Perception and practice of boundaries in London recreation, 1760-1820

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On 25 June 1797 George Macaulay “dined in the Boro' with [his] friend Parkinson en famille and in the evening walked thro' some Gardens near the Kentish Road at the expense of one half penny each.” Macaulay wrote: “We met and saw a variety of people who had Heads on their shoulders, and eyes and Legs and Arms like ourselves, but in every other respect as different from the Race of Mortals we meet at the west end of the Town and in the more polished circles of Society as a native of Bengal from a Laplander. This observation may be applied with great Truth in a general way, to the whole of the Borough and all that there-in is... their dress is not equal to what we meet in the City or in Westminster...indeed upon the whole they are one hundred years behind hand in Civilization. I must not however omit their Hospitality and kindness which if to be measured by Mr. Parkinson's Standard is at least equal to the best in either of the other Cities.”¹

Just as Macaulay separated the people living south of the river from those to the north during a transpontine excursion, one of James Boswell’s trips into the city prompted him to comment on how conversation east of Temple Bar was “quite the London style—the City style.” But both of these incidents also show that differences between court, City, and Southwark did not prevent people from moving between the various administrative jurisdictions in London, indeed Macaulay lived south of London Bridge.

Recitations of the differences between the City and the Court ends of town were commonplace in eighteenth-century descriptions of London life.² Historians of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries have long been aware of the negative cultural characteristics attributed to residents of the City of London by residents of Westminster.

The mockery directed at the vulgar ‘cit’ is tied to the City dweller’s role as an oafish interloper as well as to his or her lack of genuine taste. Less common are comments like Macaulay’s that contrast the style of the City and the Court with Southwark or the surrounding countryside.

This paper analyzes the differences between the City, Westminster, Southwark, and the counties of Middlesex and Surrey in terms of recreation and examines the extent to which the perceived cultural differences could have been the result of separate cultural centers within the metropolis. As will become clear, administrative boundaries were regularly crossed as people accessed recreational spaces, but, apart from a handful of important exceptions, crossing the boundary between the City and Westminster did not lead people to occupy the same spaces. Residents of Southwark, on the other hand, did go to a variety of spaces where City residents spent their time, suggesting that the City had a closer cultural affinity with the borough and the surrounding counties than with Westminster. This provides an opportunity to think about the cultural centers of London’s population and the possibility that the City, rather than Westminster, served as the focus for cultural activity east of Temple Bar and South of the river.

I

Historians have been quick to pick up on eighteenth-century writers' perception of a clear division between the City and the West End and have drawn a stark contrast between the lifestyles of merchants in one area and the gentry in the other. Until the last few years it had been assumed that residents of the City aspired to a West End lifestyle, purchasing country estates and patronizing the opera and theater to insert themselves into fashionable circles. The recent historiography of London’s culture has tempered this view by recognizing the distinctive lifestyle of merchants and residents of the City and the ways that their lifestyle did not seek to embrace the tastes and routines of the beau monde. The City had its own vernacular styles of housing and artistic works that did not seek to replicate the polite styles found west of Temple Bar. But this historiography has thought less about where people went, for recreation or otherwise, preferring to assume

3 For instance City Merchants and the Arts. Gauci, Emporium of the World.
that merchants were isolated in the City and eastern hamlets while the gentry remained in Westminster. With the exception of attendance at the theaters at Drury Lane and Covent Garden, it has been assumed that there was little crossover between residents of Westminster and the City in search of diversion. This paper will demonstrate that while there was not a great deal of overlap in the recreational spaces used, residents of both the city and the court were willing to cross into each other’s territory. This paper extends the examination to Southwark and the Home Counties, important parts of the metropolis in their own right.

It is worth noting that the boundaries under examination in this paper are not London’s only administrative boundaries. The City was a particularly confused patchwork of jurisdictions that overlapped in inconsistent ways, with parishes and wards being the most prominent. The function of the parish or the ward as a social and recreational unit in Georgian London has not been examined and it will not be extensively considered here, though as the maps will suggest, neither seems to have been a particularly important boundary for itineraries. In addition, one can question the extent to which the administrative boundaries used in this paper would have been recognized by the residents themselves, despite the use of the names of administrative areas to refer to particular lifestyles. The separation on the one hand of London and Westminster from Middlesex and, on the other, Southwark from Surrey stand out in this regard. This paper will throw up alternative boundaries that appear to have been more important than administrative boundaries.

Briefly, it is necessary to define the geographical areas under consideration. The City of London refers specifically to the 26 wards within the walls and two without, extending from the Tower in the east to Temple Bar in the west. This area contained London's financial center, as it still does today, and the warehouses and counting houses of merchants as well. To the east of the Tower were docks along the river and small hamlets extending off into Essex. The City was bounded on the south by the Thames and on the north roughly by the intersection of Holborn and Chancery Lane to Barbican, Moorfields, and then southeast to Aldgate.

Adjacent to the City on the east, north and northwest is the jurisdiction of the county of Middlesex. By 1760 the areas adjacent to the City were entirely built over
(with the exception of the walks at Moorfields) and the conurbation extended beyond Clerkenwell in the north. Continuous development in Middlesex carried on to the west to the boundary with Westminster at the western edges of Bloomsbury and St. Giles in the Fields. By the 1820s expansion north had carried continuous development to Somers Town, the area just north of modern King's Cross and to St. John's Wood in the west. Slightly removed were villages like Hackney or Highgate, easily reached both on foot and using transport where some spent summer afternoons and others resided as commuters.

Across the river to the south of the City was the borough of Southwark, a large and not particularly affluent area at the southern end of London Bridge. While it was administratively distinct from London, Southwark's history is more closely tied to the capital than to Surrey, the county in which it lies. The areas of Surrey near London saw considerable expansion in the period, with Blackfriars and later Waterloo bridges opening up St. George's Fields to development and encouraging expansion of recreational spaces in an area already popular for pleasure and tea gardens. Towns like Peckham and Camberwell, rural hamlets popular among City merchants as places to build second homes, grew substantially from the 1760s.

Finally we come to Westminster. The city of Westminster refers to two parishes: St. Margaret and St. John the Evangelist, both located west of the river and south of St. James's Park. In addition there were the parishes of the liberty of Westminster including St. Martin's in the Fields; St. James's; St. Anne, Soho; St. Clement Danes; St. Mary le Strand; St. George's, Hanover Square; and St. Paul's, Covent Garden. By the 1760s all of these parishes were mostly built over and as has already been mentioned by 1820 the expansion of the metropolis had extended west beyond the parishes of Westminster into Middlesex.

II

Using diaries written by men and women living in the City, Westminster, Middlesex, Southwark, and Surrey between 1760 and 1820, it will be possible to comprehend how administrative boundaries corresponded to the boundaries of realms of recreation. A sample of fourteen diaries has been used to track the movements of
different members of propertied society: mostly merchants and gentry, but also bankers and other members of the professions. [MAP 1] Because patterns did vary according to the season, I have chosen May as the month to be presented in the maps in order to compare the findings more easily. Because of the crowded schedule associated with the London season, this was the month with the most activity within the metropolis. It isn't exceptional in terms of the distances people traveled, however.

Let us look, then, at several maps showing where Londoners went according to their diaries. To begin we have Lady Mary Coke, a widow in her early forties with close ties to the Court [MAP3]. I have accidentally omitted her house in Berkeley Square from the map. She was a frequent visitor to Princess Amelia at St. James's Palace and the Duchess of Norfolk at Norfolk House. Lady Mary's rounds are typical of a woman of the court: she is a frequent visitor to houses of the gentry and nobility and a patron of the opera and theater. As might be expected from this social world, Lady Mary remained primarily within the bounds of Westminster. She leaves Westminster for shopping in the City (though not during the month I have presented on the map) and during the summer months she goes west into Middlesex more often in order to visit Princess Amelia in Gunnersbury and other aristocratic friends in their summer houses within a morning’s journey of the metropolis.

With regards to visiting, this pattern is mirrored by the movements in the diary of Elizabeth Tyrrell, wife of the City Remembrancer Timothy Tyrrell [MAP4]. Residing during the autumn, winter, and spring in the City, her visits were mostly within the square mile, though one visit to Westminster and a pair to Middlesex do buck the trend. For public amusements, however, Tyrrell went to Westminster and to Surrey to see performances at the theaters, the Opera, and Astley’s; to view art exhibitions; to shop; and to walk in the park. Recreationally, she occupied many spaces that were familiar to Lady Mary, but she still avoids most of the residential areas of Westminster.

Stephen Monteage, a clerk in the Excise Office, demonstrates a more varied set of destinations [SLIDE5]. From his house in Red Cross Street, Cripplegate, he traveled out across most of the metropolis, from the semi-rural taverns and tea houses in Islington south to the Borough and from Shoreditch in the east to Hyde Park in the west. Interestingly, he probably traveled through but does not seem to have stopped in the
liberties of Westminster. The less fashionable areas in the city of Westminster, as opposed to the liberties, may have been better suited to Monteage's tastes. Destinations within the City were far more frequently visited than locations in Middlesex or Westminster, with Leadbetter's steakhouse in Threadneedle Street receiving visits every other day on average, for instance.

Like the City residents, the destinations of Westminster resident James Boswell [MAP6] were distributed across the metropolis. Boswell most frequently visited locations in Westminster. He was a regular visitor at the homes of several acquaintances including his friend Dempster and the Earl of Eglinton, but he also walked into the City. He visited his friend Temple in the Temple on the western edge of the City and frequently went into the City to buy books, visit coffeehouses, or dine. Boswell's desire to see London and to emulate Mr. Spectator may have carried him into the City more often than other residents of Westminster, though the movements recorded by George Canning suggest that Boswell’s activities were not too eccentric.

### III

As the four maps demonstrate, patterns of recreation were not uniform across all of London’s propertied population. Men moved about in different ways than women and residents of the City went to different places than people living in Westminster. Eastern Westminster possessed a collection of high profile recreational spaces such as the theaters and the Opera that attracted audiences from across the metropolis. City residents crossed into Westminster to see performances in those spaces, but, particularly early in the period, they were more likely to go north into Middlesex or south into Southwark, Surrey, and Kent for recreations of a different sort. While the City residents did go to the theaters, they were never regular patrons like the Westminster diarists. Many went only once or twice a year.

So while the boundaries we are examining here did not hem people in, crossing over did not necessarily mean mingling with the locals. The theaters were the primary space for encountering men and women from different administrative jurisdictions. For men, some coffee houses and taverns had a trans-metropolitan clientele. Boswell’s love of Mr. Spectator’s favorite drinking holes may be an anomaly and other Westminster
men’s movements suggest that the popular coffeehouses for westenders were around Parliament and near Covent Garden. There may have been separate coffee houses for Westminster and City clienteles in the City, and a similar arrangement in Westminster, a specialization Matthew Green’s work on coffee houses and news has also suggested. In most other situations the destinations for interlopers were not the spaces used by residents of the locality. The male diarists who lived in the City rarely headed to the court, St. James’ Park, or the fashionable entertainments and residences in the west end, preferring the less-trendy pleasures in the older areas of Westminster, though Elizabeth Tyrrell provides a suggestive contrast to that pattern. Tyrrell may have aspired to a courtly existence, something suggested by her summerhouse at Kew where she associated with the Papendieks and other people connected with the Court. Nevertheless, we can see that boundary crossing was not the preserve of the aspiring city merchant or the self-confident member of the gentry. Rather the city tastes and the court tastes guided people to appropriate spaces in foreign territory.

Gender-related patterns that can be discerned suggest that unlike men who frequently crossed administrative boundaries, women were more likely to remain within their home jurisdiction. Lady Mary Coke, Frances Boscawen, and Mary Berry remained largely within Westminster, where all three lived, though all three journeyed out of Westminster occasionally for visits or to the City for specialized services. Yet these few excursions are exceptions to a pattern of living that kept them close to home. Meanwhile men visited the same private homes as women but also made their way to a wider variety of public institutions. While Westminster women kept largely to Westminster, City women moved more widely, partly because of the commercial recreations located in Westminster. As we have seen with Elizabeth Tyrrell, at least some City women moved across the whole of the metropolis. Comments in the diaries of Thomas Bridge, James Ware, and John Eliot about movements of their wives, sisters, and friends support the model Tyrrell provides, though the women in their diaries tend to go north and south more often than east and west.

Growth of the metropolis and its suburbs altered patterns of recreation and encouraged more boundary crossing. During the period under examination new attractions became available, perhaps most notably the performance spaces in Surrey, and
housing in outlying areas became increasingly common for the wealthy. People who moved to the suburbs retained recreational ties to the areas where they had previously lived. Unsurprisingly, Thomas Bridge who purchased a weekend home in Tottenham in Middlesex continued to visit many of the same spaces as he did when he only lived in Bread Street in the City. Similarly George Macaulay, the merchant and alderman whose quotation opened this paper, carried on his usual City routines, visiting John's Coffeehouse, among others, even though he lived south of the river.

City ties were also strong for merchants who lived outside of town and who had never lived in the City. Jacob Hagen, a merchant who lived in Walworth in Surrey, but operated his business from the eastern edge of Southwark, divided his time between friends and coffeehouses in the City; his office in Mill Street, Southwark; and his home and his friends’ houses in the Surrey villages of Walworth, Peckham, and Camberwell [MAP]. As we can see in the case of Hagen, merchants who worked in the city but lived outside of it, either in Middlesex or Surrey, tended to focus their attentions on the city, presumably because they were part of social networks there, were familiar with its recreational offerings, and still had business to do in the financial center. So while suburbs occupy some of people's time, older recreational spaces remained in use, especially commercial and public ones. Even though a new, suburban residence might put a merchant closer to Westminster than to the City, the City retained its cachet. Usage of City spaces became more limited as a result of distance and new opportunities, but they were not replaced by a purely suburban or West End recreational existence.

I have argued that that administrative boundaries are not particularly important for delimiting the recreational sphere, but some practical boundaries do emerge. In particular, we can see a lack of attractions north of St. James and west of the Haymarket, for people who did not roll with the beau monde. Residents of the City traveled considerable distances to commercial venues, but did not venture into the non-commercialized areas of the West End. Conversely, residents of the liberties of Westminster developed eastern boundaries: for women, Drury Lane, and for men either

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4 Similar patterns are visible in the diary of William Burgess, a resident of Marylebone in the 1780s and 1790s
the Temple or St. Paul’s if they were interested in the coffee houses of Fleet Street and St. Paul’s Churchyard.

Different recreational cultures were sustained in the metropolis in part because people who lived east of Temple Bar rarely went west of Haymarket and people who lived west of Haymarket infrequently went east of Drury Lane. In addition, the crossing over that did occur was often to access spaces similar to the ones left behind in an individual’s home jurisdiction, be they fashionable shops or coffee houses and taverns. Going to Westminster to visit a coffeehouse similar to one that might be visited in Cornhill or Fleet Street served to reinforce the cultural primacy of the City for City residents and visiting shops in Cheapside that sought to emulate fashionable parlors depicted the importance of the West End home to residents of Westminster. Furthermore, the spaces that were shared served different functions for people from different areas. Residents of the City went to the theater at most only a handful of times each year, not as a part of the weekly routine of assemblies and the opera followed by the beau monde. Rather the mercantile patterns of recreation had their own rhythms and cachet to people with City ties. The cultural importance of the City lifestyle to its residents and outsiders who did business there kept people who worked in the City focused on the spaces and activities endemic to that part of the metropolis.