities held during Preston's world famous Guild Merchant. The Guild dates back to 1179 and was celebrated every twenty years from 1542 until 1922. The outbreak of the second world war saw the 1942 event postponed until 1952, when the tradition was revived and it remains a unique symbol of the town's history and heritage. As well as being a week-long reunion for Prestonians from around the world, the history of the Guild reflects the ways in which the economic function and cultural makeup of the town has changed

¹⁴ Hunt, *Preston*, pp. 214-217 and Kidd, *Manchester* pp. 156-164 offer descriptions of typical civic provision of leisure and recreation facilities in the north west

¹⁵ Crosby, A. *The Lancashire dictionary of dialect, tradition and folklore* (Otley, Smith Settle, 2000), pp. 75, 149

over the centuries.¹⁶ Whilst these longstanding elements of Preston's communal social and cultural life have survived, others – examples of which could also be found in other parts of the north west - have not. A more widely celebrated tradition that gradually disappeared during the post-war period was that of the Whit walks. This annual expression of religious and cultural identity manifested itself in the processions of witness which took place in many of the large towns and cities across the north west. Religion had long played an important part in the spiritual and social lives of the region, with the numerous churches also being the organisers of a variety of social and sporting activities for their congregations. The processions served both a religious and a social purpose, with all the churches in a town joining together to march behind their own banners, although there were strict demarcations concerning who marched when. In Preston, the Anglican, Roman Catholic and Free Churches marched on separate days over the extended Whitsun weekend. Great expense was often incurred to fit out participants in new clothes as tradition demanded, whilst attendance at another denomination's procession was often frowned upon.¹⁷ The majority of towns ceased to hold processions of witness from the 1970s, partly due to falling church attendance but also as a spirit of ecumenicalism became to make such overt displays less acceptable. However, they did continue well into the 1990s in a few places, most notably Liverpool and the hill towns to the east of Manchester, such as Ashton under Lyne and Oldham.¹⁸

There was also a great deal of secular entertainment taking place across the region, with the consumption of alcohol playing a central part. Each town naturally had an often large number of public houses but there were also a

¹⁶ For a fuller description of the history and importance of Preston Guild see Crosby, A. *The history of Preston Guild: 800 years of England's greatest carnival* (Preston, Lancashire County Books, 1991)

¹⁷ Crosby *The Lancashire dictionary*, pp. 211-213

¹⁸ Kidd *Manchester* pp. 120-122 gives a brief overview of the place of Whit Week in the social and religious life of Manchester from the late nineteenth century onwards.

selection of social clubs affiliated to the major political parties or associated with particular trades, sports or interests.¹⁹ Although these too were places where members gathered to drink, they also acted as venues in which people with common backgrounds, beliefs or interests could meet, socialise and exchange ideas and information. For example, many Catholic churches had their own social clubs, which not only brought the congregation together in a leisure setting, but also provided a useful source of supplementary income for the parishes. In addition, social clubs served other purposes such as fundraising for worthy causes and the care of members. The various types of social clubs provided support for injured, ill or elderly members, organised group outings to places of interest and holidays and parties for their children. As such, they served as a focus for local community identity. The majority of social clubs across the north west operated on similar principles, and the co-operative nature of such clubs was demonstrated in their annual President's Day. On a set day every year – usually a Saturday in summer – the members would be given a share of the club's profits in the form of vouchers which could be redeemed at the bar for free drinks. Known as 'pint cheques', these could regularly number over a dozen and were often all redeemed on the same day, leading to scenes of excessive drunkenness in many places. However, there were seldom reports of violence or indeed disapproval amongst the local population, suggesting that these activities were accepted as part of the tradition and culture of the town and were at least tolerated as such. Many smaller towns, such as Kirkham and Leyland, were effectively closed down for one Saturday in summer as the social clubs of the town held their President's Day at the same time. Floats were decorated and processed around the town and licensing hours were extended for the day in all the town's drinking venues.²⁰ Such clubs went into decline as attendance was replaced by other social habits

¹⁹ The development and role of such clubs is discussed in Hill, J. *Sport, leisure and culture in twentieth century Britain* (Basingstoke, Palgrave, 2002), pp. 130-145

²⁰ Crosby *The Lancashire dictionary*, p. 46

and although many traditional social clubs still survived towards the end of the twentieth century, their membership dwindled and became increasingly older as newer, younger members were no longer drawn to the clubs in the same numbers as before. Club Days declined in popularity from the late 1980s, not wholly as a consequence of the decline of the social clubs who took part. Club Days began to attract increasing numbers of visitors from outside the towns, drawn by the less restrictive licensing laws. As a result, Club Days became more closely associated with drunkenness and unruly behaviour, and the local police and licensing authorities became less tolerant of such disruption to good order.²¹ The economic impact of the decline in some towns' main employers, particularly the virtual closure of Leyland Motors in Leyland, was another important contributory factor. However, similar events in the more rural towns, which were closer to traditional country fairs, continued to flourish. By 1995, Field Days were still to be found in the smaller market towns across the agricultural areas of north and west Lancashire and south Cumberland.²²

There is extensive evidence that, contrary to some popular perceptions, the lives of working-class people did not solely revolve around the regular or excessive consumption of alcohol. Indeed, the north west had a long tradition of promoting temperance and abstinence and this was firmly established in the rationale (if not necessarily the working practices) of many working-class leisure and sporting organisations.²³ The first social clubs of this type developed not as drinking

²¹ These annual celebrations do not appear to have attracted the attention of social historians and are not addressed in the historical record of the north west. Instead personal history provides vivid (if unreferenced) recollections of family and friends' involvement in President's Days throughout the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s.

²² Crosby *The Lancashire dictionary*, p. 46

²³ Levitt, I. *Joseph Livesey of Preston: business, temperance and moral reform* (Preston, University of Central Lancashire, 1996) describes the history of the Temperance Movement in north-west England and particularly its roots in Preston. See also Williams, G.P. and Brake, G.T. *Drink in Great Britain 1900 to 1979* (London, Edsall, 1980) and Hunt, *Preston*, pp. 198-204. The role of alcohol and

establishments but as venues in which members of various trades could take part in a wide range of educational activities. It was on the basis of 'improving' the moral and physical welfare of the working classes that the Club and Institute Union (CIU) was established.²⁴ The CIU's philosophy was to promote Mechanics Institutes and Working Men's Clubs as alternatives to public houses, and as promoters of temperance and the providers of forms of rational recreation. It was from these roots that the extensive network of social clubs found in the north west in the years following the second world war had developed. As will be shown, one factor which did not change was that the most popular activities throughout the period were those which participants took part in communally. As well as informal pursuits based around pubs and social clubs, there were a range of societies and organisations to be found in every town, whilst watching and taking part in a variety of sports was also very popular. As working-class groups took control over their own leisure organisations, many of these clubs and societies continued a tradition of morally or physically improving recreation that had its foundations in the facilities provided by paternalistic employers. As will be shown in later chapters, this assumption of control by club members was mirrored in the management of deaf clubs. In this and many other respects, deaf leisure across the north west will be shown to be no different to that of other communities across the region. Although evidence will be presented later in this thesis which supports to some extent the views of Puttnam on the decline of society as a result of decreasing voluntary association, it is important to acknowledge that these types of activity did not disappear completely.²⁵ As the examination of deaf leisure will show, though there was a marked decline in some forms of voluntary association, these activities still remained an important factor

temperance in the development of sporting clubs is addressed by Collins, T. and Vamplew, W. *Mud, sweat and beers: a cultural history of sport and alcohol* (Oxford, Berg, 2002), particularly pp. 119-122

²⁴ The philosophy of the founders of Working Men's Clubs and the aims of the Club and Institute Union are outlined at www.infed.org/thinkers/solly.

²⁵ Puttnam *Bowling alone*

in deaf social life. In some instances, one form of voluntary association was merely replaced by another, although the alternative form may have been less formally or rigidly organised. By examining this aspect of deaf leisure activity, the extent to which Puttnam's theories might be seen to apply within the north west can be tested. The same changes can be seen to have affected virtually all sections of society across the region, and although leisure activities may have changed to some extent, the way in which people gathered together as a result did not. Whilst forms of leisure which did not involve interaction with other people became increasingly popular, it was still those which involved sharing an activity in the presence of likeminded others which involved the greatest number of participants. This is particularly pertinent to sporting events, as figures presented below will show. Even for popular and apparently solitary activities such as angling or tending allotments, participants still joined together in the form of clubs or associations based around the various activities. They were seeking the psychological rewards which are a major motivating factor of all social activities and which will be discussed in relation to deaf leisure in chapters six to eight of this thesis.

The changing fortunes of theatres and cinemas serve as an illustration of the way north-west leisure changed after World War Two. In the immediate post-war years, attendance at theatres and cinemas was a major part of the social lives of all the towns in the region. Every city and virtually all towns of any size had at least one theatre, as well as a selection of cinemas. Kidd notes the presence of 91 cinemas in Manchester in 1951, sharing a total of 99,000 seats. However, the introduction of television to the region in the late 1950s and early 1960s led to many cinemas being converted to serve the growing demand for bingo halls. The influence of imported American leisure activities, which was to become increasingly evident in many aspects of popular culture during the second half of the twentieth century, could be seen in the conversion of many cinemas to ten-

pin bowling alleys during the 1960s. The decline was such that by the mid-1960s, Manchester's film fans were restricted to only 33 cinemas across the city.²⁶ It was not until the late 1980s that cinema going would once again become a major element in the social lives of the region's inhabitants, with the development of larger venues in out of town locations which offered high standards of accommodation for their patrons and a range of films shown on multiple screens. Theatre underwent a similar decline in popularity, initially because of the dominance of the cinemas, and many smaller towns could no longer support a theatre of their own. However, theatre-going did not entirely die out and indeed continued to flourish at grassroots levels, with amateur dramatic societies in cities and towns across the region. Locally produced pantomimes in particular remained popular in venues such as church halls.²⁷

The industrial heritage of the region had a major effect on the way many working people from the north west took their major form of concentrated relaxation, their annual holiday. The tradition of Wakes weeks in the Lancashire mill towns dated back well into the nineteenth century and continued into the post-war years, although the term 'Wakes weeks' fell largely into disuse.²⁸ During the annual holiday period, the majority of factories and associated businesses in the textile towns of the region closed down at the same time, and Blackpool would become Preston-, Blackburn- or Bolton-by-the-sea for a week or fortnight every year as the working populations of these towns would move practically *en masse* to the Fylde coast. Other Lancashire resorts catered for varying clientele, either in

²⁶ Kidd *Manchester*, p. 223

²⁷ For a discussion of the popularity of pantomimes, see Salberg, D. *Once upon a pantomime* (Luton, Cortney, 1981)

²⁸ See Hudson, J. *Wakes week* (Stroud, Alan Sutton, 1992)

their catchment areas or in the type of holiday they provided.²⁹ Rather than drawing people from Lancashire, Morecambe relied heavily on its rail links with Yorkshire, to the extent that it was known as 'the Yorkshireman's Blackpool', along with a tradition of attracting Scottish visitors for their annual holiday.³⁰ The more refined Southport, which steadfastly rejected the brasher attractions to be found across the Ribble estuary in Blackpool, provided a genteel day out for the upper- and middle-class inhabitants of Merseyside, with whom it shared an electric train link. Blackpool on the other hand remained the pre-eminent annual destination for workers from across the north west well into the post-war period. Staying in a bed and breakfast hotel, taking donkey rides on the beach, hiring deckchairs on the promenade and watching a show on one of the three piers became a stereotypical view of the Blackpool holiday, whilst at the same time being the main reasons why the resort was so popular with its working-class visitors. The resort closely resembled a home from home by the sea in many respects, in addition to offering treats and recreations that were not part of the normal working week. Often, pub regulars, church congregations and social club members would travel as a group, on trips paid for by weekly subs collected (or even paid for) by the pubs and clubs, thus spreading the financial burden over the course of the year.³¹ This pattern of self-organised and communally funded activities will be shown taking place in deaf clubs, illustrating the conformity of deaf leisure activity with that of other community groups. Some employers even continued the earlier practice of providing their workers with free or subsidised holidays.³² Eagerly anticipated by the populations of the mill towns, these mass holidays contributed significantly to the continuing popularity of Blackpool in

²⁹ See Walton, J.K. *Wonderland by the waves: a history of the seaside resorts of Lancashire* (Preston, Lancashire County Books, 1992) and Walton, J.K. *The Blackpool landlady: a social history* (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1978) for detailed descriptions of the development of Lancashire's resorts, particularly Blackpool and the holidays enjoyed by its visitors.

³⁰ Fowler, A. *Lancashire cotton operatives and work, 1900-1950* (Aldershot, Ashgate, 2003), p. 63

³¹ *Ibid*, pp. 63-64; Walton, *Wonderland*, pp. 18-19

³² Walton, *Wonderland*, p.16

particular after 1945, and this popularity was maintained despite the growth in overseas holidays and the gradual decline of communal holidays by a town's inhabitants from the early 1970s.³³ John Walton argues that no other industrial area was so closely tied to this type of communal seaside holiday as the industrial north west, and even within the region, areas where other industries dominated did not take their holidays in quite the same concentrated and communal fashion.³⁴ Nevertheless, these holidays remained closely associated with the region as a whole. Even for those workers from towns which did not close down for a set holiday period, Blackpool was also the primary resort of choice for many years. However, by the 1980s the majority of visitors to the town were making day trips, rather than staying for a week or more as in earlier times, and whole communities no longer holidayed together on such a large scale.³⁵ Other Lancashire resorts fared less well in the second half of the twentieth century, with Morecambe in particular suffering a major demise as the destination for an extended holiday. Towns such as St Annes and Southport, which had deliberately promoted themselves as suitable destinations for the middle classes, suffered to a lesser extent but also continued to attract day trippers.³⁶ The phenomenon of the Wakes weeks did not die out completely but from the 1970s onwards it did become the exception rather than the rule for much of the industry in a town to close down at the same time, and as a result the social aspects of Wakes weeks gradually disappeared.³⁷

Whilst the coastal resorts may have been the most popular holiday destination for working-class people from the north west, these had not been the only type of holiday available to them. A combination of post-war factors such as improved

³³ Walton, *Blackpool*, pp. 138-161

³⁴ *Ibid*, p.21

³⁵ Crosby, *History of Lancashire*, pp. 142-147

³⁶ Walton, *Wonderland*, pp. 37-39

³⁷ Crosby, *History of Lancashire*, pp. 142-147

transport links, government promotion of outdoor leisure, the establishment of nearby National Parks in the Lake District, Yorkshire Dales and the Derbyshire Peak District, and the availability of cheap accommodation such as Youth Hostels all built upon an existing tradition for outdoor activities within the north west. As a result, short breaks and holidays in the countryside became increasingly popular and day trips for hiking, rambling and fell walking all came to be important elements in the leisure culture of the inhabitants of north-west towns.³⁸ Many of the mill towns had readily accessible countryside nearby, and the proximity of the Lake District and the Yorkshire Dales also catered for those seeking recreation out of towns. The popularity of such activities was assisted by a concerted government policy to promote the countryside as a setting for leisure activities, which led to the creation of the Lake District National Park in 1951.³⁹ As the transport network of the region improved in line with the post-war increase in car ownership, a day or weekend of walking on the fells and moors became not only more viable but also more readily available to more people. As Snape has shown, this built on a long tradition in the north west of taking outdoor exercise dating back well into the nineteenth century and these activities gained in popularity from 1945. This exercise took the form of cycling, rambling and hiking, with the Manchester YMCA Rambling Club, founded in 1880, being just one example of the long history of such well-established organised activity in the north west.⁴⁰ These pursuits were promoted as escapes from the often squalid conditions of everyday life in the Victorian towns and holidays in the countryside were organised as alternatives to the perceived immoral temptations to be found in the coastal holiday resorts. The Co-operative Holidays Association (CHA), founded in the east Lancashire town of Colne in 1893, arranged walking holidays in the nearby

³⁸ Smith, P. *Lancashire speaks* (Lancaster, Carnegie Publishing, 1999), pp. 126-138 provides first hand accounts of working class people's involvement in these type of outdoor activities

³⁹ Snape, R. 'The Co-operative Holidays Association and the cultural formation of countryside leisure practice' *Leisure Studies* 23, 2 (2004) pp. 143-158

⁴⁰ *Ibid*, p. 144

Yorkshire Dales and attracted members from amongst all classes. The CHA established rambling and fell walking as healthy and morally uplifting activities and took advantage of the extensive areas of lakes, dales and moors within easy travelling distance of all north-west urban areas. The aim of the CHA was not only to provide healthy outdoor holidays, but also to 'promote the intellectual and social interests of its holiday groups'.⁴¹ Whilst the CHA was not directly involved in the land access campaigns of the early twentieth century, the popularity for country holidays the CHA helped to stimulate heavily influenced organisations such as the Ramblers Association. However, the Ramblers Association was predominantly a middle class organisation, dedicated to peaceful lobbying for increased access to the countryside and did not attract many members from the working class. Class distinction was evident in the different names for the activity; ramblers saw themselves as an elite who were interested in aspects beyond mere exercise, such as the natural history and topography of the walk. In this, ramblers were closely linked to the ethos of the CHA, whilst hikers were looked down on as mere walkers, groups of whom competed to see which could clock up the most miles over a day or weekend.⁴² The tradition of working-class countryside walking was taken up by the British Workers' Sport Federation (BWSF), whose more aggressive campaigning for access rights was part of the wider political ambitions of the British Communist Party, of which the BWSF was a social wing. The BWSF's most famous event in the promotion of walking as a working-class leisure activity was the mass trespass on Kinder Scout in the Peak District in 1932. Despite the adverse publicity the action brought to both landowners and the BWSF, the principle of access to the countryside for recreational purposes was established and culminated in the preservation of open spaces as National Parks from 1951.⁴³

⁴¹ Ibid, p. 146

⁴² Holt *Sport and the British*, pp. 200-201

⁴³ Phillips and Smith *Lancashire and Cheshire*, pp, 352-354

From the 1960s onwards, overseas holidays began to replace the more traditional seaside holiday at home, with better weather, the novelty of air travel and foreign destinations, and often increased value for money all contributing to the Costa del Sol replacing the Fylde coast in the leisure aspirations of the north west's working-class population. Mediterranean holidays were as cheap as those offered by the traditional Lancashire resorts by the mid-1960s and this hastened the decline of many resorts.⁴⁴ This was in line with similar changes taking place across Britain and was helped by the presence of Manchester Airport in the region and the continuing post-war development of airports in Liverpool and Blackpool to meet the growing demand for holiday flights. The combination of a wide range of more appealing overseas destinations within easy reach, more leisure time and disposable income, and a major transport network, meant that travel and outdoor leisure opportunities for those living in the north west increasingly became more varied. Numerous examples of this process are given in chapter seven. Although these examples relate specifically to deaf people, they serve to illustrate not only that deaf people took precisely the same types of holidays as hearing people, and for the same reasons, but they also show how leisure aspirations and opportunities changed more broadly during the post-war period. Whilst the large-scale communal nature of annual holidays was broken, groups of friends or club members still travelled together, thus at least partially preserving the tradition of shared holidays that was such a feature of north-west leisure in the years either side of the second world war. Certain aspects of the leisure lives of people in the north west in 1995 would have been vastly different from those of their earlier contemporaries in 1945, illustrating the way in which many facets of leisure had changed over fifty years. Whilst many traditional activities continued and indeed flourished in some cases (such as outdoor pursuits), others such as the long

⁴⁴ Crosby, *History of Lancashire*, p. 143

established social clubs appeared to be in serious jeopardy and possibly terminal decline. Whilst leisure remained an important part of the north west's cultural activity, the way in which this culture was expressed and engaged in had undergone a period of extensive change and development.

Similar changes could also be seen in the sporting activities found within the region. Sport, whether engaged in as spectator or participant, had long been an important part of the region's leisure activities, and this continued and indeed increased as working hours shortened (either by design or during periods of industrial decline) throughout the period of this research. As several commentators have shown, sport has played an important role in creating a sense of community identity, and the north west was no different in this respect.⁴⁵ Cricket was the most popular sport during the summer months, but it was league cricket rather than the county game which attracted more spectators and was more closely identified with local communities.⁴⁶ Clubs represented towns and communities rather than the county as a whole, and local rivalries were much more keenly felt and expressed as a result. This was reflected in the crowds drawn to matches in the Lancashire League, which were measured in their thousands throughout the 1950s and clubs continued to attract significant numbers well beyond the middle of the research period.⁴⁷ Each club was allowed (and in some instances required) by league regulations to employ a professional player, and many of the top stars from overseas Test playing countries appeared for town clubs across the region. This led to a high standard of competition and

⁴⁵ For examples of identity issues expressed through sport, see Bradley, J.M. 'The patriot game' *International Review for the Sociology of Sport* 37, 2 (2002) pp. 177-197; Holt, R. 'Heroes of the north: sport and the shaping of regional identity' in Hill and Williams *Sport and identity* pp. 137-164; MacClancy, J. (ed.) *Sport, identity and ethnicity* (Oxford, Berg, 1996); Weiss, O. 'Identity reinforcement in sport: revisiting the symbolic interactionist legacy' *International Review for the Sociology of Sport* 36, 4 (2001) pp. 393-405

⁴⁶ Holt 'Heroes of the north', pp. 144-150

⁴⁷ Fowler, *Lancashire cotton operatives*, pp. 66-69

continued a tradition dating back to the 1920s.⁴⁸ It was only in the later years of this research, as other summer leisure activities become more popular and the taking of holidays in the mill towns became more fragmented that league cricket began to lose its grip.

Certain sports and pastimes were more closely associated with the region, and in some instances were unique to specific areas. Despite regular efforts to expand the geographical base of the game, professional rugby league remains very much a northern sport, with the overwhelming number of clubs to be found in Yorkshire and the north-west of England.⁴⁹ The place of rugby league within the sporting life of the north west will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter.

Cumberland and Westmorland wrestling, with its unusual attire reminiscent of 'long johns' underwear, was only found in the two counties, where it remains a staple of Lakeland sporting events such as the Grasmere Sports and the Ulverston Games. Whilst these events have historically drawn visitors from beyond the borders of the two counties, they remain uniquely associated with this corner of the north west.⁵⁰ Another local activity strongly influenced by the geography of the Lake District is fell running, in which locals race to the top of an overlooking mountain and back. Both these activities acted not only as sporting contests but also served as a means of expressing the cultural identity of the area.⁵¹ Other sports closely associated with the north west could also be found in other regions, but still maintained a close identification with this part of the country. So for example, crown green bowls is often seen as a uniquely north-

⁴⁸ Hill, *Nelson*, p. 119-126 discusses the social and cultural role of Lancashire league cricket in local identity formation during the inter-war years. It was from this foundation that the post-war resurgence of league cricket in the region occurred

⁴⁹ Holt 'Heroes of the north', pp. 157-160

⁵⁰ See Barnes, F. *Barrow and district* (Barrow, Barrow in Furness Corporation, 1968), p. 125 for an example of the historical attraction of wrestling in Cumberland and Westmorland

⁵¹ Huggins 'Cumberland and Westmorland wrestling' provides an analysis of wrestling in the social and cultural identity of the Lake District counties.

western game, whilst flat green bowls is perceived as a southern variation of the sport.⁵² However, crown green bowling clubs can be found in the midlands and Wales, whilst flat green bowls was more popular than crown green in certain parts of the north west, especially around Manchester.⁵³ The first flat green bowling club in the north west was established at Heaton Hall, Stockport in 1926, whilst the Lancashire County Bowling Association was formed in 1951. Crown green bowls has a much longer tradition, with inter-county matches dating back to 1893, and local clubs had been in existence for many years previously.⁵⁴ Both forms of bowls have co-existed in the north west throughout the research period and have served as an important source of sporting competition and social intercourse for their participants during that time. Jeff Hill recounts how another, more esoteric sport closely associated with northern England persisted in east Lancashire until the 1970s. Knur and spell (also known as 'tip and hit' or 'poor man's golf') involved hitting with a stick a ball or stone thrown into the air from a sprung base, with the winner being determined by the greatest distance achieved over an agreed number of hits. As late as 1970, a crowd of over 3,000 spectators attended a match in Yorkshire involving the champions of Colne.⁵⁵ Although neither could be considered to be uniquely northern pastimes, racing greyhounds and pigeons were both popular throughout the region. Towns such as Preston and Manchester had dog racing tracks whose meetings were often well attended, whilst pigeon lofts were a common sight in many back yards and gardens. The training of both pigeon and greyhounds was taken very seriously and the rewards to be made from prize money and gambling on results meant that the results of

⁵² Holt, *Sport and the British*, pp. 156-159 outlines differing regional perceptions of the two varieties of bowls

⁵³ The geographical dispersion of the two types of bowls will be illustrated in chapter eight

⁵⁴ For further information on the history of bowls in England, see the websites of British Crown Green Bowls Association (www.bowls.org/history) and the Lancashire County Bowling Association (www.lineone.net/~lancsba/county_his.htm)

⁵⁵ Hill, *Nelson*, pp. 116-117

races were often subject to illegal outside influences.⁵⁶ Other forms of racing in the region included speedway, with tracks at Belle Vue in Manchester and Liverpool Stadium, and horse racing. Racecourses in the region included the major tracks at Haydock Park and Aintree in Liverpool, with its national associations with the annual showpiece, the Grand National steeplechase. Smaller tracks could also be found farther north in Carlisle and Cartmel in Cumbria, and all these racing venues provided opportunities for both a sporting day out and the chance to gamble on results through on-course betting.

In the north west, the major forms of mass identification derived through professional sport came from cricket in summer and the major winter games of the region, football and rugby league.⁵⁷ Attendance at a match in either sport had been a feature of the leisure activity of the region since the foundation of both bodies in the late nineteenth century and this continued through the post-war period. The region benefited from the general boom in attendances for all sports in the immediate post-war years, and suffered along with other parts of the country as attendances at football and rugby slumped during the 1970s and 1980s. The economic conditions in the region were a contributory factor but spectating at professional sports remained an important part of leisure activity in the region, as some indicative attendance figures from the period illustrate. In 1950, the area covered by this research was represented by no less than twenty clubs in the various divisions of the Football League. The aggregate average attendances of these clubs over the season 1950/51 amounted to 391,910. This figure represents a significant proportion of the region's population attending professional football matches on a regular basis. Whilst it might not be too surprising that a big city club like Everton drew in an average attendance of

⁵⁶ Holt (*Sport and the British*, pp. 185-189) discusses the effect of gambling on the popularity of both sports in the north

⁵⁷ Holt 'Heroes of the north', p. 138

42,924, the much smaller town of Preston managed to attract an average of 31,259 fans to every game – figure which represented over 25% of the town's population. Even New Brighton, who suffered from the attraction of their neighbours across the Mersey, managed to draw in 4,046 spectators every week.⁵⁸ By 1970/71, the nineteen north-west Football League clubs were still attracting 281,403 fans to their matches, including perennial strugglers Barrow and Workington both managing to maintain average crowds in excess of 2,300 and 2,200 respectively.⁵⁹ The overall aggregate declined further to 203,718 twenty years later, although the lower figure is partly explained by being based on two fewer clubs.⁶⁰ When the crowds of the numerous semi-professional clubs are added – admittedly much smaller than those of the larger Football League clubs but still attracting several hundreds in many cases – then the importance of regularly watching football matches for the inhabitants of the region is clear. Rugby league clubs have always attracted lower attendances than football clubs, due in part to the proximity of many rugby clubs to each other and the comparatively small populations each could draw on compared to football clubs. Research by Tony Collins has shown that average attendances at all Rugby League matches since 1945 has broadly matched that of clubs in the lower tiers of the Football League. Collins found that Rugby League matches in the 1949/50 season drew in almost five million fans, with an average attendance across the league of almost 9,500. Although these figures do not indicate levels in the north west, roughly 50% of the clubs were found to the west of the Pennines and so it is reasonable to assume that at least 40% of the crowds were drawn from the north west, allowing for the comparative drawing power of clubs in Lancashire and Yorkshire. Whilst it is not possible to give more accurate figures, these again represent a sizeable body of people who regularly attended Rugby League

⁵⁸ Tabner, B. *Through the turnstiles* (Harefield, Yore Publications, 1992), p. 98

⁵⁹ *Ibid*, p. 118

⁶⁰ *Ibid*, p. 138

matches in the region. The decline in Rugby League attendance was even more marked than that in football, and by 1969/70, the total aggregate was down to less than one and a half millions, but had recover slightly by 1989/90 to over 1,600,000.⁶¹ Even allowing for the declining numbers watching both sports from the immediate post-war levels, and taking into account the possibility that some fans would follow both sports, watching the two sports continued to play an important role in the leisure activity of the inhabitants of the north west as the end of the twentieth century approached.

Just as there were distinct patterns to be found in the location of the two types of bowls clubs, so the distribution of football and rugby league clubs also showed some definite geographical distinctiveness. Rugby league clubs were restricted almost exclusively to the areas where coal mining was a major industry or to towns in close proximity to mining areas, which meant they were found mostly in south-west Lancashire and the coastal strip of Cumbria.⁶² On the other hand, professional football clubs were found throughout the region, with a total of twenty teams representing virtually every major town and city of the north west in the football league at some point between 1945 and 1995 – except for those in rugby league playing areas.⁶³ The only towns to boast both professional rugby league teams and clubs in the Football League were Wigan, Blackpool, Barrow and Workington. There were also short-lived teams in the 1980s and 1990s in the football towns of Carlisle and Preston as the Rugby League looked to extend its fan base, but these were introduced into towns with no tradition of supporting rugby league and did not flourish. This partitioning illustrates the importance of

⁶¹ My thanks to Tony Collins for providing these statistics from his forthcoming publication *Rugby League in twentieth century Britain*

⁶² See Russell, D. ' "Sporadic and curious": the emergence of rugby and soccer zones in Yorkshire and Lancashire, 1850-1914' *International Journal of the History of Sport* 5, 2 (1988) pp. 185-205 for an investigation of this partitioning of football and rugby

⁶³ Nawrat, C. and Hutchings, S. *The Sunday Times Illustrated History of Football* (London, Hamlyn, 1997)

local history and tradition in the continuing popularity of certain sports over others in particular areas. Where no such tradition of spectating exists, as when rugby league clubs were introduced in Preston and Carlisle, the incomers are fighting against established patterns of interest and support in a way that is not found to the same extent in non-sporting leisure activities. These superimposed clubs ultimately failed to attract sufficient support to make them financially viable. This suggests that the attraction of a particular sport as a mass spectator activity has cultural attachments within local communities that are much harder to break down. Although support for individual teams may be somewhat fluid at times and vary according to levels of success, overall support for particular sports is more deeply ingrained. The growth of attendances in football and rugby in recent years also supports this argument, particular in the heartlands of these particular sports that the north west represents. As will be seen later in the context of deaf sport, sports such as squash, which had previously been of minority interest, were successfully promoted to a wider constituency across the region, particularly from the 1970s onwards. However, none of these new sports managed to establish themselves as major spectator sports; their attraction was mostly as participant sports. In this, they contributed to the tradition of amateur sport that had a long and extensive history across the north west. The majority of public parks across the region had huge swathes of their grasslands turned over to football and rugby pitches for amateur players and these civic amenities provided venues for cricket and bowls clubs in summer, in addition to the number of private clubs offering sporting facilities. Some indication of the opportunities available – whether as player, official, administrator or spectator – is provided by an examination of amateur sport in Preston. Various sporting bodies and organisations in the town reported their results and competitions in the pages of the local newspaper, the *Lancashire Evening Post*. Although the coverage varied over the years and was by no means exhaustive, it is possible to gain insights into at least some of the amateur sporting life of the town. Based on the last full

week in April, when there was an overlap of winter and summer sports, the same years were investigated as those used for assessing attendance at professional sport. In 1951, football clubs from Preston could be found playing in the West Lancashire League, the Lancashire Amateur League and the Lancashire Combination. Within the town, amateur footballers could choose from the Preston and District League, the Preston Churches League and the Preston and District Catholic League, all of which had several divisions and numerous clubs. The town's half-day closing gave rise to midweek afternoon football in the Preston Thursday League, which included teams representing a number of local companies as well as sides from the local army barracks. During the summer months, football gradually gave way to cricket and bowls. The Palace Shield included several clubs from Preston, and the town's senior club were members of the Northern League. Other amateur leagues found in the town included the Lancashire League and the Ribblesdale League. Crown green bowlers could take part in the Preston and District Bowling League whilst Labour clubs had their own Federated League, both of which involved multi-player teams playing in several divisions. Many other sports were also locally available, including boys' and men's boxing clubs, snooker leagues, tennis in several private clubs and on public courts and rugby union at Preston Grasshoppers. Preston Harriers provided athletics and Preston also boasted a greyhound track at which many local trainers raced their dogs. Indoor activities included several darts and snooker competitions. Many more opportunities were available within easy travelling distance, such as a table tennis exhibition tournament in Bolton.⁶⁴

These various leagues had been both expanded and augmented by the emergence of other leagues by 1971. The Lancashire Evening Post Sunday League included 48 teams whilst the Churches League and Catholic League had

⁶⁴ Details drawn from issues of the *Lancashire Evening Post (LEP)*, 21st to 27th April 1951

well over 50 teams between them. When those playing in the other football leagues are added, it is clear that amateur football was providing exercise and sporting opportunities for a great many of the town's men. A similar situation could be found in the summer months, with the Palace Shield involving at least two teams from each of twenty cricket clubs, in addition to the parks-based Churches and Catholic Leagues. One bowls league alone involved 98 teams, each of which numbered seven players. Indoor sports were equally popular, with the Preston and District Table Tennis League featuring 42 teams spread across three divisions.⁶⁵ Local amateur sport was not reported as extensively in 1991, but the continuing popularity and importance of some sports can still be gauged. There were ten different bowling leagues in the Preston area, involving 482 teams in 46 different divisions. The Preston and District League alone had 15 divisions of ten teams each. This represents a huge number of people, even allowing for the likelihood that a proportion of bowlers were playing for several clubs in different competitions. Ten pin bowling also appeared in the newspaper in 1991, the five division competition of 45 teams indicating both the expanding opportunities for sport and the popularity of such sports for participation if not spectating. The table tennis league in Preston had also expanded, doubling in size from 1971 to feature 84 teams.⁶⁶ These levels of activity are by no means all that was taking place in Preston in these years, but they do serve to show just how many people were involved in sport in some form. This involvement would be replicated proportionately in virtually every town across the north west, and give some indication of the numbers involved in amateur sport. As well as taking part in these sports, strenuous efforts were also put into organising training, fundraising and social events based around the football, rugby, cricket or bowls club. Because of the diversity of levels of involvement in local amateur sports, the impact of sport was felt beyond those who actually took to the field of play.

⁶⁵ *LEP*, 23rd to 29th April 1971

⁶⁶ *LEP*, 22nd to 28th April 1991

Sport in the north west was not merely restricted to those sports outlined above. Horse racing, golf, tennis, swimming, athletics and a range of other outdoor sports such as rugby union and lacrosse could all be found within the region in the post-war period. However, other than attending race meetings, many of these sports were often the preserve of the middle classes and as a result never gained the same hold on the majority of the region's population.⁶⁷ As some of the above figures show, indoor activities based in the working-class pubs and clubs also flourished, with leagues for snooker and billiards (and latterly pool), darts, and various types of competitive card games to be found in every town. As government initiatives such as *Sport for all* sought to involve greater numbers of people in a wider range of sporting activities, so public and private leisure facilities increased. Leisure centres appeared in every major conurbation; in some towns such as Preston and Blackburn, more than one such facility was built. Previously minority or elitist sports such as squash and golf benefited from greater numbers of participants as access was improved and coaching became more widely available. Some longer established sports declined as leisure habits and fashions changed, with league cricket being a prime example. From crowds in their thousands in the 1950s, attendances had dwindled to often little more than a few dozen by the 1990s, whilst fans returned in their droves to the football grounds of the region. The fact that so many people rediscovered their attraction to these (and other) sports – for whatever reason – illustrates their continuing importance in the social and cultural life of the north west.

Leisure and sport in north-west England underwent a series of major changes between 1945 and 1995. This was not the result of any inadequacy in the range of leisure and sporting opportunities available across the region; indeed the

⁶⁷ Holt, R. 'Heroes of the north', p. 160

opposite was true. The changes that occurred were instead indicative of the changes occurring in society generally during this period. In leisure pursuits, people no longer identified or associated with others based on shared employment or residence to the extent they had in 1945. The opportunities for acquiring sporting identity increased, and whilst people remained attached to particular teams, clubs and sports, local ties became less important in attracting people to these activities. Improved transport and increased disposable income, combined with a changing social climate which valued success more greatly than locality, meant that loyalties became more fluid. As participation in sports also became less restricted to what was available locally and choice increased, so patterns of involvement changed. The social and sporting life of the north west in 1995 was significantly different in many aspects from that of 1945, despite the constancy of some elements. What people did in their free time might not necessarily have changed in terms of watching or playing sport, going on holiday, or enjoying the company of others. However, various elements of leisure activity and social life most certainly had, particularly for the majority of the region's population, its working class. The range of activities they had the opportunity to take part in expanded; the venues for these leisure activities were different from those of their parents, such as where they chose as a holiday destination or the venues in which they gathered together socially; whom they shared their leisure time with also changed, as ties of community through common residence or occupation weakened. How – or indeed if - these broader changes were reflected in the social lives of deaf people living in the region will be considered in subsequent chapters. Before that discussion takes place, it is necessary to define whom the term 'deaf people' refers to.

Chapter Three: Defining the deaf community and deaf culture

Deafness and deaf people have historically been portrayed in a very negative way, with public perceptions being heavily influenced by medical views which promote the opinion that deaf people suffer from a condition that needs to be cured. This pathological perception of deaf people, reinforced by the official status of deaf people as handicapped or disabled, is indeed shared by many deaf people. However, for a significant proportion of the deaf population, these negative perceptions are at odds with the way they see themselves. These deaf people see their deafness in much more positive terms and regard themselves as members of a vibrant deaf community, based on shared language and a common culture. It is this section of the deaf population who are the focus of this research. Therefore it is important to clarify what is meant in the context of this research by the terms 'deaf community' and 'deaf culture'. Various models have been constructed since the 1960s which attempt to determine who should be regarded as belonging to the deaf community, and what the cultural aspects of that community involve. These will be discussed in this chapter and the various criteria by which membership is determined will be outlined. However a closer examination of these theoretical models indicates that certain aspects do not sit easily with the reality of deaf life. This is especially true when the leisure activities of deaf people are assessed. These models will therefore be challenged in the light of the evidence of deaf people's shared leisure activities which will be presented in later chapters. In doing so, a case will be made for taking a much broader view of who actually constitutes the deaf community than is suggested by these models. A number of factors need to be considered as part of this discussion, including the ways in which deafness has historically been perceived in medical terms and deaf people portrayed as disabled; the way in which different groups of deaf people are differentiated from each other; the argument for the existence of a

community of people based on their shared experiences of deafness; and the role of sign language in the cultural expression of the deaf community. The place of hearing people in the deaf community is a contentious issue which has stimulated much debate, and so this will also be addressed here. From this analysis, definitions will be put forward which will apply within the context of this research. Deafness is often seen as a hidden condition, with deaf people not being as obvious as - for example - those who are blind or who have restricted mobility. Many deaf people are only identified through the wearing of hearing aids, a lack of effective verbal communication in some cases, or through the use of sign language.¹ Nevertheless, people with some degree of hearing loss or inability to hear form a significant percentage of the population. In 1998, research by Young, Ackerman and Kyle suggested that around 8.5 million people in Great Britain had some form of hearing loss.² Although there are no comparable figures available covering the period of this research, it is likely that the ratio of deafened people within the overall population (around one in seven) remained roughly the same. Indeed, the ratio may even have been higher before the introduction of new drugs to combat the effects of diseases such as meningitis, which was a major cause of deafness in the early years of the post-war period. Therefore, deafness affects a large proportion of the population and is by no means uncommon. The vast majority of deaf people are older people who have become progressively deaf as a natural part of the ageing process, although there are also a variety of medical reasons which can result in deafness occurring at any age. Most of these people will have spent their lives, prior to becoming deaf, acquiring and using English, both spoken and written, as their principal form of communication. They therefore continue to rely upon English based communication methods,

¹ Woolley, M. 'Signs of strife – signs of life' in Lee *Deaf liberation*, pp. 85-91

² Young, A., Ackerman, J. and Kyle, J. *Looking on: deaf people and the organisation of services* (Bristol, Polity Press, 1998), p. 1

supplemented by the wearing of hearing aids and in many cases the acquisition (often subconsciously) of enhanced lip reading skills.

There are, however, a significant number of deaf people for whom spoken language is inappropriate as a communication method. From data collected in 1989, the British Deaf Association (BDA) estimated that there were approximately 62,500 people in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, and a further 7,000 in Scotland, who were deaf and whose first or preferred language was British Sign Language (BSL).³ These figures confirmed earlier statistics quoted by Ballantyne and Martin which showed a roughly similar distribution, whilst Young, Ackerman and Kyle cite similar figures more recently.⁴ Although such figures are generally accepted, deafness is not a notifiable condition in Britain, and so there are no precise official records on the number of deaf sign language users at any particular time. The vast majority of these people will have been born deaf, or will have become deaf prior to acquiring spoken language skills (identified as 'pre-lingually deaf'), and as a result will not have a working knowledge of spoken or written English to the levels taken for granted by the hearing population.⁵ A series of studies have confirmed that this group of deaf people belong to a distinct linguistic and cultural minority, certain aspects of whose lives differ significantly from the hearing majority as a direct result of their deafness.⁶ This view is also shared by many deaf people who regard their deafness as part of their cultural makeup, and this issue is discussed in more detail below. Amongst

³ Figures taken from the British Deaf Association website: www.britishdeafassociation.org.uk/bsl/page

⁴ Ballantyne, J. and Martin, J.A.M. *Deafness* (Edinburgh, Livingstone, 1984) pp. 1-2; Young et al, *Looking on* p.1

⁵ Brennan, M. *Word formation in British Sign Language* (Stockholm, University of Stockholm, 1990); Brennan, M. 'The visual world of British Sign Language' in Brien, D *Dictionary of British Sign Language* (London, Faber and Faber, 1992) pp. 1-134; Anderson, J. *Deaf student mis-writing, teacher mis-reading: English education and the deaf college student* (Burtonsville, Linstok, 1993, pp. 12-52

⁶ These include Baker-Shenk and Padden *American Sign Language*; Kyle and Woll *Sign language*; Padden and Humphries *Deaf in America*; Sutton-Spence and Woll *The linguistics of British Sign Language*

the general population, comparatively little is known about this small section of the population, who use a visual-gestural form of communication from both choice and necessity, and a number of misconceptions have arisen about deafness and deaf people. For example, there seems to be a perception amongst much of the hearing population that all deaf people are expert lipreaders. This is not true, as deaf people have no greater innate ability to lipread than hearing people. It is through a greater dependency on lipreading for communication that deaf people generally develop these skills to a higher level. Even then, lipreading is an inexact science, with only partial accuracy being achievable even in ideal circumstances.⁷ Other misconceptions relate to the use of sign language, which is often seen as being either merely English communicated by the hands and eyes rather than the voice and ears, or alternatively as a loose collection of random gestures or mime.⁸ Again, neither of these are true (although there are elements of mime and gesture inherent within sign language) with the work of Stokoe and many others since showing the linguistic and grammatical basis of signed languages.⁹ Sign language use is seen as the single most important defining characteristic necessary to belong to this cultural minority after actually being deaf, as sign language represents the most appropriate medium through which the cultural life of the deaf community can be expressed and enjoyed.¹⁰ In some respects, sign language use could be considered to be equally as important as deafness, as there is no minimum requirement regarding the degree of deafness or proficiency in sign language in order for an individual to be regarded as a member of the deaf community.

⁷ Sacks, O. *Seeing voices: a journey into the world of the deaf* (New York, Harper Collins, 1989); Royal National Institution for Deaf People *Watch this face: a practical guide to lipreading* (London, RNID, 2002)

⁸ Kyle and Woll *Sign language* pp. 24-57

⁹ See for example Stokoe, W.C., Casteline, D.C. and Croneberg, C.G. *A dictionary of American Sign Language on linguistic principles* (Silver Spring, Linstok Press, 1965); Stokoe, W. C. 'Sign language structure: an outline of the visual communication system of the American deaf' *Studies in Linguistics* (New York, Academic Press, 1960)

¹⁰ Ladd 'The modern deaf community' pp. 37-38

Deafness and disability

It is important to discuss the issue of whether deafness should be seen as a disability, as this is a perception shared by many people outside the deaf world. Devas argues that impairment and disability arise from different causes.¹¹ In this perspective of disability, impairment is regarded as a physical condition or limitation, whilst disability is a form of social oppression that results from attitudes towards that impairment held by those who do not share it. Restrictions resulting from impairment – such as the inability of a deaf person to communicate effectively in spoken English - are then blamed on the impaired person. Most external conceptions of deafness refer to deaf people in medical or pathological terms, that is as people who have a loss or an impairment which needs to be cured or overcome, and this negative perception has profound impacts on the way deaf people are dealt with by the hearing world.¹² This perception has a very long history, Aristotle declaring 'those who are deaf are also dumb'.¹³ Whilst it is believed that he used 'dumb' in its original definition of 'being without speech', this came to be interpreted as 'stupid' or 'incapable'.¹⁴ This perception has largely held sway ever since, gaining strength from its adaptation by religious groups and passing into various legal systems. The Jewish Talmud, although acknowledging that deaf people had certain rights (such as the right to have a marriage ceremony conducted in sign language), denied them others, and this situation was echoed by both Greek and Roman law. This perspective of deaf people in turn passed into the canons of the Christian Church, even finding expression in the Bible, and thus took hold in the perception of the

¹¹ Devas, M. 'Support and access in sports and leisure provision' *Disability and Society* 18, 2 (2003) pp. 231-245

¹² Kyle and Woll *Sign language* pp. 6-7; Lane, H., Hofmeister, R. and Bahan, B. *A journey into the DEAF-WORLD* (San Diego, DawnSignPress, 1996) pp. 365-366

¹³ Higgins *Outsiders* p.24

¹⁴ McLoughlin, M.G. *A history of the education of the deaf in England* (Gosport, Ashford Colour Press, 1987), pp. 1-2

wider population.¹⁵ This negative image of deafness is still encountered by deaf people on a daily basis even today, with the predominant perspective of hearing people being 'a view that the principal characteristic of deafness is the *lack* of something, i.e. hearing and/or communication ability'.¹⁶ The response of the hearing majority to this perceived lack has been to try and cure deafness by making the deaf person as 'normal' as possible. This process of normalisation was pursued during the post World War Two period through a policy of education based largely on the development of clear speech and lip reading ability, and the use of technology such as hearing aids to achieve this goal. Only those deaf people who managed to communicate effectively in English were regarded as academically successful; the use of sign language was only appropriate for those who were considered to be educational failures through their inability to develop good speech and reading skills.¹⁷

Many people who are deaf share these negative perceptions of their deafness, particularly those who have become deafened after having lived as a hearing person. In such cases, deafness can indeed represent a profound loss, and many of those who become deafened consider deafness to be a disability that has left them impaired or handicapped.¹⁸ Padden argued that those who are deafened prefer labels such as 'hard of hearing', which are seen more positively than 'deaf'.¹⁹ For such deaf people, who form the majority of the deaf element within the broader population, deafness does not contribute positively to their cultural identity. Within this broader deaf population, the term 'deaf community' is

¹⁵ See McLoughlin *A history of the education of the deaf* p.1, and the Gospel according to Mark, chapter 7, verses 31-37

¹⁶ Kyle and Woll *Sign language* p. 6

¹⁷ Conrad, R. 'Towards a definition of oral success' in Lee *Deaf liberation*, pp. 27-32; Lynas, W. 'Integrating the handicapped into ordinary schools' in Gregory and Hartley *Constructing deafness*, pp. 151-156

¹⁸ Wright, D. *Deafness: a personal account* (London, Allen Lane, 1969); Woolley 'Signs of strife'

¹⁹ Padden, C. 'The deaf community and deaf culture' in Gregory and Hartley *Constructing deafness*, p. 44

generally only used and understood by that minority of deaf people for whom being deaf is a significant part of their cultural identity. These deaf people view themselves not in medical terms, but as members of a distinct cultural and linguistic minority. The central identifier for culturally deaf people is the use of sign language as their first or preferred method of communication, and sign language is acknowledged as the most appropriate form of communication for profoundly deaf people. For this group of people, deafness *per se* is not seen as the disabling factor in their lives, and the notion of deafness as a disability is rejected, although they accept that they may be disabled as a result of widely held perceptions of deafness based solely on medical perspectives.²⁰ What is rejected is the notion that this disability arises from deaf people themselves; instead, culturally deaf people echo Devas in considering that it is the attitude of the hearing majority towards deaf people that is the disabling factor.²¹

The lack of official recognition of sign language in Britain is seen as a central part of the disabling process, and has been the source of an increasingly militant campaign for recognition in recent years, featuring political lobbying and a series of marches organised by the Federation of Deaf People to publicise the situation. The rejection of sign language as a true language by the scientific community is – according to Kyle and Woll – very much a twentieth century phenomenon. They cite earlier researchers, who viewed the development of signed languages as following a natural linguistic pattern.²² Sign languages were viewed as genuine – if primitive – forms of communication, sharing many of the linguistic features found in spoken languages. The later rejection of sign language as a true language (in linguistic and grammatical terms) resulted in the unique cultural identifier for deaf people also being rejected, and by extension the existence of a

²⁰ Corker *Deaf and disabled*

²¹ Finkelstein 'We are not disabled'; Lane, H. 'Do Deaf people have a disability?' – address given to the Federation of Deaf People conference, Blackburn, 7th November 1998

²² Kyle and Woll *Sign language* pp. 46-48

recognisable cultural and linguistic minority was denied. The non-recognition of British Sign Language as a native language of Britain, coupled with the continuing dominance of medical perceptions of deafness, is at the heart of the deafness as disability debate for many deaf people.²³ However, in circumstances where being considered 'disabled' can bring advantages, there is a marked ambivalence in the attitudes of some deaf people who otherwise reject the label. In Britain, deaf people are officially classified as disabled and are therefore entitled to specific State benefits. These include Disabled Living Allowance and Disabled Students Allowance. Many deaf people are happy enough to claim these benefits, and indeed fiercely defend their rights to do so, whilst at the same time rejecting any notion of deafness being a disability. Whether this attitude towards the material benefits of being considered disabled represents hypocrisy or pragmatism on the part of those deaf people claiming these benefits is not a matter for discussion here. In terms of whether deafness is a disability, the position taken in this thesis is clear. Whilst the widely held view that deafness constitutes a disability will be considered when it is appropriate or relevant to do so, deaf people are not regarded as disabled within the context of this research.

The rejection of the concept of deafness as a disability is illustrated in the context of leisure and sport by the self-imposed isolation of deaf sport from the International Paralympic Movement. The Comité Internationale des Sports des Sourds (CISS) was formed as the governing body for international deaf sport in 1924, and founded the Silent Games in the same year as the deaf version of the Olympic Games. The Silent Games were renamed the Deaf Olympiad in 1949, and the CISS joined the International Olympic Movement in 1951. In consequence, the title was changed to World Games for the Deaf and CISS was recognised by the International Olympic Committee as an 'international federation of Olympic

²³ The British Government finally recognised BSL as a true language in 2003, but the language still has no official status as a native language in Britain.

standing'. CISS formally joined the Paralympic Olympic Committee in 1988, with the World Games for the Deaf being recognised as having the same status as the Paralympics. As part of the agreement, CISS was to receive a percentage of the funding available to disabled sport provided through the Paralympic Olympic Committee.²⁴ The growing debate over the status of deafness as a disability and its implications for deaf sport led to the withdrawal of CISS from the Paralympic Olympic Committee in 1995. Other disabled sports groups had started to query the special status awarded to deaf athletes in being allowed to hold their own separate games, and demands were made for deaf athletes to be included in the Paralympics. Rather than agree to integration under the umbrella of disabled sport, CISS withdrew, losing the funding provided through the Paralympic Olympic Committee in the process. The perception of deafness as a disability was rejected by the deaf sporting community, despite the severe financial implications for all levels of deaf sport which resulted from adopting such a stance.

The notion of 'the deaf community'

The academic concept of a 'deaf community' arose as a direct result of the work of William Stokoe in the 1950s and early 1960s, who identified linguistic features of American Sign Language (ASL) that clearly showed that ASL was a true language, and not merely a collection of randomly generated gestures.²⁵ The *Dictionary of American Sign Language* also attempted to illustrate the ways in which sign language use affects and influences the social and cultural characteristics of deaf people.²⁶ Since this pioneering work, there has been a great deal of academic discussion on the composition and membership of what has come to be termed 'the deaf community'. Stokoe's work was taken up in Britain by academics such as Brennan, Colville and Lawson and Woll, Kyle and

²⁴ This information is drawn from the websites of the Comité Internationale des Sports des Sourds (www.ciss.org) and the International Olympic Committee (www.ioc.org)

²⁵ Stokoe 'Sign language structure'

²⁶ Stokoe et al *A dictionary of American Sign Language*

Deuchar, who found similar results when researching the linguistics of British Sign Language (BSL).²⁷ Through the academic recognition of signed languages as true languages, the languages came to be seen as the means of cultural expression and identification for and by their users:

... the discussion of the 'linguistic community' of Deaf people in the *Dictionary of ASL* represented a break from the long tradition of pathologizing Deaf people. In a sense the book brought official and public recognition of a deeper aspect of Deaf people's lives: their culture.²⁸

The argument followed that if a group of people shared a common language and a common culture, then they naturally formed a community. This argument has largely been accepted, although resistance is still evident in some quarters; for example, despite many years of scientific research in Britain and many other countries that proved conclusively that sign languages contain all the linguistic features evident in spoken languages, the British government consistently refused to acknowledge the linguistic legitimacy of BSL until 2003.²⁹

The existence of a deaf community in Britain (and elsewhere) is accepted by those involved with the deaf world, and has been the basis of an increasing amount of research since the 1970s. Whilst this research may have introduced the concept of a deaf community, the reality of a community of like minded people gathering together and sharing their experiences and interests does not

²⁷ Brennan, M., Colville, M. and Lawson, L. *Words in hand: a structural analysis of the signs of British Sign Language* (Edinburgh, Moray House College of Education 1980); Woll, B., Kyle, J. & Deuchar, M. (eds.) *Perspectives on British Sign Language and deafness* (London, Croom Helm, 1981)

²⁸ Padden 'The deaf community and deaf culture' p. 2

²⁹ For evidence of recent research in this field, see Sutton-Spence and Woll *The linguistics of British Sign Language*

stem from this period. It was not the academic recognition of sign language that resulted in the formation of the deaf community: the community was already there, if largely unrecognised or acknowledged by wider society. There is extensive evidence from the pages of the deaf print media, such as the *British Deaf News* and its predecessors, which clearly shows that a deaf community has existed in Britain for many years; in fact ever since deaf people in England began to gather together in the deaf schools established from the early nineteenth century.³⁰

Although the deaf community as an entity has existed for a considerable time, the term 'deaf community' only appeared in Britain from around 1980. A collection of papers published by the National Union of the Deaf over the period 1976 to 1986 offers an insight into the development of the use of the term by deaf writers themselves.³¹ *Deaf Liberation* includes a variety of terms to describe the deaf element of the population, with 'deaf people' being by far the most commonly used up until around 1980, but there were several others which appeared regularly such as 'the deaf' and 'the deaf world'. Some older writers even persisted with the use of 'deaf and dumb' and 'deaf mute', both terms that are now regarded as demeaning and unacceptable.³² From around 1980 onwards, the term 'deaf community' was used much more regularly, but not exclusively. Perhaps significantly, this was the start of increased political activity amongst profoundly deaf people, and the term and the concept of 'deaf community' seem to have developed symbiotically. 'Deaf community' has remained the term of choice and the standard way of describing the group identity of profoundly deaf people ever since. The subsequent evolution of the concepts of 'Deaf Nation' and 'Deaf World' in recent years are discussed later in

³⁰ Lawson 'The role of sign', p. 32

³¹ Lee *Deaf liberation*

³² Finkelstein 'We are not disabled', p. 266

this chapter, but these are based very much within the wider context of 'the deaf community'.

The major difference between the deaf community and other minority communities is that deaf people do not have an obvious geographical focus; there is no area of a town or country where deaf people group together to live in the way that other communities do. Deaf people generally live in isolation from each other in their daily lives, except for members of their family who may also be deaf. One reason for this is that the vast majority of deaf people are born into hearing families with two hearing parents; nor do deaf parents necessarily have deaf children, particularly if one or both parents have become deafened through illness or injury rather than for any genetic reason.³³ Instead of living together in geographical communities, deaf people have found alternative ways of coming together, with residential deaf schools and the extensive network of deaf social clubs around Britain playing a vital role in bringing deaf people together and introducing younger deaf people to the life and culture of the community.³⁴ This gathering together of people from similar audiological and experiential backgrounds took place mostly within the network of deaf clubs which grew up in virtually every large town and city in Britain during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. As Kyle and Woll assert, 'the central environments for deaf interaction are the social clubs which exist throughout the UK'.³⁵ Even when coming together as a community of likeminded people with similar outlooks and life experiences, deaf people as a community remained largely isolated, but in this case by choice. In many ways, it is this coming together within a world of their own creation that serves as the second major defining characteristic of the deaf community after

³³ The incidence of a deaf child having two hearing parents is as high as 90 to 95% according to Lane et al *A journey into the DEAF-WORLD*, p.30

³⁴ The role and history of deaf clubs will be discussed in the following chapter

³⁵ Kyle and Woll *Sign language* p. 10

sign language use.³⁶ As Padden points out: 'Deaf people had long recognized that their groups are different from those of hearing people'. Deaf clubs provided the venues for this difference to find expression and celebration, rather than being seen as a disability or handicap.³⁷ Deaf newspapers contain details of the wide range of activities that deaf people have participated in, both as individuals and most importantly as groups. Deaf club members have had a varied social life that brings an essentially isolated collection of individuals together in a way that conforms to various definitions of a community, as will be illustrated in later chapters.

The academic argument for the existence of the deaf community is now widely accepted, but defining the deaf community has exercised writers on deaf issues for a number of years. Several models have been constructed which attempt to define the criteria for membership, by identifying ways in which acceptance into the community can be achieved. These remain in use today whenever the deaf community is discussed in academic contexts, and these have become the accepted standards by which membership is determined. However, by attempting to set out strict rules for membership, it is often easier to identify those who do not belong than to be sure who is definitely a member. By being so prescriptive, these models only make the situation more confusing and it is the position of this thesis that the various arguments regarding membership are less valid as a result. This is not to claim that these models are necessarily wrong, but evidence presented later in this thesis will support the argument that the narrow criteria outlined in some of these models does not fully reflect the reality of deaf life. In addition, none of these models are based on empirical historical evidence. When the history of leisure activity amongst deaf club members is investigated, the

³⁶ Ibid, pp. 9-12

³⁷ Padden 'The deaf community and deaf culture', p. 2

deaf community is found to have been much less restrictive or restricted than the models and their associated criteria suggest.

A convention was adopted in the early 1970s to distinguish between the two supposedly distinct groups of deaf people, which involves the use of upper and lower case 'D' when writing the word 'deaf'.³⁸ 'Deaf' is used when referring to those people who regard their deafness as a culturally defining factor in their identity – the group generally referred to as 'the deaf community'. This group includes those deaf people whose first or preferred language is sign language. 'deaf' is used for those people whose deafness means merely being unable to hear, rather than having any linguistic or cultural connotations. This group includes those people who refer to themselves as 'deafened', 'hard of hearing', 'hearing impaired' and similar labels. It is also used when referring to purely audiological matters. This convention is now generally accepted and used amongst the majority of writers on the deaf community as the means by which membership of the deaf community is acknowledged or denied.³⁹ However, the position taken within this thesis is that this convention is both unhelpful and confusing, and therefore it will not be followed. In practice, 'Deaf' is conferred or awarded only to those who are considered to be members of the deaf community and so has come to be used as a means of exclusion rather than inclusion. In doing so, subjective judgements are often made about the person or persons on whom the 'title' is conferred. There is also an Orwellian aspect to the use of D or d as the deaf community has become more politicised. The lower case d is often used in pejorative terms, indicating those who are considered to be of inferior status as deaf people. 'Big D good, little d bad' is often a hidden subtext of the

³⁸ Woodward, J.C. 'Implications for sociolinguistic research amongst the deaf' *Sign Language Studies* 1 (1972) pp. 1–7

³⁹ An explanation of the current definitions applied to the use of 'Deaf' and 'deaf' is given in Skelton, T. and Valentine, G. 'Political participation, political action and political identities: young D/deaf people's perspectives' *Space and Polity* 7, 2 (2003) pp. 117-134

allocation of these labels, as shown by the increasing use of 'RNID' amongst politically active deaf sign language users. The argument is that the Royal National Institute for Deaf People (RNID) does not reflect the wishes and aspirations of sign language users and only works on behalf of those deaf people who are not members of the deaf community. Therefore, the use of a capital D in their acronym is rejected by the more politically active members of the deaf community.

In a recent reappraisal of the issue of who should be regarded as belonging in the deaf community, Lawson states that those who might be seen as 'deaf' (i.e. not culturally deaf) historically had a place within the deaf community. The introduction of the concept of 'Deaf' and 'deaf' has left many such people feeling excluded and hurt by the attitudes of those they regarded as fellow deaf people. As Lawson points out, these deaf people played an active part in the community and suffered the same prejudice and treatment by the hearing majority as other deaf people who used sign language.⁴⁰ Padden and Humphries attempted to deal with the issues that arise by declaring that 'Deaf people are both Deaf and deaf'.⁴¹ This may be true within the parameters suggested by Woodward, but this statement does nothing to address the confusion that arises through the use of d/D. To try to resolve this dichotomy, some authors have adopted 'D/deaf' in order to avoid assigning an unwarranted status to individual deaf people, or to encompass all deaf people whether 'Deaf' or 'deaf'. For the above reasons, and in order to avoid the potential confusions outlined earlier, the lower case 'deaf' is used throughout this thesis as an umbrella term to reflect the experiences of deaf individuals and groups. The lower case is meant to be inclusive and it is used consistently for all references to deafness, deaf people and deaf community in the text. However, in quotations the usage of the original text has been retained.

⁴⁰ Lawson, L. 'Do we want one or multiple deaf nations?' *Deaf Worlds* 18, 3 (2002) pp. 96-102

⁴¹ Padden and Humphries *Deaf in America* p.3

It is the use of 'D' or 'd' in order to differentiate between those who 'belong' and those who do not that has given rise to the various attempts to define criteria for membership of the deaf community, but these models do not address many of the questions that arise as a result. Writing in 1980, Higgins argued that whilst deafness is 'a necessary condition', deafness alone is not sufficient to warrant membership of the deaf community, and this position is supported by other writers. He contended that membership cannot be assumed, but must be conferred by existing community members, or achieved through 'identification with the deaf world; shared experiences that come from being deaf; and participation in the community's activities'.⁴² The underlying problem with this model is that it does not allow for the inclusion of hearing people in the deaf community. Indeed, Higgins clearly states that 'hearing people are not part of the deaf community'.⁴³ Lawson also made no allowance for the inclusion of hearing people, when she described the British deaf community as being 'the deaf "in group"'.⁴⁴ Despite the claims of Higgins and Lawson, hearing people can be accepted into the deaf community by meeting the criteria for membership to a large degree. Participation in the community's activities has long been a part of the social life of hearing children of deaf parents, as the evidence in chapters seven and eight will show. In doing so, they gained some measure of identification with the deaf world simply through association with deaf people. Although not deaf themselves, hearing family members deal with the consequences of deafness on a daily basis and so share the overall experience of being deaf to a large extent. Without displaying the correct attitude, it is unlikely that hearing people would be accepted into the social life of the deaf community, and the evidence shows that they were involved in the activities of the deaf clubs.

⁴² Higgins *Outsiders* p.38

⁴³ Ibid pp. 44-45

⁴⁴ Lawson 'The role of sign' p. 31

Therefore, to say that such hearing people cannot be part of the deaf community does not fully reflect the true situation. In his version of the deaf community, Ladd agreed with Higgins and Lawson that the sharing of cultural values is an essential requirement for membership.⁴⁵ However, he took a more realistic view by making allowance for the inclusion of hearing people, on the basis that the deaf person may have hearing family, friends and acquaintances who support and are involved in the cultural life of the deaf community.

Baker-Shenk and Cokely defined four routes of entry by which membership of the deaf community can be achieved: audiological; political; linguistic; social.⁴⁶ The only route that is not open to hearing people is that which necessitates being deaf. However, Baker-Shenk and Cokely argue that in order to be a full or 'core' member, involved in the very heart of the deaf community and its culture, all four criteria need to be met in combination with the necessary positive attitude. This implies that only deaf sign language users can be fully immersed in the cultural life of the deaf community, as only they can have access via all four routes. However, this model does relate more closely to the experiences of both deaf and hearing community members. Padden also accepted the place of hearing people within the deaf community, but made a similar distinction between those who are community members and those who are actively involved in deaf culture. She argued that access to deaf culture is more closed than gaining access to the deaf community, and only those who are deaf can fully participate in deaf culture. Padden defined the culturally deaf core of the deaf community as those who:

behave as Deaf people do, use the language of Deaf people and share the beliefs that Deaf people have about themselves and those who are not Deaf.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Ladd 'The modern deaf community' p. 37-38

⁴⁶ Baker-Shenk and Cokely *American Sign Language* pp. 17-20

⁴⁷ Padden 'The deaf community and deaf culture', p. 44

As Padden pointed out, the cultural life of the deaf community requires evidence of certain behaviour and attitudes. However, people who are not profoundly deaf can meet these criteria for core membership if they are involved in the social life of a deaf club. When with members who are profoundly deaf, hearing people have to use sign language in order to communicate and participate fully; through interacting with deaf people, they are to a large extent acting as deaf people do; by choosing to take part, they are sharing the beliefs of deaf people. Three of the avenues outlined by Baker-Shenk and Cokely are thus available to those who are not deaf. Therefore the requirement to be deaf in order to be considered a member of the deaf community and active in its modes of cultural expression is called into question. If someone is socially, politically and linguistically active within the deaf community, then it would seem that they are deeply immersed in all aspects of the community's shared life and culture, whether they are deaf or hearing.

One requirement that is almost totally absent from the various attempts to define the deaf community is that of a minimum level of deafness. Anyone who is deaf – to whatever degree – can become a member of the deaf community, even the cultural core included in several models. Padden and Markowitz concluded that 'audiometric deafness, the actual degree of hearing loss, often has little to do with where a person relates in the Deaf community'.⁴⁸ Padden further clarified the necessary level of deafness in order to be considered 'Deaf':

the type or degree of hearing loss is not a criterion for being Deaf. Rather, the criterion is whether a person identifies with other Deaf people, or behaves as a Deaf person.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ Cited by Woodward, J.C. 'How you gonna get to heaven if you can't talk with Jesus?' in Wilcox, S. (ed.) *American deaf culture* (Burtonsville, Linstock 1989) p. 164

⁴⁹ Padden 'The deaf community and the culture of deaf people', p.8

Higgins is the only author to suggest that a minimum level of deafness is required in order to qualify for community membership. In doing so, he provides the basis for re-examining the whole question of who should be considered as a member of the deaf community. Higgins argued that children whom he classed as hard of hearing (rather than deaf) often became members of the deaf community as a result of misdiagnosis of their degree of deafness.⁵⁰ Because they were placed in what Higgins considered to be the 'inappropriate setting' of deaf schools, these children effectively learned how to be deaf. This came from mixing socially with deaf children and developing patterns of behaviour normally associated with profoundly deaf people, such as sign language use. He concluded that these children were only 'socially deaf' rather than being sufficiently 'audiologically deaf' to warrant membership of the deaf community.⁵¹ If such people can learn how to 'behave as deaf people do' through shared social activity and acquired behaviour, then hearing people must surely be able to find acceptance in the same manner. The evidence of deaf club activity indicates that in fact hearing people have always been accepted into the social life of the community, notwithstanding their lack of deafness.

There have been several instances of people with less profound hearing loss, or who became deafened later in life, becoming respected members of the deaf community.⁵² Some of these have even attained the status of members of the cultural centre of the community, as defined by Padden and Baker-Shenk and Cokely.⁵³ Padden states that for those who come to the deaf community later in

⁵⁰ Higgins *Outsiders* pp. 26-27

⁵¹ *Ibid*, p. 44

⁵² Examples of such people include Lord Ashley and Maggie Woolley, as described in Ashley, J. *Acts of defiance* (London, Reinhardt 1992) and Woolley 'Signs of strife'

⁵³ Padden 'The deaf community and deaf culture', pp. 40-45; Baker-Shenk and Cokely *American Sign Language* pp. 17-20

life, there are often conflicts between the values and perspectives these latecomers have learnt from living in the hearing world and those held by the deaf community. It is only those who accept the views of the deaf community who are successfully integrated into the deaf world.⁵⁴ Those who feel themselves to be part of the deaf community because of shared deafness and positive attitudes towards their deafness would thus appear to be members. However, it is also argued that membership has to be conferred, not assumed. Evidence of the social activities of deaf people which will be presented later indicates that deaf people have been much more pragmatic about conferring community membership than the theoretical models would suggest. Several deaf clubs had 'Hard of Hearing' sections for those deaf people who did not use sign language, for example. Similarly, hearing people are mentioned in reports of deaf club activity on a regular basis. Such evidence shows that the various criteria for membership outlined in the academic models were less rigidly applied in the everyday life of deaf clubs and the deaf community.

Despite these apparent weaknesses, the various models described above remain the standard academic and theoretical means by which membership is determined. There have been no radical attempts to redefine the criteria for membership since the mid-1980s, and these models have not been fundamentally challenged in any way. Much of the subsequent discussion has centred more on whether the deaf community should be viewed as an ethnic group, because of the linguistic aspect of membership.⁵⁵ This view of deafness has in recent years led to much discussion of the concept of 'the Deaf Nation' and more recently 'Deafhood'.⁵⁶ The possibility of a 'Deaf Nation' emerging – at least

⁵⁴ Padden 'The deaf community and deaf culture', p. 43

⁵⁵ Examples of this debate are given in Padden and Humphreys *Deaf in America* pp. 112-114; Davis, L. J. *Enforcing normalcy: disability, deafness and the body* (London, Verso 1995) pp. 73-99

⁵⁶ Alker, D. 'The realities of nationhood' *Deaf Worlds* 18, 3 (2002) pp. 79-82; Emery, S.D. 'The Deaf Nation, five years on' *Deaf Worlds* 18, 2 (2002) pp. 103-104; Ladd, P. 'Emboldening the deaf nation'

as an ideological concept if not a geographical reality – is not an impossibility. Many of the factors identified by Anderson in the development of nation states based on 'imagined communities' can be found in the evolution of the deaf community into a 'Deaf Nation'.⁵⁷ These include a sense of shared oppression; knowledge of the language of the 'pre-nation' community as an essential to gaining membership; the decline in the importance of religion in daily life; and even the role of newspapers as 'cultural product'.⁵⁸

Amongst these recent developments, the concept and definition of 'deaf community' seems to have been quietly dropped as a topic for discussion:

It is interesting that the discussion has shifted from 'Deaf Community' to 'Deaf Nation' at a time when most Deaf people are just about grasping the meaning of 'Deaf Community'. Many Deaf people are still only paying lip service to 'Deaf Culture and Deaf Community' without being too sure what they actually mean.⁵⁹

As this quotation from Alker suggests, many deaf people do not fully grasp what the term 'deaf community' really means. This supports the argument that there remains some distance between the narrow views on membership based on academic criteria and the practical realities of everyday deaf life.

The culture of the deaf community

Although many markers and forms of behaviour exhibited by deaf people have been identified as examples of deaf culture, the validity of some of these supposedly unique deaf cultural activities might be questioned. An often-quoted

Deaf Worlds 18, 3 (2002) pp. 88-95; Lawson 'Do we want one or multiple deaf nations?'; Turner, G.H. 'The deaf nation notion: citizenship, control and courage' *Deaf Worlds* 18, 3 (2002) pp. 74-78; Ladd *Understanding deaf culture*

⁵⁷ Anderson *Imagined communities*

⁵⁸ *Ibid*, pp. 39-40

⁵⁹ Alker 'The realities of nationhood' p. 79

statistic is that 90 to 95% of deaf people marry other deaf people, but it is highly likely that this ratio is also true of many other cultural minority groups.⁶⁰ Lane, Hofmeister and Bahan argue that marriage between deaf and hearing people is frowned upon by the deaf community, and Higgins claims that a deaf spouse does not guarantee a hearing person acceptance into the deaf community.⁶¹ Again, the same could be said to apply to many minorities. Whilst these statements might have some basis in reality, it is more likely that the communication difficulties between profoundly deaf people and potential hearing partners are a more effective barrier than peer pressure. Indeed, when communication between deaf and hearing people is not an issue, relationships can and do form, as shown by the number of such relationships that occur amongst students at the University of Central Lancashire.⁶² Hearing students reading for a degree in Deaf Studies learn sign language as part of their course, and the university also attracts a large number of deaf students for a variety of courses. In this setting, relationships between deaf and hearing occur regularly and naturally as the communication barrier is removed.

Rather than being prescriptive in determining what constitutes deaf culture, it is more reflective of the life of the deaf community to consider deaf culture as those activities and behaviours deaf people share when they gather together. There are no doubt some similarities with the cultural lives of hearing people, and the main defining element of deaf culture is the medium of expression used - sign language. However, speech and sound can play a part in the cultural and social lives of deaf people. For example, some deaf people choose to speak when they sign, or to vary their method of communication depending on whom they are communicating with. Some deaf people choose to speak to each other rather than

⁶⁰ Lane et al *A journey into the DEAF-WORLD* p. 71

⁶¹ *Ibid*, p. 71; Higgins *Outsiders* p. 28

⁶² The author is a lecturer in Deaf Studies at the University of Central Lancashire, Preston

use sign in certain settings, but despite this, some writers have argued that speech has no place in deaf culture.⁶³ Evidence will also be presented which shows just how often sound based activities have played an important role in the social lives of deaf people. To say that something a deaf person freely chooses to do is not part of their culture seems to be the arbitrary application of personal biases onto others. The above example relating to the use of speech is a part of the everyday lives of many deaf people, and often arises as a pragmatic solution to the situation they find themselves in. Unlike the use of technology (such as flashing door bells), this is a pattern of behaviour that arises directly from deaf life. As Padden and Humphries point out: '[The deaf community] have found ways to define and express themselves through their rituals, tales, performances and everyday social encounters'.⁶⁴ In other words, through the types of activities that take place naturally whenever deaf people come together, whether in deaf clubs or elsewhere. It is unnecessary to try and define what is or is not a part of that culture any more precisely than this. Whilst there are some defining characteristics, such as the use of sign language, it is argued here that anything can potentially be a part of deaf culture if it is something deaf people do - or choose to do - as part of their patterns of behaviour. As the analysis of deaf leisure activity will show, deaf people choose – of their own free will – to engage in certain activities and in a certain way. Therefore, it is argued that whatever these activities are, they should be considered as deaf cultural activity, because of the element of choice.

Evidence has been produced which demonstrates that a community of deaf people, who indulge in a range of activities with other deaf people, and whose patterns of social behaviour are in some ways dictated by their deafness, most certainly exists. However, some of the definitions of the deaf community posited

⁶³ For example, Padden 'The deaf community and deaf culture', p. 42

⁶⁴ Padden and Humphries *Deaf in America* p. 10

by various academics set criteria for membership that are contradicted by the evidence provided by an analysis of deaf leisure activity. For the purposes of this thesis, the deaf community is defined as those people whose deafness gives rise to interests and experiences that they actively share and participate in with other deaf people. This group can include both people who were born deaf and those who have become deafened at some stage in their life. The use of sign language as the primary or preferred method of communication is a central feature of the social life of the deaf community and its members and is therefore a defining element in identifying the focus group for this research. However, this need not exclude those who in various parts of their lives also use speech and lipreading through choice or necessity. The main method of determining who are members of the deaf community in the context of this research is that these are primarily deaf people, who take part in the activities of a deaf club, and in which setting they choose to share their leisure time and interests with other members.

There remains the issue of the place of hearing people within the deaf community, and whether or not they can be members. Deaf people live, mix and co-exist within a hearing majority, and this extends to certain aspects of their personal and social lives. As evidence produced in later chapters will show, hearing people – such as spouses, relatives and friends – have played an active role in the social life of the deaf community. By accepting hearing people into their community and its leisure activities, membership of the deaf community was at least partially or temporarily conferred. By extension, these hearing people were involved in the cultural life of the deaf community, and so must have had some impact and input into deaf culture. In the reports of deaf club activity, there was often little indication of the audiological status of those taking part, and so participation in any particular event may have included profoundly deaf sign language users, deafened or hard of hearing members and hearing members of the deaf club. Therefore, it is not possible to say with any certainty whether an

event was attended by solely deaf or sign language using members. As the reports of deaf club life used for this research give no indication of different levels of deafness amongst members or whether hearing members were involved, no differentiation is considered necessary in this thesis. Indeed, given the lack of available evidence, no such differentiation is practicable or achievable. The sole criterion will be that it was an activity engaged in by deaf club members and therefore part of the culture of the particular deaf club, no matter who was involved.

The deaf community and its particular culture are not entirely different from those of the hearing world, although certain elements of deaf life may be. Previous investigations into deaf community life and deaf culture have suggested that deaf people view the world and act in a totally different way to their hearing neighbours. The evidence of deaf club activity presented in this thesis will show that whilst it might be argued that deaf people have a different perception of the world, they have not taken part in anything which is markedly different from their hearing neighbours in terms of their leisure activities. Therefore, for the purposes of this thesis, deaf culture is defined as those activities deaf people chose to take part in when they gathered together and the patterns of behaviour they demonstrated in such situations. Leisure and sport have played an important role in bringing deaf people together, and in doing so helped to create and maintain a community based on shared experiences of deafness. It is for this reason that this research focuses on the activities of deaf club members. As will be shown in the following chapter, it is generally agreed that deaf clubs have served as the centre of deaf cultural life. Therefore it follows that the activities of these members constituted a major part of that culture.

In order to justify taking such a broad view of deaf culture, this research will indicate not only the raw details of the leisure and sporting activities of deaf club

members, but also the way these activities served to bring and bond deaf people together. As has been shown, the deaf community is based on shared experiences, a shared social life and the communal identity which results directly from shared deafness. However, none of the models outlined earlier relate theoretical notions of either the deaf community or deaf culture to empirical historical evidence to support the positions taken. This thesis presents the first detailed investigation of deaf club members' leisure and sporting interests, and shows that these activities served as an important form of communal cultural expression. When deaf leisure and sport are investigated closely, the results show how deaf people used shared activity as more than just a way of passing their spare time. This shared activity helped deaf club members to find group and self-identity within a community of people with similar experiences and world views. This investigation will also show that the somewhat narrow views of what constitutes 'deaf culture' are flawed to an extent. By showing precisely what deaf people have chosen to do in their spare time, with whom and in which settings, the broader view of deaf culture taken within this thesis will be seen to be entirely justified, as this reflects the reality of deaf life much more accurately than the theoretical concepts of 'deaf community' and 'deaf culture'. Padden defined those at the cultural core of the deaf community as 'behaving as deaf people do'; this research will show exactly what 'behaving as deaf people do' involved in post-war north-west England. ⁶⁵

In using these parameters to define both deaf people and deaf culture, the intention is to include all who regard themselves as actively involved in the leisure life of the deaf community. By focussing on deaf club members, the experiences of a wide range of deaf people will be accurately reflected, and the variety of activities and perspectives that fall under the generic labels of 'the deaf

⁶⁵ Padden 'The deaf community and deaf culture', p. 44

community' and 'deaf culture' will be represented. It is these people and their activities which form the focus for this research, without any preconditions being applied to determine whether they fit precisely any of the models for membership of the deaf community outlined above. The evidence of the social and leisure activities of deaf people presented later in this thesis will show this to be a justifiable position to take. Having established and defined both the deaf community and deaf culture, it is necessary to show how this geographically dispersed collection of individuals came to form a distinct and identifiable body of people.

Chapter Four: The development of deaf clubs in Britain

The deaf community could not have come into existence without places where socially isolated deaf people could gather and develop relationships based on common experiences and characteristics. As was shown in the previous chapter, deaf clubs have long been seen as the hub of deaf community life. These deaf clubs emerged from a number of local voluntary organisations set up to assist deaf people in their daily lives. In this chapter, the development of the deaf welfare organisations, which emerged from the nineteenth century onwards, will be outlined, and set within the wider context of welfare provision during the Victorian era. An important factor driving the establishment of these various philanthropic ventures was the 1834 Poor Law Amendment Act, and examples of the various groups targeted for help and support will be provided from the north west of England. Deaf welfare formed just one part of a general trend to care for those seen to be disadvantaged within society, but the changes in the Poor Law were a major influence on the formation of deaf societies and independent welfare organisations. Evidence will be provided which indicates that deaf people from poorer families were placed in the workhouses solely on the basis of their deafness. As a consequence, various philanthropic measures were introduced to try to ensure that as many deaf people as possible could avoid this fate. Deaf societies played a number of roles in this endeavour, such as providing vocational training and finding jobs for deaf people, but they also had a social function. In bringing deaf people together, the deaf clubs developed as the social arms of these welfare societies and went on to play an integral part in bonding deaf people together as a community. Without the deaf clubs, the deaf community would have had no geographical focus and deaf people would have had nowhere to come together to socialise and enjoy a range of leisure and sporting activities.

One of the major motivating factors in the establishment and formation of welfare associations for deaf people in Britain was the 1834 Poor Law Amendment Act. This legislation required anyone who wanted to claim relief under the Poor Law to reside in the workhouse, rather than be eligible for what was termed 'outdoor relief', in which benefits were paid whilst claimants continued to reside in their own homes. The consequence of this change in the law was that many deaf people ended up in workhouses due to a lack of employment opportunities and the subsequent inability to provide for themselves and their families.¹ Although deafness is no respecter of social class in terms of who is affected by the condition, the effects and responses to having a deaf child were most certainly conditioned by the ability to pay for education, training and the general welfare of a deaf child or relative.

Attitudes towards the poor hardened during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, and the result was the reform of the Poor Law in 1834.² The concept of 'poverty' came to be replaced by the notion of 'pauperism', the subtle difference being that paupers were perceived to be in that condition through their own indolence; in effect, they chose to be poor rather than find gainful employment. It was believed that pauperism arose because the existing Poor Law provision discouraged self-help and self-sufficiency, by providing relief for all, whether they were capable of working or not. From 1834, those claiming poor relief were classified as either being 'deserving' or 'undeserving' poor. Those who could work (the 'able-bodied') but did not do so were classified as 'undeserving'; those who could not work because of some physical or mental impediment were 'deserving'. Determining whether or not someone was able-bodied depended on whether they fell into one of five categories: children, the sick, the insane,

¹ Dimmock 'A brief history of the RAD', *Deaf History Journal* Supplement X (2001) p. 16

² Lees, L. H. *The solidarity of strangers: the English Poor Law and the people, 1700 - 1948* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 82-152

'defectives' and the 'aged and infirm'.³ Anyone who did not come under one or more of these heading was automatically classified as able-bodied.⁴ However, deciding whether those poor who were also deaf were able-bodied or not was problematic. Deaf people were generally viewed as 'defective' (that is, having a physical barrier to working) because of their inability to hear, which would classify them as 'deserving'. However, unless they suffered some other disability, deaf people were not physically incapable of undertaking useful employment, and therefore might be seen as being 'able-bodied'. Many deaf people were in effect 'able bodied' in terms of performing manual work, no matter what difficulties may have existed in terms of communicating with hearing colleagues. However, many were unskilled or untrained, as there was little or no education or vocational training for the majority of deaf people at this time. This meant that many deaf people from poor backgrounds were unable to find work and support themselves. Dimmock contends that deaf people were often placed in workhouses because of their inability to find suitable employment, and not because of any indolence on their part or inability to work.⁵ Those who found themselves in the workhouses effectively became innocent victims of the wider changes in attitudes towards the poor and paupers, punished for the consequences of their deafness rather than for being poor through any fault of their own. Whether deaf people had been treated more considerately under the old Poor Law system is uncertain, but given the Church's historical attitude towards deafness and deaf people, this may have been the case. The old (pre-1834) Poor Law had been administered by Parishes, and so the Church of England had a more direct control over the provision of relief and the interpretation of the rules of eligibility. When control passed to the Poor Law Commissioners after 1834, the religious authorities may have felt

³ Wright, D. 'Learning disability and the New Poor Law in England, 1834-1867' *Disability and Society* 15, 5 (2000) pp. 731-745 gives an insight into the way the Poor Law Commissioners responded to one particular group of disabled people.

⁴ Oliver *The politics of disablement*, p. 34

⁵ Dimmock 'A brief history of the RAD', p. 16

obliged to provide alternative means of support for the 'deserving poor deaf'. This would certainly be in keeping with their earlier and subsequent actions, as will be shown later.

The National Index of Paupers in Workhouses in 1861 offers a rare insight into the way deaf people were treated by the Poor Law Commissioners after 1834.⁶ Based on the 1861 Census, the index contains information on all those resident in workhouses at the time. Details contained in the Index include the name of the workhouse inmate, the workhouse where he or she was resident, and the length of time each had been resident in the workhouse. Most tellingly, 'the reason assigned why the Pauper in each case is unable to maintain himself or herself' is also given. A 10% sample of the census reveals 23 workhouse inmates who were described as 'deaf and dumb'; a simple extrapolation would suggest an indicative figure of 230 deaf people resident in workhouses in 1861.⁷ Of the 23 people recorded in the sample, only five had other physical or mental conditions, which would prevent them from working. These included one who was blind, two with 'defective sight', one 'cripple' and one 'idiot'; in addition, one woman was listed as being 'deaf and dumb, and having an illegitimate child'. The remaining seventeen are merely described as 'deaf and dumb', suggesting they were not incapable of work. Examples of deaf people in workhouses were found from all parts of England, indicating some consistency in the way deaf people were treated under the provisions of the Poor Law. The figures relate only to adults (over sixteen years of age) who had been resident in the workhouse for a period of five years or more. Therefore, it is likely that there were also a number of deaf people who had been in the workhouses for less than five years who were not

⁶ Details of the *National Index of Paupers in Workhouses in 1861* can be found on the UK & Ireland Genealogical Information Service website (<http://www.genuki.org.uk/big/eng/Paupers>). Prior to the 1834 Poor Law Amendment Act, records were kept by individual parishes, and no comparative overview of the number of deaf people in the workhouses before 1834 has been found.

⁷ This sample is included in the online *National Index of Paupers* cited above

recorded by this survey, or who were under sixteen years of age at the time of the 1861 Census. The length of time they had been receiving poor relief in the workhouse varied between seven and twenty-two years. Thomas Barlow, who had been in the workhouse in Stamford in Lincolnshire since 1839, was described as 'deaf, dumb and a cripple'. This description suggests that his deafness was not necessarily the only factor in his inability to support himself. However, Mary Coram of Tavistock and Caroline Fox of Sheppey in Kent had both been receiving Poor Relief in their respective workhouses for sixteen years, and both were described simply as 'deaf and dumb'.

Although the age of workhouse inmates was not recorded, 'old' and 'aged' were given as reasons for individuals being admitted to the workhouse. In some cases, those deaf persons listed in the Index may have been too old to work, but this was not recorded in any of the 23 examples found in the 10% sample. Even if age was a factor in some instances, it is unlikely that this could apply to all those deaf poor. The evidence therefore suggests that over a quarter of a century after the change in the Poor Law, deaf people were still being placed in workhouses.⁸ This supports Dimmock's assertion that deaf people who could work were being placed in the workhouse on the grounds of their deafness, and not because of any physical inability to work. However, it is unlikely that all deaf people who were capable of working were being placed there solely because they were deaf. Even allowing for those deaf people who may have been resident in the workhouses but not included in the survey, the number of deaf people in the workhouses in 1861 is still a comparatively low figure, given the currently accepted ratios for incidences of deafness mentioned in the previous chapter. Figures of one person

⁸ Deaf people are not directly referred to in the canon of research on the workhouse system, although some references are made to what would now be termed 'disabled people'. Whether these references to 'disabled' include deaf people is not clear, but given the historical attitudes towards deafness as a disability outlined in chapter 3, this could be the case. A figure of 16% for the number of elderly, ill and disabled people in workhouses in 1803 is suggested by Lees *The solidarity of strangers* p. 117

in every seven having some degree of deafness and one in one thousand being profoundly deaf cited in the late twentieth century would almost certainly have been higher in the mid nineteenth century, when medical causes of deafness such as meningitis were more prevalent.⁹ Therefore, the number of deaf people found in workhouses in the 1861 census was only a small proportion of the overall deaf population. This suggests that the actions of the deaf welfare organisations in finding gainful employment for deaf people had achieved some degree of success.

The establishment of Deaf Societies and Welfare Organisations

The first organisations for the care and welfare of deaf people appeared during the early part of the nineteenth century, with the first Deaf Society believed to have been founded in Scotland in around 1820.¹⁰ Grant shows that these societies were typically set up either by religious denominations or as independent philanthropic ventures by former pupils of the emerging deaf schools. They were a means of continuing the friendships and social life first experienced in the schools, as well as supporting deaf people in their daily lives.¹¹ The Church of England was the major provider and supporter of deaf people, which was in keeping with the long tradition of church groups taking responsibility for the education and welfare of deaf people.¹² The change in the Poor Law then gave an added impetus to the development of welfare societies generally, not merely those which provided for deaf people.

⁹ Figures for the incidence of deafness in Britain can be found in Young et al *Looking on*, p.1; the British Deaf Association (www.britishdeafassociation.org.uk/bsl/page) indicate that around 70,000 people in Britain use sign language as their first or preferred language, a ratio of roughly 1:1000 of the general population

¹⁰ There is some debate amongst deaf historians on the place and formation date of the first voluntary deaf welfare society, with dates of 1818 for Edinburgh and 1822 for Glasgow claimed by various authors. See Lysons, K. 'The development of local voluntary societies for adult deaf persons in England' in Gregory and Hartley *Constructing deafness* pp. 235-238

¹¹ The majority of the information on the early development of deaf societies is based on Grant *Deaf advance* pp. 1-13

¹² McLoughlin *A history of the education of the deaf* provides a concise summary of the historical attitudes towards deafness and its effects, particularly amongst religious groups.

Lees notes the growth in institutions and asylums from 1760 onwards, with Asylums founded for such socially unacceptable groups as prostitutes, urchins and illegitimate children, all of whom were deemed worthy of moral and physical redemption.¹³ Asylums were seen as not only providing a refuge from the causes of distress, but they were also meant to act as a mechanism for transformation and improvement: 'once in sanitized settings, the socially deviant would supposedly absorb discipline, order and Christian morals via osmosis'.¹⁴ Although deaf people were not necessarily seen as 'socially deviant', the prevailing attitude was certainly that deaf people's inability to hear made them 'abnormal'. Therefore, it is perhaps no coincidence that the first free deaf school in Britain, opened in 1792 in London, was named the Bermondsey Asylum for the Deaf and Dumb Children of the Poor, nor that it was founded by a Minister of the Anglican Church.¹⁵ Deaf people were seen to be in need of help and the Churches, especially the Church of England, saw the salvation of deaf people as a part of their moral crusade. The Church's position was that deaf people could not pray or hear the word of God as proclaimed through the Bible, and so they could not find absolution and eternal life. In addition, it was felt that deaf people should be helped to deal with problems of a more earthly nature, such as being found employment in order to keep them from the workhouses. Therefore, it was a Christian duty to support and provide for deaf people, as was shown by the Church of England's close involvement in the development of organised deaf welfare.¹⁶ Lysons cites three main motivating factors in the establishment of voluntary welfare societies for deaf people: evangelism, mutual aid and

¹³ Lees *The solidarity of strangers* p. 107

¹⁴ *Ibid*, p. 107

¹⁵ Grant *Deaf advance* pp. 3-5; the history of the Bermondsey Asylum is included on the website www.royalschoolfordeaf.kent.sch.uk/history.htm. The Bermondsey Asylum moved to Margate in 1875 and is now known as the Royal School of the Deaf.

¹⁶ McLoughlin *The education of the deaf in England*

philanthropy.¹⁷ These were all evident in the early development of deaf societies, as will be outlined below.

Although individual deaf societies began to emerge across Britain from the 1820s, the first organised network of deaf societies only appeared soon after the change in the Poor Law. The Institution for providing Employment, Relief and Religious Instruction for the Deaf and Dumb, which eventually evolved into the Royal Association in Aid of Deaf People (RAD), was founded in London in 1841, partly in response to the way deaf people were suffering under the new Poor Law.¹⁸ Formed as a charitable organisation, the Institution modelled itself on the Deaf Society established in Edinburgh in the mid 1820s. The RAD set up missions across south-east England to provide training in various trades such as printing, bookbinding and shoemaking, with the declared intention of keeping deaf people out of the workhouses by providing a means by which they could support themselves. Initially, only men were trained, but later dressmaking and needlework was introduced for women. The initial provision of training solely for men may have been arisen from the stricter rules for receiving assistance applied to males by the Poor Law Commissioners, thus increasing the need to provide deaf men with an escape route from the strictures of the workhouse.¹⁹

Financial difficulties soon saw the vocational training scheme suspended, despite its success in turning out well-trained craftsmen. Many deaf people ended up back in the workhouses, and so efforts were made to re-establish the missions. In 1854, the organisation re-emerged as The Association in Aid of the Deaf and

¹⁷ Lysons 'The development of local voluntary societies' p. 236

¹⁸ Information about the history of the Royal Association for Deaf People is drawn from the organisation's website at www.royaldeaf.org.uk and from Dimmock 'A brief history of the RAD', pp. 16-24. For clarity, the Association will generally be referred to as the RAD, except when directly referring to earlier titles for the organisation.

¹⁹ Lees *The solidarity of strangers* pp. 135-145

Dumb (AADD), this time with a much more evangelical focus. The role of Missioners was introduced, to provide care and welfare for the deaf people in their area. The initial emphasis was more on religious instruction and education, although their role developed over time. Vocational training was no longer provided, although Missioners did try to find work and apprenticeships for deaf people. They also importantly acted as advocates and advisors to deaf people in their areas, their most vital function being to provide interpreting between deaf and hearing people.

The influence of the Anglican Church in the work of the missions was evident from the start, as all those receiving support had to agree to attend regular church services and receive compulsory religious instruction. The AADD appointed their own deaf chaplain in 1851, and established a church solely for deaf people in London in 1890. Britain's first deaf church, St Saviour's, was built on Oxford Street, on a site now occupied by Selfridges department store.²⁰ Many other deaf societies followed suit in establishing missions, emphasising the religious basis and focus of the welfare provided for deaf people. Whilst the provision of church services and religious instruction was the primary purpose of many of the missions, they also served a social function. Informal gatherings began to occur as a natural extension of the regular religious meetings, and many missions began to arrange outings for their members.²¹ The Red Lion Square Deaf Mission in London was one example of the way such missions developed. As the social role of the Mission gradually took precedence, the original religious function became less important to deaf users, to the concern of the Church of England authorities who ran the majority of deaf missions.²² Through the establishment of missions, and subsequently deaf clubs, deaf people were brought together and a

²⁰ Dimmock 'A brief history of the RAD', p. 18

²¹ An example of this process occurring in Manchester is given later in this chapter.

²² O'Neill, R. 'Manchester and Salford Adult Deaf and Dumb Benevolent Society' *Deaf History Journal* (1997) Supplement II, pp. 24-25.

sense of community based on shared interests, experience and communication methods began to be fostered. Taylor contends that the provision of a place for deaf people to meet and socialise was another important factor motivating those who set up the deaf societies from which deaf clubs emerged.²³ As missions for deaf people spread across the country, so the opportunities for community development through shared religious and leisure activities increased. Grant has identified at least 36 missions and deaf societies in existence across Britain by 1890, mostly in the cities and larger towns such as London, Birmingham, Liverpool and Manchester where there was a large deaf population. Others were set up in towns which housed the major deaf schools, such as Doncaster.²⁴

The work of the AADD was confined to London and the south east, but the services provided by the Institution were to influence greatly the work of later organisations set up for deaf people such as the British Deaf Association (BDA) and the Royal National Institute for Deaf People (RNID). Deaf societies were also established in other parts of the country during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, mostly as independent organisations developed along similar lines to the AADD model by churchmen and religious groups. The missions and societies operated under a range of titles, such as The Mission to the Deaf and Dumb of the Diocese of Carlisle, The Yorkshire Institution for the Adult Deaf and Dumb and The Salford and Manchester Deaf and Dumb Benevolent Association.²⁵ These voluntary societies all provided varying degrees of welfare support for the local deaf population and appointed a superintendent to perform the same roles as the Missioners. Eventually, the title of Missioner came to be used to all those involved in such work, and as the premises from which they worked developed a social function, these became known as deaf clubs or Deaf Institutes. The

²³ Taylor, G. 'Deaf people, ethnic minorities and social policy' in Gregory and Hartley *Constructing deafness* p. 242

²⁴ Grant *Deaf advance* p.11

²⁵ Ibid, pp. 11-12

Missioners often came from a religious background and were mostly but not exclusively hearing, and deaf people were often actively involved in delivering the services provided by the missions. The missions recognised the need for sign language as a means of communication between deaf and hearing people, and were promoters of its use. Sign language was recognised by many churchmen as being the most appropriate means of communication between deaf and hearing people, and it was used particularly in the missions' religious work. For example, the majority of missions included the provision of interpreted church services for their deaf congregations. By providing access to religious services through sign language, the Missioners were able to fulfil one of their principal functions – the spiritual salvation of deaf people. The various churches have a long history of using forms of signed communication with deaf people, based on the organised sign systems used by several silent monastic orders. French clerics such as the Abbe de l'Epee and the Abbe Sicard were also instrumental in helping to formalise local versions of signed language into standard patterns of communication for educational purposes. In doing so, the churches played a major role in promoting sign language as the most appropriate form of communication for profoundly deaf people.²⁶

In the context of this research, the foundation of the British Deaf and Dumb Association (now the BDA) in 1890 was an important development, not least because the BDA was the first truly national organisation of deaf people with a deaf leadership.²⁷ In some respects, the establishment of a national – rather than local or regional – association for deaf people might be seen as a late development in relation to other disadvantaged groups. For example, the Royal

²⁶ Further discussion on the role of religious groups in the development of sign language can be found in Baynton, D. C. *Forbidden signs* (University of Chicago Press, 1996) and Lane, H. *When the mind hears* (London, Vantage, 1984)

²⁷ Grant's *Deaf advance* is the official centenary history of the BDA, and provides extensive information on the foundation of the organisation

National Institute for the Blind was established in 1868. However, in other respects, deaf organisations were either ahead of other groups or at least keeping pace. The National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children was established in London in 1884, whilst the first ragged school for the poor of London was only founded by Barnardo in 1867 – over seventy years after a similar school was set up for deaf children. In another context, the deaf welfare organisations were no different to other welfare groups, as both the NSPCC and Barnardos were established by churchmen. The most important difference, though, was that the BDA was instigated by those who were to use its services, rather than by well meaning outsiders. The driving force in the establishment of the BDA was Francis Maginn, a Missioner in Ireland who was himself deaf.²⁸ As the fledgling organisation developed in the early years of the twentieth century, they sought to work closely with the existing missions and deaf societies in which many of their members were to be found. The BDA looked to establish a branch in every city and major town, and the logical place to base their activities was in the network of local deaf societies and deaf clubs. As a result, most deaf clubs became affiliated to the BDA, with a club member serving as Branch Secretary and using the deaf club as the centre for his or her activities. This link to the BDA remained a feature of deaf club life throughout the twentieth century, with Grant citing the existence of 178 BDA branches based in deaf clubs in 1990.²⁹ Although the BDA was not usually formally involved in the running of deaf clubs, having a member acting as BDA branch secretary meant that the distinction between the activities of the deaf clubs and the BDA branches was often blurred. The branch secretary's responsibilities included collecting subscriptions, keeping the members informed of BDA activities, seeking the views of BDA members on important policy issues, and voting on behalf of the club's BDA members at the annual Conference. As an illustration of the symbiotic nature of the link between the BDA

²⁸ Ibid, p. 5

²⁹ Ibid, p. 138

and deaf clubs, all BDA branches were required to raise money for the organisation as part of the BDA's Centenary celebrations in 1990.³⁰ This meant that many deaf clubs organised fundraising events for the BDA appeal as part of their normal schedule of activities. To all intents and purposes, the deaf club and the BDA branch were one and the same, with news of deaf club activities disseminated around the country through the pages of the BDA's newspaper, *British Deaf News*. The reports and information were usually sent in by the club's BDA branch secretary.³¹ The reports were even included in pages entitled 'Around the Clubs' rather than being presented as BDA branch reports. It is these reports which have been the source for much of the primary evidence used in this research, and on which the analyses of deaf people's leisure activity have been based.

Deaf clubs in north-west England

As recently as 2003, there were twenty eight active deaf clubs within the north west of England; that is open to members for at least one night per week.³² The presence of reports in *BDN* shows that virtually all of these clubs were in existence throughout the period of this research, and evidence from earlier deaf newspapers and periodicals shows that many of these clubs have been around for much longer. The clubs provided various leisure activities and facilities, and catered for all ages of deaf people, with many clubs having youth and pensioner sections. Drinking in the club bar and playing darts, snooker and bingo formed the regular staples of weekly deaf club activity throughout the post-war period. Deaf clubs also arranged a wide range of other leisure and sporting activities for

³⁰ *British Deaf News (BDN)* 1990, January, p. 1

³¹ Evidence of the role of the BDA branch secretary as a reporter for *British Deaf News* can be found in the 'Around the Clubs' pages of the publication. A change in the branch secretary was usually reported in *BDN*, along with an explanation that the new secretary would be providing future news from the branch. See for example *BDN* 1990, February p. 21; December p. 25

³² Royal Association for Deaf People website (www.royaldeaf.org.uk/ukclubs.htm)

members, both inside and outside the premises of the deaf club and these are analysed in chapters seven and eight.

The city of Manchester provides useful examples from north-west England of the place of the missions and deaf societies within a wider expansion of welfare provision by voluntary charities, and the way in which deaf clubs developed as the social arms of missions for deaf people. As Shapely shows, as many as 120 welfare organisations were founded in the city during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.³³ The Manchester Deaf and Dumb Institute was just one of a number of support organisations founded during this period, such as Henshaw's Blind Society, the Orphanage and Training School for Destitute Girls and the Discharged Prisoners Aid Society. In addition, a number of charitable hospitals and dispensaries appeared between 1795 and 1850. Alderman Chesters-Thompson was an important and influential Manchester businessman and philanthropist during the second half of the nineteenth century. By 1891, Chesters-Thompson was 'a vice-president of Manchester Royal Infirmary, and one of the largest subscribers to the Manchester Eye Hospital, the Ancoats Dispensary and the Convalescent Home in Southport'.³⁴ Chesters-Thompson's charitable work was not confined to these causes, however. He was also, amongst other philanthropic ventures, 'one of the chief supporters of the Adult Deaf and Dumb institution, of the Cotton Districts Convalescent Fund and the Day Nursery for the Children of Widows'.³⁵ Not surprisingly, he was lauded for his charitable work, and his decision to support deaf welfare in the city placed deaf people on an equal footing with other 'deserving unfortunates'. The Deaf Institute's charitable status was an important factor, as voluntary charities were not subject to the restraints

³³ Shapely, P. *Charity and power in Victorian Manchester* (Manchester, The Cheetham Society, 2000), pp. 141-143

³⁴ *Ibid*, p. 103

³⁵ *Ibid*, p. 103

applied by the 1819 Charitable Trusts Act.³⁶ This meant they and their supporters could employ a range of novel techniques to their fundraising activities, and entertainment became an important method of doing so. As Shapely shows, charity giving in nineteenth century Manchester was most successful when it was associated with some form of entertainment. Dinners, Flag Days, concerts, bazaars and tea parties were amongst the activities used as devices to raise public awareness of the various charities in order to attract donations, whilst providing donors with some amusement in return. Paying to take part in a balloon ascent was one of the innovative ways in which people were encouraged to make donations in aid of Manchester Royal Infirmary. In another example, Manchester Oddfellows organised a fundraising event in 1837 for the benefit of local deaf people. The Oddfellows staged a public procession followed by a celebratory dinner to celebrate the opening of a new Deaf School in Old Trafford, Manchester. The Oddfellows had been involved in raising money to build the school, and they extended an invitation to 'any of their friends who wish to favour them' to join them in the celebratory dinner, on purchase of a ticket.³⁷

The development and support of welfare support for deaf people thus fitted well into the general philanthropic provision within the growing urban environment of Manchester. Even in their physical spaces, deaf organisations were linked to other deserving causes. When the new Deaf School opened in 1837, the site was shared with the new home of Henshaw's Society for the Blind, although the two organisations had separate but identical buildings.³⁸ However, this arrangement was to have financial implications for the Deaf School. The Blind Society was commonly known by the abbreviated title of 'Henshaws', and following the move to a shared site with the Deaf School, the two organisations came to be thought

³⁶ Ibid, pp. 23-24

³⁷ Ibid, pp. 30-32

³⁸ Information taken from the website of the Royal Deaf School, Manchester
www.rsdmanchester.org/history

of as a single entity with a single title. The consequence for the Deaf School was that donations and bequests were regularly made to 'Henshaws', which meant that all such funds went to the Blind Society of that name, and money which may have been intended for the Deaf School, either for their sole use or to be shared with the Blind Society, was unintentionally misdirected.³⁹ The first deaf society in Manchester was founded by James Herriot, a deaf tailor from Edinburgh, in 1846.⁴⁰ Herriot had been involved in setting up the Deaf Association in Edinburgh, and he was keen to see a similar venture established in Manchester. His shop became a meeting point for local deaf people who came to Herriot for help and advice on a range of matters, and an ad hoc but unofficial Mission became established in the rooms above Herriot's shop. Here, deaf people came to meet and socialise with other deaf people, as well as seeking practical help in obtaining jobs and information. The informal deaf society was launched as an official organisation in 1849, under the title of the Manchester and Salford Adult Deaf and Dumb Benevolent Society and the first deaf centre was established in central Manchester the following year, as the Manchester Adult Deaf and Dumb Institute.⁴¹ Fundraising was one of the issues that saw Herriot's non-denominational organisation face opposition from the board of the Old Trafford Deaf School, which was run by the Church of England.⁴² Herriot's fundraising was seen to be depriving the school of funds, and so an alternative, strictly denominational association was set up in 1854, as the Manchester Adult Deaf and Dumb Society.⁴³ The similarity between the titles of the two organisations was almost certainly not a coincidence, as the new body set out to portray themselves

³⁹ Woolley, D. *Manchester memoirs: a pictorial record of the Manchester School for the Deaf* (Doncaster, British Deaf History Society, 2001), pp. 1-2

⁴⁰ O'Neill 'Manchester and Salford Society' pp. 15-31

⁴¹ Shapely *Charity and power* p. 23

⁴² O'Neill 'Manchester and Salford Society' pp. 24-25

⁴³ For simplicity, 'The Manchester and Salford Adult Deaf and Dumb Benevolent Society' will be referred to as 'Herriot's group', whilst the 'The Old Trafford society' will be used for 'The Manchester Adult Deaf and Dumb Society'.

as the legitimate organisation for the welfare of the city's deaf population. Despite the efforts of the Old Trafford society and its Church of England based backers, Herriot's group continued to grow and moved to more suitable premises in Quay Street, Manchester in the 1870s, where it remained for almost one hundred years. These societies provide typical examples of the way different religious denominations were closely involved in establishing and delivering welfare services for deaf people across Britain, a situation that continued until well into the twentieth century. No matter what the motives of those involved in setting up deaf societies, a deaf club almost invariably emerged once deaf people began to meet in the missions and societies. Whilst the work of the Old Trafford society remained firmly based on religious instruction and spiritual care, a social element also developed as a consequence of deaf people being brought together. From its inception, Herriot's more secular group had provided social as well as practical facilities and services for its members, and both the rival societies came to establish dedicated social clubs for their members.

The main differences between the two organisations were those of religious background, the membership of their controlling bodies and the support they gave for what they perceived to be the most suitable method of education for deaf children. Herriot's group was a loose cross-denominational gathering of people from various Nonconformist backgrounds, whilst the Old Trafford society was staunchly Church of England. The Church of England group was run by an exclusively hearing Board and hearing staff, whilst although Herriot's group had a mostly hearing Management Board, deaf people were heavily involved in the running of their own organisation. Herriot was a firm believer in the use of sign language in the education for deaf children, whilst the Old Trafford school, from which the Anglican Society developed, was firmly oralist. In many ways, the two Manchester organisations reflected the policies and perspectives of the two national organisations for deaf people, which emerged during the late nineteenth

and early twentieth centuries. The British Deaf Association played a similar role to Herriot's group in terms of being an organisation run for and by deaf people, which gave support to the use of sign language. The Royal National Institute for Deaf People, on the other hand, came to have many similarities with the work of the Old Trafford society, by being an organisation run by hearing people and strongly in favour of oral education and the medical model of deafness. The involvement of religious groups in Manchester's deaf welfare provision was extended when a Catholic Deaf Society was established in 1929, based at St. Joseph's Deaf Centre, which still serves as the city's Catholic deaf club. St. Joseph's main work has been more concerned with spiritual welfare, but the Deaf Centre has also provided an important social focal point for deaf Catholics in the city.⁴⁴ Although the sometimes acrimonious nature of the early development of deaf welfare services in Manchester was not typical of the region as a whole, the manner in which deaf clubs emerged as the social bodies of these philanthropic and spiritual ventures most certainly was. The various towns bordering on Manchester, such as Rochdale, Oldham, Ashton under Lyne and Stockport, all had their own deaf clubs, which developed out of the missions set up in these towns by various religious groups during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This pattern was repeated across the north west, with missions and deaf clubs to be found in towns such as Bolton, Preston, Liverpool and St Helens from the late nineteenth century. Therefore, it is clear that deaf clubs have been an important feature of deaf life across the north west of England for well over a century and a half and that their roots were firmly based in broader charitable provision for disadvantaged social groups. Although the religious basis of these organisations remained an important part of their work, the deaf clubs and societies themselves gradually became less focussed on spiritual matters. This was illustrated when Manchester's two deaf welfare groups finally joined together

⁴⁴ Catholic Deaf Association website – www.cda-uk.com

to form the non-denominational Manchester Deaf Society in the 1970s after over a century of separate provision for the city's deaf population. This merger was driven as much by practical and financial considerations as it was by a growing spirit of ecumenicalism and the new society moved into Manchester Deaf Centre on Oxford Road in 1975.⁴⁵ The gradual separation of the spiritual and temporal aspects of welfare provision for deaf people is perhaps best illustrated by an investigation of the development of deaf welfare during the twentieth century, and particularly in the period since the Second World War.

The role of the Missioners in sustaining deaf clubs

One of the main responsibilities of the Missioner was to act on behalf of deaf people on a daily basis. Based at the local deaf society or club, the Missioner provided practical support in all aspects of the lives of deaf people. As Grant points out:

`[The Missioners'] role and importance within the deaf community, particularly in the early days, are difficult to exaggerate. They were friend, social worker and spiritual adviser to the deaf community, and inevitably became champions of its causes'.⁴⁶

As such, the Missioners provided an important link between the deaf and hearing world, acting as interpreter, advocate and supporter for the deaf people under their care. The practical aspect of the Missioners' work was so important for deaf people that the BDA supported the introduction of a training and qualification programme for people wishing to work with deaf people. The Deaf Welfare Examination Board (DWEB) was established in 1928, and resulted in the

⁴⁵ *British Deaf News* 1975, pp. 88, 158, 189

⁴⁶ Grant *Deaf advance* p. 6

introduction of Deaf Welfare Officers (DWOs) to work alongside the Missioners.⁴⁷ The DWEB course provided successful candidates with one of two qualifications. The Certificate course lasted two years and covered all aspects of the provision of welfare for deaf people, as well as the teaching of sign language. This allowed DWOs to provide the vital service of interpreting for deaf people in their interactions with the hearing world. The Diploma course required a third year of study, consisting of religious training which allowed DWOs to support the spiritual work of the missions by conducting some minor religious services and acting as lay readers. Upon qualification, the DWOs were employed in the missions and deaf societies. In effect, the DWOs took over the practical elements of deaf welfare work, leaving the Missioners to organise the spiritual care of deaf people. Taking on much of the advocacy and interpreting role of the Missioners, the DWOs enjoyed a similarly respected position amongst the local deaf community:

The Welfare Officers worked really hard. They were called Missioners before, and they were linked to the church. They used to look after the deaf; they would go round knocking on doors collecting money for deaf people. The Missioners were replaced by the Welfare Officers and they carried on that work.⁴⁸

One of their most important functions was to continue the traditional role of Missioners in finding employment for deaf people:

When I was at school, the Deaf Welfare Officer would come to see the headmaster. This was because some pupils would need the support of

⁴⁷ A detailed description of the development of deaf welfare and social work can be found in Simpson, T.S. 'A stimulus to learning, a measure of ability' in Gregory and Hartley *Constructing deafness* pp. 217-225

⁴⁸ These extracts are taken from an interview conducted with deaf club member and deaf historian Len Hodson in Preston, 10th July 2003

the Welfare Officer when they started work. We could get support in finding jobs – the Welfare Worker would go out and find jobs for the deaf club members.⁴⁹

This support continued until the role of the Deaf Welfare Officer was subsumed within the new post of Social Worker for Deaf People during the 1970s.⁵⁰

As well as providing practical support for deaf people and advocating on their behalf, the Missioners and the Deaf Welfare Officers also helped in the development of what came to be recognised as the 'deaf community', by bringing deaf people together to share activities in the deaf club. Both the Missioner and the Deaf Welfare Officer were pivotal in introducing new members into the life of the deaf club, as Len Hodson recalls from his schooldays:

Sometimes, we had to go [from school] to the deaf club because people were being confirmed – the church services were held there and so we went [into the deaf club] regularly from school. We were encouraged to go to the deaf club by the Welfare Officer so that we could meet deaf adults, mix with them and see them signing ... The Welfare Officer would know you from school and if you were just sitting around at home with nothing to do, then you would be encouraged to join the deaf club. Other deaf people there would see you were deaf and would teach you sign language, things like that.⁵¹

However, once the work of the DWOs was taken over by Social Services Departments, the change in roles also led to a change in the way Social Workers

⁴⁹ Hodson interview

⁵⁰ Grant *Deaf advance* pp. 58-59

⁵¹ Hodson interview

supported the life – indeed the existence – of the deaf club. The Social Workers responsible for deaf people were no longer based in the deaf clubs, and their central role in the social life of the deaf community diminished. One major difference between the two roles was that religious matters were no longer the concern of those primarily responsible for deaf welfare, and there was a clear separation of the formal care provider network from religious groups. Churchmen continued to minister to their deaf parishioners, as indicated by the evidence of deaf club members' continuing (if progressively decreasing) involvement in religious activities, as will be outlined in chapter seven. However, they were no longer seen as being the most appropriate means of delivering such services. Another consequence was that the Deaf Welfare Officer's active promotion of deaf club membership to younger deaf people was not included in the more detached remit of the Social Worker for Deaf People. This was to have an impact on the numbers of new members coming into the clubs: 'When Welfare Officers were replaced by Social Services, they introduced Community Workers and after that the numbers [of people joining the deaf club] declined'.⁵² When responsibility for introducing young people into the deaf club was not taken on by deaf members in any organised way, this important, indeed vital, route into the social life provided by deaf clubs largely disappeared. Dwindling numbers of members subsequently had an adverse effect on the way deaf clubs had traditionally helped to bind the deaf community together.

The role of the deaf club in maintaining the deaf community

When arguing for the existence of a deaf community, Padden cites Hillery's three common features of a community:

- a: the sharing of common goals
- b: a shared geographical location

⁵² Ibid

c: the freedom to organise the social life of its members⁵³

The previous chapter showed how the first criterion could be applied to the deaf community, but meeting the second is not as clear. However, it can be argued that deaf clubs met the second and third criteria by providing a geographical basis for the deaf community, in which the community organised and conducted its social and leisure activities. The issue of choice is an important one both in the context of leisure generally and as a motivating factor for deaf people to become involved in the activities of deaf clubs. Hill, in attempting to define leisure, differentiates between the lack of choice involved in working life and the exercise of choice during free time: 'Leisure ... represents freedom, time in which individuals can "be themselves", when they can reveal their authentic nature as autonomous human beings'.⁵⁴

As has been shown, many deaf people were actively encouraged to go along to their local deaf club by the Missioners and Deaf Welfare Officers, although no-one was forced to become a member. Deaf people still had a choice about becoming - and more importantly remaining - members of their local deaf club, and this was a choice many exercised. This provision and promotion of deaf club membership by outsiders - in this case the Missioners and Deaf Welfare Officers - closely mirrors the paternalistic nature of many working class leisure organisations during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Just as Mechanics Institutes for example were seen as centres in which both the individual and the broader community had access to rewarding and improving social activities, so deaf clubs served a similar purpose. In addition, deaf clubs provided their members with benefits that were not available to them in any other setting. As

⁵³ Padden 'The deaf community and the culture of deaf people', p. 3

⁵⁴ Hill *Sport, leisure and culture*, p.6

Padden states, there were definite and important attractions motivating deaf people to join deaf clubs:

Deaf people consider social activities an important way of maintaining contact with other Deaf people ... One reason is certainly that Deaf people enjoy the company of other like-minded Deaf people. They feel they gain support and trusting companionship from other deaf people who share the same cultural beliefs and attitudes. ⁵⁵

This support and companionship was gained in the deaf clubs, and these clubs can be regarded as the geographical centres for the deaf community in lieu of any centralised home environment. In exercising choice through joining a deaf club, members thus found the opportunity to 'reveal their authentic nature'.⁵⁶ It was through involvement with the network of deaf clubs and their associated social activities that many deaf people came to accept their deafness as an important part of their identity.⁵⁷ Deaf clubs also provided opportunities to join in the cultural activities of the deaf community that were not available elsewhere. The majority of deaf schools were gradually closed during the post-war period, increasingly so following the introduction of integrated education alongside hearing children under the 1981 Education Act. The loss of this entry route into the deaf community made the deaf clubs an even more important setting for the maintenance of communal deaf life based on the use of sign language. It had been in the deaf clubs that many deaf people first experienced what might be regarded as a normal life; that is one in which they did not form a misrepresented and misunderstood minority.⁵⁸ This normality was based on a shared experience of deafness, which has long been a central pillar in establishing

⁵⁵ Padden 'The deaf community and the culture of deaf people' p.10

⁵⁶ Hill *Sport, leisure and culture*, p.6

⁵⁷ Ladd 'The modern deaf community'; Mason 'School experiences'

⁵⁸ Brien, D. 'Is there a deaf culture?' in Gregory and Hartley *Constructing deafness* p.50

and maintaining the cultural life of the deaf community. The use of sign language also played an important role in this discovery and maintenance of group and self-identity, by allowing its users to express themselves fully and in the most appropriate manner.⁵⁹ The deaf club effectively provided a place of refuge for deaf people where they could withdraw from the stresses of living in a hearing world: 'the function of the social [Deaf] club is to allow members to interact in a relaxed setting where there is no pressure for spoken language use and comprehension and where sign language provides the common communication medium'.⁶⁰

For many deaf people, whether deaf from birth or deafened later in life, their first experience of sign language and the deaf community only came after they joined a deaf club or deaf organisation. This discovery of a new identity as a deaf person was a life changing effect for many who had previously felt isolated or psychologically incomplete.⁶¹ Harris has shown that for many deaf people who were new to the deaf community, the deaf club was a place where they could both learn and practise their sign language skills.⁶² The acquisition of this linguistic ability was vital for both communication and acceptance by existing members. Once in the deaf community, as represented by membership of the deaf club, individuals were able live in a deaf world. Here, they were able to take part in activities that brought them enjoyment, and to meet with others with similar experiences and backgrounds. Sharing and passing on experiences to others has long been a central part of deaf cultural life; part of being immersed in deaf culture was the passing on of the rules, codes of behaviour and history of the deaf community to following generations. As Padden states: 'entering into

⁵⁹ Harris *The cultural meaning of deafness*

⁶⁰ Kyle and Woll *Sign language*, p. 11

⁶¹ For examples of this process, see Mason 'School experiences'; Woolley, M. 'Signs of strife'

⁶² Harris, *The cultural meaning of deafness*, p.126

Deaf culture and becoming Deaf means learning all the appropriate ways to behave like a Deaf person'.⁶³

One way of learning how to be deaf, and sharing experiences and perspectives, was through social contact with other deaf people. The social elements of deaf communal life were very important, as deaf people did not generally have the chance to meet other deaf people on a regular basis other than in the deaf clubs. The deaf community - as represented by the membership and social life of the deaf clubs - thus provided an opportunity for deaf people to gather together with others of a similar background, sharing and reconfirming their status as members of a culturally distinct community. In having an identifiable pattern of behaviour by which members were recognised and accepted by others, the deaf community was no different to any other community group. Members of all such community groups have to 'fit in' in order to be accepted.⁶⁴ However, the unique attribute of deaf clubs was that they provided members with access to their shared history and culture that was not available anywhere else. The incidence of deaf children born to one or more hearing parents of around 90 to 95% cited in chapter three means that there is very little opportunity for the vertical transmission of history and culture; that is history and culture passed down from preceding generations within the family unit.⁶⁵ Quite simply, deaf children were not normally born directly into the life of the deaf community. It is for this reason that the deaf community only comprises a minority of deaf people; access has had to be sought or provided. For those who did find access to the deaf community, the initial transmission of shared deaf history and culture tended to occur

⁶³ Padden 'The deaf community and the culture of deaf people' p.44

⁶⁴ Bourke, J. *Working class cultures in Britain 1890- 1960* (London, Routledge, 1994) and Anderson, *Imagined communities* provide discussions of the way in which communities expect and impose rules and standards by which members are accepted into community groups, and to which members must conform in order to remain within the groups. The way in which membership of the deaf community is achieved and maintained through shared leisure activity will be discussed in later chapters.

⁶⁵ Lane et al *A journey into the DEAF-WORLD*, p.30

horizontally, through contact with deaf peers. It was only after this horizontal introduction to deaf history and culture that a route to vertical transmission became possible, through access to older deaf people.

Social class and the deaf clubs

Research by Wilmott and Young in the 1960s suggested that social clubs were more likely to attract members from a middle-class background than from the working class.⁶⁶ Hill contends that for the working class: '... it is the more informal ties of neighbourhood, family and work that provide the foundations for communal life'.⁶⁷ This is not to suggest that social clubs were the sole preserve of the middle classes; the large number of working mens' clubs and political clubs across the working-class areas of northern towns and cities in the post-war years showed that social clubs played an important role in the leisure activities of working-class people. Walvin argues that institutions such as Working Men's Clubs emerged to provide the working class with 'a recreational challenge to the dominance of the pub', and provided alternative leisure activities to merely spending time drinking.⁶⁸ However, working-class people did not generally join as wide a range of social interest clubs as the middle class did.

The deaf clubs in north-west England which are the focus of this research appear to have adopted a mainly working-class ethos in the shared social and sporting activities of their members, suggesting that the majority of their members came from working class backgrounds. This is not to claim that all deaf people are from working class families, but those from middle- or upper-class backgrounds historically did not tend to join deaf clubs. Oral schools actively discouraged the use of sign language and by extension contact with the deaf community, and sign

⁶⁶ Wilmott, P. and Young, M. *Family and kinship in a London suburb* (London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1960)

⁶⁷ Hill *Sport, Leisure and culture* p.132

⁶⁸ Walvin, J. *Leisure and society, 1830-1950* (London, Longman, 1978), p.41

language was only used by those perceived to be educational failures who could not acquire clear speech and good lipreading skills. Middle- and upper-class families were generally better placed to ensure that their deaf children were able to communicate effectively and so find a place in the hearing world, which did not include joining a deaf club. The employment opportunities open to sign language users also influenced the social class structure of deaf clubs. Research has shown that the majority of profoundly deaf people throughout the twentieth century were predominantly employed in manual or semi-skilled jobs.⁶⁹ They were not to be found in the higher grades of employment and so it is appropriate to regard them as working class. In the deaf clubs, they mixed with others of a similar economic background. Therefore, it should not be surprising that deaf clubs reflected a working class ethos in at least some of their activities.

In the last quarter of the twentieth century, employment prospects for profoundly deaf sign language users began to improve. A 'deaf middle class' began to emerge, as profoundly deaf sign language users found pathways and opportunities into a variety of traditionally middle-class professions. This came about largely through deaf sign language users gaining positions of power in the deaf organisations, and through the increased career opportunities afforded by improved access to college and university courses for profoundly deaf students. Government schemes such as Access to Work, which provides physical and technological support for deaf people in the workplace, and anti-discriminatory employment legislation, meant that many profoundly deaf people were able to enter careers previously closed to them. In doing so, they adopted not only the career aspirations of the middle classes, but also some of the social mores which pertain to their higher social status. It might be assumed that improved career opportunities for deaf people resulted in the social background of deaf club

⁶⁹ Young et al, *Looking on*; Montgomery, G. and Laidlaw, K. *Occupational Dissonance and discrimination in the employment of deaf people* (Edinburgh, Scottish Workshop Publications, 1993)

members becoming more mixed, but this has generally not been the case. Indeed, the emergence of a deaf middle class has been cited as one of the primary causes for the decline of deaf clubs in recent years, both in Britain and America.⁷⁰ Despite being seen – and often serving – as community leaders and positive role models, it is felt that the new professionals have eschewed the values and aspirations expressed through deaf club activities. The deaf middle class have been roundly criticised for not taking a more active role in the deaf clubs, and some deaf professionals are not deaf club members. This supports the assertion by deaf club members themselves that their clubs – and indeed the wider deaf community – have essentially been working-class in nature. However, there are some differences between the way deaf clubs have functioned within the deaf community and the roles played by working class institutions in the hearing world, as will be illustrated below.

The informal ties outlined by Hill which bound working-class people together through shared work, family and neighbourhood have not applied to deaf people in the same way. Deaf people do not necessarily work with other deaf people; they do not live in the same neighbourhoods; nor do they usually come from deaf families. There was also a need for the majority of working-class deaf people to organise their social lives in a structured way, which did not correspond to the findings of Wilmott and Young. Organisations such as social clubs might be seen to provide an escape from the normal world of daily life into an abnormal world far removed from the stresses and drudgery of daily life. Whilst this escapism element was also true of deaf clubs, an argument can be made that this happened for completely opposite reasons to the way non-deaf people joined together socially. For many profoundly deaf people, particularly sign language

⁷⁰ Padden, C 'From the cultural to the bi-cultural: the modern deaf community' in Parasnis, I. (ed.) *Cultural and language diversity and the deaf experience* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press 1996), pp. 84-85

users, full participation in the sound based world of the hearing majority was denied to them because of communication difficulties. Lack of effective communication meant that sign language users working alongside hearing people were socially isolated from their colleagues and so did not take part in leisure activities with them outside the workplace. Even within the home and family, many profoundly deaf people had little or no access to everyday communication and socialisation. In effect, what the hearing majority considered to be normal life represented an abnormal way of life for sign language users, which was ultimately socially, emotionally and psychologically unfulfilling. It was only within the confines of the deaf club, where sign language was the dominant form of communication, that any sort of 'normal' life could be led. As has been shown, the sociability and attendant psychological benefits that arose from being able to meet and communicate with others of a similar background were the main attractions of the deaf club. Wise argues that the concept of 'home' is closely linked to feelings of identity derived from certain territories and that 'home' does not necessarily mean the same as 'the home'. He equates home to a sense of identity and the expression of culture, and contends that the presence of 'significant others' can provide feelings of family and home that do not necessarily relate to 'the home'.⁷¹ In many respects, the deaf club served as a surrogate home for profoundly deaf people, providing social and emotional ties that did not necessarily exist within the members' biological families. The deaf club took the place of the informal ties that were found in the hearing world. Instead, the clubs provided an opportunity to communicate and socialise that was missing in virtually all other aspects of a profoundly deaf sign language user's life. The deaf club not only provided its members with a refuge from the hearing world's version of the real world, but it also provided a socially more rewarding form of normality for its members. In effect, being in the deaf club replaced the real world of daily

⁷¹ Wise 'Home: territory and identity'

life with an alternative 'deaf real world' that more closely reflected the experiences of daily socialisation hearing people took for granted. Therefore, social class was not as important as a criterion for membership as the ability and the desire to communicate in sign language and to meet with others from a similar background.

Some of the forms of social interaction found amongst working-class social groups do not appear to have applied to the deaf clubs. For example, deaf clubs did not operate on the same gender divisions normally associated with Working Men's Clubs, although there is evidence of some gender stereotyping in the functioning of deaf clubs. Bolton Deaf Club reported holding annual 'Men's Weekends' and 'Ladies Weekends' during the 1960s, whilst as recently as 1990, Chorley Deaf Club reported that outside caterers would provide the food for the children's Christmas party 'to lessen the work for the lady members'.⁷² Whilst it is hard to determine exactly the historic pattern of gender divisions in membership of deaf clubs, there is nothing in the written record provided by *British Deaf News* to indicate that any degree of gender exclusivity was a membership criterion for deaf clubs. There is no evidence that any of the deaf clubs in north-west England were restricted to members of one sex; there were no men-only deaf clubs for instance from which women were barred. There is also no indication that any deaf club mainly provided separate events for male or female members; events such as those mentioned above were examples of occasional discrete events rather than a general pattern of gender-based division of club activities. Clubs did of course organise events aimed primarily at men or women, and reports of these are found regularly within *BDN*. So for example, deportment and make up classes might be expected to appeal to female members, whilst photographs and reports of chess teams do not feature women,

⁷² *British Deaf News* March/April 1960, p.39; Spring 1965 p.251; *British Deaf News* March 1990, p.14

indicating that this was an activity confined to male participants. However, these events were only part of a club's wider programme of activities and members of the opposite sex could still take part in other activities. For the vast majority of reports of leisure events (as outlined in chapter seven), no mention was made of the gender of participants and so it appears highly likely that most events attracted both men and women. The fact that some reports explicitly refer to events involving only men or women strengthens the assumption that other events were mixed. In sporting events, clear distinctions are made in terms of the gender of active participants, but as will be shown in chapter eight, many deaf people were attracted to sporting events because of the social activities that were almost a prerequisite of deaf sport. So even when a team consisted solely of men or women, those members who went along to watch and support included both men and women. Within the clubs, there were no explicit restrictions placed on access to certain areas of the club based solely on gender. For example, the all-male preserve of the snooker room was supposedly never a feature of deaf clubs, although it has to be accepted that the reality may have been somewhat different. In the general life of the deaf clubs, gender divisions appear to have been more a matter of choice than one of imposition.

Deaf clubs were – in theory at least – historically open to all deaf people, regardless of gender, economic status or, in the post-war period, racial background. However, the membership of deaf clubs was almost exclusively white for most of the post-war period. It was only towards the end of the research period that some diversification in the ethnic background of members can be seen. Evidence of the involvement of deaf people from ethnic minority backgrounds is not given in the newspaper reports, but some insight can be gained from other factors. In photographs of club events or sports teams, no black or brown faces can be seen before the latter years of this research. Even then, these are very much a rarity. Nor do the reports include many names of

participants that might suggest a non-British heritage. Whilst these sources are not completely reliable, they do indicate that people from ethnic minorities were no more likely to be found in deaf clubs than they were in other types of social clubs of the period. This is not to suggest that deaf clubs were overtly racist, but the racial constitution of their memberships is comparable to other social clubs catering for the wider community. Towards the end of the research period, identifiable groups of non-white deaf people began to emerge across Britain. One example from the north west was the establishment of a deaf Asians social group in Manchester in 1995.⁷³ As society generally became more racially integrated towards the end of the twentieth century, the same process can be observed within deaf clubs, most obviously through the presence of Black and Asian members in photographs of sporting events. The only type of acknowledged exclusivity practised by the deaf clubs seems to relate to the way clubs and societies were established on religious grounds.⁷⁴ This in itself may help to explain why members of ethnic minority groups do not appear to have joined deaf clubs, especially those deaf members of the immigrant families from the Indian sub-continent that moved en masse into the textile towns of the region during the post-war period. It is only since the majority of deaf clubs lost their overt connections with religious groups that their membership has diversified on racial grounds, suggesting that this may have indeed been an important issue for at least some minority groups. Membership may well have been restricted according to religious persuasion, but there was no other apparent means of selection used to determine who could become a member. However, all potential members were required to be of good reputation, as deaf club committee member Len Hodson explains:

⁷³ *BDN* 1995, September, p. 23

⁷⁴ In addition to the various Christian denominations involved in running deaf clubs, there has also been a Jewish Deaf Club in London for a number of years.

Author: Did people who wanted to become members have to be approved by the committee?

Hodson: Yes, they would come before the committee and we would decide whether we wanted that person as a member. If we thought they were ok, we would let them in.

Author: What happened if you didn't approve them? Did you turn them away?

Hodson: Oh yes, that used to happen sometimes, especially if they were troublemakers.

Author: So being deaf wasn't enough to become a member; you had to behave yourself as well?

Hodson: Yes, that's right.⁷⁵

This could of course have been one way of stopping deaf people from ethnic backgrounds from becoming members. On the other hand, when certain sections of the population were not found amongst deaf club members, this may have been due as much to their not choosing to join (for example deaf Muslims not wishing to join an overtly Anglican deaf club) as it was to their being refused membership. Why deaf people from ethnic backgrounds did not join deaf clubs is still open to debate and suggests the need for further investigation. What is clear is that such deaf people were not generally found in deaf clubs throughout the majority of the post-war period. So the deaf community in north-west England, as determined by membership of a deaf club, was not representative of the racial make-up of the broader population of the region.

In reality, the deaf community is too small to make any type of selectivity practicable or desirable, and the role of the deaf club was to bring deaf people together, regardless of age, gender, class or even degree of deafness. Once inside the deaf club, members could then choose freely whom they wished to

⁷⁵ Hodson interview

associate with, from the full range of members. Formally organised deaf clubs did not generally meet in pubs, although there have been rare exceptions.⁷⁶

However, pubs were generally not attractive as centres for deaf social life. One reason for this is that pubs did not and could not provide members with the escape from the hearing world that was such an important attraction of the separate and discrete deaf club. Pubs are part of the hearing world and function in a 'hearing way', and the attraction of the deaf club was its separateness. The deaf club, run by and for deaf people, operated in a 'deaf way' and this was central to its purpose. However, deaf clubs do seem to have performed many of the social functions usually associated with working-class pubs, if on a more formalised basis. For example, deaf clubs provided a wide range of sporting opportunities for their members, organised outings and trips, and provided a venue in which members could meet on a casual basis.

As will be shown in later chapters, deaf clubs were the focus of a wide range of social and leisure activities for their members, above and beyond the regular weekly club nights when members gathered together to socialise informally. As such, deaf clubs provided their members with ample opportunities to indulge in a variety of pastimes in the company of other deaf people with similar outlooks and life experiences. In doing so, deaf club members demonstrated the existence of a deaf community based on Hillery's three criteria outlined by Padden.⁷⁷ Members shared common goals, which derived from their shared experiences as deaf people and a desire to spend time with those of a similar background and outlook. These goals included sharing the leisure activities, which took place both inside and outside the local deaf club. The deaf club therefore provided a geographical focus for these community activities, and these social activities were

⁷⁶ For example, Blackburn Deaf Club has been based in a town centre pub since the late 1990s but is poorly attended.

⁷⁷ Padden 'The deaf community and the culture of deaf people', p. 3

organised by the members themselves, not imposed by outsiders, thus allowing members to exercise control over this important aspect of their communal lives.

Although the development of deaf clubs can be traced back to a broader pattern of charitable provision for disadvantaged sections of society, they differed from other groups in that the deaf clubs helped to foster and actively promote notions of community and shared culture amongst their members. In this respect, deaf clubs came to have as much in common with working class structures such as Working Men's clubs as they did with the provision of welfare. Given that the deaf community has either been ignored or misrepresented and misunderstood by the hearing majority for so long, how can insights be gained into this network of social clubs and the community they served? The answer is from the series of newspapers and periodicals that have been produced for and by deaf people, as will be outlined now.

Chapter Five: British Deaf News

The existence of a group of people who identify themselves as members of a distinct community based primarily on their shared deafness has been demonstrated. The members of this community were geographically dispersed, with there being no places in Britain where the majority of inhabitants were deaf. However, it has been shown that a locus for the community's activities was provided by the network of deaf clubs that were established from the mid-nineteenth century. In these clubs, deaf people were able to develop notions of identity based on mutual deafness and a communal form of social, cultural and linguistic expression. The cultural expression of this identity then served to strengthen and maintain the sense of community. These clubs would have remained to some extent isolated, self-contained communities without some means of maintaining contact and sharing information with each other. The main form for this communication was provided by a series of publications aimed at deaf people, the most recent of which was *British Deaf News (BDN)*. These newspapers and magazines allowed deaf people to keep abreast of events outside their own club and helped to maintain contact across the British deaf community. Along with its immediate predecessor *British Deaf Times*, *BDN* provided the primary source of information about deaf people's social lives for this thesis. The titles included news on all aspects of deaf people's lives, and large sections of each issue were devoted to passing on information relating to the social activities of the various deaf clubs and their members from across the United Kingdom. Because of this, *BDN* provides a wealth of information on the social and leisure activities of deaf people.¹

¹ *British Deaf News* is universally referred to by its initials by deaf people and therefore the acronym *BDN* is used throughout this thesis. To avoid confusion, *BDN* will be used within the text for both *British Deaf Times* and *British Deaf News*, particularly as the majority of data was drawn from the latter publication. However, footnote references to specific issues of these newspapers will be given as either *BDT* or *BDN* as appropriate.

Newspapers are becoming an increasingly important source of data and information for cultural historians across a range of disciplines and interests, with stories, letters and editorials used to reconstruct history from the perspectives of both readers and publishers.² As Tunstall states, 'The press reflects British history, and caricatures social divisions' and as such provides insights into a range of popular views and opinions.³ Some examples of the way in which newspapers have informed a variety of research topics include their value in tracing family histories, displaying attitudes to disadvantaged community groups, recording the impact of sporting events on sections of society, and in providing insights into the views and opinions expressed by letter writers to newspapers from earlier periods.⁴ Another reason why printed materials such as newspapers are becoming increasingly important for academic research is that 'they are an important creator and transmitter of cultural values and ideas, and socio-political ideologies'.⁵ Anderson highlights the importance of newspapers as a means of binding members of a community together, stating that each newspaper shares a connection with all other readers of the same paper who could not otherwise come together in the same place at the same time. The development of 'print capitalism' is, he argues, an essential stage in the process of community

² Further discussion of the value of newspapers as a research resource can be found for example in Tunstall, J. *The media in Britain* (London, Constable, 1983) and Hennessey, P. 'The press and broadcasting' in Seldon, A. (ed.) *Contemporary history: practice and method* (Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1988) pp. 17-29

³ Tunstall, *The media in Britain*, p.75

⁴ Examples of this type of newspaper based research include McLaughlin, E. *Family history from newspapers* (Aylesbury, Varneys, 1994); Gold, N. and Auslander, G. 'Newspaper coverage of people with disabilities in Canada and Israel: an international comparison' *Disability and Society* 14, 6, (1999) pp. 709-731; Harris, John 'Lie back and think of England: the women of Euro 96' *Journal of Sport and Social Issues*, 23, 1 (1999) pp. 96-110; Kelly, S. *Back page football: a century of newspaper coverage* (London, Aurora, 1995); Farrer, P. *Men in petticoats: a selection of letters from Victorian newspapers* (London, Karn, 1987)

⁵ Soothill, K. and Grover, C. 'A note on computer searches of newspapers' *Sociology* 31, 3 (1997) p. 591

consolidation.⁶ Reading the same newspapers allows the large-scale transmission of these 'cultural values and ideas' and thus plays a part in developing the idea of belonging to a wider community described by Anderson as 'nationhood'.

Newspapers are important in this process as they help in shaping and informing opinions and creating feelings of shared identity amongst readers. However, the transmission of identity as performed by newspapers is not a one-way process.

The way in which stories are reported can also be influenced by issues of identity which arise from the target readerships.⁷ As well as creating and transmitting culturally defining information, newspapers also record events and opinions that are derived from their readerships. On a number of geographical levels, whether local, regional or national, newspapers have to share an identity with their readers, by broadly reflecting the views and opinions of their target readership.⁸

An analysis of newspaper content can therefore provide important insights into not only the lives of their readers, but also into what readers of particular titles believe in and aspire to. Newspapers can also act as an important supplement to official records, by providing examples and specific information that may not be included in the formal accounts kept by authorities or organisations. Official records are often statistically based, with totals, trends and aggregates being the main focus of what is recorded. In situations where specific examples of the events being recorded are needed, newspapers can provide information and thus illustrate the bare statistics of official accounts.⁹ Local newspapers tend to focus more on community issues and 'human interest' stories, whilst national stories

⁶ Anderson *Imagined communities*, pp. 35-40

⁷ Examples of the role of newspapers in promoting or reflecting issues of national and regional identity can be found in Connell, L. 'The Scottishness of the Scottish press: 1918-1939' *Media, Culture and Society* 25 (2003) pp. 187-207 and Bokhorst-Heng, W. 'Newspapers in Singapore: a mass ceremony in the imagining of the nation' *Media, Culture and Society* 24, 4 (2002) pp. 559-569

⁸ Law, A. 'Near and far: banal national identity and the press in Scotland' *Media, Culture and Society* 23, (2003) p. 300

⁹ An example of the value of newspapers in such situations is given in Ghaffar, A, Hyder, A. A. and Bishai, D. 'Newspaper reports as a source of injury data in developing countries' *Health Policy and Planning* 16 (2001) pp. 322-325

are often reported in terms of local impact.¹⁰ National publications aimed at particular community groups operate in a similar way; although they may have a wider geographical focus, they share many of the characteristics of a local newspaper in the way stories are chosen and addressed.¹¹ In such titles, community membership is expressed through factors other than shared geographical location. In both types of paper, the readership acts as both the focus of the publication (by having community views and perspectives reported and reflected) and as the source of its content (by providing the topics and stories covered). In doing so, these publications inform and influence community members and help them, as readers of the same newspaper, to share feelings of community with all other readers of the same paper. Using the example of the *London Evening Standard*, Glover shows that a local newspaper may be defined on more than merely geographical considerations; 'local' can instead be linked to shared interests amongst the paper's readers. 'The Evening Standard has gone for the community of interest, rather than the geographical community. It looks at the world through the eyes of the London commuter'.¹² Replace 'The Evening Standard' with 'British Deaf News' and 'London commuters' with 'the deaf community' and this is precisely the role that *BDN* filled within the British deaf community throughout the period of this research.

Research by Peter Jackson has shown that *British Deaf News* developed from an amalgamation of two separate and long established lines of publications, which were themselves preceded by a number of earlier publications dating back over a

¹⁰ See Aldridge, M. 'The ties that divide: regional press campaigns, community and populism' *Media, Culture and Society* 25, (2003) pp. 491-509; Pilling, R. 'The changing role of the local journalist: from faithful chronicler of the parish pump to multiskilled compiler of an electronic database' in Franklin, B. and Murphy, D. (eds.) *Making the local news: local journalism in context* (London, Routledge, 1998) pp. 183-195

¹¹ Examples of such titles include *The Voice*, *Gay News* and *The Jewish Chronicle*

¹² Glover, M. 'Looking at the world through the eyes of ...: reporting the "local" in daily, weekly and Sunday local newspapers' in Franklin, B. and Murphy, D. (eds.) *Making the local news: local journalism in context* (London, Routledge, 1998) p.119

number of years.¹³

Figure 1: A genealogy of British Deaf News¹⁴

1889 –1891 Deaf and Dumb Times	1905-1908 Bolton, Bury, Rochdale and District Society Quarterly News
1891-1892 Deaf Chronicle	1908-1909 Quarterly News
1892-1895 British Deaf Mute and Deaf Mute Chronicle	1909-1915 Deaf Quarterly News (Bolton)
1896-1903 British Deaf Monthly	1915-1950 Deaf Quarterly News
1903-1954 British Deaf Times	1950-1954 Deaf News
Titles merged in 1955 as British Deaf News	

British Deaf News was founded in 1955 when *British Deaf Times* and *Deaf News* combined as a single title, and acted as the main forum through which the British Deaf Association (BDA) could keep in touch with its members. As can be seen from the above table, *BDN* was the successor to a number of periodicals aimed at deaf readers and others involved in the deaf world. The evidence provided by these and earlier deaf periodicals shows that groups of deaf people across Britain were using these publications to record and report their activities from at least

¹³ Jackson, P. *Britain's deaf heritage* (Edinburgh, Pentland, 1990) pp. 279-282

¹⁴ Based on a diagram in Jackson *Britain's deaf heritage* p. 280

the middle of the nineteenth century.¹⁵ This history of newspapers aimed at deaf readers indicates that the deaf community, expressed as a group of people with shared outlooks, experiences and a common language, has been in existence for a significant period of time. These publications were pivotal in cementing the links between deaf people by acting as a medium for the circulation of information, news and opinions. The majority of these titles had close links to the various deaf organisations, most especially the BDA. Anderson's claim that newspapers are important elements in the development of ideas of community and nationhood is echoed by Brian Grant. He contends that 'the British Deaf Association and its activities have played a vital part in fostering the deaf community's identity and cohesion as a social group. The *British Deaf News* has been a cornerstone in this endeavour'.¹⁶ By providing a means of regular contact between the national network of deaf clubs, *BDN* allowed its readers to feel part of a much wider community of deaf people.

Most of the content of *BDN* throughout its history was provided by a group of regular contributors. *BDN* and its predecessors did not employ reporters, but instead relied on a network of contributors across the country sending in stories, articles and news items concerning or involving deaf people. The essentially voluntary basis by which *BDN* gathered copy for publication illustrates the role the paper and its predecessors played within the community. Several of *BDN*'s forerunners folded because of financial pressures, but despite repeated failures, the table on the previous page shows that a new publication aimed at deaf readers always emerged. Rather than being a commercially driven venture, *BDN* was primarily concerned with maintaining contact between deaf people. In essence, the paper was produced by the deaf community for the deaf community,

¹⁵ Jackson (*Britain's deaf heritage* p. 279) cites 1843 as the year in which the first deaf newspaper was established in Edinburgh

¹⁶ Grant *Deaf advance* p. 120

rather than being primarily concerned with making a profit for its publishers. News concerning the activities of deaf clubs and their members, along with details of deaf sporting events, were provided by officials of the clubs and various deaf organisations. In this way, the content of *BDN* was not only directly relevant to its readers, but was also largely provided by them and reflected issues and perspectives from within the heart of the community.

During the middle period of the twentieth century, deaf newspapers developed a format that was to remain largely unchanged until the very end of the century. Although providing national coverage, *BDN* acted essentially as a local newspaper for the deaf community, by focussing on issues from the point of view of deaf people. Fiske shows how such community based reporting serves as a counterpoint to official or external views, and provides alternative perspectives from within the community.¹⁷ So editions of the paper included reports of events in the hearing world that were related in some way to deafness or deaf people; news of new technology, such as telephones designed for deaf users; and legislation that affected deaf people. The human interest aspect of local newspapers was reflected by news of deaf people from around the world (*Girdle around the World*), and the two central pillars of *BDN* for the first forty years of its existence, the *Deaf Sport* and *Around the Clubs* pages. The club news pages varied little from 1955 until the end of the research period in 1995, and indeed followed the format seen in *British Deaf Times* from 1945 onwards. Contributors brought news of the deaf clubs and their social and sporting activities to the attention of readers across Britain. Stories of interaction – and especially success – in and with the hearing world also featured regularly. Right up until the late 1980s, news of religious and church based activities remained a regular and

¹⁷ Fiske, J. 'Popularity and the politics of information' in Dahlgren, P. and Sparks, C. (eds.) *Journalism and popular culture* (London, Sage, 1992) pp. 45-63

important element of the news passed on through these pages. Births, engagements and marriages also featured consistently, as did items of a quite personal nature such as injury, accident, illness and death. Deaf people do not seem to have objected to this type of personal information being disseminated through *BDN*, as no apologies or letters of complaint were found in the issues investigated. This suggests that the 'gossip' element of these pages was accepted and even appreciated by deaf readers, allowing them the opportunity to keep up to date with other deaf people with whom they would not otherwise have had any direct contact. By helping to keep deaf people across the country in touch with one another's activities, *British Deaf News* showed itself to have an importance beyond that of a mere recorder and reporter of such news. It is because of its central role in both reporting and maintaining the deaf community that *British Deaf News* is such an essential and important source for this research.

Quantitative data indicating the range and frequency of deaf club members' social activities was derived from an analysis of *British Deaf Times* and *British Deaf News*. This analysis covered the period from 1945 to 1995, based on a full year's editions of the newspaper taken at five yearly intervals and focussed on a case study of north-west England. Data for 1945 and 1950 was drawn from *BDN*'s immediate predecessor, *British Deaf Times*, the format of which *BDN* largely adopted; *BDN* was the source used from 1955 onwards. For simplicity both publications will be referred to in the text as *BDN* unless it is inappropriate to do so. The majority of the data collected was collated from the 'Around the Clubs' and 'Deaf Sport' pages of these publications. A total of eleven separate years were covered by the data collection, and detailed analysis of the information found is given in chapters seven and eight. Publication dates varied between monthly, bi-monthly and quarterly throughout the research period, producing a total of eighty-six issues for analysis. Twenty-eight deaf clubs from across north-west England reported activity in *BDN* during this period, and for analytical

purposes, these were grouped into fourteen regions, based primarily on their geographical location. Therefore, all four deaf clubs in Cumbria constitute one group, as do those found in Manchester and Merseyside.

Table 1: Deaf clubs in each region

Region	Deaf clubs
Cumbria	Carlisle, Barrow, Kendal, Whitehaven
Lancaster	Lancaster
Blackpool	Blackpool
Southport	Southport
Preston	Preston, Chorley
Blackburn	Blackburn
Pendle	Burnley, Colne, Rawtenstall
Bolton	Bolton, Leigh
Wigan	Wigan
Warrington	Warrington
St Helens	St Helens
Merseyside	Liverpool, Fairfield, Wirral
Greater Manchester	Manchester, St Joseph's, Oldham, Rochdale, Ashton, Bury
Stockport	Stockport

Determining which deaf clubs to include in a particular region was also based on how reports were included in *British Deaf News*. For example, reports from Leigh Deaf Club were reported with those from Bolton and so the two deaf clubs have been placed in the same region. Other deaf clubs (for example Blackburn and Preston) were placed in separate regions for the purposes of data analysis because they demonstrated some significant differences in their reported

activities or in the regularity with which news was submitted to *BDN*. The location of the deaf clubs identified in this research is shown on the maps provided at the end of this chapter. These show the overall area of research and a closer view of the southern half, in which the majority of clubs were found.

Data was grouped under headings relating to the types of activities reported in British Deaf News. Leisure and sporting activities were recorded and analysed separately, to provide figures showing the extent of the social life of deaf club members. Data was arranged according to the years in which reports appeared in *BDN*, which is not necessarily the same year in which events took place. Because news was provided on a voluntary basis, there is some inconsistency or delay in the contributions from various clubs at certain times. Occasionally, reports commence with phrases such as 'apologies for not sending any news for a while' or 'not much has been happening in our club recently'. This meant that not all the events included in the club news pages took place in the same calendar year as the newspaper was published. For example, Ashton under Lyne Deaf Club's 1989 Bonfire Night party was not reported until the March 1990 issue of *BDN*.¹⁸ To ensure consistency, it is the year of reporting that was used in the analysis and reporting of events. Care also had to be exercised when recording sporting events, in order to avoid misrepresenting the number of events by counting some events more than once. For example, participation in a league or knock-out competition sometimes resulted in multiple reports as the season progressed. In such instances, it was involvement in the competition which was recorded rather than the number of actual reports. This also serves as a useful reminder that despite the extensive detail that can be drawn from *BDN*, the way in which the newspaper gathered and recorded the various activities of deaf people means that only a partial view of deaf leisure activity can be reconstructed. There was

¹⁸ *BDN* 1990 March, p.13

much more going on than merely that reported in *BDN*.

Nevertheless, *BDN* provides a useful insight into deaf life, its patterns and changes, and the wide range of activities deaf people engaged in during the years under investigation. The 'Around the clubs' feature listed the activities of the numerous deaf clubs and their members, whilst the 'Deaf Sport' pages offer information on the types of sporting activities deaf people chose to take part in, and with whom. As a research resource, *BDN* provides a national picture of the social lives of members of the deaf community, the prevalent views expressed by and towards the deaf community, and the various facets of what might be termed 'the deaf experience'. The breadth and detail of the data provided through these reports offers extensive information from which to identify types and patterns of activity. The extent and quality of the information available from *British Deaf News* makes it the most detailed and extensive record on which to base any quantitative and detailed research into the social lives of ordinary deaf people. It is for these reasons that this thesis has relied heavily on *BDN* as the source of primary data and this use is justified. Even within *BDN*, it is only the pages relating to deaf club news and deaf sport that were utilised, as other pages were drawn from unacknowledged sources. These included items taken from mainstream newspapers which related in some way to deaf people. Whether reproduced as originally published or edited before inclusion in *BDN*, these stories were rooted in hearing perceptions of deafness and deaf people, rather than originating from deaf people and reflecting deaf perspectives. For this reason, these sections of *BDN* were not used for this research.

In addition, there are a number of problems with attempting to use other potential sources of primary information. Although deaf clubs were run on a formal basis, with committees and elected officers, it was not possible to identify any clubs with records covering the whole or majority of the years of this

research. Even when the existence of official club records was confirmed, the available material is largely incomplete and access was not necessarily possible. If it had been possible to reconstruct the formal business of a particular club, it is questionable how useful this would be in assisting a qualitative study of the social lives of deaf club members. Nor could such a case study be guaranteed to be a representative example of the way deaf clubs across the entire region took decisions relating to their leisure activities. Across the north west as a whole, club records cannot match the breadth and depth of coverage given by *BDN*. Although the picture painted by *BDN* is not complete, it is nevertheless more comprehensive than any other written source and provides significant amounts of direct evidence from those involved. The other potential source for direct primary evidence would have been to interview deaf club members. However, this too presents problems for this research. It was originally intended to use interviews with participants in important events to investigate qualitative issues, but it was not possible to do so in a manner which would be representative of the scope of the research. For example, attempting to interview participants involved in activities during the 1940s or 1950s would be extremely unlikely to be successful sixty or seventy years after the event. Even if participants from later years could be identified, there are issues of gaining access to them and relying on their willingness to participate. Finding those involved in any event, not matter how comparatively recent, would present significant practical difficulties for an uncertain outcome. Recording and reporting any interviews pose certain logistical problems, but these are not insurmountable.¹⁹ However, the question of the accuracy of data drawn from personal memory over such a long period of time would remain. The advantage of using the club pages of *BDN* is that these offer an alternative form of oral testimony and this testimony was produced soon after

¹⁹ For a discussion of issues relating to the recording of interviews with sign language users, see Atherton, M., Russell, D. and Turner, G.H. 'Looking to the past: the role of oral history research in recording the visual history of Britain's deaf community' *Oral History* 29, 2 (2001) pp. 35-47

the events, whilst memory, enjoyment and other factors were still fresh in the minds of those reporting the activities. The pages of *BDN* act as a permanently accessible and constant record on the life of the deaf community and the reliance on the publication as the sole source for primary data for this thesis is therefore justified.

The data gathered will be described in detail in chapters seven and eight, but a brief indication of some of the findings will be given here, to illustrate the value of *BDN* as a research source. The social and sporting news pages of *British Deaf News* indicate what news and information deaf club members felt was important to pass on to other deaf people. In doing so, the 'Around the Clubs' and 'Deaf Sport' pages add an important qualitative element to the quantitative information that can be gleaned from this source, indicating those aspects of deaf social life to which deaf people themselves attached comparative value and importance. From this information, some understanding of the motivations of deaf people in choosing to take part in certain activities can be gained. In addition, this information often contradicts some of the notions and stereotypes discussed previously that are applied to the deaf community – both from outside and from within the community itself. The news contained in *BDN* shows that far from being isolated or disabled because of their deafness, many profoundly deaf people were taking part in a wide range of activities, with both deaf and hearing people, as individuals and in groups of varying sizes. For example, the details of holidays taken by deaf people in groups and as individuals show that deaf people were no less adventurous nor more restricted than their hearing neighbours. Trips throughout Europe were common from the 1960s onwards, and groups of deaf people were often to be found in many exotic or unexpected places. Examples include Liverpool Deaf Club members making a trip to Oberammergau in 1960 to watch the Passion Play, whilst a group of 120 deaf people from Preston went on a

Caribbean cruise in 1975.²⁰

News of club activities also provides information that is both unexpected and illuminating, and which challenge some of the existing conceptions of the nature of the deaf community and the way it chooses to enjoy itself. It might be presumed that many profoundly deaf people, who made up the majority of deaf club members, would have no interest in sound based entertainment such as music. They were after all deaf. However, *British Deaf News* reported in 1965 that the younger members of Liverpool Deaf Club had been entertained at their Christmas party by what was described as 'a beat group'. *Rory Storm and the Hurricanes* – a well known group at the time and famous for being the group Ringo Starr left to join the Beatles – were the guests and proved to be so popular that the club intended booking similar groups in the near future. Indeed, the *Dee Jays* performed at the deaf club a few weeks later.²¹ The reports mention that suitable amplification was provided, illustrating that not all deaf leisure activity was necessarily silent by nature. As was shown earlier, sign language was the main form of communication within the deaf clubs. However, the news pages show that many deaf clubs also had what were termed 'Hard of Hearing' sections. This indicates that some clubs were prepared to include all deaf people, not merely sign language users. There is further evidence that questions just how deaf some deaf club members were. In one example, a group of deaf people from Bolton Deaf Club attended a show at Manchester's Palace Theatre featuring the comedians Morecambe and Wise, but no mention is made of an interpreter being present, nor does it appear likely that one was.²² This then raises questions about how the deaf members of the audience followed what was happening on stage, and the reasons behind the decision to attend. These issues will be

²⁰ *BDN* 1960, p.63; 1975, p.28

²¹ *BDN* 1965, p. 255

²² *BDN* 1965, p. 251

discussed in more detail in the following chapters, but this example serves as an illustration of the type of qualitative questions that arise from the quantitative data available from *British Deaf News*.

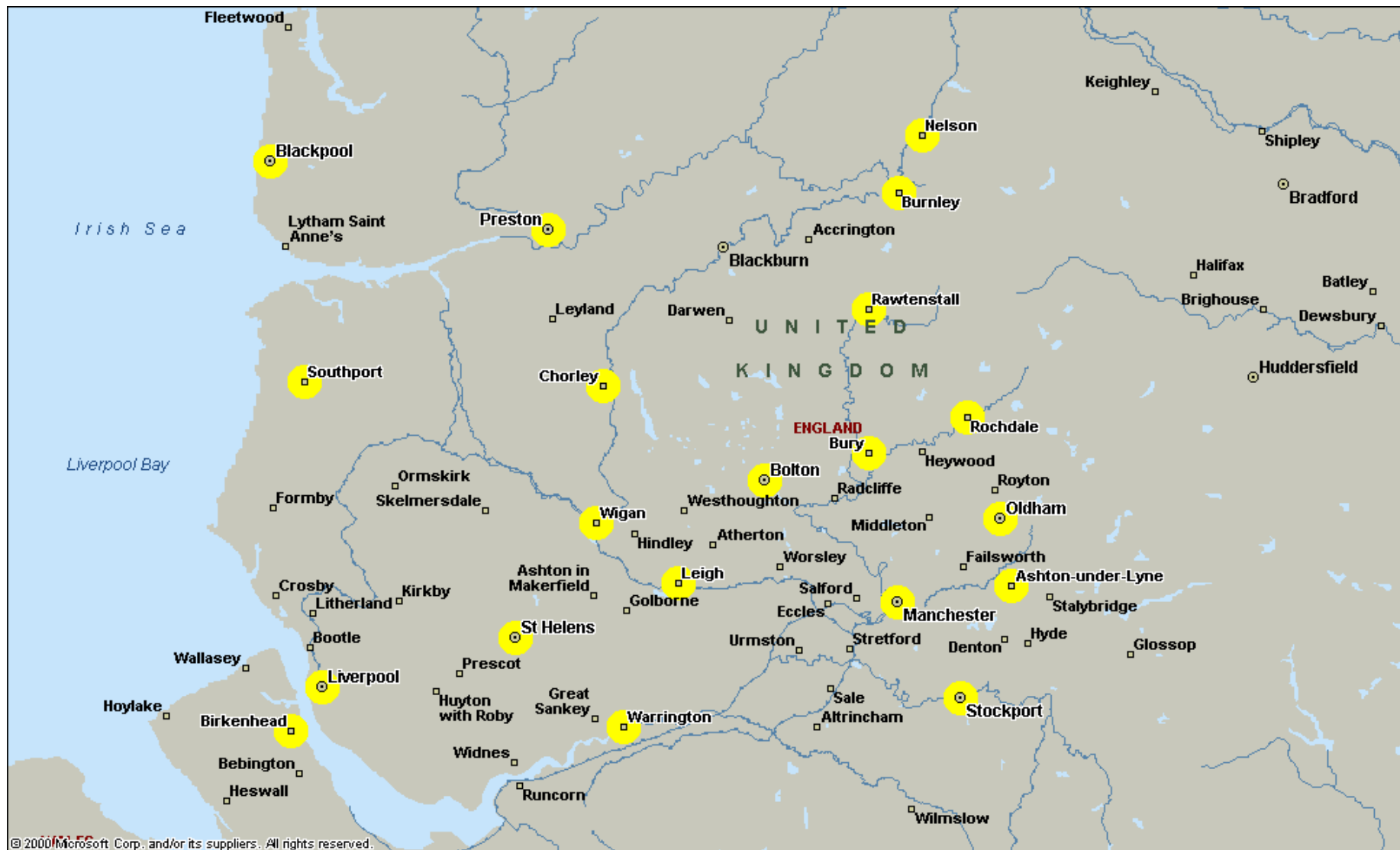
These examples underline the value and validity of using *British Deaf News* as the primary source of data on deaf social activity for this thesis. All members of the deaf community were included, with reports quite literally covering all events from 'the cradle to the grave'. In effect, the club news sections of *BDN* acted largely as a collection of human interest stories that were interesting and relevant to deaf people, and therefore of particular interest to this research. *British Deaf News*, as the *de facto* local newspaper of the deaf community, shares the 'advantage of being first and arguably best in their reportage of local stories' that McNair claims is an important feature of local and regional press.²³ As such, *BDN* provides a detailed insight into communal deaf social life that cannot be gained from any other recorded source.

²³ McNair, B. *News and journalism in the UK* (London, Routledge, 2003), p. 207

Figure 2: Location of Deaf Clubs in north-west England
 (Towns with Deaf Clubs reported in *British Deaf News* are marked in yellow)



Figure 3: Deaf Clubs in the southern area of research



Chapter Six:

Sustaining communities through shared leisure and sport

The centrality of deaf clubs in helping to sustain and reinforce notions of identity amongst deaf people who regard themselves as members of a distinct social, cultural and linguistic community has been established. The social activities of the clubs, as reported in *British Deaf News*, served as the main means by which the deaf community came together and expressed their collective culture and identity. The way in which this expression of culture and identity manifested itself will be described in detail in subsequent chapters. At this stage, it is important to investigate the ways in which shared leisure and sport can help to maintain communities, and to relate these concepts to the activities of the deaf community.

As has been established, communities can form on the basis of a number of shared factors, which can include social, geographic, relational and political connections.¹ A conception of belonging to a community may be based on shared residence or characteristics; it is not necessary to share both elements in order to form a community. Simply by living in a particular area, a sense of community identity can develop, without members of the community necessarily sharing characteristics with their neighbours.² However, shared residence does not necessarily lead to a sense of community if the residents do not share a common identity, whatever that identity may be based on. As Meegan and Mitchell point out, there can often be a very real distinction between sharing a common

¹ St John, W. 'Just what do we mean by community? Conceptualizations from the field' *Health and Social Care in the Community* 6, 2 (1998) pp. 63-70

² Crow, G. and Allan, G.A. *Community life* (Hemel Hempstead, Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1994), p. 3

neighbourhood and sharing a sense of community.³ Lee and Newby argue that, rather than through a common neighbourhood, community can be based on shared identity - what they term 'communion'.⁴ In this model, a sense of community can be derived within a 'local social system', in which individuals are linked by social networks.⁵ Two examples of local social systems from the deaf world are found in the residential deaf schools and the deaf clubs, both of which provided deaf people with access to social networks. It was through attendance at a deaf school that the majority of deaf people first came to develop feelings of shared identity and found access to the wider deaf community. As the history of deaf clubs illustrates, one of the major motivations behind their foundation was to maintain the social bonds that deaf people developed during their time at a deaf school. In doing so, the deaf clubs answered a need for the maintenance and continuation of the deaf community, rather than acting as a catalyst for the formation of the community. Once school days were over, deaf people returned to a world in which they were mostly isolated from each other. As was shown in chapter three, deaf people identified with each other through the shared characteristics that were a result of their deafness rather than being drawn together because of where they lived. So deaf clubs provided both a geographical centre for the deaf community and a social network through which existing notions of community and identity could be maintained.

Amongst the shared characteristics which can contribute to the formation of a community is a common interest in various leisure pursuits. This leads to the formation of what is termed an 'interest community', in which it is not necessary

³ Meegan, R. and Mitchell, A. ' "It's not community round here, it's neighbourhood": neighbourhood change and cohesion in urban regeneration policies' *Urban Studies* 38, 12 (2001) pp. 2167-2194

⁴ Crow and Allan *Community life*, p. 4

⁵ Ibid

to live close to other members; as Crow and Allen point out, 'interest communities may be geographically dispersed'.⁶ Socialising is often an essential factor in the formation and maintenance of a community, especially as this provides another form of 'communion'. It is in such social settings that the networks posited by Lee and Newby are accessed, and the ability to communicate with other members of the network is vital to the formation of a sense of community based on shared identity and interests. This is especially true of the deaf community, many of whose members are unable to communicate effectively with the hearing population within which they live. The social life provided by the deaf clubs, based as it was on sign language use, provided a means of access to others who shared the same medium of communication and thus had similar experiences, perspectives and expectations.⁷

With the social basis of communities established, it is apparent that each community will have its own patterns of behaviour and social mores, by which members are defined and accepted. These might be regarded as the way each community expresses its own particular culture and common identity. Within this cultural identity, forms of leisure and recreation perform a central role: 'Sports and recreational activities [i.e. leisure] have formed a basic part of all cultures, including all racial groups and historical ages, because they are as fundamental a form of human expression as music, poetry and painting.'⁸ As the evidence presented in chapters seven and eight will show, this is as true of the deaf community as it is of any other. It is those specific aspects of cultural behaviour that are directly related to leisure and sport that are of interest here, whilst acknowledging that culture has many more forms of expression than these.

⁶ Ibid, p. 3

⁷ Kyle and Woll *Sign language*, p. 11

⁸ Loy, J.W. and Kenyon, G. S. *Sport, culture and society* (London, McMillan, 1969) p. 15

Defining 'leisure'

Perhaps before discussing the role of leisure in building communities, it is necessary to construct a definition for 'leisure' as it is used within this research. Leisure can cover a broad range of activities from the sedentary (for example reading, watching television or knitting) to the very energetic or dangerous (such as marathon running, mountain climbing or extreme sports).⁹ In the interests of simplicity, it is intended to use a definition of leisure which recognises the diversity of activities the term may cover whilst focussing on those which involve some degree of socialisation. Therefore, for the specific purposes of this research, leisure is taken to mean those activities members of a community choose to take part in, either in company with other community members or as individuals, and which serve in some way to express or maintain the group's collective identity. In the case of individuals, it is those activities in which they were identified as members of a specific community that will be considered. In other words, those instances when an individual is seen to be representing a definite group or community, rather than merely being identified as an individual. Sport is just one element within a broader spectrum of leisure activity, and most of the factors relating to sport therefore apply more broadly to leisure. Those elements that relate more specifically to sport (for example, competition) will be dealt with later in this chapter. Leisure and sport provide access to a variety of forms of recreation, an important element of which is the attendant social life of all leisure and sport activities. Through this socialisation, group and self-identity can be found and reinforced, and a sense of communal attachment results.

⁹ See Bishop, J. and Hoggett, P. 'Mutual aid in leisure' in Critcher, C., Bramham, P. and Tomlinson, A. (eds.) *Sociology of leisure: a reader* (London, Chapman and Hall, 1995) pp. 197 – 208 for examples of the wide variety of activities covered by the term 'leisure'

As was shown in the earlier discussion on the structure of the deaf community, the common factors put forward by Padden, Higgins and others when defining membership were shared experiences, shared identity and cultural expression.¹⁰ The only places deaf people could be sure of encountering these three elements in the company of other deaf people were the deaf schools and the deaf clubs, and it was through these that membership of the deaf community was obtained. Solely for the purposes of this research, membership of a deaf club is the defining factor in determining who should be regarded as being a member of the deaf community. The rationale of deaf clubs was to provide their members with an opportunity to socialise with other deaf people, and so all the social activities of the clubs and their members can be regarded as leisure activities. The leisure activities provided through the deaf clubs thus played a central role in the development and maintenance of deaf communal life and in providing group and self-identity for their members. This research focuses on those aspects of deaf club life which were reported in *British Deaf News*, whilst acknowledging that these were not the sole constituents of deaf people's leisure pursuits. The more mundane and commonplace elements of the deaf clubs, such as the playing of bingo, or members merely meeting to drink and chat, were equally important, but were not reported to other members of the wider community through the pages of *British Deaf News* and so are not directly referred to in the analytical chapters which follow.

Many leisure and sport activities require the involvement of others (for example team sports or those activities which include some degree of competitiveness), whilst others can be pursued on an individual basis. However, as Bishop and

¹⁰ These issues were discussed in detail in chapter three. See for example Padden 'The deaf community and deaf culture'; Padden 'The deaf community and the culture of deaf people'; Higgins *Outsiders*

Hoggett point out, even for the most solitary of leisure activities, participants still choose to come together in clubs and societies. Why then do groups gather together to share these interests? The following reasons are put forward:

- a) leisure 'provides a vehicle through which social exchange can take place';
- b) groups provide opportunities to create collective products;
- c) groups provide opportunities for making friends and meeting people.¹¹

So even in leisure activities which are to some extent solitary pursuits (examples might include wine making, drawing and gardening), socialisation with others who share one's interests is seen as an important element in the pleasure and emotional rewards to be gained from a particular activity. Bishop and Hoggett illustrate how this coming together through shared interests can be regarded as 'communal leisure', which they define as 'collectives which are self-organized, productive and which, by and large, consume their own products'.¹² This definition can be seen to apply to deaf clubs. Club members organised a variety of events to fill their collective leisure time, which members then took part in as a group. The fourth key element identified by Bishop and Hoggett is mutual aid, examples of which can also be found in the history of the deaf clubs. Free holidays were arranged for children and elderly members, paid for by social events held specifically to raise funds for these and other purposes, such as decorating club rooms or the purchase of new equipment.¹³ This shared activity supports Crow and Allen's concept of an 'interest community' and the social

¹¹ Bishop and Hoggett 'Mutual aid in leisure', p. 201

¹² Ibid, p. 206

¹³ Examples of these various types of activities can be found in *BDT* 1945, January/February p. 20; 1950, January/February p. 19; *BDN* 1955, p. 88; 1960, p. 13; 1985, November p. 18. The issues arising from involvement in such activities will be discussed in detail in the following chapter.

elements provide the basis for 'communion' put forward by Lee and Newby as a means of gaining a shared identity.¹⁴ It is not claimed that merely by taking part in leisure and sporting activities with other deaf people, a deaf community is formed on the basis of shared interests. However, the exploration of deaf club activities in the following chapters will show that they did play an important part in helping to foster and maintain a sense of communion between and amongst deaf club members. Whilst the deaf community itself is not merely an interest community, there are specific interest communities to be found within its range of social activities. Not all deaf people liked to take part in the same activities, or even with each other; what particular interest groups within the wider deaf community did was to bring deaf people together from different areas. This in turn helped to foster feelings of belonging to a greater body of people bonded together by more than a shared interest in a particular pastime or sport. With group identity comes a distinct way of behaving within the group or community, in order to fit in and be accepted. Rose and Kiger argue that 'identification with a group ... influence[s] an individual's social identity'.¹⁵ Shared leisure allows for the transmission of values to participants, provides an entry route into specific groups and communities, and the leisure practices of the group integrate members into the society of the community. In Bourdieu's view, what he terms 'embodied actions' (a range of social practices such as engagement in leisure and sport with others) are 'the key to developing specific feelings which enable the individuals to be at ease with their self and with others of the same community'.¹⁶ Thus, leisure and sport can assist individuals to develop a sense of both group and self-identity by providing access into an existing community of like-minded others.

¹⁴ Crow and Allan *Community life*, p. 4

¹⁵ Rose, P. and Kiger, G. 'Intergroup relations: political action and identity in the deaf community' *Disability and Society* 10, 4 (1995) p. 522

¹⁶ Bishop and Hoggett 'Mutual aid in leisure', p. 198

An analysis of leisure and sport can show ways in which both internal and external factors impact on community development, based on ideas of 'sameness' and 'difference'. Rose and Kiger contend that 'groups form on the basis of difference' – that is, through being different to everyone who is not a member of the group.¹⁷ As has been shown previously, the 'difference' of deaf people has historically been viewed in negative terms; their deafness has been regarded as a loss or impairment. However, the deaf community prefers to celebrate this difference, as illustrated by the debates outlined in chapter three concerning the place of hearing people within the deaf community.¹⁸ Because hearing people do not share this difference, many commentators feel they cannot fully belong within the deaf community, no matter how positive their attitudes towards deafness and deaf people may be. Notions of difference can be reinforced internally through community members' expression of choice in terms of which leisure activities are enjoyed and with whom. Shogan shows how the 'partitioning' of leisure can constrain participants to those who are identified as belonging to a particular group or community. This partitioning can exclude those who are not deemed to belong to the group as a whole, but can also be used to differentiate within the group or community itself, for example on the basis of gender or skill and ability levels. Those who are not considered part of the 'in crowd' (on whatever basis) are not allowed to take part in the group's leisure activities.¹⁹ It was in leisure settings that the criteria for membership of the deaf community outlined in chapter three found practical application. Unless an individual was accepted as a member of a deaf club, then such a person had no means of sharing in the leisure

¹⁷ Rose and Kiger 'Intergroup relations', p. 552

¹⁸ Padden 'The deaf community and deaf culture', p. 2

¹⁹ Shogan, D. 'Characterizing constraints of leisure: a Foucaultian analysis of leisure constraints' *Leisure Studies* 21 (2002) pp. 27-38

activities of the deaf community. Membership could be granted on a temporary basis (for example by invitation to a specific event) or was not necessarily dependent on deafness. As several of the commentators quoted in chapter three have noted, hearing people have regularly been accepted into the deaf community although there is some difference of opinion on how deeply they are accepted. The important consideration was not necessarily deafness but was often one of acceptance; without this acceptance into the community, the active participation of apparent outsiders in the social life of the deaf clubs was impossible. Partitioning of leisure and sport can also take the form of self-advocacy or self-determination, with group members exercising power through their choices of activity on both individual and group levels.²⁰ As such, choice serves as an implicit political activity, in which a group hierarchy is established. This occurs through such factors as who decides what community members do; whom they share the activity with; where the activity takes place; and who pays. In deaf clubs, responsibility for organising the social calendar was normally delegated to a committee composed of members, allowing them a degree of freedom and choice in their own activities.²¹ As Padden and Humphries note, sport has been one of the few areas of deaf life in which deaf people have been able to exercise any control over all aspects of their involvement, and has served as a model of empowerment for deaf people.²² It may be more than coincidental that many of the deaf people who are currently leaders of the British deaf community were previously closely involved in the organisation of deaf sport.²³

²⁰ Devas 'Support and access in sports'

²¹ Hodson interview

²² Padden and Humphries *Deaf in America*, p. 49

²³ Examples are given in Atherton, M., Russell, D. and Turner, G.H. *Deaf United* (Coleford, Douglas McLean, 2000), P. 79

A sense of community can also be constructed through external influences, such as interaction with other communities. The most common expression of this is in competitive engagement with external groups, with the most obvious example being sporting events. In such contests, one community, as represented by a team or individual, is under symbolic attack from a group of 'outsiders'; Desmond Morris terms this aspect of sporting contests as 'stylized battle', in which sport serves as an alternative to war or conflict.²⁴ Alan Metcalfe provides an example of this process in a sporting context through his investigation of miners in the villages of north-east England. Despite having a strong internal sense of belonging to a community, the miners also needed to express their difference to others; sport provided a rare opportunity to do so. '... sport was one of the few visible symbols that provided the miners with a positive view of themselves and with mechanisms for judging themselves against each other and the outside world'.²⁵ In such settings, it is not merely notions of community that become important, but also the way in which the community conducts itself; in other words, how the community expresses its cultural difference. It is through these contests that each group both gains and expresses their communal and cultural 'otherness' from non-members.²⁶ Communities and groups can also identify themselves via other competitive settings, for example by taking part in musical contests and Best Kept Village competitions. Whether sporting or not, all such contests pit the 'in crowd' as represented by a community against outsiders with whom they may share a common interest but not a common identity. Engagement with outsiders – that is, non-deaf groups and individuals – has been a regular feature of deaf leisure and sport, as will be outlined in more detail in

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Metcalfe, A. 'Sport and community: a case study of the mining villages of East Northumberland, 1800-1914' in Hill and Williams *Sport and identity* p. 15

²⁶ Morris, D. *The soccer tribe* (London, Cape, 1981), pp. 17-20

chapters seven and eight. In such events, the community identity of deaf participants was often strengthened because of the feelings of conflict that can be an inherent factor of deaf interaction with hearing people.²⁷ As Padden notes 'the existence of conflict brings out those aspects of the culture of deaf people that are unique and separate from other cultural groups', through which they emphasise the differences between themselves and their non-deaf counterparts.²⁸

At this point, it is appropriate to mention briefly Bourdieu's concept of social capital and the role this plays in community bonding. While it is not the intention to revisit the many and various examples academics have put forward to show how social capital can be acquired, the concept will be touched upon here and addressed again later in this thesis to support the arguments relating to the specific example of communal deaf life.²⁹ Bourdieu's basic premise – that a variety of benefits which he describes as four types of 'capital' are drawn from contact with others – can be seen to apply to the whole range of leisure activities of the deaf clubs.³⁰ Bourdieu includes amongst these benefits both social capital and cultural capital, the acquisition and expression of which have been shown to play important roles in community development and maintenance.³¹ Social capital is not an end in itself but merely a theoretical construction of what takes place

²⁷ Harlan Lane provides an historical encapsulation for the origins of these feelings in Lane, H. 'Why the deaf are angry' in Lee *Deaf liberation*, pp. 121-135

²⁸ Padden 'The deaf community and deaf culture', p. 44. Examples of the way in which cultural differences can be emphasised in the context of football matches featuring deaf and hearing teams are given in Atherton et al, *Deaf United*, pp. 82-96

²⁹ For a useful overview of social capital and its application to a variety of contexts, see Office of National Statistics *Social capital: a review of the literature* (London, 2001)

³⁰ Peillon, M. 'Bourdieu's field and the sociology of welfare' *Journal of Social Policy* 27, 2 (1998) pp. 213-229

³¹ Dhesi, A.S. 'Social capital and community development' *Community Development Journal* 35, 3 (2000) pp. 199-214; Ward, A. and Tampubolon, G. 'Social capital, networks and leisure consumption' *The Sociological Review* 50, 2 (2002) pp. 155-180

naturally as communities form and develop. Shared leisure activities provide an ideal way of acquiring both social and cultural capital, with benefits drawn directly from involvement in social networks and group membership. Leisure offers the opportunity to gain both 'bonding' capital – that is with members of one's own community – and 'bridging' capital through engagement with other individuals and communities. In the context of the deaf community, bonding capital was gained through the activities of the deaf clubs. Deaf people were brought together locally, and members of different deaf clubs regularly met, with both types of engagement reinforcing notions of belonging to a larger community, whether regional, national or international. Bridging capital on the other hand could be the product of positive interaction with groups of hearing people, whether this took place on a formal or informal basis, and acted as a counterbalance to those instances which involved a degree of conflict or competition. One aspect of social capital acquisition that was often missing from the lives of profoundly deaf people was that found through the workplace. As was mentioned in chapter four, those deaf people who communicated via sign language had little or no access to the informal social interaction which forms an integral part of working life.³² The lack of contact and communication between deaf and hearing colleagues meant that they did not join in shared social activities outside the workplace, and so bridging and bonding capital were not found through employment. Instead, sign language users joined deaf clubs and gained these through contact with other deaf people instead.

In addition, cultural capital was derived through the expression of cultural identifiers and the celebration of group identity that leisure and sport both

³² The social exclusion of deaf people in the workplace is discussed by Young et al, *Looking on* and Montgomery and Laidlaw *Occupational dissonance*

bring.³³ Puttnam has described extensively the effects that a loss of social capital can have on the structure and continued existence of communities and this is of particular significance to the deaf community.³⁴ Puttnam argues that once social networks begin to erode (for whatever reason), then access to shared social capital is gradually lost and replaced by the predominance of solitary activities rather than those involving communal engagement. As social networks fail, 'communion' as espoused by Lee and Newby is lost and communal leisure no longer acts as a bonding mechanism within communities on a variety of levels.³⁵ The ultimate consequence, in the opinion of Puttnam, is the decline of society in much broader terms. Evidence will be presented later to suggest that this process is already well under way in relation to deaf clubs and their role within the deaf community. As the social networks of the deaf community have changed during the latter years of this research, so the ways in which deaf people come together as a community have become increasingly diverse and fragmented. The effects of changes in deaf social life on the traditional concept of the deaf community will be discussed in chapter nine.

As with many other aspects of shared leisure, sport plays an important part in building, developing and maintaining community bonds. As such, sport serves as a useful example of the social benefits that are an essential part of all leisure activities involving engagement with other people. Holt argues that sport is a means of maintaining and strengthening existing social ties, as well as providing an opportunity for attracting others of a similar background into the social circle

³³ Peillon 'Bourdieu's field', pp. 216-217

³⁴ Puttnam *Bowling alone*

³⁵ Crow and Allan *Community life*, p. 4; Bishop and Hoggett 'Mutual aid in leisure', p. 206

of the group or community.³⁶ Sport is not merely about competition against outsiders; it also acts as a means of bonding those involved in or with a team.

Sport does not merely 'reveal' underlying social values, it is a major mode of their expression. Sport is not a 'reflection' of some postulated essence of society, but is an integral part of society.³⁷

As such, sport can be a powerful tool for preserving and maintaining the cultural life of a community, by acting as 'a source of cultural continuity between generations'.³⁸ The main motivations for participation in sport - sociability, emotional rewards, and group and self-identity - reflect the social basis of all sports. Indeed, without the social aspects of sports club membership, sporting activity would not be as attractive as a pastime. The pre- and post-match discussions relating to all types and levels of sporting activity are important elements in choosing which activity to take part in and with whom. Wohl and Pudalkiewicz contend that the most successful sporting organisations are those which best satisfy local needs for socialisation.³⁹ Bishop and Hoggett agree with this argument: 'even the most competitive sports clubs will tend to have a highly developed social side to the club's activity.'⁴⁰

In this aspect, leisure and sport function as a cultural subsystem of wider

³⁶ Holt *Sport and the British*, p. 347

³⁷ MacClancy *Sport, identity and ethnicity*, p.2

³⁸ Holt *Sport and the British* pp. 366-367

³⁹ Wohl, A. and Pudalkiewicz, E. 'Theoretical and methodological assumptions of research on the processes of involvement in sport and sport socialization' *International Review of Sports Sociology* 7 (1972) pp. 69-84

⁴⁰ Bishop and Hoggett 'Mutual aid in leisure', p. 201

society.⁴¹ Durkheim argued that modern leisure practices arose as an antidote to the social dislocation that was a direct consequence of increasing industrialisation and urbanisation in the developed world.⁴² Leisure – and increasingly during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, sport – assumed an important role in replacing the former means of finding and celebrating communal identity that were subsumed within urbanised society.⁴³ As professional sport in particular became ever more popular throughout the twentieth century, this process of gaining a sense of belonging and community through attachment to sporting associations continued. The whole basis of shared leisure and sport thus helps to mitigate, at a variety of local, regional and national levels, against the decline in society which Puttnam argues results from a loss of social capital. Whilst society generally may decline, leisure and sport remain an essential part of society and community. Membership of a social or sports club provides group identity both internally and externally, and strengthens notions of belonging. Leisure generally celebrates sameness both within the community group and with outsiders; all participants share the same interests but are not in direct competition with each other, either as individuals or groups. Sport on the other hand celebrates sameness within the group (the team) but emphasises the group's difference through competition against outsiders.

Weiss argues that all human beings exhibit the need for identity reinforcement, and that sport, as one facet of communal leisure activity, satisfies this need on a number of different levels.⁴⁴ Through the satisfaction of this need, the participant is able to find and maintain notions of identity on personal, internal and external

⁴¹ Jarvie, G. and Maguire, J. *Sport and leisure in social thought* (London, Routledge, 1994), pp. 9-10

⁴² Durkheim, E. *The division of labour* (London, Collier Macmillan, 1964)

⁴³ Holt *Sport and the British* pp. 261-262

⁴⁴ Weiss 'Identity reinforcement in sport'

levels. As Weiss concludes, such self-identification through interaction with others is a 'fundamental endeavour' of human behaviour and results in heightened self-esteem and confidence.⁴⁵ However, this identification needs to be confirmed and recognised. Weiss identifies five types of recognition, which he classifies as 'social subjectivity':

- a) as a member of a group (for example as a member of a team and therefore an 'insider')
- b) in an assigned role (through the performance of a particular role at the request of other group members)
- c) in an acquired role (through the acceptance of responsibility or the possession of a particular skill);
- d) in a public role (by performing these roles in a public sphere on behalf of the group);
- e) through personal identity (by being recognised as oneself within the group and not just as a member of a collective whole)

The more of these types of recognition that are acquired and acknowledged, the stronger the sense of identity and derived benefits which result. These factors can also be applied to a range of non-sporting leisure pursuits, from which the same sense of self-identification can be derived.

To illustrate how these types of recognition might be achieved in a sporting context, an example based on a deaf footballer will be given. The footballer will be referred to as 'Ben' for reasons of confidentiality, but the details given are genuine and show how he was able to derive a wide range of benefits through the status he gained as a deaf footballer. As a consequence, his identification within

⁴⁵ Ibid, p. 397

both his deaf club and the wider deaf community was strong and despite retiring from playing football many years ago, he continues to enjoy an enhanced profile as a result and he has a strong positive identity as a deaf person.

- a) as a member of a group – Ben was identified through his position as a member of the deaf club’s football team
- b) in an assigned role – he was the club’s Treasurer and team captain
- c) in an acquired role– he was the team’s leading goalscorer and generally regarded as their best player, and as such his involvement was seen as vital to the team’s success. He was also a member of the Great Britain deaf international team for several years
- d) in a public role – he was invited for trials at his local professional club despite being profoundly deaf, and was the subject of a newspaper feature as a result. This was a matter of pride amongst his local deaf community and was more widely reported through *British Deaf News*
- e) through personal identity – he was regarded as a successful deaf person for a number of reasons, not merely because of his footballing achievements ⁴⁶

As he himself says ‘I think that it [being a successful footballer] made me more confident. Maybe if I hadn’t got involved with the football, I wouldn’t be the person I am today’. ⁴⁷

⁴⁶ This information is drawn from an interview conducted by the author in 1997 for the *Deaf United* project. The informant’s identity was concealed to preserve anonymity and remains so here. See Atherton et al *Deaf United*.

⁴⁷ Atherton et al, *Deaf United*, p. 79

Communal identity can often be closely tied to the psychological phenomenon that the American geographer Yi-fu Tuan named 'topophilia' or the 'affective bond between people and place or setting'.⁴⁸ Tuan describes how attachment to a place or setting can develop for a variety of psychological reasons, but can also come through engagement in the activities that take place in a particular setting, not merely the place itself.⁴⁹ Eyles contends that such attachments contribute to an enhanced quality of life, indicating the importance of topophilia in social and personal life.⁵⁰ John Bale examined the subject of topophilia in relation to football stadia, and found that the grounds of football clubs came to represent an alternative form of 'home' for many fans. Bale found that fans identify 'their club' as closely with the ground as they do with the team, and that the two cannot be separated. For those fans who develop an attachment to a particular stadium, they come to view the home ground as part of their heritage. When clubs are removed from their 'homes', then fans often feel a sense of dislocation and loss of identity.⁵¹ The deaf club can be considered to serve a similar purpose, albeit that the priority is reversed; the deaf club represents firstly a place but also the body of people who attend that place and take part in its activities. Identifying with a particular place can be gained on several levels: through attachment to the venue as a whole; through regular attendance in one particular area of the venue; and through attachment to – or rejection of – those others who regularly frequent other areas of the same venue. Certain aspects of topophilia can also be extended to the events experienced and organised through a specific venue, not merely what takes place within a particular setting. Thus those who gather together in a certain part of a football ground, for example, will also arrange to gather together

⁴⁸ Tuan *Topophilia*, p. 4

⁴⁹ Bale, *Sport, space and the city*

⁵⁰ Eyles, J. *Senses of place* (Warrington, Silverbrook, 1985)

⁵¹ Bale, *Sport, space and the city*, pp. 64-77

when attending an away game, to reinforce their communal identity in an alien environment. Attachment to a particular place can therefore be extended to those who inhabit the same physical space and the activities that are shared by group members, not merely the place itself. In terms of the deaf clubs, although the members may have had an attachment to the club's geographical location, the number of events that were arranged away from the physical base of the club suggests that a greater attachment was to the club as represented by a body of people. Members' sense of shared identity was derived more from their participation in the club's social events, in the company of each other, than necessarily attendance at a specific place. This issue will be discussed in more detail later in this thesis, when Montgomery Wise's contention that 'home' is not necessarily restricted to a place, but can also be extended to the company one keeps (feeling 'at home') will be applied to the concept of the deaf club.⁵²

Leisure and sport in the deaf community

Leisure and sport have performed essentially the same purposes within the deaf community as in any other community. The concepts by which leisure and sport can be seen to underpin the deaf community will be briefly outlined here, and demonstrated in more detail in the following chapters. Deaf people have taken part in leisure activities for the same reasons as anyone who is not deaf, and their deafness has been neither a demotivating nor a disabling factor: 'Their bodies are the same. Their minds are the same. Their desire to achieve and excel is the same'.⁵³ For deaf club members, leisure and sport provided recreation and a social life shared with others of a similar background and interests. The

⁵² Wise 'Home: territory and identity'

⁵³ Ammons, D.K. and Miller, M.S. 'Sports, deafness and the family', in Erting, C. J. and Johnson, R. *The deaf way: perspectives from the international conference on deaf culture* (Washington DC, Gallaudet University Press, 1994), p. 542

importance of the shared leisure opportunities provided by the deaf clubs is emphasised by the lack of similar forms of relaxation in the daily lives of many deaf people. Geographical isolation from other profoundly deaf people and a lack of effective communication with the surrounding hearing majority meant that for many deaf club members, the social intercourse of everyday life was absent. The social aspects of deaf leisure and sport have always been an important motivating factor for those involved, and the deaf clubs were the main - or even sole - means by which a rewarding social life could be found. Durkheim's principles for the development of leisure practices to counteract social dislocation can be seen to apply to deaf people. The concept of the deaf community arose as a direct result of increased urbanisation during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, as deaf people were finally brought together in sufficient numbers. As deaf people gathered together in towns and cities, schools and other institutions came into existence, allowing deaf people to make contact with others of a similar background and to develop cultural attachments, such as a shared language. The reality of the deaf community as it is understood today developed as a direct consequence of deaf people being brought together in the schools and other welfare institutions. Once school days were over, deaf people looked for ways of continuing their social ties with each other and from this desire, deaf clubs were established. Whilst deaf people remained isolated within the hearing majority for the majority of their daily lives, deaf clubs were a direct response to this isolation, providing opportunities for socialising and sharing leisure activities that had not previously been available. As the analyses of deaf people's leisure and sport will show, the concept of topophilia can be applied to deaf clubs. Members formed deep attachments not only to the deaf club as a physical space, but these feelings also extended to the activities organised by the deaf clubs and to the people who took part in these activities. Deaf club members gained an enhanced quality of

life as a direct result of being members, and deaf clubs played an important – indeed vital – part in providing their members with not only a social life but also a shared sense of identity through the activities they took part in together.

In terms of what deaf club members actually did together, the analyses of deaf club based leisure and sport in the following chapters will illustrate that deaf people were no different to their hearing neighbours. They took part in similar social activities, indicating that deaf people had similar motivations for choosing various leisure and sporting events and derived similar benefits from doing so. Without the existence of deaf clubs and the access to leisure activities they provided, it is difficult to see how the physical and emotional needs provided by the recreational and social aspects of leisure could have been met to the same extent. As will be shown, sport has been a major element of deaf leisure and it is here that some differences with other groups can be noted. Stewart highlights the way in which deaf sport provides an alternative view of deafness to the dominant deficit model which only sees deafness in terms of a loss: 'deaf sport emphasises the honour of being deaf, whereas society tends to focus on the adversity of deafness'.⁵⁴ The same could be claimed for other deaf club activities, as only those who were accepted into the clubs were allowed to take part. Other benefits derived from deaf sport included the exercise of choice, which was not always a factor in other aspects of deaf people's daily lives. The exercise of choice could include which sports to take part in, and with whom, whilst self-determination came through involvement in the organisation and control of deaf sporting bodies.⁵⁵ Participation in deaf leisure and sport also provided deaf people with the means to be recognised as deaf community members, on the basis described by

⁵⁴ Stewart, D. *The impact of sports within the deaf community* (Washington DC, Gallaudet University Press 1993), p. 1

⁵⁵ *Ibid*, p. 2

Weiss.⁵⁶ The social benefits derived within the community matched those outlined by Hoggett and Bishop, again showing that in this respect, deaf people took part in leisure and sport for the same reasons as their hearing counterparts.⁵⁷

Stewart shows that whilst deaf people become involved in sport for precisely the same reasons as hearing sportsmen, the audiological status of other competitors affects the types of benefits which can be gained. Whilst deaf sport caters more to the social needs of deaf sportsmen, hearing sport provides more 'physical gratification' because of the perception of hearing sport as being more skilful and of a better standard.⁵⁸ Lawson describes deaf sport as a means by which deaf people have formed 'a cohesive and mutually supportive community'.⁵⁹ Padden includes sport amongst the social factors which helped deaf people maintain contact with each other, and deaf sport regularly included a great deal of attendant socialisation.⁶⁰ Sport has also acted as an entry route into the deaf community: 'Sport offers deaf athletes an opportunity to test the social environment of the deaf community without fully adapting to its social and communicative demands'.⁶¹ Joining a deaf sports club allowed deaf people to test the water before committing themselves fully to entering the deaf community. Deaf sport was also a way in which deaf clubs recruited new members. 'When I was younger, I wasn't interested in the deaf club, I thought it was boring, but then I followed my brothers into the football team and got involved that way'.⁶² This was particularly important for younger deaf people who may have attended a

⁵⁶ Weiss 'Identity reinforcement in sport', p. 397

⁵⁷ Bishop and Hoggett 'Mutual aid in leisure', p. 201

⁵⁸ Stewart *Deaf sports*, pp. 126-131; Atherton *et al*, *Deaf United*, p. 73

⁵⁹ Lawson 'The role of sign', p. 32

⁶⁰ Examples are given in chapter eight

⁶¹ Stewart *Deaf sports* p. 37

⁶² Atherton *et al*, *Deaf United*, p. 17

deaf school far from their home and who had no contact with the local deaf community. 'You could go to someone's house and say, "I remember you from school. Do you want to come and join the deaf football club?" and they would say yes'.⁶³

It is clear that leisure and sport have long played an important role in helping to define communities and in providing community members with a sense of shared identity and cultural expression. For deaf club members, sharing leisure and sporting activities provided opportunities to find release from the stresses of daily life. This shared activity also allowed members to exercise a degree of choice over what they took part in and with whom. The deaf clubs served as an entry route into the social and cultural life of the deaf community, and members were able to find personal and shared identities. Deaf clubs and their social activities served an essential purpose in bringing new members into the community, particularly as there is no guaranteed entry route through family members. Leisure and sport were just as important in helping to maintain the deaf community as they have been in any other community group. In order to apply these arguments to a more detailed discussion of the role of leisure and sport within the deaf community, an analysis of the types and frequency of deaf people's leisure and sport activities is required. This is provided in the following chapters, based on the reported activities of deaf club members in the pages of *British Deaf News*. Separate analyses and discussions of the leisure and sporting activities of deaf club members are given, to reflect the additional motivations inherent in sports participation.

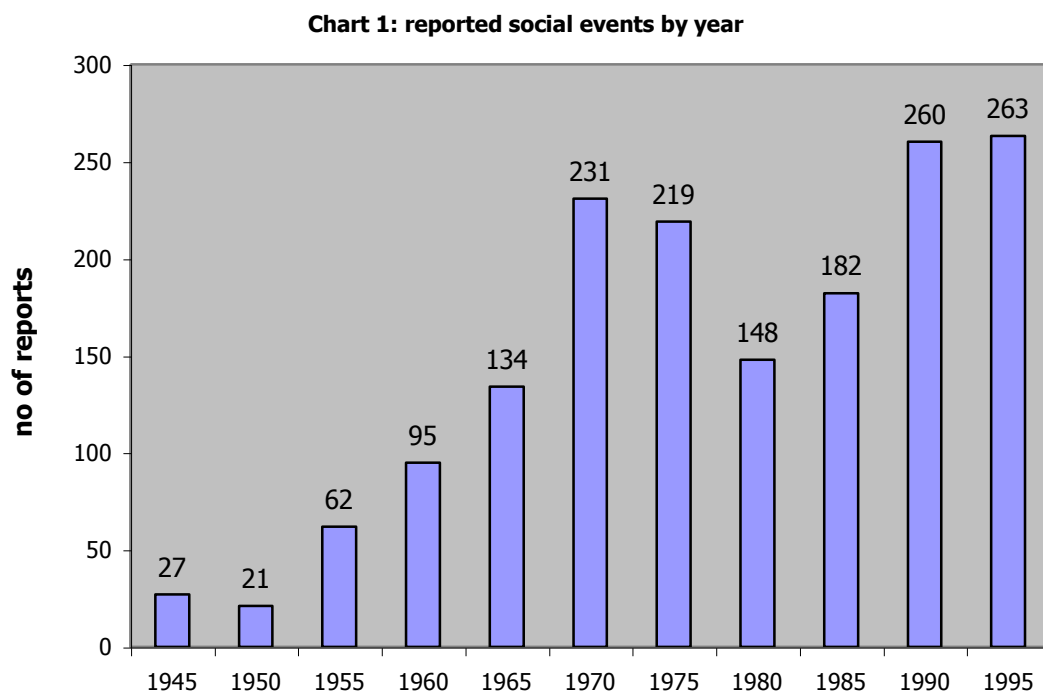
⁶³ Ibid.

Chapter Seven: The leisure activities of deaf club members

As a basis for a discussion of the importance of leisure and sport in the deaf community, quantitative analyses will first be given of the types and frequency of leisure activities engaged in by members of the 28 deaf clubs found in north-west England during the period 1945 to 1995. In this chapter, non-sporting leisure activity will be assessed, with sporting activity being analysed separately in the following chapter. The distinction between sporting and non-sporting leisure activity has been made in order to reflect the differing motivational factors relating to deaf club members' involvement in these activities. Sporting events invariably involve an element of competitiveness, whilst competition is not an essential or even a common element in the majority of non-sporting leisure activities. The types and general levels of leisure activity will first be identified and outlined, as will trends over time and variations between different regions. Examples of each category of activity will then be given, in order to illustrate the types of events engaged in by deaf club members. A detailed case study will be made using the most popular activity of organised trips and holidays, as this activity was in many respects the most culturally defining aspect of deaf social life. As such, the case study provides a number of insights into the motivations of deaf people for choosing to become members of a deaf club and the benefits they derived from the deaf club's leisure activities.

Information gathered from the 'Around the Clubs' pages of *British Deaf News* (*BDN*) illustrates both the breadth and depth of leisure activities engaged in by deaf people. This is not to suggest that these reports represent the sum total of deaf club activity; there was almost certainly additional leisure activity taking place that was not recorded in *BDN*. Nevertheless, some notion of the minimum

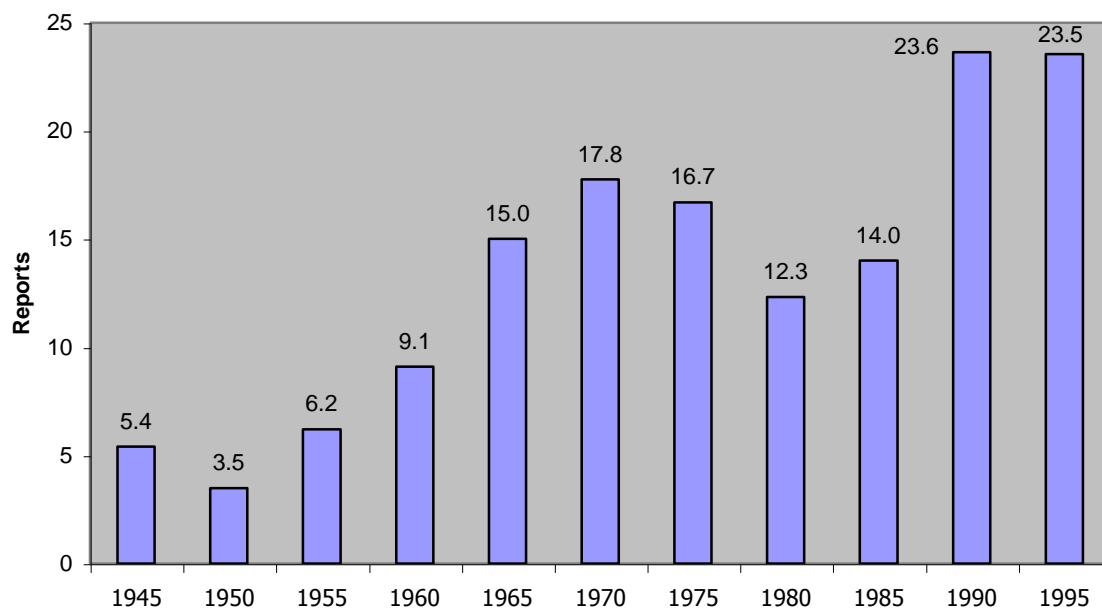
level of activity can be gauged from these reports. During the period 1945 to 1995, a five yearly analysis of *BDN* revealed 1,642 separate events across the 14 regions into which north-west England was divided for the purposes of this research. This equates to an average of 149 events across the north west for each of the 11 years investigated, or almost 11 events per region per year. Chart 1 shows that there were identifiable variations over time in the amount of activity taking place, with the lowest number of reports coming in 1950, when only 21 events were reported, whilst 1995 (the final year of analysis) shows 263 events taking place. Even during 1945, *BDN* reported 27 social events in deaf clubs across the north west, despite covering the final months of the Second World War and the immediate post-war period.



Between 1950 and 1970, a steady rise in the overall number of reported events can be seen, with the annual figure almost quadrupling from 62 in 1955 to 231 in 1970. Perhaps indicative of the general depressed economic situation in Britain at

the time, which was felt particularly hard in the north west, the figures for 1975 show a slight drop in activity whilst 1980 was a year in which deaf club based social activity suffered a major decline. Leisure activity fell by a third from 1975, with only 148 events reported compared to 219 five years earlier. Figures recovered in 1985 and the number of social events in north-west England reported in *BDN* continued to grow in both 1990 and 1995 (260 and 263 respectively). Overall, the average number of events per region increased almost fivefold between 1945 and 1995, from 5.4 events annually per region to 23.5 events annually (see chart 2 below).

**Chart 2: annual average number of events per region
(in those regions providing reports)**



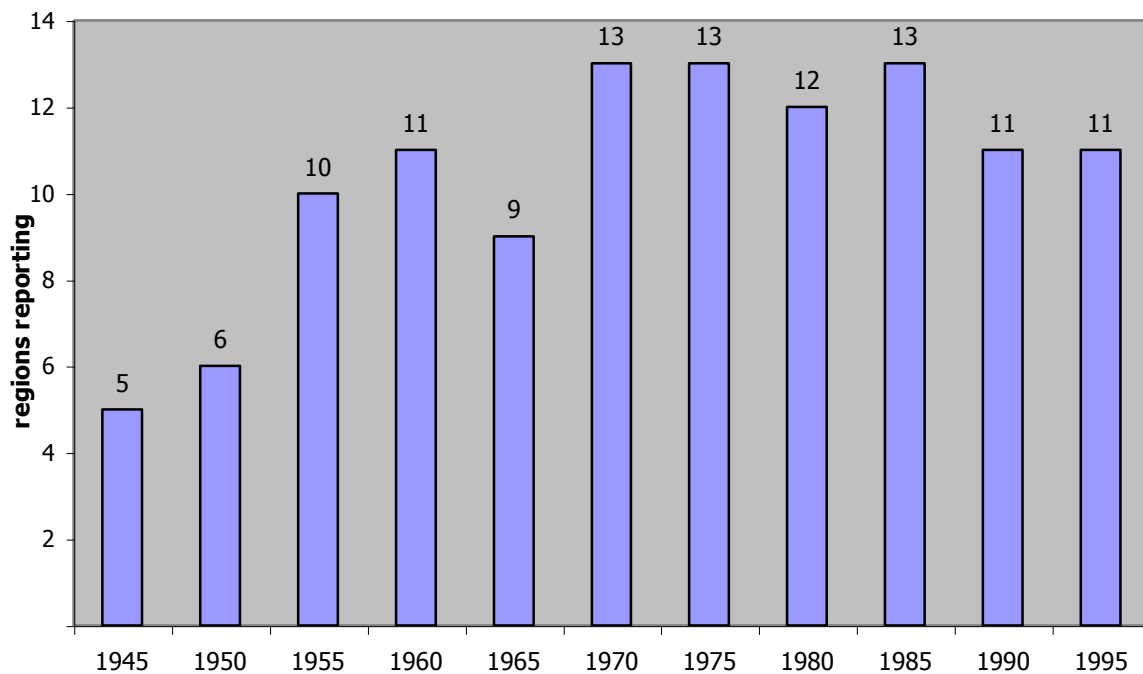
This is an interesting point, given the perceived decline in deaf club membership and the supposed unattractiveness of deaf clubs for many younger deaf people discussed in chapter four. Although membership may have been in decline over the period, the number of social activities shows a significant increase. This suggests that the 'quality' of the membership (in terms of their willingness to engage in leisure activities with other deaf people) was at least as important as

the 'quantity' of those taking part, as expressed by active membership of the deaf clubs. Other factors such as greater disposable income and more leisure time for deaf club members may also have been a factor and may account for at least some of the increase. This would also correlate with the trend of increased leisure activity amongst the general population during the same period. These figures give some indication of the overall extent to which deaf club members engaged in organised activities based in or around the deaf clubs. However, these raw averages do not reflect the changing situation either between regions or during the period covered by this research. One factor that influences the interpretation of the data is the variation in the number of regions reporting their activities in the pages of *British Deaf News*. Chart 3 indicates that there was no year in which every one of the fourteen regions reported activity. For those regions which only contain one deaf club (for example, Lancaster, Wigan, Warrington and St Helens), this apparent lack of activity might be explained by a temporary decline in membership and/or a period of insecurity in the finances of the individual deaf clubs. What is clear is that these clubs did not close, as those who were not reporting at the end of the research period were still active in 2003.¹ The lack of reports may simply be due to there being no-one from the region willing or able to provide these reports, which may explain the lack of reports from some deaf clubs in certain years. This does not fully explain why there is no reported activity from regions with more than one club. For example, Cumbria (with four deaf clubs within the region) did not report any social activity in either 1945 or 1950. As the clubs in this region had been reporting activity in the pre-war period, and reports on a wide range of activities resumed from 1955 onwards, it seems likely that there was some level of social activity taking place which was not being reported. Why all four BDA Branches should cease reporting in *BDN* is not clear;

¹ www.royaldeaf.org.uk/ukclubs.htm lists all active deaf clubs in Britain

possibly the whole region was covered by one person who for whatever reason was no longer able to do so. The absence of reports from specific clubs in the 'Around the Clubs' pages of *British Deaf News* is by no means unusual. Nor is this absence necessarily indicative of the closure of a deaf club but is rather a peculiarity both of the management and organisation of deaf clubs and the way *BDN* collected information on this aspect of deaf life.

**Chart 3: number of regions reporting activity by year
(maximum 14)**



To return to the figures of regions reporting activity, only five regions reported activity in 1945 and six in 1950, which at least partially explains the low overall figures for leisure activities for those years. The figures for 1945 and 1950 are almost certainly unrepresentative of the full extent of deaf social activity. Eleven regions reported events in 1960 and apart from a slight dip to nine regions in 1965, the number of regions reporting remained fairly constant throughout the rest of the period, with between eleven and thirteen regions reporting annually.

The variations in the number of regions which reported activity therefore has a significant effect on the total number of reports obtained in any particular year. To provide a more accurate portrayal of the true levels of activity, chart 2 shows the average number of activities based solely on those regions which submitted reports. The overall figures of activity for 1980 show a 33% decline from the 1975 figure, from 219 reports to 148. Thirteen regions reported in 1975, whilst only twelve regions reported in 1980, which might be suggested as the reason for the drop in the overall figure. However, when the average number of activities per region is calculated, there is still a 25% drop in activity in 1980, from 16.7 to 12.3 events reported per region, despite fewer regions reporting in *BDN*. A similar analysis of 1950 confirms that not only was the overall number of reports that year the lowest, but that despite only six regions reporting activity, the average number of reports per region was also the lowest during the period at 3.5. These examples indicate that that the overall trend shown in chart 1 is accurate, as is illustrated by the almost identical column heights of charts 1 and 2.

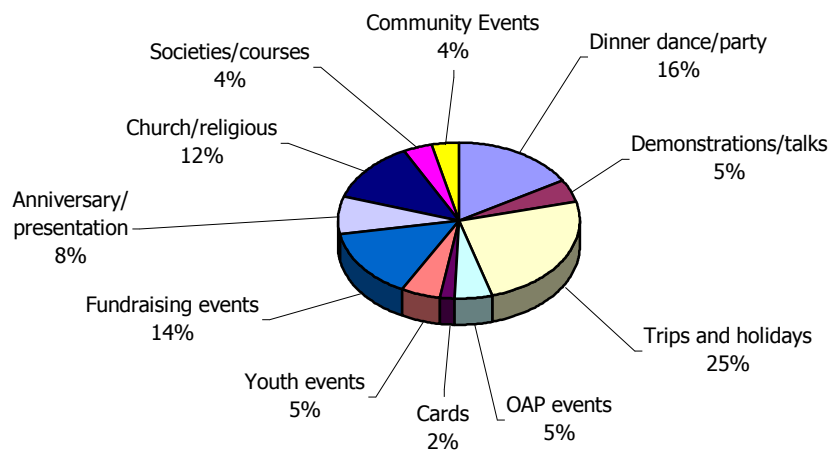
Having shown the general extent to which deaf club members have engaged in various social and leisure activities, it is now necessary to indicate exactly what these activities were. The range of activities reported in *BDN* is very broad, and for the purposes of this analysis, these activities have been grouped under eleven headings. These are:

Dances and parties	Fundraising events
Anniversaries and presentations	Church and religious events
Societies and courses	Community events
Practical demonstrations and talks	Trips and holidays
OAP events	Youth and children events
Cards	

Each heading will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter; first, some comparisons in the popularity and incidence of each type of activity will be made.

As indicated by chart 4, the most popular activity by far was that of trips and visits. Of the 1,643 events reported, 402 were trips, visits or holidays, representing almost 25% of the total number of events reported. As a proportion of the overall level of activity, this figure remained fairly constant in each of the years investigated, with 25% in 1955 and 27% in 1995. Even in the year of decreased activity (1980), visits and trips still represented 15% of deaf club activity, coming third behind fundraising (20%) and dinner dances (19%).

Chart 4 : Percentage of reports devoted to each activity



Attendance at dances (usually referred to as dinner dances) and parties constituted the second most popular activity, with 16% of deaf club social life being devoted to this type of event. Somewhat surprisingly perhaps, fundraising was the third most reported deaf club activity, at 14%. However, given the way in which most deaf clubs had to fund and support themselves, perhaps it should not be too surprising to learn that holding social events to raise funds accounted for a significant proportion of the members' efforts. The continuing influence of

church and religious groups in deaf life is shown by the number and regularity of reports on church based events, although these show a marked decline towards the end of the period under consideration. Of the other types of activities reported over the years, there was no activity missing that one might expect to find in the leisure activities of social club members. The only obvious omission is the lack of reports on bingo, which remains one of the weekly features of deaf club life; as such, perhaps it was considered too mundane to report in *BDN*. Another activity which members regularly and consistently engaged in was the playing of card games. Unlike bingo, there were regular reports of cards games, and although deaf clubs entered teams in local competitions, card games were also arranged as informal social events within the deaf clubs. Because of this, these are included under the heading of leisure activities rather than sport.

Some of the evidence gathered challenges expectations of the types of activity deaf club members might be involved in. For example, there were many incidences of members participating in what might be termed sound based events such as trips to the theatre or cinema. During the majority of the years researched, these almost certainly took place without the benefit of interpreters or subtitles, which raises the issue of who was taking part in these trips, what level of deafness they had, and what motivation the members had for choosing such activities and the benefits they derived from these events. This in turns raises the question of who should be considered to constitute the 'deaf community' (as was discussed in chapter three) and the type of activities that can be encompassed under the umbrella of 'deaf culture', especially if these activities were ones that deaf club members freely chose to be involved in. These issues will be addressed at various points throughout this chapter as part of the discussion of the range of activities reported.

Trends in the popularity of activities

All the regions in the north west provided examples of most types of activity at some point during the post-war period, although some activities were not reported in certain regions. For example, neither Blackpool nor Wigan reported holding any practical demonstrations or talks for their members. The range of activities increased over the period and across all regions, as did levels of participation in some types of activities, whilst others suffered a decline in popularity. For example, Church events declined in popularity from 38% of all activity in 1945 to only 6% by 1995. On the other hand, community events – that is to say, participation in events within the wider (hearing) community - increased from no reported involvement before 1960 to 5% of all activity by 1995.

In 1945, only six types of activity were reported: church based events, formal dinners, one youth event, two anniversaries, two cards matches and six fundraising events. Of these, church services for deaf people were the most reported, showing that church and religion still played a major part in the lives of deaf people. Fundraising was the joint second most important activity, with the six reports showing deaf clubs raising money to supporting the finances of individual deaf clubs, such as providing central heating for Burnley Deaf Club.² Perhaps unsurprisingly, no visits or trips were reported as the Second World War only ended late in the year and a number of wartime restrictions still applied. However, five years later trips represented the highest reported activity, and this category was only displaced as the most popular activity once, in 1980. All types of activity (except community events) were reported in 1955, with all eleven groups of activities being reported annually from 1960, although the number of reports relating to individual types of activity varied from year to year. A drop in

² *BDT*, 1945, p. 59

the number of reports suggests a decline in activities during 1980-1985, and this is supported by an analysis of the average number of events taking place per region. This indicates that deaf clubs were as prone to the economic pressures of the time as any other section of society, and leisure activity declined as a result. The changing nature of deaf social life is illustrated by the growth in reports of involvement in community events by deaf club members, as both individuals and groups. Prior to 1965, there is only one report of deaf club members taking part in wider community events, but this steadily increased to thirteen instances by 1995. Fundraising became an increasingly prominent activity throughout the period, with a steady growth in reports up to 1990. There was then a large increase in fundraising in 1990 due largely to the network of British Deaf Association branches (which were mostly based in deaf clubs) being required to raise money for the organisation's Centenary. Given the symbiotic nature of deaf clubs and BDA branches, it was activities involving the deaf clubs and their members that formed the main thrust of the fundraising efforts. During the latter part of the period under review, the focus of the fundraising itself moved away from being solely to support the internal finances of the deaf clubs to becoming involved in wider charity work, such as Burnley Deaf Club's contribution of £50 to the Blue Peter Appeal of 1980.³ The example of fundraising is just one of a number of regional differences to be found within the deaf clubs of north-west England. Given the geographical diversity of the area, encompassing the market towns of rural Cumbria and north Lancashire, the textile towns in the east and south of the area, the big cities of Liverpool and Manchester, and the contrasting coastal resorts of Southport and Blackpool, the fact that there were often significant differences in the social preferences of the area's deaf population should not come as any great surprise.

³ *BDN* 1980, p. 235

One of the most noticeable differences was in the amount of activity taking place within particular regions and the average levels of activity at individual clubs, as illustrated by charts 5 and 6.

Chart 5: total events by region

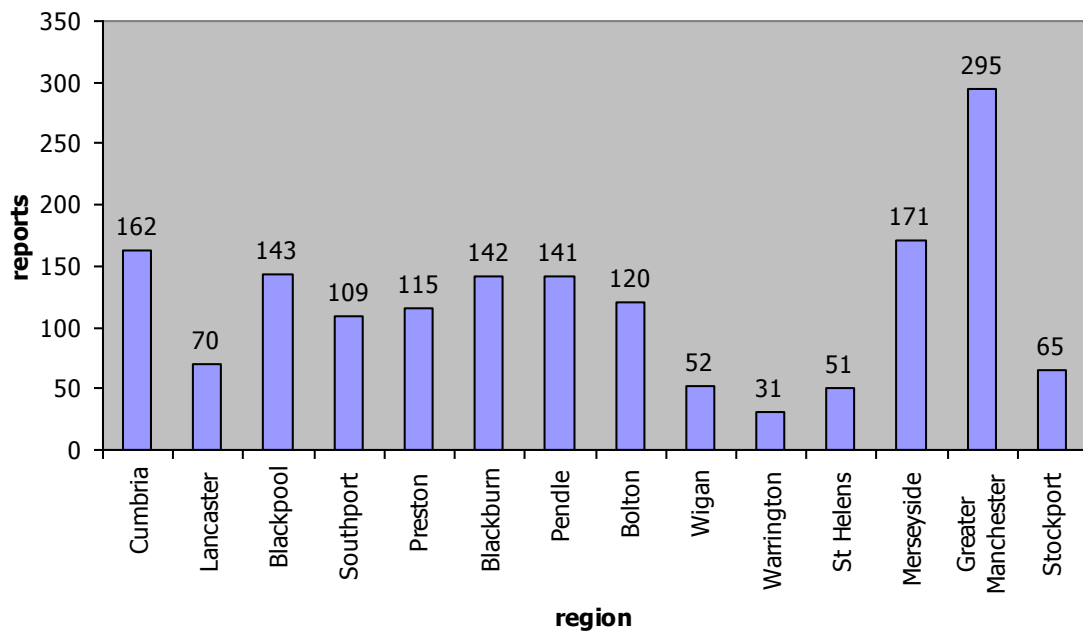
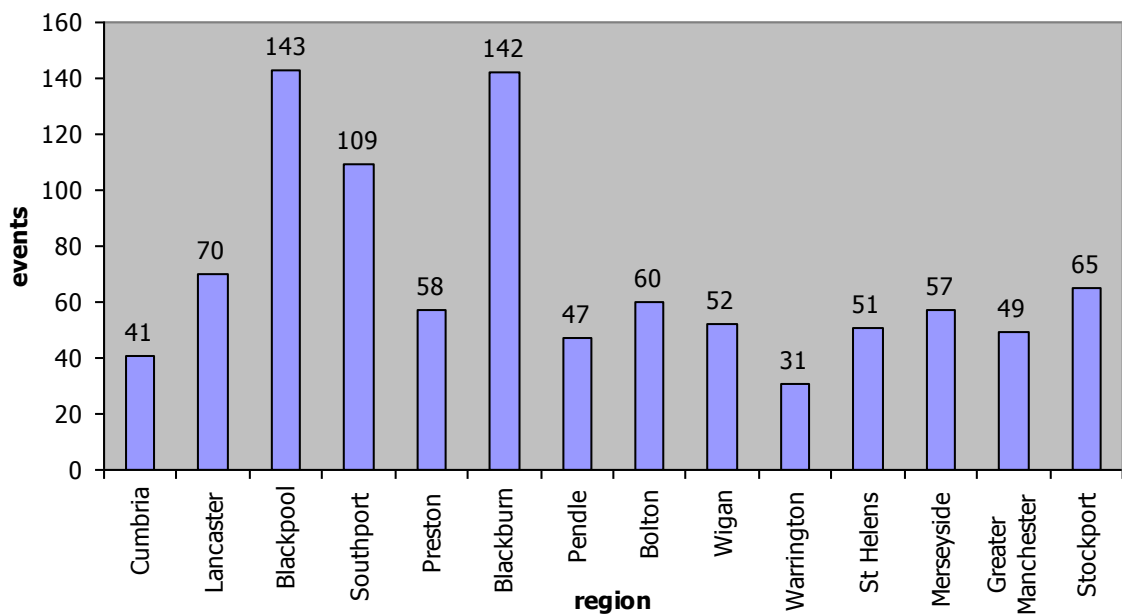


Chart 6: average events per club within each region (cumulative)



Whilst the highest number of reports relates to the Greater Manchester region, with 295 events, Blackpool (with 143 reports) and Blackburn (142) show the highest average number of events per individual club during the period. At the other end of the scale, only 31 events are recorded by Warrington Deaf Club, whilst Wigan and St Helens recorded just over 50 events each. Interestingly, four of these regions (Blackpool, Blackburn, Warrington and St Helens) consist of only one deaf club each, and the wide variation between them in terms of reports indicates that the number of clubs within a region is not necessarily an indicator of the level of activity. This is supported by the example of the region with the highest number of reports, Greater Manchester, whose six deaf clubs only averaged five annual events per club, whilst nearby Stockport with only one deaf club averaged nine events per year. The lowest annual average per club was four (Warrington), whilst the maximum was sixteen (Blackburn).

The levels of activity of specific regions show marked differences over time, suggesting deaf club membership was not static in terms of numbers. The constituency of the deaf community is constantly changing, due to the high incidence of deaf children born to hearing parents. Therefore, the natural progression into membership of both the deaf community and the deaf clubs through family ties only applies to a small proportion of deaf people.⁴ For example, the Pendle region, comprising the deaf clubs of Burnley, Colne and Rawtenstall, was the highest reporting region in 1945, contributing over 50% of the total number of reports for that year. Nothing more was heard from the region until a single report in 1965, followed by ten in 1970. However, from 1980 onwards, the region was a regular contributor to *BDN*, indicating a high level of social and leisure activities amongst the members. In 1990, the region reported

⁴ The figure is generally held to be around 90 to 95%, as was discussed in chapter three.

almost as much activity as the whole of Greater Manchester, and five years later matched Merseyside.

Conversely, reports from the regions in the south of the research area decreased dramatically. The Bolton region was busy from 1955 to 1985, with regular (although not plentiful) reports of social activity in the 'Around the Clubs' section of *BDN*. However, there were no reports at all after 1985. An even more variable situation was found in Wigan, with no reports prior to 1960, then regular reports up to and including 1975. The reports ceased from 1980 onwards; it may be significant that reports of sporting activity from Wigan ceased at the same time. The third such region, comprising St Helens Deaf Club, was active in the immediate post-war years of 1945 and 1950, before a twenty year hiatus until reports reappeared in 1970. Another twenty year period, this time of regular reports of social activity, ended in 1990, after which no news of the club's activities was reported in *BDN*. It is not safe to assume that these clubs were inactive during this period; it is more likely that there was no-one available or prepared to submit regular reports to *BDN*. Many BDA branches based in deaf clubs ceased to operate after a change in the BDA Constitution in the early 1990s, which replaced the previous system of one vote per BDA branch (in effect one per deaf club) with one vote per member. This, combined with a move towards automated collection of annual (rather than weekly) subscriptions through Direct Debit and Standing Order, made the role of the branch secretary largely obsolete. As it was usually the branch secretary who passed on branch (i.e. deaf club) news to *BDN*, this may well explain why some regions stopped reporting in the 1990s. What is clear is that these clubs did not simply disappear: they were still open and operating in 2003 and anecdotal information from deaf people in the north

west indicates that the clubs were active during the various periods for which there are no reports in *BDN*.⁵

As well as differences in the number of activities engaged in, there were also specific regional differences in the type of activities enjoyed. For example, Blackburn was by far the most active region in terms of forging links with the wider community through shared leisure and social activity. The region accounted for 22% of all reports of such events, and was involved in a range of activities with local hearing people and groups. Cumbria deaf clubs had a longer history of involvement within the wider community than other regions, which may be in part due to the British Deaf Association's headquarters having previously been based in Carlisle. This may well have given deaf people a higher than usual profile amongst the local hearing population, leading to higher levels of cross-community engagement and interaction. The comparative isolation of the clubs in the Cumbria region may have been another factor, by forcing deaf clubs into greater involvement locally to compensate for the difficulties of meeting other deaf groups from outside the region. There were also a high number of societies and educational courses reported in Cumbria, which in conjunction with those in Manchester, Merseyside and Blackburn, meant that 57% of societies and courses were found in these four regions. No other region showed any significant levels of educational courses or societies. The most active deaf clubs in terms of fundraising appear to have been those in east and central Lancashire, with Blackburn, Pendle and Preston regions accounting for almost half of the total number of events. By comparison, the south west area represented by the Warrington, St Helens and Wigan regions only held 16 fundraising events between them in the 11 years surveyed. However, religious activities were much

⁵ www.royaldeaf.org.uk/ukclubs.htm

more common in the southern part of the area, and it was only here that examples of deaf choirs were found. These were based in churches and appeared mostly at religious events and ceremonies, performing in sign language rather than song.

From the general statistics provided above, it is clear that there was a significant amount of social and leisure activity taking place in and around the various deaf clubs in the north west during the period 1945 to 1995. Some regions were more active than others, and different clubs tended to be more involved in certain activities than others. Whilst the lack of reports from some regions in some years might suggest there was nothing taking place, this is highly unlikely, given the evidence of the range of activity taking place in neighbouring regions. Deaf people in Wigan or Bolton for example may well have travelled to the apparently busier deaf clubs in Manchester to join in their events. There is certainly evidence of people from these clubs visiting entertainment venues in Manchester, so attending the city's deaf clubs would have not been impossible or unlikely. The continuing existence of clubs in Wigan and Bolton suggests that deaf social life in these towns did not cease entirely, although this may have been somewhat curtailed for financial reasons or due to fluctuating numbers of members.

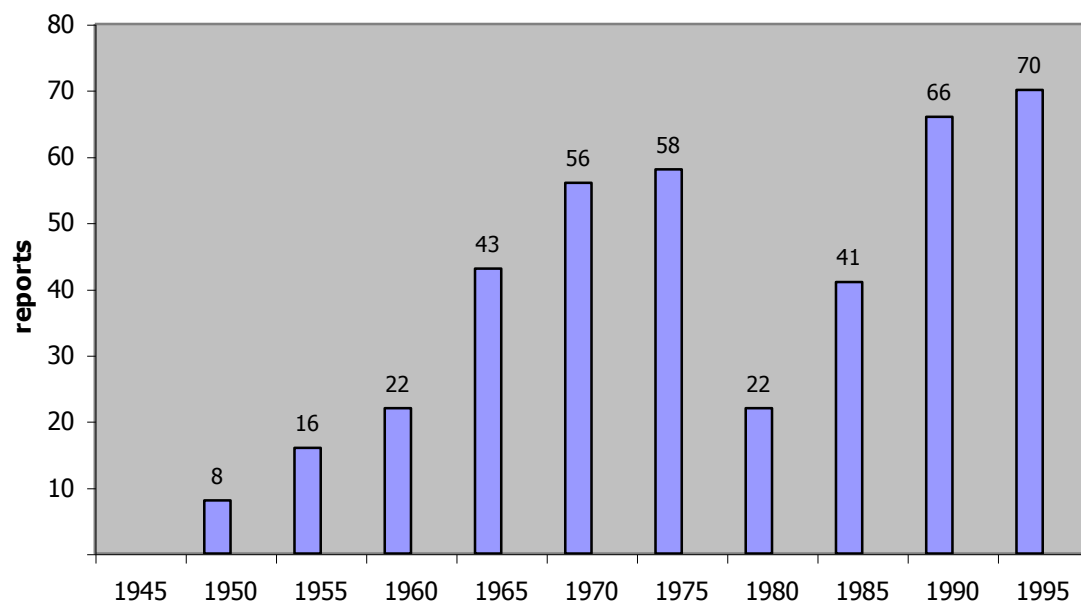
The figures above provide a brief overview of what deaf people were choosing to do in their spare time and in the company of other deaf people. In order to assess what impacts taking part in these activities had on the lives of deaf people, it is necessary to look more closely at the various activities. Therefore, each category of activity will be investigated more closely, and specific examples of what deaf club members were doing, and with whom, will be given. As trips and visits was the most popular and varied activity reported during the period, this activity will

be used as a case study for the most detailed analysis of deaf club social activity. This activity provides an insight into the wider leisure motivations of deaf people, and serves to emphasise the culturally defining nature of many deaf club based activities. Other activities will also be explored, although in less depth than trips and visits.

Visits and Trips

This activity was by far the most popular group activity for deaf club members, representing 25% of all reported activities by north-west deaf clubs, a figure that remained fairly constant for each of the years reviewed. Included under this heading are visits and trips organised under the auspices of individual deaf clubs to a wide variety of venues and events, as well as holidays taken by club members.

Chart 7: Trips and holidays by year



The majority of these reports refer to trips made by north-west deaf club members, although there were also numerous reports of deaf club members from

other parts of the country – and beyond – paying visits to north-west deaf clubs. These types of ‘incoming’ reports are perhaps unsurprisingly most prevalent in reports from Blackpool Deaf Club, although there were other examples from most other clubs. Holidays reported were often organised for members travelling as a group, as well as the personal travels of group members to notable destinations. Perhaps the lack of reports of trips during 1945 should be expected, given the restrictions on movement and the rationing of petrol during the latter days of the war and the immediate post-war period. A few reports were found in 1950, indicating that some resumption of travelling was occurring. Lancaster Deaf Club hosting a party of 45 members from Nottingham Deaf Club, and Wigan making a similar trip to visit Sheffield Deaf Club are just two examples.⁶ These inter-club exchanges are typical of the type of trip regularly made by deaf clubs across the country, not merely by those in the north-west area. Another example from 1950 shows a party from West London Deaf Club travelling up to Liverpool.⁷ They were shown around the city by their counterparts from Liverpool Deaf Club, who also entertained their southern visitors in the evening before the Londoners returned home. From 1955 onwards, making visits and trips became the activity most engaged in by north-west deaf club members, as well as hosting visits from other deaf clubs. Examples of visitors being greeted in north-west deaf clubs were found throughout the post-war period, with Warrington hosting Bradford Deaf Club in 1960 and Carlisle welcoming York Deaf Club in 1970.⁸ In 1980, Barrow Deaf Club reported the annual visit of Bedford Deaf Club to Cumbria, during which the southern members joined their northern hosts in a number of trips around the Lake District and enjoyed specially arranged social events.⁹ Bristol

⁶ *BDT*, 1950, pp. 117, 119

⁷ *BDT*, 1950, p. 18

⁸ *BDN*, 1960, p. 40; 1970, p. 222

⁹ *BDN*, 1980, p. 393

Deaf Club combining a trip to Preston for a sporting contest with a social gathering in 1995 was typical of the dual purpose served by many of these trips.¹⁰ Blackpool Deaf Club took advantage of its position in the popular tourist destination by regularly opening its doors to any deaf visitors to the town, which included deaf visitors from across the country. Long distance visitors included groups from both Gillingham and Southampton Deaf Clubs in 1990, and Aberdeen Deaf Club's visit to the Illuminations in late 1965 was just one of a number of similar visits which invariably included a social event at the town's deaf club.¹¹ Blackpool Deaf Club provided deaf visitors to the resort with a social retreat in the evenings and provided contact with local deaf people as well as fellow deaf tourists, which included a number of casual visitors to the resort. Whilst Blackpool Deaf Club was happy to welcome all visitors, not least because of the boost to the club coffers in bar takings, it appears there was also an additional burden being placed upon the members. Many casual visitors seem to have arrived without booking accommodation, and expected Blackpool Deaf Club to organise this on their behalf once they arrived in the town. The problem was apparently so acute in the 1950s that Blackpool Deaf Club was forced to place a notice in *British Deaf News* asking visitors not to expect this service in the future.

Special Notice

Owing to the number of people who came to Blackpool without booking accommodation, and for whom quite a lot of time was spent looking for same, some late at night, notice is now given that we cannot accept responsibility for finding accommodation for those who come here during the two weeks preceding the August Bank Holiday weekend and the two weeks after. ¹²

¹⁰ *BDN*, 1995, July p. 21

¹¹ *BDN*, 1965, p. 76; 1990, September p. 20; December p. 24

¹² *BDN*, 1955, p. 150

The above instances are just a few examples of the distances deaf clubs from outside the region were prepared to travel in order to take part in shared social activities with other deaf people. Many of these trips were for a comparatively short time, some even lasting only a day despite having to travel quite long distances. Middlesbrough visiting Liverpool in 1985 and Stoke Deaf Club travelling to Kendal in 1995 were typical examples, although improved road connections admittedly made such trips less arduous than in earlier years.¹³ All these trips were in addition to the regular trips being made within the area, as north-west clubs visited their near neighbours for a range of social and sporting events, often combining the two. Some trips into the area even had an international flavour, as deaf visitors from abroad sought out the deaf clubs in areas they were visiting for informal cultural and social exchanges. Such exchanges were a feature of deaf life, with examples from the north west including German visitors to both Whitehaven and Barrow DCs during a tour around the Lake District in 1985, Irish and Canadian visitors calling at Carlisle in 1990, whilst the same year saw a deaf group from Malta visiting Stockport Deaf Club as part of an organised trip.¹⁴ Deaf visitors from the Gambia were to be found in Merseyside in 1995.¹⁵ It is a common misconception that there is only one form of sign language, which is the same no matter what the country of origin of the deaf person, but this is not the case. There are a number of different and distinct sign languages to be found around the world. However, a lack of knowledge of other languages poses less of a problem for sign language users than it does for those who use speech. It is much easier for sign language users to adapt to different varieties of sign languages, due to the visual nature of the language, and a shared *lingua franca* can be fairly easily established, making communication much more easily

¹³ *BDN*, 1985, January p. 17; 1995, May p. 23

¹⁴ *BDN*, 1985, September p. 23; November p. 15; 1990, July p. 19; October, p. 65

¹⁵ *BDN*, 1995, August p. 23

achievable than it might be for two groups of hearing people, whose languages may be mutually unintelligible.¹⁶

Such international exchange visits were reciprocated by north-west deaf clubs travelling abroad, with organised club trips ranging far and wide across Europe from the 1960s onwards. These were in addition to the trips made by small groups of members travelling independently. As early as 1955, a Barrow Deaf Club member visited Belgium and France, and managed to find a number of deaf clubs in the towns he visited.¹⁷ In the same year, Liverpool Deaf Club reported that one of its members was 'by now a seasoned foreign traveller' who travelled to Denmark for a sporting tournament, whilst various other members spent holidays in Austria, Switzerland, France and Yugoslavia.¹⁸ 1970 saw a group from Preston Deaf Club on a visit to Innsbruck in Austria, during which they paid a prearranged visit to the town's deaf club, which included the obligatory social evening.¹⁹ Liverpool Deaf Club organised a visit to Ghent Deaf Club in Belgium five years later, as part of an Easter trip to take part in a football tournament; Manchester Deaf Football Club's trip to Germany in 1985 also featured a visit to a local deaf club and was just one of many such multi-purpose trips.²⁰ This combination of sporting and social events was a regular part of the activities of deaf clubs and examples of the diverse sporting activities of north-west deaf clubs will be analysed in the next chapter.

¹⁶ Woll, B. 'International perspectives on sign language communication' *International Journal of Sign Linguistics* 1, 2 (1990) pp. 107-120

¹⁷ *BDN*, 1955, p. 150

¹⁸ *BDN*, 1955, p. 152

¹⁹ *BDN*, 1970, p. 305

²⁰ *BDN*, 1975, p. 87; 1985, April p. 16

Not all international trips made by deaf club members included or required interaction with the local deaf community in the countries visited. As foreign holidays became a more regular part of the leisure activities of Britons generally during the 1960s and 1970s, similar trends can be found in the north-west deaf community. News of overseas holidays – either by members travelling independently, or as organised deaf club trips – became a regular feature of the ‘Around the Clubs’ pages of *BDN* from the 1960s onwards. Early examples included deaf club members from the Wigan region arranging camping holidays in France, a sea cruise and a deaf club trip to the south of France, all these taking place in 1960, when such trips were not yet as commonplace as they became later in the decade.²¹ Five years later, members of the Wigan region were to be found holidaying in Italy and Spain, whilst in the same year, eleven members of Oldham Deaf Club travelled together on a package holiday to Majorca.²² The 1970s explosion in overseas holidays, particularly to destinations where sunshine was guaranteed, did not pass deaf club members by, with Blackpool members taking a group holiday in Benidorm in 1975, a holiday which 22 members of the same deaf club repeated in 1980.²³ 1975 saw Liverpool members on a BDA organised holiday to Austria in the company of deaf club members from across the country; Preston Deaf Club members, having visited Innsbruck in 1970, were reported to be planning a trip to Sweden for the following year and chose Holland as their destination in 1975.²⁴ The same year saw the club embark on a much more ambitious project, as 120 Preston members went on a cruise of the Mediterranean and Canary Islands.²⁵ The cruise must have been a huge

²¹ *BDN*, 1960, p. 93

²² *BDN*, 1965, p. 257

²³ *BDN*, 1975, p. 19; 1980, p. 234

²⁴ *BDN*, 1970, p. 305; 1975, p. 159; 1975, p. 157

²⁵ *BDN*, 1975, p. 28

undertaking to organise, and serves as an extreme but by no means remarkable example of the way in which the community life of a deaf club extends beyond the physical boundaries of the building in which the deaf club is held. Two Pendle members stretched the boundaries of such holidays when they organised a group trip to Bulgaria in 1990, and the expectations of members of this particular region were reflected in their personal holiday choices, which included the Canaries, Disney World, Malta and Corfu.²⁶ Two Pendle region members celebrated their Silver Wedding anniversary with a cruise in the Mediterranean on which they were accompanied by other members of Burnley Deaf Club; the same club also arranged a caravanning holiday in Spain for its members.²⁷ The growth in holiday destinations generally was also demonstrated by the selection of the Caribbean, Switzerland, Gibraltar, the West Indies, Egypt, Zambia and Hawaii by members of various deaf clubs across the north west.²⁸ This breadth of choice for holidays and the number of such holidays being taken shows that far from being isolated and in need of care and support, many deaf club members found no financial or logistical difficulties in emulating their hearing neighbours when it came to choosing and taking holidays. The number of instances when these holidays were taken in the company of other deaf people only serves to further suggest that the concept of the deaf club goes beyond a building or a place, and that the term 'deaf club' may in fact mean much more than simply the premises of the club inhabits.

Some of these foreign trips and holidays could serve purposes other than mere relaxation, indicating religious or moral motivations. Saint Joseph's Catholic Deaf

²⁶ *BDN*, 1990, January, p. 21; June, p. 16; September p. 18; November p. 19

²⁷ *BDN*, 1990, January, p. 17; June, p. 16

²⁸ *BDN*, 1990, April p. 22; May p. 21; August p. 24; December p. 27; 1995, May, p.21; September p. 23; October p. 24

Club in Manchester played a leading role in arranging spiritually motivated trips for its members in the later years of the twentieth century. St Joseph's organised a retreat to Douai Abbey in 1995, and the same year four members of the club accompanied two nuns on a pilgrimage to the Philippines to undertake voluntary work with local deaf people there.²⁹ Members of the same club had earlier been involved in a similar venture in Yugoslavia in 1990.³⁰ An early example of an overseas trip by deaf club members combining religious and spiritual elements saw a small group of members from Liverpool Deaf Club travel to Germany in 1960 to watch the Oberammergau Passion Plays.³¹

Trips could also have a broader cultural or educational purpose, with trips to the theatre and cinema, or to museums and gardens becoming increasingly common from the 1960s onwards. Southport Deaf Club members visited the stately home at Alton Towers in 1970, in its pre-adventure park days, as did Stockport Deaf Club in 1975, whilst Southport went on a mystery tour to Whalley Abbey in the Ribble Valley.³² In 1985, Blackpool Deaf Club paid visits to both Castle Howard and the National Garden Festival, Bolton Deaf Club also choosing this latter destination for a day trip.³³ Beamish Open Air Museum in County Durham was the joint destination of Carlisle and Pendle DCs in 1990, with the trip coinciding with the filming of an item for BBC TV's 'See Hear' programme for deaf viewers.³⁴ Educational trips included Wigan members visiting a local power station in 1960 to learn how electricity was generated, which was followed by a visit to the Wedgwood pottery factory in 1965; 1970 saw Warrington Deaf Club visiting a

²⁹ *BDN*, 1995 March p. 26

³⁰ *BDN*, 1990, August p. 22

³¹ *BDN*, 1960, p. 63

³² *BDN*, 1970, p. 307; 1975, p. 158

³³ *BDN*, 1985, November p. 15

³⁴ *BDN*, 1990, July p. 19; August p. 19

motor museum and Bolton members visiting their local Fire Brigade headquarters, whilst Blackpool Deaf Club's trips in 1995 included visits to Pilkington Glass Works, Appleby Horse Fair and the Ironbridge Gorge.³⁵ The variety and regularity of such trips shows that deaf people were not insular when making leisure choices, and nor did they restrict themselves merely to deaf-oriented activities.

Not all deaf club members could take part in the trips organised by their clubs, and so one method of involving those left behind was to film the event and show the film at the deaf club soon afterwards. A good example of this comes from 1955, when Rochdale Deaf Club made a trip to Cleethorpes.³⁶ The trip was filmed by a member and the film shown in Rochdale Deaf Club the following week. Not only did this allow viewers the opportunity to see what had taken place, but they were also able to view some of the entertainment provided for the Rochdale members during the evening, when the day out included a visit to Grimsby Deaf Club. An additional benefit for those watching the film was that the conversations and entertainment could be easily accessed, as the visual medium of cine film was entirely appropriate for the recording and viewing of communication taking place in sign language. This type of recording and reporting of the club's activities seems to have been a particular feature of Rochdale Deaf Club during this period, as a trip to Great Yarmouth in 1960 was similarly filmed and the results shown soon after the return home.³⁷ Anecdotal evidence from conversations with deaf club members indicates that filming trips, along with a range of other social activities, and showing the results later was a regular feature of deaf social life.

³⁵ *BDN*, 1960, p. 67; 1965, p. 75; 1970, pp. 191, 308; 1995, August p. 21; November p. 21

³⁶ *BDN*, 1955, p. 122

³⁷ *BDN*, 1960, p. 65

As was shown earlier, deaf club members visiting the north west would include a trip to the local deaf club as part of the day, and the same principle applied to north-west deaf clubs venturing beyond the region. The Rochdale trip to Cleethorpes is just one of literally hundreds of such trips, which increased in popularity during the period, and were not merely superseded by the more exotic trips abroad. The way in which a deaf club outing regularly incorporated a visit to another deaf club may be seen as being a culturally defining aspect of deaf social life. Whilst other social groups may have occasionally come together for shared events (for example, the Yorkshire and Durham Miners Galas to which Miners Welfare Clubs organised outings), no other network of social clubs seems to have as extensive a history of joining together for purely social gatherings as deaf club members. The question of why deaf people have chosen to do so remains to be addressed. The example of what might be termed 'deaf holidays' may provide an answer.

One type of trip that was extremely popular in both the number of reports and the value placed upon it was the shared holiday, and there are numerous reports of such trips to be found in the pages of *BDN*. In many respects these were often merely longer versions of the day trips reported above. These tended to fall into two main categories: the group holiday organised by and for members to a variety of destinations; and the centrally organised holidays in which members of a number of deaf clubs would gather together in one location, often taking over a holiday camp or similar venue for a week or fortnight. From 1955 onwards, these were annual events for most clubs, with certain clubs choosing to visit the same resorts year on year. Free holidays were also often provided, paid for from club funds, particularly when those being catered for were pensioners or disadvantaged in some way. Blackpool Deaf Club reported in 1960 that their OAP

members would once again be making their annual journey to Southport for a week's break.³⁸ By 1970, the venue had changed to Scotland and the 55 Blackpool members on the holiday were said to include a number of 'infirm' members.³⁹ Liverpool Deaf Club paid for their deaf-blind members to have a week's holiday in Blackpool in 1955, and Wigan Deaf Club organised a similar holiday to Scarborough for their deaf-blind members in 1960.⁴⁰

Many deaf clubs would arrange annual holidays in resorts such as Blackpool, and the dates of these appear to have been co-ordinated to ensure that several deaf clubs were present in the same town at the same time. These communal holidays mirrored the area's Wakes weeks tradition outlined in chapter Two, and indeed continued long after such shared relaxation had largely been abandoned by the non-deaf residents of the north west. Wigan, Bolton and Southport DCs spending a joint holiday at a holiday camp in Paignton in 1965 is just one example, and the annual Blackpool Rally, in which literally hundreds of deaf people would descend on the resort for an extended weekend, grew to attract 500 mostly young deaf people by 1990.⁴¹ This was in addition to the annual BDA Conference, which although concerned with campaigning on deaf issues, was also incorporated into the holidays of many delegates. The fact that most BDA Conferences since 1945 have been held at seaside resorts no doubt increased the attraction of attending by adding a holiday atmosphere to the weekend. The British Deaf Association organised their own series of members' holidays, particularly during the 1960s to 1980s, and these were popular because they brought together deaf people from around the country. Even as recently as 1995 (the last year covered by this

³⁸ *BDN*, 1960, p. 59

³⁹ *BDN*, 1970, p. 155

⁴⁰ *BDN*, 1955, p. 152; 1960, p. 93

⁴¹ *BDN*, 1965, pp. 65, 72, 75; 1990, May p. 20

research), Burnley and Liverpool Deaf Clubs were amongst those taking part in the BDA holiday in Scarborough.⁴² In the case of Burnley, this was an example of a free holiday paid for out of club funds, and the holiday was extended to include time in York. 1990 saw the BDA Centenary Rally held in Brighton, and members of several north-west deaf clubs took advantage of the long weekend break which formed part of the festivities.⁴³ Having to travel comparatively long distances to be involved in BDA holidays does not seem to have deterred north-west deaf club members, as both Blackburn and Southport Deaf Clubs travelled to Bournemouth in 1965 and various deaf clubs from across Manchester descended on Lowestoft and Skegness in 1975.⁴⁴ The Isle of Wight and the Isle of Man were other popular and regular destinations for BDA holidays attended by north-west members. The BDA also arranged specific holidays for elderly members, and several venues seem to have been chosen each year, in order to minimise the amount of travelling needed to reach the resorts. Hence there were regular reports throughout the period of north-west deaf club members travelling together to resorts in north Wales, as well as the Lancashire seaside resorts. OAP holidays could also involve longer journeys, such as sixty Manchester OAPs visiting Skegness in 1965, and older Bolton members joined the deaf exodus to the Isle of Man in 1985.⁴⁵ Particular interest groups were also catered for, with members from the Pendle region amongst those taking part in a number of Deaf Camping and Caravanning Club gatherings during the 1980s and 90s.⁴⁶ 1965 saw Manchester Deaf Club attending the Deaf Motorists Rally in Scarborough at Easter, and this may well have been an annual gathering during that period, as

⁴² *BDN*, 1995, July, p. 21; October p. 23

⁴³ *BDN*, 1990, October p. 21-25 *passim*

⁴⁴ *BDN*, 1965, pp. 23, 65; 1975, pp. 88, 158, 159

⁴⁵ *BDN*, 1965, p. 69; 1985, April p. 13

⁴⁶ An example illustrating the trips made by the Deaf Caravanning Club is given in *BDN*, 1980, p. 422

Lancaster members reported their attendance in 1970.⁴⁷ Warrington Deaf Club was one of several clubs at the event that year, during which they won the 'Motoring Quiz' that formed part of the entertainment; they had also won the national Road Safety Competition organised by the British Deaf Association.⁴⁸

By bringing deaf people together on these holidays, an extra element of variety was introduced into deaf social life, as deaf people had the opportunity to meet new friends and renew old acquaintances. This was particularly important before the introduction of technology such as the textphone, which now allows deaf people to communicate easily and quickly with each other via the telephone system. Prior to these devices being available, deaf people had no way of maintaining contact with other deaf people except by letter or by face to face communication. One of the attractions of the deaf club was that it provided an opportunity for deaf people to meet and socialise that was not available in other elements of their lives. Shared holidays therefore served as a temporary extension of the members' own deaf club, with a greatly enhanced membership brought together for a longer period of time unencumbered by the demands of everyday life. Visits to other deaf clubs served a similar purpose over a shorter period. In effect, deaf people gathering together for a shared activity might be seen to derive additional benefits to those normally associated with holidays specifically and leisure activities generally. Holidays provide an escape from the pressures of everyday life and the chance to engage in 'abnormal' (i.e. non-routine) activities. The same is of course true of deaf people, but when they gather together, they are in fact escaping from a daily experience that is in some respects abnormal. As was shown in chapter four, profoundly deaf sign language

⁴⁷ *BDN*, 1965, p. 256; 1970, p. 225

⁴⁸ *BDN*, 1970, p. 273

users do not have the same opportunities to engage in the type of social intercourse that is an integral and important part of working with other people (unless of course they work in a signing environment). Therefore they might be regarded as having an abnormal experience of daily life. Just as with membership of a deaf club, sharing holidays and other leisure activities with those from a similar background offered deaf people the chance to share in a more fulfilling way of life for at least part of the year. This allowed the sociological and psychological benefits that accrue from membership of a deaf club to be experienced beyond the physical confines of the deaf club's base. Thus the term 'deaf club' is not restricted to a fixed physical space but can also be considered to mean a group of people choosing to associate with each other. This point will be returned to later in this thesis, when the issues of topophilia and 'home' will be addressed in the context of deaf clubs.

Deaf club trips and visits were not completely limited to sharing events with other deaf people, although there is no evidence in *British Deaf News* of deaf and hearing groups organising shared holidays. The pages of *British Deaf News* show that there was some joint participation in a variety of events with hearing groups; as these normally involved one party travelling to meet the other, these are dealt with under the generic heading of trips and visits. These events often involved fundraising or receiving donations of various kinds from local organisations. Often some local dignitary such as the Mayor would be invited to attend the deaf club's Annual General Meeting or Annual Dinner Dance, whilst some deaf clubs made deliberate efforts to involve the wider local community in at least some aspects of the social life of the deaf club. Some areas seem to have been more active than others, with Barrow Deaf Club exchanging visits with St Paul's Young Wives Group (a group of hearing women from a local church) in 1955, and Kendal Deaf Club

reported regular meetings with the local branch of the Toc H Christian voluntary group in 1960.⁴⁹ Several other reports of shared events with local hearing people are to be found throughout the 1960s. Liverpool Deaf Club's Drama Group staged a signed version of 'Oedipus Rex' in 1960, with the play narrated for the benefit of hearing members of the audience. Bolton Deaf Club was invited to attend a meeting of the local Inner Wheel charity organisation in 1965, at which they presented a slide show on deaf life. Wigan Round Table presented a cine projector and screen to Wigan Deaf Club after a similar joint event in the same year, whilst Ashton under Lyne Deaf Club had received a television from the local Rotary Club five years earlier.⁵⁰ These examples help to demonstrate a tradition of local interaction with the hearing population by deaf clubs, and illustrate the generally charitable nature of this contact.

The venues and nature of some deaf club visits, particularly those events not specifically intended for a deaf audience, raise questions about why deaf club members chose to be involved in particular events. In turn, these questions lead to the consideration of further issues regarding the constitution of deaf clubs and by extension the deaf community. If, as was discussed in chapter three, deaf community membership is indeed dependent on deafness and the primacy of sign language for communication, and the deaf club forms the heart of the deaf community and deaf culture, then evidence of events such as Bolton Deaf Club's visit to the Manchester Opera House in 1965 require careful consideration. Members travelled to watch a comedy show by Morecambe and Wise.⁵¹ It is highly unlikely that an interpreter was present: at that time, sign language interpreting was still largely performed on an *ad hoc* basis by competent

⁴⁹ *BDN*, 1955, p. 150; 1960, p. 88

⁵⁰ *BDN*, 1960, pp. 42, 85; 1965, pp. 18, 26

⁵¹ *BDN*, 1965, p. 288

practitioners such as the Deaf Welfare Officers. Therefore, the question arises of how the deaf club members accessed what was a largely sound based performance, with only limited visual humour. The obvious assumption to be made is that it was only or mostly those members of the deaf club who had some residual hearing and who could therefore benefit from wearing hearing aids who chose this particular type of entertainment. Although there is no evidence to indicate that this was definitely the case, it is hard to imagine what might motivate a profoundly deaf sign language user to attend this type of show, or to speculate on the pleasure that could be derived. Certainly there was an element of visual humour in the shows of Morecambe and Wise, but they relied heavily on vocal comedy and the use (and misuse) of spoken English. Whether there was sufficient visual humour to appeal to deaf people is open to conjecture, but as they chose to attend this show, presumably there was sufficient entertainment value to justify the effort and expense involved.

Similar questions are raised by the visit of the same deaf club to the cinema in 1970, for a showing of 'Spring and Port Wine'.⁵² Cinema had been a feature of deaf club life in the early part of the twentieth century, with silent films being popular with both deaf and hearing audiences. The silent films had captions to convey important dialogue or plot developments, and this made them equally accessible to deaf viewers. With the advent of the 'talkies', films which continued to rely heavily on visual humour, such as the comedies of Laurel and Hardy, continued to be shown in deaf clubs throughout the century.⁵³ In an interesting development in providing access to a wider range of films for their members,

⁵² *BDN*, 1970, p. 220

⁵³ For example Salford Deaf Club held fortnightly film shows *BDN*, 1955, January/February, p. 28

Liverpool Deaf Club showed a series of continental films in 1960.⁵⁴ The films were available with English subtitles, a feature which meant they could be enjoyed by a deaf audience. Subtitled English language films were not available until several years later, and there is no mention in the *BDN* report of 'Spring and Port Wine' having subtitles. It is highly unlikely that a commercial English language film would be shown in a mainstream cinema with subtitles at that time. Indeed, the first reference in *BDN* to a subtitled English film being shown in a north-west cinema came in 1980, as will be discussed below.⁵⁵ There is very little action in 'Spring and Port Wine', with the plot focussing largely on the characters discussing family relationships. So once again, the question of what pleasure deaf viewers might derive from watching this particular film is raised. The only obvious attraction was that the film was partly filmed in and around Bolton, providing cinema-goers in the town with a rare opportunity to see places they knew on the big screen. However, this does not seem to be sufficient to attract deaf patrons, who would not have had access to the central plot of the film. One possible answer might be that it was the Darby and Joan Club (the Old Age Pensioners section of Bolton Deaf Club) who attended both the Morecambe and Wise performance and the cinema show. It is possible that these were members who had become deafened with age, rather than being profoundly deaf. If this was the case, they may well have been able to hear the film's dialogue and follow the vocal elements of the stage show through hearing aids. The fact that 'Spring and Port Wine' was filmed in their home town could then have been an added, rather than primary, attraction. If the members of Bolton's Darby and Joan Club were indeed deafened, rather than being sign language users, then the question of who should be regarded as members of the deaf community remains. The Darby and

⁵⁴ *BDN*, 1960, pp. 89-90

⁵⁵ *BDN*, 1980, p. 421

Joan Club was comprised of deaf club members and therefore they must be a part of the deaf community through that membership. Therefore, if it is accepted that the Darby and Joan Club members belonged in the deaf community, then how does this impact on definitions of deaf culture? Attendance at sound based events such as comedy shows and cinema visits does not fit the narrow criteria outlined in chapter three by which academics have sought to define deaf culture and membership of the deaf community. However, the argument put forward in this thesis is that these activities must be considered to be a part of the cultural life of the deaf club community if deaf club members chose to participate in such activities.

Bolton Deaf Club seems to have played a major part in broadening access to mainstream entertainment for deaf people in the north west. Following the deaf club's earlier ventures into theatre and cinema trips, some of the first subtitled English language films for deaf audiences were shown in mainstream venues in Bolton from the 1980s onwards. For example, 'Airport 77' was shown with open subtitles at the town's Octagon Theatre in 1980, and unlike 'Spring and Port Wine', this particular film also had action scenes to retain the interest of deaf viewers.⁵⁶ It is interesting to speculate on why the Octagon decided to show a subtitled film for a deaf audience; either they were responding to an approach from the local deaf club or they felt there were sufficient potential viewers to warrant such a venture. Whatever the reasons, the Octagon demonstrated their willingness to provide for a deaf audience by becoming one of the pioneers in providing sign language interpreted performances of their repertoire of plays and shows. This early initiative led to the Octagon eventually providing interpreted performances of all their theatre productions, and their success encouraged other

⁵⁶ *BDN*, 1980, p. 421

north-west venues to provide similar access for deaf patrons, such as the Duke's Theatre in Lancaster, Preston's Guild Hall and the Oldham Coliseum Theatre.

Perhaps the most notable examples of deaf club members choosing to indulge in what might be considered 'hearing culture' come from Liverpool in the period of the 'Merseybeat' boom of the mid 1960s. *BDN* reported in 1965 that the beat group 'Rory Storm and the Hurricanes' had performed at Liverpool Deaf Club. The evening was deemed to have been such a success that it was hoped to stage a series of these concerts, and later in the year, the group 'The Dee Jays' performed at the deaf club's Centenary Dinner.⁵⁷ Certain conceptions of what should or should not be considered as 'deaf culture' are challenged by these examples. Some writers argue that speech has no place in deaf culture; but why then did deaf club members choose to take part in activities that were based almost exclusively on spoken English?⁵⁸ In order to have at least partial access - and by extension entertainment - some degree of hearing would seem essential. As with the outings made by Bolton Deaf Club to the theatre and cinema, the answer may be that at least some of those attending the Liverpool concerts were not profoundly deaf; again the response must be that the event was organised by and for deaf club members, and therefore by extension many of those attending must be regarded as having some degree of membership of the deaf community. In the case of the Liverpool concerts, these reports at least mention that amplification was provided, suggesting that some - if not all - of those present needed enhanced audible access in order to participate in the event. Alternatively, it might simply have been that the person reporting the event was unaware that pop groups generally use amplifiers for their performances, and the

⁵⁷ *BDN* 1965, p. 255

⁵⁸ For example Padden 'The deaf community and deaf culture', p.42

fact that the venue was a deaf club was immaterial. Possibly the visual element of the performance, combined with some auditory access, was sufficient to make the event successful for those deaf people present and therefore worth repeating. Another explanation may be that deaf club members were aware of the new fashion in pop music sweeping the city and merely wanted to see what all the fuss was about. Arthur Marwick has acknowledged the emergence of pop and rock music as 'the central cultural phenomenon of the time'.⁵⁹ Perhaps it should therefore not be too surprising to learn that deaf people, who are as affected by events in the wider world as anyone else, should be attracted in some way to this cultural revolution taking place within their own city. Whatever the motivations of deaf people in arranging such events, their success – as shown by their repetition – marks them as being integrated into the cultural life of the deaf club and therefore the deaf culture of that particular place and time.

There is no such debate about the reasons why many deaf clubs across the region attended the performances of the National Theater of the Deaf at Lancaster University and Bolton's Octagon Theatre in 1975.⁶⁰ Established in America as the first theatre company composed entirely of deaf performers, the NTD was a major attraction, providing audiences with a unique opportunity to see professional theatre performed in sign language. Although signed performances have long been a regular part of deaf club entertainment, these had been strictly amateur performances, usually given by club members themselves. Lancaster Deaf Club choosing to visit Granada Studios in 1995 is also not too hard to understand, given that television had by that time come to play a much more central role in the

⁵⁹ Marwick, A. 'The arts, books, media and entertainments in Britain since 1945' in Obelkevich, J. and Catterall, P. (eds.) *Understanding post-war British society* (London, Routledge, 1994), p. 187

⁶⁰ *BDN*, 1975, pp. 19, 23

lives of deaf people.⁶¹ The introduction of subtitles in 1964 and deaf targeted programmes such as the BBC's 'See Hear' and Listening Eye on Channel Four in the 1970s and 1980s had made television viewing a more common part of leisure time for profoundly deaf people.⁶² By 1995, venues were becoming more accessible to a wider range of visitors, and interpreting support for such events – whether qualified or provided on an *ad hoc* basis by competent amateurs – was becoming much more commonplace.

Trips and visits were by no means the only activity deaf clubs were organising for their members, although they were by far the most numerous and varied type of activity reported. The cultural attachments associated with this activity mark it out as having served a central purpose in bonding deaf club members together. Sharing holidays and trips marked the participants out as members of a much larger community based on shared deafness, life experience and perspectives. There were also a number of other types of activity being held on a regular basis in deaf clubs or being organised for members away from the venue of the deaf club. Whilst these activities also had cultural connotations simply because of the fact that deaf club members were involved, they were not significantly different from those to be found in many other types of social clubs and voluntary associations.

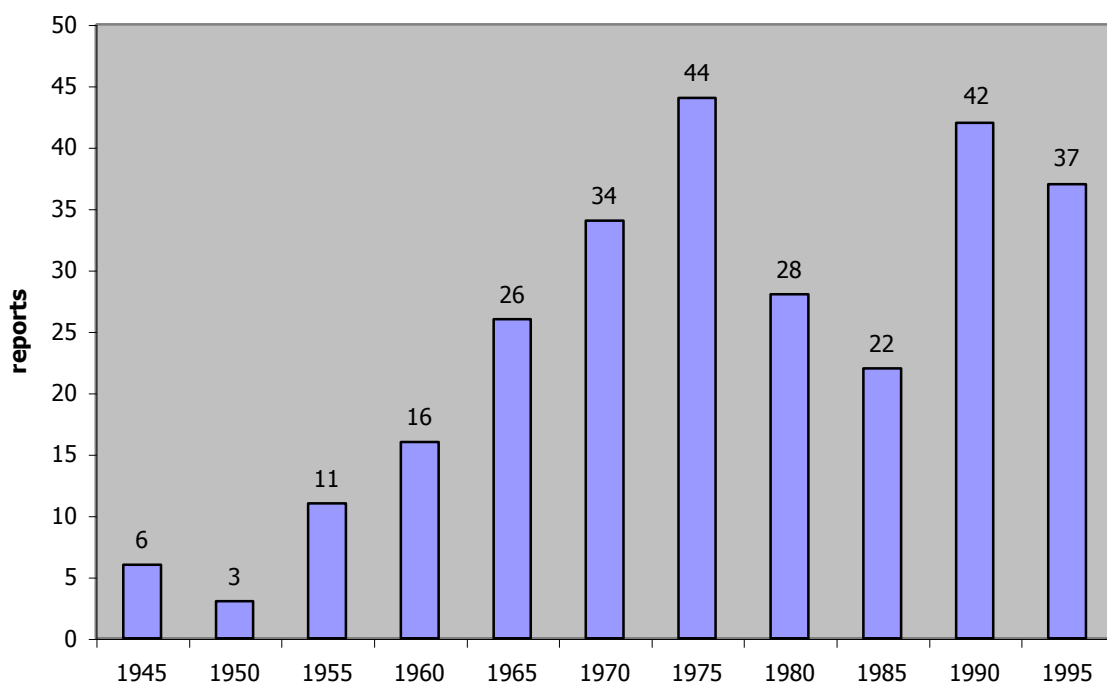
Dances were normally described in *BDN* as 'dinner dances' and formed a regular occurrence in the social lives of deaf clubs, being the second most popular activity every year except 1980. Events were generally organised by the deaf clubs for all their members, such as Christmas parties, or as celebrations held in the deaf club

⁶¹ *BDN*, 1995, November p. 23

⁶² The 'See Hear' pages of the BBC website (www.bbc.co.uk/seehear) provide a useful history of subtitling and deaf programming in Britain

by members for family and friends. Even comparatively small clubs would organise a range of events over the Christmas period, with dances held for all members, as well as specific groups such as pensioners, children and youth groups, and deaf/blind members. Evidence of dances at deaf clubs can be found throughout the research period, from the annual dinner dance held in St Helens in 1945, through the Reunion Dinner Dance held in Lancaster in 1950 which attracted guests from across the north west, to the Manchester Deaf Schools' Reunion Dinner Dance held in 1985.⁶³ The numbers involved could often be very high, with 190 present at Blackpool Deaf Club's annual dinner dance in 1965, 210 people attending Lancaster's event in 1975, and 300 at Liverpool Deaf Club's own annual dance.⁶⁴

Chart 8: dinner dances and discos by year



⁶³ *BDT*, 1945, January/February p. 20; 1950, January/February p. 19; *BDN*, 1985, November p. 18

⁶⁴ *BDN*, 1960, p. 14; 1975, pp. 49, 50

Dinner dances were often arranged in conjunction with other social and sporting events, adding a social element to a gathering of deaf people that had taken place for another reason. Many of these were linked to sporting contests, with a club's annual sporting trophies being presented at a special dance, as happens at many other types of social clubs. Other dances were arranged when another deaf club visited for a sporting contest. When various football teams travelled to Manchester to play matches during 1955, the day was invariably rounded off with a dinner and dance in the evening.⁶⁵ These were by no means isolated occasions, especially when the opponents or visitors had travelled a long way. Indeed, this was in some ways merely a variation on the visit to another deaf club which featured so regularly in day trips. As these gatherings are almost universally reported as 'dinner dances', with the later addition of references to 'discos', it has to be assumed that music was provided. There are certainly regular references to dancing taking place, and as with the later discos, it seems inconceivable that a dance would be held without music. Just as with the pop group evenings described above, the evidence that deaf people chose to organise social activities which necessitated an element of sound challenges some of the apparently narrow definitions of what constitutes deaf cultural activity described in chapter three. In all the above examples of sound playing a part in deaf social life, it must also be remembered that the majority of deaf people are born into hearing families, and so it is not hard to accept that at least some hearing people would also be deaf club members, or at least allowed to join in club activities. The less contentious means of cultural expression of deaf life were evident in other events, with signed plays and performances being regular features. For example, St Helens Deaf Club included a series of sketches in sign language as part of the entertainment at their 1945 Dinner Dance and the Deaf Comedians appeared at Preston Deaf Club

⁶⁵ *BDN*, 1955, p. 28

in 1995.⁶⁶ Deaf club members also demonstrated that they were no different than hearing people in the breadth of their interests. All the events one might expect to find in any thriving social club across the north west during the post-war years were also being organised by deaf clubs. Easter Bonnet parades, Bonfire Parties, Reunion Dances, and Beauty contests were all regular events and were supplemented by occasional items such as magic shows, April Fools parties and fancy dress parades.⁶⁷

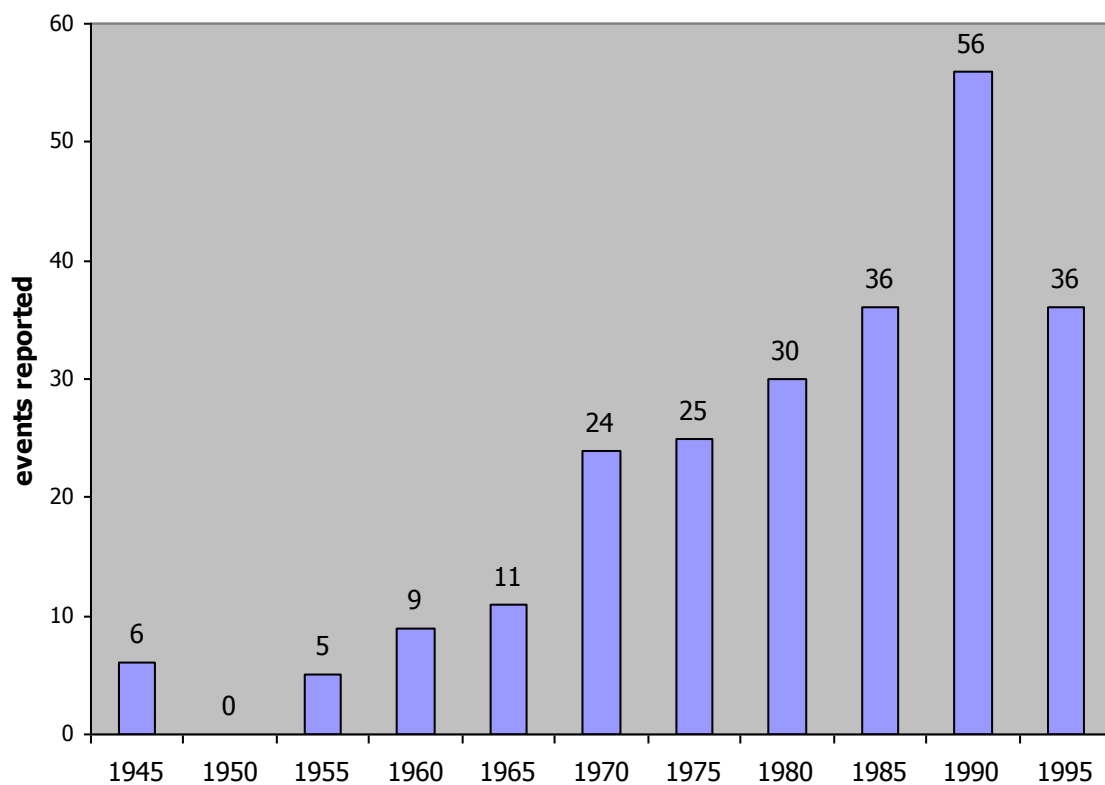
Fundraising has always been a necessary and regular part of deaf club life, as the clubs sought ways of increasing their income to pay for the various running costs of their premises and activities. Funds were generally needed for redecoration or improvements to the fabric of the deaf clubs, such as installing new kitchens or bars, or to provide holidays for certain groups of members, such as pensioners, children and unemployed people. In this respect, deaf clubs benefited from being allowed to register as charitable organisations. Even so, it is somewhat surprising to discover that events intended to raise money for the deaf club compromised the third most common type of leisure activity, with fundraising accounting for 20% of deaf club social activity between 1945 and 1995. The immediate post-war period perhaps understandably saw fundraising being a major part of deaf club life, as clubs sought to address the limitations and privations placed on them during the war years. Fundraising usually came from one of three main sources: street and pub collections within the local community; a range of sponsored novelty events such as fashion shows, piano pulls and endurance tests organised in the deaf club or by deaf club members; and charitable events organised by local groups on behalf of the local deaf club or deaf society. There were numerous

⁶⁶ *BDT*, 1945, January/February p. 20; *BDN*, 1995, December p. 24

⁶⁷ See for example *BDN*, 1955, p. 124; 1960, p. 15; 1970, p. 227; 1975 pp. 88-89; 1980, p. 349; 1985, p. 13; 1995, January p. 27

examples of the above types of fundraising activities amongst the 238 reports in *British Deaf News* during the post-war period. These included Bolton Deaf Club holding a Ladies Weekend in 1955 to raise money for new kitchen equipment and Ashton under Lyne Deaf Club organising two Flag Days in 1960 to boost club funds.⁶⁸ Bury Deaf Club became one of seventeen charities in the town to set up a joint fundraising venture when a 'Good as new' shop was opened in the town centre in 1970, with the proceeds shared amongst the various groups.⁶⁹

Chart 9: fundraising events by year



From the mid 1960s onwards, sponsored events became a regular way of raising money for a whole range of causes and deaf clubs were quick to join in. The earliest example found was a sponsored walk by Blackburn Deaf Club in 1970,

⁶⁸ *BDN*, 1955, p. 88; 1960, p. 13

⁶⁹ *BDN*, 1970, p. 156

and reports increased dramatically during the following years. Such events were also used to raise deaf awareness amongst the local community, such as Stockport Deaf Club's sponsored Sign Marathon in the local shopping centre in 1985.⁷⁰ Contributions to deaf clubs by local charitable bodies such as the Round Table and Lions Club featured regularly in *BDN*, and the pubs and clubs in Cumbria were especially noticeable as regular contributors to their local deaf clubs.⁷¹ In the later years covered by this research, there was also an increase in reports of deaf clubs raising money for external appeals and charities. By 1980, Blackburn Deaf Club's sponsored walk had become an annual event and in an interesting role reversal, a donation was made to the local Round Table from the proceeds. The same year saw clubs in the Pendle region donating £50 to the Blue Peter Appeal for Cambodia.⁷² The increase in donations from deaf clubs may be indicative of a change in attitude amongst members, away from needing or requiring charity towards one of being a provider of support to other more needy groups. Even so, internal fundraising was still a major activity, as demonstrated in 1990. The British Deaf Association celebrated its Centenary that year, and all BDA branches were required to raise money for the BDA Centenary Appeal, which accounts for the dramatic increase and subsequent fall in fundraising events reported in 1990 and 1995.

There have been strong historical links between the various religious denominations and deaf clubs, as was outlined in chapter four, and these links were still in evidence in the late twentieth century. However, chart 10 illustrates the marked decrease in reports of organised church-based activities over the

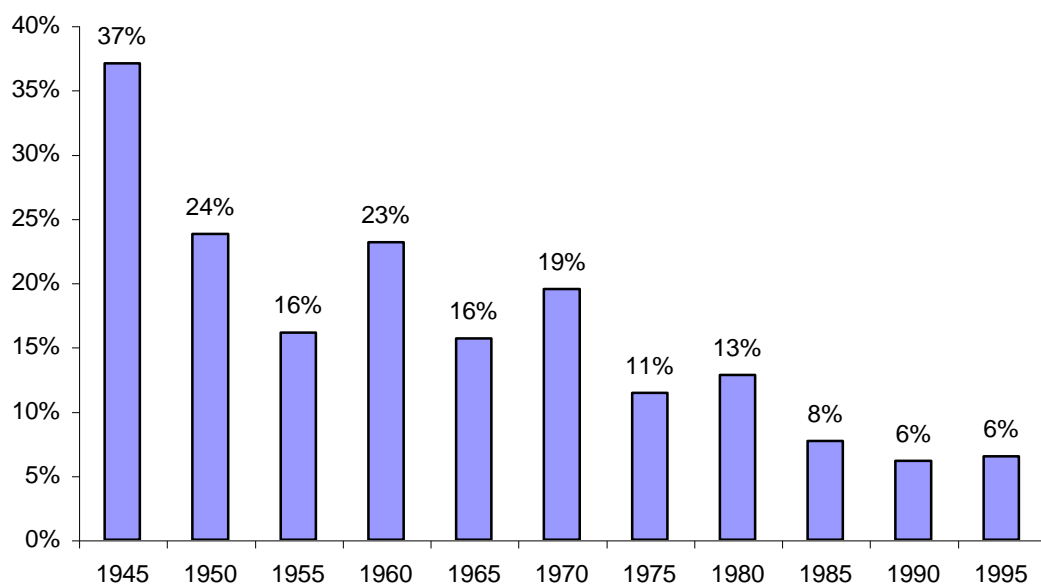
⁷⁰ *BDN*, 1970, p. 220; 1985, September p. 21

⁷¹ Indicative examples of this type of community contribution to deaf club funds can be found in *BDN*, 1955, pp. 26, 150; 1980, pp. 355, 393

⁷² *BDN*, 1980, pp. 235, 344

research period. Church-based activity accounted for 37% of deaf club events reported in 1945, but this fell dramatically to only 16% in 1955, and was as low as 6% by 1995. The introduction of regular reports from St Joseph's Deaf Club in Manchester from 1990 onwards served to maintain the level in later years, and suggests that the decline might not have been as steep as earlier figures indicate.

**Chart 10: the declining importance of church activity
(expressed as percentage of annual reported leisure activity)**



St Joseph's is a Catholic Deaf Club which was in existence throughout the research period, but the lack of reports before 1990 of their largely religiously focussed activities would indicate that there was more taking place than was being reported – at least in Manchester. The increase in reports of other activities would also depress the comparative standing of church activities, but there was still a noticeable decline in the number of reports overall. The overall picture is also in keeping with the general trend of declining involvement with religious observance throughout the region since World War Two, as illustrated for

example by the virtual disappearance of the Whit Walks described in chapter two.⁷³

The various regions show geographical variations in the reports of church-based activity. Bolton (25%), Southport (17%), and Wigan (17%) all show a large proportion of their social and leisure activity being linked to religious events throughout the period. On the other hand, Preston (2%), Stockport (5%) and Warrington (6%) report little if any of this type of activity in any year. Church-based activity was also a much higher percentage of activity in the southern regions than in the north. This is perhaps best illustrated by the rise in the numbers of deaf choirs during the 1980s and 1990s. These were initially formed to perform hymns and other religious songs in sign language, and these were found exclusively in deaf clubs in the south of the region. Manchester, Liverpool, Wigan and St Helens all boasted deaf choirs from 1980 onwards. Several choirs from across the region took part in the national Deaf Choirs Festival held in Canterbury in 1980.⁷⁴ Deaf choirs were a regular feature at church services across the north west during the 1980s and 1990s, and demonstrated that although the number of reports decreased, religion and church based activities continued to have an influence in the lives of deaf people.

Other deaf club group activities

Deaf clubs also provided a range of other activities for their members, which might be expected to be found in other social clubs and voluntary associations. There is nothing intrinsically or uniquely 'deaf' about the types of activities found. In choosing these activities, Deaf Club members were essentially demonstrating

⁷³ Davie, G. 'Religion in post-war Britain: a sociological view' in Obelkevich and Catterall *Understanding post-war British society*, pp. 165-178

⁷⁴ *BDN*, 1980, p. 234

that leisure served the same purpose for them as for any other group of likeminded individuals who chose to join an organised social setting. Evidence drawn from *British Deaf News* shows that deaf clubs were regularly used by members as the venue for family celebrations such as wedding anniversaries and christenings. The regularity of such celebrations taking place in the deaf club is reflected by this activity constituting 8% of the total number of leisure events recorded over the past war period. This level remains fairly constant, varying between 7% and 10% in individual years. The presence of other members emphasised the concept of the deaf club as forming a surrogate family, but as these events also involved the extended families of members, hearing friends and relatives were drawn into the community of the deaf club, even if only on a temporary basis.

Events organised for the eldest and youngest members of the deaf club were also a regular part of the programme of activities, which included parties, outings and special events. However, the figures for each group indicate differing trends in the attractiveness of deaf clubs for younger and older deaf people, with the number of events arranged for pensioners and older members showing a steady increase over the research period. This indicates a changing demographic basis of deaf clubs, with a decline in the number of young people becoming members over a period of years. During the research period, the number of events arranged for younger deaf people, recorded as 'youth events', decreased from 10% of overall activity to only 5%. As younger deaf people have become more confident in integrating with the hearing world, so they have been afforded a wider number of opportunities for filling their leisure time. Younger deaf people became less reliant on the deaf club as the hub and provider of their social life, unlike older deaf people who remained committed to the more traditional home offered by the deaf

club. In many ways the decline of the deaf clubs in terms of membership, and the increasingly older age group who attend the clubs, might be seen to reflect a similar decline in other social clubs in the north west. Working-class bases such as political clubs, working mens' clubs and trades associations all declined in popularity towards the end of the twentieth century, and so deaf clubs may not be unique in the reasons for their decline. As disposable income and available leisure time gradually increased for the general population in the post-war years, this corresponded with an increase in the range of activities people could participate in, making the traditional drinking and meeting places less attractive, especially for younger people. However, the impact on the deaf community has been much greater, given the centrality of the deaf club in community life in earlier times.

Conversely, this period of gradually declining membership took place as many of the deaf clubs broadened their range of activities. Many deaf clubs increasingly became centres of learning for their members, particularly in areas of self-help and improvement. One way of informing and educating members was through practical demonstrations and talks, which seem to have been especially popular in the Cumbrian deaf clubs. 1970 was a particularly busy year, with Barrow Deaf Club showing films about Laurel and Hardy (Stan Laurel was born in nearby Ulverston) and the activities of young local deaf people. The club also invited a local bank manager to give an interpreted talk to members explaining the new decimal currency which was soon to be introduced.⁷⁵ In the only example of its type to be found in *British Deaf News*, Carlisle Deaf Club reported that they had been visited by all the local candidates in the forthcoming election to explain their

⁷⁵ *BDN*, 1970, p. 155, 220

manifestos.⁷⁶ Informative and educational talks given to deaf club members in Cumbria during 1975 included a first aid demonstration by the St John's Ambulance service; a cookery demonstration by the local electricity board Norweb; forensic investigations by an Inspector from the Cumbrian Constabulary; the work of the Royal National Lifeboat Institute; and the role of the deaf psychiatric unit at Whittingham Hospital near Preston.⁷⁷ More talks and demonstrations seem to have taken place in Cumbria than in any other region of the north west, although many similar examples were found from other deaf clubs.

The other main avenue for providing an increased range of social, self-help and educational activities was through the establishment of societies and courses. The number of courses and societies based in deaf clubs increased from one report in 1955 to 22 by 1995, representing 8% of all deaf club leisure activity reported that year. All these events had a social aspect of course, and some were focussed variations on other activities already established in deaf clubs. So for example, the popularity of trips and visits was further enhanced by the participation of members in nationwide societies such as the Deaf Camping and Caravanning Club and the Deaf Motorists Club.⁷⁸ Fell walking groups were established in both Kendal (on the edge of the Lake district) and Manchester (close to both the Lake and Peak Districts), and regular outings for deaf members were arranged.⁷⁹ A whole range of self-help and interest groups were set up, with Keep Fit classes, Film and Photography Clubs and Drama Groups being particularly popular. Drama Groups were a feature of many deaf clubs, with a wide range of plays being

⁷⁶ *BDN*, 1970, p. 263

⁷⁷ *BDN*, 1975, pp. 92, 120, 161, 185

⁷⁸ *BDN*, 1965, p. 256; 1985, May p. 11; 1990, January p. 17

⁷⁹ *BDN*, 1985, November p. 15; 1995, December p. 24

produced, most often presented in sign language as the most appropriate means of access for both the actors and those watching the plays. The choice of certain plays raises some interesting questions about how these plays were translated from English into sign language, and by whom. For example, Liverpool Deaf Club's Drama Group seems to have been particularly active and thriving in the 1960s and 1970s. 'A Midsummer Night's Dream' was presented in 1970, following their earlier production of 'Oedipus Rex' in 1960.⁸⁰ In both instances the plays were signed, with the 1960 play having a spoken narration provided 'for hearing friends'.⁸¹ The language of these plays is not necessarily easily accessible or understood by hearing audiences, and so the translation of the plays into sign language must have been a long and difficult process. The adaptation of the 1960 play was undertaken by the Assistant Supervisor of the local Deaf Society, who was a hearing person and presumably sufficiently proficient in sign language to translate the text in a meaningful way. Liverpool was by no means the only deaf club taking part in drama productions, but they do appear to have been the most adventurous in their choice of productions. No doubt the same group's productions of the pantomimes 'Mother Goose' and 'Peter Pan' (both of which included both singing and dancing) in 1970 proved less arduous in terms of translation.⁸²

Away from the stage, other interests catered for across the north west included photography and film classes, and deportment, make up and hairstyling classes were provided in Bolton in 1960.⁸³ Several keep fit and aerobics classes were set up in various clubs, and many clubs had groups for unemployed members,

⁸⁰ *BDN*, 1960, p. 42; 1970, p. 227

⁸¹ *BDN*, 1960, p. 42

⁸² *BDN*, 1970, p. 160, 227

⁸³ *BDN*, 1960, p. 85

mothers and toddlers and Ladies Groups.⁸⁴ In the 1990s, 'Triangle Clubs' for deaf lesbian and gay men and women reflected the increasing acceptance of minority groups in wider society, as did the establishment of a deaf Asians group in Manchester in 1995.⁸⁵ Educational ventures for deaf people included Further Education classes provided by Rochdale Deaf Club in 1965, reading and writing classes in Warrington in 1975, and a training course for unemployed deaf people to become sign language tutors organised by Liverpool Deaf Club in 1995.⁸⁶

Deaf club members also began to take a more active role in events amongst the wider hearing community during the post-war years. From no reports in 1955, the number of events recorded grew to 13 by 1995, and these were often closely linked to the increase in fundraising by deaf clubs. When this involvement included some degree of success for a deaf person or reflected well on the deaf community, then the news was passed on to other deaf people through the pages of *British Deaf News*. Thus the achievement of a deaf man in winning the 'Best Decorated Car in Morecambe Carnival' competition three years running was reported in *BDN* with a degree of pride, as was the presence of a couple from Blackburn Deaf Club at a Buckingham Palace garden party in 1990.⁸⁷ The couple, accompanied by sign language interpreters, were being rewarded for their work with the deaf club and as members of the local deaf church. The growth in reports may also be indicative of the growing integration of deaf people into wider society, resulting from a growing confidence amongst deaf people in meeting hearing people. Sign language users were no longer isolated in the deaf clubs, as deaf awareness grew and deaf people became less hidden away due to changes

⁸⁴ *BDN*, 1960 p. 39; 1975, pp. 159, 160, 183; 1985, February, p. 15; March, p. 15; July, p. 18

⁸⁵ *BDN*, 1995, February, p. 25; September, p. 23

⁸⁶ *BDN*, 1965, p. 297; 1975, p. 192; 1995, April p. 24

⁸⁷ *BDN*, 1980, p. 349; 1990, pp. 20, 21

in education policy. Following the Warnock Report of 1978, segregated education for deaf pupils was largely replaced by integration into mainstream schools, and whilst sign language as an education medium remained very much in the minority, the use of sign language in public places increased as deaf people attained a higher profile than they had when they were hidden away in deaf schools.

The breadth and levels of activity outlined in this chapter have emphasised the social function of deaf clubs. This role involved not just the local deaf population but also served as a means of bringing deaf people together with others from outside the immediate locality. It has been shown that deaf clubs were much more than simply a place where likeminded people met to drink and socialise for a few hours. For many deaf people, deaf clubs formed the hub of their lives and provided a refuge from the pressures of everyday life. In addition, deaf clubs allowed their members to escape from the specific pressures associated with being a member of a largely misunderstood minority who were socially and linguistically isolated from interaction with the surrounding majority culture. The way in which deaf people chose to take part in certain leisure activities may have been no different from any other members of society. However, there were some aspects of deaf leisure activity, particularly those communal events organised and shared by deaf club members, which served a uniquely deaf cultural purpose. Precisely what an understanding of these shared leisure and sporting activities tells us about the nature of the deaf community will be discussed in chapter nine. Before that analysis takes place, the sporting activities of deaf club members will be described in the next chapter.

Chapter Eight: The sporting activities of deaf club members

In addition to recording deaf people's leisure activity, *British Deaf News (BDN)* regularly reported the sporting activities of deaf club members, both as participants and spectators. This data illustrates that sport has played an important part in the lives of deaf club members for many years, as will be shown by the history of the organisation of deaf sport. Although the *BDN* reports mostly related to sport that was based in, and organised through, the deaf clubs, there is also evidence of members joining teams and taking part in competitions not directly linked to the deaf club. In this chapter, distinct geographical and chronological trends will be identified from data covering half a century of deaf sporting activity. The extent to which deaf sportsmen and women participated in specific sports will be outlined, and the range of sporting activities engaged in by deaf sportsmen and women is discussed on a sport by sport basis. Although sport has long formed an integral part of leisure activity generally, several factors support a separate analysis being made, including the additional motivations that involvement in sport offers when compared to leisure. The most important of these is of course the element of competition, which brings with it a variety of specific rewards. In addition, the ways in which an understanding of deaf sport provides insights into broader notions of 'deaf community' will be assessed. This analysis will also be used to challenge some of the stereotypical conceptions of deaf people, especially the notion of deafness being a disability.

Deaf sport was not formally organised at either regional or national levels until the mid twentieth century. Although a team of deaf sportsmen and women represented Great Britain at the Silent Games of 1924 (the first international deaf sports competition), there was no national body overseeing deaf sport until the

formation of the British Deaf Amateur Sports Association (BDASA) in 1930.¹ In terms of European deaf sport, Britain lagged behind countries such as Germany (1910), Sweden (1913) and France (1918) in establishing a national governing body.² The BDASA was a purely voluntary organisation until 1982, arranging a number of competitions in various sports at both regional and national levels. National competitions were usually conducted on a regional basis initially, with the victorious teams then progressing to a further competition to determine the national champions. In its heyday, the BDASA had many thousands of members operating under eleven regional councils. By 1980, the British Deaf Amateur Sports Association had become the British Deaf Sports Council, and the British Deaf Association (BDA) assumed formal responsibility for funding deaf sports administration in 1982. The BDSC became an affiliated member organisation of the BDA but retained its autonomy. Roland Haythornthwaite became the BDSC's first paid employee, when his previously unpaid role of voluntary administrator became that of BDA Sports and Leisure Officer. The remainder of the BDSC's posts continued to be manned by volunteers, with funding derived from donations and the fundraising efforts of deaf club members.³ At the time of the 50th anniversary of organised deaf sport in Britain, there were reportedly over 8,500 members involved in the sporting life of 120 deaf clubs, spread across 11 Regional Councils.⁴

¹ The 1924 team was selected and organised by Reverend Vernon Jones of the Royal Association in Aid of Deaf People. Competitors were drawn from members of the organisation's network of deaf clubs in southern England. Dimmock 'A brief history of the RAD', p. 18.

² Seguillion, D. 'The origins and consequences of the first World Games for the Deaf: Paris 1924' *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 19, 1 (2003) pp. 119-136 provides an historical analysis of the development of deaf sport in Europe, as well as a detailed account of the foundation of the Silent Games.

³ Greater detail on the history of the British Deaf Sports Council can be found in Grant *Deaf advance* and from the BDSC website at www.britishdeafsportsCouncil.org

⁴ *BDN*, 1980, p. 416

During the post-war years, a number of governing bodies for individual deaf sports emerged, usually but not exclusively operating under the aegis of the BDASA and its successor the BDSC. In north-west England, organised deaf sport developed from the Lancashire Deaf and Dumb Orme League, which was founded in 1924 by a group of deaf billiards players. Named after a local billiards manufacturing company, who provided the shield presented to the winners, the league developed from a number of deaf individuals coming together to arrange a series of friendly matches. As the number of interested participants grew, the league was formed, eventually shortening its name to the more manageable Orme League. The success of the Orme League led to demands for other sports to be included, and in 1947, the North West Deaf Sports Association (NWDSA) was formed. The Orme League continued as an independent competition for some years, before coming under the umbrella of the NWDSA in the 1960s. Acting as the regional body of the BDASA, the NWDSA organised a number of sporting events across the north west throughout the post-war period. The NWDSA was also instrumental in setting up the highly successful Indoor Sports League which was the mainstay of many deaf clubs' sporting activities through the winter months. From the original focus on billiards, the NWDSA eventually came to encompass darts, whist, pool, football, snooker, dominoes, badminton, squash, cricket and swimming competitions.⁵ The NWDSA became the North West Deaf Sports Council in the early 1980s, as part of the changes which saw the national body the BDASA become the British Deaf Sports Council. These organisations were concerned solely with the organisation and control of deaf sport only in as far as this involved competition between deaf competitors. Neither organisation had any control over deaf sportsmen and women competing against hearing

⁵ For further information on the foundation of the NWDSA, see *BDN*, 1984 August, p. 24; a fuller description of the history of the NWDSOC can be found in Scarfe, L. (ed.) *A brief history of the NWDSOC* (Manchester, North West Deaf Sports Council, 1996)

opponents. In a 'deaf against deaf' context, the BDSC was an affiliated member of the Comité Internationale des Sports des Sourds (CISS), the international governing body for deaf sport founded in 1924.⁶ From its foundation, the CISS was concerned to ensure that only deaf sportsmen and women took part in its competitions. To this end, the CISS introduced and rigidly enforces a number of restrictions for deaf only sport, such as a minimum level of deafness and the banning of deaf sportsmen who wear hearing aids during competition. The minimum deafness level required by the CISS is an upper limit of 55Hz hearing in the better ear. This level was set within the frequency range of human speech, in order to ensure competitors could not gain an advantage by being able to hear spoken instructions. Competitors in events organised under the auspices of the CISS and its affiliated organisations are subject to hearing tests to determine their eligibility to compete. Bans for the wearing of hearing aids are typically one year for a first offence.⁷ The political implications of deaf sport are also important, as Padden and Humphreys acknowledge: 'sports organisations like these are one of the few places where deaf people exercise almost total control over their own affairs, from deciding their own rules to determining who qualifies as a member'.⁸

The reporting of deaf sporting events and achievements in *BDN* was a regular feature of the publication throughout the twentieth century, with news appearing both in the dedicated sports pages and amongst the reports from deaf clubs. A total of 573 separate reports were found in the period 1945 to 1995, although this does not fully reflect the overall level of sporting activity. This is due to the distinctive nature of sports reporting when compared to leisure activity; a report on leisure related to a specific event, whereas a report on sport often referred to

⁶ Comité Internationale des Sports des Sourds website www.ciss.org

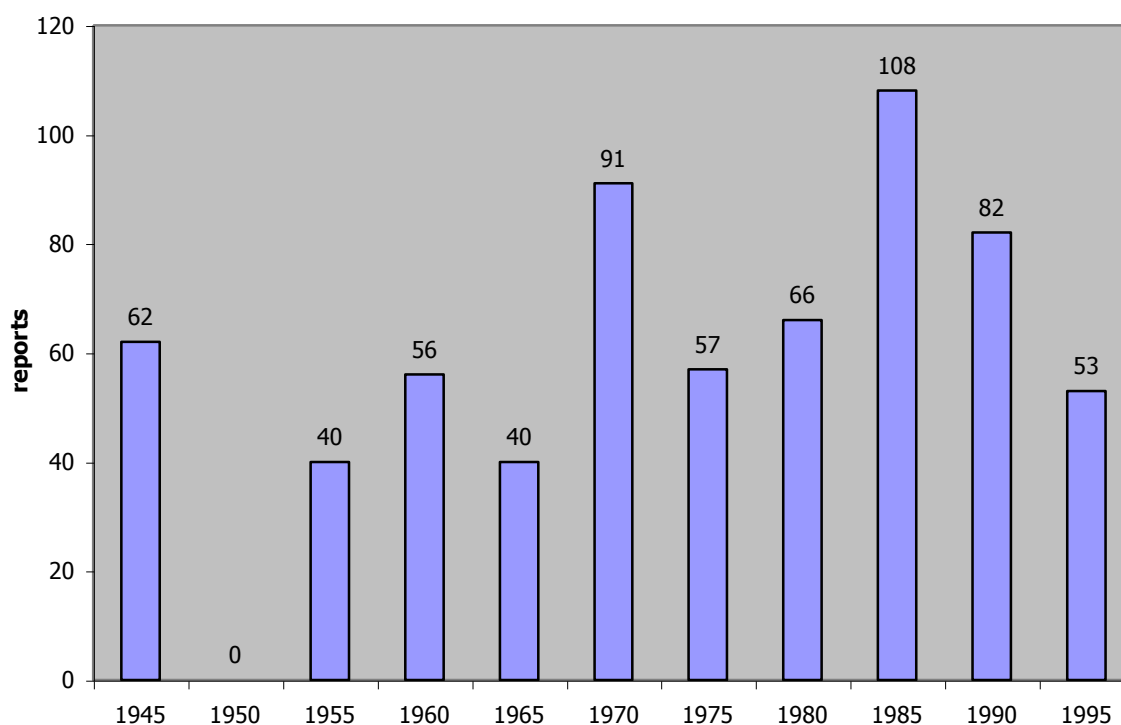
⁷ Further details on the qualification criteria for deaf sport can be found at www.ciss.org

⁸ Padden and Humphreys *Deaf in America*, p. 49

the participation of a team or individual in a league or cup competition. This naturally meant that participants were involved in a number of individual matches or contests. Exact details of the number of games or matches involved was not indicated in reports, and so definitive quantitative figures cannot be given. Nor is it claimed that all sport within a region was reported, partly due to the restrictions of space within *BDN*. As was discussed in the previous chapter, the reports from deaf clubs were provided by individuals within each club, rather than by professional journalists, and so coverage could be variable. Nevertheless, some underlying levels of activity can be seen, as can trends in participation. The number of reports in *BDN* ranged from 40 in 1955 and 1965 to 108 in 1985. There was an anomaly in 1950 when *British Deaf Times* (the predecessor to *BDN*) contained no sport reports at all. This lack of reports was national, and not just a feature of reports from north-west England. It is highly unlikely, given the evidence from other years, that deaf sport simply ceased in 1950; it is much more likely that sport reporting was dropped for unspecified editorial reasons. This lack of evidence from 1950 has been taken into account when identifying the general trends relating to deaf sports participation. 62 reports were recorded during 1945, which included the latter months of the Second World War. Chart 11 shows a series of apparent peaks and troughs in reported deaf sport. However, the drop in reports in 1965 may be explained by a fall in the number of regions reporting their activities in *BDN*. When this is taken into account, a steadier progression from 1955 to 1970 can be seen, with the apparent decline in 1965 actually being reversed, as is shown in Chart 12. This chart indicates the annual average number of reports for each region that actually reported activity. Nine regions reported 56 sporting activities in 1960, whilst only five regions reported 40 activities in 1965. The average number of sports reports therefore rises in 1965 to 8.0 reports per region, supporting the supposition that the drop in the

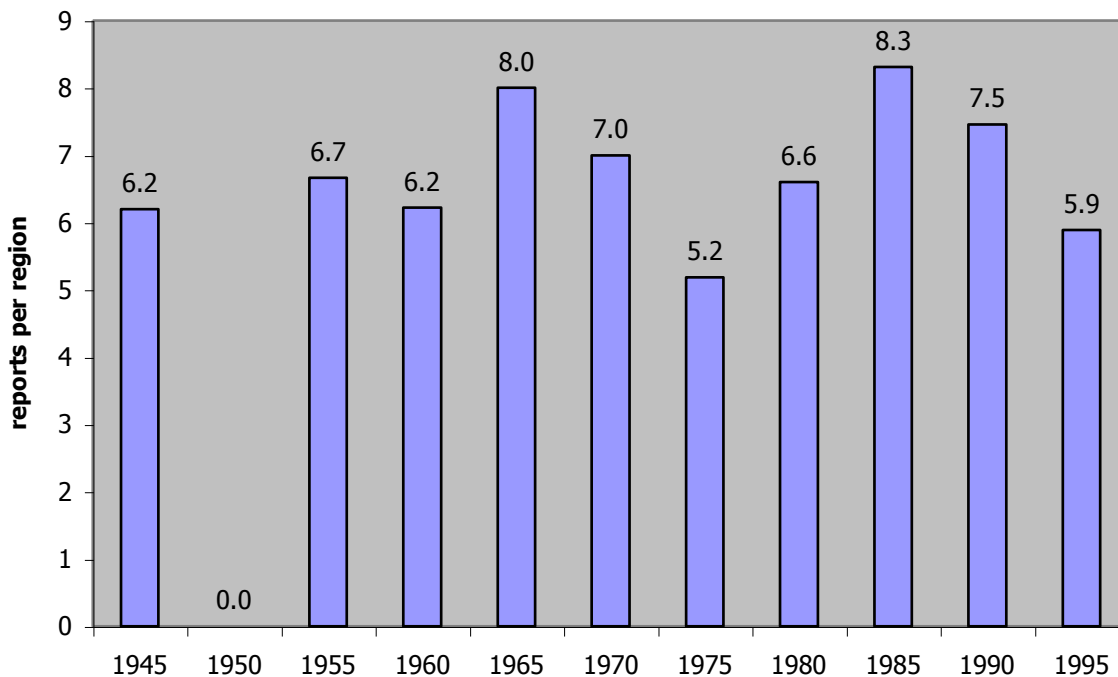
total number of reports was due to lack of reporting, not a decline in sporting activity. There was certainly no comparative decline in reported leisure activity in 1965, indicating that the decline in the number of sports reports was not due to an overall decrease in deaf club activity. The general trend during the post-war period until 1985 was of an increase in the number of regions reporting sporting activity and in the number of events being reported.

Chart 11: reported sports events by year



As can be seen in chart 12, there was a noticeable drop in the average number of reports from 1970 to 1975, in which year the lowest annual average for the number of events per region (5.2) was found. There was a similar decline in the non-sporting leisure activities of deaf clubs during the 1980s, but this came slightly later (1980 and 1985) than the decline in sporting activity. Most regions were affected, but not all, whilst the number of regions reporting sporting activity remained fairly constant.

Chart 12 : Average annual reports per region reporting sporting activity



As with leisure activity, the decline in deaf club based sport might have been a consequence of the wider economic depression being experienced during the 1970s and 1980s. As disposable income came under pressures from rising inflation and interest rates, and unemployment increased, non-essential activities such as sport and leisure inevitably suffered. The situation in deaf club sport may well have been a reflection of the wider economic health of the country rather than being a specific 'deaf' problem. The peak of deaf club based sport in the north west came with 108 reports in 1985 (an average of 8.3 reports per region), after which reported sport showed a major decline. There was a 20% decline in reports in 1990, and the overall total halved from 1985 to 1995, when only 53 reports were found. This represented an average of only 5.9 events amongst those regions which reported sporting activity. This decline mirrored a similar decline in the general leisure activities of deaf clubs, and the relationship between

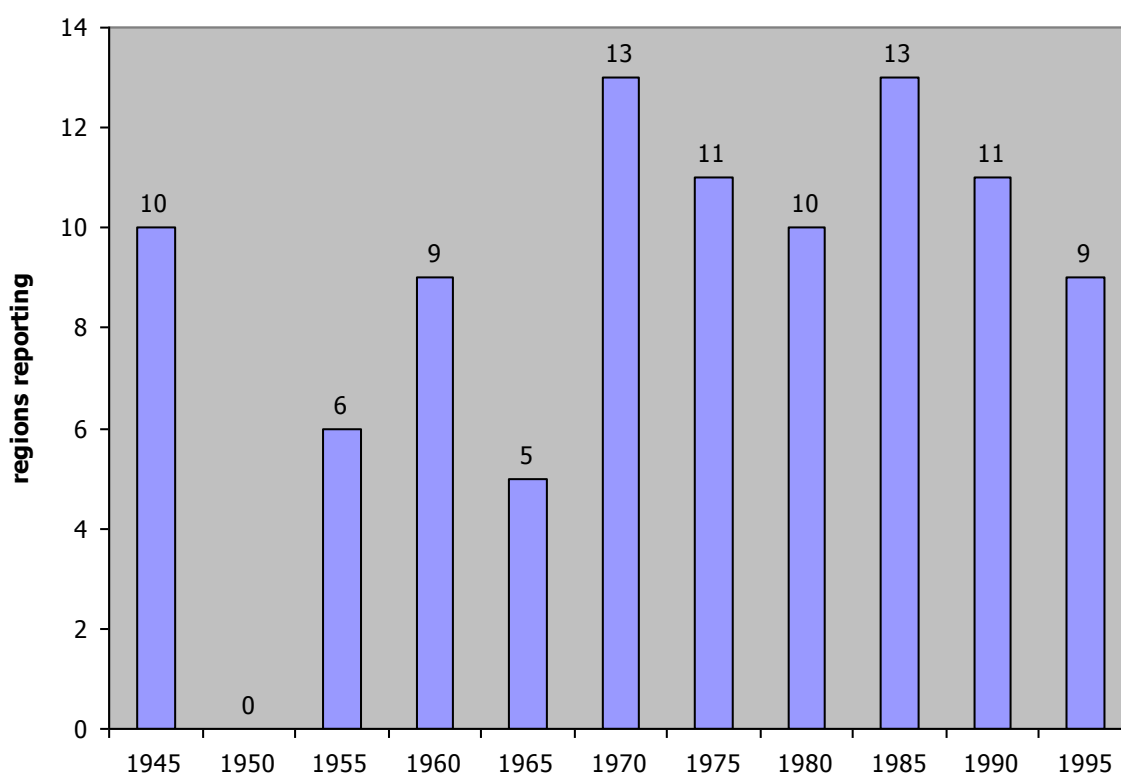
declining membership of deaf clubs (particularly amongst young people) and a reduction in the number of leisure pursuits being organised for and by the deaf clubs was an important factor. The growth in leisure opportunities outside the deaf clubs and the growing confidence of younger deaf people within the hearing world are also factors which need to be considered. However, it is hard to identify a clear hierarchy in the reasons for this decline, in that it is not possible to say with any certainty which - if any - of the above factors had a greater impact than any other.

The figures were affected to an extent by variations in the number of regions reporting sporting activity. Discounting the lack of any reports in 1950, the number of regions providing reports of sporting activity varied between 5 in 1965 and 13 in both 1970 and 1985. The average annual total of reports per region fluctuated between 5.2 in 1975 and 8.0 in 1965 (the year with the least total number of reports) and 8.3 in 1985 (the year with the highest number of reports). However, both the average number of reports and the total number of reports support the conclusion that deaf sport experienced a general trend of growth from 1945 to 1970, and then recovered steadily from the decline of 1975. A steady period of decline is evident in the 1990s, from the peak achieved in 1985. This is supported by the perceptions of deaf club members, who indicate that the period since the mid 1980s has been one of a decline in the number of deaf club members overall, and younger deaf people in particular no longer became deaf club members.⁹ The consequence has been a shrinking and ageing membership, which meant that there were fewer deaf club members available to

⁹ This information was not gathered in any quantifiable form, but has been gathered during informal conversations with deaf club members over a period of years.

take part in organised sporting activity. Those who were involved were generally older, and so the overall decline is perhaps understandable.

**Chart 13: regions reporting sporting activity by year
(maximum 14)**



The range of deaf club based activity

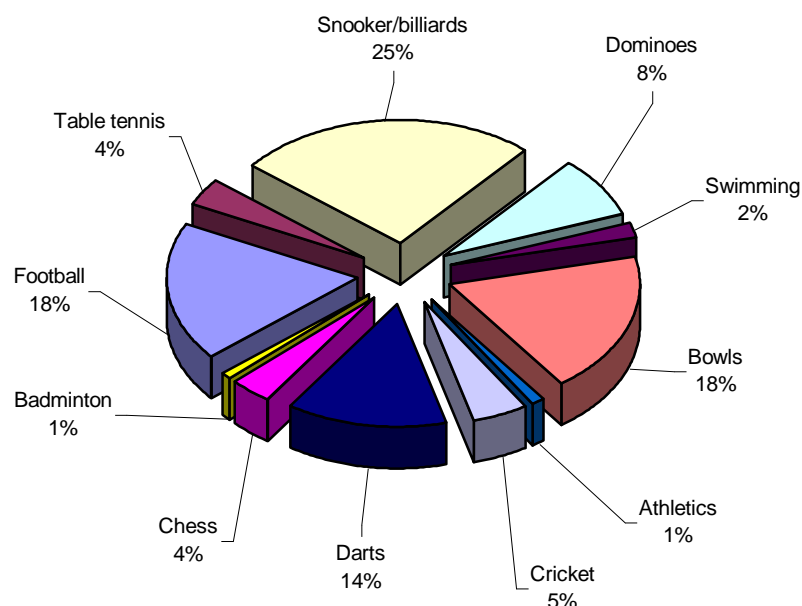
The range of sports reported by north-west deaf club members was comparatively narrow, with only eleven sports featuring with any regularity.

These were:

Outdoor sports	Indoor sports
Football	Dominoes
Cricket	Snooker/billiards/pool
Athletics	Darts
Bowls	Chess
	Badminton
	Table Tennis
	Swimming

There were isolated instances of other sports being reported but the overwhelming majority of reports were restricted to the eleven mainstream sports outlined above. Of these, three sports (snooker, football and bowls) accounted for 61% of reported sporting activity during the research period; when the figures for darts are added, these four sports made up 75% of all reported sporting activity by deaf club members. These were also the only sports for which reports appeared in every year analysed.

Chart 14 : popularity of sports determined by number of reports



The majority of deaf sporting activity took place indoors, with outdoor sport restricted to football in winter and bowls in summer, with some limited evidence of cricket and athletics. There were numerous examples of indoor sporting leagues being organised during the period and indoor sports events provided the basis for informal but regular social gatherings.¹⁰ These events took place both in

¹⁰ Examples of these activities are given in the analyses of individual sports which follows later in this chapter, as well as in the previous chapter on leisure activity.

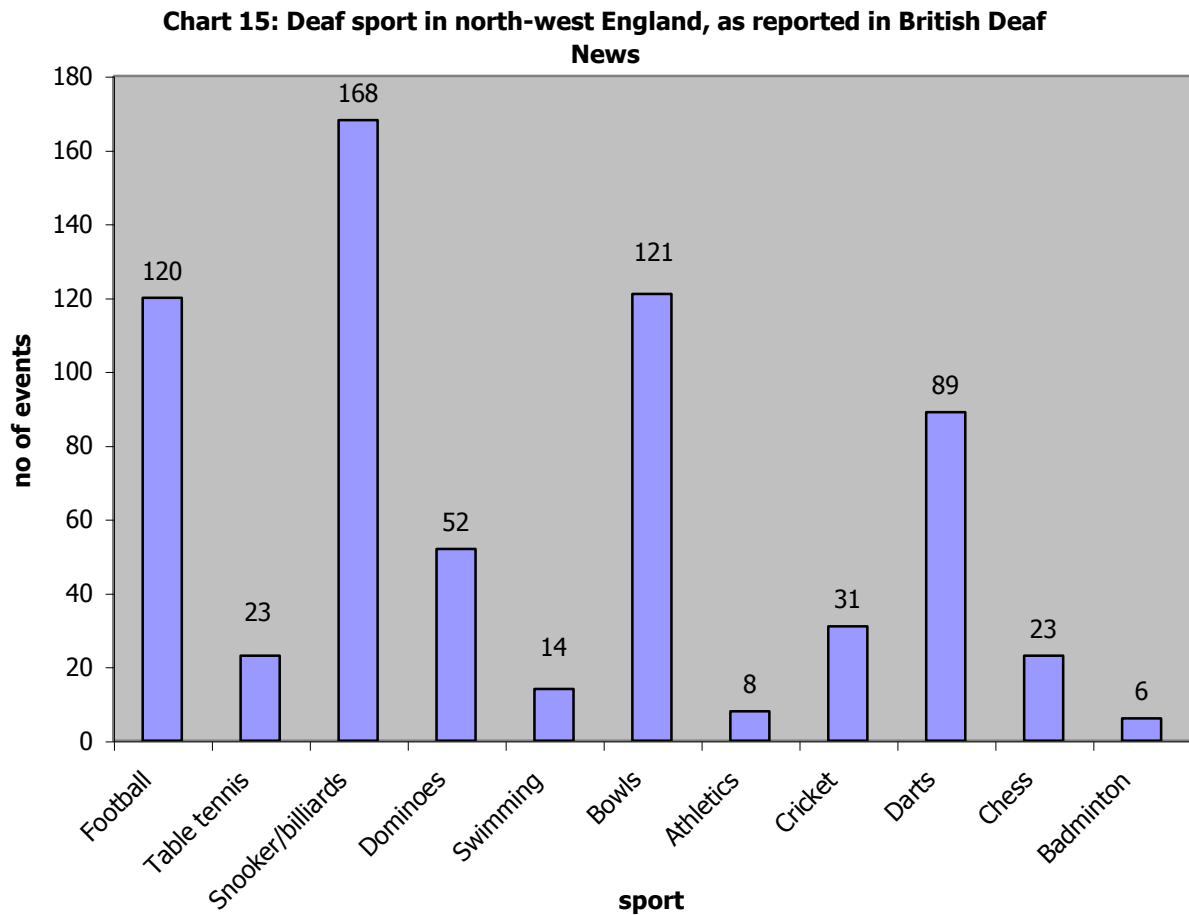
the deaf clubs and in other venues, with opponents including both deaf and hearing competitors. When these sporting events involved deaf opponents, they appear to have been treated as much as social events as sporting contests. On the other hand, there is little evidence to suggest that organised socialising formed a major or regular part of sporting competitions between deaf and hearing opponents. It is not possible to quantify precisely the ratio of sport versus deaf or hearing opponents, particularly in the case of deaf people participating in leagues and competitions. There is certainly more direct evidence of deaf/hearing interaction from sports such as football and bowls than others, but even here many deaf teams were not always identified as such. Even so, the participation of deaf teams and players in local leagues was the norm rather than being restricted to playing solely with and against other deaf teams. Some sports appear more 'inter-deaf' than others; for example, reports concerning chess, table tennis and athletics seem to be restricted almost exclusively to matches and contests against other deaf people. There is very little evidence of deaf clubs taking part in these particular activities against hearing opponents, rare examples being Blackburn and Oldham deaf clubs' membership of local table tennis leagues in 1960 and 1995 respectively.¹¹ Rochdale Deaf Club's table tennis team winning the championship of their local league in 1960 was an even rarer example of a deaf team achieving success in a mixed setting.¹² Although deaf individuals also joined hearing teams and clubs, there is little evidence of such involvement unless the individual achieved some success. Examples of such success will be given where appropriate in the discussion of individual sports which follows.

¹¹ *BDN* 1960, p. 85; 1990, June p. 20

¹² *BDN* 1960, p. 43

Determining the comparative popularity of various sports is to some extent problematic, especially when based on data which may appear solely quantitative. Nevertheless, it is possible to reach some general conclusions based on the number of reports in *BDN*, which also provide some qualitative insights into the value placed on different sports. If certain sports were not particularly popular, it seems logical to assume that deaf club members would not have taken part in them to any great extent and therefore they would not have been reported in *BDN*. Where there is evidence to show that deaf people were participating in certain sports, but this participation was not reported, this will be acknowledged and discussed. Minor statistical problems arise from the number of matches against hearing opponents not being given, but this was resolved by recording deaf involvement in competitions rather than the number of matches played in a season. As can be seen in Chart 15 below, the most reported activity was the playing of snooker and billiards, with 168 reports between 1945 and 1995. The popularity of these particular sports is shown by the success of the Orme League, from which the North West Deaf Sports Council emerged. The league was based in deaf clubs, indicating that many (if not all) clubs possessed at least one snooker table, despite the expense of buying a table and the need for an appropriate room to devote to the sport. It is also interesting to speculate on the acceptance of snooker by the Missioners, given the attitude towards snooker and snooker halls by many religious groups. The notion of prowess at the game indicating a 'misspent youth' does not seem to have been applied to deaf club members. Indeed, it could be suggested that playing snooker and billiards in the deaf clubs may have been actively promoted by the Missioners, as a means of keeping young deaf people out of the snooker halls. Pool began to feature during the 1970s, as the game gained a foothold in the nation's leisure time generally,

and so is included in this category. Football was only the third most popular activity with 120 reports, just behind bowls with 121 reports.



The non-energetic nature of the two most popular sports may indicate a comparatively high average age of deaf club members. As was discussed in chapter four, many younger deaf people did not become active in their local deaf club until after leaving school, and so the number of fit and active members available to form a football team could almost certainly fluctuate greatly. An example of this effect is provided in the discussion of football given later. Some of the factors which might mitigate against the formation of a football team, such as sufficient numbers, injuries, age and expense, possibly did not restrict participation in less active sports such as snooker and bowls to the same extent.

This may explain why football was not at the top of the chart in terms of participation, whatever its position might have been in terms of overall popularity amongst deaf people.

No particular sport was regularly more popular than any other on an annual basis before 1985. During 1985, 1990 and 1995, snooker became established as the consistently most popular sport for deaf club members. This was a period when snooker on television was enjoying great popularity, and it was also a period when many deaf clubs began to obtain television sets for their members. Once a basic understanding of the rules is acquired, the highly visual nature of the sport means access to a commentary is not vital to enjoyment of the game. So it should not be surprising that snooker, which was already very popular with deaf club members, should attain primacy as the most popular sport played in deaf clubs. The highest percentage of reports for any one sport in a single year was 38%, with snooker gaining this ratio of overall deaf club sporting activity in 1970 and 1995. Despite the narrow range of sports deaf club members took part in, there was only one year (1955) in which participation in all eleven sports was reported. Only six sports were reported in 1945, and only seven in 1975, 1990 and 1995. In the remaining years, either nine or ten sports were reported. One factor behind this variation may be the fluid nature of the deaf community, whose membership could fluctuate at a local level. As was shown earlier, deafness is not inherited in the majority of cases, and so a steady flow of new members into the clubs could not be guaranteed. Therefore, both the number and age range of deaf people in a particular area was subject to change over time. Changes in the welfare provision for deaf people also impacted on the recruitment of new members into the deaf clubs. The consequences for deaf sports teams were that as players became older, there was not necessarily a pool of younger players on

which to draw. The popularity of snooker in the latter years of this research would support the notion that the membership of deaf clubs was ageing and therefore increasingly likely to engage in more sedentary sporting activities.

Most popular sport per year

Year	Most popular sport
1945	Bowls
1950	No sport reported in <i>British Deaf News</i>
1955	Snooker/billiards
1960	Football
1965	Football
1970	Snooker/billiards/pool
1975	Football
1980	Darts
1985	Snooker/billiards/pool
1990	Snooker/billiards/pool
1995	Snooker/billiards/pool

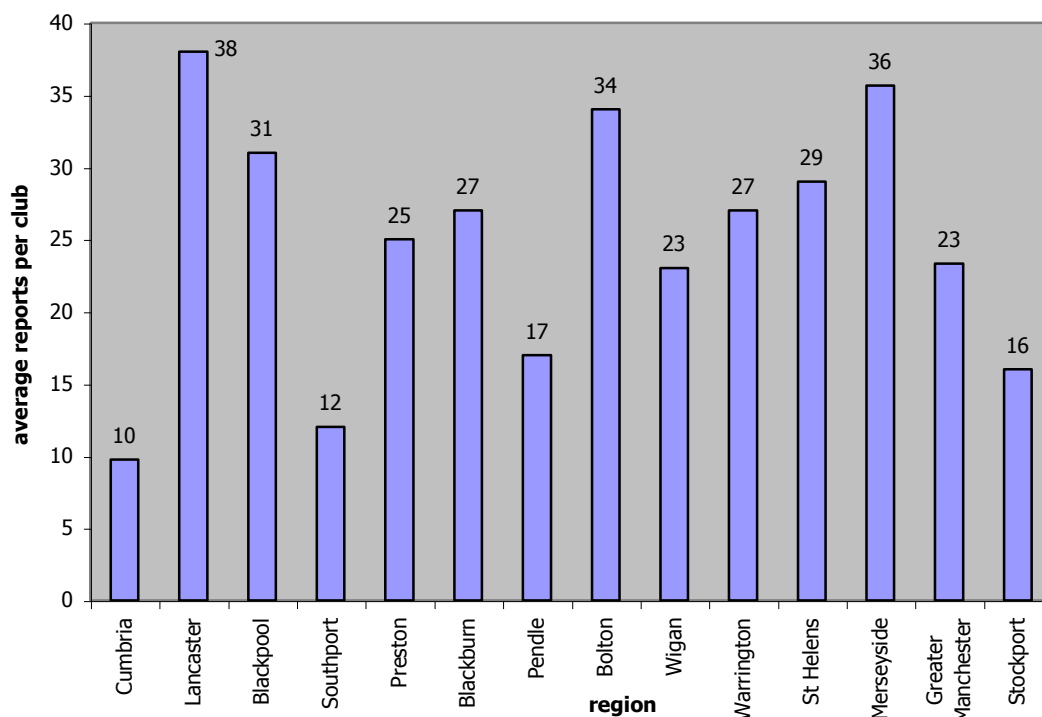
Of the eleven sports found in *BDN* reports from north-west England, some hardly ever appeared, with badminton and athletics only featuring a combined total of fourteen times in the eleven years investigated. There is no evidence of deaf people taking part in organised athletics events below county or regional levels, suggesting that there were not enough deaf athletes to make formal competitions at a lesser level (for example between deaf clubs) a viable proposition. Other sports such as golf and squash, which experienced a huge growth in Britain during the 1970s and 1980s, were not reported in the north west, although there is evidence that deaf people were taking up these sports. This was certainly the

case with golf, which despite the lack of reports in *BDN*, had a strong following in the north west in the latter years covered by this research. The English Deaf Golf Association, founded in the early 1980s, held its annual Northern Championship in north-west England, and the majority of the English national deaf golf team came from the region. The national team competed in international competitions, including the World Deaf Golf Championships.¹³ Based solely on the evidence provided by *BDN*, it is not possible to state definitively what other sports deaf people were taking part in as individuals nor to what extent. Even when evidence was found, such as that of deaf people playing golf, it is not possible to gauge accurately how extensive this participation was. What can be said with some certainty is that those taking part were not representing their local deaf clubs in competition with hearing opponents, nor were their activities being reported as such in *British Deaf News*. Therefore, this participation is not considered here to constitute part of the communal sporting life of the deaf clubs, although it was no doubt of interest and importance on a personal satisfaction level to those involved.

There are a number of variations in sporting activity between the various regions within the north west, both in terms of overall involvement in sport and in the types of sports found. The regions of Lancaster (38), Merseyside (36) and Bolton (34) showed the highest average number of sporting events per individual deaf club. Conversely, the lowest average number of activities per club was ten (Cumbria) and twelve (Southport). Despite these variations, it can be seen that deaf clubs in all the regions of the north west were involved in sport to some extent.

¹³ This information was provided by Stuart Harrison, UK Deaf Sport's Development Manager and a member of the British Deaf Golf Association, in an email to the author on 10th December 2003.

**Chart 16: average sport activity per club within each region
(cumulative 1945-1995)**



A number of specific differences between regions can also be found; for example, no football was reported in Cumbria, whilst Greater Manchester was the only region to report activity in all eleven sports. There was very little sporting activity reported in Southport (only twelve reports in eleven years) which may indicate that the deaf club there mostly consisted of older members. Indeed, eight of the twelve reports appear in 1980, when Southport Deaf Club had an active Youth section, which was reporting its activities separately in *BDN*. Apart from two reports of Southport Deaf Club members being involved in deaf football competitions and three instances concerning deaf swimming events in 1980, the remainder of the reports from this club related to the more sedentary sports of darts, snooker and bowls.¹⁴ This supports the suggestion that a younger membership was an important factor in whether deaf clubs were active in the

¹⁴ *BDN* 1980, pp. 280, 339, 354

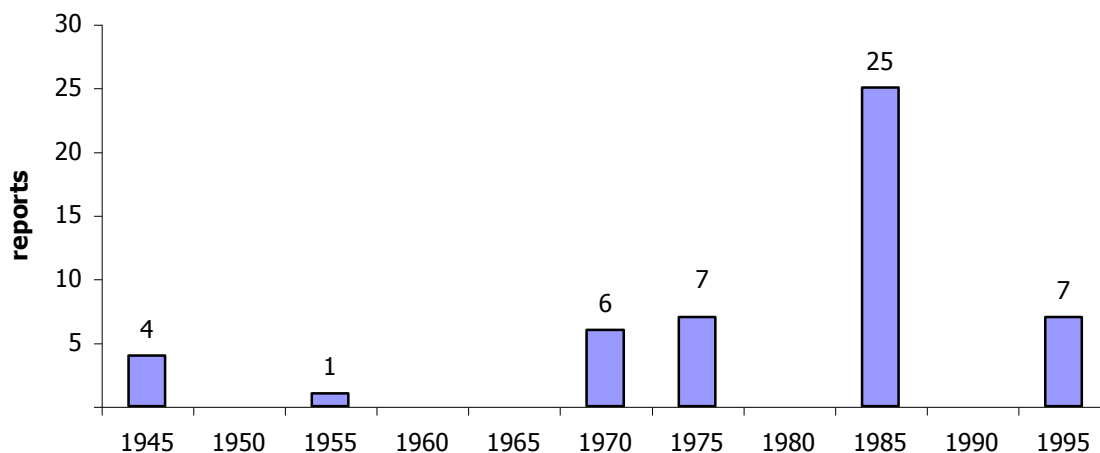
more energetic sporting activities. There was little sporting activity reported in Cumbria before 1970, with the only evidence from the four deaf clubs in the region being two reports of sporting events in 1960. These showed that Kendal Deaf Club had a team in a local table tennis league, and members also played a couple of friendly cricket matches against a side made up of apprentices from a local Army base during the summer.¹⁵ No leisure activity of any kind was reported in this region in either 1945 or 1950, but in the following three years covered by this study, twenty social events were recorded. This shows that the deaf clubs in Cumbria were socially active, but not necessarily in a sporting sense.

The fluctuating nature of deaf club membership and sporting activity referred to above can be demonstrated by a brief case study of Preston Deaf Club. For the purposes of this research, the Preston region consists of Preston and Chorley Deaf Clubs, but there was no sporting activity reported from Chorley at any time during the years under consideration. Therefore all analysis of sporting activity in this region relates solely to Preston Deaf Club. The pages of *British Deaf Times* and *British Deaf News* carried four reports from Preston in 1945, but only one report appeared in the whole of the next four years. There were then six and seven reports in 1970 and 1975 respectively, before a total lack of reports in 1980 was followed by as many as twenty five reports in 1985. A further blank year in 1990 was then followed by seven reports in 1995. In all, Preston provided a total of fifty reports, but half of these came in one year. In four of the eleven years investigated, no sporting activity was reported in this region. There was a similar lack of social activity reported from the two deaf clubs in the region prior to 1970, but despite the lack of sporting activity in all but 1985, both deaf clubs in the region were very active socially throughout the years from 1970 onwards.

¹⁵ *BDN* 1960, p. 67

This example, when taken with those of Cumbria and Southport, suggests that a thriving deaf club did not automatically result in an active sports section.

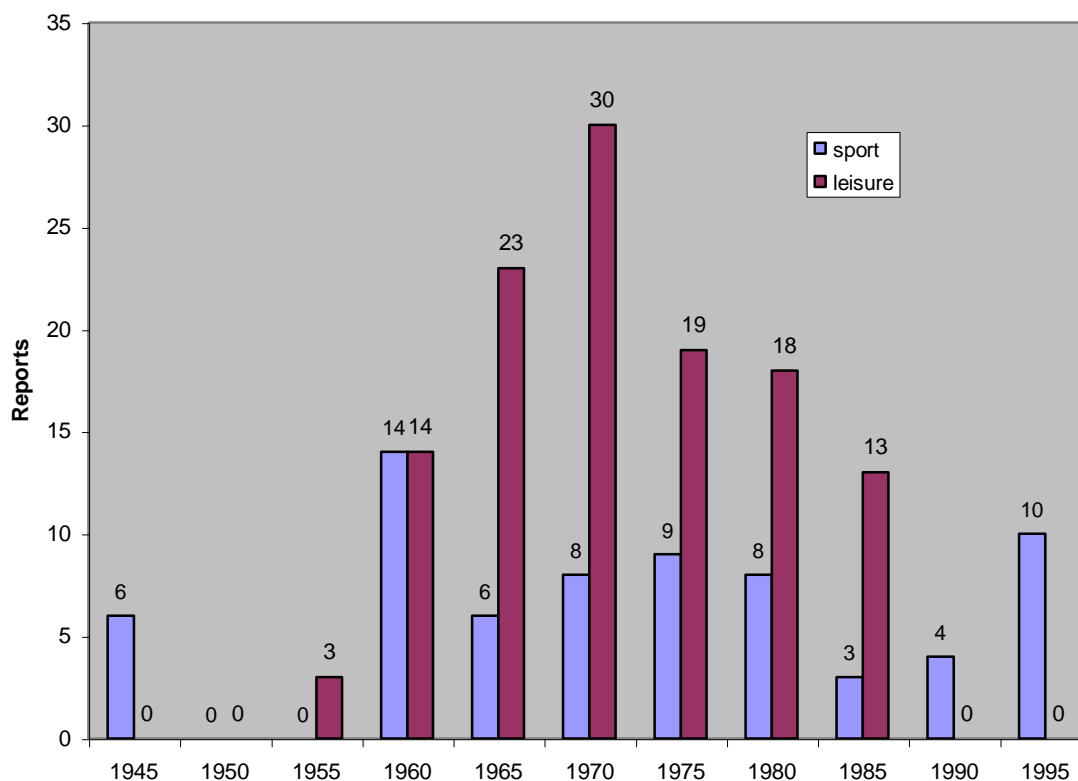
Chart 17: variations in the sporting activity of Preston Deaf Club 1945-1995



The deaf clubs in the southern regions of the research area showed some interesting differences between their sporting and leisure activities which illustrate that the complete opposite to the above example could also occur. An apparently inactive club in terms of organised leisure events could still function at a sporting level. Chart 18 shows how Bolton continued to report sport up until 1995 despite no leisure activity being reported after 1985. Whether this reflects a shift in the role of the deaf clubs in this region is unclear, but it is interesting to note that a previously busy social life in the region apparently disappeared (at least as reported in *BDN*) whilst the sporting life of the region's deaf population continued on much the same level as in previous years. The picture from other regions further confuses any attempts to determine the factors which brought this change about; there certainly does not appear to be any consistent pattern of change which affected all the deaf clubs in the north west. Warrington ceased reporting sport from 1985 to 1995, but this is not too surprising as there was also minimal social activity being reported during the same period. In Wigan, leisure

reports ended in 1975, but a few sports reports appeared in 1980 and 1985 until news of the club disappeared completely from the pages of *BDN*.

Chart 18 : comparative levels of leisure and sporting activity in the Bolton region



One fact which is clear is that none of these clubs ceased to exist, as all were still active in 2003.¹⁶ A decline in sporting activity, possibly due to an ageing membership, might be expected, but the reasons for the continuation of sport in Bolton but not social activity are not easy to identify. One possible explanation could be simply that the *BDN* correspondent was more interested (and active) in the sporting life of the club than the social life, and thus the reports provided reflected the writer's own preferences.

¹⁶ www.royaldeaf.org.uk/ukclubs.htm. The clubs cited here are all included on the list of active clubs.

Other regional variations include the lack of football in Cumbria highlighted earlier, and the majority of bowls activity was to be found in the south of the area. Fifty-one of the sixty-four reports came from south Lancashire, Greater Manchester and Merseyside, with only thirteen reports from the more northerly clubs. Tennis seems to have been virtually non-existent in terms of reported activity from the north west, whilst reports of deaf club members playing badminton were restricted to just four of the fourteen north-west regions. More detailed examinations of individual sports are given later.

Missing sports

The question of local preferences for particular sports raises an interesting issue in relation to deaf sport in north-west England. Nationally popular sports such as netball, squash and angling hardly ever featured in *BDN*, with only three reports of deaf angling contests in the north west, two reports relating to netball and nothing at all concerning squash.¹⁷ The absence of reports on netball and squash is particularly notable, as both sports were included in the activities of the North West Deaf Sports Council.¹⁸ Indeed, a report from Bolton in 1995 specifically refers to the club winning the NWDSC netball championship.¹⁹ Although reports on these sports may have appeared in other years not covered by this research, the general lack of coverage suggests that these were not major participant sports for deaf people for any significant period of time. Another factor is the need for specialist equipment and venues for sports such as netball, squash and tennis. Deaf people in the north west may well have been joining clubs as individuals, rather than joining as a group or team of deaf people. Golf serves as

¹⁷ *BDN* 1970, pp. 191, 266 (angling); 1985, April p. 17 (netball); 1995, July p. 21 (angling); 1995 August p. 21 (netball)

¹⁸ Scarfe, *A brief history of the NWDSC*

¹⁹ *BDN* 1995, August p. 21

a good example of this process. As was mentioned earlier, golf did not feature at all in the reports of north-west deaf sport from 1945 to 1995. However, deaf people were most certainly playing the game, which involved joining local golf clubs. Evidence provided by the British Deaf Golf Association indicates that deaf golfers of higher ability joined clubs on an individual basis, and played largely with and against hearing golfers.²⁰ These players improved their handicaps as a result of playing at a higher level, although the social rewards were somewhat reduced for those who had difficulty communicating and socialising with their playing partners. The greater the degree of integration, the less likely that such golfers would have their activities reported in *BDN*, as this activity was not part of the communal life of the deaf club. Those who preferred to join golf clubs in the company of other deaf players tended to socialise less outside their immediate group, but gained greater social benefits from playing in the company of their contemporaries. A consequence of this restricted competition was that deaf social golfers did not develop their skills to the same extent and so typically had a higher handicap than their more integrated fellow deaf golfers. In this aspect of the game, deaf golfers showed themselves to be no different from hearing golfers playing in similar circumstances. Again, this participation was not reported in *BDN*, indicating that even when taking part as a group, this was not an activity that formed part of the communal sporting life of the wider deaf club membership. Both instances involved making a decision on what was the greater motivation for playing the game – the social rewards or the sporting rewards. For those deaf golfers who had limited communication with hearing people, it appears (as with other sports) that it was not possible to reap both types of benefit fully. The lack of social rewards may have deterred many deaf golfers from taking up

²⁰ Harrison, personal communication with author

the game, when they could not do so in the company of those who could provide the social life which is an important part of sports participation.

There were a number of sports that were particularly associated with the north west in the post-war period, such as greyhound racing, pigeon racing and Rugby League. However, there is no evidence in the years surveyed to indicate any organised deaf club involvement in these activities, either as participants or observers. Rugby League as a participant sport would no doubt be subject to the same pressures as football in terms of available players, finance, facilities and equipment. Research has shown that as the officiating of football matches relies heavily on sound, this can cause problems for deaf players.²¹ In both codes of rugby, the referee communicates his instructions to players by word of mouth, which is vital to the smooth flowing of the game. Therefore, finding alternative ways of controlling the game to accommodate deaf players may have been a disincentive to encouraging deaf players to become involved. Even after the introduction of a formalised system of signalling decisions in recent years, rugby has remained a rarity in deaf sport. Without suitably qualified coaches able to communicate the technical details and rules of the game to players who could not hear, the lack of participation in the game by deaf people is perhaps not surprising.

The lack of any organised deaf group involvement in greyhound racing or pigeon racing seems to fit into a broader trend of non-participation in certain sporting events. There is no evidence to indicate that deaf club members made organised group trips to mainstream sporting events as spectators. For example, there were

²¹ The historical and cultural place of football in the deaf community is examined in Atherton et al *Deaf United*. This includes a discussion of the adaptations made in the officiating of matches involving deaf players.

a number of greyhound tracks in the region during the post-war years, but there were no reports of any visits being made to greyhound meetings. Racecourses in the area of research include Cartmel and Carlisle in Cumbria, Haydock Park near Wigan and Aintree in Liverpool. There are also several more within easy travelling distance, such as those in Chester and Uttoxeter. Only one report relating to a visit to a race meeting was found, when Blackpool Deaf Club members made a trip to Chester Races in 1990.²² Not even the Grand National meetings in Liverpool seemed to have been sufficiently attractive to warrant a deaf club outing during the years of this research. One factor which may have mitigated against deaf people attending any type of race meeting was the importance of gambling in these events. As Richard Holt has shown, betting on the results of races (whether legally or illegally) was a central part of the attraction of these sporting activities.²³ The influence of religious groups in all aspects of deaf life, particularly that of the Missioner based in the deaf clubs and societies, may well have been a major reason why these sports are missing from the record of deaf club organised activities. This is not to say that deaf people did not attend race meetings of all types on an individual basis, or indeed wager on the outcome of races, but if they did, they were careful not to advertise the fact.

Perhaps somewhat surprisingly, there were no reports of trips to professional football matches, despite the popularity amongst deaf club members of football as a participant sport. There was a high number of football clubs in the area, with as many as twenty north-west clubs playing in the Football League at various times during the research period, as well as a myriad of semi-professional clubs at lower levels. Attendance at cricket matches was another activity for which

²² *BDN* 1990 September, p. 18

²³ Holt *Sport and the British*, pp. 179-194

there is no evidence of organised deaf participation, despite the post-war popularity of both county and Test cricket (both of which were held at the Old Trafford ground in Manchester) and the particular attraction of league cricket in north-west towns. Lancashire County Cricket Club also regularly played matches in Liverpool, Blackpool, Lytham and Southport. Therefore deaf people were not short of opportunities to attend cricket matches, but there is no evidence that they were doing so in large numbers. The broad heading of 'trips' constituted by far the most popular post-war deaf club group leisure activity, and these included many which were based around a range of sporting contests. However, it would appear that attendance at mainstream sporting outings was not something that deaf club members did as an organised club activity.

There are several possible conclusions to be drawn from this lack of reports: firstly, deaf people attended such events as individuals or in small groups, but not as part of an organised deaf club event; or secondly, organised trips did take place but were not thought worthy of reporting. These activities were adequately provided for throughout the north west, and so anyone from the local deaf community with an interest in these pursuits could find ample opportunities to take part. They could easily go along to a football or cricket match, or visit a race course or greyhound track, without the need to plan the event in advance. A third alternative of course is that deaf people simply were not interested in these activities and so chose not to attend, which would at least explain the almost total lack of evidence to suggest that they did. The comparative lack of cricket matches involving deaf teams may at least partly explain the apparent lack of trips to Old Trafford. However, the same lack of participation as a reason for not watching professional matches does not apply to football. Whatever the true reason, the

lack of evidence in itself raises some interesting questions about the nature of deaf people choosing certain sports to participate in and not others.

The individual sports enjoyed by deaf club members

A brief analysis of the individual sports engaged in by deaf club members will now be given, based on reports in *British Deaf News*. Snooker and billiards and in later years, pool were categorised together for the purposes of this research, and collectively these constituted the most popular activity in four of the eleven years investigated, including the last three years covered by this research. The 168 reports of this activity represent 25% of all reported sport activity by deaf club members during the post-war period. Many deaf billiards players played in the Orme League, and snooker was also very popular in deaf clubs; both games were mainstays of the Indoor Games League.²⁴ Many deaf clubs were also active in their local leagues, playing against hearing teams, with several examples of deaf club teams gaining success. A member of Oldham Deaf Club reached the final of the local billiards competition in 1965, whilst nearby Manchester Deaf Club won both the snooker and the billiards leagues they entered in 1970, in which they competed against hearing teams.²⁵ Anecdotal evidence also suggests that several of the better deaf players were invited to play alongside hearing players in teams based in local pubs and clubs.²⁶ Deaf players sometimes tested their skills against touring professionals, as when John Parrott took part in a charity event in Lancaster Deaf Club in 1985.²⁷ Parrott's fellow professional Willie Thorne

²⁴ Examples of deaf clubs playing matches in the Orme League can be found in *BDT*, 1945, p.119; *BDN*, 1955, p. 156; 1960, p. 59

²⁵ *BDN* 1965, p. 296; 1970, p. 268

²⁶ Hodson interview

²⁷ *BDN* 1985, December p. 18

gave a demonstration of trick shots and played against members of Kendal Deaf Club's snooker team in 1995.²⁸

The apparently sedate sport of snooker could also be the cause of some tension between deaf and hearing people. A report in *British Deaf News* in 1975 included a complaint from Warrington Deaf Club that the snooker team had been fined 50p by the local hearing league they played in for the late arrival of results. The deaf club's claim that the results had been posted in time but took four days to travel two miles failed to impress the league's committee. A much more serious complaint followed, when the club reported that they were being repeatedly fined for non-attendance at meetings of the league. The club felt they were being unfairly treated, as they were unable to arrange or afford an interpreter. Apologies for their absence were sent, together with an explanation of the situation, but still the fines were levied. The lack of deaf awareness from the league's officials and the inflexibility in the application of the competition's rules was felt to be of sufficient importance to be passed on to other deaf people around the country through the pages of *BDN*.²⁹ This instance shows that many of the frustrations faced by deaf people on a daily basis, often due to a lack of awareness or understanding on the part of hearing people, could also affect them in their leisure time.

Bowls was the major summer sport for deaf club members, and again many clubs were active and successful both in local hearing leagues and in exclusively deaf competitions. Bowls also occasionally afforded deaf people the opportunity to succeed in the sporting world in non-competitive ways, and these successes were

²⁸ *BDN* 1995, July p. 23

²⁹ *BDN* 1975, p. 128. Deaf football clubs reported similar experiences with ruling bodies not making allowances for the particular needs of deaf footballers. See Atherton et al *Deaf United*, pp. 88-89

celebrated with as much pride as any sporting achievement. When a Manchester deaf man was elected President of the Lancashire Bowling League in 1960, this was a source of pride for all connected with his deaf club. The news was reported as a major achievement not only for the deaf individual concerned, but also for the wider deaf community. Manchester Deaf Club's claim to be the only deaf team in the English Bowling Association was a similar cause for pride and celebration, and was also reported as a significant achievement.³⁰ Such successes served as an antidote to the less positive aspects of involvement with hearing sport illustrated by the experience of the Warrington deaf bowls team.

There are two schools of bowls, the flat green version which is found throughout Britain, and the crown green form of the sport, which is largely restricted to north-west of England, Yorkshire, the Midlands and parts of Wales. Both forms of the game were found in the north west, with flat green popular around Manchester, whilst crown green was favoured in other areas. In the *BDN* reports, there was no indication whether deaf bowlers were playing flat or crown green. The probability is that both were played, depending on local favouritism and practice. For example, it would be hard for deaf bowlers in Blackburn or Preston to take part in flat green bowling, as until very recently there were no flat greens in either town. Therefore it must be assumed that deaf people played crown green bowls in these regions. On the other hand, the flat green version of the game has predominated in south Lancashire, Manchester, Merseyside and Cheshire - that is those areas where the majority of deaf bowling was taking place. Therefore, it does not require a great leap of the imagination to conclude that deaf club members in these regions were almost certainly playing flat green bowls.

³⁰ *BDN* 1960, p. 64

Football was the most popular outdoor sport for deaf club members in winter; indeed, it was the only outdoor winter sport that the majority of deaf clubs took part in. There is ample evidence of deaf teams playing against both deaf and hearing opponents, whether in local leagues or in competitions exclusively for deaf teams. The Lancashire Deaf Football League was in existence in 1945, and Burnley, Preston, Rochdale and Bolton were all members of the league in that year.³¹ In subsequent years, the North West Deaf Sports Council ran a football competition for the clubs in the area, and teams also entered the national cup competition organised by the British Deaf Sports Council. Virtually all deaf teams also took part in their local hearing leagues, as well as five a side competitions. Deaf leagues only featured a few teams, meaning fewer fixtures, and the standard could be quite variable.³² By playing in a local league, deaf teams could guarantee a greater number of matches, and find an appropriate level at which to play. Hearing football was also perceived to be of a higher standard, and so could take precedence over involvement in deaf sport, as shown by the actions of Blackburn Deaf Club in 1960. Rather than join the winter deaf sports league, Blackburn's younger members chose instead to enter a team in one of the town's football leagues.³³ The sporting attractions of regular football against hearing opponents was obviously greater than the social and sporting attractions of darts, snooker and the like against deaf opponents.

Even though football was the most popular sport for many deaf sportsmen, there is evidence of fluctuations in the fortunes, and indeed the existence, of deaf

³¹ *BDT* 1945, p.38

³² For a fuller history of deaf football, see Atherton et al, *Deaf United* and Paull, A. 'The establishment of the English Deaf Football Council, 1983' *Deaf History Journal* 6, 1 (2001) pp. 14-15

³³ *BDN* 1960, p. 85

football teams. Preston Deaf Club provides a typical example of the way in which participation could wax and wane even in sports as popular as football. Preston Deaf Football Club were winners of the national deaf football cup competition in 1975 and had two players in the England deaf team.³⁴ However, five years later, there was no evidence of any football team at the club, and football only reappeared in reports from Preston in 1985. According to the *BDN* report, the team was not doing too well but 'as it is the first time for a long time we have had a football team, they seem to be pointing in the right direction'.³⁵ Such optimism was short-lived, as no football was reported in Preston in 1990, and only five-a-side football was evident in 1995.³⁶ Footballers from Preston were to be found in the Bolton team in 1995, as there was no deaf team operating in Preston.³⁷ It was only in the cities and larger towns, with their greater population of potential players to draw on, that any consistency in the existence of deaf football teams was found.

Darts and dominoes were both the subject of regular reports in *BDN*, and both were standard components, alongside snooker and billiards, of the various indoor sports leagues in which many north-west deaf clubs competed in the post-war period. There were matches and competitions for both men and women and once again deaf players and teams joined local leagues to play with and against hearing opponents. These events were hosted in local pubs and clubs, as well as in deaf clubs, indicating the way in which various sports could serve as a means of integrating deaf and hearing competitors in shared competition.

³⁴ *BDN* 1975, pp. 28, 53, 90, 126

³⁵ *BDN* 1985, February, p. 15

³⁶ *BDN* 1995, April p. 25

³⁷ *BDN* 1995, June p. 26

Cricket was the only outdoor summer sport other than bowls that deaf sportsmen were regularly involved in. In terms of the number of reports found, cricket was less popular than dominoes, and there is very little evidence of much involvement at club level, although there were annual inter-regional matches featuring north-west players. For example, there were regular Lancashire versus Yorkshire 'Roses' matches throughout the 1950s and 1960s, with Lancashire County Cricket Club's Old Trafford ground being the venue on more than one occasion. The report of the 1960 match begins, 'Once again, the Lancashire County Cricket Club has very kindly permitted the use of the County Ground ...' indicating earlier occasions when the ground had been used for this fixture.³⁸ There is some evidence of a north-west deaf cricket league in existence in 1985, which may have involved as many as seven deaf clubs or as few as four. These figures are based on playing records for the season which indicate clubs played six matches each. The confusion over the number of clubs taking part arises because it is not clear whether return home and away fixtures were played, or if opponents played each other just once.³⁹

Perhaps one disincentive for deaf participation in cricket at club level was the cost of equipment, and as with certain other sports, the level of technical skill and coaching required to play at a decent standard may have also dissuaded deaf people from taking up the game. Winning may not have been the sole motivation for engaging in sport, but losing on a regular basis would not add to the enjoyment of participation. Cricket formed part of the sporting life of the deaf schools in the area and beyond, but how much this involvement was due to compulsion rather than choice might be open to debate. Certainly participation in

³⁸ *BDT* 1945, p.96; 1960, P. 63.

³⁹ *BDN* 1985: July, p. 18; September p. 18

cricket did not continue to any great extent when deaf people graduated into the deaf clubs. As with all deaf sport, the lack of numbers to form teams was undoubtedly a major factor, as was the cost of having to travel to find opponents if there were none available locally. There were also no reports found of deaf cricketers playing for hearing teams, although this may well have happened.

Other deaf club sporting and competitive activity

Chess was very popular from well before the Second World War, with gambits and discussions of matches featuring in each issue of *British Deaf Times* in the pre-war years. This interest continued after the war, with the north west particularly blessed with chess players. It is also the only sporting or competitive activity to be reported in 1950, when the entire England team for the match against Scotland was drawn from the north west.⁴⁰ There was a north-west league active in 1950 featuring teams from eight deaf clubs.⁴¹ However, in terms of reports in *BDN*, the game suffered a rapid post-war decline after having been the second most popular activity in 1955. From fourteen reports in that year, there were only nine reports in all the subsequent years combined. Nevertheless, the game did not die out completely, with *British Deaf News* running a correspondence league for many years after 1950, which included members from north-west deaf clubs.⁴² Two Liverpool Deaf Club members travelled to play in the World Deaf Chess Championships in Germany in 1955, whilst the English Deaf Championships attracted 40 players to Preston in 1975.⁴³ As with so many other deaf sporting events, even a chess tournament could be the basis for organising a social gathering, with 240 people attended the celebratory dinner which followed the

⁴⁰ *BDT* 1950, pp. 14, 33

⁴¹ *BDT* 1950 p. 34

⁴² *BDT* 1950, p.14; 1960, P. 36 are just two examples

⁴³ *BDN* 1955, p. 58; 1975, p. 28

1975 championship. The number of people involved in these later events also suggests that whilst the number of reports may have decreased, there were still significant numbers engaging in chess matches between deaf people.⁴⁴

Athletics featured during the summer months at regional and national levels, but there is no evidence of inter-club meetings. Given the small number of potential competitors in each club, the costs of specialist equipment and the need for a suitable venue, the staging of formal athletics events may have been feasible at club level. There is some evidence of local events taking place in other parts of Britain, such as the annual walking race in Hull reported in 1955, but these were not large scale athletics meetings. Although there were no reports of similar events from the north west, it is possible that such one-off races did feature in the sporting calendar.⁴⁵ There were regular meetings at county and regional level, however; examples of meetings at various levels were found in most years from 1955 to 1985.⁴⁶ Athletes from north-west deaf clubs were amongst those who attended the trials to select the team for the 1965 World Games of the Deaf.⁴⁷

Badminton was certainly a feature of the sporting life of deaf people in other parts of the country, as shown by the existence of both cup and league competitions in London in 1945.⁴⁸ However, as was mentioned earlier, badminton does not appear to have been especially strong in the north west, with only ten reports from the entire research period. However, the lack of reports may well hide the

⁴⁴ For more information on the importance of chess in the social life of the deaf community, see Boyce, A. 'History of the I.C.S.C.' *Deaf History Journal* Supplement V (2002) pp. 19-22 and Gardner, P. 'British deaf chess history' *Deaf History Journal* Supplement III (2002) pp. 7-10

⁴⁵ *BDN* 1955, pp. 106-107

⁴⁶ *BDN* 1955, pp. 112-113; *BDN* 1960, p. 56

⁴⁷ *BDN* 1965, Spring p. 256; Autumn p. 26

⁴⁸ *BDT* 1945, pp. 58, 115

true extent of participation, as reports in 1985 refer to a north-west badminton knock-out competition.⁴⁹ This suggests that there were enough individual deaf people involved in the sport at that time to make a local knock-out competition a viable proposition.

Swimming was another sport which was not a regular feature in the reports from north-west deaf clubs. The majority of reports appeared during the 1980s, with little before this period. Both Manchester and Southport Deaf Clubs boasted medal winners at the National Championships of 1980, whilst the National Championships were held in Wigan in 1985.⁵⁰ *BDN* reported in the same year that the North West Championships were being held for the first time since 1957, and it was also noted that all the officials at the event would be deaf for the first time.⁵¹ Once again, sport provided deaf people with an opportunity to travel, when members from several north-west deaf clubs were included in the Great Britain team which travelled to the European Deaf Swimming Championships in Antibes.⁵² Water sport was also the source of local and national deaf pride when the selection of an 18 year old member of Lancaster Deaf Club for the England Youth Water Polo team was reported in 1980. The pride was due to his being the only deaf member of the team, but the reporter also chose to conclude the report with the following comment: 'well done, Steven, that's another achievement against the hearing world ...'.⁵³ This seems a somewhat inappropriate comment in a report which otherwise expressed pride at the young man's achievement in being selected on his ability, rather than being excluded because of his deafness.

⁴⁹ *BDN* 1985 March, p. 13

⁵⁰ *BDN* 1980, p. 339 ; 1985, May pp. 18-19

⁵¹ *BDN* 1985 May, p. 20

⁵² *BDN* 1985 March, pp. 19-20

⁵³ *BDN* 1980, p. 349

Perhaps this illustrates the underlying tension felt by many profoundly deaf people when they find themselves in direct competition with hearing people, even when that competition was for places on the same team.

The narrow range of deaf sport in north-west England

It must be accepted that the extent of sporting activity as reported in *BDN* was almost certainly incomplete, but nevertheless it has been possible to gain some overview of the extent of deaf sporting participation. From this, it is possible to draw some broad conclusions concerning the involvement of deaf people in various sports, with and against both deaf and hearing opponents. The above analysis of sport, as reported in the pages of *British Deaf News*, has shown that sport played a major role in the broader social and leisure activities of deaf club members during the post-war period. The evidence has shown that there were significant numbers of deaf people enjoying a range of sporting activities across the north west throughout the years between 1945 and 1995. In this, deaf people showed themselves to be no different to the rest of the north-west population. Just as in the hearing world, there were some regional variations in terms of the sports engaged in and some sports were more popular than others in certain years, but the overall picture is of a group of people who were regularly brought together for and by their enjoyment of sporting contests. Deaf people not only played against each other, but they also engaged – as groups and as individuals – with hearing people as team-mates and opponents. However, despite the levels of activity, the range of deaf sporting activity was somewhat narrow. Only eleven distinct sports were reported with any degree of regularity throughout the fifty years covered by the research. Others may have featured very occasionally, but the evidence indicates that the eleven sports included in this analysis represent the main sporting pastimes of deaf club members. Many sports which were

enjoyed and actively pursued by other social and community groups across the north west, such as Rugby League or angling, do not appear to have featured in the organised sporting activity of the deaf clubs. If they were, then this participation was not reported in *BDN*. Sports which were popular with deaf people in other parts of the country, such as squash and golf, are similarly absent from the sports reported by north-west deaf clubs.

Wilson argues that social class can be an important factor in involvement in sport generally and more specifically the types of sports a particular group or class chooses to pursue. The more working-class a social group, the more restricted the types of sports they will be involved in.⁵⁴ Wilson refers to those sports followed by the working class as 'prole' sports, which can include such sports as football, snooker, bowls and darts. Whilst prole sports were indeed the most popular amongst north-west deaf club members, this does not necessarily mean that all deaf people or all deaf sport in the area was restricted to those most often associated with the working class. Sports not traditionally associated with the working class such as table tennis and netball were occasionally reported in the north west. Deaf people were also quite possibly playing these and other non-prole games as individuals, as was shown in the section on golf, although their participation was not recorded in *BDN*. There is also a counter argument that sporting activities traditionally attractive to the working class in the north west, such as watching professional football and Rugby League, angling, and racing greyhounds and pigeons were not a feature of deaf sport. In other parts of the country, middle-class pursuits such as golf and squash were popular amongst deaf club members. Why deaf people in the north west were so outwardly

⁵⁴ Wilson, T.C. 'The paradox of social class and sports involvement: the roles of cultural and economic capital' *International Review for the Sociology of Sport* 37, 1 (2002) pp. 5-16

conservative in their sporting enjoyment is not readily apparent, but the range of sports may have been influenced by other factors than merely social class. These might include available facilities, sports first encountered amongst contemporaries in the deaf schools, local tradition, and of course financial restrictions. There is certainly no definitive evidence which conclusively links the range of deaf sports to issues of social class. As with the possible class structure of the deaf clubs, it is not possible to reach any conclusions on this aspect of deaf sport with any degree of certainty.

Indoor sports were a regular feature of the activities of other social clubs, so perhaps it should not be surprising that deaf clubs took part in the same sort of activities. They were cheap, relatively easy to organise and opponents were easily found. There is also the advantage that indoor sports are not subject to the vagaries of the weather that can lead to the postponement of outdoors events. Despite the wider range of sports potentially accessible to deaf people, certain factors meant that the scope of organised deaf-centred sport remained restricted. For example, changes in education policy from the 1980s onwards meant that the majority of deaf children were placed in mainstream schools, often having to travel long distances to attend. The provision of shared transport often militated against deaf pupils being involved in any extra-curricular activities, and so access to sport was restricted. The time element of such travel, coupled with a lack of school friends within the local population, were additional factors which reduced opportunities and motivations for deaf pupils to become involved in sporting activity. Pupils could also be withdrawn from sport lessons for additional academic lessons, such as improving reading and writing skills. Without an early introduction to various sports, especially outdoor sports, many deaf pupils were lost to sport in later life, or were limited by their lack of skills development. For

those pupils who were able to take part in school sports, they were still restricted to those sports which formed part of the school curriculum. As was mentioned earlier, communication with suitable coaches was also an important factor, as without effective communication, deaf sportsmen and women lacked access to the means to improve or even learn the basics of certain more technically demanding sports. Although deaf sportsmen and women acted as both role models and coaches to younger or less experienced players, they could only do so in sports they themselves had had access to. Deaf sport was certainly less common in the summer than in the autumn and winter months. The shortage of summer sport might suggest a drop in the amount of attendant socialisation, but this was counterbalanced by the number of trips and visits deaf club members made at this time of year. The number of these trips may even have been a contributory factor, as the already comparatively small pool of potential sportsmen and women was further depleted by members choosing to go off on the wide range of holidays and outings outlined in the previous chapter. In this respect, deaf sport can be seen to have been just one part of a much bigger social calendar of events that deaf club members could choose from.

Integration, segregation and notions of disability in deaf sport

In the last quarter of the twentieth century particularly, sport was the subject of proactive government initiatives and policies to encourage integration and interaction, and these factors may have had an effect on sports participation by deaf people. As has been shown, deaf people have always shown themselves willing to join in shared activities with the hearing majority through a variety of sporting contests. The evidence offered here and in the previous chapter has shown that in terms of activity organised by and through the deaf club, members have been more likely to share sporting contests with hearing people than other

leisure activities. This involvement has taken many forms, whether it be through membership of deaf teams, as deaf individuals competing with and against hearing opponents, or as members of teams consisting mostly of hearing players in what might be termed 'hearing sport'. Various sports promotion initiatives have also actively encouraged the greater integration of various minority community groups into the wider community. With the existing network of deaf sporting competitions, and the history of informal integration with hearing sport, these initiatives might not have been needed by deaf sportsmen and women, as they already had access to an abundance of sporting opportunities. However, despite this access, deaf sport still fell into a period of decline from the 1990s, suggesting that other factors were responsible.

It is interesting to note that the range of organised deaf sport in the north west did not noticeably expand from the 1970s onwards, when there was a concerted effort to involve a greater number of people in a wider range of sporting activities.⁵⁵ Government sponsored programmes such as *Sport for all* do not seem to have made any significant impact on organised deaf sport in terms of what deaf club members actually took part in. Opportunities for involvement increased for all levels of society from the 1970s onwards, through increased leisure time and the provision of easily accessible facilities such as leisure centres. Improved access to a range of minority participation or elitist sports meant that deaf people also had access to a number of sports for the first time. Squash was one example of a sport which experienced a huge growth in popularity amongst the general population during the 1970s and 1980s, once access was made easier for a greater number of people. Such increased opportunities meant deaf sportsmen

⁵⁵ See Wilson, J. 'Leisure in the welfare state' in Critcher, C., Brahman, P. and Tomlinson, A. (eds.) *Sociology of leisure* (London, E & FN Spon, 1995), pp. 216-221; Whannel, G. 'Sport and the state' in Critcher et al, *Sociology of leisure*, pp. 222-228

and women were able to broaden their sporting scope on an individual basis, and were no longer as reliant on sport organised solely for deaf competitors.

Integration in hearing sport had always been a factor in deaf people's involvement in sport, but now they had access to some sports simply through being able to find sufficient opponents of a suitable standard, through leagues and competitions organised by local leisure centres.

The evidence of the extent of deaf sporting activity most certainly challenges perception of deaf people as being disabled. Historically, anyone regarded as being either physically or mentally disabled was thought to be unable to take part fully or 'properly' in either society or by extension sport.⁵⁶ It is only in recent years that sport amongst disabled groups has been actively promoted for sporting reasons alone. Aitchison shows how the provision of access to sport for disabled people can act as a mechanism for social exclusion, rather than promoting inclusion or integration.⁵⁷ The majority of efforts to involve disabled people as participants in sport have been based on providing discrete access. This has normally resulted in segregated participation, rather than in promoting access with or alongside 'able bodied' sportsmen and women. The motivation of those providing access to sports is seemingly based on medical perceptions of disability. There is no apparent acknowledgement of sport as a form of cultural expression for disabled people, despite even segregated sport giving those who take part a sense of shared identity.⁵⁸ This attitude should not be surprising, as it is merely an extension of broader assumptions relating to impairment or 'abnormality'.

⁵⁶ De Pauw, K.P. and Gavron, S. J. *Disability and sport* (Champaign Illinois, Human Kinetics, 1995), p. 9

⁵⁷ Aitchison, C. 'From leisure and disability to disability leisure: developing data, definitions and discourses' *Disability and Society* 18, 7 (2003) pp. 955-969

⁵⁸ Ibid

Fullagar and Owler describe how it is the disability which is seen first, and the person second (if at all).⁵⁹ This has led to disabled people being excluded from mainstream involvement in leisure and sport through the perpetuation of stereotypes of ability in both disabled and able bodied groups.

As a minority (or marginalized) group, individuals with disabilities have limitations placed upon their participation in society. As sport is an integral part of society, similar sanctions and limitations have been imposed for inclusion within the sporting world.⁶⁰

De Pauw and Gavron outline some of the barriers faced by disabled sportsmen, which include a lack of organised sporting events, a lack of role models and psychological and sociological factors.⁶¹ Whilst the economic barrier they identify may have applied to deaf people wishing to become involved in sports, this is not an issue that is unique to deaf or indeed disabled people; many people from all sections of society have faced financial barriers to participation in sport. The evidence contained in the historical record of deaf sport clearly indicates that none of the other factors faced by disabled people, which also include access to appropriate facilities, have stopped deaf sportsmen and women from regularly taking part in a variety of sports. Whilst deaf club members in north-west England were largely confined to participation in eleven different sports, deaf people in other areas were involved in various other sports. This illustrates that there is in fact no physical restriction to deaf people taking part in any sport. Older deaf sportsmen and women served as role models and informal coaches, and the only

⁵⁹ Fullagar, S. and Owler, K. 'Narratives of leisure: recreating the self' *Disability and Society* 13, 3 (1998) pp. 441-450

⁶⁰ De Pauw and Gavron *Disability and sport*, p. 8

⁶¹ *Ibid*, p. 11

issues of accessibility related to minor alterations in the way in which certain sports were controlled and decisions notified. The fact that other issues, such as the provision of adequate coaching which met the communication needs of deaf people, were not widely addressed possibly says more about the attitudes of the sporting bodies than it does about the abilities and potential of deaf sportsmen and women.

Deaf sportsmen and women regularly took part in mainstream sport alongside hearing people, as well as in their own discrete events.⁶² The mere presence of deaf sportsmen and women competing alongside their hearing counterparts thus challenges conceptions of both their sporting abilities and wider issues relating to deafness as a disability. This is an often neglected but important aspect of deaf sport. When De Pauw and Gavron assert that 'socialization into sport, let alone socialization via sport, is often not a part of the socialization of youth with disabilities', this does not equate with the experiences of those people who were members of the deaf community.⁶³ Sport played an important part in their socialisation into a community of people with similar life experiences, backgrounds and expectations. In this respect, deaf sport provided access to a social life that was not generally available to disabled people. When deaf sportsmen and women took part in segregated deaf-only events, this was generally as a matter of choice, sometimes based on social as much as sporting considerations, and was not because of any lack of ability based purely on their being deaf. The sporting history of the deaf community thus acts as an effective rebuttal of claims that deafness should be seen as a disability.

⁶² See for example Atherton, M. 'Kicking down the barriers: deaf players in professional football' *Deaf History Journal* 2, 4 (1999) pp. 21-27; Dimmock, A. 'Sport and deaf people' in Taylor and Bishop *Being deaf*, pp. 192-195. This topic is also expanded on in chapter seven.

⁶³ De Pauw and Gavron *Disability and sport* p. 10

Sport has played a central role in bringing deaf people together, and as a result has helped to both construct and maintain the deaf community and act as a medium for its cultural expression. Sporting events were regularly used as a vehicle (often indeed as an excuse) for socialising between deaf clubs. Club A would invite Club B to take part in some sporting contest, to which many non-sporting members would also come along. The sport itself was not necessarily the attraction, but it provided an opportunity for social contact with other deaf people and thus served as yet another means by which the social cohesion of the deaf community was promoted and maintained. Such events brought deaf people together not just locally, but also on a number of ever-wider geographical levels, up to and including international exchanges. The diary of social and cultural events attached to the World Games of the Deaf for example remains almost as extensive as the sporting programme, and this is by no means an unusual occurrence whenever deaf people come together for competitive reasons. Social events were a part and parcel of virtually every sporting event in the deaf community, emphasising the close relationship between sport and wider leisure activities.

Deaf sportsmen and women found identification with the wider deaf community through their involvement alongside or in opposition with those of a similar background and life experiences. This shared identity came even when in competition with deaf opponents in segregated 'deaf only' events. This identity was based on the perception of difference which comes from competition with 'outsiders' – that is those who are not in one's own team. A variety of identities could be derived from taking part in deaf sport, whether these identities were related to deafness, geography, sporting achievement, or based on levels of skill and ability. These came from competitions with and against other deaf sportsmen

and women in a range of locations (local, regional, national, international) and sports, as well as with and against hearing opponents.

What the analyses of deaf leisure and sport contained in these two chapters reveal about the nature of the deaf community in practice, and how this equates to the theoretical models of community membership outlined in chapter three, will be the subject of the concluding discussion in this thesis.

Chapter Nine

Leisure in the deaf community: more than just a way of passing the time

This research has illustrated the role and importance of leisure and sport in helping to maintain a shared sense of community amongst a distinct group of people across north-west England. These activities also helped to locate that community within broader national and international contexts, by providing and building on links with others of similar backgrounds and life experiences. The fact that these people were deaf or that they happened to live in north-west England is largely immaterial in determining the validity of this research as an investigation into a group of people who identify themselves as members of a community. This research has demonstrated originality in the way it has reclaimed the history of a largely unknown and ignored section of Britain's population, bringing together as it does information that has never previously been collated in any degree of detail. This in itself is sufficient to meet the criterion of contributing to existing knowledge; this topic has never been addressed in this fashion before and so the findings constitute new knowledge. The broader implications of this research are evident in the way existing theoretical models have been applied to an identifiable social and cultural group and the conclusions drawn can be located within the region as a whole. Whilst focussing on deaf people, this research has not looked at deaf people in isolation. Instead, deaf leisure has been used as a case study for investigating issues relating to changing patterns of leisure participation across the north west, the purpose of leisure in maintaining and developing community ties, and the similarities between community groups in their motivations for choosing and enjoying certain types of activity. As has been shown, deaf people do not 'do' leisure any differently than their hearing counterparts, and they have been as

subject to fashions and trends as any other group of people. Therefore, the theories and analyses included in this thesis could be applied just as effectively to any other section of society, and this research can act as a template for reconstructing the leisure histories of other minority groups within the wider population. Admittedly, finding as extensive a source for data collection on other community groups may not be as easily resolved, as this research has been able to cover a large geographical area over a period of half a century. As well as being an innovative source of data for this type of research, the use of newspapers as a primary source has been a crucial element in this historical recreation. The way in which *British Deaf News* gathered its content meant that the information found there came directly from those being investigated. This provided insights into not only the activities of this group of people but also the social, cultural and communal motivations and rewards involved in these choices. This allowed existing theories relating to the structure and formation of the deaf community to be reassessed and indeed challenged, by providing direct evidence of communal activity to compare with these theoretical models. It was never the intention to prove these models wrong, and nor has this research done so. What this research has achieved is to show that the underlying premise of these models was basically sound, in that the social lives of deaf people were essential factors in the formation of the deaf community. However, these models lacked any historical context and failed to provide concrete examples of the types and extent of this central element in the formation and cohesion of the deaf community. This research has revealed the previously unknown constituent details of this leisure activity and demonstrated the breadth and regularity of deaf social life. In addition, this evidence has shown that in issues of community membership and cultural expression, the true situation has been less clearly delineated than the models might suggest. This illustrates that notions of community cohesion and

identity are complex and such communal activities need careful investigation before attempting to reach any definitive conclusions on these issues. This research has contributed to this process of reassessment by providing a quantitative and qualitative analysis of the deaf community's communal leisure and sporting activities. This in itself is an important addition to the history of the region's leisure and sport, as well as filling a major gap in our understanding of the region's deaf inhabitants.

This research set out to address a number of research questions, and responses to each have been found. These questions were:

1. What sporting and leisure activities did deaf people engage in during the post-war period?
2. Were there specific activities that deaf people preferred over others?
3. How important have leisure and sport been in the wider social and cultural life of deaf people in Britain?
4. What role has involvement in leisure and sport activities played in the formation and maintenance of a distinct deaf community in Britain?
5. Has the deaf community shown any marked differences to other social or community groups in its use of leisure and sport?

In answering these questions, the social lives of deaf club members have been revealed in detail for the first time. This evidence provides specific quantitative data which illustrates and supports the validity of the longstanding arguments put forward concerning the centrality of deaf clubs in the development and maintenance of the British deaf community. Whilst virtually all commentators on the deaf community in both Britain and other countries have agreed that deaf clubs were vitally important in promoting and sustaining the cohesion of the

community, no direct evidence of how this cohesion was achieved in terms of the shared leisure activities has previously been presented.¹ In addition, a number of issues have been identified which reveal insights into the lives of deaf people that extend beyond those related solely to their engagement in leisure and sport. The analysis of leisure and sport in the previous chapters has shown that the social activities of deaf club members in post-war Britain were extensive and varied, and these played an important part in maintaining the sense of shared identity that many deaf people held with each other. On a quantitative level, what deaf people chose to do in their free time, with whom, where and how often have all been analysed and these will be briefly revisited here. Beyond revealing details of the social lives of a community that has been largely unrecognised by the general population, what additional insights does such a close examination of the history of these leisure activities reveal about deaf people and the deaf community? Several conclusions have been drawn from this analysis and these provide evidence with which to challenge some of the negative perceptions of deaf people that have been dominant throughout history. What the future might hold for the deaf clubs and the historical importance of the clubs within the deaf community will comprise the concluding discussion of this chapter.

Firstly, it is clear that deaf club members had a busy and varied social life, and in this they were no different to similar social and voluntary groups in the hearing world. If anything, members of certain deaf clubs appear to have enjoyed a level of communal activity that was not matched by their hearing counterparts, although the lack of similar evidence from other types of social clubs means it is not possible to prove this categorically. Nevertheless, there were significant

¹ These studies include Baker-Shenk and Padden *American Sign Language*; Kyle and Woll *Sign language*; Padden and Humphries *Deaf in America*; Sutton-Spence and Woll *The linguistics of British Sign Language*

numbers of social activities taking place under the auspices of the deaf clubs for their members to take part in. The breadth of activities found in the historical records provided by *British Deaf News* shows that there were no physical reasons why deaf people should not be involved in virtually any leisure activity. When no evidence of particular activities can be found, this does not necessarily indicate an inability to participate; instead, it shows that deaf club members merely chose to take part in certain activities rather than others. This exercise of choice was influenced by factors such as local preferences and historical involvement in certain leisure pursuits, both amongst deaf people themselves and by the wider population of north-west England. In addition, some regular activities (such as the playing of bingo in almost all deaf clubs) were not reported in the club news pages of *BDN* simply because they were so commonplace and therefore presumably not especially noteworthy. Trends were also identified between different regions as well as variations across time. In these activities, deaf people were as subject to the vagaries, fashions and trends of leisure as any other community or social group. Various activities which became popular in the wider world were not closed to deaf people simply because of their deafness; an obvious example is the growth in overseas holidays from the 1960s onwards. Conversely, there is nothing evident in the historical record that is overtly or uniquely 'deaf' in terms of what deaf people chose to do together, although the number of trips members made to other deaf clubs seems significantly greater than might be the case for other types of social club. No matter what the purpose of a trip out, a visit to the local deaf club was almost a prerequisite element of the event. By joining a deaf club, members were able to pursue a range of leisure activities that suited their interests in the company of like-minded others, rather than having to rely solely on the activities of the hearing world with whom communication was not always shared. From this, they could draw companionship

and a variety of psychological benefits that were often absent from their daily lives, due in no small part to the communication difficulties that were an intrinsic part of daily life for deaf people. However, although deaf people mostly engaged in the social aspects of leisure with other deaf people, deaf social life was not exclusively 'deaf only'. Numerous examples have been given of deaf people either actively engaging in social and sporting activities with hearing people, or attending the same events as each other. This indicates that a commonality of interests could be – and often was – shared by both deaf and hearing people. The importance of these shared interests and activities is an important consideration when the issue of whether deafness should be seen as a disability is discussed later in this chapter. From the 1980s, the data presented earlier shows that the number of activities organised by deaf clubs decreased, as the deaf clubs themselves went into decline. Whether these declines were symbiotic is not definitively proved by the data, but it seems highly likely that the decline of both the clubs and their organised activities were mutually motivated. In simple terms, deaf clubs lost their appeal for certain elements of the deaf population. As was discussed in chapter three, the reasons for this decline were closely linked to the changing social habits of younger deaf people, as well as changes in the way deaf children were educated. As the influx of new members dried up, so the demographic profile of deaf clubs progressively became older, membership numbers shrank and the historical record shows that as a consequence the number of activities organised by the clubs decreased. Deaf clubs increasingly came to be both the perceived and the actual refuge of older deaf people, and participation in deaf club based sport in particular suffered as a result. This decline was similar to that experienced by a variety of social clubs across the north west, illustrating once again the way in which leisure trends in the deaf community broadly mirrored those of the wider population.

The question of whether there were specific activities that deaf people preferred over others was posed and the popularity of various activities as illustrated in chapters seven and eight provided a detailed answer. In general terms, there was nothing particularly unique in the leisure activities of deaf people in north-west England. The activities identified in chapters seven and eight were those which one might expect to find being enjoyed by other social groups in the region in the post-war period. The most popular activities such as organised trips and group holidays might also be found amongst other groups, but what appears distinctive about the involvement of deaf club members in these activities is the number and frequency of such events. Nor was there any type of activity noticeably missing from the list of pursuits deaf people took part in, which one might expect to find being enjoyed by members of similar types of social clubs and groups. The one aspect of leisure in which deaf people were somewhat more conservative in their choices was in their communal sporting activities. These were largely restricted to those one would expect to find in working-class communities, such as football, cricket, bowls and snooker. Even after a range of sports became more generally accessible from the 1970s onwards, deaf people did not appear to become involved in these as representatives of their deaf clubs as they had with other sports. Although this analysis has focussed specifically on north-west England, many of the conclusions drawn can be applied more broadly. Examples of the specific leisure activities identified in the north west could also be found being enjoyed by deaf people in other parts of the country. Where there were noticeable differences between the north west and other parts of Britain, these were mostly in the sports that were pursued. For example, golf, squash and tennis featured rarely in the reports from the north west but were more regularly to be found in the sporting life of deaf people in other areas. On the other hand,

some sports rarely – if ever – featured in deaf sport anywhere in Britain; examples include both codes of rugby, gymnastics and hockey. When instances were found, they showed that these sports were more often pursued by individuals rather than as an organised deaf club activity. This conformity of leisure helps to emphasise that a lack of hearing would not necessarily produce a radically different world view in all aspects of life. The overall picture produced by the evidence is of an active community whose members regularly joined together to share their leisure time in a wide range of activities and interests. This communal activity continued until the last quarter of the twentieth century, after which the traditional forms of deaf leisure activity declined (but did not disappear completely) in favour of more fragmented socialising. In this, the deaf community showed itself to be no different than other sections of society.

Beyond the basic factual history of deaf leisure provided by the quantitative analysis, a number of qualitative issues arise which warrant closer discussion, as they help to emphasise the importance of leisure and sport in the wider social and cultural life of deaf people in Britain. The data collected for this research provides a unique insight into deaf life and gives rise to a reappraisal of certain aspects of the deaf community. First amongst these is a confirmation that the term 'deaf club' represents more than the physical premises within which the deaf club was housed. As Wise points out, 'home' is not necessarily just a place, but it is also possible to associate feelings of home with being in the presence of what he terms 'significant others'.² It was not until the late twentieth century that deaf clubs lost their position as the *de facto* homes of the deaf community. The sheer volume of activities that members took part in prior to this supports the argument that the network of deaf clubs acted as surrogate homes for their members, and

² Wise 'Home: territory and identity'

as such constituted more than just a place where deaf people met. Bale's claim that attachment can not only be felt to a physical place but also to the concept of community engendered by that place can also be seen to have applied to deaf clubs.³ Many of the activities took place away from the building in which the deaf club was based but were just as much a part of 'going to the deaf club' as those events which were held within the club itself. So the idea of 'the deaf club' was as closely associated with the people and events that the term represented as it was to a geographical space. In this, the existence of deaf clubs was vital to the development and maintenance of the notion of a deaf community, as they represented communion with others who shared similar experiences, outlooks and values. Where that communion was found was less important than having contact to the body of people who comprised the deaf club. For deaf club members, 'significant others' encompassed not only fellow members but also members of other deaf clubs, with whom they shared and expressed their communal culture and identity. For deaf people, the deaf clubs provided access to a community which extended well beyond the confines of the deaf club and which encompassed many more people than merely the local deaf population. In this way, the deaf community was promoted and maintained as a positive aspect of deaf people's lives, and through the community's shared activities deaf culture was preserved and passed on to new members of the community.⁴ Padden and others have claimed that it was only by conforming to the community's cultural norms that membership of the deaf community could be achieved.⁵ This research has shown what these culture norms comprised and how they were expressed in

³ Bale, *Sport, space and the city*

⁴ Padden 'The deaf community and the culture of deaf people'

⁵ Instances of the various models for determining membership of the deaf community were discussed in detail in chapter three and include Baker-Shenk and Cokely *American Sign Language*; Higgins *Outsiders*; Lawson 'The role of sign'; Padden and Humphries *Deaf in America*

the context of shared leisure activities. Put simply, deaf people chose to do certain things together; in doing so, these became part of their shared culture as deaf people. The scale of communal deaf leisure uncovered by this research demonstrates the importance of leisure in the wider social and cultural life of deaf people not only in north-west England but across Britain.

Somewhat perversely, the success of deaf clubs in bringing deaf people together may have been a primary contributor to their ultimate decline. There is because there is an important relationship to be seen between the degree of autonomy that the organisation of deaf clubs offered to deaf people and Bourdieu's concept of social and cultural capital.⁶ Through the clubs' activities, the cultural elements of deaf social life were accessed and expressed, and these activities provided members with an important means by which to accrue social and cultural capital. Deaf clubs were the main means by which these types of capital were acquired by deaf people, as they were often the only places in which anything approaching a 'normal' social life could be found. By providing both social and cultural capital, the cultural aspects of deaf life eventually became more overtly important as the deaf community as a whole became more politicised. Deaf culture moved from being the way deaf people behaved naturally to something which was more explicitly treasured and celebrated.⁷ Evidence to support Bourdieu's argument that capital could also be accessed through activities that are specifically political can be found in the actions of deaf club members. The activities of deaf club members were largely self-determined, increasingly so during the post-war period. Deaf people ran the deaf clubs on a day to day basis and it was the members who largely determined the calendar of social events. Deaf clubs

⁶ Peillon 'Bourdieu's field'

⁷ For examples of the importance placed on deaf culture within the deaf community, see Brien 'Is there a deaf culture?'; Erting and Johnson *The Deaf Way*; Ladd *Understanding deaf culture*

provided deaf people with opportunities to become politicised, through the exercise of choice in determining their communal social lives. Members formed and joined various committees, which were charged with taking responsibility for organising and financing a number of appropriate events and activities on behalf of the membership. For many deaf people, the exercise of such control over their own lives would have been a novel experience, having been subjected to an educational and welfare system which viewed them as being in need of care and which controlled and ordered many aspects of their daily lives. The clubs also played an important role in supporting the work of the deaf organisations, especially the British Deaf Association (BDA). Almost every club was effectively a local BDA branch, providing officials for the organisation, and offering a route by which politically active but geographically dispersed deaf people could join together. The actions of the BDA through their involvement in deaf clubs provided political capital for those members who took part in overtly political activities such as acting as Branch Secretary and voting in BDA elections. From the 1970s onwards, the growth in political activism amongst deaf people of all ages, but especially younger deaf people, gave rise to demands for equality in all aspects of their lives.⁸ As Rose and Kiger state, 'when a minority group begins to re-evaluate its status, members also re-evaluate their notions of what the group deserves'.⁹ Within the deaf community, one consequence of this re-evaluation was a broadening of both the scope and expectations of their leisure activities and forms of cultural expression. One of the ways in which this movement towards equality manifested itself was in a greater involvement in what might be termed 'hearing' events. Deaf clubs declined as a consequence of younger deaf people finding new forms of acquiring social capital which did not include membership of the local

⁸ The early history of the resurgence in deaf political activism in Britain is given in Lee *Deaf liberation*

⁹ Rose and Kiger 'Intergroup relations', p. 524

deaf club. An example of this process would be the provision of subtitled versions of popular films in local cinemas. This change came about partly as a result of representations to cinema chains by younger deaf people for accessible versions of major box office films. When trial showings were held, these proved so popular that virtually all the larger chains started to offer either special showings of subtitled mainstream films or even simultaneous screenings in most large towns and cities.¹⁰ It is important to note that this decision by the cinema companies was no doubt as much driven by commercial considerations as it was by altruism, but nevertheless the effect on deaf culture and leisure has been significant. Regular attendance at mainstream cinemas became a viable leisure option for deaf people for the first time since the demise of silent films and provided just one example of the alternative attractions which have drawn deaf people away from the deaf clubs. The slow demise of the deaf clubs was not helped by changes in other aspects of deaf life which had the biggest impacts on younger deaf people, as they became more integrated into mainstream society. The natural progression route from the deaf schools into the clubs was lost as deaf children were taught in schools alongside hearing pupils, rather than being educated discretely. The schools themselves served as a means of entry into the culture of deaf people and the larger deaf community. After schooldays were over, the deaf clubs allowed access to the community to be maintained, as well as accessed for the first time for others. With educational integration came a greater exposure to mainstream culture, whilst an increased awareness of the options available for spending leisure time coincided with another of the entry routes into the deaf community disappearing. The replacement of the Missioner, based in the deaf clubs and an active propagandist for the benefits of membership amongst

¹⁰ Page 642 of the BBC's Ceefax service provides a weekly list of subtitled films in mainstream cinemas, as does *SignMatters*, the successor to *British Deaf News*

young deaf people, by a more detached Social Worker for Deaf People meant that this traditional entry route to both the deaf clubs and subsequently the deaf community was also lost. Emerging technology such as textphones, subtitles and later email and the internet meant deaf people could keep in touch with each other on more than face to face terms. Subsequently the need to visit the deaf club in order to keep up to date with the latest news and gossip declined. The combination of all three factors meant that the decline in deaf club membership was virtually inevitable unless some other means of advertising the clubs and drawing younger people into the clubs was introduced. The evidence that this did not happen and of the consequent decline of the deaf clubs is found in the diminishing levels of activity amongst virtually all deaf clubs across the north west, as was shown in chapters seven and eight.

Puttnam's argument that the erosion of social networks results in a loss of shared social capital has been shown to be true of deaf clubs, in some respects at least.¹¹ As has been seen, the deaf club gradually became less influential as a means of acquiring shared social capital, especially for younger deaf people. The consequence was a decline in shared leisure activity centred on the deaf clubs, which no longer involved members from all sections of the deaf community. However, the deaf community did not completely disintegrate in the ways Puttnam describes, but instead became more fragmented. Although the deaf community sub-divided along the lines of class, age and political involvement, and deaf clubs became less important for some members, deaf people did not stop socialising with each other. Communal activity with other deaf people continued to be an important factor in community cohesion in a broader sense, but some of the activities changed (especially those of a non-sporting nature) and

¹¹ Puttnam *Bowling alone*

the primary venue of this social life moved away from its traditional home of the deaf club. By the mid-1990s, young deaf people were increasingly more likely to be found in pubs and nightclubs than their local deaf club. The clubs became instead the reserve of older deaf people, for whom mainstream leisure venues had never held the same attraction as the deaf club. This change, whilst it may be lamented by older deaf people, might not necessarily be of long term damage to the deaf community. The historical record shows clearly that the deaf community underwent a period of change between 1945 and 1995, and personal experience indicates that the rate of change has accelerated since. It is clear that whilst the deaf community changed in terms of how its members came together socially, it most emphatically did not disappear. In many ways, the deaf community in 1995 was stronger than at any period in its history, as members became more confident in being identified as deaf people and expressing their demands for their rights as human beings. Employment and education opportunities were enhanced by changes in government policy and there was a growing awareness amongst the hearing majority that many deaf people rejected the long held negative perceptions of deafness and its effects. However, one consequence of the changes in the deaf community and the decline of the deaf clubs was that some aspects of deaf culture came under threat. Deaf people from all sections of the community no longer joined together in the same numbers or as often. For example, the numerous trips previously made by deaf club members almost completely disappeared, and deaf clubs no longer hosted other clubs as often as before. Although some of these traditional activities have been replaced by alternative forms of communal deaf leisure, there is often a distinct generation gap between those who take part and those who do not. For example, the annual Deaf Rally in Blackpool became increasingly an event that attracted only young deaf adults, rather than being the cross-community event it had been for most of

the post-war period.¹² Many traditional forms of communal activity, such as the Wakes week holidays and Whit walks, have disappeared amongst the general population, and leisure patterns have changed dramatically since the 1970s especially. So the fact that changes occurred in the leisure activities of deaf people between 1945 and 1995 should not be surprising, and nor should it be surprising that many traditional forms of entertainment were no longer as attractive to younger deaf people as they had been to previous generations. The changing nature of deaf leisure also shows once more that the deaf community responded to changing fashions in the majority hearing population and that deaf people's motivations for choosing certain leisure activities whilst rejecting others were no different from other social groups within society.

Several commentators have debated in recent years the possibility of the traditional deaf community evolving into a 'Deaf Nation' and the history of deaf people's leisure pursuits supports some of their arguments.¹³ The Deaf Nation concept sees the deaf community at local, national and international levels developing into an effective global political structure, from its existing basis of a community of people linked by shared life experiences and outlooks. As a result of the increasing politicisation of the deaf community during the post-war period, it is claimed that the community is taking on the trappings of a nation and has begun to evolve beyond being merely a community. The analysis of deaf leisure activities provides evidence that at least some of the factors Anderson identified as being central to the nation building process can be found within the deaf community. Anderson wrote '[the nation] is imagined as a community because ...

¹² For insights into changes into the way the Deaf Rally was perceived by deaf people, compare *BDN*, 1965, pp. 65, 72, 75 with *BDN* 1990, May p. 20

¹³ Alker 'The realities of nationhood'; Emery 'The deaf nation, five years on'; Ladd, P. 'Emboldening the deaf nation'; Lawson 'Do we want one or multiple deaf nations?'; Turner 'The deaf nation notion'

the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship'; the picture of the deaf community painted by the evidence of communal activity strongly suggests that 'the deaf community' could be substituted for 'the nation' in this quote and the sentiments would hold true.¹⁴ The philosophical concept of the deaf community has been as important to its members as its physical embodiment in the association known as 'the deaf club'. It is here that the argument that the deaf club constitutes 'home' and its members 'significant others' finds its most compelling evidence. Without the sense of identity and purpose that members of the deaf community have shared, the idea of a Deaf Nation could not have found support from the very heart of the community. Once the idea of a shared community was established, members of the community found a common identity. In some ways, it was almost inevitable that ideas of nationhood would eventually follow once the deaf community gained control over certain aspects of their lives and through this self-determination became more assertive in demanding their rights as equal members of society. It was through the political campaigning conducted by organisations such as the British Deaf Association and the National Union of the Deaf, through the pages of *British Deaf News* and in talks given in deaf clubs, that many deaf people first became politically active. The network of deaf clubs allowed these political campaigners to seek out and join with others with similar aims and to develop a national focus to their campaign. Anderson defines the nation as 'an imagined political community' which emerges from a number of smaller social groups or 'villages'.¹⁵ Through their place at the forefront of the deaf community's political campaigning, deaf clubs might be seen as the 'villages' from which the 'imagined political community' that is at the heart of the Deaf Nation principle emerged.

¹⁴ Anderson *Imagined communities* p. 16

¹⁵ *Ibid*, p. 15

Anderson contends that nationality arises when three cultural conceptions are no longer a central influence within a community:

- Privileged access to the community by knowledge of language
- The existence of a dominant external hierarchical system of control over society
- A decline of the importance of religious faith in daily life¹⁶

All three factors have been important considerations throughout the history of the deaf community in Britain. The issue of language is the hardest to resolve in the context of the Deaf Nation, but some relevance can be seen. Chapter three showed how deaf people had their preference for the visual/gestural mode of communication of sign language denied, with the teaching of spoken English being imposed on deaf people through the education system. Those who did not or could not learn to speak clearly and lipread well were regarded as failures and incapable of fulfilling useful roles in society.¹⁷ This argument was rejected in the deaf clubs. When deaf people were not subjected to outside pressures, their predominant and preferred form of communication was sign language and they enjoyed a full and rewarding social life as a result of having effective and meaningful communication with other people. It was only in the later years of the twentieth century that sign language began to be accepted as a true language and the most appropriate means by which many deaf people could communicate other people, whether deaf or hearing. The long process of accepting people as full members of society despite not having full or effective use of the language of that society had at least begun. Language also plays another important role in

¹⁶ Ibid, pp. 39-40

¹⁷ See Conrad 'Towards a definition of oral success'

developing ideas of an alternative nationhood, as knowledge of a community's language is an essential pre-requisite for anyone wishing to gain membership of what Anderson terms 'pre-nation' communities.¹⁸ As has been emphatically shown by those commentators cited in chapter three, both the use of - and respect for - sign language have been equally essential for those hoping to enter the deaf community. So rather than being excluded from the nation of the hearing majority by their lack of English language skills, sign language users came to find themselves having the means by which they could develop their own ideas of nationhood, from which those who could not sign were excluded. This is a natural extension of the debates outlined in chapter three regarding the place of hearing people in the deaf community. Whether hearing people who can sign will have a role to play in the Deaf Nation will no doubt be a contentious issue as the concept evolves.

The perceived control of deaf people's lives by hearing people has been the source of debate and argument within the deaf community throughout its existence, and the demands for deaf self-determination and human rights grew as the deaf community became more politicised from the 1970s.¹⁹ As was shown in previous chapters, much of this control was exercised through religious bodies, with church groups being the main providers of welfare and support for deaf people. Within the specific context of this research, the presence of an external hierarchy and the decline of religious influence in deaf life can both be seen. Anderson's 'dominant external hierarchy' was evident in the person of the Missioner who took control over many aspects of the lives of the deaf people in his care. In chapter three, the role of the Missioners and their background in

¹⁸ Anderson *Imagined communities*, p. 20

¹⁹ Numerous examples of deaf people regarding hearing people as oppressors are given throughout Lee *Deaf liberation*

religious orders was outlined. The Missioners themselves were not rejected by the deaf community (and it must be acknowledged that many older deaf people remember their Missioners with some affection), but their influence did extend to virtually every aspect of a deaf person's life. As such, they acted as the representatives of what many saw as the hearing world's oppression of deaf people and it was this that was rejected. As Anderson notes, many nation states emerged from a sense of religious or colonial oppression and this has been a constant theme in deaf activism.²⁰ It was only after the transfer of deaf welfare to Social Services departments that the influence of religious groups began to dissipate to any degree and this coincided with the steady decline in religious activities amongst deaf club members recorded in chapter seven. It is interesting to note that the change from Missioner to Social Worker for Deaf People took place in the 1970s, at a time when deaf political activism was becoming more widespread. The change did not come about as a direct result of pressure from deaf people, but it may have provided encouragement for those seeking to gain more control over their lives. That the influence of religious groups had not entirely disappeared by 1995 can be seen from the level of continuing, if somewhat reduced, involvement with religious activities presented in chapter seven. The churches were not rejected outright, but much of what they had historically represented in terms of exerting control over the lives of deaf people was.

Another factor in the development of nationhood highlighted by Anderson is the role of newspapers as cultural product.²¹ Despite the introduction of new technology which allows deaf people to communicate with each other more

²⁰ Anderson, *Imagined communities* p.19

²¹ *Ibid*, pp. 39-40

readily over distance, and the dissemination of information through television programmes aimed at deaf viewers, the deaf newspaper remained an important means of mass communication. In continuing to reflect the interests and perspectives of the deaf community, deaf newspapers have proven to be invaluable in underpinning the methodology employed in this thesis, by providing the primary source of data for this research. Members of the nation state do not have to meet in order to share a common bond of nationhood: '[a nation] is *imagined* because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow members, meet them or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their community'.²² In this way, the image of the deaf community was both reflected and engendered through the pages of *British Deaf News*. It was through reading the gossip and news reported in *BDN* that many deaf people kept in touch with those community members they did not know, had not met nor had they heard of. Not only did *BDN* allow readers to keep in touch with deaf people with whom they had no other means of communication, but in doing so, the newspaper served as an important cultural tie within the community. As the nature and culture of the deaf community changed, this was mirrored in both the content and the purpose of *BDN*. For example, when the National Union of the Deaf began to campaign more directly for the rights of sign language users from the mid-1980s, the main deaf organisations began to follow suit and many deaf people became more politically astute and active as a result. This is reflected noticeably in the pages of *British Deaf News*, which became much more an organ of dissemination for the political activities of the British Deaf Association from the 1970s onwards.

²² Ibid, p. 15

As the quote from Doug Alker given in chapter three illustrated, the idea of there being a single imagined deaf community has declined in recent years as community members have become more politicised, and this is reflected in the historical record of deaf leisure.²³ The Deaf Nation seems to be the logical consequence of the fragmenting of the deaf community illustrated by changes in members' leisure activities and this may well be the next stage in the development of what is presently regarded as 'the deaf community'. The imagined community of deaf people has been shown to be well established and has developed in a number of new directions; it has rejected (but not yet overthrown) a dominant external hierarchy based in part on religious teachings; and it has its own language in British Sign Language and its cultural products include *British Deaf News*. Although the continued existence of a community based on shared deafness is not disputed, this is no longer expressed in the same way through leisure activities that are shared by the whole community and centred largely in the deaf clubs. In chapter three, the emergence of the deaf community from informal gatherings of deaf people at places they attended to receive welfare was outlined. In these gatherings, deaf people built on the relationships and ideas of shared identity that had been formed at deaf schools. From these meetings, more structured social bodies emerged which eventually became the network of deaf clubs which are still in existence today. Without the deaf clubs in which to meet other deaf people and share leisure activities, the deaf community could not have developed and flourished. It was the success of deaf clubs in helping to maintain and enhance feelings of belonging to a community of deaf people that ultimately led to the diversification of that community, as younger deaf people become more empowered, confident and assertive. The paradox of this situation is that the acceptance of the idea of the

²³ Alker 'The realities of nationhood' p. 79

Deaf Nation grew during a period in which the traditional homes of the deaf community went into decline. Therefore, in many ways, deaf clubs were unwitting victims of their own success and their demise should be seen as an indication of the progress of deaf people rather than signalling the end of the deaf community. Since the second world war, the deaf community had changed from a community whose members regularly joined together for social reasons to one which is as closely aligned through mutual political aspirations as it is by shared social bonds. As with many other social groups within society, the social life of the deaf community is now more diverse and more fragmented than ever before. However, that communal social life has not disappeared; it has merely moved into other locations and involves alternative forms of social and cultural expression, in addition to the traditional homes and activities of the community.

Deaf leisure and sport - challenging notions of disability

As was shown in chapter six, communities form on the basis of 'sameness' and one of the ways in which this sameness is celebrated is through shared leisure. Sport on the other hand celebrates sameness within a group but emphasises difference from outsiders, as represented by opponents. An analysis of deaf leisure and sport therefore provides an opportunity to reassess who and what the 'deaf community' has been and how it has been constituted based on issues of sameness and difference evident in these activities. It is not intended to revisit here the theoretical models of community membership described in chapter three, but rather to use the history of deaf leisure to challenge the prevalent perception of deafness as a disability. In chapter three, the idea of deafness as a disability was shown to be one that has been rejected by the majority of the deaf

community, and the evidence of deaf leisure and sport supports this rejection.²⁴ There is nothing in the available evidence to suggest that deaf people's social lives differed significantly from those of hearing people in terms of what they chose to do. In many respects, it was the way in which deaf club members collectively shared their leisure time, rather than what they chose to take part in, that marked them out as being different from other voluntary associations. Deaf clubs did not provide the escape *from* normality that is a motivating factor in all leisure activity; instead, the clubs provided an escape *into* a world of normality that could not be found in the outside world. In their everyday lives, deaf people were defined on the basis of their exclusion from the 'normal' world, and treated accordingly. They lived in a world in which their deafness marked them out as 'different'. Deaf and hearing could not generally communicate easily with each other and deaf people suffered as a consequence, not least in the way they were perceived. As deaf people, they were seen by the majority of the hearing world as abnormal, deficient, handicapped or disabled and subjected to any number of similarly negative perceptions. Deaf people were seen to be worthy of pity or charity, rather than being accepted and acknowledged as a distinct social and cultural group. Instead, the hearing majority's efforts were concentrated on finding ways to cure their deafness and thus remove the cause of their difference.

The alleviation of difference brought on by disability is at the centre of general attitudes towards people who are seen as disabled. Oliver notes that 'disabled people continue to be portrayed as more or less than human, rarely as ordinary people doing ordinary things'.²⁵ In other words, disabled people are seen to be prevented from leading 'normal' or 'ordinary' lives by their disability. Oliver

²⁴ Examples of this rejection include Finkelstein 'We are not disabled'; Lane 'Do Deaf people have a disability?'; Corker 'Deaf and disabled'

²⁵ Oliver *The politics of disablement*, p. 61

further argues that the notion of disability is then perpetuated by the imposition on and towards disabled people of an attitude of dependency.²⁶ The general perception that arises from this view is that if disabled people are to lead as 'normal' a life as possible, they cannot do so without the help of the 'able-bodied' majority. As the evidence from deaf leisure has shown, neither of these perceptions of disability can be applied to deaf people, particularly in the context of their social lives. They were not dependent on 'able-bodied' others (in the context of deafness, this would mean hearing people) for this social life, beyond using sign language interpreters for some events. Whilst certain aspects of the deaf clubs were initially managed by the Missioners and later the Social Workers for Deaf People, such as strategic financial matters, the organisation of the day to day running of the deaf clubs and the choice of club activities was placed in the hands of the members. Towards the end of the research period, all aspects of deaf club management were increasingly being made with the involvement of deaf people working alongside hearing specialists (such as accountants), rather than being the sole preserve of hearing people delegated to the task.²⁷ As for being disabled through an inability to do ordinary things, the evidence of leisure activity shows that deaf people were perfectly capable of doing ordinary things. Not only did they choose the same types of leisure activities as their hearing neighbours, but also the way they engaged in these activities was essentially ordinary in that their participation was almost always exactly the same as that of hearing people. The only difference in the way deaf people took part in certain leisure activities was the language of interaction. When some leisure activities overtly required sound or hearing, alternative forms of participation were found and numerous examples of such adaptations were given in chapter seven. For

²⁶ Ibid, pp. 78-94

²⁷ Hodson interview

example, before the days of subtitled popular films shown in mainstream cinemas, Liverpool Deaf Club showed foreign films that had been imported with English subtitles.²⁸ Plays were translated into sign language, and on occasion narrators were provided for those hearing people who were denied access by an inability to sign.²⁹ In addition to these examples, a wide range of other events were made accessible following the introduction of sign language interpreters during the later years of the research period.³⁰ Once events were made accessible, deaf people once again demonstrated their 'ordinariness' by attending those events which appealed to them, rather than attending events just because they were accessible. Even before the availability of interpreters, deaf club members attended 'hearing' cultural events such as the theatre, cinema and even pop concerts.³¹ What is clear from the extensive evidence presented in earlier chapters is that there is no foundation for claiming that deaf people were physically incapable of taking part in ordinary leisure activities. As has been demonstrated, these activities were equally attractive to both deaf and hearing people, and were often attended by both. As such, although individual events may have been seen as special occasions, they nevertheless constituted an ordinary way of filling available leisure time. The evidence clearly shows that whilst deaf people might not have taken part in every type of activity that hearing people did, those they did enjoy were no different to those of their hearing counterparts. Therefore the argument that deaf people should be regarded as disabled because of an inability to take part in ordinary events is refuted by the evidence of their engagement in leisure activities.

²⁸ *BDN*, 1960, pp. 89-90

²⁹ An example of spoken narration being provided for a play performed in sign language was reported in *BDN*, 1960, p. 42

³⁰ See for example *BDN*, 1970, p. 155, 220; 1980, p. 349; 1990, pp. 20, 21

³¹ *BDN* 1965, p. 255

The analysis of deaf sport further contradicts the notion of deaf people being disabled. Aitchison contends that disabled people are excluded from mainstream leisure, and especially sport, to some degree, and the majority of such provision is discrete rather than being integrated with non-disabled participants.³² It is clear that this has not applied to deaf sportsmen and women, as they regularly and consistently took part in a variety of sports both alongside and in competition with 'able-bodied' (hearing) people. Deaf teams and individuals engaged in football, cricket, bowls, snooker and several other sports, as members of competitions and teams involving a majority of hearing players. In the case of football (the only sport in which deaf involvement has been extensively researched), some deaf players were of a sufficiently high standard to play professionally, although there have been fewer instances since the second world war than in earlier years.³³ It must be accepted that deaf sportsmen and women have been regarded as disabled by hearing opponents and even team-mates, but their ability to play alongside hearing players proves this perception to be wrong.³⁴ Deafness presents no physical barrier to taking part in any sport, as can be seen by the levels of involvement in the years since 1945. The only accommodation required as a result of participants being deaf is in the way a sport is controlled, with flags or lights being used instead of whistles or starting pistols for example. Deaf involvement in sport has been essentially no different to that of hearing participants, although some deaf people regard some team games to be of a higher standard when played by hearing people. It is claimed that because hearing competitors can call to each other without needing to look up,

³² Aitchison 'From leisure and disability to disability leisure'

³³ Atherton et al *Deaf United*

³⁴ Atherton, M., Russell, D. and Turner, G.H. 'More than a match: the role of football in Britain's deaf community' *Soccer and Society* 2, 3 (2001) pp. 22-43

for instance to see where to place a pass or to identify opponents and teammates, that the game is quicker and therefore of a better quality. This has acted as an incentive for deaf sportsmen and women to choose to play alongside and against hearing people.³⁵ Although the range of sports deaf people in post-war north-west Britain took part in was limited to a degree, this appears largely to be due to issues of choice and access rather than because a lack of physical capability. For example, there was little evidence from the region of deaf people playing golf or squash. However, deaf people in other parts of the country did take up these sports, indicating that deafness in itself was no barrier. They were not excluded from mainstream sport; indeed, without involvement in hearing sport, the opportunities available to deaf sportsmen and women would not have had as extensive or rewarding. Nor were they solely dependent on hearing people for their sporting opportunities. Deaf people worked alongside hearing people in administering, organising and coaching various sports, and teams based in deaf clubs were run by the members. No matter which sports deaf people chose to take part in, the fact that they did so alongside hearing competitors, rather than being confined to sport involving only other deaf people, indicates that in sporting as well as leisure terms, deaf people should not be regarded as disabled.

The final question posed by this research was 'Has the deaf community shown any marked differences to other social or community groups in its use of leisure and sport?'. This question has already been addressed to a large extent by the previous conclusions put forward in this chapter, and so a short answer which draws on these responses will be proposed here. Whether that answer is 'yes' or 'no' may depend on the role that leisure and sport are seen to play within society.

³⁵ Examples of this attitude expressed by deaf footballers are given in Atherton *et al*, *Deaf United* pp. 68-70

Deaf people are distinct from other people simply because they are deaf, and so for this reason 'other social groups' is taken largely to mean hearing people. Viewed as a means of filling free time, the deaf community has not used leisure or sport differently to hearing people, in either the choice of activity or the reasons for those choices being made. It has been shown conclusively that deaf people took part in activities that were no different from those engaged in by hearing people. The motivational factors for choosing certain activities and sports were the same for both deaf and hearing: sociability, emotional rewards, and group and self-identity. If this were not the case, deaf people would not have joined together to take part in as many events and activities as they did, nor in as much variety. The attraction of sport motivation identified by Holt in maintaining and strengthening existing social ties, as well as providing an opportunity for attracting others of a similar background into the social circle of the group or community, can equally be applied to the more general leisure pursuits of deaf people.³⁶ Deaf people took part in leisure activities for the enjoyment these activities brought; the fact that they themselves were deaf was mostly incidental in terms of what they chose to do. The one exception was in their choice of companions and team-mates. Deaf people chose to share so much of their leisure time in each others' company precisely because they were deaf. As happens in virtually every other leisure setting, people with shared goals and interests are drawn together to form social groups. In this respect, deaf people showed themselves to be no different to anyone else; they preferred the company of those with whom they shared interests and bonds. In doing so, the social ties between deaf people were maintained and extended, most notably in the number of trips made between deaf clubs. Where the deaf community's use of leisure might be considered to differ from that of other social groups was in the

³⁶ Holt *Sport and the British*, p. 347

extent to which communal leisure was regarded as a means of cultural expression. However, even as a means of cultural expression, deaf people's leisure activities did not differ from those of other community groups. Although the activities themselves may have differed according to the particular community involved, the reasons why these groups gather together are the same. All groups who identify themselves as different or separate join with each other to express, maintain and pass on their cultural heritage, and this is not something that is unique to deaf people. The reasons why members of a community come together to celebrate those elements of their shared culture, history and heritage remain constant no matter what the basis of the community.

When leisure and sport are considered as more than merely ways of passing the time, then the answer to the question of whether deaf people used leisure and sport differently can be answered with a 'yes'. This is due to the singular position of the deaf clubs in deaf people's lives. Deaf clubs were not just a place for deaf people to meet up with each other; in many respects, the clubs acted as a surrogate home for their deaf members. These members in turn provided an extended surrogate family for each other - Wise's 'significant others'. The extensive leisure activities of the deaf clubs were as much a response to large numbers of deaf people coming together as they were a motivation for people to join the clubs. As was discussed in chapter four, deaf people (especially those who are sign language users) spend the vast majority of their lives isolated from those around them. A lack of effective communication, often even within their own families, meant they had few opportunities to engage in the type of everyday interaction and socialising the hearing world takes for granted. For other social groups, whether based in working men's clubs, political associations, sports clubs, or in community groups based on ethnic origin, their members had access to

social lives away from or in addition to those found in their clubs. They could socialise informally with their families and relations, through work, or amongst friends and neighbours. Deaf people did not have access to the same network of readily available social intercourse that was a normal part of daily life for hearing people. It was only in the deaf clubs that any degree of normality could be found; communication was not a problem, they were not seen as disabled or in need of care as a result of being deaf, and they could share their time with people who had the same outlook and life experiences as themselves. The deaf clubs provided possibly the only place in a deaf person's life where he or she was not subjected to negative perceptions of deafness and deaf people. The attractiveness of the deaf clubs for deaf people can be seen from the number of events which were arranged through the clubs. If they had not been important and attractive to deaf people, the clubs would not have flourished as they so obviously did. The clubs also provided opportunities for their members to enjoy activities they might not otherwise have had access to. For instance, travelling independently to various places and events was perfectly possible for deaf people to arrange for themselves and there is some evidence of this happening throughout the research period.³⁷ However, without the company of others with whom to share the experience, then many of the social and emotional rewards of the event would be missing and therefore much of the motivation to take part was lost. In the examples found, all the reports suggest those taking such trips enjoyed the company of other deaf people or had pre-arranged meetings with other deaf people whilst away. There is very little evidence of deaf people making such trips without the company of at least one other deaf person, such as a spouse. In providing deaf people with access to a rewarding social life, the deaf clubs were no different to any other social club. By offering their members a sanctuary from

³⁷ Examples of deaf people travelling independently are given in chapter seven

the hearing world in which they did not fit easily, deaf clubs provided a service that was markedly different from that of other social groups. Many deaf people simply did not have any other access to the type of social normality that the deaf clubs provided. The clubs did not offer an alternative form of socialisation; they provided the only rewarding form of socialisation for many deaf people.

What future for deaf clubs?

The ways in which deaf people engage in shared leisure and sport as outlined in this thesis is now largely consigned to history. Younger deaf people now 'choose to be deaf' in a different way to that of their predecessors. They still socialise and take part in shared leisure activities, but they do so in ways which are radically and fundamentally different from earlier deaf generations. However, whilst what they do might have changed, why and how they do it remains largely unaltered. Jeff Hill describes voluntary association as being at the very heart of leisure activity in Britain:

Of all the sectors in which British sports and leisure pursuits are to be found it is the voluntary – the one created by people themselves as part of everyday life – that is the most extensive and deeply embedded, reaching into the very fabric of social life.³⁸

In the British deaf community, the main form of voluntary association from the mid-nineteenth century onwards was provided by the deaf clubs. However, both anecdotal evidence from deaf club members and the data acquired from the pages of *British Deaf News* indicate that deaf clubs have been in a state of decline for several years. Although it is not possible to give any definitive dates, trends

³⁸ Hill *Sport, Leisure and culture*, p.130

indicate a steady reduction in activity and membership since around the mid-1980s. The deaf club is still an important factor in the maintenance of the deaf community, but mostly for older deaf people. As has been demonstrated, younger deaf people are finding their own means of expressing their deaf identity and for them, deaf culture no longer automatically involves being a member of the local deaf club. A similar pattern of non-attendance seems to have followed the development of a deaf middle class. Although there is no real statistical evidence to support this conclusion, it is a widely held view within the deaf community that profoundly deaf people who would previously have become active deaf club members are shunning the clubs in favour of other pursuits more usually associated with their enhanced social status.

The importance of the deaf clubs in the historical development of the deaf community cannot be overstated. Voluntary association was in many respects the rationale for the existence of deaf clubs; without the deaf clubs, it is hard to imagine where or how else profoundly deaf adults would have had the opportunity to come together in a mutually satisfying social environment. Without this contact, many deaf people would have had little or no fulfilling social life, or been able to derive the benefits that result from regular socialisation with others of a similar background, life experience and communication needs. It may well be true that the gradual decline of the deaf clubs indicates that they are no longer relevant to the lives of younger deaf people, but without the deaf clubs, it is hard to see how the deaf community could have existed in any meaningful form. Without deaf clubs, many deaf people would have had no contact with other deaf people, no access to sign language or the deaf community, and no means of accessing the culture and history of that community. As such, deaf clubs were a fundamental factor in the development and continued existence of the deaf

community in Britain. Through their membership of deaf clubs, deaf people were able to fulfil the requirements of Hill's definition of leisure and 'reveal their authentic nature as autonomous human beings'.³⁹ In their shared leisure and sport activities, deaf people found a common purpose which then allowed them to become more empowered in other aspects of their lives. This analysis has also shown that when it came to enjoying themselves, deaf people were no different to any other section of society. In deciding which leisure activities they took part in and with whom, deaf club members found mutual satisfaction and a sense of community identity.

Deaf people had no choice concerning the physical aspects of their deafness; they were audiologicaly deaf. However, they were able to exercise choice in dealing with the consequences of this deafness. The vast majority of people who are audiologicaly deaf have historically chosen to try and combat their deafness by making use of hearing aids and other technological aids to be as near hearing as possible. Those deaf people who chose to be deaf did so by associating with others of a similar background, usually through becoming members of deaf clubs. They did not gather together on the basis of shared disability; instead for them choosing to be deaf was a positive step. Deaf clubs played a central role in providing their members with a sense of community and shared identity which was not easily found in other aspects of their lives. Within deaf clubs, profoundly deaf people were able to escape from the pressures and consequences of daily life. Members could exercise some degree of control over their lives by choosing what leisure activities they wanted to take part in, and with whom. In addition, deaf clubs served to facilitate developments beyond mere leisure; membership provided access to increased self-identity and self worth, the opportunity for

³⁹ Hill *Sport, Leisure and culture*, p.130

language acquisition and development, and routes into political activism. The results were access to a world in which social and cultural expression and fulfilment were available, and through which it was possible to gain a positive self-identity which counteracted the medical perspectives of deafness as a disability. Without this world of social activity provided by the deaf clubs, the lives of many profoundly deaf people would have been much poorer. For them, 'choosing to be deaf' would not have been an option.

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