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1 'Heads in the Sand': Football, Politics and Crowd Disasters in Twentieth-Century Britain¹


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expectations and demands for action to ensure there can be no repetition.³ Yet the extent to which expectations are fulfilled, and the force with which they are demanded, depends very much on the political circumstances of the tragedy and those affected. This chapter explores the responses to football disasters in the UK. It aims to show how the responses have been characterized by an apathy towards safety amongst the football authorities, central government and fans. This apathy was rooted in a desire to exclude sport from legislation, in the terrace culture of the game, in the characterization of fans as hooligans and in the exclusion of the safety of football fans from the concerns of central government.

Notes

The early stages of the research were funded by an ESRC grant (R000222677) to look at responses to Aberfan and other disasters.

For the purposes of this paper, disasters are defined as events causing multiple deaths.

Bridget M. Hutter and Sally Lloyd-Bostock, 'The Power of Accidents: The Social and Psychological Impact of Accidents and the Enforcement of Safety Regulations', *British Journal of Psychology* 72 (1981), pp. 1-12.

Quoted in *The Aberfan Disaster* (London: Willow, 2000), 2nd edn, p. 192.

However, see also *The Aberfan Disaster* (London: Willow, 2000), p. 230-40.

Geoffrey (1953), p. 192.

Inglis, pp. 1-12. For a general history of the Aberfan disaster, see *The Aberfan Disaster: A Social History* (London: Willow, 1997).

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T.E. Keeler and S.E. Foreman, 'Regulation and Deregulation', in P. Newman (ed.), *The New Palgrave Dictionary of Economics and the Law* (London, Macmillan: 1998), vol.3, pp.213-22, quoted at p.213.

Iain McLean and Martin Johnes, "'Regulation run mad": The Board of Trade and the loss of the Titanic', *Public Administration*, 78, 4 (2000), 729-49.

See Peter Bailey (ed.), *Music Hall: The Business of Pleasure* (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1986).

Quoted in Edward Grayson, *Sport and the Law* (London: Butterworth, 2nd edn., 1994), p.110.

Sydney Woodhouse (witness) in Andrew Ward and Rogan Taylor (eds), *Kicking and Screaming: An Oral History of Football in England* (London: Robson, 1995), p.23.

Rt Hon. Edward Shortt KC (chairman), *Report of the Departmental Committee on Crowds*, Cmd. 2088 (London: HMSO, 1924), hereafter Shortt Report. The evidence heard by the inquiry is held at the National Archives (NA): HO 73/114 and 115.

Shortt Report, paras 46-7.

Liverpool Echo, 7 Jan. 1932.

South Wales Police: South Wales, 1925, injuring

A pole, v 1925, injuring nine people

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The inter matches can be found filed in Police files, see John (Jan. 2003), 1

Bert Gregory, member of ground staff, in Guardian, 9 March 1996.

Harold Riley in Guardian, 9 March 1996.

R. Moelwyn Hughes, Enquiry into the Disaster at Bolton Wanderers' Football Ground on the 9th March, 1946, Cmd. 6846 (London: HMSO, 1946), p.12. Original syntax.

FA and Football League representatives quoted in Norman Baker, 'Have they forgotten Bolton?', The Sports Historian, 18, 1 (May 1998), 143. The analysis presented here of the aftermath of the Bolton disaster is largely derived from this article. The Home Office records of the disaster can be found at NA: HO 45/25125, 45/25126 and 45/25127.

Herbert Morrison (Lord President) quoted in Baker, 144.

Declining attendance figures probably even owed something to a reluctance to watch football in uncomfortable grounds when there were other more 'attractive' entertainments now on offer. Russell, pp.184-6.

Police Review, 4 July 1952. In the early 1950s, following the introduction of floodlit football, there was brief police concern centred on the safety of spectators should the power fail and a ground have to be evacuated in the dark. See NA: HO 42/24798.

Chief Constable of Burnley to E. Anstey (Home Office), 11 March 1953. NA: HO 42/24798

G. Dicke (1968), p.9.

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Yet, even then, he was of higher rank than the third-tier ministers who looked after sport under Mrs Thatcher.

See Eric Dunning, Patrick Murphy and John Williams, *The Roots of Football Hooliganism: An Historical and Sociological Study* (London: Routledge, 1988).

Mary Douglas, *Risk and Blame: Essays in Cultural Theory* (London: Routledge, 1992).

Shortt Report, para. 40.

In response to the hooligan concerns of the inquiry, the government also passed the Sporting Events (Control of Alcohol etc.) Act 1986 and the Public Order Act 1986.

Thirty-nine Juventus fans were killed when a wall collapsed following a charge by Liverpool fans at the European Cup final held in Heysel, Belgium.

Hansard, 3 June 1985, vol.79, cols.23, 36.

Fletcher & Fletcher v Bradford City AFC, HSE and West Yorkshire Metropolitan Council. *The Times*, 24 Feb. 1987. The exclusion of the ground from the direct provisions of the 1975 Safety Act did not of course free the club from a legal responsibility to ensure the safety of its customers, most notably under the Health and Safety at Work Etc. Act 1974 which created an obligation for companies to protect the safety of non-employees on their

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The Transformation of English Football in the 1990s (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1998), p.102.

Graham Kelly, Sweet FA (London: Collins Willow, 1999), pp.170, 179.

Football Trust, Annual Report, 1997, p.1.

Tom Horlick-Jones, 'Modern Disasters as Outrage and Betrayal', International Journal of Mass Emergencies and Disasters, 13, 3 (1995), 306.

Ken Foster, 'Developments in Sporting Law', in Lincoln Allison (ed.), The Changing Politics of Sport (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993).

Hansard, 19 June 1975, vol.893, col.1751.

Hurd diary, 19 April 1989, quoted in Mark Stuart, Douglas Hurd: The Public Servant, An Authorised Biography (Edinburgh: Mainstream, 1998), p.218.

Hansard (Lords), 16 June 1989, vol.508, col.1647.

Margaret Thatcher, The Downing Street Years (London: HarperCollins, 1993).

James Bulpitt, Territory and Power in the United Kingdom: An Interpretation (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1983) and idem, 'The Discipline of the New Democracy', 19-39.

Quoted in ... in, 21 Feb. 2000.

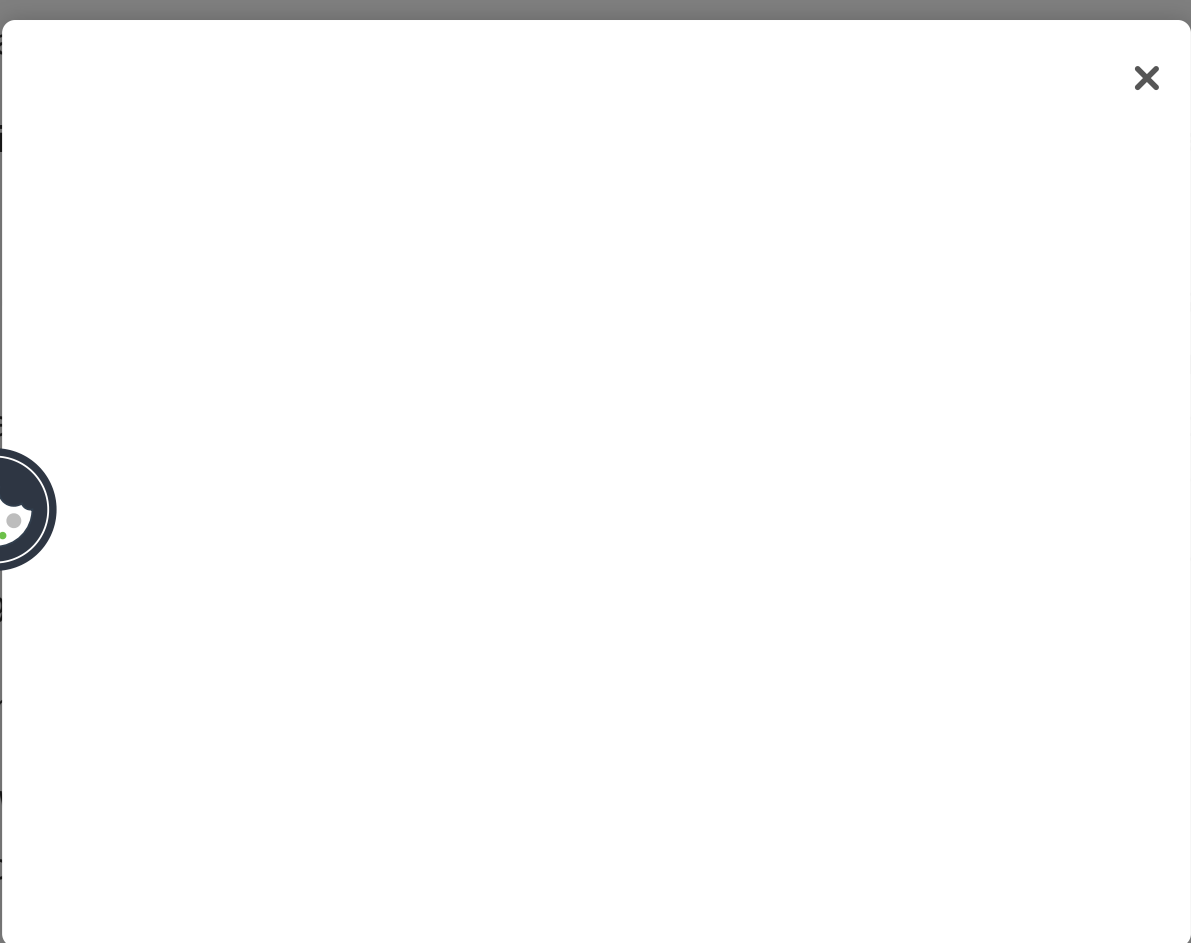
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Hayhurst, 'Why Labour Loves Muddied Oafs'.



David Bull and Alistair Campbell (eds), *Football and the Commons People* (Sheffield: Juma, 1994).

McLean and Johnes, 'Regulation run mad'.

For the response to Aberfan and disasters since see McLean and Johnes, *Aberfan*.

Jack Williams, "'A Wild Orgy of Speed": Responses to Speedway in Britain before the Second World War', *The Sports Historian*, 19, 1 (May, 1999), 11.

Peter Taylor, *The Hillsborough Stadium Disaster, 15 April 1989: Inquiry by the Rt Hon. Lord Justice Taylor: Final Report*, Cmnd. 962 (London: HMSO, 1990), paras 19, 23, p.4.

Ward and Taylor, p.359.

Ibid., p.358.

FLA website, www.flaweb.org.uk/fla.intro.html.

For an example of how safety regulations can be buried beneath daily concerns see T. Hynes and P. Prasad, 'Patterns of "Mock Bureaucracy" in Mining Disasters: An Analysis of the Westray Coal Mine Explosion', *Journal of Management Studies*, 34, 4 (1997), 601-23.

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