

Radical changes in the transport infrastructure ⁴¹ and shifts in the definition of ‘respectability’ within the social groups that made up the working-class population of Norwich were clearly important in shaping the new developments in the use of leisure-time in the second half of Victoria’s reign. The pleasure gardens were perceived to have ‘deteriorated’ once those who might have gone in the past would do so no more. Perhaps ‘respectability’ had had to be redefined by those making a relative social advance that took them beyond the world of the pleasure garden; perhaps those social groups within the working classes who once would neither have been able to afford to nor have dared to set foot in a pleasure garden were now confident enough to do so. What becomes more certain as the argument of this chapter develops, is the degree to which a man could be defined in social terms by the public house in which he drank. A full understanding of the social hierarchy of the drinking place in Victorian Norwich is probably no longer possible; yet there is sufficient evidence to point out that it once existed. Such nuances of social hierarchy were subtler than the crude division between rough and respectable that contemporaries made and some later historians have followed.⁴² Drinking places and their customers gained their reputations not least because of the activities associated with them. All drinking places shared the convivial, pleasure-seeking features common to that way of life, but important social differences were registered by the leisure-pursuits that accompanied the drinking and those nuances became more significant in the last few decades of Victoria’s reign as the range of leisure activities widened. If the Norwich drinker was watching fewer prize-fights or walking-matches by 1901, he might be more likely to be a member of a pub-based cycling club, or caged bird society, or a club for fishing or bowling or gardening.⁴³ The pub remained the main organising centre for these new developments within the working classes and their ways of making meaning when not at work.⁴⁴