A Study of the Rise and Decline of Selected Labour Halls in the Greater London Area 1918-1979

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Abstract

This thesis contributes to the existing knowledge and understanding of Greater London local labour movement history, by considering it from the perspective of the meeting spaces, the labour halls, which provided a focal point for a range of activities between 1918 and 1979. Evidence, drawn from fifteen selected labour halls, illuminates a diverse range of themes, including the role of political and industrial organisations; the provision of leisure and working class education; the representation of women and the nature of gender-specific organisation; the increasing non-political usage of the premises and the diverse range of associations which using the halls. Furthermore, financial necessity precipitated a certain degree of pragmatism in the management of the halls, as evidenced by the hiring of rooms to organisations such as the Communist Party of Great Britain and the frequent sale of alcohol on the premises. Comparative studies centred upon Cambridge, Sheffield and Newport, South Wales, established that there was no indication of a specific and unique "Greater London Labour Hall" identity. The reasons for the decline of the 15 halls were more complex and extensive than the existing literature on the post-war Labour Party implies. The lack of reform at Constituency Labour Party level, the cost of maintaining the premises, and the rise of alternative meeting venues contributed to the decline of the selected premises as political spaces.

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Introduction

This study is a qualitative and thematic analysis of the histories of 15 labour halls in the Greater London area between 1918 and 1979. The term 'labour hall' is, in this instance, broadly defined as a building, which has been purchased by one or more labour movement organisations to provide a meeting place for its members. In spite of extensive research, I have been unable to locate any kind of official, or even standard, definition of the term 'labour hall'. The lack of an official definition, even in a contemporary encyclopaedia of the labour movement, is perplexing. However, a search of a variety of publications such as *Kelly's Post Office Directory* and local newspapers has revealed that there was almost certainly at least one labour hall or institute in the majority of London boroughs.[1] It is possible, then, that as the premises were apparently regarded as such an integral part of the life of the local labour movements, it was unnecessary to provide a precise definition. In spite of this though, further clarification of the nature of a labour hall or institute is desirable. Many of the elements of one particular description of a 'labour club' may equally be applied to the selected halls:

> the establishment of a labour club-often in response to already existing Conservative or 'independent' workingmen's clubs-gave a Party the means by which it could hold events, fund activity, and attract members and potential members to the Labour fold.[2]

The main difference between the labour clubs and the halls in this study would have been the provision of alcohol on the premises. The *raison d'etre* of the labour clubs was to compete with similarly constituted Conservative establishments in the provision of inexpensive intoxicants. However, as will be seen, many of the founders of the halls were committed to the ideals of the temperance movement and the majority of the premises were not licensed to sell alcoholic beverages until financial necessity expedited such a move in the post-war decades. The construction of my own, broadly based, initial definition of a labour hall as being a building owned by a labour movement organisation, rather than strictly limiting this study to Labour Party properties, has permitted the inclusion of other buildings. These are two labour institutes, one of which was initially administered by the Social Democratic Federation,

and a trade union building. These 15 buildings were constructed or purchased between 1909 and 1936. The legal and practical position of the labour halls will be considered in detail during the course of the next chapter of this thesis.

It is pertinent at this stage, to briefly consider precisely why labour halls were needed. Primarily, they provided a permanent single meeting place, within each constituency, for labour movement organisations. The importance of the halls to their local labour movements was significant. Prior to the acquisition of a hall, it was often necessary for political organisations to attempt to hold their meetings in civic buildings and council-owned school halls. In some instances, a local authority could be hostile to left-wing politics and permission could be refused. A cursory glance through local newspapers in many of the areas covered by this study has revealed that prior to the inceptions of labour halls, trade union branches often met in public houses, which, as will be shown in the case of Croydon, was not deemed to be appropriate by temperance movement activists. The inception of a labour hall, local Labour Party members believed, could represent the 'stabilisation' of the local labour movement's position.[3] It certainly provided a focal point for activities, which would otherwise have been scattered across several different buildings in the constituency. More research would be necessary to compare, in detail, the fortunes of local labour movements which did not have their own premises, with those that did, to ascertain the extent of 'stabilisation' provided by the halls in specific areas. Ownership of a building was also regarded as a symbol of the presence of left-wing organisations in a community. In 1915, for example, a local councillor in the borough of Uxbridge felt that a 'Labour/Trade union hall would provide silent evidence of the strength of the Labour movement in Hayes'. [4] The quotation about labour clubs, cited above, also provides another reason for the purchase of the premises. Like labour clubs, halls used by left-wing organisations could also have been set up in direct competition with their Conservative counterparts.[5]

A substantial literature has been produced on the history of the national labour movement and more recently research has also been undertaken into local organisation.[6] However, even in the local studies, there are few

references to the venues for left-wing political activity; the labour halls and institutes.[7] In the absence of a specific literature on the history of the labour hall, the aim of this thesis is to address this omission, by examining the role of the premises in their local labour movements and communities.

The first chapter is a consideration of the general nature of a labour hall before assessing and tabulating the inceptions of the 15 halls in their demographic and political contexts. The following seven chapters, a substantial part of the thesis, examine the ways in which the evidence collected from the selected premises supports or contradicts contentions made in the existing literature on a range of themes in social and political history. There is inevitably some overlap. Co-operative organisations, for example, are generally considered to be industrial associations, which are examined in the third chapter of this thesis. However, the Co-operative Comrades Circles are also compared with the Labour Party's Leagues of Youth in the previous chapter. The Women's Co-operative Guild also falls naturally into the later analysis of the role of women in the selected premises.

Chapters two and three analyse the relationships between the labour halls and the industrial and political organisations which used the premises. In spite of the fragmentary nature of the surviving records, it is clear that the premises were used by a wide range of such organisations and these chapters also focus on the tensions in the relationships between the management committees and groups such as the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB). The national Labour Party proscribed the CPGB. However, the thesis will show how financial necessity, in part at least, precipitated a different, often more flexible, attitude towards local Communist Party branches by the hall management committees.

The fourth chapter assesses the role of leisure and fundraising in the life of the halls and how far the kind of activities adopted were determined by the provision of an alternative leisure culture and how far by a simple desire to raise funds and increase membership. Chapter five considers the four types of workers' education undertaken on the premises: the Socialist Sunday

School, political education, and the ways in which the labour hall evidence supports or contradicts the existing literature on structured learning provided by the Workers' Educational Association (WEA) and the Marxist based National Council of Labour Colleges (NCLC). These two organisations polarised the opinions of contemporary educational commentators, but this was not entirely reflected in the provision in the labour halls. The chapter also assesses less formal provision for the self taught person in the form of libraries and reading rooms.

The position of women in labour hall culture is the subject of the sixth chapter. This is addressed by an analysis of the representation of women on labour hall and Constituency Labour Party committees, followed by an assessment of the role of gender issues in women's organisations, which used the halls. This chapter examines the evidence in the context of contentions from the existing literature: women were unable to transcend gender stereotypes. Furthermore, their organisations devoted themselves to welfare related issues, rather than traditional political work, such as electioneering which was associated with men. The sixth chapter will argue that the labour hall evidence does substantiate and extend many of the claims in the literature.

The final thematic chapters, seven and eight, examine the extraordinary non-political usage of the premises and the politicisation of areas outside of the established political space.[8] Chapter seven illustrates the attempts that were made to place the labour hall at the centre of the local community, by using the premises as advice bureaux and, during the Second World War, in a variety of different ways. Chapter eight considers the activities, which were organised in the immediate vicinity of the halls and argues that the reasons for such activities were twofold. It was important for the local Labour Parties to evangelise their political message beyond the enclosed space of their own building and in any case, those halls were not large enough to hold mass meetings.

Although the focus of the thesis is on the 15 Greater London halls, chapter nine compares the London premises with three provincial labour halls:

Cambridge Central, Stow Hill in Newport, South Wales and Heeley in Sheffield. The comparison is further extended to cover other types of premises, including Conservative and Liberal clubs and Methodist and public halls. This chapter of the thesis attempts to establish how representative the Greater London labour hall experience actually was, by considering the evidence provided by these premises in the same thematic framework as the metropolitan labour halls. The selection of the premises was entirely governed by the availability of archives and relatively few these have been preserved. Although the political clubs would not have been the direct counterparts of the labour halls, their archives still provide useful evidence regarding the usage of political space. Similarly, the Methodist and public halls illustrate the ways in which public, social and religious spaces were employed. This comparison is further emphasised by two summary tables, which highlight the similarities and differences between the various premises

Chapter ten analyses in detail the extent to which the premises declined as political spaces after 1945. This is achieved by examining the labour hall evidence in the context of the literature on the difficulties experienced by the Labour Party in the post war decades, and decline of associational life as a result of the rise of television and other home-centred leisure activities. The negative impact of the establishment of alternative venues, such as community centres, on the selected labour halls, is also considered in this chapter.

The conclusion of the thesis brings together the most significant findings of the study and as a result of this, assesses the importance of the role of Greater London labour halls and indicates the ways in which a study, such as this one may be extended.

Methodologies and Sources

The nature of the research into institutional and organisational history has necessitated the use of an archive based methodology. The majority of the archives used have been those of Constituency Labour Parties and labour halls, situated in the local history centres of eight boroughs in the Greater

London area as well as one London wide repository. Other record offices and collections have provided additional evidence on different kinds of premises, which are used for comparative purposes. I have also been permitted access to private collections of papers and the archive of one labour hall, which is stored on the premises of that hall.

The archives of the 15 labour halls are not uniform. Most of the archives consist of minute books and other official documents of the Constituency Labour Parties or, in a minority of cases, the labour hall society itself. These include cash or account books, as well as other ephemera, such as meeting agendas, social tickets and, in one instance, a play script. Very few of the archives contain a complete run of minute books and as a result the evidence is, at best, fragmentary. It should also be noted that the use of a Constituency Labour Party archive, does not always result in the fullest account of all of the organisations, which used the premises. There would not have been any requirement for the local Parties to reflect upon the work of other groups, which shared the same premises, unless the Party was responsible for the letting of the hall. This was the case, for example, in Heston and Isleworth. It has not always been possible to consult original minute books and has therefore been necessary to use other kinds of source material, such as local newspapers, published histories and biographies of significant labour movement figures.

The oral history interview has been the other methodology used in this study. There were very few responses to appeals in local newspapers and letters to a wide range of political organisations. However, I was able to conduct formal interviews with two labour movement activists and have supplemented this with recordings for an earlier research project as well as informal discussions with several people, since the commencement of the research for the thesis. It has also been possible to quote from interviews undertaken by researchers involved in the Labour Oral History Project.

The combination of these two methodologies, with the emphasis on the use of archives has led to an almost exclusive focus on the history of various labour

movement organisations. There is no comparable mechanism for recording the activities of individuals, who were not members of these organisations, who may have used the labour halls. On occasion, such usage is hinted at in newspaper articles.[9] I have also not been able to locate relevant archives of the non-political organisations, which used the premises. It is clear that, without records of the usage by non-political groups and individuals, a significant part of labour hall history is still missing.

This introduction has attempted to define the 'labour hall' and describe the sources and methodologies, which have been employed. It has also highlighted the occasional difficulties in using an archive based methodology. The first chapter will consider the nature of a labour hall in more depth, before examining the inceptions of each of the selected premises in their local contexts.

Notes:

1 Apart from the halls which are studied in some depth during the course of this thesis, references to premises in the following boroughs were also located: West Ham, Kensington and Chelsea, Hammersmith and Fulham, Westminster, Hackney, Ealing, Kingston-upon-Thames, Harlington and Enfield. It would have been interesting to include some of these properties in the thesis. However, there is insufficient surviving evidence to make any kind of viable comparison.

2 Matthew Worley, 'Building The Party: Labour Party Activism in Five British Counties Between The Wars', *Labour History Review,* Vol. 70 (1) p. 87.

3 *Ilford Recorder,* 10 May 1929.

4 The Hayes People's History Website: http://ourhistory-hayes.blogspot.com/2006/04/hayes-labour-hall-1930-during-early.html Accessed, 15 June 2006.

5 It would have been interesting to compare of the two kinds of hall. However, I was unable to locate any specific archives of 'Conservative Halls' and there was not enough time to trawl through local Conservative Association records.

6 See for example Matthew Worley (ed.), *Labour's Grass Roots: Essays on the Activities of Local Labour Party Members 1918-1945* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005).

7 Extensive searching has only located one journal article which cites the term 'labour hall': Lawrence Black, '"Still at the Penny Farthing Stage in a Jet Propelled Era": Branch life in 1950s Socialism' *Labour History Review,* volume 65 (2), 2000. This article will be considered in some detail in the context of the apparent decline of labour halls in the post war decades.

8 It should be noted that there is virtually no extant historiography on these last two themes.

9 See, for example the references to unemployed usage of East Ham Labour Hall in chapter three of this thesis.

1. The Selected Labour Halls in the Greater London Area

This chapter is divided into two halves. The first part will briefly examine the context and nature of the labour hall. This will be achieved in two ways. Firstly, a consideration of the types of venues, which were the focal point of political or more generic working class activity prior to the establishment of designated 'labour hall' spaces. Secondly, the requisite legal and practical formalities in the administration of the premises will be outlined. The final section of the first half of this chapter will then define the labour hall space in terms of cultural geography.

The chapter will then briefly consider the governance of London, before assessing the inceptions of each of the Greater London halls in their local social and demographic contexts. The halls have been divided geographically into five areas: North West, East, South East, South and South West London. This part of the chapter will particularly note significant similarities and differences. Finally, at the end of the chapter, the inception and closure dates and significant details of each of the halls will be tabulated. This will highlight many of the elements raised in this chapter.

The Labour Hall

The labour halls in this study do not mark an entirely new innovation in the Greater London area. Some local radical organisations had owned their own proprieties since at least the late nineteenth century. In 1898 for example, Wimbledon Liberal and Radical Club purchased the freehold of the premises in which the members had been meeting since the inception of the club in 1889. The building allowed space for a reading room, a meeting hall, a bar and refreshment area and games room.[1] Provision for educational and recreational activities on behalf of and by the working class itself, which was one of the objectives of the labour halls in this study, had also been a feature of nineteenth century society. The mechanics institutes had been established in the early nineteenth century as a largely middle class initiative. It has been

argued that these were not well attended by those men which it intended to assist. Conversely, the Working Men's Club and Institute Union, founded in 1862 as another middle class initiative, was so popular with the working class, 'that by the 1880s, local clubs were being set up by the workers themselves'. The main differential between the two institutions was that the working men's Clubs made provision for recreational activity, which was not offered by the mechanics institutes. [2]

The Radical clubs were a significant force in late nineteenth century London politics. John Davis has noted that 'systematic' political activity in the clubs began in the mid-1870s in Chelsea. The members, who had promoted working class electoral registration, also involved themselves in the selection of prospective parliamentary candidates. Davis notes that club-based radicalism was particularly popular in the 1880s. He shows that the expansion of the number of clubs in London as well as a rise in the number of demonstrations, a form of 'populist' political activity promoted by the clubs, 'lent apparent plausibility to the clubs' repeated claim that their associational politics gave them a strength, which could not be attained by the party machines.' However commercial factors impacted upon the level of activism in the radical clubs:

> Traditional club politics fell victim to the commercialization of leisure. The tension between political and commercial ends was implicit in club life from the start, though it was only in the 1890s that it became clear that the balance had tilted irreversibly away from the politicians. Profits from entertainments and the bar proved more reliable than subscriptions and more capable of expansion.[3]

In many ways, as will be shown during the course of the thesis, this foreshadowed the difficulties experienced by the labour halls more than half a century later.

There are surviving references to political activity taking place in designated labour halls from the end of the nineteenth century. In 1891, for example, a meeting was held at a labour hall in Edinburgh to commemorate the twentieth anniversary of 'the Commune of Paris'.[4] However, the focus of this thesis is the Greater London area and the 15 labour halls, which form the kernel of this

study, are amongst the earliest such premises in this area, for which records survive.

The erection or purchase of labour halls was a feature of local labour movement activity during the inter-war years, in many areas of Great Britain. In June 1921 an East Ham labour movement newspaper noted that:

> All over the country, labour organisations in their respective localities, often helped by loans from the Banking Department of the Co-operative Wholesale Society, are purchasing property to provide themselves with meeting rooms and halls for their business and propaganda meetings.

The article promoted the newly opened East Ham Labour Hall, whose description could equally be applied to any of the other halls in this study and, indeed, nationwide: 'Here is a hive of activity – [such] activities not having for their object the advancement of the interests of the few, but existing for the social betterment of the people.'[5]

The acquisition of premises was a slow, complex process, which was initiated on more than one occasion in some areas. This was certainly the case in Heston and Isleworth. At the official opening of the labour hall, the Borough Labour Party noted that: 'Several proposals have received consideration in past years, but the difficulties to be overcome seemed insurmountable and the schemes have not developed.'

The activity undertaken to establish a labour hall was also outlined:

> Since February 1936, there has been months of preparatory work involving:
>
> (a) The negotiation for the freehold purchase of the property, surveying, alterations etc
>
> (b) Ways and means of raising the necessary capital for the purchase of the Premises
>
> (c) Appointment of trustees and general management.[6]

The necessity of formal procedures regarding the administration of these premises was often recognised. For example, in 1919, it was noted by the

Secretary of Ilford Hill Labour Hall that: "the Committee had realised that the letting of the Labour Hall will have to be conducted on a businesslike basis".[7] By 1928, the national Labour Party was also approached for advice by several of the Constituency and Divisional Labour Parties on the legalities of purchasing property for the provision of a meeting place. As a result of this, the Party drafted a "Suggested Trustee Deed", an indenture, which effectively clarified the legal position of the purchase of property by Constituency Labour Parties (CLPs).

This trust deed also defined the role of the trustees, as representatives of the CLP. Trustees were legally appointed by CLPs or Labour Hall Societies to act on behalf of that organisation in the purchase of the property which would ultimately become the labour hall. They were also empowered to approve decisions made by the general committee of the local Party regarding: the repair, decoration, mortgage, letting and demolition or sale of the premises as well as the 'application of moneys', which arose from the usage or sale of the labour halls. [8]

Although there is no existing evidence that any of the halls in this study made use of the 'suggested trustee deed', there is evidence to suggest that the trustees were still legally appointed by several of the local Labour Parties. In 1934, for example, the Executive Committee of the South Battersea Divisional Labour Party convened a special meeting to agree the following:

> We, the undersigned members of the South Battersea Divisional Labour Party, assembled at the Central Offices of the South Battersea Divisional Labour Party, 177 Lavender Hill, SW11, on Thursday the ninth day of February 1934 hereby appoint George Fineran William Davis and Ruxton Cuthbert Kiloh to be trustees for the South Battersea Divisional Labour Party situate at 177 Lavender Hill SW11 and authority is hereby vested in them to act for and on behalf of the South Battersea Labour Party to enter into a deed of mortgage in respect of the property known as 177 Lavender Hill, SW11.[9]

The 'suggested trustee deed' was not the only involvement by the national Labour Party in the acquisition of local labour movement premises. In 1953,

the Labour Party's Annual Conference voted to allow provision for the purchase of property and appointment of trustees.[10] This led to a second wave of labour hall acquisition in the 1950s and 1960s. Examples of these acquisitions include, New Hall, later Pavitt Hall, in Wembley and Ruskin Hall in Acton.[11] These halls were administered in the same manner as the earlier examples, which dominate this study. New Hall in Wembley, for example, which was opened in 1963, had a management committee, composed of the officers of Wembley South Labour Party. The management committee was ultimately accountable to four trustees, which included two local councillors and an alderman. It is unlikely that the development of New Hall was a direct response to the resolution passed by the national Party in 1953, as the land for the building had been purchased the previous year.[12] However, it could be argued that the Labour Party resolutions were a response to such purchases.

In 1960, the London Labour Party conducted a census of Labour Party properties. It had been directed to do this by the Party's National Executive Committee (NEC), which was 'concerned' about the ways that the halls and institutes were 'safeguarded'. It believed that a census would establish if any of the properties were 'lost' or had 'fallen into other hands'.[13] As this census was undertaken five years prior to the adoption of the 1965 Greater London boundaries, only two of the remaining halls in this study were included in the census: Battersea Labour Hall and Lansbury House, Peckham.

It is possible to define the space provided by the labour halls, by conceptualisations beyond the technical and legal. For example, in terms of cultural geography, the hall may be described as what Mike Crang has designated 'existential space'. This would be in the sense that with respect to political activity, it was 'a space full of social meaning' and was 'defined in relationship to some human experience or task'. It could also be argued that the establishment of labour halls was representative of the tradition in which 'people always sought to define themselves and defend themselves (not just physically but also psychologically) through control of territory by creating a bounded (and often exclusive) domain'. [14] Erica Carter, James Donald and Judith Squires have further asked:

> How then does space become place? By being named: as the flows of power and negotiations are rendered in the concrete form of architecture; and also, of course, by embodying the symbolic and imaginary investments of a population. Place is space for which meaning has been ascribed.[15]

In some sense, then labour halls could be regarded as both space and place, as both have been invested with meaning, by the people who used them.

There is also a sense that members of the various labour movement organisations perceived the space in terms of ownership. Local activist, Len Snow emphasised the fact that New Hall in Wembley was 'our hall' and this ideal would also have a primary motivation of the founders of the earlier halls which form the kernel of this study.[16] In the halls which were purchased by share-issuing societies, this was literally the case, with each member having purchased an official stake in the property. Membership arrangements usually defined that the labour halls were also exclusive spaces in the sense that the meeting space and facilities were often only available to members of the various labour movement organisations and it was necessary to show one's membership card before being permitted to enter. In 1953, at Barnes and Richmond Labour Club, for example, the management committee decided that 'all visitors must be signed in'.[17] However, as will be illustrated in some detail, extraordinary non-political usage and the holding of open, public meetings could lessen the exclusivity of the labour hall domain for at least part of the time.

Location of the selected labour halls: Greater London

The thesis utilises the post-1965 boundaries of 'Greater London', as shown in figure 1.1. Prior to 1965, 'Greater London', was divided between, London, Essex, Surrey and Kent County Councils and until re-organisation, the population of areas such as Croydon did not consider itself to be part of the metropolis.[18] The boundaries of Greater London, then, are the boroughs of Enfield in the north, Havering in the east, Croydon in the south and Hillingdon in the west. The utilisation of the post-1965 boundaries, for this thesis, was

Map of the London Boroughs

Figure 1.1

1 Hammersmith & Fulham
2 Kensington & Chelsea
3 City of Westminster
4 City of London

influenced by practical methodological considerations as the majority of the archival evidence is located in local borough archives.

Prior to 1965, the area regarded as 'London', consisted of the following 'Inner London' boroughs: Camden, Greenwich, Hackney, Hammersmith and Fulham, Islington, Kensington and Chelsea, Lambeth, Lewisham, Southwark, Tower Hamlets, Wandsworth and Westminster. It was governed by the London County Council (LCC), which had been established in 1889, as a result of the Local Government Act of the previous year. [19] The LCC was initially dominated by 'Progressive', politicians, who were loosely allied to the Liberal Party. By 1907, however, the 'Municipal Reformers', or largely Conservative representatives, controlled the council. The Labour Party, under Herbert Morrison, took power in 1934 and was able to hold it until the abolition of the LCC in 1965.[20] The LCC was replaced by the Greater London Council (GLC), which as has already been noted included 'Outer London' boroughs, such as Richmond upon Thames, Croydon and Barnet. Like its predecessor, the GLC was initially dominated by the Labour Party. However, in 1967, the Conservatives benefited from the unpopularity of the national Labour Government to take 82 out of the 100 GLC seats. Thereafter, control of the GLC moved back and forth between the Labour and Conservative Parties.[21]

Having considered the nature of 'Greater London', the remainder of this introduction will provide a historical and local context for the inceptions and development of the halls within their geographical areas: north-west, east, south-east and south-west London. In the absence of a substantial literature on local labour movement histories, the introduction will also draw on local generic social histories.

North West London

Three, or one fifth of the selected premises, are situated in North West London: Willesden, Wealdstone and Hendon Labour Halls.

Demographic and social context

The expansion of the rail network in the late nineteenth century transformed the social composition of a large proportion of the Greater London area. In Willesden, for example, which had been a rural parish in the eighteenth century, the development of workers' housing estates was precipitated by the routing of both over ground and underground train lines through the area. Similarly, the vicinity which became known as 'Wealdstone' was agricultural land until the advent of the railway. From 1837, urban development rapidly expanded from the focal point of Harrow station. Cyril Harrison, the secretary of Wealdstone Labour Hall, recalls that during the inter-war years, at least, Wealdstone was a predominantly working class area, unlike other local areas, which included Pinner.[22] Hendon and its environs also underwent radical demographic change. It has been noted that Hendon became 'the largest urban district in the country' as a result of the expansion of the railway into the locality in 1867 and the extension of the underground in the 1920s.[23]

The urbanisation of North London accelerated in the first four decades of the twentieth century. By 1933, Willesden was part of 'the greatest single concentration of manufacturing industry in Southern England' and this had precipitated the development of several new council housing estates. [24] Five years later, in 1938, Middlesex was an 'entirely' industrial and suburban county, with a total population of two million people. By the same year, the population of Hendon had more than doubled since the beginning of the century and the population of Harrow, in which Wealdstone was included, had increased by 275 percent.[25]

Political context

From the late nineteenth century onwards, a plethora of local branches of radical and socialist organisations were established in Willesden and its surrounding area. From the 1880s onwards, a branch of the Social Democratic Federation (SDF), two Radical Clubs and a progressive Club were all established in the vicinity. It has been noted that the Progressive Club was the 'seed bed' for several future Labour Party politicians.[26] There were also two local Co-operative Societies and a branch of the Women's Co-

operative Guild in the Willesden area. At the beginning of the twentieth century, very few local councillors adopted overt party affiliations. However, the first 'Labour' councillor was elected in 1904.

Willesden Trades and Labour Hall Ltd was registered as a friendly society in 1913, five years prior to the formal establishment of the East and West Willesden Constituency Labour Parties. However, the Society did not acquire its own premises until 1922, when it 'took over' Hamilton Hall, a former church hall. The building incorporated several rooms, including: a large hall on the ground floor, an upper hall, separate rooms for committee meetings and billiards, a caretaker's room and a scullery. Funds were raised by the sale of one-pound shares in the Society, which could be paid for in quarterly instalments of five shillings.[27]

Wealdstone Labour Hall Limited was incorporated on 29 August 1931 and three people attended its first meeting. It was ultimately controlled by nine trustees; two from each of the four local Labour Party wards and the chair of Wealdstone Women's Section.[28] In November 1931, the Company purchased land in Wealdstone, with the intention of erecting a hall. This objective was not realised, the land was resold and in 1934, Wealdstone Labour Hall Ltd purchased two cottages elsewhere in the area. There was enough land with this property to provide scope for the construction of a hall. In January 1935, when the cottages began to be used for political meetings of the local labour movement, the cost of the venture was estimated at more than £1,000 and this was raised, in part at least, by the sale of one shilling shares.[29] A further £2600 was required for the completion of a large hall on the site, the construction of which was commenced in June 1936. At the annual general meeting in January 1937, the importance of the venture to the local labour movement was noted: '[t]he premises are becoming more and more a centre for Labour and Trade Union activity and it is hoped with the completion of the hall to increase this until we are a landmark in the district.' [30] Wealdstone Labour Hall was finally officially opened on 20th March 1937 by the leader of the Labour Party, Clement Attlee MP.

In the early decades of the twentieth century, the social composition of much of Hendon and its environs was more overtly middle class than either Willesden or Wealdstone. After the Watling council housing estate had been built in Burnt Oak, in 1927, for example, there were protests in Mill Hill about the influx of working class families into the area.[31] It is probable in this context that Hendon Labour Party attracted very well paid artisans or middle class radicals. There is some evidence to support this. In 1927, Hendon Labour Party was required to relinquish its meeting space at the local co-operative hall and the Hendon Labour Hall Society was formed to purchase a permanent headquarters for the local labour movement. In the fundraising for the new premises, Hendon Labour Hall Society was uniquely able to benefit from a £400 loan, which a member of the Society raised on his house. To place this loan in context, rent for three rooms in a tenement on the new Watling Estate in 1928 was between 14 and 18 shillings per week. The remainder of the requisite £2,850 for the purchase of Hendon Labour Hall was raised by the sale of one pound shares in Hendon Labour Hall Society, a mortgage, whist drives, donations, socials and jumble sales. As has been noted, the sale of shares in a labour hall society was a common factor in fundraising for most, if not all halls in the Greater London area especially those, including the William Morris Institute, Walthamstow and Willesden and Wimbledon Trades and Labour Halls which, were run by friendly or co-operative societies. [32] These methods of financial enhancement were used by labour movement organisations across London.

The premises were adapted for use as a meeting space by voluntary labour. The main alteration was the creation of a hall from two smaller rooms and the construction of a conservatory to further enlarge the hall. The temperance ideal of the labour movement was reflected in the lack of a bar selling intoxicants on the premises and the 'innumerable cups of tea', which were consumed at the official opening. [33]

By 1931, three labour halls had been established as focal points for labour movement activities in North West London. Although the three halls were in the same geographical area, it is interesting to note the marked difference in

the social circumstances of the members. Willesden and Wealdstone were at least partly working-class areas, but Hendon was clearly more affluent. However, there were other similarities between the inceptions of the three halls. All of them had been established by a company or society, in which it was possible to purchase shares. Methods of raising the rest of the requisite finance, with the exception of the individual donation of £400 would also have been broadly similar.

East London

Five, or one third, of the selected labour premises in this study were situated in East London. These were: the William Morris Institute in Walthamstow and Ilford Hill, Ilford Central, East Ham and Stepney Labour Halls.

Demographic and social context

As was the case with many other areas of London in the latter decades of the nineteenth century, the eastern part had been subject to rapid urbanisation and population expansion. By the 1890s, with the development of several housing estates, East Ham was 'Britain's fastest growing town'.[34] The population of Stepney also more than doubled during the course of the nineteenth century. In 1801, it had been 113,000; 80 years later this figure had risen to 290,000. However the increased population and the amount of space required by the new docks, which brought employment to the area, became problematic. Nikolaus Pevsner noted: 'no provision was made for adequate rehousing of those deprived of their dwellings, they increased overcrowding and worsened slum conditions, for which in any case the dock demand for more and more labourers was bad enough.' [35] The desirable nature of both Ilford and Walthamstow and their environs as places to live at this time has been attributed to inexpensive housing, local employment and convenient commuting to the City of London. [36]

At the commencement of the twentieth century, a large proportion of the population of east London was located in mixed working and lower middle-class communities. The terraced houses of Walthamstow and East Ham were

inhabited by both artisans and those in lower middle-class occupations, such as office workers. Twentieth century East Ham was described as a 'pleasant suburb', which incorporated a range of shopping facilities and 'civic institutions'. At the turn of the twentieth century, Ilford perceived itself as middle class: its population was composed largely of civil servants and clerks. However, it has also been noted that during the inter-war years, at least, certain areas of Ilford were 'quite slummy'. Local Labour Party activist, Vi Willis noted that in the 1920s and 1930s, a group of avenues comprising 'Little Ilford' was regarded as the 'posh' area, with other parts of the borough suffering from poverty and regular flooding.[37] However, this was not on the scale of the poverty of Stepney, where a large percentage of the population lived in small overcrowded houses in close proximity to, or below the poverty line. During the inter-war years, Vi Willis visited the east end of London and noted that the poverty was even more extreme in that locality than the poorest parts of Ilford.[38] Prior to 1939, the situation in Stepney did begin to improve, as a proportion of the slum dwelling population was re-housed on the Becontree Housing Estate in Dagenham, which was completed under the auspices of London County Council in 1934. This may be the reason that there are no references to action taken by the local Labour Party against extreme poverty in the preserved records of the Mile End and Stepney Labour Parties, which do not commence until 1945.

Political Context

The Walthamstow area had an established Liberal and Radical tradition from at least the last decade of the nineteenth century. In 1885, it was represented by a Liberal member of parliament. A decade later in January 1895, although the constituency had elected a Conservative Member of Parliament, there were 'six, or eight at most Radical borough councillors'. These would have been members of the Radical and Progressive Party and there was also a local branch of the Social Democratic Federation. The co-operative movement was represented by the Walthamstow Co-operative Society.

There were also several local political institutions, which predated the various labour halls. The Essex Working Men's Club was based in the area and it advertised that it was:

> open for the reception of all respectable men, above the age of 21 years as members. Good bar, Concert Room, Skittle Alley, Bagatelle Room, Card Room, Library and Reading Room. Subscription 6s per year or 7d per month. Registered and affiliated to the Working Men's Club and Institute Union.[39]

The emphasis on leisure activities accentuates the difference between the Working Men's Club and Institute Union and the Mechanics Institutes, which has already been noted.

The Liberal and Radical Club was a popular venue for meetings and social intercourse. As in the case of the Working Men's Club, contemporary advertisements in the radical press emphasised the 'large concert room, billiard and card room'. A good example of the kind of function held on the premises was the fancy dress ball of January 1891, which attracted more than two hundred people.

There were two other local focal points for radical activities. A workman's hall was a venue for some radical meetings, such as the "large and enthusiastic" one, addressed by a Radical councillor in January 1897. A Liberal and Radical Coffee Palace was an alternative venue for political discussion. Its facilities were described thus: '[a]ll items of the Best Quality. Open at 5 O'Clock am. Lodgings for single men. Club Room to Let.' By 14 May 1897, the influence of local radicalism had extended to parliament with the election of the constituency's first Liberal and Radical Member of Parliament, Sam Woods. This was celebrated by a large demonstration. Liberal and Radical Parliamentary representation lasted for three years, until 1900. The seat was gained by the Conservative Party, before becoming Liberal, then represented by a National Democratic Party Member of Parliament in 1918. Walthamstow West finally became a Labour constituency in 1922 .For the majority of the remainder of the period under examination, the seat was held by the Labour Party. However, it was briefly held by the Liberal Party in the latter half of the 1920s and the Conservatives between 1967 and 1970. [40]

The William Morris Co-operative Society was formed in 1903 to raise funds to provide a trading space for bakers, general dealers and confectioners. Many of the original fundraising ideas, including the establishment of a bakery, did not come to fruition. Serious attempts to raise money for the new building were not made until 1908, when the required finances were acquired by a combination of the issuing of five-shilling shares and the sale of tea. It is necessary to place the cost of these shares into some kind of context. In the summer of 1909, builders and carpenters and joiners in the London area earned 10 ½ pence per hour, for a 50 hour week. Labourers earned seven pence per hour at this time. Therefore, five shillings would have equalled just over five and a half hours work for skilled artisans and eight and a half hours work for unskilled labourers. The price of one share was also slightly less than the cost of one week's rent for three rooms in a new council tenement block in Walthamstow. The land for the building was purchased in 1909 and the premises were erected using voluntary labour. The William Morris Institute was formally opened in December 1909 and the local branch of the Social Democratic Federation (SDF) administered the premises as a 'Socialist Institute'. [41] The inception of the William Morris Institute is the earliest in this study.

The constituency in which Ilford was situated returned consecutive Conservative Members of Parliament between 1885 and 1945. In the latter year, the constituency was bisected into Ilford North and South. Ilford North elected a Labour and Co-operative MP, and Ilford South a Labour one. For the majority of the post-war years covered by this study, Ilford North became a relatively safe Conservative seat. Conversely, Ilford South between 1966 and 1970 and again between 1974 and 1979, Ilford South returned a Labour Member of Parliament.[42]

Ilford Hill Labour Hall was opened during the First World War, under the auspices of the Labour Hall Committee of the Ilford Branch of the Independent Labour Party (ILP).[43] A mortgage was required for the £600 purchase price and the deed of conveyance, which formally made the ILP the official owners of the hall, was signed in July 1920. Fundraising for mortgage repayments

took a number of different forms. In conjunction with jumble sales and other social activities, appeals were made to members of the ILP for loans, which 'would be repayable at a rate of two shillings and sixpence per quarter for each pound loaned'. One member, who was also a local retailer, donated one shilling of every pound spent in his shop by ILP members to the labour hall fund.[44] The building comprised several committee rooms, a gallery, a large hall and a scullery. The absence of a bar, which sold alcoholic beverages, reflected the temperance commitment of Ilford ILP and the local labour movement as a whole, to the temperance ethos.

Ilford Central Labour Hall was officially opened on Saturday 4th May 1929, after a six-year fundraising campaign. Fundraising efforts included a prize draw and the sale of five-shilling shares. Shares could be purchased over a five or ten week period, at one shilling or sixpence per week respectively. By 1928, more than 1,000 shares had been sold. As with the William Morris Institute in Walthamstow, it is necessary to place the price of these shares in context. In 1928, a craftsman was paid one shilling and nine and a half pence per hour for a 48 hour week and a labourer received one shilling and four and a half pence per hour for the same working week.[45] A building fund was also established through *The Ilford Argus*, a local labour movement newspaper, which made regular appeals.[46] After the closure of Ilford Hill Labour Hall, which had been owned by Ilford Independent Labour Party (ILP), in September 1928, the acquisition of Labour Party premises in Ilford took on a greater urgency.

Until 1918, East Ham formed part of the Essex constituency of Romford. This had been represented by both Conservative and Liberal Members of Parliament in almost equal measure. After East Ham became a constituency in its own right, it returned MPs from across the political spectrum: National Democratic Party (1918-1922), Labour (1922-1931 and 1935-1945) and Conservative (1931-1935). However, since the Second World War, it has been regarded as a particularly safe Labour seat.[47]

East Ham Labour Hall was opened in July 1919, under the auspices of East Ham Trades Council and Central Labour Party. 'East Ham Labour Hall' was

actually three separate buildings. The main building, previously known as Anderson Cottage, was one of two original buildings on the redeveloped Plashett House site.[48] The second building was an existing agricultural hut, which became known as Despard Hall, in honour of the suffragette, Charlotte Despard. This building was largely used by the trade unions. It is ironic, that a space, which was used by the, largely male-dominated trade union movement, should be named after a feminist. The third building was a hall erected by voluntary labour, after the Trades Council and Labour Party had purchased the site. It had a capacity of at least 130 people.[49] The Trades Council had initially intended that the hall should also be a cinema, but this was not established. The temperance principle was also adhered to in two out of the three labour hall buildings. [50]

After 1885, the Mile End Constituency of Tower Hamlets was regarded as a relatively safe Conservative seat, although it did return a Liberal Unionist Member of Parliament between 1905 and 1916. During the inter-war and war years, the constituency fluctuated between Conservative and Labour Party representation, although the Labour Party did hold the seat for a total of 18 out of the 27 years. Throughout the post-war years, like East Ham, the constituency now known as Stepney was regarded as a solidly Labour.[51]

Stepney Labour Hall, situated at 133 Stepney Green, was initially known as Mile End Labour Club. 133 Stepney Green is first cited in local directories as the registered premises of the Mile End Labour Party in 1928, although there is some evidence that it was the focus of party activity as early as 1926.[52] By January 1930: 'the Mile End Labour Club is now definitely established in Stepney as the permanent home of the Stepney Labour and Socialist Movement...After a good many ups and downs, it is now established as the finest Labour Club in East London.' [53] The Mile End Divisional Labour Party administered the premises until changes to the parliamentary boundaries precipitated the formation of the Stepney Labour Party in 1948. This Constituency Labour Party assumed responsibility for the hall until the compulsory purchase of the building by the London County Council in 1963. The hall was not in continual use throughout the period. A part of the premises had been damaged by enemy action during the Second World War

and the remainder had been let to a tenant. The Party did not return to the premises on a full-time basis until 1951

The evidence from East London indicates that, during the inter-war years, labour halls were established in some of the poorest parts of the metropolis. It should, of course, be noted that, as elsewhere in both London and the United Kingdom as a whole, it would not necessarily attract the poorest people in the local areas, because labour movement activists tended to be drawn from the artisan population. As has been noted with Ilford Hill Labour Hall, these premises could also benefit from middle class funding.

South East London

Two of the selected premises were situated in South East London: Bermondsey Labour Institute and Lansbury House, Peckham.

Demographic and social context

At the beginning of the twentieth century, Bermondsey and Peckham were contrasting areas of south-east London. Bermondsey had been an established centre of trade and industry since the early nineteenth century and the high proportion of the food stored in local warehouses precipitated the epithet 'London's Larder'. Housing in the area comprised some reasonable sized Victorian stock, but the majority was contained in small houses situated in 'row upon row of narrow streets and alleys', which had been hurriedly constructed on fields and meadows. Nikolaus Pevsner notes that the population of Bermondsey rose from 46,000 at the turn of the nineteenth century to 122,000 in 1871 and 'living conditions were amongst the worst in London'. This was similar to the situation in contemporary Stepney. Bermondsey was improved by housing development undertaken by the local council, led by Alfred Salter, a socialist doctor. During the 1930s, a proportion of the slum properties were replaced by modern flats. A good example of this was the Neckinger Estate, which was opened in 1938.[54]

Conversely, in 1901, Peckham was perceived as a 'desirable' location, with high employment and very few areas of poverty. Affordable housing was provided by the local council, which in the early twentieth century, opened its first housing estate. The residents of this estate tended to be drawn from the 'more respectable and thrifty members' of the working class, such as, in this case, the clerk or the shop worker. [55]

Political context

From 1885, the constituency of West Bermondsey was alternately represented by Conservative and Liberal Members of Parliament. In 1922, Bermondsey elected its first Labour MP. Although, Dr Alfred Salter's initial term of office lasted for one year, he was re-elected in 1924 and the Labour Party held the seat continuously thereafter for the rest of the period under analysis. At the end of the nineteenth century, Peckham similarly fluctuated between Conservative and Liberal representation. From 1918 until 1945 the pattern was largely repeated, with the Labour Party replacing the Liberals. During the post-war years, Peckham became a relatively safe Labour seat.[56]

During the first four decades of the twentieth century, branches of two major political institutions were established in Peckham. In 1901, the Amalgamated Society of Engineers (ASE) opened its headquarters in the vicinity and 31 years later Co-operative House was unveiled by the Royal Arsenal Co-operative Society (RACS). Although no political institutions on this scale were established in Bermondsey, the first meeting of the Bermondsey branch of the Independent Labour Party (ILP) took place on 5 May 1908.

Three years later, on 8 July 1911, Keir Hardie officially opened the Bermondsey Labour Institute, by unveiling a stone inscribed with the words 'Socialism the Hope of the World'. Prior to its purchase by the Bermondsey Independent Labour Party (ILP) and West Bermondsey Labour Party, the building had ironically been a liberal workingmen's institute, which had, according to Fenner Brockway, 'fallen into disrepute'. The Labour Party and ILP, however, were able to negotiate a mortgage to cover the purchase price of £1,450 on the strength of a bazaar, which raised £150.[57] The premises were further extended in June 1914, when Beatrice Webb formally opened a

co-operative bakery in the grounds of the institute. The general maintenance and cost of the mortgage repayments were financed by the profits from the sale of the bread, loans from members and the distribution of one-shilling shares.[58] Each member was limited to the purchase of a single share, which, it was intended, would ensure the practice of democracy in the equal participation of all members. The bakery itself represented model industrial working conditions. Employees were guaranteed a 48 hour week and one week paid holiday.[59] Within the confines of this study, at least, the provision of the bakery and the limit of one share per member were both unique to Bermondsey Labour Institute.

The Peckham Division of the Camberwell Labour Party purchased 41 Camberwell Grove in 1935 and the premises were named Lansbury House, in honour of the former Labour Party leader, George Lansbury.[60] The premises were administered on a day-to-day basis by a dedicated 'Lansbury House' sub-committee of the Party, upon which each ward was represented by one delegate. This committee was accountable to three trustees. Lansbury House was comprised of one large meeting room and three smaller committee rooms. By 1977, the premises were also equipped with two licensed bars; one of which had been installed in 1975 and was intended for general use. The other was reserved for 'special functions'.[61] In 1976 Lansbury House was significantly structurally altered. In order to create a greater political space, a partition had been removed to create a larger committee room on the second floor and a toilet had been relocated.

By 1935, two labour halls had been established in highly contrasting areas of South East London. These halls also present a contrast in that they represent, within the scope of this thesis at least, the earliest and one of the later examples of this kind of building.

South London

It is necessary to consider Ruskin House, Croydon on its own, as Croydon does not neatly fit geographically into either South East or South West London

Demographic and social context

In the latter half of the nineteenth century, Croydon grew from a small town into a large urban space. This, it has been noted was precipitated by the expansion of the railway and Croydon's comparative proximity to the Surrey Hills. The Surrey Hills had been designated a 'healthy place' by eminent members of the medical profession. However, it was not until the 1930s, that terraced houses were specifically provided for the working-class. These homes were unflatteringly described as 'dollshouses' in the local press, but were, in fact, very popular with their residents, because of the modern fixtures and fittings.[62]

Political Context

Like many of the other constituencies in this study, after 1885, Croydon was represented consecutively by Conservative and Liberal Members of Parliament. However, in 1918 it was divided into two. Croydon North became a solidly Conservative seat, but Croydon South elected a Labour MP in 1945. After 1950, the constituencies were further divided into: North, East, North East, North West, South and West. All of the new constituencies returned Conservative Members of Parliament, with the exception of Croydon South, which elected a Labour MP between 1966 and 1970.[63]

One of the earliest surviving instances of organised labour movement activity in Croydon was the establishment of Croydon Trade Union Council in 1890. By 1903, five members of this organisation had been elected to Croydon Council and it has been noted that these councillors 'were some of the first ever elected Labour politicians in the United Kingdom.' [64]

Since 1912, the three buildings, which were consecutively named Ruskin House, have provided a focal point for the activities of Croydon's labour

movement. Although Croydon had a 'long trade union and Labour Party tradition', the first Ruskin House was established by a donation of £1,200 from an individual temperance activist to the Croydon Trades and Labour Council.[65] The first Ruskin House was not the only premises in the study to benefit from middle class assistance in this manner. As will be shown, the Richmond Labour Hall premises were given to the local Party rent free by the sympathetic property owner. Some non-labour movement provincial institutions were also funded in this way. A workingman's club and institute in Nettlebed, Oxfordshire had been provided by a local benefactor, before the First World War, at a cost of £4,400. Users of the premises were expected to pay a small annual subscription.[66] In Croydon, Georgina King Lewis wished to provide a political space in which trade unions could meet that was an alternative to the alcohol-dominated environment of the local public houses. The only condition of the gift, which was administered through the Croydon United Temperance Council, was that 'intoxicants' should not be sold on the premises.[67] It is likely that the provision of alternative spaces to the public house would have been at least a causal factor in the inception of many of the halls in this study. However, Ruskin House, provides the only example in this study, where such an intention was explicitly stated.

The first Ruskin House was used as a central location for labour movement activity in Croydon until 1919, when it became necessary to acquire larger premises. The requisite funds, of more than £3,000, were raised through the Ruskin House Memorial Fund, which had been established with the intention that the new hall should be a physical commemoration of the loss of 'hundreds' of Croydon's trade unionists during the First World War.It was intended that all the names of Croydon's 'fallen' trade unionists would be inscribed on the walls of the new building.[68] It is not clear whether or not this was ever achieved. This is the most explicit link between the labour halls and the remembrance of war dead, which has been located in the Greater London area. No such references survive for the William Morris Institute in Walthamstow or the Bermondsey Labour Institute, both of which were established prior to the First World War. Contributions to the Ruskin House Memorial Fund were made by the local trade union movement itself and a public appeal was also launched.

In contrast to its predecessor, the 'new' Ruskin House was controlled by a 13 member management committee, which was drawn from the local trade union movement.[69] The temperance tradition was still strongly adhered to; there was no bar in the new premises. In 1927, the decision was taken to extend the second Ruskin House to provide Labour with 'a creditable hall': a greater political space for labour movement activities.[70] The necessary finance was raised by conventional appeals for donations and loans and Ruskin Hall, with a five hundred person seating capacity, had been completed by 1930. In early advertisements in the local labour press the role of the hall as a social, rather than an explicitly political, space is emphasised. Ruskin Hall is referred to in entirely non-political terms, when it is cited as 'Croydon's New Social Centre'.[71] It has not been possible to locate any similar advertisements for political activities undertaken at the hall in the contemporary press. In 1967, the second Ruskin House was compulsorily purchased by Croydon Council as part of a road widening scheme.

In the same year, New Ruskin House Ltd, a company comprising share holders from all sections of the labour movement, purchased Coombe Hill House, a former school. Coombe Hill House became known as the third Ruskin House. Bridget Cherry and Nikolaus Pevsner described the third Ruskin House thus;

> early c18 and very satisfying to look at. Yellow and red brick. Five bays and two and half storeys. Giant angle pilasters and parapet. Segment-headed windows. Pedimented doorway on Tuscan columns. Staircase with three slender balusters to each step; two steps twisted differently, the third columnar.[72]

In spite of the fact that 'Ruskin House' has actually been three very distinct consecutive entities, its continuation up until the present day ensures that it is one of the most enduring examples of a labour movement institution in this study.

South West London

Four of the halls in this study are located in South West London: Battersea, Wimbledon and Heston and Isleworth Labour Halls and Richmond Labour Club and Institute.

Demographic and social context

Wimbledon had been transformed by industrialisation: from a village at the beginning of the nineteenth century, to a larger and more culturally diverse area, as a result of an influx of largely working class residents. These residents undertook local employment, which included working in many different capacities on the railway and as builders, tradesmen and in domestic service.[73] The expansion of the railway also acted as a "spur" to the development of Battersea and its environs. The opening of the Clapham Junction railway station in 1838 completely transformed the "backwater" of only eight hundred houses.[74] 'New' Richmond, an area of housing designated for artisans was also developed in the first half of the nineteenth century, partly in response to railway expansion. In the 1890s, Richmond Council was also the first in the London area to build a council housing estate and the success of this venture led to further housing development prior to the outbreak of the First World War.[75]

Hounslow, which encompasses Heston and Isleworth, was the only area in this study to not expand as a result of the arrival of the railway. Prior to the establishment of the railway in 1841, the main source of local income had been garnered from passing stage coaches. The loss of this trade precipitated a serious depression. Local fortunes improved when the underground railway arrived in 1883, followed by a tram link from Shepherds Bush in 1901 and finally a local bus service in 1912. By this time, Hounslow had largely become a commuter suburb of London. [76]

Political context

Battersea Labour Hall was the product of a 'vibrant working class organisational culture', which had originated in the area during the urbanisation

of the nineteenth century.[77] A plethora of radical and socialist organisations had been established including: a local branch of the Social Democratic Federation (SDF), the Battersea Liberal and Radical Association and the Battersea Labour League. Many of these organisations united to form a loose 'Progressive Alliance', which ultimately led, in 1892, to the election of John Burns as Battersea's independent socialist Member of Parliament. Radicalism in Battersea was not confined to the nineteenth century. In 1913, John Archer became Britain's first black mayor. John Burns represented Battersea until it was gained by the Conservatives in 1910 and held until 1929, although the constituency had been divided into two in 1919. South Battersea returned a Labour Member of Parliament between 1929 and 1931. The Conservatives regained the seat for the following 14 years, until 1945 when a Labour MP was elected. This pattern continued until 1974, when the local Labour Party succeeded in holding the seat for more than one consecutive Parliamentary term.[78]

Unusually, there were initiatives by the labour movements in both constituencies to establish 'labour halls' in their respective areas. In 1919, North Battersea established 'Battersea Trades Hall and Labour Institute', which although it was registered with the Registrar of Friendly Societies in October 1925, ultimately failed as a result of an inability to purchase or rent premises. Conversely, the 'labour hall' initiative in South Battersea was more successful. In 1919, 173 Lavender Hill became the rented premises of the Party. The premises were purchased by South Battersea Labour Club and Institute the following year.[79] Battersea Labour Hall was relocated to 177 Lavender Hill at the end of February 1928. From at least 1929, it had been proposed that the South Battersea Divisional Labour Party should purchase the premises from the Labour Club at the cost of £1,000 at the rate of £125 per annum.[80] The Party established a building fund and a series of fund-raising activities were held in order to raise the requisite finance. A mortgage was finally taken out on the premises in February 1934.[81]

The parliamentary constituency of Wimbledon has always been one of the safest Conservative seats in the United Kingdom. During the period covered by this study, only one Labour Member of Parliament was elected to represent

the area between 1945 and 1950.[82] In spite of this, however Wimbledon Labour Hall was the product of a strong socialist and radical tradition, which had commenced with the industrialisation of the local area in the mid-nineteenth century. Working class activists and middle class radicals established several forms of organised political association from the latter half of the nineteenth century onwards. Such organisations included the Wimbledon and Merton Liberal and Radical Association, which was founded in 1889. The Association purchased its own premises, the Wimbledon Liberal and Radical Club, which was opened in June of that year.[83] A local branch of the Social Democratic Federation (SDF) and the Wimbledon Marxist Socialist Society (WMSS) also met in the local area. The latter organisation was founded in 1907 and the title of the organisation was put to a vote. The alternative had been the World Marxist Socialist Society, indicating that at least some of its members envisaged a wider role for the organisation. The WMSS held weekly Friday evening business meetings in rented premises and regular Sunday evening public political meetings were also a feature of the programme of the WMSS. These meetings were usually well attended.[84]

The organisations which were directly involved in the establishment of the Wimbledon Labour Hall Ltd were particularly active in the Wimbledon area from circa 1917. Co-operative activity flourished in the locality. In 1917, for example, a propaganda meeting held under the auspices of the Royal Arsenal Co-operative Society (RACS) in the local Baths Hall is reported to have attracted an audience of more than 900 people.[85] Women's Co-operative Guilds had also been instituted in both Wimbledon and Raynes Park. The Wimbledon Merton and Morden Labour Party was established on 6 April 1918. Within a year, the Party was able to afford to rent premises at sixty-five pounds per annum. This would not necessarily have been possible in other areas of Greater London. Finally, the trade union movement, which was also partially responsible for the foundation of Wimbledon Labour Hall Ltd, was a fairly strong presence in Wimbledon. By April 1919, local branches of the Amalgamated Society of Carpenters and Joiners (ASC and J) and the National Union of Railwaymen (NUR) had affiliated to the local Labour Party. The presence of the NUR embodied the changes that Wimbledon had undergone since the mid nineteenth century as it was effectively the railway

which had brought the working class to Wimbledon. The NUR and the ASC and J were particularly active in the formation of the new labour hall society. [86]

The first general meeting of Wimbledon Labour Hall Ltd took place on 2 December 1921 in the Labour Party's rented rooms. The Labour Party and four trade unions were represented on the original management committee, which was comprised of five officers, including an auditor, and ten members.[87] The initial objective of Wimbledon Labour Hall Ltd was the acquisition of appropriate premises. Members of the management committee visited established halls and institutes in Greater London and South East England to observe the ways in which they were administered. Interestingly, one of the premises visited by the management committee was the William Morris Institute in Walthamstow.[88] The William Morris Institute is also examined in this study. After the establishment of Wimbledon Labour Hall, the Management Committee were regularly approached by other organisations. In 1927, Heston and Isleworth Labour Party contacted the Management Committee of Wimbledon Labour Hall Ltd for advice on the establishment of their own hall. Heston and Isleworth Labour Hall is another hall, which played a significant part in this study. The visits are briefly referred to in the Wimbledon Labour Hall minutes. Unfortunately, there are no surviving accounts of the nature of the meetings or the advice offered.

In terms of suitable property in the Wimbledon area, the committee had a choice between 14 Hartfield Road and 'Coombe Villa', 105 Merton Road. The latter proved to be more popular, largely because there were fewer building restrictions placed upon it. There are very few surviving records of the physical dimensions of the selected labour halls. However these were listed by the management committee prior to the purchase of the premises:

Frontage to existing party wall on north boundary	30' [9 metres]
Depth of forecourt	10' [3 m]
Principal Room	27'6" [8.12m] x 16'2" [4.84m]
Hall	7'2 ½" [2.15m] x 25'8 ½" [7.67m]
Conservatory	15'5" [4.6m] x 12'7 ½" [3.75m]

Length of garden from rear wall of house	101'8" [30.46m]
Width of garden	30'5 ½ " [9.11m]
Net length of garden (from conservatory)	85'3" [25.56m]
Width of side entrance	5'8 ½ " [1.67m] [89]

Coombe Villa cost Wimbledon Labour Hall Ltd £1,100. After a concerted fund-raising effort, which included raffles, collections, trade union levies and share drives Wimbledon Labour Hall was able to pay £370 in cash. The balance, of £730, was met by a mortgage from the Co-operative Wholesale Society Bank.

Arthur Henderson, Labour Member of Parliament and Secretary of the Parliamentary Labour Party officially opened the new Labour Hall on the afternoon of Saturday 30 September 1922. The 'order of opening', as previously discussed by the Management Committee was to be the following;

3 for 3.15 Open door from front with a few words and invite all inside when Henderson will deliver 15-minute speech. Vote of thanks: proposer and seconder 5 minutes.
3.45 to 5.30 Tea (cost not to exceed one shilling)
5.30 to 7.30 Speeches from representatives and delegates interspersed with music and songs.
7.30 to 10.30 Dance and whist drive.[90]

In 1930, Wimbledon Labour Hall was extended by the erection of a large meeting hall, which had a capacity of four hundred people. The extension became known as the William Morris Hall and George Bernard Shaw contributed a photograph of himself, with the following inscription: 'William Morris and I preached the gospel of Labour together on many occasions. Many respectable persons thought we deserved hanging. I am proud to hang in a hall dedicated to him.10th Oct. 1930.'

The direct link between William Morris, who had been a local resident and Wimbledon Labour Hall was further commemorated by the presentation of two original glass roundels featuring Chaucer and Helen of Troy, which had been designed by Morris and Company in circa 1881. These were installed in the

windows of the labour hall premises and were the motivation for the inclusion of Wimbledon Labour Hall in Nikolaus Pevsner's survey of the buildings of England.[91]

The local politics of Richmond upon Thames was very similar to Wimbledon. Richmond was also a safe Conservative seat, throughout the period until 1979.[92] In spite of this, a local Labour Party had been established in the constituency in the years immediately after the First World War. The acquisition of premises had been a long-term objective of Richmond and Barnes Labour Party and it was finally realised with the opening of Barnes and Richmond Labour Club at 8a Church Road on Wednesday 19th February 1936. This 'labour club' comprised several rooms, the majority of which were hired out for political meetings. It therefore may be broadly defined as a labour hall. [93] The premises, which had been decorated by voluntary labour, were given, rent free, to the Labour Hall Committee of Richmond and Barnes Labour Party by Miss Morgan Brown, a sympathetic property owner. Fund-raising was nonetheless vital and from 1935 a 'loans and deposits' account was established, into which members could pay a minimum of one pound. These loans were repayable to the lender on request. This account remained active until 1958. By 1971, however, the price of a share in Barnes and Richmond Labour Club and Institute Ltd, was one shilling.[94]

Labour movement activity has been recorded in the neighbouring borough of Hounslow, which included the Heston and Isleworth area from the beginning of the twentieth century. This evidence is largely drawn from local district council poll results. A 'Labour' candidate stood in the 1902 election and the Independent Labour Party (ILP) contested three wards in nearby Chiswick in 1906. In 1910, an ILP councillor was elected in Hounslow South, which was part of Heston and Isleworth [95] In the same year, open air meetings were held in Hounslow, by 'Herald Leaguers', who had been 'inspired' by the fortnightly 'Herald' newspaper, which later became the *Daily Herald.* 'Herald Leaguers' wore distinctive red lapel buttons and in 1911 a trade union known as the 'Red Button Union' was established in Hounslow. In the years immediately preceding the First World War, two local branches of transport workers' trade unions were also formed: the London Carmen's Union in approximately 1911

and the London Provincial Union of Licensed Vehicle Workers, which later became part of the Transport and General Workers Union (TGWU) in 1913. Local labour movement historian, John Grigg notes that this indicates that transport union men were the founders and early leaders of the local Labour Parties'. It was trade unionists such as these which co-operated in 'putting up' local Labour candidates in the Council elections of 1914.[96]

There is also evidence of co-operative movement activity in the Heston and Isleworth area. In 1913, the West London Co-operative Society opened a shop in Hounslow. The opening of the shop attracted more publicity and for a different reason than had been initially anticipated. It was reported that two local activists publicised the event by covering themselves with paper advertisement posters. One of the men drew particular attention to himself when, in the process of lighting a cigarette, he accidentally set fire to the advertisements with which he was decorated.[97]

In 1932, the Parliamentary Constituency of Heston and Isleworth was created and this precipitated the establishment of the new Constituency Labour Party. Four years later, on Saturday 17 October 1936, D.N. Pritt, the Labour Member of Parliament for North Hammersmith, officially opened Heston and Isleworth Labour Hall. The catalyst for the acquisition of the premises had been the financial and physical withdrawal of the Co-operative Society from the Hounslow area, which had deprived the Heston and Isleworth Labour Party of its previous meeting place in the Co-operative shop.[98] The new premises had originally been purchased using a loan of £600 from the London Co-operative Society Ltd, but almost half of this amount had been raised by the building fund by the time the formal opening had taken place.[99] Heston and Isleworth Labour Party was not a wealthy organisation. It was noted in the local newspaper that in June 1936, the Party had been merely in possession of 'two pounds and an old typewriter', but four months later, the members had managed to raise the £300, which formed half of the loan. Ninety pounds of this had been raised from functions and a further £20 had been donated by the Labour Party Women's Section.

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The layout of the new labour hall was described in detail in both the local newspaper and the souvenir programme of the opening ceremony: 'The premises, which are at 20 Heath Road, Hounslow, comprise a spaciously planned pre-war freehold property, with a large brick built studio attached. The house is semi detached and has a large garden and all the rooms are electrically lighted and heated by gas.' [100]

The opening ceremony itself was widely perceived to be a symbolic occasion: the decoration making a political statement. The building was 'gaily decorated', with flags, which included both the red flag and the union jack. The presence of the union jack was intended to indicate that socialism was not anti-English and the addition of the red flag was to be interpreted as a 'happier and better England for all' The ceremony itself simply consisted of a speech by Pritt followed by him being invited to unveil a certificate. The certificate noted the date of the opening of the premises and a list of the members of the contemporary management committee. In his speech, Pritt noted that the purchase of the premises was: 'a very fine achievement and there were many more prosperous Labour Parties who would be jealous of their headquarters'.[101] The Heston and Isleworth Labour Party Premises Committee administered the hall on a day-to-day level and this committee was responsible to three Labour Party trustees. The premises were extended by the erection of a large Nissen hut in December 1950.

As a whole, South West London is the most affluent area in this study. It is probably also one of the most traditionally Conservative. It is interesting, then, that three out of the four halls examined in this study survive as at least nominally political spaces in Conservative rather than traditionally Labour areas. It is, however, unclear from the surviving evidence, whether this is as a result of the affluence of the area or a need to maintain a visible Labour presence in a traditionally Conservative area. The continued existence of these particular halls will be considered further in a later chapter of this thesis.

This chapter has aimed to place the labour hall in some kind of historical context, by briefly considering the nature of meeting places which preceded it. It has contended that there were similarities in the fates of Radical clubs and

labour halls. The chapter has also defined the nature of a labour hall before placing the inceptions of the 15 halls in their local, social and political contexts. The salient points are tabulated in Figure 1.2 to further emphasise the similarities and differences between the premises. It is clear that the establishment of the labour hall was often precipitated by intensely local events, such as, in Hendon, the removal of a previous meeting space and in Croydon, in part at least to honour the local trade unions' war dead. However, this chapter has also pinpointed several similarities in the establishment, financing and management of the halls. Many of the premises were established and maintained by companies or societies in which the users of the premises could become directly involved by the purchase of shares. A certain amount of advice and guidance could also be obtained from the national Labour Party, with respect to those premises owned by local branches. Three, or one fifth of the premises, were able to benefit directly from financial assistance provided by middle class members or benefactors. As has been noted, these three premises tended to be situated in the more affluent, and largely Conservative, areas of Greater London: Hendon, Croydon and Richmond. The traditional link between the labour and temperance movement was another common factor in the establishment of the halls: there were no licensed bars on any of the premises until the post-war era. By 1936, the 15 labour halls, which feature in this study, had been established, offering the local labour movements both political and social spaces for a range of activities. It is now appropriate to consider the ways in which the space was used by both political and industrial organisations.

Figure 1.2: The Greater London Labour Halls

Name of Labour Hall	Date of Inception	Management	Cost of premises	Notes	Closure
Battersea	1919	South Battersea Labour Club and Institute/ South Battersea Divisional Labour Party	£1,000	This was the more successful of the two labour hall ventures in the Battersea area.	Still in use
Bermondsey Labour Institute	1911	The management committee was drawn from members of West Bermondsey Labour Party and Bermondsey ILP	£1,450	The Labour Institute was the only premises to run a bakery and to be completely destroyed during the Second World War.	1940
Ruskin House, Croydon	1912/1919/ 1967	The first Ruskin House was run by Croydon United Temperance Council. The second Ruskin House's management committee was drawn from local trade unions and the third premises are run by New Ruskin House.	The first Ruskin House cost £1,200, which was donated by a temperance activist). The second Ruskin House was purchased for £3,000. I have been unable to ascertain the cost of the third premises.	The only premises, which were actually three consecutive properties. The first Ruskin House benefited from middle class financial assistance	Still in use
East Ham	1919	The premises were owned by East Ham Trades Council and Central Labour Party.	unknown	The only 'labour hall' that was actually three buildings on the same site.	1940
Hendon	1927	The building was purchased by Hendon Labour Hall Society.	£2,850	The Society was able to benefit from middle class financial assistance.	c1985

Heston and Isleworth	1936	The hall was administered by the Premises Committee of the Heston and Isleworth Constituency Labour Party.	£600	At the inception of the premises, the local Party possessed 'two pounds and an old typewriter'.	1977
Ilford Hill	1917	The building was administered by the Labour Hall Committee of the Ilford Branch of the Independent Labour Party (ILP).	£600	The 11 year duration of these premises as a labour hall is the shortest in this study.	1928
Ilford Central	1929	The premises were purchased by Ilford Constituency Labour Party	unknown	Extensive research has unearthed very few references to this hall.	unknown
Lansbury House, Peckham	1935	The building was owned by Peckham Division of the Camberwell Labour Party.	The cost of the premises is unknown at time of purchase. In 1960, it was valued at £3,000	One of only two surviving halls to be mentioned in the 1960 Census of Property owned by Constituency Labour Parties in London.	c1985
Richmond and Barnes Labour Club and Institute	1936	The premises were administered by the Labour Hall Committee of Richmond and Barnes Labour Party.	The building was donated rent free by a sympathetic property owner.	The hall was able to benefit from middle class financial assistance.	Still in use
Stepney	1926	The premises were owned by Mile End Divisional Labour Party.	unknown	The only hall to be cited in the labour movement literature.	1963

William Morris Institute, Walthamstow	1909	The hall was owned by the William Morris Co-operative Society and, until 1937, administered by a local branch of the SDF.	unknown	This is the earliest example of labour movement premises in this study/	c1983
Wealdstone	1934	The premises were purchased by Wealdstone Labour Hall Ltd.	£3,600. This included the addition of a large hall prior to the official opening.	Although the premises are not used for a political purpose, the hall is still owned by Wealdstone Labour Hall Ltd (2005)	1973
Willesden	1922	The building was owned by Willesden Trades and Labour Hall Ltd.	unknown	The hall was 'taken over' by the Communist Party in the 1980s.	Still in use
Wimbledon	1922	The premises were purchased by Wimbledon Labour Hall Ltd.	£1,100	The hall possesses original William Morris stained glass and a George Bernard Shaw autographed photograph.	Still in use

Figure 1.3 Wimbledon Labour Hall (2006)

Figure 1.4 Barnes and Richmond Labour Hall (2006)

Notes:

1 Gillian Hawtin, *Early Radical Wimbledon c. 1880-1931* (Wimbledon, London: self published, 1993), p.22; Solicitors' Accounts pertaining to the purchase of 95 Merton Road by the Wimbledon Liberal and Radical Club, 1898. (5/LRC/B2). The very few surviving records of the Wimbledon Liberal and Radical Club (WLRC) are held in the Wimbledon Labour Hall archive on the original labour hall premises, which are currently (2006) known as the William Morris Labour and Community Rooms, Wimbledon, London. I am responsible for the organisation of this archive.
2 Brian Simon, *Education & the Labour Movement 1870-1920* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1965), pp. 72-3.
3 John Davis, 'Radical clubs and London Politics 1870-1900', in David Feldman and Gareth Stedman Jones (eds), *Metropolis London: Histories and Representations since 1800* (London: Routledge, 1989). pp.106-107.
4 *Freedom: A Journal of Anarchist Socialism*, Vol. 5 (53), 1891.
5 *The London Citizen-East Ham Edition,* June 1921.
6 Heston and Isleworth Borough Labour Party, 'Souvenir Programme of the Opening Ceremony of the Party's Premises at 20 Heath Road, Hounslow, Saturday 17 October 1936'. Private Collection of John Grigg, a local Labour Party activist.
7 Ilford Independent Labour Party minutes, 10 Dec.1919. BLPES/ILP/9/48. Local Independent Labour Party (ILP) records are held at the British Library of Political and Economic Science (BLPES), London School of Economics (LSE), London.
8 Suggested Trustee Deed for Bournemouth Labour Hall and Premises circa 1928, pp. 2,4, 5, 'Labour Halls', Labour Party General Secretary's Papers, Labour Party Archive, Labour History Archive and Study Centre (LHASC), People's History Museum, Manchester.
9 South Battersea Divisional Labour Party minutes, 9 Feb.1934.
10 Len Simm, London Regional Labour Party Organiser to West Lewisham Labour Party, 10 June 1960; 'Census of Property Owned by Constituency Parties in London' (1960). Greater London Labour Party Collection. London Metropolitan Archives (LMA).
11 I have been unable to locate archives for these halls. The third Ruskin House in Croydon was also purchased in this period.
12 Interview with Len Snow, a local activist, 18 Nov.2004; 'Wembley South Labour Party, Souvenir Programme: Opening of the New Hall' (n.d.).Private Collection of Len Snow.
13 London Regional Organiser to 'All Property Owning CLP's', March 1960, Acc 2417/E/10. Greater London Labour Party Archive. This is held at the London Metropolitan Archives, London.
14 Mike Crang, *Cultural Geography* (London: Routledge, 1998), pp. 110-111.
15 Erica Carter, James Donald and Judith Squires (eds), *Space and Place: Theories of Identity and Location* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1993), p.xii.
16 Interview with Len Snow, 18 Nov.2004.

17 Barnes and Richmond Labour Club and Institute Ltd minutes, 19 March 1953. Richmond and Barnes Constituency Labour Party (CLP) archive, Richmond Local Studies Centre, Richmond upon Thames, London.
18 Jerry White notes Croydon's 'fiercely independent' stance regarding its relationship with London: Jerry White, *London in the Twentieth Century: A City and its People* (London: Viking, 2001), p. 25.
19 For further details on this, see the Greater London Authority's web site http://www.london.gov.uk/london-life/city-government/history.jsp. Accessed 15 May 2006.
20 White, *London in the Twentieth Century*, p..357 and http://www.reference.com/browse/wiki/London County Council . Accessed 29 May 2006.
21 http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Greater London Council#Political control. Accessed, 29 May 2006. White, *London in the Twentieth Century* p.388.
22 Notes for a speech given by Cyril Harrison at the Wealdstone Labour Hall 70th Anniversary Dinner, 24 May 2003. In his *Book of Wealdstone* (Buckingham: Barracuda Books Ltd, 1989), R.S. Brown does not emphasise the social composition of Wealdstone.
23 Daniel Weinbren, 'Hendon Labour Party, 1924-1992: A Brief Introduction to the Microfilm edition' (Wakefield: Microform Academic Publishers, 1998), p.1.
24 Len Snow, *Willesden Past* (Chichester: Philimore, 1994), p. 53; p.106. This "concentration" was comprised of Willesden, Wembley, Perivale and Park Royal.
25 P. Abercrombie, *Greater London Plan, 1944,*(1945) Appendix 2, pp.188-9 and M. Robbins, *Middlesex* (1953) chapters 5, 7 and 14 cited in Stephen Inwood, *A History of London* (London: Macmillan,1998), pp. 716-717.
26 Len Snow, *A Short History of the Labour Party in Brent 1900-2000* (Brent, London: Brent Labour Party, 2000), p. 3.
27 Snow, *Labour Party in Brent,* p 11. Unfortunately, the surviving minutes only cover the 1930s. Willesden Trades and Labour Hall minutes, 29 April 1931. Willesden Trades and Labour Hall minutes are located in the Willesden Labour Party collection (Accessions register 1984 no 2-28) at Brent Archives, London.
28 Wealdstone Labour Hall Ltd minutes, 8 Sept.1931; 26 Jan.1934. Wealdstone Labour Hall minutes are located in the Harrow Labour Party collection (A6/12) in Harrow Local Studies Centre, London. The original number of trustees were also referred to on the third page of the notes for a speech made by Cyril Harrison, the current Secretary of Wealdstone Labour Hall at a dinner to celebrate 'The Seventieth Anniversary of Wealdstone Labour Hall' on 22 May 2003.
29 Wealdstone Labour Hall Ltd minutes, 28 Jan.1935. "The share capital of the Company is £100, divided into 2,000 ordinary shares of 1/- each", The *Memorandum and Articles of Association of Wealdstone Labour Hall Ltd* (1938, amended 1951), p.6. Private collection of Len Snow.
30 Minutes of the Annual General Meeting of Wealdstone Labour Hall Ltd, 21 Jan.1937.
31 John Hopkins, *A History of Hendon* (Hendon, London: Hendon Borough Council, 1964) p 70. A labour hall was also established on the Watling Estate. It has not been possible to include the Burnt Oak Labour Hall

in this study as there are no surviving records pertaining to the hall in local archives.

32 The rent statistics are taken from London County Council, *London Statistics: Volume Thirty Three, 1927-28* (London: London County Council, 1928).

33 From a leaflet entitled "19 Sunningfields Road and the Hendon Labour Party" n.d.(but it is likely to have formed part of a fundraising campaign in 1946/47). It is interesting that the cups of tea are cited in this leaflet, but not who opened the hall, or even the date of the official opening. Hendon Labour Hall records are located within the Hendon Constituency Labour Party (CLP) archive in Barnet Archives.

34 Stephen Pewsey, *East Ham* (Stroud: Sutton Publishing Ltd, 1996), p.6.

35 Nikolaus Pevsner, *London: Volume Two, Except the Cities of London and Westminster* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1952), pp. 412-3.

36 Keith Romig and Peter Lawrence (compilers), *Walthamstow,* (Stroud: The Chalford Publishing Company, 1996), p 8; 'HHL' 'A Curious Piece of Development' in *Long Ago and Not So Far Away: A Miscellany of Local History extracted from the Newsletters of the Ilford and District Historical Society 1986-1991*, Ilford and District Historical Society Transaction No 3 (Ilford: Ilford and District Historical Society, 1991), p.14; Pewsey, *East Ham,* p.6; Pevsner, London: *Volume Two,* pp. 412-3; Romig and Lawrence, *Walthamstow,* p. 8; 'HHL', 'A Curious Piece of Development', p.14.

37 Jerry White refers to the "swathes" of artisan and lower middle class terraced housing in the area in 1901: White, *London in the Twentieth Century,* p. 241; Pewsey, *East Ham*, p.6; 'HHL', 'A Curious Piece of Development', p. 14; Vi Willis interviewed by John Casson, Labour Oral History Project, 1991 (C609/52). The Labour Oral History Project archive is located in the National Sound Archive, British Library, London.

38 Rosemary Taylor and Christopher Lloyd, *The Changing East End: Stepney, Bethnal Green and Poplar 1860-1960* (Stroud: Sutton Publishing, 1997), p.7. During the inter-war years, Vi Willis visited the east end of London and noted that the poverty was even more extreme in that locality than the poorest parts of Ilford: Vi Willis interview (C609/52).

39 *Walthamstow Reporter,* 4 Jan.1895.

40 *Walthamstow Reporter,* 18 Jan.1895, 8 Nov.1895; 29 Jan. 1897, 14 May 1897; F.W.S. Craig, *British Parliamentary Election Results 1885-1918* (London: Macmillan, 1974, p.282; FWS Craig, British *Parliamentary Election Results, 1918-1949,* revised ed, (London: Macmillan, 1977), p.266; F.W.S. Craig *British Parliamentary Election Results, 1950-1973* 2nd ed (Chichester: Parliamentary Research Services, 1983.), p.300; FWS Craig, *British Parliamentary Election Results 1974-1983* (Chichester: Parliamentary Research Services, 1984), p.47.

41 This information was largely gleaned from a preserved letterhead. The unsorted records of the William Morris Institute are held at the Waltham Forest Archive, Waltham Forest, London. The letterhead was not dated but was probably printed as part of the Institute's 21st Anniversary celebrations in 1930. The Honorary Secretary of the Walthamstow Labour Party also refers to the early decision to put the William Morris Institute in the hands of the SDF in her annual report of 1949, in which she relates the history of the William Morris Institute. The preserved minutes do not begin until 1930. The comparative statistics are taken from London County Council, *London*

Statistics: Volume Twenty 1909-10 (London: London County Council, 1910), p.59.

42 Craig, *British Parliamentary Election Results 1885-1918*, p.281; Craig, *British Parliamentary Election Results, 1918-1949*, pp.145-7; Craig, *British Parliamentary Election Results,* 1950-1973, pp.167-8; Craig, *British Parliamentary Election Results 1974-1983* , p.28.

43 Details of the official opening have not been preserved. Ilford Labour Party met at the hall from Nov. 1917. The Ilford Branch of the Independent Labour Party was founded in Feb. 1916. ILP records have been preserved from 1919 onwards.

44 Ilford Branch of the ILP minutes 14 July 1920; 19 May 1920. BLPES/ILP/ 9/48-50. Ilford ILP records are held at the British Library of Political and Economic Science, London School of Economics, London.

45 London County Council, *London Statistics: Volume Thirty Three 1928-29,* (London: London County Council ,1929).p.35.

46 However plans to acquire land for the new hall had been mooted at a specially convened conference almost ten years earlier: Ilford Labour Party minutes, 23 Oct.1919; 10 May 1923 (Acc/2527). Ilford Labour Party records are held at the London Metropolitan Archives (LMA), London. *Ilford Argus,* 3 March 1928. This represented £250 in share sales. See, for example, the appeal in *The Ilford Argus,* 2 Jan. 1926.

47 Craig, *British Parliamentary Election Results 1885-1918*, p.279; Craig, *British Parliamentary Election Results, 1918-1949,* p.132.

48 Plashett House had been the home of Elizabeth Fry, the Quaker prison reformer, but the estate was sold and redeveloped during the 1850s: Interview with John Hart, a local labour movement activist, 16 Feb.2002.

49 The Trades Council and Labour Party, rather than the trade unions themselves presumably chose the name: Interview with John Hart, 16 Feb 2002 and *The London Citizen-East Ham Edition,* June 1921.

50 Report of a Trades Council meeting by the delegate of the Wakefield Street Branch of the East Ham Independent Labour Party. Wakefield Street Branch minutes. 23 April 1919 (Coll Misc 400). The records of the East Ham Branch of the ILP are held at the British Library of Political and Economic Science (BLPES) at the London School of Economics (LSE), London. John Hart believes, however, that there was a bar, which sold alcohol, in Despard Hall, used by the trade unions, during the 1930s.

51 Craig, *British Parliamentary Election Results 1885-1918*, p.53; Craig, *British Parliamentary Election Results 1918-1949,* p.52; Craig British Parliamentary Election Results, 1950-1973, p.41.

52 *Kelly's London Directory,* 1928. The Jan.1931 edition of the *Stepney Citizen*, however notes that a legal advice service had commenced "four years ago in the present offices" .The preserved minutes do not commence until 1945 and the *Stepney Citizen* was not published until 1929. Extensive study of local newspapers of 1925, 1926, 1927 and 1928, has failed to determine a precise date of acquisition.

53 *Stepney Citizen*, Jan.1930.

54 Mary Boast, *The Story of Bermondsey* (Southwark, London: London Borough of Southwark, 1998), p. 10, p. 18, p.24, p.28. For a detailed account of the life of Alfred Salter, see Fenner Brockway, *Bermondsey Story: The Life of Alfred Salter*, 3rd. ed. (London: Independent Labour Publications, 1995); Pevsner, *London: Volume Two*, p.85.

55 John D. Beasley, *The Story of Peckham and Nunhead* (Southwark, London: London Borough of Southwark , 1999), p. 48-49.
56 Craig, *British Parliamentary Election Results 1885-1918,* p.9, p.47; Craig, *British Parliamentary Election Results, 1918-1949*, p.6, p.12; Craig, *British Parliamentary Election Results 1974-1983*, p.37.
57 Brockway, *Bermondsey Story,* p 42. It would be interesting to ascertain whether, as Brockway suggests, this was literally the case, or whether further proof of fundraising was required.
58 Instances of the sale of the shares are recorded in the Bermondsey Labour Institute cashbook (1915-1927).(5572-3) Bermondsey Labour Institute papers form part of the Bermondsey Independent Labour Party archive, which is held at the Southwark Local Studies Library, London.
59 Brockway, *Bermondsey Story,* p.51.
60 This is noted in a questionnaire response from the local Party to the London Labour Party's 'Census of Property Owned by Constituency Parties in London' in 1960 Acc 2417/E/10. Greater London Labour Party papers, London Metropolitan Archives (LMA), London. Neither the acquisition nor the opening of the premises are reported in the *South London Observer, Camberwell and Peckham Times* in 1935 or 1936. Peckham Labour Party was established in November 1949. Preserved records commence with the *Peckham Citizen* in 1949. Further records are fragmentary until the preserved Executive Committee and General Management Committee minutes in the late 1960s.
61 Ian Arnold, Peckham Labour Party's Trade Union Liaison Officer to all affiliated organisations, 9 Jan.1977. At the 1975 AGM, the chairman looked forward to the opening of a bar by Easter.
62 John B. Gent (ed), *Croydon: The Story of One Hundred Years*, 2nd. ed. (Croydon, London: The Croydon Natural History and Scientific Society Ltd, 1979), p.11, pp.14-15.
63 Craig, *British Parliamentary Election Results 1885-1918*, p.100; Craig, *British Parliamentary Election Results 1918-1949*, pp.119-20; Craig, *British Parliamentary Election Results, 1950-1973*, pp.118-123; Craig, British Parliamentary Election Results 1974-1983, p.12.
64 Ruskin House Management Committee, *Ruskin House: A History 1919-1999* (Croydon, London: Ruskin House Management Committee, 1999) p.1.
65 Ruskin House Management Committee, *Ruskin House,* p.1. This publication tends to emphasise the second two Ruskin Houses, as the trade union movement directly established these.
66 Lawrence Weaver, *Village Clubs and Halls* (London: George Newnes Ltd, 1920), p. 74, p. 76.
67 Ruskin House Management Committee, *Ruskin House: A History,* p.7.
68 Ruskin House Management Committee, *Ruskin House: A History,* p.8.
69 New Ruskin House Ltd owns the third Ruskin House, which is essentially a friendly society. The shareholders are representatives of the whole of the local labour movement.
70 *The Croydon Labour Outlook*, Sept.1927.
71 *The Croydon Labour Outlook,* Jan.1930.
72 Bridget Cherry and Niklaus Pevsner, *London 2: South,* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1994), p.223.

73 Richard Milward, *Wimbledon Past* (London: Historical Publications Ltd, 1998), p.66.
74 Patrick Loobey (compiler), *Battersea and Clapham*, (Stroud: Chalford, 1994), p.7.
75 John Cloake, *The Growth of Richmond,* (Richmond upon Thames, London: Richmond Local History Society, Paper No 8, 1993), p. 36, p.38.
76 Andrea Cameron (compiler), *Hounslow, Isleworth, Heston & Cranford: A Pictorial History* (Chichester: Phillimore and Co Ltd, 1995).
77 Sean Creighton, 'From Exclusion to Political Control: Radical and Working Class Organisation in Battersea 1830s-1918'. Introduction to a paper given at "Voice of the Multitude: Radicalism and Unrest in Britain, 1790-1918" Conference held at the Public Record Office, 29 October 1996.
78 Craig, *British Parliamentary Election Results 1885-1918,* p.3; Craig, *British Parliamentary Election Results, 1918-1949*, p.4; Craig *British Parliamentary Election Results, 1950-1973*, p.5; Craig, *British Parliamentary Election Results 1974-1983* , p.4.
79 During the 1920s, 173 Lavender Hill was interchangeably referred to as 'Battersea Labour Hall' and 'Battersea Labour Club '.
80 Battersea Labour Club to the Executive Committee of the South Battersea Divisional Labour Party, 17 Dec. 1929.(D80) Battersea Labour Club and Hall records form part of the South Battersea Labour Party collection which is held at Wandsworth Local History Library Service, Wandsworth, London.
81 South Battersea Divisional Labour Party Executive Committee minutes, 8 Feb. 1934 (D80). Reports and advertisements in the *South Battersea Citizen* indicate that by the mid-1930s, Battersea Labour Club has established other premises on Falcon Road. 177 Lavender Hill is the current registered office of Battersea Labour Party.
82 Craig, *British Parliamentary Election Results 1885-1918*, p.401; Craig, *British Parliamentary Election Results 1918-1949*, p.279; Craig, *British Parliamentary Election Results, 1950-1973*, p.313; Craig, *British Parliamentary Election Results 1974-1983* , p.48.
83 *Surrey Independent,* 8 June 1889, cited in Hawtin *Early Radical Wimbledon,* p.22.
84 Tom Braddock, 'Socialism in Wimbledon' (unpublished manuscript n.d.) p.3. (1/WLH/D1) Tom Braddock had been a member of the WMSS. Wimbledon Labour Hall (Co-operative Society) Ltd and Wimbledon (Merton and Morden) Constituency Labour Party papers are held on the original labour hall premises. Since April 2005, this building has been known as 'William Morris Labour and Community Rooms'. I am responsible for these partially sorted archives, including the system of reference.
85 *Comradeship: The Organ of the Royal Arsenal Co-operative Society,* March 1917. There are no extant records of either branch of the Women's Co-operative Guild prior to the establishment of Wimbledon Labour Hall Ltd.
86 First Annual Report of the Wimbledon Merton and Morden Constituency Labour Party, April 1919 (1/CLP/A1). On 1 Jan.1921, the ASC and J amalgamated with the General Union of Carpenters and Joiners, to become the Amalgamated Society of Woodworkers (ASW). Very few records of trade union activity prior to 1921 have been preserved.
87 The four trade unions which appointed delegates to the management committee of Wimbledon Labour Hall Ltd, were: the ASW with four delegates

and the NUR, the Amalgamated Union of Building Trade Workers (AUBTW) and the National Union of House and Ship Painters with one delegate each. Wimbledon Labour Hall Ltd Management Committee minutes, 2 Dec.1921 (1/WLH/A1). It is surprising that the co-operative movement is not overtly represented on the committee.

88 See for example Wimbledon Labour Hall minutes, 10 July 1922

89 Wimbledon Labour Hall minutes, 31 May 1922.

90 Wimbledon Labour Hall minutes, 7 Sept.1922.

91 The framed photograph is preserved on the Wimbledon Labour Hall premises. The roundels are described in Cherry and Pevsner, *London 2: South,* p. 454.

92 Craig, *British Parliamentary Election Results, 1918-1949* p.223; Craig *British Parliamentary Election Results 1950-1973*, p.249; Craig, *British Parliamentary Election Results 1974-1983*, p.38.

93 Unlike many other 'labour clubs', Barnes and Richmond did not acquire an alcohol licence until 1944.

94 Barnes and Richmond Labour Club and Institute Loans and Deposit Account Books 1935-1958; Barnes and Richmond Labour Club and Institute Finance Committee minutes, 19 Jan. 1971. The records of Barnes and Richmond Labour Club form part of the Richmond and Barnes Labour Party archive at Richmond-upon-Thames Local Studies Centre.

95 'Heston and Isleworth' was comprised of the following wards: Hounslow North, Hounslow South, Isleworth North, Isleworth South and Heston.

96 Grigg, 'Local Labour History, Part 1: Prehistoric Events' and 'Part 2: 1914 – Labour Fights Three wards in Hounslow and Isleworth' (no page numbers), published in consecutive issues of the Brentford and Isleworth Constituency Labour Party organ, 1984. Grigg acknowledges that his accounts have 'relied heavily' on Walter Brown, 'Story of a Party – The Labour Movement in Heston and Isleworth', a 20-page pamphlet (nd).

97 Grigg, 'Local Labour History, 'Part 1: Prehistoric Events'.

98 *County of Middlesex Independent* 24 Oct. 1936. The Society in question is the London Co-operative Society.

99 This information is taken from the legal charge from the trustees of Heston and Isleworth Borough Labour Party to the London Co-operative Society Ltd on the property of 20 Heath Road, Hounslow dated 8 July 1936 and the trust deed, dated 19 May 1936 which defined the role of the trustees and General Management Committee in relation to the hall. Private collection of John Grigg.

100 *County of Middlesex Independent,* 24 Oct. 1936. 'Heston and Isleworth Borough Labour Party Souvenir Programme of the Opening Ceremony of the Party's Premises at 20 Heath Road, Hounslow, Saturday 17 October 1936'. Private Collection of John Grigg.

101 *County of Middlesex Independent,* 24 Oct.1936 and *The Middlesex Chronicle,* 24 Oct.1936.

2. Labour Halls and Political Organisations.

Between 1918 and 1979, the labour halls in this study provided a focal point for the activities of many different organisations. The consideration of the relationships between the selected labour hall management committees and their tenants will form a significant part of the thesis. This analysis will begin with an examination of labour movement organisations. These may be divided into two groups loosely defined as 'political': the Labour Party and its youth groups, the Communist Party and several local organisations and 'industrial': the trade unions and co-operative societies.

This section will illustrate the importance of the labour hall space to various political organisations. It will commence with the predominant hirers of the majority of the halls in this study: the local Labour Parties. The section will review the existing literature on branch life in the Labour Party during the relevant decades. It will then examine the surviving evidence of Labour Party activity in the selected labour halls. The remainder of this section will consider how the many other political organisations utilised the space provided, referring to extant literature where appropriate. The ways in which the complex relationship between the Labour Party and the Communist Party of Great Britain impacted upon the local labour movements as represented by the selected labour halls will also be discussed in this section. Ultimately, it will examine how closely, labour hall usage reflected the ideal established by the national Labour Party that: 'the Labour Hall or any portion or portions thereof to be used by any society, company, person or persons for objects not inconsistent with the objects of a Labour Party.'[1]

The Labour Party

Constituency organisations were an integral part of the re-constitution of the Labour Party in 1918. It was intended that divisional Labour Parties would be established in each British constituency.[2] Although a substantial body of literature exists on the history of the Labour Party, little has been written specifically on local branch life in the period under examination.[3] Sue Goss has noted that:

> Studies of the Labour Party... which have only examined the national dimension have missed a rich seam of evidence which casts doubts on some theories and depths to others. The evolution of Labour at a local level has been a very different process from that suggested by simply studying the national party.[4]

Until recently, the majority of the extant historiography has not dwelt on the minutiae of branch life, but has considered it in the context of the experiences of individual activists, an integral part of the Labour Party's local electoral fortunes or as representative of the decline of branch socialism in the 1950s. The evidence provided by the halls in this study expands and in some instances, challenges the existing theories about local Labour Party activities. It should be noted at this point that although parts of this chapter deal with the post-war labour movement, there in inevitably a greater emphasis on the latter decades considered in the tenth chapter of this thesis, which concerns the apparent decline of the selected labour halls.

Matthew Worley has noted that, 'historiographically, the role of political organisation has increasingly become a feature of recent writing on the Labour Party.'[5] A proportion of this literature has adopted a local emphasis, although a proportion of this has concentrated on local policies rather than activities undertaken.[6] The work of Matthew Worley, which compares a broad range of local labour Party activities across five separate British counties and Daniel Weinbren's writing on the Labour Oral History Project are particularly useful. Worley argues that the examination of local activism is significant because: 'Even though political activists tended to be in the minority within their respective communities, political organizations became a site of much activity in the inter-war years and they did so for a greater number of people than in any previous period of British history.'[7] Although there are no references to labour halls, institutes or other buildings in this article, as the focal point of much of the work of such organisations, their importance in this context is clear and will be explored in more detail during the course of this thesis.

A significant proportion of the literature on the history of the local Labour Parties considers the notion of 'community'. John Lawrence has shown how,

prior to 1914: 'local Labour politicians did frequently espouse what might be termed a politics of community-contrasting their own concern for, and understanding of, the locality and its needs with the remoteness of London's political elites'. He goes on to argue that the way in which Labour presented itself as 'the champion of local communities' was 'to prove an important, if ultimately rather self-limiting, aspect of Labour's appeal between the wars'.[8] Conversely it has also been contended that Labour Party members created an exclusive community which was detached from the working class as a whole. For example, Matthew Worley argues that, in spite of attempts to interact with their local communities: 'Labour members could often inhabit a relatively contained social-political world, in which intra-party functions, solidarity and comradeship was often rewarding for those involved, but was simultaneously detached from the wider community'. Daniel Weinbren has similarly contended that groups of Labour Party members could 'occasionally become cosy introverted gerontocracies'. As will be demonstrated, throughout the course of this thesis, labour halls could be regarded as representative of the boundaries of this 'relatively contained social-political world'. However, as has already been noted, such premises were not entirely bounded political spaces at all times. Several attempts were made to engage on a non-political level with the local community and the evidence provided by the selected labour halls substantiates Worley's further assertion that: 'Labour at least sought either to complement or extend its organization and activities into those localities of which its members were a part.' Worley argues that this was achieved by the Party emphasis on social-political issues such as housing, which were traditionally associated with the working class and Weinbren also notes that 'through their involvement in local issues, activists have helped to create a sense of community which has led to people supporting Labour'.[9] Sue Goss concurs with this view: support for the local Party: 'depended on Labour's ability to reflect local concerns and the traditions and assumptions which made up the dominant political culture'.[10] In the context of labour halls and their environs, this study further contends that such an extension into the local community would have included the provision of advice bureaux on the premises as well as open air meetings, which would politicise the local areas.[11]

Worley's final observation, which is of interest in this present chapter, reflects on the changing nature of local organisation in the 1920s and 1930s:

> Constituency–level Labour Parties between the wars endeavoured to transform, themselves from small groups of men, usually trade unionists, supervising electoral work at particular times, to larger and more continuous organizations of men and women with an array of campaigning, political and social functions.[12]

The remainder of this section of the chapter, then, will consider in detail the kinds of Labour Party activities, which were undertaken on the selected premises and assess how successful the local Parties were in achieving this aim.[13]

Throughout the period examined in this study, Constituency and Divisional Labour Parties were the predominant hirers of labour halls in the Greater London area. Local Labour Parties used the selected premises as an important focal point for a wide range of political activities, which, prior to the inception of the halls, had been scattered across different venues. The main activity undertaken by the Party in the labour halls was the political or propaganda meeting, which had been an integral part of the Party's function since its inception. These meetings were held on a diverse range of local and national contemporary issues. Often, however, it is only the subject or title of the meeting, which has survived and there are no further references to the size of the gathering or the precise nature or impact of the speaker's views or that of the ensuing discussion. In 1931, subjects under discussion at Labour Party political meetings at East Ham Labour Hall included, 'The Co-ordination of London Traffic'.[14] Between 1940 and 1969, at Willesden Labour Hall, meetings were held on subjects including 'Social Legislation' (1941), 'The Communist Party's Application for Affiliation' (1943), 'The European Situation' (1943) and 'The Cuban Crisis' (1962). [15] Similarly, during 1943, at Barnes and Richmond Labour Club, the subjects adopted by speakers at open meetings included 'Local Government in the Post-War World' and 'Labour's View on Post-War Planning'. Fourteen years later, in 1957, consideration was devoted to 'Tricks of Company Finance' and 'Recent Events in Poland'.[16]

Wimbledon Labour Party held several series of propaganda meetings at the Trades and Labour Hall, which were open to the general public. In 1923 and 1924, for example, Sunday evening propaganda meetings included subjects such as 'Labour's Next Step'. This 'syllabus' of political meetings indicates the way in which political propaganda would have been combined with workers' education. Although many of the speakers were clearly delivering political propaganda, the syllabus also incorporated speakers from the Workers' Educational Association (WEA).[17] During the period in question many meetings were held under the auspices of Wimbledon Labour Party at the Trades and Labour Hall, which were not part of a series. The diverse range of current affairs, covered by these meetings included: 'Tenants' Rights and Landlords Obligations' (1939); 'The War Question and the Labour Party' (1939) and 'Education' (1963).[18]

Lansbury House, Peckham provides examples of the issues under discussion at political meetings at the end of the period in question. For example, during the winter season of 1975-1976, political meetings were being held on subjects, which included 'Are Workers' Co-operatives the answer to unemployment in Southwark?', 'The Philosophy and Workings of the Community Land Act' and 'Squatters versus the Housing List'. By October 1979, Peckham Labour Party was registering its opposition to the policies of the new Conservative government, with a political meeting on 'Fighting the Tory Cuts'.[19] Contemporary issues were under discussion at other halls during this time. These included 'the Community Land Act' and 'Racialism' (both 1975) at Barnes and Richmond Labour Club.[20]

On occasion, political meetings also took the form of debates between informed speakers. For example, in 1936, a quarterly meeting held at East Ham Labour Hall under the auspices of the Labour Party included a debate on the 'United Front'. During the 1950s, a debate between Denis Healey MP and Konni Zillacus MP on 'Nuclear Disarmament' (1958) was part of a series held at Hendon Labour Hall.[21]

During the inter-war years, evidence survives that some political propaganda meetings were particularly popular. On 11 June 1926, for example, Ellen

Wilkinson was the principal speaker at a meeting in support of the miners' strike, which had precipitated the General Strike in the garden of Wimbledon Trades and Labour Hall. This meeting was later reported to have been 'a great success'.[22] In November 1931, the attendance of 'a large crowd' at a demonstration at Stepney Labour Hall, addressed by Clement Attlee, meant that it was necessary to hold an overflow meeting. Such meetings were crucial for the acquisition of new members and voluntary workers. In February 1932, for example, 50 volunteers were 'secured' at a single meeting on the Stepney premises. By April of that year, successful meetings and 'grand' rallies at the hall contributed to the recruitment of 800 new members in the Mile End constituency. This trend continued in Stepney. An 'enthusiastic' meeting was held at the Labour Hall on 23 January 1933. Local councillors addressed the audience on issues such as, 'health', 'industrial evolution' and 'the means test and local relief'. The address on 'industrial evolution', which traced the subject from 'the fallacies of Adam Smith' onwards, was particularly highlighted in the report of the meeting in the local labour movement newspaper as 'one of the best ever speeches given at the hall'. The report concluded that "the meeting was, without the slightest doubt, a successful one.' [23]

The selected labour halls were also used for local Labour Party Executive Committee or General Management Committee meetings. These 'business meetings' included reports from Party delegates to national and local conferences. A good example of this was the address, given at a quarterly meeting, by the local Party's delegate to the national conference of 1931. He reported on the 'momentous decisions' of the conference to expel Ramsay MacDonald, Snowden and the other Labour members of the National Government from the Labour Party.[24]

General Management Committee meetings were sometimes concluded by an address from an invited speaker on a topical issue. These issues were as diverse as the larger scale propaganda meetings. Speakers from various political organisations addressed Wimbledon Labour Party members on: 'The Spanish Situation' (1938); 'The Cost of Living' (1943); 'Labour's View on the Beveridge Report' (1942) and 'The Labour Committee in Europe' (1966).[25]

Subjects discussed at Battersea Labour Hall included; 'Ward Organisation' (1923), 'The Political Situation' (1924), 'A Visit to Russia' (1933), 'Atomic Energy' (1947) and 'The Economic Problems Facing Britain' (1947).[26] Speakers addressed Wealdstone Labour Party on 'Controlled Tipping' (1936), 'Unemployment in Harrow' (1939), 'Current Housing Problems Related to Local Government Policy' (1954), 'The Prime Minister's Cuts Statement' and 'Problems of World Population' (both 1949). [27]

The labour halls in this study were hired by local branches for activities outside traditional meetings. During the 1930s, the Party used Ilford Central Labour Hall as a fund-raising venue for political causes such as striking Lancashire cotton workers and 'Aid Spain' work, during that country's civil war.[28]

The selected premises were vital for electioneering. In 1918, Ilford Labour Party's local election campaign commenced at the Ilford Hill Hall with a conference of all the affiliated bodies and sections. This attracted 60 delegates. After the local elections, the Party acknowledged the importance of the labour hall in the election campaigns, which resulted in one county councillor, two borough councillors and two representatives on the Romford Board of Guardians.[29]

The labour halls also provided venues for Constituency Labour Parties to hold meetings with non-political local community organisations. In September 1979, for example, Peckham Labour Party resolved to make contact with members of the local police force. In orchestrating such a meeting at Lansbury House, however, the Party was working towards a political agenda. It was intended that as well as raising concerns experienced by local residents, the police would also be presented with 'the Socialist perspective on crime'. [30]

The fragmentary nature of the labour hall archive renders problematic most generalisations about post-war political activities undertaken at the labour halls. There are at least two kinds of activity to which references are made in the archives of only one hall: in this case, discussion groups and 'brains

trusts'. However, this does not necessarily mean that the activity was restricted to that particular hall. The discussion group was a particular feature of Battersea Labour Party's programme. In 1947, for example, Bolingbroke Ward organised series of discussion group meetings. Two such meetings focussed upon 'Direction of Labour' and 'Further Restrictions'.[31] It is possible that, in this case, the discussion group was a less formal post-war continuation of the debating society. In 1932, one such society met at East Ham Labour Hall and subjects under discussion included 'the League of Nations' and 'the trend of mechanisation'.[32]

Similarly, the 'Brains Trust' or panel discussion is particularly associated with Barnes and Richmond Labour Party. The 'Brains Trusts', have been described as part of post-war 'attempts to update public meetings'. The 'Brains Trust' was a popular early 1950s radio programme, whose format was adapted for political education purposes by the Labour Party. Initially, at least, a panel of national, mostly 'Bevanite' Party speakers, including Michael Foot and A.J.P Taylor, toured constituencies 'to great success'.[33] Throughout the 1950s, brains trusts were adopted at a local level in Richmond and were held on a variety of different subjects. They were occasionally incorporated into election campaigns, such as the one in 1959. This event, which featured the Labour Party's Prospective Parliamentary Candidates for Twickenham, Richmond and Kingston illustrated that such political education methods were not always popular, by attracting a smaller attendance than had been anticipated.[34]

During the period in question, the Labour Party contributed a diverse range of activities to the culture of the selected halls. Although it has been possible to include some references to post-war activity, the nature of the surviving archives has necessitated an emphasis on inter-war activities. It is clear that the majority of Labour Party activities in the halls lend support to Matthew Worley's argument that during the 1920s and 1930s, Constituency Parties did attempt to broaden their programmes beyond election campaigning at specific times. It is now necessary to consider the ways in which other organisations used the political spaces provided by these premises.

The Independent Labour Party

The Independent Labour Party (ILP) has traditionally been perceived as weak in the south of England. [35] However, local branches of the ILP undertook important roles in the histories of several labour halls in the Greater London area. Ilford Hill Labour Hall had been purchased by the local ILP and West Bermondsey Labour Party was established by Bermondsey ILP in 1910 to foster closer links with the trade union movement. The following year, the new organisation purchased Bermondsey Labour Institute. Until the ILP disaffiliated from the Labour Party in 1932, local branches were also major tenants of several of the other labour halls in the Greater London area. This section will briefly consider the nature of activities undertaken by the ILP branches on the various premises. It will then look at the local impact on th ILP of the 1918 Labour Party constitution.

'Making socialists' was one of the main objectives of the ILP. [36] Inevitably, its propaganda activities were more easily facilitated in its own political space. This is certainly the case in Ilford Hill Labour Hall. Weekly political meetings were held on various subjects, including 'The Education Act' (1920), 'Municipal Government' (1926) and 'The Historic Mission of the Working Classes' (1921), which commenced with 'primitive man'[37]. The demonstration was another form of political expression, which was adopted by the ILP. For example, on Armistice Day in 1925, a 'No More War'demonstration was held, under the auspices of the ILP.[38]

Until it disaffiliated from the Labour Party in 1932, the Independent Labour Party was a regular hirer of East Ham Labour Hall. From the opening of the hall in 1919, at least one branch held frequent socials on the premises. The hall was also used by the ILP on a regional level. In 1922, a conference organised by the East London Federation on 'Co-operation, Municipalisation and Nationalisation', which advertised Sidney Webb as its main speaker, attracted more than two hundred delegates.[39]

From its inception, Bermondsey Labour Institute was the focal point of the political activity, which enhanced the perception of Bermondsey as 'the Mecca

of London Socialism'.[40] Bermondsey ILP made extensive use of the facilities provided by the institute between 1911 and 1940. In December 1916, for example, the ILP took part in a 'food prices demonstration' and was also represented on a joint committee for adult suffrage. The institute provided the venue for regular Thursday evening propaganda and political meetings.[41]

The Croydon branch of the ILP was a regular tenant at Ruskin House, until ILP disaffiliation in 1932.. In 1918, the ILP held fortnightly business meetings, which regularly closed with a discussion on a topical issue, for example, 'Why I am not a pacifist'.[42] It is clear that although pacifism was a significant issue within the ILP, there was not a consensus on it. The ILP has been described as the only left-wing organisation internationally, which was comprised of significant numbers of pacifists. It produced a large volume of literature, which questioned the motivations of the protagonists in the War. In spite of this, however, it is not defined as a purely 'pacifist body', because this was not necessarily the majority view. [43] This is reflected in the discussion held at Ruskin House.

ILP meetings at Ruskin House retained the same discussion based format until at least 1930. In May of that year, the business meeting was followed by a discussion on unemployment. The ILP also hired space in Ruskin House for occasional events, for example the memorial to the ILP leader, Keir Hardie. It is probable that the ILP put the premises to other uses. Customary activities for some branches at this time included 'mission weeks', which focussed upon the role of open-air meetings to attract new members.[44]

In 1918, the new Labour Party constitution impacted upon the ILP at both national and local levels. The new constitution provided for the establishment of constituency Labour Party branches for the first time. It also outlined a distinct socialist policy for the Labour Party. Local organisation within the Labour Party had previously been the sole preserve of the ILP and it had also supplied much of the Party's policy ideas. Without this clearly defined role, the existence of the ILP as a separate entity was questioned. The future role of the ILP in the Labour Party was also made increasingly uncertain by the 'hegemony' of the trade unions, which was confirmed by the Labour Party's

new constitution. This entitled the unions to 11 of the 21 seats on the reformed National Executive Committee.[45]

The uncertain future of the ILP was also reflected on a local level. At Ilford Hill Labour Hall for example, attendance at ILP meetings began to decline during the 1920s. In 1925, 18 members, out of 75 attended branch meetings. Although the actual membership did decline in 1926, to 63, the greater involvement of these members in branch affairs in the year of the General Strike is suggested.[46] The role of the ILP, on a local level at least, was still being questioned seven years after the implementation of the Labour Party's new constitution. A defeated motion proposing the dissolution of the branch in 1925 and, two years later, a lecture and discussion entitled 'Does Ilford ILP justify its existence?' was indicative of the concern with which many members regarded the position of the branch in the latter half of the 1920s. [47]

It is clear, then, that the ILP was a significant presence in the selected labour halls, until at least 1932 and many of its activities are similar in structure to those adopted by the Constituency Labour Parties and other left-wing organisations. The evidence from Ilford ILP is particularly significant in that the members were questioning the relevance of their own organisation locally several years after it had been effectively sidelined by the Labour Party at a national level. In the absence of specific evidence from other branches, it should be noted that this particular branch of the ILP may not be representative of those which used the other halls. There are no references to Bermondsey ILP conducting similar debates about its purpose, but this could be explained by the nature of the surviving evidence. The majority of references to ILP activities during this period are taken from Fenner Brockway's biography of Dr Alfred Salter, which tends to highlight his achievements, rather than any perceived difficulties within the local ILP.

The Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB)

Between its establishment in 1920 and 1928, local branches of the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB) were largely considered to be as much a part of the labour movement as the Labour Party and the trade unions in the selected areas of Greater London. It was represented at many of the

labour halls in the Greater London area. Nationally, however, during the 1920s, the Labour Party distanced itself from the CPGB. This process has been described by Andrew Thorpe as part of 'the marginalization of dissent', within the Labour Party and led to the CPGB's application for affiliation to the Labour Party to be rejected in two consecutive years and, in 1923, the expulsion of Communist members from the Party was endorsed by the National Executive Committee (NEC) of the Labour Party. Five years later, CPGB members were no longer permitted to attend the Labour Party Conference as trade union delegates. The CPGB's extreme "class against class" campaign, which alienated the Labour Party between 1928 and 1935, Thorpe contends, was 'the logical end of the dispute' between the two parties. This resistance of the Labour Party continued into the following decade. John Stevenson and Chris Cook have noted that 'the most striking feature of the character of the British Labour movement in the thirties was its uncompromising stand against communist influence'.[48]

The complex relationship between the two national organisations inevitably had an impact at a local level. The remainder of this section will consider the relationship between the management committees of the selected halls and the local branches of the CPGB and will assess how far the 'uncompromising stand' was reflected on the labour hall committees. In several instances proposed CPGB bookings precipitated divisions within the management committees. These divisions were sometimes resolved by pragmatic, financially motivated agreements in favour of renting space to the CPGB. For example the management committee of Willesden Trades and Labour Hall Ltd was completely divided over proposed bookings from the North Willesden branch of the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB), for a series of six lectures. The proposed booking was accepted on the casting vote of the chairman. Ultimately, for financial reasons, it was decided that it was in the 'best interests of the society' to permit the CPGB and its allied organisations to hire rooms. On this occasion, two members, out of a total of 27, voted against the resolution.[49]

Such pragmatic decisions were also required during other periods of policy divergence between the CPGB and the Labour Party. In 1947, for example,

the CPGB moved away from co-operation with the Labour Party. [50] In this context it is interesting that in October 1947, permission was granted by the Management Committee of Wimbledon Labour Hall Ltd, for the local branch of the Communist Party of Great Britain to hire a room in the Trades and Labour Hall for its committee meetings. However, there is some indication that the national situation was reflected on a local level at Wimbledon. The Management Committee stipulated that other Communist Party functions, especially public propaganda meetings were not permitted on the premises. It is clear that the decision to let a committee room to the CPGB was almost certainly motivated by the financial imperative. The Party had also hired the premises during the 1930s, for amongst other things, an open meeting in the William Morris Hall, entitled 'We Can Still Save Peace'.[51]

Between the inception of East Ham Labour Hall in 1919 and 1930, the Communist Party was a regular hirer of the East Ham Labour Hall.[52] From 1930, no general references to the Communist Party are made in the local labour movement newspapers and it is not listed amongst the regular tenants of the hall. This is almost certainly as a direct result of the class against class policy of the CPGB.

During the 1940s, the local branch of the Communist Party of Great Britain was regular hirers of Barnes and Richmond Labour Club. There had been limited local co-operation between the Labour and Communist Parties during the 1945 general election campaign. However, in 1950, three years after the CPGB had ceased co-operation with the national Labour Party, the Executive Committee of the Richmond and Barnes Labour Party resolved that the Communist Party's letting should be discontinued.[53] In spite of this, there are no references to the resolution in the minutes of the Labour Club and the Communist Party was still connected with the premises in March 1951.[54] This was not an entirely problem-free relationship. The Communist Party had been in arrears with the settlement of their account in both 1949 and 1951. Two years later, however, in 1953, the Labour Club 'did not wish to accept' a donation of five pounds from the Barnes branch of the Communist Party. The money was forwarded to the Constituency Labour Party, to either treat as a donation, or return to the Communist Party. A subsequent request by the local

Communist branch for the hire of a room for their monthly meetings was also rejected.[55]

The William Morris Institute in Walthamstow did not adopt a pragmatic approach towards the CPGB. In many ways this attitude is surprising, because before 1938, the Institute was controlled by the Social Democratic Federation (SDF). In theory at least, both the SDF and the CPGB adhered to a Marxist based ideology, but the relationship between the organisations appears to have been quite complex. An undated Social Democratic Federation leaflet, for example is entitled 'Damnation to you Bolsheviks!'[56] In 1936, the management committee of the William Morris Institute resolved that room bookings should not be accepted from the Communist Party or 'organisations connected thereto.'[57] The minutes of the relevant meeting do not indicate that there was a debate on this issue; only the decision itself is recorded. However, approximately thirteen months later, in March 1937, the William Morris Co-operative Society was dissolved after a substantial minority of the officers and membership broke away to form a local branch of the 'Communist Party'.[58] There are no further references to this organisation in either the preserved records of the William Morris Institute or the contemporary local press.

The relationship between the management committees of each of the halls and the Communist Party of Great Britain is a useful example of the ways in which financial necessity impinged upon the ideology and political allegiances of hall management committees. Such pragmatism illustrates that the 'uncompromising stand', which Stevenson and Cook identified in the national labour movement, was not necessarily practical on a local level. Although the motivations of the committee members are not always stated, financial reasons were almost certainly the only impetus for the acceptance of CPGB bookings. There is no indication that such bookings were permitted as a result of the convergence of ideologies in the local movements.

Labour Movement Youth Organisations

Many of the selected labour halls under consideration in this study provided focal points for the activities of the youth organisations, which were attached to the Labour Party and the co-operative movement.

The Labour League of Youth was established by the national Labour Party in 1926 and was described thus:

> The Labour Party League of Youth is an integral part of the Labour Party. It exists so that Young People between the ages of fourteen and twenty-one years, interested in Labour's fight for Political, Social and Economic justice, can come into direct and personal association with the Labour Movement through an organisation controlled by the Young People themselves.

Young people were ecouraged to join the new organisation for three reasons:

> Because by becoming a member of the Labour Party League of Youth you can assist the Labour Movement to abolish the evil social conditions that exist to-day.
> Because in the Labour Party League of Youth you can serve your political apprenticeship in an atmosphere of comradeship and goodwill.
> Because the Labour Party League of Youth will widen your social horizon, will bring you in touch with new friends and will link you up in a great fellowship striving for a glorious human Cause.[59]

There had been previous, largely local, initiatives, which included the Young Labour League, founded in Clapham in 1920. However, it has been noted that, the Labour Party's action in establishing the League in 1926, was at least partly a response to the establishment of two rival left wing organisations: the Independent Labour Party's Guild of Youth and the Young Communist League.

During the interwar years, the Labour League of Youth was particularly popular in London. By 1933, 60 branches had been established in the Greater London area alone.[60] The following year, the *Stepney Citizen* summarised the aims of the organisation thus:'The Labour Party League of Youth introduces

to this generation the elementary principles of Socialism and dispels any wrong ideas you may have about the creed'. [61] The importance of the organisation in local areas, including London, was also retrospectively noted by Clement Attlee: 'In pre-war days, the League of Youth met an important need in the life of many local Labour Parties and the work put in by many of its members up and down the country was of great benefit to the Movement and an inspiration to us of an older generation.'[62]

However, the League of Youth was not an entirely an independent branch of the Labour Party in the inter-war decades: it had been reorganised in 1929 under central Labour Party control. David M. Pomfret notes that the National Executive Committee (NEC) responded to the League's 'unity campaign' in 1936, by 'ordering it to concentrate on recreational and educational activities and weakening it numerically.' [63] The National Advisory Committee of the League was also suspended by the NEC. *Advance,* the official organ of the Labour League of Youth, protested against this, contending that the NEC was only content with a 'dummy leadership' for the League, rather than one that was trying to 'create a strong League'.[64]

The NEC also proposed to reduce the upper age limit of the League of Youth from 25 to 21 years of age. This was known as 'the memorandum' and more than 250 local Labour Parties and other affiliated organisations opposed it. These included several labour movement organisations in the selected halls, such as Ilford, Peckham, Richmond and Wimbledon, Merton and Morden. Dr Alfred Salter, a significant figure in the Bermondsey Labour movement, also spoke against the memorandum:

> Youth is naturally to the Left. Youth will naturally be in advance of staid, solid, matured opinion. It would be a disaster if it were not so...Why should youth not have its say and crystallise its views in the form of considered resolutions? Older people may disagree (I disagree) with some of the viewpoints of the League of Youth. The way to meet the divergent position taken up on policy matters by the League is by argument, consultation, reason, friendly discussion and contact... Excluding the people between 21 and 25 years of age will not stamp out the rebellion in the League. It may stamp out the League itself.[65]

Central control by the NEC also directly affected at least one of the branches of the League, which met at labour halls in the Greater London area. In May 1939, several members of Wealdstone Labour League of Youth were suspended as a direct result of 'co-operation with the Popular Front.'[66] Ben Pimlott describes the Labour League of Youth as a 'Crippsite' in its support of the Popular Front campaign. Pimlott quotes the chairman, (Lord) Ted Willis's recollections of the League's activities at this time:

> [O]ur activities reached a climax in February 1939, when we organised a great Youth Pilgrimage to London. It succeeded beyond our expectations: thousands of young people from all over Britain, travelling by train, bus, bicycles and on foot, descended on London.

Pimlott notes in the summer of 1939, as a result of this, the NEC of the Labour Party, again suspended the National Advisory Council of the Labour League of Youth and several of the League's leaders joined the Young Communist League. [67] It is probable that the suspensions of members of the Wealdstone Labour League of Youth was a direct consequence of activities such as the pilgrimage.

The League was also clearly aware of the increasing number of alternative uses to which the non-working time of young people could be put. An official publication noted that:

> No movement was ever built on a policy of waiting for its potential converts to drift along and be talked to. With young people particularly, it is necessary in these days of innumerable counter-attractions, to make the basis of our approach one of systematic personal cultivation of support

and recommended proactive visits by members of League to other potential new recruits as well as personal letters.[68]

The activities of the League as a whole were severely disrupted by the Second World War. However, there was a major attempt to resuscitate the organisation in the immediate post-war years, endorsed by the Labour Party leadership. It is clear that this leadership intended to retain control of League

activities. In the first issue of the new organ of the Labour League of Youth, Clement Attlee wrote that he looked 'forward to the growing development of League of Youth work within the framework of our Party constitution'. Afiliation with organisations from outside the Labour Party was also not encouraged by the hierarchy. In August 1946, *Young Socialist* reported that 'overtures' for afiliation to their organisation had been made by the Young Co-operators. The official Labour Party response was that:

> There is no agreement or machinery for such affiliation and branches should not entertain these proposals.
> The constitution of the League as approved by the recent Party Conference gives branches full scope for development within the Party's own organisation.[69]

This attitude was almost certainly a reaction to the League's political radicalism during the 1930s.

By July 1946, 40 branches of the Labour League of Youth had been established '[a]round the residential fringes of London'.[70] However this attempt to restart the League was not a particularly successful long term measure. Finally, in 1955, the Labour League of Youth was dissolved into constituency organisations. Lawrence Black notes that the main reason for this action was depleted national membership.[71]

Five years later, in 1960, the Labour Party's national youth organisation was reformed as the Young Socialists. This was similarly under the direct control of the Labour Party's NEC. For example, in 1965, several League of Youth branches refused to attend the National Conference in protest at a particular NEC proposal. The Executive intended to forbid the League Branches from debating any political issues, which were not directly related to the interests of youth.[72]

However, one resolution which was passed by the NEC at this time was that 'discussion documents' should be provided by that body in conjunction with the Executive of the Young Socialists for the annual conference of the latter organisation. Between 1967 and 1979, subjects for discussion included: 'Industrial Democracy', (1967), 'The Aftermath of Colonialism in Africa' and

'Social Services', (both 1968), 'Common Market-No, Socialist United States of Europe-Yes' (1974) and 'Unemployment and the Crisis of Capitalism' (1976).[73] These contemporary issues would have also been debated at local League of Youth meetings in the selected labour halls..

The Hendon Labour Party League of Youth was a regular hirer of various rooms on the Hendon Labour Hall premises. Members could participate in political and social activities, which, during 1936 included a fancy dress Christmas party and a debate on the 'vexed question' of the possible affiliation of the Communist Party of Great Britain to the Labour Party. By 1952, the League's programme included the following elements: discussions on contemporary issues with other local leagues, conference reports, rambling, record evenings, play readings, square dancing and 'hat' debates. A 'hat debate' involved choosing a subject for debate, at random, out of a hat.[74] Many of these activities had been listed as suitable pursuits in Labour Party guidelines for youth activities during the 1930s.[75]

The Ilford Labour League of Youth was also a regular tenant of the Ilford Central Labour Hall. Subsequent to its formation in 1932, the Ilford League ran a variety of activities, including study circles, on subjects such as "the case for socialism". Debates with the young people's sections of other political parties were also important parts of the League's programme. A good example of this was the debate between Ilford League of Youth and the local Young Liberals about 'the retention of capitalism'. Prominent local speakers regularly addressed the branch. One such speaker was Percy Astins, the Labour Party's prospective parliamentary candidate for Ilford, who spoke about 'the motive force, which brought youth into socialism'. [76]

Ilford Labour Party League of Youth was restarted after the Second World War. It was represented at the Labour Party's first National Summer School at Bangor in 1946. The Branch noted that: 'although it was not strong in members, it was doing extremely effective work within the Party and social activity was merely secondary to its political work'. Two years later, the monthly programme of Ilford Labour League of Youth, consisted of a social, a

lecture and a novel feature such as a spelling bee, mock trial and a balloon debate.[77]

The Labour League of Youth was a regular tenant of Stepney Labour Hall. [78] In 1933, for example, the League undertook two bookings per week, on consecutive evenings. The weekly dance on a Tuesday night was followed by an evening of lectures and debates on the Wednesday. During 1933, subjects covered on Wednesday evening lectures included 'The Labour Party and Youth', 'Film and Propaganda' and 'The Socialist Policy'. Debates were arranged with other political organisations. In April 1933, one member of the League of Youth debated against the assertion of a member of the Independent Labour Party (ILP) that 'The Labour Party is an ineffective instrument for Socialism.' Other activities which were held under the auspices of the Labour League of Youth at Stepney Labour Hall during the 1930s included a 'Mock Parliament' and a 'very successful' lantern lecture on the subject of 'War against War' (1935). This lecture considered national and international issues, including the situation in Abyssinia and incorporated the use of visual aids.[79] During the latter half of the 1930s, regular League dances were held at the hall. These were often promoted by *Advance,* the League of Youth journal. The Stepney Labour League of Youth was inaugurated in September 1950 at the Stepney Labour Hall. [80]

During the period to 1979, the Labour League of Youth, and later the Young Socialists, was a habitual tenant of Lansbury House. From 1949, the League met initially once then twice a week on the premises for meetings, socials and discussions. Public meetings were also held in Lansbury House under the auspices of the Labour Party's youth organisation. On 18 June 1979, for example, the Young Socialists held such a meeting, asking 'Which Way Forward for Labour?' The main speaker at this meeting was Andy Bevan, the Labour Party's National Youth Officer.[81] He was a relatively high profile speaker, as he held a seat on the Labour Party's National Executive Committee.

Battersea's Labour League of Youth was a rapidly growing organisation during the inter-war years, which held weekly meetings at the Labour Hall. In

1937, a League of Youth delegate reported to the Executive Committee of Battersea Labour Party that:

> [t]hey were developing the educational side of the increment by which they hope to instruct their members in Socialism. They were not neglecting the sporting side. Arrangements were being made to hold cricket matches and [they] were taking an active part in the cricket club.[82]

The apparent restriction of the League's activities to educational and social provides a perfect example of the kind of non-confrontational programme, which would have been approved by the Labour Party's NEC at this time.

Speakers and discussions also formed a central part of the programme undertaken by the Battersea League. Subjects included; 'Local Government' (1930), 'Economics and Socialism' (1936) and 'Youth and Crime' (1957). Frequent 'stimulating and amusing' debates were another activity which was held on the premises on a regular basis.[83] The organisation was forced to disband during the Second World War, but was reformed in 1948. For two consecutive years, 1953 and 1954, Battersea's Youth Section was the largest in London, reaching a total of 70 members. [84]

The Wimbledon Labour Party's youth groups were regular hirers of the Wimbledon Trades and Labour Hall premises. From at least 1928, the Young People's Section held weekly lectures and debates on the premises. The debates were held on topical subjects, including, 'Should the death penalty be abolished?' Regular social events were also held under the auspices of the Young People's Section. The League of Youth was re-established after the Second World War. This 'large and enthusiastic organisation', met at the Trades and Labour Hall twice a week in the late 1940s and early 1950s for both social and political functions. The Wimbledon League was a member of the Surrey Federation of Labour Leagues of Youth, which included other branches such as Richmond and Kingston. The Trades and Labour Hall was the venue for several 'Surrey Fed' propaganda meetings, reunions and other social gatherings.[85]

The Wealdstone Labour League of Youth and later the Harrow Young Socialists were regular hirers of the Wealdstone Labour Hall throughout the period. The League held monthly meetings on the premises from 1937 and was initially described as 'small but energetic'. The membership divided itself into three groups; 'Social', 'Dramatic' and 'Discussion' and it was hoped that the dramatic group would produce a play for a forthcoming Labour Party social. No record survives of the play actually being performed.[86]

The detailed nature of the surviving references to the Wealdstone Labour League of Youth and Harrow Young Socialists provides an insight into the history of a local political youth organisation. Soon after inception the League encountered fluctuations of both recruitment and finance. The League was effectively disbanded by the impact of the Second World War. There was an attempt to re-establish it in 1948, but this failed after less than a year. A further attempt to reconstitute the League of Youth was made by the Harrow Central Constituency Labour Party in 1951, but suffered from a similar lack of support to the pre-war years. In his report to the Labour Party Executive Committee, the League of Youth delegate indicated that only four members had attended one particular League meeting. Although, on at least one occasion, low attendance at a League of Youth gathering was attributed to bad weather, it appears that there was no radical improvement in the position of the League during the 1950s. However by 1968, the local branch of the Young Socialists was meeting on the premises.[87]

Local co-operative youth groups, comprised of 15 to 25 year olds, were invested with the title 'Co-operative Comrades Circle' from 1922. Two years later, several of these circles formed themselves into the British Federation of Co-operative Youth. The objectives of the organisation were as follows:

1. To arouse, maintain and increase interest among adolescents; to induce the formation and maintenance of Circles and other groups approved by the National Executive and to work for an International of Co-operative Youth.
2. To encourage co-operative trading and production with a view to the establishment of a co-operative system of industry.
3. To encourage all forms of co-operative education.

4. To assist in carrying out the policy of the co-operative movement as expressed at Congress.[88]

The Co-operative Comrades' Circles did not attract a mass membership. In 1937 the last recorded figures indicate that there were 8,000 paid-up members. Selina Todd notes that this was only a small fraction of the membership of the contemporary guiding and scouting movements. However, Todd also argues that the Circles did provide an alternative, distinctive programme for British youth during the inter-war years.[89]

Studying and debate formed the kernel of Comrades' Circle activities. Several branches were affiliated to the NCLC and the Co-operative movement had established its own brand of educational activities.[90] The same emphasis on internationalism, which pervaded the whole of the co-operative movement, was present in the Comrades' Circle programme, which included Esperanto lessons and penfriend schemes.

The Co-operative Comrades Circles were finally closed down by the Co-operative Union in 1941 and the youth movement, which had been covered in its entirety by the Co-operative Comrades' Circles, was divided into three distinct age groups: Rainbow Playways for seven to 11 year olds, Pathfinders for 11 to 15 and Co-operative Youth Clubs for fifteen to twenty year olds. The British Federation of Young Co-operators was established as an autonomous organisation to cater for 20 to 25 year olds. [91] In 1949, there is a passing reference in the archives of the William Morris Institute, Walthamstow to the weekly meetings of the 'Co-operative Juveniles' [92]. It is not entirely clear, precisely which branch of the movement this was, although as 'juvenile' is a synonym for 'youthful', it is probable that this refers to the Co-operative Youth Club, for 15 to 20 year olds.

The Battersea Co-operative Comrades' Circle were regular tenants of the local labour hall. In November 1931, this Circle had an increasing membership and a good regular attendance at its meetings. It adopted a programme which included both educational and social activities. For example, five members had passed the National Council of Labour Colleges

(NCLC) examination on 'Co-operation' and a dance had raised a profit of two pounds for the Circle's 'Congress' fund. The following year, the branch had enjoyed a ramble on Box Hill near Dorking in Surrey. [93] However, in 1935, at least one complaint was lodged against the Comrades' Circle, by the local branch of the National Union of Railwaymen regarding the level of noise and the lack of consideration shown by its members towards other users of the premises.

Similarly, in 1933, the Walthamstow Branch of the Co-operative Comrades' Circle was a tenant of the William Morris Institute. It was noted that the members of this branch were 'not well behaved' and as this interfered with Institute 'business', the convenor of the group was notified that the Circle would be placed on trial' for one month and asked to ensure that the members were 'better behaved'. [94]

Co-operative Comrades Circles did function in other areas covered by this study, including Bermondsey. However, no records of the Bermondsey Circle have been preserved, although soon after its formation, it was attracting a membership of approximately 36 young people.[95] It is probable that there are not more references to Co-operative Comrades Circles meeting in the selected labour halls for two reasons. Firstly several of the geographical areas covered in this study also had local designated co-operative premises, as was the case in Croydon. Secondly, in the years immediately after 1931, many Co-operative Comrades Circles in the London area were forced to disband as a result of declining membership. This was because both the London Co-operative Society (LCS) and Royal Arsenal Co-operative Society (RACS) insisted that Co-operative Comrades Circle members should join the relevant Society within three months of becoming a 'Circleite'. This 'autocratic' move left 'feelings running high' throughout the South-Eastern co-operative youth movement. [96]

The Independent Labour Party's young people's movement, the Guild of Youth, was established in the mid-1920s, prior to the Labour Party League. The Guild promoted a "balanced" programme of activities within its local branches. It was concerned with the 'education' of its membership: 'those of

us beyond the school age have to eradicate many of the false impressions created in our minds by the present educational system. We have to get a grasp of the elementary facts regarding both Capitalism and Socialism.' As a result, the use of debates, lectures, economics courses, study circles, mock elections and weekend schools at branch level was encouraged. The Guild also promoted the incorporation of 'art and culture' into its programme: 'Guilds ought to have a circulating library, while dramatic societies, choirs, jazz bands, and handicraft sections should appeal to many.' The ILP certainly perceived such activities as another form of propaganda. It is noted that: 'These can all be approached from the Socialist standpoint, and are as necessary to our full mental development as a knowledge of economics or political theory.' Sport and other open-air activities were also promoted, because, the ILP argued that life for young workers was only made 'bearable', through such forms of 'relaxation'. The Guild of Youth undertook political campaigning on certain, usually youth-related, issues. It was particularly active in the areas of education and 'youth in industry'. In the former campaign, it demanded, free secondary education, with a maintenance grant and the raising of the school leaving age to 16, as well as the establishment of nursery schools. The Guild also called upon the Trade Unions to assist the organisation in its campaign for a minimum wage and six hour day for young workers.[97]

The Independent Labour Party's young people's movement was represented in at least two halls; East Ham Labour Hall and the ILP owned Ilford Hill Labour Hall. The East Ham Guild of Youth met in the local Labour Hall from at least April 1925. Two years later in March 1927, the Guild of Youth began to meet in the Ilford hall each Monday night. The Guild was effectively given free use of the room, but a donation towards ILP funds was made by the Guild every three months. The chairman and secretary of the Guild were co-opted onto the ILP Branch Committee.[98] The activities of both of these Guilds of Youth would have been similar to those suggested by the national organisation.

The closure of Ilford Hill Labour Hall and the disaffiliation of the ILP from the Labour Party in 1928 and 1932 respectively would almost certainly account

for the lack of references to Guild of Youth activities in the archives of the selected labour halls from the early 1930s onwards. It is also probable, that like the co-operative organisations, the ILP maintained its own buildings elsewhere in the local areas.

The various youth organisations, then, were strongly represented on the selected premises. It is clear, in the case of the Labour League of Youth, that some of the halls provided the focal point for activities, which were perceived as controversial and precipitated the intervention of the National Executive Committee into local youth labour movement politics. The lack of detailed records of the activities of many of the young people's organisations, does, in some cases, leave a slightly negative impression. Often these groups are only referred to in the minutes of the senior association, when a problem has arisen.

Other organisations

Throughout the period in question, many single issue or purely local political organisations utilised the space afforded by the selected labour halls as either the focal point for their activities or as a base from which to co-ordinate larger scale activities in the vicinity. [99]

Cycling was a popular activity during the inter-war years, particularly amongst the urban working and lower middle class youth, from both within and outside the labour movement. This formed part of a trend towards outdoor pursuits, which has been identified, as 'one of the social phenomena which helped characterise the inter-war era'. Contemporary commentators, such as C E M Joad, believed that this phenomena was precipitated by the appreciation by young people of the contrasts between urban and rural areas, the latter offering 'rest and refreshment of the spirit'.[100] John McGurn has also noted that: 'The upsurge in walking, climbing, cycling and camping was at its most potent between 1929 and 1933, years of economic slump and uncertainty.' [101] These, comparatively inexpensive, activities would certainly have provided a viable escape from the hardships of daily living during the worst years of the depression.

Socialist cycling organisations used the facilities provided by at least two of the halls in this study. Willesden Socialist Cycling Club was a regular tenant of Willesden Trades and Labour Hall. This particular organisation was formed as a socialist cycling club in August 1926. Initially the cycling was deemed to be of secondary importance to the holding of the political meetings at the end of the club runs to villages outside of London. A speaker's platform, which was specifically designed by a member of the club to be easily transportable on a bicycle, was carried to each meeting. Within five years, however, the emphasis of the club's activities had changed from politics to cycling for its own sake: the members had effectively decided that 'politics and cycling did not mix'. In 1931, the political activities ceased and the word 'Socialist' was dropped from the Club's name.[102]

This change was not unusual. The Clarion Cycling Club was a nationally recognised socialist organisation, which had been founded in 1894, inspired by the *Clarion* newspaper. Initially, like Willesden Socialist Cycling Club, the cycling itself was of lesser importance than spreading the socialist message. However, the membership of the Clarion Cycling Club did not actually peak until 1936, two years after the demise of the newspaper as a socialist entity and there was a greater interest in competitive cycling than socialism. Some members were unaware of any political leanings in local branches. In spite of this apolitical appearance, the Clarion Cycling Club did occasionally continue to raise funds for political causes, including the organisation of relay races in aid of the Republican movement during the Spanish Civil War. [103] In 1948, Heston and Isleworth Labour Hall provided a venue for Clarion Cycling Club meetings.[104] By this stage, however, it is probable that there was very little, if any, political activity involved.

Cycling and rambling were also adopted by other labour movement organisations, such as the Labour League of Youth, for both propaganda and social purposes:

> Branches of the League should aim at making their rambling and cycling parties both enjoyable and helpful to the Party. In arranging these rambles or cycling tours visits should be made to villages and literature distributed. The distribution of literature in the remote parts of

the county divisions, whether or not it is in the constituency in which you reside, will be of great service to the Party.

Similarly, the ILP's Guild of Youth noted that its own 'cycling clubs [could] combine pleasure with propaganda and holding outdoor meetings in villages where our message is little known'. [105]

Several other kinds of organisation also used the selected premises. The temperance movement was represented at Willesden Trades and Labour Hall during the 1930s, by regular bookings from a local lodge of the Independent Order of Good Templars. For much of the 1920s, this order had also met in the Willesden area. The activities of seven different lodges were reported in the Good Templars' own column on the *Willesden Citizen and Suburban Star* between 1922 and 1925. This society had originated in the United States of America in the mid–nineteenth century and had been established in Britain, Canada and parts of Europe thereafter. Interestingly, this particular lodge of the Independent Order of Good Templars is the only temperance organisation to have left records of meeting at any of the halls in this study, in spite of the commitment of the labour movement to the temperance ideal. This may be partly attributed to at least a partial separation of the temperance and labour movements. Brian Harrison has noted that the 'long and unquestioned alliance' between the labour and temperance movements came to an end during the 1908 licensing debate, when at least one Labour Member of Parliament, Victor Grayson, contended that the question of the unemployed was more important than 'trifling' with the licensing bill.[106] In spite of this, as will be noted in a later chapter of this thesis, alcohol was not generally sold on any of the selected labour hall premises until the 1940s. This could indicate stronger ties to the temperance movement on a local, rather than national level

The Socialist Medical Association regularly hired Wealdstone Labour Hall. In June 1951, for example, a public meeting, 'Hands off the Health Service', was held at the hall. This meeting was organised as a response to proposals to charge patients for certain elements of the previously entirely free National Health Service. Although the Socialist Medical Association was a national organisation, there are no surviving records of meetings held under its

auspices in the other halls in this study. The other local political organisations did not appear to get involved in health issues directly; however, at least one Labour Party raised funds for the Manor House Hospital.[107]

Local branches of the Fabian Society were tenants of at least two halls in this study in the post war years. Harrow Fabian Society hired Wealdstone Labour Hall and in 1945 held political meetings, on such subjects such as 'Socialist Colonial Policy'.[108] Similarly, in 1949 and 1950, Croydon Fabian Society hired space at Ruskin House, for political meetings on issues including 'the Nationalisation of Industrial Insurance', 'Problems of the Far East and South East Asia' and 'British Socialism: Threat to Personal Liberty?'[109]

It is clear, then, that the selected labour halls were significant spaces for a range of activities for not only the Constituency Labour Parties, but also several other kinds of left-wing political organisations. Occasionally, these adopted and co-operated on a specific cause. International events were of particular importance in the 1930s and it is useful to assess the roles of the premises in such campaigns.

International Issues- Spain, China and Russia

During the late 1930s and early 1940s, several organisations rented space in the selected labour halls to raise awareness of specific international issues.These included the Spanish Civil War, the Japanese invasion of China and the German invasion of Russia. Between 1936 and 1939, several of the labour halls in this study provided focal points for 'Aid to Spain' activities. The Spanish Civil War had broken out in July 1936, in the wake of a military coup lead by General Franco to overthrow the Popular Front government. Although Franco was supported by the Fascist regimes of Germany and Italy, many other countries, including Great Britain and France adopted a non-intervention policy. This decision had been initially supported by the British Trade Union Congress (TUC) and Labour Party, although it had been opposed by the CPGB.[110] However, in 1937, this attitude began to change. Single-issue organisations, local Labour Parties and national co-operative societies

commenced a campign to raise both funds for, and awareness of, the Spanish situation. The Royal Arsenal Co-operative Society, for example sold 'Milk for Spain' tokens through its stores, at a cost of sixpence each.

Battersea is a good example of the kind of 'Aid to Spain' work undertaken in the selected labour halls. An 'Aid to Spain Committee' was established by the local Trades Council in 1936, comprising of representatives from the Trades Council, Communist Party, Labour Party and Women's Co-operative Guild. However, it should be noted that the Communist and Labour Parties did not always co-operate with each other. Prior to 1938, the two organisations would often arrange separate events.[111] Activities included the collection of one tonne of tinned food by the Labour League of Youth and the Young Communist League for the Spanish Youth Food Ship as well as public meetings at Battersea Town Hall. These helped to raise almost £1,200 during the course of the three year conflict.[112] Battersea Labour Hall was not the venue for much of this overtly political activity. However, the Secretary of the Communist Party recalled that the Aid to Spain Committee itself met regularly at Battersea Labour Hall to co-ordinate the campaign. [113]

In April 1937, an organisation referred to as 'Co-ordination of Working-Class Activities in Hendon and District' hired Hendon Labour Hall for the planning and co-ordination of local political activities for a 'Spain Week'. This was the epitome of political campaigning during the 1930s, consisting of poster parades, literature sales, demonstrations and marches. 'Co-ordination of Working-Class Activities in Hendon and District' was charged five shillings by Hendon Labour Hall Society, for the hire of the room and a further five shillings for the hire of a loud speaker.[114] This is quite unusual and presumably a result of financial necessity. Several hall committees, including Wimbledon and Battersea did not charge for 'Spain events'. In 1938, at Wimbledon Labour Hall, such events included a concert promoted by the Labour Party, held free of charge in the William Morris Hall extension.[115] The 'Spain' evnts were not the only events in labour halls, for which there was no charge. As will be highlighted in the next chapter, orgnisations which represented the unemployed, could also, on occasion be granted a rent-free room.

Local Labour League of Youth branches collected items for Youth Foodships, which were sent to Spain. The campaign for the Second Foodship was underway by February 1937. By January 1938 Mile End Labour League of Youth, had collected 100 tins of milk and four pounds 10 shillings as its contribution to the ship.[116]

The Japanese incursion into Chinese territory had begun as early as 1931. Further expansion in 1937 precipitated widespread resistance from the Chinese on a greater scale than had previously been attempted. The ensuing Sino-Japanese war lasted until the final defeat of Japan by the Allied powers in 1945.[117] British left-wing organisations were keen to raise awareness of the plight of the Chinese and labour halls in this study became the focal points for some of their activities. Between 20 and 27 February 1938, for example, the Left Book Club rented Ilford Central Labour Hall for a 'free film show' as part of 'China Week'. The two films shown were *China Strikes Back* and *War is Hell.* A poster parade, which advised the public to boycott Japanese goods, was co-ordinated from the hall. During the second annual Peace Week organised by Battersea Peace Council in 1938, Battersea Labour Hall was similarly used to co-ordinate a poster parade, which condemned Japan's treatment of China.[118] Unlike Spain and later Russia, the 'China' events apparently had a greater focus on raising awareness, rather than finance. This is not to assume that money was not raised for China, but it was not emphasised in the same manner

On 22 June 1941, Germany invaded Russia. This led to British 'unreserved solidarity with Soviet Russia in the war against Hitler', which A. J. P. Taylor has noted, was popular with 'many' of the British people.[119] This was certainly the case with labour movement organisations. Several raised funds for the people of Russia and such events were occasionally held in the selected labour halls. From December 1941, for example, an 'Aid Russia Committee' held weekly rent free meetings in Battersea Labour Hall. The following year, fundraising events, such as raffles and dances, were co-ordinated by this Committee.[120] However, the amount of money raised by these efforts and the precise use to which this money was put has not been preserved.

This chapter has illustrated that, throughout the period in question, the labour halls provided a focal point for the activities of many different political organisations. It has also added a local dimension to some of the national events referred to in the secondary literature. A good example of such a contribution would have been the Labour Party's reaction to the Labour League of Youth's 'unity' campaign' of the 1930s. It has also highlighted the often financially-motivated pragmatic attitude of a proportion of the labour hall committees towards the CPGB and the way in which this contrasts with the national situation.

The diverse range of labour movement organisations which utilised the selected labour halls demonstrates the fundamental importance of the political space provided by the halls to the local movements. As has been noted, prior to the inceptions of the halls there was an inevitable dilution of labour movement activity across several venues in the boroughs, including schools, church halls and civic institutions such as town halls. As such spaces were primarily designated for other kinds of usage, the local labour movements were not afforded the same kind of permanence as the acquisition of their own 'home' entailed.[121]

Notes:

1 Suggested Trustee Deed for Bournemouth Labour Hall and Premises c.1928, 'Labour Halls', p.2. General Secretary's papers, LHASC.
2 'The Constitution of the Labour Party' *Report of the Annual Conference of the Labour Party 1919,* (London: Labour Party, 1919).
3 Examples include Lawrence Black, 'Still at the Penny Farthing Stage in a Jet Propelled Era: Branch Life in 1950s Socialism', *Labour History Review,* vol. 65,(2) 2000; Matthew Worley, 'Building the Party: Labour Party Activism in Five British Counties Between The Wars', *Labour History Review,* vol. 70, (1) 2005; and Daniel Weinbren, 'Labour's Roots and Branches', *Oral History,* Spring 1996, which informs his *Generating Socialism: Recollections of life in the Labour Party,*(Stroud: Sutton Publishing, 1997). Although the latter is not strictly an academic study, it is a useful collection of excerpts from oral history interviews with labour movement activists, conducted under the auspices of the Labour Oral History Project. The interviews have been deposited in the National Sound Archive at the British Library. In a similar vein, Hugh Jenkins *Rank and File* (London: Croom Helm, 1980), provides summaries of interviews with contemporary Putney Labour Party activists.
4 Sue Goss, *Local Labour and Local Government: A Study of Changing Interests, politics and policy in Southwark, 1919 to 1982* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1988), p.184.
5 Worley 'Building the Party', p. 74 .
6 See for example Daniel Weinbren, 'Building Communities, Constructing Identities: The Rise of the Labour Party in London', *The London Journal,* vol 23 (1), 1998.
7 In making this assertion, Matthew Worley draws on the oral history work of Daniel Weinbren in his *Generating Socialism*: Worley 'Building the Party', p.75.
8 John Lawrence, *Speaking for the People: Party Language and Popular Politics in England 1867-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p.129, p.266.
9 Worley, 'Building the Party', p.90; Weinbren, 'Labour's Roots and Branches', p.29.
10 Goss, *Local Labour and Local Government,* p.186.
11 The role of the halls in the provision of advice bureaux or information services will be considered in more detail in the seventh chapter of this thesis and open air meetings figure significantly in chapter 8.
12 Worley 'Building the Party', p.90.
13 However, it should be noted that to a certain extent at least, this analysis will also continue into later chapters of this thesis: for example, chapter four on 'leisure and finance' and chapter six on the role of women in the selected premises.
14 *The London Citizen-East Ham Edition* June 1921; *East Ham South Citizen*, April 1931.
15 West Willesden Labour Party, Annual General Meeting , 23 Feb. 1941;.Open combined meeting of West Willesden Labour Party, 15 April 1943; Aggregate meeting of West Willesden Labour Party, 30 Sept. 1943; Joint meeting between the West Willesden Labour Party's Executive Committee and the Executive Committees of the West Willesden Wards, 28 Oct. 1962.

16 Richmond and Barnes Divisional Labour Party General Management Committee minutes, 17 Jan. 1944; *Richmond and Barnes Clarion.* Nov.1957.
17 Wimbledon Merton and Morden Labour Party Syllabus 1923-4. Workers' Education and propaganda will be considered in greater detail in chapter 4.
18 Wimbledon Constituency Labour Party General Committee minutes, 17 March 1939; 25 Aug. 1939, July 1963.
19 Peckham Labour Party, Executive Committee minutes, 27 Feb.1976; Peckham Labour Party General Management Committee Meeting Notice, 12 Oct. 1979.
20 Richmond and Barnes Divisional Labour Party, Annual Report 1976.
21 *East Ham South Citizen,* October 1936. No records of the actual debate survive. Hendon South Constituency Labour Party Annual Report 1959. These sessions were often recorded onto audiotape and stored in a 'tape library', which had been established on the premises.
22 The meeting was advertised in consecutive editions of the *Wimbledon Borough News.*
23 *Stepney Citizen,* Nov. 1931; Feb. 1932; April 1932; February 1933.
24 *East Ham South Citizen*: Borough Council Election Special, 1931; Tony Wright and Matt Carter, *The People's Party*: *The History of the Labour Party* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1997), p.52.
25 Wimbledon Constituency Labour Party General Committee minutes; 3 December 1938; 30 April 1943:L Wimbledon Constituency Labour Party Executive Committee minutes, June 1966.
26 Shaftesbury Ward of the South Battersea Divisional Labour Party minutes, 22 March 1923; 11 April 1924; South Battersea Divisional Labour Party Executive Committee minutes, 19 Sept. 1933; *South Battersea Citizen,* Jan. 1947; May 1947. The Divisional Labour Party minutes cite a St John's Ward meeting. The *Citizen* refers to two Bolingbroke ward gatherings.
27 Harrow Local Labour Party General Committee minutes, 22 February 1936, 9 February 1939; Harrow Central Divisional Labour Party Executive Committee minutes, 6 Jan. 1954; Harrow Central Division Labour Party General Committee minutes, 26 Oct. 1949; Interview with Cyril Harrison, 20 Oct. 2003. Cyril Harrison recalls that Derry Irvine, the Labour Prospective Parliamentary Candidate for Hendon North was at this meeting. Unfortunately the contemporary Labour Party minutes do not allude to it.
28 The preserved Labour Party minutes cease prior to the opening of the Central Labour Hall in 1929. The majority of the information about the activities that took place at the hall has been extracted from the *Ilford Citizen. Ilford Citizen*, Oct.1932; March 1939. Larger meetings, which attracted well known speakers, for example Stafford Cripps, were held in Ilford Town Hall. *Ilford Citizen*, Oct. 1938.
29 Ilford Labour Party minutes, 27 March 1918; 19 June 1919.
30 Honorary Secretary of Peckham Labour Party to 'All Councillors and Party Officers', 13 Sept. 1979.
31 *South Battersea Citizen,* Dec. 1947. Although there are no other references to discussion groups in the preserved records of local Labour Parties, Hounslow Labour Party Women's Section did hold discussion afternoons. These are considered separately in the section on the role of women.
32 East Ham South Citizen, April 1932.

33 Black, 'Still at the Penny Farthing Stage in a Jet propelled Era', p.213.
34 *Richmond and Barnes Clarion,* July 1959; Aug. 1959.
35 Robert Edward Dowse, *Left in the Centre: The Independent Labour Party 1893-1940* (London: Longmans, Green and Co Ltd,1966), p. 5. The emphasis on the north of England is also present in David James, Tony Jowitt and Keith Laybourn (eds), *The Centennial History of the Independent Labour Party,* (Halifax: Ryburn Academic Publishing, 1992). Regional and local studies are centred on: North East England, Lancashire and the North West, Scotland, Leicester and Bradford.
36 Barry Winter, *The ILP: Past and Present,* 3rd.ed (London: Independent Labour Publications,1996) p.3.
37 Ilford Branch of the ILP minutes, 3 March 1920; 17 March 1926; *The Ilford Argus,* 19 Nov. 1921.
38 Ilford Branch of the ILP minutes, 28 Oct. 1925.
39 *The London Citizen–East Ham Edition,* Feb. 1922. Unfortunately no actual conference reports have survived.
40 Brockway, *Bermondsey Story,* p. 49.
41 These activities are indicated by donations or payments recorded in the Bermondsey Labour Institute cashbook (1915-1927). The attendance at these meetings is not recorded.
42 *The Epistle,* 9 July 1918.
43 Peter Brock and Nigel Young, *Pacifism in the Twentieth Century,* (Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 1999), pp. 13, p.24. For a complete list of ILP Publications, see Gillian B. Woolven *Publications of the Independent Labour Party 1893-1932* (Coventry: Society for the Study of Labour History Bulletin Supplement, 1977).
44 *Croydon News,* June 1930, Winter, *The ILP,* p.8.*The Epistle.* 29 September 1918.
45 For more detail on the impact of the 1918 constitution on the ILP, see Dowse *Left in the Centre,* pp. 35 – 48; Andrew Thorpe, *A History of the British Labour* Party, 2nd ed. (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2000), p.39.
46 Ilford Branch of the ILP minutes, 23 March 1926; 2 March 1927. Unfortunately no further membership or attendance figures survive.
47 Ilford Branch of the ILP minutes, 14th Oct. 1925; 6th Nov. 1927.
48 Thorpe *A History of the British Labour Party,* p.55; John Stevenson and Chris Cook (eds), *Britain in the Depression: Society and Politics 1929-1939,* 2nd. ed. (London: Longman, 1994) p. 160.
49 Willesden Trades and Labour Hall minutes, 5 Aug. 1931; 24 Feb. 1932.
50 The change of CPGB policy is noted in Henry Pelling *A Short History of the Labour Party* 4th. ed (London: Macmillan Press, 1972), p. 101.
51 Wimbledon Labour Hall Ltd Management Committee minutes, 1 Oct. 1949, 3 June 1936; Wimbledon Constituency Labour Party Executive Committee minutes, 18 March 1938.
52 See, for example *The London Citizen-East Ham Edition,* Sept. 1921.
53 Richmond and Barnes Divisional Labour Party Executive Committee minutes, 8 May 1950.
54 Barnes and Richmond Labour Club and Institute Ltd, minutes, 15 March 1951; Barnes and Richmond Labour Club and Institute Ltd, Finance Committee minutes, 22 July 1948.
55 Barnes and Richmond Labour Club and Institute Ltd, minutes, 19 Feb. 1953; 18 June 1953.

56 V.L. Burtzeff 'Damnation to you, Bolsheviks!', Twentieth Century Press Social Democratic Federation Leaflets (1890-1928).These are held in the Working Class Movement Library in Salford, Greater Manchester, http://www.wcml.org.uk/holdings/sdf_20thc_bydate.htm. Accessed, 28 Nov. 2003.
57 William Morris Institute minutes, 3 Feb. 1936.
58 Cited in the Walthamstow Labour Party Honorary Secretary's Annual Report 1949. This "Communist Party" branch is more likely to have been part of the broad 'Popular Front' movement, which rose to prominence in 1937, than a purely CPGB organisation.
59 'The Labour Party League of Youth' , (London: Labour Party, LPLOY Leaflet No 1 n.d [Stamped 10 Aug. 1926, British Museum])
60 Weinbren, *Generating Socialism,* p. 39. However, very few references to local branches survive.
61 *Stepney Citizen*, June 1934.
62 *Young Socialist: The Organ of the Labour Party League of Youth*, July 1946.
63 David M. Pomfret ' 'Lionised and Toothless': Young People and Urban Politics in England and France, 1918-1940', p,5. A paper given at the Power, Knowledge and Society in the City Conference, 4-7 Sept. 2002, at the University of Edinburgh.
64 *Advance-The Organ of the Labour League of Youth*, Aug. 1936.
65 *Advance*, Aug. 1936.
66 Harrow Local Labour Party Executive Committee minutes, 17 May 1939. This is one of very few references to militant labour movement organisations.
67 Ted Willis, *Whatever Happened to Tom Mix?* (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1970), p.172, cited in Ben Pimlott, *Labour and the Left in the 1930s,* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), p. 178.
68 Maurice Webb *Youth for Socialism: Handbook of the organisation of the Labour Party League of Youth,* (London: Labour Party, n.d [stamped 24th May 1934]), p.6 Specific leisure issues are examined in a separate chapter of this thesis.
69 *Young Socialist:* July 1946, Aug. 1946.
70 *Young Socialist:* July 1946.
71 Lawrence.Black, *The Political Culture of the Left in Affluent Britain, 1951-64: Old Labour, New Britain,*(Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), p. 68.
72 Annual Report of Haywards Heath Young Socialists to the Haywards Heath Constituency Labour Party, 1965. Haywards Heath Constituency Labour Party records are held in the British Library of Political and Economic Science (BLPES) at the London School of Economics (LSE), London.
73 Documents for Discussion at Young Socialist Conferences. (YK.1996 b.5565), British Library, London.
74 *Hendon Constituency Citizen* Jan. 1936; July 1936; Hendon South Labour League of Youth Summer Programme, 1952.
75 Weinbren, *Generating Socialism,* p. 40.
76 *Ilford Citizen*, March 1932.
77 *Young Socialist,* Sept. 1946; Nov. 1948.
78 The full name of this Labour League of Youth reflected the change in the local Labour Party. Before 1948, it was known as the Mile End Labour League of Youth. It was restarted again in 1950 as the Stepney Labour

League of Youth.
79 *Stepney Citizen,* Jan. 1933
80 *Stepney Citizen,* March 1933; April 1933; Nov. 1935. It is difficult to assess the activities of the new League, however, as there are very few references to it in surviving Stepney Labour Party minutes or the local press; *Advance,* March 1937.
81 No specific activities are cited in the *Peckham Citizen* between 1949-1951. Peckham Labour Party General Management Committee Meeting Notice, 12 Oct. 1979.
82 South Battersea Divisional Labour Party Executive Committee minutes, 18 May 1937.
83 South Battersea Divisional Labour Party Executive Committee minutes, 15 April 1930. Battersea Labour Party and Trades Council Annual Report 1936; Battersea Labour Party Youth Section Programme, Oct. to Dec.1957; *South Battersea Citizen,* Dec. 1935.
84 Battersea Labour Party and Trades Council Annual Report 1953; 1954.
85 Interview with Harry Lane,a Wimbledon labour movement activist, Feb. 2000; Interview with Eileen Evans, July 2000. Eileen Evans was the co-founder of the Wimbledon Labour League of Youth. Although it is not clear when the League ceased to function , a branch of the Young Socialists was established in 1975.
86 Harrow Local Labour Party Executive Committee Minutes, 15 Dec. 1937, 18 Feb. 1938.
87 Harrow Central Constituency Labour Party Executive Committee minutes, 20 Nov. 1951; 15 April 1952; 8 July 1969. There are very few references to the League of Youth in these minutes after 1952. It is possible that either the League folded and was completely re-established as a Youth Section, or one organisation simply metamorphosed into the other. There are no records of specific activities undertaken by the Young Socialists.
88 *Co-operative Youth: The Organ of the British Federation of Co-operative Youth,* Dec. 1930.
89 Selina Todd, 'Pleasure, Politics and Co-operative Youth: the Inter-war Co-operative Comrades Circles', *Journal of Co-operative Studies*, Volume 32 (2), 1999, p. 129.
90 For further detail, see chapter 5 of this thesis on working class education. It is referred to, briefly, in this section, because it was such a fundamental part of the Circles' programme.
91 *South Battersea Citizen,* March 1935; April 1935; April 1947; Todd, 'Pleasure, Politics and Co-operative Youth' p. 134, p.143. G. D. H. Cole, *A Century of Co-operation,* (Manchester: Co-operative Union Ltd, 1944), p.308.
92 Annual Report of the Walthamstow Labour Party, 1949.
93 *Co-operative Youth:* Nov. 1931, July 1932.
94 South Battersea Divisional Labour Party minutes, 18 June 1935; William Morris Institute, Walthamstow minutes, 6 Feb. 1933.
95 *Co-operative Youth,* Nov.1930,
96 *Co-operative Youth,* March-April 1931.
97 John Nixon, *What the ILP Guild of Youth Stands For!* (London: ILP Publications Department, n.d.[stamped British Museum 28th July 1928]) p.4, p.6, p.7.
98 Ilford Branch of the ILP minutes, 16 March 1927, 20 April 1927. No specific detailed information about Guild activities has been preserved.

99 It should be noted that many of the surviving records pertain to the inter war years.
100 Harvey Taylor, *A Claim on the Countryside: A History of the British Outdoor Movement,*(Edinburgh: Keele University Press, 1997) p.226, C.E.M Joad, *A Charter for Ramblers*, London 1934 p. 12, cited in Taylor, *A Claim on the Countryside,* p.229.
101 John.McGurn *On Your Bicycle: An Illustrated History of Cycling,*(London: John Murray, 1987).p.144.
102 A Short History of Willesden Cycling Club- http://www.willesden-cycling-club.co.uk/history.rtf. Accessed 10 June 2003.
103 Dennis Pye, *Fellowship is Life: The National Clarion Cycling Club 1895-1995* (Bolton: Clarion Publishing,, 1995), p.58. McGurn *On Your Bicycle*, p.146.
104 Heston and Isleworth Labour Party Building Committee minutes, 7 October 1948.
105 *The League of Youth*, (London: Labour Party, December 1931), Nixon *What the ILP Guild of Youth Stands For!,* p.6.
106 Brian Harrison, *Drink and the Victorians: The Temperance Question in England 1815-1872* (London: Faber and Faber, 1971) p.405.
107 Harrow Local Labour Party Executive Committee minutes, 15 May 1941.
108 Harrow Central Constituency Labour Party Executive Committee minutes, 19 June 1951; 7 July 1954. The Harrow Fabian Society meetings are cited in the Wealdstone Women's Section minutes, 15 March 1945.
109 *Croydon Labour Journal*, November 1949, January 1950, Dec.1950.
110 Mike. Squires, *The Aid to Spain Movement in Battersea 1936-1939* (London: Elmfield Communications Ltd, 1994), pp.7-8; *Encyclopaedia Britannica 2003*, (DVD Edition), 'The Spanish Civil War'.
111 Squires, *The Aid to Spain Movement in Battersea*, p.33.
112 Squires, *The Aid to Spain Movement in Battersea,* p.12, p. 25.
113 The transcript of a talk given by Noreen Branson, the Secretary of the CP to the Wandsworth History Workshop on 12th May 1992. Reproduced in Squires, *The Aid to Spain Movement in Battersea,* p.58. This is the only reference to Battersea Labour Hall (177 Lavender Hill) in the book.
114 Interestingly, this is the only reference to 'Co-ordination of Working Class Activities in Hendon and District' in the archive. Correspondence between the secretary of 'Co-ordination of Working-Class Activities in Hendon and District' and Hendon Labour Hall Society .
115 Wimbledon Labour Hall Ltd minutes, 18 March 1938.
116 *Advance-The Organ of the Labour League of Youth,* Feb. 1937; Jan. 1938.
117 Encyclopaedia Britannica 2003 (DVD Edition) 'The Sino-Japanese War'.
118 *Ilford Citizen,* March 1938; Squires, *The Aid to Spain Movement in Battersea,* p.28.
119 A.J.P. Taylor *English History 1914-1945*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press,1975), p.528.
120 South Battersea Divisional Labour Party Executive Committee minutes, 16 Dec. 1941, 21 April 1942.
121 Wimbledon Labour Hall is described as 'a home for labour' in fundraising leaflets from 1921.

3. Labour Halls and Industrial Organisations

The industrial wing of the labour movement, as represented by local trade union branches and co-operative organisations, used the selected labour halls in this study as focal points for a significant proportion of their activities. This section will examine the contributions of the trade unions and co-operative societies consecutively. It will first consider the existing literature on the trade union movement, before evaluating how the evidence and resulting interpretations provided contributes to that literature. However, it should be noted that, an extensive search has not revealed a literature specifically dedicated to the London trade union movement. The local response to significant events in trade union history, such as the General and Miners Strike of 1926 and the impact of unemployment during the inter-war decades will be examined. The local co-operative movement will also be considered.[1]

Trade Unions

A substantial literature exists on the history of the British trade union movement in the twentieth century. This section of the thesis will evaluate general literature before examining the ways in which the evidence provided by the labour halls in this study extends or contradicts existing arguments. It should be noted that evidence of trade union activity in these halls is fragmentary at best. It has therefore not been possible to examine this theme in as much depth, over the period in question, as some of the other strands in this study.

Employment in the Greater London area is traditionally dominated by manufacturing, light industry and the service sector and this is reflected in the kinds of trade unions, which used the labour halls in this study as a focal point for their activities. These included the Amalgamated Union of Building Trade Workers (AUBTW), Amalgamated Engineering Union (AEU), Amalgamated Society of Woodworkers (ASW), National Union of Railwaymen (NUR), Transport and General Workers Union (TGWU), National Association of Local

Government Officers (NALGO), National Union of Public Employees (NUPE), Union of Postal Workers (UPW), Railway Clerks Association (RCA) and National Union of Distributive and Allied Workers (NUDAW)[2]

The impact of the First World War on the fortunes of the trade union movement has been noted. By 1918, wages had been substantially increased and both the coalmines and railways were controlled by the government and the Trade Union Congress was even 'courted' by the government. Patrick Renshaw has argued that these conditions and the spirit of collectivism, which had been fostered during the war, 'made trade union solidarity, and even socialism seem more acceptable'. However, during the 1920s, trade union difficulties increased as a result of rising unemployment and low wages and this led to the General Strike of 1926, 'the most serious political crisis' of the inter-war years. This chapter will consider the impact of the General Strike on the selected labour halls in a dedicated section. In spite of this, Renshaw contends that 'trade unions were to grow more rapidly in experience and maturity than in any previous decade'. This, he argues, was as a result of the large numbers of trade unionists engaged in industrial action between 1918 and 1922 and also the increasing success of the Labour Party, supported by the trade union movement, in local elections. [3] During this period, trade union membership also doubled: from four million in 1914 to its inter-war high of eight million members in 1920.

Although trade union membership did decline by twenty percent immediately after this peak, Keith Laybourn has argued that it was, 'ironically' in the aftermath of the General Strike that the trade union movement gained increasing confidence, which was to last throughout the remainder of the inter-war years: 'Far from bringing about the denouement of inter-war trade unionism, the General Strike reaffirmed, in the fullest form possible, the potential power of trade unionism within the capitalist system.'[4] Indeed, this confidence was such, that it has been argued that after the Labour Party crisis of 1931, the Party itself proved to be 'bankrupt' and that the TUC 'put forward the only ideas to have come from the labour movement' [5]

There is some evidence from the archives of the selected labour halls, to support these assertions. The attitude of the Willesden Branch of the Transport and General Workers Union (TGWU) reflects Keith Laybourn's contention that the trade unions were in a stronger position during the 1930s, than they had been in the 1920s.[6] During the London busmen's strike of 1937, the local branch of the TGWU antagonised other users of Willesden Labour Hall, when, without consultation, the branch took over the entire premises. The West Willesden Labour Party Women's Section complained that they had been displaced by the activities of the TGWU. A union deputation to the management committee meeting responded, they 'had the right to take over the premises whilst there was a strike on and did so demand'. Ultimately, an acceptable compromise was reached and the TGWU were granted the use of one of the large halls for the majority of the week. [7] Other trade union branches did use several rooms simultaneously in the various labour halls for strike activity. However, there is no evidence to suggest that this action was undertaken with the same attitude as that employed by the TGWU in this instance.

There were other instances of increasing trade union confidence. One of these was the 'Great Trade Union Rally', in 1935, which was organised by East Ham Trades Council and held at the local labour hall. The focal point of this event was the presentation of a compensation cheque for £1,600 to a local member of the National Union of Building Trade Workers, by George Hicks, the national leader of that union. A musical programme was also provided. Many different trade unions became involved in the event and it attracted several national trade union speakers.[8] There are evidently strong local reasons for a considerable trade union celebration; not least the large amount of compensation, which had been received. It can also be argued that this celebration is a physical representation of the increasing confidence of the trade union movement after the depression of the early 1930s. Keith Laybourn notes that trade union fortunes did substantially improve after the General Strike and the economic slump. Under the guidance of unionists such as Bevin and Citrine, the trade union movement was increasingly able to dictate the direction of the entire labour movement during the 1930s. [9]

In spite of evidence of attitudes such as that illustrated by the Willesden TGWU example, Clare Griffiths has contended that the trade union movement was seriously affected by the crisis in the labour movement which was precipitated by the formation of the 1931 National Government. The Tolpuddle Martyrs Centenary Commemoration, which was organised by the Trades Union Congress in Dorset in 1934, was largely 'concerned with present morale....there was a strong sense of a movement searching for a focus and a restatement of purpose.' She notes that this was explicitly stated by J R Clynes, who introduced the plans for the commemoration at the 1932 Congress by invoking the positive image of the Tolpuddle Martyrs, widely regarded as the pioneers of the trade union movement 'when in our own minds there is fresh the recollection of betrayal.' Griffiths concludes that it was 'hoped that the Labour movement might find in the story of Tolpuddle some consolation and guidance in difficult times.'[10]

Although there is no specific evidence that any trade union members from the selected halls travelled to Dorset for the Tolpuddle commemoration, there were many meetings held in the Greater London area to mark the centenary of the deportation to Australia of six workers from a Dorset village for their attempts to form a trade union. A good example of such a meeting took place in Ilford. The local branches of the National Union of Railwaymen (NUR) and the Transport and General Workers Union (TGWU) were particularly involved in the 1934 open-air Tolpuddle Martyrs Memorial Meeting at which 'the beautiful [trade union] banners enlivened the drab surroundings'.[11] It is clear that the Tolpuddle centenary celebrations were significant on both a local and national level. It is also probable that local activists could well have been influenced by the views of prominent trade unionists such as Clynes. [12] In this context, it is also possible to interpret the purpose of the local trade union celebration in East Ham Labour Hall as a similar attempt to raise the morale of trade unionists.

There has been almost universal agreement amongst historians regarding the importance of trade unions from the Second World War until the late 1960s. Keith Laybourn has noted that this has been largely attributed to the widespread acceptance of the fact that 'the war-time and post-war consensus

created the opportunity for trade union development'. Yet, trade union history, from the 1940s to the 1960s has still sparked some areas of debate. Laybourn notes that these have included the precise nature of 'consensus' and a rejection of 'institutional history' in favour of a 'rank and file' interpretation. Ken Coates has noted, for example, that the 'real extent of post-war consensus rested on full employment' and thus would naturally cease when full employment came to an end. The latter debate commenced in the late 1960s and its chief exponents have been Richard Price, J E Cronin and Richard Hyman. However, Laybourn observes that this approach has been criticised as 'flawed' in its suggestion of a division between the interests of the trade union leaders and their membership. Laybourn, perceives the relevance of the 'rank and filist' debate for the 1950s and 1960s, as a result of the rise of unofficial strike action in Britain. He does qualify this by acknowledging that 'a full study of post-war Labour history must take account of all sides of industrial relations', including the responses of management to trade union policy.[13]

It is almost inevitable that a local history study concerning itself with trade union branch life may lend itself to a 'rank and filist' interpretation. The evidence provided by the post-war records of the Wimbledon Branch of the ASW, certainly highlight differences between the approach adopted by the local branch and the national union over 'payment by results'. Between 1947 and 1959, the Wimbledon No1 Branch of the ASW held the majority of its business meetings on the premises. Issues such as payment by results were discussed at these meetings. The Branch voted overwhelmingly against this proposal and censured the national executive committee of the ASW for its handling of the matter.[14]

It has also been argued, that although Britain appeared to be 'strike-prone' in the latter 1960s, strikes actually only accounted for "a small proportion" of lost work days. In spite of this, Laybourn contends that by 1970, British trade unionism was on the 'defensive', although it still maintained a "degree of influence despite the fact that the 'Winter of Discontent' of 1979 turned much of the British public against trade unions.'[15] It is interesting in this context that in the extant archives of the five surviving labour halls, there are very few references to the premises being let for industrial action. There are, however,

indications that Wimbledon Labour Hall was for trade union activity during strikes. In 1971, for example, rooms were placed at the disposal of several unions, including the Union of Postal Workers, in periods of industrial action.[16] Usage of the premises by various trade unions during periods of industrial unrest continued throughout the 1970s.

The political space afforded by the selected labour halls was extensively used by the trade unions and co-operative societies, or the 'industrial' section of the labour movement. These organisations were particularly influential in the establishment of two of the halls in this study. The first Ruskin House in Croydon was purchased in 1912 by a benefactor for the local trade union movement and was ultimately administered by the unions. They were similarly influential in the establishment of the second Ruskin House and had a substantial presence on the management committee of the third Ruskin House. From its inception in 1921, several trade unions and the Royal Arsenal Co-operative Society (RACS) were also represented on the management committee of Wimbledon Trades and Labour Hall.

Several other trade unions raised funds for the various halls by imposing a levy or creating a subscriptions list. In Ilford Hill Labour Hall for example, several unions co-operated in the provision of amenities for the hall free of charge. The Electrical Trades Union (ETU), for example, installed electrical lighting throughout the premises and the National Union of Railwaymen (NUR) paid for the hall piano to be tuned. Other trade unions raised funds for the hall, by levies, collections, or in the case of 'the Busmen's Union' a subscriptions list.[17]

The local trade union movement was well-represented at the Bermondsey Labour Institute. Between 1910 and 1918, there was an increased level of national trade union organisation, which significantly affected the Greater London area.[18] The Bermondsey industrial action of 1911 was precipitated by a London-wide dock strike, during which the institute had been predominantly used for the relief of the strikers' families. The ensuing strike wave encompassed rail and women workers. Fenner Brockway notes that not all

workers were unionised before the industrial action began, but that many workers joined unions such as the Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants (ASRS) and the National Federation of Women Workers during the strikes.[19] During this industrial action and that involving the Transport and General Workers Union the following year, the institute was extensively used for strike meetings and the provision of meals for the strikers and their families.[20]

Between 1912 and 1919, the first Ruskin House provided a base of operations for the activities of more than 50 trade unions. These included: the National Union of Railwaymen (NUR); the Association of Carpenters, Cabinet Makers and Joiners (ACCMJ); National Union of General Workers (NUGW); National Union of Clerks (NUC); Railway Clerks Association (RCA); Operative Society of Bricklayers (OSB); the National Amalgamated Society of House and Ship Painters and Decorators and the National and Local Government Officers Association (NALGO).The local trade union movement, as a whole had a greater influence over the affairs of the second Ruskin House, than the first.[21] There is implicit evidence that trade unions continued to use the second Ruskin House as a focal point for branch activities until its closure in 1967. This was demonstrated in the concern that existing trade union tenants would not transfer to the third Ruskin House if alcohol were sold on the premises.[22]

The trade unions had their own building as part of the East Ham Labour Hall premises. This was known as Despard Hall. During the inter-war years, more than 13 unions used this hall for fortnightly business meetings. These were; two local branches of the Amalgamated Society of Woodworkers, the Electrical Trades Union, the National Union of Co-operative Workers, Associated Society of Locomotive Engineers and Firemen, National Union of Operative Plasterers, National Union of Shop Assistants, National Association of House and Ship Painters, London Society of Compositors, United Operative Plumbers Association of Great Britain, National Union of Building Trade Workers and the Amalgamated Engineering Union.

Within two years of the inception of East Ham Labour Hall, the frequency and therefore importance of trade union bookings is noted in contemporary

advertisements for the facilities provided by the Labour Hall: 'Every night a host of trade unions gather there in their respective branch rooms or meet together in the large hall when the Trades Council or Labour Hall are in session.' [23]

The number of unions represented at East Ham Labour Hall is the second highest in this study. During the 1920s and 1930s, only Ruskin House in Croydon, which was essentially founded by the local trade unions, had more union tenants. The strong representation of trade unions in the case of East Ham Labour Hall may be attributed to two factors. Prior to 1900, East Ham and its surrounding area had been largely rural. The first two decades of the twentieth century witnessed extensive industrialisation of the locality, which inevitably led to the establishment of many different trade unions.[24] Despard Hall was also maintained exclusively for trade union use and a separate political space would have been an attractive proposition for local branches. It also meant that branches could hold more frequent meetings than would have been possible in some of the other labour halls, where space was at a premium.

Various trade unions held their meetings at Ilford Central Labour Hall. These included East Ham and District United Operative Plumbers Association, Agricultural Workers Union (Ilford Branch), Municipal Employees Union (Ilford Branch), Amalgamated Society of Engineers (Ilford Branch), National Union of Railwaymen (Ilford Branch) and the Transport and General Workers Union (Ilford Branch). [25] In addition to ordinary business meetings, the unions used the hall for the co-ordination of local events and campaigns. In September 1938, the trade union movement orchestrated a recruitment campaign from the labour hall. This consisted predominantly of open-air events.[26]

During the 1970s, the NUR Wimbledon Branch business meetings on the Trades and Labour Hall premises were primarily concerned with questions regarding the standard of living of local railway workers and the 'anti-working class' legislation of the Heath administration. [27]

The General and Miners' Strikes of 1926

The General Strike of 1926 is one of the key moments of twentieth century labour movement history. However, this is not necessarily reflected in the histories of the halls in this study, for which records of this period survive. Almost half of the halls were not established until after the Strike and of those that were; several were simply used as a venue to print the local Strike Bulletin, with large-scale meetings held in civic buildings elsewhere in the borough. It should be noted, however, that as few local trade union records from this period survive, the majority of evidence for this section is reconstructed from local histories and contemporary local newspapers.

Ruskin House in Croydon was a major exception to this assumption. The General Strike is cited as one of the factors, which placed Ruskin House at the centre of the labour movement in Croydon in the 1930s. [28] It was described as 'a hive of activity' involving between 300 and 500 people per day.[29] The local council of action used the premises to co-ordinate 'monster' demonstrations; and publish a strike bulletin, the *Croydon Worker,* which was distributed by a dedicated dispatch department. Volunteers were also organised into a 'workers defence corps', with which to maintain order at the many propaganda meetings. The social committee provided entertainment for the strikers and a profit-making canteen was established to raise money for the Miners' Hardship Fund. [30] A few of the organisations, which were created during the nine days of the General Strike, existed for several years. Ruskin House was also used as the starting point for a march of more than 20,000 people.

Many of the other halls, which had been opened prior to the General Strike, were not necessarily the centre of trade union activity at this time. They were support spaces for activists rather than a place in which to engage the public in meetings and other events. In Bermondsey, for example, the strike bulletin was produced at the institute, but the majority of other activities were held at either Bermondsey or Rotherhithe town halls, which had been placed at the disposal of the Council of Action, by the Labour Party dominated local council. Willesden Trades and Labour Hall was similarly used for organisation and

printing, rather than as a meeting venue. Meetings and social activities took place on a local green or in school halls. [31] Wimbledon Trades and Labour Hall was also largely used as a focal point for organisation during the General Strike. However, the garden of the premises was used by the local Labour Party, on 11 June 1926, for a high profile, well attended meeting, addressed by Ellen Wilkinson, in support of the miner's strike, which had precipitated the General Strike. Wilkinson had been elected Member of Parliament for Middlesborough East in 1924 and in June 1926, had just returned from a visit to 'the coalfields'. [32]

It is possible that the selected Greater London labour halls were not used more extensively for large-scale, high profile events because of their size. Many of the most significant events were held either in open spaces or the local civic centres, such as town halls, which were almost certainly equipped with halls able to hold a greater number of people. In 1926, for example, the largest room on the Wimbledon Labour Hall premises could only seat a maximum of 45 attendees. As has been noted, a larger meeting space was not added until 1930.

Although a minority of labour hall premises were used as the focus of political action during the Miners' and General Strikes, it was possible for the selected labour halls to provide a convenient space for small-scale fundraising activities or discussion about the progress of the strike. In Ilford Hill Labour Hall, for example, the local Labour Party Women's Section held a jumble sale and the National Union of Railwaymen (NUR) Women's Guild ran a whist drive in support of the Women's Committee for the support of Miners' Wives and Children.[33] Willesden Labour Party Women's Section, which was represented on the local Council of Action, used one of their business meetings to discuss the impact of the strike and it was resolved to congratulate the staff of the *Daily Mail* for joining the industrial action.[34] During the nine days of the General Strike, then, the existing labour halls provided a largely support and administrative function, rather than as a venue for public meetings. It is probable that, to an extent at least, this function was determined by logistics. In 1926, very few of the halls, would have had meeting spaces large enough for public events.

Unemployment during the Inter War Years

The 1920s and 1930s were traditionally associated with unemployment and depression. This section will initially consider interpretations of the attitude of the organised labour movement to unemployment and the National Unemployed Workers Movement, before focussing on the role which the selected halls played on a local level.

The attitude of the organised labour movement to unemployment during the inter-war years has been extensively considered in the relevant literature. Richard Shackleton has noted how the response of the movement in the 1930s was "hampered" by several elements:

> the unions were excessively rigid in their approach to the organisation of the unemployed; there was indecision on the limits of justifiable protest against the government's policies; and both issues were complicated by the existence of the lively, militant, communist-led NUWM. [35]

Patrick Renshaw goes further in arguing that trade unions were actually prepared to 'accept' unemployment, partly because:

> even in the depths of depression a majority of wage earners remained in work. They could forget that their good fortune and the steady rise in purchasing power of their wages was being paid for largely by the sacrifices of others. Such forgetfulness was easier when the jobless-engineers, miners, shipbuilders and textile workers-lived far away in other parts of the country. [36]

It is certainly correct that the majority of the Greater London area was not as severely affected as other areas of the United Kingdom. As Malcolm Smith has noted, from the 1930s onwards, the British economy was not dependent on the heavy industry, which had been a dominant feature, prior to this date.[37] Inevitably, this affected some areas, such as the industrial North of England more than the Greater London area, the employment focus of which, tended to centre increasingly on lighter industry and the customer service sector. However, unemployment and poverty were still significant in Greater London. The East End, for example, was the focus of the 'London' chapter of a

collection of oral history testimonies. The interviewee was an investigator of behalf of the Unemployment Assistance Board in Stepney and she noted the extent of poverty in that area, for example: 'a heavy snowfall was a blessing, when men with broken boots earned a little money by sweeping the streets.'[38]

The National Unemployed Workers Movement (NUWM) was founded in 1921 and was initially accepted by the Labour Party as part of the labour movement. However, from the latter half of the 1920s onwards, the NUWM and its 'hunger marches' became increasingly associated with the CPGB. This was inevitable, as the NUWM's leadership was largely drawn from that organisation, but the CPGB link to the NUWM alienated the national Labour Party and the TUC, which as Ben Pimlott has observed, 'refused to have anything to do with' the movement. This, he notes contributed to the frustrations of 'the activist Left' in this period.[39] This refusal of the Labour Party seems to have been reflected on a local level. In 1924, the Shaftesbury Ward of the South Battersea Divisional Labour Party opposed the request for affiliation from the Battersea Unemployed Workers Committee. The catalyst in this instance, however, was almost certainly the manner in which a 'local unemployed' candidate stood against the official Labour Party candidate in the 1922 Board of Guardians elections. In 1933, conversely, Wimbledon Labour Hall Ltd permitted the Wimbledon Unemployed Association the use of a rent free room for their meetings. [40] There is, however, no indication that, such a concession was widespread as, unlike the 'Aid to Spain' campaign, there are no specific references to other halls also offering rent-free accommodation to unemployed organisations. However, as will be illustrated, several halls did raise money for benevolent and other funds, which assisted those who were out of work.

John Stevenson has noted that the sight of the hunger marchers 'attracted a great deal of sympathy and help' from local labour movement organisations. Members of the Labour League of Youth were also instructed: 'Don't forget to turn out in full to greet the marchers when they arrive and get your local Parties and Co-ops to assist them with food and accommodation.' [41] The latter also serves as an indication of the already noted willingness of the Labour Party League of Youth to contravene the official policy of the senior Party.

However, support for the marchers was only recorded in the archives of the management committees of two halls. The NUWM held a series of meetings at Willesden Trades and Labour Hall in 1931. The hiring of rooms to the organisation led to Willesden Trades and Labour Halls becoming directly involved in national politics during the depression, albeit in a limited capacity. In spite of the fact that both the national Labour Party and the TUC condemned the NUWM's National Hunger March to London in 1932, the management committee provided overnight accommodation for 60 participants. Accommodation for the marchers was also provided at Wimbledon Trades and Labour Hall. [42] No record has survived that other halls were even approached by the NUWM. Although there is no evidence to suggest that Wimbledon Merton and Morden Labour Party was involved in the National Hunger March in 1932, it was represented at both local marches and, in 1933, a National Workers March at Hyde Park.[43]

Fundraising for the unemployed was undertaken in at least some of the selected labour halls. In 1933, for example, a whist drive was held at the William Morris Institute under the auspices of the Walthamstow Trades Council for their 'Fund for the Unemployed'. The Trades Council were granted free use of the Institute for this event, although the Council to be responsible for the purchase of prizes. The free services of the William Morris Troupe, a group of singers, were also provided for the evening's entertainment. [44]

There are some references to unemployed people, apparently outside of official organisations, utilising the facilities offered by at least one labour hall in this study. In 1921, an article promoting East Ham Labour Hall noted that: 'Even in the daytime, there are so many unemployed signing the registers, that one is assured company at almost any hour.'[45] It is almost certainly the case that this was typical usage by the unemployed of the political space provided by labour halls during the inter-war years, but because these people were not necessarily part of an official organisation, their presence on the premises, has not been recorded in the archives of the selected halls. Similarly, unofficial usage of this nature by striking workers was likely to have been prevalent in the halls during the General Strike.

It is impossible, then, to establish the full extent of hall usage by those who were out of work during the inter-war years. However, it is clear that the halls did have a role to play in either the provision of space for, or the fund-raising on behalf of, the unemployed.

Co-operative Societies

The co-operative movement effectively began in the first half of the nineteenth century, initially with the efforts of Robert Owen and then the Rochdale Pioneers. Over the next 100 years there was a rapid expansion in co-operative activity. In 1884 there were 1128 co-operative societies with a combined membership of almost 700,000 people. By 1939, the number of societies had been reduced to just over 1,000, but these boasted a combined membership of 8,634,000.[46]

Throughout the period in question, the Royal Arsenal Co-operative Society (RACS) and the London Co-operative Society (LCS) were the two dominant co-operative societies in the Greater London area. These societies were regular tenants of some of the selected labour halls in this study. Local branches of the Co-operative Party also hired the political space of the labour halls. The RACS was founded in 1868 in Woolwich and the LCS was an amalgamation of several smaller societies including: the Stratford, Edmonton and West London Co-operative Societies in 1920 and 1921. The third major co-operative society in Greater London was the South Suburban Co-operative Society, which does not appear to have been represented at any of the halls in this study. The Co-operative Party, which continues to be affiliated to the Labour Party, was founded in 1917. However, there are very few specific references to activities undertaken at the halls by these organisations. They almost certainly made use of specific co-operative halls.

The Blackhorse Road Co-operative Guild represented the co-operative movement at the William Morris Institute in the relevant years. The Guild, a local RACS organisation, was comprised of junior and senior circles, as well as the main Guild, which all held regular meetings and social events at the

Institute during the 1920s and 1930s. However, no records of this particular organisation or comparable societies have survived. [47]

During the 1930s, the Mile End Political Council of the London Co-operative Society held monthly meetings on the Stepney Labour Hall premises. Many of these gatherings were 'Concert Meetings', which combined political propaganda in the form of two speakers, with music by artistes such as 'The London Entertainers'. Some political groups hired the hall for occasional events. On 30 September 1931, The National Guild of Co-operators (Mixed Guild) and the London Co-operative Society Education Committee held a joint conference on the subject of 'Disarmament'.[48] This event illustrates co-operation on a local level between the RACS and the LCS.

Sections of the local co-operative movement used Battersea Labour Hall as a centre for their activities. After 1935, the South Battersea Branch of the Political Council of the London Co-operative Society held monthly business and propaganda meetings on the premises. In 1935, one such political meeting was addressed by a member of the local clergy, Reverend R. Sorenson, on 'the deadly influence on the souls of men and women that present-day conditions exert.' Other topical issues under discussion during this period included: 'The Usefulness of the League of Nations' (1935) and 'The Coal Crisis and Its Effects on Industry' (1947). From at the least the late 1950s, South Battersea Co-operative Party used the Labour Hall for its business meetings. Socials and larger meetings were usually held at the town hall or other larger venue. [49]

The co-operative movement, then, used the labour hall space for many of the same kinds of activities as other left-wing organisations: business and propaganda meetings and concert parties. However it does not appear to have a presence in as many of the halls as some of the other organisations in this study. There are two reasons why this should be the case. Firstly, much of the labour hall references for the thesis have been gathered from Constituency Labour Party archives, which would not necessarily refer to the activities of other associations. Secondly, and possibly more significantly,

there were dedicated co-operative premises in several of the selected areas including Walthamstow and Battersea.

The preserved records indicate that the selected labour halls were an important focal point for trade union activity. The unions were also responsible for the establishment of one hall, in Croydon, and played a significant part in the creation of others, such as Wimbledon. As we have seen, in the context of the Willesden TGWU and the London Busmen's Strike, the 'Great Trade Union Rally' at East Ham Labour Hall and the Tolpuddle Martyrs meetings, it is possible to use evidence from the selected labour halls to substantiate two very different contentions in the existing literature. Co-operative society activity was less widespread, largely as a result of the possession of dedicated premises by the local movements. In spite of this, the co-operative presence in labour halls was still significant. The archives of the various halls do give some indication of the importance of the relationship with the trade unions and co-operative societies to the individual halls. The significance of trade union lettings to one hall in particular is illustrated by the fact that from the early 1970s, it was perceived that the finances of Wealdstone Labour Hall were severely affected by a rapid decline in bookings from the local trade union movement. This was attributed to the fact that it was possible for local union branches to hire rooms in public houses free of charge and members could consume alcohol during the meetings. The management committee of Wealdstone Labour Hall Ltd could not offer a practical alternative to this. It was necessary to levy a charge for the hire of the room and the provision of bar facilities was limited to Labour Party socials. The secretary of Wealdstone Labour Hall Ltd believes that it was ultimately this inability to compete with non-political, commercial organisations, such as the public house, which, in 1973 necessitated the long-term lease of the whole premises to a non-political organisation.[50] Conversely, as has already been noted, during the 1960s the management committee of Ruskin House in Croydon, had been concerned that installing a licensed bar on the premises would alienate the trade union tenants.

This chapter has also highlighted inadequacies in the physical size of the premises and the methodology used in the research for the thesis. As we

have seen, during the General Strike the majority of existing labour halls were used to support the activities taking place, rather than as a focal point for the protest. This, it has been proposed, was almost certainly because the premises were not sufficiently large enough to hold mass public meetings. Several of the halls were extended in the years after 1926. Although there is no specific evidence to suggest this was as a direct result of the General Strike, it is possible that the events of 1926, and other large scale protests, influenced the decision to expand. Brief references in a local newspaper to usage of the premises by individuals also emphasises the fact that the use of an archive based methodology, which focuses on the history of organisations is inevitably unable to present a complete picture of activities in the 15 Greater London halls.

Notes:

1 The Women's Co-operative Guild and the Co-operative Youth organisations are examined in other sections.
2 Very few local branch records of these trade unions have been preserved.
3 Patrick Renshaw, 'The Depression Years 1918-1931' in Ben Pimlott and Chris Cook , *Trade Unions in British Politics: The First 250 Years*, 2nd ed. (Longman, Harlow, 1991), p. 88, p.89.
4 Keith Laybourn, *A History of British Trade Unionism* (Stroud: Sutton Publishing, 1992), p.153.
5 Sidney Pollard, 'Trade Union Reactions to the Economic Crisis', *Journal of Contemporary History,* vol. 4 (1969), cited in Renshaw 'The Depression Years 1918-1931,' p.102, p.104.
6 Laybourn, *A History of British Trade Unionism*, p.146.
7 Willesden Trades and Labour Hall minutes, 5 May 1937.
8 *East Ham South Citizen*, May 1935. The reason for the compensation is not stated in the article.
9 Laybourn, *A History of British Trade Unionism* pp.148-149.
10 Claire Griffiths, 'Remembering Tolpuddle: Rural History and Commemoration in the Inter-War Labour Movement' *History* Workshop Journal, volume 44 (1997), p.151; Report of the proceedings of the 64th Annual TUC, 1932, p.263, cited in Griffiths, 'Remembering Tolpuddle' p. 151.
11 *Ilford Citizen*, October 1934. For a summary of the Tolpuddle Martyrs case, see Laybourn, *A History of British Trade Unionism,* p 29. Other nationwide events included musical, dramatic and sports events organised by the Trades Union Congress (TUC) in Dorset. Commemorative medals and histories were also issued:
http://www.unionhistory.info/timeline/TI_Display.php?irn=10026&QueryPage=.%2AdvSearch.php.lang .
12 However, the account of the open-air commemoration in Ilford was taken from a newspaper report, which did not provide an in-depth consideration of the motivations of the trade unionists.
13 Laybourn, *A History of British Trade Unionism,* p. 158, p.186. Ken Coates 'the vagaries of participation 1945-1960' in Pimlott and Cook, *Trade Unions in British Politics,* p. 171.
14 ASW Wimbledon No1 Branch, minutes, Sept. 1947; Oct. 1947.
15 Laybourn, *A History of British Trade Unionism,* p.186, p.190.
16 Wimbledon Labour Hall Ltd, Annual Reports 1970; 1971.
17 Ilford Branch of the ILP minutes, 9th July 1924; 17th Jan. 1920; Ilford Branch of the ILP Social Committee minutes, 23rd May 1926; Ilford Branch of the ILP minutes, 18th Feb. 1920.
18 Half of the episodes of 'significant industrial conflict', between 1910 and 1914, which Keith Laybourn cites took place in the London area. These included dock and rail strikes: Laybourn, *A History of British Trade Unionism* pp.102-103.
19 Brockway, *Bermondsey Story,* p. 46.
20 Brockway, *Bermondsey Story,* p. 128.
21 Ruskin House Management Committee, *Ruskin House: A History,* p 7. These particular unions were represented on the first management committee in 1919: Ruskin House Management Committee, *Ruskin House: A History,* p. 9.

22 Ruskin House Management Committee, *Ruskin House: A History,* p. 10.
23 *The London Citizen-East Ham Edition,* Sept. 1921.
24 Interview with John Hart, a local labour movement activist, Feb. 2002.
25 Very little specific information survives about the activities of these unions.
26 *Ilford Citizen*, Sept. 1938; Oct. 1938. There does not appear to be any indication in subsequent *Citizens* of how successful the various campaigns actually were.
27 NUR Wimbledon minutes, Nov. 1973.
28 Ruskin House Management Committee, *Ruskin House: A History,* p. 10 I have, thus far, been unable to locate any examples of the activities, which these organisations undertook after May 1926.
29 *Croydon Labour Outlook,* June 1926; Ruskin House Management Committee, *Ruskin House: A History,* p. 10.
30 Emile Burns, *General Strike May 1926: Trades Councils in Action,* reprinted ed. (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1975). This information is taken from a Croydon Council of Action report to the Labour Research Department regarding activities in Ruskin House during the General Strike. Although many Council of Action reports are reprinted, the councils that met in the other labour halls in this study are not represented.
31 Snow, *A Short History of the Labour Party in Brent,* p.16.
32 The precise details of this meeting have already been noted in an earlier section of the thesis. Trade union records have not been preserved for this period.
33 *Ilford Argus,* 20 February, 29 May; 19 June 1926.
34 West Willesden Women's Section minutes, 3 May 1926.
35 Richard Shackleton, 'Trade Unions and the Slump', in Pimlott & Cook *Trade Unions in British Politics*, p. 123.
36 Renshaw, 'The Depression Years 1918-1931' in Pimlott & Cook *Trade Unions in British Politics*, p. 104.
37 Malcolm Smith, *Democracy in a Depression* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1998), p.27.
38 Gladys Gibson 'London' in Nigel Gray, (ed) *The Worst of Times: An Oral History of the Great Depression in Britain* (London: Wildwood House, 1985), p.85.
39 Ben Pimlott, *Labour and the Left in the 1930s* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), p. 55.
40 Shaftesbury Ward of the South Battersea Divisional Labour Party minutes, 20th March, 1924; 2nd Feb. 1922; Wimbledon Labour Hall Management Committee minutes, 26 March 1933.
41 John Stevenson, *British Society 1914-1945* (London: Penguin, 1990), p. 290; *Advance,* Nov. 1936.
42 Willesden Trades and Labour Hall minutes, 12 Oct. 1932; Wimbledon Labour Hall Ltd minutes, 6 Oct. 1932.
43 Wimbledon Labour Hall minutes, 13 March 1933; 16 June 1933; 18 July 1933.
44 William Morris Institute minutes, 6 Nov. 1933.
45 *The London Citizen-East Ham Edition,* Sept. 1921.

46 Rita Rhodes, 'The Contribution of Consumer Co-operatives to Adult Education', *Journal of Co-operative Studies*, Volume 32 (1),1999, p. 64, pp. 67-8.
47 The Blackhorse Road Women's Co-operative Guild also extensively used the William Morris Institute, but the activities of this organisation will be examined elsewhere with the other women's political groups.
48 *Stepney Citizen,* March 1933. Sept. 1931. After the premises were repaired in the early 1950s, there are no references to the hiring of the hall. any labour movement organisations, apart from the Labour Party in the Executive Committee minutes of the Stepney Labour Party.
49 E-mail from Terence Chapman, a South Battersea Co-operative Party member, 13 Jan. 2004.
50 Interview with Cyril Harrison, 20 Oct. 2003.

4. Leisure and Finance

Throughout the period in question, recreational activities accounted for a large percentage of the usage of the labour halls by both political and non-political organisations. The chapter will initially consider the existing literature on generic history of working class leisure and the ways in which evidence from the selected labour halls in this study connects with established theories on 'rational recreation', 'reformist leisure cultures' and the contested definition of what constitutes 'recreation' for women. The chapter will then go on to examine the significant historiography on the labour movement and leisure. The most useful theory, in the context of the labour hall evidence, is that of Stephen Jones, which was later endorsed by Jeffrey Hill: that unlike the CPGB, SDF and ILP, the Labour Party did not, in practice, regard the provision of leisure activities as some kind of weapon in the fight against capitalism, but rather as a way in which to raise funds and attract new members.[1] The chapter will also assess the link between leisure activities and fundraising on the premises.

It is useful to place the recreational provision on the labour hall premises into the historical context of working class leisure. From the late nineteenth century, the different kinds of activities available rapidly expanded. As a direct result of successive reductions to the statutory number of hours of employment, the working class were particularly able to devote a greater amount of time to recreational pursuits. The reduction in working hours was centred on three periods: the early 1870s saw the establishment of a nine hour day, in 1919-20, this was reduced to eight hours and finally by the end of 1949, weekly hours exclusive of overtime, had been reduced to 44.6.[2] Wages also rose by one third in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, which gave the working class a larger disposable income. As a result of this, at the beginning of the twentieth century, there was an increase in the number of recreational related goods purchased, such as bicycles and pianos and more working class families were able to go on holiday. By the late 1930s, almost eight million workers were able to take advantage of one week in paid holidays. By 1952, in all industries where collective bargaining was used, two

thirds of workers could claim up to two weeks. The end of the 1960s saw paid holidays for some workers increase to a maximum of three weeks. [3]

Working class leisure in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries has been the focus of a substantial academic literature. Much of this is concerned with the developments of leisure provision from the eighteenth or nineteenth century onwards. D. A. Reid, for example, has shown how during the mid nineteenth century, working class people largely used the street space for their leisure activities, which included 'lamppost cricket', dancing and gambling. Public parks, libraries, art galleries and museums were established by the local authorities to 'civilise' the population and 'can also be seen...as attempts to facilitate a predominantly (though not wholly) bourgeois ideal of 'rational recreation', shorn of the temptations and malign consequences they associated with street pastimes.'[4] The notion of 'rational recreation' and social control is a common theme in a significant proportion of leisure historiography. Jeffrey Hill has similarly contended:

> The control of people's leisure could never be entirely separated from the improvement of their minds, and the nineteenth century crusade (the term is not too strong) for better leisure was intimately connected with perceptions of urban conditions that were completely novel, potentially or actually degrading, and in need of 'civilizing'. [5]

There is no evidence to suggest that, as late as the inter-war years, the provision of leisure activities on the labour hall premises was directly influenced by the bourgeois idea of 'rational recreation'. However, leisure activities undertaken in many halls would have been influenced by what Hugh Cunningham has defined as a 'reformist leisure culture', which aimed to provide an alcohol free alternative to the public house related and increasingly commercialised 'urban popular culture'.[6] This culture was generated by elements within the working class itself and was thus different from the impulse by some middle class socialists to reform the leisure habits of the working class in the years before the First World War.[7] It has already been noted that, with the exception of premises such as the first Ruskin House, the halls themselves were products of working class activism, rather than middle class attempts to influence working class cultures. Although, as also has been noted, some of the halls did benefit from degrees of middle class funding,

there is no evidence to suggest that the leisure activities in the halls were necessarily influenced by middle class attempts to reform the working class. If we accept, then that the halls were an enclosed space, dominated by the working-class, it is possible to argue that they could offer some kind of protection against middle class interference in working class leisure habits. However, surviving evidence from the halls is not conclusive enough to argue that this was a conscious aim of leisure provision on the premises.

The literature on the subject has identified two types of reformist culture: religious and secular. It should be noted however that these were not necessarily mutually exclusive. Religious reformism was informed by Wesleyan Methodism and, from the 1830s, became synonymous with temperance and its more extreme form, teetotalism. The secular element focused on education, self improvement and independence through the medium of clubs and societies, which were frequently political in outlook. This kind of reformism was not limited to self improvement and education. It also encompassed rambling, cycling and holiday provision, activities which were increasingly adopted by the working class after 1850. Hugh Cunningham notes that in the latter half of the nineteenth and early years of the twentieth centuries, societies which were associated with the secular reformist culture included: elements of the Co-operative movement, the Clarion movement, the Workers' Educational Association (WEA) and the Left Book Club. [8] In the twentieth century, the selected labour halls in this study provided a focal point for the activities of these organisations, thus providing a useful focal point for the continuation of a form of the 'secular reformist leisure culture'. This is, of course, not to say that these organisations would have been unable to continue without the presence of the labour halls in the Greater London area.

It is almost certain that recreational activities undertaken in labour halls would also have been influenced by elements of the 'artisan leisure culture'. However, it is not really possible to quantify to what extent this was the case. The 'artisan leisure' culture was a distinct entity from the eighteenth century to the years immediately preceding the outbreak of the First World War. This was exclusively dominated by the adult male skilled worker, an integral part of the trade union movement. It has been noted that, in large cities, such as

Birmingham, activities associated with the culture were almost identical to those adopted by the reformists: clubs, societies and theatre visits. However, unlike the labour halls, there was no adherence to the temperance ethos by the artisans. The proponents of the culture also tended to promote the exclusivity of it, rather than making any attempt at large-scale conversion to their leisure culture.[9] Conversely, the labour movement organisations, which used the selected labour halls, desired that their message should reach the widest possible audience.

There are several other approaches to the history of working class recreation. Theories have focused on the increasing commercialisation of leisure; the generation of recreational activities by the participants themselves and the complex division between work and leisure.[10] Over the last 20 years, the economic prosperity of the later Victorian years has been the starting point for much of the historiography which emphasises the increasing commercialisation of leisure pursuits. James Walvin, for example, refers to the 'consumer power' which, after approximately 1875, enabled working class enjoyment of a diverse range of activities for the first time, which included visits to the music hall, seaside and later cinema, drinking, spectator sports and listening to and playing in brass bands. This trend continued into the twentieth century, culminating, from the 1950s onwards, in the ultimate symbols of consumer power: the motor car and the television. However, it has also been noted that in the much poorer areas of cities such as Manchester and Salford, in the 1930s, this commercialisation was clearly a 'partial process' and the cost-free elements of Victorian street life co-existed with newer commercial leisure pursuits such as the cinema. [11]

Another approach to the history of leisure considers the provision of leisure by the participants themselves. The focal point of recreational activities analysed in this approach was the public house, which provided a community space for pursuits such as brass bands, mass choirs, flower shows and pigeon fancying, as well as the consumption of alcohol. Local competitiveness could be an element of this male dominated culture: pub teams and clubs and societies, which used the premises, vied against each other in various sports and games. [12] As has been noted in the consideration of rational recreation

and reformist leisure cultures earlier in this chapter, the various labour halls in this study offered an alternative, usually alcohol free, venue for this type of activity.

Throughout the period in question, women formed a significant proportion of users of the labour hall space. Female 'leisure' epitomises the complex division between work and leisure Jeffrey Hill has contended that traditional definitions of leisure are inappropriate in the context of women's recreation because:

> It described, indeed sprang from, an experience of the labour market that was confined largely to waged working men, for whom leisure existed because of the domestic labour of their wives and, to a lesser extent their daughters. In this sense then, 'leisure' became something *appropriated by men at the expense of women.*[13]

Claire Langhamer has further argued that a strict segregation *of employment* and recreation is "unhelpful" in the context of women's experiences between 1920 and 1960. Listening to the radio, for example, was generally considered to be a leisure pursuit. However, this was often done in the home environment in conjunction with housework. Talking with one's neighbours in the public space of the street could also be considered as a fusion of 'work' and 'leisure'. Local gossip could be combined with domestic matters such as food prices. This trend continued into the 1980s: a survey of women in Sheffield revealed that many women did not perceive leisure as an experience strictly demarcated from other experiences, but rather as brief periods of time in which they could be free to "do nothing" if they so chose. [14] These positions are supported to an extent at least, in the kinds of leisure activities undertaken by women in the enclosed space of the labour hall. Hounslow Labour Party Women's Section, for example, organised dedicated recreational pursuits such as whist and beetle drives, but also derived 'amusement' from an auction of their garden produce. Other afternoon meetings were devoted to the swapping of recipes.[15] A 'beetle drive' is a dice-ased game, played in pairs. Competitors must collect, draw or 'tick off' all the pieces of a one-dimensional cardboard 'beetle' by rolling the dice. The number on each part of the 'beetle' corresponds with a number on the dice. The head, for example, corresponds with number one on the dice. Where there is more than one body

part, such as the legs, eyes, wings or feelers, each part must be acquired separately: six sixes to complete the required number of legs. The game does not begin until each participant or team has 'rolled' a one for the head. The winning partnership is the first one to complete their 'beetle'.

Although, as we have seen, many of the left wing organisations were influenced by reformist desire to provide an alternative leisure culture, it was not always possible for this to be implemented. It has been noted that, during the inter-war years at least: '[t]he fact remains that few chose to take the opportunities of increased leisure to develop a challenge to dominant modes of thinking.'[16] Stephen Jones has contended that the concept of leisure was an ideological issue which was adhered to less strongly, in practice at least, by the Labour Party than other organisations on the left of the labour movement, such as the ILP, the SDF and the CPGB. He has argued that these organisations perceived leisure to be a weapon in the anti-capitalist struggle, whereas:

> Labour cultural activities were usually the off-shoot of the more fundamental needs of industrial and political organisations. This is not to deny that the primary concerns for the local Labour Party of trade union branch when arranging social functions were such issues as entertainment, finance and recruitment, not the possibility of subverting the dominant social order. [17]

The next part of this chapter will consider this argument in the context of the evidence provided by the selected Greater London halls.

For the majority of the period in question, very similar, if not identical, leisure activities were undertaken in labour halls across the Greater London area. As will be illustrated, by detailed considerations of the activities in the 15 halls, Labour Party leisure revolved around whist drives, socials, bazaars, concerts, rummage and jumble sales and derby and football draws.[18] It should be noted that the majority of the surviving evidence pertains to the inter-war period. However, the few surviving references to leisure activities after 1945 indicate that there was not a seismic shift towards a radically different programme. There were, however, occasional attempts to provide elements of an alternative leisure culture. In the late 1930s, for example, Ilford Labour

Horticultural Society held three consecutive 'Flower, Fruit and Vegetable Shows' at Ilford Central Labour Hall. In 1950, a horticultural society was also established at Wealdstone Labour Hall by Harrow Central Constituency Labour Party.[19]

A 'social' was a generic term, which could cover a wide range of activities, from sales of work, singing and storytelling to the performance of plays. Such plays were often a cultural expression of political propaganda and a fusion of politics and leisure. A good example of such 'activist theatre' is 'Peter the Archer or How to Tackle the Tories', which was written by a member of the local Labour Party and performed at a ward social at Hendon Labour Hall in November 1958. The play had local resonance: Peter Archer was the name of the local Labour Party Prospective Parliamentary Candidate, Golda Green, the 'fair maiden', was a geographical reference and the 'villain', Sir Tory Loose-Tooth, was a caricature of the Conservative Member of Parliament for Hendon, Sir H. Lucas-Tooth. The plot is straightforward: with the assistance of the fairy godmother, Socialism, Peter the Archer rescues Golda Green from Sir Tory. The play ends with a monologue by Peter the Archer, hoping that, ultimately the Labour Party's "faith and comradeship", would "conquer" the local Conservatives.[20]

The whist drive was a nationally popular activity throughout the inter-war years. This was reflected in its dominance in the programmes of recreational pursuits in the overwhelming majority of halls in this study. Part of the attraction of the whist drive at the various halls in this study was almost certainly the ease with which it could be organised: sufficient numbers of card tables and packs of playing cards were the only items which were required. A contemporary whist drive instruction manual also advised that: '[t]o-day, whist drives provide probably the most acceptable way of giving amusement to large and small gatherings of people.....Thus the hostess who has a party of friends to entertain or the society wishing to raise funds will be well advised to organise a drive.'[21] Local labour movement organisations regularly employed whist for this purpose. Whist drives were especially popular at Willesden Labour Hall: afternoon and evening drives being held on five days per week in 1936.[22] Refreshments and 'good money prizes' were on offer on payment of

the one-shilling entrance fee. In other labour halls, drives were held to raise money for various causes, including branch funds, the maintenance of the labour hall premises and specific political or non-political issues or campaigns. The East Ham Women's Co-operative Guild, for example, ran whist drives for either their own funds, or to benefit the local cancer hospital. In 1938, Harrow Local Labour Party similarly raised more than seven pounds for the Spanish Relief Fund. [23]

Whist drives did not generally attain the same level of popularity in the vast majority of halls in the post war decades as had been the case prior to 1939. However, this statement does require a certain amount of qualification. Fewer records of post-war activity have been preserved in the various labour hall archives and three, or one fifth, of the halls in this study had ceased to be political spaces by the end of the Second World War. Bermondsey Labour Institute had been destroyed during an air-raid and East Ham Labour Hall and Ilford Hill Labour Hall had both been sold. Although whist drives continued to be organised at Richmond Labour Club up until at least 1954, there are no references to whist drives being held at Lansbury House, Peckham, for example, after 1945. In other halls, including Wealdstone Labour Hall, the whist drive was effectively replaced by bingo and beetle drives. This was especially the case during the 1960s. The money raised at twice weekly bingo sessions at Wealdstone Labour Hall was a vital source of income for both the Labour Party and the Labour Hall. This income ceased when local cinemas were converted to bingo halls and offered 'big money' prizes, with which the Labour Hall could not compete.[24]

Sweepstakes, totes, and derby and football draws were also popular leisure and fundraising activities throughout the period under examination. Gambling activities on the labour movement premises did not generally present inter-war socialists with the same kind of moral difficulty as the activity would have done, prior to the First World War. Some nineteenth and early twentieth century socialists perceived gambling of any kind to be a 'pernicious habit which diverted the attention of workers away from involvement in the struggle to change society', although many others were more tolerant of this particular working class leisure activity. It has been argued that the opposition to

working class gambling illustrated the ways in which, significant Labour Party figures such as George Lansbury 'were divorced from the everyday existence of the class they wished to lead.' [25] The presence of gambling-inspired activities on the labour hall premises indicates that local labour movement leaders were not 'divorced' in the same way, although it is probable that the decision to permit these activities, was at least in part, influenced by the financial imperative. It is not possible to determine, from the existing labour hall records, whether one of these factors was more influential than the other.

In other examples of the literature on this subject, any opposition to gambling within the labour movement is not treated with the same emphasis as opposition from the church. The absence of labour movement opposition from much of the literature may be at least partially explained by the fact that by 1914, the Labour Party had officially adopted a more 'neutral' attitude towards the 'evil'. [26] In spite of this official position, Lawrence Black has noted that, as late as the 1950s, the use of gambling as a fundraising tool was a controversial issue in areas such as Darlington, which had strong Methodist and Quaker traditions. Fundraising initiatives, which depended on gambling in such communities, were rarely successful. Lawrence Black contends that gambling offended 'that puritan strain within socialism'. [27] Like the provision and consumption of alcohol, there were clearly ties to traditional values on a local rather than a national level.

There are many different forms of gambling and only those with the most limited risks tended to be undertaken at the selected labour halls in this study. The most widespread example of this is the sweepstake, which, a contemporary social survey noted, is 'the quintessence of gambling, since every vestige of skill and judgement is eliminated from the 'draw''. The limited risk meant that the sweepstakes were "commonly indulged by a wide circle of persons who would be horrified to be denounced as gamblers", such as attendees at labour movement events. [28]

The legal position of gambling was also called into question in at least one hall in the inter-war years. The 1906 Street Betting Act had criminalised off-racecourse betting and bookmaking, a step which was largely perceived as

instituting one law for the rich, who could afford to attend race meetings and another for the poor, who could not.[29] In May 1930, Battersea Labour Party were threatened with prosecution if a 'Derby Draw' was held under their auspices at Battersea Labour Hall, because the police perceived this as an infringement of the 1906 Act. However, it does appear that the draw went ahead and the Party was not prosecuted, as four months later, Battersea Labour Party expected to receive 30 pounds as its share of the profits from the draw.[30] The impact of the legalities of gambling on the selected labour halls was not restricted to the inter-war years. In 1957, the Management Committee of Barnes and Richmond Labour Club intended to install an 'automatic 1d fruit machine' into the members' room. However this venture was abandoned, when the Committee was advised that such machines were illegal. In 1962, the Secretary of Wimbledon Labour Hall Ltd, clarified why this was the case, by explaining that it was not permitted for dividend-paying societies to install fruit machines on their premises. Other gambling related recreational pursuits at this time were also not strictly legal. 'Housey Housey', for example, was a form of bingo, which involved betting. This was a regular leisure and fundraising activity in the latter half of the 1950s at Barnes and Richmond Labour Club, after 'the Secretary drew attention to an article in the Club and Institute Union Journal outlining the conditions under which this game may be played without infringing the law.'[31]

In the post-war years, the tote was used as a leisure and fund-raising activitiy in at least one hall. In 1962, a weekly tote, which was run the auspices of the Association of Labour Party Supporters (ALPS), was adopted by Lansbury House, Peckham. This scheme entitled the Constituency Labour Party to retain 50 percent of the gross takings, with a further dividend awarded by the organisation after the organisation's expenses had been deducted. In 1976, Peckham Constituency Labour Party made a total profit of two hundred and twenty pounds from this venture.[32]

Dancing was another popular activity during this period. By the end of the Second World War, for example, it was estimated by one company, Mecca Dancing, which owned several *palais de dances* across the country that 'ten

million people took to its floors'.[33] Inevitably, then, it was also a leisure and fundraising activity, which was regularly undertaken by both political and non-political organisations in the selected premises. Wealdstone Labour Hall's pine sprung floor was apparently specifically chosen for its suitability as a dance floor.[34] Preserved advertisements do not always refer to exactly what kind of dancing took place on the hall premises, but a contemporary social survey from 1939 is indicative of general music trends. The survey notes that the popularity of the foxtrot type slow dance was decreasing and had been replaced by "fast tempo" dances. Waltzing was also making a 'comeback'.[35] It was not always practical for every musical 'craze' to be catered for in the selected premises. In 1954, for example, jiving was banned in the William Morris Hall extension of Wimbledon Labour Hall, because of potential damage to the hall floor. This ban, the committee believed, was common practice in other, public halls. There is some indication that constituency Labour Parties did attempt to cater for other modern music trends in the post-war decades, although it was not always possible for larger scale events to be held within the often limited space afforded by the labour hall. In 1972, for example, a disco was held under the auspices of Battersea Labour Party at the local town hall.[36]

The post-war decline in formal political activities in the selected labour halls necessitated increased non-political usage. A proportion of this usage was by commercial providers of dancing. This provision had a significant impact on Wimbledon and Wealdstone Labour Halls. In a typical week in 1950, Wimbledon Labour Hall was the venue for 'old tyme', Scottish and Irish dancing classes. The latter occupied the William Morris Hall extension for up to three nights per week. Ultimately, the William Morris Hall extension of Wimbledon Labour Hall was hired out on a long-term lease to a tenant from outside the labour movement, for the provision of dance classes. Similarly, in 1973, the whole of the Wealdstone Labour Hall premises were let to a dance club. Conversely, dancing had been one of the main activities undertaken at Stepney Labour Hall, but this became impossible in 1950, after the Hall was refused a music and dancing licence by London County Council because "the arrangements of the hall, particularly secondary means of escape, are below the standard required". The condition of the premises appeared to have

deteriorated relatively rapidly. In 1947, the premises were described by the Labour Party's London Regional Organiser as 'first class accommodation'.[37]

There were a few leisure and fund-raising activities, which were limited to a minority of the halls. A 'Grand Garden Party', which was held in the grounds of Ruskin House, Croydon in July 1924, offered competitions; sideshows; races; dancing; concerts and a fancy dress parade, with prizes for the best costume, for an inclusive entrance fee of two pence per person.[38] Arguably, a higher entrance fee could be charged if fundraising was of a greater importance than the straightforward provision of enjoyment. Other organisations, which rented space at labour halls, not considered in this study, imposed higher charges for their social events. South Norwood ILP, for example, charged a one-shilling entrance fee for a whist drive at Harrington Hall in South Norwood in the borough of Croydon.[39] This was more than double the cost of the garden party at Ruskin House and likely to have been too expensive for some working people. It may, of course, be argued that a garden fete may attract a greater number of people than a whist drive. Garden parties were also held at Barnes and Richmond and East Ham Labour Halls, but no references to specific activities at these parties have survived.

A social club was another recreational activity, which seems to have been adopted by just one management committee. In 1936 a 'Hamilton Hall Social Section' had been formed on the Willesden Labour Hall premises. This club was open to 'all comrades' for a subscription of one shilling per annum and the available activities included 'billiards, darts, draughts etc'. [40] The management committee of East Ham Labour Hall seems to have been the only one out of the selected halls to organise 'American teas'. An American tea, consisted of 'rough-cut' sandwiches and mugs, rather than cups, of tea, accompanied by singing, music or storytelling.[41]

Having considered the types of leisure provision organised in the Labour Party and trade union dominated premises, during the inter-war years, it is useful to compare these findings with evidence from halls established or maintained by other left-wing organisations. How far did the recreational activities held at the Bermondsey Labour Institute, which was owned by the

ILP and The William Morris Institute, managed by the Social Democratic Federation (SDF) reflect the ideological positions of those two organisations? As has already been noted, the ILP and SDF regarded the provision of leisure as a tool in the struggle against capitalism and both organisations wished to provide an alternative leisure culture. However, socials, bazaars and billiards were the main leisure activities undertaken at the Bermondsey Labour Institute. These are identical to recreational activities practiced at halls administered by the Labour Party throughout the Greater London area, although the incomplete nature of the archive renders generalisations regarding leisure provision at the institute problematic.[42] It is possible that the recreational activities listed here formed only a small proportion of those provided by the ILP and other organisations at the institute between 1911 and 1940 and that the institute was, instead, the venue for the wide-ranging leisure activities. If recreational pursuits were limited to fundraising activities during the First World War, then it may be argued that this would have continued after the adoption of the new national Labour Party constitution in February 1918 and the ensuing debates over the position of the ILP within the labour movement. On a local level, therefore, fundraising may have been perceived as of greater urgency than the implementation of an alternative leisure culture.

Conversely, prior to the disintegration of the influence of the SDF in 1937, the William Morris Institute was the venue for a more diverse range of leisure activities than any other hall or institute in the study. From at least 1920 until 1937, members could apparently become involved in the following activities: concerts, socials, whist drives, sports, rambles, cycling, sketching, photography, orchestra rehearsals, military band practice and repertory theatre. A billiard table, a dartboard and a ping-pong set were also provided.[43] During the 1940s and 1950s, after the Labour Party had assumed control of the William Morris Institute, leisure activities were restricted to socials, concerts, dances, whist drives and bazaars.

It is clear that there were several attempts in the post-war decades to offer a wider range of recreational activities. Prior to 1950, for example, many of the leisure activities provided by Barnes and Richmond Labour Club were

identical to those offered by the inter-war Constituency Labour Parties. Subsequently, though, the Labour Club provided a broader range of leisure activities for its members, including; 'mystery coach trips' and river boat excursions, visits to country public houses, darts tournaments, wine and cheese parties, theatre trips, quiz nights and coffee evenings. These activities were occasionally invested with a degree of political propaganda. For example, in 1960 and 1961, subjects including 'crime and punishment', 'bus services' and 'the fire service' were addressed by speakers at wine and cheese parties. [44]

The provision of a more diverse range of activities in the post-war years was almost certainly to maintain membership levels in response to both the revitalisation of inter-war leisure pursuits, which included attending the cinema and football matches and visiting the seaside, as well as newer types of activity. Holiday camps were increasingly 'taken over', by the working class. Between 1951 and 1970, according to official statistics, the development of the 'package holiday' quadrupled the number of British tourists. These developments were noted in the popular press as early as 1946. B. Charles, a contributor to the Mass Observation project, referred in his diary to a *Picture Post*: article about the Butlin's Holiday Camp in Filey, Yorkshire:

> I gather Mr Butlin turns down six hundred applications a week for accommodation, and next year he hopes to cater for a million holidaymakers and I should think he will. It seems to me that this holiday camp is about the same sort of thing as a holiday on the French Riviera, only for £5.5s 6d a week, instead of for hundreds of pounds. In fact it brings Monte Carlo within the reach of the working class.[45]

Although B. Charles is clearly exaggerating, his comments certainly illustrate the way in which the holiday market was opening up to the working class in the immediate post-war years.

Watching television was also a major and increasingly popular leisure innovation of the post-war decades. Although television is associated with the 1950s onwards, Andrew Thorpe notes the increasing domestication of leisure activities from the 1930s. This is epitomised by the rapid increase in the

proportion of radio listeners from one quarter of all households in 1928, to virtual universality in the late 1940s. [46] However, it is the post-war television boom, which has been held directly accountable for the decline of labour movement activities including leisure provision, by at least some of the activists themselves. For example, Sid Willis, Ilford Labour Party activist and husband of the interviewee, Vi Willis, attributed the advent of television as the main reason for people 'not being active any more'. He believed that it is this that 'broke up' Labour Party meetings. Cyril Harrison, the Secretary of Wealdstone Labour Hall Ltd also concluded that '[w]ith the advent of TV, social activity collapsed and income fell'. [47] The specific impact on the halls of the post-war changes in leisure activities will be considered in more detail in the discussion of the apparent decline of the premises as political spaces after 1945.

It has been noted that at least before 1950, 'most voluntary organisations saw themselves in direct competition with the commercial supply of leisure.' [48] Other voluntary organisations such as *church groups and other political* parties, which advertised in newspapers including the *South Western Star* in Battersea, appear to have offered similar activities to the local Labour Party. This may be explained by the relative popularity of certain activities. At Richmond and Barnes Labour Club, for example, the programme of recreational pursuits was ultimately influenced by the level of interest expressed by the membership. Wine and cheese parties, for example, were often socially, if not always financially, successful. Conversely, the cancellation of a boat trip from Kingston to Windsor was attributed to a lack of interest. The popularity of established activities, such as whist drives, also tended to fluctuate. [49]

In the majority of halls the connection between leisure and fundraising or the increase of membership is inferred rather than explicit. However, this was not always the case. In December 1945, for example, Barnes and Richmond Labour Party established a social committee at the Labour Club with the 'first object' to raise funds, only subsequently for the 'entertainment and interest' of the membership. In 1951, the Labour Club itself embarked upon a series of 'Games Nights', '[t]he object of the scheme being to increase membership

and to create more interest in the Club generally'. In 1949, Stepney Labour Party established a social committee: 'It was decided that the prime function of this committee should be the raising of funds, but sight should not be lost of the social side.'[50] These quotations tend to substantiate the suggestion that although fundraising was clearly important, there were other motivations for organising leisure activities. This could be merely to provide 'an enjoyable evening'. However, it has also been noted that across the political spectrum: 'beyond their financial *raison d'etre,* the rounds of socials, outings and dances were held to maintain the party organisation and sustain morale.'[51] The ways in which individual events or activities were publicised also emphasised the link between leisure and finance. Advertisements for football draw tickets at Hendon Labour Hall expressed the hope that the sale of tickets 'will help the Party's financial headaches to disappear'.[52]

Financial considerations further influenced the scope of leisure activities offered at the halls. In some cases this necessitated a pragmatic attitude towards some of the cultures inherent in the labour movement. A good example of this is the temperance ethos. Many socialists, liberals and the non-conformist churches had supported the temperance cause throughout the nineteenth and into the twentieth century. The thesis has already noted the way in which, from 1908, the temperance and labour movement and temperance movements became separated, to a certain extent.

However, until at least the mid-1940s, there were still strong ties to the temperance ideals in some of the labour halls. The original trustees of Wealdstone Labour Hall believed that 'drink was the downfall of the working classes'.[53] This was in contrast to the position adopted by the Conservative Party, which, from the late nineteenth century, opened working class clubs. One of the aims of these clubs was to 'provide facilities for the working man to drink after work'.[54] It is probable that Conservative clubs aimed to emulate the popular elements of public house-based culture: the 'cheap' beer and companionship, which were appreciated by at least some elements of the working class. In her autobiography, Mrs D M Ponton, who grew up in Southwark, notes that in 'hard times', visits to the local public house was often

the only 'real relaxation', enjoyed by the poorer members of the working class. [55]

A Labour Club was established on the premises of the William Morris Institute in 1943. The 'bar' had previously only sold tea and other non-alcoholic beverages and it had been made clear to wedding parties and other potential hirers that intoxicants were not permitted on the premises. In December 1944, Barnes and Richmond Labour Club also applied for a licence to sell intoxicants on the premises. Interestingly, the response of the local Labour Party to this extension of recreational facilities at the hall was purely a desire for an increase in membership, with no reference to the temperance ideal.[56] It is almost certain that, during the 1940s, temperance was less important to the local labour movements, than the necessity of improving their financial positions.

In the post war years, this trend was extended to other halls. From the late 1960s a bar was established in Wealdstone Labour Hall for the quarterly Labour Party socials. This was run in collaboration with a former member of the local Labour Party, who was the licensee of a public house in West Peckham, Kent. [57] In November 1967, a labour club was established in the Heston and Isleworth Labour Hall as 'an attempt to fill the social gap, which has tended to widen in recent years.' As well as the provision of a licensed bar, this also became a venue for folk and blues music and discos.[58]

From the early 1960s onwards there had also been some interest in establishing a bar on the Wimbledon Labour Hall premises. In 1962, a proposal by the local Labour Party highlighted the financial advantages of such a venture:

> It was felt that it was a great pity the local labour movement was not able to run and maintain the premises without a financial struggle and that a club would be of financial benefit to the Hall....They did not want membership to be too wide, and did not want anything offensive to the shareholders-merely to provide a drink in comfort for members of the Labour Party and Trade Unions.[59]

Although this was agreed to in principle by the hall management committee, there was insufficient interest in the project amongst Labour Party members and the project was dropped. In 1973, however, a licensed bar was installed in the William Morris Hall extension of the Wimbledon Labour Hall. Although this was completed by a long term tenant, the permission of the management committee had been sought and granted.

The evidence provided by the selected labour halls in this study indicates that leisure provision in the inter-war years was initially at least strongly influenced by nineteenth century reforming leisure cultures. However, this was not necessarily continued in practice throughout the period, especially by those organisations such as the Labour Party, which, it has been argued, were concerned with the recruitment and retention of membership. From the 1930s, the vast majority of recreational pursuits organised by the labour movement organisations were long established leisure activities, such as whist drives. In conjunction with the pragmatic decision to permit the consumption of alcohol on the premises, these activities were established in competition with other claims on the leisure-time of the working class in an increasingly domestic-centric recreation culture. The limited nature of the activities provided may be at least partly attributed to the membership of the organisations concerned. Particularly in the post-war decades, new innovations such as river boat trips were not always popular with the membership and this often led to their cancellation. The provision of leisure in these halls is also illustrative of the complex relationship between the importance of leisure as an end in itself and its role as a fundraising tool.

Notes:

1 Stephen G. Jones, *Workers at Play: A Social and Economic History of Leisure 1918-1939* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1986), p.149; Jeffrey Hill, *Sport, Leisure and Culture in Twentieth Century Britain* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002), p.169.
2. Hugh Cunningham, 'Leisure and Culture', in F.M.L. Thompson (ed), *The Cambridge Social History of Britain 1750-1950, Volume 2: People and Their Environment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p. 281.
3 Tony Mason, 'Sport and Recreation' in Paul Johnson (ed), *Twentieth Century Britain: Economic, Social and Cultural Change*, 5th ed. (London: Longman, 1998), p.111; Andrew Davies, 'Cinema and Broadcasting' in Johnson (ed), *Twentieth Century Britain,* p.264; A. H. Halsey, *Trends in British Society since 1900: A Guide to the Changing Social Structure of Britain*, (London: Macmillan, 1972), p.540.
4 D. A. Reid, 'Playing and Praying', in Martin Daunton (ed), *The Cambridge Urban History of Britain,* Volume 3: 1840-1950 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), p.763.
5 Hill, *Sport, Leisure and Culture,* p. 167.
6 Cunningham, 'Leisure and Culture'. p.301.
7 For a detailed discussion of this, see Chris Waters *British Socialists and the Politics of Popular Culture 1884- 1914* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990). Waters notes that the attitudes adopted by some middle class socialists towards the working class was 'impatient, condescending and contemptuous', p. 188.
8 Cunningham, 'Leisure and Culture', pp. 299- 301.
9 Cunningham, 'Leisure and Culture', p.301.
10 Cunningham, 'Leisure and Culture' p.305. Cunningham has noted that there is a certain degree of convergence between these theories.
11 James Walvin, *Leisure and Society,* (London: Longman, 1978), p. 162; Andrew Davies *Leisure, Gender and Poverty: Working Class Culture in Salford and Manchester 1900 – 1939* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1992), p. 170.
12 Cunningham, 'Leisure and Culture', p.305.
13 Hill, *Sport, Leisure and Culture in Twentieth Century Britain,* p.8.
14 Claire Langhamer, *Women's Leisure in England 1920-1960,* (Manchester: Manchester University Press 2000), p.23; Cunningham, 'Leisure and Culture', p.305; E. Green, S. Hebron and D. Woodward, *Women's Leisure, What Leisure?* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1990), [no page references given], cited in J. Hill, *Sport, Leisure and Culture,* p.6.
15 Hounslow Labour Party Women's Section minutes, 17 Sept.1941; 5 April 1944. Hounslow Labour Party Women's Section minutes form part of the Heston and Isleworth Labour Party Archive, which is held at the Hounslow Local Studies Centre, London.
16 Smith, *Democracy in a Depression,* p.58.
17 Jones, *Workers at Play,* p.149. This argument is endorsed in Hill *Sport, Leisure and Culture,* p169.
18 A 'sale of work', involved the women members selling home-made items, such as jam or knitted objects for Party finances.
19 *Ilford Citizen,* Sept. 1937. No details of these shows have been preserved in the labour hall archive. Harrow Central Constituency Labour

Party minutes, 25 Oct. 1950.
20 B.R. Schauf, 'Peter the Archer or How to Tackle the Tories', unpublished play script, 1958.
21 Clive Stanley, *The Successful Whist Drive Player: A complete guide to successful play and etiquette at public drives* (London: W Foulsham & Co Ltd, 1938), p. 9. This manual also clearly defines the rules of a whist drive. For a more generic description of the rules of whist, see David Parlett *A History of Card Games* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), p.215. The enduring appeal of whist is noted by Parlett, who describes whist as 'England's national card game'.
22 West Willesden Courier, May 1936
23 *East Ham South Citizen,* January 1936; Harrow Local Labour Party General Committee minutes, 21 Feb. 1938.
24 Interview with Cyril Harrison, 20 Oct. 2003. The bingo sessions are referred to in the minutes of the Harrow Central Constituency Labour Party during the 1960s.
25 Carl Chinn, *Better Betting with a Decent Feller: Bookmaking, Betting and the British Working-Class, 1750-1990* (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991), p. 11.
26 Ross McKibbin, 'Working Class Gambling in Britain 1880-1939', *Past and Present* (82), 1979, p. 176. Roger Munting, for example, does not refer to specific labour movement opposition to gambling. However, he does note that Ramsay Macdonald was a member of the National Anti-Gambling League (NAGL). Roger Munting, *An Economic and Social History of Gambling in Britain and the USA* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996).
27 Black, 'Still at the Penny Farthing Stage in a Jet Propelled Era', p. 217.
28 London School of Economics and Political Science, *The New Survey of London Life and Labour: Volume IX Life and Leisure* (London: P.S. King and Son Ltd, 1935), p. 271.
29 Chinn, *Better Betting with a Decent Feller*, p. 222; John Wilson, *Politics and Leisure* (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1988), p.25.
30 South Battersea Divisional Labour Party Executive Committee minutes, 20 May 1930, 16 Sept. 1930.
31 Richmond and Barnes Labour Club and Institute Ltd, 31July 1957. Wimbledon Labour Hall Ltd minutes, 30 Jan. 1962. Richmond and Barnes Labour Club and Institute minutes, 20 Nov. 1957.
32 The details in this scheme are outlined in 'Fund Raising: A Labour Party Booklet', Jan. 1977, pp. 11-12. The tote profit figure was noted on a loose sheet of paper entitled 'Tote Organiser's Report'. These form part of the Peckham Labour Party Archive, held at Southwark Local Studies Centre, London.
33 Ross McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures: England 1918-1951* (Oxford: Oxford University Press,1998), p.393.
34 Interview with Cyril Harrison, 20 Oct. 2003.
35 Mass-Observation File Report 11A, Jazz and Dancing 21.11.39, pp. 8-9. The Mass Observation Archive is held at the University of Sussex, Brighton.
36 *South Western Star,* 3 March 1972.
37 The Licensing Committee of the London County Council to the Executive Committee of the Stepney Labour Party, 21 September 1950; Report by J M Raisin (London District Organiser) on Mile End LP, 28 Jan.

1947. Stepney (Mile End) Labour Party records, Tower Hamlets Local Studies, London.
38 *Croydon Labour Outlook,* May 1924.
39 *Croydon Labour Outlook,* March 1925.
40 *Croydon Labour Outlook,* Jan. 1936.
41 E-mail from Harry Foy, a local historian in Portadown, Northern Ireland, 8 Oct. 2002. .
42 The archive consists of one cash book, several newspaper cuttings, which are held in an unsorted collection at Southwark Local Studies Centre, and the relevant passages of Brockway *Bermondsey Story.* The latter does not relate any specific information about leisure activities. The secondary literature on the ILP does not reveal much about actual branch leisure practices.
43 This list was taken from George Ingram's *unpublished notes, which* form part of the unsorted archive of the William Morris Institute, Walthamstow. It is largely confirmed by the existing minutes.
44 Barnes and Richmond Labour Club and Institute Ltd minutes, 26 Jan. 1960; 21 Aug. 1960; 28 Sept. 1961.
45 Arthur Marwick, *British Society since 1945,* 4th ed. (London: Penguin, 2003), p. 50; *Britain 1975:An official handbook* (London:HMSO, 1975), p.18, cited in Francois Bedarida, *A Social History of England 1851*-1990 (translated by A S Fraser), 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 1991) p. 256; Simon Garfield, *Our Hidden Lives: The Everyday Diaries of a Forgotten Britain 1945-1948* (London: Ebury Press, 2004), p.250.
46 Andrew Thorpe, *Britain in the 1930s: The Deceptive Decade* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), p 102.
47 Vi Willis interview,(C609/52); Notes from a speech given by Cyril Harrison at a dinner to celebrate the 70th anniversary of Wealdstone Labour Hall Ltd on 24 May 2003. This aspect of television consumption will be considered in greater detail in the context of the decline of the labour halls.
48 Cunningham, 'Leisure and Culture', p.330.
49 Barnes and Richmond Labour Club and Institute Ltd minutes, 29 June 1959.
50 Richmond Borough Labour Party minutes, 17 Dec. 1945; Barnes and Richmond Labour Club and Institute Ltd, minutes, 15 March 1951; Stepney Labour Party Executive Committee minutes, 27 Oct. 1949.
51 Duncan Hall, '*A Pleasant Change from Politics*' : *Music and the British Labour Movement Between the Wars* (Cheltenham: New Clarion Press, 2001), p.50; Ball, Thorpe and Worley 'Elections, Leaflets and Whist Drives', p.21.
52 Hendon Labour Party Publicity leaflet, dated Aug. 1953.
53 Notes from a speech given by Cyril Harrison, the Secretary of Wealdstone Labour Hall Ltd, at the Company's 70th Anniversary dinner, 24 May 2003.
54 P. Tether, 'Clubs: A Neglected Aspect of Conservative Organisation', Hull Papers in Politics No 42 (Hull: Hull University,1988), p.41.
55 D. M. Ponton, 'Autobiographical Letter', p. 5, Working Class Autobiographical Archive, Brunel University, London.
56 William Morris Institute minutes, 18 Aug. 1930; Richmond Borough Labour Party minutes, 18 Dec. 1944.

57 Interview with Cyril Harrison, 20 Oct. 2003. This is also noted in the Harrow Central Constituency Labour Party minutes, 28 Jan. 1969.
58 *Hounslow Clarion,* Nov. 1967; March 1969.
59 Wimbledon Labour Hall Ltd, Annual General Meeting, 6 March 1962.

5. Working Class Education

Workers' education was a central function of labour halls in the Greater London area. A broad interpretation was placed upon the term 'education'. In this context, it was used to refer to Socialist Sunday School activity and 'political education' offered by the Constituency Labour Parties and other overtly political societies as well as educational provision offered by dedicated organisations such as the Workers' Educational Association (WEA) and the National Council of Labour Colleges (NCLC).[1] This section will consider these different kinds of 'education' in the context of the selected labour halls and finally assessing the provision which each of the premises made for the autodidact.

There is not a significant extant literature on organisations such as the Socialist Sunday School and the majority of the writing on the history of the Constituency Labour Parties does not address the issue of political education in great detail. However, the existing historiography on the Workers' Educational Association and the National Council of Labour Colleges will be considered in that part of this chapter.

Structured Education: Socialist Sunday Schools

One branch of the Socialist Sunday School movement originated in Battersea during the 1892 dock strike, by Mary Gray, a member of the Social Democratic Federation (SDF). The initial objective of the school was to educate the poor children who attended a local soup kitchen. The movement rapidly expanded into a nationwide organisation and by 1912 there were 120 local schools in the London area. The children, aged between five and 15 years, were taught the 'principles and ethics of socialism', although it has also been argued that in theory at least the objective of the School was to 'enable children to think for themselves', rather than to necessarily convert them to socialism as a whole or a particular left-wing organisation.[2] Another organisation, described as a Socialist Sunday School, started in Glasgow in 1896. This was in response to an appeal by Keir Hardie three years earlier. Initially at least, this seems to have had no direct links to the Battersea

movement. Daniel Weinbren notes that in 1900, a Scottish Socialist Sunday School organiser, Archie McArthur, moved to London to 're-invigorate the schools there'. It has also been noted that the National Council of British Socialist Sunday Schools Union, was formed in 1909, from the Scottish rather than the Battersea initiative. [3]

R. J. Morris has observed that the Schools and labour churches could form an 'important bridge between the world of dissenting chapels and that of the labour movement'.[4] It was certainly true that the Socialist Sunday Schools aimed to offer an alternative to existing forms of religious observance without losing many of the tradition symbols and ceremonies entirely. Hymn and prayer books were produced and the School had its own version of the Ten Commandments, known as 'precepts'. In many ways, these precepts echoed the teaching of the traditional Christian church: children were instructed to love their school friends and to undertake a 'good deed' every day. However, there were no references to traditional Christian theology or 'dogma' and unsurprisingly, the principles of socialism were also prominent: the seventh precept for example, indicated that 'all good things gathered from the earth', should be retained by the workers. [5] Children born into the movement were recognised in a formal rite. 'Instead of the children being baptized as they were in church, there was a naming ceremony, where a big crowd sang socialist songs...Four little girls put flowers on the baby for purity and then a red rose was put on for the revolution.'[6]

It is almost certainly the case that the Socialist Sunday Schools had an impact on the traditional Churches. In 1923 at the Second Anglo-Catholic Conference, it was acknowledged that: 'If Christian social teaching were not so rotten we would not have Socialist Sunday schools.'[7] Although the speaker does not develop this point, it is clear that, at least parts of the Anglo-Catholic Church understandably perceived the Socialist Sunday Schools as a form of competition, for which the inadequacies of the Christian Churches were at least partially responsible.

The local Socialist Sunday School was a regular tenant of several of the halls in this study. In 1926, Socialist Sunday School meetings in Ilford Hill Labour

Hall included three songs, interspersed throughout the beginning, middle and end of the meeting, an 'opening phrase', roll call, declaration of belief, a recitation of the precepts and a speaker, who delivered a 'short talk in story form'. It is possible that these talks may have taken a similar form to those delivered at the Socialist Sunday School in North Islington nearly twenty years earlier. Subjects under consideration at those meetings, in 1907, included: 'Socialism and the Working Class'; 'Hungry Children'; 'Hospitals' and 'The Blind' [8]

The account of the Ilford School meeting is one of the very few detailed descriptions of the formal activities of the Socialist Sunday School in the preserved records of any of the labour halls in this study. However, there is evidence that the Schools were active in other halls. In 1926, for example, Battersea Socialist Sunday School met every Sunday afternoon. There were 60 children on the School register and it was noted that several 'grown-ups' also regularly attended the meetings. Ten years later, the local School met on the Willesden Labour Hall premises, offering an 'attractive address' to children and young people, as well as 'bright music'.[9] The Socialist Sunday Schools also engaged in leisure activities. In Walthamstow, for example, the School was remembered by one member as a conduit for learning poetry, picnicking and playing rounders, football and cricket as much as for 'the creed'.[10]

Bernard Mends has argued that Socialist Sunday Schools declined during the 1930s, as a result of the impact of both the First World War and the disaffiliation of the Independent Labour Party (ILP) from the Labour Party in 1932. The latter was cited as important because, it is argued, as the Schools were by this time chiefly associated with the ILP, labour clubs and similar Party premises were no longer viable meeting places.[11] This argument is particularly interesting in the light of the evidence provided by one of the labour halls in this study. The Hounslow Socialist Sunday School hired a room on the Heston and Isleworth Labour Hall premises until as late as January 1955, having made use of the hall since its inception in the mid 1930s.[12] This is the only reference to Socialist Sunday School activity during the 1950s in the archives of the selected labour halls. There is one brief reference to the continuation of the Socialist Sunday School on a very small scale in the

existing literature on the subject. Daniel Weinbren refers to the fact that in 1964, seventeen Socialist Sunday Schools remained, nine of which were in Glasgow.[13]

The use of Heston and Isleworth Labour Hall as a focal point for the activities of the Socialist Sunday School may have been unusual, but it does render problematic any generalisations regarding the attitude of 'labour clubs' or similar organisations to the Socialist Sunday School after 1932.

Political Education

The provision of 'political education' at the selected halls followed in the tradition of the plethora of socialist societies, which had been established in the 1880s and 1890s. Many of these had been influenced by the ideologies of William Morris and John Ruskin, among others who believed in a vision of society in which 'labour would be pleasurable and education the right of all.' Brian Simon has contended that in the nineteenth century: 'Socialist education programmes aimed directly to change the workers' outlook, to develop a new conception of the dignity of man. In this sense the importance of the early socialist movement... was primarily educational.' Educational activities at the selected halls would have also followed in the tradition of that provided by nineteenth century institutions, which were established to cater for the working-class, such as the mechanics institutes, the co-operative movement, and workingmen's and radical clubs.[14]

Political education lectures in the various labour halls were often orchestrated and led by local labour movement activists. At the beginning of the period under examination, for example, a series of classes on the Labour Party's 1918 programme, 'Labour and the New Social Order', was held at Ruskin House under the auspices of the Croydon United Socialist Council. The winter seasons at the William Morris Institute, Walthamstow, during the 1920s, encompassed such diverse subjects as 'Co-operation As I see It' and 'Shelley: Rebel and Pioneer'. Representatives of national organisations were also invited to address members of the Institute. The Secretary of the Commonweal Land Party, for example, spoke on the 'timid politicians who fear to touch the land'.[15] Although the substance of many of these

'educational' lectures and classes has not been preserved, it is clear from the titles, that the line between political education and propaganda may well have been blurred. It is possible to interpret a title such 'Labour and the New Social Order' as pure propaganda. However, such an interpretation would largely depend on the way in which the term 'Labour' was understood. It could, in theory at least, refer to either 'labour' in the generic sense of the workforce, or the 'Labour' Party. The address given by the Secretary of the Commonweal Land Party was entirely, and unambiguously, political propaganda.

Political education continued into the Second World War. In 1940, arrangements were made by Harrow Labour Party, for an essay competition, which was open to all members. Entrants were offered titles such as: 'The Philosophy of the Labour Party'; 'The Labour Party in respect to International Affairs' and 'The Labour Party's Policy for the Home Front'. Each subject would be addressed in the form of a 'lecturette' at consecutive General Committee meetings and books were to be presented as prizes for the best essays of not more than 500 words.[16] If there was ambiguity regarding the extent to which 'political education' may be regarded as 'propaganda' at Ruskin House and Wimbledon Labour Hall, then that is not the case here. Encouraging people to write about Labour Party policy, would have obviously been a propaganda exercise. Yet, how far does that really matter? It should be noted that the provision of secondary education on a national level was not entirely uniform until at least the Butler Act of 1944. It is probable that for some Labour Party members, who had been required to leave school at an early age, the lectures and classes provided by the local labour movement organisations formed a significant part of their education.

It is clear that this kind of education was valued by the students. Jack Hart, from East Ham remembers that: 'The Labour Party provided so much education in those days. Every Sunday night at the Labour Hall they had a speakers' meeting...a public meeting open to everybody to come along and hear well-known people.'[17] George Ingram, an inter-war labour movement activist in Walthamstow perceived the role of political education as significant for the future of the student:

> I think that it would be fair to say that many of the people who were elected to serve on the local council from about the mid twenties were well trusted members of the William Morris Institute, who received their early 'training' on the many subjects relating to social welfare and to work on a more just society.[18]

Both men emphasise the 'political', in the political education, which they received and appreciated. Despite the lack of specific detailed literature on the role of Constituency Labour Parties in political education, the people that attended the classes clearly felt that this had played a significant part in their future lives and were well aware of the propaganda element of it. This kind of structured learning would not necessarily have been possible without the selected labour halls.

The Workers' Educational Association and the National Council of Labour Colleges

For the majority of the twentieth century, ideological differences dominated the provision of workers' education. The Workers' Educational Association (WEA), established in 1903, aimed to extend the general education, which was already enjoyed by the middle class. Conversely, the National Council of Labour Colleges (NCLC), formally created in 1921 from many local initiatives, promoted a specifically Marxist propaganda based system of education, which it was perceived, would enable the worker to take 'his' place in the class struggle. [19] Lawrence Goldman has further illustrated the ideological positions of the two organisations thus:

> One hoped to bring working class communities, organized through the WEA into association with the national culture as represented by the universities and so provide access to liberal higher learning for working people hitherto denied the opportunity for sustained academic work. Its ethos was politically progressive and socially reformist. The other rejected what it saw as the establishment's embrace, and promoted an independent education for workers specifically in a more stridently class-conscious politics designed to build an autonomous and oppositional socialist political movement and culture.[20]

Both types of education were largely delivered in either six or twelve week courses and often offered different perspectives on the same subjects. A

course on 'Industrial History', for example, was administered by the WEA and the NCLC. This part of the chapter will be concerned with the roles of these apparently competing models in the provision of worker's education in the selected labour halls.

During the course of the twentieth century, the function of the WEA and NCLC in working-class adult education has been the subjects of fierce debate. Roger Fieldhouse contends that the emphasis on objectivity propounded by the WEA could negate the students own political opinions, ultimately "integrating them into the hegemonic national culture". Fieldhouse also argues that the adult education movement as a whole was accepted by the establishment because it provided a diversion for those who may otherwise have become involved in revolutionary politics. [21] However, it is interesting to note, as Jonathan Rose does, that evidence collected by Fieldhouse indicates that education with the WEA maintained many students' political beliefs and could also attract students into left wing organisations. Rose argues that 'political militancy was as much at home in the WEA as the NCLC'. Lawrence Goldman concurs with this argument and contends that the WEA 'did not prevent the emergence of an alternative socialist educational movement, but simply reflected the moderate aspirations of the working class elite at the time'. [22] Opinion had not always been polarised on the relative merits of the WEA. In 1961, JFC Harrison noted:

> that the WEA always appeared to many militant workers as a movement whose teeth had been drawn was no less true than the equally obvious fact that it provided a background training for many hundreds of Labour town councillors and trade union branch secretaries.[23]

During the inter-war years, several of the selected labour halls simultaneously ran courses provided by NCLC and the WEA. This was the case with the William Morris Institute and East Ham Labour Hall. Within seven months of the opening of the East Ham Labour Hall, for example, a Ruskin College correspondence course was being administered under the auspices of the East Ham Trades Council. Another example of workers' education undertaken at the hall was the course of 'Industrial History' lectures offered by the East

Ham Branch of the Independent Labour Party. [24] This series could have been provided by either the NCLC or the WEA: the sentiments behind the promotional line 'Workers, Learn the History of Your Class', are associated with both the WEA and the NCLC during this period.[25]

The provision of courses provided by the two different organisations in one place did have a precedent. G. D. H Cole notes that, during the inter-war years, this practice was adopted by several trade unions. Rita Rhodes observes that co-operative movement organisations also encouraged their members to undertake courses provided by both the WEA and the NCLC during these years. These courses would often be run in conjunction with the work undertaken by local Co-operative Education Committees. [26] The fact that several halls in this study made often simultaneous use of courses provided by the two organisations could also substantiate J F C Harrison's claim that the kind of education provided by both the WEA and the NCLC was essentially liberal in the broadest sense. Harrison bases this assertion on the fact that neither of the providers offered a large proportion of trade union 'bread and butter courses'. Instead, he notes that 'education for life, not livelihood' was undertaken. This he contends equates to a liberal education. [27] However, the method of teaching such courses and the way that the information is relayed would have been the factor, which determined whether or not the education received was actually 'liberal', rather than just the name of the course. In this context, it is quite difficult to assess how liberal the educational provision offered on the labour hall premises actually was. Often the only surviving references to educational provision only cite the title of the course. Two arguments could therefore be put forward to explain the decisions of these hall committees to offer courses provided by the NCLC and the WEA simultaneously. Firstly, that they regarded educational provision by both organisations as liberal in the broadest sense and the courses were chosen for their subject matter rather than whether they were provided by the WEA or NCLC. Secondly, the management committees appreciated the ideological differences between the two organisations and wanted to offer both types of education to their students. The severely limited nature of the evidence, however renders either theory as little more than speculation.

The majority of management committees or local Labour Parties in the remainder of the labour halls in this study tended to favour the educational provision of the NCLC over that of the WEA. Jonathan Rose notes the aspiration of the NCLC to become the 'education arm of moderate trade unions and the Labour Party'.[28] It certainly seems to be the case in this limited sample. Prior to the Second World War, Wealdstone Labour Hall was a centre for workers' education under the auspices of the local Labour Party. During 1936 and 1937 two series of twelve week Sunday evening classes were held. In 1936, the course commenced with a speaker from the League Against Imperialism. The remainder of the course was organised as a forum, incorporating NCLC speakers, under the umbrella title of 'Democracy - Can It Be Saved?' The following year, the first six weeks of lectures addressed either 'Foreign or European Affairs.' [29] In common with several other local branches of the Labour Party during the 1930s, Harrow was affiliated to both the WEA and the NCLC. Both of these organisations administered courses of the type offered by the Labour Party in 1937. However, as there is no record of the WEA being approached, it is almost certain that the course used was that offered by the NCLC.

In 1948, at Barnes and Richmond Labour Club, education courses were being convened by ten Labour Party ward groups and further courses in 'Party Organisation' and 'Chairmanship', were to be considered.[30] The author of these courses in not referred to in the minutes. However, this provides some evidence that, in spite of J.F.C. Harrison's claim that the NCLC offered a basically liberal education, some vocational courses were offered.[31] Two years later Barnes and Richmond Labour Club was further associated with the NCLC; the Executive Committee of Richmond and Barnes Labour Party hoped that the NCLC would finance the hire of a room for a course of political lectures. [32] This tradition continued throughout the remainder of the period under discussion.

Two of the labour halls in this study ultimately became official centres of 'independent working class education'. Such centres were the focal points of this kind of education in their localities and courses were chosen and administered directly by a local committee rather than through a conduit such

as the local Labour Party or branch of the ILP. Independent working class education had originally been instigated by the SDF before effectively becoming absorbed by the NCLC in the 1920s. Its primary emphasis was on the 'centrality of education to make socialists.'[33] The concern of Ilford ILP to provide education 'from a socialist point of view' led, in 1921, to the establishment of the Ilford District Council for Independent Working Class Education, which operated out of Ilford Hill Labour Hall, under the auspices of the Labour College. Subjects covered by this organisation included a twelve-week course on 'Industrial History' and a lecture on 'Esperanto'.[34]

Battersea Labour Hall was also the centre of independent working-class education in the local area.[35] South Battersea Divisional Labour Party was affiliated to the NCLC and in February 1935, this organisation established a local Labour College Committee on the premises, which continued to meet at the hall at regular intervals. Thereafter, exclusively NCLC educational courses, study circles and day schools were offered on the premises. During the 1930s, subjects offered by the NCLC were occasionally tailored for specific events. In 1935, for example, educational provision included a series of classes entitled 'A Worker looks at the Jubilee Period'. The following year, a day school was organised, which asked 'The British Empire: Who Benefits from it?'[36]

In spite of the fact that the overwhelming proportion of structured education at the selected halls, was provided by the NCLC, the connection between the co-operative movement and the WEA is still relevant. In 1930, for example a course on 'Trade Union and Social History' was being run at Stepney Labour Hall under the auspices of the Political Council of the London Co-operative Society (LCS).[37] Between 1949 and 1951, classes were undertaken at Lansbury House in co-operation with the Education Committee of the Royal Arsenal Co-operative Society (RACS). [38] Subjects studied included 'Modern Problems' and 'Social and Economic History'. These subjects are chiefly associated with the approach to education, propounded by organisations such as the WEA. The manner in which co-operative societies encouraged their members to undertake WEA and NCLC courses has already been noted. Roger Fieldhouse also notes the way in which the WEA and university

extension courses were supported by various co-operative societies from the latter half of the nineteenth century onwards.[39]

Although several co-operative movement organisations were regular tenants of some of the labour halls in this study, the halls do not appear to have provided a venue for the distinctive brand of co-operative education, which had been devised during the course of the period under analysis. In the first half of the twentieth century, the emphasis was on the 'teaching of co-operative ideas, organisation and history, together with the development of co-operative managerial capabilities.'[40] However, it is probable that these forms of education were undertaken on the premises of individual co-operative societies and at the Co-operative College in Loughborough, which had been established in 1919, rather than in labour halls in the Greater London area.

In spite of the fact that the WEA does not seem to have been asked to provide a large proportion of the courses, which were offered on the selected premises, WEA speakers would be invited to deliver individual lectures. In 1923 and 1924, subjects included 'Problems of Working Class Education' at Wimbledon Labour Hall. The Wimbledon Labour League of Youth also invited WEA speakers to address their meetings in the decade after 1945. [41]

At least one local Labour Party chose a form of education, which is not easily identified with either the WEA or NCLC. In Stepney Labour Hall, lecture classes and study circles were held on subjects including 'Trade Union and Social History', 'Capitalism and the World Crisis', 'The Rise of the Labour Movement' and 'The Socialisation of Industry'. A series of three lectures addressing the impact of 'Fascism', 'Communism' and 'Socialism' was also held at the hall. This particular course of lectures was open to members of the labour movement at a registration fee of three pence for the whole course or two pence per lecture.[42] The attendance at these lectures tended to depend on the subject matter. A 'large number of members were present' for the 'Socialisation of Industry' lecture class, for example.[43] These lectures were typically held under the auspices of the London Labour Party and do not directly reflect courses offered by either the WEA or the NCLC. It is probable

that these courses were written specifically for the London Labour Party by an organisation such as the Labour Research Department.[44]

There are comparatively few references to structured non-overtly political education in the surviving records of many of the labour halls in this study from the late 1950s onwards. This may be explained by changes to the two main providers of working-class education. The NCLC ceased to function as an independent entity and was absorbed into the Labour Party in 1964. The WEA did continue to provide education aimed at the working classes. However, it is evident from its literature of the 1960s, that the organisation was directing a large proportion of its "effort" at educational opportunities in the workplace.[45]

It is clear that the distinctions made between the NCLC and the WEA in the majority of the extant literature were not necessarily reflected in the experiences of the provision of structured education in the labour halls. The limitations of the use of minutes are apparent in this instance. Either the WEA or the NCLC would be selected, but the motivation for the decision is not necessarily recorded. During the 1920s and 1930s, it may simply have been that the NCLC was more widely chosen because of its Marxist interpretations, which could have appealed to labour movement activists.

Provision for the autodidact

Although structured adult learning was considered to be an important function of the labour halls in this study, it was not the only way in which the management committees and local Labour Parties contributed to the education of their members. In several cases a reading room or library was also provided and where this was not practical, literature was circulated. The addition of a library to the premises adhered to nineteenth century traditions adopted by the co-operative movement and the Working Men's Club and Institute Union. It has been noted that in the 1870s and 1880s there were more Co-operative libraries than public libraries in Britain and by 1903, 500 out of the 900 hundred Working Men's Clubs also had libraries.[46] Richard Hoggart, has described the kinds of reading material, which was stocked in

these libraries and reading rooms as 'wide, solid and inspiring'. It would have included socialist literature such as Robert Blatchford's *Merrie England*, 'volume after volume of Morris and Ruskin', as well as at least two series of books described as 'libraries'.[47] Jonathan Rose's research indicates that at the beginning of the twentieth century, fiction was the most popular kind of reading material in the libraries of the Working Men's Clubs. By the 1930s, the RACS library in Woolwich had established a 10,000 volume library, which was predominantly 'light fiction', but also contained books on economics, social science and philosophy.[48]

It may then be argued that the contents of these libraries did not necessarily conform entirely to the kinds of reading material, which Ross McKibbin has chiefly associated with the working-class between 1918 and 1951: "Books'...to most working men and women did not mean J. B. Priestley but the magazines, newspapers and paper-backed short stories read by a huge audience, few of whom were middle class.' He further notes that: '[t]he content of mass literature...was melodramatic and largely asocial and apolitical'. [49] It is possible that there may have been some overlap in the 'light fiction genre' and magazines and newspapers were almost always available in those labour halls which were equipped with reading rooms. In spite of this, however, much of the surviving evidence from the labour hall archives, leaves the impression that at least some of the reading undertaken on these premises was more 'serious' and 'educational' than that engaged in by 'most working men and women'. Indeed, Richard Hoggart has made such a distinction: the users of the educational facilities in the labour halls were 'the earnest minority'.[50]

From 1920, Ilford Hill Labour Hall provided a library on the premises. The library was open to Ilford ILP members and all other hirers of the hall, at the cost of a fortnightly subscription and an entrance fee, which was payable on each visit. In 1924, for example, the subscription was 'one penny per fortnight, then one penny per week subsequently'. The entrance fee, for each visit, was sixpence for Ilford ILP members and one shilling for non-members.[51] No records of the library stock survive, but it is probable that socialist oriented

publications such as *Socialism at Work* by Ernest Hunter, Arthur Henderson's *Socialism and Freedom* and *Meanwhile* by H.G. Wells would have been included in the library, as these were the core texts of lectures and study circles.[52] This kind of reading material would reflect that which was offered in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century Co-operative and Working Men's Clubs libraries.

In 1924, the Labour Party and the NUR established a lending library in Wimbledon Trades and Labour Hall. However, there are very few references to this library in the archives of any of the organisations, which regularly used the premises. In November 1945, the Management Committee of Wimbledon Labour Hall Ltd also put forward proposals for a library and reading room under its own auspices.[53] It is probable that the original library was sacrificed during the Second World War, when the Trades and Labour Hall premises were used as a reception centre for local residents 'bombed out' of their houses. From the inception of Wealdstone Labour Hall, one room was designated as a library. There are very few references to the library in the preserved records of Wealdstone Labour Hall. However, it is clear that, initially it was stocked with books, which were either donated by members or had been purchased by previous incarnations of the local Labour Party, such as Harrow and Roxeth.[54]

The Battersea Labour Hall premises also incorporated provision for the self-taught person. A library was established upon the inception of the hall. Individual organisations would also encourage their members to read. In 1935, for example, three copies of *Love on the Dole* by Walter Greenwood were purchased by the Executive Committee of the South Battersea Divisional Labour Party. Members were charged threepence per week to borrow the book. [55] It is unclear how much such a book would have cost to buy in 1935. However, in 1939, it seems that a publication in the popular, and relatively inexpensive, Everyman's Library could have been purchased for around one shilling.[56] It is therefore possible that Labour Party members were charged approximately one quarter of the price of the book to borrow it for one week. Presumably, this scheme would be less economical for any members that required the book for more than four weeks.

At the inception of Barnes and Richmond Labour Club in 1936, it was intended that provision would be made for the autodidact as well as those members who wished to benefit from a structured learning programme. The 'nucleus' of a library had been obtained prior to the opening ceremony and this collection was expanded, often by donations from Club members. In May 1949, the Club received such a gift of 36 books.[57] However, the Constituency Labour Party preferred to keep its collection separate from that of the Club. In 1945, the Party proposed to utilise a cupboard as a 'library'. Six years later, the Political Education Committee of the Constituency Labour Party was granted permission to erect shelving for their library books.[58]

Books were not the only source of literature at Barnes and Richmond Labour Club. From 1951, left-wing newspapers and periodicals, including *The New Statesman, Manchester Guardian* and *Tribune* were made available to interested members. These had either been ordered by the Club itself, or donated by various members. The choice of publication on display was occasionally highly controversial. The largest Labour Party ward protested over the decision of the Club's management committee to permit a display of the Marxist publication *Socialist Outlook* on the premises. [59] Such a contentious decision is indicative of the independence of the Club's management committee from the local Labour Party, which adhered to the national Party's proscription of this journal.

Although, the William Morris Institute did not have space for a reading room or library in the Institute, the management committee ensured that groups such as the Labour League of Youth had access to literature. In 1930, this included the loan of several copies of *Merrie England* by Robert Blatchford. A wireless and a cinematograph were hired, explicitly for the provision of educational programmes and films. There are no records in the archive of the William Morris Institute to indicate whether or not the wireless and cinematograph were actually used for the promotion of education.[60]

This chapter has contended that the selected labour halls performed an important dual function in encouraging both structured education and the strong working-class self-taught tradition, for interested parties from the age of five years into adulthood. It has considered both 'political' and more general kinds of education. The chapter makes a significant contribution to the existing literature on the Socialist Sunday School. The presence of Hounslow Socialist Sunday School in Heston and Isleworth hall challenges an assumption, that after the ILP's disaffiliation from the Labour Party in 1932, labour movement premises were no longer viable meeting places for branches of the School. The chapter has also shown how political education was, unsurprisingly, used to disseminate Labour Party propaganda. However, this was valued by the students as a grounding for future political activity and, arguably, as a contribution to the inadequacies of the existing education system. As has also been noted in this chapter, the majority of halls tended to undertake structured educational courses provided by the NCLC, which certainly promoted itself as a working-class political organisation. However, on occasion, these courses would be run concurrently with those provided by the WEA, which tended to propound a non-political ethos. This chapter has also highlighted the fact that, during the inter-war years, the activities of the WEA and NCLC were not as polarised as has been inferred by a large proportion of the existing literature. Surviving evidence regarding the type of material read in the libraries or reading rooms at the halls indicates that the literature provided was almost entirely of a left wing nature. It should be noted though, that in the absence of detailed library stock lists, the emphasis on socialist-oriented reading material in the records of political organisations, was almost certainly not representative of the entire range of literature provided on the premises. In spite of lack of surviving evidence in this particular area, it is clear that the halls provided a focal point for both structured and independent learning, which may not have been possible in the absence of such premises.

Notes:

1 In many ways the distinction between the two types of education is not strictly defined. The workers education provided by the NCLC was certainly presented from the Marxist perspective. This will be discussed further in this section.
2 'No 18: The Socialist Sunday School.' Bill Crowther Collection, Labour Party Archive. This is a short history, written by an activist in the Ashton-Under-Lyme Socialist Sunday School in response to a newspaper query in 1953/4; B. Mends 'John Trevor: The Labour Church and Socialist Sunday Schools' , unpublished MA dissertation, University of Middlesex, 1996, p 14.
3 Weinbren, *Generating Socialism,* p. 33. The reference to the National Council of British Socialist Sunday Schools Union is taken from an article on the Working Class Movement Library website entitled 'Songs: Socialist Sunday School' http://www.wcml.org.uk/culture/songs_sss.htm.
4 R.J. Morris, 'Clubs, Societies and Associations', in F.M.L. Thompson (ed), *The Cambridge Social History of Britain 1750-1950, Volume 3: Social Agencies and Institutions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p.427.
5. The precepts are listed in the appendices of B. Mends, 'John Trevor: The Labour Church and Socialist Sunday Schools'.
6 Harry McShane and J. Smith, *No Mean Fighter*, 1978, p.31, cited in R.J. Morris, 'Clubs, Societies and Associations,' p. 427.
7 Report of the Second Anglo-Catholic Congress, London, July 1923, http://anglicanhistory.org/acc/2/143.html.
8 Letter from the Superintendent of the Ilford Socialist Sunday School to the *Ilford Argus*, 16 Jan. 1926; 'No 73: The Red Catechism, by A. P. Hazell, 1907', Bill Crowther Collection.
9 *The Battersea Standard,* No 2, May 1920; *West Willesden Courier*, January 1936. There is also evidence that the local Socialist Sunday Schools hired rooms at East Ham and Wimbledon Labour Halls during the inter-war years.
10 Unpublished, undated account by Mary Dunhill of her father's Socialist Sunday School activities at the William Morris Institute.
11 Mends, 'John Trevor: The Labour Church and Socialist Sunday Schools', p.17.
12 Heston and Isleworth Constituency Labour Party Premises Committee minutes, 19 April 1955.
13 Weinbren, *Generating Socialism,* p.33.
14 Brian Simon, *Education & the Labour Movement 1870-1920* (London: Lawrence and Wishart,1965), p. 18.
15 Advertisement for the 1924-25 Winter Season at the William Morris Institute; *Walthamstow Observer* 24th Nov. 1924.
16 Minutes of a meeting of the officers of Harrow Local Labour Party, 11 March 1940. There are no further references in the minutes to this competition.
17 Interview with Jack Hart, (C609/97/01), Labour Oral History Project, National Sound Archive, British Library, London.
18 Unpublished notes written by George Ingram, a local activist (n.d), William Morris Institute Archive.
19 'Education', in H.B. Lees Smith, *The Encyclopaedia of the Labour*

Movement (London: Caxton, 1928).
20 Lawrence Goldman, 'Intellectuals and the English Working Class 1870-1945: The Case of Adult Education', *History of Education,* Volume 29 (4), 2000, pp.281-2.
21 Roger Fieldhouse, 'The ideology of English Adult Education Teaching 1925-1950' *Studies in Adult Education* 15 (1983), pp. 29-30; Roger Fieldhouse,'Conformity and Contradiction in English Responsible Body Adult Education 1925-1950' *Studies in the Education of Adults* 17, (1985), p123, cited in Jonathan Rose, *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes,* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), p.271.
22 Rose *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes,* p 271, p.273.
23 J F C Harrison, *Learning and Living 1790 – 1960: A Study in the History of the English Adult Education Movement* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1961) p. 268.
24 The Wakefield Road Branch of the East Ham Independent Labour Party minutes, 17 Dec. 1922; *The London Citizen-East Ham Edition,* Sept. 1921; Sept. 1922.
25 See for example the WEA leaflets 'To All Trade Unionists: Workers Education Why and How' (n.d.) and 'Invest Your Leisure' (September 1929). WEA Archive, London Metropolitan University.
26 G.D.H Cole, *An Introduction to Trade Unionism,* 2nd edition (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1955) p196. Rita Rhodes, 'The Contribution of Consumer Co-operatives to Adult Education', *Journal of Co-operative Studies,* Volume 32 (1) 1999, pp. 68-9.
27 J. F. C. Harrison, *Learning and Living,* p. 298.
28 Rose *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes,* p. 279; Goldman, 'Intellectuals and the English Working Class', p.282.
29 Harrow Local Labour Party Executive Committee minutes, 21 Oct. 1936; 18 August 1937.
30 Richmond and Barnes Labour Party Executive Committee minutes, 24 May 1948.
31 During the 1920s and 1930s, for example, the NCLC ran a course on 'Secretaryship'. The WEA emphasised less vocational subjects, such as 'Appreciation of Art' and 'International Relations.' It should, of course be noted that Harrison refers only to the majority of NCLC classes.
32 Richmond and Barnes Labour Party Executive Committee minutes, 13 June 1950.
33 John McIlroy 'Independent Working Class Education', in Roger Fieldhouse and Associates, *A History of Modern British Adult Education,* (Leicester: NIACE, 1996), p.264.
34 Ilford Branch of the ILP minutes, 18 Feb. 1920; *The Ilford Argus* 1 Oct.1921; Ilford Branch of the ILP minutes, 6 Oct. 1920; 22nd June 1921.
35 By this stage, the terms would literally just be used to refer to premises, which co-ordinated exclusively NCLC courses.
36 South Battersea Divisional Labour Party Executive Committee minutes, 19 Feb. 1935; 16 April 1935; 17 March 1936. Research has not indicated that classes on these subjects were held under the auspices of the NCLC, in any other hall in this study.
37 *Stepney Citizen,* Jan. 1930.
38 The educational classes are listed in *The Peckham Citizen.* There are no other explicit references to workers education in the preserved records of

Lansbury House, but it is unlikely to have been limited to these three years.
39 Roger Fieldhouse, 'An overview of British Adult Education in the Twentieth Century' in Fieldhouse and Associates. *A History of Modern British Adult Education,* p.51. It is probable that if the RACS educational syllabus was not actually written by tutors of the WEA, then it was heavily influenced by the philosophy of that organisation.
40 Rhodes, 'The Contribution of Consumer Co-operatives to Adult Education' p.61.
41 Wimbledon, Merton and Morden Labour Party Syllabus 1923-1924; Interview with Eileen Evans, July 2000.
42 *Stepney Citizen,* Jan. 1930, Nov. 1932, March 1935.
43 *Stepney Citizen,* March 1933.
44 These courses are not listed in contemporary NCLC literature. The Labour Research Department (LRD) provided educational courses from at least the early 1920s on subjects such as 'The British Labour Movement' and 'The Development of Capitalism'. Extensive Research has not located a complete list of LRD courses. Both the NCLC and WEA also tended to run courses which lasted for between six and twelve weeks.
45 See, for example, Frederick J. Bayliss, *In Factory and Mine: The WEA on the Job,* The Workers' Educational Association (London: Workers' Educational Association, 1964), p.1. There are of course, also proportionately fewer post-war records in the archives of the selected labour halls.
46 Rose, *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes,* p.79.
47 Richard Hoggart, *The Uses of Literacy: Aspects of Working Class Life with Special Reference to Publications and Entertainments,* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1957), p.261.
48 Rose, *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes,* p.79.
49 McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures: England 1918-1951,* p.527.
50 Hoggart, *The Uses of Literacy,* p.260.
51 Ilford Branch of the ILP minutes, 7 May 1924.
52 Ilford Branch of the ILP minutes, 14 Sept. 1921; 6 Aug. 1925; 31 Sept. 1927.
53 The original library is referred to in an undated Labour Party leaflet as well as the Wimbledon, Merton and Morden Labour Party General Committee minutes, 11 July 1924.(1/CLP/A1) The proposals of the Management Committee of Wimbledon Labour Hall Ltd are located in the minutes of Nov. 1945.(1/WLH/A7). There are no references to the types of books which were placed in the original library and it is not clear if a second library was actually opened.
54 Harrow Local Labour Party Executive Committee minutes, 15 May 1935.
55 South Battersea Divisional Labour Party Executive Committee minutes, 19 March 1935. References to provision for the post-war autodidact tend to be limited to political propaganda leaflets.
56 This was extrapolated from a reference to a worker being able to purchase 60 such books for £3 in Howard Spring, *Heaven Lies About Us* (London: Constable, 1939), pp.93-94, cited in Rose, *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Class,* p.370. There is, however, no evidence to suggest that *Love on the Dole* was published as part of the Everyman Library. This reference is merely to suggest the approximate cost of books in the period.
57 *Richmond, Twickenham and Barnes Herald,* 22 Feb. 1936; Barnes and

Richmond Labour Club and Institute Ltd, Finance Committee minutes 26 May 1949.

58 Richmond Borough Labour Party minutes, 17 Dec. 1945; Barnes and Richmond Labour Club and Institute minutes, 13 Sept. 1951.

59 Barnes and Richmond Labour Club and Institute minutes, 17 May 1951; 15 Oct. 1953.

60 It appears that the wireless had been installed before the beginning of the surviving minutes. The decision to hire the cinematograph is referred to in the minutes of 7 Jan. 1935.

6. The Role of Women in the Halls.

This section will consider both the role of women in the day-to-day administration of the labour halls and the ways in which the two major women's political organisations, the local Labour Party women's sections and the branches of the Women's Co-operative Guild, contributed to the political culture of the selected halls in this study. It will also examine the ways in which these findings substantiate or challenge the existing literature on women in the labour movement.

It is useful to place the political, legal and social position of women in a general context. For the majority of the first half of the nineteenth century, women, especially married women, had very few legal or political rights. Hard fought campaigns by mostly, but not exclusively, middle class women eventually achieved a number of reforms. These included, being regarded as individuals under the law, rather than simply possessions or chattels of their husbands and fathers (1884), and sole guardianship of their children after a legal separation (1886). In many ways, during the nineteenth century, women's achievements were divided along social class lines. Middle class ladies' employment prospects slowly improved, with increasing access to higher education. Conversely, working women tended to either be employed in domestic service or factories. Their opportunities for employment actually contracted during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. After the 1842 Mines Act, women were no longer allowed to be employed underground. Factory legislation after 1844 also classed all women as young persons, under the age of 18. This reduced the number of hours, which women were permitted to work. [1]

The campaign for the parliamentary franchise commenced in the mid-nineteenth century. After John's Stuart Mill's amendment to the 1867 Reform Bill was defeated in parliament, local women's suffrage societies were established across the United Kingdom. In 1887, seventeen of these local organisations amalgamated to form the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies (NUWSS). These suffragists pledged to use only constitutional

means to attain the franchise. They held political meetings, organised petitions, wrote to politicians, and disseminated propaganda. However, this was a very slow process. By 1903, when no real gains had been made, a group of disillusioned members from Manchester, led by Emmeline Pankhurst formed the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU). The WSPU was prepared to use more radical methods to ensure 'Votes for Women'. Their better known campaign included chaining themselves to railings, heckling and damaging property. However, it is probable that it was the work of the suffragists, rather than the more high profile suffragettes, which eventually at least partially enfranchised women. Ultimately, women gained the right to vote in two stages. In 1918, middle class women who were householders or wives of householders became eligible and ten years later, in 1928, all women over the age of 21 were enfranchised on the same terms as men.[2]

It is worth briefly considering the context of the inter-war feminist movement, aside from the continued campaign to extend the franchise to all women, because the movement was inevitably concerned with issues which were directly relevant to women in labour movement politics in these years. From the early 1920s onwards, the women's movement divided itself loosely into 'new' and 'old' feminism. 'Old' feminists continued to pursue an agenda, which would give women absolute equality with men in all areas under the law. Their 'new' counterparts, however, argued that: 'we can demand what we want for women, not because it is what men have got, but because it is what women need to fulfil the potentialities of their own natures and to adjust themselves to the circumstances of their own lives'.[3] 'New' or 'welfare' feminist campaigns emphasised family allowances and birth control. As will be shown during the course of this chapter, these were issues, which were addressed by women's organisations in the labour halls in the 1920s and 1930s.

Having considered the general context of the women's movement in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, it is now necessary to examine the existing literature on women in local party-politics. The presence of working-class, often married women in local politics in pre-First World War London has been noted by Kim Yoonok Stenberg. These women tended to be the wives of artisans and resident in a comparatively small number of working-class

boroughs, where several of them were married to local officials, which included Poplar, Southwark and Woolwich. These women were politicised by their experiences initially in the Women's Co-operative Guild, local Liberal associations and ultimately, for many, the Labour Party. The tasks undertaken by women activists in, for example Woolwich in these years, included voluntary canvassing and fundraising. It has been argued that, these voluntary activities enabled some women to secure patronage for local political office. This is contrary to the perception that the role and function of women in local labour movement organisations was solely that of tea making and newspaper selling.[4]

The role of women in twentieth century labour movement politics has received a rather different interpretation and this is substantiated by much of the evidence provided by the selected labour halls in this study. Pamela Graves has argued that, during the inter-war years at least, both men and women were not entirely able to disregard traditional gender stereotypes. Women, especially, tended to establish their own organisations, usually in the form of a 'women's section'. She has contended that this kind of organisation tended to be concerned with local 'welfare issues' or 'woman-centred' issues, such as infant welfare, health in general, or birth control, rather than political organisation and electioneering. [5] It should of course be noted that some welfare issues such as the birth control campaign, which will be discussed in further detail later in this section, became highly politicised during the inter-war years. This echoes the 'separate spheres' theory, which has been particularly applied to nineteenth and twentieth century women's history. This theory argues that men and women were assigned distinct roles: women's domain was the household, family and welfare related issues and the male sphere was that which took place outside the house including paid employment, associational life and politics. However, in a consideration of the more general role of women within local Labour Parties, Matthew Worley has noted that 'Labour women were regularly to the fore with regard to canvassing and electioneering.'[6] This chapter will assess how far either of these assertions are substantiated by the evidence provided by the archives of the selected labour halls.

Labour hall administration

It has been argued that in terms of political organisation, "women consistently formed but a small minority of the party executive and generally remained detached from the main decision making organs."[7] How far may this be applied to labour hall administration? Prior to the Second World War, women enjoyed minimal representation on the majority of labour hall committees. In 1922, less than one third of the members of the management committee of Wimbledon Trades and Labour Hall were female.[8] The surviving minutes of the William Morris Institute in Walthamstow indicate that between 1930 and 1937, there were only two women out of 12 management committee members. The proportion of women did not greatly increase after the Labour Party assumed control of the Institute in 1938.[9] In 1936, the first committee of Heston and Isleworth Labour Hall also had two women management committee members out of a total of nine.[10]

The policy of the trustees of Wealdstone Labour Hall Ltd was slightly different from that of the other halls. In 1934, concern was expressed by the management committee that there were no women trustees. This was rectified by the permanent addition of the chairman of the Wealdstone Women's Section to the board of nine trustees.[11] This meant that, although women were still in the minority in the administration of Wealdstone Labour Hall, they were at least guaranteed representation. Evidence from the other halls in this study indicates that women were often elected to the management committees on a purely *ad hoc* basis. Post-war committee records show that in a few of the halls, there was a slightly higher proportion of female members than there had been during the inter-war years. In 1954, for example, five members, or one third, of the management committee of Barnes and Richmond Labour Club were women.[12]

Once elected to the labour hall management committees, during the inter-war years at least, women tended to undertake stereotypical functions. In 1932 the female members of the management committee of Wimbledon Labour Hall Ltd, were expected to form a 'house sub-committee', which would look after the soft furnishings and ensure the cleanliness of the premises. A

comparable 'works committee' was comprised of a proportion of the male members of the management committee. This committee undertook such tasks as were directly related to the maintenance and repair of the fixtures and fittings on the labour hall premises. The role of the women on Richmond Labour Club's management committee was similar to that of the female committee members of Wimbledon Labour Hall Ltd. They were also responsible for the repair or replacement of soft furnishings. Women also dominated the catering sub committee and had a significant presence on the social committee. The duties assumed by the female members of the Heston and Isleworth Labour Party Premises Committee strongly resembled those undertaken by their counterparts in Wimbledon and Richmond. No objections were recorded as having been raised by the women members of any of these committees. Some, such as approaching the Labour Party's Women's Section to clean the Wimbledon Trades and Labour Hall premises, were suggested and actively endorsed by them.[13] It is possible to argue that such an endorsement substantiates Pamela Graves' contention that women in the labour movement were unable or possibly unwilling to transcend the stereotypical functions, which were assigned to them.[14] There is no evidence to suggest any further differentiation between the activities of male and female committee members in the post-war years.

Few women were elected as officers on the labour hall management committees. Between 1936 and 1979, the Barnes and Richmond Labour Club presidency remained a completely male preserve. However, there is some evidence of a slight change over the period in question on other management committees. A woman assumed the relatively minor position of assistant secretary of Wimbledon Labour Hall Ltd, for twenty-four years after 1945, and in 1971 a woman vice-chairman was elected.

Conversely, women became elected officials of constituency Labour Parties during the inter-war years. Wimbledon Labour Party elected a woman president in 1932 and by 1952, it was 'usual' for one of the vice-presidents of the Party to be a woman. [15] Similarly, Ilford Labour Party had also elected a woman president in 1935 and Richmond and Barnes Labour Party elected a woman chairman from 1942 until 1947. This may be perceived as part of a

nationwide trend. Pamela Graves has noted that from the 1930s onwards, a greater number of women began to undertake significant roles, even high office, within their constituency parties.[16] This provides an interesting contrast to the position of women on labour hall management committees. However, this is a relatively small sample of both labour halls and constituency labour parties. It would therefore not be possible to draw many representative conclusions on this particular aspect of the study.

Labour Party Women's Sections

Women's political organisations were represented at the selected labour halls by the constituency Labour Party women's sections and the local Women's Co-operative Guilds. In several cases the membership of the two organisations tended to overlap. In 1927, the South Battersea Labour Party Women's Section attributed the decline in attendance at its meetings to the fact that there were two local Women's Co-operative Guilds and it was 'asking too much' for them to attend two afternoon meetings per week.[17]

The Women's Section was particularly active within the Party structure, rising to a total of more than two thousand branches nationwide in 1951.[18] During the inter-war years, several of the sections were invested with a dual function in the labour halls: the provision of cleaning and catering services for other tenants as well as hiring the political spaces for their own meetings. [19] The evidence provided by these Women's Section tends to substantiate and extend Pamela Graves' contention that Women's Sections tended to place more emphasis on social and welfare issues, rather than political organisation and electioneering [20]

Mike Savage has argued that effectively, the women's sections were less important as campaigning organisations in the 1930s:

> The tendency to assume that Women's Sections...[in the 1920s] were of little political import is to extrapolate the situation obtaining [sic] in the 1930s back too far. Certainly the Labour Party's annual reports show that women campaigned over a number of issues: women in paid employment, unemployment among women, social services, education

for 'working women', Trade Boards, the need for equality in employment, minimum wages, the end of marriage bars and family allowances paid for out of a wealth tax. [21]

However, as will be highlighted, the Women's Sections used the labour halls as a venue for such campaigns throughout the inter-war years and to a lesser extent, into the 1940s.[22]

Between the inceptions of the labour halls and the end of the study in 1979, the women's sections actively campaigned on a number of issues. Hounslow Labour Party Women's Section was particularly active in this area. In 1941, for example, the Section protested to the local council about the borough wide canvas, which its officials had undertaken, to fund baby minders for women doing war work. The Section was in favour of local authority funded nursery provision. Similarly, the organisation complained about the allocation of sugar for jam making, which, it believed disproportionately favoured the Women's Institute. Hounslow Women's Section also involved itself in more overtly political gender-specific issues. In 1942, a resolution was sent to the Home Secretary, Herbert Morrison, deploring the differentiation in wartime injury compensation, which was awarded to men and women. The Section urged the 'need for immediate revision so that men and women receive equal rates'. The Section also expressed opinions on non-gender related matters. In 1940, it demanded that disciplinary action be taken against the assistant secretary of the Borough Labour Party, who had been one of the main speakers at a Communist Party meeting in Isleworth. Wimbledon Labour Party Women's Section also submitted a resolution to the Labour Party on the nationwide equalisation of higher education grants. [23]

In the 1920s, the labour halls were utilised by several of the local sections as venues for open political meetings on largely controversial issues. The birth control campaign was a major issue, which divided political opinion throughout the inter-war decades. Even among women's feminist organisations the position taken on this issue reflected religious as well as political persuasions. For example the Catholic Women's Suffrage Society, later St Joan's Social and Political Alliance, subscribed to many of the ideals of the inter-war feminist movement. However, it opposed birth control on

principle, in line with the teachings of the Catholic Church. [24] It has been noted, however, that women Labour Party members were generally in favour of birth control from a humanitarian perspective: they believed that it was desirable that working class women should be preserved from the physical suffering and anxiety of almost continual pregnancy and a family income, which became 'overstretched' with the arrival of each child. However this position was not formally adopted by the national Labour Party in these years. It is interesting that, in contrast with the policy adopted by St Joan's Social and Political Alliance, even Catholic women within the party seem to have been in favour of birth control. [25]

In March 1925, a meeting on 'Birth Control' took place under the auspices of the local Women's Section at the William Morris Institute in Walthamstow. This meeting was a ticket only event, open exclusively to married women.[26] The restriction of the attendance to married women at such meetings was common practice amongst all political organisations with an interest in this matter during the inter-war years. Thus the labour hall became a public space in which controversial issues relating to women's sexuality may be discussed, albeit within a female-only audience.

In November 1927, a lecture meeting was held under the auspices of the Battersea Labour Party Women's Section, on 'Factory Legislation'.[27] This was a contentious political issue in the inter-war period, which largely split the feminist movement along class lines. Some working-class women were in favour of protective legislation for female factory workers, which was contrary to the opinion expressed by middle-class feminists that any differentiation in the way in which men and women were treated in the workplace, would adversely affect the claim for equality. The issue of protective legislation is however more complicated than a simple class divide would indicate. Johanna Alberti notes that some women trade union leaders were middle class women who paradoxically argued that feminists outside the labour movement had no direct experience of the needs of industrial women and therefore could not speak for them. [28] The position taken by the speaker at the meeting at the hall is not specified.

Throughout the period in question, the members' meetings of the various sections were dominated by invited speakers on a diverse range of contemporary subjects. Although there were a substantial number of generic subjects, including 'the Anti-Vivisection League' (1939), 'Coloured People in Britain' (1959) and 'The Balance of Payment' (1955), the majority of the talks encompassed gender-specific and welfare issues. Many of these were nonetheless political. Matters such as 'birth control' (1928), 'family allowances' (1931) and 'abortion law reform' (1947) reflected the feminist concerns and as has been noted, were the subject of public meetings at two of the halls. Other talks on subjects such as 'communal feeding' (1941) and 'food tips' (1948), were less overtly controversial. [29]

Discussion meetings were regular activities of several women's sections. Wealdstone Labour Party Women's Section tended to focus on political questions raised by the annual Labour Women's Conference. In 1935, many of these were inevitably gendered issues such as maternal mortality, child welfare and equal pay. The 'discussion afternoon' was a political activity also undertaken by Hounslow Women's Section. During the course of the meeting, the members would read and then discuss an article in a current Labour Party journal, usually *Labour Woman.* The topic areas covered in these discussions also tended to emphasise the interest of the Section in welfare matters. In September 1941, an article on 'juvenile offenders' was considered and six years later the Section discussed a review of the impact of the Curtis Report into 'children deprived of a normal home life'. [30]

There is evidence of further gendered activity undertaken by women's sections in this study. From the late 1920s, members in Wimbledon organised 'sewing afternoons', during which they would make articles, such as kettle holders to sell at bazaars. During the Second World War Hounslow Women's Section used discounted wool to make 'comforts' for servicemen.[31] Vegetable auctions, cake sales and 'recipe swapping afternoons', were also regular fixtures in the Section's programme.

Surviving references to the labour hall management committees and Labour Party Women's Sections in this study do provide a significant amount of

evidence to support several of the contentions made by Pamela Graves. In the case of at least one hall, women management committee members endorsed traditional gender stereotypes. During the inter-war years, Labour women in these halls did begin to assume responsibilities in the shape of officerships in their local Parties. However, there is less evidence of this on labour hall management committees; although there was some significant progress in this area. Women's sections were clearly committed to the apparently female domain of welfare issues, rather than electioneering. It is, however, not possible to dismiss Matthew Worley's assertion that women were involved in electioneering completely as the membership at ordinary Labour Party meetings is often not listed.

Women's Co-operative Guilds

Branches of the Women's Co-operative Guild were regular tenants of several of the labour halls in this study.[32] The Women's Co-operative Guild was founded in 1883 by a group of women co-operators, who desired their own organisation, within the male-dominated Royal Arsenal Co-operative Society (RACS). Martin Pugh has noted that 'the Guild is of interest because it constituted one of the most effective attempts to sustain a political organisation of women that was adapted to the mood of the inter-war period'. He argues that this was achieved in the following way: 'The WCG placed great emphasis upon its role as a mouthpiece for married women; this helped to make it more reassuring and more likely to be treated sympathetically by politicians than many of the feminist groups who were associated with the spinster and antagonism to the male sex'. [33] Initially, at least, the Guild made a self conscious effort to be 'reassuring'. Its first motto, 'study to be quiet and do your own business', illustrated the desire of the founder, 'not to arouse the antagonism provoked by the dress and manners of some contemporary advocates of women's rights'.[34] The special interests and highest profile campaigns of the Women's Co-operative Guild related to maternity issues and infant welfare, which tended to be, as Pugh has noted, the preserve of the married woman. The Guild also campaigned on other issues primarily associated with married women: birth control, divorce law reform, and family

allowances. However, these were many of the same issues, which engaged other women's and feminist groups, of both single and married women. Such organisations included the Labour Party's own Women's Sections. It should be noted that the Women's Co-operative also campaigned for other, non-specifically gender related issues, which included the abolition of the means test during the 1930s.[35] Peace was also an important element of the ideology of the Women's Co-operative Guild. By 1935, local government bodies, including London County Council, had instituted the Guild's proposals for the abandonment of military training in schools, in favour of games, pageants and choral singing.

There are very few detailed surviving references to specific Women's Co-operative Guild activities in the labour halls. Martin Pugh has noted that:

> The WCG dedicated itself to inculcating some training for citizenship in women. In its local classes and branch meetings working-class women learnt the techniques of public speaking, chairing meetings, taking minutes, tabling resolutions and agendas, keeping accounts and conducting correspondence.[36]

This was certainly the kind of political activity undertaken by the Guild on the selected premises. 'Business' meetings would have incorporated many of the elements cited by Pugh. Weekly gatherings also included a series of addresses on contemporary social or political issues, similar in structure to Labour Party Women's Section meetings. Outings to various places of local interest and social activities, such as whist drives completed the Guild's diverse programme.[37] In January 1934, the weekly meetings of Ilford Women's Co-operative Guild reflect the activities of those cited in the literature: reports from the children's co-operative circle; a "question box", which was designed to initiate discussion on 'co-operative subjects', such as 'peace', 'co-operation' and 'disarmament'; a whist drive and a 'Lutona Cocoa' competition. During the year, the Guild also ran a programme of visits to establishments such as a London Co-operative Society dairy. Like the Labour Party Women's Sections, speakers on contemporary social and political issues also addressed the Guild. In 1934, for example, subjects covered included, 'crime and its causes,' 'Co-operative Women in International Life' and 'the economic emancipation of married women'[38]. The inclusion of a talk

on 'the economic emancipation of married women' indicates that during the 1930s, the Guild was as 'strongly feminist' as Gaffin and Thoms believe it had been prior to the First World War.[39]

Similarly, East Ham Women's Co-operative Guild also arranged a diverse programme of activities at the Labour Hall.[40] Many of these reflected the national campaigns of the Women's Co-operative Guild, which have already been noted. It is probable that the Women's Co-operative Guild was involved in an open conference on maternal mortality in 1935 at East Ham Labour Hall, but the organisers are not identified in the newspaper advertisement.[41] The format of the Guild meetings incorporated a mixture of speakers, business meetings and recreational activities. During the 1930s, the Guild was addressed on a diverse range of social reform and co-operative subjects such as 'consumers co-operatives' and 'the work of the education committee' (both 1935). Outings were also organised to seaside resorts, such as Bournemouth.[42]

During much of the period in question, the Wimbledon and Raynes Park branches of the Women's Co-operative Guild were regular hirers of the Trades and Labour Hall. In 1931, for example, the Wimbledon Guild held weekly 'purely educational' afternoon meetings on the premises. Although the Guild was affiliated to the Labour Party, it welcomed 'all shades of opinion' to its meetings. There are very few other specific references to the activities of the Guilds in the preserved records. However, the fact that the President of the Wimbledon Guild was invited to speak at the formal opening of the William Morris Hall in 1930, indicates the strength of the local movement and the importance that the labour movement as a whole placed upon it. The President addressed the meeting on behalf of the mothers and children of Wimbledon, which reflected the concern of the Women's Co-operative Guild with issues such as maternal mortality and child welfare.[43]

After 1939, there was a significant decline the active membership of the Women's Co-operative Guild. This has been largely attributed to the impact of the Second World War on women, including the consequences of evacuation• and the increased number of working women, unable to attend afternoon

meetings.[44] There is some evidence that this trend was reflected in the membership of the local Guilds. In the post-war decades, the Guilds are not listed as tenants in any of the surviving records of the halls in this study. Decreasing membership, however, was not the national experience of women's sections. By 1951, more than two thousand women's sections had been established and these continued to attract members.[45]

In spite of post-war differences in fortune, there were many similarities between the two types of political women's organisations, which met on the labour hall premises. The most self evident of these was the emphasis on welfare issues by both the Women's Sections and the Co-operative Women's Guild. The way in which this emphasis may be perceived as 'strongly feminist', has already been noted in the context of each organisation. It is possible then, to contend that although women may have been unable to progress from traditional stereotypes, their choice of issues was inherently political, in the sense of 'welfare feminism'.

A physical representation of the contribution of women to the labour movement was incorporated into at least two of the halls in this study. In East Ham Labour Hall, the historical and contemporary role of women was commemorated in a plaque fixed to one of the walls in the original building.[46] It is also symbolic that the emblem of the Blackhorse Women's Co-operative Guild hung on one of the walls of the William Morris Institute from at least 1934.[47] It was on display alongside emblems of such bastions of male trade unionism as the Amalgamated Society of Woodworkers (ASW). The presence of the emblem of the Guild and the commemorative plaque may be interpreted as an acknowledgement of a women's organisation in a male dominated political space. This encapsulates the fortunes of both individual women and their political organisations throughout the period in question. In spite of the fact that women were in the minority in numerical terms on the vast majority of labour hall committees, it was still possible for them to make a distinctive contribution to the political culture of the selected halls. This would have been as individuals and as members of either, or even both, of the main women's organisations.

Notes:

1 For a very basic summary of the legislation, which affects women in the nineteenth century, see Encyclopaedia of British History: Legislation 1760-1860 http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/legislation.htm.
2 There is a vast literature, which addresses the parliamentary suffrage campaign. See for example, Angela Holdsworth, *Out of the Dolls House: The Story of Women in the Twentieth Century* (London: BBC Books, 1988) and Martin Pugh, *The March of the Women:A Revisionist Analysis of the Women's Suffrage Campaign 1866-1914,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).
3 An address by Eleanor Rathbone, the president of the National Union of Societies for Equal Citizenship (NUSEC) to that organisations national conference, March 1925, cited in Johanna Alberti, *Beyond Suffrage :Feminists in War and Peace 1914-28* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1989). p 164.
4 Kim Yoonok Stenberg, 'Working-Class Women in London Local Politics', *Twentieth Century History,* Volume 9 (3) 1998, p. 323, p.327, p.333, p.342; David Thom, 'Women Munitions Workers at the Woolwich Arsenal in the 1914-1918 War', unpublished MA dissertation, University of Warwick 1975, quoted in C. Rowan, 'Women in the Labour Party 1906-1920', *Feminist Review 12,* (1982) p.76, cited in Kim Yoonok Stenberg 'Working-Class Women in London Local Politics', p. 342.
5 Wimbledon Constituency Labour Party Annual General Meeting minutes, 23 Jan. 1952; Pamela M. Graves *Labour Women: Women in British Working-Class Politics 1918-1939* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 220-5.
6 Worley 'Building the Party', p.90.
7 Worley 'Building the Party', p.78; Ball, Thorpe and Worley 'Elections, Leaflets and Whist Drives: Constituency Party Members in Britain Between the Wars', p.36.
8 First annual meeting of Wimbledon Labour Hall Ltd minutes, 2 Dec. 1922.
9 William Morris Co-operative Society management committee minutes, 1930-1937.
10 Heston and Isleworth Labour Party Premises Committee minutes, 9 Oct. 1936.
11 Wealdstone Labour Hall Ltd minutes, 26 Jan. 1934.
12. Barnes and Richmond Labour Club Annual Report 1954.
13 Wimbledon Labour Hall Ltd Management Committee minutes, 19 Oct. 1932.
14 Graves, *Labour Women*, p. 220.
15 It is not possible to ascertain the precise duration of the presidency, because Labour Party minutes between the latter half of 1932 and 1939 have not been preserved. In 1939, a man was elected as president; Minutes of the Wimbledon Constituency Labour Party Annual General Meeting, 23 Jan. 1952
16 Graves, *Labour Women,* p.217.
17 South Battersea Divisional Labour Party Executive Committee minutes, 18 Jan. 1927.
18 Cited in Christine Collette, 'Questions of Gender: Labour and Women', in Brian Brivati and Richard Heffeman (eds), *The Labour Party: A Centenary*

History (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000), p.409
19 The emphasis on the inter-war years is necessitated by the lack of documentary evidence from other decades. Where possible, I have referred to the post-war decades.
20 Graves, *Labour Women,* p. 225.
21 Michael Savage, *The Dynamics of Working Class Politics*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), pp.197-8.
22 It should be noted that Savage's study principally covers Preston in Lancashire. It is possible that local differences may account for the discrepancy.
23 Hounslow Women's Section minutes, 2 April 1941; 7 Oct. 1942; 31 Jan. 1940; Wimbledon Labour Party Women's Section minutes, 5th Jan. 1961. It is probable that the other women's sections also campaigned on specific issues, but that these records have not been preserved.
24. For further details on this, see H. Tingey, '"In Honour of St Joan" An Analysis of the Catholic Women's Participation in the Inter-War Feminist Movement', unpublished MA dissertation, Royal Holloway, University of London, 1997 pp. 28-32.
25 Graves, *Labour Women,* p. 221.
26 This meeting was advertised in the *Walthamstow Observer*, Feb. 1925.
27 South Battersea Divisional Labour Party Executive Committee minutes, 15 Nov. 1927.
28 Alberti, *Beyond Suffrage,* p.178.
29 Wealdstone Women's Section Secretary's Report to the Annual General Meeting, 26 Jan. 1939; Wimbledon Labour Party Women's Section, Annual Report 1959; Hounslow Labour Party Women's Section Annual General Meeting, 19 Jan. 1955; West Willesden Women's Section minutes 16 Jan. 1928; 19 Jan. 1931; Wealdstone Women's Section Secretary's Report to the Annual General Meeting, 23 Jan. 1947; Hounslow Women's Section minutes, 26 March 1941; 7 Jan. 1948. The position, which the speakers took on many of these controversial issues is rarely noted.
30 Wealdstone Women's Section, 2 May 1935, Hounslow Labour Party Women's Section minutes, 31 Jan. 1940; 26 March 1941; 7 Jan. 1948; Annual General Meeting, 19 Jan. 1955; 24 Sept. 1941; 19 March 1947. The description of the Curtis report is taken from the Barnardo's web site http://www.barnardos.org.uk/whoweare/history/history3.jsp. Accessed, 19 January 2005
31 Interview with Sarah Carolan, March 2000. Sarah Carolan's mother organised many of these sewing afternoons: Hounslow Women's Section minutes, 7 Dec. 1939.
32 However, the local records of the Neasden, Hounslow and Walthamstow's Blackhorse Road Women's Co-operative Guild have not been preserved. There is no evidence to suggest that the activities of these local branches were very different from those undertaken by the national movement or those local Guilds, for which records survive.
33 Martin Pugh, *Women and the Women's Movement in Britain 1914-1959* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1992), p.230.
34 Jean Gaffin, 'Women and Co-operation' in Lucy Middleton (ed), *Women in the Labour Movement: The British Experience* (London: Croom Helm, 1977), p.114.
35 Jean Gaffin and David Thoms, *Caring and Sharing: The Centenary*

History of the Co-operative Women's Guild, 2nd ed, (Manchester: Holyoake Books, 1993), pp. 103-108.

36 Pugh, *Women and the Women's Movement,* p.231.

37 Gaffin and Thoms, *Caring and Sharing* pp. 94-96. The example given here is Westley Castle Branch in Birmingham, but Neasden Women's Co-operative Guild would have undertaken a similar range of activities during the 1930s.

38 *Ilford Citizen* January 1934. 'Lutona Cocoa' was a brand name and entries to this competition included cakes and sweetmeats. It is unclear whether the cocoa was the prize or a required ingredient. The former is most likely: *Ilford Citizen,* April 1934; March 1934; May 1934.

39 Gaffin and Thoms, *Caring and Sharing,* p. 94.

40 The records of the East Ham Co-operative Women's Guild have not survived, but there are several references to their activities in the local co-operative press.

41 *East Ham South Citizen*, June 1935.

42 *East Ham South Citizen*, April 1935; Dec. 1935; June 1936 .These Guild activities were comparable to those undertaken, by other Guilds, such as the Westley Castle Branch in Birmingham, cited in Gaffin and Thoms *Caring and Sharing:* pp. 94-96.

43 *Wimbledon and St Helier Citizen*, Oct. 1931; *Wimbledon Borough News*, 31 Oct. 1930.

44 Gaffin and Thoms, *Caring and Sharing,* p. 117.

45 Collette, 'Questions of Gender: Labour and Women', pp. 409-410.

46 Interview with John Hart, 18 Feb. 2002.

47 William Morris Institute minutes, 7 May 1934.

7. Extraordinary Non-Political Usage

Throughout the period under analysis, several of the labour halls in this study were used on certain occasions as local community, rather than exclusively political, spaces. From inception, the survival of the various halls was dependent upon small scale usage from individual organisations outside of the labour movement. However, this section will primarily consider larger-scale extraordinary non-political usage by the labour movement itself as well as civic institutions in both war and peace-time. It will also briefly consider the increasing usage and, in at least one instance from the 1970s, long term lease of the entire premises to a non-political organisation.

It should be noted that extensive searching has not located a specific literature on this subject. However, as the non-political usage of the selected premises forms a significant part of the history of the halls, this chapter is still a useful part of the thesis.

Advice Bureaux

This kind of usage is epitomised by the establishment of free 'advice bureaux' or 'information services', which were open to all local residents regardless of Labour Party membership. These services were established in the halls by the local branches of either the Labour Party or the Independent Labour Party and in several instances pre-date the establishment of Citizen's Advice Bureaux in 1939. The Labour Party was not alone in the provision of such a service. In 1928, for example, the Whitechapel and St Georges Conservative and Unionist Association also employed a 'Poor Man's Lawyer'.[1] For the purposes of this study however, the advice bureaux, which were held at the selected labour halls, provide useful examples of the ways in which a political party utilised a largely political space for a non-political purpose.

Twenty–six years before the establishment of the national network of Citizens' Advice Bureaux, Bermondsey Labour Institute was the first of the selected halls to introduce such a service. From 1913, the ILP administered weekly surgeries, which encompassed various 'domestic, economic, accident and

legal difficulties'.[2] Fourteen years after the establishment of the advice service at Bermondsey Labour Institute, a similar service was established at Ruskin House.[3] It is probable that the service offered at Ruskin House was similar to those co-ordinated by the local Labour Party or ILP in several of the other labour halls in this study to assist callers with rent, housing and unemployment difficulties.

During the 1930s, one third of the halls in this study established advice services. .In 1931 one was offered at Ilford Central Labour Hall under the auspices of the local Labour Party. A Justice of the Peace attended the labour hall once every fortnight for an hour and a half to assist callers with legal problems.[4] Between 1935 and 1944, Battersea Labour Party offered a free legal advice service on the premises. The 'Poor Man's Lawyer' was made available to all those who required the service, regardless of party membership, which proved to be very popular, with callers travelling from other areas of London, including Kennington. This initially caused concern amongst members of the General Management Committee, which proposed to either restrict the service to Party members, or to charge a "small fee". Neither of these suggestions was ever imposed.[5] The year after the establishment of the advice service at Battersea Labour Hall, West Willesden Labour Party and Willesden Borough Labour Party were instrumental in the co-ordination of an 'information service', at Willesden Labour Hall, which offered advice and clarification to visitors and correspondents on a wide range of issues, including unemployment, pensions, housing and financial problems.[6]

In 1937, Wealdstone Labour Party agreed in principle to provide a 'Poor Man's Lawyer'. It was not initially intended that these fortnightly sessions would be held at the Labour Hall; accommodation was sought at local church halls. However, by April 1940, a 'Central Advice Bureau' had been established at the hall. Although a 'token rent' of two pounds from this service was offered to Wealdstone Labour Hall Ltd, it was decided that the hall management committee should submit an invoice for the room rent and the Chairman of the Labour Party would apply for a grant from the Central Advice Committee. [7]

This directly connects the advice service run by the local Labour Party to the formal national network of Citizens Advice Bureaux

Prior to the outbreak of the Second World War, Mile End Divisional Labour Party offered free legal advice at Stepney Labour Hall. A solicitor was in weekly attendance for consultation on a variety of issues, including rent cases, old age and widows' pensions. Advice was dispensed to all those who required it, irrespective of trade union or party membership. After the war, however, potential users of the proposed "Poor Man's Lawyer" were politicised as 'electors'.[8] During the Second World War, and in the immediate post-war decades, local labour movement organisations continued to set up advice or information services. In 1940, an advice bureau was established at Heston and Isleworth Labour Hall. Initially, three sessions were planned per week, but this was soon reduced and ultimately discontinued. There is evidence that this was as a result of a lack of enquiries. In the first month only one case was brought to the bureau. However, the bureau was re-established in 1952.[9]

In 1947, Wimbledon Labour Party established an advice bureau. The bureau was held at the Wimbledon Trades and Labour Hall on alternate Friday afternoons and, initially at least, the main area of concern was the imposition of the 1948 Rent Act. The service was restarted in 1968 and it advised on general rent cases, rates and the cost of living.[10] Peckham Labour Party's advice service was operated every Friday between six and seven thirty pm from November 1949 until at least September 1951.[11] Many of the advice services, which were administered from other halls in this study, had been established during the 1930s. It is probable that this had been the case in Lansbury House and the service had been restarted after the Second World War. Unlike the advice service offered in many of the other halls in this study, all the advisors at Lansbury House had a political profile as either a local councillor or Member of Parliament, with no apparent legal qualifications. In several of the other halls, the advice service had been staffed by at least one qualified solicitor. In Peckham a Justice of the Peace was also on hand for one morning per week to sign forms. In October 1954, Hendon Labour Hall was the final hall in the study to establish a legal advice bureau. This bureau

had originally been created as a response to increasing local rent concerns, but almost immediately undertook a wide variety of cases including employment and pension issues. Within the first two months of its establishment, the bureau had assumed 24 cases.[12] The advice bureau was regularly advertised in the local newspapers as a free service.[13]

Between 1913 and 1968, then, various attempts were made to establish and restart advice services in 11 out of the 15 selected halls. It is possible that similar bureaux were co-ordinated on the remaining premises, but no records have survived. In spite of this, it is clear that, for the vast majority of the period in question, the 'poor man's lawyer' was symbolic of the way in which the Greater London labour hall spaces were used by political organisations for non-political purposes.

The Second World War

The Second World War was a catalyst for various forms of non-political usage of at least twelve out of the fifteen halls in this study. The three remaining premises were not political spaces for the entire duration of the war: the Bermondsey Labour Institute was completely destroyed, Hendon Labour Hall was seriously damaged and East Ham Labour Hall was sold. Wimbledon Trades and Labour Hall was used as both a public air-raid shelter and a reception centre for 'bombed out' families and schools. Although there is no evidence to suggest that finance was a primary motivation of the management committee in its decisions to permit the premises to be used in this way, such usage did become financially lucrative. In 1942, Surrey County Council was prevailed upon to pay £60 per annum, back dated to September 1940, for the William Morris air-raid shelter. It was believed that the fact that the air-raid shelter had been designated a 'public' one, rather than a shelter restricted to hirers of the premises, had had a detrimental impact on the hiring of adjoining rooms.[14] Rutlish School, which had been 'bombed out' in 1942, was also charged five pounds per week of the 40 week school year for the hire of the premises. Ultimately, in 1943, as a result of war time non-political usage, Wimbledon Trades and Labour Hall was in a stronger financial position than it had been for the majority of the previous decade.[15] Other halls were

considered by local authorities to be integral to the war effort. In 1939, for example, Walthamstow Borough Council requisitioned the William Morris Institute for the storage of furniture. This severely reduced the number of bookings, which could be made for at least the first two years of the Second World War. However, by 1945, the hall was described as 'well let'. [16]

The contribution of other halls to their local communities during the Second World War may be defined by the non-political activities of the organisations, which used the premises. For the duration of the War, Ruskin House became a centre for the Croydon Youth Service, which was a voluntary confederation of several political and non-political young peoples' organisations. Participating organisations included: the Labour League of Youth; Young Communist League; Air Training Corps; Sea Cadets; Guides and Scouts. The main contribution of the service to the local 'war effort' was the collection from the local community of pots, pans and other articles suitable for melting down. In the final years of the war and the immediate aftermath, the service endeavoured to alleviate the problem of homelessness in Croydon, by touring the district, noting the location of unoccupied properties and reporting their findings to the local council.[17] Political activities, including trade union meetings continued throughout the Second World War, but the political space of Ruskin House, in common with the surviving records of the other halls, which have already been considered, was also used for extraordinary non-political purposes. Wealdstone Labour Hall was used by Harrow Women's Central Committee as the receiving address for donations of clothing to be sent to evacuated mothers and children. Within the first six weeks, the women had collected and dispatched six hundred items of clothing.[18] A local doctor and Party member also gave a series of six weekly first aid lectures on the premises.[19]

There are several references to other kinds of war-related activities. In 1940, for example, a 'vigilance committee' was established by Heston and Isleworth Labour Party. This was composed of six members of the General Management Committee, and two members each of the local Trades Council and Labour Party group on Hounslow Council. The vigilance committee undertook a variety of activities, including the management of the advice

service and writing letters to Dr Edith Summerskill regarding the cases of people suffering from tuberculosis, who had been 'dismissed from the West Middlesex Hospital at the beginning of the war and not been readmitted'. The committee was also concerned about the local provision of allotments.[20]

It is not possible to conduct a complete survey of wartime activity in all of the halls. The main archive of Lansbury House in Peckham, for example, commences in 1946 and there are no surviving records of Ilford Central Labour Hall in these years. However, the evidence provided by one third of the selected halls indicates that between 1939 and 1945, the premises were used for a diverse range of purposes and activities.

It is briefly worth noting that the Second World War had a detrimental effect on the non-political usage of one hall. From June 1914, a co-operative bakery extended the premises of Bermondsey (Fort Road) Labour Institute. On 18 September 1940, both the Labour Institute and the co-operative bakery were completely destroyed in an air-raid .This had a two-fold impact on Bermondsey itself. It not only affected its 'social and political' life, but also created difficulties for the 'many thousands' of bakery customers.[21]

Post-war non-political usage

The preserved records indicate that after 1945, an apparent decline in political usage necessitated increased non-political usage for financial reasons. This usually required more frequent lettings to organisations from outside of the labour movement.[22] However, for three years, the management committee of Wealdstone Labour Hall Ltd administered a more innovative fundraising attempt to resolve the situation: the provision of a 'wedding reception service', which ensured that between 1968 and 1971, the hall was regularly booked on Saturday evenings.[23] Many of the other halls in this study did cater for wedding receptions and private parties, but such efforts were *ad hoc.* This service is the only example of an organised service. This service also provides an interesting point of comparison with the advice bureaux and information services, as this a good example of a political organisation using a political space for a non-political purpose as a direct result of financial

necessity. The advice bureaux had been regarded as a community service and did not result in a financial profit for the administering organisation.

The 'wedding reception service' undertaken by the management committee of Wealdstone Labour hall was very unusual. It was far more common for part of the labour hall premises to be let on a long term lease to a commercial or local civic organisation. Between 1947 and 1959, the William Morris Hall extension of Wimbledon Labour Hall was hired out to Surrey County Council for the provision of school meals for children at a local overcrowded primary school. Although it was presented to the shareholders as almost entirely a kind of social service to local children and parents, the rent accrued for this venture was £400 per school year. This was a useful sum of money, which was needed for essential alterations to enable the William Morris Hall to revert back from a public air-raid shelter to a dance hall and meeting room. After the end of the school meals contract in 1959, the hall was periodically let on long leases to non-political organisations, predominantly dance schools.

Several other management committees in this study leased at least part of their premises to non-political organisations for long periods of time. Between 1967 and 1979, a nursery school used the main hall of Barnes and Richmond Labour Club on week day mornings during term time. The most extreme example of the extension of such a lease was that of Wealdstone Labour Hall. From 1973 onwards, the entire premises were leased out to a commercial enterprise that operated a dance school. The Labour Party continued to hold a small office in the building.

The non-political usage of the selected labour halls is indicative of the desire of the local labour movement organisations to become integrated in their local communities by providing necessary services, such as the bakery and advice bureaux. Increasing usage by non-political tenants, for dance classes and other activities, also ensured that the labour halls were further integrated. However, particularly in the post-war decades, many labour halls became apparently contested spaces as non-political usage by organisations from outside the labour movement became crucial for the survival of the halls as political spaces. After 1945, the premises became increasingly social or non-

political spaces for the majority of the time for which they were open: in many cases, political activity was effectively relegated to a secondary form of usage. This is a trend which has continued until the present day.

Notes:

1 In 1928, this service is regularly promoted in the *East London Advertiser.*
2 Brockway *Bermondsey Story,* p 49. Brockway notes that this service continued for 'many years'.
3 *Croydon Labour Outlook,* April 1927. The organisation responsible for the establishment of this service is not cited in the newspaper advertisements.
4 *Ilford Citizen,* Aug. 1931.
5 South Battersea Divisional Labour Party General Management Committee minutes, 26 Sept. 1935. Advertisements in the *South Battersea Citizen* indicate that the service remained free and was not restricted to Labour Party members.
6 *West Willesden Courier,* Jan. 1936.
7 Harrow Local Labour Party Executive Committee minutes, 17 Nov. 1937; 17 May 1940.
8 Stepney Borough Labour Party minutes, 29 May 1946. During the 1930s, the advice service was advertised in the *Stepney Citizen.*
9 Heston and Isleworth Borough Labour Party Vigilance Committee minutes, 11 April 1940; Executive Committee minutes, 4 June 1940; Hounslow Women's Section minutes 3 Sept. 1952. This reference is cited towards the end of the preserved minutes and there are no further references in them. The only other references to Heston and Isleworth Labour Hall are to be found in the *Heston and Isleworth Clarion* in 1964. There is no indication that an advice bureau is functioning in that year.
10 The bureau is noted in the Amalgamated Society of Woodworkers, Wimbledon No1 Branch minutes, 8 Dec. 1947; Wimbledon Constituency Labour Party Executive Committee minutes, 18 Nov. 1968. It is not clear when the original advice bureau ceased to exist.
11 The advice service was advertised in the *Peckham Citizen*, which was discontinued in September 1951. It is, however, not referred to in annual reports of the Peckham Constituency Labour Party after this date.
12 Report of Hendon South Constituency Labour Party Executive Committee to the Annual General Meeting 1954.
13 For example *Hendon and Finchley Times,* 25 May 1957
14 However, the reasoning which led to this conclusion is not stated in the minutes.
15 The annual financial statement of Wimbledon Trades and Labour Hall, 1943.
16 William Morris Institute Management Committee minutes, 8 Nov. 1941; 7 Oct. 1946. Although it is not stipulated, meetings at this time are effectively annual general meetings.
17 The memories of Mercedes Stiles, a member of the Croydon Youth Service, cited in Ruskin House Management Committee, *Ruskin House: A History,* p.10.
18 Harrow Women's Section minutes, 21 Sept. 1939. Within the first six weeks, the women had collected and dispatched 600 items of clothing.
19 Harrow Women's Section minutes, 6 June 1940. It is not clear whether these lectures were exclusively open to Labour Party members, or to the general public at large.
20 Heston and Isleworth Labour Party General Management Committee

minutes, 12 March 1940; Vigilance Committee minutes, 11 April 1940.
21 James D Stewart, *Bermondsey in War 1939-1945*, (Southwark, London: London Borough of Southwark, 1981), p 14. There is no indication that all of the customers were necessarily Labour Party members.
22 The reasons for the decline of political usage will be explored more fully in chapter 10.
23 Interview with Cyril Harrison 20 Oct. 2003. No documentary record of this survives because the minutes of Wealdstone Labour Hall Ltd were not preserved between 1961 and 1999.

8. Politicising the local areas

Throughout the period under examination, local labour movement activity frequently transcended the enclosed spaces of the selected halls and politicised the public space in the form of the streets and civic buildings of the London boroughs. Mike Crang defines the 'public sphere' in almost political terms as:

> fora in which ordinary people can discuss, assess and act. The public sphere is often linked to ideas of 'spaces' to which everyone has access in which people can meet as formal equals-so everyone's opinion carries equal weight-and reasonably discuss conflicts, issues and events.

This presents a contrast to the arguably 'bounded' and 'exclusive' spaces provided by the labour halls. [1] Propaganda based labour movement activities also added a party-political dimension to the public sphere. This section will firstly consider the kinds of open-air activities, which were undertaken by the various local left-wing organisations and then examine the politicisation of civic building as in the period to 1979.

Open- Air Activities

Open air meetings were the most popular form of politicisation, although very few specific detailed accounts of such meetings survive. These meetings were held either to highlight a specific propaganda issue or more generically as part of election or membership campaigns. The meeting would commence with one or two speakers and this would then be followed by open discussion and questions from the audience. The labour halls were often used by the various political organisations to plan the open-air activities and were occasionally used as rallying points for them.

Individual open air meetings were held on as wide a range of issues as their counterparts within the labour hall building. During the 1930s, for example, open-air meetings were held in Harrow and Wealdstone to demonstrate against the proposals of 'the New Unemployment Act' (1935) and Willesden to

protest against military conscription (1939). [2] This tradition continued throughout the period across Greater London. In 1971, for instance, a high profile, open-air, anti-Common Market meeting was used as a prelude to a large rally in Richmond Town Hall.[3]

A series of several open-air propaganda meetings regularly formed a part of the programme of the constituency Labour Parties. During the inter-war period, for example, the Ilford streets were politicised by series of weekly open-air Labour Party meetings, on subjects such as 'The Case for Socialism' (1934). in May and June 1938 in Wealdstone, weekly open-air meetings also took place on Saturday evenings.[4] Open-air meetings were regularly used for recruitment drives by the Labour Party, the Independent Labour Party (ILP) and the trade unions. 'Mission weeks' were chiefly associated with the ILP and entailed the politicisation of the local streets for one week every year for a series of open-air meetings. There were other open-air meetings held under the auspices of the ILP during the year, but the annual mission week was the ILP's most intensive campaign outside the political space of the labour hall.[5]

Occasionally, local Labour Parties would undertake a concentrated week of political activities, which would feature open-air meetings as well as other kinds of political activities. Many of these were instigated by the national Labour Party. A good example of this is The 'Great Socialist Crusade Week' of September 1937 .Events held in Hendon between 19 and 26 September included parades and demonstrations.[6] North and South Battersea Labour Party also co-operated on events for the Socialist Crusade Week. These events were co-ordinated from Battersea Labour Hall. Such political activities became a regular feature of the constituency Labour Parties programmes. Between 26 September and 1 October 1938, for example, nightly political meetings were held, under the auspices of Ilford Labour Party, culminating in 'A Great Peace Demonstration' on the final day. Membership figures for this period have not been preserved, it is, therefore, not possible to ascertain whether the campaign was undertaken in response to declining individual membership.[7]

Open-air meetings were also an important element of election campaigns throughout the period in question. In the general election of 1929, for

example, the Labour Party's Prospective Parliamentary Candidate spoke at twice weekly meetings in Wimbledon. The 1963 Campaign Week featured a 'good factory gate' meeting and the local Labour MP made 75 'whistle-stop' speeches, some of which would have been at open-air meetings.[8]

The immediate vicinities of the labour halls were used as rallying points for participants in large scale events. The *Stepney Citizen* estimated that on 5th February 1933, 15,000 Labour Party, trade union and co-operative activists marched from outside the hall to join the 'National Demonstration on Unemployment' in Hyde Park.[9] The selected halls were also used as departure points for local May Day demonstrations and other commemorative events. In 1937, for example, the Ilford May Day rally coincided with the local celebrations to mark the coronation of George VI and it is noted that: 'The large red banners of the Labour Party and the League of Youth stood out conspicuously against the red, white and blue decorations of the shopkeepers'. [10] As has already been noted elsewhere in this thesis, the Ilford branches of the National Union of Railwaymen (NUR) and the Transport and General Workers Union (TGWU) were also particularly involved in the 1934 open-air Tolpuddle Martyrs Memorial Meeting in Ilford.[11]

After the Second World War, there are fewer references to local labour movement participation in open-air activities. This may be partly attributed to the lack of available evidence for the post-war decades. It is, however, also likely that in the late 1940s, the decision not to hold as many large-scale outdoor events was influenced by prevailing social conditions. The practical difficulties in the austere post-war climate were acknowledged by the local Labour Party in Stepney. One member noted that, during the summer of 1946, it would have been a 'tragedy' to hold open-air meetings, on account of bread rationing and the shortage of beer.[12] There is also evidence that, in Wealdstone at least, open-air meetings had not been particularly well attended by Labour Party members during the inter-war period. This would have been an influential factor in the Party's decision after 1945 not to hold regular outdoor meetings in the area.

The streets surrounding the labour halls were also politicised by Labour Party canvassing. In 1956 and 1957, Peckham Labour Party became involved in the national Labour Party's push to raise individual membership to one million. During November 1956, one evening per week was devoted to canvassing in Peckham, with the promise of a more 'substantial' membership drive in 1957.[13] Canvassing to recruit new members was an ongoing venture. After the Conservative Party's general election victory of 1979, Peckham Labour Party endowed its group of volunteer canvassers with the title 'Membership Hit Squad'.[14]

It is clear then that a range of activities were organised by the local labour movement in the streets around the selected premises. Events were also arranged in non-labour movement premises.

The Politicisation of Civic Buildings

Local civic and community buildings were utilised for political purposes during election campaigns and for high profile or large scale meetings. The reasons for this were twofold. Often civic buildings and school halls offered a larger meeting space than was possible at many of the labour halls. The use of community buildings could also be interpreted in the same way as the motivation for outdoor meetings: evangelical attempts by the local labour movement to disseminate its message in the public sphere, rather than restricting itself to the enclosed overtly political space afforded by the labour hall. It should, of course, be noted that the 'politicisation' of civic buildings, did not originate in the inter-war years with the Labour Party. From at least the beginning of the twentieth century, local Conservatives and Liberals had used town halls and schools for their meetings.

Schools and civic buildings were politicised by the Labour Party during the 1945 election campaign. In the week preceding the vote, Labour Party meetings were held in schools or town halls once or twice a day in the Wimbledon Merton and Morden constituency. [15] Prior to the merging of Battersea into the Borough of Wandsworth in 1965, Battersea Town Hall was regularly used for Labour Party propaganda meetings. In 1939, for example, the town hall was booked for a series of Sunday evening meetings, which local

people were invited to 'Come and hear the Labour Party's solution to world problems!' In 1952, Clement Attlee was given 'a really rousing reception by more than 1000 supporters at Battersea Town Hall. In 1964, more than 1000 supporters had to be turned away from a popular town hall meeting at which Harold Wilson was speaking.[16] This meeting took place six days before the Labour Party leader became Prime Minister. It was possible to convert the largely civic space into a predominantly political one, as a result of the Labour Party's long-term dominance on Battersea Council.

The diverse range of labour movement activities undertaken in the public, non-political space of the street and civic building indicates that although the local labour halls were of fundamental importance, the labour movement was still concerned to carry its message beyond the enclosed political spaces of the halls. It should also be noted that it was not always logistically possible for some of the larger scale meetings to be held in those premises which had not been extended by the erections of large halls. Many such premises could only accommodate comparatively small numbers of people. Before Wimbledon Labour Hall was extended in 1930, the largest room on the premises could only hold a maximum audience of 45.

The preceding seven chapters have considered distinct themes within the culture of the 15 Greater London labour halls and the results of this analysis are summarised and tabulated in Figure 8.1. The final two chapters of the thesis will consider the halls from a different perspective. Chapter nine will compare the Greater London premises with both labour halls in other areas of the United Kingdom and then other kinds of halls and clubs. Chapter ten will examine the reasons for the apparent decline of the selected labour halls in the post war decades.

Figure 8.1 A Comparison of Labour Halls in the Greater London Area

	Leisure Activities	Workers' Education	Women	Second World War	Extraordinary Non-political usage
Battersea	Socials, dances, whist drives, bazaars, rummage sales, draws and jumble sales	Educational cases on the premises were provided by the NCLC. There was also a library for the autodidact.	The Labour Party's Women's Section and the local Women's Co-operative Guild met on the premises.	There are no specific references to war-related activities in the archive.	A legal advice service was established in 1935.
Bermondsey Labour Institute.	Socials, bazaars and billiards	There are no surviving references to workers' education in the archive.	There are no surviving references to women's activities in the archive	The premises were destroyed by enemy action in 1940.	In 1913, Bermondsey Labour Institute was the first hall in this study to establish an Advice Bureau.
Ruskin House, Croydon	Whist drives, socials, dances, garden parties and concerts	Croydon United Socialist Council provided educational classes on the premises.	There are no surviving references to women's activities in the archive.	Croydon Youth Service, which was composed of a number of voluntary organisations, contributed to the local war effort.	An advice bureau was established in 1927.
East Ham	Whist drives; socials dances; garden parties; fetes, bazaars and American teas.	Educational provision was made on the premises by both the NCLC and the WEA.	The local branch of the Women's Co-operative Guild met in the hall.	The premises were sold in 1940.	There are no records of extra-ordinary non-political usage in the archive.
Hendon	Whist drives, socials, dancing and football draws.	There are no surviving references to educational provision in the hall archive.	There are no surviving references to women's activities in the archives.	During the Second World War, the hall was seriously damaged by a bomb.	In 1954, Hendon was the last labour hall to establish an advice service.
Heston and Isleworth	Whist drives, concerts social evenings, bazaars, jumble sales, football draws, tombolas and beetle drives.	There are no surviving references to educational provision in the archives.	In 1936, 2 out of the 9 hall management committee members were women. The local Labour Party Women's Section met on the premises.	There are no specific references to war-related activities.	An advice service was established in 1940.

Ilford Central	Whist drives, socials, dancing	There are no surviving references to educational provision on the premises.	In 1935 a women was elected president of the Constituency Labour Party. The local branch of the Women's Co-operative Guild met in the hall.	There are no specific references to war-related activities on the premises.	An advice bureau was set up in 1931.
Ilford Hill	Whist drives, socials,concerts, jumble sales sweepstakes	The NCLC provided educational classes and a library was established on the premises.	There are no surviving references to women's activities in the archive.	The premises had been sold prior to the Second World War.	There are no surviving references to extraordinary non-political usage.
Lansbury House, Peckham	Dancing, whist drives and socials	Educational provision was made by the WEA.	There are no surviving references to women's activities on the premises.	There are no surviving references to war-related activities in the archive.	An advice service was established in 1949. It appears to be the only service solely staffed by politicians. A Justice of the Peace also attended for one morning per week.
Richmond and Barnes	Whist drives, garden parties and jumble sales 'mystery' coach and river boat trips, visits to country public houses, darts tournaments, wine and cheese parties, theatre trips, quiz nights and coffee evenings.	Educational provision was made by the NCLC and there was also a library on the premises.	During the inter-war years, women management committee members were responsible for soft furnishings and the catering sub committee. In 1954- 5 out of a total of 15, or one third of hall management committee members were women. Between 1942 and 1947 the chair of the local Labour Party was a woman.	There are no specific references to war-related activity.	There are no surviving references to non-political usage.

Stepney	whist drives, socials, dancing, sweepstakes and football draws	Educational provision was made by the WEA and the Labour Research Department.	There are no surviving references to women's activities on the premises.	The property was not used by the local labour movement during the war years.	An advice service was set up in approximately 1938.
William Morris Institute, Walthamstow	concerts, socials, whist drives, sports, rambles, cycling, sketching, photography, orchestra rehearsals, military band practice and repertory theatre	Educational provision was made by the NCLC and WEA.	Between 1930 and 1937, one sixth of management committee members were women. The local Labour Party's Women's Section met on the premises.	Between 1939 and 1941 the premises were requisitioned for the storage of furniture. Otherwise the hall was 'well let'.	There are no records of extraordinary non-political usage.
Wealdstone	whist drives, socials, bazaars, jumble sales, derby draws, sweepstakes and bingo	The NCLC provided educational classes and a library was established in the hall.	From 1934 onwards, 1 out of the 9 hall trustees had to be a woman. The Labour Party's Women's Section used the hall.	There are no specific references to war related usage.	A 'central advice service' was established in 1940.
Willesden	whist drives, socials, jumble and rummage sales, billiards, darts, draughts	There are no surviving references to the provision of education.	There are no surviving references to women's activities.	There are no specific references to war related usage.	An advice service was established in 1936
Wimbledon	'old tyme', Scottish and Irish dancing, whist drives, socials, concerts	The WEA gave talks and there was a library on the premises.	In 1921, there were 3 women on the first management committee and women were responsible for soft furnishings throughout the inter-war years. Women held minor office on hall management committee. In 1932 the Labour Party president was a woman. The Labour Party Women's Section and the Women's Co-operative Guild used the hall.	Part of the premises were used as a public air-raid shelter and as a reception centre for bombed out families and schools.	An advice service was established in 1947 and again in 1968.

Notes:

1 Crang, *Cultural Geography*, p.111, p.164
2 Harrow Local Labour Party Executive Committee minutes, 20 March 1935; West Willesden Labour Party General Committee minutes, 27 April 1939.
3 Richmond and Barnes Divisional Labour Party, Annual Report 1971. The membership of the Divisional Labour Party was 'overwhelmingly' anti-Common Market.
4 *Ilford Citizen,* Aug. 1934; Harrow Local Labour Party Executive Committee minutes, 18 May 1938.
5 Winter, *The ILP: Past and Present,* p.9.
6 *The Hendon Constituency Citizen,* Sept. 1937.
7 *Ilford Citizen*, Oct. 1938.
8 Secretary Agents' Report to the General Committee of the West Willesden Labour Party, 25 April 1963.
9 *Stepney Citizen,* March 1933. The newspaper asserted that its estimate of the size of the Stepney contingent was a conservative one.
10 *Ilford Citizen*, June 1937. No further comment is passed on the coronation celebrations.
11 *Ilford Citizen,* Oct. 1934 concentrates on the aesthetic; the way in which the 'beautiful [trade union] banners enlivened the drab surroundings' rather than the content of the speeches.
12 Stepney Borough Labour Party Executive Committee minutes, 6 Nov. 1946.
13 Assistant District Organiser of London Labour Party's Report of a meeting of Peckham Labour Party, 1 Nov. 1956, Greater London Labour Party papers.
14 Peckham Labour Party General Management Committee Meeting notice, 12 Oct. 1979.
15 *Wimbledon Borough News,* 22 June 1945; 29 June 1945.
16 South Battersea Divisional Labour Party Executive Committee minutes, 17 Aug. 1937, *South Battersea Citizen,* Jan. 1939; Battersea Labour Party and Trades Council Annual Report 1952; *South Western Star,* 9 Oct.1964.

9. A Comparison of the Greater London Labour Premises with Provincial Labour Halls and Other Spaces

Although the focus of this thesis has been the rise and decline of selected labour halls in the Greater London area, it is useful to consider developments in other labour halls across the United Kingdom. These premises include the Central Labour Hall in Cambridge, Stow Hill Labour Hall in Newport, South Wales and Heeley Labour Hall in Sheffield. Such a comparison will give some indication of whether or not the processes associated with the Greater London labour hall were indicative if not entirely representative of nationwide labour hall usage.

Similarly an analysis of the activities undertaken in other dedicated political spaces, such as Conservative or Liberal Clubs, will extend the comparison beyond the labour movement, to other political voluntary associations. However, it has not been possible to find comparative local examples of these in the Greater London area. As a result of this, evidence will be considered from the Liberal Clubs in Epsom and Carlisle and Conservative Clubs in Great Yarmouth, Stafford and Gainsborough. Brief references will also be made to the National Conservative Clubs. However, extensive comparisons would be problematic, as the National Clubs were effectively 'gentlemen's clubs', for which a substantial annual subscriptions and entrance fees would be paid. Such expenditure would not have been possible for working class people.

This comparative chapter will also, where possible, compare the selected Greater London labour halls with other religious or non-political institutions. In this instance, the thesis will consider the uses to which the Bermondsey Wesleyan Central Methodist Hall was put. It will also compare the kinds of activities undertaken in the Greater London labour halls, with those in the Public Hall in Witham, Essex

The comparison will be undertaken by first briefly considering the inception of the halls outside London. The provincial labour halls and other political and non-political spaces will then be examined in the same thematic framework as Greater London halls: the political and industrial organisations which used the halls, workers' education, leisure and social activities, the role of women and extraordinary non-political usage. The salient points of the comparisons are outlined in two tables at the end of the chapter.

Local political cultures and the inceptions of the halls in the selected provincial areas

Like many of the halls in the Greater London area, the provincial halls were very often the product of a significant radical and labour movement tradition. In Cambridge, for example, in 1825, a branch of the Carpenters and Joiners trade union was established and by 1888, several local building trades and transport unions had also been inaugurated. Four years later, in 1892, a meeting of the Building Trades Debating Society at the Corn Exchange was the catalyst for the inceptions of the Trades Council and Independent Labour Party (ILP). In 1912, the local Labour Party was established and agricultural unions were also set up in the villages surrounding Cambridge. Two years later, an outdoor trade union meeting was organised in the town. The local council voted to deny permission for the holding of the meeting, but this restriction ultimately worked in the favour of the local labour movement. The event did take place, in contravention of the council's order and it was estimated that 7,000 people attended.[1] This illustrates the strength of a movement, which, more than a quarter of a century later, would establish the Central Labour Hall.

By the end of the nineteenth century, there was a significant radical presence in Newport political culture. It is possible to consider a single year when analysing this presence. In 1892, a 'properly constituted' branch of the Independent Labour Party (ILP) was founded. A local newspaper, which was largely in sympathy with the workers' noted that as a result of this, 'it cannot be gainsaid that the workers are getting more and more powerful as the days roll along'. Several trade unions were also active by this stage. The Newport Amalgamated Society of Tailors (AST) was involved in a national dispute, which had originated in Liverpool over this issue of masters' shops versus outwork. The masters were in favour of outwork, because it was perceived that this was less expensive that the shop-based system advocated by the AST. A meeting of the Iron and Steel Workers of South Wales, in August of that year, attracted 200 members and this was believed to be a comparatively small gathering. The level of influence exercised by Newport's workforce is also indicated by the outcome of a meeting between the master and men at the Blaenavon Iron and Steel Works. The men had argued for shorter working hours, specifically two half or short days. The master initially objected to these demands, but ultimately submitted to their demands, rather than cause 'unpleasantness'.[2] However, a few months later, a strike over pay was called at the Works. Other labour movement organisations also active at this time included the South Wales and Monmouthshire Clerks Association, South Wales and Monmouthshire Federation of Trades and Labour Unions and local branches of the

National Amalgamated Sailor's & Firemen's Union, National Union of Teachers, Dockers & General Labourer's Union and National Amalgamated Labourer's Union.[3] Many of these organisations would later be instrumental in the foundation of Stow Hill Labour Hall.

The temperance movement was represented in the Newport area. The local temperance hall was a central venue for meetings, such as the one on the temptations to drink faced by youth, which attracted a 'good attendance'. Regular 'sociables', which consisted of music, songs and recitals, were also popular events. [4] Although the temperance movement was not exclusively a part of the left-wing political culture, its activities shared many of the same elements. Temperance also influenced the newly established labour hall in that the sale of alcohol was not permitted on the premises.

Heeley is a district of the city of Sheffield. From at least the eighteenth century, Sheffield was known for its metal industry and as a result the production of cutlery. The latter was a major source of employment for the residents of Heeley. In the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century cutlers were 'in great demand'. In spite of this, however, in 1870, Heeley was described as 'squalid'. [5] Extensive research has failed to uncover detailed evidence of nineteenth century labour movement activity specific to the Heeley area. However, by the early twentieth century, a Heeley branch of the National Union of Railwaymen (NUR) had been established. The first half of the 1920s also saw the inceptions of labour halls in two other Sheffield districts: Attercliffe and Hillsborough.

Although the Labour Party was clearly a significant force in the establishment of the local halls, the Cambridge Labour Party was more directly involved in the purchase and establishment of the Central Hall than the Newport Party was in the Stow Hill Labour Hall. A committee had first been convened in 1917 to consider the possibility of erecting a trades hall in the city. Extensive fundraising activities included a sports event and a raffle. The derelict factory premises, which ultimately became the Central Labour Hall was finally purchased in March 1927. It is clear that the Labour Party felt ownership over this bounded political space: 'Monthly meeting 5th Oct 1927 in The Labour Hall, Norfolk Terrace. The chairman welcomed the delegates to the first meeting in our own hall and paid tribute to the courtesy we had received from the owners of the premises where we had previously met'.[6]

The Central Labour Hall was also administered by a Labour Party sub-committee. There are no references to fundraising in the surviving Newport Labour Party and Trades Council

records. The hall was established by Newport Labour Hall Ltd in 1922 and the level of direct Labour Party representation on the management committee is unclear. In 1919, prior to the establishment of the hall, there is a single reference to an unspecified 'labour hall balance'. In August 1922, it was further noted that 'progress was being made with a Labour Hall'. In the minutes of the first meeting of the Labour Party, the labour hall is referred to, in passing, as the location of the meeting. However, no further reference is made to the acquisition of the premises.[7]

Like several of the London halls, very little specific information about the inception of Heeley Labour Hall in Sheffield has survived and the level of Labour Party involvement is similarly unclear. However, by December 1924, the Heeley Ward of the local Labour Party was holding its meetings on the premises. It is almost certain that the hall was not officially opened until the following June, after the building had been spring-cleaned. An advertisement in the local Federation of Trades Councils newspaper noted that an 'opening ceremony' on 6 June 1925 would be part of a 'Grand Gala Week'.[8]

These contrasting levels of Labour Party involvement are reflected in the origins of the Greater London premises. Like Cambridge, halls such as Heston and Isleworth were established and maintained by a sub committee of the local Labour Party. Conversely, as was the case with Newport, the management committee of Wimbledon Labour Hall Ltd was composed of more than one organisation.

This chapter will consider a range of other political and non-political premises in comparison to the selected labour halls. It will endeavour to ascertain how similar the organisation of and the activities within other spaces were to those undertaken in labour halls. This chapter will examine Conservative and Liberal Clubs as well as a Methodist central hall and a public hall.

Great Yarmouth Conservative Club in Norfolk was founded in 1887 as a largely social club, approximately at the same time as Epsom Liberal and Social Club in Surrey. Brief references will also be made to political premises, where the complete original archive has not been accessible, such as the Carlisle Liberal Club and the Stafford Conservative Club. The inception of the Wesleyan Central Methodist Hall coincided with the turn of the twentieth century. It is unclear when some of the other non-political premises, such as the Witham Public Hall in Essex, were founded. However, surviving records from this institution date from the inter-war years.

Political tenants

A comparison of this nature requires a consideration of many of the same themes which were considered in relation to the Greater London labour halls. The first of these was the role of political tenants. As has already been noted, one of the main functions of labour halls in the Greater London area was to provide a meeting space for left-wing political organisations. In the 15 halls which have been examined it is clear that the local Labour Parties were predominant hirers of the various premises. Is it accurate to assume that this was also the case in at least some provincial areas? This section will primarily consider the activities of the local Labour Parties and their Leagues of Youth in the Cambridge and Newport halls.[9]

The labour halls in Cambridge, Newport and Sheffield provided a focal point for the activities of their respective Labour Parties. The nature of these activities was identical in structure to those in the Greater London area. The kernels of Party activity were the General and Executive Committee meetings. Although many of these were 'business' related, speaker led gatherings on contemporary issues were also regularly organised at Cambridge and Newport.[10] Health issues were clearly a concern at Cambridge Central Labour Hall. The Cambridgeshire County Council Medical Officer for health spoke on at least two occasions in the months following the inception of the Central Hall: 'the prevention of disease' and the County Tuberculosis Officer on the 'prevention and cure of tuberculosis'. The services of a speaker from the Industrial Health Education Society were also engaged for a General Committee meeting.[11] Speakers on a diverse range of other contemporary issues were invited to address the General Committee prior to the outbreak of the Second Word War. These included 'the work of the police force', by the chief constable of the Cambridgeshire Constabulary (1932),'juvenile employment', by a representative of the Shop Assistants Union (1934) and 'the work of the Industrial Aid to Spain Committee', by a member of that organisation (1938).[12]

Speakers were also invited to address the general committee of Newport Labour Party on topical subjects. However such meetings took place less frequently than at Cambridge and many of the London halls. In spite of this, some of the subjects addressed were comparatively controversial. In 1933, for example, several speakers offered to address the local Party on various birth control related issues. However, the local organisation rejected several of these offers until it was decided to establish the official national Labour Party

position on contraception. The specific response of the National Party was not recorded, although at this time, the Labour Party was divided on the issue and not committed to any form of action. As early as 1925, a resolution in favour of 'the right of maternity centres to give advice on birth control' was passed at the Labour Party's annual conference. However this was not pursued by the NEC.[13] However, it is unlikely that the response was prohibitive, because a speaker from the National Birth Control Association was invited to a Newport Labour Party General Committee meeting on 1st September 1933. [14] Other topical issues discussed at these meetings during the period under analysis included a representative of the Information Bureau of the Royal Yugoslav Govt on 'Yugoslavia' (1943), 'the Socialist Medical Association' (1955), 'Education' (1957) and 'A History of the National Council of Labour Colleges' (1958).[15]

During the period in question, although often only the titles of individual talks survive, it is clear that the subjects addressed by speakers at Labour Party General Committee meetings in the provincial halls did not vary greatly from those in the London premises. 'Local' emphasis would often be placed on major 'national' subjects. Useful examples of this include, 'Unemployment in Harrow', at Wealdstone Labour Hall and the 'Present Position of the Unemployment Problem in the Cambridge Area' at the Central Hall.[16] The majority of all the halls under consideration received at least one address from local or borough councillors on the working of the council as well as individual talks focussing on specific committees, such as Education.

Open or public meetings were another feature of Labour Party programmes in Sheffield, Cambridge and Newport as well as the selected halls in the Greater London area, which have already been considered. From 1925, weekly Sunday evening meetings were a feature of the Park and Heeley Constituency Labour Party's programme at the labour hall. These included an address by the local Member of Parliament on an unspecified subject and an academic discussing 'Moscow 1924'. In April 1933, the 'exceedingly useful and informative' Sunday evening meetings were still an integral element of political activity at Heeley Labour Hall. During the 1930s, such evening meetings were also held in Cambridge Central Labour Hall. However, specific references to the subjects under discussion have not been preserved. [17]

Although there are no references to Sunday evening activities, meetings and conferences were organised under the auspices of the Newport Labour Party on a diverse range of subjects at Stow Hill Labour Hall. In 1939, for example, a Chartist Memorial Meeting was

held on the premises to celebrate the centenary of the establishment of that organisation and the following year, a conference to discuss 'Labour's Home Front Policy' was convened by the local Party. In 1943, the subject of another such conference was 'The Beveridge Report'. Similar events were also organised during the post-war decades. In 1965, a conference was convened under the auspices of the local Party, with the Minister for Wales, James Griffiths as the main speaker.[18]

It is unfortunate that, as in the selected Greater London halls, very few detailed references to open meetings have survived. However, the existing evidence indicates that meetings held in Cambridge and Newport were not substantially different from those held in the selected London halls. In both instances national Labour Party policies were, unsurprisingly, important subjects for discussion. The conference, which has already been noted, on 'Labour's Home Front' Policy' in Stow Hill Labour Hall is comparable to, for example, 'Labour's View on Post-War Planning' which was held in 1943 in Barnes and Richmond Labour Hall.[19]

One interesting difference between the Labour Parties in the Greater London area and the Newport local branch was the role of organised religion. In 1924, Newport Labour Halls Ltd refused permission for the Labour Party to hold a Sunday evening religious service on the premises. Although this was not directly challenged, the Executive Committee did recommend another option; that the local vicar should be invited to address the branch on 'Christianity and Socialism'. In September 1941, the Newport Party also resolved to hold a 'harvest festival' in the hall.[20] It is, of course, possible that this was intended to be a secular celebration, but the phrase used tended to have religious connotations. Although there were strong links between traditional Christianity and socialism in the history of the movement, it seems to have been more strongly connected in this particular part of South Wales than in the selected parts of Greater London area at the heart of this thesis and also in Cambridge. The evidence provided by the halls in this study indicates a greater emphasis on other, alternative, kinds of religious observance, such as the Socialist Sunday Schools.

There are very few references to local Conservative Associations or Liberal Parties utilising the selected Conservative or Liberal Club premises specifically for political meetings. For example, such activity is not indicated in the respective archives and commemorative golden jubilee souvenir booklet of Great Yarmouth and Greenford Conservative Clubs. This may be explained by the fact that the Conservative Club

movement 'resulted from the gradual separation of social and political elements of the Party's organisation in the constituencies'.[21] Members of the Great Yarmouth Club were, however, encouraged to attend Party political meetings at other venues, such as, in 1937, the installation of the new local Conservative Party chairman at the Theatre Plain Club.[22]

There are no direct references to Liberal Party meetings on the premises in the inter-war records of Epsom Liberal and Social Club. The Club was certainly involved in political activity, indirectly at least. In July 1928, for example, chairs and tables were loaned to the Liberal candidate, during a by-election campaign.[23] However, there is some evidence of proposed use by other political organisations. In 1923, for example, the management committee of Epsom Liberal and Social Club was approached by the local Constituency Labour Party with as view to hiring a room for a political meeting. The booking was refused on the grounds that the Club had 'decided to remain neutral'. This would give the impression that the political emphasis had been removed from the club's constitution. However, there is no evidence to substantiate this and the neutrality may simply refer to a decision not to overtly support either the Conservative or Labour Parties rather than as a reflection on its own lack of political affiliation. Interestingly, the neutrality which the Liberal Club practiced also extended to leisure activities. The refusal of the Labour Party's booking coincided with the cancellation of a billiards handicap against a team from the Epsom Conservative Association.[24]

During the 1930s and 1940s, non- overtly political, civic spaces, such as Witham Public Hall, also provided a venue for party political meetings. Initially the records indicate that these were largely held under the auspices of the local Conservative Association. However, the hall was also hired by Maldon Constituency Labour Party on more than one occasion and in 1942, a by-election meeting was arranged by the Agricultural National candidate.[25]

Unfortunately a lack of references to specific political activities in the non-labour halls makes any kind of detailed comparison very problematic. However, it is clear that, while public halls such as the one in Witham, were hired by different political organisations for similar kinds of activity to that undertaken in the selected labour halls. The Conservative and Liberal Clubs, which have been considered in this section tended to emphasise the social aspect over the political. The paucity of references to direct Conservative and Liberal Party activity on these premises is significant, because even some Labour Clubs provided a focal point for the political activity of local left-wing organisations. Battersea

Labour Club, for example was the focal point for the activities of several trade unions and co-operative societies. However, more research would be required on a greater number of premises to establish the significance of the lack of Liberal and Conservative direct political activity.

During the period in question, the halls in Cambridge, Newport and Sheffield all provided focal points for the activities of the local Labour Party youth groups. As in the London halls, the Labour League of Youth and later the Young Socialists were the man left-wing young people's organisations. However, in October 1928, in the Central Labour Hall, Cambridge, the Labour Party also decided to establish a 'children's club', presumably for those under sixteen, the lower age limit of the Labour League of Youth. There are no further references to it in the surviving records, but two months later a Labour Party 'girls' club' staged a play on the premises.[26]

A Newport branch of the Young Labour League was established by the Executive Committee of the local Labour Party in December 1924. This branch of the Young Labour League was comparatively short lived: it was closed down by the Labour Party in December 1926, almost exactly two years after formation. The main reason for the closure was a lack of discipline within the membership. In June 1925, Newport Labour Halls Ltd formally complained to the local Party about the conduct of the League on the premises and the Executive Committee directly involved itself in the organisation of a flannel dance under the auspices of the Young Labour League. In spite of this, three months later, the League was barred from the Stow Hill Hall with one month's notice. The General Committee of the Party believed this to be "harsh" and it appealed to the hall management committee on behalf of the League. However the Labour Party ultimately concluded that by the end of 1926, the conduct of the Young Labour League was still "not good".[27]

This branch of the Young Labour League is the earliest surviving example of a Labour Party-specific youth organisation in this study. This may be interpreted as ironic, because the roots of the Young Labour League were established in Clapham, Greater London. It is, however, also at least partially explained by both the fragmentary nature of the preserved records and the fact that many of the Greater London halls in this study were opened after 1926, when the Young Labour League branches, which still existed, had merged into the new organisation effectively become part of the Labour League of Youth.

It was estimated that between 60 and 70 prospective members attended the inauguration, or more specifically re-establishment, meeting of Newport Young Labour League, which took place in the Stow Hill Hall on 30th April 1928. The League continued to utilise the premises as a centre for the vast majority of its activities. From the inception of the organisation, weekly 'educational' meetings were held on Monday evenings, on subjects such as 'the political history of Labour'. Educational provision continued throughout the 1930s. In 1934, for example, lectures were held on both 'the rise of the Labour Party and 'the rise of trade unionism'.[28] During the inter-war years, other political activities undertaken by the League included debates on significant contemporary issues including 'Socialism' and 'Wives Should Be Paid' featured in the League's programme. On at least one occasion, a 'mock trial' was also held regarding 'a wife beating case'. This was noted as being 'moderately successful'.[29]

Social and leisure activities completed the programme of the Newport Labour League of Youth between 1928 and 1936, when the surviving records end. A 'sports' sub committee was established, soon after the inception of the branch and this produced both football and skittles teams. There was a particularly strong connection between the football team and the Stow Hill Hall. The team were designated 'the Labour Hall Juniors' and a photograph of the players was placed on the premises. The skittles teams were organised along gender lines and both the boys' and girls' arranged matches against their counterparts in the League of Youth at the local Pill Labour Hall. Rambling and cycling clubs were also established and dances were regularly held.[30]

Ultimately, however, by 1935, the League was detrimentally affected by declining attendances at meetings and other events. A committee was formed to 're-invigorate' the League's 'depleted ranks' and dances and socials were held to publicise the work of the organisation. A 'general meeting of young people' also took place 'with a view to re-organising the Labour Party's Youth movement'.[31] It was unlikely these strategies succeeded, as the preserved minutes ceased in early 1936. In December of that year, the National Labour Party asked Newport to re-establish the branch. The local party referred this matter to its wards and there are no further references to a Labour Party youth organisation being re-established in the preserved archives until the 1950s. In 1954, the Labour League of Youth campaigned on 'the period of national service' .Two years later, in October 1956; the League was 'reconstituted' as a local organisation, in line with the resolution of the previous year by the Labour Party's National Executive Committee (NEC). After 1960, there is some evidence to suggest that the Newport Branch of the re-named

Young Socialists continued to meet on the premises and the branch was reformed again in 1975.[32] This pattern is similar to that illustrated by many of the Greater London Labour Leagues of Youth, for which detailed records survive.

Conversely, the activities of the Cambridge Labour League of Youth are rarely cited in the preserved Labour Party archive. However, it is clear that the League was particularly involved in the 'Aid to Spain' movement. In September 1936 the League had established a 'Spanish Workers Relief Fund' and the following January it used the hall to convene 'a meeting on Spain in co-operation with other Youth Societies'. As a result of this, a young people's committee was formed and the Central Labour Hall was hired for fundraising on at least one further occasion. [33] As the study has already shown, several of the Greater London Labour Party Leagues of Youth were involved in raising funds for the Spanish cause. The Battersea League, for example supplied, a 'youth ship', which was sent to the area.

At the end of March 1940, the Cambridge branch of the Labour League of Youth dissolved itself and passed its financial balance of two pounds, eight shilling and nine pence to the local Party. This was held in trust until the reformation of the branch. The League was reformed after the Second World War, but there continue to be few references to its activities. It is clear, however that it met on the premises until at least 1959 and was renamed the Cambridge Young Socialists in line with the national position in 1960. It ceased to meet in 1962 and was reformed the following year. However, it was 'wound up' again in 1964 as a result of a 'lack of members'. The Cambridge branch of the Young Socialists was restarted for a second time in 1966 and the following year the Party noted that it was 'one of the strongest branches in the Eastern Region'. In 1970, it was further noted that 'the Young Socialist Annual Conference' would be held in the Central Labour Hall. [34]

There are a similar lack of surviving references to labour movement youth organisations in the archive of Heeley Labour Hall. However, from the acquisition of the premises, in 1924, Friday evenings were devoted to young people's activities. These were broadly divided into two groups: those under 14 years and an unspecified 'Junior League'. In 1934, a branch of the Labour League of Youth was established in the hall. The League held weekly Friday evening meetings on the premises; the programme included speeches and debates, whist drives and socials.[35] Although a branch of the Labour League of Youth existed in Heeley in the post-war years, it did not meet in the hall.

It appears that the activities undertaken by the provincial Leagues of Youth and Young Socialists in this study were not very different from those in the Greater London area. However the nature of the fragmented records, as in so many areas, renders detailed comparison problematic. In spite of this, there are some points of comparison and contrast. Surviving records do not indicate that any members of the provincial Leagues of Youth were suspended by the Labour Party's National Executive Committee for supporting the inter-war Unity campaign with the Communist Party of Great Britain. Several London branches experienced difficulties of recruitment and retention of members, in both the inter- and post- war years, but none seem to have registered such fluctuating fortunes resulting in actual and apparently sustained improvement as the Cambridge Young Socialists did in the mid 1960s. This is, perhaps an unfair comparison, as there is a dearth of records of Young Socialist branches in Greater London in the post-war decades.

Although there are no references to youth groups meeting in the other political spaces, the Bermondsey Wesleyan Methodist Central Hall did provide a focal point for youth activity throughout much of the period in question. From 1921 "social gatherings for young people" were held on the premises and during 1942, a 'boys' club' was founded. The types of activities undertaken by the club are not recorded. However the focus would have been on moral and educational guidance in a poor area of London. The Leaders noted that: 'This was very difficult work but it was now flourishing and no doubt these boys would become better men through contact with the hall.'[36] The boys' club was not the only work, which the leaders undertook with the local Methodist youth. In 1949, a 'scouting movement' for both genders was established. Similarly, no specific details of the movement's work have survived, but it did attract 32 boys and 38 girls. More generally, it was noted that there was: 'Active youth work at the hall. Indoor and outdoor games were fostered and Educational Classes were growing in favour.'[37]

It is clear then, that a proportion of the youth culture which had been established at the Bermondsey Wesleyan Methodist Central Hall, was, at least in part, modelled on and set up as an alternative to the mainstream scouting movement. The Labour League of Youth, although not generally equated with the scouts, was also perceived as another option for young people who did not wish to join often militaristic youth organisations. In many ways the details of young people's activities provided in the above quotation could be just as easily applied to the selected labour halls.

Industrial usage

Between 1918 and 1979, the activities of industrial organisations, trade unions and co-operative societies, accounted for the remainder of the labour movement usage in the selected halls in the Greater London area. There are virtually no records of co-operative society activity in the surviving archives of Stow Hill Labour Hall in Newport and its Cambridge counterpart, but this is almost certainly explained by the presence of co-operative premises in both boroughs. Like the Greater London analysis, this section, then, will consider trade union activity in the two halls and the impact of unemployment in the 1930s. The latter will focus on local attitudes to the National Unemployed Workers' Movement (NUWM). This section will also consider, where possible, the response to the depression and unemployment of the 1930s, in the selected non-labour halls.

There are very few references to specific trade union usage in the preserved records of the Cambridge, Newport and Sheffield halls. As has already been noted, this reflects the situation in the selected London premises. The acquisition of the Central Labour Hall premises in Cambridge coincided with the passing of the 1927 Trades Disputes Act, which had a negative impact on the labour movement. It outlawed general strikes, prevented civil servants from joining trade unions and instituted a system whereby workers were legally required to 'contract in' rather than out of paying a trade union levy. As a result of this a 'Joint Trade Union Committee' was formed in Cambridge and a series of meetings were arranged for July 1927.[38]

It is clear that several trade union branches were using the Cambridge hall as the focal point for their activities from the inception of the premises. In November 1928, it was decided to ask 'all trade unions' to take a collection for the Miners' Relief Fund at their December meetings. Two months later, rooms in the hall were booked by the Railway Clerks Association (RCA) and the Amalgamated Union of Building Trade Workers (AUBTW) for meetings and the Amalgamated Society of Woodworkers (ASW) for an annual dinner. The RCA was also formally thanked for assistance provided to the Labour Party during the 1929 general election campaign.[39]

The Central Labour Hall provided a convenient venue for trade union fundraising and recruitment drives. In 1932, the ASW was granted free use of a room to hold a concert for this purpose. Five years later, during an unofficial strike, the hall was placed at the disposal of local transport workers for a whist drive to raise money for the Busmen's Relief Fund. [40] There are no references to trade union activities in the post war records of the

Cambridge Central Labour Hall. However, trade unions were almost certainly still associated with the hall towards the end of the period under analysis. In 1967, Cambridge Labour Party investigated the possibility of acquiring alternative, larger premises and local trade union branches were contacted to ascertain if they would be interested in renting 'more office space' in a prospective new building.[41]

There is a similar dearth of references to trade union activities in the preserved minutes of Newport Labour Party. During the course of the period in question, several, unspecified, trade union conferences took place on the Stow Hill premises. One of these was almost certainly the first meeting to be held in the new hall.[42] Some of the trade unions, which used the hall as a focal point for their activities, were local branches of those which were operating in the Greater London area. In 1925, the Union of Post Office Workers both met on the premises and donated towards the cost of the local Labour Party's office furniture and on 9th October 1930, the National Federation of Building Trade Operatives organised a conference on 'Slum Problems'. However, the presence of other unions in the hall illustrates the extent of the differences in the industrial landscape between South Wales and the metropolis. The Iron and Steel Confederation was connected with the labour hall until 1932, when its support for the Labour Party ceased and in 1944, the South Wales Miner's Federation held a meeting on the premises.[43]

There is specific evidence of only one trade union meeting at Heeley Labour Hall. From at least 1930, the local branch of the National Union of Railwaymen (NUR) used the hall as a focal point for its, unspecified, activities on alternate Sunday afternoons.[44] Other Sheffield trade union branches, such as the ETU tended to convene in public houses or the local Vestry hall. The nature of heavy industry in Heeley in Sheffield would have had more in common with Newport in South Wales than Cambridge or London.

The fragmentary nature of the local trade union records inevitably means that it is very difficult to present a complete picture of the role of those organisations in the Cambridge Newport and Sheffield labour halls. However, many of the activities undertaken by the local branches would have been similar, if not identical to each other and the Greater London branches, because they would have been determined by the national executives of the individual unions. The comparison which this section has attempted is most useful in highlighting regional differences; especially between the light industries of Greater London and Cambridge on one hand and the iron, steel and mining of South Wales respectively. It has been possible to identify that trade unions representing heavy industries, such as the

Iron and Steel Confederation, met at the Stow Hill Labour Hall. However the dearth of records of specific activity has made an analysis of the ways in which this difference was expressed through trade union activity within the selected labour halls highly problematic.

In the context of unemployment in the 1920s and 1930s, the records of the Cambridge and Newport halls provide an interesting contrast to the preserved archives of their Greater London counterparts. In both cases, it is possible to build a clear picture of interactions between the local Labour Parties and the National Unemployed Workers Movement (NUWM). As has already been noted, this is largely absent from the majority of the selected Greater London labour hall records. There are also no references to the NUWM in the surviving Heeley Labour Hall archive.

In June 1923, Cambridge Labour Party voted in favour of the affiliation of the National Unemployed Workers Committee to the Labour Party. It also voted against the same proposal for the Communist Party of Great Britain Almost certainly as a result of the increasing CPGB influence in the NUWM in the later 1920s, however, Cambridge Labour Party would not co-operate when approached by that organisation to provide accommodation for hunger marchers in 1929, 1930 and 1932. In January 1934, it also rejected an appeal for assistance directly from the CPGB. The strength of feeling against the proposal is indicated by the fact that it was defeated by 25 votes to three.[45] There is no evidence to suggest that Cambridge Labour Party altered its position on this issue in the latter half of the 1930s. As the local Party exercised direct control over the daily management of the hall, it would not have been possible for the local branch of the NUWM to have met on the premises.

In contrast to both the surviving records of the Greater London halls and the premises in Cambridge, there is some evidence to indicate that the Newport Labour Party did change its attitude towards the NUWM. From at least 1926, Newport Labour Party was involved in local unemployment demonstrations and also represented on the local Distress Committee. However, initially at least, like Cambridge Labour Party, the Newport Constituency Party, did not to want to co-operate with organisations influenced by the CPGB. Thus, it did not condone the policies of the local branch of the NUWM. As a result of this, the Party decided not to co-operate with the 1929 Hunger March and it appears that the hall was not used by any other organisations for this purpose; this was 'regretted' by at least one Labour Party ward and as a result of this, several weeks elapsed before the Executive Committee's action was officially endorsed.[46] This policy continued into the

following decade. In 1933, the Newport Labour Party did not respond to an appeal from the United Marchers Reception Committee .The following year, it also declined a request by the local Independent Labour Party (ILP) for a subscription towards feeding hunger marchers at the ILP institute. However, by October 1936, the policy of the Newport Labour Party had changed to the extent that the Executive Committee of the Party led a march as it processed through the centre of the town. This alteration in the Party's position was almost certainly a direct result of its willingness, from September 1936, to co-operate with the local branches of the CPGB and ILP in a Popular Front 'Council of Action'. [47]

The situations in the Cambridge and Newport labour halls do provide a useful contrast with the paucity of references to the NUWM in the surviving records of both the selected Greater London and Heeley halls. As has already been established in the earlier chapters of this thesis, only two out of the 15 London halls, in Willesden and Wimbledon, were connected with the NUWM in any way. There is no surviving evidence to suggest that the other 13 halls were even contacted by the organisation.[48] Further research, featuring a larger number of premises over a wider geographical area would be useful in this context. It would certainly be required to establish, to a more representative degree, the actual relationship between the NUWM and local labour halls. It is, however, possible that this was an intensely local issue, which did not necessarily conform to a nationwide pattern. It would require a large amount of detailed research on specifically NUWM related sources or a fortuitous search of local newspapers to establish precisely where NUWM branches did actually meet.

There are no references to action on unemployment issues in the surviving records of the selected Conservative and Liberal Clubs or the public hall in Witham, nor any evidence that any of the premises were utilised or even approached by the NUWM. The However the Bermondsey Wesleyan Methodist Central Hall involved itself in in poverty issues, if not unemployment directly. From at least 1927, money was given on a quarterly basis to 'poor cases'. This amounted to 10/- per person, distributed by "poor stewards". In December 1927, there were 28 such cases.[49]

The imparting of direct financial assistance to individual cases was very different to the approach generally adopted by the Labour Party and trade unions at this time. However financial assistance would often have been made available by those organisations to their own members, in the form of donations to strike relief or trade union benevolent funds.

Leisure and Finance

As in the selected Greater London premises, labour movement leisure activities accounted for a large proportion of the usage of the Central, Stow Hill and Heeley Labour Halls as well as the non-labour halls. This section will consider leisure provision and its links with fundraising in the context of Stephen Jones' contention that although the Labour Party wished to create an alternative leisure culture, recreational activities were more often used as fundraising activities or ways in which to recruit new members rather than as a concerted attempt to enhance the social well-being of the membership. [50] As has been already noted, the surviving evidence from the Greater London halls largely supports this well substantiated perspective. The section will also look at the main similarities and differences in contemporary leisure provision in the other political, civic and religious spaces.

Many of these activities were either identical or very similar to those undertaken at the London halls. All three labour halls provided venues for socials, whist drives, dancing and bazaars. Socials were held by several organisations for a variety of different reasons. In 1929, in the Central Labour Hall, for example, a 'victory social' was planned by Cambridge Labour Party, in anticipation of the election of Ramsay MacDonald. Socials were also held on the premises in the same year by Cambridge Co-operative Society and in 1932, under the auspices of the Petersfield and St Matthew's Ward of the Labour Party. The latter was specifically for fundraising purposes. This kind of leisure activity was held on the premises until at least 1961.[51] Socials were also arranged by Newport Labour Party, during the 1920s and by at least one Labour Party Ward organisation in 1930.[52] However, there are very few other references to them in the surviving minutes. From early 1925, Labour Party socials were a regular fixture in Heeley Labour Hall on Friday evenings and were also a significant part of the opening ceremony in June of that year. Social evenings were popular recreational activities with other organisations, including the Party's Women's Section.[53] There is no indication, in any of the three halls, of the nature of the activities incorporated into the entertainment provided at these socials.

Whist drives were popular both as recreational pursuits and as a method of fundraising. From 1933, for example, whist drives were regularly held on Thursday evenings in Cambridge and the profits from these were used to purchase tables for the premises. The management committee also granted free use of a room in the Central Labour Hall in certain instances, to raise money for a specific cause. The whist drive held in support of

striking transport workers in Cambridge, which has already been noted in this section was also an excellent example of this kind of fundraising.[54] From 1925 onwards, the large hall on the Newport premises was regularly hired by the local Labour Party for whist drives and on at least one occasion, in 1937, a drive was held jointly under the auspices of Newport Labour Party and Newport Labour Hall Ltd.[55] Whist drives were organised in Heeley Labour Hall from its inception. Like the Central Labour Hall in Cambridge, these usually took place on Thursday evenings.[56] After the Second World War, the popularity of whist drives declined in both the Central Labour Hall and the Stow Hill Hall.[57] This reflected the situation in the selected Greater London premises.

Whist drives were also regularly held in other political spaces such as the Epsom Liberal and Social Club and the card tables were also loaned to other organisations, such as Reigate hospital for fundraising purposes.[58] No specific evidence survives of whist drives being organised at either the Great Yarmouth or Greenford Conservative Clubs. However, both clubs had card rooms. It is therefore probable that whist was played on the premises. If this was not done in the form of a drive, it would have been played for entertainment and the financial gain, effectively by gambling, of the individual member rather than as a fundraising tool for the whole organisation.

Between 1918 and 1979, gambling was a common form of leisure and fundraising in both the Cambridge and Newport halls. There is no surviving evidence to suggest that this was also the case in Heeley Labour Hall.[59] As with the Greater London premises, this generally took the form of derby draws and tote. Newport Labour Party held its derby draws between 1927 and 1943 and such draws were also held under the auspices of Cambridge Labour Party up until at least 1969.[60] In both Cambridge and Newport, the tote was a post-war innovation. A tote was established on the Cambridge premises from at least 1961. The Newport scheme explicitly demonstrates a connection between the evidently popular tote and local Labour Party recruitment. In 1964, it was suggested that one way in which to increase Party membership was to attach a form to the tote slips. It is unclear whether this suggestion was ever adopted. If it had been, it may have been profitable to the Party as, for example, in the last few weeks of 1966, 89 new tote members were 'made'.[61] It is interesting that there was a kind of gambling tradition in Newport Labour Hall. The particularly strong links between the local labour movement in this part of South Wales and organised religion have already been noted in this chapter. However, it is probable that the financial imperative became more important than the possibility of the condemnation of these methods by the church.

Other forms of gambling were part of the both the recreational and fundraising culture of Liberal and Conservative political spaces. Epsom Liberal and Social Club had 'slot machines' from at least 1924. Similar activity was popular in some Conservative and Liberal Clubs in the post-war years. In 1958, Greenford Conservative Club had two 'Gaming Machines' installed on the premises, the club's 'financial life-blood'. Three years later, in 1961, Gainsborough Conservative Club purchased two machines, which two years later, made a profit of more than £700.[62] The management committee of Carlisle Liberal Club initially rejected the idea of fruit machines on principal, but in 1963, financial necessity dictated the installation of two machines. Great Yarmouth Conservative Club also had fruit machines installed on the premises by 1967 and these were noted as being 'successful'. However, some Conservative Clubs did not permit the introduction of any kind of gaming machines on the premises before 1979. In 1977, for example, the steward of the County Conservative Club in Stafford regarded them, like the workingmen's club in which they were installed as 'a trifle vulgar'. However, he did concede that the introduction of such things on the premises may at some stage be part of a necessary 'lowering of standards'. [63] There are very few specific references to such machines in the records of the surviving labour halls, but only a minority of these have post-war archives. It is therefore not possible to categorically state that gaming machines were objected to on principle. However, as has already been noted, in connection with the Greater London halls, there may have been legal restrictions placed upon management committees of these dividend paying societies.

There are no references to any gambling-related activities being undertaken at either Witham Public Hall or Bermondsey Wesleyan Central Methodist Hall. The absence of this activity on the latter premises is unsurprising. Gambling was largely condemned by organised religion, especially the Methodist Church. It is also probable that the complex way in which gambling was regulated would have precluded it from taking place on local council owned premises, such as Witham Public Hall.

Like the Greater London Halls, during the interwar decades, dances accounted for a large proportion of leisure usage in the halls. In 1927, the official opening of Cambridge Central Labour Hall was celebrated with a dance and Saturday evening dances were organised by the social committee from the inception of the premises. Other organisations were permitted to hire the hall as a dance venue. It is interesting to note that the executive committee stipulated that as a condition of hire, 'a policeman must be engaged' for the

duration of the dance. There is no surviving evidence to indicate the presence of such a regulation in any of the other halls in this study. Weekly dances continued to be held under the auspices of Cambridge Labour Party during the 1930s. There are fewer references to the provision of dances in the post-war records. However it is apparent that this particular form of leisure activity had not been abandoned entirely. A 'New Year' dance was held in January 1953.[64]

From 1925, the main hall of the Newport premises was booked by the local Labour Party for regular dances. Although there are very few other specific references to organised dances in the surviving archive, by 1941, dances were being held at least annually. The following year, Newport Labour Hall Ltd held a dance for the Party. It is probable that this was for fundraising purposes, but the intention is not explicitly stated.[65] Dancing was similarly popular at Heeley Labour Hall. From the inception of the premises in 1924, Tuesday evenings were reserved for this purpose and occasional dances were also held on Friday nights. By 1931, twice weekly dances were being arranged. However two years later in 1933 only one weekly 'select dance' was held on the premises. [66] The evidence for this leisure activity is collated from newspaper advertisements. It is therefore not possible to conclusively establish the motivation behind the organisation of it at the Heeley Labour Hall.

Non-political spaces, such as Witham Public Hall in Essex, also provided a venue for dances organised by a variety of different voluntary and commercial organisations and private hirers. Between 1935 and 1938, for example, such events were held under the auspices of the local Women's Institute, Terminus Hotel, Scouts, Football Club, Swimming Club, Cricket Club, British Legion and Red Cross.[67] Dances were also organised during the years of the Second World War when the premises were not requisitioned by the Government. These were usually held under the auspices of the British Legion or a local branch of the home guard or military and were, on at least one occasion, proposed specifically for the purpose of raising funds. In December 1939, the estates committee of the Public Hall was approached by the Witham British Legion with a request to hold a dance to raise money for 'Prisoners of War, Serving and ex-Servicemen'.[68] The response of the estates committee has not been preserved. However, the dance itself is unlikely to have taken place at that time as the hall was requisitioned in January 1940 and this was the reason given for the refusal of many such bookings.

Bazaars were important both for recreational and fundraising purposes. From 1926, for

example, these were regularly held by the Newport Labour Party and its Women's Section in the Stow Hill Hall. In 1936, the Executive Committee of the Party arranged a bazaar to assist in defraying debts, which included a £150 loan from Newport Labour Halls Ltd. Throughout the 1950s and early 1960s, such annual events were held under the auspices of the Labour Party Women's Section. The 1963 bazaar was of particular importance from a financial perspective, as this 'wonderful effort' raised £164, settling a debt of more than £90, which was owed to Newport Labour Halls Ltd.[69] Similarly, in January 1961, the financial position of Cambridge Labour Party was declared to be 'slightly healthier' as a result of a bazaar held on the Central Hall premises. Bazaars continued to be successfully employed as a fundraising tool by the local Party in the Central Labour Hall until at least the early 1970s. The 1970 event for example, made a profit of £200.[70]

There is less surviving evidence that bazaars were an integral part of the recreational programme at Heeley Labour Hall. However, it is clear that when they did occur, they were usually organised by the local Labour Party Women's Sections. In 1929, for example, representatives from the Woodseats Women's Section attended a 'divisional bazaar committee meeting', for a bazaar to be held in the labour hall. At least part of the profit from such events was given directly to the Heeley Labour Hall management committee.[71] Bazaars were also used as a leisure and fundraising tool in non-political spaces. During the 1930s, Witham Public Hall provided the venue for several Congregational and Methodist Church bazaars and in May 1951, a bazaar was held in Bermondsey Central Methodist Hall, which raised more than £85.[72] There is no explicit evidence to suggest that on these premises, unlike several of the labour halls, both inside and outside the Greater London area, that the organisation of this kind of activity was the preserve of women rather than men.

Throughout the period under examination, a large proportion of leisure time in the Conservative and Liberal Clubs was spent at the bar. As has already been noted, part of the *raison d'etre* of these clubs was to provide a venue for the consumption of inexpensive alcohol. This was something that was resisted by many of the labour halls in this study, until the post war years, when bars were installed in premises such as Barnes and Richmond and Wimbledon in an effort to increase membership. Billiards and snooker were also popular in Conservative and Liberal Clubs. In 1923, for example, billiards handicaps were held on Sunday evenings at Epsom Liberal and Social Club. Billiards was also played on the Great Yarmouth Conservative Club premises from at least 1896 and the Greenford Conservative Club was specially extended to incorporate a larger billiards hall in

1937, three years after the Club was opened. [73] This kind of activity did not take place in the vast majority of the labour halls in this study; with the exceptions of Bermondsey and Willesden.

The majority of recreational pursuits provided on the Cambridge, Newport and Heeley premises were identical to the vast majority of those undertaken in the selected Greater London halls. However, there is at least some indication that in the early 1930s, something approaching an alternative leisure culture was occasionally provided at Newport Labour Hall. In 1930, for example, a flower show was held on the premises. The following year, a Newport Labour Choral Society was meeting in the Stow Hill Hall.[74] There is no evidence of comparable activities taking place in Cambridge or Sheffield. However, as has already been noted, there were attempts to establish an alternative leisure culture in at least two of the Greater London halls. Labour Horticultural Societies were established in Ilford in the late 1930s and in Wealdstone in 1950.

The local non-political culture also seems to have impacted upon at least one leisure activity in the Newport labour hall. On 26th December 1923, it was the venue for a typically Welsh event: an eisteddfod. This joint venture between the local Party and Newport Labour Hall Ltd was essentially 'a competitive festival of the arts, especially music and poetry'. An essay competition, with a prize of five pounds, was also organised.[75] However, in spite of these very few examples, evidence of the provision of recreational activities at the Central Labour Hall in Cambridge, Stow Hill Labour Hall in Newport, South Wales, Heeley Labour Hall in Sheffield and many of the non-labour halls echoes that of the selected Greater London halls. The labour hall provision therefore largely substantiates the argument propounded by Stephen Jones, which has already been cited: that the Labour Party, in the inter-war years, was more concerned with the recruitment and retention of members and the necessity for fundraising, rather than the provision of an alternative leisure culture. Although more research would be required on a greater geographical range of labour halls, the striking similarities may be indicative of a nationwide trend. It should also be noted that, the evidence from the other political, civic and religious spaces, indicates that the kind of leisure provision offered by other voluntary societies was very similar to that arranged under the auspices of the labour movement.

Working Class Education

An earlier chapter of this thesis has established that 'education' was of significant importance in the 15 Greater London establishments. This section will consider the nature

of such activities in the Cambridge, Newport and Heeley labour halls and the other political, civic and religious premises. It will examine both structured classes and provision for the autodidact; emphasising the similarities and differences between the different types of halls.

There were two main types of structured education provided in the halls in this study: the class provided by the National Council of Labour Colleges (NCLC) or Workers' Educational Association (WEA) and other kinds of education undertaken in the political spaces and that administered by the Methodist Church. There were no references to education on the Conservative Club premises and the only kind of 'education' on the Witham Public Hall premises referred to first aid, civil defence and similar practical kinds of education.[76]

It has already been noted that, in the selected Greater London labour halls, the majority of worker's education was provided by the National Council of Labour Colleges (NCLC), rather than the Worker's Educational Association (WEA). However, as has also been established, in some halls it was common practice for courses devised by both organisations to be run concurrently. How far was this reflected in Cambridge, Newport and Heeley? What kind of education was available at Liberal Clubs?

Like several of the London premises, Stow Hill Labour Hall in Newport also provided a venue for educational activities devised by the NCLC rather than the WEA. In 1926, a course of lectures on 'Local Government' was held on the premises. The NCLC also provided individual lectures, such as the one in 1933 on 'Socialism and Empire'. The association between the organisation and the hall continued into the Second World War, with a class in 1940 on 'Marxism and War'. During the post war era there is no surviving evidence to indicate that either the WEA or the NCLC were responsible for educational provision. In spite of this, in 1958, a speaker on the history of the NCLC was invited to address a Labour Party General Committee meeting.[77]

Although the Cambridge Constituency Labour Party was affiliated to both the WEA and NCLC from at least 1925, there are no references to actual educational provision in the Central Labour Hall, by either organisation, until 1953. On 15th August of that year, the NCLC held a day school on the premises. A series of fortnightly lectures, provided by the same organisation, was held in the autumn of that year.[78] There are no surviving references to WEA courses being held in the hall. The links between the NCLC and

political propaganda have already been explored elsewhere in this thesis. It is therefore appropriate that these activities were organised by the Party's political education committee.

The dominance of the NCLC in educational provision in the Cambridge and Newport halls largely extends the pattern established by the Greater London premises Further research in a wider range of halls would be necessary to ascertain whether this is representative of labour halls in general. However, the limitation of the role of the NCLC to the post-war decades in the Central Labour Hall was unusual, if not unique.[79]

The educational provision in Heeley Labour Hall was different from that in Cambridge Newport and the majority of Greater London halls. There is no surviving evidence to suggest that classes and lectures directly supplied by either the NCLC or WEA were held on the premises. There are a few references to 'lantern lectures' on unspecified subjects in 1930 and addresses given by local labour movement figures were occasionally described as 'lectures'. A good example of the latter was Alderman J G Graves speaking on his 'impressions of India'.[80] The incomplete nature of the Heeley Labour Hall archive, however, means that it is not possible to categorically state that this was the only kind of educational activity on the premises.

The role of at least the provincial labour halls in working class education was not very different from that of their Greater London counterparts. However, there are very few references in either the Cambridge or Newport archives to specific 'political education' or propaganda activities. The recorded use of other kinds of 'political education' certainly seemed to be more widespread in many of the Greater London halls and Heeley in Sheffield. The amount of time devoted to political education by each Constituency Labour Party would have been locally rather than nationally determined, so without further research on a wider geographical range of halls, it is not entirely possible to generalise.

The kind of education offered by at least one Liberal Club in Carlisle, seems to be similar to, and possibly a precursor of, that which was undertaken in labour halls. From 1886, the Carlisle Liberal Club debating class met each Monday evening over the winter months 'for the discussion of political and social questions and the reading of Papers and Essays on subjects of general interest'.[81] During the 1950s, the National Liberal Club in London offered discussion groups on subjects such as politics and literature and 'a series of lectures organised in association with other Liberal bodies'. [82] However, this was not

worker's education, as the membership fees ensured that the National Liberal Club was an elitist gentleman's club.

'Structured' education was perceived as one of the most important functions of the Bermondsey Wesleyan Methodist Central Hall. There are very few detailed references to the type of work undertaken, but by the late 1940s, it attracted both adults and children. In 1948, 148 people were enrolled in classes. The children were divided into four groups: cradle, beginners, primary and junior. Adult groups were held on Tuesday afternoons and evenings. It was noted that the Tuesday evening class was 'well attended'. The afternoon class maintained an average attendance of 50 people per week, with many 'getting on his [sic] years'. There were also specific separate bible study classes for boys and girls.[83]

Evidence provided by the Greater London labour halls has indicated that these institutions often provided a venue for more than just structured classes or lectures. Several of the metropolitan halls also had dedicated libraries or reading rooms to cater for the autodidact. It is useful to consider such provision in halls outside the Greater London area. What was the situation in Cambridge, Newport and Heeley? Were such facilities incorporated in other types of hall?

There are no surviving references to a library or reading room on the Stow Hill, Newport or Heeley Labour Hall premises. Conversely, a detailed account of the inception of the library at the Central Labour Hall in Cambridge has survived. In July 1928, plans for it were approved by the Executive Committee of the local Labour Party. The cost of the venture was defrayed by Mansfield D Forbes, a fellow in the English department and librarian of Clare College, University of Cambridge and other sympathetic acquaintances. Although the exact amount donated was not specified in the labour hall minutes, the benefactors emphasised that this gift was to benefit young people and it was managed under the auspices of the Labour League of Youth. Unlike other halls, the Cambridge library was not automatically available to all hirers of the premises. The Labour Party Women's Section, for example, had to apply for permission from the Executive Committee to use the library, which was granted.[84]

Although the Executive Committee was clearly concerned with the provision of a library, it was also aware of wider issues: 'When the alterations have been completed, the room would have a very attractive appearance, and in addition to being a great asset to the Party, from the educational point of view, would considerably add to the value of the

Hall'.[85] This illustrates the necessary balance between the political idealism represented, in this instance, by the facilitation of workers' education and the financial pragmatism of increasing the market value of the property.

In spite of the fact that there is evidence of the presence of several libraries in the selected Greater London halls, the way in which the Cambridge library was funded, by a fellow and librarian of the city's university was certainly unique in the scope of this study. Several libraries benefited from individual donations from members and supporters over a number of years. However, there is no evidence to indicate that the inceptions of any of the other libraries were precipitated by such donations *en-masse*. As was the case with so many areas, the fragmentary nature of all the labour hall records renders generalisations problematic. It is, however possible to refer again to the findings of Jonathan Rose and conjecture that the content of these libraries may be similar to the RACS library in Woolwich, which contained a variety of volumes of both 'light fiction' and more scholarly books on subjects such as economics and philosophy.[86] It is clear that provision for the autodidactic tradition in these kinds of premises extended beyond Greater London.

From the nineteenth century onwards, libraries and reading rooms were features of other kinds of political and civic spaces. Both the National Liberal and the National Conservative Clubs in London had libraries or the intention to provide them reasonably soon after their respective inceptions. In 1888, for example, two guineas of a member's subscription were diverted into the library fund. As has been noted, the exclusive nature of these two gentlemen's clubs meant that these facilities were not provided for the self improvement of members of the working class. However, such facilities were not restricted to the national clubs. There was a reading room on the premises of the Farnham Market House and Town Hall in Surrey from at least 1886, although there are no references to similar provision at Witham Public Hall.[87] Both a reading room and a library had been established on the Epsom Liberal and Social Club premises prior to the commencement of the surviving records in the early 1920s. Great Yarmouth Conservative Club seems to have been comparatively late in acquiring a reading room in 1960. It should be noted that it is unclear whether this was, in fact the first on the premises.[88] Libraries and reading rooms were not always maximised throughout the period. The reading room at the Stafford County Conservative Club was unused by 1977.[89]

Some evidence has survived of the nature of the books, newspapers and other periodicals which were read in the various halls. In 1927, for example, it would have been possible to

browse 26 different kinds of newspaper or periodical in the reading room at Great Yarmouth Conservative Club, although most of these were designed for recreational rather than educational reading.[90] However, references to library books in the smaller clubs were usually less specific. For example, in 1924, the management committee of Epsom Liberal and Social Club purchased 50 new books for its library. The titles of these books, however, were not noted. The National Liberal Club provides the only detailed references of the kinds of literature which may have been stocked in such libraries. Interestingly, in July 1954, this included two books by prominent Labour and Conservative Party figures: Clement Attlee's memoir *As It Happened* and Herbert Morrison's *Government and Parliament,* as well as Winston Churchill's *Triumph and Tragedy.* The Library was not restricted to works of political history and theory. A fiction section was inaugurated in January 1956.[91] As previously noted, however, the subscriptions and entrance fees would have precluded many working class auto-didacts from using this library on a regular basis.

It is clear that education was of importance to the various organisations. It should be remembered that education up to the age of 13 was not effectively compulsory and largely free until 1880 and secondary education was not really reformed and made accessible by the Government until well into the twentieth century. For the first half of the period under examination, it is likely that at least a proportion of the education provided in these halls, regardless of any elements of propaganda, may have gone some way to fulfilling a significant need in the local communities.

Role of Women

It has already been noted that in the selected Greater London labour halls, women were largely under-represented on the majority of management committees, but began to become officers in local Labour Parties from the 1930s. The thesis has also considered the role of women's organisations, such as the Constituency Parties Women's Sections. This section will consider, where possible, how far this was representative of a more general pattern in labour halls outside Greater London and the other contemporary political and religious spaces and the equivalent female associations, which met on these premises.

It is not really possible to assess the precise impact of women on the direct labour hall administration as the specific management committee minutes from Cambridge, Newport

and Heeley Labour Halls have not been preserved. However, in at least two of the halls, Cambridge and Newport, at least a proportion of the records of the local Labour Party have survived. Women's representation in Cambridge Labour Party indicates a pattern of representation very similar to that of the Greater London halls. A woman was elected chairman of the Constituency Labour Party in 1923, 1925, 1951 and 1952. It is unclear why this was not replicated in the 1930s and 1940s. However, throughout this period, women were still generally in the minority on the various committees. In 1930, for example, one out of the twelve committee members was a woman and the representation was only slightly better on the Hall Committee, with a ratio of two to eleven. By 1963, there was both a woman chairman and one third of the Party's General Management Committee were women.[92] However, the male Party members were still in the majority.

The situation in Newport was different from that in Cambridge and many of the Greater London Constituency Labour Parties. There is very little evidence of women holding official positions in the local Party. The first woman chairperson was not elected until 1941, which was comparatively late. It may be significant that this was during war-time, when fewer men would have been available to fill the position. Throughout the inter-war years there was also only an average of two or three women on the Executive Committee of the Party at any one time.[93] Like many of the Greater London Labour Parties, the position of women in the post-war decades is less clear, as committee members present are rarely listed.

The Cambridge, Heeley and Newport halls provided a focal point for the activities of the local Labour Party Women Sections. The absence of the Women's Co-operative Guild in any of the halls contrasts with the position in many of the Greater London premises, but may be explained by two factors. Firstly, that in all three cases it is the Labour Party archive, which has survived and this may not necessarily refer to Co-operative activity. Therefore it is possible that the Women's Co-operative Guild did meet on the premises, but any references to this have not been preserved. Secondly, in all three areas, there were also a plethora of other meeting places, such as trade union or co-operative halls. As there are very few references as a whole to co-operative activity, it is also possible that the Women's Co-operative Guild, like the other co-operative organisations, met elsewhere. However, in the absence of detailed records, these options may only be conjecture at best.

It has been noted that, in the Greater London area, at least, the activities of the various women's sections, tended to substantiate the argument put forward by Pamela Graves that the emphasis was on social and welfare issues rather than political organisation and

electioneering.[94] How far was this the case in, Newport, Cambridge and Heeley?

Emphasis is placed on the women's role in catering at functions held under the auspices of other organisations, organising bazaars and on one occasion, a 'baby show'. Fundraising was also undertaken for causes such as the local baby clinic. [95] When the Section itself engaged in political activity, this could also be perceived as largely pastoral. In 1932, a conference was held in the Labour Hall under its auspices on 'The Education Bill Economies'. However, there are crucial gaps in the records, which may change the emphasis of the women's work. In 1923 it was noted that the Women's Section was entertaining 'national speakers' at its meetings, but the subjects covered at those meetings are not noted.[96]

There are also several generic references to 'women's meetings' taking place on the premises, which would almost certainly have involved the Women's Section, possibly in conjunction with another similar organisation, such as the Women's Co-operative Guild or a comparative association from outside the labour movement. Although the some of subjects are not noted, in 1931 one of the meetings was addressed by Mrs Harrison Bell, who had been largely associated with a minority report into 'National Health Insurance' and the conditions of British child immigrants into Canada in the 1920s. In 1942, the meeting was addressed by Isabel Blume, a Belgian Member of Parliament. Two years later, a similar meeting addressed 'Labour's Housing Policy' [97] At least two of these speakers, therefore, almost certainly addressed the gathering on typically welfare-related issues.

Labour Party political meetings in the Newport area were definitely arranged along more gender specific lines than any other halls in this study. An individual men's section existed throughout the inter-war period. It organised mock parliaments and at least one 'smoking concert'.[98] References to this group cease after the outbreak of the Second World War. It is therefore possible that it was dissolved as a direct result of military recruitment and conscription. However the presence of such a group in the inter-war years provides a perfect comparison with the work of the Women's Section. The few surviving references to the Individual Men's section do tend to indicate that the men were engaging more directly in general politics, outside the sphere of welfare reform.

There are very few specific references to the activities of Cambridge Labour Party's Central Women's Section. In 1927, like several Sections in the selected Greater London

area, such as Wimbledon, the organisation was initially responsible for the cleaning and decoration of the recently acquired Cambridge premises. It also regularly rented an office on the premises for its committee meetings and was granted free use of a room for at least one meeting. It was also given special permission to use the library, which was administered by the Labour League of Youth. [99] However, the Section does appear to have had some difficulties during the inter-war years. It was reported as closed in 1931, but reappears again the following year. There are no specific references to the Central Women's Section in the post-war Cambridge Labour Party minutes. However, it was often noted when sections closed, such as the one at Cherry Hinton in 1953 and there are no such references to the Central Women's Section closing prior to 1979.[100]

There are similarly few references to the activities of Heeley Women's Section in Sheffield. It is clear that meetings were organised under the auspices of the Section. In 1928, for example, a public meeting was held in Heeley Labour Hall on the subject of 'Education in America'. The address was given by an American lecturer and it precipitated an 'interesting discussion' regarding the differences in the British and American educational systems. Mrs Bruce Glazier [sic] also spoke at the hall under the Auspices of the Women's Section in September 1932.[101] Like the Newport meetings the subjects of these gatherings were concerned with welfare reforms The Women's Section were also involved in organising bazaars, pie suppers, socials and day trips to seaside resorts such as Blackpool.[102]

The fragmentary evidence provided by the three non-metropolitan halls largely concurs that of the Greater London premises, which further endorses Graves' contention. The activities of the various Women's Sections did largely revolve around welfare and pastoral issues. However, as with the Greater London Women's Sections, it should also be noted that 'welfare feminism' was a growing political movement of the inter-war years. It has already been noted that women were in the minority on Labour Party and hall committees for much of the period in question. Between 1918 and 1979, this was not the case in the selected Conservative and Liberal Clubs, which have been researched for this chapter. Women were not only under-represented in these spaces they were either confined to a very small part of them or absent altogether. A 'ladies room' was incorporated into some of the premises from at least the inter-war period onwards. Epsom Liberal and Social Club in Surrey, for example had such a space prior to the commencement of the surviving records in 1923. Other clubs had developed a similar space by the post war years. Preserved annual general meeting records for the early 1960s indicate that Gainsborough and District

Conservative Club in Lincolnshire possessed a 'ladies room'. A dedicated 'annexe' was established at Great Yarmouth Conservative Club in Norfolk in late 1969, after an Emergency General Meeting was called specifically to discuss this issue. It was evidently a highly controversial issue. In spite of the fact that the 'ladies annexe' improved the Club's finances, the chairman noted that a small group of 'antis' had almost caused the resignation of the steward over an unspecified incident.[103]

If women were not entirely restricted to certain parts of the building, they were restricted in the times which they could enter it. Ladies could only be admitted to Stafford County Conservative Club on Sundays and only then if they were accompanied by a member. As late as 1977, the only standing item on the annual general meeting agenda was the "members' willingness to provide this concession".[104] It should be noted that, in some Conservative Clubs, restrictions on women's membership persists until the present day. On 3rd May 2003, for example, the members of Tonge Moor Conservative Club, in the Bolton area, voted on whether women should be permitted to have full membership of the club. They voted against it.[105] Greenford Conservative Club was certainly in the minority of the selected premises. In 1934, there were two women on the committee, which established the club. It is not clear if they were elected to serve on the first official management committee and there are no specific references to the policy of the club on the admittance of women.[106]

For the majority of this period, members of Conservative and Liberal Clubs, with the possible exception of Greenford, perceived them to be a private 'gentlemen's clubs' or working men's institutions and women were either actively excluded or restricted to certain parts of the political and social space. As has already been noted this has not generally been the case in the selected labour halls. However, it would be interesting to compare labour clubs with their Conservative and Liberal counterparts. Like the other clubs, the *raison d'etre* for the labour premises was the provision of inexpensive alcohol. It is possible that the role of women on these premises was entirely different from the halls, in which the sale of 'intoxicants' was not the primary objective.

Women were certainly represented on the leaders' committee, which would have been the nearest equivalent to a management committee in the labour halls. In some years, such as 1939, female members comprised almost half of the committee.[107] However, as with several of the labour halls, it is not entirely possible to get a comprehensive picture of the representation of women, as the members present at the meeting are not always listed. In

spite of this, though, during the inter-war years, none of the labour hall management committees or Constituency Labour Parties encompassed such a high proportion of women. It would be necessary to conduct more research into a greater range of religious premises to establish if the leaders' committee at Bermondsey Wesleyan Methodist Central Hall is representative of the role of women in the management of these halls.

The Sisterhood was the equivalent of the Labour Party Women's Section. There were twice weekly Sisterhood meetings in Bermondsey Wesleyan Methodist Central Hall on Mondays and Wednesdays until these combined in 1943, to become a larger Wednesday weekly meeting. [108] Like several of the Labour Party Women's Sections, precise references to the nature of Sisterhood meetings at the hall have not survived. Despite this, however, it is possible to gain an insight into the kind of work undertaken by Sisterhoods in other Methodist chapels and halls. For example, in Rycroft, South Yorkshire activities of the Sisterhood included 'coffee mornings, autumn fayres and other fundraising events' Members of the Sisterhood in Bourne, Lincolnshire would also perform duties as 'sick visitors'. [109] The first of these is certainly very similar to the work of many of the Labour Party Women's Sections. The second, however, is less so. Although Women's Sections in the selected halls did sometimes undertake fundraising activities for local hospitals and send 'kindly thoughts' to their own sick members, extensive research of rather limited archive material has not uncovered any references to an organised system of hospital or home visits.

It is very interesting that women's organisation in the selected labour halls had more in common with that in at least one Methodist hall, than in several of the other political spaces. In the selected Conservative and Liberal Clubs, women were either restricted to certain areas of the building or excluded from the premises completely. It has already been noted that in some areas of the United Kingdom, for example, South Wales, there were strong connections between the labour movement, non-conformist religion of which Methodism was a substantial part and temperance. It is possible that the Labour Party Women's Sections were influenced by this and the establishment of such organisations as the Methodist Sisterhood. The reasons for women being excluded from the Liberal and Conservative Clubs are not explicitly stated in the surviving archives of the selected premises. It has however been noted that these establishments were set up as either exclusive gentlemen's or working men's clubs.

Extraordinary Activity

The non-political usage of the fifteen selected Greater London labours halls has already been examined in terms of the provisions of advice bureaux, use during the Second World War and post-war non-political usage. It will not be possible to do this in quite the same way with all of the non-political premises. However there are certain elements which it is possible to compare. This will certainly be the case with regard to usage during the Second World War.

It has already been established that many of the selected Greater London Labour Parties held regular advice bureaux or information services on their premises. However, there are no comparable explicit references to such services in the Cambridge or Newport Halls. Conversely, in 1934, it is noted that at Heeley Labour Hall: 'Two thousand five hundred people per annum attend at the office there for advice, information, assistance &c and no charge is ever made'. The precise nature of the assistance given is unclear. A bureaux or information service is not advertised, so it is therefore possible that this assistance is given, as it was in 1925, by a Justice of the Peace attending on the third Monday of each month half an hour before each ward meeting 'to sign papers for the convenience of members and friends'. [110] If this remained accurate, how open the service was to the local residents, on a non-political level, would depend on how broadly the term 'friend' was interpreted. It may have been the case that it was not possible to get advice, without first becoming acquainted with an individual member of the local Party. This would certainly have been a narrower interpretation that that implied in the Greater London halls. There are no comparable references in Cambridge and Newport. However, it would be necessary to research in detail a larger number of halls in different regions to establish whether there was, in fact, a pattern of advice provision, of which Cambridge and Newport were not a part, or the Greater London and Heeley halls were unusual in their provision of such a service. There is no indication of an equivalent bureau being operated in any of the other types of hall.

The Second World War was a catalyst for the dramatic expansion of non-political usage of many of the fifteen selected Greater London labour halls in this study. This section will consider the ways in which usage of the labour halls outside the metropolis was affected by the conflict. It will also examine the contemporary situation in the other kinds of halls.

The Central Labour Hall in Cambridge was requisitioned by the Government for

unspecified military occupation at the beginning of the war. Although the local Party objected to this and, in January 1940, applied for the immediate release of the premises from occupation, the military did renovate part of the hall the following month.[111] There are no further references to a military occupation, but this did not end the direct involvement in the war effort. In July 1940, the Executive Committee contacted the warden to offer the use of the premises in the event of another local air raid.[112] The extent to which the hall was used for this purpose is unclear. Like the labour hall in Cambridge, Witham Public Hall was requisitioned, in this instance for billeted troops by January 1940. It was de-requisitioned more than two years later in mid 1942. Thereafter, it also provided a venue for military and civilian authority exercises and tactical planning as well as Home Guard training.[113] Part of Bermondsey Wesleyan Central Methodist Hall was converted into an air-raid shelter, similar to that in Wimbledon Labour Hall. On one night in February 1941, it was reported that approximately 200 people came to the shelter. This was perceived in almost evangelical terms: 'most of them did not belong to a place of worship and good work was being done'.[114]

The premises of Stow Hill Labour Hall in Newport and the majority of the Conservative and Liberal Clubs in this study were not affected by the war in the same way as these halls. There are no direct references to specifically war related activity on the Newport premises and the only ways that Great Yarmouth Conservative Club was affected were by the curtailing of social events, shortages of some spirits and the preparation of meals 'under difficult circumstances'. However, several members of the National Liberal Club in London remained on the premises throughout the war and undertook local duties, such as volunteering for the home guard or as air-raid wardens. After the war, these men became known as the 'Dog and Duck' Circle, which held regular dinners in the Club in the 1950s.[115] There are no similar references to such co-ordinated activity by the membership of other halls, although it is almost certain that individual members undertook voluntary duties during the war. However, it should be borne in mind that as an exclusive gentleman's club', the National Liberal Club was almost inevitably an exception to many of the rules which governed many of the other, less elitist, premises. The ways in which the various halls in this section were affected by the Second World War, largely reflected the situations in the Greater London labour halls. While some of those premises remained unaffected, others were adapted to become public air-raid shelters or requisitioned by the military.

The post-1945 situation in several of the Greater London labour halls was very different

from the inter-war years. A decline in usage by political organisations necessitated increased revenue from other sources, usually from outside the labour movement. This will be examined in the context of the Cambridge and Newport Halls. The position of the Conservative and Liberal Clubs will also be considered. Is it possible to compare this with usage of non-political spaces?

During the 1950s, the management committee of Cambridge hall adopted the same strategy as many of the London halls and advertised the premises as a venue for largely non-political activities: 'Your next Social will be a success if held at the Labour Hall, Norfolk Street. Also parties, weddings and meetings. Reasonable terms'. In 1953, the Labour Party's Finance Committee recommended the leasing of the hall to a commercial organisation, but retaining the use of the committee rooms and offices. This suggestion was also endorsed by the Executive Committee. [116] However, it is unclear whether or not it was enacted as there are no further references to it in either the surviving records of the Party or the local labour movement newspaper.

There is no explicit indication in the surviving Newport Labour Party records that the premises were leased out to a commercial organisation by Newport Labour Halls Ltd. The only possible clue that this may have been the case was that by 1972, the Party continues to maintain an office on the premises, but hold its Executive and General Committees elsewhere.[117] Leasing out all, or part, of the premises to commercial or non-political organisations was actually adopted by at least two of the Greater London labour halls: Wealdstone and Wimbledon, the designated areas of which became social rather than political spaces. However, this does not seem to have been the case in the other political premises In both the Great Yarmouth and Stafford Conservative Clubs, it was decided that the best way in which to increase membership and thus improve the financial position of the Clubs, was to disassociate the premises from the Party. In 1965, the chairman of Great Yarmouth Conservative Club explained that: 'it is proposed to instruct the committee to take such steps as are necessary to change the name of the club to the Hall Quay Club thereby severing any Conservative ties.[because]... there is no likelihood of our membership increasing whilst we remain a Political Club'. This change was resisted by the Annual General Meeting of the Club until 1971.[118]. Similarly, the word 'Conservative' was dropped from the Stafford County Club's name after an Emergency General Meeting in March 1976.[119]

During the post-war years, several of the management committees of labours halls in this

study slightly changed the name of their premises in order to attract tenants from outside the labour movement. However, unlike the Conservative Clubs in Great Yarmouth and Stafford, there was an attempt in each case to retain in the name some identification with the local or national labour movement. Barnes and Richmond Labour Club and Institute for example became Starr House, after one of the co-founders of the premises and Wimbledon Labour Hall was renamed the William Morris Meeting Rooms in honour of the nineteenth century socialist. There is no indication that any of the Liberal premises altered in this way. In fact there is no surviving evidence of the Liberal Clubs changing in any substantial manner in the post-war years, apart from the introduction of fruit and other slot machines. However, it seems that by this stage, they had become essentially depoliticised spaces.

Inevitably, the approach of the Bermondsey Wesleyan Methodist Central Hall was very different from that of some of the Labour and Conservative political spaces. In 1948, there was some concern expressed by the leaders that 'a lack of members prevented us from doing what we wanted in this important work'.[120] Like the Liberal Clubs, the activities undertaken in the hall did not really change and the membership began to decline prior to the end of the preserved minutes in 1952.

From 1945 onwards, it could be argued that there was only effectively extensive extraordinary usage of the some of the selected labour halls and Conservative Clubs in this study. Activities undertaken on the Liberal Club and Methodist Hall premises did not really change in this period. However, there are some similarities between Great Yarmouth and Stafford Conservative Clubs and Wealdstone and parts of Wimbledon Labour Halls. The usage of all four spaces was transformed from social-political or political-social to entirely social. It should be noted that although political activity almost certainly took place in the Conservative Clubs, they were originally designed as largely leisure spaces. Conversely, the emphasis in the labour halls was largely, but not exclusively, on political activity.

During the course of this chapter it has been argued that activities in the Cambridge, Sheffield and Heeley labour halls, were very similar and in areas such as recreational pursuits, almost identical to those in the Greater London area. There is, in fact, no evidence to indicate a distinctive Greater London labour hall identity. The provision of leisure activities also highlighted similarities between all of the political, religious and civic organisations. In several other instances, especially the role of women, the management

committees of the labour halls have had more in common with the Methodist halls than the other political spaces. Ultimately, however, although there are some similarities, approaches in the various types of halls were largely quite different. The similarities and differences between each of the premises are further highlighted in the two tables below. Figure 9.1 addresses the three provincial halls and Figure 9.2 summarises the evidence from the non-labour movement premises in the established thematic framework.

Figure 9.1 A Comparison of the Provincial Labour Halls

	Inception	Leisure	Workers Education	Women	Second World War	Closure
Cambridge Central	1927	Socials, whist drives, dancing, bazaars Derby draws and tote	Educational provision was made by the NCLC. Books for a library were donated by members of Clare College, Cambridge University. .	In 1930, two out of 11 members of the hall management committee were women. The Constituency Labour Party elected a woman chairman in 1923, 1925, 1951, 1952 and 1963. The Labour Party's Women's Section met on the premises.	Between 1939 and 1940 the hall was requisitioned for unspecified military use.. It was thereafter offered for use during air raids.	1987 (new building erected on same land)
Heeley, Sheffield	c.1924	Socials, whist drives, dancing, bazaars and Derby draws.	There are no specific references to educational provision by the NCLC or WEA. Some lantern lectures took place. There are no references to a library or reading room in the existing records.	The Labour Party's Women's Section met on the premises.	The hall was almost certainly sold immediately prior to, or possibly during, the Second World War.	c.1940
Stow Hill, Newport	1922	Socials, whist drives, dancing, bazaars, Derby draws, tote and meetings of Newport Labour Choral Society.	Educational provision was made by the NCLC. There are no references to a library or reading room on the premises.	During the inter-war years there were two or three women on the Constituency Labour Party Executive Committee and in 1941 a woman chairman was elected. The Labour Party's Women's Section also met on the premises.	There are no specific war related references in the surviving archive.	The precise date of closure is unclear, but the premises were still in use at the end of this period.

Figure 9. 2: A Comparison of Non-Labour Hall premises

	Inception	Leisure Activities	Workers' Education	Women	Second World War
Epsom Liberal Club	c.1887	Whist drives Licensed drinking, billiards,	A library and reading room was established on the premises.	Women's usage of the club was restricted to a 'ladies' room'.	There are no references to war related activities.
Carlisle Liberal Club	1885	Slot machines Licensed drinking	A debating class was held in the club.	There are no references to the role of women in the club.	There are no specific references to war-related activity.
Great Yarmouth Conservative Club	1887	Cards Licensed drinking, billiards	There was a reading room on the premises.	Women were only permitted to use a 'Ladies' annexe'.	The war precipitated a curtailing of social events and some shortages.
Gainsborough Conservative Club	Not known	Slot machines Licensed drinking	There are no references to workers' educational activities in the surviving archive.	Women's usage of the premises was restricted to a 'ladies room'.	No specific references to extraordinary activity have been preserved in the available records.
Greenford Conservative Club	1934	Cards Slot machines, billiards	There are no references to education in the available archive.	There were two women on initial establishing committee of the Conservative Club.	There are no specific references to extraordinary activity in the available records
National Liberal Club	1882	Licensed drinking	The Club held discussion groups, and a series of lectures. There was also a Library. However this was not 'worker's education'.	There were some restrictions on the times of the day in which women could use the premises. There was also a 'ladies room'.	A 'Dog and Duck Circle', was established. The members were home guard and ARP volunteers.
National Conservative Club	No specific date available	Licensed drinking	A library was established on the premises.	There are no references to women in the available archive of the Club.	There are no references to war-related usage in the available records.

Bermondsey Wesleyan Methodist Central Hall	1900	bazaars	Methodist education and bible study classes were held on the premises.	Women were represented on leaders' committee, which managed the hall. The Methodist sisterhood also met on the premises.	Part of the premises was converted into an air-raid shelter.
Witham Public Hall	Not known	Dancing, bazaars	Practical classes were held in subjects such as first aid.	There are no specific references to women's activities on the premises.	Between 1940-1942, the hall was requisitioned for billeted troops. From 1942 until the end of hostilities in 1945 military and civilian authority exercises took place on the premises.

Notes:

1 Cambridge Labour Party, *Silver Jubilee 1912-1937: Twenty Five Years in the History of the Cambridge Labour Party* (Cambridge: Cambridge Labour Party, 1937), pp. 9 – 11. The Cambridge Labour Party records are held at the Cambridgeshire Record Office, Cambridge.
2 *South Wales Weekly Argus,* 27 Aug. 1892
3 *South Wales Weekly Argus,* 1 Oct. 1892.
4 *South Wales Weekly Argus,* 3 Sept. 1892.
5 Heeley History Workshop, *Old Heeley: A Few Notes,* No 2. July 1986, No 9 March 1988.
6 Cambridge Labour Party General Management Committee minutes, 5 Oct. 1927. Original emphasis.
7 Labour Representation Committee of the Newport Trades Council, 13 March 1919; General Council of Newport Trades Council and Labour Party 24 Aug. 1922; 21 Oct. 1922. The Newport Labour Party and Trades Council archive is held at the University of Wales, Swansea.
8 *The Sheffield Forward,* Dec. 1924, June 1925.
9 As the surviving archives are those of the Labour Parties rather than the halls themselves, there are very few specific references to other political users.
10 No detailed records of Park and Heeley Constituency Labour Party Executive or General Committee have been preserved from this period. Some papers have been preserved and these are held at the Sheffield Archives. The majority of the references in this thesis, however, have been extracted from local newspapers.
11 Cambridge Labour Party, General Committee minutes, 7 March 1928; 5 Dec. 1928.
12 Cambridge Labour Party, General Committee minutes, 7 Dec. 1932; 6 June 1934; 2 February 1938. There are virtually no references to such meetings in the post-war records.
13 Alberti, *Beyond Suffrage,* p. 122.
14 Newport Labour Party Executive Committee minutes, 21 July 1933; General Committee minutes, 1 Sept. 1933.
15 Newport Labour Party General Committee minutes, 16 April 1943; 16 Sept. 1955, 19 July 1957, 31 Jan. 1958.
16 Harrow Local Labour Party General Committee minutes, 9 Feb. 1939; Cambridge Labour Party General Committee minutes, 3 July 1935.
17 *The Sheffield Forward,* Feb. 1925; *Park and Heeley Gazette*, April 1933. See for example Cambridge Labour Party Executive Committee minutes, 6 Jan. 1930.
18 Newport Labour Party Executive Committee minutes, 30 Oct. 1939; 1 April 1940; General Committee minutes, 8 Jan. 1943. During the inter-war years, there was another labour hall in the Newport area, known as the Pill Labour Hall. Several meetings and conferences took place on those premises. Newport Labour Party General Committee minutes, 11 June 1965. There is no evidence to suggest that attendance at these conferences was strictly limited to Labour Party members.
19 Richmond and Barnes Divisional Labour Party General Management Committee minutes, 17 Jan. 1944.
20 Newport Constituency Labour Party, General Management Committee minutes 18 July 1924; 23 Aug. 1941.
21 Philip Tether, *Clubs: A Neglected Aspect of Conservative Organisation*, (Hull: Hull Papers in Politics No 42, Hull University,1988), p. 2.
22 Great Yarmouth Conservative Club, AGM minutes, 27 Jan. 1937. It is unlikely that the Theatre Plain Club is also a Conservative institution. The Great Yarmouth

Conservative Club archive is held at the Norfolk Record Office, Norwich.
23 Epsom Liberal and Social Club management committee minutes, 10 July 1928. The Epsom Liberal and Social Club archive is held at the Surrey History Centre, Woking.
24 Epsom Liberal and Social Club management committee minutes, 26 Nov. 1923.
25 Booking forms for Witham Public Hall dated, 7 Nov. 1935, 17 Oct. 1935; 11 Oct. 1938; 23 June 1942 . The Witham Public Hall archive is held at the Essex Record Office, Chelmsford.
26 Cambridge Labour Party Executive Committee minutes 1 Oct. 1928; 3 Dec. 1928. It is probable that the latter organisation evolved out of the inspiration for the former.
27 As has already been noted, the Young Labour League was founded in Clapham in 1920 and was the fore-runner of the Labour League of Youth, which was actually established in 1926; Newport Labour Party Executive Committee minutes, 16 Dec. 1924; 15 June 1925, General Committee minutes, 25 Sept. 1925; Executive Committee minutes, 14 Dec. 1926.
28 Newport Labour Party Young Labour League minutes, 30 April 1928; 14 May 1928; Labour League of Youth minutes, 28 Nov. 1934.
29 Newport Labour Party Young Labour League minutes, 18 June 1928, 29 Oct. 1928; Labour League of Youth minutes, 29 Aug. 1934.
30 Newport Labour Party Young Labour League Committee minutes, 3 May 1928; Labour League of Youth minutes, 28 April 1930; 11 Nov. 1930; 12 May 1930. Leisure as a whole will be considered separately.
31 Newport Labour League of Youth minutes, 6 March 1935; 27 Nov. 1935.
32 It should be noted that the records are incomplete at this stage. No Labour Party minutes have been preserved from the period June 1944 to Jan. 1954. Newport Labour Party Executive Committee minutes, 30 Dec. 1936, 3 June 1954; 22 Oct. 1956; 16 June 1961; General Committee minutes, 25 July 1975. The preserved minutes cease in 1976.
33 Cambridge Labour Party General Committee minutes, 2 Sept. 1936; Executive Committee minutes, 4 January 1937; 1 Feb. 1937.
34 Cambridge Labour Party Executive Committee minutes, 1 April 1940; 3 Sept. 1952; Balance Sheet for year ending Sept. 1959; General Committee minutes, 5 Sept.1962; 9 Jan. 1963; 2 Dec. 1964; 28 Nov. 1966; Annual Report 1967; General Committee minutes, 5 Oct. 1970. More research would be required to determine whether this is a local, regional or national conference.
35 *The Sheffield Forward*, Dec. 1924; Feb. 1925; Park and Heeley Gazette, April 1934.
36 Bermondsey Wesleyan Methodist Central Hall Leaders' minutes, 2 March 1921; 18 Jan. 1942. The Bermondsey Wesleyan Methodist Central Hall archive is held at the Southwark Local Studies Centre.
37 Bermondsey Wesleyan Methodist Central Hall Leaders' Annual Church Meeting, 11 Jan. 1949.
38 Joint meeting between the Executive Committee of Cambridge Labour Party and Trade Union representatives, 20 June 1927. The location of these meetings is not stated.
39 Cambridge Labour Party Executive Committee minutes, 5 Nov. 1928; 22 Jan. 1929; General Committee minutes, 7 Nov. 1928.
40 Cambridge Labour Party Executive Committee minutes, 4 April 1932; 3 May 1937.
41 Cambridge Labour Party General Committee minutes, 5 June 1967. Any trade union responses to this enquiry have not been preserved.
42 Newport Labour Party General Committee minutes, 11 Sept. 1922.
43 Newport Labour Party General Committee minutes, 28 Aug. 1925; Executive Committee minutes, 19 Sept. 1930; 20 July 1932; 28 Feb. 1944. Further research would be required to ascertain the reasons for the withdrawal of support by the Iron and Steel Confederation.
44 *Park and Heeley Gazette*, Jan. 1930.
45 Cambridge Labour Party, Executive Committee minutes, 22 June 1923; 8 Jan.

1929; 3 March 1930; General Committee minutes, 7 Sept. 1932; Executive Committee minutes, 3 January 1934.

46 Newport Labour Party, General Committee minutes, 1 Jan. 1926; Annual General Meeting, 8 Feb.1929; Executive Committee, 18 Feb. 1929; General Committee, 22 March 1929.

47 Newport Labour Party, Executive Committee minutes, 21 July 1933; 12 March 1934; General Committee minutes, 9 Oct. 1936. The desire of the Newport CLP to participate in the Council of Action was ruled 'out of order' by the Labour Party NEC and it is unclear whether such a Council was ever established.

48 As has been noted on a number of occasions, the London archives are highly fragmentary and it is unlikely that some of the main source material used, such as Fenner Brockway's biography of Alfred Salter or the *East Ham Citizen,* would refer to specific communications from the NUWM.

49 Bermondsey Wesleyan Central Methodist Hall Leaders' minutes, 14 Dec. 1927.

50 Stephen G. Jones, *Workers at Play,* p.149.

51 Cambridge Labour Party, General Committee minutes, 5 June 1929; Executive Committee minutes 22 Jan. 1929; 4 April 1932; 31 March 1952; 4 April 1961.

52 See for example Newport Labour Party, Executive Committee minutes, 8 Jan. 1929; 20 Oct. 1930.

53 See for example *The Sheffield Forward,* Feb. 1925; June 1925; *Park and Heeley Gazette,* Jan. 1930.

54 Cambridge Labour Party, Executive Committee minutes, 9 Jan. 1933; 4 Sept. 1933; 3 May 1937.

55 Newport Labour Party, General Committee minutes, 13 Aug. 1925, 1 Jan. 1937.

56 *The Sheffield Forward,* Dec 1924; April 1934.

57 The post-war records of the Park and Heeley Constituency Labour Party indicate that Heeley Labour Hall was no longer functioning.

58 See for example Epsom Liberal and Social Club management committee minutes, 2 July 1923.

59 This is only because such activities were not referred to in the local labour movement newspapers or the Woodseats Women's Section minutes, which form the core of the inter-war labour hall archive.

60 Newport Labour Party, Annual General Meeting, 28 Jan. 1928; General Committee, 16 April 1943; Cambridge Labour Party, Finance Committee minutes, 22 June 1953; 9 June 1969.

61 Cambridge Labour Party, General Committee minutes 2 Aug. 1961. Newport Labour Party, Executive Committee minutes 24 Nov. 1964, General Committee minutes, 6 Jan. 1967.

62 Mike Savage, *50th Anniversary of the Official Opening of Greenford Conservative Club, Tuesday December 11th 1984*, (Greenford: Greenford Conservative Club, 1984) p.14; Gainsborough District Conservative Club, Secretary's Reports for 1961; 1963. (HMNTS P.P.7618.mb/1).The few surviving Gainsborough Conservative Club papers are held at the British Library, London.

63 Robert Fell, *Carlisle Liberal Club Ltd: Club History and Reflections on Earlier Days.* (Carlisle: Carlisle Liberal Club 1981), p. 27; Great Yarmouth Conservative Club AGM minutes, 9 Feb. 1967. Denis Gilbert, *The County Club, Stafford,* (Stafford: The County Club, 1977), p.18.

64 Cambridge Labour Party, Executive Committee minutes, 4 July 1927; 25 July 1927; 3 Oct. 1927; 30 April 1934; 29 Sept. 1952.

65 Newport Labour Party, General Committee minutes, 13 Aug. 1925; Annual General Meeting, 25 Jan. 1941; Executive Committee, 28 Sept. 1942.

66 *The Sheffield Forward,* Dec. 1924; Feb. 1925; *Park and Heeley Gazette*, April 1931; April 1933.

67 Witham Public Hall contracts of hire: 24 January 1936; 5, 6 and 13 Dec. 1935; 31 Jan.1935, 15 Dec. 1935; 6 Dec.1936; 28 Oct. 1938; 14 Nov. 1938; 3, 11 Feb.1938, 31 Dec. 1938.
68 Secretary of Witham British Legion to the Clerk of the Estates Committee of the Witham Public Hall, 31 Dec. 1939.
69 Newport Labour Party, Executive Committee minutes, 16 March 1926; 7 Sept. 1936. See for example Newport Labour Party General Committee, minutes, 16 Sept. 1955. Executive Committee minutes, 25 Nov. 1963.
70 Cambridge Labour Party, Executive Committee minutes, [ ] January 1961. The precise date of this meeting is concealed by the minute book binding; General Committee minutes, 7 Dec. 1970.
71 Woodseats Women's Section of the Park and Heeley Constituency Labour Party, minutes, 12 June 1929.
72 See for example Witham Public Hall contracts of hire, 2 Nov. 1935; 18, 19 Nov. 1938; Bermondsey Wesleyan Methodist Central Hall Leaders minutes, 6 June 1951.
73 Epsom Liberal and Social Club management committee minutes, 26 Nov.1923; Great Yarmouth Conservative Club, 22 Jan. 1936; Savage, *50th Anniversary of the Official Opening of Greenford Conservative Club*, p.12.
74 Newport Labour Party Executive Committee minutes, 13 May 1930; 23 March 1931.
75 *The Longman Dictionary of the English Language* (London: Longman Ltd, 1984); Joint meeting between Newport Labour Party and Newport Labour Halls Ltd, 25 June 1923. No records of how successful this event was have been preserved in the Newport Labour Party archive.
76 See for example contracts of hire between St John's Ambulance Brigade and Witham Public Hall in the winter of 1935 and Witham Public Hall and Witham Civil Defence Association between 1959 and 1961.
77 Newport Constituency Labour Party, General Committee minutes 10 Sept. 1926; Executive Committee minutes, 30 Jan. 1933; General Committee minutes, 30 Nov. 1940; 31 Jan. 1958.
78 Cambridge Constituency Labour Party Executive Committee minutes, 4 May 1925; Political Education sub committee, minutes 22 June 1953.
79 At least in halls for which a pre-war archive survives.
80 *Park and Heeley Gazette,* Jan. 1930.
81 Directors' Report to the 1886 General Meeting cited in Fell *Carlisle Liberal Club Ltd* p.22.
82 See for example the Annual Report of the National Liberal Club for 1953 and *The National Liberal Club 1951, A Brochure* (London: National Liberal Club, 1951).
83 Bermondsey Wesleyan Methodist Central Hall Leaders minutes, 9 June 1948; 9 Dec. 1948; Annual Church Meeting, 11 January 1949.
84 Cambridge Labour Party, Executive Committee minutes, 30 July 1928; 2 May 1932.
85 Cambridge Labour Party, Executive Committee minutes, 30 July 1928.
86 Rose, *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes* p.79.
87 Rules of the National Conservative Club, 1888. These are held at the British Library, London. Annual Report of the Farnham Market House and Town Hall Company Ltd ,1886. The archive of the Farnham Market House and Town Hall Company Ltd is held at the Surrey History Centre, Woking.
88 One of the first references to a reading room in Epsom Liberal and Social Club was the management committee minutes of 2 July 1923; Great Yarmouth Conservative Club minutes, 27 Jan. 1960.
89 Gilbert, *The County Club, Stafford*, p.19.
90 Great Yarmouth Conservative Club AGM minutes, 26 Jan. 1927.
91 Epsom Liberal and Social Club management committee minutes, 29 Jan. 1924; Bulletins of the National Liberal Club, July 1954, Oct. 1954, April 1956.These are held at

the British Library, London.
92 Cambridge Labour Party, minutes of Annual General Meetings, 1923, 1925, 1951 and 1952, Executive Committee minutes, 7 April 1930; Annual General Meeting minutes, 6 Feb. 1963.
93 Newport Labour Party AGM minutes, 25 Jan. 1941; See for example Newport Labour Party Executive Committee minutes, 3 March 1930; Joint meeting of the Executive Committees of Newport Labour Party and Newport Trades Council minutes, 26 March 1930. There are no women on the Trades Council Executive Committee at this stage.
94 Graves, *Labour Women,* p. 225.
95 See, for example, Newport Labour Party, Executive Committee minutes, 3 March 1930; 20 July 1932; 9 Sept. 1932; 16 March 1926.
96 Newport Labour Party Executive Committee minutes , 18 May 1923; 7 Nov. 1932
97 Newport Labour Party General Committee minutes, 4 September 1931; 184 National Health Insurance 1924-1926, in *Office Holders in Modern Britain X: Officials of Royal Commissions of Inquiry 1870-1939* (London: Institute of Historical Research, 1995). *The Globe,* 8 April 1925 cited on http://archiver.rootsweb.com/th/read/BRITISHHOMECHILDREN/2004-02/1077059836. Accessed on 8 Oct. 2005; Newport Labour Party Executive Committee, 18 Sept 1942; General Committee 4 April 1944.
98 Newport Labour Party Executive Committee minutes, 16 Dec. 1924. General Committee meeting 1936
99 Cambridge Labour Party, Executive Committee minutes, 2 March 1927; Joint Meeting of Cambridge Labour Party Executive Committee and Local Trade Union Representatives, 20 June 1927; Executive Committee minutes, 2 July 1928; 2 May 1932.
100 Cambridge Labour Party Executive Committee minutes, 30 March 1931; Financial Committee minutes, 24 July 1953. It is of course possible that the Central Women's Section had amalgamated with another one by this stage.
101 Woodseats Women's Section of the Heeley Division of the Park Constituency Labour Party minutes, 29 July 1928, 21 Sept. 1932.
102 Woodseats Women's Section of the Heeley Division of the Park Constituency Labour Party minutes, 12 June 1929; 29 Jan. 1930; *Park and Heeley Gazette*, Jan. 1930; Women's Section of the Heeley Division of the Park Constituency Labour Party minutes, 4 March 1931.
103 Gainsborough and District Conservative Club Secretary's report for 1961; Great Yarmouth Conservative Club Emergency General Meeting, 29 May 1969; Chairman's report for 1970.
104 Gilbert, *The County Club, Stafford,* p. 11.
105 *Bolton Evening News*, 5 May 2003.
106 Savage,*50th Anniversary of the Official Opening of Greenford Conservative Club,* p.7.
107 See for example Bermondsey Wesleyan Methodist Central Hall Leaders' minutes 22 Nov. 1939.
108 Bermondsey Wesleyan Methodist Central Hall leaders minutes, 25 Sept. 1943.
109 Memories of Graham Uttley
http://www.hilarymaryjackson.pwp.blueyonder.co.uk/Hicklings%20Shop.htm. Notes on the life of Florence Tipler http://homepages.which.net/~rex/bourne/diary200411.htm. Both accessed, on 14 July 2005.
110 *Park and Heeley Gazette,* July 1934; *Sheffield Forward,* Feb. 1925
111 Cambridge Labour Party Executive Committee minutes, 3 Oct. 1939; 8 Jan. 1940; 5 Feb. 1940.
112 Cambridge Labour Party Executive Committee minutes, 1 July 1940.
113 Invitation to a Combined Military and Civil TEWT at Witham Public Hall at 7pm on 13 July 1943. Agreement for hire of Witham Public Hall dated Aug. 1942.

114 Bermondsey Wesleyan Methodist Central Hall, leaders minutes, 23 Feb.1941.
115 Great Yarmouth Conservative Club, Annual General Meeting minutes, 28 Jan. 1942. It is almost certain that it had been necessary to sell Heeley Labour Hall prior to the outbreak of the war. See for example the National Liberal Club Bulletin, July 1956.
116 *Cambridge Citizen,* Jan. 1952. It should be noted that this is a labour movement newspaper. Cambridge Labour Party Finance Committee minutes, 30 Dec. 1953; Executive Committee minutes, 4 Jan. 1954.
117 Newport Labour Party, Executive Committee minutes, 16 Sept. 1972.
118 Great Yarmouth Conservative Club, Chairman's report for 1965. Annual General Meeting minutes, Feb. 1971.
119 Gilbert, *The County Club, Stafford*, p.6.
120 Bermondsey Wesleyan Methodist Central Hall, leaders minutes, 1948.

10. Did Labour Halls in the Greater London Area Decline?

Between 1945 and 1979, it is clear that many of the surviving halls declined as political spaces. This section will consider the evidence from the selected Greater London halls and also briefly refer to the provincial halls, for comparative purposes. There is some indication that this decline was not necessarily a uniform process, which coincided with the fluctuations in the fortunes of the national labour movement. In this context, the section will examine several of the theories posited for the decline of party political activism both inside the labour movement and more generally. It will consider the impact of television and home-centred recreation and the rise of the single issue pressure group, before going on to consider the nature of the difficulties experienced by local Labour Parties, emphasising a lack of reform at a local level. However, there were other factors, not examined in the historiography, which dictated the decline of many of the selected labour halls. The main reason for this was the increasing cost of maintaining often aging premises, in the face of decreasing income from lettings. This will be illustrated by a detailed examination of the evidence from the surviving archives of several of the halls.

Decline of Party Political Activism

Political participation has been defined as: 'citizen involvement in politics through for example voting, group and party activity aimed at influencing government and public policy.'[1] In 1979, at the end of the period in question, at least one investigation into political activism in Britain and similar contemporary systems identified low levels of participation and questioned 'how the business of representative democracy is ever carried out'. [2] Traditionally, the apparent post-war decline in political activism has been associated with greater provision of home centred leisure activities, especially the role of television, which impacted on associational life.[3] It has also been posited that rather than declining, political activism has taken on a different form: membership of a single issue or pressure group, rather than a multi issue political party.

The impact of television on leisure provision in labour halls in the last two decades of the period under examination has already been referred to during the course of the this thesis. However, it is worth considering it more generally. Mark Donnelly has argued that 'television's rise to become a near universal presence in people's homes was the most important cultural transformation of the sixties'. In 1961, 75 percent of the British population owned a television set. Ten years later this figure had risen to 91 percent, with the British public watching, on average, almost 20 hours of television per week. This was the greatest number of hours in Europe. Inevitably 'this omnipresence changed social life and habits in Britain'.[4] The impact of this was clearly felt by more than one political party. The reaction of several local labour movement activists has already been noted. The impact was not limited to labour movement premises. Carlisle Liberal Club, for example, experienced an 'appreciable financial problem' after the 1950s, which 'saw noticeable changes in social habits and leisure activities steadily manifesting themselves following the immediate post-war years.'[5] The rise of television as a home-centred leisure activity would definitely have contributed to this problem.

The rise of television could also have had a negative impact upon the number of people using the labour halls in another way. In 1965, Frank Bealey, J. Blondel and W.P. McGann examined the role of television in election campaigns and contended that:

> It is clear that a large number of people saw the [1959] television election programmes and that those who saw them had a greater knowledge of General Election issues than those who did not... Thus the party organizations may indeed be deprived eventually of their 'educating' and 'agitating' functions and be left with the humdrum task of 'getting out the vote'.[6]

More than 30 years later, it was contended by Patrick Seyd and Paul Whiteley that the Labour Party hierarchy appreciated the new role of television in politics:

> The prevailing wisdom of the Gaitskellite leadership ... appeared to be that television and political advertising had replaced the need for campaigning footsoldiers. The local candidate, local party organisation

and party membership had little impact on the uniform national swing of voters which was determined by national campaigning.

They go on to assert that this was one of the reasons that by the 1980s, 'the grass roots of this old established mass party had withered.'[7] Was it inevitable that if people could be 'educated' without leaving their living rooms, activities organised in the labour halls would be adversely affected? If this was the case, as the first quotation implies, it would have been a long term process. Political television would have deprived the labour hall meetings of future audiences, rather than preventing long-term members from attending. It was, of course, possible that the labour hall committees could have turned the new interest in political television to their advantage by renting a set for use on the premises. As has been noted, during the 1920s and 1930s, wirelesses and cinematographs were hired by various organisations and used for political education on the premises. It is interesting that no references survive in the post-war archives to these organisations hiring televisions in order to screen political programmes at meetings. However, the reason for this is likely to have been that in the context of declining attendance at meetings and the rising costs of maintaining the premises, the rental of a television set was simply too expensive.

The argument that the rise of single-issue or pressure groups was a significant factor in the decline of traditional political party membership in the post-war decades was particularly significant in the 1970s and 1980s. In 1974, for example, McKenzie contended that pressure groups had become: 'a far more important channel of communication than parties for the transmission of political ideas from the mass of the citizenry to their rulers.' Eleven years later, Moran agreed with this assessment, stating that 'pressure groups now seriously rival parties in the system of representation'.[8] However, John Curtice has noted that 'only a relatively small minority of people are members of a pressure group'. Surviving statistical evidence is particularly vague in this area. Two different surveys estimated that in 1974, 17 percent of people 'frequently or sometimes' became involved in activities linked with such organisations and in 1983, six percent of the population were members of single-issue or pressure groups. These figures were lower than contemporary

comparable democracies such as West Germany or the United States of America. [9] Paul Byrne has further argued that many members of traditional political organisations such as the Labour Party also supported 'social movements' such as Greenpeace or CND.[10] It is therefore possible that, although important, the impact of pressure or single issue groups on tradition political party membership was not as significant as some contemporary commentators believed.

Single issue and pressure groups had traditionally been associated with the selected labour halls in the inter-war years. As has already been noted the Spanish Civil War, for example, provided the catalyst for many local 'aid to Spain' committees and 'peace councils'. Links with Russia also precipitated a plethora of organisations in support of that country. There are fewer specific references to single issue organisations using the remaining premises between 1945 and 1979. There is no surviving written evidence in the labour hall archives at least, to suggest, for example, that the local branches of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND) extensively used any of the London halls. However, at least one Wimbledon activist remembers that CND posters were displayed and the journal of the local branch was made available at Wimbledon Labour Hall.[11]

Outside the Greater London area, the position was similar to that of Wimbledon. CND posters were displayed in the Cambridge Central Labour Hall and the local Labour Party sent contingents on the CND Weatherfield and Aldermaston Marches in 1961 and 1962.[12] In spite of this support, even in the Cambridge hall there is no specific evidence that the local CND branch actually met at the hall. There are two possible reasons for this paucity. As is the case with several other issues, the surviving evidence from these years is almost entirely extracted from Constituency Labour Party records. These do not necessarily refer to other organisations which used the selected halls. Another possible explanation is that the local CND branches did not meet at the labours hall at all, because of its complex relationship with the Labour Party. It has been noted that although many Labour Party members also supported CND and were sympathetic to the idea of unilateral disarmament, the Party leadership was not. In 1947, the decision to join the 'nuclear club'

was taken by a Labour Government and the Party Conference rejected the principle of unilateral disarmament ten years later. In 1964, when the Wilson Government was elected, the pro-nuclear policy of the previous Conservative administration was adopted.[13] It is possible that as a result of the Labour Party's apparently pro-nuclear stance, local CND branches did not perceive labour halls to be appropriate places in which to meet. Further, more extensive research would be required to establish the exact meeting places of many of the local branches.

There is some evidence to suggest that other single issue pressure groups did use at least one labour hall as a focal point for their activities at the end of the period in question and into the 1980s. Merton Anti-Apartheid Group and the local Miners' Support Group, for example, were both regular tenants of Wimbledon Labour Hall. Ruskin House, Croydon was similarly used by comparative groups during the Miners' Strike of 1984-1985.

It is clear then, that the labour halls and other political spaces in this study were affected, to an extent at least, by both the rise of television and the alternative kind of political activism represented by single-issue or pressure groups. However, the lack of post-war evidence of pressure group meeting places renders detailed analyses of their role in the decline of labour halls as political spaces as problematic.

Decline of active participation within the Labour Party

The decline of active participation within the Labour Party, a major tenant of the selected halls, is evidently of crucial importance in the consideration of the decline of labour halls as political spaces in the Greater London area. Official membership statistics are indicative of the extent of the decline. The statistics indicate that individual Labour Party membership continuously decreased from high points of over one million in 1952 and 1953 to little more than 660,000 at the end of this study in 1979. [14] It is probable that even these decreasing figures do not reflect the actual levels of activism within the Labour Party; estimates of one third of the membership being active during this period are considered to be 'generous'.[15]

Four main theories have been put forward to account for the difficulties experienced by the Labour Party in this period. The first of these, the 'affluent worker' theory, implies that the economic boom of the 1950s was responsible for the decline of enthusiasm for the Labour Party at an electoral level. Secondly, it has been theorised that post-war demographic changes reduced the role of Constituency Labour Parties in their local communities. More recently, it has been argued that the lack of modernisation within the Party at both a national and local level and its inability to respond to the social change of the post war decades dented its popularity. The final theory is that after 1945, activists identified with single-issue or pressure groups more closely than broad organisations, such as the Labour Party. The role of pressure groups in post-war politics has already been considered in this section. It is useful to examine the remaining theories consecutively.

From the 1960s onwards, the 'affluent worker' theory was posited as a possible explanation for the decline in the electoral popularity of the Labour Party. This theory contended that the rising wages and resultant consumer boom of the 1950s had created a new kind of worker who perceived themselves as middle class and therefore their sympathies were more likely to err towards the Conservative than the Labour Party. However, even in the 1960s, this was not a consensual view. In 1968, for example, a study indicated that, in Luton at least, Labour Party voters accounted for seventy-five percent of those 'affluent workers' surveyed.[16] The 'affluent worker' theory has also been disputed in the more modern literature. Keith Laybourn noted that the rise in the number of trade unionists during these years, the majority of whom were Labour voters, rendered the affluent worker argument 'a poor explanation of Labour's decline'. This view has been supported elsewhere in the literature. Nick Tiratsoo suggested that the Labour Party's difficulties in the 1950s were more likely to have been caused by its 'ambiguous attitude' to affluence and consumerism and its inability to fully engage with those social groups directly affected by the consumer boom of the 1950s, than the 'working class embourgeoisification' argument.[17]

This argument can be extended into the 1960s. Mark Donnelly has noted a perceived 'cultural malaise', focusing on the apparent Americanisation of

British popular culture: 'Glossy, American-style mass media images were particularly noxious for the high minded left, who were convinced that the working classes were being distracted from the repressive nature of capitalism by trashy 'spectacle".[18] It was clear that certain elements in the Party were not connecting with a section of the working classes, the core of Labour's support.

The second theory which has been put forward is that post-war demographic changes reduced the role of the various Constituency Labour Parties in their local communities. K. Von Beyme, for example, has argued that the decline of traditional working class communities after 1945 and increasing diversity in society weakened the ties between the Party and its core supporters. Sue .Goss specifically cites Labour Parties in South London to support the contention that during the inter-war years the Party had been at the centre of the 'social and political life' of the local community. By the late 1960s, however, it was a 'seldom activated election machine'. She concludes that: 'generational and demographic changes meant that the local party was no longer a part of this local community'.[19] It is perhaps ironic, then, that increasing non-political usage in the post war years has given some of the labour halls a more direct and generic role in their local districts.

The difficulties of the Labour Party, during the 1950s and 1960s at least, have been partially attributed to a marked lack of modernisation at local level. It has been contended that modernisation was opposed by a proportion of the active membership, because this process would result in a greater level of professionalism, which was largely distrusted. Voluntarism was perceived as an integral part of Labour Party political culture and even the otherwise radical 'Wilson Report' on Party organisation, in 1955, did not suggest that local organisation should be made entirely professional. [20] Traditional party activities were also no longer perceived as attractive: 'the drama of the public meeting was being outmoded by alternative theatres, notably the nefarious television'. [21]

This is not to suggest that there was complete political stagnation on the left-wing in what Arthur Marwick has described as the "participatory sixties" and

the 1970s.[22] Such activity simply took a different form, which was not focused on the formal political party structure and thus not necessarily situated in labour halls. Mark Donnelly has noted, for example, that in the 1960s many politically aware young people were 'disengaged from party- or class- based politics'. These activists became involved with CND and similar protest groups, or on issues such as second wave feminism, race, and anti-Vietnam war movements which 'favoured the march and the demonstration over the committee room'.[23] The impact of this on the selected labour halls has already been noted in the consideration of single-issue groups: there are no references to many of such organisations using the premises as focal points for their activities.

Although there is no indication of the motivation of activists, the evidence provided by the surviving archives of the Constituency Labour Parties does seem to substantiate the fact that there was little modernisation at local level. Many of the activities arranged by Richmond and Barnes Labour Party between 1956 and 1979 were almost identical to those of the inter-war years. An examination of the Party's programme in 1956 itself, reveals that one of the main political events of the year was a 'day school' on 'The Problems of Rents' and this attracted an audience of nine members. Social activities for that year were listed as; a summer fair, a jumble sale, two sales of Christmas goods, at least one dance and various prize draws. Party activity in the 1970s tended towards a similar pattern. Meetings, both at Starr House and in the local area were inevitably the kernel of the Party's programme and that of the Labour League of Youth and there are no references to experimentation with other ideas. The issues were different from those of the 1920s and 1930s. In 1971 and 1972, for example, at least one ward of the Richmond Party was involved in the Anti-Common Market Campaign. However the methods employed did not tend to change. This apparently traditional approach was not wholeheartedly endorsed by the membership. In 1972 and 1973, a series of meetings on subjects as diverse as 'Health Centres in the Reorganised Health Service', 'Unemployment', 'Disarmament' and 'the US in Vietnam' attracted only an average attendance of 10 members. Social activities in the early 1970s were also reminiscent of the inter-war period; largely limited to socials and parties. [24]

Other Labour Parties were in a similar position to Richmond and Barnes. In 1966, Peckham Labour Party was particularly concerned about the 'image' the Party was projecting and a General Committee meeting was arranged to evaluate the available options. The discussion centred on two possible courses of action: 'performance', concentrating on postal voters 'and some form of organisation at elections' or focusing on the social side of party activity: 'Juke Boxes, Old Tyme Dances, Talent Shows, family evenings. Having got this we could move on to debating or discussion groups'.[25] The members present did not reach a definite conclusion regarding the direction the Party should take and the meeting did not precipitate large scale change. During the 1970s, Peckham Constituency Labour Party undertook similar activities to the local Party in Richmond and Barnes. Meetings were at the core of the programme. However, in 1975, there was an attempt to present political education in a slightly different way. A monthly 'Wednesday Club' was established, to which it was 'hoped to invite speakers'. There is no indication that the substance of these meetings was radically different from that which had preceded them. Subjects addressed included: 'the philosophy and workings of the Community Land Act'. Although many of the social activities were also similar to those undertaken in the inter-war period, barbeques were particularly popular at Lansbury House in the 1970s. [26]

The surviving archive of Wimbledon Constituency Labour Party also indicates very little change to the Party programme in the post-war decades. During the 1950s, there were few references to specific political activities, which could potentially involve the ordinary membership of the Party. Executive and General Committee minutes dealt primarily with the representation of the CLP on other local bodies. However, in October and November 1956, the Suez Crisis precipitated public and open air meetings in the labour hall and its environs. Like many of the other events, which have been considered in this section, the public meeting in the labour hall was recorded in the minutes as having been 'not well attended'. Although as attendance figures for this meeting have not been preserved, it is impossible to place this comment in any kind of context. There was, however, one difference from pre-war activity. From the late 1940s, onwards, a Labour Party discussion group met regularly on the premises. There are very few references to the number of

members involved on the group, or its specific activities. However, it did submit a resolution to an Executive Committee meeting, endorsing the opposition of the Parliamentary Labour Party to the use of 'armed force at Suez'. [27]

By 1961, it was clear that reform of the Party at an organisational level was necessary as two ward groups had ceased functioning. The financial position of the Party as a whole was very weak. Wimbledon CLP responded with a number of measures. The existing social committee resolved itself into a 'ways and means' committee. There are no references to the precise nature of the activities organised by this body, but it was noted that the committee made an important, if unspecified, fiscal contribution. A newsletter was also inaugurated to publicise Party events and the aforementioned discussion group was restarted. The main 'innovation', however, was a dedicated 'working party', which was established to 'prepare for the coming elections'.[28] The long term success of these new measures is unclear from the surviving minutes.

Until at least 1979, Constituency Labour Party leisure activities remained similar to those undertaken in the inter-war years. Socials and dancing maintained a significant presence in the party programme. The dominance of the whist drive was, however, replaced by bingo and the Party also contributed to 'The Kingston upon Thames Tote'. The popularity of bingo as a post-war Labour Party leisure and fundraising activity was not limited to the Greater London area. Tony Benn remembers that a labour hall in his Bristol constituency was not available to hire for a political meeting, because it would coincide with the weekly 'bingo night'.[29]

The activities of Harrow Central Divisional Labour Party, which met at Wealdstone Labour Hall were similar to those of the other Constituency Labour Parties in the post-war years. In November 1951, the local Party arranged an aggregate meeting to discuss: 'ways and means of strengthening the movement in the light of experience gained at the recent general election'.[30] As was the case with several other such gatherings, the conclusions which were reached by the meeting are not recorded. However,

there was no perceptible change in the Party's programme after this date. General Committee meetings continued to address such subjects as 'current housing problems related to local government policy'. By 1969, there were serious concerns over the financial position of the Party. However, suggestions to address this problem were largely 'traditional'. A jumble sale, a 'twice yearly constituency draw' and holding appeals and collections at meetings were among the proposals put forward.[31]

The Mile End division of Stepney Labour Party experienced severe difficulties in the post-war years, which resulted in 1946 in an official Labour Party enquiry into local organisation in the constituency. This recommended constant 'oversight' of the Party's activities.[32] The specific activities undertaken thereafter, however, were not radically different from those already cited. In 1948, it was decided that 'street corner meetings should be promoted' and that social and leisure activities should 'play an increasing part' in the Party's programme.[33] As was the case with several of the other Constituency Labour Parties at this time, some traditional political activities were not popular. In 1950, for example propaganda meetings were so badly attended that it was deemed necessary to suspend them. This was also extended to the traditional leisure provision, which was largely restricted to socials, dancing and various types of draw. In 1951, the chairman of the social sub committee noted that: 'The Christmas Draw was unsuccessful, indicative of the apathy existing in the Party. He then dealt with the other social activities and underlined the poor response'.[34]

It is clear therefore that the evidence provided by the selected Constituency Labour Parties in parts of the Greater London area, largely substantiates the theory that there was a distinct lack of modernisation at local level in the post-war decades. However, was the Greater London experience different from other localities in England and Wales? It is possible to get a strictly limited indication of the level of local reform outside the metropolis, by briefly considering Cambridge City and Newport Constituency Labour Parties.

There was an apparent lack of reform within Cambridge Labour Party, which mirrors that of the Greater London halls. As with many of the metropolitan

halls, public and open air meetings, on subjects such as the 'denationalisation of road transport' continued to be regarded as the kernel of the Cambridge Party's political activities. Weekend schools were also held on subjects such as 'the EEC'. There were some innovations. A 'Brains Trust' was organised and a discussion group on education formed.[35] The discussion group met until at least 1967. Both of these activities had also been adopted by the selected metropolitan Labour Parties. Unlike some of the London Parties, though, there were no meetings held on the premises, which specifically considered the future direction of the organisation.

Leisure activities undertaken by Cambridge City Labour Party in the post-war decades were very similar to those organised before 1945 in both Cambridge and the Greater London halls. Socials, jumble sales and Grand National, derby and Christmas draws tended to dominate the Party's programme. There was, however, at least one post-war development in recreational activities: the 'wine and cheese party'. As has been noted in the chapter on 'leisure and finance', wine and cheese parties were also adopted by at least one Constituency Labour Party in the Greater London area.[36]

The preserved archive of Newport Constituency Labour Party indicates a similar lack of reform to both Cambridge and the selected Greater London Labour Parties. Party political and leisure activities remained almost identical to those undertaken in the inter-war years. There are not many references to significant large scale political work, but speakers on subjects such as 'education' were regularly invited to address general management committee meetings.[37] Recreational and fundraising activities were also largely unchanged. There were some experiments: in 1972 a share based '200 club' was established. However it was not a successful venture and was finally abandoned in 1974.[38].

It is apparent then, that the arguments for a lack of reform at local level are sustained by evidence provided by a limited number of halls outside of the Greater London area. There are, in fact, striking similarities in all cases.

Lack of Labour Party reform at a local level has been addressed in a slightly different way by Lawrence Black .He has used the physical condition of labour halls as part of a wider argument that in the 1950s, local socialism was 'improvised and decrepit'. It is worth considering his contentions in some detail. Although the early 1950s saw Labour Party membership exceed one million, Black noted that there were many difficulties at a local level. Using evidence from at least 16 Constituency Labour Parties, he contends that: 'Labour branches tended to 'muddle through', 'on a human shoestring' and fettered by the purse strings'.[39] There is some evidence to substantiate the assertions of both a lack of membership and finance in the surviving records of the Constituency Labour Parties in this study. At least one Labour Party ward in Croydon experienced difficulties in recruitment and retention of membership in the late 1940s and early 1950s. The Secretary of Central Ward bemoaned the low attendance at ward meetings: 'The Party needs more "live" members. In other words-Those who are willing to combine their financial help with their regular attendance and general activeness for the cause'. [40]

In 1948, a mass canvass in Wealdstone, increased the membership in one ward by 44. This reflected the experiences in other wards in the Harrow area, but it was noted that the increase in membership did not necessarily mean a corresponding increment in the number of activists. By 1952, the lack of attendance at General Committee meetings was noted. This was the case with both individual members and delegates. [41] In 1954, Peckham Labour Party was also seriously affected by a decrease in individual membership and financial support. It had been necessary to borrow £400 from the Co-operative Wholesale Society and a the same amount of money from Freda Corbet, the Constituency's Labour Member of Parliament.[42] Recruitment and retention of membership was as problematic for Barnes and Richmond Labour Party. In 1956, the average attendance at general management committee meetings was 31 delegates out of a potential total of 96, which 'cannot be considered satisfactory.'[43]

Generally, then, Lawrence Black's initial assertion is supported to some extent by the surviving evidence from the Constituency Labour Parties in this study.

Black further contends that local branch life, embodied in Party premises, was dilapidated and the austere, puritanical culture, which pervaded many Labour Party premises, was at odds with the 'affluence' of the 1950s. Black cites the results of a Mass Observation survey on Labour Party premises, including Stepney, East Ham North, Islington East, Kensington North and Merton to argue that these buildings reflected the 'almost atavistic character' of branch socialism. The inability of Stepney Labour Hall to obtain a dancing licence as a result of the condition of the building has already been noted. East Ham North Labour Party premises are also cited as examples, with 'broken stairs and bare floors' and Kensington North was 'shabby', 'messy' and 'completely lacking in furniture'. Black does, however, acknowledge that there were exceptions to this generalisation, especially where there was a significant co-operative presence. Faversham Labour Party in Kent, for example, was able to benefit from a 'strong' co-operative movement. During the 1950s and 1960s, this 'best organised constituency in Britain' was able to maintain no fewer than eight labour halls.[44]

Lawrence Black's findings are largely reflected in the evidence obtained from the labour halls in this study. There is, however, no specific evidence that, with the exception of Stepney Labour Hall, which also features in Black's article, the physical condition of any of the selected premises had degenerated to the level of the previously mentioned 'broken stairs' of East Ham North. Many of the individual premises in this study were actually very well looked after. Members of the management committee of Wimbledon Labour Hall, for example, regularly undertook a range of maintenance tasks themselves. Although, there is no indication that any of the Constituency Labour Parties enjoyed the same degree of success as Faversham Labour Party in the maintenance of multiple properties, there were significant attempts to improve the selected halls. In 1950, for example, the Heston and Isleworth Labour Hall premises were extended by the erection of a Nissen hut, which was used for large-scale meetings and dances. Several other halls were also renovated during the course of the 1950s and early 1960s. In spite of this, maintenance of the premises could still be problematic. In 1962, the national Labour Party organised a 'Brighter Premises' competition as part of the preparations for the Festival of Labour. The Assistant Secretary of

Battersea Labour Party wrote to the London Regional Organiser that: 'My first reaction is to advise the 'Brighter Premises' Adjudicators to bring scrubbing brushes and paint and to tell whoever comes to the GMC to bring and use a very large whip-but perhaps I'm not displaying sufficient socialist comradeship towards my brothers'. [45]

In the 1960s and 1970s, the financial and membership difficulties experienced by at least two of the Constituency Labour Parties, featured in this study were very similar to those of the 1950s. Membership drives were a common feature of the Wealdstone Labour Party's programme throughout the 1960s and 1970s. In February 1965, for example, the local Labour Party had 1050 members. It was hoped to recruit a further 250 members through a concerted membership drive. Inevitably, there was a degree of differentiation between the various wards in the final decade of the period in question. North Wealdstone Ward, for example, was perceived as having been much 'livelier' than South Wealdstone. One particular selection conference was also notable in attracting an estimated one hundred Labour Party members.[46]

Attendance at Barnes and Richmond Labour Party general management committee meetings fluctuated during the 1960s and early 1970s. This was attributed, in part at least, to the cost of housing in the borough; younger people were forced to move north of the river or out of the Greater London area completely to look for less expensive accommodation. However, the decline of the 1960s and 1970s was not terminal. In March 1980, it was noted that: 'Mrs Thatcher and her Government are proving excellent recruiting agents for Labour. Since September 1979 we've had over one hundred new members, many of them keen to take an active part in our activities'.[47]

Evidence from the selected labour halls substantiates many of the established theories regarding the problems of the post-war Labour Party. This contribution is particularly significant in terms of local difficulties. The archives show that there was a distinct lack of reform at Constituency Labour Party level in the majority of these particular areas. However, the oral testimony from the secretary of Wealdstone Labour Hall also illustrates that generalising from specific examples, may indeed be slightly problematic.

Greater London Labour Halls: An Overview 1945-present

The apparent decline as political spaces of many of the fifteen labour halls in this study was not a uniform process, which neatly coincided with the fluctuating fortunes of the post-war labour movement. By the end of the Second World War, at least three of the labour halls in this study had ceased functioning as political spaces. Ilford Hill Labour Hall had been sold off as early as 1928, East Ham Labour Hall was sold in 1940 and Bermondsey Labour Institute was destroyed in an air raid in the same year. This was also the situation in at least one of the halls outside the Greater London area: Heeley Labour Hall in Sheffield had been disposed of during the late 1930s.

Interestingly, the sale or destruction of these premises did not, in all cases, lead to the decline of the local labour movement. It is certainly the case that East Ham Labour Party moved to much smaller premises, and from 1930, Ilford ILP began to meet at Ilford Labour Party's Central Labour Hall, rather than maintaining its own political space. However West Bermondsey Labour Party acquired new premises, which were of a high enough standard in 1962, to be awarded first place in the London Region of the Brighter Premises Competition. [48]

Several of the remaining Greater London premises ceased functioning as political spaces in the post-war decades. A large proportion of these were sold. Two of the halls were compulsorily purchased by the borough councils as part of local area redevelopment: Stepney Labour Hall in 1963 and the second Ruskin House in 1967. In both instances the local labour movements obtained alternative accommodation. In Croydon, the third Ruskin House was purchased. [49] In 1973, the William Morris Institute in Walthamstow was sold to Labour Party Properties Ltd. In the same year, Wealdstone Labour Hall was approached by Labour Party Properties Ltd. However, the management committee rejected this approach.[50] In spite of this, Wealdstone Labour Hall effectively ceased to be a political space in 1973 and the whole premises was hired out to a non-political organisation on a long term lease. Heston and Isleworth Labour Hall became redundant after boundary changes placed it on the edge of the Parliamentary Constituency and the building was sold in 1977. Hendon Labour Hall functioned as a political space until at least 1979, but the

fate of the property after this date is unclear.[51] Extensive research has also failed to ascertain the post-war history of Ilford Central Labour Hall or the precise date of the closure of Lansbury House in Peckham.[52] The latter was still extensively used by the local Labour Party in 1977. In January of that year, a by-election was held in one ward in the Constituency and electors were invited to meet their local Labour Party candidate at Lansbury House 'at 7pm every evening and all day on polling day'.[53] A consideration of the selected non-metropolitan halls reveals that Cambridge Central Labour Hall continued to be used by the local labour movement until 1986, when the site was redeveloped to provide a more modern meeting space, which is still used by the Labour Party. The fate of Newport Labour Hall in South Wales remains unclear. However, the local Party maintained a presence on the premises until the end of the period under analysis.

A small percentage of the selected labour halls have continued to be used as a focus of left-wing political activity until the present day. The third Ruskin House in Croydon was opened in 1967. In both Battersea and Wimbledon, it has been necessary for the local labour movements to compromise in order to retain ownership of their premises. Battersea Labour Party maintains an office in the basement of the labour hall premises, leasing the other floors to interests from outside the labour movement. Whilst Wimbledon Labour Hall Co-operative Society Ltd has retained control of the majority of the premises, the basement and William Morris Hall extension have been utilised as a nightclub since 1994. Barnes and Richmond Labour Club and Willesden Labour Hall continue to function as political spaces. However, the latter was 'taken over' by the local branch of the Communist Party in the 1980s. [54]

Detailed Histories: Barnes and Richmond Labour Club and Institute, Ruskin House, Croydon and Wimbledon Labour Hall

As has been noted throughout the course of this thesis, the post war evidence of activity within the labour halls is much less abundant than the pre-war records.. In spite of this, however, it is useful to consider detailed evidence from the records of three of the surviving halls: Barnes and Richmond Labour Club; Ruskin House, Croydon and Wimbledon Labour Hall.

Barnes and Richmond Labour Club was subject to fluctuating fortunes from at least the early 1950s. [55] During 1951, Club membership had declined to the point where it represented only ten percent of the members of the Constituency Labour Party. There was no immediate improvement in the position of the club and in 1953, the annual general meeting of Barnes and Richmond Labour Club and Institute Ltd gave serious consideration to a resolution advocating the closure of the Club.[56] In spite of the modest increase in membership during the latter half of the 1950s, the Club was still affected by "the apathy that has been symptomatic of the movement as a whole".[57] In January 1955, only three members attended a special meeting, which had been convened to consider the future of the Labour Club. There is no evidence of a substantial improvement in the number of attendees at Club business meetings and the culmination of this period of decline may be pinpointed as the 1970 annual general meeting, at which only two members were present. The response of the management committee to this crisis was to organise 'something unusual' to ensure a larger attendance at the resulting extraordinary general meeting. Thus the business of the meeting was preceded by a free tea and succeeded by several games of bingo. The presence of 26 members and delegates indicates that this strategy enjoyed a degree of success.[58]

Concerns regarding membership levels and the resulting financial insecurity precipitated periodic reviews of the position of the Labour Club. Such reviews were often undertaken in conjunction with the general management committee of the Constituency Labour Party. In 1953, for example, a joint meeting of the Labour Party and Labour Club made several recommendations about the future of the Club, including: the reduction of club subscriptions to sixpence or one shilling per year, to encourage the participation of all Labour Party members, the dual collection of Labour Party and Club subscriptions and the greater involvement of the Labour Party in the day-to-day management of the club. Several of these recommendations were implemented, but the Club did not receive the anticipated level of interest from the Labour Party. The meeting was the first of several joint ventures between the Club and the Party between the 1950s and the 1970s. None of the

meetings were very productive.[59]The future role of the Labour Club continued to dominate the agenda. A decade after the initial joint meeting with the Labour Party, the Club established its own study group to consider the use to which the premises should be put. The two main elements of debate focused on whether the club should be utilised exclusively for social events or, in the light of proposed changes to the structure of local government, as a political centre for a wider geographical area than the borough of Richmond. It was, however, 'reaffirmed that the primary function' of the Club was as 'a centre for Labour Party thought and activities'. [60] Ultimately, however, the financial imperative dictated a reduction in the emphasis of the Labour Club as a political space. It was deemed necessary to let at least one room to a non-political voluntary organisation on a permanent or semi-permanent basis. In order to attract such a booking, it was resolved to "discourage the use of the term 'Labour Club'" in favour of bestowing an apparently neutral name on the premises. Such a name would still have a great deal of significance for local labour movement activists. Alderman T. Raymond Starr had been one of the founders of the Labour Club and was also the serving vice-president. Thus, in 1967, the premises became known as 'Starr House'. Alderman Starr initially opposed the new name for the premises. He considered that 'Endeavour House' would be a more appropriate choice, because several people had been involved in the establishment of the Club.[61] The change of name to Starr House, however, may have been effective; the hall was let to a nursery school on a term-time only basis until 1979.

Unlike many of the other halls in this study, Ruskin House was not in terminal decline by 1979. There had been some concern over the number of lettings as early as 1924. During the course of that year a series of advertisements, were published in *Croydon Labour Outlook*, appealing to local organisations to 'Help Ruskin House!!' by holding their meetings on the premises. However Ruskin House does not seem to have been adversely affected in the long-term. After 1979, the premises were extensively used as a focal point for strike action and the local anti-apartheid movement. At present, 12 trade union branches, the Labour Party and the Co-operative Party continue to meet at Ruskin House. [62]

From 1960, bookings from non-labour movement organisations exceeded those from within the movement, for the first time at Wimbledon Labour Hall. In 1968, the William Morris Hall was hired out on a long lease to the proprietor of a dance club and functions in the original building included a full "Indian" wedding on the premises. Some concern had been expressed by members of the Management Committee about this situation and during the 1960s various appeals were made to local trade unions. This resulted in a greater number of trade union bookings in the 1970s. Since 1979, Wimbledon Trades and Labour Hall has continued to decline as a political space. It did, however act as a focal point for resistance to the Thatcher administration, especially during the Miners' Strike of 1984-5, in which the Merton and District Trades Council Miners' Support Group was particularly active. It was also a venue for the meetings of many single issue organisations, including Merton Anti-Apartheid Group. After a failed attempt to run a Labour Club in the William Morris Hall, the extension has been leased as a licensed nightclub since 1994. Ironically, the rent accrued from the lease of the William Morris Hall ensured financial security for Wimbledon Labour Hall Ltd at a time when very few political organisations were using the premises.

Reasons for the perceived decline where it occurs

Although the precise reasons for the sale or comparative decline of a hall are not always detailed, it is clear in a number of halls that the expense of maintaining, often aging, premises was a significant factor. This is explicitly noted in the preserved records of two of the London halls and a further two from outside the Greater London area. The post-war years also witnessed the rise of alternative meeting places such as the entirely non-political and non partisan community centres. This section will consider the impact that these two factors had on the selected labour halls.

During the 1960s and 1970s, the requisite expenditure on Lansbury House would have had an impact on the finances of Peckham Labour Party. In 1973, for example, it had been stated that the cost of 'maintaining normal conditions' on the premises was almost £300 per annum. In spite of this, selling the

premises was not considered to be a practical option and the Party acknowledged the importance of maintaining Lansbury House as a physical representation of the fact that the Constituency Labour Party is 'active and alive'. By April 1976, it was noted that the annual expenditure had been £782, with an income of only £320.[63] In 1966, Barnes and Richmond Labour Club was in a similar position:

> The ever rising cost of maintaining the Club premises is a continual source of concern to your Committee. Various steps have been taken to secure economies but the position is still not satisfactory and additional income must be secured if the position is not to deteriorate further. The hall and the committee room are not fully let on all days of the week and members could assist the Committee by making these facilities more widely known among the Labour and Trade Union movements in the district.[64]

The necessary expenditure also had a detrimental affect on premises outside of the Greater London area. Sharrow Ward of the Park and Heeley Constituency Labour Party in Sheffield maintained rented premises, which were described as a 'labour hall'. In circa 1960, a report into the viability of continued occupation of the premises concluded that:

> It was recognised that the expenses involved in these were considerable and unless additional income could be found from lettings that the retention of the premises was not justified..... It was noted that major efforts had to be made for the maintenance of the accommodation at Napier Street, and that if this burden was eased the ward would be in reasonable financial circumstances.

An effort was made to attract local trade union branches, but the level of success of this appeal was unclear.[65] Ultimately, however, it was necessary for the Sharrow Ward to leave the rented premises. By 1970, the management committee of the Central Labour Hall in Cambridge had a similar financial concern. Expenditure on the premises contributed to a deficit of expenditure over income of £279.[66]

After 1945, new, alternative, venues for political and social activities began to be created. One of the most significant of these was the community centre.

The number of community centres in the United Kingdom more than trebled between 1947 and 1960: from 300 to 929.[67] What was a community centre? In 1947 it was defined, in part, at least as a building which: 'provides facilities for the development of the recreational, cultural and personal welfare of ...[the] community ...and constitutes a meeting place for voluntary organizations [sic] or other groups in the community which need accommodation'.[68] Architecturally, the ideal community centre would have contained many of the same designated rooms as the selected labour halls: 'A large hall suitable for meetings, social events and theatre, and, if possible, a common room, canteen, games facilities and a number of small meeting rooms'.[69]

There is some evidence to suggest that the alternative provided by non-political premises such as community centres, was attractive to organisations which had previously met at labour halls. In December 1961, the management committee of Wimbledon Labour Hall noted that:

> [T]he fortnightly booking by the Wimbledon Mothers' Guild was to cease. They were moving to the Community Centre after thirteen years at the Labour Hall, their rent having been worth approximately £30 a year. It was understood that there was no dissatisfaction with the premises but they had decided other premises would dispel any fear of their being connected specifically with the Labour Party.[70]

It is almost certainly the case that the loss of lucrative tenants to non-partisan spaces such as community centres prompted several of the management committees of the halls in this study to remove the word 'labour' from the name of their premises. The impact of this change and the subsequent rise in non-political usage in many of the halls has been noted elsewhere in this thesis.

As a result of increased non-political usage, it may also be argued that several of the surviving labour halls became unofficial community centres. In 2005, it is revealing to note that the management committee of the William Morris Meeting Rooms (formerly Wimbledon Labour Hall), is considering making such a move official by changing the name of the premises to 'The William Morris Arts and Community Centre'.[71] Unlike the labour halls,

however, community centres were largely subsidised by local government. Mark Smith notes that the oil crisis of 1974 and the rise of Thatcherism precipitated state cutbacks to community centre funding in the 1970s and early 1980s: 'The hours that buildings could be open for communal use often shrunk through the inability to pay for caretaking, cleaning and repairs. Increased attention was given to money-making activities such as wedding receptions, multi-gyms and bars'. [72] This was a situation which generally mirrored that experienced by the contemporary management committees of the labour halls.

Both the rising cost of labour hall maintenance and the proliferation of community centres until at least 1974, then, did have a negative effect on at least some of the labour halls in this study. The evidence provided by the selected labour halls indicates that although there was, at the very least, a perceptible decline in the fortunes of the selected premises as political spaces in the post-war decades, this was more complex and uneven than the literature on the post 1945 Labour Party implies. It is not simply a case of the inter-war years representing a kind of golden age of political activism, which was sent into terminal decline by changes in British society from 1945 onwards. As has been noted elsewhere in the thesis, during the 1920s and 1930s, concern was expressed in several of the labour halls about low attendances at political meetings and other functions. More generally, Matthew Worley has noted that during the inter-war years, 'apathy was recognised as a constant blight on the [Labour] party's organisational and electoral progress'. [73] However, in spite of this, it is clear that both the majority of the remaining halls and their principal tenants were affected to a lesser or greater degree by social and political changes in the post-war decades.

Notes:

1 Bill Coxall, Lynton Robins and Robin Leach, *Contemporary British Politics*, 4th ed (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), p.75.
2 Samuel Barnes, Max Kaase et al, *Political Action in Five Western Democracies* (Beverly Hills and London, Sage, 1979) p.85, cited in G .Parry, G Moyser & N. Day *Political Participation in Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p.83.
3 As I have already noted in the chapter on leisure and finance, it is clear that several local political activists felt that television was responsible for this.
4 Mark Donnelly, *Sixties Britain: Culture, Society and Politics* (Harlow: Pearson Longman, 2005) p. 77.
5 Fell, *Carlisle Liberal Club Ltd,* p.26.
6 Frank Bealey, J. Blondel and W.P McGann, *Constituency Politics: A Study of Newcastle Under Lyme,* (London: Faber and Faber, 1965), pp.406-7.
7 Patrick Seyd and Whiteley, *Labour's Grass Roots: The Politics of Party Membership,* 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), p.19.
8 Seyd and Whiteley, *Labour's Grass Roots*, p.19.
9 John Curtice, 'Political Sociology 1945-92', in James Obelkevich and Peter Catterall, *Understanding Post-War British Society,*(London: Routledge, 1994), p.38; Russell Dalton, *Citizen Politics in Western Democracies* (Chatham, New Jersey: Chatham House, 1988); Dennis Kavanagh, *British Politics: Continuities and Change,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987) cited in Curtice, 'Political Sociology 1945-92', pp.38-39.
10 Paul Byrne 'Pressure Groups and Popular Campaigns', in Johnson (ed), *Twentieth Century Britain: Economic, Social and Cultural Change*, p.458.
11 Informal telephone conversation with Barbara Bampton, former Secretary of Wimbledon Labour Hall Co-operative Society and CND member, 29 Aug. 2005.
12 Cambridge City Labour Party, General Management Committee minutes, 1 March 1961; 2 March 1962.
13 See for example Mark Garnett and Richard Weight, *The A-Z Guide to Modern British History* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2003), p.78; 'The History of CND' on that organisations website www.cnduk.org/pages/binfo/hist.html . Accessed, on 22 Aug. 2005.
14 Membership statistics for this period are compiled in Henry Pelling and A. J. Reid, *A Short History of the Labour Party*, 11th ed. (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1996) pp. 197-9.
15 Steven Fielding, *The Labour Party : 'Socialism' and Society since 1951* (Manchester:Manchester University Press, 1997), p. 12.
16 For example, Zweig, *The Worker in an Affluent Society* cited in Nick Tiratsoo, 'Popular Politics, Affluence and the Labour Party in the 1950s', in Anthony Gorst et al *Contemporary British History,* (London: Pinter, 1991), p.48; J.H. Goldthorp et al *The Affluent Worker: Political Attitudes and Behaviour* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968) pp.45-6. The authors concede that the methodology used in their study did not permit them to 'test' the affluent worker theory thoroughly. However, they regard the high level of Labour Party support among their subjects in Luton as the most important finding of the study.
17 Keith Laybourn, *The Rise of Labour: The British Labour Party1890-1979* (London: Edward Arnold, 1988) p.159; Nick Tiratsoo, 'Popular Politics,

Affluence and the Labour Party in the 1950s' in Gorst et al *Contemporary British History*, p. 58.
18 Donnelly, *Sixties Britain : Culture Society and Politics,* p. 51.
19 Klaus Von Beyme, *Political Parties in Western Democracies,* (Aldershot: Gower 1985) pp.167-87; Sue Goss, *Local Labour and Local Government*, pp.20-21, p.79 cited in Seyd & Whiteley, *Labour's Grass Roots,* p. 17.
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23 Donnelly, *Sixties Britain,* p.40.
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32 Mile End Division of the Stepney Labour Party Executive Committee minutes, 3 May 1946.
33 Stepney Borough Labour Party Executive Committee minutes, 29 May 1946.
34 Stepney Labour Party General Committee minutes, 30 Nov. 1950; 4 Jan. 1951.
35 See, for example, Cambridge City Labour Party, General Management Committee Minutes, 3 Sept. 1952; 1 May 1967; Political Education Committee minutes; 22 June 1953; Executive Committee minutes 3 Nov.1952.
36. Cambridge City Labour Party General Management Committee minutes, 9 June 1969.
37 Newport Constituency Labour Party General Management Committee minutes, 19 July 1957.
38 Newport Constituency Labour Party Executive Committee minutes, 16 Sept. 1972.
39 Black 'Still at the Penny Farthing Stage in a Jet Propelled Era', p.203

40 *Croydon Labour Journal*, Aug. 1945.
41 Harrow Central Divisional Labour Party General Committee minutes, 24 November 1948; Annual Reports 1948; 1952; Harrow Central Divisional Labour Party Executive Committee minutes, 20 Nov.1951.
42 The Annual Report of Peckham Constituency Labour Party 1954; 'Peckham Labour Party Papers and Correspondence with London Labour Party Headquarters, 1952-1955',Greater London Labour Party Archive, LMA; Peckham Constituency Labour Party Executive Committee minutes, 30 April 1976. Part of the reason for the disparity between income and expenditure in this particular year, were the structural alterations undertaken on Lansbury House.
43 Richmond and Barnes Divisional Labour Party, Annual Report 1956.
44 Black, 'Still at the Penny Farthing Stage in a Jet Propelled Era': pp. 203, p.216-7.
45 J.J. Duffy, Assistant Secretary of Battersea Labour Party to the London Regional Organiser, 28 June 1962, Brighter Premises Competition 1962, Greater London Labour Party archive, LMA.
46 Harrow Central Constituency Labour Party Executive Committee minutes, 9 Feb. 1965. The results of the membership drive are not recorded; Interview with Cyril Harrison, 20 Oct. 2003.
47 Richmond and Barnes Divisional Labour Party, Annual Reports 1972; 1980.
48 The Brighter Premises Competition was set up as part of the 1962 Festival of Labour. For further details see the file on the 'Brighter Party Premises Competition', Greater London Labour Party archive, LMA. Extensive research has failed to locate records of the new West Bermondsey Labour Party premises.
49 I have been unable to locate any records of the property which was used by the labour movement in Stepney.
50 The Hon Secretary of Wealdstone Labour Hall Ltd, Cyril Harrison recalls his relief at this decision, as he notes that Labour Party Properties Ltd went into liquidation during the course of the following year. Interview with Cyril Harrison, 20 Oct. 2003.
51 Daniel Weinbren notes that the premises were redecorated in 1977: Daniel Weinbren, 'Hendon Labour Party 1924-1992: A Brief Introduction to the Microfilm edition' (Wakefield: Microform Academic Publishers, 1998), footnote no 9, p.11. He is unsure precisely when the premises were sold. Hendon Labour Party now meets elsewhere in the borough.
52 I had hoped to use the Land Registry to determine the fate of some of these halls. However, it will not undertake, what it describes as 'historical searches'.
53 Election leaflet from a file of material relating to a by-election in Burgess Ward on 20th Jan. 1977.
54 L. Snow, *A Short History of the Labour Party in Brent,* p.17. In an informal conversation, at the Labour Heritage West London Conference on 19 Oct. 2002, Len Snow recalled that it was 'sometime in the early 1980s' that the Communist Party gained the majority of shares in Willesden Labour Hall Ltd.
55 The surviving finance committee minutes commence in 1946 and management committee minutes in Jan. 1951.

56 Barnes and Richmond Labour Club and Institute minutes 29 March 1952; 15 Jan. 1953. This resolution was amended to permit joint discussions regarding the future of the labour club between the labour club and the Richmond and Barnes Labour Party.
57 Richmond and Barnes Divisional Labour Party, Annual Report 1956.
58 Barnes and Richmond Labour Club and Institute minutes, 26 Jan. 1955. A copy of a letter to the president transcribed into minute book, 28 March 1970; Barnes and Richmond Labour Club and Institute minutes, 1 April 1970; 25 April 1970.
59 Minutes of a joint meeting of the members of Barnes and Richmond Labour Club and Institute Ltd and Richmond and Barnes Divisional Labour Party, 23 June 1953; Barnes and Richmond Labour Club and Institute Ltd minutes, 21 Jan. 1954.
60 Barnes and Richmond Labour Club and Institute Ltd minutes, 23 April 1963. There is no reference to this study group presenting a detailed report of its findings. Barnes and Richmond Labour Club and Institute Ltd minutes, 26 Feb. 1965.
61 Barnes and Richmond Labour Club and Institute Ltd minutes, 5 May; 1 Sept. 1967.
62 Ruskin House Management Committee, *Ruskin House: A History,* pp. 11-12. It should be noted that, although *Ruskin House: A History*, lists the number of trade union branches, which use the premises, no membership figures for these unions are included. In other halls, including Wimbledon Labour Hall, several trade unions continue to use the hall, but union meetings only attract two or three members. It should also be noted that this evidence is gleaned from a promotional history of the premises rather than a more objective detailed examination of the archives.
63 Peckham Constituency Labour Party Financial Statement, 1972-1973; Annual Report 1979; Executive Committee minutes, 30 April 1976.
64 Barnes and Richmond Labour Club and Institute, Annual Report 1966.
65 Report of a Joint Meeting between Park and Heeley Labour Party Divisional Organising Committee, Park and Heeley Trades and Labour Council and Sharrow Ward Members, n.d but circa Aug. 1960.
66 Cambridge Constituency Labour Party Balance Sheet, 31 Dec. 1970.
67 M. Broady et al, *Enterprising Neighbours: The Development of the Community Association in Britain,* (London: National Federation of Community Organisations, 1990), cited in Mark K Smith, 'Community centres (centers) and associations', *The Encyclopedia of Informal Education 2002* www.infed.org/association/b-comcen.htm, p.7.
68 H. A. Mess and H. King, 'Community Centres and Community Associations' in H.A. Mess (ed) *Voluntary Social Services since 1918,* Kegan Paul, Trench Trubner and Co, London 1947, p.73, cited in Smith 'Community centres (centers) and associations', p.6.
69 Smith 'Community centres (centers) and associations', p.6.
70 Wimbledon Labour Hall Ltd Management Committee minutes, 5 Dec. 1961.
71 Notice of the Annual General Meeting of the Wimbledon Labour Hall Co-operative Society, June 2005. The hall did retain the word 'Labour' in its name. It is now known as 'The William Morris Labour and Community Rooms'.
72 Smith, 'Community centres (centers) and associations', pp. 7-8.

73 Matthew Worley cites, for example, *Labour Organiser,* April-May 1923; Worley, 'Building the Party', p. 74.

Conclusion

During the course of the thesis, the nature of local left wing activity in London in the context of labour movement premises has been examined. This is a focus which is largely, if not entirely, absent from the existing literature. Previous studies have tended to emphasise the national level and there are very few specific references to labour halls. Even in the most recent essays on the activities of local Labour Parties, there is only one reference to a labour hall and it is not cited in the index.[1] This is also the case with many of the local Labour Party studies: there are one or two brief references to the actual premises.[2]

However, it is clear, from this study, that the possession of their own halls gave a diverse range of local labour movement organisations a focal point for their activities. As has been noted, it had not always been possible for such groups to hire civic buildings such as town halls or schools. Even where this had been an option, it did not offer local labour movements any sense of permanence. The council-owned premises were only usually hired for specific events and it was necessary to spread such activities across different schools or halls throughout the constituency or borough. Thus the erection of halls and similar premises were significant and often stabilising developments in the history of the Greater London labour movement.[3]

Although the surviving archives of the selected labour halls have provided fragmentary evidence at best, this study has contributed to several debates in a meaningful way. These have included: leisure, working class education, the role of women in society and the use of space. The thesis has examined issues in many of these areas, which have not been directly addressed by the literature. It has also raised many significant issues in connection with the decline of the halls in the context of the fluctuating fortunes of the post-war labour movement and the decline of associational life in the twentieth century in general.

In the inter-war period, at least, examples of leisure provision in the selected labour halls and other premises substantiated the argument that the Labour Party largely utilised recreational pursuits as a fundraising tool and a way in which to attract membership rather than as a concerted attempt to provide a coherent alternative to the prevailing culture of commercialised leisure provision.[4] The inclusion of premises administered by other left-wing organisations, such as the Independent Labour Party (ILP) and the Social Democratic Federation (SDF) has provided, in this instance, a contrast to those controlled by the Labour Party. At least one of these halls, the William Morris Institute in Walthamstow, which was controlled by the SDF, did endeavour to provide a coherent programme of alternative recreational activities. However, the thesis has also noted sporadic attempts by Labour Party owned halls to provide organisations such as labour horticultural societies.

This study has shown that it is also possible to extend Jones and Hill's arguments to leisure provision in the post-war decades. Many of the halls in this study did not substantially change the kinds of leisure provision offered and where it was attempted, new innovations such as boat trips on the Thames were not overwhelmingly supported by the membership. An evaluation of recreational activities in other political spaces such as Liberal and Conservative Clubs has revealed that the situation was not entirely different in those places. Many of the same activities were undertaken and problems encountered. There was, however, a greater reliance on the provision of alcohol throughout the period in question in these clubs. This was an idea, which would have contravened the principles of the founders or the labour halls, who, in many cases, strongly advocated the ideal of temperance within the working classes. During the post-war decades, however, financial necessity precipitated the installation of licensed bars on several of the premises. The surviving hall records do not really give clear indication of how controversial such moves were at a local level. The sale of alcohol on the premises was usually presented as a *fait accompli*.

It is interesting that several of the leisure activities organised by the hall management committees and Constituency Labour Parties are still regularly used by some voluntary organisations across the country at the beginning of the 21st century. The classified section of at least one Greater London local newspaper, for example, has a dedicated whist drive section. Similarly, in the latter months of 2005 in Great Barton, a village near Bury St Edmunds in Suffolk, 'progressive whist drives' will be held in aid of the local bowls club, a beetle drive is to be arranged to raise money for 'mission ships' for an apparently religious organisation referred to as 'Mission Direct' and a 'supper-bar-and bingo' night has been organised to expedite the completion of an extension to the village hall. The Surrey Branch of the Reliant Owners' Club similarly holds bingo and beetle nights, as well as the annual 'Tramps Supper'.[5]

The thesis has also considered the role of the labour halls in working class education and identified the four main strands, which were organised on the premises: the Socialist Sunday School, left-wing propaganda, structured learning in the shape of the Workers' Educational Association (WEA) or National Council of Labour Colleges (NCLC) and, finally, provision for the autodidact. Evidence provided by Heston and Isleworth Labour Hall in the 1950s challenges at least one assumption regarding the decline of the ILP influenced Socialist Sunday School branches after the disaffiliation of the ILP from the Labour Party in 1932. As has been noted, it has been generally argued that this schism meant that Socialist Sunday school branches no longer felt able to meet on Labour Party premises. However as late the 1950s: the Hounslow branch used the Heston and Isleworth Labour Hall. It was also one of very few remaining branches outside Scotland in that decade.[6]

A detailed consideration of programmes of structured education established that the NCLC was the preferred provider of courses on a variety of subjects in many of the halls. It was, however, possible for lectures and classes by that organisation to be run concurrently with those provided by the WEA. In some instances, local labour halls actually became centres for NCLC activity, emphasising the importance of the premises to the movement for independent

working class education. The lack of references to NCLC and WEA activity in the post-war years in the selected halls is explained by the respective situation of the national organisations after 1945. As has been noted, structured education was important to at least some of its recipients in the William Morris Institute in Walthamstow and this is almost certainly representative of the experiences of students in the other halls. It is also clear that many of the labour halls played a significant role in the provision of facilities for the autodidact. Although no specific library stock lists have survived, evidence suggests that, unsurprisingly, left wing literature was well represented in labour hall reading rooms.

The evidence provided by the selected labour halls both substantiates and extends assertions made in the scant existing literature on the role of women in local Labour Parties. Pamela Graves has contended that women began to hold official positions from at least the 1930s[7] and this is supported by records from the selected Constituency Labour Parties. However evidence from labour hall committees indicates that, prior to 1979, fewer women were elected as officers. The precise reason for this contrasting picture is unclear. It is unlikely to be antipathy towards women by the trade unions, as many of the unions would have had a greater level of direct representation on the Executive Committees of local Labour Parties than the labour hall management committees. Major exceptions to this generalisation were Wimbledon Labour Hall, which had a significant trade union presence on its management committee and Ruskin House, Croydon, which was effectively run by the trade unions. However, neither Wimbledon Labour Hall nor Ruskin House deviated from the prevailing trend.

The activities of Labour Party Women's Sections on the premises were more complex than the existing literature implies. Much of the content of the various programmes tended to substantiate Pamela Graves' argument that the women were more concerned with welfare issues rather than the traditionally male domain of electioneering and administration.[8] Some of those welfare issues, such as birth control and even family allowances could be highly controversial. The Women's Co-operative Guild also provides a good, if

frustrating, example of an organisation for which no local records of activity have been located for the areas served by the selected labour halls.

The extraordinary non-political usage of the selected Greater London labour halls illustrates the importance of the premises to their local communities: whether it was in the provision of advice and information services, often many years before the establishment of the nationwide network of Citizens' Advice Bureaux or as different kinds of accommodation during the Second World War. In many ways the use of the halls as advice bureaux is particularly significant. They were clearly well attended by the local population and offered a free service, which was not otherwise widely available. There is, however, some evidence to suggest that other voluntary organisations, such as at least one local Conservative Party ward, did offer something similar.

As has already been noted, with regard to the sale of alcohol, financial necessity required many of the management committees to be pragmatic. This trend was also evident in the late 1920s and early 1930s, with the decision to let rooms in several of the premises to the Communist Party of Great Britain. However an even greater degree of pragmatism was necessary in the post-war years as declining income forced several of the halls to rent out part or even all of their building to non-political organisations. It had not been the original intention of the founders of Wimbledon Labour Hall, for example, that a proportion of the premises should become a nightclub, but this was the only way in which the remainder of the labour hall could be maintained for the local movement.

Financial necessity also precipitated a trend in many of the management committees of the labour halls and indeed Conservative Clubs, which have been considered in this thesis, to reduce the overt references to the premises as political spaces. This was a clear attempt to attract a greater number of non-political tenants. As has been noted, several of the labour halls had their names altered and the word 'labour' was completely dropped. However, their left-wing identity was still adhered to in the sense that their new names usually incorporated references to local or national labour movement figures.

In contrast to this position, some of the Conservative Clubs removed all forms of political affiliation from the names of their premises. More detailed research would be required on Conservative Clubs with more comprehensive surviving records to establish whether, as was the case in many of the labour halls, this was merely a cosmetic exercise to gain and retain tenants or a complete break with the Conservative Party.

The thesis has not conclusively established that the labour hall experience in the Greater London area was unique in any significant way. There were a large number of similarities between the 15 selected halls and the provincial premises in this study However, the thesis has also identified a few differences. At least two of these have been noted in relation to Stow Hill Labour Hall in Newport, South Wales. The mixed nature of local industry meant that different kinds of trade unions were associated with the premises, from those that met in the Greater London area. The role of gender was also different in Newport. As has been noted the local Labour Party incorporated both 'men's' and 'women's' sections and there was very little female representation in the administration of the hall. Despite these differences, however, the study has indicated that labour hall usage in London was largely indicative, if not representative, of England and Wales as a whole. The thesis has also highlighted the number of similarities between the labour hall experience and the usage on non-labour movement premises.

The complex reasons for the decline of many of the labour halls as political spaces have been detailed during the course of the thesis. Although the fragmentary nature of the surviving records renders sweeping generalisations impossible, it is clear that in many instances falling income and rising expenditure on ageing premises were significant factors in the decline. The study has considered several existing theories which examine the difficulties of the Labour Party in the post war years, which may have contributed to the decreasing income in the selected labour halls. However, the decline of the selected labour halls was a more uneven process than the literature suggests. It is possible that the significant differences may be attributed to unidentified local factors. It is interesting that Wimbledon Labour Hall, Barnes and

Richmond Labour Club and Institute and Ruskin House, Croydon, three of the longest surviving halls, are all situated in traditionally Conservative constituencies. There are two possible explanations for this. It could be conjectured that activists were more inclined towards preservation of a labour movement presence in such areas of Conservative dominance. Alternatively, the continued existence of these political spaces could simply be attributed to the fact that Wimbledon, Richmond and Croydon are more affluent localities than, for example, Stepney. There is, however, no specific evidence to support either of these theories.

It is also significant to note that the *decline of these* selected buildings as political spaces did not herald the end of the construction or purchase of new labour halls by many other constituency parties from the 1950s onwards. Good examples of these new political spaces are Ruskin Hall, Acton, Pavitt Hall in Wembley and Witham Labour Hall in Essex. There are many others, which appear in the Labour Party's property census of the early 1960s. Like the reasons for decline, it is possible that the reasons for the creation of these new political spaces were intensely local and more research would be required in each area to establish the precise reasons for the inception of the various premises. Could it be argued that the labour halls in this study influenced the creation of the 1950s political spaces in some way? Perhaps the erection of new premises *en masse,* was an attempt by Constituency Labour Parties to assert their presence on a local level, in spite of the difficulties being experienced by the national Party. This would echo one of the possible reasons for the longevity of premises such as Wimbledon Labour Hall and Barnes and Richmond Labour Club and Institute.

It would be useful to extend this thesis by undertaking a nationwide study in this under-researched area. Such an analysis would establish, more conclusively than this geographically limited thesis has been able to do, how significant regional and local differences were in the establishment and administration of British labour halls. However, it is clear that labour halls and similar buildings did have an important role to play in the history of the Greater London labour movement. These socialist spaces facilitated focused political

and social activity, which would not have been achievable if they had never existed. Few of the selected pre-war premises remain and those that do are not always used for their original purpose. However, their legacy continues to the present day in the later generations of labour halls.

Notes:

1 Worley (ed), *Labour's Grass Roots* The specific reference, to East Ham Labour Hall, appears in Daniel Weinbren's chapter, 'Sociable Capital: London's Labour Parties 1918-1945', p.206.
2 See for example, Snow *One Hundred Years of the Labour Party in Brent,* in which there are two brief references to Willesden Labour Hall and one further one to the New or Pavitt Hall in Wembley.
3 A good example of this is found in *Ilford Recorder,* 10 May 1929.
4 See Jones, *Workers at Play* p149. Hill, *Sport, Leisure and Culture,* p.169.
5 See, for example, *Teddington and Hampton Times*, 30 Sept. 2005; *Great Barton Newsletter,* Autumn 2005 and *Top Gear: Organ of the Reliant Owners' Club, Surrey Branch,* Autumn 2005.
6 Mends, 'John Trevor: The Labour Church and Socialist Sunday Schools', p 17; Weinbren *Generating Socialism*, p33.
7 Graves, *Labour Women,* pp. 220-225.
8 Graves, *Labour Women,* p. 217.

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