General editor's foreword

Brad Beaven's wide-ranging, readable and impressively researched book constitutes a major contribution to the ongoing debate about the nature and scope of working-class male leisure in the period 1850–1945. Recently class has been downplayed by scholars in favour of gender, generation and income as principal determinants in the nature of working-class leisure. Dr Beaven does not deny the importance of these factors, but powerfully argues for the continuing importance of class and in particular an active engagement in and contestation with popular culture by working-class males.

To make his case, he analyses the efforts of a succession of essentially middle-class interventions aimed at promoting improving pastimes and creating a sense of responsible citizenship in the working-class male. They included the rational recreation advocates from Salvationists to socialists, paternalist employers providing company-based activities, uniformed youth movements and government agencies like the wartime Council for the Encouragement of Music and the Arts. He examines the successive debates about and inquiries into such concerns as youthful hooliganism, suburban neurosis and the Americanisation of inter-war teenagers, and considers the moral panics about the deleterious influence of various aspects of popular culture.

In parallel with this strand of investigation, Dr Beaven charts the growth of the commercialised leisure industries: mass-produced literature, the music

hall, association football, cinema and wireless. He assesses the extent and nature of working-class male participation in such activities.

Throughout the book, Dr Beaven engages thoughtfully and constructively with a wide range of secondary literature, including the most recent scholarship. He also deploys a mass of fresh primary research, particularly in the hitherto comparatively neglected areas of the Midlands and Southeast, to support his argument. The whole adds up to a fresh, vivid and thought-provoking interpretation of a subject central to the history of popular culture.

Jeffrey Richards