

## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **THE CHOICE OF TIME AND PLACE**

Serried ranks of beach huts form a striking visual component of many English seaside resort towns, introducing elements of a miniaturised suburbia into a maritime landscape. In larger resorts, they contrast with the more urban presence of the Pier and its garish amusements. Jointly, they prompted my interest in exploring the history and use of a place which had acquired an iconic status as a timeless symbol of escape and as a hybrid of the natural and the artificial; the naughty and the restrained. These oppositional characterisations are epitomised by the comic seaside postcard, where images of release and rejuvenation vie with those of discomfort and restriction. These tensions also characterised the division of the resorts into the seemingly fixed categories of popular and select, with the artificial and the naughty seen to be in the ascendant at the popular resort, and the natural and the restrained at the select resort.

The unique built environments and generalised images of the seaside resort raised a series of questions which appear to be best encapsulated under the category of issues of representation, or the ways in which the image of a place is created, maintained, and disseminated. These could be seen to be of particular importance to places reliant on tourism and the selling of their image, and to be critical during a historical period, the interwar years, when consumerism assumed an increasingly higher profile.

The Essex resorts of Clacton and Frinton provide an excellent source of examples for a study of the ways in which place image is shaped, and where select and popular resort image

have been created and maintained. The location of the resorts, some seventy miles east of London, placed them within the catchment area for seaside day trips from London, which also included Brighton, Margate, and Southend (See Map 1). Clacton, as a popular resort, actively sought to compete with these rivals. Its success in doing so was measured by rapid increases in interwar resident population and visitors as well as expansion of its attractions, particularly its Pier. Select Frinton, by contrast carved out a smaller niche for itself as a retreat for City businessmen and other members of the middle and upper classes. In this divergent development, Clacton and Frinton were echoing the similar development of other neighbouring select and popular resorts around the Coast:

Nearly all the bigger resorts have spawned middle class satellites as a reaction to the invasion of the life-giving but peace-disrupting proletariat. Hove is to Brighton as Broadstairs is to Margate; Westcliff is to Southend as St Anne's is to Blackpool. The equation can be repeated almost right round the coast (Hern 1967:152-153).

Clacton and Frinton are thus representative of both paired popular and select resorts and of the numerous southeast area resorts competing for the London market. This point will be primarily made by reference to ways in which the two resorts perceived their position in relation to their competitors, but relevant examples from other resorts will not be neglected.<sup>1</sup>

The interwar period provides the opportunity to study Clacton at the peak of its popularity and Frinton at its most fashionable. The towns were clearly defined by images that placed tourism and the seaside at the fore. The interwar period represented a period when image

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<sup>1</sup> At this stage, it is necessary to note the exclusion of the neighbouring resort of Walton-on-Naze from this study, since it would appear to be a logical candidate given its proximity to Frinton and Clacton, and its longer history of development as a seaside resort. Clacton, however, succeeded in capturing the larger share of the popular resort market from Walton in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, as Chapter Two will detail. By the interwar years Walton had ended its direct competition with Clacton and had become established as a small-scale family resort. It accordingly did not exhibit enough unique characteristics to set it apart as a special case from its larger and noisier popular neighbour, and Clacton and Frinton between them provided a wealth of examples to illustrate the characteristics of popular and select resorts.

Map 1 South-east England showing selected seaside resorts

makers in the two towns broadly agreed on the centrality of their tourist role and recognised the imperative of keeping up with rival resorts, although they often disagreed on the precise form which promotion of their tourist role should take. This strong sense of identity was reinforced by trends in popular consumer culture and expansion of southeastern service-based centres. Many aspects of consumerism developed in the years dominated by the Depression, such as hire purchase, creation of new products, the cinema, increased car ownership, and development of advertising. This reflects the fact that while traditional manufacturing industries were in decline in northern England, new light industries and services arising from new technologies and markets were developing in southeast England in the wake of Britain's 1931 abandonment of the Gold Standard. Thorpe (1992:95) argues that these changes did not have an immediate effect on the hierarchical class structure, with 'no dramatic changes in the structure of British society in the 1930s', but he does contend that economic and cultural change had an immediate impact on leisure, whose changing patterns were 'one of the most significant aspects of British society in the 1930s' (102). The degree of change thus varied according to region and sector of society.

Walton (1996) justifiably argues that seaside historians have downplayed the importance of World War I, but the complex effect of the above noted factors do introduce a time lag into the manifestation of some social changes induced by the war. The War, for example, served as a catalyst to changes in gender relations, which gradually became apparent in changes in patterns in seaside town social norms, seaside rituals, and spending habits during the twenties and thirties. In terms of the development of consumerism and a 'modern' image set in train by post-war economic and social changes, it is argued that the most noticeable changes came in the early thirties. World War II occasioned a much clearer break by virtue of the fact that a large percentage of each town's population was evacuated during the war, which

severed and changed existing ties for many. Clacton's middle classes appear to have moved on after the War, while Frinton failed to regain its earlier measure of social cachet.

The English seaside resort is currently often viewed as a generic product past its sell-by date. Both the popular media and academic critiques have found in the seaside resort an apposite example of faded pleasure to counterpoise with the sensation-packed theme park. Broadsheet features such as 'Remembrance of Holidays Past' (IoS 26/6/95), 'Oh to be Wet and Windswept' (DT 30/8/95) or 'The Beach before Baywatch' (Ind. 30/5/98) provide a nostalgic gloss to the sentiment more starkly phrased by cultural critic John Urry that seaside towers and piers are now 'near the bottom of the hierarchy of the extraordinary' (1988:47). Any remaining popularity of the resorts' Punch and Judy shows, piers, fish and chips and grey weather is frequently attributed to an English predilection for nostalgia. The assumption that the seaside resort became preserved in aspic somewhere along the line, however, ignores its changing nature over time, and in particular, overlooks the ascendancy of modern images which characterised their interwar heyday. The fashion for sun tanning and the creation of a hybrid modern seaside architecture are two of the most obvious examples of the presence of the modern at the interwar seaside resort, but a generalised idea of 'modernity' also forms the backdrop for more subtle evocations used to paint a picture of new, healthy seaside towns in contrast to the grime and disease of industrial areas. This thesis will accordingly explore these images in their interwar context, prior to their postwar disappearance or inversion. The current status of the seaside resort as a backwater obscures the active role they played in the interwar years as important sites for the introduction of new forms of consumption and social practices, as well as the creation of unique built forms. The displacement of this earlier set of images was not simply a matter of the seaside resort standing still while the rest of the world moved on, but rather was a complex process of shifts in social practices, economic determinants, and local

political decisions. The sharp dichotomy between the rise of the seaside resort in the first half of the century and its fall in the second half, thus blurs on closer analysis, with earlier successes never complete, uncontested, or taken for granted, and later declines less total and inevitable.

The geographically marginal position of the seaside resort is assumed by Shields (1991) to translate into cultural, political, and economic marginality. While English seaside resorts may currently be able to be dismissed as ‘places on the margin’, “‘left behind’ in the modern race for progress’ (Shields 1991:3), the interwar resorts cannot be so easily categorised as a subservient periphery to the urban core. In their use of modern imagery and focus for new social practices, architectural styles, and ‘Americanised’ entertainment and attractions, the interwar popular resort was setting trends to some degree rather than just receiving them. Furthermore, a core/periphery model concentrates attention on the power exercised by the core. While over the long term this might prove the case, it is ultimately both incorrect and patronising to assume that all peripheral locations by definition are weak at all times. This minimises the importance of power struggles within and between peripheral locations, which, while in an unequal power relationship with the centre, are not bereft of their own power structures. Struggles over these structures are the focus of this thesis, and are seen to be an important element of the local contribution to the social construction of place.

Images of the seaside resort have arguably changed dramatically from interwar modern to postwar old-fashioned, making it easier to characterise it as marginal. It is questionable, however, whether a similar degree of change has affected the place of individual resorts within the resort hierarchy of ‘popular’ and ‘select’ social tones which first developed in the nineteenth century. These distinctions meant that the experiences, built environments, and activities on

offer at working and middle class popular resorts were clearly demarcated apart from those at middle and upper class select resorts. During the interwar years, some observers assumed the distinctions between select and popular would diminish in the face of rapid coastal growth and democratisation of the seaside holiday. Dougill (1935:267) for example contends that 'select' resorts are, with scarcely any exceptions, becoming popularised', and natural resorts 'are being transformed into artificial ones'. The following case studies of Clacton and Frinton will consider whether this homogenisation in the face of development did occur, or alternatively whether a select resort could continue to fend off popularisation. Frinton's current reputation as a staid, select resort and Clacton's as a somewhat faded popular resort supports the latter interpretation. In fact, the categories of popular and select appear to have acquired a structuring force of their own, rather than diminishing over time. The continuing demarcation of popular and select resorts has to some extent overshadowed the importance of changes over time in the nature of popular and select experiences, built environments and activities. The strength of place myths in relation to the resort hierarchy thus has been an important factor in the characterisation of the English seaside resort as static. This work will argue that this characterisation is not supported by a closer look at the place myths and changes in the qualities of popular and select. This thesis will accordingly explore the creation and maintenance of seaside resort image in the interwar years in order to assess both differences between resorts and the function of those images in determining the overall cultural significance of the seaside resort and the seaside holiday.

The specific literature on the interwar seaside resort is not extensive, but there is a wealth of material on the overall history of the seaside resort and the wider issues raised by their development. The following sections will accordingly examine the existing literature on the seaside resorts and the main parameters of debates on their nature and development, and

significance for wider social and cultural trends, themes that will form the theoretical backdrop for the detailed case study of interwar Clacton and Frinton to follow.

## **STUDIES OF SEASIDE RESORTS**

Studies of the English seaside resort divide roughly into two categories: historical works in which chronological narratives of growth and development are linked in with discussions of social tone; and sociological/cultural studies works in which the seaside town is used as an example within theoretical analyses of tourism and popular culture. In both categories, the growing importance of leisure and consumption in society has, from the late 1970s on, intensified interest in the seaside resort, although there has been little cross-over between the two approaches. Historical work has continued to focus on socio-economic structures, while theoretical work on resorts has incorporated existing historical studies and has not sought to gather new empirical evidence to inform its formulations of the seaside resort as a site for the 'tourist gaze' or as a 'place on the margin'.

A third category of work, which can best be described as cultural history is of relevance here since it is concerned with considering the links between representations and the world they purport to represent (see Hunt 1989:16-17). The general perspective of this thesis is in line with Hunt's stance: '...the accent in cultural history is on close examination - of texts, of pictures, and of actions - and on open-mindedness to what those examinations will reveal, rather than on elaboration of new master narratives or social theories to replace the materialist reductionism of Marxism and the Annales school' (22). This quote implies a tidy split between cultural and socio/economic history which Hunt's work, with its grounding in socio-economic background, does not bear out. Similarly in this thesis the cultural history label is intended to categorise the nature of the questions asked rather than to exclude the valuable insights of

socio-economic history. While a cultural history approach has not previously been specifically applied to the interwar seaside resort, a concern with representation and its effects does characterise studies of other related areas during that period. Examples, to be discussed further below, include analyses of the English countryside Matless (1998), Wright (1985), and Taylor (1994) and on changes to interwar gender imagery (Light 1991). The interest in these works in images of modernity and femininity as key to understanding changes in interwar social/spatial relations will also emerge as strong themes here, along with a characterisation of interwar modernity as a very specific and complex discourse.

Historical studies of the English seaside resort have tended to focus on the years prior to 1914, reflecting the overall focus of seaside historians on socio-economic structures. The early years of the resort are of particular interest from that perspective because the establishment of the resort as a unique new urban typology and the initial creation of long-lasting divisions between popular and select had important ramifications for wider class divisions and national economic growth. These issues were initially noted in Pimlott's 1947 work on the seaside holiday and resort, and explored for the local East Coast resorts in Gayler's 1965 thesis on Essex coastal resorts, which highlights the role of transport links and the competition between local resorts. Another source of useful local historical information are the local histories produced by Jacobs (1984, 1986 and 1993) and Walker (1963). John Walton's 1983 study of comparative English resort development investigates the social and economic structures of the seaside resort in some detail, but does not go beyond 1914. Walton has continued to explore different aspects of English seaside towns as a distinct English urban typology and in relation to European counterparts, producing numerous articles whose findings and contentions will be referred to throughout this work. His later work includes some discussion of the interwar period, such as a 1997 essay on the English seaside resort during the period 1900-1950, which

outlines the main parameters of their growth, and raises some intriguing points for consideration here including the disproportionate growth of some medium-size resorts such as Clacton.

In general, however, interwar changes in resort imagery and their relationship to changing social and cultural patterns has received little academic attention at the case study level. Of the limited amount of thesis work considering the seaside resort during the interwar years, Nigel Morgan's 1991 study of twentieth century Ilfracombe and Torquay in Devon considers the debate on social tone in a later historical period than studied elsewhere. Its main premise is in line with the statement made above that distinctions between select Frinton and popular Clacton did not diminish during the interwar years. Morgan similarly argues: 'the gradations of resort 'social tone' accepted as still valid in the early twentieth century continued well beyond the Great War in Devon, maintained by geographical remoteness and local tourism policies' (26).

Interest in the early years of resort development is compatible with the focus of another area of enquiry, tourism studies, and its 'resort cycle model'. This model posits the resort town as a typology of urban growth and development, where a start-up phase is followed by growth and then either decline or rejuvenation. Factors influencing the start-up phase and distinct changes in growth curves are accordingly the focus of this work, minimising the analysis needed for a period of growth such as the interwar years. The model replicates, in many ways, the product life cycle, and focuses on the place as a product to be marketed, with the number of visitors replacing sales of a product (Cooper 1997:80, Shaw and Williams 1994: 163-167). In this model, 'there is a similarity of resort form and function irrespective of location' (Goodall

1992:8). The phrase ‘irrespective of location’ is of interest - how can a model categorising places ignore the specifics of individual development? Advocates of the resort cycle address this issue through modification for specific cases, but this arguably is at the expense of overall clarity of the model.<sup>2</sup> The resort cycle model does appeal for its straightforward comprehensiveness, but does not go far enough in explaining the differences between popular and select resorts or historical variation over time in the ways resorts grow or decline, which explains its largely limited application to historical work. The select resort, for example, sought to achieve a steady state rather than constant growth, and thus lies somewhat outside of the resort cycle’s measures of success. The resort cycle model is thus of some use in considering Clacton’s relative standing among popular resorts, but does not address the analysis of the tensions within and between resorts and the shifting nature and meaning of resort imagery which is central to this work. While marginal to this work, the resort cycle model in general has had a general influence on analyses of the seaside resort in that it is often portrayed in a stark rise and fall narrative. In particular, it is popular with economic development specialists seeking to remake present day resorts, who can discredit aspects seen to be part of the ‘decline’ phase.

The historical period under discussion, the interwar years, is very clearly defined by two world wars and the intervening economic and political changes wrought by Depression and conflicts between Left and Right (see Baxendale and Pawling 1996). The boundaries are not so clear, however, for social and cultural change, and are viewed differently by later

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<sup>2</sup> Certain similarities of resort form and function allow Soane (1993) to group together Bournemouth, Nice and Los Angeles as comparable resort regions. A strong case can be made, however, for the differences between them. The growth and development of Los Angeles, for example, was multi-nodal and did not simply flow from the ocean inland, as the ‘coastal resort’ category would imply. The iconic and economic symbols of its growth - the car, the motion picture, and the orange grove, point to defining areas of economic growth and cultural meaning not shared with Bournemouth or Nice.

commentators. Light (1991:9) contends that 'For right-wing commentators the 1930s echo the prelapsarian days before the Great War in a kind of dying fall; those on the left are more likely to be impatient for the changes in social mobility which only the late 1950s would bring.' A midway course between the two stances is possible if the incursion of consumerism and the continuation of existing activities and social relations are viewed as a process of complex interaction. Davies (1992:170), for example notes the 'survival of the Victorian pattern of street life' in interwar Salford and Manchester 'alongside the more glamorous modern entertainments such as the cinema', with poverty and gender noted as key variables constraining social life and the spread of consumerism. These factors in particular limited the extent to which the seaside holiday habit penetrated the working class. In 1937, for example, only 15 million out of 46 million took a holiday of one or more weeks (Brunner 1945:3). Holidays instead served as status symbols for those who could afford them. Davies (1992:42) considers that they 'sharpened feelings of relative deprivation in working-class neighbourhoods'. The onward march of consumerism which characterised the interwar years accordingly needs to be qualified by attention to those left behind. Equally, it is important to note that even for those lagging behind, new consumer goods and activities possessed symbolic value, whether as aspirational goals or as a perceived threat to traditional ways.

Studies of the expansion of consumerism and leisure during the interwar years also call attention to the need to note geographical variations in its spread (see Jones 1986). In this respect, the southeastern popular seaside resort towns were clear beneficiaries from the overall growth of southeast service and light industrial sector employment. This thesis will note Clacton's relative success in benefiting from this regional growth. Growth was not of course a variable which defined the success of the select resort. It is now necessary to take a closer look

at what variables did define the select resort and differentiate it from the popular, as well as how they relate to the allied concept of image.

## **DEFINING SOCIAL TONE AND IMAGE**

Social tone has come to be defined in historical works as the creation and maintenance of class distinctions in a hierarchy of resorts from popular to select. The select or popular nature of a resort was determined by the type of visitor it attracted, and their resulting interaction with the resident population, who tended to oppose expansion of tourism, and pro-growth business interests (Morgan 1991:26-27). Different social tones are shown to arise from variations in landownership, political power structures, location, and access, and to provide a clear manifestation of wider class divisions. The segmented development of select and popular resorts has emerged in historical work as a key issue for explanation and debate. The overall principle that class divisions produced segmented markets and resorts did not necessarily pinpoint the precise causes for why one resort, or part of a resort, should be select and another not. Causes for differential social tones were first posited in Harold Perkin's 1976 analysis of northwest resorts. His formulations have since been applied and modified in studies of other resorts and regions, including the South Coast (Cannadine: 1980 and Farrant: 1987), the northeast (Huggins: 1984), Devon (Morgan: 1991 and 1997), and Blackpool and England as a whole (Walton: 1978, 1983a, 1992).

With the exception of some of Walton's studies and Morgan's work, the focus of these works, as noted above, has been on the pre-1914 years. In part, this reflects the extent to which the nineteenth century resort to shed light on wider class divisions. Perkin contends that 'the class consciousness of the Victorians...was nowhere more evident than in their pleasure resorts' (1976:180). Perkin's original formulation of social tone stressing the primacy of unified

ownership in maintaining a select social tone has subsequently been modified to account for popular resorts under unified ownership, such as the bungalow town at Shoreham, whose character was also affected by its accessibility to London (Morgan 1991:25). The status of popular or select is not a steady state which is reached after a resort's initial development, but is instead constantly modified and contested, as Perkin notes (1976:181). In his study of Eastbourne David Cannadine (1980) observes:

The most important factor in determining the social tone was the competition for the domination of the resort by large wealthy residents, hotel keepers and providers of genteel entertainments such as concert halls and bathing establishments; by small property owners, boarding house keepers, and purveyors of cheap amusements; and, later in the century, by large, capitalist enterprises, usually financed from outside, providing cheap, spectacular entertainment for a mass public.

The study of Clacton and Frinton's development reveals related instances of power struggles over social tone. It also reveals variations within the categories of popular and select that gave each resort its own set of unique characteristics. In Clacton, for example, it will be argued that private entrepreneurs rather than large capitalist enterprises provided the mass entertainment, most notably at the Pier, with the result that battles over social tone and appropriate development acquired a much more personalised and heated quality than elsewhere. Additionally, local government played a key role in setting social tone in Clacton and Frinton as well as in other resorts, as Roberts (1983) and Walton (1978, 1983a, 1983b and 1997) have observed. Finally, Clacton was distinguished by its unusual status of being both planned and popular. While Clacton and Frinton are differentiated by their popular and select social tones, they have in common their status as 'planned' resorts, with each laid out as a speculative development in the late nineteenth century. This characteristic is of interest both because of their subsequent divergent development paths and because this status grouped them together with the limited number of other resorts with planned antecedents, including Eastbourne, Bournemouth, Southport, Skegness and Llandudno. These resorts referred to their planned beginnings with pride as a means of distinguishing themselves from other resorts which grew

from haphazardly developed fishing villages, as well as from dense, polluted urban centres. Their planned status became, as detailed in Chapter Three, integrated in the interwar years into overall images of healthfulness and progress.

Differences in social tone, once established, had the effect of differentiating the activities and experiences on offer at popular and select resorts. These were defined by complex assumptions about appropriate pursuits, dress, and demeanour, as well as attitudes to crowds or seclusion, the natural or the artificial, the active or the passive, and the private club or the fee-paying attraction. This thesis will analyse these assumptions and attitudes as found in Clacton and Frinton to illustrate the complexities behind the labels ‘popular’ and ‘select’. This is in contrast to the more straightforward dichotomy between class pursuits found elsewhere such as in functionalist sociology of leisure. Roberts (1970:27), for example, contends that the working class spends its leisure passively, while the middle class is more active. Jackson’s history of the interwar middle class contends:

Unlike the working class, who used their brief respites as often orgiastic escapes from toil, the middle classes tended to have purposeful, sober holidays, pursuing recreation rather than relaxation and release (1991:298).

The notion of the popular resort as a site for orgiastic escape will be examined further below, but for now this characterisation is noted for its stark dichotomy between the popular and select holiday. This clear divide is more a hallmark of preconceptions formed over time of the assumed nature of popular and select holidays and resorts, than it is the product of case studies of these social practices and environments. These preconceptions lead to the reification of the categories of select and popular, in a manner similar to what Davies (1992:viii) terms the ‘historical mythology’ of the leisure habits of the working class. This has created a set of images of a ‘traditional working class peopled by cloth-capped, fish and chip eating, pub-going, football watching working men, taking holidays in Blackpool’. The historical debate on social

tone has not been characterised by an equivalent level of oversimplification, but its socio-economic focus has highlighted issues of how social tone is created and maintained rather than on how it is experienced or translated into enduring spatial characterisations. The nuances of what it meant to be a popular or select resort have therefore not been fully explored, particularly for the interwar years.

Walton's analysis of the extent to which Blackpool can be considered a working-class resort during the period 1840-1974 begins to take some of these issues on board in that it notes firstly, the role of the resident population in maintaining select and popular images, and secondly, does not take definitions of popular and select visitors as given. Walton chronicles alternative characterisations of the working class holidaymaker as respectable rather than rowdy, which meant that to a certain degree that Blackpool was seen to have succeeded in 'taming the mass market'. This reflected an 'essential aspect of Blackpool's role in pioneering mass holiday-making, which depended on security of life, property and sensibilities' (1992:15). Walton, however, is asking a somewhat different set of questions concerning the perception of class definitions and relations, and their effect on resort development, rather than those posed here about cultural representations of the experience of the seaside holiday and their relationship to differences between resorts and wider social trends.

It is thus useful to look elsewhere to broaden the debate on social tone, since it is so closely tied to questions of class. 'Image' arguably describes the process of the translation of experiences and activities into media, myth and memory. To some extent, social tone is interchangeable with that of image in popular usage - the 'social tone' of Clacton or Frinton refers also to its 'image', but 'image' is a much wider and vaguer term, encompassing a wide

range of associations with perception and representation. I will not argue for arbitrary or artificial boundaries between the two terms, but I will use 'social tone' primarily to refer to class differences and to what separates the resorts rather than to what they share in common, while 'image' will be used in relation to popular perceptions of place. In academic terms, it is contended that the historical perspective on the seaside resort can be enriched by inclusion of aspects of cultural history studies of other places as well as issues addressed by sociological work on tourism.

The first aspect of this work to be considered is that of the definition of 'image' and its relation to the tourist experience. The word image has multiple meanings, many of which spin out of an original act of seeing, including image as a physical record such as a photograph or picture; image as a record in the mind's eye which can be drawn from memory; and image as the root of imagination and a component of fantasy. The first is most frequently used in considering the experience of tourism and sites which define and frame the 'tourist gaze' (Urry 1990). Adler (1989) describes the ascendancy of 'sightseeing', or the collection of visual experiences in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries which superseded the classical Grand Tour based on the ritualised movement to a few set locales which provided opportunities for discourse. Nineteenth century Romanticism encouraged the development of a passionate personal relationship between the individual and the tourist sight. This valorisation of sight in the tourist experience as well as the increasing role for travel as a delimiter of taste was codified by the use of photographs, postcards and guidebooks to frame the landscape and fix the image in time, as Chapter Six will discuss (see Taylor 1994). The argument for the predominance of sight in the tourist experience and the concomitant importance of visual representations needs to be qualified, however, by two points. The first is that, as Adler notes, different periods accommodate different travel styles, with those in 'minor travel traditions' journeying to

engage other senses at hot springs, music festivals, or seaside resorts (1989:24). The second is that the very identification of the importance of sight is part of what feminist and post-structuralist writers have identified as an ‘ocularcentric’ bias to Western thought, epitomised by the idea of Cartesian perspective, which supports patriarchal structures and the scientific position of detached observation and rationality (Braidotti 1994, Levin 1993). Urry (1990) uses the ‘tourist gaze’ as a shorthand for the experience of tourism, but as Koshar (1998:325) argues, Urry’s formulation implies an ‘uncritical and undifferentiated extension of consumer behaviour’ in which tourism is strictly passive and superficial. The limitations of the ‘tourist gaze’ are also critiqued by Veijola and Jokinen (1994:136):

..it baffles me that people are so interested in seeing how the Western individual begins to “frame landscapes”, “to create closed spaces” and a panoramic view of things, while they fail to ask whether this *view*, this way of “highlighting overview”, leaves any place for meanings, experiences and knowledge created by, in and for the body? Is the gaze really detachable from the eye, the eye from the body, the body from the situation?

This criticism serves as a reminder that the visual was only one aspect of the seaside holiday, and visual images such as postcards and photographs provide only part of the story and the memory. Urry’s (1997:179) more recent work acknowledges this point, although it is still assumed that tourism predominantly involve ‘the visual appropriation of place’. The hierarchy of sensory perception in the tourist experience is not at issue here, however, but its diversity will be highlighted. The visceral experience of sea, wind, sun, and sand; the sounds of military bands, amusement arcades and hawkers; the taste of ice cream, rock, and fish and chips; and the smells of seaweed and suntan oil; are all additional elements of the experience of the seaside resort. While not directly recorded, of course, echoes of these sensations can be discerned in seaside rituals, activities, and built forms and help form the context of their distinctive spatial and social environments. In particular, the select and popular resort can be distinguished by the efforts to restrain sensation produced by artifice or commerce at the select resort, while such stimulation was accepted, within bounds, at the popular resort. This thesis will chronicle a wide

range of formal legal restrictions and informal social practices which defined the individual self-restraint of a select resort, in contrast with the greater scope for mass conviviality at the popular resort. Taken on their own, the visual representations such as ads and postcards tell more about how image makers wished a place or holiday to be experienced than how it might have actually been experienced in practice. An understanding of the particular towns involved thus requires the integration of the images with an understanding of the activities and spaces they portray, as well as contests over their development and transmission and the ways in which they were used and remembered over the long term. An analysis of activities, rituals and entertainment is accordingly as important a part of this thesis as the analysis of visual and written representations of the resorts.<sup>3</sup>

Image as a composite formulation of place and collective memory forms another useful structuring category within multiple possible definitions of image. This topic has been pursued by a variety of sociologists and geographers, ranging from those focusing on individual perception of place and the creation of ‘mental maps’ (Gould and White 1974) to those concerned with the social construction of space and meaning. Shields (1991) and Harvey (1989) both provide a useful summary of this range of theorists, including three influential French writers on the subject whom have elaborated theories of social space sharing similar categorisations. Lefebvre’s ‘dialectic of space’, Bourdieu’s *habitus* and Foucault’s *dispositif* all

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<sup>3</sup> Frykman and Lofgren’s ethnographic look at turn-of-the-century middle class Sweden (*Culture Builders*: 1987) provides an example of an approach which highlights physical experience and ritual as an essential component of the understanding of place and class. They argue that middle class culture was defined in opposition to both the degenerate aristocracy and the disordered and uncontrolled emerging working class, and that the bourgeoisie’s ‘important cultural codes were transmitted more effectively through trivial everyday routines than through cultural preaching and normative statements’. Table manners, for example, were not so much a lesson in eating as indirect instruction in the art of self-control’ (271). Swedish 19<sup>th</sup> century society was more static and homogeneous than English interwar society, so their arguments about the creation of a clearly hegemonic and unified bourgeois culture cannot be adopted wholesale, but I think their analysis on everyday routines as transmitters of class and culture point to the importance of such interwar seaside resort rituals as bathing, the restrictions placed on beachfront activities, or the ownership of a beach hut.

bring together '(1) conventionally developed Reason, (2) practice or habitual activities, and (3) imagination or creative problem-solving' (Shields 1991:58). This constellation of experience, representation and imagination can be summarised by the terms 'place image' and 'place myth':

A set of core images forms a widely disseminated and commonly held set of images of a place or space. These form a relatively stable group of ideas in currency, reinforced by their communication value as conventions circulating in a discursive economy. To these, a range of more subtle or modifying connotations can be added. These peripheral images are more ephemeral and transitory. They result from idiosyncratic associations and individual experiences. Generally these find expression in descriptions only where they are set into the terms of more conventional and widely understood core images. Collectively a set of place-images forms a place-myth. Thus, there is both a constancy and a shifting quality to this model of place- or space-myths as the core images change slowly over time, are displaced by radical changes in the nature of a place, and as various images simply lose their connotative power, becoming 'dead metaphors', while others are invented, disseminated, and become accepted in common parlance (Shields 1991: 61).

A place myth can also be defined in a more concrete way as a set of assumptions that come to acquire a structuring power of their own. Place myths also circulate widely enough to allow those who have not visited a place to feel nevertheless that they have a good idea of what it is like. Select and popular place myths accordingly become increasingly difficult to alter over time. Gold and Gold (1995:138) for example, discuss how place myths surrounding the Highlands created in the nineteenth century 'emphasizing tradition and tartanry, nostalgia and heritage, sentimentality and romanticism' continue to be exploited for promotional purposes in the twentieth. The negative aspect of this legacy, they contend, is that 'conventional promotional policy propagates a conservative and incomplete picture of Scotland which in turn may limit the nation's ability to broaden its tourist base' (202).

Equally, in the case of the popular English seaside resort, the current place myths of it as old-fashioned mitigate against its easy return to popular status. Their current place myths could be changed over time, however, as witnessed by the disappearance of the representations of modernity which predominated in the interwar years. In Brighton, Shields identifies three

distinct place myths in different periods, the medicalised bathing beach; the mass seaside carnival; and the fading ‘dirty weekend’ myth (1991:110-111). This succession of place myths reflects the fact that towns that sold themselves rather than manufactured products needed to continually re-invent and repackage their identities.<sup>4</sup> Periodisation seems essential to the avoidance of an overly simplistic characterisation of the seaside resort as a timeless zone of transgression, but to provide an even fuller understanding, prevailing social myths need to be linked in more explicitly to contemporary social attitudes and observed in use in other seaside resorts.

Image, therefore, is a slippery term, overladen with meanings and possible uses. It will, however, be used with caution here as the best shorthand for describing the network of perceptions and myths that defined the social construction and wider meaning of the interwar seaside resort. ‘Social tone’ will also be used, but in a much more tightly defined context as a specific configuration of social and class divisions. If ‘place image’ provides a general framework for the consideration of the seaside resort as tourist sites reliant on the production and consumption of representations, ‘modern’ represents a critical interwar modifier of that framework, so its specific definition here now needs to be explored.

## **MULTIPLE MODERNITIES**

Many of the efforts of the resorts in the interwar years to promote their growth and positive place myths were carried out under the banner of the ‘modern’. ‘Modernity’ appeared as a stylistic hallmark of interwar resort architecture, entertainment, fashion, social practice, and advertising. Just as theorists today assign different qualities to the idea of the modern and place

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<sup>4</sup> Another example of a periodisation of place myths of service/image based towns can be found in Klein (1997:29), which notes the succession of myths of Los Angeles: the myth of the climate (1880s to 1930s); the myth of a freeway metropolis (1936-1949); the myths of downtown renewal (1936-49) and the myth of the pacific Byzantium (1980s).

its conception and heyday at different times, seaside resort image makers in the interwar period contested the expropriation of the label for their use, a label that was considered to keep them ahead of any less progressive rivals. The thesis will accordingly analyse the diverse meanings assigned to modernity at the interwar resort, with Chapter Three, for example, discussing how those with different attitudes to growth and development in their towns sought to categorise their attitudes as modern, and also how different agendas were encompassed by 'modern' architecture. Chapter Four considers bathing as a 'modern' pastime, while Chapter Five details the impact of modern images on entertainment and sport. Chapter Six discusses how interwar media and advertising often portrayed the seaside resort in the guise of the modern woman, with both considered to embody progress, health, and physicality without licentiousness.

The multiplicity of meanings assigned to the 'modern' arises in part from the frequent elision of 'modernity' as a historical epoch; 'modernisation' as the process of capital consolidation, commodification, and urbanisation; and 'modernism' as aesthetic style, philosophical approach, or psychological condition. Furthermore, place, as Harvey (1989:25) observes, puts 'a distinctive stamp on the diversity of the modernist effort'. In particular, Harvey's argument continues, the 'modern' is usually assumed to be synonymous with the urban. Modernity as a period is linked to the Industrial Revolution and the concentration of large numbers of people together in urban areas, creating a 'pressing need to confront the psychological, sociological, technical, organizational, and political problems of massive urbanization'. The perceptions of modernism are seen to arise from the experiences of the urban flaneur, alienated factory worker, bedazzled consumer, or crowd participant. The seaside resort, however, cannot be seen to be a typical urban environment, with its natural as well as urban elements. The 'modern' at the seaside resort therefore has a very particular definition. In some senses, the seaside resort was a direct by-product of urbanisation, serving as an outlet for

capitalist investment generated by urban and industrial growth; a psychological escape valve for the overcrowding and stresses of urban life; and as an extension of urbanised forms of mass consumption and entertainment such as the amusement arcade and variety theatre. The seaside resort, however, like the suburb, is a unique urban typology distinguished by the continuing effort to marry development with preservation of links to nature, a typology which also found expression in the Garden City.

The presence of the modern at the seaside carries with it many of the contradictions and tensions noted in interwar perceptions of the role of the countryside, a subject which has been thoughtfully critiqued by a number of writers including Wright (1985), Light (1991), Taylor (1994) and Matless (1998). The approach taken by these writers is considered to be of great value in the analysis here for their careful analysis of issues of representation. This significance includes content as well as method, because of the many similarities which characterised the perception of both the countryside and the seaside as sources of escape and renewal. In the countryside, this took the form of portraying it as the embodiment of tradition and Englishness, what Wright terms 'Deep England'. Critically, however, as David Matless (1998) has pointed out, this Arcadian view was intermingled with advocacy of modern methods of planning by preservationist groups such as the Council for the Preservation of Rural England. The 'movement for preservation entailed not a conservative protection of the old against the new but an attempt to plan a landscape simultaneously modern and traditional under the guidance of an expert public authority' (Matless 1998:25). Matless outlines the complex discourse which underlay the belief in the creation of a 'moral landscape' wherein 'structures are to embody moral principles and offenders are to be cleared out' (47). This discourse could also be observed at the seaside resort, where, it will be shown, organised, modern built environments

were seen to be prerequisites of the promotion of seemly behaviour and the economic health of seaside tourist towns.

A noteworthy characteristic of this moral landscape of rural and seaside escape was that it was frequently defined in feminine terms, whether it be by a rose-covered thatched cottage, or, as discussed in Chapter Six, by the 'modern' woman at the seaside. Light (1991) argues that this was part of an overall trend to a 'feminised' notion of interwar England resulting from the destruction of the heroic masculinity of World War I. The argument here lends this 'feminisation' spatially constrained boundaries, with the intent of metaphors of femininity being to differentiate the seaside and countryside from urban industry, corruption and pollution. A final point noted in the above-mentioned critiques of the interwar countryside picked up on here is that representations of sites for escapes took modern form, such as the modern graphic style of interwar railway or advertising posters, and became widely available, with photographs, guidebooks and postcards ensuring that 'when tourists went in search of what they had already seen, they found exactly what they were looking for' (Taylor 1994:130).

The interwar period is characterised by meanings for 'modern' specific to that time which should not be confused with later understandings of what it meant to be modern in a post-Holocaust, post-atom bomb world. The interwar years thus appear to David Harvey (1989) to be the 'heroic' period of modernity, when both the American version of modernity as progress and the European tradition of modernity as aesthetic liberation and/or democratic functionalism had not yet lost their lustre. For some then, modernity was defined as a 'project', with its roots in Enlightenment rationality (Nava and O'Shea 1996:8). The sense of mission engendered by this goal helps to explain the assurance with which those seeking to be modern

vaunted their claims, knowing that many would accept something proclaimed to be modern as intrinsically beneficial.

Rojek (1995) suggests that the overall modernist project can be usefully divided into two categories. Modernity 1 refers to functionalist/positivist/pluralist philosophies which stress order and control as prime features of modernity, a technocratic and largely positive definition which is contended to interact and co-exist with the darker aesthetic and philosophical sensibilities of Modernity 2, which focuses on the disorder and fragmentation engendered by urbanisation. Rojek's categories are of some use in considering the interwar seaside resort because they provide one way of distinguishing divergent strands of modernity. Rojek's first category, Modernity 1, initially seems to emerge as a strong theme around the late Victorian period when it features in efforts to develop and publicise the towns as centres of health, cleanliness, planning and progress. The second type of modern imagery, Modernity 2, appears in a different and less universally welcome guise following World War I when it is linked to the relaxation of social standards and the development of consumerism and mass culture. Chapters Three and Six will discuss in more detail the negative reaction to these changes by some, such as elements of the English intelligentsia, who saw commercialised modernity as an attack on English tradition. Tensions between the positive and negative aspects of modernity are thus, it will be argued, a significant feature of contests over the formation and projection of resort image. One aspect of these tensions and confusions over what it meant to be modern is that Modernity 1 and Modernity 2 could co-exist as well as oppose. Butlin's holiday camp, for example, exemplified the rational planning of Modernity 1 in its regimented physical layout and daily programme, as well as the consumerist aspects of Modernity 2 in its adoption of American entertainment for a mass market.

Rojek's categories thus point to different historical roots for a complicated debate rather than cut and dried positions. Other efforts to clarify formulations of modernity require similar attention to the complexity of the debate in practice. Harvey makes a distinction between the material modernity of the US in contrast to the intellectual and aesthetic modernity of Europe, but notes that 'Modernism look quite different depending on where one locates oneself and when' (1989:25). For example, Modern architectural styles which found favour at the interwar seaside resort, as discussed in Chapter Three, owed varying degrees of debt to both American streamline imagery and technological advances and to European aesthetic and social goals, depending on the extent to which they deployed the playful allusions to the ocean liner of Jazz Moderne, or the austere formalism of the International Style.

Modern styles, fashions and ideas were slow to take off in England at first, particularly since they were seen to be American or Continental imports, but by the 1930s, modernity had definitely made a major impact on the seaside resort. Yates and Stafford do not consider the influence of modernity to have been significant in the 1920s: 'a survey of the Kent resorts in 1926, published by the Southern Railway Company, showed that the major resorts were still essentially Edwardian in the range of their attractions' (1985:112). This had changed by the 1930s, with construction of such attractions as the architecturally Moderne Dreamland showing the distinct impact of consumerist modernity in Margate. The following observations, found in the 1934 collection of six essays on seaside towns, illustrates the ambivalent fascination with the attractions of consumerist modernism; attractions which do not quite succeed in obliterating the natural charms of the town:

Today. When all seaside place of any popularity are equally 'modern'. When they all have their cinemas and pin-tables, their automatic machines and bars; their swimming-pools, their tennis courts, their golf-links and their dance halls. When their beaches are all equally crowded, their bandstands packed, their piers alive, their hotels a-hum, their boarding house parties debouching on

to the steps, their pretty girls, their smart young men, their careful parents, their thousand children. Everyone goes to the seaside for enjoyment, and everyone finds it. Every place provides the same fare today....Yet the smell of the air is different here. That is because it is the breath of the sea which animates Margate (Cloud 1934:258).

‘Everyone goes to the beach for enjoyment and everyone finds it’ reflects the self-assured role of the interwar seaside town as specialised sites for escape and pleasure. The next section will discuss works which consider the extent to which the resorts fulfilled this role.

### **RELEASE OR RESTRAINT?**

You can do a lot of things at the seaside that you can’t do in town.

line from song by Mark Sheridan, quoted in Marsden (1947)

The promise of escape forms a key component of resort imagery, with renewal or even transgression on sun-baked sands counterpoised to the humdrum routinised work and strict social norms of inland cities. The seaside resort is thus a prototypical site for leisure and tourism, which is defined from the perspective of their consumers as places where the individual can experience the out-of-the-ordinary, either in the sense of providing ‘authenticity’ to counteract alienation (McCannell 1976), ‘liminality’ to provide a sense of escape and new possibilities (Shields 1991) or ‘departures’ from the norm (Urry 1990). The success of a tourist site in this definition accordingly relates to the extent reality converges with imagery in the individual tourist’s experience, and the ways in which the expectation of difference is followed by the actual experience of the out-of-the-ordinary, and its incorporation into memory. This model downplays the appeal of the predictable, which Ritzer (1997) contends still has appeal, even in the era of the post-Fordist tourist. To some extent, it is possible to take into account different tourist motivations by formulating different individual typologies. Cohen (1988) for example, suggests that McCannell’s search for authenticity is not the motive for all tourists, since not all tourists are equally alienated. In his typology only the ‘existential’ tourist is

seeking authenticity; there are also casual 'recreational' tourists as well as 'diversionary', 'experiential', and 'experimental' tourists exemplifying different standings in their own societies, in search of different qualities in travel. The complicated ways in which particular places might appeal to differently motivated tourists, however, has received less attention. The assumption that seaside resorts are liminal escape zones for all thus merits further consideration.

The concept of liminality was first systematically applied in Victor Turner's anthropological studies of rites of passage and occasions when individuals are in marginal or transitional positions in their communities such as puberty rituals, festivals, or marriage ceremonies (1969). In these rites of passage, certain individuals function as 'liminal entities' whom are on the margins of the social structure, such as monks or court jesters. In Turner's work, place appears in rites of passage as a state of mind, a 'communitas' of shared experiences (see also Shields 1991).

Liminality was subsequently linked more firmly to specific places where transgressive experiences occurred in works considering firstly the tourist experience, and secondly, the social construction of space. Liminality is argued to be a component of the tourist experience by Cohen (1988), who sees the rituals of traditional societies transformed into the leisure of modern societies, although liminality and 'recreation as re-creation' now has an optional rather than an obligatory status. The work of Stallybrass and White (1986) on the role of transgression links liminality to class and spatial relationships, and is a key source for theories that highlight the liminality of the seaside resort. Partly due to the legitimisation of its medical virtues, Stallybrass and White contend that the beach evolved into a site for 'carnival' activities and

behaviours, while repressive state action gradually halted fairs, games and festivals at inland sites. The definition of carnival as the populist inversion of hierarchies and rituals accordingly granted the seaside resort an identification with the statuses of 'low' as opposed to 'high' culture, and a marginal geographical status contrasting to urban centres. Shields (1991) draws upon this formulation and contends that liminality is essential to understanding the social construction of Brighton as a tourist site and a place myth, where there was an expectation that boundaries would be reached and structuring codes could be broken. Liminal zones are not necessarily zones of freedom; instead they opposed their own particular rituals and routines to contrast with the everyday. Shields notes that the 'subtle technologies of manners and modesty' related to bathing and beach-going routinised activities and social interaction on the pleasure beach (1991:89). It would seem, however, that liminality would be reduced if the routinisation of activities and social interaction resulted in their convergence with everyday rituals back home.

Liminality seems an even more puzzling concept when transferred to spaces. Cultural history studies have been keen to borrow from anthropology, but this particular term cannot be straightforwardly transferred from small traditional communities to the more fragmented spaces and rituals of urbanised society. Defining a place as 'betwixt and between', or inherently fluid, would seem to deny that a place characterised as liminal could have a sense of uniqueness and history. Also, it is assumed that boundary zones are necessarily liminal transgressive zones, but boundary zones by definition are ambiguous areas where a visitor could pursue a variety of other strategies including confrontation, submission to new rules, avoidance, or escape. It is thus important to examine how these zones were actually regulated and represented to see which strategies prevailed, and examples from Clacton and Frinton will be analysed in this work to discern the balance between transgression and restraint.

To the extent that a place can be described as liminal, the beach would certainly be a likely candidate given its marginal position between land and sea. Corbin (1994) chronicles the pre-modern identification of the seaside with images of terror and wonder, and its gradual inclusion within the network of everyday social practice through artistic transformation and medicalised bathing rituals. Domestication notwithstanding, however, the marginal geographical status of the seafront combined with the promise of escape from routine of the holiday experience continues to prompt associations with liminality. In their history of the beach, Lencek and Bosker romanticise the beach as a site for re-invention of the self, ‘the infinitely creative junction of elements where habit and convention dissipate and imagination once again takes over’ (1998:xxiv).

While not denying that the seaside could offer for some ‘a liberation from the regimes of normative practices and performance codes of mundane life’ (Shields 1991:84), I would argue that the assumption that the interwar English beach is necessarily liminal overplays the liberating aspect of seaside holidays and resorts in at least three ways. The first is that the degree of liminality will be significantly varied by factors such as gender, class and occupation. A seaside family holiday, for example, could have a low quotient of liminality for many mothers if they felt that the change of locale did not override the familiarity engendered by performing similar domestic tasks such as childcare or organising meals, within the same set of social relations as home. Brunner’s 1945 study of the holiday industry found that, particularly in the North and Scotland, ‘in a great many families the wife will have no holiday even away from home, for she will still have to do the cooking, or buy the food for the landlady to cook’ (10). Secondly, the seaside resort is likely to be a non-liminal zone for its residents and workers. And finally, it downplays the importance of new restrictive codes imposed at the

seaside which replicate social norms found elsewhere. Holidaymakers wishing to experience difference and relax normal standards of behaviour at an interwar seaside resort would find their actions constrained at every moment by regulation reflecting prevailing social norms, which Chapter Four will discuss. A key point about these norms during the interwar years is that many standards were relaxed in the wake of changing social relations, so that, for example, by the end of the interwar years, bathers wore swimwear that would have been considered scandalous at the beginning of the 1920s. These changes in fashion do not seem to have made the beach a more liminal and transgressive place. Instead, the boundaries shifted to permit scantier dress to remain within acceptable social norms.

While liminality is arguably too subjective and historically variable a concept to aid understanding of a socially constructed space, it is perhaps more appropriate if it is used in its original anthropological context of ritual. In this context, the social restrictions governing the beach can be seen to be the ritualistic text of the seaside experience, akin to the procedures governing any liminal rite of passage, and the Beach Inspector, wearing his cap and military uniform, assumes the role of shaman interpreting the changing set of rules and regulations. It seems most useful in general, however, to view liminality as a possible goal for the tourist which can either be tempered by reality or achieved in circuitous ways, such as enjoyment of the regimentation at a holiday camp.

The above points also apply to the beach as a site for leisure. Leisure is another relative category which, as Rojek observes, can no longer be considered to exist in a discrete dichotomy separate from work and linked to 'freedom', 'choice' and 'self-determination' (1995:1). It is accordingly difficult to define spaces as 'leisure' spaces, since like 'liminal' spaces, their

perception varies by class, race, and gender, and they are likely to be work spaces for some. Furthermore, the experience of the space may be fraught with tensions over its use and control, which lie outside the traditional idea of leisure as time for relaxation and renewal.

While the evolution of popular and select resorts, or sections of resorts, worked to contain these tensions, the seaside resorts were, as Walton observes, often crucibles of conflict over lifestyles, as visitors from differing and sometimes incompatible backgrounds and with divergent expectations about holiday enjoyments and environments competed for access to and use of valued space within resorts' (1997:23). This is in line with Rojek's assertion that 'conflict over public leisure space occurs regularly' (1989:191). By contrast, functional leisure theorists, epitomising Rojek's Modernity 1 view of the world as ordered and controlled, would see the evolution of popular and select resorts as a consequence of leisure's function of enhancing the well-being of society through clearly delineated forms of identity, association and practice. Through such spatial divisions as popular and select resorts, Modernity 1 'installs and maintains a formal and informal system of policing which aims to ensure that leisure practice is orderly and decent' (Rojek 1995:39-40).

It is important to note this positivist view of leisure because it was a prominent approach during the 'heroic' interwar period of modernity. The notion that 'New Leisure Makes New Men', the title of a chapter in the 1932 work *Leisure in the Modern World* (Burns) reflected the transformative power frequently granted to the ever-increasing profile of leisure in an era perceived as characterised by technological progress and increasing material prosperity. Cross (1993) describes how the belief in the transformative potential of leisure informed many interwar initiatives to further 'democratic' leisure pursuits such as rambling and the trade union

push for paid leave from work (see also Jones 1986). He observes that during the 1920s many assumed that ‘free time, not the endless increase of consumption was the inevitable consequence of growth’. Granting more free time to workers was thus seen to be a logical step by those on both the left and right influenced by this positive view, who shared the opinion that ‘the holiday was a free-time ritual that ventilated social space, promised release from routine behaviours, and inculcated shared goals of familial and national reconciliation’ (100).

It seems fair to assume that this positive view of leisure would then go on to promote positive views of leisure spaces, and create a receptive atmosphere for images of seaside resorts as modern and healthful, in line with their modern and health-giving function. The imperatives of the increasing demand for leisure were also felt to increase demand for seaside holidays. This view is apparent in Dougill’s 1935 prediction that ‘the popularity of the seaside will increase, and...its advantages from residential, health and recreational points of view will be more and more needed and sought after’ (268). The incorporation of this positive view of leisure with other elements of the modernist discourse is also illustrated in physical form by new temples of leisure such as the modern De la Warr Pavilion in Bexhill, which an opening ceremony speech hoped could give ‘suggestions to those of future generations in methods for employing their leisure’ (Hawkins 1979: 270). Planners and architects frequently noted that the down side to this trend, however, was the increasing risk that this national asset could be ‘frittered away’ by unregulated development (Dougill 1935:269). The realisation of the positive aspects of increases in leisure accordingly required orderly planning and supervision. Cross sees the early 1930s as the high point of an optimistic view of the possibilities of leisure. By the late 1930s, however, this widespread support for the expansion of free time and democratic leisure had given way to the acceptance of the ‘culture of work and spend’ (1993:16). ‘Free time seems to have depoliticized in private, cyclic rites of the weekend and vacation’ (126), at

the same time that many more were for the first time gaining the opportunity for paid leave with the 1938 Holidays with Pay Act.

The above overview of sources and issues indicates a theoretical stance for this thesis somewhere between narrative historical empiricism and a theory-led interpretative analysis, with the label of a cultural history best describing the effort to link theory of representation to specific historical examples. The influence of post-structuralist critiques of meta-narratives and universal models can be seen in the critical attitude adopted to rigid functional formulations, such as the resort cycle model. On the other hand, post-structuralist theories highlighting transgression and marginality as key features of the seaside resort have been questioned for their over-simplification of historical evidence, which masks the continuities between social practices at the beach and those elsewhere. The usefulness of any particular category or term such as modernity, liminality, leisure, or image will accordingly be assessed in terms of its specific interpretation for the interwar seaside resort.

The key issues for discussion here of the differences between popular and select resorts, the changing nature and significance of resort imagery, and the particular characteristics of two resorts during the interwar years, do not just arise from the literature written after the fact, but reflect the images and issues raised by a study of sources produced at the time. In a study concerned with representation, it is of course important to study the representations themselves as well as the things written about them later, giving theoretical speculation an empirical grounding. In particular, the prevalence of modern imagery during the interwar years, including the metaphor of the seaside as a modern woman, became a focus for this dissertation due to the extent to which it characterised the preoccupations and style of interwar primary

sources, and not because it received extensive coverage in secondary studies of the resorts. The next section will therefore outline the choice of primary sources and discuss their application to the understanding of image and the interwar seaside resort.

## **PRIMARY SOURCES**

Local newspapers for Clacton and Frinton form the backbone of this work's historical evidence. In addition to being considered as sources of factual information, they will also be considered as representations, of interest for their rhetoric, layout and editorial comment. This point also applies to contemporaneous essays and journal articles, and to later popularised histories of the seaside resort. The pre-eminent role of newspapers also arises from the fact that they are the main source for detailed contemporary comment on the political debates and conflicts over social tone which shaped interwar Clacton and Frinton; debates which did not always find their way into secondary sources. Of particular value is their inclusion of full transcripts of Council meetings, which reveal the highly contested nature of interwar policy-making as well as insights into how different councillors viewed Clacton's image and future. Leader comment and letter columns provide further rich sources of contemporary perceptions of image and appropriate policy direction. The owner of the *Clacton Times*, Col. Quick, was an active participant in Clacton political life and served on the Council for many years. He used the paper as a vehicle to boost Clacton and surround it with a progressive image, with his paper having a slight edge in hyperbole over its equally promotion-minded rival, the *Clacton Graphic*. Both often printed articles comparing Clacton to other resorts and discussing best practice amongst seaside resorts. The papers are thus an essential source of evidence to support the argument that modern images dominated the portrayal of interwar Clacton and Frinton. It is important, however, to understand the agenda of the newspapers in using these images, so they need to be analysed within in the context of the business and political motivation and interests of their publishers.

Modern imagery marked changes in the newspapers' style as well as their content. The newspapers of 1919 show little change from the pre-war papers in their wordy editorial style and limited advertising for consumer goods, while the papers of 1939 are more familiar to a present day reader in their breezier journalistic style, use of photographs, and consumer-conscious ads. The papers' stylistic changes thus also illustrate the growth of a consumer culture, which was charted in the local paper in its coverage of such stories as battles over the playing of jazz music on Sundays; the end of bathing restrictions; the opening of Butlin's holiday camp; the continual expansion of attractions on Clacton Pier; and the partial construction of a Moderne estate in Frinton.

Official Council and Parliamentary records, and Government statistics yielded basic information on names, dates, trends, and regulations, which were then integrated in with other sources to provide a more comprehensive picture. It took me some time, for example, to finally establish that there were in fact no explicit regulations against picnicking on the greensward in Frinton in spite of assertions in newspaper articles and former beach-goers' comments to the contrary. Council minutes, bylaws and a Parliamentary Act all failed to mention any picnicking restrictions, which led me to believe that subsequent newspaper articles and individual recollections were misleading. Additional sources, however, reconciled these contradictory findings. Newspaper references to picnicking nuisances in the 1920s established that picnicking had been perceived as a problem which the Council should address, but a 1926 letter in the Frinton Heritage Trust archives from a solicitor advised Frinton Council that it was legally not empowered to restrict picnicking. An interview with a post-war Deputy Town Clerk revealed, however, that the Council proceeded to post anti-picnicking prohibitions in the post-war years, in spite of legal and Home Office indications to the contrary. This example will be discussed below to illustrate the social construction of myth and image, but is mentioned

here in the context of a methodological approach which seeks to incorporate a range of written and visual primary sources as well as the memories and recollections of former residents.

The wealth of visual available material, including photographs, postcards, guidebooks, and maps, provides a good starting point from which to form both my own set of mental images of Clacton and Frinton in the interwar years and to speculate on the meaning of those images for others. The visual artefacts are also important in formulating notions of the social construction of the places. Postcards, for example, are interesting not only for their visual images of Clacton and Frinton in previous times but also for the social commentary found in the comic cards, the written comments on the back, and the type and quantity of cards available for Clacton, as a popular resort, versus Frinton as a select one, where only a few non-humorous cards were circulated in the past and are available to collect today. Guidebooks provide evidence of the prevalence of modern imagery and changes in the structuring of the tourist experience, as well as providing useful factual information on attractions and accommodation. Finally, the unique architecture and building types at the seaside constitute a rich source of imagery and evidence about the social construction of seaside spaces. Photographs, plans and the existing buildings themselves have been studied to aid decoding of the Modern architectural vocabulary and the links between design, social meaning, and place myths.

Because place image is a social construct lying within social memory, it is essential to seek it out in the recollections of those involved in both shaping it and reacting to it. I have therefore included material from interviews with residents and visitors which is used to consider current perceptions of past place images; the ways in which decisions were made to visit or live in Clacton and Frinton; and the extent to which the structure of daily life and

activities in the two towns set them apart both from each other and from non-seaside towns. The number of interviews is small and confined to those who still live in the Clacton and Frinton area, but I was seeking vivid memories of those who had thought about their association with the towns rather than pursuing quantitative goals of completeness and representativeness. The usefulness of this material can be demonstrated in that there were some instances where interviewees provided information not available in written sources, such as the extent of accommodation letting in the summer (Chapter Two), or as noted above, the story of picnicking regulations in Frinton. Changes in social tone are difficult to chart using Census statistics alone, so anecdotal evidence is useful in fleshing out a picture of what the class composition of the towns was perceived to be. An inclusive methodological approach will accordingly be used in pursuing the areas outlined in the following chapter summary.

## **CHAPTER SUMMARY**

The structure of this thesis flows from the central concern with changing forms of representation of the seaside resort during the interwar years. Structural economic, demographic, and political parameters are outlined in the next chapter, with the subsequent four chapters considering in detail the particular nature of seaside activities at popular Clacton and select Frinton, and the ways these were contested and represented in built form, place myths, media, and mementoes.

The analysis of the construction of interwar place images in Clacton and Frinton will begin with a consideration of their Victorian and Edwardian inheritance in Chapter Two. The development of the local political power structures and economic bases in this period established the interwar parameters of social tone. The role of local government is critical in this regard, since local authorities in seaside resorts assumed a higher level of service and

infrastructure provision than comparable inland authorities in order to sustain the tourist economy. In Clacton, the involvement of a steamer company with the contradictory remit to both promote steamer day trippers and sell its real estate in the town, set the scene for decades of arguments over whether the town should cultivate or discourage a popular image. In Frinton, social tone was primarily defined negatively by what could not be done, an approach which delimited its interwar fashionability.

The physical development of the two resorts during the interwar years will be described in Chapter Three in the context of the development of town planning as a modern discipline, with its far-reaching goals to order space for enlightened capital, contrasting with its limited legislative means. Butlin's holiday camp and the Jaywick chalet development provide two good case studies of the planning of mass leisure residential spaces, particularly since Clacton Council accepted Butlin's and fought against Jaywick. The partial development of a Moderne estate in Frinton, the Frinton Park Estate, will be examined as an instance where modernity was adopted more as a style to promote a fashionable image, rather than as a progressive ideology.

Chapter Four analyses the dramatic change in seafront activities and regulation of social order which characterised the interwar seaside resort. In 1919, disused bathing machines still served as changing facilities, numerous bathing restrictions applied, bathing costumes tended to be commodious, unflattering, and rented, and pale skin was a virtue. By 1939, public changing chalets and private beach huts had replaced tents and machines, bathing restrictions had largely disappeared, and bathing costumes had shrunk and become a personal wardrobe necessity, along with a tan. The development of the sun-worship culture has received academic attention, particularly in relation to the development of consumerism, but does not appear to have been

studied along with the concomitant transformation of bathing rituals, restrictions, and buildings. These changes in Clacton and Frinton will therefore be tracked through various sources including bylaws, newspaper coverage, personal reminiscences, and photographs to show how they mirrored larger changes in attitudes to the body and public leisure activities. A number of interesting issues emerge along the way, such as the balance between official legal and unofficial economic and social sanctions in the maintenance of social order on the beach (with particular regard to the role of the Beach Inspector), and the degree to which private beach huts promoted a higher social tone at Frinton.

Other interwar seafront activities were equally constrained by the regulation and division of seafront space. Frinton excluded commercial activity from its seafront altogether, while in Clacton, the Council sought to segregate commercial and non-commercial uses, with the assumption that commercial uses were associated with a lower social tone. Chapter Five describes how the Council thus had an ambivalent attitude to the Pier and did not greatly encourage its interwar expansion. The Pier may have represented the latest in modern entertainment, but the perceived permissiveness of new cultural forms was felt to represent a threat to the town's image. Frinton image makers felt its select tone could best be preserved by restricting activities to rational recreational pursuits such as golf and tennis, two sports which could be delimited by the rules of an exclusive club, and which entailed engagement and activity rather than passive consumption.

Select and popular resorts could also be distinguished by their attitudes to self-advertisement. Chapter Six discusses how Frinton relied on word of mouth to maintain its image, along with occasional features in the sports or fashion pages of the newspaper, while

Clacton, by contrast, was very much aware that its growth and progressive image depended on vigorous advertisement and attention to the competition posed by other resorts. The publicity produced by Clacton, either through advertising campaigns or in the newspaper, is of interest for the ways in which the publicity was broadcast and received, and for the content of the campaigns themselves. Clacton's catchphrase, for example, 'Sunny Clacton - Champagne Air, Rainfall Rare' encapsulates the interwar turn to sun worship and Clacton's wishful attempt to combine the popular and the select in its champagne air. Clacton's publicity was prepared with the efforts of other resorts very much in mind. Clacton was an active member of the Association of Health and Pleasure Resorts, which allowed it both to keep up with what the competition was doing and to group together to promote the overall interests of seaside tourism.

The thesis concludes with a summary of the key points made concerning the modern interwar images of Clacton and Frinton and raises area for further debate and study. In terms of image, 'modern' became an increasingly inappropriate adjective to apply to seaside resorts judged in the same category as new theme parks. But although 'modern' may have declined in importance in post-war attempts to mould Clacton and Frinton's images, new place myths continue to shape the towns' direction. To illustrate this point, four vignettes will be presented of prototypical events, structures, or rituals which embody elements of the towns' postwar images, as well as changes and continuities in the nature of popular and select. The first postwar decades will be illustrated by the Mods and Rockers 'riots' in Clacton and the London commuter ritual in Frinton, and the Clacton Common Factory Outlet and a new pub for Frinton will be flagged as exemplifying recent representation and images.

## CONCLUSION

The overall goal of this dissertation is thus to examine the social construction of place image in two interwar seaside resorts as constituted in physical activities, social relations and built environments and then translated into media, memory and myth. The English interwar seaside resort is presented as a particularly appropriate site to study place image, since image forms a cornerstone of its identity as a tourist destination. This identity was transformed in the interwar years by the development of consumer culture, contests over the form and extent of built development, and changes in the formal and informal regulation of social behaviour and physical activity. Seaside resort identity was far from uniform, and analysis of the divergent development of Clacton as a popular resort and Frinton as a select resort is intended to show the range of formal and informal mechanisms which created and maintained distinct place images. As befits a social/cultural history study carried out in a sociology department, I have endeavoured to incorporate arguments from both areas, including historical debates on social tone and benchmarks in the development of consumerism as well as sociological debates on modernity, liminality, and tourist spaces.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **THE CREATION, GROWTH, AND POLITICAL CONTROL OF A TOURIST ECONOMY IN CLACTON AND FRINTON**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

Clacton was established in 1871 by a steamboat company with the dual remit of bringing the masses to Clacton on its steamboats and maximising the value of its Clacton land. Mass popularity and retention of a measure of selectness continued through its early years and into the interwar years as contradictory goals for Clacton image makers. This chapter will detail the pre-World War I distinctions in social tone which marked Clacton and Frinton from the outset. Debates on social tone then periodically reoccurred in Clacton, in the wake of new developments and issues which re-opened the debate on the appropriate direction for the town. In Frinton, meanwhile, this chapter will note how a select social tone was more easily maintained given the congruence between landowner interests, the self-selecting visitor and residential market, and underlying legal, economic, and social sanctions. Clacton also contrasts with large popular resorts, which could accommodate select visitors in their own distinct section of the town, allowing the economically profitable popular image to predominate in the remainder of the town.

This chapter will then detail the role of local authorities in the creation and maintenance of seaside resort image and social tone. Support for the principle of active municipal intervention on one hand will be contrasted with the divisions in practice imposed by conflicting interest groups, including hoteliers, businessmen, professionals, and ratepayers. Attitudes to growth and its effect on social tone will be presented as the key dividing lines on Clacton Council rather than party political allegiance. The resulting conflicts over policies

concerning new development and appropriate levels of municipal intervention held the Council back from both maximum levels of municipal investment and from saying no to private investment catering to the mass market.

The rapid interwar population and visitor growth of the two towns will next be analysed in the context of national trends in settlement and consumer preferences. This analysis leads on to a discussion of the economic structure of Clacton and Frinton. Their reliance on tourism as their sole interwar industry will be highlighted, a focus that was sustained by high levels of resident participation in the provision of accommodation and tourist services. Finally, the class composition of the two towns will be considered, on the basis of the limited information available, to assess the relationship between perceived social tone and the actual class composition of the residents.

## **THE CURATIVE SEASIDE RESORT AND THE ESSEX COAST**

The early resorts, epitomised by Brighton (Brighthelmstone) and Scarborough, asserted medical benefit as their drawing points, in common with their direct antecedents the inland spas. The East Coast largely missed out on this initial period of development of the medicalised seaside resort, as it had a reputation for being unhealthy, as Chapter Six will detail. A further physical constraint on the development of East Coast resorts was their eroding coastlines. Around the turn of the nineteenth century, for example, Walton's original church was in the final throes of sliding into the sea. A hundred years later, an engineer working on Frinton's sea defences noted that the coastline of loosely consolidated London Clay and Glacial deposits in north-east Essex was retreating at an average rate of 10 ft. every year. Early construction of sea defences was hampered by a lack of understanding of the reasons for coastal erosion and the techniques of coastal protection, and the expense of constructing sea defences

deterred individual landowners (Gayler, 1965:33,34). Lack of access to London further inhibited early Essex development. Brighton, by contrast, was a relatively smooth stagecoach ride away across the Downs, or Margate, accessible via boats down the Thames.<sup>5</sup> The initial limited development in coastal Essex was confined to Southend, Walton and Harwich because they were the only places with a stage coach service and recognisable roads to the shore (Gayler, 1965:29).

Demand for seaside holidays was of course initially limited to a small segment of the population. Early seaside holidays bore a stronger resemblance to spa visits than to modern holidays. Early seaside ‘seasons’ from around August through early October, like those at the spas revolved around a busy formal social calendar, moderated by a Master of Ceremonies. As noted in Chapter Four, sea bathing was assigned a therapeutic role, akin to taking the waters, and with the growth of the Romantic Movement acquired claims to spiritual healing qualities as well (Shields 1991:75-82, Urry 1990:20, Walton, 1983a:6-20). During the nineteenth century, the seaside resorts, which were ‘large enough to absorb all comers’, supplanted the spas as the pre-eminent holiday destination (Pimlott 1976:55). A significant aspect of this development was that the working classes established a presence early on at some resorts, in particular the Thanet resorts accessible by boat from London, thus creating a distinction between select and popular resorts. In his thesis on the early Thanet resorts, Whyman notes: ‘the increasing popularity of Margate compared to the selectness of Broadstairs was a constant theme in guidebooks from the 1780s onward’ (1980:vi-vii).

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<sup>5</sup>Travelling was, however, an arduous occupation under any circumstances. Walton writes (1983:21): The earliest stage-coaches in 1762 took a day between London and Brighton, but by 1791 nine hours was the norm, falling again as competition intensified to six hours in 1811 and between five and six hours in 1833. Margate was reached initially by corn hoys down the Thames, and according to Walton (1983:13) this form of transport “enabled ‘the decent tradesman’ and ‘people of the middle and inferior classes’ to pay regular visits in the summer.”

East Coast resorts lacked the fashionable cachet of Brighton, although Royal visits to Southend in 1801 and 1803 did provide a short lived impetus to development. Southend, like other towns along the coast, did not take off until transport improved and a wider demand for seaside holidays was created beginning in the mid-nineteenth century. Until then, Southend, Walton-on-the-Naze and Harwich catered to limited demand, primarily from the professional and merchant classes in local inland towns. Harwich only had a short career as a resort around the turn of the nineteenth century, and its resort trade was always an adjunct to other economic activities, including the Continental packet trade, the fishing industry, and the Government ship yard. The packet services were not restored after the Napoleonic Wars, and the holiday trade was not sufficient to fill the accommodation no longer used by travellers to the continent (Gayler 1965:29,37,39,40).

The village of Walton-on-the-Naze began to acquire the trappings of a seaside resort in the 1820s and 1830s, including a hotel with ballroom, music and coffee rooms and sea-water baths, lodging houses, circulating library, and a 150 foot pier which would allow boats to dock at high tide. The developer of these amenities, the Society of Friends in Colchester, had hoped to build a new seaside resort at Clacton, near the small farming village of Great Clacton. They had been thwarted in their attempt to buy land by the restrictions of a trust, so they instead turned to the small existing village of Walton. Their efforts to promote the town were hindered by difficulties in amassing sufficient capital to address the continuing problem of coastal erosion, which halted any further development in the 1840s and 1850s (Boyden 1981, Gayler 1965, 38). Walton-on-the-Naze could be grouped in the category of what John Walton (1978:14) calls third rank regional resorts, which sprang up all around the coastline and catered for farmers, clergy, professional men, manufacturers, urban shopkeepers and tradesmen from places within easy reach.

In the late 1850s, new attempts were made at developing Walton by Peter Schuyler Bruff. Bruff was a classic Victorian engineer/entrepreneur, with many irons in the fire, including work as the chief engineer for the Eastern Counties Railway and construction of Colchester's waterworks. Bruff was successful in gaining Parliamentary approval in 1859 for a branch line from Colchester to Walton, with the line opening in 1867. Bruff had previously purchased land in Walton, which he sold on to his railway company for the new line (Bruff argued for the solidity of the land, but a mile of the Walton line had to be re-laid in 1929 due to crumbling of the cliff (Paar 1981: 39)). Bruff also initiated a number of other projects in the 1860s including building a gas works; improving the water system; construction of the Clifton Music Hall and one terrace of housing; schemes to prevent coastal erosion (largely inadequate); and completion of a new pier, which although longer than the 1830 pier, was still insufficient to allow steamboats to dock at low tides (Gayler 1965:55). Bruff, however, did not remain satisfied with concentrating on Walton alone, particularly due to continuing problems with coastal erosion and attracting outside capital, and in 1864 he expanded his interests to the development of Clacton (Boyden 1981:39-40, Skudder 1980: 7).

Bruff picked a propitious period to create a seaside resort. The Bank Holiday Act, passed coincidentally in 1871, the year of Clacton's founding, provided at least one day in August in which the seaside holiday habit could be nourished, and over the following years the numbers of people taking at least a day, if not a week, at the seaside rose dramatically. Pimlott (1976:212) notes that by 1900 holidays were spreading from the middle classes to the better paid manual workers. This steady expansion of demand provided the basis for the early steady growth of Clacton and Frinton.

## EARLY GROWTH OF CLACTON AND FRINTON

In 1864, the last trustee of the Watson estate died, thus freeing the seaside lands near Great Clacton for development. Peter Bruff bought the land, hoping that a pristine site would facilitate development of a prestigious resort and avoid the problems faced at Walton of working with existing buildings and infrastructure. In addition, Clacton had the advantage of having a less exposed coastline with better drainage than Walton (Skudder 1980:8). Bruff obtained the necessary parliamentary powers in 1866 to provide a pier and a railway extension from Thorpe and drew up a plan of the proposed new town. Bruff was a good candidate to be reconstructed to the role of a 'civic pioneer' needed for an official town history, but Bruff's resources were spread too thin to allow him to follow through immediately on his plans. Skudder (1980:11) accordingly termed Bruff's Clacton venture a failure, while Gayler (1965:57) considered that his plans never succeeded in their original form.

Bruff, however, did exhibit ingenuity in overcoming his problem of lack of capital. The Parliamentary powers to build a pier and a railway line only lasted for five years. The Tendring Hundred Railway, for which Bruff was a promoter, had only reached Walton in 1867, after eight years of delay caused by shortage of finance, Parliamentary expenses and construction hold-ups (Phillips 1985:48). The Railway was therefore in no position to initiate a new branch line, and Clacton was not served by a railway line until 1882. Bruff's only option was to rely on access by sea, and he was successful in interesting the chairman of the Woolwich Steam Packet Company, William Parry Jackson, in Clacton's potential. Thus, while Bruff himself was not successful in carrying through his development plans, he did manage to find other investors who would. 'At a celebrated meeting on the deserted beach in 1870 the two men strode the sands, discussing the lay-out and no doubt the funding of a new seaside resort' (Phillips 1985:55). Jackson agreed to provide development capital in exchange for the exclusive use of

the pier by his paddle steamers. Initial development at Clacton included the opening of the pier in 1871, the laying out of roads, including Pier Avenue and Pier Gap, and the construction of the Royal Hotel in 1872 (Jacobs 1993:3).

The development of a new seaside resort appealed to the Woolwich Steam Packet Company because it would allow them to open a new route to challenge existing routes to Margate held by competitors. Their wish to place Clacton in the same league as Margate to promote patronage of the paddle steamers thus set Clacton apart from the beginning from the ranks of the most exclusive resorts. But as Phillips (1985:56) writes, this image did not coincide with Bruff's plan for a 'high class' development. Bruff imposed a Deed of Mutual Covenant on early development, imposing special rates for the maintenance of drainage, paving, lighting and improvement which made him a 'one-man Improvement Commission'. Phillips goes on to observe, however, that Bruff gradually lost control to outside capital in the form of the Woolwich steamboat company and its subsidiaries, who acquired all Bruff's land by 1877 under the corporate title of the Clacton-on-Sea General Land, Building and Investment Co. Ltd. (Land Co.).

Bruff had done very well out of Clacton financially, but he was no more the father of the resort. Indeed, even a promise made to Bruff to develop the land west of the pier in line with his symmetrical plan was not observed. More extensive building, the arrival of the railway in 1882 and a massive increase in the number of steam boat passengers began to tilt the delicate balance away from a select resort of substantial properties to a seaside town catering for day trippers and London excursionists (1985:57)

The select market was not abandoned, however, since it was in the interests of the steamer company as landowner, if not as a steamboat company, to promote high property values. The increasing numbers of visitors to Clacton in its first forty years found their activities delimited to a certain extent by the policies of what was in effect a company town. During that period, the steamboat company, in various corporate guises as its fortunes rose and fell and bits

of it were regrouped or sold off, exercised a major influence over the development of Clacton as its major landowner. The Land Co. laid out a large 285-acre estate with roads in the late 1870s, continuing Bruff's policies of restricting land use and fixing minimum house prices. In contrast to an individual entrepreneur like Bruff, the company had sufficient overall financial resources elsewhere to weather the slow process of development arising from flooding a new market with a large supply of expensive plots. Walton (1983a:122) notes that from the 1860s on, the availability of limited liability encouraged a new form of resort growth, with both Clacton and Frinton grouped with Colwyn Bay, St. Annes, Saltburn, Westward Ho! and Bridport's West Bay as resorts where land company powers and finances permitted similar restrictive growth policies to resorts developed by aristocratic landowners.

Instead of decreasing land prices, the company promoted Clacton as a day-excursion destination, not because the excursionists themselves would buy land, but because, later writers speculated, the increase in the number of visitors would favourably influence potential buyers by increasing the town's overall health (Gayler 1965:90, 96, Skudder 1980:26). Paddle steamer day excursion services were introduced to Clacton in 1888, with the additional aim of addressing potential competition from the railways and other steamer services. Competition was particularly intense amongst paddle steamer companies. Mergers, failures and takeovers were a common feature of steamer companies serving the Thames and southeast during the late 1800s (Box 1989). The train service that began serving Clacton from London in 1882 took half the time of the paddle steamers, but the paddle steamers charged a lower fare. The Great Eastern Railway did not have a cheap excursion rate and did not market the journey itself as the paddle steamer companies did by promoting the joys of a sea journey and by building increasingly well-appointed travelling accommodation (Gayler 1965:96). Paddle steamers

accommodated less people than the railways, but the steamers certainly helped to create demand for the new East Coast resorts.<sup>6</sup>

These potential customers could also choose Margate or Southend as an easy destination, so Clacton promoters had to position the town's image carefully between excitement of attractions provided at the larger resorts and more intimate charms of smaller seaside resorts. Gayler contends that the main way that Clacton, and Walton, distinguished themselves from other resorts was by the means of getting there as much as the place itself. 'To make Clacton and Walton popular as day-tripper resorts demanded considerable publicity of some counter-attraction. The new steamboats became the counter-attraction' (1965:98). Given that a day tripper would spend at least ten hours on the boat and only two hours in Clacton on a day outing from London, it is reasonable to highlight the focus on the journey for those who arrived by sea, in contrast to those who would have much quicker journey times by rail and who would have had more time in Clacton to see the sights, spend money or create a 'tripper' presence.

Walton did briefly enjoy pre-eminence in its paddle steamer service, when from 1898 to 1904 its new pier served as the terminus for London boats, but this was not enough to allow it to outpace its rival as a resort, Clacton (Box 1989: 51, 72). Clacton had by then overtaken Walton as a seaside destination. Jacobs quotes an 1882 guidebook (Thorough Guide to the Eastern Counties) which noted that:

Some years ago Walton was a favourite resort, late in the year, with quiet-loving folk, who wanting to do nothing could perfectly succeed. In a measure it is so still, but the place has about it rather the shabbiness than the respectability of age. Public spirit appears to be dead and buried, unless, indeed, it has migrated to Clacton (1986:18).

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<sup>6</sup> The statistics for numbers visiting the pier quoted in Jacobs (1993:5) give an idea of the general popularity of Clacton in those years. In 1883 92,873 paid to go on the pier, and in 1893 the figure had risen to 327,451.

Frinton acquired a railway station in 1888 when the population of the existing village was only seventy-five (Jacobs 1993:19). Railway access, however was not sought to promote greater accessibility to tourists, but rather to facilitate travel for a select number of residents and visitors, many of whom had their primary residence in London.<sup>7</sup> The original developers of Frinton, the Marine & General Land, Building & Investment Company imposed a high level of infrastructure charges, minimum house values, and prohibitions against commercial use barring one street. The similarity of these policies with those found in the early days of Clacton may be partially explained by the fact that one of the directors of the Marine & General was James Harman, who was Managing Director of the Land Co. Gayler speculates that Harman turned to Frinton because of the inevitable limited potential of restrictive policies at Clacton. ....'the new Company considered Clacton an unsuitable place for fashionable residential development because its cheap steamboat services attracted working class holidaymakers' (1965:152). Restrictive land policies alone were not enough sell a town to potential investors, and following the initial slow sale of land, the Marine & General went into liquidation in 1890. The new landowner, Sir Richard Cooper, succeeded where the Marine and General had failed in attracting select investors. In large measure, this can be attributed to the establishment of the golf and tennis clubs, (discussed in Chapter Five) since they provided the necessary inducements to attract a wealthy clientele who could afford and tolerate requirements such as minimum house prices and high maintenance levies.

While the influence of restrictive land policies on the character of Clacton may not have been as extensive as their originators would have liked, the initial development did create an 'old guard' of residents who would argue the case for restrictions on development.

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<sup>7</sup> According to the 1901 census, 30% of houses in Frinton were unoccupied on enumeration night compared to 5% in Clacton (Gayler 1965:155).

Skudder (1980:29) and Jacobs (1993:4) both note an 1884 complaint by a resident:

Clacton-on-Sea will soon have a painful and even ruinous experience if speedy measures be not taken to stop the present rush of the lowest type of London excursionists - men and women, boys and girls - who seem only to enjoy themselves when they are revelling in drink and obscenity, both of language and behaviour.

Jacobs goes on to argue that the old guard was soon vanquished, with Skudder commenting that the Land Company, in its dual role as landowner and business owner would benefit from either outcome, although it eventually found that it was virtually impossible to satisfy both ends of the class spectrum.

The symbolic epitome of this conflict between the upper-class proponents and the popular resort proponents came in 1885 when two planning proposals were put forward - one to build a mansion on Marine Parade and the other to build a urinal in Pier Avenue. Mansion or urinal seemed to sum up Clacton's dilemma of the 1880s. With the subsequent victory of the urinal over the mansion Clacton's fate was sealed. The minstrel shows, German bands, donkey rides and shellfish stalls took over from the public lectures, the circulating libraries and the quiet reading rooms (Jacobs 1993:4, Skudder 1980:28).

The decision over mansion or urinal was, however, not the last time that the Council debated planning proposals affecting social tone, as subsequent chapters will detail. The cast of characters involved in these debates of course altered, most notably with the disappearance of the steamboat company as a key player. The cessation of services resulting from World War I proved to be the final blow for what was by then known as the Coast Development Corporation. The company went into liquidation, having struggled to survive in the face of increased competition from roads and rail, and to absorb high costs with only a short four month season in which to make profits. In addition, the company's diversification into land and pier ownership in Walton, Felixstowe, Lowestoft and Southwold were a debit rather than an asset. Records of the Coast Development Co. show that profits from Clacton Pier consistently subsidised losses on the other piers throughout the period 1899-1914 (Coast Development Co.). Piers were costly to maintain, sea defences remained a continual problem and relationships with local authorities were strained (Box 1989:81,89, Gayler 1965:89). The local authority therefore might have been expected to acquire the Pier following World War I, in line with other seaside local

authorities (Walton 1987:26). The fact that it did not, with the Pier remaining in a derelict state until its acquisition by Ernest Kingsman in 1922, is explained by Clacton Urban District Council's attitude to municipal enterprise, as explored in the next two sections.

## **MUNICIPAL INTERVENTION AND THE SEASIDE RESORT**

The unique political structure of seaside resorts is characterised by the co-existence of political conservatism and support for municipal intervention (See Buck et al (1989), Pickvance (1990), Roberts (1983) and Walton (1978), (1983a),(1983b) and (1997)). Walton (1983a: 125, 130) notes that the high profile of local authorities in resort towns was a product of the late Victorian age, when the role of local authorities in general expanded, and seaside resort municipalities in particular began to invest in areas which had been the prerogative of private landowners and entrepreneurs in order to boost the tourist economy. Linked in with this economic rationale, as will be argued in the following chapter, was the growing importance of the resort local authority as a standard bearer of hygiene and progress. The seemingly irreconcilable characteristics of political conservatism and high levels of public spending were thus brought together under the umbrella of economic self-interest and rational planning, with investment seen as an unavoidable prerequisite to progress and competitiveness. The resorts thus shared an 'unarticulated but pervasive civic ideology which legitimated and even prescribed, a steady extension of municipal activity' (Walton 1983b:160). This civic ideology was inherited from the earlier 'municipal gospel' of larger Victorian provincial cities which included 'public health reform and slum clearance, the provision of gas, water electricity and transport, and urban regeneration through street improvements, parks and other amenities' (Davis (1989:27). This Victorian 'gas and water socialism' was found in both Conservative and Liberal councils, and the seaside resorts as well treated municipal intervention as a matter of sound business rather than as part of a radical political agenda. This set them clearly apart from authorities such as the London County Council, where turn-of-the-century Progressive and

interwar Labour administrations defined municipal intervention in terms of a larger social agenda (Saint 1989). If not by politics, the resorts could be distinguished from their provincial predecessors by their single-minded focus on enhancing their tourism function and by a higher level of services and infrastructure than that found in comparably sized towns.

The interwar period, Walton (1997) contends, was ‘probably the high point of local authority investment in seaside amenities’, and also, as discussed in Chapter Six, saw publicity become an important resort local authority function. This high point was based on an earlier history of steady expansion. Clacton Urban District Council was typical of seaside resort councils in acquiring by 1914 a major role in infrastructure and service provision (Farrant 1987:151). This higher level of municipal activity was seen as a prerequisite for a successful seaside resort economy, in the process setting the Councils of these towns apart from their less dynamic inland equivalents:

It cannot be too often repeated that the Council of a town such as Clacton has responsibilities far beyond those of the routine administration of a quiet inland town. Improvement, development, attractions, big trading undertakings, and even advertising the town rest very largely with the Council (CTEEG 4/1/30).

Municipal intervention in Clacton followed on from the original development of Clacton by a single landowner. The Land Company initiated a Special Drainage District (SDD) in 1879, with powers to levy rates to fund drainage and sewerage works, as well as sea walls. The SDD quickly incurred ratepayer complaints over cost and accounting methods. Furthermore, because of the small size of the area it originally covered, speculators found the land beyond its boundaries a tempting proposition (Skudder 1980:25). As discussed in the following chapter, this reinforced spatial divisions that placed lower cost housing on the periphery of the town.

The transfer of the SDD's powers to the newly-formed Great Clacton Local Board in 1890 and then to the Urban District Council (UDC) in 1895 thus did not alter the terms of already well established debates about costs and benefits (Walker 1966: 53). In the absence of a political mandate for collective ownership, any new municipal venture renewed the debate, with supporters needing to show immediate investments for any new project. The UDC's assumption of authority for the delivery of gas and water in 1899 and electricity in 1906 was accepted as an efficient and revenue-generating measure, but each new investment in an increasing range of infrastructure projects to support the tourist industry encountered ratepayer opposition (Walker 1966: 60). The UDC's expenditure in 1914 of £80,000 on a new band pavilion, sea defences, Venetian Bridge and promenade seemed profligate to many ratepayers in light of stretched Council resources in the difficult post World War I period (CGECIN 7/2/20). When the Council considered remodelling the Band Pavilion in the mid 1930s, the earlier disagreements were recalled: 'The town was divided into two camps when the proposal for a Sun Bandstand was mooted in 1913, and rival factions organised themselves as fighting units to defend their views' (CGECIN 17/11/34). These conflicts, however, were overlooked in later sweeping narratives of the march of progress. Profligacy turned into foresight in the estimation of later pro-growth advocates:

If the pioneers of Clacton had shown the narrow-minded cheese-paring attitude that is so prominent in some quarters today the town would still be the unpretentious hamlet it then was... There must be progress. Clacton cannot afford to stand still. A great and prosperous future lies ahead for seaside holiday resorts, but they are in a competitive business and must plan for the future (CTEEG 7/8/37).

Even select resorts expected local government to play a prominent role. Councillor Mrs. Cooper commented in a 1930 speech to the Frinton Chamber of Commerce:

The Council would do in the future, as it had in the past, everything to bring [celebrated people] there, for they realised the prosperity of Frinton depended on their summer visitors. Frinton, however, did attract the people they really wanted... The Council were always looking for new things to attract people to Frinton, but they wanted to keep it in the state it was that day - nature unadorned (CTEEG 12/4/30).

In the same breath that the importance of the local authority is acknowledged, however, it is also played down - it is not clear what these 'new things to attract people to Frinton' might be if its the quality of its unadorned nature already suffices. The character of the Council's role in this view is accordingly that of preserving amenity. This less pro-active role to the provision of attractions and service delivery than in popular resorts is illustrated by the fact that utilities in Frinton were provided privately.<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, with little growth outside the already restricted Cooper Estate, there was less of an imperative for local government in Frinton to seek to manage and control growth. The preservation of select status, however, did require some intervention in the regulation of public behaviour to strengthen informal social sanctions, as will be detailed in Chapter Four.

One useful way to contrast the differing approaches of the two authorities is by comparing the two Parliamentary Acts supported by the Frinton and Clacton local authorities to widen their powers in 1903 and 1905 respectively. These acts provide a sense of the additional infrastructure and regulations the two local authorities deemed it necessary to provide. The ever-increasing level of municipal activity of the local authorities in the late Victorian/Edwardian period was not strongly curbed by central government. Local authorities did however, have to convince the Local Government Board and Parliamentary committees of the need to grant them 'novel powers' for new activities that would have otherwise been ultra vires (Roberts 1983:139). Both Clacton and Frinton sought 'novel powers' to pass bylaws regulating activity and behaviour along the seafront, greensward and promenades, which as Chapter Four will discuss, provided an important focus for the improvement and maintenance of social tone. Frinton's Sea Defence Act enabled the construction of sea defences, an activity

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<sup>8</sup> Municipal provision of utilities was widespread by 1914. Waller (1983:302) quotes the statistics that by 1914 two-thirds of the population were supplied water by a public authority, while in Edwardian times, local authority gas sales represented 37% of the total.

which in Clacton had been carried out after acts sponsored by the SDD and UDC in 1881, 1889, and 1899 (CTEEG 21/1/33). Clacton's Improvement Act enabled the construction of a recreation ground, illustrating the local authority's concern to enhance the provision of leisure facilities. The main difference between the two acts, however, is in the range of public health, building and infrastructure regulation powers sought by Clacton to deal with the consequences of its rapid growth beyond the limits of the original estate, where development was strictly regulated. The Clacton Improvement Act accordingly granted a number of additional powers covering regulation of new streets; prescription of frontage lines; restrictions on building heights; sanitary provision; limiting the spread of infectious diseases; regulation of ice cream production and distribution; restrictions on advertisements; regulation of nuisance behaviour; and hackney carriage licensing. In many cases, the need for specific powers disappeared with the passage of national legislation, but the process of gaining wider municipal jurisdiction did set Clacton and other popular seaside resorts on the path of active intervention in service provision and regulation of development, public order, and business practice. The following section will consider how in practice, this increased municipal activity was constrained by conflicting political and class interests.

## **THE LOCAL POLITICAL POWER STRUCTURE**

With no one single business establishment dominating resort economies, leadership in popular resorts tended to be drawn from a mixture of professional, business, and holiday industry representatives, who tended to agree on the overall importance of tourism to their towns. The councils in Clacton and Frinton thus shared broadly similar compositions, with Table 2.1 showing that both included a cross-section of middle class interests, with self-employed professionals, retirees, women active in volunteer work, and businessmen leading the list of professions of council members.

While seaside resort councils may have been broadly similar in composition and attitude, with a 'narrow commercial ethos', there were however key differences within and between them that produced divergent policies on growth, development, and social tone (Walton 1983b: 164, 167). An agreement on ends, the importance of tourism, by no means resulted in a consensus on means. Ratepayer and local business interests frequently diverged of course, but different types of local business interests could also hold divided opinions on new development. Additionally, the precise composition of occupational backgrounds on councils obviously changed over time. Walton (1983:166) for example, has noted the increasing influence of the holiday industry on Blackpool Council during the period 1876-1896, a period in which Blackpool secured an early lead as the pre-eminent popular resort, while professionals and retired businessmen dominated during the period 1899-1913.

In Clacton, the coalition that might have been expected between the holiday trade and other local business interests to promote tourism as the town's main industry weakened over the interwar years. While two hotel owners were on Clacton UDC in the early 1920s, by the early 1930s there were none. With developments such as the Jaywick chalets (discussed in the next chapter) fragmenting the Council's pro-growth stance, the catering industry decided to take a more systematic approach to ensuring its interests were reliably put forward on the Council. In 1929, hoteliers decided that the existing Chamber of Commerce (formed as the Clacton Trader's Association in 1904) was too broad an interest group to represent their specific needs and formed the Clacton Hotel and Boarding House Association (CHBHA). At its 1933 annual meeting it was noted that 'it was time the Association had a representative on the Council'. Clacton was seen to be lagging behind rival resorts in its degree of political organisation in support of the holiday industry: 'At other places along the coast, the councils as a rule were

**TABLE 2.1 Selected Interwar Clacton and Frinton Council Members by Profession**

<b>Occupation</b>	<b>Name</b>	<b>Time in Office</b>	<b>Town</b>
Solicitor	D. Fenton-Jones	1922-1938	Clacton
	Kenneth Elliott	1925-1939	Clacton
Accountant	Walter Lowther-Kemp	1930-1936	<b>Frinton</b>
	A.J. Green	1930-1939	Clacton
Estate agent	Cecil W. Hayne	1935-1950	<b>Frinton</b>
	Gilbert Roberts	1924-1940	<b>Frinton</b>
	William Hayne	1925-1928	<b>Frinton</b>
Voluntary/charity work	Arthur Tomkins	1934-1939	<b>Frinton</b>
	May McJannett	1922-1940s	<b>Frinton</b>
	Florence Coleman	1920-1939	Clacton
	Mrs. Sykes (daughter of T. Lilley, shoe manufacturer)	1924-1931 & 1934-1937	Clacton
	Mrs. C.A. Cooper	1925-1933 & Postwar	<b>Frinton</b>
Dentist	Dorothy White	1933-1938	Clacton
	Sydney Wheeler	1910-1937	Clacton
Insurance Agent	R. Charters	1928-1937	Clacton
Retired businessman	C.L. Gregory	1911-1931	Clacton
Retired house furnisher	O.B. Thompson	1930-1938	Clacton
Retired builder	J.E. Ball	1926-1940s	Clacton
Retired shipbroker	James Carter	1930-1940	Clacton
Retired policeman	T.A. Joyce	1931-1934	Clacton
	Albert Girt	1934-1937 & Postwar	<b>Frinton</b>
Retired Army officer	Lt. Col. Robertson	1934-1939	<b>Frinton</b>
	Col. Marriott	1934-1936	<b>Frinton</b>
Tobacconist	Frederick Wagstaff	1913-1938	Clacton
	F. Garwood	1922-1925	Clacton
Baker	F.A. Hume	Early 1920's -1930	<b>Frinton</b>
Theatre Owner	E.R. Pennell	1925-1939 & Postwar	Clacton
	Bert Graham	1923-1926	Clacton
Restaurant owner	George Gardiner	1914-1931	Clacton
Hotel owner	F.E. Harris	1914-1924	Clacton
	C.F. Hill	1915-1924	Clacton
	A.P. Meager	1937-1940	Clacton
	E.W. Avery	1937-1940	Clacton
	Percy King	1923-1939	Clacton
Manufacturer	Percy King	1923-1939	Clacton
Newspaper owner/Printer	Abraham Quick	1907-1937	Clacton
Fabric Merchant	H.T. Hilton	1925-1931	Clacton
Union Representative – TGWU	Jack Shingfield	1922-1939	Clacton

SOURCES : Council Minutes, CTEEG, CGECIN, Local Directories

predominated by members of Hotel and Boarding House Associations' (CTEEG 25/3/33). The Association finally succeeded in its efforts to get one of its hotel owners on the Council in 1937. By 1938, the CHBHA was perceived to be a force to be reckoned with. The *Graphic* commented: 'Since the Ratepayers Group lapsed into obscurity the role of unofficial opposition to the local government in this town has been assumed by the Clacton Hotel and Boarding House Association', while Councillor Carter considered that 'Clacton consisted mainly of three different groups - the hoteliers, the ordinary private residents and the commercial side of the town' (CGECIN 5/2/38 and 26/3/38). The 1930s thus saw the evolution of Clacton's hotel industry into a more distinct political entity in response to new threats to their business. Chapter Three documents, however, the ultimate failure of this action to stop the rise of new rivals such as the Butlins' holiday camp and Jaywick chalets.

The 'narrow commercial ethos' thus did not eliminate conflicts between the holiday trades and other commercial interests in Clacton at key moments during the interwar years. An even more significant challenge to an overall pro-growth consensus were the splits between the range of business representatives who benefited economically from new development, and the professional classes, who could be expected to consider carefully the effect of new development on social tone. Those whose livelihood depended on a middle class clientele, such as lawyers and accountants, could be expected to place a higher priority on the preservation of residential amenity than those representing business interests directly linked to the holiday trade. This point will be illustrated in the next chapter in a discussion of the opposition of professional class Clacton Council representatives to the incursion of holiday camps and chalets in the 1930s, while Chapter Five chronicles professional Council members' hostility to the continuing interwar expansion of the Pier.

In Frinton, by contrast, no such troubling developments arose to fragment the consensus of a Council characterised by shared backgrounds and attitudes. The small number of councillors with local business interests, such as the estate agents/architects Arthur Tomkins, William Hayne, and Gilbert Roberts had linked their businesses firmly to the select market. There were many on the Council with non-local interests, both past and present, who were equally concerned to retain Frinton's status as a watering spot for the influential. Frinton's links to the City and the Empire are alluded to in the presence on the Council of retired Army officers, such as Col. Marriott who trained at Sandhurst and served in India, and by the life histories of some of the councillors - Lowther Kemp, for example, began his career working in Singapore (Who's Who 1935, Plumpton interview). The major possible threat to this consensus, the large new development of Frinton Park Estate, described in Chapter Three, failed of its own accord before it had a chance to become of a size to demand difficult decisions of the Council on its character, servicing, and extent. The 1934 merger which created Frinton and Walton Urban District Council was unsurprisingly opposed by Frinton, with the idea considered to be 'mixing oil with water', but in practice, councillors representing Walton seemed to have little interest in changing policies for Frinton (CTEEG 20/5/33).

While Clacton UDC was not party political, it could be characterised as conservative in political orientation, as would be expected in a resort town without a significant industrialised or unionised working class electorate.<sup>9</sup> The only ward in which interwar Labour interests stood any chance of success in conservative Clacton was the North Ward with its relatively high working class population. In the immediate post war years, the Labour Party targeted the North Ward with its platform of municipal intervention. The first Labour bid was in 1920, when the

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<sup>9</sup> Clacton and Frinton were within the Harwich parliamentary constituency, which during the interwar years alternated between Conservative and Liberal representation: 1918, Newton (Con); 1922 Hillary (Lib); 1924 Rice (Con); 1929 Pybus (Lib); 1935 Holmes (Nat. Lib) (Walker 1966:82).

party put forward an ‘ambitious programme which starts off with a jibe at the shopkeepers and publicans sitting in authority’ Labour criticised the Council for holding Clacton’s development back, promising to provide more facilities in order ‘to make Clacton the best health and holiday resort on the East Coast’ (CGECIN 14/2/20). The 1921 campaign included cricket pitches, bathing chalets, public baths and a free library on this list of facilities (CTEEG 5/3/21).

The Labour campaigns of the early 1920s achieved limited success - in 1922, for example, only 759 electors voted in the North Ward, while 1900 were eligible. A local paper criticised Labour for its injection of party politics, and for attempting to ‘persuade the electors that there is a dark and desperate coterie called the old gang, but to any who make the vaguest pretence of following Council affairs the existence of gangs new or old is the height of absurdity’ (CTEEG 25/3/22). Additionally, the paper contended that Jack Shingfield’s comparison of band season ticket holders to parasites had alienated prospective voters. Shingfield, however, went on to win the election and retain a seat on the Council until 1939, heading the Electricity, Gas and Water Committee for part of that time and serving as Council Chairman in 1931 (CTEEG). Shingfield, a graduate of Ruskin College Oxford who went on to become a TGWU representative, was very much a moderate Labour representative, and as the forthcoming chapters will illustrate, he considered that pro-growth attitudes were compatible with advancing the interests of the working people of Clacton. His stance was summarised in a speech he made at Clacton Development Week, in his capacity as chairman of the Development Association: ‘I claim to represent the working class interest; I recognise that the interests I represent cannot be well-off unless Clacton is prosperous and goes ahead’ (CTEEG 8/2/30). With Shingfield firmly in control, the Clacton Labour Party’s moderate, pro-growth stance did not markedly diverge from those of conservative business interests.

Attitudes to Clacton's growth, therefore, provide the key focus for divisions on the Council rather than party political allegiances. In general terms, a pro-growth coalition can be discerned, composed of local businessmen (and the Labour Party representative). Pro-growth interests, however, comprised a shifting set of alliances, with decisions on particular projects influenced by such factors as personal allegiances, perceived economic benefit, possible effects on social tone, and a proposal's status as either public or private. The building of a new Town Hall for Clacton, for example, would seem to be a fairly uncontentious matter for a Council anxious to present an active and impressive civic profile. Cllr. Shingfield claimed that the Town Hall would 'give to Clacton-on-Sea that civic dignity, central cohesion, unity, civic direction and importance without which it cannot be expected to be taken seriously', and if it included a theatre, would provide space for national conferences and income from letting (CTEEG 18/1/30).

The proposal, however, quickly bogged down in arguments over whether the theatre was an extravagance, and cost overruns quickly mounted, some of which resulted from the Council changing its mind.<sup>10</sup> The issue produced many acrimonious debates in the Council throughout the late 1920s and early 1930s, at a time when personality conflicts and name calling sessions were a regular feature of Council meetings. A 1931 meeting, for example, was branded the 'worst ever' by the *Graphic* and characterised as 'undignified, disorderly and unworthy of a town the standing of Clacton' (CGECIN 9/5/31, and see CTEEG 5/3/32). The more expensive Town Hall with theatre scheme passed in 1929 in a 10-to-5 vote. Those against included businessmen opposed to the costs involved as well as two concerned with the potential threat of a new theatre to existing businesses - E.R. Pennell, a theatre owner, and Col. Quick,

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<sup>10</sup> The original 1927 Town Hall proposal was estimated at £26,000, but the final cost of the building, open in April 1931 was £80,000, after the scheme had been revised to include a theatre and different floor plan (CTEEG 25/2/33).

newspaper proprietor and friend of E. Kingsman, the pier owner. Supporters, however, included those who on other occasions presented themselves as guardians of the public purse. In particular, by 1929 the straightforward opposition of the Ratepayers Association in 1926 had evolved into grudging acceptance after the Council approved it. Having previously opposed the scheme, it was now ‘up to them to make the best of it’, partly in view of the fact that the project would provide local employment and receive some central government funding (CTEEG 25/1/30).

The Clacton Ratepayers Association thus served more as a gadfly to the Council during its most active period in the late twenties and early thirties than as a force capable of consistently blocking increased municipal spending and activity.<sup>11</sup> Both the existence and relative ineffectiveness of the Ratepayers Associations were arguably predictable in the context of a popular resort town. As Farrant (1987:137) notes: ‘The expectations of residents who wished to preserve the social tone and image of these [seaside] towns increasingly diverged from the aims of those whose livelihood depended upon providing tourist attractions’ (A point also made by Walton (1995:25). The continuing self-organisation of residents into a ratepayers association was however, easily affected by apathy to its agenda, which was by definition reactive and negative. When a Clacton Ratepayers Association formed in December 1925, a local paper noted they had come and gone in the past:

Clacton has had them in the past and they do not tend to produce good results.... We have memories of a meeting fifteen years ago regarding Council owned bathing tents, when municipal trading was said to take bread out of the mouths of traders. The wisdom of the earlier Council has been proved by the amounts of revenue produced by the tents since then (CTEEG 19/12/35).

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<sup>11</sup> The primary leader of the Ratepayers, James Ball, also hindered the effectiveness of the association due to his headstrong manner, although he was popular enough with the electorate to also be elected as a County Councillor. He was a frequent participant in Council name-calling sessions, and on one occasion had to apologise for a speech opposing municipal car parking in which he said: “Were the Council...going to provide this accommodation for a few dirty Jews to come down on a Sunday morning and bring a lot of rubbish on the beautiful front?” (CTEEG 24/9/32).

The formation of the 1925 Association was prompted by the Council's plans for large expenditures on the Town Hall, new sewers, sea defences, and Band Pavilion. The 1930s brought additional new Council projects and private developments to mobilise resident concern, as the following chapters will detail, but by the late 1930s, membership had declined from 1200 in 1926 to 93 in 1938 and 140 in 1939, and the hoteliers had taken over as the main oppositional force, as noted above (CTEEG 27/2/26 and 4/2/39). This reflected the shift in focus in the mid- to late-Thirties from Council expenditure to the role of the Council in protecting local business interests and safeguarding social tone.

The end result of these various conflicts between professionals and businessmen; residents and supporters of municipal enterprise; and hoteliers and other businessmen, was that the Council found it difficult to establish clear boundaries for the extent of municipal enterprise. While 'the Council' has been used here as a collective noun, this chapter has highlighted the contested nature of any eventual consensus, with the opposition of hoteliers, professionals, and ratepayers at different times serving as a check, if not a stop, to the unfettered exercise of municipal activity and expansion. Some goals were shared, in a general sense, such as the desire for a high profile for Clacton as a resort town, but this goal conflicted with some members' views that limiting expenditure and avoiding competition with private enterprise were more important priorities. The Town Hall was an example of the desire for a high profile eventually prevailing after a closely fought battle, but concerns for economy and limiting municipal competition did hold Clacton back from embarking upon the more ambitious schemes of some of the other large seaside resorts such as Blackpool, Brighton and Hastings with their schemes for winter gardens, swimming pools, piers, and municipal car parking (see 'Coast Resort Schemes - What Clacton's Rivals are Doing' CTEEG 24/8/29, 'Parsimony or

Progress' (CTEEG 28/8/37) as well as Walton (1995:38) for a comparison of municipal resort expenditure).

When viewed in this national context, Clacton's conflicts over its municipal activity appear a common feature of medium-size resort towns struggling to secure their market share by providing as many facilities and attractions as possible, while at the same time restraining total expenditure. Studies of particular seaside resorts in the interwar years demonstrate that agreement on the need for the local authority to support the tourist industry did not result in uncontested or unified policies. Morecambe, for example, was plagued in the 1920s by 'injudicious spending, internal squabbling, delays in decision making, inefficiency and lack of foresight' (Simmill 1993:96). In Bognor Regis, councillors had an inconsistent record of supporting some new attractions, such as a Dance Pavilion and municipal orchestra, but failing to secure a key seafront site that, just like in Clacton, was snapped up by Butlin's (Young 1983:216,233). Medium size resorts were particularly challenged by the effort to be popular while retaining a measure of selectivity, since, unlike large resorts, they could not create clearly delineated large select zones. Social tone therefore remained a more unsettled issue in medium size resorts during the interwar years, in contrast to a large resort like Blackpool, where Walton contends, debates over its target market had largely ceased by the turn of the century: the 'great debate during the seventies and eighties over what class of visitor was likely to prove best for the town, gave way in the nineties to acquiescence in the domination of the economy by the working class visitor' (1978:29). In part this domination was accepted because the development of the northern end of Blackpool as a select area allowed that market to be at least partially retained.

The other key variable, of course, in the debate over social tone and the expansion of resort town's facilities and attractions is the role of private enterprise and investment. The Council's desire to see Clacton retain a high profile as a resort meant that it relied on entrepreneurs to provide new attractions, in spite of what proved to be well-founded concerns about their effect on social tone. Subsequent chapters will describe how, in the wake of the Council's unwillingness to either compete with private ventures or stop them as a threat to social tone, entrepreneurs took the lead in promoting Clacton's interwar growth and image through their control of such developments as Clacton Pier, Jaywick chalets, and Butlin's Holiday Camp.

Select resorts, meanwhile, did not attract entrepreneurial interests looking for rapid growth and profits. Slower growth also accommodates a more laissez-faire approach to local government intervention. The Council's focus accordingly was on preserving amenity through restrictions on development and regulation of public behaviour rather than providing facilities and attractions. Frinton's interwar Council could be characterised as homogeneous in class composition and outlook, producing policies consistent with the preservation of a select social tone. While slower growing, however, Frinton still needed to address the consequences of its slow but steady growth in population. The next section will analyse the nature and extent of residential population and visitor growth in Clacton and Frinton and how they fit within national trends.

## **POPULATION GROWTH**

One of the key factors affecting and resulting from the image of both Clacton and Frinton during the interwar years was the steady influx of new residents and visitors. As Table 2.2 shows, the overall patterns of growth for the two places are not dissimilar, with a 'take-off'

phase followed by steady growth, reflecting national trends in the growth of seaside towns. Nationally, the years between the 1881 and 1911 censuses witnessed the most dramatic growth rates in English seaside resorts, in line with the growing popularity of seaside holidays, with fourteen seaside resorts more than trebling in size, including Blackpool, Southend and Bournemouth (Walton 1997a: 21). Walton states that the initial rapid growth phase could not be sustained, but in the first half of the twentieth century seaside resorts were still growing quickly, and increased their share of the population of England and Wales from nearly 4.5 % in 1911 to 5.7% in 1951. The most dynamic of them featured ‘among the fastest-growing towns, among lists which were dominated by London suburbs, new manufacturing towns and expanding older settlements in the south Midlands, and a few new northern industrial centres’ (Walton 1997a: 29). Urban development after the turn of the century was thus spurred by growth in service sector-based economies such as those of the seaside towns, and by pressures for increasing spatial segregation between commercial and residential functions. The attractions of seaside town amenities for both commuters and retirees influenced the strong interwar growth of these population categories. This of course gradually diluted the numbers of those directly dependent on the tourist industry, which affected its profile over the long term. Increases in commuter and retiree populations were well underway by the interwar years, although it was only in the postwar years that the retired population came to predominate in Clacton and Frinton, with percentages over 30%. The number of retired males in Clacton and Frinton in 1931 was thus just over 10% in both cases, in comparison with 5.5% nationally. This was in line with the similar figures for other seaside resorts such as Hastings and Hove (Gilbert 1939:18). A commuter presence in Clacton and Frinton is testified to by the existence of a season ticket holders’ lobbying group, the Clacton, Frinton and Walton Travellers Association, which sought improvements to rail service to London throughout the interwar years.

TABLE 2.2

POPULATION  
CLACTON AND FRINTON  
1891-1991 CENSUSES

<b>CLACTON</b>										
	<b>1891</b>	<b>1901</b>	<b>1911</b>	<b>1921</b>	<b>1931</b>	<b>1951</b>	<b>1961</b>	<b>1971</b>	<b>1981</b>	<b>1991</b>
Number	3,584	7,456	9,777	12,064	16,737	24,066	27,572	38,070	42,961	49,800
% Increase		108.0	31.1	23.4	38.7	43.8	14.6	38.1	12.8	15.9
<b>FRINTON</b>										
Number	75	647	1,510	2,001	2,196	2,919#	9,576	12,475	12,507	14,300
% Increase		763	133.4	32.5	9.7	32.9	13.3#	30.3	0.3	14.3
<b>UK % Inc.</b>			<b>10.0</b>	<b>4.6</b>	<b>4.6</b>	<b>9.2</b>	<b>5.0</b>	<b>5.9</b>	<b>0.8</b>	<b>2.6</b>

Sources: Decennial Censuses

- \* 1921 figures adjusted by Census to reflect inflation in resort populations arising from June, rather than April, census date. Unadjusted figures were 17,367 for Clacton and 3,032 for Frinton
- # Census area changed in 1961 from Frinton to Frinton and Walton. % Increase is 1961 is based on 1951 population for Frinton and Walton of 8,451

Walton places Clacton within the group of middle-ranking resorts which outstripped the growth of many larger resorts in percentage terms during the period 1911-1951. Clacton was ranked 42<sup>nd</sup> in 1911 on the list of 116 English and Welsh seaside resorts, rising to 32<sup>nd</sup> in 1951. Frinton and Walton were ranked 79<sup>th</sup> in 1911 and 71<sup>st</sup> in 1951. Clacton was among five seaside resorts which appeared prominently in all three measure of growth: incremental, percentage and population rank, with the other four being Morecambe, Bognor Regis, Redcar and Christchurch (Walton 1997a: 39).<sup>12</sup> Clacton's population doubled from 1921 to 1951, growing from 12,000 to 24,000. An estimate made by the Medical Officer of Health for 1937 of 23,420 would indicate that the mid-Thirties were the period of most rapid growth, as also substantiated by the housing construction figures presented in the following chapter (CTEEG 6/8/38). This period of growth, of course was dramatically halted by World War II, when the population declined to 5,000 due to the evacuation of most of Clacton's residents for the duration of the war.

Frinton's growth during the period 1921 to 1951 was a comparatively less dramatic, but still substantial, increase of 50%. The relative success of Frinton, at any rate, did not rely on population growth. Walton suggests an alternative model for gauging the relative success of a select resort that lies in the 'relationship between resident population and those who service them' (1997b:48). This model would rank highly resorts with multiple visiting seasons and highly fashionable visiting publics. The success of select resorts is thus measured in terms of intangible qualities of image such as fashionability rather than in quantitative terms of population growth.

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<sup>12</sup> Precise measurement of the shifting populations of resort towns was always problematic. This was particularly apparent in the 1921 Census, which took place in June rather than April and thus inflated resort population figures with early summer visitors (Walton 1993). The totals were later adjusted, to the disappointment of Clacton officials anxious to present the town as fast-growing. The increase in residential population was not felt to be overly inflated with visitors numbers, as the Census was taken when the coal strike was at its height and the train service was at a minimum (CTEEG 10/6/21). If the figure had remained unaltered, of course, it would have appeared that there was no net population growth in Clacton in the twenties, which was certainly not the case.

Walton (1997a) posits that a receptive attitude to the trend toward more relaxed holidaymaking was key to the population growth of the fastest growing resorts, as exemplified by informal development, such as the Jaywick chalets, and holiday camps, such as Butlin's. Walton concedes, however, that in Clacton the adjective 'receptive' is open to question. As the next chapter discusses, Clacton Council allowed new informal development to be imposed, rather than actively welcoming it. Another question about Walton's premise is the extent to which temporary summer developments would increase permanent residential numbers. Jaywick gradually became a year-round settlement, primarily for retirees, but this was a post-war phenomenon. Walton comments on this point that 'a holiday camp might not boost a resort's population at an April census, but it represented an approach to holidaymaking which seems to have become widely popular' (1997a:35). Population growth is thus correlated to success in promoting a successful resort image in tune with the latest trends in holidaymaking.

## **VISITOR NUMBERS**

Popularity, difficult enough to measure through population statistics, was even more difficult to measure through visitor numbers, which need to be distinguished by purpose of visit, type of accommodation, length of stay, and mode of transport. In particular, the growth of motorised traffic to the seaside make calculation of interwar visitor numbers much more difficult than in the days when most visitors arrived by train and newspapers published visitor lists. These problems have limited the amount of information available on popular interwar resort visitor numbers (see Walton 1997b:39). These difficulties had their advantages for resorts of course in making it difficult for rivals to refute their claims. It is however, necessary to make some attempt to pinpoint patterns if not precise numbers to permit analysis of the extent to which Clacton was popular with the public. The number of railway passengers travelling at Easter and the August Bank Holiday provides a set of relatively continuous figures for the

interwar years in Clacton which is useful in charting the relative successes of different seasons, although it of course ignores the overall increase in numbers arriving by car and coach and only permits calculation of short stay visitors. Table 2.3 indicates that during the interwar years, the mid-Thirties produced the most successful seasons for Clacton. This evidence of growth in the mid-Thirties is as would be expected in view of the gradually increasing real incomes of the period and the depression affecting the early Thirties. Of interest is the lack of consistent overall growth in Easter visitors, which can perhaps be attributed both to yearly variations in weather for that time of year and the lack of success of Clacton and other popular resorts in extending the season.

Visitor numbers, to the extent that they have been calculated by historians, are usually presented as annual totals (see Walton 1992 for Blackpool). Everitt (1980:121) provides August Bank Holiday rail figures for Southend, but only for the period 1900-1910. Direct comparisons between Clacton and other popular resorts based on the figures in Table 2.3 are thus not possible, but the limited evidence available indicates Clacton was consistently increasing its share of the holiday market. If the newspapers estimates were not too hopelessly exaggerated, overall visitor numbers doubled during the Thirties, giving Clacton a summer population of 100,000 by 1939. Given the healthy status of the southeast economy, this growth need not have been at the expense of Clacton's rivals.

Clacton, along with Southend, was a logical first choice for East End seaside-goers, day trippers in particular, but longer staying visitors appear to have also come in large numbers from a much wider area. On the occasions when the newspapers published hotel visitor lists,

**TABLE 2.3 CLACTON INTERWAR VISITOR NUMBERS****RAIL TRAVEL**

Year	Easter Weekend	Easter Monday	Total	August Bank Holiday Weekend	August Bank Holiday Monday	Total
1919	5,000	1,500	6,500			
1920	7,000	NA		11,000	4,000	15,000
1921						
1922						
1923				5,600	7,600	13,200
1924	6,000	2,000	8,000		6,400	
1925			10,000			
1926				11,000	8,000	19,000
1927	8,000	4,000	12,000			24,000
1928	5,000	7,000	12,000			19,000
1929			14,500	10,300	11,000	21,300
1930				11,000	5,000	16,000
1931				10,500	7,000	17,500
1932			6,000	11,200	8,500	19,700
1933			11,500	18,100	8,200	26,300
1934						30,000
1935						35,000
1936						
1937			7,100			36,800
1938			9,300	21,800	10,200	32,000
1939	6,200	2,000	8,200	22,900	11,000	33,900

**MOTOR TRAFFIC**

Traffic measured at Weeley Black Boy Corner (village on approach road to Clacton)

- 1926 - - Whitsun Monday evening- 1,135/hour
- 1930 - - busy Sundays - 2,000/
- 1933 - - Aug. Bank Holiday Monday evening - 3,480/hour
- 1928 - - Whitsun - 100 large charabancs garaged in town
- 1930 - - Whitsun - close to 30,000 cars entering Clacton on Sunday and Monday

**STEAMER TRAFFIC**

- 1929 - - 40,000 arrive by water during season
- 1930 - - Laguna Belle - single tickets - 1,850 per week

**VISITORS IN TOWN**

- 1923 - - 100,000 in town for August Bank Holiday
- 1929 - - normal Clacton population of 21,000 rises to 50-60,000 in season
- 1939 - - Clacton population of 25,000 rises to 100,000 in season

Sources: CTEEG, CGECIN

the rest of London is very well represented, along with a good size proportion of guests from the Midlands, East Anglia, and the Home Counties (CTEEG summer 1928-30). Access to these markets was facilitated by direct coach and rail links. South-east resorts like Clacton, with their fairly dispersed spread of visitors from southern England in general, thus seem to be distinguished from the traditional linkages of northern industrial towns with specific resorts which dates back to nineteenth century Wakes Week habits.

An important point to make about the increasing numbers of visitors and their effect on social tone is that the growing crowds were perceived as becoming more well-behaved over time. Walton, writing about Blackpool, attributes this trend in part to ‘the development of the working-class seaside holiday as something mainstream and communal within the culture’, with ‘work discipline and trade union respectability ... carried over into holiday behaviour’ (1992:13-14). This was also seen to be the case in Clacton, with the holidaymaker as well as the resort progressing with the times. Accordingly, the increasing number of visitors did not entail a commensurate growth in rowdyism. ‘Popular’ and ‘select’ were not static definitions, with the differences between the ‘popular’ and ‘select’ holidaymaker perceived as decreasing over time:

We may remark that the modern tripper is a very different individual to the old-time excursionists. Education and love of nature combined with good behaviour is now recognised as a salient part of their make up (CGECIN 17/5/30).

But while the modern tripper might be evolving into a more genteel being, select resorts like Frinton still continued to discourage them. Growth in visitor numbers, therefore, was not a measure of success, which was instead measured by the qualitative indicator of ‘fashionableness’. This implied a certain level of popularity, but one distinguished by the prominence of those visiting, and not by numbers alone. The presence of 6,000-10,000 people

in Frinton during summer seasons in the mid-Twenties, for example, as opposed to the winter population of 2,000 was accordingly sufficient to ensure its fashionable reputation (CTEEG 16/2/24, 18/4/25).

The consistent growth of visitors and residents in Clacton and Frinton was linked to the steady expansion of their tourist economies. The next section will analyse aspects of the characteristics of these single industry based economies, in particular the accommodation sector, which will provide further evidence on the distinctions between popular and select markets.

### **THE TOURIST INDUSTRY IN CLACTON AND FRINTON**

Tourist-related businesses were the overwhelmingly dominant feature of Clacton and Frinton's interwar economies. The Medical Officer of Health reported that the main source of income came from 'letting rooms to visitors during the season, the bulk of the remaining population being engaged in shopkeeping and the building trades' (CTEEG 17/6/34). Hotels were estimated to represent 75-80% of Clacton's industry, with hotels and boarding houses accommodating around 40,000 visitors in the height of the season (CTEEG 9/2/35 and 19/1/29). At the busiest times, all these rooms were full, with potential guests turned away for lack of space. Newspaper comments that 'hundreds slept on the beach', due to both poverty and lack of space, were common for August Bank Holiday weekends (CGECIN 9/8/30, CTEEG 7/8/37).

Key features of this single industry were its seasonal nature and the extent to which it involved a large percentage of the residential population. Structurally, the accommodation industry was diverse. If the social tone of interwar Clacton is judged by the range of

accommodation on offer, it could indeed cater for select as well as popular tastes. A former resident recalls:

Where I lived, the working class people used to take in visitors. But the hotels used to be full of people with larger incomes. Beaumont Hall, that's an old people's home now, the Grand, the Towers. People used to dress up for dinner at night. And afterwards you'd see them walking along the seafront in their evening dress. It was quite a mixed holiday venue really (Smith interview).

The full extent of the accommodation available at the cheaper end of the range was far less apparent than that of the imposing seafront hotels. The practice of room letting does not necessarily appear in any statistics, as it was seasonal, carried out largely by women who were classified as 'economically inactive' and did not necessarily constitute a primary source of family income (see Davidoff 1979 on the assumptions behind the measurement, or lack of, lodging as an occupational category). Anecdotal evidence, however, indicates that room letting was almost universal in some neighbourhoods and would have given a wide cross-section of the population a personal involvement with Clacton's identity as a tourist town. A study of post-war employment in Clacton quotes one hotelier as recalling: 'Before the war every other house in all the side streets leading off the front took in guests' (Seymour 1973). Room letting extended as far away as Burrsville, almost three miles from the beach, where the Young brothers recalled that their family used to take in guests to help make ends meet, (who might have had to sleep in the bath in the scullery). The Youngs, who lived in a council house and whose father was a building labourer and beach attendant could be categorised as working class, but room letting was also acceptable for middle class families. Honor Smith, whose father was an insurance agent, remembers that her mother catered for visitors from Easter through September, many of whom, such as a member of the Metropolitan Police, could also be considered middle class. Business was steady, with repeat visitors and new business generated by word of mouth. 'We used to have people knock on the door for accommodation. There was a kind of union, if you like, among neighbours. You'd pass them on to someone else if you didn't have room.' A somewhat different set of social conventions governing the acceptability

of lodging thus seemed to be in operation at seaside towns. Elsewhere, Davidoff (1979:68) describes how lodging carried ‘moral opprobrium’ and the ‘loss of a genteel status’ throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth century. The prevalence of the practice of letting out rooms at popular seaside resorts seems to have blunted this opprobrium and allowed it to remain an acceptable practice far higher up the social scale.

Frinton offered a similar, if narrower, range of hotels, boarding houses, and rooms to let, but its more select status was demarcated by the smaller percentage of lodging houses and the availability of large houses for rent. Many of the owners of large houses on the Avenues would rent their houses for a period of six to eight weeks during the summer while they travelled (Tomkins interview). Summer letting could cover the cost of the upkeep, allowing the owners to use the house at the beginning and end of the season (Rouse interview). The maintenance and catering to support these large houses relied on the availability of domestic staff. Domestic service, as in many seaside resorts, was the most common form of employment in Frinton in 1921, employing 38.7% of the employed population (See Table 2.4). Additionally, due to the limited amount of working class housing in Frinton, a number of residents of the nearby villages of Thorpe and Kirby cycled or walked to Frinton on a daily basis to work (Plumpton interview).

In common with other select resorts, Frinton acquired a particular niche catering for the children of the well-to-do or with parents living abroad, with certain hotels such as the Cedars specialising in accommodating nannies and their charges, during the month of June in particular. One former resident remembers that ‘their parents didn’t come, they went off to the south of France for a holiday on their own and left the nannies with the children’ (Bates

interview). Another aspect of the focus on children was the presence of a number of schools. Schools were a common feature of many seaside resorts, due to the perceived health benefits of that location. Another former resident recalls that her parents lived in London while, for her early school years, she was left in charge of a nanny to go to school in Frinton, living alternately in the family home in the Avenues, the Beach Hotel or a neighbouring boarding house (Plumpton interview). The extent of the market for facilities for wealthy and ex-pat children is testified by the existence of ‘Wheeler’s Indian Guide to British Resorts and Schools’, published during the interwar years as an aid for those seeking to make their leave arrangements and provide for their children. An ad for the Glenvar School in Frinton stressed that ‘children of officers and Indian Officials are especially welcomed’, particularly since doctors had recommended Frinton as being suitable for children from tropical countries because of its bracing air and sunshine (1931:82).

Policy makers in Clacton and Frinton resisted attempts to move away from a unified focus on the tourist industry, and as will be detailed further in the following chapter, discouraged the establishment of industrial concerns in their areas. Clacton was instead viewed as already having its own industry - tourism. Success was seen to rely on its sound management:

The main industry in Clacton was to provide health and recreation for holidaymakers and to renew the health of those jaded by long sojourning in smoky places like London. If they were carrying on an industry, one of the first essentials to the welfare of that industry was to see that they had a ready supply of raw material. In London there was more than an adequate supply of raw material. The raw materials were the holiday makers and people were only too glad to journey to Clacton (CTEEG 27/5/33).

The reluctance to spend ratepayers’ money would have certainly been much greater if so many people had not had a stake in the tourist industry. By the mid-Thirties, however, the need for this single industry to adapt to changing markets were noted: ‘The popularity of the motor-

car started the decline of the staying visitor, followed by the springing up of hutment colonies along the coast and adjacent to popular resorts, and liner cruises. These new ‘diversions’ have added to the difficulties of those who cater for the entertainment of the visitor, coupled with the gradual shrinkage of the visitorial period’ (CGECIN 22/9/34). It is significant to note here that problems normally associated with the decline of the English seaside resort in the postwar years were clearly identified well before that time, although in the context of the interwar period’s expanding holiday trade the problems were of far less magnitude.

Of more immediate concern at the time were the problems of seasonality and the elastic nature of consumer demand associated with the tourist industry. Clacton was of course affected by the depression of the early Thirties, although to a far less a degree than northern industrial towns, and unemployment became a growing focus of concern. During the early Thirties, unemployment figures rose in total numbers, if not as a percentage rate in a rapidly growing town, and the Council sought to alleviate the problem by applying for grants for construction projects (such as the Town Hall) as well as by creating a job centre and providing allotments.<sup>13</sup>

## **SOCIAL CLASS**

Clacton and Frinton’s class and occupational structures shared some similarities with other service-based centres in the South-east, but, like other seaside resorts, they were set apart by the seasonality of employment, the changing nature of the workforce, the susceptibility to elastic consumer demand, and the fragmented nature of individual job histories. These are all characteristics which arguably link seaside towns with the occupational structures of postwar

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<sup>13</sup> 12/1/29 - 307 unemployed  
 22/2/30 - 280  
 1931 - 178  
 15/10/32 - 460  
 14/1/33 - 500 (CTEEG)

service economies.

Statistical measures were ill-suited to capture this complex nature of the occupational structures of seaside towns. Census figures for the interwar years, limited in any case by availability, sample size, comparability across time, and definition, are thus of slight value in assessing the occupational and class structure of seaside towns (see Walton and O'Neill 1993 for a discussion of these issues). 1921 figures (Table 2.4) clearly show the extent of traditional industrial employment, as well as the very high levels of employment in domestic service, but do not provide clear categories for the towns' largest industry, accommodation and catering, and of course do not measure those employed seasonally or part time at all.

The anecdotal evidence cited above arguably gives a clearer picture of the dependence of Clacton and Frinton on the accommodation and catering industry, and is also useful in assessing social class. Anecdotal evidence points to a more noticeable interwar middle class presence in Clacton than its status as a popular resort might suggest. The Young brothers, for example, recall of Clacton in the Thirties that it was 'very much a middle class town, and just building up at the edges'. Areas such as parts of West Clacton were distinguished as middle class neighbourhoods by their substantial homes and grounds. Louisa Carr, resident in the same West Clacton home since 1925, recalls that childhood neighbours included prominent Clacton professionals and businessmen active in local politics such as Robert Coan and Frederick Wagstaff. This type of resident left during the postwar years as the density of the neighbourhood increased. The subdivision of big houses and infilling of gardens was a pattern of succession typical of many growing central urban areas.

**TABLE 2.4 Occupations in Clacton and Frinton - 1921 Census**

	Clacton			Frinton		
	Men	Women	Total	Men	Women	Total
Fishermen	-	-	-	1	-	1
Agriculture	340	12	352	52	4	56
Mining	1	-	1	-	-	-
Makers of Coke, Lime, Cement, etc.	1	-	1	-	-	-
Makers of Bricks	8	3	11	1	-	1
Chemical Workers	13	1	14	2	-	2
Metal Workers	232	2	234	43	-	43
Workers in Precious Metals	10	1	11	2	-	2
Electrical Fitters	50	3	53	16	-	16
Watchmakers, etc.	15	1	16	1	-	1
Workers in Skins	17	3	20	5	-	5
Textile Workers	5	5	10	-	-	-
Makers of Textile Goods	59	141	200	11	11	22
Makers of Food and Drink	82	6	88	15	1	16
Workers in Wood	154	4	158	27	-	27
Paper Workers	110	33	143	8	1	9
Builders	178	1	179	29	-	29
Painters & Decorators	133	-	133	14	-	14
Workers in other Materials	4	2	6	2	-	2
Workers in Mixed & Undefined Materials	29	21	50	1	-	1
Gas, Water, Electricity Workers	23	-	23	-	-	-
Transport Workers	548	30	578	70	3	73
Commercial and Financial	810	278	1088	169	35	204
Public Admin.	210	52	262	34	9	43
Professionals	191	183	374	88	48	136
Persons employed in Entertainments	69	23	92	8	3	11
Personal Services	278	1590	1868	35	492	522
Clerks, Typists, etc	510	395	905	58	27	85
Warehousemen, etc	58	11	69	3	-	3
Engine Drivers	18	-	18	1	-	1
All Others	165	3	168	18	-	18
Total Occupied	4,321	2,804	7,125	714	634	1348
Unoccupied & Retired	915	5,514	6,429	139	917	1056
Total Occupied and Unoccupied	5,236	8,318	13,554	853	1,551	2,404

This sort of change is far less visible in Frinton, where the overall middle and upper class character set by the large houses on the Avenues remains largely unchanged from the interwar years. Frinton only provided a small amount of working class housing, with many workers, as noted above, commuting from neighbouring villages. One lifetime resident of Frinton, Frederick Cook, who worked there as a fisherman and a builder, recalls that Frinton ‘only had a small working class population in the winter’, although there was ‘always a fair amount of work in the winter’ doing building and decorating work on the houses that people occupied during the summer months. The fluctuating nature of this sort of work reinforces the difficulties of assigning precise occupational definitions of the population in both towns.

Seasonality and volatility are thus hallmarks of the seaside resorts’ demographic and economic structures, characteristics which gave them a particular prominence in the public eye, as Walton (1997a: 22) notes: ‘in practice seaside life was much more widely experienced than even the impressive snapshot census figures of resort populations would suggest. The swelling flood of summer visitors adds additional force to this argument.’

## **CONCLUSION**

Clacton and Frinton accordingly both entered the interwar period with the terms of the debate on social tone largely fixed. Both resorts began life as developments of limited liability companies, which sought to regulate growth and influence social tone through the imposition of covenants and restrictions. This type of growth dates the resorts as products of the mid- to late-Victorian period, when development by individual landowners began to give way to more collective action and eventually to an increased role for municipal intervention. Following similar beginnings, however, Clacton and Frinton diverged. While Clacton from the outset attempted to square the circle of attracting more visitors while retaining elements of selectness,

Frinton pursued the less problematic goal of concentrating on preserving its select image. Frinton thus avoided the confusion over image, which characterised Clacton from its establishment and continued throughout the interwar period.

This chapter has identified the local authorities of Clacton and Frinton as key shapers of image and social tone, but has stressed that municipal intervention was far from consistent, and that its extent should not be exaggerated. Band pavilions, promenades, sea walls, and formal gardens remain in seaside resort towns to testify to the significance of the local authority, but the stories of their construction, as well as the stories of those attractions not constructed, reveal sharp differences within and between seaside resort interest groups over the precise nature of the municipal role. In Clacton, the Council's concern to limit expenditure constrained its municipal activity and paved the way for the greater influence and activity of private capital, while in Frinton, the role of the local authority was even more tightly defined by its fairly homogeneous governing body to be that of preserving amenity and restraining public behaviour.

This analysis of the complexities and limitations of municipal intervention in practice points to the difficulties of assigning straightforward causes, such as a pro-active local authority, to explain Clacton and Frinton's rapid interwar population growth. Its explanation could have rested with reference to the resort cycle model, since rapid population growth is an expected feature of the take-off and growth phases. The resort cycle model, however, does not explain the nuances of growth which distinguish the popular and select resorts, nor does it address the implications of the particular spatial form of growth chosen, whether it be high-rise or low-rise, architecturally modern or traditional. Equally, while in outline it suffices to say

that southeast resort towns were beneficiaries of the area's growth in service sector jobs and real incomes, and the increasing popularity of seaside holidays, the precise causes as to why Clacton's population growth was higher than some of its rivals are less clear, and are tied up with the motivations and expectations of the influx of new residents and visitors. The following chapters will accordingly seek to examine these issues in more detail, with the impact of spatial growth considered in Chapter Three, and the effect of changing social patterns, place images, and tourist practices considered in Chapters Four through Six.

The relationship between qualitative issues of image and social tone and quantitative issues such as economic and demographic trends has been reflected methodologically in the inclusion of qualitative sources such as oral evidence to expand upon the statistical evidence of Census figures, visitor guesstimates and factual written narratives. Oral evidence provides useful insights into such areas as perceived class distinctions, non-official employment, and attitudinal changes which are outside the scope of statistical measures. The primacy of the tourist industry in seaside towns, for example, is best understood in the context of the oral testimony pointing to the ubiquity of summer lettings, which gave the bulk of the population a personal stake in the health of the tourist industry. This chapter has accordingly cast the net widely into a variety of disciplines and methods to give insights into non-statistically documented social practices that are part of the structural background to interwar debates on social tone.

This chapter has established some key themes to be explored in subsequent chapters in its analysis of the quantitative and chronological background to Clacton and Frinton's interwar years. The contested nature of debates on social tone, the overwhelming importance of tourism

in the local economy, and rapid population growth and physical development are important features of the two town's early development which also shaped their interwar history. Questions raised here concerning the role of local government and its relationship to private entrepreneurs, the nature of Clacton's rapid interwar growth, the extent to which Clacton retained a select visitor or residential population element, and the mechanisms which supported a select or popular status will now be considered in the subsequent chapters in the context of changes in the built environments, social practice, leisure activities, and representation.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **BUILDING THE MODERN SEASIDE TOWN**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

This chapter will outline the development of the built environments of Clacton and Frinton in the context of wider developments in town planning and architecture. In particular, the promotion and practice of planning in the two towns will be linked to the overall arguments of this thesis concerning the problematic development of a ‘modern’ image and the creation and maintenance of distinct social tones. Many of the tensions produced by attempts to achieve a modern image were masked, it will be contended, by a generalised use of the rhetoric of progress which assumed that a more select social tone could be achieved through the imposition of an ordered spatial hierarchy and aesthetic harmony. Social tone was as important a consideration in the attraction of new residents as it was in the attraction of new visitors. The enthusiasm felt for the rapid interwar growth of Clacton, and for the less dramatic growth of Frinton, was hedged by concerns over the social tone of the new residential areas being created. A 1958 morphological study of seaside towns took a link between social tone and consistent design for granted: ‘Needless to say, selectness and visual attractiveness are invariably found together’ (Barrett 1958: 61). In his study of the interwar English landscape, Matless has argued that this sort of aesthetic value judgement was founded in an ‘ideal of good grouping and community, an order of settlement which excludes any visual and social disorder’ such as haphazardly built shacks or garish amusements (1998:43).

Town planning was thus advocated by interwar image-makers as the mechanism for channelling growth in a positive direction. A study of the process of introducing and

implementing planning in Clacton and Frinton, however, illustrates the numerous gaps between social practice and aspirations. Town planning as found in interwar planning legislation could only ever go a limited way in shaping and controlling development. It helped reinforce existing class separations through zoning and density mechanisms, but it was not designed to interfere directly with the free market and involve the state in land ownership. Ultimately, therefore an analysis of the effects of interwar town planning legislation in Clacton and Frinton reveals its limited impact on the built environment itself, but arguably shows a significant role for the *idea* of town planning in creating and shaping image. Just as the seaside resorts extracted elements of a liminal, escapist image in advertising their attractions, they also sought to promote an image of a regulated townscape that suited claims to modernity.

Town planning was a ‘modern’ discipline, in that as a profession created in the twentieth century on the back of nineteenth century liberal reform movements, it lay claims to promoting health, rationality, efficiency and progress. Matless has noted these categories combining in a discourse of ‘moral modernity’, where ‘loudness, vulgarity, impertinence on the one side, dignity, composure and fitness on the other, provide a lexicon of architectural (and human) conduct for English landscape’ (1998:47). This same discourse will be observed elsewhere in this thesis for its impact on seaside activities, entertainment, behaviour and representations, but firstly it will be examined with its centrality to interwar attitudes to seaside resort growth and development. The chapter begins with discussion of the initial planning of Clacton and Frinton and the importance assigned to their rational layout on greenfield sites, in contrast to crowded and unsanitary older towns. The acceptance of private town planning ventures, it is then argued, created a receptive climate for planning schemes legislated by the state, as long as their goals were modest. The chequered history of the implementation of town planning legislation in Clacton and Frinton is discussed in the context of the general shift of

town planning as an adjunct to public health and housing reforms to a separate discipline designed to control rapid interwar suburban expansion, using the rhetoric of modernity to make its claims.

Just as modernity meant different things to different people, town planning as well was also viewed in different lights, as will be illustrated by case studies from Clacton and Frinton. In the example of Jaywick Sands Estate, its developer sought to frame his development plans as good examples of populist modern planning in order to attract customers and to win over the local authority. The local authority, it will be contended, was split between pro-growth interests which accepted the existence of Jaywick grudgingly as a fact of modern life and which prevailed over those anxious to stop the development because of the costs of providing its infrastructure, the potential flooding dangers of its below-sea-level location, and its perceived effects on social tone. A much more clear-cut instance of the triumph of pro-growth interests over town planning concerns is then discussed with the example of Butlin's holiday camp. The case study from Frinton is the unsuccessful attempt to develop the Frinton Park Estate, which demonstrates how a modern image proved largely incompatible with the conservative image of a select resort, with planning viewed as an aid to preserving an exclusive village rather than as a component of a trend-setting modern design.

The chapter will also discuss how changes in housing types and architectural style affected the seaside resort. The beginning of the ascendancy of the bungalow as the prototypical seaside residence in the interwar years presaged the continuing rise of the retired population in Clacton and Frinton in the post-war years. The bungalow, in the course of its rise, alienated high culture purists who thought it epitomised the destruction of the countryside. If

the bungalow had remained limited in numbers, unadorned, and solidly built, it might have retained the support of purists as it arguably represented desirable qualities of modernity and simplicity of design. The lip service paid to modern styles did not, however, necessarily translate into the success of estates built along modern architectural lines. Modern architecture found somewhat more favour at seaside locations than it did elsewhere in interwar Britain because of its associations with healthy indoor/outdoor living, but the example of Frinton Park illustrates the limited willingness of the British house buying public to radically depart from established domestic architectural styles. As in town planning, therefore, a rhetorical commitment to modernity was not matched by a similar commitment to the actual construction of large numbers of homes in modern architectural styles.

### **PLANNING ALONG HEALTH LINES**

...What impresses scores of thousands of people who visit Clacton and the other modern towns along this sun-blessed coastline is the cleanliness, spaciousness and well-housed conditions in which we are privileged to live. There are no slums and therefore none of the problems related to bad housing. Indeed, it is not too much to say that those who planned Clacton, in days when town-planning was scarcely thought of, and still later those who began to plan Frinton, definitely thought along health lines. They were social pioneers in the best sense and their work anticipated to a large extent the later ideas which are now being applied, encouraged by the Ministry of Health, throughout the rest of the country where new town planning areas are still in the process of development (CTEEG 7/9/35).

Seaside towns were already accustomed by 1900 to stamping their claims to physical superiority with medical credentials attesting to their health-giving qualities for both invalids and otherwise healthy people in need of a revitalising break. No Victorian resort guidebook was complete without a testimonial or two from a medical authority testifying to the curative properties of the resort (see for example Jarrolds 1900). Resorts thus readily adopted the gospel of town planning as a means of promoting the healthfulness of their towns. British town planning had its own links to the medical discourse as it had roots in mid-nineteenth century public health campaigns which initially identified slum conditions as a cause of disease and then gradually widened their scope to incorporate housing reform and urban design.

Nineteenth century seaside towns' claims to hygiene and attraction to convalescents were reinforced by the physical layout of many new developments which avoided the health risks of overcrowding, poor drainage, and substandard housing conditions, since they were not 'built on the unsanitary debris of previous ages' (Clacton Guide 1909). Mentions of Clacton as a new pristine town without slums or urban ills are found in newspapers and guidebooks from its inception, with the 1872 Times noting 'There will be no slums, nor any object that can offend the eye' and continue through the interwar period (Walker 1966:32). A good example of the discourse uniting sanitation and new planned development is found in the 1905 guide to Clacton, which contended that the town 'is wholly free from slums. There are no purlieus, no unsanitary cottages, or unsanitary quarters where insidious disease may breed and infect the air' (CUDC 1905:18).

In Barrett's 1958 thesis, Clacton is listed along with Skegness, Saltburn, Hunstanton, Colwyn Bay, St. Annes, Penarth, and Littlehampton as a resorts which grew in a controlled manner in the period 1860-1880<sup>14</sup>. Town planning in this nineteenth century context was largely synonymous with estate planning. It referred to the orderly development of land under unified private ownership, and had not yet acquired its associations with state intervention and urban reform. Peter Bruff's plan for Clacton typifies this approach. It provided for the initial construction of the central core of the town in the years immediately following 1871, established road layouts and a generalised zoning scheme which segregated commercial and

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<sup>14</sup> Barrett's list for other time periods includes:

pre-1800 - Bognor

1800-30 St. Leonards

1830-60 Herne Bay, Lytham, Southport, Birkdale, Shanklin, Torquay, Bournemouth, Folkestone, Eastbourne, Fleetwood, Llandudno, Lowestoft, Whitby

1880-1914 Bexhill, Minehead, Felixstowe

Barrett studied eighty seaside resorts in England and Wales, so the number where growth was at least in part controlled represents approximately one-third of the total, indicating the important role estate planning played in the growth of nineteenth century seaside resorts.

residential uses and provided for minimum property values. Bruff did not have to contend with any messy existing development, as had been the case with his earlier schemes in neighbouring Walton. His plan provided for a main commercial street at right angles to the shore, leading down to the pier.<sup>15</sup> Bruff's standing as an engineer, the greenfield status of the land, and the newness of the project in general were accented in the numerous subsequent testimonies to the virtues of Clacton's planned early growth, as typified by Walker (1966:30):

The town is indeed fortunate that its leading pioneer was no idle speculator but one who, in accordance with his profession, planned a resort of broad thoroughfares and well-spaced villas. In this respect it was fortunate too that the land had not been available earlier when Clacton might well have had at its centre a maze of congested streets and squalid terraces which characterise so many of our older resorts.

The actual area developed according to Bruff's plan was quite small, but it was sufficient to allow Clacton to claim it was a planned town. Map 2 shows the actual amount of development in 1878, one year after Bruff had sold his land and properties on, before completion of his plan, to the Clacton-on-Sea and General Land Building and Investment Company Limited, (Land Co.) part of the London Steamboat Company. By 1882, the company owned 285 acres adjacent to the sea front in Clacton which they sought to develop as a select residential area by establishing minimum house prices and issuing covenants dictating future uses. As the preceding chapter notes, the goal of selectness was inevitably compromised by the steamboat company's encouragement of day tripper traffic. Another problem with this approach, pointed out by Gayler (1965:90, 93), was that the company provided an oversupply of expensive land, but neglected the need for working class housing. This latent demand was instead met by speculators who supplied roads and building plots in land adjacent to the Land Company's from the 1890s onward. These two trends accordingly minimised the effect of

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<sup>15</sup>The existing road to Great Clacton, however, approached the coast obliquely, and this oblique trend was, Barrett notes, "handed on to the street pattern in characteristic manner." Clacton thus acquired several five-road intersections at its centre, unique among resorts, which, Barrett contended, meant that "the visitor to Clacton will experience much difficulty in orientating himself", although the overall impression of the town was that of 'spaciousness, elegance and 'tidyness' rarely found in other resorts' (Barrett 1958:67, 114).

restrictive covenants and land use policies which continued to govern Clacton until the Coast Development Company (who acquired the Land Co. in 1898) went bankrupt in 1915.

Frinton also began life as a 'planned' community, but in contrast to Clacton, its planning and building restrictions remained consistent with overall efforts to build and maintain a select image. The original developers of Frinton, the Marine & General Land, Building & Investment Company (referred to as Marine & General) imposed a high level of charges for improvements and services, minimum house values, and prohibitions against commercial use, barring one street. The Cooper Estate continued the use of restrictive land policies and covenants after the Marine and General went bankrupt in 1890. Frinton's original layout imposed a number of physical constraints which helped to preserve a select social tone. Prime among them were the various roles performed by Frinton's main commercial street, Connaught Avenue. Firstly, it provided the official approach to the sea. Secondly, it separated the 'Avenues' from the less select side of town. The numbered avenues were selected for the location of larger plots and more expensive houses, and accordingly became the essential address for those with social pretensions. As Ursula Bloom noted in her memoir of Frinton: 'The very word 'avenue' gave the place class' (Bloom 1970:22). Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the level crossing and gates at the top of Connaught Avenue provided the primary, and at one stage the only, access into Frinton. The railway line proved to be an effective barrier to development until after World War II, since it clearly delimited undeveloped and agricultural land apart from the town proper, discouraging piecemeal development. The railway gate, much like a moat, provided both a real and symbolic filtering of access to the town (See Maps 6,7).

MAP 2 CLACTON 1878  
SOURCE: ORDNANCE SURVEY

MAP 3 CLACTON 1898  
SOURCE: ORDNANCE SURVEY

MAP 4 CLACTON 1925  
SOURCE: ORDNANCE SURVEY

MAP 5 CLACTON 1938  
SOURCE: ORDNANCE SURVEY

MAP 6 FRINTON 1898  
SOURCE: ORDNANCE SURVEY

MAP 7 FRINTON 1925  
SOURCE: ORDNANCE SURVEY

An 1899 brochure stated: 'it is desired to keep Frinton select in character, and such houses as are to be built will necessarily be of a good class.' The establishment of the golf and tennis clubs provided the necessary inducements to attract a wealthy clientele who could afford and tolerate requirements such as minimum house prices and high maintenance levies. Planning restrictions alone were thus insufficient to guarantee a select social tone, but as other chapters will further detail, they were an important element in the overall network which also included select institutions, unwritten social rules, and economic barriers.

In the beginning of the twentieth century, the state sector began to impose controls over land use. Since both Clacton and Frinton saw themselves as 'planned' towns, they were accordingly receptive to the idea of planning controls, insofar as they would strengthen previous efforts to ensure that growth occurred in an orderly and directed manner. As the following section contends, however, overall acceptance of the idea of town planning in both Clacton and Frinton contrasted with limits on its actual implementation arising from conflicting definitions of town planning as well as divisions between political and economic interest groups.

### **TOWN PLANNING IN THE INTERWAR YEARS - THE IDEA AND THE ACTIVITY**

The State, beginning in 1909 and continuing with 1919 and 1932 Acts, made hesitant steps toward controlling new development through the introduction of 'planning schemes' to be developed by local authorities. Planning schemes, like earlier private efforts to plan Clacton and Frinton, scheduled land use, road layout and development phasing, but unlike the private efforts, did not attempt to set minimum values. The uses and construction of individual properties was controlled through building and public health departments. The 1919 Housing and Town Planning Act made town planning a statutory duty of all urban authorities of over

20,000, (both Clacton and Frinton UDCs were under this number) with the intent that minimal, rather than extensive, planning powers to control town expansion would aid the development of 'homes for heroes' (Cullingworth 1972:20, Swenarton 1981). In practice, the requirement to prepare schemes was not enforced, and procedures for approval by the Ministry of Health were cumbersome.

The town planning aspects of the 1919 Act were at first overshadowed by the housing element, which established a role for the state in providing social housing as a response to the severe post-war shortfall in housing and industrial unrest (see Swenarton 1981). Harloe (1995:112) notes the post-World War I focus on local authority housing for the 'core working class and lower middle class' who were the 'backbone' of the labour movement and accordingly politically significant. Rather than the social rented sector, however, the private owner-occupied sector of course came to increasingly dominate housing for this class and all but the lowest end of the housing market in the wake of changing national policy, economic trends, and the increasingly iconic status of the single family home. The Conservative Chamberlain Act of 1923 and, to a lesser extent, the Labour Wheatley Act of 1924 decreased local authority subsidies from 1919 levels and sought to encourage private enterprise building. This change of direction meant that those local authorities such as Clacton and Frinton which were not quick off the mark to take advantage of the 1919 Act never geared up to take an extensive role in housing provision, and helps to explain why local authorities did not provide more than 31% of the housing built between 1919 and 1934 (Burnett 1978:229). It is interesting to consider how national policy translated into practice at the local level, particularly since academic work on interwar housing policy has tended to focus on the national level. Several examples for comparison are provided, however, in Dauntton's 1984 collection of case studies on local authority interwar housing policy. These studies suggest that, as in Clacton and

Frinton, local authorities who were willing to provide social housing, even if it was for the better-off sections of the working class, often resisted its construction if it was thought to damage the social tone of a middle class neighbourhood. In Leeds, for example, middle class antipathy to council housing in their neighbourhoods led to vigorous opposition and, in combination with patterns of land ownership and availability, resulted in the perpetuation of residential segregation (Finnigan 1984:145). This judgement, of the Labour controlled Council that also produced the innovative Quarry Hill flats, points to the obstacles facing the implementation of an aggressive interwar council house building programme. Those authorities under Labour control did of course tend to be more involved in Council house building, so conservative Clacton and Frinton's hesitancy to intervene in the housing market is to be expected (see Ryder 1984:50 for the correlation between Labour council political affiliation and higher levels of local authority housing provision in County Durham).

While actual local authority construction levels were not great in Clacton and Frinton, the 'housing question' was a prominent feature of debate in the Council meetings of the post World War I period, and presaged debates on similar issues which occurred later in the Twenties and Thirties under the town planning label. Council members concurred on the need to build houses in the wake of post-war material and labour shortages and resultant overcrowding, but there was conflict over the type and level of public assistance in what was felt to be, in normal circumstances, the province of the free market. There were also disagreements about the amount of working class housing needed. Even in select Frinton, it was conceded that a certain amount of working class housing was needed to house those who worked there, but its provision was strictly limited by concerns about the impact on rates and social tone. In 1919, Frinton Council hesitantly approved taking 'further steps' in providing new housing, in spite of concerns that the Government scheme didn't provide for economic

rents and rates would accordingly be affected. While it was conceded that many of the workers who lived outside Frinton 'might prefer to live in town', councillors suggested that the type of accommodation Frinton might be able to provide wouldn't be as satisfactory as that available in the villages, since 'house rents in the villages are comparatively low, gardens are larger and bye-laws are less strict'. The Committee proposed to construct sixteen houses, while the Ministry of Health proposed seventy based on the large number of workers living outside Frinton. In the end, thirty-two Council houses were built on Pole Barn Lane - well away from the select avenues of course (Frinton UDC 17/6/19 and 18/11/19).

In Clacton, debates over the amount of working class housing needed arose when the *Graphic* took on Quick's *Times*' support of a proposed (and never built) Garden City scheme for a field on the eastern side of town. The *Graphic* editorialised that the Council's obligations should not go beyond housing its fixed population. 'The proposed scheme would set up an undesirable colony and tempt working class people from a distance' (CGECIN 23/10/20). The priority was thus, as noted above, to house members of the 'respectable' working class. Clacton's efforts at constructing state-aided housing were considered to be marked by administrative incompetence in the view of politically minded critics. In 1923, Labour Councillor Shingfield attacked Councillor Quick, the Chairman of the Housing Committee (and *Times* editor), for his ineffective efforts to build state-aided housing in Clacton. In response to the Housing Committee's plans to build 16 houses for rent, which after long delays resulted in the construction of 20 smaller houses, Shingfield unsuccessfully proposed a wider ranging resolution to allow the Council to borrow at long term and, in line with his conservative approach to advocacy for the working class, provide for owner-occupied housing 'designed to encourage the working man to become thrifty' (CGECIN 24/2/23). This approach was very much in line with the 1923 Conservative Chamberlain Act, if less so with the Labour Wheatley

Act of the following year, which gave back more powers to the local authority to build social rented housing (Bowley 1945:40). The Housing Committee's delays in securing results also prompted criticism from other quarters such as the rival *Graphic*, (although this criticism should be set in the context of the competitive animosity that saw the *Graphic* claim that Quick 'has never once during his boasted long service on the Council produced one constructive or productive idea' (CGECIN 21/4/23).

By 1927, Clacton had erected 139 houses out of public funds, but thereafter the focus shifted to controlling the development of the increasing amounts of private construction rapidly transforming Clacton's outer areas, with over 3000 houses being constructed in Clacton during the period 1928-38 (CGECIN 5/2/38). A comparison between Maps 3 and 4 shows this rapid growth around Clacton's periphery.<sup>16</sup> The new development in the 1920s was largely judged to have enhanced the town's social tone. Clacton's 1928 Official Guide noted with satisfaction the increasing pre-eminence of the owner-occupied sector:

Clacton has seen more houses erected in the past six years than any town of proportionate size within a one hundred-mile radius. By that, of course, is meant the building of large and medium size residences by private owners and quite distinct from the hundreds of small houses which have been erected under state-aided schemes in other places.

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<sup>16</sup> Yearly construction figures are as follows:

1923	332
1924	290
1925	380
1926	261
1927	287
1928	199
1929	175
1930	138
1931	131
1932	178
1933	315
1934 -1937	1,851
1923 -1937=	4537

the total number of houses in 1937 was 8,650, so 52% had been built since 1923

Sources: 1924-28 CTEEG 4/5/29, 1928-1933 Clacton Directory and Handbook, 1935-36, CTEEG 20/3/37.

The pursuit of a housing strategy that favoured, in southeast England in particular, expansion of the owner-occupied sector in low-rise, suburban developments was not, however, without its negative consequences. This strategy, while a politically acceptable alternative for conservatives to social rented housing, did, however raise new land use and aesthetic problems for elements of that constituency. The discipline of town planning, originally largely an adjunct to housing and public health questions was modified in the 1920s to respond to concerns about the dangers of unregulated development and loss of rural land and amenities. Aspects of the housing question thus evolved into town planning questions, within the context of an overall discourse stressing rationality, health and progress. Reflecting this shift, town planning issues became a regular feature of Clacton and Frinton Council debates and local newspaper editorials in the late 1920s.

This new constituency for town planning was seen by one planning historian as being derived from ‘the patrician disdain for the bargain basement environmental quality of the nascent consumer capitalism’ (Hague 1984: 62) seen, for example, in the formation of the Council for the Preservation of Rural England in 1926. It is misleading, however, to paint the preservationist alliance in too straightforward a right-wing, retrograde manner. Matless (1996) points out that the preservationist movement combined a fondness for modern rational planning goals and techniques with its visions of rural Arcadia, and united conservative landowners with those with socialist leanings, such as Clough Williams Ellis who attacked suburban sprawl and coastal disfigurement in his books *England and the Octopus* (1928) and *Britain and the Beast* (1937). A contemporary book on seaside houses illustrates the ways in which modern planning methods were enlisted to the moral crusade of landscape preservation: ‘unless we make up our minds to group our seaside houses in an orderly fashion nothing can save the English coast

from untidy ribbon development as wasteful and unsightly as the filling up of main road frontages in inland places' (Carter 1937:12).

The CPRE was influential in ensuring that the 1932 Act included powers to plan for undeveloped rural land. The effect of the 1932 Act, however, was almost as limited as the 1919 Act. It continued the concept of the planning scheme and broadened it to include built-up areas, but these broad brush zoning plans were voluntarily enacted and tended to acknowledge existing trends, particularly since the Act required compensation for owners of land which could not be developed. Furthermore, lengthy bureaucratic delays were involved in getting a planning scheme approved, as typified by the six year gap in Clacton between the 1929 approval in principle of a scheme and its 1935 adoption (Cullingworth 1972: 20-22, King:1984: 187).

Interwar planning legislation thus reflected the cautious approach of the conservative constituency that supported legislative controls as a necessary evil to promote aesthetic and economic order, rather than the more radical stance of those who saw it as a part of a package of state intervention and social reform including public housing. The restricted nature of interwar planning legislation, however, should not be directly equated with the overall popularity of the concept of town planning. As Eric Reade observes of the interwar period: '...if town planning as an *activity* was of relatively little significance, the *idea* of town and country planning developed apace' (Reade 1987:42). Reade focuses on the activities of those within the professions in developing this idea, but arguably the favourable response of local authorities and its incorporation into the rhetoric of progress also furthered its overall reception and the implementation of more far-reaching post-war planning legislation and the acceptance

of such concepts as green belts, new towns and development planning control. Local authorities achieved a wider and more popular profile for town planning by situating it within the discourse of modernity, which emphasised good municipal housekeeping and rational foresight and downplayed any infringement on the rights of property. In the following quote from the local newspaper, for example, well-regulated planning and design is seen as an exemplar of appropriate apolitical local government action:

Among the many things for which Clacton is noted is its remarkable tidiness - a great tribute to a communal co-operation by residents and visitors alike. Not only does this tidiness apply to its Front and its street, but to the whole tone of the town; to its various building lines; to the architectural features of its front; to its general design and effect and to the entire absence of anything even approaching the appearance of a slum area...Just as housewives and property owners have been busy lately with their annual 'spring clean', so should we all personally have a little 'spring-cleaning' of our minds and process in a metaphorical sense...More than anywhere else tidiness is required in the minds and actions of our local government rulers. Untidiness in that direction too often means a waste of the people's money, and too often a lack of progress... Clacton needs not only a tidy town, but a council cleared of old untidy prejudices and with a well-regulated policy (CTEEG 6/5/33).

The analogies are clearly drawn here between personal and municipal tidiness, with planning serving as housekeeping writ large. Town planning and good government are defined clearly by assumptions about what constitutes 'matter out of place' and requires tidying up. In a planning context, this would include non-conforming uses, irregular design, high plot ratios and narrow streets. This relates directly to social tone in that the characteristics of a well-designed town scheme were seen to embody the virtues of order, rational demarcation of space and hygiene seen within the select home. Town planning is thus part of the discourse of the modern hygienic landscape described by Forty :

In the decades since the 1930s, the aesthetic of cleanliness has become the norm in the domestic landscape. The visible display of cleanliness seems to have been accepted unquestioningly as the proper appearance for household goods of all kinds. Likewise, the imagery of exaggerated hygiene appears in many other modern environments, such as trains, aeroplanes and public buildings (1986:156).

The limited nature of interwar planning legislation was actually a selling point, in that it allowed the Councils to be seen as adopting a fashionable new trend without seriously compromising entrenched economic and political interests. Advocates for the adoption of

planning schemes thus argued for the perceived enhancement of a progressive image as well as for actual benefits of orderly growth. A 1927 letter to the local newspaper chivvied the Council: ‘Clacton will suffer severely if the Council continues to boycott town planning legislation. Neighbouring places are getting their municipal houses in order. Dovercourt is adopting a scheme soon and will become a dangerous rival to Clacton’ (CTEEG 29/1/27). Advocates of planning in Clacton also made much of its earlier planning heritage and emphasised the continuity, as quoted above, between the early ‘social pioneers in the best sense’ and later state-endorsed efforts, as well as the need to maintain the planning tradition. Clacton’s Surveyor warned in 1933: ‘Building development went on in every part of the district and unless controlled, the amenities of the town and foresight shown when the central portion was laid out might easily be jeopardised’ (CTEEG 27/5/33). An additional concern over the location and amount of working class housing remained, and town planning schemes were felt to be needed to address this issue. The Clacton *Graphic* editorialised:

There is a class of small property springing up in Clacton, which is not calculated to enhance the reputation of the town as a residential centre. It is such enterprises as these that the Town Planning Act would suppress. We have in our mind a colony of small tenements which has had the result of luring to the town a large surplus of workers whom Clacton cannot absorb, hence the swelling of the out-of-work. It is time a period was put to misplaced enterprises (CGECIN 22/2/30).

In this example, concerns about social tone apply to the residential population rather than to its visitors. It is unclear, though, how small tenements were meant to lure surplus workers to Clacton, particularly given its lack of industrial employment and the seasonal nature of its tourism employment. Many were satisfied with this lack of industrial employment, since it was considered to be an unsuitable use for a tourist town. Town planning schemes could keep unwanted industrial uses at bay. Some encouraged the development of a wider economic base for Clacton, in particular to address the problems of seasonal unemployment, an attitude that came to predominate in the postwar years. During the interwar years, however, the pre-eminence of the tourist industry in Clacton was more commonly felt to dictate opposition to any

industrial development which would dilute Clacton's identity as the unpolluted antithesis of a grimy industrial town:

Clacton is indubitably first, foremost and always a holiday resort and residential town. People who are on holiday do not wish to be reminded by factories and works, such as they have in their own towns, of the environment they have quitted for holiday or residence. Clacton and other resorts should be true to the tradition they have created for themselves (CTEEG 19/12/36).

The implementation of town planning legislation required expansion of the local authority bureaucracy, at a small-scale level at first. The surveyor's department normally took on the responsibility, while particular town planning schemes were prepared by outside consultants, as they were considered to be one-off documents and not a steady source of work for full-time staff. The lack of planners on the local authority payroll also reflected the fact that town planning was a latecomer in the ranks of professions created by the nineteenth century growth of state bureaucracy and urban infrastructure (see Perkin 1989). The Town Planning Institute was only created in 1913, and its practitioners had to carve out what are still indistinct boundary lines with architects, surveyors, landscape architects, and public policy makers.

Clacton Council debated over the need to hire a town planning assistant in 1928. The newness of the discipline was seen by Councillor Shingfield as both an asset in and of itself for a modern town, and a rationale for hiring a 'person not exceeding 27 years old', but not as a local authority employee since the 'men who understood town planning were engaged by a firm of experts' and commanded higher salaries (CTEEG 7/1/28). A subsequent letter to the editor contested that 'the work of the town plan be conducted through the ...present Surveyor' and so avoid the cost of an expert (CTEEG 28/1/28). In the end, the Council relied on the prominent consulting firm of Adams, Thompson and Fry for its advice. Thomas Adams, the first president of the Town Planning Institute, and his colleagues prepared pragmatic advisory regional plans throughout south-eastern England in the interwar years, as well as town plans for the seaside

resorts of Hastings, Bexhill and Eastbourne, which focused on containing urban growth, improving arterial road systems and protection of amenity (Simpson 1981:37). Adams (1932:301-302) considered that seaside resorts were particularly in need of town planning, since 'there has been less advance in the art of designing and laying out the seaside town than there has been in any other kind of town, yet nowhere is there greater need for beauty in the design and arrangement and buildings and for the preservation of amenities than in the case of pleasure resorts'.

Echoing the national trend to a higher profile for planning and its separation from public health matters, the Town Planning Sub-Committee of the Clacton's Public Health Committee was elevated to the status of a Joint Committee in 1929. Members representing Tendring Rural District Council (TRDC) joined Clacton UDC councillors to consider a town plan for an area including land from both jurisdictions, a sometimes contentious process that pitted largely pro-development Clacton against the agricultural interests represented on the TRDC, characterised by one Clacton observer as a 'stagnant body' representing 'the petrifying hand of the local farmer' (CTEEG 28/1/28). Frinton and Walton Council, covering an area with less people and development pressures, created planning sub-committees on an ad-hoc basis, including one to consider a proposed Town Planning Scheme in 1935 and one to deal with the Frinton Park Estate (discussed below).

Clacton Council began in the early 1930s to reach agreement with Tendring over a joint planning scheme. Before it could be finalised, however, a new Regional Planning Committee incorporating all of northeast Essex was created in 1933. An editorial remarked on this as 'a rather unfortunate experience', as it forestalled implementation of a virtually agreed scheme and

communicated confusion rather than co-ordinated planning (CTEEG 28/10/33). The setback, however, was considered to be justified by the long-term benefits of a region-wide approach, and Adams, Thompson and Fry were directed to incorporate their work into the new scheme to be prepared for the entire northeast Essex area which was adopted in October 1935. The approved scheme included planning schemes for both Clacton, and Frinton and Walton. The local authorities were then responsible for the implementation of the schemes, which prescribed new roads and the widening of existing roads; determined the location of land suitable for development; and sub-divided land suitable for general development into residential, industrial and commercial zones (NE Essex Regional Planning Committee 1935/36). The town planning scheme was welcomed in one newspaper editorial which commented ‘Town planning is not only a good heritage to posterity, but is a matter productive of good business in an age when the public has become...more exacting and amenity-minded’ (CTEEG 5/10/35).

By the last half of the 1930s, therefore, Clacton and Frinton could demonstrate their official adherence to the principles of town planning, a status which put them in the mainstream rather than the vanguard of resort local authorities. The principles of zoning and regulated new development had acquired widespread currency, even if the legislation requiring them lacked teeth. Town planning scheme largely confirmed existing growth patterns and as such only proved contentious when they prescribed policy for areas where the nature of appropriate development was already subject to conflict such as the chalet development at Jaywick Sands. Particular developments will accordingly now be analysed in Clacton and Frinton to show how the generalised agreement on the utility of town planning was affected by developments challenging both desirable social tone and aspects of ‘good’ town planning.

## JAYWICK SANDS

The Jaywick Sands Estate, built beyond the western end of Clacton during the interwar years, epitomises the sort of plotland development that attracted the particular opprobrium of planners. Their high density, greenfield/coastal settings, eclectic styling, and cheap construction were thought to offend against density, siting, design, and building principles. In *Arcadia for All*, Ward and Hardy (1984:33) assign a wider political meaning to the conflicts between planners and plotland developers, arguing that they ‘exemplified the conflict between individual rights of property and freedom of action and growing State involvement to act in the public interest’. They also note the class dimension of this conflict, with the individual rights being largely those of the working-class or elements of the middle class desirous of basic outdoor pleasures, and the State involvement defined by the middle-class orientation of the countryside preservation movement. Planners considered that catering to the masses should be accommodated within existing popular resorts rather than by despoiling unbuilt areas. Geographer J.A. Steers, in his survey of coastal planning, considered that even those popular resorts which did not merit praise for their town planning at least had the virtue of reducing demand for development on greenfield sites. ‘[Popular resorts] have acted as safety valves and undoubtedly have saved other parts of our coast from unsightly buildings of all descriptions’ (Steers 1944:8). Plotland developments such as Jaywick thus offended against prevailing standards of appropriate new coastal area development.

Entrepreneur Frank Stedman first began to develop the Jaywick Sands Estate in 1928. One of his first schemes, the creation of an artificial mile long lake, failed. His attempts to flood the area just resulted in the water draining away (Lyons 1996:12). Stedman then encountered difficulties in seeing his plans for permanent homes realised since the area was subject to a number of flooding and drainage problems (which later left the area devastated in

the 1953 floods). Stedman's initial efforts to encourage Clacton Urban District Council to aid in the necessary investment failed, so he turned to beach huts and holiday chalet development as a fall-back alternative. The Council permitted these on the assumption that the chalets would not be used for sleeping in overnight. The purchasers, however, were not necessarily aware of this assumption and blamed Stedman for misrepresenting the position when the Council sought to take action against them during a two-year period when the status of the huts as permanent dwellings was in question. This was at last resolved by the Council issuing licences for existing huts which could be renewed subject to upgrading work. The Freeholders formed their own association to ensure their interests were represented in this battle, along with other wrangles over the acquisition and maintenance of infrastructure. This would have been a natural course of action for many of the Jaywick freeholders who were politically active East Enders such as the Poplar MP and Labour leader George Lansbury (who also managed to maintain a friendship with Stedman) (Lyons 1996).

Elsewhere, the Council could have been expected to agree readily to the provision of infrastructure for new development, but Jaywick's initial poor development prospects set the pattern for the Council's avoidance of financial commitment to the area. In 1930, for example, the Council agreed to lay gas and water mains only upon funding by Stedman. Stedman also faced difficulties satisfying Council planning requirements. In turning to the development of beach chalets for summer use only to satisfy one of the Council's concerns about permanent occupancy, Stedman found he had created new concerns about the high density of the beach huts, which was 29 plots per acre in some areas in contrast to the approved maximum of nine. In 1932, Stedman reached a compromise with the Council on density, and entered into a written agreement with the Council to allow a density of nine units per acre in one section. This was in exchange for designating the 75-acre site of the former lake, which was not suitable for

building, as private open space for the Jaywick Sands Freeholders Association. Averaging the density over the unbuilt open space as well as the developed area thus allowed Stedman to retain densities of twenty chalets per acre.

Stedman did not let continuing negotiations with the Council slow down his efforts to market and develop Jaywick. Full page ads appeared in the local papers, as well as ads in London papers, stressing Jaywick's affordability, modernity and ease of access, and offering freehold beach hut sites for sale as well as a range of around 20 different chalets which could be constructed on the sites by the Estate Builder. Stedman marketed his small plots as the latest in up-to-date inexpensive holidaymaking and ensured that Jaywick would be attractive to the growing number of car owners by providing access and parking for them throughout the development, and by naming roads in the Brooklands part of the estate after popular makes of cars (see Fig. 3.1). Stedman put model chalets on display at the Ideal Home Exhibition, which led to the sale of 220 plots of land and huts, and at the Model Houses Exhibition (CTEEG 1-8-31, Lyons: 1996:11-12).

Stedman's marketing efforts proved successful in selling land and chalets and Jaywick grew rapidly in the early 1930s, in spite of problems with Clacton Council and with Tendring Rural District Council, who had jurisdiction over part of Jaywick. Map 4 shows the extent of growth during this period. In the mid-thirties, Stedman initiated development of the last section of Jaywick, the 'Tudor Estates' area, which was on higher land away from the sea and accordingly deemed acceptable for permanent development by the Council. In an early example of the 'themed' architecture post-modern approach, the Tudor Estates area attempted to make Elizabethan connections, with a village green to be the centre for Jaywick and featuring stocks,

a pump, and a maypole to ‘enhance the atmosphere of ancient days’ (CTEEG 29/5/36). The publicity brochure for the Estate boasted:

The Estate has been laid out with great care by Town Planning experts, and while enjoying the advantage of concrete roads and every modern facility, yet it has not lost that air of old world charm inseparable from villages in Essex....The ugly sites of modern industrial towns are nowhere to be found (Tudor Estates Brochure).

While the Tudor Estates portion of Jaywick was not at odds with Council density requirements and similar in character to other new Clacton developments, some lenders refused to lend to potential customers in the area because they assumed all structures in Jaywick were beach huts. Referring to the area as ‘West Clacton’ was thought to help avoid this problem (Lyons 1996:16).

The relationship between Stedman and the Council is worth examining in greater detail because the Council’s opposition was not as extreme or consistent as might initially have appeared. As the above agreement between Stedman and the Council over densities indicates, both sides tended to modify their positions when pressured, and the Freeholders Association worked to ensure the existing residents’ interests were not overlooked. Ward and Hardy’s analysis presents a more straightforward picture which contrasts working class self-activity, exemplified by the Jaywick Sands Freeholders Association, with Council intransigence and bureaucracy. They quote Stedman’s contention that this intransigence stemmed from ‘Clacton Council... being dominated by hotel and boarding house proprietors who did not want to see a new threat to their trade’ (Ward and Hardy 1984:140). In practice, Jaywick, would not have presented any real threat to the hotel trade since it was catering to a long-stay, fixed-budget clientele who preferred the outdoor life. The hoteliers were worried nevertheless, particularly because Jaywick was seen to be at odds with attempts to stake claims to selectness. This was because the popular character broadcast by the small, inexpensive and densely packed chalets

FIGURE 3.1 JAYWICK SANDS  
SOURCE: PHOTO BY AUTHOR

generated assumptions of an exclusively working class composition. Working class East Enders certainly formed the core of Jaywick's population. Additionally, a certain section of the middle class was attracted by the appeal of fresh air living. One resident claimed: 'our happy community comprises some of the leading business men in London, many medical men and happy father and mother with children who get a real care-free holiday.' (CTEEG 3/12/36). The Hotel and Boarding House Association, however, ignored the nuances of Jaywick's class composition and painted it as a clear threat to Clacton's social tone. Far from being satisfied that the Council was representing its position, as Stedman contended, they felt that the Council had not gone far enough:

They all knew that Jaywick was doing the town a great deal of harm, both from a business point of view, and the fact it was giving the town the tone they deserved. [sic] There was a danger that it would give Clacton the reputation of fourth-class place. The Council said the Ministry of Health forced it on them. That was not so in other places. The Council should have done its job and not been led away (CGECIN 11/10/34).

The perceived gap between the Council and the Hotel Association illustrates the fact that, contrary to Stedman's allegations, hoteliers were not directly represented on the Council in the first half of the 1930s, as Chapter Two notes, although it was reasonable to assume that the local businessmen, professionals and retired London businessmen that predominated on the Council would support the hotel industry since it was Clacton's primary breadwinner. Stedman's clearest ally on the Council was Councillor Abraham Quick, owner of the Clacton *Times* and the printer of much of Stedman's promotional literature. Quick readily applied his pro-growth boosterist editorial endorsement to Jaywick, claiming, for example, 'its high standard of building and the careful standard of planning' (CTEEG 20/6/35). The rival Clacton *Graphic* also supported Jaywick and Stedman. In 1931, the *Graphic* commented:

It may be said to [Stedman's] everlasting credit he successfully solved many problems without the assistance of anyone and in the face often of very obstinate official opposition. Mr. Stedman has filled the proverbial longfelt want in providing attractive, cheap and substantial seaside residences for all and sundry, who desire to become at least summer inhabitants of this new suburb of our town (CGECIN 11/7/31).

An analysis of a close eight to seven vote in 1931 to decide if Clacton Council should take on the supply of electricity to Jaywick illustrates the subtle nuances in attitudes to Jaywick. The majority in favour included Quick, unsurprisingly, along with other pragmatic local and retired businessmen who shared Quick's appraisal that 'Jaywick was a growing neighbourhood....and whoever secured the fringe order for electricity would get a growing business' (CGECIN 5/12/31).<sup>17</sup> Their interest in maximising Council revenues overrode the objections on public health and safety grounds of the councillors, primarily in the professional classes, who opposed the motion. The Council's attitude toward Jaywick, while obstructionist in the main, was often characterised by a lack of consensus in the face of continual requests from Stedman and the Freeholders Association in the 1930s for leeway in applying regulations and assistance with infrastructure. The overall result of Council policy was thus to let Jaywick exist, but only as a poor relation. The Council did not avail itself of the full range of town planning and public health regulations available to stop much of the Jaywick area being used for permanent, high-density dwellings, but equally the grudging support of pro-growth interests never extended to the financing of adequate infrastructure for the area.<sup>18</sup>

### **BUTLIN'S HOLIDAY CAMP AND THE FACTORY PSYCHOLOGY**

In contrast to Jaywick, the result for the developer was much less equivocal in the case of Butlin's Holiday Camp. In spite of town planning concerns, Billy Butlin won approval from

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<sup>17</sup> Lyons (1996:29) states that the Council refused to supply electricity, but the specific outcome of the vote on 5<sup>th</sup> December 1931 was to narrowly turn down Councillor Fenton-Jones amendment to refer back the matter because the area was below the high water level. (CGECIN 5/12/31).

<sup>18</sup> Jaywick's original status, however, continued to govern its image nationally in the post-war years as 'the last shanty town in the country'. This was reinforced by Clacton Council's unwillingness to spend money on Jaywick, in spite of continuing resident organisation. Main drainage, for example, was not installed until 1966 for "The Village" portion of the estate, and 1980 for the "New Town" portion. Arguably, the low point in relations between Jaywick and Clacton Council did not come until 1971, when the Council voted in favour of compulsory purchase and demolition of houses in the Grasslands and Brooklands areas. This decision was overturned by the Department of the Environment, with the Inspector finding: 'Here were worthy citizens, with a high degree of community organisation, who, just because their houses were substandard, should not be pushed around.' Relations between Jaywick and the local authority have improved since the local government reorganisation of 1974 and the incorporation of Clacton Council into Tendring District Council. The severity of housing and infrastructure deficiencies in Jaywick have made it a candidate for additional government funding, in particular £1 million Rural Challenge funds in 1995 (Lyons 1996 72,78,80,83,92).

Clacton Council in December 1936 for his scheme to be developed in West Clacton under a General Interim Development Order. Butlin succeeded in orchestrating a distinct turn-around in Council policy. Only two months before the twelve-to-five December Council vote, the Council was seriously considering the compulsory purchase of the West Clacton Estate for use as a park and public open space. The West Clacton Estate had been purchased by four prominent Clacton businessmen in 1919, and they developed the 148 acre site as an outdoor leisure complex, with a boating lake and caravan sites. The Council's interest in buying the site rapidly evaporated once Butlin appeared as a serious option who would put his own money into the site instead of costing the ratepayers money. One source (Hutchence 1952:9) takes a more sceptical view of this deal, contending that the exact details of Butlin's purchase of the West Clacton Estate were 'highly suspicious', and that it 'serves as an example of the low standard to which public conduct had sunk; the deal was associated with some of Clacton's leading citizens'. Juicy details, however, are unfortunately lacking. In terms of the sale itself, of the original Estate owners, Robert Coan died in 1930, and George Gardiner in 1931, so by 1936 only Frederick Wagstaff, a Councillor, would have been in a position to directly influence the Council's decision (Jacobs 1993, CTEEG 19/4/30, 31/1/31). The site was available several times, as it was first sold by the Coan syndicate in 1935 for £90,000, sold again for £94,000 a few months later, and finally sold privately in 1936 for £75,000 to Butlin's (Goodwin 1993: 28). One of the minority councillors opposed to the scheme regretted the lost opportunity to obtain the land for Clacton:

One of the great mistakes of the past had been not to have acquired certain lands at a favourable time. [The Pier perhaps] The Council two months ago were definitely in favour of acquiring this land for the town on the grounds that it was the only land available on the 'right lung' of Clacton...and now Mr. Butlin would have a great laugh over the Council because he had induced them to scrap their by-laws and town planning scheme in his favour (CTEEG 5/12/36).

The Surveyor's strongly worded recommendations had certainly counselled against accepting Butlins, stating that 'the Council would be wise requiring full compliance with the

Town Planning Scheme and Bylaws for any scheme submitted and rigidly guard the town against development which might in any way be injurious to the town as a whole'. The Surveyor expressed concern about the scheme's high density, back-to-back chalets without air space, and the 'factory-like' appearance of the main buildings. In addition, 'to alter the appearance of some one thousand chalets into something reasonably artistic would be a difficult and I submit, impossible task' (Clacton Joint Town Planning Committee 18/11/36). The Council, however, proved susceptible to Butlin's sale pitch. A trip to his Skegness camp and the hopes for rate income and employment opportunities swayed the Council in his favour. The extent of Butlin's influence was assessed in cryptic terms by Councillor Ball: 'There is a suggestion that Mr. Butlin had nobbled some of the councillors. Well Mr. Butlin is a very clever man. These sort of camps had come to stay and Clacton must keep up with the times' (CTEEG 5/12/36).

Butlin's represented a similar threat to a select image as Jaywick, since the existence of both depended upon the increases in free time and disposable income of segments of the working and lower middle classes. In Jaywick, however, this democratisation of leisure had an individualist tinge, while Butlin's was perceived as an outgrowth of the modern factory system. Councillor Shingfield observed:

...the modern development was that people were going for their holidays in groups. It was the factory psychology. People lived in towns and worked in factories and were used to noise. They took the same sort of system in their holidays as they had in their ordinary everyday lives and that was the reason why these group holidays were proving so successful.

Shingfield, a Socialist of the sort that felt 'there were times when they could make progress and time when they could not' considered that Butlin's 'would be a credit to Clacton' as it addressed current 'demands of the people'. More conservative members of the Council also thought the imperatives of progress could not be ignored, with Councillor Quick contesting

that 'if they turned it down they would be putting a spoke in the town's progress'. Some did not even perceive Butlin's as a threat to social tone: Councillor King alleged that Butlin's wouldn't affect the boarding houses as it only held fifteen hundred out of 100,000 weekly summer visitors and 'would bring a new type of visitor much better than they had in the past'. This was not necessarily an overly optimistic assumption, since as Ward and Hardy note, holiday campers in the 1930s tended to be clerks and skilled workers rather than dock labourers and factory hands (1986:52). This statement was echoed by the *Clacton Times*, which editorialised: 'The reality is at Butlin's, 50% of campers are middle aged with families...they range from the office worker to the professional classes. It is quite common for us to have the chief engineer and chief constable of the town' (CTEEG 17/7/37). The effect of the Holiday with Pay Act 1939 was not felt until after World War II when Butlin's acquired its image as appealing more to the working class. In 1945, Brunner's study of the holiday industry observed that 'commercial holiday camps reported that their visitors were not drawn from the factory floor but consisted mainly of the smaller salaried people' (11).

The Hotel and Boarding House Association of course opposed the scheme, but they found allies on the Council only amongst a few in the professional middle classes including two lawyers (Elliott and Fenton-Jones) and Mrs. Sykes, who were concerned that the scheme went 'against the advice of town planning experts and their own bylaws' (CTEEG 12.5.36). The perceived economic imperative and Butlin's lobbying thus overcame concerns over social tone and produced a more receptive attitude by Clacton Council to Butlin's than Stedman found with Jaywick. The irony was not lost on Stedman, who commented sarcastically that he 'hoped everyone could get the same treatment as Butlin's' (CTEEG 16/10/37). Butlin certainly seemed able to turn the system to his advantage the following year when he opened an amusement park on the site in advance of the opening of the holiday camp. The Council objected to the park as

it would ‘cheapen the neighbourhood and the noise would be objectionable’, but the Clerk pointed out that ‘although the amusement park would contravene the Town Planning Scheme, no action for its removal could be taken before the scheme was approved’ (Clacton Joint Town Planning Committee 24/4/37).

The Burrsville Park estate, developed beginning in 1931 in an area northeast of Clacton, is another example like Jaywick of a residential estate which did not fit in with Clacton’s claims to selectness and town planning. Its developer, Mr. Renshaw, stated he was ‘supplying a demand for very cheap bungalows for retired people of small means’ with his concrete breeze-block bungalows selling for £250-400 each with no services provided (Joint Town Planning Committee 14/1/32). (Bungalows in nearby Holland-on-Sea were selling at the same time for £400-800)<sup>19</sup>. Like Stedman, Renshaw found that his efforts to cut costs to keep his prices low ran up against Council building and planning bylaws. The situation deteriorated to the point where, in 1935, the Council restricted building operations to one house per acre until sewer facilities were installed. As in Jaywick, an association of local residents sprang up to look out for its own interests, but also as in Jaywick the initial substandard provision of infrastructure left the area as a poor relation low down on the list of Council spending priorities. The Council rejected a 1937 proposal by Renshaw to build a sewage farm and sewers for Burrsville to allow development to proceed, on the grounds that they would soon be providing them as part of a wider plan to provide main sewers (Clacton UDC 7/4/37). In 1950, however, the Burrsville Park and District Ratepayers Association was still applying to Clacton Council to take over and improve side roads and install main drains (CTEEG 27/10/50). Unlike Jaywick, however, the houses at Burrsville, were not advertised at exhibitions and through the national press, so their

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<sup>19</sup> Burnett (1978: 246) states that national inter-war averages for mass market speculative houses were about £300-800, with £1,000 buying an individual, architect-designed house, probably detached with a garden.

presence in an out-of-the-way corner away from Clacton was rarely commented on and they were not attacked as Jaywick was for their influence on social tone.

Added together with other developments in the 1930s such as Jaywick and Butlin's, Burrsville nonetheless did have a cumulative effect on social tone that became apparent in the post-war years when efforts to promote a more select image finally ceased. The town planning schemes that came into effect in the Thirties set the framework for discussing new development, but their ultimate impact was constrained by the Council's failure of political will in the face of tenacious private developers. Clacton's town planning schemes and policy decisions thus only directed, or, as in the case of Jaywick and Burrsville, slowed expansion of new developments at odds with a select image. The same ingredients of a divided Council and increasing pulls in a popular nature also characterise the interwar experience of Bognor Regis, another medium sized seaside resort attempting to appeal to both popular and select markets. The visit of George V to Bognor in 1929 added 'Regis' to Bognor's name along with social cachet, but as a history of Bognor notes, the 1930s witnessed a 'running battle between East and West to decide which of the two would wield the major influence in moulding the future character of the town' (Young 1983:232). Bognor Council missed an opportunity to buy land east of the pier in 1925, which led to piecemeal lots sales and the opening of an amusement park in 1931. Butlin's gained a foothold in Bognor through acquisition of the amusement park and subsequently traded the sea front site for a larger site for a holiday camp. As in Clacton, Butlin's camp came to dominate the post-war image of Bognor, so that 'to countless people all over the country Bognor would mean, first and foremost, Butlins' (Young 1983:236).

The types of housing constructed at the beginning of the interwar period, in the absence of town planning schemes, approximated the aspirations of Clacton image makers in that detached houses for the middle classes predominated, bolstering claims to a more select social tone. Construction in the Thirties, however, increasingly consisted of bungalows designed for the working class and retired market that dominated Clacton's post-war growth. The next section will examine how in the interwar years the bungalow increasingly came to epitomise the spoliation of the seaside and suburban sprawl.

### **A BUNGALOW BY THE SEA**

The image of the bungalow changed over time in Britain from that of a Bohemian idyllic retreat for the few to that of the suburban or seaside home for the many, en route becoming 'for an influential social elite, the focus of ridicule and wrath, a symbol of environmental change which they altogether deplored' (King 1984:156). The bungalow first arrived in England in the 1890s as an exotic Indian import to the more exclusive areas of the South Coast and rural hinterland of London. The bungalow allowed its residents to experience 'nature' close hand and privately. Their self-consciously simple designs, constructed using the latest advances in building technology such as pre-fabrication, were intended to minimise housekeeping requirements and consequently the need for servants.<sup>20</sup>

After World War I, the popularity of the bungalow grew along with the growth in home ownership. Burnett (1976:246) notes that 'new houses have probably never been so cheap or so widely available as in the mid-thirties'. The majority were built for sale rather than rent with their purchase aided by the expansion of building societies and low interest rates. The new, wider market for owner-occupier homes found the bungalow attractive due to its low cost,

simplicity of design, and low maintenance. The idea of a home which synthesised the best of town and country initially appeared to fit in with the ideas of the proponents of the Garden City. Support from planners, however, turned to attack beginning in the 1920s, when the numbers of bungalows had grown sufficiently to be considered a cause of the 'spoliation of the countryside' (King 1984:177). The bit of open land most likely to have been 'despoiled' by the bungalow after World War I was the seaside, particularly the southeast coast resorts, with Peacehaven being the most well-known example.

Bungalows thus came to acquire a very strong association with living at the sea. The pull of the ideal for pensioners tired of crowded city life can be seen in a 1977 survey of retired people in Clacton and Bexhill which found that the stereotyped view of the ideal retirement home as a stairless bungalow was 'certainly fulfilled by our survey, particularly in Clacton, where 70% of the retired people interviewed lived in bungalows' (The national average was 6%) (Karn1977:129). In Frinton as well, the bungalow became the favoured building type for land outside the gates in the post-war years. A developer recalled the channelling of the strong demand for bungalows by retired incomers: 'The local planning authority, the council, virtually disallowed any bungalow building this side of the tracks. You'll find very few bungalows if you walk around Frinton. Virtually everybody retiring here dreamed they wanted a bungalow' (Tomkins interview).

Frinton thus managed to keep the bungalow at bay until the post-war years, and then restricted them to outside the gates, but interwar Frinton could not entirely escape development pressures. The railway gates and restrictive covenants helped to minimise development, but

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<sup>20</sup> King (1984:112) notes that a manufacture of portable buildings set up some of his own at Clacton at the turn of the century.

this still left Frinton's eastern edge open for expansion in the 1920s (subject to the technical hitch of moving the railway line away from the eroding cliffs). The following section will analyse how a general consensus on the select nature of this new development still left room for debate on the precise nature of its architectural style and tone.

## **FRINTON PARK ESTATE AND MODERN ARCHITECTURE**

The developers of the Frinton Park Estate hoped to tap into the 'smart set' market with their plans for an 1100 homes laid out in a 200 acre estate on the edge of Frinton. A focus for the development was to be a luxury hotel designed in the Modern style, which was touted as 'something entirely new in hotels - a seaside hotel which is actually on the shore and whose terrace walls will be washed by the waves at high water' (CTEEG 23/3/35). The hotel, however was an early casualty of the proposal due to the engineering difficulties of building into Frinton's eroding cliffs. The Modern style was also selected for the homes nearest to the beach, as the style was thought to epitomise Frinton's image of healthiness, exclusivity and fashionableness. *Country Life* observed sympathetically:

To create a similar atmosphere [to the continent] on our own coast involves foremost (I am afraid) the elimination of the "vulgar plebs", the preserving somehow of the natural foreshore, a lay-out combining the intimacy of a village with lucidity and spaciousness and a type of building that suggest in design and colouring the glitter of the sea, the fresh salt air (quoted in Storey 1992:27).

To the limited extent that modern architecture found favour in interwar England, it attained its greatest popularity at the seaside resort. Nautical references such as porthole windows, curved walls, sun decks and railings all entered the vocabulary of Modern architecture in the twenties and can be found in seaside resorts throughout England in domestic, hotel, and entertainment architecture. As Jeremy Gould (1977:12) notes, however, modernity in the twenties was seen strictly as a style alternative to Tudor or Georgian and did not tamper with traditional structure or plan. These style battles were satirised in Osbert Lancaster's 1936 portrayal of a fictional seaside resort, Pelvis Bay, with its Moorish pier, modified Renaissance

style Winter Garden, neo-Egyptian fronted Hotel Splendide, maritime-themed Ship Hotel, and Ace of Hearts roadhouse (with Olde Englishe Grille, American Bar, and Pompeiian Swimming Pool). Eclecticism was certainly the hallmark of the work of Frinton Park Estate's project architect, Oliver Hill, whose qualifications for a project in Frinton included that he 'moved easily in fashionable society' (Dean 1983:42). The 'chameleon-like' architect was known for his willingness to execute any style, and his commissions included 'vernacular borrowed from Provence as well as Basque, Dutch, French, North African and English sources', as well as 'eighteenth century chateausque, neo-Georgian and diluted Baroque' (Lever 1979:496). The most well known of his efforts in the Moderne style was the Midland Hotel at Morecambe (1932-34). In Clacton, buildings in the Modern style include the Oulton Hall Hotel and the Blue Lagoon Dance Hall at the entrance to the Pier, described by one later architectural writer as 'perhaps the most typical building of the period between the wars', whose 'very name conjures up the atmosphere of the era' (Lindley 1973:52). (Figure 3.2)

In the mid-Thirties Continental concerns with use of native materials and the principle of form following function began to overtake superficial 'Jazz Modern' and permeate modern design in England, but only in a limited fashion. Chermayeff and Mendelsohn's De La Warr Pavilion in Bexhill (1934-35), was the first public building in Britain to epitomise the formal and structural hallmarks of the 'International Modern' (Times 16/5/96). To the extent that modernity did garner popular support in design and architecture, it reflected its incorporation into the wider discourse of hygiene and simplicity discussed above in relation to town planning and encapsulated by Matless' (1998) term the 'moral landscape'. The 'aesthetic of cleanliness' valorised modern design because it was easy to keep clean and additionally marked its consumers as up-to-date with the latest trends (Forty 1986:156). Lubbock (1995) has also pointed to the ways in which this discourse in interwar England defined the interpretation of

FIGURE 3.2 BLUE LAGOON AND CLACTON PIER, OULTON HALL HOTEL  
SOURCE: AUTHOR'S COLLECTION

theories of modern architecture and social reform. Social reformers such as Rowntree and Beveridge and architectural modernists such as Corbusier advocated the combination of design simplicity, active recreation, and modern, hygienic built environments. The unwritten assumptions of this discourse are seen by Lubbock to be that ‘good modern design in a comfortable well-designed modern home stimulated the intellectual and spiritual faculties while keeping at bay all the escapist, narcotic and sensationalist tendencies of modern life which discouraged a serious-minded approach to citizenship’ (322).

Modern architecture, particularly the International style, ultimately failed, however, to gain widespread acceptance in England, with the International style seen to be ‘a bit “fast”, rather too “continental” and probably (and mysteriously) Bolshie’ (Hawkins 1979:55). The ‘Bolshie’ label derived from a caricature of International Modern’s social agenda, which in contrast to Jazz Modern, saw architecture as part of a wider agenda for social reform. The reactions to modern architecture also need to be situated within the ‘cartography of taste’ delineated by Dick Hebdidge (1988), which encompasses complicated interactions of popular cultural trends, high culture comment and technological advances:

The proliferation of “jazz forms” was cited by European cultural commentators to connote simultaneously: “popular taste”, the “look of the future” and “Americanness” - all of which were negatively defined. On the other hand, for designers and advertisers of streamlined products and for the “public at large” the vocabulary of streamlining was used to signal a positive improvement in the quality of life which in turn entailed a massive expansion in the productive base and in the scale of conspicuous consumption (72).

The efforts of Frinton Park Estate’s developers to use Modern architecture to re-create a sophisticated Continental plage and promote healthy seaside living were thus constrained by the corresponding set of negative associations that could be made of Modern architecture, with ‘Continental’ embodying anti-English qualities, and ‘Modern’ the epitome of everything crassly American. The developers were trusting that Oliver Hill’s smart set connections would prove susceptible to the strands of modern architecture which referred either to Jazz Age

fashionableness or the 'aesthetic of cleanliness', however negative associations were uppermost in the minds of traditionally-minded Frintonians.

The town planning aspects of the proposed plans for the Frinton Park Estate fit within, in a more straightforward fashion than the architecture, the discourse of hygiene and modernity by providing clearly zoned spaces and accessibility within a self-contained estate containing shops and public buildings. The local authority and the local newspapers welcomed the project, and a special committee of the Council was convened to see it through, with this combination of local authority and private developer seen to be a 'significant illustration of the progress of British planning practice' (Storey 1992:21). Oliver Hill sought to integrate his stylistic Modern approach with the more thorough-going formalistic and social approach of a range of young architects by commissioning a panel of architects to design houses for the Estate. The 'cream of our younger designers in the contemporary style' included Mendelsohn and Chermayeff; Tecton; Wells Coates; Connell Ward and Lucas, E. Maxwell Fry; Frederick Gibberd; and F.R.S. Yorke among others (Lever 1979: 497).

Following this ambitious start, however, divisions quickly opened up between the architect and developer, seeking to retain an aesthetic vision while keeping down costs, and the surveyors and engineers, concerned with maintaining building standards. The builders were unconvinced by the architects' insistence on concrete and argued that 'we shall be undertaking too much if in addition to...[popularising] modern houses we also went too far in the direction of trying to overcome the mistrust and prejudice against concrete houses which undoubtedly exists' (Lever 1979:497). The local authority, meanwhile, asked for thicker walls than the builders felt they could afford. Many of the Modern architects were committed to the use of

concrete and left the project over this issue. This issue symbolised their comprehensive approach to modern structure and materials, and the ideological issues which separated the younger Modern architects from the eclectic Hill, who was seen to be ‘not one of them’ (Dean 1983:129). Eventually, the only members of the panel to actually complete houses were Wamsley Lewis, Frederick Etchells, R.A. Duncan, Howard Robertson and Marshall Sisson, with the remainder of the Modern houses actually built being designed by Oliver Hill (the only one to build any in concrete, surprisingly) and the resident architect, J.T. Shelton (Lever 1979:498). To compound the problem, the contractor was inexperienced and incompetent, resulting in structural and maintenance problems for the houses. Finally, and most importantly, consumers proved resistant to the appeal of modern architecture, and to the concept of a Mediterranean lifestyle in Frinton. As one later commentator noted, ‘a sun terrace is not really *sine qua non* in Essex’ (Dean 1983:22). The developers, while featuring the Modern houses in their publicity, had hedged their bets by providing for a potpourri of English domestic residential styles in rest of the estate. Even a limited commitment to Modern architecture, however, proved difficult to sustain for the developers in the face of all their other building problems. Out of twenty buyers committed to buy houses, eighteen took their name off the list because of the flat roofs and fears that they would all look alike and have a bare, barrack-like appearance. The development company finally went bankrupt in 1936, having built only thirty-six of the proposed Modern houses at a cost of around £1500 each (Lever 1979:497, 498).

The Frinton firm of estate agents, Homer, Tomkins and Ley, which took over the marketing and selling of the plots and houses was said to take a ‘severely practical view of the Estate and [was] interested in nothing that [was] not likely to bring business’ (Lever 1979:499). They sought to assuage buyers’ fears about buying an architecturally modern house by framing

it in the discourse of hygiene and progress and minimising the extent to which their architecture represented a departure from the norm:

Some people call the new architecture 'modern' or 'modernistic'. But in reality that is no more a true description than it would be to say that women's clothes today are 'modernistic' compared with those of twenty years ago. Just as women's clothing has changed in appearance because it has become more practical and healthy, permitting greater freedom of movement, so the faces of buildings are changing as a result of more sensible internal planning, the use of space-saving equipment and the employment of new and far more adaptable materials (Homer, Tomkins and Ley 1936).

The modern houses actually built were thus integrated with the suburban layout and traditional style of the rest of the area. They are clearly distinguished from their neighbours, however, by their modern styling with its vocabulary of flat asphalt roofs, metal windows, and white cement render (See Figure 3.3). Their interior layout and design is more conventional, and does not experiment with open-plan arrangements. They reflect interwar standards for the middle classes in providing both a garage and a maid's room.

Modern architecture was thus intended to provide a fashionable gloss to Frinton life during the interwar years. The developers of the Frinton Park Estate downplayed the serious critique of form and design presented by the International Style and instead highlighted the fashionability of Jazz Modern and the technological modernity of its hygienic, simple design. Cutting out the more radical aspects of modern architecture was not enough however, to create a receptive climate for a clearly new and different style in a conservative town seeking to restrict change and development. The town continued to be defined by the restrictive covenants imposed by the Cooper Estate coupled with less formal economic and social sanctions established in the first part of the century, and these provided the framework for Frinton's post-war transformation into a sedate retirement centre.

FIGURE 3.3 FRINTON PARK ESTATE  
PHOTO BY AUTHOR

## CONCLUSION

This chapter has highlighted the confidence in modern architecture and planning broadcast by interwar booster rhetoric in guidebooks and newspapers. This has been contrasted with the actual efforts to implement modern architectural and town planning ideas, which largely fell short of promised ideals, and sometimes contradicted them. The gap between theory and practice has not been pointed out in order to argue for the hollowness of the theory, but rather to show the complicated way in which ideological assumptions and goals intersect with the actions of interest groups and economic considerations. This entails differentiating ideological assumptions about the built environment to show areas of shared values as well as areas where definitions conflicted. Boosterist rhetoric *can* be taken at face value at one level in the sense that its users did want their towns to be the best and the brightest. Equally, residents and visitors to seaside resorts found associations with hygiene, progress and order to be appropriate for their aspirations for a holiday destination or retirement home. This point can be illustrated by reference to a *Life* magazine cutting which is in a collection of Stedman's photos and memorabilia at the Clacton Library. It shows a photograph of a turn-of-the-century vintage, tree-lined, middle-class suburb of Chicago, annotated with a hand-written comment by Stedman: 'This is what I wanted'. Jaywick certainly never approximated the scale of a middle-class American suburb, either in conception or execution, but, like the seafront beach hut discussed in the next chapter, in its own miniaturised way it did embody Anglo-American cultural preferences for single detached dwellings with their own gardens, however small.

The cartography of taste, equally as complicated in the interwar years as in post-modern times, did however, vary the nature of 'what I wanted', as the mixed reception granted the prototypical small home, the bungalow, illustrates. Hailed as the ideal low-cost home and as an efficient, healthful design solution on the one hand, it was also castigated as the embodiment of

the spoliation of the English countryside and coastline. The reaction to the bungalow indicates the ambivalence occasioned when modern developments threatened social tone. In Frinton, town planning was welcomed as an additional means of preserving its property restrictions and combining 'selectness with visual attractiveness'. Modern architecture, however, had less appeal. It found favour briefly as a stylistic credo for a few in the social limelight, but its negative connotations limited its appeal to conservative Frinton, whether it was those of popular culture, growth and Americanism associated with Jazz Modern, or the ties with Continental styles and radical political agendas associated with the International Modern.

The acceptance of 'modern' town planning was equally constrained by a number of economic and political factors. The first was that town planning was tied in Clacton to a conservative political establishment which was divided amongst itself on the sort of growth which should be permitted and was dominated during the period in question by pro-growth business interests which did not wish to overly interfere with the workings of the free market. Secondly, the developers of Jaywick, Butlin's, and Burrsville were single-minded entrepreneurs who were willing to take on the Council in battle over minor battle in order to achieve their overall goals, and who would compromise or horse trade if necessary. Thirdly, once Jaywick and Burrsville gained residents and vocal resident associations, the Council proved reluctant to penalise those who had bought in good faith and were now Council constituents and ratepayers. Finally, because town planning was seen to be intrinsically beneficial, its rhetoric was adopted by those both for and against a development. Stedman, for example, contended that Jaywick was not an anarchic plotland development, but instead 'is to be developed in town planning lines, and not the casual efforts of "Jerry builders"' (Lyons 1996:39). Some members of Clacton Council, meanwhile, considered that Jaywick lay very much outside its definition of 'planning lines' and argued that Jaywick violated fundamental town planning principles of

design, density, infrastructure provision and compatibility with larger planning schemes. The pro-growth majority on the Council prevailed, however, and permitted high-density developments which paved the way for the ascendancy of the holiday camp, retirement bungalows and chalets in post-war Clacton's built environment and image.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### **THE SEPARATION OF VIOLENT STIMULUS FROM PEACE AND QUIETNESS: THE PROVISION AND REGULATION OF SEASIDE ACTIVITIES AT CLACTON AND FRINTON**

Differences in social tone at seaside resorts meant that resorts could be distinguished by the types of experiences and physical sensations available as well as by the social composition of their visitors. The smell of fish and chips and the noise of an amusement arcade provided instant visceral markers of a popular resort, while select resorts sought to define themselves by the absence of intrusive physical sensations. This chapter will highlight these experiential aspects of the seaside holiday and their relationship to the built environment and social mores. The arguments will be situated between the structural empirical focus of historians on the determinants of growth and decline of seaside resorts and the hermeneutically oriented stance of sociological writers on tourism and popular culture.

The latter body of work is useful in accounting for the development of social myths and place image, but as argued in the introduction, the tendency of writers such as Shields and Urry to subsume differences between resorts and over time, under an overall categorisation of the English beach as a 'pleasure zone' that has now largely lost its particular powers to please, reflects an approach that is theoretically led, rather than following on from empirical work. The concept of liminality is useful in highlighting the symbolic content of seaside activities and rituals, and their importance in defining class hierarchies, but ignores the ways in which the seaside resort was not a liminal zone at all times and for all people. The transitional zone between land and water was a place where pleasure and sexuality were both restrained and given an outlet, but these intersected in different ways in different times and places. It is an

examination of the specific *constraints* on liminality and the ‘tourist gaze’ which best explain the differences between Clacton and Frinton and changes over the interwar period.

This chapter will examine the constraints placed on beachfront activities in the two resorts in the form of changing attitudes and regulations to the use of space and the nature of appropriate seafront activities. Bathing will provide the initial focus for this chapter, with a discussion of its dramatic transformation from medical ritual to a ‘modern’ pleasure. The spatial consequences of assumptions about appropriate activity and behaviour will then be analysed in the context of a unique English seaside structure, the beach hut. The beach hut came to acquire clear associations with a select social tone, in part because of its link with non-commercial, private consumption and activity. Attempts to virtually eliminate commercial activity at Frinton and to restrict it on the beachfront at Clacton will be analysed to draw out the implications of commercial activity for social tone. The rise in car traffic at the seaside will then be discussed for its significance in both challenging the insularity of select resorts and in taxing the ability of popular resorts to cater for the new set of demands for infrastructure and facilities made by the motorist. Car traffic also entailed more picnickers at Frinton, and the attempt to restrict them is noted for the ways in which quasi-legal and social sanctions were used to enforce a select social tone. The chapter will go on to note that those working on the beach played a major role in establishing social tone at the seaside, by either selling things, and reinforcing a popular social tone, or by enforcing restraints, such as the Beach Inspector or the nanny. The concluding topic for this chapter is the place myth of the seaside resort as a site for licentious behaviour, and the gaps between liminal expectations and representations, and contrasting experiences. Throughout, distinctions between formal sanctions and social codes as actually practised will be noted, since the resulting place myths were a product of both, and formal restrictions were not always consistently interpreted or enforced.

## BATHING

‘The Englishman can’t throw off his social straight-jacket even when he puts on his bathing-suit.’  
 quote by Anna Bowman Dodd of Boston, visiting Bognor Regis in 1886, in  
 Young (1983:184)

In 1919, a dip in the sea normally entailed renting an ill-fitting costume that unflatteringly covered both men and women from the neck to the knees, changing in a tent or chalet, and a prompt change back into everyday clothes following a swim or paddle. By 1939, ownership of a swimsuit was widespread, along with other sportswear specifically designed for the beach, and it would also be worn before and after a swim while the wearer acquired a suntan. Photographs of the English beachfront prior to the 1920s thus show no acknowledgement in the user’s attire that they are in a distinctive public space. Victorians and Edwardians did not feel the need to acquire specialised clothes to mark a special environment<sup>21</sup>.

By the 1920s, a new consumer market had been created for beachwear which took advantage of new man-made textiles, changing social mores, and the alliance of health with sun-tanning. Lansdell’s study of seaside fashions notes: ‘The bathing costumes of the 1920s for both men and women showed almost year by year, an increase in the amount of skin exposed and a decrease in the weight and amount of fabric used’ (1990:63). The extent of this dramatic transformation, however, was limited both by the English climate and by the clear boundaries still remaining in social behaviour, as discussed below. Photographs of the seaside in the interwar years tend to show the great majority of beach-goers wearing their everyday clothes when not in the water (See Fig. 4.1.) Leisurewear and abbreviated swimwear became accepted in principle, but its actual purchase and use was the province of trendsetters with sufficient

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<sup>21</sup> 1. The similarity with other Victorian domestic spaces was particularly strong in the years prior to the advent of the deck chair in the 1880s, when ordinary chairs were used at the beach.

disposable income, particularly the nascent youth market.<sup>22</sup> Seaside towns, seeking to encourage the growth of this market, were willing to encourage the spread of the new fashions as part of their efforts to project a modern image. In 1930, for example, the local newspaper noted that

bathers of both sexes were allowed to wear what they like at Clacton...the principal seaside resorts have now accepted modern ideas in relation to the type of bathing suits to be worn this season. While this country is not prepared, and rightly to accept Continental fashions, we are willing to recognise and permit the wearing of multi-coloured suits, and in many instances the low cut 'sun back' is also allowed...the modern generation realise the wisdom of wearing garments which are not only more in keeping with the present trend of fashion but freely admit the ultra-violet rays so beneficial to health...We must not, nor do we wish to, emulate Continental resorts by permitting men to appear only in shorts, and ladies in suits without legs, but this country is now sufficiently broadminded to accept new fashions in such moderation as will be beneficial to the wearers (CGECIN 17/5/30).

During the next decade, Clacton became broadminded enough to accept men in shorts and ladies in suits without legs as well, with the perceived health benefits of ultra-violet rays providing the medical rationale for the acceptance of otherwise overly daring 'Continental' styles. New boundaries were swiftly set so that prevailing behaviour remained within the bounds of decency and decorum. In 1923, for example, the Clacton newspaper thought it notable that 'the heat seemed so to affect some that conventional attire was cast altogether in favour of bathing suits for three 'lads of the village' were observed in a motor car dressed in nothing but swimming costumes. They were accompanied by a young lady, but she was in an ordinary summer dress' (CTEEG 11/8/23). Ten years later, the paper commented 'in the matter of bathing suits...Clacton has no restriction provided public decency is observed and nobody is startled to see costumes worn in the street' (CTEEG 29/7/33).

This change in norms and public discourse helps explain why the increase in the display of bare flesh at the seaside did not greatly heighten the seaside's reputation as a liminal zone,

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<sup>22</sup> Fowler (1995:1) contends that 'the affluent teenager and the emergence of a distinctive teenage culture, at least in Britain, were not post-war developments but products of the interwar years'.

FIGURE 4.1 PHOTO OF CLACTON BEACH AUGUST 1923

SOURCE: HULTON GETTY PHOTO LIBRARY

where social norms could be relaxed and even transgressed. While some aspects of a liminal image emerged more strongly in the interwar years, with the heyday of the comic postcard and the development of the 'dirty weekend' image for Brighton, in most respects, the beachfront was characterised by continuing efforts to control and direct activities that could offend against prevailing standards. By the time bathing regulations had changed in the wake of social practice in the latter half of the interwar years, disrobing on the beach and abbreviated bathing costumes were conventional rather than disruptive and thus no longer offended against prevailing standards. Relaxation in the regulations were viewed as common-sense measures to meet popular demand:

The problem of dress today at the seaside is not what one should wear, but what one can dispense with without incurring the wrath of authority. The change of sentiment regarding clothes is defended in the cause of health...No one - that is except for a few fanatics - would like to see those frumpish and foolish dresses of a decade ago. Generally speaking sensible and comfortable holiday dress of today goes to show a sensible advance (CTEEG 12/8/33).

Thus, the skimpier costumes were seen as 'sensible', and any opposition to them the province of a few 'frumpish and foolish fanatics'. The new fashions were part of a discourse which integrated swimming and sun-tanning with health, hygiene and progress, essential characteristics of the 'modern' interwar resort image. This discourse, as discussed in Chapter Six, often took the course of giving seaside towns feminine characteristics, in contrast 'masculine' inland industrial towns. In this discourse, the female beachgoer projected confidence and vitality, clouding other comic postcard images of the passive bathing beauty (See Fig. 4.2). Changes in bathing and fashion both reflected and initiated changes in strict gender distinctions, as the postcard in Fig. 4.3 illustrates. Previously unacceptable dress and actions were thus brought in the realm of propriety. 'Clacton belles with that poise of jolly independence and unawareness which makes bare limbs modest and is the natural grace of English girls' (CTEEG 25/6/32). Subtle class distinctions also complicated a simplistic ahistorical view of the female bather, providing different contexts for fashions sweeping

FIGURE 4.2 PHOTO OF SOUTHEND BEACHGOERS, 1933  
SOURCE: HULTON GETTY PHOTO LIBRARY

FIGURE 4.3 COMIC POSTCARD  
SOURCE: AUTHOR'S COLLECTION

through both Clacton and Frinton.

Frinton's conservative social structure and behaviour codes apparently adjusted easily to the new fashions:

There are sand girls at Frinton who could compete successfully with any bronzed beauty of Palm Beach. Regardless of complexion, they have allowed the sun to burn them deep brown - and the sun has heaps of opportunity. For if Frinton is strict about stalls on the beach, it has no objection to lolls on the front. So the bathing girls dry themselves in the sun on the sands, or sit before their huts - still in bathing costume - and drink tea. And here and there, you see a young mother in bathing costume and bath robe pushing her brown baby in a perambulator, with the nurse at the side (CTEEG 17/7/25).

In this example, the bronzed beauties retain such social markers as beach huts and servants to legitimise both their behaviour and the newspaper's voyeuristic discussion of it.

An earlier nineteenth century discourse succeeded for a time in sanitising the practice of men bathing naked. While this practice was at odds with Victorian morality, it arose in the context of bathing as a health ritual, and not as a licentious activity. As John Travis (1997:13) observed in his examination of English sea-bathing, costumes were considered to prevent men from receiving the full benefit of having salt water next to their skin. He also notes that wearing bathing drawers was regarded as a sign of effeminacy (although women bathers were wearing flannel gowns rather than drawers). Many men only reluctantly accepted the requirement to accept an imposition upon their masculine prerogatives and Travis comments that nude bathing continued to the end of the nineteenth century, albeit in a marginalised fashion, and only finally died out before the First World War along with the belief that exposure of bare skin to salt water was good for health. This could explain why in 1911 the East Cliff Inspector in Clacton 'cautioned ladies against bathing from the public bathing station before 8AM.' The early morning swim was another relic of swimming as a health ritual which also continued until World War I. In Clacton, the Council set aside the east beach in 1908 for bathing without a machine or tent between 4 and 8 AM (Clacton Improvement 22/01/08). The

numbers of early morning bathers there were sufficient to generate a complaint about their noise in 1913.

The practice of nude bathing did not lead only to a requirement for men to wear costumes; it also led to the creation of separate bathing areas for men and women. The ascendancy of Evangelical attitudes to recreation provided the initial moral arguments for local authorities to impose bathing bylaws and segregated bathing areas in the 1850s and 60s. As Travis notes, however, local authorities often failed to enforce these regulations in an effort to keep all sections of their market happy, particularly since it was often wealthy patrons who preferred to bathe in the traditional manner. The occasional day-tripper incurred prosecution by the local authorities, but enforcement was not consistent.

By the end of the century, with most men willing to wear costumes, the moral arguments had shifted to place the focus on the unsuitability of segregated bathing for family holidays. Additionally, bathing had lost many of its medical connotations and had become a more hedonistic pasttime. Swimming became more popular and was by the turn of the century practised by increasing numbers of both men and women, meaning that boundaries of segregated bathing areas were more frequently crossed. Commercial pressure to accede to this demand for mixed bathing facilities thus led to the repeal of segregated bathing areas. Pimlott, in 1947, erroneously fixed the date for the beginning of this trend in 1901 in Bexhill, and a host of writers on the seaside have replicated this mis-statement since (see for example Walvin (1978:92), Howell (1974:121), Landsell (1990:50), Anderson and Swinglehurst, (1978:76), Manning-Sanders (1951:41), or Everitt (1980:36). Fifty years on, the error has been at last corrected by Travis who found that in 1896 'males and females were bathing together at places

as far apart as Newquay, Felixstowe, Littlehampton, Deal, Seaton, Barmouth, Tenby and Sea View on the Isle of Wight....Far from leading the movement, Bexhill was well back in the field.’ (1997:24) Clacton can be added to the above list of places that permitted mixed bathing by the turn of the century, with a 1900 guidebook (Rochard:16) observing that ‘mixed bathing has now become an established and deservedly popular feature of this progressive watering-place’ which was free from ‘the ban of an over-fastidious and unreasoning puritanism’.

Aside from serving as an example of an incorrect assumption acquiring the weight of historical fact through repetition, the continued acceptance of the misconceived view of when mixed bathing was introduced is symptomatic of the difficulties to be encountered in pinning down the exact nature of the practice of leisure activity and behaviour, difficulties which will also be noted in discussions below of other beachfront activities such as picnicking or the patronage of amusements. Legislation often did not coincide with actual practice, and variations in regulation and practice between and within different places confuse the overall picture. In the case of mixed bathing, Travis notes that ‘it is hardly surprising that most present-day commentators have failed to realise that mixed bathing continued in the late-Victorian period; even at the time, some people were unaware that there were still places where the sexes could bathe in the sea together’ (1997:24). The initially monolithic view of late Victorian bathing as an entirely constrained and restricted activity thus fragments on closer inspection to reveal its overlay on the earlier tradition of both mixed and nude bathing.

Travis concludes his study of English sea-bathing by contending that the beginning of the twentieth century largely witnessed the end of significant bathing regulations, but this neglects a phenomena specific to the interwar years: mackintosh bathing (1997:30). This term

arose to describe the practice of bathers arriving at the beach in swimwear covered by a mackintosh and bypassing Council-owned changing facilities. Mackintosh bathing ran contrary to Council regulations which sought to enforce the use of Council-owned bathing facilities (except during the early morning hours as noted above). These restrictions originally largely affected working-class visitors who could not afford the charges for the changing facilities and costume and towel rental. Day trippers would adapt by rolling up their stockings or trousers and go for a paddle instead (See Fig. 4.4). Those who contravened the restrictions could be cautioned by the Beach Inspector, although enforcement does not appear to have been vigorously pursued (See Fig. 4.5). A 1919 visitor to Clacton found these restrictions an insulting infringement on his liberties and wrote to the Council to complain. The Council did not further prosecute his breach, but did write back commenting that notices on the beach made it clear that open bathing was prohibited (Clacton Improvements 16/9/19).

Mackintosh bathing increased in the twenties in response to more relaxed attitudes to seaside attire, the growing fashion for sun-tanning and the addition of new leisure fashions to the holidaymaker's wardrobe which they wished to display ("Mackintosh" is a misleading term - women in particular would have been more likely to wear colourful beach wraps to cover their swimsuits). The Clacton *Graphic's* 'Clacton Chatter' column observed in 1930 'The bathing public are already deleting the bathing tent from their programmes and proceeding from their apartments ready for their dip covered with the now popular bathing wrap, and thus saving themselves and depriving the Council of a source of revenue' (23/8/30).

The increase in Mackintosh bathing posed a dilemma for Clacton Council. To permit it would entail a loss of revenue to the Council from changing facilities, but to forbid would

FIGURE 4.4 CLACTON 1924  
SOURCE: HULTON GETTY PICTURE LIBRARY

FIGURE 4.5 COMIC POSTCARD  
SOURCE: AUTHOR'S COLLECTION

discourage visitors and harm its reputation as a forward-thinking resort. Even more so than with the mixed bathing regulations, discussion on the subject was couched in commercial rather than moral terms, with concerns about possible indecency overshadowed by worries about loss of revenue to Council-owned facilities. The Council reluctantly removed restrictions on mackintosh bathing in 1930, feeling under pressure from competition from other resorts which permitted it (CGECIN 7/6/30). The Ratepayers Association criticised the change, claiming that mackintosh bathing had caused a loss of £700 to £1000 in receipts for the 1930 season. They also alleged that boarding house keepers encouraged their visitors to make use of mackintosh bathing. A Clacton councillor commented:

Of course there have been a large number of people staying at hotels who have gone down to the beach in bathing wraps simply because it is the fashion to do so. They are the people most able to afford sixpence for a bathe. I was speaking to one of the attendants the other day and he told me that people have come up to him and asked him to mind articles of jewellery and other valuables for them while bathing. When he reminded them that they had not purchased a bathing ticket, their retort was 'Oh, that does not matter: we're bathing from the beach'. I call that absolute impertinence. When asked if the renewal of restrictions upon 'mackintosh' bathers were contemplated for next year, the Councillor replied that other resorts allowed this kind of bathing, and therefore Clacton had to fall in with other seaside towns (CTEEG 8/11/29).

In Frinton, where the Council was less concerned with generating revenue from its limited number of public changing facilities, although more concerned with preserving social tone, it was noted in 1930 Council minutes that Mackintosh bathing was allowed 'consistently with the observation of decency' (Frinton General Purposes 25/3/30). This suggests that popular resorts had to work harder than select resorts at imposing restrictions and enforcing them, since select resorts could rely on a greater degree of shared norms. Eastbourne Borough Corporation, for example, an example of a larger resort resisting popular status, sought to enforce its 'no hut no bathe' rule in 1930, and dispatched police in lorry-loads to take the names and addresses of hundred of mackintosh bathers (Everitt: 1980:41). Eastbourne's policy, however, was the exception rather than the rule, and by the end of the interwar period bathing

was at last largely unrestricted in practice by local authorities at English seaside resorts, even if byelaw restraints lingered on.

The changes in fashion and social custom detailed above had integrated bathing into a new discourse which re-worked the medical aspect of bathing, in which bathing was something to be endured rather than enjoyed, into a new combination with hedonism and consumerism. This shift affected bathing at both popular and select resorts without altering the parameters of social tone. As the next section will argue, however, while interwar bathing fashions might not have had great social tone implications, beach huts, the structures associated with bathing, did serve a critical role in representing social tone.

## **BEACH HUTS**

Beach huts and chalets followed on from bathing machines, which were relics of the era of bathing as a medical ritual. The machines housed bathers as they were pulled by horses or winches from the shore into the water for a brief immersion, ensuring privacy and modesty. The huts, however, were only tolerable in the context of a medicalised ritual rather than a pleasurable one.

Unless one was lucky enough to get it early in the day, the machine was a very unattractive object: damp, ill-lit, ill-ventilated, its floor covered with sand and the seawater which had dripped from its previous occupants and perhaps even sloshed up the steps of the machine while it was out in the sea, it was also set in motion as soon as its hirer was inside. He or she had to change into their bathing costume as best they could in such a confined space while the machine jolted and shook its way down the beach and into the water (Anderson and Swinglehurst: 1978:71).

The rationale behind bathing machines disappeared once mixed bathing and bathing costumes for men became common by the turn of the century. They still lingered on in most resorts though until after World War I, with many fixed on shore for use as changing facilities. In Frinton, for example, bathing machines were available for hire until World War I, and several remained on the beach until 1925, when they were scrapped and replaced by six beach

huts (Cook interview; Frinton Council 24/03/25). Tents served as a transitional form of changing facilities, and photographs of Edwardian beaches show tents, bathing machines and huts all sharing the beach. Local authorities preferred to invest in structures more solid than a tent, so unlike Continental resorts, tents gradually diminished on English beaches after World War I.

By the 1920s, beach huts had acquired a range of symbolic connotations that made them an important element of the place image of the English seaside resort (See Fig. 4.6). Although bathing machines became merely quaint anachronisms once shed of their function, their forbidding interiors initially had associations with the sea as a place of shocks and discomfort, harking back to the era of the sea as ‘territory of the void’ (described by Corbin (1988), prior to its transformation by the Romantic imagination into a site for the sublime. By contrast the beach hut symbolised a miniaturised suburbia, domesticating the seafront and deflating connotations with either fear or the sublime. The beach hut by the interwar years was not just a place for changing clothes. It had come to serve a wide range of domestic functions, including shelter, catering, and the display of objects and interior design skills, surrounding the otherwise relatively anonymous beach-goer with a number of indicators of social status and lifestyle preference. This domestication also meant that the presence of the beach hut signalled ownership by groups of select individuals rather than unrestricted public access: beach huts were rarely found singly. The uniform appearance of their serried ranks communicated control and order, particularly when paint colour choices were strictly limited, as in Frinton, as opposed to the more festive palette permitted at resorts with artistic pretensions such as Southwold. Unlike the earlier terraces of the Georgian seaside resort, however, this uniformity retained distinct individual boundaries for each owner rather than subsuming them under a collective

FIGURE 4.6 POSTCARDS SHOWING BEACH HUTS AT FRINTON

TOP: 1931 Postmark

BOTTOM: Note Beach Inspector at centre

SOURCE: AUTHOR'S COLLECTION

grandeur. The consequent links made to the image of popular and select resorts can be seen in contemporary debates about how Councils should respond to the demand for bathing facilities:

Clacton tradesmen have protested against Council erecting more beach huts....They will constitute a most serious nuisance, especially from a sanitary point of view...They are a spoliation of our great asset, namely a free and uninterrupted front. When people engaged the huts they made a sort of private preserve of the ground around them and if there was a public footpath near, people were given the impression they were not allowed to use it....people bring their own food, no trader revenue.....Visitors to the huts would be given the prerogative of becoming Lords of the Manor for the time being...but...the beach was the privilege of all who visited it (CTEEG 16/11/29).

Clacton Council's overall priority thus remained on the provision of public bathing facilities, viewing it as a component of the public infrastructure required to attract visitors. In 1919, the Council sent out an enquiry to other seaside resorts concerning their public bathing facilities (apart from tents, machines and chalets). Of the 18 replies received, only three towns had provided baths and/or a pavilion (Clacton Improvements 26/05/19). The Council saw this result as an opportunity to outstrip the facilities of its rivals and opened the East Cliff bathing chalet in 1922.

Clacton policy makers were, however, swayed by the promise of extra income which beachfront development such as beach huts could generate, which they attempted to reconcile with the perceived inappropriateness of transforming the front of a popular resort by introducing a quasi-private area. They approved plans to construct beach huts on the East Cliffs in 1931, although they were subsequently deferred three months later. The initial approval was greeted unenthusiastically by the local Chamber of Commerce:

In Clacton we cannot compare our town with a place like Frinton. Where Frinton gets one visitor, we get a hundred in the season. We want our front for the enjoyment of the people; we do not want any particular individual to have the right of our front. Where they say 'I rent this and this is my property'. When those people are sitting in the huts they will feel, if you walk in front of their hut you are importuning on their property (CTEEG, 17/01/31).

The *Graphic* agreed, editorialising that it was

to be deplored that Chamber of Commerce advice on huts had been treated so off-handedly by the Council ...Each one will be sure to be the nucleus of family and friendly gatherings, which as we know by experience, will prove to be nothing but a stumbling block and hindrance to promenaders. ...These huts will inevitably lead to an increase in the mackintosh bathing and as a natural consequence our bathing pitches will become obsolescent.' (7/2/31).

The direct link with beach huts and the preservation of exclusive social tone was thus widely perceived. Of interest here is both the financial link made between beach huts and mackintosh bathing, and that the beach huts identification with 'family values' were seen to be at odds with the requirement for its spaces to clearly promote fluid mass movement to sustain a popular image. Clacton accordingly preserved the area next to the Pier, where most visitors would have congregated, for public spaces such as formal gardens and facilities such as the Band Pavilion. The market for beach huts provided by middle class residents and visitors, meanwhile, was catered for with beach huts on the West Beach. One life-long Clacton resident, for example, remembers childhood summers with her nanny at the family beach hut at the far side of the Jetty in West Clacton, close to home but distant from the town centre, Pier and trippers (Carr interview). The huts in West Clacton shared a similar character with those at neighbouring Walton-on-Naze, a popular resort abounding in beach huts. In both cases, the beach hut can be seen as the signifier of the 'family resort' characterised by repeat visitors, an intermediary category to either the select resort or the popular resort catering to day trippers. Walton's family resort status was confirmed in the interwar years by the active August Visitors Society, a group of regular neighbouring beach hut users from the East End of London who organised annual social and sporting events (Palmer 1994:79).

The nuances of actual use and regulation of beach huts are thus important to an understanding of how they influenced social tone. In Frinton, the owner of a beach hut was constrained by Council restrictions designed to control development, thereby maintaining social tone. While the beach huts were owned privately, the Frinton local authority owned the land

underneath the huts. A particular restriction that set Frinton apart from other local authorities was that hut owners were required by Council bylaws to be Frinton residents. Furthermore, ‘any hut-owner who, on leaving Frinton sells his hut, and any purchaser thereof, must clearly understand that the site does not go with the house or hut, but becomes vacant and the hut must be removed from that particular site if there are any applicants on the Councils waiting list’ (Frinton General Purposes, 26/06/17). The Council gradually relaxed its residency requirements, providing a few non-residents’ sites in 1919 and a few more in 1920 when demand slowed. The policy, however, to refuse non-resident applications was tightened up again later in 1920 when resident demand picked up, and residency requirements were not again lifted until 1974. The residency requirements heightened the focus on gradations of social tone, since the ones reserved for the best houses accordingly had the most prestige. A local resident recalled:

Before the war, according to where you lived in the town, you were allocated to a certain area. The dividing line was the main street. If you lived on the west side of the main street you went on the low wall, which was the posh section, and if you lived on the east side you went on the east wall, which wasn’t quite so posh (Tomkins interview).

The Council retained an active role in preserving the character of the huts, which by the 1920s reached around 600 in number. In the 1910s and 1920s, the Council passed regulations governing the naming of the huts (preferably after the owner’s main residence); requiring regular hut maintenance; requiring Council approval for hut designs; and recommending that all huts be painted white with black roofs. The Council and Frinton residents thus worked together to ensure that the beach huts contributed to a select social tone. The beach hut thus evolved from a bathing accessory to a shore-bound icon symbolising the resort hierarchy.

## **SOCIAL TONE AND REGULATION OF COMMERCIAL ACTIVITY**

The beach would initially seem to be defined clearly as a public space, but as the above discussion of beach huts illustrates, varying assumptions of ownership, along with actual

ownership, link perceptions of spaces as public or private to perceptions of whether they are select or popular. The high level of social interaction seen at the popular beach set it apart from the greater accent on the private domestic sphere which characterised the select beach, in the form of the beach hut, or as discussed below, the nanny. The private allusions of the select beach at Frinton follows on from the late nineteenth century discourse promoting the seaside holiday within the context of rational recreation and progressive hygiene, and, as Chapter Three has discussed, could be discerned in the interwar credo of rational planning. In the sphere of leisure, this discourse could be seen in the valorisation of non-commercial activities as intrinsically superior to those passively consumed and purchased. The distinction between the public popular beach and the private select beach has also been described in more explicit class struggle terms. Travis (1997:17) notes contests over the use of the beach for bathing to be symptomatic of the national struggle over hitherto public leisure spaces described by Cunningham (1980), 'with the wealthier sections of society trying to demarcate areas for their private use on land which had always been regarded as common and public'.

The focus here, however, is on distinctions not proscribed by statute or explicit demarcations. A distinction between commercial and non-commercial activities on the seafront was one of these important unspoken considerations, which arose from the legacy of rational recreation and the priority placed on the acquisition of cultural capital amongst the bourgeoisie. 'Commercial' implied activities that required minimal effort on the part of a consumer in search of stimulation while 'non-commercial' activities such as sports or enjoying nature were felt to require greater physical or mental involvement, albeit concealed by the restraint in actions and emotions associated with an exclusive and conservative resort. 'Commercial' was perceived in the context of crowds, urbanity, fads, transgressive behaviour, and artifice, all qualities antithetical to a select resort. An 1894 brochure promoting Frinton defined its audience clearly:

We are not speaking to those who want to take town and all its gaities to the sea-side with them. To such, the main charm is absent, for Frinton is essentially quiet and reposeful. Bands and niggers, and all the gay allurements which are so attractive to the tripper, are conspicuous only by their absence.

Economic activity was cloaked by this quiet and repose, but not absent. Unlike the constant flow of coins at Clacton pier, the cost of leisure at Frinton were more discreetly obscured in the large upfront costs required to join the golf or tennis clubs or to buy a house and its associated beach hut.

Divisions of public/private and commercial/non-commercial spaces at the seafront was neither fixed or static. The use and control of spaces on the beach was contested, whether it was in the nature of permitted activities, the types of structures which could be erected, or the kinds of public behaviour that would be tolerated. Some activities such as bathing became less regulated over time, while others, such as commercial activity became more regulated and spatially concentrated. The local authority was usually at the centre of these conflicts, either in its role as guardian of public order and morality, municipal entrepreneur, image maker, or rate collector.

By the interwar period, differences between select and popular resorts in the types of available leisure activities were well-established, with commercial ones predominating in popular resorts, and activities perceived as non-commercial predominating in select resorts. In the popular resorts, this process was accompanied by a concentration of commercial activities into prescribed areas, along with their increasing regulation. This concentration in a town such as Clacton was intended to further its attempts to capture a wide spectrum of the potential market and provide appropriate environments for both working and middle class

holidaymakers. It also served to direct revenue away from itinerant hawkers and entertainers to Council run services and the Pier.

While the link between social tone and types of seaside activities had been clearly made before the interwar period, this link was significantly transformed during this period by the expansion of consumerism and commercialised leisure and related changes in the workforce and economy, as noted in Chapter One. Contemporary observers perceived a logical progression from the demands of the modern Fordist workplace to the structure of seaside holidays:

Though some may deplore the passing of the old seaside of peace and quietness, with nature all or nearly sufficient, to-day's round of gaiety and amusement has the advantage that it serves the same purpose in a changed environment, and was indeed unavoidable as a stage in development. It is an inevitable psychological reaction of the jaded nerves of people who have spent the larger part of the year in the same routine of often mechanical, monotonous, inartistic and uncreative labour, that they want a holiday of violent stimulus. Peace and quietness are no longer the correct antidote against the mental diseases of modern industrialisms, and holiday makers want to be entertained all the time. Not that they no longer seek the health-giving and health restoring qualities of sunshine and sea breezes, but that these qualities - rather than the chief mental objective of the holiday- are the incidental, though all-important, atmosphere in the sense of the drama. They are the background of health to be absorbed subconsciously during the continuous round of activity and amusement- with occasional deliberate doses of rest (CTEEG 3/6/33).

In the interwar period, leisure activities for the middle and working classes were increasingly defined by a commercial and popular culture realm outside the parameters of the nineteenth century discourse of rational recreation. The above formulation of the modern holiday attempts to accommodate both the old and the new. It is one of many examples where Clacton image makers disingenuously argue that Clacton can happily cater for all classes and potentially conflictual desires within and between these classes.

It is interesting that the Clacton *Times* felt that the old seaside had been characterised by 'peace and quietness', since Victorian and Edwardian seaside resorts were noted for the cacophony produced by roving peddlers, musicians, and entertainers. These activities were

gradually rationalised and consolidated, both spatially and organisationally, in a manner similar to other forms of popular entertainment such as music halls or sport (see Bailey (1986) for music hall, Lowerson (1993) for sport). This process was set underway earlier on in Clacton than in other popular resorts such as Southend due to the unified control of the steamboat company, whose restrictive covenants provided that ‘summer shops, bazaars, small amusements and cafes were contained within the commercial core of the town and not allowed on the sea-front’ (Gayler 1965:150). Photos of Clacton Beach in the 1890s, however, do show a number of stalls and pitches for Pierrots, ice-cream vendors, photographers, and novelty merchants. Over the next thirty years, these activities were largely moved to the Pier, Council-run kiosks, or town centre locations. The Council played a key role in this process, and gradually increased its control over seafront enterprises (with the notable exception of the privately run Pier).

A key moment in this consolidation and sanitising of commercial activity was the demolition of the shops in Pier Gap in 1914 and its replacement by formal gardens and a Venetian Bridge. Pier Gap led the way into the Pier and thus provided a key focal point for the seafront and shaped first impressions of disembarking steamboat passengers. The sharply sloping Pier Gap was too steep to clean with dustcarts, and was felt to offend the sensibilities of the better class of visitors due to the smell of fish; the noise of ‘the little shop proprietors, some of them Italian, worrying visitors to buy’; and ‘the shrimp heads, shells, bones and so on that were dropped every day along with cigarette packets, chips, old newspapers etc’ (CTEEG 2/1/26, and Jacobs 1986:21). The old Pier Gap thus compromised images of hygiene, social respectability, and Clacton’s pride in being a purpose built seaside resort rather than an expanded fishing village. Clacton Council accordingly ‘acquired at great expense the little shops at Pier Gap and covenanted with the Coast Development Corporation that they would not

enlarge shop frontage at the Pier.’ The new Venetian Bridge and formal gardens, epitomising rational planning, aesthetic refinement, and an absence of commercialism, were felt to be in line with the Council’s policy to ‘attract a different class of people’ and to create a ‘place without wheelk stalls and rattletrap affairs’ (CTEEG 8/8/25). (see Fig. 4.7.) The influence of the old Pier Gap, however, was considered to have had a long-lasting detrimental effect on Clacton’s social tone. Eight years on, a local paper bemoaned: ‘the town has a bitter experience of the cockle stalls and the shops of the old Gap, the stigma of which is still to some extent being lived down’ (CTEEG 2/9/22).

The Council’s efforts to restrict commercial activity to approved businesses in approved areas were challenged by itinerant hawkers and peddlers. The Improvement Committee in 1905 recommended that ‘no hawking be allowed on the beach, as this class of trading would be a source of nuisance to visitors and would also ‘interfere with the businesses of the tenants of the trade spaces allotted by the Council’ (Clacton Improvements 24/5/05). The Clacton Improvement Act 1905, however, did prescribe certain specific areas for hawking on the beach, while disallowing it on the promenade. Hawking was thus regulated by limiting the places where it could occur rather than by a system of Council licensing. The Act contained hawking to a limited degree, but the enforcement of its provisions proved difficult and the fines imposed by the Magistrates were insufficient to discourage offenders from returning. The issue of beach peddling came to the fore in the mid-1920s when the Council sought to displace hawkers from both the beach and Pier Avenue. In July 1925 a raid on beach hawkers resulted in thirty summons, and in 1926 the newspaper reported that beach hawkers were ‘trouble again this season’. A new type of prosecution, obstruction of the highways, was tried to limited success, but the real economic challenge to the hawkers was felt to lie in licensing and in the provision of Council-owned kiosks. Significantly, the newspaper pointed to a link between the presence

of hawkers and public perception of who was in control of the beach: ‘The continuing summoning of offenders makes it appear that Clacton has no control over the beach’ (CTEEG 5/10/26). Hawkers thus represented both an economic threat and a threat to the otherwise clearly regulated and established subdivisions of commercial/ non-commercial, public/ private, spaces. The beach was expected to be a zone for non-commercial relaxation, and the Pier and the town proper the appropriate zones for commerce. Overly vigorous prosecution of hawkers was seen by some, however, as counter to Clacton’s overall interests as a popular resort. The 1925 raid on beach hawkers prompted the local paper to comment: ‘We presume the idea is not to have any photographers, hawkers or Punch and Judy shows near the pier. Why? Is Clacton to be a popular resort? If so, she must have those things which are to be found in every other popular resort’(CTEEG 11/7/25).

In 1928, Clacton Council decided that regulating the demand through licensing was the best way forward and applied to the Ministry of Health for a provisional order amending the Clacton Improvement Act 1905 to allow the Council to issue licenses to hawkers and photographers. The Council argued that its policy of allowing only certain portions of the beach for hawking had proved counter-productive:

....that part of the beach was studiously avoided by the persons using the seashore for peace and enjoyment. The result was the hawkers disregarded the regulation and passed to and fro along the whole of the beach....In prosecutions, the magistrates desired independent witnesses, and it was very hard to get them. They had been successful in getting penalties, but not in stopping the nuisances (CTEEG 21/1/28).

A prime component of the economic threat to local business was the large number of itinerant hawkers and photographers coming from elsewhere, with one 1925 estimate putting the total of non-locals at 75%, and a 1928 estimate of 20 local photographers and hawkers and 45 from Colchester and outside (CTEEG 26/9/25 and 21/1/28). Non-locals, however, were at a disadvantage in their supplying and servicing. For example, non-local ‘tintype men’ could

FIGURE 4.7 POSTCARD OF PIER AND VENETIAN BRIDGE  
SOURCE: AUTHOR'S COLLECTION

develop their photos quickly, but at the sacrifice of quality, while local established photographers established kiosks at the beach ancillary to their larger high street studios. The established beach photographers could also offer a wider range of photo opportunities than the itinerants. The fortunes of both types of beach photographers tended to improve steadily from around 1900-1930, but they then went into decline due to the advent of the snapshot camera and the growth of amateur photography (Batty interview).

The licensing system appears to have been successful in limiting hawking. The regulations approved in 1928 permitted 6 general hawkers, 3 photographers and one newspaper vendor (CTEEG 9/6/28). As early as 1929, the local paper was proclaiming, in its usual boosterist tone, 'After its climate and violet rays, Clacton boasts of its cleanliness...the sea front is devoid of winkle and cockle stalls and itinerant hawkers' (CTEEG 22/6/29). The decline in hawking is also likely to have been influenced by increases in the amount of Council kiosks, greater consumer sophistication and the low profit margins of seasonal itinerant trading. The zones of non-commercial activity that were created on Clacton Beach by these trends, however, were insufficient to ensure Clacton's appeal to the upper end of its target market. The Pier, continuously expanding in the interwar period, as detailed in Chapter Five, instead emerged as the dominant focus for the Clacton seafront and put images of commercial activity and 'violent stimulus' to the fore.

Frinton Council had a far less ambiguous view of commercial activity. It was seen to be totally inappropriate for a select seafront. Restrictive covenants, first instituted by the Marine

and General Land Building and Investment Company in 1886 and carried on by the Cooper Estate, provided that ‘No trade or business whatever shall be carried on or permitted in or upon any part of the estate without the written consent of the Vendors previously given in that behalf and then only of the character previously authorised by them’ (Deed of Covenant 1886). In effect, this excluded commercial activities from the seafront and greensward since the Estate, in its role as a private planning authority, refused all requests for commercial uses. The Council reinforced this policy for public land by refusing requests to carry out any activities on the seafront that could be considered remotely commercial or damaging to social tone. In 1931, for example, permissions for a palmist, a Punch and Judy show, and a Daily Mirror- sponsored display of physical culture were all refused. Sand design competitions, however, were deemed acceptable, perhaps because they had artistic and natural connotations (Frinton UDC General Purposes Committee 28/5/29; 28/4, 14/7/31). A 1929 proposal to refurbish Frinton’s one kiosk and change its use from dancing class studio and the football club to refreshment stand, was rejected in 1929, since the ‘Council had always had the idea to keep the tripper out of Frinton’ (CTEEG 16/11/29).

This anti-commercial ethos acquired a weight of its own which ensured the gradually clouding legal status of the original covenants did not become an issue. In 1924, for example, a drinks licence was granted to the Beach Hotel, so that it, along with the Queen’s, Esplanade and Grand Hotels could serve alcohol to its visitors. The licence was granted in spite of questions raised about whether it was ‘right for the magistrates to grant a licence on property respecting which there is a covenant that there should be no licence? It was understood [the Cooper Estate] had taken the opinion...which said that the covenant could not be enforced and was of no effect whatever’ (CTEEG 16/2/24). No publicans seemed to have come along in the interwar years to test the strength of this covenant, and the perceived, if perhaps not actual,

effectiveness of the covenants, combined with the lack of demand for a pub succeeded in limiting the sale of alcoholic drinks to the four hotels. The advent of day tripping motorists in the 1920s, however, diminished the effectiveness of commercial restrictions since the motorists could survive on their own supplies, including drinks. Car ownership became extensive enough in the interwar years to include many who either did not fit the definition of a 'select' visitor, or did not avail themselves of Frinton's facilities in what was considered a proper manner. The next section will accordingly analyse the significant effect of the motorist on social tone and amenity in Clacton and Frinton.

### **REGULATING TRAFFIC**

The increase in the numbers of motorists in both Clacton and Frinton over the interwar period was dramatic, reflecting the overall national increase in car ownership: 32,000 people owned cars in 1907, rising to 109,000 in 1919 and 2,000,000 in 1939 (Oliver: 1981:38). The resulting change in patterns of tourism were also noticeable, significantly modifying the image of the interwar years as the heyday of the fortnight's summer holiday in one place. One Clacton councillor saw a clear link between the increasing popularity of the car and changes in social attitudes and behaviour: 'The motor-car has changed all the old holiday habits. People are on the move and want more freedom and quicker entertainment' (CTEEG 25/6/32). Seaside resorts had to adapt to these changes in order to retain their share of the holiday market. A 1928 editorial opined: 'The visiting families that come for a set period will decrease and in their place will be the owner-driver and his small family on their week-end or holiday tour. A quite new set of problems has been evoked by the motor-car, and has to be met within the next few years', concluding optimistically, 'but we are sure that if it is dealt with in the right way it will tend to the continued growth and progress of Clacton and places similarly situated' (CTEEG 28/7/28).

Frintonians perceived the motoring day tripper as a clear threat to their select social tone. Frinton's train station never occasioned similar criticisms, as it was essential to the City businessmen who commuted into town on a daily or weekly basis. Cars provided a physical marker of the presence of outsiders, and were considered to pose traffic and parking nuisances. The Council, however, was somewhat divided over how to restrict motor traffic and parking. Coaches were required by traffic bylaws to leave and pick up their passengers by the gated level crossing which provided the only entrance to Frinton, but car traffic was more of a problem. A proposal to narrow the Esplanade by one third was narrowly defeated in 1929, since the road was seen to be a great feature and, according to one councillor, 'our duty is to regulate visitors, not penalise'. An opposing view was put forward in the debate by Cllr. Conly who fulminated: 'The amenities of Frinton are being gradually destroyed. Between five to seven hundred cars arrived in the summer and discharged their human cargo all over the greensward, cliffs, beach and even the huts if they happened to be vacant'. This view was echoed by another Frinton resident, who viewed the quiet of Frinton as a commodity devalued by the motorist:

Frinton owes its prosperity, nay, even its very existence, to its reputation for quiet restfulness and absence of trippers. It caters for the well-to-do families that want rest and peace after a busy life in some big town, and they are prepared to pay big prices to obtain these blessings so very hard to get in any other seaside place. In consequence of the weekend invasion (437 cars were counted parked on the front last Sunday containing probably some 2000 persons) a considerable number of these regular visitors have left us, and prices are falling. This little town of some 2100 inhabitants has spent some thousands of pounds in the erection of groynes to catch and retain its sand. It has spent over £50,000 on its sea wall and prom and some thousands of pounds a year to collect the debris left behind by our unwanted weekend motor visitors and to parade the beach and prevent acts of indecency. In spite of this supervision, four acts of an indecent nature were reported by residents last Sunday (CTEEG 13/4/29).

In the absence of clear legislative proscriptions against the motorists, the residents of Frinton had to be satisfied with giving the cold shoulder to the 'unwanted weekend motor visitors', patrolling the seafront to catalogue their numbers and misdeeds. The parking issue was eventually partially addressed in both Frinton and Clacton by authorising the British Legion to issue tickets and supervise parking, a function the local authority did not have the legal powers to do. The Legion in Frinton collected a voluntary contribution for charity from

motorists for the approximately 700 seafront parking spaces, which was rarely refused, and passed on 10% to the local authority if business was good. The system thus relied primarily on goodwill, and offenders found polite notes under their windscreen wipers rather than parking tickets. Severe parking offenders in Frinton would be referred on to the Town Clerk, who would dispatch a letter requesting them not to do it again (J.P. McLarney interview). This combination of quasi-legal and social sanctions will next be observed in the approach used to regulate growing interwar numbers of people picnicking on the greensward, a follow-on effect of the increased number of motorists visiting Frinton.

### **THE PICNICKING PLACE MYTH**

Picnicking on the greensward was assumed to be prohibited by law by the popular press and received opinion. Ursula Bloom's Frinton memoirs note 'I have seen picnicking parties on the sacred greensward, entirely forbidden, and rightly so, in my day' (Bloom 1970: 83).

Picnicking per se was not considered objectionable, since nannies' teas by the beach huts were a staple of Frinton summers. One Frinton resident recalled an image, passed on to him but not seen personally, of 'the maid going across the greensward with silver trays to the beach huts for teas' (Rouse interview). Frintonians, however, did not want uninvited guests presuming upon their hospitality. Frinton's view of itself as a domestic retreat was emphasised by one resident who complained: 'There is no other place where people are allowed to lunch in their gardens, and I think our greensward is our garden' (CTEEG 9/6/28). (Further to the distinctions noted above between commercial Clacton and non-commercial Frinton, it is interesting to note the contrast between this metaphor of the greensward as a garden with the frequent use in Clacton of the metaphor of its seafront as its shop window). 'The rumour had gone round that people could do as they liked' residents worried in 1927, with complaints to the Council that 'on two subsequent Sundays the west end of the Greensward and the beach was covered with picnicking parties and the quietude was utterly destroyed...conditions were a perfect disgrace to Frinton'.

The Clerk replied that he doubted they could do much, since they had no powers under the bylaws (CTEEG 11/6/27). This opinion was informed by a 1926 opinion from a solicitor who stated that since the Council had not imposed restrictions on public access when it first acquired the greensward from the Cooper Estate in 1901 it could not do so now. The same principle applied to the beach, along with the fact that the tide came right up to the sea wall, so 'the beach was foreshore which is subject to the immemorial rights of the subject of the King to the enjoyment thereof'.

In the postwar years, the former Deputy Town Clerk from 1949-86 recalled that the Council nevertheless applied to the Home Office for powers to prohibit picnicking. They were refused on the grounds that picnicking was a normal beach pastime. Undeterred, the Council went ahead anyway and erected signs prohibiting picnicking which remained until Frinton and Walton Urban District Council was absorbed by Tendring District Council in the local government reorganisation of 1974. 'The Beach Inspectors used to walk along, and if people did picnic they would draw their attention to it and the people would kindly go away' (Rouse interview). The former Town Clerk from 1952 -83 concurred, noting that there were very few actual prosecutions for littering bylaw infringement, and that an 'air of civility' prevailed (McLarney interview). The Beach Inspector was an important figure in the maintenance of this 'air of civility', and was a prominent feature at both Frinton and Clacton beaches. The next section will discuss the significance of those employed on the seafront to maintain appropriate standards of behaviour, activity and social tone.

## **BEACHFRONT MEDIARIES**

The Beach Inspector was responsible for enforcing a range of restrictions on bathing, activity and behaviour on the interwar beach as well as supervising local authority revenue-

generating services such as deck chair rentals. Their role as mediators and enforcers of the seaside code of social behaviour arguably emulates that of earlier guides to liminal experiences. Shields (1991:79) assigns the label ‘powerful animateurs’ to both the Master of Ceremonies at Georgian spa towns and their contemporaries the Dippers of the early seaside resorts who assisted with the bathing ritual, who ‘like priests, were mediaries between two worlds, civilised land and the undisciplined waves....and also technicians of the ritual process’ (84). The Beach Inspector focused on the shore: fishermen and the lifeboat men were often relied upon to rescue swimmers<sup>23</sup> The Inspectors’ military-style white uniforms reinforced their claims to authority over the use of beach territory. The military uniforms were also appropriate to the military or police background of many Inspectors (McLarney and Cook interviews). At Clacton, the Beach Inspector maintained public order and ensured the smooth functioning of Council enterprises such as deck chair hire and the bathing chalets by checking to see that the attendants had issued tickets (Young brothers interview). At Frinton, the Beach Inspector would have had a lesser regulatory function due both to the smaller number of visitors and to the vigilant attentions of the beach hut regulars, but Frinton’s reputation was not quite forbidding enough to frighten off all unwelcome visitors, as one resident recalled:

The gypsies would sometimes come along and want to read people’s fortunes, read their palms - [the beach inspectors] would clear them off. There was a band of men who came along once. They were not Scotch, they were just dressed in kilts and so on and they’d got some bagpipes. They were marching along the middle of the beach, the four of them, and another one was going along tapping people for money. One of the beach inspectors, he was a little chap, he was the head of them - he wasn’t an ex-policeman - he went and told him stop, but they took no notice. So he went and got his second-in-command, who was a big burly ex-policeman and he came down and stopped right in front of them. They went to fan out either side of him, so he just reached out and grabbed their bagpipes, wrenched them out of their hands. He said ‘I’ll break them if you don’t pack them up and clear off’. And they went (Cook interview).

The implied physical force in the military uniform and bearing of the Inspectors thus occasionally came into play when polite social sanctions failed to modify behaviour.

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<sup>23</sup> The several fishermen in Frinton during the interwar years, for example, used to supplement their income from fishing by taking holidaymakers out for pleasure trips and by giving swimming lessons. They also served as unpaid lifeguards (Cook interview).

Frinton beach hut owners, however, did not always welcome state intervention into what they perceived as their own territory. 1936 Council minutes record ‘a growing volume of complaints by site holders and hut tenants against the enquiries made by the Inspector’, although the Inspector was only seeking to ensure huts were registered with the Council (Frinton and Walton UDC, 8/7/36). Equally, in Clacton, a newspaper editorial writer worried that ‘nothing hurts an individual more than to be ordered about by an official in uniform and nothing hurts a place so much as to be remembered by the number of restrictions placed upon the visitors’ (CTEEG 22/3/24).

While important as a figurehead of the maintenance of public order, the actual authority of the beach inspector of course depended in the first instance on the prevailing tone set by those on the beach. At Frinton, for example, the beach in mid-week during the summer was dominated by the presence of nannies and their charges (see Fig. 4.8). A Frinton resident recalled of his childhood that ‘we had a nanny and we used to spend virtually every day at the seafront...the nannies ruled the roost down there’ (Tomkins interview). This would have been particularly true during the month of June, when, as Chapter Two noted, upper class parents sent their toddlers and babies off to Frinton while they travelled. Older children, also tended by the ‘nanny brigade’, followed in July once school was out (Bates interview). The nannies at Frinton were there as part of their job, rather than strictly for pleasure, and part of their job would have been to ensure the absence of behaviour deemed inappropriate in the presence of small children. Their presence would have reinforced the perception of the beach as a domestic zone, curtailing the freedom granted by the anonymity of the crowd and public spaces. The transposition of private domestic practices to a public space blurred boundaries between public and private in the process of setting other boundaries of social tone. As in a public urban park, the presence of large numbers of nannies with high quality, expensive baby equipment and

FIGURE 4.8 NANNIES AT FRINTON  
SOURCE: HULTON GETTY PHOTO LIBRARY

provisions conveyed the absent economic and social influence of their employers and allowed them to control the space immediately around them; to ‘rule the roost’. The strictly defined remit of the Beach Inspector and the nanny which was most apparent on the select beach contrasted with a set of place myths which painted the popular resort as a site of escape and licence.

### **THE DIRTY WEEKEND VS. THE WET WEEKEND**

The beach at Clacton was less constrained by private domestic codes of behaviour and more likely to evoke auras of danger and excitement associated with big cities and unrestrained sexuality. Behaviour that could provoke these images is documented in Paul Martin’s photographs of Great Yarmouth in the 1890s, which captured couples lying down embracing on the beach, albeit fully clothed. They provide one of the few remaining tangible visual records of behaviour differentiating select and popular resorts. Public courting was rarely captured on film and it was only done so here because Martin’s box camera was held at his side and hidden from view, allowing him the unfettered exercise of his voyeuristic pre-occupations.<sup>24</sup> Public courting as emblematic behaviour of the day tripper would certainly have fuelled the desire of Victorian and Edwardian middle class tourists to set physical distance between themselves and trippers. Behaviour on the popular beach could elicit the uneasy fascination of transgression for some of the requirements for propriety of a middle class family holiday. For example, one comic postcard I collected indicates that at least one beachgoer found the beach to be an unsettling liminal zone (Fig. 4.9). The conflicting perceptions of moral codes prevailing on the

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<sup>24</sup> Paul Martin is a missing figure in Taylor’s study of landscape, photography and the tourist’s imagination. Taylor describes the work of photographers such as P.H. Emerson, whose photographs of Great Yarmouth comprise long shots of scenery, with people only seen in the distance to enforce the ‘necessary gulf that lay between the worlds of aristocrats and ‘natives’ (Taylor 1994:105). Emerson ‘wanted to get close to working-class women, but not too close; and he was particularly intimidated by women from the city’ (ibid, 111). Martin felt able to erase this photographic distance, but only under the cloak of anonymity. Martin was unique in the years prior to the advent of the snapshot camera in his interest in unposed subjects and scenes from everyday life, and as such provides a notable exception to Taylor’s contention that the ‘trippers on the beach between the piers were virtually excluded from the world of photography’ (ibid, 96).

beach communicated by the card is echoed by the comment on the back, which reads: ‘Dear Nevvy, The girls are awful fast. I went paddling and swimming with three there. The talk made me blush. Your Dear Uncle William’.

Whether differences in public behaviour continued to be so dramatic in the interwar years is more questionable. Walton (1983:210) contends as early as the 1890s, a ‘common recreational culture was developing at the seaside for the pleasure-loving of all classes, with a convergence between relaxing middle class attitudes and the perceived improvement of working class behaviour.’ Lowerson (1977:44) points to the structural aspects of this convergence, with the resorts providing an increasing number of ‘palm palaces and dance halls’ for those who might otherwise pursued ‘rough recreations’. In Clacton, the interwar newspapers create an impression of changes in behaviour not becoming noticeable until after World War I. They often hearkened back to the ‘bad old days’ of the stalls on Pier Gap, perhaps as a way of boosting the town’s current image. A 1930 issue contended that greater restraint was present in the overall behaviour of day trippers: ‘with the growing education and improving ideals of today, the inconvenience [caused by those who have forgotten the virtues of strict sobriety and courtesy] is decreasing’(CTEEG 19/7/30).

This convergence of behavioural standards is much less prominent in representations of the period than the perceived relaxation in attitudes. The comic postcards of the period, for example, highlight male fantasy images of the beach as a place of sexual conquest and feminine availability (see Fig. 4.10). Purchase of the card, of course, did not necessitate that actual experience tally with the image. Mass Observation in Blackpool, contended that there was much more talk than action:

FIGURE 4.9 COMIC POSTCARD  
SOURCE: AUTHOR'S COLLECTION

FIGURE 4.10 COMIC POSTCARD  
SOURCE: AUTHOR'S COLLECTION

When we told reporters that 'Blackpool was the most moral town in England', this seemed positively to annoy the municipal authorities. The sexual myth apparently must be preserved. Although the imputations of brassiered belle on postcard and publicity brochure bear little relation to the real thing, they are nevertheless true in the minds of innumerable Worktowners (Cross 1990:190).

The oral testimony gathered by Humphries (1988:181), however, suggests that 'there was a lot going on at the seaside which Mass Observation's 1937 survey missed' due to their status as middle class outsiders. The point here is not to assess the degree of fit between practice and myth, but rather to note the importance of the myth in prevailing interwar representations, where, as Humphries observes 'sexuality was seen as a selling point rather than a sin.' (1988: 176, see also Walton 1992:18). Judging exactly the right tone to take with this selling point could be difficult, as it had to be reconciled with other aspects of the modern image such as hygiene, safety and regulation. Overly strict regulation of the carnivalesque aspects of the seaside which formed a cornerstone of its attractiveness ran against the economic interests of popular resorts, so that it was both unprofitable and unfeasible for local authorities to police behaviour heavily. The official discourse of interwar seaside towns cloaked the lure of excitement, escape and contact with the unknown in the rhetoric of health and modernity (as discussed in Chapter Six). The dangers of the libidinous aspects of the seaside holiday were acknowledged explicitly in the postcard shown in Fig. 4.11 depicting predatory adventuresses after the affections of their wealthier male admirers. The advice 'beware, beware' echoes the sentiments of the following article entitled 'Seaside Pests', implying that the exercise of individual rational common sense would provide a sufficient curb on behaviour.

With the growing popularity of [seaside resorts] there is little doubt that among the hundreds of thousands of holiday-makers during the coming season, will be a number of these unwanted visitors. The young men with motor car who are so polite in their invitations to impressionable young women, the members of both sexes who haunt dance halls seeking victims whom they first infatuate before 'plucking' them; the young men and women who effect similar introductions for similar purposes, but in other surroundings - these are common enough features in our cities and towns the whole year round, but at seaside resorts during the summer these social criminals intensify their activities. When on holiday by the sea, people seem more likely to trust strangers and less inclined to exercise that ordinary care and commonsense which they use everyday of the rest of their lives. There is no need to live one's holidays in a constant atmosphere of suspicion, but better a little care than later regrets and perhaps heavy losses (CTEEG 22/4/33).

FIGURE 4.11 COMIC POSTCARD  
SOURCE: AUTHOR'S COLLECTION

The Pier and the promenade provided spaces for the seaside visitor to self-consciously see and be seen, as Chapter Five details, but in contrast to the active pursuit of contact and stimulation, sitting on the beach and letting time pass in an unstructured way continued to be a fundamental feature of the interwar seaside holiday as contemporary photographs and the profitability of deck chair rentals demonstrate. The growing popularity of sun-tanning gave this activity a new rationale, but many holidaymakers would have few other options than to station themselves on the beach for the day until they could return to their boarding houses. When the sun-tanners had disappeared due to bad weather, deck chair business still continued. The sons of a deck chair attendant recalled ‘they used to hide behind the groynes, or hide under the pier - anywhere at all to keep warm’ (Young interview). Holidays could thus be periods of cold empty time to be passed for those who couldn’t afford alternatives, rather than a continuous round of activity and amusement. The British climate has always made the seaside holiday an unpredictable experience and constrained liminality, but prior to the 1920s, seaside towns turned the uncertainty of the climate into a positive benefit, extolling the benefits of bracing air and ozone, as discussed in the chapter on image. Interwar visitors could no longer console themselves with the belief that enduring a grey day was good for their health. To the extent to which Fordist workers preferred a Fordist holiday, the comparative appeal of the structured day of a Butlin’s holiday was understandable in that it addressed the issue of the boredom of a grey day. Visitors to the seaside could find either an absence of the hoped-for liminal experiences, or find that they were too unsettled by them and the change in routine to enjoy them, as was the case with these observations of a Colchester tripper to Clacton:

To sit and watch the passing crowd is an entertainment in itself so weird and wonderful are the types to be seen and the outfits worn. Beach pyjamas look charming on the fascinating little ladies in the shop windows, but when worn over mountains of billowing flesh are decidedly repellent and must be distinctly uncomfortable for the wearers. The boats arriving at the pier head discharged hundreds of perspiring passengers and, as they passed along, I wondered if they were really enjoying themselves. I saw very few smiling faces, and a great number seemed to be suffering from foot-troubles. Colchester seemed almost restful as we neared our journey’s end, and there was something pleasing about the sane apparel of the strollers that was in strong contrast to the freakish and gaudy costumes of many of the seaside belles (CTEEG 20/8/32).

These comments, read either as a typical example of little England whinging or as a frank assessment of reality rather than the myth, stand apart from the local newspapers usual positive portrayal of Clacton, or schemes for its enhancement (as discussed in Chapter Six).

## CONCLUSION

The tension between encouraging and regulating hedonistic behaviour within class boundaries complicated the forward march of rationalised leisure and mass consumerism at the interwar seaside resort. Structures such as beach huts and social regulations such as mackintosh bathing and picnicking prohibitions concerned with class and social boundaries defined the experience of different interwar seaside resorts as much as new consumer trends in fashion or entertainment. The chapter has detailed how these structures and regulations were created through a complex interaction between formal and informal practices.

The analysis has expanded the traditional cast of characters seen on the interwar beach beyond the amorphous crowd and the individual bathing beauty, since the experience of the English seaside is differentiated by place and by class, race and gender. Jokinen and Veijola (1997), for example, have re-invigorated standard typologies of the tourist by inserting their own candidates for metaphors, substituting paparazzi for flaneur, sextourist for stranger/adventurer, and au pair for pilgrim/nomad. Similarly, figures such as the beach inspector and the nanny, have been put forward here, due to the importance of their role as workers in defining the spatial and social rules for those who are there for pleasure on a more temporary basis. Differentiation between select and popular has been observed in the way that the beach-goer housed in a beach hut assumes a more territorial and permanent relationship with the beach than the day tripper. It is also valuable to examine in detail the rules governing the holidaymaker

as s/he assumes various guises such as a bather, consumer, or picnicker. This produces a more complicated set of roles and interactions than found in analyses which set declining English seaside resorts against an undifferentiated backcloth of mythologised fortnightly family holidays and escapist day trips. The links made between social tone and commercial vs. non-commercial activities through the interwar years, and the visceral experience of these differences, remain in both Clacton and Frinton as important determinants of the built environment and perceived image.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **POPULAR AND SELECT ENTERTAINMENT AND SPORT**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

The discussion of the intersection of activities, built environments and social mores begun in the preceding chapter will be continued here in an examination of the role of selected entertainment and sport institutions in defining Clacton and Frinton's social tone and place image. It will be contended that the particular places selected for discussion, Clacton Pier, and Frinton Golf and Tennis Clubs, played key roles in forming either popular or select images, and featured in efforts to package these images as 'modern'. Also considered will be the temporal aspect of debates on social tone, which will be illustrated by attitudes and regulations governing activities permitted on Sundays, a day which for seaside resorts meant reconciling peak visitor numbers with social/religious restrictions on permissible activities.

A brief analysis of the wider context of leisure provision is appropriate in advance of the analysis of the above case studies. The overall provision of leisure activities in the two towns, as argued in the preceding chapter, reflected prevailing preferences of popular and select markets, with Clacton offering a range of commercial activities and entertainment which were unavailable in Frinton. This reflected not only Frinton's smaller size, but also lack of demand. For example, in the late 1930s, there were six purpose-built cinemas in Clacton, while cinema-goers in Frinton had to get by with seeing films three times a week at the Queen's Hall, or on nights when the Imperial Hall was not being used for shows or dancing. Alternatively, they could journey to the Kino or Regal at Walton (Jacobs: 1986:96, Plumpton interview). The relatively large numbers of cinemas in Clacton supplemented rather than replaced existing pre-

war sources of live entertainment there. In addition to the Pier theatres discussed below, interwar Clacton offered music at the Band Pavilion along with variety shows, concerts, and theatre at the West Cliff, the Palace, and, after 1931, the Princes Theatre in the Town Hall. This level of provision was commensurate with that required of a popular resort seeking to attract long-stay visitors expecting a wide choice of evening entertainment. It is also worth restating here that the interwar years saw an expansion of all forms of leisure in the wake of decreases in the working week and increases in disposable incomes for many in work (Jones 1986:9).

Residents of both Clacton and Frinton also made their own entertainment, in pre-television days, with amateur dramatics, fancy dress parties and benefit dinners featuring on the social calendar of both resorts. The larger hotels in Clacton and Frinton were a further focus for activity, hosting dinners and dances for residents as well as full programmes of sport and entertainment activities for visitors. Hotel visitor entertainment programmes were an important lure for visitors in particular during the Christmas and Easter holidays when summer season facilities were closed. Visitors to either the Grand Hotel in Frinton or the Grand Hotel in Clacton during the interwar years could thus have expected to have encountered very similar programmes of entertainment, catering to a similar social set.

Visitors to Frinton, however, would have found few other commercial entertainment venues. As a select resort, a main focus for entertainment was instead private houses and gardens. Those who could afford the large properties on the Avenues could also afford the facilities and staff to host cocktail parties, dinners, and croquet or tennis matches (See Bloom 1970). The vast majority of both short- and long-stay visitors to Clacton, in contrast, would

have welcomed its commercial entertainment venues as a means of escaping the rain and/or cramped accommodation.

Popular entertainment venues, of course, were much more than mere rain shelters. They played a key role in supporting the liminal reputation of the seaside holiday, both through the entertainment provided and the surroundings. Popular entertainment venues elsewhere also performed this function; but the popular seaside resort differed in the extent and variety, for towns of their size, of entertainment provided. Arguably, there was also a difference in tone. In particular, the links of the seaside revue with the working class music hall, as discussed below, ensured its place on the list of popular resort hallmarks, along with the stick of rock and the comic postcard. Clacton entertainers Reg and Bob Young recall:

Seaside shows were inclined to be totally different to what you'd get inland. The comedy can be just that little bit broader. Not quite so subtle. In the towns, it was only the bigger towns that had theatres, you'd have a more sophisticated audience. You'd come to the seaside, and the people were a little bit unsophisticated, to say the least.

The movie-going experience, meanwhile, was creating increasingly sophisticated audiences over the interwar years. The dramatic effect of movies on interwar leisure practice, gender roles, and consumer culture has been charted elsewhere (see for example Richards: 1983, Jones: 1986). Of particular note in the case of the cinema and the popular seaside town is the common interest in the promotion of a modern image. During the boom years of English cinema construction, 1928-38, the 'super cinema automatically became associated with 'modernistic' expression in architecture' (Sharp 1969:145). The two cinemas built in Clacton during this time, the Odeon and the Century, were both modern in style. The Odeon, with its vertical tower, was easily identifiable as one of a national chain of similarly styled cinemas. While in inland towns the Odeon would be likely to be the only example of modern architecture, in Clacton, it was but one of the buildings, as described in Chapter Three,

demonstrating the town's claims to modernity and progress. In particular, the cinemas would have been outshone as symbols of modern entertainment in Clacton by the Clacton Pier.

### **CLACTON PIER, NUMBER ONE NORTH SEA**

Ernest Kingsman's intent to make Clacton Pier the biggest and best of its kind during the interwar years can be seen in his immodest choice of address of Number One North Sea, claiming premiere status on the entire sea. The Pier could at least make a clear claim to be the foremost symbol of Clacton, particularly since its opening in 1871 marked the birth of Clacton as a town and seaside resort. This section will explore the ways that the Pier continued to epitomise changing modes of experience and travel. It first marked the Victorian leisure experience, with its functions as a steamer arrival point; site for the medicalised bathing ritual in the hot and cold baths at its entrance; and as a stage for promenading and panoramic vistas.

The fragmentation of the totalising Victorian view, as exemplified as Crary (1990) notes, by the shift from the camera obscura to the cinematic eye, also can be illustrated by the changing role of the observer on the Pier from that of a consumer of vistas and promenades to that of a consumer of manufactured entertainment. Amusements and entertainments to distract and delay the Pier promenader mushroomed during the Edwardian period, adding on, as Walton (1987:20) comments, to the basic mid-Victorian menu rather than replacing earlier functions. It was still possible for the Pier-goer to bypass the commercial in favour of a promenade to the end, preserving for some the pre-eminence of the Pier's links to the natural. Sir John Betjeman, for example, could have chosen to attack commercialism on piers, given he attacked mass culture in other locales, but instead he ignored those aspects and described the piers as 'havens of fresh air and freedom from anxiety' (Bainbridge 1986:17). For others in the middle and upper classes, however, new commercialised amusements widened the perceived gap between

the approved sorts of 'rational recreation' and active sport pursued by the middle class and the passive entertainment seen to be the preference of the day tripper. By the interwar period, therefore, the pier for many had the attributes of a quintessentially modern leisure experience, a fantasy world embodying within its arcades and rides Benjamin's definition of Modernity as 'the enthronement of the commodity and the glitter of distraction' (quoted in Rojek 1993:105).

Key among these distractions were garishly decorated and often noisy automatic entertainment machines. These became increasingly popular from the 1890s on, once the technical problem of how to stop the user from defrauding the machine had been solved. An ever widening selection of machines appeared thereafter, including working models, fortune tellers, ball games, athletic machines, shooting games, music machines, and film machines. While British gambling laws were tightened up in the early 1900s to prevent gambling on these machines, enforcement remained a problem and an element of gambling could be incorporated if the overall game purportedly required skill to operate (Costa 1988). This association with gambling, plus the allegedly risqué content of 'What the Butler Saw' film machines established for some observers an aura of illicit pleasures damaging to social tone, a perception which continued through the interwar years. Councillor Ball commented in 1930, for example, that he didn't 'like the tone of the amusement park on the pier which attracts a certain class of visitor.' The councillor 'strongly object[ed] to the amusements which encourage a child to speculate a penny with the idea of winning a shilling and probably spending a shilling for a penny' (CTEEG 8/3/30).

Stressing instead the glamorous and positive connotations of new developments in entertainment, Kingsman sought to achieve national prominence for the Pier as the standard

bearer for the most modern in commercial entertainment. The Pier expanded rapidly after its acquisition by Kingsman in 1922.<sup>25</sup> During the period 1922-1939, Kingsman spent £200,000 on the Pier and initiated nine Parliamentary Acts to enable its physical expansion (CTEEG 19/8/39). Virtually every year brought either physical enlargement of the Pier or the introduction of a new attraction. By 1939, structures on the Pier included the Children's Theatre, the Ocean Theatre, the Jolly Roger Theatre, the Blue Lagoon Dance Hall, the Crystal Casino amusement arcade and an open-air swimming pool.

The steady expansion of the Pier and its attractions arose not simply from the demands of cash flow but also from Kingsman's efforts to position the Pier as up-to-date and modern. Along with the traditional attractions bequeathed by the carnival and fairground and entertainment transferred from the Music Hall, Kingsman also continually looked to America for new sources of attractions and entertainment which could be promoted as glamorous and exciting. In 1923, for example, Kingsman introduced skee ball to the Pier, heralding it as a 'most up-to-date pastime' and one that had captured the US by storm, with over 11,000 skee ball alleys in daily use (CTEEG 19/5/23). Toy Taxis (1927), Dodgem cars (1935) and the Steel Stella roller coaster (1938) were further new American inspired attractions.

Architecturally, as noted in the previous chapter on the built environment, new Pier buildings drew upon Modern architectural styles, with the Blue Lagoon dance hall being the most noteworthy. The doubling in size of the Blue Lagoon in 1925 included the installation of

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<sup>25</sup> Kingsman was a Londoner who became interested in welfare work for ex-soldiers after the war, establishing a rest camp at Lowestoft. In 1919, he bought the bankrupt steamboat company to transport the soldiers and their families. Kingsman resold all of the company's assets, with the exception of Clacton Pier, including the paddle steamers and piers at Walton, Felixstowe, Southwold and Lowestoft, as his attention shifted to Clacton. He did, however, buy back a paddle steamer to serve Clacton, operating the 'Laguna Belle' between 1930 and 1935 (CTEEG 8/3/30, Box 1989: 98,113).

an American ice soda refreshment department, and for Continental glamour, hand-painted silken electric shades designed by Etienne Niglea, depicting scenes from H. de Vere Stackpoole's story of the Blue Lagoon. The Blue Lagoon was revamped again in 1934. The *Clacton Times* portrayed the dance hall as novel and modern, noting that: 'The lighting of the building is in keeping with the structure – unique – and provides the only example in Great Britain. Constant cycloramic changes of colour are effected by the use of Neon tubes' (CTEEG 19/5/34). The Blue Lagoon was also of course significant in furthering claims to modernity for its importing of the latest dance steps and top bands.

Kingsman's claims to modernity were made in the atmosphere of the competing claims of rival seaside attractions. The expenditure of £5-6000 a year on advertising, including full page ads in national newspapers attested to Kingsman's wish to attain national prominence for Clacton Pier (CTEEG 12/8/33, CGECIN 9/4/38). Visitor numbers to the Pier certainly grew rapidly, so that by 1930 the Clacton Graphic claimed 50,000 had gone through the Pier's turnstiles on Bank Holiday Monday, compared with 10,00 and 16,000 on the Bank Holiday Mondays of 1923 and 1924 (CGECIN 8/8/30, CTEEG 11/8/23 and 9/8/24). Kingsman asserted that 170,000 had visited the Pier during his first season as owner in 1922, while 2.5 million visited the Pier during the 1937 season (CTEEG 9/4/38). Kingsman sought to position Clacton Pier alongside piers and attractions in larger resorts such as Brighton and Blackpool, busy making the same hyperbolic claims as Bennett (1983:138) observes:

Blackpool Pleasure Beach represents itself, and has always represented itself, as offering the biggest, the best, the only one of its kind, the unique, the latest, the most up-to-the minute range of thrills, spills and popular entertainment...pleasure at the Pleasure Beach is rigorously constructed under the signs of modernity, progress, the future, America.

Contemporary commentators also highlighted the contrast with earlier seaside entertainment. J.B. Priestley, for example, viewed the incursion of American influences with

alarm, contending that Blackpool's 'amusements are becoming too mechanised and Americanised... The entertainers are more calculating, their shows more standardised, and the audiences more passive. It has developed a pitiful sophistication - machine-made and not really English - that is much worse than the old hearty vulgarity' (1949:265). It is important to note, however, that these signs of modernity, progress, the future, and America appear throughout the history of British popular entertainment from the Victorian period on. It was, paradoxically, traditional for entertainment entrepreneurs to import new fads and repackage old material to retain the custom of fickle audiences. America was a frequent source for new ideas, as Weightman (1992:59) notes in his survey of the history of London entertainment: 'A great deal of popular British entertainment in the nineteenth century had its origins in America and there was continuous traffic both ways across the Atlantic of both stage actors and actresses and music hall stars.' McKibbin (1998:413) also comments on the close relationship of the English music hall and American vaudeville, resulting in a 'largely common Anglo-American musical culture'.

Pier entertainment to a large extent incorporated earlier Music Hall and seaside concert party traditions transferred from the sands. A key source of these traditions was the 'nigger minstrel' show, imported from America in the early 1840s. The minstrel troupes established the basic later concert party ingredients of song, dance, recitation and comedy, as well as the grouping of the troupe in a half-circle: a comedian at each end, and 'Mr. Interlocutor', straight man and compere, in the middle (Pertwee 1979:11). Victorian perceptions of racial difference as total permitted the 'nigger minstrel' to serve as a shorthand reference to the exotic and the transformed (see Pickering (1986). The references remained, but in the 1890s, the style changed and an inversion from black to white occurred, with the French-inspired 'Pierrot' concert parties supplanting the American influenced 'nigger minstrel' show. Clacton was a

relative latecomer to the presence of concert parties, but in the wake of the fashion for Pierrots, however, Clacton caught up quickly, and in the pre-World War I years, visitors could choose from Popplewell and Pullan's Yorkshire Pierrots, Jack Holland, Harry Frewin's Jolly Coons, all on the beach, or the White Coons on the Pier (Walker 1966:39) (See Figure 5.1).

The loose-fitting white costumes ornamented with pom poms, black silk headscarves and conical white hats worn by the Pierrots hearkened back to those of the *commedia dell'arte*, an ancestry the Pierrots (*Pagliacii*) shared with another seaside entertainment, the Punch and Judy (*Pulcinello*) shows. The more immediate ancestry of the English Pierrots was a visit to France by Clifford Essex, the leader of a small group of concert singers 'who earned large fees from engagements in the homes of the well-to-do' (Pertwee 1979: 12). It is accordingly difficult to assign precise class associations to different forms of popular entertainment, both because of their diverse sources of inspiration and because some similar forms of popular entertainment developed different audiences. The minstrel show, for example, appealed early on to family audiences, while the music hall found it hard to shake off its pub beginnings.

By the interwar years, these class differences had receded, and a concert party and a music hall-derived revue both had theatres on Clacton Pier. The construction of Pier theatres resulted in the gradual displacement of concert parties from open-air stages on the beach, where payment was optional, to the more formal and commercial atmosphere of the Pier. The physical growth of the Pier made it the primary site of seafront entertainment and, as observed above, reflected the increasing demarcation of commercial from non-commercial spaces on the seafront. The open-air theatre provided for the Ramblas concert party, however, did continue

FIGURE 5.1 POSTCARD OF CLACTON WEST BEACH - 1908 POSTMARK  
SOURCE: AUTHOR'S COLLECTION

to some extent the informal atmosphere of the seafront stages. The Ramblas started on the Pier in 1932 with the traditional concert party format of artistes, including a comedian, a 'soubrette' (head female dancer/singer), dancers, and the Sunshine Revellers Band (Polley 1991). The Ocean Theatre opened in 1928 with a circus performance and thereafter featured a range of variety entertainment until its closure fifty years later (Adams 1978).

Kingsman, in a positive sense, and Pier detractors, in a negative sense, both sought to site the Pier within the vanguard of commercialising forces. The Pier, however, falls short of such a characterisation. This is most obvious in the postwar period, when the Pier as a symbol of up-to-date entertainment was eclipsed by even more commercialised theme parks. Even during the interwar period, however, thoroughgoing commercialisation in entertainment is more completely represented by the cinema industry, with the ascension of the Odeon as a corporate chain and homogenising force. Like many other popular entertainments, it is argued that the Pier instead was an amalgam of traditional and modern influences. Just as Music Hall happily continued using tried and true formats as it expanded, a significant element of Pier entertainment drew on earlier traditions.

Unlike the later Music Halls, however, Clacton Pier was owned by an individual entrepreneur rather than a national chain. In this respect, Kingsman was following in the path of earlier Victorian entrepreneurs such as Bruff in Walton and Clacton, Ramuz in Southend and Peto in Lowestoft (Rouse 1982). The wider trend in English entertainment by the turn of the century, by contrast, was to more formal corporate control and structure. This was exemplified by the evolution of early singing saloons to ornate music halls (Bailey 1978:150 and Bailey 1986). Pier ownership, as Walton (1987:26) documents, followed a similar trend in the late

Victorian period. While the first wave of pier building in the 1860s was financed by local money, in the second wave of the 1890s ‘major projects were being financed increasingly by consortia from London and the big industrial towns’.

A further important distinction arising from the individual nature of Clacton Pier ownership was the conflictual personal relationship established between Kingsman and Clacton Council. This, along with the overwhelming prominence of the Pier in Clacton’s image as a seaside resort, made the Pier a critical battleground in the debate over how to achieve popularity without damaging social tone. In the main, battles between Kingsman and the Council saw Kingsman justifying Pier expansion and increased popularity with economic benefits, while the Council saw efforts to preserve an element of selectness harmed by the nature and scale of Pier entertainment. The *Graphic* summarised the debate in these terms:

Kingsman’s contention is that to pin our faith to the so-called ‘classy’ holiday maker is not the right angle to approach the whole question. As a business man he naturally is out and admits it, to make profits. The more profits he makes the stronger the evidence that his methods are right, and that the greater multitude, apart from its ‘classy’ members, should be the town’s objective as well as his (CGECIN 28/6/30).

Conflicting management goals were not a problem for other seaside resorts where municipalities owned the Pier as was the case by the turn of the century in Southend, Great Yarmouth, Bournemouth, Clevedon, Ilfracombe, Bognor, Boscombe, Rhyl and Torquay (Walton 1987: 26). Clacton Council could have purchased the Pier following the bankruptcy of the Coast Development Corporation in 1915. Instead, the Pier languished until its purchase by Kingsman in 1922. The Council never seriously considered purchase, as it was still recovering from both the financial effects of World War I and its 1914 expenditure on the demolition of Pier Gap and the erection of the Venetian Bridge and Bandstand.

Kingsman's continual interwar expansion efforts brought him into frequent conflict with the Council, the owner of the land or foreshore on which Kingsman wished to expand. Aspects of the history and development of the Pier and surrounds added particular controversy to this growth. In 1913 the earlier owners, the Coast Development Corporation, had handed over control of the adjacent foreshore to the Council in exchange for the Council's construction of sea wall defences. Additionally, they had covenanted not to enlarge shop frontage at the Pier. This was done both to avoid repetition of the 'whelk stalls and rattletrap affairs' found on Pier Gap, and to minimise competition with Council-run endeavours such as the Band Pavilion (CTEEG 8/8/25). The Council accordingly resisted Kingsman's efforts to expand onto this small strip of land demarcating Council land from Pier land. The restrictive covenant served as the main rationale in resisting Kingsman's first attempt to improve the Pier entrance in 1924/25, although it was argued that a ban on shops could have been made a condition of the lease.

Council debates revealed the personal acrimony that had quickly developed between Kingsman and members of the Council, such as Shingfield. While contending that he was not prejudiced against Kingsman, Shingfield nevertheless held that Kingsman had turned the Pier into a 'view of chicken runs'. Other Councillors took a more relaxed view to this perceived threat to Clacton's image, with Cllr Elliott noting that the 'Pier was a great attraction to Clacton although it might be for a different class – the poorer people.' Observing that it was a 'shame that it didn't belong to the town', Elliott argued that the Council should address the issue of competition to the adjacent Bandstand by upgrading the Bandstand (CTEEG 8/8/25).

Kingsman side-stepped the issue of Council opposition to foreshore encroachment by enlarging the Pier away from the shore during the Twenties. Both Kingsman and the Council

remained alert to the preservation of their business interests, with Kingsman, for example, opposing the construction of a theatre in the proposed Town Hall (CTEEG 23/2/29). In 1930, Kingsman finally reached agreement with the Council over a scheme to improve the Pier entrance, overcoming initial Council opposition to the Pier Bill. The Council maintained that the ‘past conduct and management of the pier undertaking had not been what it might have been’. More specific objections to the plan included that it would come in front of the town’s Band Pavilion and ‘thus prevent any extension seaward that may be required’, and ‘that the proposed Pier entrance buildings extend so far on both sides of the Pier as to form an obstruction to the view of the sea from the Pier Approach’ (CTEEG 17/5/30). The compromise reached provided for the granting by the Council of an easement in perpetuity for the necessary piling to support widening of the Pier decking, which meant the Council could retain actual ownership of the foreshore. Additionally, the proposed elevation was set back further to widen the angle of view from the Band Pavilion (CTEEG 5/7/30).

In 1933, however, the *Times* observed that the Pier entrance ‘is still very much like it was many years ago, not because efforts have not been made to improve it, but because opposition has been raised to its reconstruction’ (CTEEG 4/11/33). Kingsman dropped his grander plans to improve the Pier entrance, with its eventual form a result of the 1934 improvements to the Blue Lagoon. Kingsman and the Council continued their adversarial relationship during the Thirties, with Kingsman frequently taking the opportunity to berate the Council in the letters pages of the local newspapers, which were sympathetic to his position. Following the negotiations on the 1930 Pier Bill, for example, Kingsman accused the Council of hampering ‘the progress of the pier in every possible and petty way’. This letter prompted a reply by ‘M.B.’ that the Pier ‘is frankly cheapjack and jerry, an eyesore to an otherwise beautiful town’ (CTEEG 15/11, 22/11/30). Eight years later, following periodic contests over

assessments and expansion plans, Kingsman contended that 'so far the Pier has received no concession without a fight' (CTEEG 4/6/38).

Other letters from Kingsman seemed targeted to win over popular opinion. One letter addressed the assumption that Clacton Pier was only for day trippers. Kingsman wrote: 'I looked up figures and found that during a recent week we had in the Ocean Theatre, the Children's Theatre, the Pier Theatre, and the Blue Lagoon 34,000 people who paid to be entertained to say nothing of the crowds in the Casino, Midget Golf and other side shows – long after the tripper had departed' (CTEEG 6/9/30). Kingsman's success in marketing the Pier as the epitome of modern mass entertainment, however, to a large extent argued against identifying the Pier's appeal with long stay visitors and residents. Additionally, his welcome of American and Continental influences and attractions may have been common practice for popular entertainment entrepreneurs, but were seen to result by some in a display of non-English gaudy commercialism. Kingsman's desertion of Clacton each winter for the French Riviera provided his critics with an example of Kingsman's misplaced preference for the Continental over the English.

The conflict between Kingsman and the Council is of interest both as a political power struggle over the image of an essential Clacton landmark and because it illustrates the multi-layered nature of resort popular institutions, which mixed elements of the modern and the traditional, the natural and the artificial, and the glamorous and the tacky. From the vantage point of the select resort, Kingsman's opponents on the Council, and high culture critics, the modern, artificial and tacky aspects of the Pier determined its character. This one-dimensional view of the Pier facilitated the perceived ease of attack from select territory, but it also

demonstrated the select critics' cultural distance from those attracted by what was in reality a more complex configuration of attractions. The Pier attracted crowds because the latest attractions in amusements and entertainment were blended in calculated fashion with those of the traditional fairground and music hall and then offered in an environment of fresh sea air and food smells, with the buzz of social interaction, music, and machine noises.

In light of the adversarial relationship between Kingsman and the Council, the go-ahead given to Butlin's seems at first glance incongruous, given that both Butlin's and the Pier sought to provide a similar wide range of up-to-date entertainment. By 1937, however, the Council could see that the discouragement it had given to Kingsman had only raised his hackles and had not significantly stood in the way of his expansion plans. The expansion of the Pier thus set a precedent paving the way for Butlin's. Even Kingsman's opponent Cllr. Shingfield acknowledged that this was the case, commenting that while he was 'against amusements whether they belonged to Mr. Butlin or to Mr. Kingsman, in permitting them to Mr. Kingsman they would have difficulty in refusing them to Mr. Butlin' (CTEEG 10/7/37).

After Butlin's opened in 1938, the Pier had to share with it the status of the premiere icon of Clacton. Butlin's, as well as the Pier, now claimed to provide a complete range of entertainment for the holidaymaker. This loss of a unique status for the Pier was, however, compensated by the attraction of further holidaymakers and pier-goers to Clacton. The Clacton *Times* found that the 'luxury holiday camp' providing for 1500 visitors per week ensured that the 'holidaymaker need never have one dull minute, nor second, for that matter'. In addition to a wide range of activities, visitors could experience fantasy architectural spaces such as the

Smuggler's Cave or Spanish Galleon bars, designed by a builder of studio set for films (CTEEG 2/7, 23/7/38).

Along with their debt to Hollywood, these fantasy spaces owed a debt to earlier pleasure ground simulacra. Not simply a creation of the post-modern theme park or consumer experience, the long history of the simulacra includes the eighteenth century London pleasure gardens, nineteenth century fairs and expositions, and was seen in Clacton both at the Pier and at the Palace, which for a short period after 1906, featured a Japanese Pagoda, Madeira Promenade, an Old English Home, the Blue Caves of Capri, and a Neopolitan Pergola (Baker 1992). And for an experiential simulacra, long before the 'Backdraft' reconstruction of a blazing building opened at Universal Studios, interwar visitors to Clacton could attend the 'Orphanage on Fire' display at the John Grooms Orphanage, in which Fire Brigade volunteers enacted the rescuing of orphans from a mock blaze (Figure 5.1)<sup>26</sup>.

Butlin combined his fantasy spaces with a structured daily timetable to create the correct balance of liminality and order, thought to be desirable by the modern holidaymaker. Both the Pier and Butlin's were successful in the eyes of contemporary observers in re-packaging the traditional fairground to suit the Fordist worker, who as quoted in Chapter Four, were characterised as requiring a 'holiday of violent stimulus' as an 'antidote against the mental diseases of modern industrialisms'. The provision of cheap commercial entertainment in a crowded, colourful setting was thus seen as unavoidable for a popular resort:

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<sup>26</sup> The 'Orphanage on Fire' display concluded 7 hours of entertainment, which also included a floral exhibition, races, tea, roller pillow fight for gentlemen, and tug-of-war, gents v. gents and gents v. orphan girls. The weekly show ran from 1911 - 1939, attracting 33,000 in 1934 (CTEEG 6/7/35, Walker:1992).

Why do people come in crowds to holiday resorts like Clacton?...Owing to the encouragement of mass-thinking begun in the earliest years and continued more and more as years pass, the ordinary adult is not happy unless with a crowd. Even so he finds that owing to mass-production being a method of cost reduction he is able to get his amusement and entertainment cheaper when they are provided on a mass basis. So he must go where cheaper fares will take him and cheaper fare will be provided for him (CGECIN 12/3/38).

The leisure needs of the select holidaymaker were defined in opposition to the 'ordinary' holidaymakers' need for crowds and commercial stimulus. The select holidaymaker was expected to wish to pursue a more individualised programme of pursuits requiring investments of both time and money. The next section will explore how golf and tennis clubs were well-suited to enhance Frinton's select social tone during the interwar years.

### **SPORT FOR THE SELECT RESORT**

Clacton and Frinton both catered for the interwar golfer and tennis player. By the turn of the century, provision for these sports had become important for any seaside resort with pretensions to a middle class clientele. Rouse (1982:142), for example, notes that by 1905, golf courses could be found at Clacton, Felixstowe, Lowestoft, Mundesley, Wells-next-the-Sea and West Runton (9 holes) and Aldeburgh, Brancaster, Cromer, Frinton, Great Yarmouth, Hunstanton, Sheringham and Southwold (18 holes). Walton-on-Naze had a golf course during the period 1928 to 1940. (Its membership could not afford to re-open it after the war).

Clacton Golf Club, founded in 1892, moved to its present site in West Clacton in 1895 and by 1910 had expanded to provide an 18-hole course (Anon 1981, 34-5). The pre-War course was an important attraction for middle-class visitors, with non-residents forming the majority of its 1903 membership of 150 (Goodwin 1993:17). A number of local Councillors and businessmen feature prominently in the list of interwar members, in particular Robert Coan, the London aluminium foundry owner and developer of the West Clacton estate, who bailed the Club out of financial difficulties on several occasions (Goodwin 1993:23-27). Tennis facilities

FIGURE 5.2 POSTCARD OF JOHN GROOM ORPHANAGE 'ON FIRE'  
SOURCE: AUTHOR'S COLLECTION

were also available in Clacton, with courts, for example, available for both visitors and local residents at the Grand Hotel. Provision of facilities in Clacton for sports which were the preserve of the middle and upper classes in the interwar years thus points to at least a certain amount of demand from that sector.

The golf and tennis clubs thus functioned to attract a select clientele in Clacton, just as they did in Frinton. Golf and tennis, however, only ever featured as two among many of the attractions available at Clacton, with the main draw, outside the seafront, being the wide range of commercial entertainment. This was in contrast to Frinton, where the golf and tennis clubs served as the primary markers of a select social status. Their importance was acknowledged by the question posed by a 1926 'current weekly periodical': 'Frinton-on-Sea might exist without Frinton-on-Sea, but would Frinton-on-Sea exist without tennis?' (CTEEG 4/9/26). Golf even had an occasional presence on the beach, as Figure 5.3 illustrates. The actual numbers of members of the two clubs, however, were small. In 1923, for example, 754 belonged to the golf club and 500 to the tennis club (CTEEG 16/2/24). This was consistent with the principle that selectness was inversely related to size. Exclusivity alone, however, was not enough to grant the clubs their disproportionate influence in shaping Frinton's image. Also important were firstly, the significance of golf and tennis as appropriate sports for the middle and upper classes, and secondly, the extra social cachet given in the interwar years by the presence of celebrity members and visitors.

Lowerson (1993:21) argues convincingly that the prime role of sport in the late Victorian and Edwardian period was 'to define boundaries between the broad middle class and its inferiors, and occasionally superiors, and between different status levels within the middle

classes.’ Clubs played a major role in this process, offering not only physical exercise, but also, for their core members, a ‘way of life and additional layers of recognition, occasionally as alternatives to those provided by economic roles in status reinforcement’ (Lowerson 1993:98).

The interwar period continued this function, with clubs for middle class sports, in their focus on individual mastery of skills and social networking, arguably less affected by commercialisation than working-class associational sports such as football (see Jones 1986). Those aspects of commercialisation that did affect middle class clubs, such as the growth of spectatorship, did not necessarily diminish their select status. The increasingly important role of tournaments in the interwar golf and tennis club was seen as enhancing a select reputation rather than signalling its democratisation if it advertised a club as the preferred venue for the fashionable. Huggins (1996:9) contends, for example, that in the select resort of St Annes an ‘open’ championship had the direct result of attracting wealthy residents and visitors and also raised the value of the land owned by the resort developer.

Distinctions between unpaid amateurs and paid professionals were clearly maintained throughout the interwar years, arising from the perception, as Lowerson (1993:176) notes that: ‘Social tone was at greatest risk from those whose interest in the business of sport overlapped with their playing it’. Caddies and club professionals accordingly tended to come from working-class backgrounds. Frinton’s interwar professional, for example, was ‘a Cockney who dropped all his ‘h’s and put them on when they shouldn’t be put on’ (Plumpton interview).

Golf, with its strict class hierarchy of caddy/player; exclusion of tradesmen and artisans from membership of most clubs; and rules separating men from women players, clearly echoed

FIGURE 5.3 PHOTO OF FRINTON BEACH, AUGUST 1922  
SOURCE: HULTON GETTY PHOTO LIBRARY

existing boundaries in its strict rituals and protocols. The class position of the game was also signalled by the lengthy amount of time needed to play, which favoured the rentier, the self-employed professional, and the retired. At seaside resort golf courses, these categories were supplemented by visiting urban business and professional men who joined as 'country' members. The history of the Frinton Golf Club observes: 'Frinton was never conceived as a 'local' club, drawing as it did the majority of its members from those whose living was made in London... from this basis Frinton developed with a diverse membership drawn from all over the country attracted to holiday and weekend homes' (Bond 1995:94).

As with most golf clubs, membership was a matter of self-selection. Tradesmen and artisans were simply not put forward for membership, nor would they be likely to be able to afford membership fees. A Frinton resident recalls: 'They wouldn't accept people in trade before the war, like Mr. Bailey the chemist' (Rouse interview). Given the larger working class population of Clacton, an artisan section might have been expected by the postwar years, but this was not the case. In 1951, the Clacton Trades Council complained 'the golf course was only there for the few' and unsuccessfully requested the establishment of an artisan section (Goodwin 1993:31). At Frinton, those of foreign extraction would be revealed by a nomination form which 'pointedly required every candidate to state his or her nationality and place of birth and if the candidate's name had been changed, to state the original name.' A 1935 proposal to establish a definite policy either sanctioning or prohibiting the further election of Jews was rejected by the Captain since it would have fettered the Club's discretion and 'moreover to make a rule in any such terms would have brought the Club into disrepute'. In 1938, the Committee passed a bylaw, for information of the committee only that 'no application from a Jew for membership would be accepted whenever the total number of Jewish members of the Club exceeded 10% of the total' (Bond 1995:43). The Golf Club thus provides another

example of the way selectness in Frinton was defined by informal social practices rather than by official fiat.

In addition to requiring large amounts of time to play, the game of golf was also demanding of large amounts of carefully manicured space, expanses that served to allude to the vistas of a country house and their domestication of the landscape. The golf course, along with the formal garden and the beach hut, thus epitomised the seaside resorts' promotion of Nature under control. The Frinton Golf course's situation at the end of the Esplanade continued the pastoral sweep of the Greensward. The sea meanwhile was kept at bay so that while the course lay next to the coast, protective sea defences shielded it from view at all but one tee. The spatial status of the golf course (and the tennis club) was further enhanced by their siting at the far side of the select Avenues. The most select section of Frinton is remembered accordingly as either the Avenues or 'the golf club end' (Plumpton interview).

This siting seems to have been due more to expediency than to intent. While the Cooper Estate recognised the value a golf course would add to its Frinton properties, it did not actually construct the course as part of its estate development. It was not uncommon at the time, for example, for golf courses to be constructed in conjunction with hotels, as was the case at Hunstanton, West Runton, and Cromer (Rouse 1982: 134). Instead, as Bond notes, it sought to 'actively encourage' the formation of the Club, 'since a golf course by the seaside provided just the sort of amenity which potential purchasers of the plots would have found attractive' (Bond 1995:2). Equally, in Clacton, Robert Coan's financial assistance to the Golf Club can be assumed to have been motivated by the value a successful club would add to his adjacent West Clacton property, as well as testifying to his fondness for golf. The Cooper Estate's

encouragement, however, was strictly limited by commercial considerations. Membership of the Golf Club Committee in its early years thus entailed for some the exercise of their professional legal and financial skills in Committee work and negotiations with the Cooper Estate. The Estate realised that the original site of the golf course, with its club house on Third Avenue, stood in the way of residential development, and in 1903 offered the Club the options of retaining its course at a higher cost, or moving to a different site on the marshes, which some members branded as ‘malarious and the haunt of mosquitoes’ (Bond 1995:14). The latter site was approved and the new Club House, with mock Tudor gables, opened in 1905. This was an opportune time to open a new course, since new golf balls introduced around the turn of the century provided 20% greater driving potential, necessitating longer fairways and rendering earlier courses obsolescent (Lowerson 1993:138).

These facilities sufficed until the early 1930s, when the Club divided between the traditionalists, who advocated ‘economy with efficiency’ and a more progressive group, led by Walter Lowther-Kemp, who was also active on Frinton Council. The latter group sought to retain and expand membership and revenues by upgrading course and clubhouse facilities, efforts which saw the opening of a refurbished clubhouse in 1934 (Bond 1995:34, Plumpton interview). The Moderne-influenced facade, with its white walls and horizontally banded windows, reflected the inroads that Modern architecture had made into general acceptance. A few modern touches were considered acceptable in a building designed for leisure use, even if its users were not inclined to welcome the more uncompromisingly austere modernity of the Frinton Park Estate. Thus, even as traditional a bastion as the Frinton Golf Club was arguably affected, albeit superficially, by the interwar concern to be seen as modern.

The Frinton Tennis Club provides a much clearer example of the interwar intersection of modern and select images. Firstly, in contrast to the male-dominated game of golf the game of tennis showcased the ‘modern’ athletic woman. Off the courts as well, women exercised significant influence in the management and social activity of tennis clubs (Lowerson 1993:98). McKibbin contends ‘The centrality of tennis to middle class sociability in the suburbs was well understood’ (1998:362). Secondly, in the particular case of the Frinton club, tennis tournaments and associated social activities provided a strong lure for members of the interwar ‘smart set’ to come to Frinton. ‘In 1921, the hottest and sunniest summer of the century, the tennis club was a humming centre and many famous people supported its most popular dances and social life’ (Pertwee 1975:15). Frinton was included along with Wimbledon and Paris on the interwar circuit of important tennis tournaments (Tomkins interview). Golf tournaments as well served this function, but the social life surrounding the tennis club was much more active, in large part due to the activities of the energetic Club Secretary Percy ‘Popsy’ Bangs. Bangs, who also owned the White House Hotel, joined the Club in 1913 (it started in 1900) and served as Secretary until 1933. Bangs was remembered by one Frinton resident as ‘a big fat bulldog sort of man’ who ‘got the thing going and got the right people there.’ Frinton regulars would entertain well-known tennis players at their Avenue homes and ‘that brought people into Frinton’ (Plumpton interview). A local newspaper viewed this as a sensible form of publicity for the town: ‘by drawing famous players in the tennis and golfing world it is “helping itself to help itself”’ (CTEEG 9/8/19). As discussed in the following chapter on publicity, the tournaments and associated social whirl attracted national press coverage highlighting the fashionability of Frinton, which served to reinforce its social cachet.

The level of publicity and activity generated by the presence of the smart set at the tennis club, however, was not always felt to be compatible with the image appropriate to a

select resort. At a 1930 hearing to extend the licensing hours of the Club, the presiding Magistrate commented ‘There have been complaints made as to the considerable amount of what I should call rowdyism which one must associate more or less with these dances in your club house’ (CTEEG 23/8/30). Bangs retirement from the club in 1933 signalled a reduction of both positive and negative publicity for the club, and paralleled Frinton’s reduction in fashionability as a destination for the ‘smart set’. The Tennis Club then settled into its role as the sporting focus for younger Frinton residents and visitors during the summer, while the Golf Club catered to a somewhat older crowd, particularly as Frinton’s retired population grew.

The interwar years thus arguably mark the period in which the Frinton Golf and Tennis Clubs had the most influence in enhancing Frinton’s select reputation. The Golf Club, partly as a result of the happenstance of its location, came to serve as a prime spatial marker of selectness, while the Tennis Club defined the social calendar of the smart set. Tournaments sponsored by both clubs served to draw the attention to Frinton of both sports and social national newspaper commentators. The clubs in Frinton and the Pier in Clacton accordingly established key social and spatial parameters for the definition of social tone and image. The next section will consider the way temporal parameters, as seen in debates over appropriate Sunday activities, also shaped the towns’ images.

### **TEMPORAL DISTINCTIONS: THE SUNDAY ENTERTAINMENT QUESTION**

The type of amusements and entertainments to be permitted on a Sunday posed a difficult dilemma for interwar seaside resort image makers seeking to attract a wide range of holidaymakers. Once again in Clacton, the argument was posed as a choice between increased revenue and popularity versus a reduction in select social tone. In the case of Sabbath entertainments, this choice was made even more stark by the lure on the one hand of the

possible revenue from those who only had leisure time on that day and on the other, the weight of social and legislative constraints limiting commercial activity on Sundays. These divisions reflected the unique status of the day as ‘a curious combination of day of rest, holy day, and tabooed day’ (Rybczynski 1991:80). Sunday’s secular status increased steadily in the early twentieth century, as a result of the growing importance of the weekend as a time for leisure, travel and consumption, enabled by the shortening of the working week. Cross (1993:126) sees this as a privatising trend: ‘Free time seems to have depoliticized in private, cyclic rites of the weekend and vacation.’ Cross mounts a convincing body of evidence in support of the triumph of a culture of atomised work and spending rather than an age of collective leisure. The use of free time on Sundays, however, did have a political dimension, as seen in the battles over the nature of permitted activities.

Social and legislative constraints restricting Sunday activity have a long history, as Cunningham (1980:85) notes. Attempts to enforce Sunday observance in England stemmed from late eighteenth and early nineteenth century concern at the amount of commercialised leisure on that day. The Sunday Observance Act of 1780 prohibited unlicensed Sunday entertainment (CTEEG 6/7/35). Efforts to pass stricter Sunday Observance laws failed, but Sabbatarians, combined with liberal reformers seeking to restrict long working hours did succeed in limiting Sunday trading with the Sunday Trading Act of 1857. More broadly, middle-class churchgoers consistently worked to colonise Sunday as a territory defined by their notions of appropriate activity; notions which encompassed individual recreation but excluded commercial entertainment. The notion of Sunday as a day of rest was thus compatible with the definition of a select resort as a place without commercial activities, but inherently less so with the commercial nature of popular resorts.

Accordingly, contests over Sunday commercial activities were a common feature of English seaside resorts from the mid-nineteenth century on, beginning with resistance to Sunday rail excursions, which of course also served to restrict day tripper outings to middle class resorts (Walvin 1978:53, Travis 1993:101,120). Activities and entertainment were restricted on Sundays, and sometimes even religious events were challenged if they were thought to damage social tone. This was the rationale behind opposition to Salvation Army processions in Eastbourne in the 1890s (Farrant 1978:149).

Restrictions on Sunday commercial activity thus became an important tool in the efforts of seaside towns to limit day tripper traffic so as not to damage the promotion of a more select social tone. Their utility was clearly perceived in a 1925 *Clacton Times* leader:

If Clacton catered for the class of Sunday tripper whose one idea is to get as much enjoyment out of the Sabbath as hours are in the day, then residents of a better class would leave and Clacton would suffer (CTEEG 26/9/25).

Seaside town residents, less concerned with the economic prospects of the town than issues of propriety were more likely to couch their arguments within the discourse of the seaside town as a wellspring of health, which should not be contaminated by more urban temptations. A 1935 letter to the local newspaper was in no doubt of the immorality of Sunday commercial entertainment:

Look up the Pier or down to town on Sunday, with its amusement halls, the gaming machines and the lure and temptation to thousands of boys and girls: that is the time to think the place "Godforsaken". Close those places and let the benefits of Clacton as a health resort be enjoyed in a less boisterous and secular atmosphere for one day in the week (CTEEG 20/7/35).

The debate moved into a more explicitly political arena when the Magistrates granted a Sunday licence to the Clacton Town Hall and Band Pavilion in 1935, which limited the entertainment to 'sacred concerts' only. Acceptable programmes were considered to include 'good orchestral music, straight songs, no props or fancy or character dress, no cross talk or

patter.’ Clacton Councillors were quick to see the move as an unreasonable attack on their management prerogatives, and a stricter interpretation than that taken elsewhere. Councillor Shingfield, no fan of jazz, still thought it was at any rate respectable and argued that economic imperatives dictated its acceptance: ‘Clacton earned its living by providing entertainment and catering for visitors...they had to be guided by tastes of people in the town.’ This view echoed that of the Hotel and Boarding House Association: ‘As Clacton is in serious competition with all other resorts we find the lack of competitive music on Sunday evenings a very serious detriment to business and are receiving many complaints from our guests who threaten to ignore Clacton in future’ (CTEEG 6/7/35).

The music the Magistrates expected Clacton to provide on a Sunday was considered to be more in line with an old-fashioned resort rather than one seeking to project a modern image. Municipally provided music in general was felt to need modernising by the 1930s in Clacton. At the Band Pavilion, the military bands once favoured by pre-World War I audiences had been gradually losing favour. The new band pavilion, which opened in 1937, provided greater shelter and modern architectural styling. A move in this direction had previously been made in 1914, when the original Victorian bandstand was re-installed in a sunken Pavilion, but the 1937 remodel eliminated the bandstand altogether. ‘The old idea that a mere bandstand set stilt-like in the middle of the verge is adequate to the present day is gone’ (CTEEG 25/9/37). The music to be played inside it had to be changed as well, since ‘the taste of the public has changed. A programme of military band and a straight vocalist has lost attractiveness’ (CTEEG 2/11/35).

The issue of the music appropriate to seaside resorts on Sunday attracted national press coverage, with the *Daily Mail* posing the question ‘shall holidaymakers be allowed to listen to

syncopated “jazz” or “hot” music on Sundays?’ to selected seaside resorts, with their finding reprinted in a Clacton newspaper. Sunday entertainment appeared to have been less contested elsewhere, with Blackpool imposing no restrictions; Bournemouth leaving the programme to the discretion of conductors (a freedom which was not abused, according to an official); and Folkestone and Eastbourne offering visitors a choice between ‘heavy’ and ‘light’ programmes (CTEEG 31/8/35). Morecambe did, however, continue to impose Sunday entertainment restrictions, in line with what Simmill (1993:95) considers the Corporation’s ‘old fashioned values’ totally at odds to the needs of any working class seaside resort of the interwar period.

Reluctantly, in the face of the Magistrate’s unwillingness to back down, Clacton Council agreed to an undertaking to restrict Sunday concerts to ‘orchestral music, straight songs and recitations, with no variety, dancing, jazz patter or compere’ (CTEEG 10/8/35). This definition, compatible with a Puritanical world view suspicious of corrupt commercial, American influences, could be seen as a victory for selectness. Since the policy was imposed by outsiders, however, it was instead criticised by many councillors as an unfair restriction by those unfamiliar with the economic needs of a seaside resort. In this instance, therefore, Clacton Council adopted the viewpoint of a popular resort rather than one trying to enhance selectness, or as in the case of Morecambe, enforce outdated customs for its working class visitors.

Select resorts were themselves not immune from occasional debates over the level of Sunday activities. In 1901, a request to cease the playing of golf on Sunday mornings at the Frinton course met with the response that the Churchwarden could ‘not seriously expect members to adopt his suggestion of not playing golf on Sunday mornings, but did suggest that

members should not walk to the course from the place they were staying in their green or red golfing coats on Sunday' (Bond 1995:12). The pursuit of non-commercial individual sports was thus argued by the golfers to be compatible with selectness, as long as a low profile was maintained. The attempts of the Frinton Golf Club to allow the consumption of alcohol on Sunday afternoons, however, met with failure in the High Court in 1930 (Bond 1995:34-35).

The Sunday entertainment question thus illustrates the temporal context of debates about social tone at seaside resorts. The unique iconic status of the day as one defined by the absence of commercial activity created even stricter criteria for claims to a select social tone than those prevailing for the other days of the week; criteria that a popular resort like Clacton proved both unable and unwilling to meet.

## **CONCLUSION**

This chapter has sought to further define the markers of select and popular resorts arising from differences in leisure activities. Several key issues have been highlighted in this discussion, including firstly the association of commercial entertainment with the popular resort and participant (as opposed to spectator) sport with the select resort. These associations derived from a complex assortment of assumptions which saw the definition of popular linked to images of modernity, mass-production, American and Continental imports, and passively experienced entertainment reliant on strong visual and aural stimulation. The complex assortment of assumptions which defined the select resort was largely framed in opposition to these images, although it included the occasional image of modern American or Continental sophistication if it could be linked to an overall image of fashionable exclusivity.

Another key issue raised is the importance of spatial and temporal markers in signalling the popular or select connotations of resort leisure activities. The Pier, densely packed with both attractions and people, has been contrasted with the uncrowded Frinton Golf Course to illustrate this point. The spatial significance of both places was enhanced by their prominent locations, with the Pier at Number One North Sea, and the Golf Course marking one end of the Greensward. Temporal distinctions between the popular Pier and the select golf course are also noteworthy, as seen in the contrast between on one hand, the short bursts of excitement provided by Pier amusements, and on the other, the hours required to complete a game of golf. An equally clear temporal distinction was noted in the debate over activities permissible on Sundays, with the special demands of the day making it even more difficult for a popular resort like Clacton to make claims to a more select social tone.

The markers identified above were not fixed. Instead, it has been argued, the links between leisure activities, rituals and spaces, and social tone were being constantly re-negotiated by leisure providers and users. This is seen particularly clearly in the relationship between Kingsman and Clacton Council, which entailed constant struggles over the prerogatives of defining Clacton's image. In these struggles, the popular tone of Kingsman's ever-expanding Pier came to dominate Clacton's image, along with Butlin's holiday camp and Stedman's Jaywick. The tastes of the consumers of these popular attractions and images were also changing throughout the interwar period, in the wake of the growth of consumer culture. The growing number of attractions on the Pier thus reflects the demand for an increasing variety of leisure experiences. Frinton provides less dramatic examples of such evolution, given that tradition was viewed as a cornerstone of selectness, but even there subtle nuances in its select social tone can be discerned, with the Tennis Club providing a greater focus for the fashionable than the more traditional Golf Club. It is also interesting to note that while the Golf

Club served as similar signifiers of a select social tone in both Clacton and Frinton, its importance in Clacton was overwhelmed by the greater weight of popular attractions which coloured its overall image. In Frinton, the Golf and Tennis Clubs stood out in the absence of other competing entertainment and facilities, and their role was amplified by national media coverage.

The march of ‘progress’, however, is not a consistent element of leisure provision in the interwar seaside resort. A final major theme in this chapter has been the gap between efforts to project a modern image and the actual composite nature of available attractions and activities. The Pier, it was argued, was advertised as representing the latest in modern entertainment, but its success was dependant on the continual remixing and repackaging of old and new, with claims to modernity being traditional in the history of popular entertainment.

The historical roots of seaside towns’ claims to modernity have now been discussed across a number of areas, including architecture, town planning, sea bathing and other resort activities, social mores, and popular entertainment. The next chapter will consider how these claims were structured, disseminated and received by the potential customers of the popular and select resorts.

## **CHAPTER SIX**

### **SELLING THE SEASIDE RESORT**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

The contested development of the built environments, social structures, and activities on offer at Clacton and Frinton considered in the previous chapters became absorbed into a set of place myths and images which over time have evolved, accrued and become overlaid on one another. This chapter will examine the representation and dissemination of these place images and consider the wider discourse of modernity, health, and femininity which informed resort boosterism. It is important to return to the original context, since interwar images once seen as modern, have with the passage of time, become nostalgic. In his article on Blackpool Tower, Walton (1994:196) observes this process at work: ‘the Tower’s cultural meaning has shifted until it contains more of an appeal to tradition and heritage than to modernity.’ Making claims based on evanescent qualities of style, as is required of tourist sites selling their image, always entailed dedication to the task of continual image re-invention. What is modern and fashionable one moment quickly becomes out-of-date in the next, leaving a residue of nostalgia for better times in the past, which obscures to some extent the contested nature of earlier efforts to create and transmit place images. To the extent that nostalgic images are bland and sentimental, a closer look at their original context is needed to recall the import of their initial freshness and complexity.

This chapter will therefore critically examine efforts to form place image in the interwar years, in particular the important relationship between it and the creation and maintenance of social tone. A critical assessment entails an examination of both selection and consumption of

images as well as their production and transmission. The promotion of a desired place image through the use of metaphor is discussed using the widely prevalent interwar linkage of the popular seaside town with the ‘modern’ woman. Turning to the nuts and bolts of seaside publicity efforts, the chapter will focus on the historiography of seaside resort’s efforts to sell their towns, which is a reasonably well-charted area when it comes to image delivery, but less so when considering image selection. It is argued that scrutiny of both of these areas is needed to appreciate the multi-faceted way in which differences in social tone between select and popular resorts manifested themselves. To illustrate this point, in the case of Clacton and Frinton, examples of images from a range of official and informal publicity sources, including ads, guidebooks, media coverage, postcards and photographs will be used both for evidence on how Clacton and Frinton were portrayed and to show the ways in which these different representations served as markers for the popular or select holidaymaker. The chapter will end with a brief discussion of the complexities involved in measuring and judging image creation efforts over the long-term.

### **MIDWAY BETWEEN THE BOILED SHIRT AND NUDISM**

Seaside resorts sought to carve out a unique niche for themselves in the popular imagination, in part by capitalising on positive associations of the seaside resort in the interwar years with both modernity and femininity. As discussed in the introductory chapter, the modern has frequently been viewed from the vantage point of the metropolis and the factory, which are seen as the seedbeds of modernity. Viewing modernity from a different vantage point, the English interwar seaside town, provides a different context of leisure and nature for the same modern vocabulary of words and concepts such as progress, efficiency, simplicity, and rationality. While it is not suggested that modernity was in any sense used in its more radical incarnation by the Establishment image-makers of seaside resorts, the transposition of images to a different locale did arguably soften and feminise the hard-edged glorification of progress

and science, since in the traditional dualistic world view characteristic of modernity and its Enlightenment heritage, femininity was inevitably a quality associated with leisure and nature (and more specifically, the sea). While this argument assigns feminine qualities to place, Alison Light poses a similar set of arguments for a time - the interwar years. She contends that there was ‘a move away from formerly heroic and officially masculine public rhetorics of national destiny to an Englishness at once less imperial and more inward-looking, more domestic and more private - and, in terms of pre-war standards, more “feminine”’ (Light 1991:8). Femininity was allied to modernity and hygiene in contrast to the stuffiness of the Victorian period. An image which brings the feminine time and place together is that of the Kodak girl in her distinctive striped dress at the seaside, with one typical ad described by Taylor (1994:140) portraying her as ‘the essence of modern womanhood - standing by herself, armed with a camera and, in the manner of all viewers of landscape ‘she’ occupies the commanding heights of the quayside to look down on the beach scene below.’

The widespread use of metaphors of femininity in seaside resort publicity arguably marks the popular resorts as key locales for the interwar redefinition of notions of ‘Englishness’ in the interwar years identified by Light. Seaside resort image makers frequently linked their towns with qualities of both femininity and modernity, which demarcated them as places for the ‘new kinds of social and personal opportunity offered by changing cultures of sport and entertainment’(Light 1991:9). These opportunities were facilitated by increases, for women in particular, in disposable income and physical freedom (Alexander 1994:205). Previous chapters of this thesis have illustrated this point with examples of the ways in which these changes manifested themselves in resort social behaviour (i.e. bathing rituals and attire) and built environment (i.e. holiday camps). A 1934 collection of six essays on different English seaside towns provides several examples of seaside towns in a feminine guise. Southend was ‘a

tolerant, unquestioning mistress who takes her lover as, and for as long as, she finds him', while Scarborough was 'the courtesan among towns', which 'exchanges the respectability of industry and commerce for the "Come-up-and-see-me-sometime" life of sea view, bed and breakfast' (Cloud 1934).<sup>27</sup>

Allusions to femininity, however, did not have exclusively positive connotations for all. Sally Alexander has commented on the unease created by changes in the sexual division of labour following World War II, with the 'epithet 'feminine' used to denigrate both new consumer industries and the human needs they evoke'. Modernity, in the sense that it was associated with this new consumerism, represented a threat rather than a promise. Alexander notes the concern of the writer J.B. Priestley that the 'English are in danger of being feminised by their wireless, movie-star worship, silk stockings and hire-purchase' (Alexander 1994:203). Those, however, seeking to reap the benefit from this new consumerism and increases in disposable income and leisure time could not afford to be so disparaging.

Clacton image makers were happy to align the town's image to that of the 'modern woman', but certainly not that of the courtesan or the dirty weekend. Any transgression of accepted social norms and customs was to be kept to a seemly pace and defined by strict boundaries, as argued above in the chapter on seafront activities and rituals. A 1935 newspaper column sought to pin down the correct tone:

I am sure that Clacton - Queen of the East Coast - wants me to visit her again, otherwise she would not have made herself so attractive to me; but like the true artist she is, she does not flaunt her charms nor thrust them upon me. ...She is aware that she possesses good breeding, refinement and good manners as well as good looks, but she does not shout at me to observe them; her innate good taste precludes that. Of the many seaside places I have visited some are dirty, some blatant, some garish, more noisy and many more bad-mannered. Clacton has none of these drawbacks....She is

<sup>2727</sup>The metaphor for Scarborough is extended as far as an argument that it is a "woman-run town", a "widow's or spinster's gold mine" - an intriguing proposition, but not one that appears to have translated into a matriarchal political structure for Scarborough or any other resort. (Cloud 1934:213).

free and easy without being too free and easy. She lies halfway between the boiled shirt and nudism (CTEEG 14/09/35).

This reference is of course illustrative rather than conclusive, but is consistent with Clacton's image makers' problematic efforts to widen its popularity while retaining a measure of selectness. While numerous other quotes from the popular media of the time could be provided to illustrate the prevalence of feminine metaphors, the following extract from an article from a London paper entitled 'Shy Lady of the East: Clacton's Sunny Lure' reprinted in the Clacton *Times* has been selected because of the way in which 'femininity' represented a grab bag category of metaphors for the publicist, with Clacton compared in turn to a coquette, a queen, and a housewife:

Shy Lady of the East: Clacton's Sunny Lure - Clacton ! The shy lady of the East! You know those simpering women. You say, 'My dear, you are very lovely' and she giggles and replies, 'Oh, of course I'm not. Do you really think so?' ...Clacton so far is the queen of the coast, bright, jolly, and so clean that you imagine a gargantuan housewife has risen at dawn and swabbed and polished to make this town the jewel set in a sunlit sea (CTEEG 2/7/32).

The associations here are with traditional notions of femininity rather than that of the 'modern' woman, but the overall effect of linking the seaside resort with hygiene, in opposition to the grimy environments of industrial work, is similar. These metaphors of femininity seem to have been the province of the popular resort and are one of the numerous ways that popular resorts sought to differentiate themselves as the best at delivering the standard ingredients of the holiday experience. By contrast, poetic licence was restrained in descriptions of a select resort like Frinton, in keeping with the creation of a select image formed in antithesis to the use of hyperbole or metaphors hinting at links with mass culture. Given that selectness was thus tied to restraint in advertising, those popular resorts that wished to capture an element of the select market needed to play a complicated game to ensure their efforts to widen their popularity did not damage claims to selectness. The following section will consider academic studies documenting the relative successes of Clacton and Frinton's competitors in this competition to

capture the tourist market, with attention paid to *how* the subject is approached as much as on actual differences between the towns.

### **THE HISTORIOGRAPHY OF SEASIDE RESORT PUBLICITY**

In the historiography of popular seaside resort towns, publicity is frequently considered within discussions of the prominent role of local authorities in seaside resorts and related considerations of attempts to define social tone. The overall focus thus tends to be on image delivery rather than on the assumptions behind image selection, such as the links made between sunshine, health and modernity. The focus on image delivery is of course evident in short studies highlighting the role of local government in seaside resorts, such as Robert's article on Victorian and Edwardian Bournemouth and in the same volume, Walton's on Blackpool which both highlight the role of the 'Corporation as Impresario' and note the combined importance of local authority investment, control and advertising to the economic growth of seaside resorts (Walton et al 1983). Image delivery is also stressed in Nigel Morgan's 1991 study of resort towns in Devon which compares Torquay with the smaller resort of Ilfracombe. Morgan argues that while Torquay successfully re-aligned its image during the interwar years from a select watering place to a popular resort, Ilfracombe publicity and local authority investment and management policies were markedly less successful, with efforts at popularisation 'never to overcome the fundamental barrier of distance' (340). Thus, while Torquay and Ilfracombe 'had been very similarly matched in terms of the facilities they offered and their accommodation base, by 1939 Torquay had pulled away from its nearest competitor.' (Morgan 1997:90) Morgan focuses on the role of the local authority, contending that it 'above all else, played a vital role in shaping resort development in Devon over the century'. Torquay's interwar success is seen to rely on the increasingly professionalised Council working as a united front with local interest groups to invest in tourist industry infrastructure. Torquay, like Clacton, sought to retain an element of selectness while broadening its popular appeal, but Torquay, as

the larger resort, had greater resources at its command.<sup>28</sup> These resources also included the financial and advertising expertise of the Great Western Railway, who backed the most aggressive and sophisticated of railway company schemes to jointly fund advertising campaigns with the resorts on its routes.

Walton (1997) takes a more critical view of Torquay's efforts to retain a measure of selectness, noting that it 'grew quite impressively during the period but went down-market in the process'. He argues firstly against assuming a clear relationship between municipal enterprise and success as measured by population growth (as discussed here in Chapter Two), and secondly and more fundamentally, against concentrating too closely on size and development as barometers of success at the expense of more subtle considerations of amenity, social tone and the unique structural constraints of the seaside resort. These caveats provide a useful backdrop for a consideration of the actual images selected to advertise Torquay. Arguably, like Clacton, the framing discourse of the seaside town as a modern woman for its publicity masked the contradictions caused when a resort sought to be both select and popular at the same time. Torquay sought to position itself as 'Queen of the English Riviera' and an equal competitor with the luxury resorts of the French Riviera. Its efforts to woo the more select end of the market away from the Continent were also intended to attract the popular market by creating an allure of the exotic tempered by the familiar. Thornton (1997) describes how the Riviera analogy was also applied to Cornwall by its resorts and the Great Western Railway, with the additional element of difference of Cornwall's Celtic connections. Taking these images of exclusivity and difference at face value gives more weight to Morgan's assertion that Torquay retained a large measure of selectness during the interwar years.

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<sup>28</sup> In Walton's listing of 116 English and Welsh seaside resorts, 1911-51, Torquay ranks 11<sup>th</sup> in 1911 and 10<sup>th</sup> in 1951, while Clacton ranks 42<sup>nd</sup> in 1911 and 32<sup>nd</sup> in 1951 (Walton 1997).

Arguably, however, a closer analysis of the images chosen and the ways in which they converge with image delivery and perception, social practice, and the built environment points to the paradox of using images of selectness to enhance an image of popularity. Shaw and Williams (1991) have commented on the problematic legacy left by the Riviera branding, with the South-west's growing dependence on tourism introducing environmental and social conflicts and raising questions about its economic benefits to local communities. In the Cornish example, the prevalence of images of selectness worked to attract both the select and the not-so-select in greater numbers, ultimately reducing its claims to selectness. In Clacton, as will be argued below, efforts to market the resort as the select 'Queen of the East Coast' succeeded to a limited extent during the interwar years, but more importantly masked the ever increasing predominance of popular attractions and activities.

Attention to the issue of image selection is supported in an article on 'Selling the Seaside' by Nigel Yates, who contends that image selection was critically important to the success or failure of resort publicity efforts:

Promotion based on expenditure was easy. Identifying and developing resort image was very much more complex and not always accurate in an era when sophisticated market research was in its infancy. Resorts tended therefore to develop images that appealed to them and unfortunately discovered afterwards that the image was not sustained by reality (1988:24).

Yates does not find an automatic match between levels of spending on publicity and consequent popularity. He argues, for example, that money spent on publicity in Ramsgate between 1930 and 1960 was wasted since its attractions did not rival its nearby competitors (1988:25).

The attainment of either a select or a popular image was thus fraught with difficulties, and many middle ranking resorts such as Clacton struggled to find a niche in the market. The popular market was dominated by the largest resorts, which had more resources to both finance

attractions and advertise them widely. A key element of their dominance, Walton argues in the case of Blackpool, was the will to re-structure and re-position image when necessary by creating new attractions and selling them to new markets, a feat Blackpool first achieved in the 1890s with the construction of the Blackpool Tower and the 'most spectacular and enduring redefinition of itself, confirming and promoting its position as the great pioneer of the working-class seaside holiday' (Walton 1994: 198). In terms of publicity, Blackpool had a great advantage in the unique privilege granted to it in 1879 to levy a two penny rate to advertise the town. Widespread poster advertising throughout Britain and extending to the Continent helped Blackpool extend its market beyond its traditional clientele of Lancashire cotton workers (Walton 1978:55, Howell 1974:174). Publicity was seen by the Mass Observation team in the 1930s as both the signifier and the transmitter of Blackpool's popularity: 'Publicity and the close linkage between the Corporation and big business are the key to Blackpool's notions of progress' (Cross 1990: 211). Other local authorities began to catch up in 1921 with the Health and Pleasure Resorts Act, which allowed local authorities to use the proceeds from municipal seafront enterprises up to a penny rate to fund advertising. As Yates and Stafford note in their study of Kentish resorts, this prompted a noticeable increase in the levels of local authority involvement in publicity and development, which was 'in marked contrast to resort development before the First World War which had been largely due to the efforts of private entrepreneurs' (1985:118). Not all resorts, however, immediately expanded their publicity efforts. Shields (1991:110) contends that in Brighton, the amount of publicity by the local authority did not become significant until the late 1930s, with a primary goal of the publicity to re-align its dirty weekend image rather than to increase visitor numbers per se.

Clacton and Frinton were accordingly in competition with other seaside resort towns with varying levels of expertise and resources for self-advertisement but which all recognised

the centrality of image to towns based on tourism and consumption. The following sections will consider in detail the contests in Frinton and Clacton over image selection, production, and transmission which defined their place in the hierarchy of competing popular and select resorts.

### **FRINTON: ADVERTISING THROUGH LACK OF ADVERTISING**

Frinton, as a select resort, seldom advertised itself commercially and maintained its image through word of mouth and by news of its celebrity guests appearing in national newspapers. In 1919, for example the local paper commented that Frinton ‘has so often had the honour of being specially referred to as a ‘fashionable magnet’ and of having its doings recorded in the illustrated papers’ (CTEEG 19/8/19). Golf and tennis tournaments, as discussed in Chapter Five, frequently focused national press attention on Frinton: ‘Although one sometimes hears the statement that Frinton neither seeks nor desires publicity, this annual [tennis] tournament gives the town a prominent place in the news and picture pages of the national and provincial Press, and it also acquaints many prominent people from all parts of the country with the charms and amenities of Frinton’ (CGECIN 16/7/38).

This form of indirect advertising was not always welcome in Frinton, however, partly because it was found in the popular media and partly because one of Frinton’s attractions for the famous lay in its lack of popular media scrutiny. For select resorts, image was created by the conspicuous absence of forms derived from mass culture. ‘Distinction’ in the select resort, in the sense of Bourdieu’s formulation of the cultural definition and internalisation of class norms, relied on an implicit opposition to the characteristics of the popular resort. In the same way that commercial activities were banned, as discussed in the Chapter Four, regular visitors to Frinton could be expected to be attracted to it by the absence of railway posters advertising its charms rather than their presence. Frinton visitors defined themselves as travellers to the

exclusive rather than tourists to the common. One example of publicity directed at these sensibilities is the 1899 brochure 'From Rush to Repose': 'Many will ask, but where is Frinton-on-Sea? The mere question is a compliment to the place, as an evidence that it is outside the usual run of trippers.'

Frinton's Council did not entirely shun publicity, but the limited publicity it did issue stressed the town's exclusivity. In an early 1930's brochure, this message was packaged in a modernistic typeface and layout. It highlighted Frinton's claims to be both up-to-date and exclusive, with claims such as 'Frinton has become the holiday sanctuary of the man who wants to forget his fame and the woman who is tired of public adulation'. The brochure thus sought, paradoxically, to encourage more people to come and get away from it all, particularly those who considered that the celebrity status of some at the sanctuary raised the status for the place as a whole. In line with the earlier tradition of Royal visits establishing the social cachet of a resort, such as the Prince Regent at Brighton, the unpublicised but privately advertised presence of Royals such as Princes Edward and George served to increase Frinton's attractiveness to the smart set in the interwar years, and their disappearance following the abdication equally served to diminish Frinton's social cachet at the margins among the glamour-minded (see Palmer 1994:104).

Ursula Bloom's memoir, *Rosemary for Frinton*, assigns to World War I a critical effect on Frinton's status and social attitudes: 'The war had brought luck to Frinton, for since the end of hostilities the famous watering places abroad were not prepared to receive the honoured guests from the peerage who had always gone there, and they came to us. Blue blood had swept riotously down on us, demanding furnished houses galore, and price did not matter' (Bloom 1970:68). Bloom, a prolific novelist by trade, exhibited a tendency to unabashed

hyperbole which, while not exemplifying the normal understatement characterising select Frinton, did echo the similar prose used in the popular media of the time which fuelled perceptions of Frinton's fashionableness. The transformation of Frinton from what Bloom categorised in the pre-war years as a 'prosperous tradesman's Mecca' was, however, by no means complete. The prosperous tradesman and the incoming blue blood and smart young things might have shared a fondness for golf and tennis, but did not share the same social attitudes:

We believed that a new world had been born and the old silly world was dead. We had done it, and this was a world which was entirely new, entirely young, entirely different. This was our fling! Old dowagers shook their heads over it and said that we would pay for our foolishness. All those tatty old colonels and mouldy admirals who groused about our dancing so much, the chemise dress and the Oxford bags, and goodbye to the straw hat for men, said that if we were the spirit of the new world, we had not been worth fighting for. We were the new world, we declared (Bloom 1970:101)<sup>29</sup>.

Frinton's fashionable image thus encompassed a large measure of generational conflict, with World War I marking a distinct rupture in social attitudes. By the end of the interwar period, however, the rupture appeared less dramatic in Frinton, in the context of the town's growing retired population; the abandonment of Frinton by the smart set after Edward's abdication; the resultant reduction in fawning comment in the society pages; and the ethos of privacy and restriction firmly established by Frinton's founding traditionalists. While the smart set and the traditionalists were divided by the smart set's hedonistic social attitudes and fondness for stylistic modernity, they both shared a willingness to promote Frinton as select, primarily through word-of-mouth rather than through more official channels. As one Frinton resident recalls:

I think Frinton was very exclusive [in the twenties and thirties], largely on the size of the houses and the people that came, and the fact that the town was highly regulated...It very cleverly built on that reputation, to keep the value of property up. No one minded the publicity that said Frinton is snooty...it was good publicity (Tomkins interview).

<sup>29</sup> Waging their own form of intra-class conflict, Bloom and her friends subjected the traditionalists of Frinton to a variety of sophomoric practical jokes. These included: exchanging gates along the road; drawers up the flagstaff; sending a chicken through the window in a lady visitor's bedroom; painting a gun white; setting mice loose in someone's house; and watering the lawn of 'Lord Pork' with weed-killer to form the words 'buy my pork' (Bloom 1970).

## THE FRIENDLY RIVALRY

Quiet provincial towns in the country do not need to the same extent, as do popular coastal towns, the frequent 'charging up' of ideas and imagination in order to maintain their position in the social scheme of things. [Clacton] must definitely progress; it must move with the times. If Clacton is to compete with increasingly greater success in its friendly rivalry with other coastal resorts in South-East England, it must go ahead - and keep on going ahead (CTEEG 24/8/35).

Clacton, in contrast to Frinton, was an enthusiastic competitor with other seaside resorts for the growing seaside holiday market, a competition which was waged using the rhetoric of progress. The vital importance of the tourist trade to seaside resort towns ensured vigilance in monitoring the activities of competitors. The Council frequently sent out enquiries or even deputations to establish best practice in provision for tourism. In 1919 and in 1937, for example, the Council surveyed other resorts on their provision of public baths and/or pavilions to help them determine what their level of provision should be (Clacton Improvements Com. 26/5/19, Entertainments Com.18/1/37). The 'friendly rivalry', however, also entailed the pooling of ideas and resources when appropriate. Clacton Council was an active member of the Association of Health and Pleasure Resorts, a voluntary grouping of resort local authorities founded in 1921 which was active throughout the interwar years, in the absence of other forms of national tourist board. The Association served as an information exchange and promoted overall increases in levels of seaside tourism, with annual conferences held at different resorts.<sup>30</sup>

English seaside resorts were united in their concern over the threat presented by Continental competition. Claims to modernity were made by English resorts with the awareness that Continental rivals might be thought to have a greater title to that status. Long before the 'decline phase' in the resort cycle of English resorts is considered to have set in,

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<sup>30</sup> The local media also covered statements from the annual conference of the British Health Resorts Association, founded in 1933. Its membership was largely comprised of medical men, who could be relied on to issue quotes supporting the medical benefits of the resorts.

commentators criticised the ‘genteel shabbiness, air of neglect, and premature decay in once fashionable resorts’, contrasting them with the ‘sparkling aspect of their foreign rivals’ (CTEEG 14/3/25). World War I was seen to be a decisive influence in the increase of Continental competition, since ‘the War accustomed many millions of men of all classes to the Continent, which the countries of Europe have not been slow to use by affording travel facilities’ (CTEEG 7/7/28). English seaside resorts accordingly needed to modernise their social attitudes as well as their facilities to keep up with the competition from Continental travel in general and Continental seaside resorts in particular. The Secretary of the Clacton Publicity Association warned:

The resorts of this country must certainly wake up, unless they wish to see the money that should be flowing into their pockets being filched away to the resorts of other lands. More and more British people, too, are spending their holidays abroad. Not entirely because of the foreign advertisements, but because the visitor is given freedom from pettifogging restrictions that are like millstones round the neck of the holiday maker in many British resorts. Black looks at 11:15 at night because one is a few minutes later than the scheduled time for locked doors is enough to send anyone abroad (CTEEG 19/4/30).

Thus, while the levels of interwar Continental travel might seem low in comparison to that of the postwar years, they were still sufficient to generate concern amongst English resorts, particularly when it was seen as a favoured option by the trend -setting consumers English resorts were trying to attract.<sup>31</sup> Campaigns to counteract the lure of foreign travel often swapped the discourse of modernity for an appeal to nationalist self-interest, such as an effort spearheaded by local MP John Pybus in 1931 which stressed that ‘every pound spent in this country means a step forward to national recovery’ (CGECIN 4/4/31).

Within a regional context, Clacton saw itself as an East Coast resort in direct competition with the South Coast for the London market. In particular, it had to contend with a

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<sup>31</sup> While the extent of Continental competition has arguably been underestimated for the interwar years, as the conclusion notes, Demetriadi (1994) argues that it should not be over-estimated for the postwar years, with English resorts contributing in large measure to their own decline.

long-standing prejudice going back to the time of Daniel Defoe that the East Coast was unhealthy. In 1724, he wrote that gentlemen who go to the Essex marshes for shooting ‘often return with an Essex ague on their back, which they find a heavier load than the fowls they have shot’ (quoted in Rouse 1982:4). Soldiers during the Napoleonic Wars assigned to the coastal Martello towers were garrisoned inland to preserve their health (Jacobs 1993:2). Even though the marshlands were gradually drained from the 17<sup>th</sup> to early nineteenth centuries, eliminating disease carrying mosquitoes, the coasts negative reputation lingered on in folk memory in the more generalised form that it was not worth visiting. Dr. Granville, for example, was reluctant to include Essex in his 1841 tour of English spas and resorts, as it had ‘a bad name with invalids’ (1971:606-7). A 1930 newspaper editorial commented:

The old prejudice that the East Coast is bleak and uninteresting is certainly not true so far as the South East Coast is concerned, for the climate is brighter, drier, and more invigorating than the South and South-Westerly coasts. Such prejudices, however, die very badly, but well-produced and widely distributed newspapers are the best means of educating the public to a juster appreciation of their advantages and their attractiveness, both as holiday resorts and residential towns (CTEEG 5/7/30).

The railway serving the East Coast, the London and Northeast Railway (LNER) also sought to elevate the image of the East Coast. In the early 1930s, it ran a series of poster campaigns promoting the East Coast rather than specific destinations on the line. Most of the posters were designed by the noted graphic artist Tom Purvis, whose use of flat brilliant colours and modern typefaces shared stylistic similarities with the railway poster ads for other seaside resorts (Heller 1998:114). Thus, the railway poster became another key transmitter linking modern images and the seaside resort.

Larger rivals, as noted above, had the advantage in the financial resources at their command. The 1921 Health and Pleasure Resorts Act did little to alter this since it set limits on the amounts that could be raised according to population. In 1920, the Clacton *Times* expressed the view that Clacton was better served by voluntary efforts, as the town was not big enough to

realise large amounts through a penny rate (CTEEG 17/7/20). Frinton Council, unsurprisingly, decided to defer the matter in both 1926 and 1928 when it considered whether to take advantage of the Act. Clacton Council however, did not wish to miss out on a new source of revenue and approved use of the 1921 Act provisions in 1923, although it was only expected to bring in around £280 for that year.

Voluntary subscription efforts thus remained essential to Clacton advertising campaigns, but overcoming apathy, political differences and the reluctance to spend on discretionary advertising proved difficult. At various times during the interwar years, Clacton boosters sought to re-adjust the organisational framework for voluntary Clacton publicity efforts in the context of conflicts over responsibilities and political turf. The name of the Clacton Advancement Association, founded in 1909, was changed to the Clacton Publicity Association in 1925 in concert with an expanded advertising campaign. In 1930, Councillor Jack Shingfield spearheaded the founding of a Development Association, beginning with a 'Development Week' to promote investment in the town, reasoning that 'I claim to represent the working class interest; I recognise that the interests I represent cannot be well-off unless Clacton is prosperous and goes ahead' (CTEEG 8/2/30). One commentator questioned the need for a new association, given the existence of the Publicity Association, but after 'twelve months of haggling' because the 'movements are so divided into cliques', the Development Association merged with the Publicity Association (CTEEG 6/9/30). 1930 concluded with the *Graphic* commenting that 'The enthusiasm over the birth of the Development Association, has, we observe, not been of a lasting character judging by the sparse attendance at the annual meeting, due probably to the fact that things have not gone according to plan' (CGECIN 22/11/30). Four years later, a special meeting of the Publicity and Development Association was convened to consider the future of the Association, which was in debt. Many agreed that 'only the Council can effect a

cure which will give Clacton adequate publicity', although the limitations of funding publicity through income from seafront enterprises, which had gone down that year, were highlighted (CGECIN 21/7/34). The profile of publicity was certainly increasing in the Council, as evidenced by the creation of an Official Guide and Publicity Committee in 1929. At the same time, however, splits on the Council, which seem to have as much to do with personality conflicts as with ideological differences between ratepayers and tourist industry boosters, diverted Council energies. The *Graphic* bemoaned 'Is it too much to hope that the members of the Clacton Council will agree to sink personal and petty differences; become 'pro' Clactonians imbued with a burning desire to do all in their power for the advancement of the town?' (CGECIN 22/9/34).

### **CHAMPAGNE AIR, RAINFALL RARE**

The primary conflicts concerning publicity in both local government and business sectors thus arose over funding and organisation, with less disagreement over the rhetoric and content to be used in guidebooks, posters and newspaper advertising. The catchphrase unifying Clacton's healthy modern image was 'Sunny Clacton - Champagne Air, Rainfall Rare'.<sup>32</sup> Clacton's publicity writers adopted the favoured benchmark of most resorts of that period, the average hours of sunshine table designed to be of interest to both modern tanners and traditional health seekers, and argued that Clacton's south-facing position gave it a particularly salubrious climate. The sun was of course a key icon of the interwar years. Oliver, et al (1981:184-186) note its predominance in the symbolic metalanguage and design of interwar 'Dunroamin'; the same metalanguage that paired 'sunny' with 'Clacton'. Use of modernistic graphic style and design for advertising artwork in guidebooks, posters and newspapers followed on from these

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<sup>32</sup>The slogan was a result of a competition sponsored by the Clacton Development Association in 1930 and won by Mrs. Sutherland of North Finchley (CTEEG 5/7/30). The phrase 'champagne air' was also found in earlier advertising campaigns - in 1923, an advertising agency proposed a campaign with posters reading 'Clacton on Sea - facing South - the resort with the Champagne Air' (CGECIN 3/3/23).

linkages between sunshine motifs, health, and progress, although modernistic design was not approved by all on the Council. Councillor Shingfield criticised the layout of the 1933 Guide for being inartistic and containing ‘American’ ideas: ‘We have got a “jazz guide” this year and I hate jazz’ (CTEEG 4/2/33) (The end product actually evidenced few changes to the preceding year’s guidebook).

As noted in Chapter Three, the appeal of the pristine and new was another important element of the publicity of planned resorts, along with their superiority to haphazardly built old fishing villages. The representations that resulted from this assumption highlighted images of modernity and appealed to the tourist seeking the most up-to-date environments, rather than seeking to tap into the tourist’s search for authenticity identified by McCannell (1976) on which an old fishing village could attempt to capitalise. The latter environments produced their own discourse which valorised ‘local colour’, the natural, and the picturesque. Stilgoe’s (1994:333) examination of the images and meanings of the New England coastal zone observes: ‘Away from the crowded resorts, away from the traffic, the well-schooled vacationers find the ‘old coast’, not the gold coast, and discover the uncrowded beaches, the dimly lit, packed-to-the-rafters antique shops, the salt-stained, wind-burned towns, the quaintness of everything.’ A similar description could be applied to the old fishing villages of Southwold and Aldeburgh on the Suffolk coast. Their small scale put them into the realm of the picturesque rather than linking them with the poor housing, poverty, and industrial-scale fishing operations found in large towns such as Great Yarmouth. Southwold and Aldeburgh thus developed a niche market going back to the early years of this century catering to those in the middle classes attracted by its particular brand of aesthetic selectness, with shared interests focusing on the arts rather than on sports, as at Frinton.

A good example of interwar seaside resort publicity which reflects the prevailing discourse uniting modernity, health and sunshine is the locally published guidebook/novel *Champagne Air* (Maxwell 1933). The book combines boosterist rhetoric in an uncomfortable partnership with a melodramatic plot describing how the happiness of two young lovers thrown together by the magic of Clacton in the summer is shattered by a murder. *Brighton Rock* it's not, either for the quality of its writing or the creation of a *noir* place image, but within the limits of a literary oddity, it is a good example of a portrayal of the seaside town as modern and healthful, but with a potential for the casting aside of convention and the pursuit of excitement. The book epitomises the environmental determinism of resort publicity at its most unrestrained, with places given utopian transformative powers over individuals. 'Most of all, Brian noticed the unrestrained freedom that existed. Everyone after the same purpose - happiness. No position, no professions, all just men and women whose one aim is enjoyment and rest' (29). The book described a Clacton Pier Publicity van which would woo Londoners, not only with its message, but because of its persuasive announcer/driver, whose 'vitality, enthusiasm, eagerness, inspiration, happiness and encouragement seemed to ooze from him...In fact, he was a ray of sunshine' (8).

Clacton did indeed have a publicity van for several summers, beginning in 1929. Donated by the Liberal MP John Pybus, the van was 'tastefully designed in a tri-colour scheme of red, yellow and blue' and initially toured the Midlands and London suburbs with its loudspeakers, reaching, according to the Development Association, over 3 million people and distributing 35,000 leaflets (CTEEG 15/6/29, 9/11/29). In 1931, the van toured Holland and Belgium, with the *Graphic* claiming that it was the 'first in the country to be used for publicity purposes, and the first to be so used on the Continent' (CGECIN 4/4/31). The van was thus portrayed as putting Clacton in the forefront of seaside resort publicity efforts, but only for a

few summers as it relied on Pybus' generosity rather than corporate sponsorship (Inland publicity tours were revived by Clacton Council in the postwar years.).

### **PRESS BOOSTERISM**

The local newspapers, including the *Clacton Times and East Essex Gazette* and the *Clacton Graphic and East Coast Illustrated News*, gradually assumed a higher profile in expanding Clacton's tourist trade over the interwar years. The newspapers accordingly represent a significant source for both efforts to create image and evidence for how visitors perceived image. In respect of image creation, both the *Times* and the *Graphic* pursued the advancement of Clacton with zeal, often using the leader column to bolster the place image of Clacton as the progressive Queen of the East Coast. The *Times* had a particularly important place in Clacton's political structure since its editor, Colonel Abraham Quick, as Chapter Two noted, served as a Clacton councillor throughout the interwar years and was happy to ally himself with the Ratepayers Association. He opposed measures which he felt threatened private enterprise such as building a theatre within the new Town Hall which would compete with privately run theatres. Quick's frequent exhortations for the Council to follow 'progressive policy' thus should be set within the context of the pro-growth coalition described in Chapter Two, which did not entail wholesale support for municipal enterprise in seaside attractions, but which did include prudent municipal investment in public goods such as gas, water and electricity; careful investment in Clacton's 'shop window', its seafront; and a publicity machine which drew upon the organising and financial resources of both the public and private sectors.

The central role of the entrepreneur in Quick's political philosophy resulted in his support for Clacton entrepreneurs such as Stedman (developer of Jaywick) and Kingsman (Clacton Pier owner). He defended their role in bringing investment to Clacton against critics

who charged them with lowering Clacton's social tone, arguing that 'people to whom cheaper amusements appeal should be catered to as long as it is decent and only amusing and without vulgarity' (CTEEG 8/8/25). His obituary in July 1940 noted that Quick 'always hoped that the civic leaders would work with energy and enterprise until Clacton, Holland, Frinton and Walton had been built into one great "Blackpool of the South"'; a vision that was certainly not widely shared! (CTEEG 6/7/40).<sup>33</sup> The overall slant of coverage in the *Times* accordingly supported a drift away from select and towards popular, in the wake of unfettered free enterprise.

The newspapers considered themselves an important part of the local publicity machine and provided resources for tourists such as the *Times*' 'Holiday Times - Facts that visitors like to know' section. They also provided a forum for discussing how Clacton might best advance its position in competition with other resorts. They kept readers apprised of competing resorts' new attractions in articles such as 'Coast Resorts Schemes - What Clacton's Rivals are Doing' (CTEEG 24/8/29). In 1935, the *Times* ran a series entitled 'Wandering on the Continent' by Beachcomber, discussing how Clacton could learn from Continental resorts, as well as an article on 'Clacton's Future', in which various community leaders were quizzed on their suggestions for improvement (CTEEG 5/1, 12/1, 26/1, 24/8/35). It was agreed that efforts should be made to lengthen the holiday season (a recurring theme for all resorts), that the railway service should be improved and that more advertising was felt to be needed to build on the success of previous advertising. The issues were thus, as argued above, getting the message across rather than changing the message or the product itself.

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<sup>33</sup> Councillor Ball, for example, thought Blackpool was the sort of place that had 'snake charmers in every front garden....it was an absolute scandal to English seaside places' (CGECIN 16/5/31).

The national media also played its part in focusing attention on seaside resorts through its travel pages, and in the case of Frinton as discussed above, its gossip, fashion, and sports pages. The national papers sought to forge links between the customers, the newspapers and the resorts by sponsoring competitions at the resorts, such as sand castle competitions held at both Clacton and Frinton. Two former residents recall as boys the excitement generated on days when ‘Lobby Lud’ was meant to be in Clacton to hand out a cash prize to the first person with a *News Chronicle* to correctly identify him (Young interview). Additionally, like the local newspapers, national newspapers ran promotional features presented as news, such as the *Times* article ‘A Progressive East Coast Resort - Clacton’s Development’, which praised its enterprise, both private and public, in fulsome tones (6/6/34).

### **GUIDEBOOKS AND THE STRUCTURING OF THE TOURIST EXPERIENCE**

While newspapers served to popularise locales to a broad public, guidebooks served a more particular function in structuring place image for a smaller, middle class public. The middle class interwar tourist relied on guidebooks both to create expectations before the journey and to structure the actual experience of a destination, serving as ‘markers’ signifying a tourist locale and ‘sight sacralisation’ (see MacCannell 1976, Rojek 1993). As such, guidebooks form an important source of insight into the complexities of the expectations and perceptions of the tourist. Koshar (1998) posits that ‘guidebooks were active agents in the formation of an optics of tourism, the attempt to visualize an authenticity that could provide meaning beyond the marketplace.’ Buzard (1993:71) describes the nineteenth century establishment of the principle of composition by guidebook writers such as Baedeker and Murray, whereby tourist spots were established in a hierarchy of prestige in addition to providing a quick fix of facts and opinions.. Its claims to encapsulate all worth knowing about a place attracted mockery from the cultural elite, but also seduced: ‘The handbooks encouraged acts of imaginary appropriation, the gesture of ‘verifying one’s Murray’ resembling a stock-

taking of cultural possessions' (Buzard 1993:77). By the interwar period, guidebooks had become a taken-for-granted accessory which helped distinguish the tourist from both the 'traveller', who would disdain the short-hand approach of a guidebook in favour of individual exploration; and the short stay 'tripper' (Taylor 1994, MacCannell 1976).

Guidebooks also had the straightforward task of providing information on accommodation and services for visitors. The guidebook was thus an important tool for any resort wishing to target the middle class market, providing opportunities both to transmit positive place images and to serve as an essential form of advertising for local tourist businesses. In Clacton, production of Official Guides assumed increasing importance through the interwar years, with 15,000-25,000 produced each year during the Twenties, and 20,000-40,000 produced during the Thirties (CTEEG, CGECIN). These numbers by no means put Clacton at the top of the league in advertising. Larger Torquay, for example was producing 80,000 publicity folders annually with Great Western co-operation in the late Thirties (Morgan 1997:95). The guidebook's function in transmitting place image, however, cannot be directly measured by the numbers printed. It is important here to note the slight gradations in function between official guides, with their accent on information, and privately produced guides printed as part of a national series by companies such as Ward Lock, with their accent on structuring the tourist experience (Ward-Lock 1930).

In both types of guides, it is interesting to find that, even in the pre-motoring era guides, the tourist is expected to venture beyond the boundaries of one resort to experience the area as a whole. In contrast to the idea of a select social tone entailing a tight allegiance of visitors to one place and a firmly fixed routine of holiday activities, the guidebooks present an itinerary

spread over a wider range of places and activities, suggesting that it was expected for those in Clacton to visit Frinton and vice versa. Jarrold's *Illustrated Guide to Clacton* (1900), for example, suggested that 'you take the walks and excursions, the picnics and cycle rides during the day in the country around, returning to the amusements...in the evening.' The pursuit of rational recreation on the beach could thus be augmented by appreciation of the countryside and historical sites. While the guidebooks sought to distinguish seaside resorts as modern, as discussed in the above chapter on the built environment, they also suggested ways in which the visitor could take refuge in the traditional landscapes of 'deep England' evocative of past historical epochs. Inclusion of historical sites also allowed seaside resort visitors to feel differentiated from trippers. Taylor (1996:132) contends that guidebooks served as a 'badge of respectability and seriousness' to set them apart from seaside trippers, who were seen to be 'scarcely attentive to the historic resonance of the country'. Accordingly, guidebooks on Clacton and Frinton gave a high priority to a visit to the St. Osyth Priory and described in detail its architectural features and rich history full of legend and anecdote. They also did not miss out on opportunities to place Clacton and Frinton, with a bit of poetic licence, within Constable Country: 'Clacton is situated in the midst of some of the most beautiful country in East Anglia, that delightful rural district immortalised by the brush of Constable' (*Guide to Clacton* 1930).

The guidebooks' inclusive itineraries lend weight to a comment made by the President of the Clacton Chamber of Commerce in support of a united effort to develop Clacton, Walton, and Frinton jointly that 'at least 90% of all visitors who came to any one of these three places visited all three' (CTEEG 8/2/29). This cross-fertilisation of visitors does not seem to have had a large impact on the distinct nature and differing social tone of each resort, but it is arguably significant for its structuring of the individual tourist experience and the creation of long-term social memory. The individual tourist could use the suggested itineraries to add to their store of

cultural capital, with the guidebooks providing suggestions for associations to enrich the experience and memory of a place, producing a composite picture of seaside resorts. The extent to which these elisions of images succeeded of course varied, and as discussed above, was not arguably essential to the overall creation of place myth and fantasy. Numerous comparisons of Clacton with Eastbourne might have helped Clacton move up a notch in the selectness scales in the minds of some visitors, but attempts to brand Clacton as the ‘Mentone of the East’ seem less convincing than the similar branding discussed above of Devon and Cornwall, as witnessed by the choice of Ernest Kingsman, the owner of the Pier, to spend the winter months of each year at the real French Riviera (e.g *Borough Guide*).

### **PRESERVING THE VISUAL IMAGE: POSTCARDS AND PHOTOGRAPHS**

Postcards and photographs both represent quintessential elements of the interwar seaside holiday experience, meriting attention both for the images they portray and the function they perform in shaping memories and image over the long term. Just as guidebooks served to structure the tourist experience before and during the holiday, postcards and photographs structured the tourist’s perception during and after the fact, and also provided the key place images for the tourist to pass on to those back at home. Photographs in particular are a vast area of cultural study, but a few key points will be made here to illustrate the way in which these markers of the tourist experience were also used to mark and define social tone.

Postcards had, by the interwar period, become a well-established feature of a seaside holiday, providing, as Susan Stewart notes, one of the means by which public places are expropriated for private consumption:

That remarkable souvenir, the postcard, is characterized by a complex process of captioning and display which repeats this transformation of public into private. First, as a mass-produced view of a culturally articulated site, the postcard is purchased...the other’s reception of the postcard is the receipt, the ticket stub, that validates the experience of the site’ (Stewart 1984:138).

The craze for sending and collecting postcards which peaked in the Edwardian period had by the interwar years settled down to a ritual observed by a broad cross-section of seaside visitors, leaving out only the poorer trippers and the most select regulars (Carline 1959:39). During this period, popular seaside resorts such as Clacton supported a number of small firms publishing postcards in addition to the larger national publishing firms (Jacobs 1996:33).

The comic postcard figures along with the stick of rock figure as the key markers of an English seaside holiday at a popular resort. Both were available for purchase at the sort of souvenir shop that was accepted at the popular resort but shunned at the select resort. Comic postcards are accordingly much rarer and less racy for Frinton than they are for Clacton. Lofgren (1985) finds clear class distinctions between the landscape and the comic postcard. The landscape panorama is seen to be ‘firmly planted in [the] classic bourgeois tradition’, a tradition which, in the nineteenth century valorised the panorama in the wake of Romantic individualism and the vistas framed by new modes of travel such as the train. The comic postcard, meanwhile, is seen to lie in direct opposition to this aesthetic morality, and to offend middle class sensibilities to the extent they represent a ‘kind of guerilla warfare of parody and sniggering which is often typical of a subordinate culture fighting back’ (Lofgren 1985:99).

Lofgren is attempting to account for the severe reaction of middle class cultural critics to the comic postcard as much as to speculate on the motives of the cards’ purchasers. George Orwell assumed, for example, that the cultured viewer would share his opinion of the cartoonist Donald MacGill that ‘your first impression is of overpowering vulgarity’ (Orwell 1941). The sense of distance Orwell felt as an intellectual viewing a working class artefact from above was also apparent in his view of the comic postcard as a timeless object. The second impression

after vulgarity, he asserts, is ‘indefinable familiarity’, since ‘what you are really looking at is something as traditional as Greek tragedy, a sort of sub-world of smacked bottoms and scrawny mother-in-law which is a part of western European consciousness.’ The humour in the comic postcard can, however, be situated historically. One observer notes a transition from early twentieth century postcards which ‘reflected a harsher working-class world’ full of ‘ugly spinsters, mean landladies and drunken husbands’ to those of the more affluent interwar years, where ‘in these sun-bathing thirties everybody, on the cards, seems to get brown, all over as far as possible; and all, fat or thin, join in the beach keep-fit class’ (Alderson 1970:25).

While they can be identified with a time, comic postcards cannot be distinguished by place, other than by their association with the popular resort in general. Orwell notes that while comic postcards could be bought at any Woolworths, many people ‘have a vague notion that they are something to be found only at the seaside’ (Orwell 1941:155). The name of the actual resort was irrelevant to this linkage. Comic postcards tended to be printed and distributed through national networks, with the name of the resort changed in the punchline where required, so comic Clacton postcards have no unique features that set them apart from postcards found in other popular resorts. The comic postcards were thus in the interwar years, part of the overall pool of popular resort images of modernity and constrained liminality. As Shields notes, the comic postcard alludes to the ways in which the seaside holiday simultaneously promotes and restrains transgression: ‘The subject matter is both the carnivalesque transgression of social codes and the embarrassment of being “caught in the act”’ (Shields 1991:98). The comic postcard documents the holidaymaker’s awareness of the opportunities to play with different roles: ‘The chance to swank about, to be taken for a duchess or more likely a film actress, is one of the fantasy situations that holidays permit and one that the cards both celebrate and correct’ (Alderson 1970:22) (See Fig. 6.1). Thus, in some ways, the comic

FIGURE 6.1 COMIC POSTCARD  
SOURCE: AUTHOR'S COLLECTION

postcard did indirectly promote a sense of place, albeit one of association with a generic popular resort. This arose because, more than with the undifferentiated crowds and vistas on a photographic postcard, comic postcards personalised the relationship between a place, the activity portrayed, and the postcard sender.

I acquired around seventy postcards of Clacton and Frinton for this thesis and flipped through hundreds more at postcard and stamp fairs. I originally intended to study them for their images alone, but since many of them proved to have been actually sent, they also provided a further rich source of analysis in the comments found on the backs, both for the comments and for information on visitor origins. Arrival and departure messages and banal comments about the weather and health predominate to an overwhelming degree, reflecting the totally public nature of the communication and the extent to which the clichéd nature of the comments is a part of the postcard sending ritual. Lofgren (1985:106) identifies the stock phrases such as ‘wish you were here’ as part of a folklore genre. It is a genre that seems to largely transcend class, in that visitors to both select and popular resorts used postcards as a shorthand way of displaying the status inferred by going on a holiday, even if it was just a day trip, and as a method of acknowledging a wide range of near and distant friends and relations with a minimum of effort. While the images selected reflected class-oriented cultural preferences, as seen most clearly in the distinctions between the comic and the landscape postcard, the conventions of the postcard form produced standardised categories of remarks. The comments on the back rarely provided clues to the image on the front. Writers who selected comic postcards did not normally feel obligated to refer to the comic sentiment, but adhered to the same conventions as those who selected scenic postcards. The postcard sent by the uncle unsettled by ‘fast’ girls on the beach, noted in Chapter Four, was a notable exception to this convention. Postcards seem to have been just as likely to have been sent by a day tripper with a

very temporary connection to the place pictured but who was anxious to mark a short break away, as by a long stay visitor who could be expected to feel a stronger connection with the place portrayed on a postcard. In the case of this particular thesis, postcards are most useful when the comments provide a capsule summary of a place's character and further evidence of the tendency of resort-goers to visit a wider area, such as a 1935 postcard from Frinton - 'Have been here for the day to avoid overcrowding at Clacton', or a 1928 one written after an afternoon in Frinton commenting that 'it is quieter than Clacton'.

Vendors at postcard and stamp fairs tend to stock a far greater number of postcards for Clacton than Frinton, although when Frinton's smaller size is discounted, the difference is far less. The key way differences in social tone between the two places is expressed lies in the type and levels of use of the similar seafront landscapes portrayed, with shots of select beach hut users or largely deserted shots of the greensward common for Frinton, and crowded shots of the beach or pier for Clacton. This point is illustrated by the two composite postcards shown in Figure 6.2. They are of postwar vintage, but show vistas unchanged from the interwar years. The vistas selected for Clacton contain large number of holidaymakers, while those of Frinton show manicured landscapes with only scattered users, even in the shot of Frinton's main commercial street. Both have shots of formal gardens, but even there, the Frinton card shows two people strolling through them, while the Clacton card shows several groups sitting down enjoying the sun. The people are, of course, little more than dots since the level of detail in a composite postcard is very little. The recipient is given only a general sense of the main attractions of the town at a distance. This is also true of most resort landscape postcards of both select and popular resorts, which feature a single shot vista or an aerial view which communicate the scale and rational layout of the resort, or the aesthetic qualities of its natural landscape rather than any particular pleasures of a selected feature or attraction. The difference

FIGURE 6.2 COMPOSITE POSTCARDS, CLACTON AND FRINTON  
SOURCE: AUTHOR'S COLLECTION

between the popular and the select resort postcard are thus subtle, and lie mostly in the greater numbers of people pictured in the popular resort postcard rather than in the overall angle or composition.

The postcards also provide evidence on resort catchment areas, although the predominantly local Essex and Suffolk addresses of my own small collection point to the bias arising from their source in local postcard fairs. Simmill (1993) refers to postcard analysis for evidence on Morecambe's fairly narrow catchment area, but in the case of Clacton and Frinton the evidence of local postcards needs to be set in the evidence noted in Chapter Two of a wider catchment area centred on London and including the Midlands as well as East Anglia.

The postcard thus provided a way to both mark cultural preferences through the selection of images, and to formalise the communication of sentiment and status. The former point is of course the most significant for this study of resort image and social tone, but the latter has been flagged to illustrate the ways in which the creation of place image is linked to other social practices and the process of tourism. Resort-goers could have, after all, chosen to communicate with their friends and relations by means of a non-place specific postcard, greeting card, or by a letter, phone call or telegram. In choosing a comic or scenic postcard the sender is marking their status as a tourist, creating an 'object of travel' which defines the tourist experience along with the travel itself (see Lury 1997). The juxtaposition of specific place images with mundane messages brought exotic or at least different place into the realm of the everyday.

The place images of Clacton and Frinton were thus created in part by visual representations of the towns which gave even those who had never been there the sense that they might have been. An even stronger sense of ownership of a place was provided by photography, which by preserving a record of an individual's presence at a tourist site, or by the act of shooting a photograph, created a lasting link between the tourist and the tourist site (see Crawshaw 1997 and Taylor 1994). The act of being photographed also turned the tourist site into a stage set for the tourist as actor, heightening its perceived role as a site for escape and role-playing. An example of this from Clacton is provided by a 1924 fad observed by a Clacton beach inspector tracking an itinerant photographer:

Beach Inspector Sparrow said the defendant was working a new 'stunt' since the photographers were stopped in taking large groups in the Pier Gap on account of the obstruction they caused. This was 'walking snaps', taking photos of people as they walked and in consequence queues of people formed up to be taken and they walked 'in style' and they were watched by other people who were not in the focus of the cameras. He had counted as many as ten different groups of people walking to be photographed....the defendant was fined 10s (CTEEG 20/9/24).

Another option for being photographed was the 'whistle stop', where a photographer would blow a whistle and take a group shot of whoever might be at the beach which could be bought and collected later. As noted in the chapter on seafront activities, the presence of commercial photographers was a clear marker of a popular resort. The overtaking of commercial photography by amateur snapshotting during the interwar years largely removed this marker and also redefined the nature of the product, with snapshots more likely to preserve close-ups of individuals, thereby minimising the collective experience of holiday crowds and reducing the presence of the surroundings. Taylor (1994:122) notes the correspondence between the more individualistic nature of the snapshot and the perceived wishes of the expanding middle class market. 'Kodak, more than its British competitors, pursued nationwide campaigns appealing to the middle class through popular snapshotting, promising its members a relaxed and permanent world of reliable memories.' The snapshot promoted positive retrospective place images given that, as a history of the snapshot notes, 'When the sun

shone...it unleashed the combined recording power of millions of Kodaks. But when clouds gathered, when a sharp wind whipped up waves and the sea turned gray, the shutters were modestly silent' (King 1986:32). Thus, as with the postcard and the guidebook, the prevailing effect of the snapshot as a visual representation is to accentuate those sights and experiences worthy of the tourist gaze, standardising them in the process and sidelining negative memories. As the next section will argue, however, there is not a straightforward correlation between the creation of positive place images and their translation over the long term into accepted place myths.

### **IMAGE PERCEPTION**

The ways in which transmitted place images were actually perceived cannot be easily measured, but in the same way that advertising psychology has moved on from the simplistic view that consumers are unwitting dupes of product advertising, it cannot be assumed that boosterist seaside resort publicity and rosy visual representations were always taken at face value. Rojek (1997) has pointed to the importance of 'dragging' as a vital component of the tourist experience, where selections of images, selections and associations are drawn from a variety of sources to create composite and new values for a site. The accuracy of images is not an essential element of this process, since, Rojek observes, 'sights have produced a discursive level of densely embroidered false impressions, exaggerated claims and travel liars', in line with his proposition that 'myth and fantasy play an unusually large role in the social construction of all travel and tourist sights' (Rojek 1997:52-53). In this analysis, the popularity of a tourist sight is measured by the extent to which it creates and maintains images of myth and fantasy. With Clacton, this took such forms as claims to the status of 'Queen of the East Coast' and publicity utilising iconic images of the sun and bathing beauties. Visitors to Clacton would have arrived with an image bank already full of these positive associations as transmitted through such media as guidebooks, postcards, photographs, advertising, and word of mouth.

Appeals to fantasy also had a place at Frinton, albeit limited, in the transferred glamour to be derived from the presence in town of Royals and celebrities. In considering the history of Los Angeles, whose development owes a great deal to the peddling of place myths, Norman Klein (1997:29) argues that its promotional myths were ‘half fact, half cloaking device, a collective imaginary shared by those who ran policy’. Equally, those at the receiving end of these myths could have been expected to have varying levels of complicity in the willingness to suspend disbelief. This issue complicates the task of matching place images as found in media representations with their actual reception and subsequent incorporation into an evolving collective memory.

One simplistic quantitative measure of the success of place marketing efforts for popular resorts is the number of visitors, which as the second chapter details, rose steadily in Clacton over the interwar period. These raw numbers, of course, provide no qualitative information on the extent to which Clacton and Frinton visitors found a congruence between expectations created by publicity and the actual place as experienced. This sort of information is hard to come by, but one isolated example is a 1937 random survey conducted by the *Times* entitled ‘Visitors Have Their Say’. Over several weeks during the summer, a reporter chatted to a total of 48 visitors to Clacton, gathering their views on the town. The reporter’s overall summary of the comments was that people felt Clacton ‘caters for all types of visitors, with both entertainment and quiet’. This summary, however, obscured the more complicated relationship between perception and experience of place image and social tone expressed by many. The image for some, for example, of Clacton as a tripper resort seemed to have shaped their expectations, with one respondent commenting that he was ‘agreeably surprised, since one is apt to associate the place by its name with a certain atmosphere, a kind of rowdy place filled with trippers’ (CTEEG 21/8/37). One visitor had a clear perception of Clacton’s place within

the social hierarchy of resorts: Clacton is not equal to a place like Worthing, but you can't expect everything to be done at once', while another disagreed, stating that Clacton had 'a better type of people ...than you do at some of the South Coast resorts' (CTEEG 28/8/37, 4/9/37). These comments serve as a reminder that the publicity touting Clacton's claims to health and modernity and a certain degree of selectness needs to be set in the context of its status as a well-known easily accessed tripper destination. The prevalence of this latter image, judging by the first visitor comment above, was perhaps more commonly held by those who hadn't been to Clacton than those who had.

Those who actually lived in Clacton or were regular visitors are a source of perceptions on the intersection between booster rhetoric and the place as experienced. Their memories provide a more complex set of associations with a place than those of transitory visitors and accentuate the positive qualities that led people to return to favourite holiday destinations and/or to retire there. This 'vernacular landscape', which is worthy of a study in its own right, is 'layered with the traces of previous generations' struggles to earn a living, raise children, and participate in community life' (Hayden 1995: 15, see also Jackson 1984:xii). Memories of the vernacular landscape, however, are intertwined with life stories, so that extraction of capsule summaries of the extent to which a place was select or popular violates the integrity of a narrative interweaving place, memory and change. The recollection of the Young brothers, for example, of Clacton during the interwar years as 'very much a middle-class town' needs to be set within the context of their parents' positive perception of this status as providing opportunities for employment and mobility, with their father able to find construction work building the new suburbs. Equally, Ralph Rouse's evocation of maids carrying silver tea services across the Frinton greensward for teas, recalls an era when social distance was greater for him personally, since his parents were labourers. The role of individual memory in the

creation of place myth is a large topic, but a brief mention is made of it here as a reminder of its contribution to place image over the long term. In Clacton and Frinton, nostalgic images held by earlier visitors and residents of childhood experiences in the interwar years have fuelled their postwar transformation into retirement centres.

Seaside resort images were thus perceived at varying levels of involvement. The widespread circulation of seaside resort publicity and their frequent representation in the popular media and a variety of visual forms ensured a higher profile for them than the average inland town, allowing even those who had not visited them to retain some sort of pre-conceptions about what they were like. Equally, their status as tourist towns meant that more people would have been likely to have actually seen them, reflecting both the influx of visitors and the seasonal workforce.

## **CONCLUSION**

This chapter has examined the significance of the selection, production and transmission of interwar seaside resort place images, and has contended that all these aspects of place image were affected by the effort to create and maintain a particular social tone. In selecting place images, popular resorts such as Clacton found the metaphor of the 'modern' woman appealing in that it epitomised a stance 'midway between the boiled shirt and nudism' which they hoped would aid in their difficult balancing act of broadening popular appeal while retaining some measure of selectness. The popular resorts tended to draw upon a common pool of images, with iconic representations of sun, sea, and bathing beauties presented in stylised modernistic graphic form in the resort advertising of the period. This choice and use of images put the interwar popular resorts very much in the forefront of the interwar popular imagination, a vanguard role which the select resorts shied away from because of the negative associations

with mass culture. Competing to be the best in providing a generic product, popular resorts varied in the ways in which they reconciled the limits imposed by financial limitations and political disputes with the desire of each resort to outdo its rivals in the quantity and innovation of its publicity. The study of these differences has formed the mainstay of historical critiques of interwar seaside resorts, but a more inclusive approach has been adopted here, which has looked to other forms of representation as well for markers delineating social tone. Among these, the comic postcard is the most archetypal marker of the popular resort, but scenic postcards, press booster rhetoric, guidebooks, and photographs also signified social tone in both their form and content, along with helping to structure the tourist experience. The select resort, by contrast, sought to minimise representations, in line with the equation of selectness with exclusivity. While Clacton, as a popular resort, broadcast all of its attractions as widely as possible, Frinton preserved its social cachet by restricting publicity, in particular concerning Royal visits.

When representations are combined with collective memories and myths; when the active creation of metaphors and allusions is viewed in context with their perception or equally mis-perception, the result is a multi-layered 'place myth'. These are particularly in evidence at seaside resorts, because of their functions as tourist towns and sites for the consumption of novel experiences. The concluding chapter will argue that the context for the present-day creation of seaside resort place myths has changed from that of modernity to one of nostalgia, but the process of creating and selling them still continues.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### CONCLUSION

#### RISE AND FALL VS CONTINUITIES AND CHANGE

*The Rise and Fall of British Coastal Resorts*, the title of a 1997 collection of essays, epitomises the currently prevalent grand narrative of the English seaside resort, in which golden years, of either the Victorian/Edwardian or interwar period, are succeeded by postwar decay. This thesis has argued that this mechanistic view, the view that also is part of the tourist cycle model, is flawed when viewed at close hand. Instead of the rise and fall of the resort, this work has stressed the continuing tension between the production of image and its experience, along with the contested nature of the use of the unique seafront spaces. The particular approach taken here, that of a case study of two representative types of resorts during a fairly narrow time period, has been intended to show both the importance of long-lasting differences between popular and select resorts as well as the complex effects of change on the role of all types of seaside holidays and resorts.

This thesis has explored the tensions informing the vitality of the interwar years and its expression in built environments, activities, social protocols, entertainment, visual media, memories, and written sources. Key among those tensions is the differentiation of popular and select resorts, as seen in a number of different ways, such as the markets they attracted; the facilities they provided; the social codes that prevailed; and the image they projected. A number of historical works have approached this phenomenon in other resorts, primarily for early periods, and this thesis has drawn upon this work in analysing the structural components which gave Clacton and Frinton their defining popular or select characteristics. Chapter Two

followed very much in the footsteps of other seaside town academic studies which have outlined the links between social tone and economic, political, demographic, and social determinants.

The next four chapters were intended to extend the conventional approach through a detailed analysis of what popular and select meant in practice, in addition to the structures behind it. Popular and select have thus been defined as a habitus of inter-linked lifestyle choices that extends beyond a characterisation of popular resorts as working class and select as upper class. The arguments made about how distinctions between popular and select were created and maintained have been supported by specific examples drawn from the built environment, social relations, and physical activities. These have been treated as supplying equally rich insights into the nature of popular and select as the local political power structure or patterns of land ownership.

Examples drawn from the built environment have illustrated the critical role of spatial expressions of social tone. The golf club, for example, has been put forward as the epitome of the select space in its restricted access and extensive manicured open spaces, while the Pier has been counterpoised as a symbol of the popular resort for its commercial, garish amusements and crowded spaces. The degree to which spaces were public or private, commercial or non-commercial, natural or artificial thus all contributed to the multi-layered socially constructed meaning of popular and select built environments. The beach hut provided a further example of this point, and it was shown to have more than a functional purpose arising from its descent from the bathing machine. It came to serve as a signifier of a select resort in its demarcation of private space and status as offshoots of grander main houses, and accordingly came to dominate

the seafront at Frinton. Clacton, as a popular resort, limited their spread since they were thought to be inappropriate for an entirely public space.

Formal and informal codes governing appropriate behaviour and activities have also been analysed as expressions of social tone. At Frinton, selectness was sustained as much as by informal social sanctions as by explicit legislative and economic barriers. A number of barriers to popular activities such as picnicking, drinking and bus travel were demonstrated to have been upheld more by social sanctions and widely prevalent assumptions rather than by explicit legal prohibitions. These were assumed to be sufficiently robust to withstand challenges to selectness well into the future, as evidenced by a fanciful session of the Clacton Debating Society in 1937, which considered the topic 'Clacton Fifty Years Hence'. While Clacton was predicted to continue to be in the forefront of modernity, with 'helicopters and autogyros landing or taking off'...from its 'flat-roofed graceful buildings', Frinton, meanwhile, would be continuing to 'discourage anything vulgar', with nets in place to 'prevent air traffic from landing in the streets' (CTEEG 9/1/37).

The regulation of activities at Clacton reflected the tension between accommodating the mass market while retaining some pretensions to selectness. The tidying up of Pier Gap and the consolidation of commercial activity on the Pier, for example, was thought to preserve a general appearance of restraint and order commensurate with pretensions to selectness while popular commercialism could still be accommodated within a manageable area. Another example of attempts to strike the right balance between popularity and selectness was the debate over Sunday entertainment. The issue of whether or not jazz concerts were appropriate for Sundays was taken particularly seriously because of the perceived ramifications for Clacton's social

tone. Ultimately, however, Clacton's claims to selectness, limited as they were, were eroded by the ever-increasing prominence of popular developments such as the Pier, Jaywick, and Butlins. In this trend to an ever more 'popular' social tone, Clacton shared structural similarities with other medium-sized resorts responding to new forms of holidaymaking and increases in numbers of holidaymakers, but which lacked the space of larger resorts to accommodate select areas well away from new popular attractions. In reaching decisions on the location and nature of new developments, the Councils of medium-sized resorts such as Clacton, Morecambe, or Bognor Regis tended to be swayed by the perceived imperatives of progress and the allure of the modern rather than by concerns over loss of a select social tone. The stakes involved were not always clear, however, and in Morecambe in particular Simmill (1993:96) judges that the interwar Council failed to judge the positive actions needed accurately, leaving a legacy of confusion. The greater commitment to tourism of Clacton's interwar council did not ensure a unified or consistent approach to the new environments developed by private entrepreneurs, so by the postwar years, it was the images established by Kingsman, Stedman, and Butlin that defined the overall place image of Clacton.

The consideration of representations of social tone has thus led on to a more general assessment of the nature of enduring place images. The lines between 'social tone' and 'image' are not clear, but the introduction explained that the risk of confusion has been taken because both concepts are necessary to explore the links between class; the nature of the holiday experience; the physical character of different places; and their representation in place image. The thesis argued for the broadening of the historical debate on social tone to incorporate concerns with the tourist experience and the symbolic value of representations. Accentuating the cultural history component, however, did not entail the abandonment of social tone as the appropriate term to describe the class-based nuances of difference between popular and select.

‘Social tone’ accordingly was used to refer to distinctions between popular and select resorts, while ‘image’ was applied to the more general issues of the social construction of place myths and the ways in which the seaside holiday experience attained its wider interwar importance as a symbol of escape and modernity. The overlap reflects the thesis’ focus on both differences between resorts and the overall cultural significance of the interwar resort.

Representations of Clacton and Frinton in visual, written, and oral form have been contended to have had a strong influence in shaping self-perpetuating place myths, whereby a seaside resort assumed to be select or popular maintains that status by continual reinforcement in the representations of wider popular culture. The point of a place myth is that it produces a generally held set of assumptions about a place, assumptions which do not need to be firmly grounded in fact. Frinton, for example, sustained its select reputation through place myths stressing the restrictions on such seaside activities as picnicking, commercial entertainment, or drinking. The Frinton place myth exaggerated the extent to which these restrictions were upheld in law, but the assumption that restrictions did have the force of law in all cases, when combined with unofficial social sanctions, seem to have been enough to give them an equivalent force in practice.

The perpetuation of place myths relied on their dissemination through a wide range of written, visual and oral means. Chapter Six detailed the ways in which interwar seaside resorts sought to create their own positive place myths of the modern, sunny resort through advertising, as well as the equally significant role of other publicity such as guidebooks and postcards. The choices of new graphic styles and evocative motifs such as the sun were highlighted as important components of the creation of a marketable modern image. The chapter also detailed

the spread of resort place myths through more indirect mechanisms, such as the boosterist rhetoric of the local papers, comments on postcards, and photographs.

Resort media representations are but one of the places where ‘modern’ images predominate, and also include the modern built environments discussed in Chapter Three, the modern social practices and fashions discussed in Chapter Four, and the modern entertainment, amusements and sports discussed in Chapter Five. Modernity, as perceived at the interwar seaside town, incorporated discourses drawn from such different disciplines as health, planning, advertising, and municipal politics and included qualities of femininity, hygiene, progress, and efficiency. This was epitomised by the metaphor of the seaside town as a modern woman, an image which could then be favourably counterpoised to the masculine, industrial world of urban hinterlands.

The analysis of the interwar concept of modernity has thus arguably proved instructive on two fronts. Firstly, the desire to be seen as ‘modern’ served as a touchstone for debates over social tone. This thesis has noted that agreement on the utility of a modern image in theory often broke down in practice over differences of opinion as to what being ‘modern’ actually meant, in particular whether it would promote or detract from a more select social tone. Both adherents and opponents to Jaywick, Butlin’s and the Frinton Park Estate classed their positions as progressive and modern, the supporters presenting themselves as populists and in the vanguard of the latest trends, while the opponents presenting themselves as standard bearers of rational planning. In either case, the proponents considered their actions followed on from a desire to improve the standing and competitiveness of their resort, whether it be by attracting growth or preserving elements of selectness.

Secondly, the particular definition of modernity at the seaside provides an insight into wider contemporary social trends. The seaside resort has normally been considered as an end product rather than as an initiator of these trends, due to their status as towns of consumption of leisure rather than producers of goods, and their physical location at the periphery away from centres of political and economic power. This thesis has argued against the formulation of the seaside resort as a 'place on the margin' and has instead documented ways in which the towns were setting rather than following trends, in the process arguably prefiguring the postwar domination of service economies and consumer culture in a number of ways. Seaside towns have been presented as epitomising 'modern' trends in the fragmented occupational structure of their service-led economies; the appearance of the latest fashions in entertainment, architecture, and consumer culture; their efforts to follow 'progressive' policies of governance and planning; and their redefinition of social norms and behaviour in activities such as bathing .

The example of the interwar seaside resort thus provides a useful contribution to current debates seeking to refine the chronology of modernity in twentieth century Britain. A critique of a conference attempting to pinpoint the arrival of full-blown consumerism in postwar Britain noted that modernity remains a contested term, 'vague, slippery yet voguish' (Vernon 1997:208). In the context of contemporary debates seeking to periodise and define modernity it is useful to consider earlier conflicting definitions and assumptions about the first sightings of 'modern' trends. The late Thirties at the seaside resort prefigure many trends in social relations and consumerism that are usually dated as beginning in the postwar period for England as a whole. For example, the chapter on bathing rituals and fashion highlighted the dramatic social, economic, and technological changes of the interwar years which transformed the attire, practice and significance of bathing from an therapeutic, probably unpleasent medical treatment, taken in an uncomfortable and ill-fitting garment, to a hedonistic sun-worshiping

ritual, taken in a scantier, more fashionable swimsuit and linked with a more relaxed attitude to the body. A photograph of the early 1920s beach shows the beach-goers fully and formally clothed, while a similar photograph for the late 1930s shows fewer clothes and more beach wear - visual evidence of the dramatic social changes of the interwar years. The subsequent dramatic ruptures of World War II arguably tended to obscure the extent to which social transformations were already well under way by the end of the Thirties.

A nostalgic view of the Fordist worker enjoying his two week's holiday in one resort with his family counterpoises nicely with that of a post-Fordist consumer flitting from one transient simulacra to another, but it ignores the extent to which the seaside holiday has always had its 'post-modern' elements of pastiche, consumerism, and transience. This is not meant as an argument that the interwar seaside resort was an early example of post-modern consumer culture, but rather that the case for a distinct post-modern society often conveniently ignores 'post-modern' elements from earlier periods in order to create a clear rupture between modern and post-modern (see Harvey 1989 for definitions of modern and post-modern). Urry (1988:47, 1997:112), for example considers that seaside attractions are 'near the bottom of the hierarchy of the extraordinary'. A later expansion on this theme contends that the current seaside resort suffered from comparisons both with other current leisure attractions and with its earlier incarnations:

...multiple and changing experiences organized through the dynamic of instantaneous time seem to be straightforwardly less pleasurable than those pleasures which were once enjoyed in the English seaside resorts. These were pleasure that derived from familiarity, from the reinforcing of group norms, from the replication of similar activities year on year. Our contemporary social practices are not so organized around these spatial and temporal regularities. They are pleasures of the new, the fickle, the unexpected; and resorts are weakly placed to attract many visitors since they lie near the bottom of what I have described as the consumption spaces hierarchy (Urry 1997:112).

This formulation arguably paints an idealised view of the earlier seaside holiday that is not grounded in empirical evidence and ignores continuities, to paint clear black and white

distinctions between the 'extraordinary' pre World War II resort and the 'poor taste' of post-modern era resorts. The interwar resort may indeed have had the appeal of familiarity, but this work has argued that the predominant tone of interwar representations of the resorts was to stress the opposite: 'the pleasures of the new, the fickle, the unexpected'. These latter qualities normally are essential components of what Urry (1990) considers to be the tourist gaze and the tourist's need to experience difference, and it is puzzling to find opposite qualities of familiarity valorised by him as priorities for interwar resort-goers. This is perhaps because the interwar tourist could be considered to epitomise a Fordist consumer, conditioned by routine and industrial work rhythms, which Urry considers has been replaced by the more unsettled consumerist post-modern tourist. Ritzer (1997), however, has posed the continuing appeal of mass 'McDisneyized' experiences which can be considered to be as familiar and predictable at modern day theme parks as they were at interwar resorts. Another way of addressing the contrast is through different tourist typologies which post-modern lifestyles have promoted ranging from the 'allocentric' or adventuresome tourist, to the 'psychocentric' or package tourist (Shaw 1994:71). These typologies, however, are primarily designed to address the marketing needs of travel companies rather than provide an explanation of place images. Given the difficulties of establishing boundaries between modern and post-modern that may not exist, it seems more useful to stress the historical specificity of a term such as modern. Interwar modernity, it has been argued here, is accordingly the keystone of a different discourse than pre-WWI or post WWII modernity, and additionally, has a particular character when applied to the seaside resort. The resulting definition incorporating progress, hygiene, rationality, femininity, and relaxation in behavioural codes has thus been contended to be the hallmark of the English interwar seaside resort.

Relaxation of behavioural codes was always relative of course. The extent to which the seaside holiday and the seaside resort were places apart and sites for escape and transgression has been weighed against the evidence of numerous restrictions on behaviour and activity. The concept of liminality initially appealed as a way of addressing these issues, as deployed by writers such as Urry and Shields who use it as a defining characteristic of the beach. On closer examination, however, the concept appears less useful, as it forces the seaside resort into an artificially dichotomous relationship with other urban centres in which they are peripheral sites of 'Low' culture. This formulation certainly does not apply to the select resort, and the popular resort is better understood as expressing tensions between prevailing social norms and new consumer trends defining expectations of leisure time. While liminal images presented in seaside publicity and representational media, such as the comic postcard, have a certain reality of their own in attracting visitors and creating place myths, these myths were always filtered through economic and social restraints which varied over time and between select and popular resorts. Furthermore, social practice adapted to lessen the liminal aspects of certain behaviours, such as sun bathing.

Part of the argument that seaside resorts are not 'places at the margin' shaped entirely by forces emanating from central urban areas includes the importance of the role of individuals and groups at the resorts in shaping place image. The thesis has accordingly stressed the significance of individual entrepreneurs and interest groups in directing development, particularly in Clacton. The absence of large national corporate interests in the two towns left scope for the particularly strong influence of individual entrepreneurs, in a manner more characteristic of the Victorian era than of advanced capitalism. The fragile nature of the consensus in favour of municipal intervention has been identified as a key variable, both in abetting the prominence of entrepreneurs and in ensuring that Clacton's identity as a tourist

town was continually in front of the public for discussion and definition. It is important to stress the importance of local government in both promoting seaside resorts and in providing and servicing infrastructure, given that that role is not always recognised. A report shaping recent policy directions for the Clacton and Frinton area, for example, commented that during the interwar years, 'local authorities saw their role as being one of providing a clean, welcoming environment, but little more' (Breheny 1992:83). Downplaying the previous important role of seaside resort local government makes it easier to downplay its current role.

Perceptions of the two resorts were created and maintained by a variety of built, written, visual and oral sources and forms. While the analysis of Clacton and Frinton has relied largely on newspapers to build up a day-to-day picture of the interwar years, the methodology used here has combined official written sources with visual, oral, and architectural sources. This inclusive methodological approach is a logical extension of the central importance assigned to representations in expressing and creating place image. The evidence of such artefacts of seaside tourism as photographs, the built environment, guidebooks and postcards is also essential to support the argument that the seaside interwar resort was in the vanguard of the development of leisure and consumer trends. Photographs, for example provide visual evidence of changing beach fashions and rituals, while the type of photograph, be it tintype, whistle stop commercial photo, or snapshot, bears witness to the changes in commercial photography and the growth of amateur photography.

This study, a case study of two particular towns during an under-researched period, is intended firstly, to contribute to the overall historiography of seaside towns. The case has been made for the need for historical analysis of image-dependent seaside resorts to grant social

ritual, built form, and representations in popular culture co-equal status with the formal structures of land ownership, economic activity, and political power. Clacton and Frinton have been argued to be prototypical popular and select resorts, based on the evidence of generally prevailing assumptions and on the differences between the two resorts themselves. Detailed evidence on other interwar resorts is patchy, and further comparative case studies would be of interest which range across social, economic, political and cultural determinants of interwar resorts. Cross-cultural and cross-temporal resort case studies would also throw light on the nuances of the cultural and historical role of the holiday and resort, such in the manner of Walton's essay exploring the similarities and differences of the effect of World War I on the economic and social structures of Blackpool and San Sebastian in Spain (Walton 1996). Postwar resorts still largely fall within the remit of tourism and cultural studies grappling with their current status and there are few historical studies other than Demetriadi's (1994) economic and policy-oriented study of postwar Blackpool. The tourist resort model sees the resorts struggling to halt a virtually terminal decline, and the cultural studies model equally grants them little hope for stimulating the tourist gaze.

A number of questions have also been raised by this thesis' exploration of the cultural and spatial significance of the seaside resort and holiday. The argument that the seaside towns are not simply places on the margin includes the point that they deserve more prominence in debates considering the chronology and meaning of modernity and the development of consumer culture. The history of seaside resort towns as service-based sites of consumption is of particular interest given the increasing prominence of this economic and spatial model, with more and more places seeking to sell themselves based on image rather than on products. The process of image re-invention, as carried out at the resorts, is worthy of further investigation both in terms of the resorts' own future and the revitalisation of other tourist sites.

## KEY POSTWAR IMAGES

Tensions over image continue to bedevil present day seaside resorts, and as is frequently the case with the particular choice of a historical subject, the impetus of current concerns prompts and magnifies interest in previous experiences. This does not mean that extensive parallels will be drawn between the present and the interwar years, but my fascination with the resorts and opposition to typecasting them as places on the margin does lend this work a certain air of advocacy, which extends to wishing to see a higher current profile for them as well as more detailed and critical examinations of lessons to be learned from their past history.

The thesis has sought to illustrate the importance of representation at the seaside resort by highlighting key forms and images such as the metaphor of the interwar resort as a modern woman. Representations of place image continue to define the resorts, and to illustrate that point the postwar status of Clacton and Frinton will now be noted briefly using four vignettes of key images. Two are from the 1960s - the first class City commuter experience for Frinton and the Mods and Rockers moral panic for Clacton, and two are from the 1990s - the incursion of a pub in Frinton and the Clacton Common Factory Village in Clacton. These images are intended to illustrate the points that firstly, earlier defining qualities of popular and select continue to resonate in later place images, and secondly, place myths continue to be created for the seaside resorts, entailing the filtering of perception and experience through various forms of representation. The following examples were selected on the basis that they illustrated key events, rituals, or places that were transformed by media, myth and memory into defining elements of Frinton or Clacton's postwar place images.

Postwar Frinton certainly showed few outward expressions of the structural changes which increased the percentage of the town's retired population, many of whom lived in new bungalows outside the gates; removed Frinton from the society pages; closed hotels; and curtailed the supply of domestic servants to large houses. These changes were masked by the maintenance, and even intensification, of earlier regulations and informal protocols enforcing select behaviour. It was in the postwar years, after all, rather in the interwar years that the Council erected the signs without Home Office approval that prohibited picnicking on the Greensward. A particularly apposite example of the way in which Frinton's insularity sustained select institutions and rituals during the immediate postwar years was the experience of commuting into London enjoyed by City businessmen resident in London. Eric Bland, an accountant who worked in Colchester but who commuted into London once a week, recalled the experience was 'like being in a club'.

I remember catching a train at about eight o'clock which had a restaurant car, and you could have a jolly good breakfast - you could have your kippers or bacon and eggs - we had a sort of club car in first class where we used to play bridge. There used to be a number of us who would play bridge on the way up. We used to have a debate just before we got to Liverpool Street whether or not there was time for another hand - ditto on the way back. There was a train at 5:30. There again, you could have your drinks and play cards.

This example obviously does not relate to the townscape itself, but it does evoke the way in which the residents of the town could sustain a network of select environments. The atmosphere of the Golf Club or hotel restaurant at Frinton or London gentlemen's club was indistinguishable from that of the first class club car. The continuity between all these environments was not disrupted by contact with wider popular culture, which was kept at bay by the strength of formal and informal economic and social barriers maintained by those with political and economic power, nor did these environments change quickly in response to new trends. The above description no doubt could apply equally well to the interwar as well as the early postwar years. In retrospect, the now vanished ritual of the train journey remains in the

memory of Frinton residents as a synecdoche of the shared values and self-containment of their select community.

While the example from Frinton illustrates the ways in which its residents preserved its rituals, the Mods and Rockers 'moral panic' which affected Clacton along with other South-east coast seaside resorts in the 1960s provides an excellent example of the way in which place image can be negatively affected by assumptions about people, places and events which were either incorrect or blown out of proportion. Stanley Cohen's (1987) dissection of the Mods and Rockers presence at seaside resorts in the 1960s focuses on the development of youth cultures and the social reaction to 'deviant' behaviour. His idea of a 'moral panic' used to describe the exaggerated response to the behaviour of a sub-culture can also, however, be transferred to the places where the behaviour occurs as well as to the people involved. He chronicles how fairly small scale incidents between rival groups of youth and between youths and the police at Clacton during the Easter holiday of 1964 were magnified by the press into a 'Day of Terror by Scooter Groups', when 'Wild Ones Invade Seaside - 97 Arrests'. This over-exaggeration led both to the labelling of the teenagers involved as 'folk devils' and to the strong identification of popular seaside resorts with deviant behaviour, to the extent that 'a word such as "Clacton" acquired symbolic powers. It became meaningful to say "we don't want another Clacton here"' (Cohen 1987:40).

This sort of identification of course did nothing to further Clacton's tourism industry, which, while comparatively healthy in the 50s and 60s, was declining over the long term in the face of changing markets, consumer preferences, and structural transformations to the seaside tourist industry. Foreign competition from sunnier destinations was the most obvious challenge, but Demetriadi (1994) argues that the lack of national support for the seaside tourism

industry were important along with the inadequacy of the local response to changes in demand. The ever increasing numbers of retired residents and the closure of large hotels to be replaced by caravan parks and self-catering accommodation reduced the constituency which, in the interwar years, had supported a pro-active stance towards tourism. The post-war Council in Clacton sought to diversify Clacton's economic base into light industry, with only limited success, and there was little new public or private investment into tourist infrastructure and services. With less positive publicity in circulation, negative publicity, such as that generated by the Mods and Rockers, assumed greater influence, feeding into an increasingly prevalent place myth which summed up Clacton as 'downmarket'.

Frinton, it has just been contended, sustained its select, if not fashionable, reputation through the 1970s, but more recent developments have challenged its ability to restrict unwanted incursions from popular culture. The wider network of select institutions which sustained the select resort have been transformed. The leisurely commute to a sinecure in the City, for example, has vanished in the wake of the privatisation of British Rail and the Big Bang. It retains its select reputation, but 'selectness', however, no longer retains any associations with fashionableness. It is instead seen as a rearguard action by its largely retired population to keep the 'real world' out. Thus, opposition to the granting of planning permission by Tendring District Council for a pub in Frinton amidst the shops on its main street, rated national media coverage as a manifestation of its residents' anachronistic attitude. One article, entitled 'Frinton is braced for loosening of moral standards' contended that the town was 'laughably out of date', with the inference that its place image was defined by an antiquated moral code (Ind 20/2/99). Many Frintonians meanwhile, see the battle as one defined by diminishing local political prerogatives as much as moral or social image. The swallowing up of Frinton and Walton Urban District Council by Tendring District Council (TDC) in 1974 is

seen by Frintonians interviewed for this thesis as a key moment, leading to the loss of Frinton's autonomy. TDC, for example, ended the policy restricting some of the beach huts to Frinton residents, which Frintonians had defended as a way of limiting the price escalation of the free market (as well as of course keeping non-locals out). Local government is now seen as working against resident interest rather than in tandem with it. The efforts by the Cooper Estate at the turn of the last century to establish a permanently select resort have thus not been as watertight as originally conceived, in spite of its imposition of legal covenants. In some senses, this is not important since, as this thesis has argued, social convention is an equally important means of upholding selectness. Social convention, and lack of economic demand, will no doubt continue to minimise the incursion of non-select businesses and clientele into Frinton. The presence of a pub in Frinton is more of a symbolic issue, representing the weakening of a formerly clear convergence between social convention, legal restriction, and economic demand that previously allowed Frinton a high degree of local control in determining the nature of its visitor and resident population. It will not of course on its own alter Frinton's character, but it denotes that Frinton is no longer seen as a bastion of the Establishment which is always able to exclude mass culture. Equally, metaphors of the modern young woman have disappeared from media references to the seaside resort. Instead, we have Frinton as 'a mad old aunt in a print frock you laugh at but always want to give a great big hug' (Ind 30/5/98). (While lacking the glamour of interwar imagery, Frintonians would probably not mind this sort of condescending characterisation of a select character if it works to dissuade unwanted visitors.)

If Frinton is resisting the incursion of new trends and a corporately defined popular culture, Clacton, harking back to its interwar efforts to be 'modern', is again seeking to reposition its image to be more up-to-date, this time in a post-modern guise. 'Clacton Common', a 'factory shopping village' on the outskirts of Clacton turns away from offering a promise of

escape linked directly to the existing seafront at Clacton, now considered downmarket. It instead links the shopping experience to a thoroughly imaginary seaside resort cast in communitarian terms, i.e. 'Common' and 'village', complete with a 'Victorian village square'. Wedding nostalgia to consumerism, the sales pitch to attract firms to take up space in the development is packaged in forms associated with the interwar popular resort- the slogan and the postcard (Fig. 7.1). In the post-modern tradition of ironic eclecticism, the images allude to a variety of seaside resorts with Skegness's slogan modified to 'richness is so bracing', and a miniature Brighton Pavilion behind the motoring couple having a grand day out, producing an image of a composite resort. Punch and Judy, meanwhile, feature in the extensive southeastern region poster and media advertising campaign for Clacton Common. On site, the references become more sparse. There are awnings, a play boat in the 'Victorian village square' and Punch and Judy dolls in vacant units, but whether these touches are enough to justify the Council's claim that it 'resembles a 30s and 40s seaside village' is questionable (Tendring 1998:6). The degree of resemblance, however, is not important as long as the images are attractive enough to lure shoppers to the site.

Just as in the interwar years, the marketing and representation of a place image, be it modern or nostalgic, is as important as the actual environment of the destination. Arguably, however, the interwar visitor found more of a match between the imagery and the actual environment, with its examples of modern architecture, entertainment, fashions and behaviour, than the present day shopper, who must expect to derive satisfaction from shopping bargains rather than the sense of being in an interwar seaside town. There is certainly nothing in the merchandise on sale, bland architecture, or industrial park siting that distinguishes Clacton Common from any other factory outlet. Clacton Common currently does not have many nearby rivals, but its non-place specific formula could be easily replicated elsewhere, leaving it open to

FIGURE 7.1 PROMOTIONAL MATERIAL FOR CLACTON COMMON

competition from new rivals. Whether the seaside imagery and a shuttle bus service will encourage shoppers to venture into Clacton proper remains to be seen. If they do come, to encourage them to stay, the gap between nostalgic imagery and present-day reality will need to be narrowed by a renewed focus of debate and investment on the seafront. This comment is informed by the argument of this thesis that the combination of general agreement on the town's role as a tourist town, continual debate and attention to place-specific strategies to re-invent the seafront and its image, gave the interwar years in Clacton a particular vitality that facilitated expansion and the enhancement of its popular status. This is not to characterise the interwar years as a halcyon period, given that along with the tensions generated within the period itself, Clacton's expansion proved to be into a market that subsequently either abandoned Clacton for foreign climes in the postwar years, or branded it with a 'downmarket' image. The point here is that, with the seaside resorts' rich history of re-inventing themselves, a place like Clacton would seem to have plenty of architectural, natural, and historic references to repackage now that are more unique than those provided by the formulaic approach of corporate capital.

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CTEEG: *East Coast Advertiser and Clacton News* (1919- 1927), thereafter, *Clacton Times and East Essex Gazette* - (1927-1939).

DT: *Daily Telegraph*.  
Ind: *Independent*.  
IoS: *Independent on Sunday*.  
*Times*.

### **Interviews**

#### **Interwar Residents**

Joyce Bates  
Eric Bland  
Louisa Carr  
Frederick Cook  
Helen Plumpton  
Ralph Rouse  
Honor Smith  
Robin Tomkins  
Reg and Bob Young

#### **Additional Sources**

Malcolm Batty  
John Bond  
Roger Kennell  
J.P. McLarney  
Mr. and Mrs. Leslie Price  
Jane Quick  
Kenneth Walker