

ISLINGTON PLEASURE GROUNDS 1660-1790: MODERN MORALITY TALES FROM THE EDGE

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as the nobility and gentry go to Tunbridge, the merchants and rich citizens to Epsome; so the common people go chiefly to Dulwich and Streatham; and the rather also, because it lies so near London, that they can walk to it in the morning and return at night.

Daniel Defoe, *A Tour Through the Whole Island of Great Britain*, 1724-26.

The identity of the environs was not just inscribed in the realm of print but was equally the creation of the thousands of visitors who flocked to its attractions, traversed its highways and walked its fields each weekend. As de Certeau argues, the urban is defined by the experiential as well as by 'graphic representations'. He identified circulation and particularly 'pedestrian movement' as one of those 'real systems whose existence in fact makes up the city'.¹ This was particularly true for the open areas around the city in which one of the major activities was simply strolling, walking and taking the fresh air. (Fig 4.1) On maps the open spaces of the outskirts, with the notable exceptions of the surveys of Rocque and Milne, often appeared as blanks beyond indications of the occasional footpath or field boundary. Yet as numerous topographical views show these were landscapes thronging with life; as well-known and familiar to many city-dwellers as the streets in which they lived and worked. The leisure facilities and functions (in its broadest sense) of the environs is a vast subject which would require several chapters, if not books, to do it justice. This talk therefore focuses mainly on pleasure gardens and spas in the Islington areas to consider the type of locale that existed in such leisure resorts and the extent to which these were new spaces which generated new forms of behaviour. In the writing on eighteenth-century culture a great deal of attention has been given to the coffee houses, assembly rooms and open areas, such as squares, of the inner city as the Habermasian loci of sociability, harbingers and forgers of the public sphere, along with the realm of print.² Peter Borsay has also discussed the importance of promenading and outdoor socialising in provincial towns as indicators of a new urban sensibility.³ But little attention has been paid to the equally important outer London suburban playgrounds with the notable exception of one of the most visible and fashionable, Vauxhall Gardens.⁴ There are invaluable works on London pleasure gardens, particularly by Wroth and Wroth and more recently by James Stevens Curl, but few attempts to situate such places within the social and cultural milieu of the capital more broadly.⁵ (Fig 4.2) This chapter considers the impact of the commodification of the environs as a realm of tourism and leisure in the long eighteenth century for the middle classes, for whom it came to represent a recreational realm similar to that of the country estate for the landed gentry and nobility.⁶ As Carole Fabricant writes: 'we can see in eighteenth-century tourism the distinct beginnings of what it has developed into today: a collective, institutional force, a profoundly social and socializing ritual'.⁷

Londoners had long used the hinterland as a place for outdoor sporting activities, military exercises and for repose and relaxation. Stow in the late sixteenth century noted that: 'There are near London, on the north side, especial wells in the suburbs, sweet, wholesome, and clear. Amongst which, Holy-well, Clarkenwell, and St. Clement's well, are most famous, and most frequented by scholars and youths of the city in summer evenings, when they walk forth to take

the air'.⁸ Stow's commentary introduces us to several of the key features of the open spaces contiguous to the city. Firstly, they combined both solitary pursuits for scholars and others of a reflective cast with sociable activities for the young and others in search of excitement and adventure. Secondly, he characterises such spaces as masculine and although this was never entirely the case they appear to have been predominantly so prior to the seventeenth century. Besides the wells and walks, as we saw in the Introduction, there were other less wholesome activities on offer all around the capitals fringes such as bear-baiting, cock-fighting and hunting particularly of ducks; an activity which will feature prominently in a cautionary tale at the end of this chapter. Most of these field sports pre-dated Stow's time and continued unabated through the long eighteenth century. The theatres of the South Bank were one of the major out-of-town attractions in Stow's day but by the early eighteenth century playhouses were being built in the centre for the first time which came to dominate over their out-of-town rivals. The Queen's Theatre opened in the Haymarket in 1705 for example, designed appropriately by Vanbrugh nicely combining his theatrical and architectural expertise.

The outer fringe's purpose as an urban playground was greatly enhanced from the late seventeenth century onwards by the development of a range of establishments catering for all sectors of society, in which pleasure grounds, spas, inns, and tea and assembly rooms all vied for the custom of pleasure-seeking city dwellers. As Peter Clark writes of the transformation of the old-style drinking houses: 'premises became larger, more lavish and commercial, acquiring specialist facilities including club rooms and assembly rooms, while their landlords became energetic social and cultural entrepreneurs, organising, hosting and marketing many of the new entertainments'.⁹

As the types of activity on offer broadened women began to participate in the consumer culture of these new recreational spaces. At the same time, in a reverse pattern from many other types of leisure pursuits, the gentry and aristocracy also came to patronise the outer London spas and inns, which hitherto had been the almost exclusive domain of the artisan and merchant classes of the City. Visits to outer London resorts became popular with all sections of society, as Defoe observed in the opening quote of this chapter. The 1751 Act for 'Regulating Places of Public Entertainment and punishing Persons keeping Disorderly Houses' shows how widely distributed such premises might be and yet still considered within the purlieu of London. The Act required licensing of all public places of entertainment within twenty miles of London and Westminster including every 'house, room and garden'.

A flavour of these resorts can be gleaned from an answer in a play on Tunbridge Wells to the query 'What are the chief Diversions?':

Beaus, Raffle and Dance – Citts play at Nine-Pins, Bowls and Back-gammon
–Rakes scoure the Walks, bully the Shop-Keepers, and beat the Fiddlers -
Men of Wit rally over Claret and Fools get to the Royal-Oak Lottery where
you may lose Fifty Guinea's in a moment'.¹⁰

The first and most essential feature to transform a village into a 'resort' (with a few exceptions) was a mineral spa, which offered the possibility of combining medical and leisure facilities. The Foreigner's Guide of 1740 advised that, 'Near London also are several mineral and salutary Springs ... where in the fine Season People of all Ranks and Conditions resort either for Health or Pleasure'.¹¹ There were some 'baths' that were only medical, such as the 'Cold Bath' at Islington, but on the whole the bathing in and ingestion of the waters was combined with other refreshments and entertainments. (Fig 4.3) It is with the pleasure aspect that we are going to be concerned here rather than the medical

side of the resorts' operations.¹² As Stow had noted the geological structure of London made the Thames basin a mass of watercourses and springs. These were created by the streams of the higher sandy areas, including the Bagshot sands of the Hampstead-Highgate ridge and the Surrey sands, flowing down to meet the gravel terraces of the Thames below where they emerged as rivers such as the Westbourne, Wandle and the Fleet. The centre was surrounded by a ring of mineral wells where these came to the surface, many of them chalybeate springs with a high iron content.¹³ The two most popular waters, according to Defoe in the 1720s, were at Hampstead and Islington, and it is on the latter of these two resorts that we will concentrate. The focus here will be on sociable pursuits and spaces which embraced both the gentry and the middle classes with a concentration, not so much on individual leisure genres, but on the identity of such areas which created a new kind of environment, the 'resort' or leisure arena, distinguished by its landscape, architecture and attractions. These were surprisingly varied in topography and tone. As with the early suburbs they were not the outcome of any systematic planning or development but rather the result of the colonization and consumption of their spaces and activities by polite society.

Islington: rurality and liberality on the City fringe

In the afternoon I walked out on the North side of the town to see the country on that side. The land here was mostly divided into grass fields. Beautiful and very well-built villages, farm-houses, and buildings were scattered here and there amongst them. These villages and houses were commonly surrounded with beautiful gardens. A multitude of people streamed out here from all sides of London to enjoy their Sunday afternoon and take the fresh air. In all the aforesaid villages there was a superfluity of beer-shops, inns, and such-like houses, where those who came from the town rested. There were also small summer houses, built in the gardens, with benches and tables in them, which were now all full of swarming crowds of people, of both sexes. Pehr Kalm, *Account of His Visit to England: On His Way to America in 1748*, May 1748.

Defoe described Islington as being, 'joined to the streets of London, excepting one small field', a not entirely accurate assessment, but one intended to convey its proximity to the centre.¹⁴ As *The Foreigners' Guide* reported in 1740, 'The Neighbourhood of the City makes it very much frequented'.¹⁵ John Swertner's *View of the Cities of London and Westminster* (Figure 4.4) shows that even in 1789, on the eve of Islington's major period of expansion, it was still several fields walk away from the ever-encroaching northern suburbs. While Figure 0.26 executed two years earlier, testifies to the still predominantly rural aspect of the area; even allowing for the pastoral idealism of the image. This was after the arrival of the New Road in 1756 created to connect Islington and Paddington and extended eastwards in 1761 to the City.¹⁶ Dodd's print presents two of the newly-built fashionable Georgian terraces out in the fields to the north, Highbury and Canonbury Places of 1774-9 and 1776-80 respectively. By contrast the elevated view shows that the character of the old area of settlement was very different, even in the late eighteenth century. Swertner's panorama, taken from the steeple of the parish church of St Mary's, presents an image of semi-rusticity in the village set against the metropolis on the horizon. We can see that the polite architecture of Highbury Place was by no means universal, although some classical terraces are visible snaking along the main roads. The foreground shows the area behind Islington Green where the Upper and Lower

Roads met and is dominated by the irregular groupings, gables and pitched roofs of a variety of structures and spaces of varying dates. Residential, commercial and agricultural buildings existed side by side and are interspersed with gardens and low shed-like structures. Even the brand new Chapel which can be seen being roofed in the centre of the picture seems to be remarkably unassuming, notwithstanding that it was a nonconformist edifice and unfinished. Islington's role as the dairy of London is represented by some cows and pigs in the centre of the picture while evidence of nursery gardening is visible in the right foreground.

The predominantly rural and historic character of the village was captured by John Nelson in his *History of Islington*, 1811 where he was admiring of 'the prospect down the Lower-street' in which 'the irregular disposition of the houses, intersected and enlivened by the variegated foliage of the different sorts of trees gives the scene a very agreeable and picturesque appearance'.¹⁷ Islington's open aspect and the course of the artificially cut New River through its fields had long made it popular as a place for fresh air and exercise, as Wenceslaus Hollar had so poignantly portrayed it. (Fig 3.2) The area was transformed at the end of the seventeenth century with the discovery in c.1674-84 by Edward Sadler of a medicinal spring in the gardens of his music house which he opened as a spa.¹⁸ This was followed in quick succession by the establishment of its rivals: the New Tunbridge Wells or Islington Spa, the Royal Oak, the White Conduit House and the London Spa. The Islington pleasure houses fortunes waxed and waned during the long eighteenth century, reaching their peak of fashionability in the 1730s, but throughout they maintained a reputation for an exceptionally socially mixed clientele. In response to this diversity a dual mode of depicting the Islington resorts developed which veered between the wholesome and the licentious. The Hollar tradition continued with representations of the area as a healthy open space for family outings and sporting activities, particularly fishing and shooting, as seen in Figure 4.5. Scenes showing the urban middle classes in their semi-rural playground, the poor man's equivalent of the country estate, were common and frequently satirical in nature. (Fig 4.6) It was one of these citizens or so called 'cits' who Hogarth depicted in his painting *Evening of 1738* in which the pretensions of the mercantile City elite to the aristocratic pastoral are portrayed through the pathetic figure of a cuckolded dyer strolling with his overbearing wife and children along the New River past Sadlers Wells and the Hugh Myddleton Tavern. (Figure 4.7) The work was commissioned as part of the series *The Times of Day* for the rival attraction of Vauxhall Gardens by Jonathan Tyers, in an attempt to differentiate his more refined riverside grounds from the plebian establishments to the north.

The dichotomy between the health-giving and the hedonistic aspects of the spas' operations was also reflected in their gardens, ornamentation and architecture. While some gardens, such as those at Sadlers Wells, sought to create an atmosphere of tranquil rurality with its fruit trees and naturalistic planting others took a different more flamboyant approach. If Sadlers Wells, as shown in Figures 4.1 and 4.12, offered naturalism the alternative was fantasy and make-believe on a large scale. Nearby Bagnigge Wells, for example, used a collage of architectural styles including Chinese and Gothick, to create a modern exotic fantasy image in direct contrast to the vernacular stability of the ancient inns and their orchards. (Fig 4.10) Such establishments offered a world of make-believe with their fairytale architecture, illuminated gardens, trellis work and exotic pavilion-type architecture. The exemplars par excellence were Vauxhall & Ranelagh Gardens where a cornucopia of ephemeral architectural delights formed one of the main attractions. At Vauxhall there was a Chinese Pavilion for the orchestra, Gothick supper boxes and rococo triumphal arches along the walks while the Music Room was a wonderfully eclectic confection of all three. The slightly later Ranelagh took the architectural crescendo to its utmost pitch

featuring the stupendous central Rotunda building (1741) with its circle of boxes and outside a Chinese Pavilion positioned on the canal set in extensive grounds. The essential razzmatazz is perhaps better captured in Ackerman's view from *The Microcosm of the gaudily illuminated orchestra box at Vauxhall* rather than the more often reproduced sanitised scenes of Canaletto. (Figs 4.8 & 0.7)

While small suburban tea houses and inns could not compete with the Rotunda at Ranelagh or the pavilions at Vauxhall they did copy smaller features such as the coloured glass lamps and the private supper boxes which began to appear elsewhere from the 1730s onwards.¹⁹ Bagnigge Wells had a colonnade with individual boxes and many establishments built them in a circular or inward facing arrangement so that performances could be put on in the centre. (Fig 4.9) Bagnigge Wells' grounds adjoined the River Fleet and made full use of this waterside location providing walks and seats along its banks as well as rustic bridges over the stream. In the centre of the gardens was a pond, the boxes or arbours, a rustic cottage and a Gothick grotto 'decorated in cockney fashion with shells, fossils, and fragments of broken glass'.²⁰ The stylistic melange is epitomised in one of Carington Bowles's prints of *Mr Deputy Dumpling and Family* (1780) on an afternoon visit to Bagnigge Wells which draws on Hogarth's earlier *Sadlers Wells*' satire for its composition. (Fig 4.10) Hogarth's lampooning of the City family bringing their urban manners and tastes to the countryside established a stock type for later eighteenth-century satirical prints. Here Bowles reprises many of the familiar features such as: the group's over-fed physiques indicative of a sedentary lifestyle devoted to business; their unsuitable clothing and general air of discontent; and above all the lampooning of the 'family outing', suggesting the enslavement of the hen-pecked husband to bourgeois domestic life.²¹ Such comments are paralleled by other contemporary satires on 'cit's taste', particularly their deployment of an uncouth mixture of architectural styles, as is explored in Chapter Six. This type of eclecticism could be found in the gardens of the elite as well as the plebeian - the gothic folly was a staple of great landscape gardens such as Rousham and Stowe - but the reduction in scale bringing such heterodox items into unseemly proximity seems to have excited particular ire. (Fig 6.7).

The spas around London promoted themselves for their health-giving purifications, fresh air and open countryside but they were also known as venues for drinking and gambling and gained a more ambiguous reputation as places of sexual immorality. From Colson's *Le Guide de Londres*, 1693 and Ned Ward's *The London Spy* of 1698-1700 onwards the less respectable inns and pleasure grounds, particularly those of Islington, became a staple of sex tourism guides and low life accounts of the city. Indeed Ward (1667-1731) perhaps inspired by his literary adventures opened an ale house in 1712, the *Bacchus Tavern* in Clerkenwell, which he used as the setting for *The Delights of the Bottle* (1720).²² This alternative tradition of licentiousness informs the view from George Bickham's *The Musical Entertainer of New Tunbridge Wells*, 1733, produced at the height of its success when it was patronised briefly by the Princesses Amelia and Caroline. (Figure 4.11) The accompany song is a risqué ditty by John Lockman, a well-known composer of songs for pleasure gardens, entitled *The Charms of Dishabille* in which the potential risks and misalliances of mixed company, in both senses of the word, are titillatingly celebrated.²³

Whence comes it that ye shining Great
To Titles born and awful State,
Thus condescend thus check their Wills,
And scud away to Tunbridge Wells,
To mix with vulgar Beaux & Belles?

Ye Sages your fam'd Glasses raise,
Survey this Meteors dazzling Blaze,
And say, portends it Good or Ill?

...

Behold the Walks, a checquer'd Shade,
In the gay Pride of Green array'd;
How bright the Sun! the Air how still!
In wild Confusion there we view,
Red Ribbons groop'd with Aprons blew;
Scrapes, Curtzies, Nods, Winks, Smiles & Frowns.
Lords, Milkmaids, Dutchesses and Clowns,
In all their various Dishabille.

The depiction of the healthy pleasures of the taking of the waters and the enjoyment of the attractive grounds are juxtaposed in the plate with the more equivocal message of the song, which asks whether such behaviour 'portends Good or Ill?'. 'Dishabille' in this context referred to informal or even negligent dress or 'undress' as it was called at the time, not nakedness. Ladies and gentlemen were said to be in a state of undress while at their toilette, before they had donned the formal attire deemed suitable for the time of day. Normally they would only be seen by others in such a state during their morning levée when intimates might gather in their bedroom, as is famously depicted in the Countess's Levée in *Marriage à la Mode* (Plate IV) by Hogarth. To appear in public so attired or unattired was a daring undertaking and it is open to question how far people really attended the spa in such a manner. It is known to have been open from the early morning and the satirical publication *Islington: Or, The Humours of New Tunbridge Wells* (1733) opens with 'A Company of Sober Sots' arriving at the place at '5 i'th Morn' for 'a Cooler' after a night's male drinking, followed by at '7 a-Clock 700 Persons of Both Sexes' descending for breakfast.²⁴

The 'dishabille' then was part of the artlessness or rusticity that these resorts encouraged making the potential for social elision even more possible. The image itself, in which the langorous poses of those shown positioned round the stairs drinking from the spa, particularly that of the woman in the foreground, speaks of the possibilities of unorthodox encounters in an intermediate space. A space neither town nor country, neither wholly occupied by the polite nor the impolite, an ambiguous arena in which it is suggested the normal moral and social codes of conduct might be suspended.

However, it was not just sexual morality that was at stake here but the moral health of the nation as well. This forms part of a broader concern with the dangers of leisure, or more specifically an excess of leisure and its necessary concomitant, luxury. The 'luxury debate' has become a mainstay of eighteenth-century studies as Paul Langford comments, 'A history of luxury and attitudes to luxury would come very close to being a history of the eighteenth century'.²⁵ From urban guides to poems and ballads metropolitan literature both celebrated and deplored the duality of the outer London pleasure round. The pursuit of leisure (and pleasure) had become constituted as a positive virtue and a central tenet of the elites' claim to legitimacy for leadership. The foundations of the 1688 political settlement rested on the assumption that only those independent of the ties of commerce could truly represent the interests of the nation disinterestedly.²⁶ The nobility and gentry claimed social superiority not just on the grounds of birth but through the benefits for self-improvement and cultivation that their non-working status bestowed. However, as moralists from the earliest times onwards had cautioned leisure could be a double-edged sword. An excess

of leisure could be as dangerous as its opposite so that gentlemen in the eighteenth century were enjoined to spend less time in town and take more of an interest in their estates.²⁷ The reality was that they spent increasing amounts of time in London, due to the extension of the parliamentary, court and social seasons, where an ever-expanding array of leisure pursuits in and around the capital presented themselves for their delectation. As the author of the *Tricks of the Town Laid Open: Or, a Companion For Country Gentlemen* (1747) argued in seeking for relief from the tedium of the countryside the metropolis was the last place that sensible young men should search for distraction: 'Idleness is a very dangerous Thing, and the fertile Seminary of almost all other Vices; but then I cannot grant that London is a proper Place to remove you out of the reach of it'.²⁸

The *Tricks of the Town* was a vade-mecum or portable conduct guide for country dwellers arriving in the capital. This was a genre which stretched back to the early seventeenth century and reached well into the nineteenth century, with cautionary tales such as, Pierce Egan's *Life in London* (1821), which we will return to in the final chapter. The *Tricks of the Town* dwelt at length on the dangers that the quasi-rural pursuits of the metropolitan fringes might provide:

Tis the very same in all the rest of our pretended Diversions, ie. Bowling-greens, Cock-pits, Tennis-courts, ordinaries, Balls, Musick-Entertainments, &c. tho' the Recreations in themselves may most of 'em be innocent, and harmless enough; yet they are generally so vitiated and corrupted, and the Pleasure they Pretend to, is so interwoven with Danger, as well as Vexation of Spirit.²⁹

These seemingly innocent pastimes were in fact the haunts of what he termed the three 'Idle Companions – Sots, Beaus and Gamesters' who would seek out and corrupt any innocent young gentlemen fresh from the country. Even a healthy activity, such as tennis, is exposed as a site of gambling and fleecing from which 'there are several in Town that live purely upon the Tennis-Courts (and live well too)'.³⁰ In part this was a long-established discourse against vice and dissipation but the rhetoric was also directed against the commodification of culture which turned leisure into a business: 'I am not entirely advising you against the Play-house, Tennis-court or Bowling-Green, or any other innocent and harmless Recreation. ... But that which I would reprehend is the Excess and Inordinancy of them; the making that a set and formal Business and trade, which should be only used as a Diversion'.³¹

Furthermore such commodification allowed for hitherto excluded groups such as women and the non-leisured to participate in its offerings. It was the degree of social ambiguity and the inclusion of respectable women (as well as disreputable ones) in such outer London venues that made such spaces both dynamic and dangerous, in contrast to the all-male coffee or ale-house:

... by what Steps and Variations the British Ladies have arrived at the excessive Politeness they now enjoy ... our Great-Grandmothers they said their Prayers in their Closets, and seldom went to Play-Houses, or Places of Diversion; such as Vaux-Hall, Ranelagh-Gardens, &c. where as much Money is spent in one Evening, as would keep a Family a Week formerly. The very Thoughts of Masquerades, would have put them into a Swoon; and the sight of Heydegger, would have terrified them ... They never insisted on that wicked Innovations, call'd Pin-Money, for they had no other Expences, than what were supplied from the Husband's Purse.³²

Masquerades were particularly dangerous as women attended unescorted and the use of masks allowed men to pose as women and women as men.³³ Commercialised leisure and its economic imperatives are presented in the quote above as having familial as well as social and moral repercussions. In Baker's play *Hampstead Heath*, the merchant husband Deputy Driver of the main protagonist Arabella asks: 'what Business has a Tradesman's Wife at the Wells. Has she not her Family concerns, and a Shop to look to when I'm gone to Change?' and feels instead that she should 'rest contented with my Country-House at Hogsdon [Hoxton], instead of fluttering through the Walks at Tunbridge ... where you are laugh'd at by People of Quality and despis'd by People of Sense'.³⁴

The ambiguity created in class and gender relations in the outer pleasure resorts was also the hallmark of the area's architecture. Islington's metamorphosis into an urban pleasure ground was not matched by any equivalent physical transformation. As the illustrations show activities took place in the fields which had ringed the capital for centuries among which were dotted cottages, inns and other structures, largely vernacular in feel and only semi-classical in style at most.³⁵ (Fig 4.1) The various spas were largely housed in existing buildings which could generally be characterised as rustic until at least the latter half of the century, as can be seen in Figure 4.12 of Sadlers Wells. The spring there in fact dried up in 1697 after which the entertainments became the main attraction, along with a tea house. The entry in *The Foreigners' Guide* of 1740 states: 'Here you have all the Summer, Rope-Dancing, Vaulting, Singing, Musick &c. and every Evening there is a farce acted, which every Body may see, drinking and paying for one Bottle of Wine'.³⁶ The print published by Robert Wilkinson in 1814 provides two views of the building in its pre- and post-1764 state, before and after rebuilding. The earlier view is by George Bickham junior of 1728 which was also placed above a song, in a similar fashion to his print of 'New Tunbridge Wells'. This was the format he adopted in his later *Musical Entertainer* (1737-39) which bought together the sheet music sold at the different pleasure gardens - sometimes in the form of fans - into one volume, a good example of the cycles of reproduction and inter-materiality which surrounded the promotional goods of such venues.

There is a striking difference between the two depictions of Sadlers Wells in Wilkinson's print, for whereas the later view presented an image of sophisticated, worldly pleasures for knowing urbanites, in the earlier image the pretence of rural innocence is maintained. The song celebrates the bucolic setting of the resort beside the New River with its opportunities for healthy activities such as fishing as well as the other attractions, concluding with a paen of praise for the sweet air for which it was renowned.

There pleasant streams of Middleton,
In gentle Murmurs glide along:
In which the sporting Fishes play,
To close each weary'd Summers day:
And Musicks Charms in lulling sounds,
Of Mirth and Harmony's abounds:

.....
And Zephyrs with their gentlest Gales,
Breathing more sweets than flow'ry Vales,
Which give new Health and Heat repells,
Such are the Joys of Sadlers Wells.

It is likely that this print and the poem were commissioned by the spa's owner at the time, Francis Forcer, as part of a commonly employed marketing strategy under which the semi-rural attractions of the hinterland were continuously promoted within the metropolis through the sale of prints and other souvenirs and in due course tickets as well. The 1733 publication *Islington: Or, The Humours of New Tunbridge Wells*, for example, was advertised as being sold by 'the Pamphlet Shops of London and Westminster, and Miss Reason at the Wells'. Miss Reason was the principal character and 'Mistress of the Wells' in the story and in reality Mrs Reason who managed the spa with her husband in the 1730s. The exaggerated pastoral and mythological allusions of the song create an atmosphere of sylvan refinement. However, the picture itself shows that far from taking place, as one might expect, in a suitably classical environment the entertainments were housed in a pre-Georgian semi-vernacular building. The view foregrounds the natural setting of the secluded walled garden with its mature trees and the river with the two swans. Water remains a powerful presence but its health-giving qualities are now imparted through the senses rather than being consumed in any more direct fashion. A central seven-bay building is shown with a subsidiary wing to one side both with pitched roofs and dormer windows plus various attached outhouses. The empty landscape, devoid of people apart from a solitary figure at the window, contributes to the air of serenity and rurality. The irregularity of the windows on the building to the left indicates that it was an earlier or unaltered structure, possibly the Wells-house itself. The main building has a more regular disposition but the presence of both casement and sash windows suggests that the right hand side may have been an extension to an existing edifice which was possibly refaced at the same time.³⁷ The Survey of London suggests that the extension was for a dwelling house for Forcer and his family.³⁸

This block was the music house the end of which is visible, with its old casement latticed windows, in Hogarth's *Evening*. Seclusion had its pitfalls, however, and Forcer had to shift the program to begin at 5pm and finish before nightfall after the City Marshal was robbed by three footpads on entering Spa Field in 1733.³⁹ The perils of journeying to Islington and even more so to Hampstead, a notorious highwayman's haunt, remained a perennial problem and various remedies were tried over the years including armed escorts and specially chartered coaches. When Thomas Rosoman, a local builder, took over Sadler Wells in 1746 the lease described the premises as: 'the Brewhouse Storehouse Stables Granary Sheds Yards Walls Gardens Walks Trees Outhouses & other Buildings together with the Stage Benches & Galleries thereunto belonging and also all Ways Passages, Lights Pavements Water Springs Wells Watercourses Cellars Vaults Fixtures etc'.⁴⁰ In this list none of the structures are described in terms of their entertainment purposes, although other functions are clearly delineated, emphasising the extent to which the enterprise was housed in converted buildings which retained their previous character and associations. Rosoman resurrected the Wells' fortunes as a palace of entertainments, following a period when it had been closed down for immorality. His first major intervention on the site was to build a large wooden theatre in 1748-49. This formed the basis of the large new brick theatre built in 1764, along with a house for himself (also possibly incorporating an earlier building), which can be seen in the upper print by Andrews.⁴¹ This was the place Wordsworth recalled visiting in *The Prelude* in his youth, in the years 1788-1802, calling it 'Half-rural Sadlers Wells' where he saw 'giants and dwarfs, Clowns, conjurors, posture-masters, harlequins'.⁴² The final and most dramatic development in the early nineteenth century were the aquatic dramas staged on a specially constructed metal tank to display naval battles complete with ships, fireworks and volcanoes; an astonishingly similar list to the attractions on show today at the various aquatic

entertainments in Las Vegas. Pugin and Rowlandson included one of these watery pageants as one of the sights of the city in Ackerman's *Microcosm of London*, 1808-10. (Fig 4.13).

Although the second building incorporated classical features and proportioning it retained a rustic feel in Andrew's view with its steeply pitched roofs, the weather-vane on top of the theatre building and the dormer windows above the house. The illusion of absolute isolation was no longer sustainable, however, and new terraces and buildings are visible in the background. The surrounding were also up-dated with the addition of lamps and railings along the river in the grounds. By this date urban nuisances were beginning to intrude and in c.1775 a wall and iron railing was placed along the Wells walk on the other side of the river to prevent passers-by 'throwing in their dogs, etc'.⁴³ Islington despite its proximity to the capital maintained a rural aspect and vernacular buildings until the end of the eighteenth century. In the village this was probably more a matter of lack of need and opportunity rather than anything more conscious, survivalism rather than revivalism to employ Howard Colvin's useful distinction.⁴⁴ But with the vastly expanded number and range of entertainment venues which dotted the fields this was survivalism of a different order. Given the competition to provide novelty and even excess the image projected by the buildings of Sadlers Wells of stability and permanence may seem puzzling. It seems likely that the failure to transform the attendant architecture into the polite classicism of the town was not a matter of oversight or neglect but a deliberate ploy to help provide a country feel. The spas adjacent to London marketed themselves as a more convenient alternative to those further afield, particularly Epsom and Tunbridge Wells. To emphasise the purity of their product the spa owners sought to perpetuate a rustic environment redolent of healthiness and tranquility, even paradoxically, as this was being undermined by the large number of townspeople who flocked to them. New forms of social interaction and entertainment were being housed here but this does not mean that new forms of architecture were necessarily deployed to do so. Modernity, urbanity and the classical did not form an indissoluble holy trinity and in the case of the outer London spas new forms of entertainment and social engagement were accommodated within an environment constituted predominately by the traditional and the rural.

¹ de Certeau, 1984, p. 97.

² Habermas, 1989.

³ Borsay, 1989.

⁴ For Vauxhall see among others: Borg, 2012; Ogborn, 1998; Solkin, 1993.

⁵ Wroth & Wroth 1896; Stevens Curl, 2010.

⁶ The standard books on the commodification of culture in the period include: McKendrick, Brewer & Plumb, 1982; Brewer & Porter, 1993; Birmingham & Brewer 1995; Brewer, 1997; Berg & Clifford, 1999.

⁷ Fabricant, 1987, p. 256.

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- ⁸ Stow, 1598, p. 374.
- ⁹ Clark & Houston, 2000, p. 578.
- ¹⁰ Baker, 1736, p. 16.
- ¹¹ Anon, *Foreigner's Guide*, 1740, pp. 10-12.
- ¹² SOL, 2008, pp. 24-27; Stevens Curl, 2010, pp. 32, 77-79.
- ¹³ Stevens Curl, 2010; Barton, 1992, pp. 13-15, 112 ff.
- ¹⁴ Defoe, 1724-26, p. 287.
- ¹⁵ Anon, *Foreigners' Guide*, 1740, p. 148.
- ¹⁶ On the Islington spas see: Wroth & Wroth, 1896; Stevens Curl, 2010; and SOL, 2008. Information on Islington from: Nelson, 1811; Pinks; 1865; Richardson, 1988; VCH, 1988; Willats, 1988; SOL, 2008.
- ¹⁷ Nelson, 1811, p. 272.
- ¹⁸ The definitive account of Sadlers Wells' origins and building history is in the SOL, 2008, Chp V. The theatrical history is covered in Arundell, 1965.
- ¹⁹ Bermondsey Spa for example copied the lamps, see Stevens Curl, 2010, p. 180.
- ²⁰ Wroth & Wroth, 1896, p. 62.
- ²¹ Donald, 1989.
- ²² *ODNB*.
- ²³ Clayton, 1997, pp. 118-19.
- ²⁴ Anon, *Islington*, 1733, pp. 4-5.
- ²⁵ Langford, 1989, p. 3.
- ²⁶ Barrell, 1990, pp. 20-21.
- ²⁷ Girouard, 1978, p. 189.
- ²⁸ Anon, *Tricks of the Town*, 1747, p. 27.
- ²⁹ *Ibid*, p. 15.
- ³⁰ *Ibid*, p. 53.
- ³¹ *Ibid*, Letter X, pp. 60-61.
- ³² Anon, *A Ttip from St James's*, 1744, p. 229.
- ³³ Clark & Houston, 2000, p. 582.
- ³⁴ Baker, 1706, pp. 4, 59.
- ³⁵ For more on this outer London development, particularly in relation to housing see: McKellar, 1995.
- ³⁶ Anon, *Foreigners' Guide*, 1740, p. 146.
- ³⁷ Arundell, 1965, p. 16.
- ³⁸ as suggested by Forcer's insurance policy for 1732, SOL, 2008, p. 12.
- ³⁹ Arundell, 1965, pp. 10-11.
- ⁴⁰ quoted in Arundell, 1965, p. 15.
- ⁴¹ SOL, 2008, pp. 145-47. The Survey suggests that this wooden theatre may have been a reduced version of a more ambitious scheme for which a drawing survives.
- ⁴² Wordsworth, 1850, Bk. VII, 'Residence in London', 267-272
- ⁴³ quoted in Arundell, 1965, p. 31.
- ⁴⁴ Colvin, 1948.