

## **Organised Cycling and Politics: the 1890s & 1900s in Battersea**

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I began to be interested in sports history as a result of undertaking a family history research commission into Percival Powell, a professional roller skating floor manager in the Edwardian roller-skating boom of 1908 to 1912. Many cyclists took up roller-skating with enthusiasm, there were races between cyclists and rinkers as the skaters were called, and there were ‘doom and gloom’ merchants deploring the adverse effect rinking was having attracting people away from cycling and other sports. The Society published an article by me on the boom in 1991.<sup>1</sup>

My main historical interest, however, is the labour movement in Battersea and Wandsworth in to-day’s South-West London. During an in-depth look at one year, 1907, I came across a lot of material about the local Battersea and Wandsworth based Clarion cyclists group, and discovered a bound volume of the internal newsletter of the Pioneer Cycling Club for the years 1895-1901.

It is my intention to say a little about these two organised cycling groups, within the political, social and cultural environment in which they were active. But first I need to set the scene in Battersea.

By 1900 Battersea had been transformed from a rural North East Surrey rural village parish to an industrial urban appendage of London. The population had risen from nearly 7,000 in 1841 to over 150,000 in 1891. During the transformation a rich culture of working class organisations developed including the friendly benefit societies, like the Oddfellows and the Forestors, co-operatives, trade unions, and political and radical clubs. Four occupational groups played a particularly important role in this organisational development: the candle-makers, the builders, the railwaymen and the engineers. In 1854 the workers at Prices Candles

set up a retail co-operative, which became the Battersea & Wandsworth Co-operative Society surviving until 1908. The carpenters and joiners helped to set up their Amalgamated Society in 1860. In 1871 the railwaymen helped create the Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants (ASRS), the forerunner of today's RMT. The railwaymen were also active co-operators, especially in the Battersea & Wandsworth Co-operative. The Society ran retail stores, engaged in educational activities, and helped to foster the early growth of the Co-operative Permanent Building Society (now Nationwide Anglia). Its women members played an early and leading role in the Womens Co-operative Guild. Many local activists were elected or appointed to important regional and national trade union positions. It was from within this trade union and co-operative environment that the Workers Educational Association was set up in Battersea in 1904.

Among the engineers were the socialists John Burns and Tom Mann. Mann started the campaign for the eight hour day in Battersea which led to the celebration of May Day as a workers festival. He and Burns were the charismatic leaders of the New Unionist wave of trade union organisation from 1888, their most famous success being the victory of the Dockers in 1889. Burns had been pulling together a loose political alliance involving Liberals, Radicals, Socialists, trade unionists, co-operators and temperance activists, which got him elected to the newly formed London County Council in early 1889. In 1892 Burns was elected to Parliament as an independent labour MP, backed by his widening political alliance, in a straight fight with the Conservatives. 2

The next important step in cementing the alliance was the initiation of the Trades Council in 1893, formally established in 1894 as the Battersea Trades & Labour Council. 3 Later that year the Progressive Alliance as it became called won electoral control of the Vestry, and remained in control when the Battersea Borough Council took over local administration in 1900. Never a Liberal Burns accepted the post of local government minister in the Liberal Government from 1905. He remained a Cabinet member until his resignation in 1914 in protest at the outbreak of the First World War, and an MP until 1918. 4

Opposing the Alliance were the Conservatives or Municipal Reformers.

They also had an extensive range of organisations promoting their cause including branches of the Primrose League, the vehicle for women.

Social, cultural and leisure activities were central to almost all organisations. Back in the 1840s the candle workers had played cricket against a Christian Socialist team. A wide range of organisations provided railwaymen with concerts, singing, choirs, dinners, soirees, brake outings and other entertainments. One of the largest local events held in the Albert Palace, next to Battersea Park, attracting 10,000 people was organised in September 1885 by the Railway Orphans Fund. William Ellis, the Fund's Secretary was an activist in the Union. There was an industrial exhibition, a roller coaster, a military band, a magician, singing and athletic sports, including normal running and three-legged races and a concert in the evening. Both the ASRS and the local co-op donated prizes for some of the races. In 1891 the Marxist SDF set up the first Socialist Sunday School in the country. Activities included a brake outing to the country, picking wild flowers and singing socialist songs on the way back. Its Christmas Party included games, dancing and singing. 7

John Burns was a man with very clear views about what constituted a responsible and respectable way of life and leisure pursuits, and about the role of local government in fostering them. His explicitly socialist manifesto for the 1889 LCC election contained a declaration of support for:

establishing free baths and wash-houses, as well as free libraries, in all districts of London, and set on foot free gymnasiums and recreation grounds for the people, throwing open all enclosed squares to the public. 5

His 1892 Parliamentary Manifesto talked about: 'The recent movements of labour, the popular demand for more leisure and a higher standard of life' 6 He was anti-drink and gambling. 'The man who bets regularly is the man who never votes at all. The man who gambles frequently cares nothing for the affairs of the community.' 7

He had many leisure interests, including a passion for playing cricket, and he liked to pass on tips to the boys and young men in Battersea Park and on Clapham Common. Certainly in the Edwardian years he was using a cycle to get around Battersea, although I do not know whether he cycled to Westminster. He had a reputation for being able to wallop the ball. He once told an audience at the local Washington Music Hall in April 1897:

Cricket was a game that was heartily enjoyed by the people who attended, without that spirit of betting which would make a betting man lay a wager on a fly walking across a jam tart. 7

Speaking in a House of Commons debate on 30 March 1900 against a motion favouring military drill in elementary schools, he referred to the enormous popularity of cricket and extolled its virtues. 8

He was suspicious of professional sport. Approached in 1904 by the Secretary of the Wandsworth Football Club to support the formation of a professional team, Burns declared:

The young men whom you wish to concentrate on one spot in the interest of 'local trade'; should be distributed over a wide area, playing the game themselves, if so inclined; and when not so engaged they would be better occupied in taking a walk across the Common to Wimbledon or Richmond Park. Real amateur sport will be discounted, the neighbourhood vulgarised and a pleasant suburban area will be given over to large crowds with the results to be seen everywhere. 9

This view did not stop Burns watching cricket at Lords and at the Oval, the Boat Race or the Cup Final. In an article he wrote on the 1905 Boat Race for the Daily News he praised the excellent standard of behaviour of the crowds.

For the first time, I was really firmly convinced that thirty years of free education, larger schools, concerted play, collective drill, and methodical diversion were creditably revealed in the mutable many that were gathering along the towpath... Well bodied, well clad, better

fed, kindly, quiet, civil and obliging was the Boat Race crowd of 1905.<sup>10</sup>

The central core of Burns' views are not untypical of many of those active in the local political alliance which ensured his electoral success, even if they did not all go along with his anti-drink position. Individual and collective self-help were important aspects of improving the quality of life of workers. As we will see later this was to be central to the outlook of the Clarion movement.

Even before the Progressive Alliance took control of the Vestry in 1894, socialist and radical members had been arguing for an extension of leisure facilities. In 1891 two SDF members proposed the building of a Town Hall. Conceived of as a municipal palace, in addition to Offices and meeting facilities for the Vestrymen, there were the Grand and Lower Town Halls. These were designed for meetings, social functions and other events run by local organisations. The pediment carving at the front of the Town Hall shows Labour and Progress, Art and Literature instructing the young figure of Battersea. The entrance to the Grand Hall has mosaics of bees, the symbol of co-operation, and the motto, in Latin. 'Not For Me. Not For You, But For Us.'<sup>11</sup>

The Alliance pioneered many of the services that were to become part of local government provision, including housing, health visiting and child welfare, milk sterilisation and later electricity generation. The Vestry and the Council were seen as having an important role to play in expanding the range of wholesome and respectable leisure and educational opportunities available for their working-class base.

One of the initiatives was an attempt to provide municipal music. A municipal choir and orchestra were established, an organ installed in the Town Hall, an official borough organist appointed and free public concerts started. These Tuesday evening concerts cost £650 a year. From October 1901 to March 1902 additional performances took place on Fridays and Sundays at a cost of an additional £400. The Conservatives objected and Battersea was surcharged £278.<sup>12</sup>

Perhaps the most important leisure initiative was the way in which the Alliance it developed the Latchmere Baths, originally built in 1888/89. In 1895 the Vestry opened them up to school use and the number of school children attending the baths in that year was 5,211. The Trades & Labour Council took part in lobbying for and supporting the efforts to improve the facilities. It detailed developments in its Annual Reports. An extra pool and more slipper baths had to be added on to meet demand.<sup>13</sup> Gymnasium facilities were added from 1898 during the winter months 'for the athletic enjoyment of Battersea's youthful citizens'.<sup>14</sup> By 1904 62,116 lads had used the facility. 'There is no need to point the moral of these figures to those who are anxious for the welfare of the rising generation.' commented the Trades Council.<sup>13</sup> The number of bathers increased from 133,000 to 226,193 between 1898 and 1901.<sup>15</sup> In 1901 a recreation room was added for playing games such as billiards and bagatelle. By 1904 this had been used by 55,224 young and older men. A separate female swimming pool was added in 1902 to meet the demand from women.<sup>13,16</sup> A ladies team of the Battersea Swimming Club was formed, and in 1907 took part in a competition in Paris in 1907.<sup>17</sup>

The Council went on in 1906 to open the Plough Rd Institute, where billiards, bagatelle, bar games, a reading room, a gymnasium, and slipper baths for both men and women were provided. In addition there was a museum and a picture gallery, and a recreation and reading room for children. 18

The Conservatives kept up a rear-guard action against such leisure initiatives. being provided on the rates. One of their members, however, Percy Haythornthwaite was a believer in the conviviality and friendship that sporting leisure activity provided. He was a leading member of the local Pioneer Cycling Club.

Battersea had two large open spaces, Battersea Park on the River Thames, and Clapham Common. Cycling was a particularly popular pastime for well-to-do people in the Park, especially women.<sup>19</sup> By today's standards people were prepared to walk long distances to and from work, and for leisure. So both Wimbledon Common and Richmond Park

were within walking distance. London had not sprawled as far south as it is today, so cycling to the nearest countryside was a much more pleasant experience.

Cycling had its individual enthusiasts like A.G.Pratt who kept a diary of his trips. He purchased his first bike in March 1888. Once he had mastered cycling, and experienced being attacked by a dog, almost run down a young woman, and crashing into a horse-drawn coach, he got permission to cycle to work in Southwark and ‘stand the bicycle in the factory’. As he became more sure of himself he rode further and further afield. Then as now cycling had its dangers. His skull was nearly kicked in when he was blown by a gust of wind in front of a horse. People rushed to help, women and children screamed, his trousers fell down. But the experience did not dampen his enthusiasm. In his first year he rode 982 miles, rising to 1,320 in 1891.<sup>20</sup> Although he occasionally rode with a friend, Pratt was an individual cyclist, unlike the members of the Pioneer and Clarion Clubs, who unashamedly enjoyed the cycling and the social life that went with the cycling.

The Pioneer Cycling Club was started in 1881.<sup>21</sup> In its early years the Club ran races including a 25-mile championship. Later on it concentrated on weekly runs, with the occasional train outing for wives and girl friends, a monthly general meeting, dances and dinners, and other social activities, especially billiards.

Even organised enthusiasts were not immune from accidents. Even though an accident in the 1883 Championship prevented Alf Pickard from riding for several years, he helped to organise the Club.<sup>22</sup> Most members probably joined when they were young and still bachelors, like A.H.Allridge, who despite being the youngest member of the Club was elected Captain. Ill-health was then to stop him cycling, but like Pickard he continued to help to organise the Club.<sup>23</sup>

The Club was quick to get young enthusiastic members involved. In 1886 Alfred Williams joined the Club ‘a dark-eyed, dark complexioned youth, attired in a grey uniform, and riding a Rudge rotary tricycle.’ The next year he was Secretary, and then for many years the Club’s

delegate to the National Cycling Union.<sup>24</sup>

Many of the members were active in other sports as well. Tommy Hayes was a prominent member of the London Athletic Club and the winner of the first open mile in London 'upon the then peculiar looking pneumatic tyres, his back wheel only being fitted with the new invention.'<sup>25</sup> A.M. Kellaway had been a member of the Swimming and Rowing Clubs and the Harriers in Portsmouth, and a member of the London Rifle Brigade. His ability to accompany the Pioneers on the piano was particularly valued.<sup>26</sup> Ernest Oakeshott played football and cricket, was 'a crack shot', had saved a man from drowning, played chess and billiards 'and is one of the finest judges of a cigar or a bottle of Burgundy that we have in the Club', rivalling Mark Twain in the quantities of cigars he consumes each day'. He also collected 'ancient and modern cycles'.<sup>27</sup> Taffy Roberts was into cricket, football, boating, swimming, shooting, skating, walking, golf, dancing, singing and billiards.<sup>28</sup> Harry Westmore, from Brixton, liked boating, football and cricket. He had been a Secretary of the Surrey Wanderers' Football Club, as had been W.J. Tarplit.<sup>29</sup>

The Club seems to have pioneered touring in France and on the Continent from 1889. In fact so much interest was taken in this trip by the English and French cycle world, that *Bicycling News*, gave three columns to an account of the tour, with illustrations, which were reproduced in *Le Veloce Sport*.<sup>30</sup>

In 1894 the Club started *The Pioneer Gazette*, an internal magazine for members, edited for most of its life by Percy Haythornthwaite. Haythornthwaite had become a member of the Club in 1888. He served for a time as Chairman, then in 1893 as Secretary. He brought a politician's desire for order through Committees. He wanted to persuade Club members that it was time to have each separate activity of the Club managed by sub-committees, for Dance, Billiards, Dinners, the *Gazette* and Racing, and relieve the Secretary of much of the work-load.<sup>31</sup>

The South London Clarion Cycling Club drew its members from Battersea, the districts of Wandsworth such as Clapham and Tooting, and from Brixton and Kennington. It was part of a movement built up around

The Clarion newspaper edited by Robert Blatchford from 1891. He hated the drabness of so many people's lives and started the Clarion Clubs to provide for leisure and friendship. Through them he hoped to widen the appeal of the socialist movement. He had already organised Cinderella Clubs in the north of England to provide meals and entertainment for the poorest children. In some cases they developed into Sunday Schools educating children towards a socialist outlook. Then came groups for cycling, rambling, camping, photography, and other activities.<sup>32</sup>

It is clear from *The Clarion* in 1907 that there was a wide range of supporters for the movement. Readers were able to find out what was going on through the list of and reports of events. They could contribute to various funds run by the newspaper. They could support Clarion causes through their membership of other organisations. They could use the newspaper to draw attention to issues of concern.

In the columns we find 'E.L' who can only be Edith Lanchester, a member of Battersea Social Democratic Federation, whose daughter Elsa, became the famous Hollywood star and wife of Charles Laughton.<sup>33</sup> There was Councillor Andrews a Progressive Councillor 1906-9 and 1912-1919, and Labour Councillor 1919-22.<sup>34</sup> Stephen Sanders, who had been first Secretary of Battersea Trades & Labour Council, and was a member of the London County Council, called for resolutions against the proposed ban on Socialist Sunday Schools using LCC school premises, and to press the LCC to implement the Provision of Meals Act 1906 by providing school meals.<sup>35</sup>

A Clarion Cinderella Club was started in Battersea in March and April by G.Steer<sup>34</sup>, and there were plans to establish one in Clapham, although this may in fact have turned into the Socialist Sunday School which opened in July.<sup>36</sup> How Steer found the time I do not know. He was an engineer by trade. He represented his union branch on the Trades & Labour Council, and the District at the national Labour Party Conference. He was a member of Battersea SDF, was to be Secretary of the Battersea branch of the ILP (Independent Labour Party) from 1908. He was also Secretary of Battersea Labour Party which was an umbrella group for a number of trade union and socialist organisations, and its representative

to the 1909 Labour Party National Conference. He was also a member of the Cycling Club, towards the end of 1907 being elected as Captain.<sup>37</sup>

There were some similarities between the Pioneers and the Clarionettes, and many dissimilarities. At one level they shared the same view of conviviality and friendship. Haythornthwaite wrote:

Sociability, with true friendship, has ever been the keynote of the Club, and 1894 has seen these great traits of all true Pioneers more accentuated and marked to a greater degree than ever.<sup>38</sup>

Commenting on the last three runs in the 1907 season, the Club reporter to *The Clarion* said:

Surely a revival has set in. The last two runs have been the best for quite twelve months. There was the true spirit of fellowship about them.<sup>39</sup>

If the two previous runs were remarkable for the *Clarion* spirit of Fellowship, then this Sunday's run was doubly so.<sup>40</sup>

Both Clubs held Annual General Meetings, elected Chairs, Secretaries and Treasurers, Captains and Vice-Captains. Both held social functions, although the Pioneers were more organised in this respect. In February 1895, for example, they held a Cinderella Dance at Battersea Town Hall, and an Annual Dinner at the Holborn Restaurant.<sup>41</sup> The Clarionettes held Fellowship Gatherings. The one on 9 February 1907 'was a great success', partly due to the entertainment provided by a couple of 'talented members of the Variety Artistes' Federation.'<sup>42</sup>

The runs of both clubs were mainly into Surrey and Kent. The Pioneers were pre-organised on Saturdays, the Clarionettes impromptu on Saturdays and organised on Sundays. They went to Surbiton, Wootton, Ewell, Sutton, Epsom, Merstham, Ripley, Cheam, Carshalton, Dorking, Reigate, Godstone, Weybridge, Caterham, Sevenoaks, Guildford, Maidenhead, Box Hill and Virginia Woods. One of the Pioneer runs in 1895 went as far as Aylesbury, and that September saw a run to Brighton. The runs ended in tea, usually

at an inn, where they would sing, go for a walk, play billiards and pool. In the Pioneers case great emphasis was put on smoking. 'After a solid tea, we smoked and smoked, and rode home.' One hotel even managed to arrange the tables in such a way that the Club members could toboggan on a tea-tray from ceiling to floor. For their last run of 1907 the Clarionettes were urged 'please tune up your singing boxes and bring your best voices.'<sup>39</sup>

The success of these runs inevitably depended on the weather. Both Clubs gave long reports on their runs. The Clarion run to Godstone on 3 February was 'Most successful...';<sup>43</sup> Bookham on 10 February: 'A very successful and extremely muddy run';<sup>42</sup> Westerham on 17 February saw a 'nice little crowd' and 'glorious weather'.<sup>44</sup> 'Despite mud, we enjoyed Sunday's run to Merstham' on 10 March.<sup>45</sup> Seventeen took part in the Reigate run on 17 March: 'Although many old faces were missing, the attendance on club runs maintains a good average.'<sup>46</sup> The run to Keston on 21 April was the worst. 'Last Sunday, it rained all day, and six homeless idiots sullied forth to get wet. People starred scornfully out of windows, and pedestrians passed rude remarks, but we never flinched. This was the club run.'<sup>47</sup>

More members tended to take part in the summer runs. 25 went to Redhill with the Clarion Cyclists on 26 May. 'Our numbers increase weekly. Last Sunday we went to Ockham, and interviewed various types of British publicans. A sunny time in the woods terminated in a wet scramble to Cobham for tea.'<sup>48</sup> 'Last Sunday to Reigate Hill. Another truly successful day. To have rambled with us along Sylvan lanes, till we suddenly found ourselves out upon the verge of a steep precipice, with a view across a broad sweep of some thirty miles towards the hazy ridge of the North Downs, was to have lived.'<sup>49</sup> 'The great enjoyment and continued success of our runs was again most particularly marked at Hindhead last Sunday. Although over 40 miles away, South London's reputation for long distances had to be maintained somehow, and reputation being right loyally upheld, in spite of distance or doubtful weather by 21, mainly tourist members.'<sup>50</sup>

There was friendly rivalry with other cycling clubs, the Pioneers

with clubs they met on the runs, like the Wandsworth T & B C, and the London County, while the Clarionettes sparred with other Clarion groups. The latter rivalry seems to have been triggered by the behaviour of the South London Club at the thirteenth annual meet of the National Clarion Cycling Club of which it was a section. This was held at Matlock over 4 days of the Easter weekend at the end of March. Club members and supporters made up 32 of the 1,320 who attended from 123 clubs.

We went to Matlock. We pushed all other Clarion Clubs off the map. We have won the prize for attendance (32 out of 26 paid members). We disgusted the inhabitants and the police. We taught Matlock how to make tea. And now we have returned and will spend a year in anticipation of next Easter. We were well entertained by the Nottingham Club, and we thank them heartily. Also by the Railway Inn, Matlock, where we filled up twice daily; they quite understood London appetites here, and acted accordingly. For further particulars those who were not at Matlock had better turn up next Sunday at Balham Corner at ten o'clock, and we will talk of nothing else.<sup>51</sup>

This also a period when the Clarion Cycling Clubs were coming into existence elsewhere in London, including Croydon, Bromley, and West London, and in which a degree of friendly rivalry and joint runs develops. A report about Clarion Cyclists support of the London Clarion propaganda Van in Islington on 12 May, noted that of the 134 present only 3 were from South London, 'despite possessing the largest membership of any club in the South of England.'<sup>52</sup> Shortly after South London claimed to have saved the situation in a run to Watford on 2 June 'beating North London in numbers by four. Our turnout was only 17.' Tea was provided for the 40 riders by the Watford Labour Church.<sup>53</sup>

Reporting on a joint run in June the Bromley Club jibed: 'But where was South London? Have we beaten them already or are only 24 capable of doing 20 miles...' Croydon reported: 'During our travels we came upon the South London Club... in the park.' On another joint meet in June to Brighton, the Croydon Club was sitting down to breakfast, 'when the bold bad South London rolled in - late.'<sup>54</sup>

The quality of the inns was very important to both Clubs. At the Duke's Head at Leatherhead the Pioneers received a frosty reception: 'Fancy, in these go ahead-days, an inn-keeper being so far behind the times as to have to confess that he cannot provide a meal for six hungry cyclists.' This contrasted with the White Hart in Blackwater, where:

An excellent hot and cold luncheon was served in good style, and much good it did us. We were all very pleased with the food, hotel, landlord, and general surroundings, and I prophesy that we shall have a real good time when he next visit the place.<sup>55</sup>

The Clayton Arms at Godstone was described in the Gazette as 'one of those old-world inns, whose charm has not been destroyed by the craze of modern improvements and where the catering is excellent and proportionately reasonable.'<sup>56</sup> The Clarion Club arranged a Whitsun holiday weekend at Foster's Temperance Hotel, at the top of Redhill. Thirty went down 'and created quite a sensation in the town. We explored the neighbouring country, including Leith Hill. Foster's Hotel is a good place for Clarionettes.'<sup>57</sup>

But the Clubs were far apart in their attitudes and activities in many other ways. The Pioneers was an all male club. Although two members had successfully moved a resolution at the 1885 Committee meeting to admit ladies as members, it was rescinded a year later. 'From this we may gather that with us, at any rate, lady members were not a success.', wrote Haythornthwaite.<sup>58</sup> The columns of the Gazette contain frequent comments deploring the effect of marriage on Club involvement.

On the other hand the Clarion Cyclists included lady members. This was not surprising as there was strong support in Battersea and Wandsworth for votes for women. Charlotte Despard lived in the Thames-side Nine Elms District, and Stephen Sanders wife worked at the head office of the Pankhursts' Womens' Political and Social Union. 'Eighteen hardy cyclists braved the elements on the final run of the season. Thanks are due to the lady member who discoursed sweet music.'<sup>59</sup> At the Annual General Meeting Miss. A. Norman was elected a Vice-Captain.<sup>57</sup>

The social status of the two clubs seems very different, although this is based more on guess-work than actual clear information. The Pioneers seem to have been professionals and businessmen, the Clarionettes better-off workers and clerks. Subscriptions and donations to the Pioneers could be as high as 10s 6d. Many of the Pioneer members were honorary, although they were expected to subscribe, donate money and support social events. Vice-Presidents included Jack Pilditch, the Battersea Borough Surveyor; Percy Low, the former journalist on the newspaper *Wheeling*, and an activist in the National Cycling Union; Percy Thornton, Clapham's Liberal MP; and at one stage W. Chinnery, the Conservative beaten by Burns in 1892 General Election.

Like all organisations they both had their ups and downs of membership and attendances. Being the more highly organised, with a greater level of expenses, it was the Pioneers that experienced the greater difficulties. Because the club was making a loss in June 1901 a Special General Meeting was held to discuss the future of the *Gazette*. 'It appeared that the present parlous state of the finances had arisen owing to the losses on social events, and to the great difficulty experienced in getting in subscriptions, and other outstanding amounts.' It was decided to cease the *Gazette* at the end of the financial year, the last issues being October 1901.<sup>60</sup> I do not know how long the Club survived after that.

The substantial difference between the two clubs, however, was the fact that the Clarion Club was political, while the Pioneer Club was not. Occasionally a hint of politics did creep into the *Gazette*. Not everyone seems to have shared Haythornthwaite's political views. In December 1898 mention is made of 'our worthy, but Radical Captain',<sup>61</sup> The reviewer of the January 1899 dance at Battersea Town Hall was not entirely happy with the facilities provided by the Vestry. The Club had to provide its own furniture and furnishings for the event. The writer thought that as a Vestryman Haythornthwaite should sort these problems out, but if the demands had been acceded to there would have been a cost on the rates.<sup>62</sup> In April 1900 when the Vestry was doing a household survey, Augustus Pipplewhite wrote a barbed letter saying that the information requested was nothing to do with them,

and accusing Haythornthwaite of ‘asking rude and irritating questions.’<sup>63</sup>

The undercurrent of racism in Victorian and Edwardian Britain surfaces, but it is not clear whether it was Haythornthwaite the editor, or another member writing. The summer Ladies dance in 1899 had been a complete flop. The writer met one of his fellow members.

‘He had a face the colour of a Pawnee Indian, and for the moment I imagined that one of the natives from “Savage South Africa” had eluded his keepers.’<sup>64</sup>

There was one dig at John Burns: ‘Wanted. - A few Shakespearean or other quotations, suited to the various members shortly to be treated as “Celebrities” in these columns. Our present stock is very low. Anything from Keats, Burns (not John), Shelley, Tennyson, or Alfred Austin will be highly acceptable.’<sup>65</sup>

The Clarion Club’s political activities included running three dances raising money towards buying a Van for Clarion propaganda activities in London. The Secretary of the Van Committee Frederick Hagger lived in Clapham and was a member of the Club.<sup>66</sup> On one run Club members found 5s. 2d at Crystal Palace and donated it to the Van Fund. There was other specific political fund raising. The collection at the February Fellowship Gathering raised  $\text{œ}1.3\text{s}.6\text{d}$  for the Music Hall Strike Fund.<sup>42</sup> The Club also made a donation to an election campaign fund in Aberdeen.<sup>67</sup>

On 14 July several members supported the Wimbledon Socialist Society on the Common, where ‘A fair muster of Socialists were in attendance from all parts of South London.’ The Society was protesting against the threat by the Commons Conservators to prevent meetings on the Common. In response to the campaign the Conservators backed off.<sup>68</sup>

A major focus for activities of the London Clubs in the summer was to support the tour being made by the newly purchased London Clarion Van Tour. South London Club members were among hundreds who went to Epsom, where there were organised attacks on the Van.<sup>69</sup> Several went

to a Garden Party raising funds for the van on 31 August organised by the Bromley Club.<sup>70</sup>

On September 1 a cycle parade from Lavender Hill was held at 10.30am to support the Van in Battersea Park. 'Nearly 100 cyclists were in appearance, and, with the van in attendance, paraded several of the principal roads, creating much interest by their brave show.' They included members of the South London, the Croydon, the Bromley and the North London clubs.<sup>71</sup>

Dave Prynne, who has researched and written about the Clarion movement, suggests that its members and supporters had:

in their vision of socialism, ... the implicit assumption that the new society would be one of free, conscious self-determination and self-activity for its members at all levels of political and economic life.

A 'change in social values was seen as a necessary pre-condition for a more general improvement in the condition of society. To make a healthier and more just society, it was first necessary to make people 'better', to alter human nature. In attempting to do this, it was believed that community living, fellowship and the expansion of the human personality would play a vital part...' <sup>72</sup>

Sports and leisure activities were clearly seen by many political activists as an important part of everyday life, especially for friendship and relaxation. There were major differences of opinion as to whether such activities should only be carried on through individual self-help as Haythornthwaite of the Pioneers clearly believed, or through collective self-help and provision by the local authority, as Steer of the Clarionettes believed. The bottom line, however, was that the Haythornthwaite approach depended on people having the money to pursue their hobbies. The majority of Battersea's working class could not afford the expense. Therefore municipal provision was all important.

Because I am not a specialist in sports or social history I do not

have a sufficient knowledge to draw any general conclusions or to offer theoretical perspectives. I suspect though that a lot more research into Battersea and Wandsworth working-class organisations will uncover a much richer seam of material about the role of leisure and sporting activities than I have been able to hint at today. My research so far seems to suggest that leisure and sporting activities contributed to the building up of members sense of solidarity, interdependence, unity and confidence, workplace, occupational, neighbourhood and class identity, except when serious personality and policy clashes or financial crises shattered that collectivity.

It is therefore significant that fundamental changes in thinking within the labour movement nationally and in Battersea, involving a sharp debate on whether there should be alliances with the Liberals, or an all-out drive for independent labour movement representation, led to deep divisions within and between organisations in Battersea, resulting in the Progressive Alliance losing control of the Council. The three years from 1909 to 1912 saw Percy Haythornthwaite at the helm. The shock of defeat brought people back together in the Alliance, which re-gained control in 1912. A new period in the development of Battersea's labour movement began. Perhaps the pre-War highlight was the election in 1913 of the Progressive John Archer and his wife as first black Mayor and Mayoress in Britain. The War interrupted what could be achieved. The tensions of the War led many Liberals to split off. The Alliance folded and was replaced by the newly created Battersea Trades & Labour Party which swept into control in 1919.<sup>73</sup> This ushered in a second period of municipal socialist initiatives. I do not know as yet how long the local Clarion Club remained in existence. Its social, leisure and cultural approach is evident in some of the Battersea organisations after the War. When some of these helped form it, they took that approach into the Communist Party. But that is another story.

## Notes

1 Sean Creighton. The Edwardian Roller Skating Boom. *British Society of Sports History Bulletin*, 11. 1991. Since then Roger Pout has written

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2 Sean Creighton. *Battersea and New Unionism*. *South London Record* 4, 1989

3 Ben Ruddock. *Builders of the Borough. A Century of Achievement by Battersea & Wandsworth Trades Union Council 1894-1994*. (Battersea & Wandsworth Trades Union Council, 1993)

4 Kenneth D. Brown. *John Burns*. (Royal Historical Society, 1977)

5 Quoted. A. P. Grubb, *From Candle Factory to British Cabinet. The Life Story of the Right Hon. John Burns, P.C., M.P.* (Edwin Dalton, 1908), p. 107

6 *Ibid*, p. 130

7 William Kent. *John Burns. Labour's Lost Leader*. (Williams & Norgate, 1950) p. 80

8 *ibid*, p. 100

9 *ibid*, p. 132

10 *ibid*, p. 143

11 Jo Stanley. *Battersea Old Town Hall, 1893-1993* (Battersea Arts Centre, 1993)

12 Chris Waters. *British Socialists and the Politics of Popular Culture. 1884-1914*, p. 140-141

13 *Battersea Trades & Labour Council 1904 Annual Report*

14 *ibid*, 1898-99

15 *ibid*, 1907

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24 *The Pioneer Gazette*, August 1894, p.1

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26 *ibid*, September 1895, p.1

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31 *ibid*, September 1894, p.1

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34 *ibid*, p. 12

35 *ibid*, 31 May 1907, p. 12; 7 June 1907, p. 5

36 *ibid*, 10 May 1907, p. 8; 12 July 1907, p. 7

37 *ibid*, 29 November 1907, p. 8

38 *The Pioneer Gazette*, October 1894, p.1

39 *The Clarion*, 27 September 1907, p.9

40 *ibid*, 4 October 1907, p. 11

41 *The Pioneer Gazette*, December & January 1894-5, p.4; February 1895, p.3*ibid*

42 *The Clarion*, 15 February 1907, p. 8

43 *The Clarion*, 8 February 1907, p. 11

44 *ibid*, 22 February 1907, p. 8

45 *ibid*, 15 March 1907, p. 9

46 *ibid*, 22 March 1907,

47 *ibid*, 26 April 1907, p.9

48 *ibid*, 31 May 1907, p. 9

49 *ibid*, 26 July 1907, p. 9

50 *ibid*, 2 August, 1907, p. 9

51 *ibid*, 5 April 1907, p. 9 52 *ibid*, 17 May 1907, p. 9

53 *ibid*, 7 June 1907, p.

54 *ibid*, 14 June 1907, p. 9

55 *The Pioneer Gazette* April 1899, p. 3

56 *ibid*, August 1900, p. 4

57 *The Clarion*, 24 May 1907, p. 9

58 *The Pioneer Gazette*, May 1895, p. 1

59 *The Clarion*, 11 October 1907, p. 11

60 *The Pioneer Gazette*, June 1901, p.4; October 1901

61 *ibid*, December 1889, p.3

5 2 *ibid*, February 1889, p.3

63 *ibid*, February 1899, p. 3

64 *ibid*, July 1899, p. 4

65 *ibid*, August 1901, p.2

66 *The Clarion*, 11 January 1907, p.8; 18 January, p. 10; 25 January, p. 10; 15 February, p. 8; 22 February, p. 5

67 *ibid*, 1 March 1907, p. 8

68 *ibid*, 19 July 1907, p. 5 & 7

69 *ibid*, 23 August 1907, p. 6 & 9

70 *ibid*, 23 August 1907, p. 9; 30 August, p. 10

71 *ibid*, 30 August, p. 9

72 Prynne, *op cit*, p. 75

73 Chris Wrigley, *op cit*, and *Republicanism and War in Battersea* (Wandsworth History Workshop, 1973)